

October 8, 1974

Blessett Comments on World  
Viewed From Beneath Cross

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By Adon Taft

MIAMI (BP)--They're still fighting in Ireland. Religious persecution still exists in Spain. In Africa, revolution has either broken out or is on the verge of breaking out in several places. Corruption is still a problem in the United States.

Nevertheless, Arthur Blessett, now residing here with his wife Sherri and their four children, feels the four years he has spent carrying a 10-foot wooden cross 10,500 miles through 22 countries on three continents have had an impact.

"Everywhere I've gone I've seen the beginnings of what I believe will be a tremendous spiritual awakening," declared the 33-year-old Southern Baptist evangelist who became famous as the "mod minister of Sunset Strip" in Los Angeles.

In fact, Blessett is so encouraged that he is planning to walk with his cross through Asia and South America after a year of shorter hikes through the United States on a mission he will announce later.

The Mississippi-born, Louisiana-reared evangelist who was known for his work among hippies, dope addicts, and other society drop-outs has acquired a world view during his years on the road. But it has not changed his simple Gospel message of peace and love through Jesus Christ.

Africa has had the biggest impact on Blessett who just completed a year's trek across that continent. Because of that experience, "We don't throw away any food. We eat what others would call garbage because we have been with so many starving people," he said.

"It breaks your heart to see the wealth here," he continued. "I believe God will judge the Christians of this nation where some churches spend enough on chandeliers to feed tribes in Africa!

"I wish I could say that I changed the poverty statistics in north Africa or the racial prejudice in South Africa, but I can't and it breaks my heart," Blessett added.

Those situations, however, have "never shaken my faith in Christ," insisted Blessett. "You can't blame Christ when people put their traditions ahead of His message."

Thousands of Africans became Christians, accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, when Blessett preached through local interpreters, he reported. "The people are eager to learn, he said, and the commitment of their young preachers is something to see."

He predicted that within a few years, Africa will be the strongest Christian base in the world, sending out missionaries to other continents.

The spiritual awakening he saw there is taking place on a lesser scale elsewhere, according to Blessett, who describes himself as "a Jesus activist. I believe we ought to act on what little we know about Jesus and what He taught about how to live with our enemies, use our money, and spend our time."

Even in Ireland, he said, there is a spiritual renewal at the street level, even though it "has not reached the official structure of the nation yet.

"We showed that a Christian could go to both the Catholics and Protestants and work with both in the name of Christ," said the Baptist preacher.

"The groups we started in 1971 have begun to mushroom. They are made up of both Catholics and Protestants, mostly young people who are praying together and going out into the streets and sharing Christ's love."

Blessett said that when he left Ireland, there were about 30 groups of about 10 persons each involved in the praying and sharing groups. Today there are about 100 groups with as many as 150 people in them.

In Spain, a decades-long drive by non-Catholics to obtain religious freedom climaxed when he was arrested for attracting a crowd by carrying his cross, Blessett recalled. The result was laws that gave Protestants and others the right to hold outdoor assemblies for the first time and publicly proclaim their message.

In this country, Blessett views the indignation over Watergate and similar corruption as an indication of the beginning of a spiritual awakening, one he believes needs to be nurtured until Christians in places like Miami "live as Christ did--befriending the lonely, feeding the hungry, showing love and concern for people.

"It is more important than changing government policy," he believes. "It's a growing thing that would change the world. The church wouldn't be able to hold all the people who would be attracted if each Christian would show that kind of love by doing things himself and not calling the welfare department to do it for him."

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October 8, 1974

## Hays Calls for Moral Leadership by the Religious

By Erwin L. McDonald

**LITTLE ROCK (BP)**--Moral leadership in American politics and government is contingent upon the fullest participation by the rank and file members of the nation's religious bodies, former Southern Baptist Convention president Brooks Hays said here in a lecture series.

The former Arkansas congressman, who served as White House assistant to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, gave four lectures on the theme, "Authentic Hopes for Our Society," to inaugurate the Brooks Hays Lectures in Church and Society established recently by Pulaski Heights Baptist Church here.

Religion, without the parading of piety, is an indispensable ingredient in politics, Hays said.

One of the pitfalls of politics is cynicism "to which is closely related the shocking heresy--'in politics the only thing that counts is winning,'" Hays said.

Any victory gained at the expense of sacrificing principle and honor will be hollow and unrewarding, said Hays, who lost his seat in Congress in 1958 because of his stand for equal rights for American citizens regardless of race.

"Where, except in religious faith, can we find the inspiration for renouncing political power if the price involves dishonorable conduct?" Hays asked.

Speaking on the moral implications of the Watergate scandal, Hays said Christians are "duty bound to confront economic and political authorities with the demand that they obey God's laws of righteousness and justice."

Prior to the break of the Watergate case, the American people almost abdicated, and political authorities "almost gave us a police state," Hays said.

The basic values of constitutional government have now been preserved, he continued. The judicial process "has functioned admirably" and the Congress, "after a lag," did its part well, he said.

"The courts have exercised their power with firmness toward the executive (branch of government) which had threatened to crash through its constitutional bounds," Hays said.

The salient facts of the Watergate scandal are no longer in the "shadowland of uncertainty," Hays said. "No one can claim that Mr. Nixon was hounded out of office. It was his admission that he had not told us the truth that led to the unanimous verdict of the House Judiciary Committee that articles of impeachment should be voted."

While asserting that he had no desire to see the former president behind bars, Hays, nonetheless, deplored the pardon of Mr. Nixon by President Ford. He sees the pardoning "as representing a straining of the presidential powers of pardon under the Constitution and a breach of the judicial process."

But Hays had kind words for Mr. Ford for his "indicating that he is aware of the sins against our government in the complex activities known as Watergate." He praised Ford for speaking out against illegal wiretapping and his promise to prevent inspection of income tax returns by his aids and others, "a practice that grew up during the Nixon years."

Hays scored the so-called "dirty tricks" of Watergate, calling them "distortions produced by disreputable activities of the group which was financed by funds ostensibly raised to re-elect the president," and "forgery of letters imputing to opposing candidates crimes of which they were completely innocent."

"The Christian seeks a sensitivity to human need that propels him into the struggle for amelioration and hope for a better order of living," he continued. "It is something to challenge us that 20 per cent of the American people are below the poverty line."

The primal motivation of Christians is a desire to fulfill the mandate of Jesus for us to minister to "his little ones."

The Hays lectureship is supported by earnings from an endowment fund which has already reached \$20,000, Jerry Warmath, pastor of Pulaski Heights Baptist Church, has reported.

Future plans call for an outstanding lecturer each year to continue the series.

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Erwin L. McDonald is editor emeritus of the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine and religion editor of the Arkansas Democrat, Little Rock.

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Medical Personnel Enlisted  
For Honduras Relief Mission

10/8/74

RICHMOND (BP)--In response to needs for medical personnel following the massive destruction by Hurricane Fifi which hit Honduras Sept. 19, six Baptist physicians and one nurse have volunteered for several weeks of relief work in that Central American country.

Sponsored by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, they will work in San Pedro Sula with Dr. W. David Harms, Southern Baptist medical missionary to Honduras. They will help in a section of the city designated for Baptist relief efforts by the Honduran government.

Dr. Wilbur C. Lewis and his wife, a nurse, from Oklahoma City, Okla., will be leaving immediately. Dr. William J. Bickers from Memphis, Tenn., will arrive later in October. Dr. Bickers and Dr. and Mrs. Lewis are former Southern Baptist medical missionaries to Paraguay.

A Southern Baptist medical missionary to Paraguay, Dr. William Skinner, will also arrive in Honduras from Paraguay.

A team of physicians from Bowman Gray School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, N.C., the only Baptist medical school in the United States, will also assist the Honduras missionaries. Dr. John Denham, Dr. Richard Sterba and Dr. Michael Roberts are making plans to leave for Honduras.

Plans are being finalized concerning the possibility of additional aid from several doctors from the Mexico-American Hospital, a Baptist hospital in Guadalajara, Mexico.

Medical relief volunteers are being coordinated through the office of the Foreign Mission Board's medical consultant, Dr. Franklin T. Fowler.

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NAB Code Board Recommends  
Off-Track Betting Advertising

10/8/74

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Television Code Review Board of the National Association of Broadcasters recommended in a meeting here that television stations be allowed to accept off-track betting (O-TB) advertising in states where it is legal.

The action is subject to approval by the NAB Television Board at the NAB's board of directors meeting next January in San Juan, Puerto Rico. An NAB spokesman in Washington said the Television Board has twice before rejected similar proposals by the Code Review Board.

In other action, the review board adopted guidelines to assure truthfulness of comparative advertising, recommended that the Television Board strengthen code provisions in programming and advertising for children and asked the NAB's Code Authority to review its alcoholic beverage guidelines to make any changes considered necessary.

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Proposed language of the measure on off-track betting would permit only "institutional type advertising which does not exhort the public to bet," an NAB announcement reported.

The board acted on the O-TB proposal, the announcement said, after hearing a presentation by Paul R. Screvane, chairman and president of New York City's Off-Track Betting Corp., and three members of his staff.

In response to a question by Baptist Press, James H. Hulbert of Washington, NAB's executive vice president in charge of public relations, said no one appeared before the Code Board to express a view differing from Screvane's. He noted, however, that Code Board is open to opposing points of view on any issue and that occasionally opposing points of view are aired at the NAB board of directors meeting.

Hulbert said Screvane's presentation asked for approval of the measure because off-track betting is legal in New York and because Screvane believes legal off-track betting would cut down on illegal gambling.

"They also noted," Hulbert continued, "that the commercials would be circumspect and would not try to get new people to bet but get regular bettors to place bets through O-TB instead of other channels."

On the alcoholic beverage question the Code Review Board screened a reel of beer and wine commercials before calling for the review of guidelines.

This was not to lead toward loosening standards, Hulbert told Baptist Press, but resulted because of "uneasiness" on the part of the board about "borderline" commercials which did not technically violate the code but seemed to be leaning toward promoting associations between youth and alcoholic consumption.

Vincent T. Wasilewski of Washington is NAB president and Stockton Helffrich directs the Code Authority at the NAB's main office in New York City.

All nine Code Review Board members attended the two-day gathering in Washington. They are Alfred R. Schneider, vice president, ABC, New York; Thomas J. Swafford, vice president, program practices, CBS-TV, New York; Herminio Traviesas, vice president, broadcast standards, NBC, New York; Wayne Kearn, Code Board chairman and president and general manager, KENS, San Antonio, Tex.; Harold Grams, vice president, broadcasting, KSD-TV, St. Louis; Wallace Jorgenson, executive vice president, WBTV, Charlotte, N.C.; Burton LaDow, general manager, KTVK, Phoenix, Ariz.; Roger Rice, vice president and general manager, KTVU, Oakland, Calif.; and Robert J. Rich, general manager, WDSM-TV, Duluth, Minn.

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SBC Foreign Missions Work  
Approaches Million Members

10/8/74

RICHMOND (BP)--The first million is the hardest to get, but, at the present rate of growth, churches overseas related to the 129-year-old efforts of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board should surpass that mark in membership in 1977.

That is the conservative dimension of a statistical projection by Ronald C. Hill, a missionary to Thailand since 1952, in an article he wrote for the October issue of The Commission, the Foreign Mission Board's monthly magazine.

Hill describes that anticipated historic milestone as "the takeoff point" for accelerated growth in the work of the world's greatest evangelical missionary sending organization.

During the past two decades, he reports, churches related to Southern Baptist foreign missions have nearly doubled in membership.

At the beginning of 1953, churches on the foreign field had 195,067 members. That accelerated 87 per cent to 364,943 by 1963, and then went up another 121 per cent to 807,356 through 1973, according to the latest available figures.

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"Projecting the present growth rate into the future presents a breathtaking challenge," says Hill, who assisted Joseph B. Underwood, Foreign Mission Board consultant for evangelism and church growth, during a furlough from Thailand.

"If Baptists (abroad) continue to baptize . . . (more than) 50,000 a year as during the past decade, the first million should be reached by 1977 and, by the year 2000, the second million.

"If, however, the momentum could be maintained of doubling every decade, a different picture would emerge. Considering 1977 as the takeoff year, the two million mark would be reached by 1987. . . and four million by . . . 2000," Hill says.

"While such growth and such a projection are exciting, the situation is not out of the ordinary in today's mission fields," continued Hill, citing a 1970 study by David Barrett, published in International Review of Missions, which shows mission field churches "are growing at a much faster rate in traditional mission lands than in the West."

Hill said Barrett, an ecumenical research executive, predicted more Christians will live in the "Third World" than in Europe and North America by 2000.

A comparison of statistics from the Southern Baptist foreign mission fields (where 2,554 missionaries now work in 81 countries) and from Southern Baptist work in the United States corresponds with Barrett's study.

In the past 20 years, churches on the foreign mission field related to Southern Baptist work have increased more than 300 per cent, rising from 2,201 at the end of 1953 to 6,907 at the end of 1973.

Membership during that time has almost quadrupled, from 214,767 at the end of 1953 to 807,356 at the end of last year.

Meanwhile in the United States, churches in the SBC, the nation's largest Protestant-evangelical denomination, showed only a 17.5 per cent increase from 29,496 to 34,667. Membership increased more than 4.4 million, from 7,886,016 at the end of 1953 to 12,297,346 at the end of 1973. That represents a 55.9 per cent increase.

The annual average growth rate in members has shown a 7.4 per cent increase each year on the mission field, but just 2.8 per cent in SBC churches at home.

Foreign mission field totals are not included in SBC statistics. The SBC sends missionaries and millions of dollars to develop and support indigenous churches and leadership, but mission field conventions are not identified as Southern Baptist. They bear the indigenous name, such as Kenya Baptist Convention.

The baptism category provides another comparison. In 1953, Baptist churches abroad baptized 20,326--a ratio of one baptism to every 10.57 members. In 1973, a record 62,151 foreign field baptisms represented a one to 12.99 ratio.

Although SBC churches baptized 361,835 persons in 1953, that represented a ratio of one baptism to 21.8 members, twice the members for the same result overseas.

The 1973 figures show the SBC churches here baptized 413,990--a ratio of one to 29.7, a much more rapid decline in ratio than overseas.

"Baptists in many countries showed almost no growth at all . . . (for such reasons as) newness of work, persecution, difficulty of proclamation, (and) unresponsiveness. . .

"In other countries, however, phenomenal growth has taken place," Hill continues. "Several East African countries are experiencing an ingathering into the churches from 16 to 60 per cent a year, far above the average.

"In Southeast Asia in 1973, unusual growth was taking place in Indonesia (18 per cent), the Philippines (22.3 per cent) and Vietnam (37.9 per cent). Korea, of course, continues to be one of the nations most responsive to the gospel."

But Hill notes that "rejoicing must be tempered by some sobering facts," The average annual membership growth rate in the overseas churches (more than seven per cent) is more than three times that of the world's population (two per cent), but the gap is not closing fast enough, he says.

"Even if we are able to win four million to discipleship by 2000 A.D., what of the projected four billion that still will be non-Christian by then? Is the goal of doubling every decade enough?"

Citing an observation about Baptists worldwide, by church growth expert Peter Wagner, Hill says that during the last decade Baptists of all varieties have grown at a rate of only 25 per cent.

"Although we have baptized over three million, we are standing still, barely keeping up with biological growth. Growth rates can slow down, and some Baptist bodies have stopped winning people at all."

Pointing out that Southern Baptists make up five per cent of the world's evangelical mission force, he notes, "As stewards of vast financial resources and with a reservoir of potential manpower perhaps unprecedented in modern Christian history, we represent an even larger part of the missionary potential. The troubling question is: Are we pulling our full weight? Are we producing our share of the fruit?"

He suggests possible approaches for improved ability to reach people on the mission field, including realistic but more challenging goals for Southern Baptists at home, missionaries and nationals to offset minimal growth possibilities.

Other suggestions include more long-range planning in evangelism and church development, redefining and sharpening of the role of field evangelists, seeking "vast numbers of new missionaries" to act as catalysts to overseas churches, more emphasis on responsive mission fields, developing of evangelism and church development "specialists," better mobilization of some 100,000 Southern Baptist laymen working overseas and thousands of Southern Baptists who will pay their way overseas for fixed term mission projects, and increased mobilization of overseas church membership through lay leadership and evangelism training, spiritual renewal and campaign evangelism.

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Adapted from the October, 1974 issue of The Commission, the Foreign Mission Board's monthly magazine.

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