

November 27, 1974

Japanese Show Interest
In Variety of Religions

74-90

By Lois Whaley
For Baptist Press

TOKYO, Japan (BP)--Japanese people are looking for something to believe in, and many are turning to religion.

There is a renewed interest in Christianity, but there is also a renewed interest in traditional Japanese religions characterized by the community shrines.

With a lively revival of festivals all over the country this year, community shrines have organized the most colorful parades seen in modern Japan. The sound of temple drums and voices chanting can be heard almost daily as gaily dressed groups pull portable shrines through the streets.

Newspapers report record participation, and stores dealing in religious articles are doing a prosperous business. All of this creates an atmosphere of festivity which is infectious and impossible for the average child to resist.

Christians differ concerning the influence of these activities. Some say this is simply an aspect of Japanese culture and should be regarded as just another game, a club activity or an athletic meet. They contribute to the community shrines and allow their children to participate in the parades and bazaars, although they say it has no religious significance for their family.

But Mrs. Soeda, a pastor's wife, writer and mother of a well-known sociologist, does not agree. "It is not just a game for children," she said. "It is the gateway into a lifelong commitment, and Christians should be very careful of the effect on their children."

There may be many reasons for this new interest in traditional religions. The government's efforts to re-establish a national Shinto shrine in the center of Tokyo is a major cause. This has been controversial, with Christians speaking out strongly against it.

They fear a return to a national religion which would make it difficult for Christians to practice and preach their convictions. Already government sanction and public opinion encourage the renewal of these traditions. Christians may be fighting a losing battle.

A worthwhile wave of nostalgia may also be a reason for this revival. Tired of the noisy, impersonal cities, people long for the happy camaraderie of their childhood. The festival songs and dances bring back memories of carefree days in quiet villages. It is a touch with the past when they knew who they were and what they believed.

Financial insecurity also affects the mood of the people. Japan has also felt the "oil shock." Inflation at home makes Japanese products abroad more expensive, and they suffer in a competitive market. Bankruptcy and unemployment make personal incomes uncertain. With the shiny world of materialism tarnishing, they grasp for some constant value.

Japanese people also have a very sensitive, artistic nature. They have always been appreciative of spiritual discipline. After an extended period of material pursuits, it is only natural that the reasonable man return to a time of meditation.

Lonely, uncertain people seek answers for life in a complicated world. Many of them prefer the hope and promise of life they find in the Christian gospel.

The churches are aware of this and almost every congregation is excited about finding and winning these people. Autumn is a popular time for evangelistic meetings, and already

churches in every area are reporting good results. In fact, some churches which haven't had additions for years, are baptizing new Christians.

The 55-member Okubo Baptist Church in Tokyo recently planned and organized home meetings, team visitation and prayer meetings to prepare for their fall "revival." Sixty-six decisions for Jesus Christ were reported during the week, with Pastor Arase of Mt. Zion Baptist Church of North Kyushu preaching. Eleven persons asked for baptism, another 28 requested special instruction leading to baptism and others signed statements promising to attend services and study Christianity.

The harvest will continue for months as the Christians lead and teach these new prospects. But already the results are exciting.

What is the future of Christianity in Japan? It may be difficult, but it can be victorious as His disciples do His bidding and preach the gospel.

-30-

(BP) Photos mailed to Baptist state editors.

NOTE: Mrs. Whaley is a Southern Baptist Missionary stationed in Tokyo, Japan.

Ola Cox Dies
in West Virginia

11/27/74

CHARLESTON, W. VA. (BP)--Mrs. Ola Cox, director of Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) for the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists, died November 27 after a long struggle with cancer. She had been hospitalized 28 months.

Mrs. Cox pioneered in organizing WMU work in West Virginia, beginning even before the convention's founding in 1970.

She had served as a special worker in Baptist Student work, library and Sunday School children's work for the West Virginia convention. Mrs. Cox had also served as president of the Union Mission Auxiliary, in an interdenominational ministry in Charleston.

WMU of West Virginia honored Mrs. Cox in 1973 by naming their state mission offering after her.

Surviving are her husband, Elmo and two sons. A memorial service and burial were to be in South Charleston.

-30-

Ad Hoc Group Suggests Ways
To Speed Disaster Relief

11/27/74

ATLANTA (BP)--Southern Baptist response to national disaster should be faster, an ad hoc committee of state and agency Brotherhood and mission representatives attending a stateside disaster relief meeting said here.

To speed response, the committee recommended to the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (HMB) that a national coordinator be appointed, a how-to manual be written. Recommended also was the development of a uniform arm band symbol for immediate recognition of qualified volunteers.

They also recommended seminary training in awareness and sensitivity in response to disaster, using minimesters, and j-terms (month-long).

The committee gave their recommendations to Paul Adkins, director of the HMB's Christian social ministries department which administers disaster relief funds of \$100,000 per year to churches and individuals as direct gifts to those in need.

Normal procedure is for funds to be requested from and channeled through state conventions

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"We sent \$6,000 this morning to Alaska to help in the Nome area which was hit last week by high tides and winds," said Adkins.

The committee said a national coordinator would operate out of the HMB's Atlanta offices with fulltime responsibilities of assisting state conventions in providing training and identifying governmental referral agencies and types of equipment needed.

"This person should have at hand a computer printout of plumbers, carpenters, physicians and paramedical personnel ready to drop everything and give three days to two weeks to disaster relief," Adkins noted.

The how-to manual which the committee plans to begin work on immediately should become a policy and action guideline for state conventions interested in disaster relief. It will include information on the impact phase, the cleanup and inspection phase, reconstruction and repairs after a disaster.

The committee said they hoped these recommendations would help solve the two basic problems in disaster relief: identification of services needed and logistics of providing food, housing, clothing, counseling.

Other suggestions included each convention providing a fund which could be used immediately in a disaster, and chaplains to be assigned to teams relating people to the congregations in the disaster area.

-30-

33 State Conventions Report Harmony and Growth

By Baptist Press

Thirty-three state conventions, affiliated with the 12.3-million-member Southern Baptist Convention, completed annual sessions, amidst unanimous reports of harmony and numerical and financial growth.

Harmony, reports indicated, was the hallmark, even though several state conventions dealt with some thorny issues.

A keynote of the conventions, which cover 50 states, was support of the SBC's Cooperative Program unified budget and a determination to cooperate with the Southern Baptists goal to raise \$150 million dollars in Cooperative program funds through the SBC's 34,665 churches in 1975-76 in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Cooperative Program.

The world hunger crisis seemed to be another common concern in the state convention sessions--drawing comment from at least nine conventions--Texas, North Carolina, Indiana, Mississippi, Arizona, Michigan, the District of Columbia, Florida and Kentucky.

Four--Illinois, New York, Alabama and Mississippi--reacted to a possible name change for the Southern Baptist Convention, a subject now under study by a seven-person committee authorized last June in Dallas at the annual SBC meeting.

Three Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana, expressed concern about the charismatic movement, and Georgia tabled a motion on it.

Several conventions opposed violence, profanity, and sex on television, asked for prayer support for President Ford and his programs of conservation and called for action to bring about integrity in government.

At the Missouri Convention, where controversy had erupted at the previous annual meeting, registered "messengers" bound up the wounds of disunity inflicted by a protracted controversy over financial management procedures.

Missouri Baptists overwhelmingly approved, without change, recommendations from the convention's restructure committee, which had been born out of turmoil over reported mis-

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management of Missouri Baptist funds.

The Missouri convention set mandatory retirement age for convention staff at 65, delayed until next year's convention a motion to set up a separate board for the convention's state paper, the Word and Way, and passed recommendations designed to improve management of funds.

On the question of alien immersion--accepting of immersed Christians from other bodies without rebaptism--North Carolina Baptists defeated a motion which would have eliminated messengers from churches which practice it, and Arkansas Baptists approved the voluntary withdrawal of messengers from a church to avoid controversy over it.

The issue in Arkansas concerned First Baptist Church, Russelville, which accepts persons baptized in other Baptist bodies. The controversy has continued for several years. Russelville messengers elected to withdraw but pledged continued support for Southern Baptists and the Cooperative Program.

On the question of an SBC name-change, a debate which arises periodically, Illinois and New York said another name would be more appropriate to a nationwide body, while Mississippi passed a resolution opposing such a change. Alabama Baptists tabled a motion opposing a name change, responding to a plea by a messenger to have an open mind and not restrict deliberations of the name-change committee.

Two state conventions--South Carolina and Virginia--faced the question of Baptist colleges receiving public money.

In South Carolina, Baptists established guidelines for the use of federal money and set up a watchdog committee to oversee the matter. The convention's action stipulates for their four colleges that the funds be used "with discrimination and upon proper safeguards." It limits use of government funds to non-religious and non-sectarian purposes of the institutions and prohibits acceptance of funds that would lead to "intolerable or undue elements of government control."

Expected controversy over the status of two Virginia Baptist Colleges, Averett and Virginia Intermont, failed to materialize, as messengers accepted an earlier action of the state convention's general board to refer the debate over charter changes at the two schools to the board's executive committee for study.

Earlier in the year, trustees of the two Baptist schools changed their charters to qualify technically as "non-sectarian" so their students could receive state tuition grants.

The Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists, which has progressed through financial troubles to solvency in the past six years, approved the sale of its office building in Wichita, Kan., and a move to Topeka in five years.

Two conventions--the District of Columbia and Oklahoma--took opposing stands on ordination of women. Oklahoma went on record as opposing, while D.C. called for ordination of women on an equal basis with men.

In Illinois, messengers faced a problem relating to alleged misappropriation of funds from the Baptist Children's Home, Carmi.

The administrative committee of the convention's board was asked to review auditing practices of Illinois state Baptist funds and report back to the board. The board was asked to take whatever action necessary and report back to the 1975 annual meeting.

The problem involves James Paynter, the home's business and development director, missing since Aug. 31, and the disappearance of at least \$86,000 over the past three years, according to incomplete audits. Messengers, however, passed a motion to seek Paynter's "redemption."

In New Mexico, messengers elected a new executive director, Chester O'Brien of Amarillo, Tex., to succeed R. Y. Bradford, who is retiring. O'Brien has served as superintendent of missions for the Amarillo Baptist Association of churches for the past nine years.

In Tennessee, Baptists set up a statewide ministry for the aging, and in Michigan they voted to purchase a new office building on the northwest edge of metropolitan Detroit, to occupy by April 1.

Alabama Baptists, in an effort to more nearly equalize tuition cost between state supported and Alabama Baptists schools, approved a scholarship from Cooperative Program funds for a qualified Baptist students.