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**Southern Baptists Look  
Into the Face of Disaster**

by Porter Routh

The tragic human consequences of great natural disasters and of widespread hunger have impressed Southern Baptists in recent months as never before.

Who can soon forget the devastation which left 50,000 homeless and 10,000 dead in Guatemala and Honduras after Hurricane Fifi struck?

Who can be comfortable when thinking of the great tragedy that befell Darwin, Australia, or some communities in the United States as tornadoes swept to earth?

Who can be complacent after looking at pictures of the haunting eyes and the emaciated bodies of little children in Bangladesh or the sub-Sahara?

Who does not share in the tremors of earthquakes bringing death and destruction to Central America, Peru, Iran, or Pakistan?

Jesus said one characteristic of the righteous would be that they "saw the hungry and gave something to eat." Again and again, the Bible teaches mercy and compassion.

Southern Baptists have always expressed concern in meeting world emergencies. After World War II, more than \$4,000,000 was given for relief and rehabilitation. In 1966, the Southern Baptist Executive Committee studied the problem, found that the Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board were involved in relief. The board executives, Arthur Rutledge and Baker James Cauthen "reported that a specific sum for emergency or disaster relief would be suggested as a part of the requested budget."

The 1966 report concluded "Because of the manner in which both mission boards plan to move into action immediately upon knowledge of any future disaster, and feeling that any added or new organizational machinery would be extraneous and financially burdensome, we would suggest that the matter be left in the hands of the two mission boards."

The report also stated, "We would further suggest that the Executive Committee put its stamp of approval on such a plan and seek to inform the membership of our many churches that any funds donated for specific relief by individuals or congregations be sent immediately to the Nashville office where the treasurer could forward such to the mission board directing such assistance. If funds shall be contributed without specific designation, the distribution shall be in proportion to the annual appropriation set forth in each board's operating budget."

The report was adopted by the Executive Committee on February 23, 1966 and reported to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

In program statements adopted by the SBC in 1966, the Foreign Mission Board was mandated in its "Program of Benevolent Ministries in Foreign Lands" to "maintain and publish clearly defined procedures for administering relief in foreign countries in crises created by wars, storms, earthquakes, famines, and other calamities" and to "coordinate direct assistance in facing benevolent ministries and relief by groups or individuals in the United States." The Foreign Mission Board was also authorized to work with "the Baptist World Alliance through cooperating in relief programs."

The Home Mission Board in the same year was authorized to "maintain clearly defined procedures for administering relief in times of crises created by storms, earthquakes, war and other tragic forces in areas served by the Home Mission Board" and to "coordinate national relief assistance of Southern Baptist groups or individuals in times of crises."

The Home Mission Board was also mandated to "work cooperatively with state conventions in administering relief in times of crises; whenever feasible, such efforts will be correlated with the relief effort of others."

The great tragedies brought on by disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes usually call for short range solutions. This may consist of food, clothing, energy, building material, and skills prepared to assist in rehabilitation. Governmental agencies from many parts of the world combine with agencies from the private sector to meet immediate needs. The needs in Honduras illustrate the problems which arise.

A more devastating need is brought on by world hunger, sometimes brought on by national disasters, such as the floods in Bangladesh, or the drought of sub-Sahara, brought on partly by ecological imbalance. These problems are larger, longer and more mind-boggling in finding solutions.

Lester R. Brown tells in his book on "By Bread Alone" that probably a billion people in the world, about one-fourth of the total population, suffer from serious hunger or malnutrition at least during part of the year.

U. N. demographers are now projecting a 6.5 billion population for the year 2000. All four of the major essentials for food production—land, water, energy and fertilizer—are now in short supply, very costly, and diminishing on a per capita basis.

The stress on ecology brought on by over grazing, deforestation, pesticides, etc., has had its effect on the supply of fish, on drought in Africa, and on floods in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The daily protein intake varies from about 90 grams per day in affluent countries to about 40 grams per day in the poorest. The U. N. food experts say a 145-pound man needs about 37 to 62 grams per day, depending on the quality of the protein consumed.

The literature on world hunger is growing as the food itself is dwindling, but this brief view is presented only to point out the complexity of the situation. Statistics do not define the problem. It is one thing to say an African mother must have six children in order to have one grow to maturity. It is another thing to go into a mud hut with the mother and share her grief.

In the face of these growing problems, growing shortages, and growing complexities, governments are trying to shift more of the burden to private agencies. Sending more dollars overseas is not always the answer. In some cases, it just drives up the price of already scarce grain or soybeans, or even fertilizer.

One does not know all of the answers, but perhaps we should seek for a greater share of the burden. The motivation for feeding the hungry and binding up the broken should be more than the secular and humanistic. Our Lord hears these cries.

What can we as Southern Baptists do as we hear these cries—at home and around the world?

We feel that the conclusion reached in 1966 still has validity; that new organizational machinery, new bureaucracy, is not the answer.

There is some understandable hesitation by the mission boards in mounting campaigns in face of the SBC Business and Financial Plan regarding special solicitations.

Perhaps the answer might lie in setting up a small advisory committee composed of the president of the Convention, representatives of the Home Mission Board, Foreign Mission Board, Executive Committee, state secretaries, editors, pastors, and laypersons, who could act quickly on the basis of considered criteria, in sounding the alert for Southern Baptists when immediate action is needed.

We should avoid duplication and waste, but we must also avoid apathy and unconcern.

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**Soviet Court Convicts  
 Dissident Baptist Leader**

MOSCOW (BP)--Georgi Vins, a dissident Soviet Baptist leader, has been sentenced to five years in jail and five in "internal exile" for "illegal religious action," according to wire service reports out of here.

The sentencing of 46-year-old Vins took place at a court in Kiev in the Ukraine, a Soviet human rights campaigner, physicist Andrei Sakharov told Western newsmen.

Vins, secretary of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB), a movement considered illegal by the Soviet government, was serving as an underground Baptist pastor last March, when secret police arrested him.

Best known leader of a claimed 100,000 or more "Initsiativniki," or reform Soviet Baptists, who refuse allegiance to the officially recognized All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Vins has been characterized by Time magazine as "stubborn and courageous."

He is, said Time in its Jan. 27, issue, "the latest in a line of Baptists from John Bunyan to Martin Luther King Jr. who have gone to jail for defying the state on grounds of conscience."

"Though the plight of Soviet Jews and intellectuals is far better publicized in the West," Time said, "Baptists have suffered every bit as much. At least 700 have been jailed, and one civil rights leader reports that Baptists have comprised more than one-third of the known political prisoners during the past two decades."

The reform Baptists broke from the legally established Baptist body, the AUCECB, several years ago, partly on the grounds it is allegedly controlled by the state. The AUCECB has denied this, but often supports Soviet policy, the wire reports said.

Knowledgeable observers say the AUCECB does so, in the same manner religious leaders in the United States support their government and that the AUCECB stance is taken to allow churches to continue to operate openly despite restrictions which include no religious training or baptism for youths.

Vins, who has already served one three-year sentence, was released in 1969 in broken health, according to reports. His father, also a pastor, died in prison camp and his mother ended a three-year sentence in 1973.

Last December, an international delegation of Baptist leaders, led by Robert Denny, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, pled for clemency for Vins and other religious prisoners in a meeting in Moscow with the deputy chairman of the Board of International Affairs of the USSR.

In October, the AUCECB, also made a request for the release of dissident believers now in Soviet prisons. Reportedly about 60 were released.

The Soviet government rejected separate requests of the Baptist World Alliance, the World Council of Churches and others to send observers to Vins' trial. The Soviets would also not allow a Christian lawyer to come into the country to defend Vins.

Sakharov said Vins had refused to be defended by an atheist attorney because he felt, the wire reports said, "that he was not competent to represent him in a trial involving religious matters."

Vins' case has drawn appeals from religious leaders and others, in and out of the Soviet Union, for clemency but to no avail. His family reportedly feels that another term in a labor camp will lead to his death. He is reportedly in poor health in a Kiev hospital.

## S. Korea Asks Baptist Preacher to Probe Oppression

ATLANTA (BP)--William L. Self, pastor of Wieuca Road Baptist Church here, has been invited to South Korea by the country's prime minister to examine the facts surrounding alleged religious oppression and report his findings.

Prime Minister Jong Kile Kim invited Self, a Southern Baptist minister, and his wife to visit, Feb. 17-26, upon the recommendation of Baptist evangelist, Billy Kim, who led an evangelistic crusade in Wieuca Road Baptist Church last November.

Kim, interpreter for Billy Graham when the American evangelist preached to millions in his South Korean crusade, said Self will be "the first American clergyman to be so invited," according to Jack U. Harwell, editor of the Christian Index, Georgia Baptist weekly newsmagazine.

The Korean evangelist, who some have called the "Billy Graham of the Orient," said, "Many people around the world have read one-sided stories about alleged religious oppression in South Korea. President Park Chung Hee wants American leaders to see the facts for themselves and to share these facts with others."

He said: "Dr. Self will have full access to all facets of South Korean life, including those people opposed to President Park, and he will be free to ask any questions on his mind."

The Selfs will have an official audience with President Park and meet members of the South Korean National Assembly.

Another purpose of his trip, he said, will be to speak in churches and evangelistic rallies and meet with missionaries of the 12.3-million-member Southern Baptist Convention, largest Protestant-evangelical denomination in the United States.

South Korea's invitation was officially presented to the Wieuca Road Baptist Church congregation on Feb. 2 by Billy Kim and In Deuk Kim, financial consultant to President Park and member of the South Korean National Assembly.

Reports have come from South Korea for many months that President Park was suppressing religious freedom. Methodist missionary George Ogle was deported in December for his public identity with people opposed to President Park.

In Deuk Kim told Harwell: "We want Dr. Self to look at South Korea's political, cultural, economic and religious situation as fully as he desires. After he observes it, we hope he will come back to America and tell it just like he sees it. We will pull no punches with Dr. and Mrs. Self and want them to hold back nothing. That's all we expect."

The American minister said he plans to thoroughly background himself on the South Korean situation and approach the task with no preconceptions. He has spoken in Spain, Brazil, Thailand, Hong Kong and Tokyo.

"This is an exciting and frightening opportunity for my wife and myself," he told the Christian Index, adding that he requests the prayers of Christians everywhere.

Self is a member of the board of trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, the world's largest missionary sending agency, which has 2,600 missionaries in 82 countries. That includes 80 assigned to South Korea. More than 18,500 persons are members of 409 South Korean Baptist churches, which are related to Southern Baptist missions.