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Charismatic Story Barely
Takes Top (BP) Poll Spot

By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE (BP)--The charismatic or neo-pentecostal clash among Southern Baptists, surging ahead on the strength of the final two ballots received, barely placed first in hotly-contested voting for the first three spots in the 1975 top ten Baptist Press (BP) stories poll.

The charismatic story collected 221 points in the (BP) poll of 33 Baptist state editors, the (BP) national office and six (BP) bureau chiefs. It edged out the story of the success of the Southern Baptist national Cooperative Program unified budget, which has continued to rise despite the unfavorable economy (218.9 points).

Third place went to Southern Baptist response to the Southeast Asia refugees, with 208.5 points.

In equally close voting for the fourth, fifth and sixth slots, the evacuation by Southern Baptist missionaries of four countries and missionary efforts amidst danger and political tension took fourth slot, slightly ahead of the story of Southern Baptists' refusal to bow to ultra-conservative creedalism advocates. The evacuation story got 144.4 points, and the "creedalism" story received 140.1 points in the (BP) rating system.

The escalating efforts of Southern Baptists to respond to world hunger and other relief needs drew 138.7 points for a sixth place finish.

The report of Southern Baptist foreign missions advance, while some other mission groups were reporting retrenchment, took a fairly comfortable seventh place finish, with 111.2 points. And the story of a 1,000-student enrollment increase in the six SBC theological seminaries over last year settled easily into eighth place, with 98 points.

The same held true of the story of the SBC Brotherhood Commission's decision in the face of financial difficulties to slash 25 percent of its staff. That story finished a clear-cut ninth, with 82 points.

But, in tight struggle for final place in the top ten, the SBC Home Mission Board's decision to elevate its department of evangelism in its structure showed enough finishing kick in the poll to outdistance the election by the Baptist World Alliance of its first layman and first Asian as BWA president. The Home Mission Board story claimed tenth with 62.9 points, while David Wong's BWA election dropped to eleventh with 61.3 points. That barely beat the decision by SBC messengers in June to accept recommendations not to change the denomination's name (58.8 points).

The top story--the charismatic controversy--involved widespread publicity of the expulsion of five churches by three associations of churches in three different states due to the practice of charismatic "gifts," particularly speaking in unknown tongues.

The expulsion issue did not surface on the state or national SBC levels, although SBC messengers in Miami Beach in June refused to denounce charismatics, and Texas Baptists refused to poll their more than 4,400 churches to determine their opinions on charismatics.

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In the continuing charismatic controversy, five churches in Alabama, Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky and Florida announced recently that they will sponsor a national charismatic conference next year in Dallas.

The Cooperative Program, which bucked the economy's downtrend to finish \$1.1 million above total budget requirements, produced over \$41.1 million from 34,734 churches in the nation's largest Protestant denomination. That topped the operating and capital needs of SBC agencies by \$4.1 million and the total budget, including a \$3 million "challenge" portion, by \$1.1 million. More than \$35.6 million in designated contributions also was collected during the 1974-75 fiscal year for national SBC causes, in addition to the \$41.1 million.

The Southeast Asia refugee story, replete with the human drama of displaced persons who had faced danger and grief, reported efforts of America's denominations and relief agencies to place 130,000 refugees.

Southern Baptists had problems with the resettlement effort, but the SBC Home and Foreign Mission Boards joined in an effort with Church World Service. They placed 2,652 refugees with Southern Baptists, not including refugees Southern Baptists helped through other channels. All 130,000 of the refugees were to have been placed by Christmas.

One of the most dramatic stories of the year, although it finished fourth in the balloting, was the evacuation by SBC missionaries of four countries while others continue in the face of the danger and tension in other countries.

Faced by agonizing decisions on whether to go or stay, missionaries eventually left South Vietnam, Laos, Angola and Mozambique but remained in such troubled countries as Portugal and Lebanon. In each case, the Foreign Mission Board has left the decision to the missionaries themselves.

The fifth place story reported attempts by ultra-conservatives to make a creed of the statement of "Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the 1963 Southern Baptist Convention. But Southern Baptists, although steadfastly supporting the Bible and the statement of faith and message itself, continued on more than one front to hold to a middle of the road stance in 1975.

In Miami Beach, SBC messengers refused to tamper with the statement, and an earlier pre-convention meeting of the ultra-conservative Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship was cancelled, reportedly because of "lack of interest."

Messengers in at least two state conventions--particularly Georgia where both the Bible and faith and message statement drew unanimous support--Baptists nevertheless refused to narrow their parameters of belief to ultra-conservatism and stood firmly in the middle of the conservative theological spectrum.

Although SBC missionaries evacuated four countries, the seventh place story showed continuing advancement by SBC foreign missions, while some other missionary groups have reported retrenchment. The SBC entered two new mission fields, appointed a one-year record total of 265 new missionaries in 1975 and received growing financial support for missions through the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions.

While both the Cooperative Program and overseas missions ran counter to trends reported by some other religious groups, the same held true in seminary enrollment. The eighth place story is one of continued growth. SBC seminaries enrolled 1,000 more students in fall, 1975, than in fall, 1974, and reported student housing bursting at the seams.

Additional reports on the ninth place story--the Brotherhood Commission employee cutback--indicate that the commission finished the fiscal year in the black, despite its originally bleak prospects. All released employees found new positions.

Some 78.5 percent of the state paper and Baptist Press editors returned ballots by deadline time. Ballots were tabulated using a rating system provided to (BP) by Martin Bradley, manager of the research services department of the SBC Sunday School Board. The system includes statistical factors which give weight both to the place on the ballot a story was ranked and the number of ballots on which it appeared.

Teel Leaving Mission Field To
Join Stewardship Commission

NASHVILLE (BP)--James O. Teel Jr., who is completing 20 years as a Southern Baptist missionary to Argentina, will join the Southern Baptist Stewardship Commission here in early February as assistant director of Cooperative Program promotion.

Teel, 48, will assist Michael L. Speer, the commission's associate director and director of Cooperative Program promotion. His duties will include assisting in planning, developing and coordinating promotion of the SBC's unified budget, assisting in public relations and working with SBC agencies and media in developing content of editorial materials about the Cooperative Program and what it accomplishes.

A native of Electra, Tex., Teel has been serving as press representative for the Argentine Baptist Mission (organization of missionaries) and holds its power of attorney, a duty which involves caring for the mission's property and looking after its legal affairs.

He has also served as promoter of radio and television evangelism for the Argentine Baptist Convention, coordinator of evangelistic campaigns and pastor during his tenure as a foreign missionary.

On his last furlough, Teel spent a year with the stewardship division of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, under joint sponsorship of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and Texas Baptists, in promoting missions and Cooperative Program support.

A pastor in Texas before missionary appointment, Teel is a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Tex., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Forth Worth.

He is accredited by the Public Relations Society of America and is a member of the Baptist Public Relations Association.

Mrs. Teel, the former Georgie Williams of Dallas, is a graduate of Hardin-Simmons and has studied at Southwestern Seminary and Hendrick Memorial School of Nursing, Abilene.

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(BP) Photo will be mailed to state Baptist papers.

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Santa Claus
A Baptist?

MIAMI, Fla. (BP)--Santa Claus is a Baptist. Pass it on.

John Kooistra always had the urge "to scream, shout and holler in a store." Now he can do all that and get away with it, in the Jordan Marsh store here, where he plays Santa Claus during the December holiday season. At the same time, he gets in a good word, from time to time, for Jesus Christ.

Kooistra, who is minister of music for the First Baptist Church in South Miami, says the youngsters pull his whiskers, "to see if I'm real." Many of them offer to leave "a cold beer" for Santa when he makes his rounds at Christmas.

"I say, 'No thanks, how about cheese cake and cocoa instead?'"

While some Christians believe teaching a child about Santa is less than right, Kooistra believes taking away "that particular joy of Christmastime is robbing a child of a part of life."

Besides, "I always emphasize that giving is the most important part of Christmas, to Mom and Dad and others." One child asked Kooistra, "Santa, what can I give you for Christmas?" And, "I melted on the spot," the music minister recalled.

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Kooistra and "Bobo the Clown," a Presbyterian, also in the Miami area, are both Christians who entertain at Christmas parties for children, where they have been given opportunity to tell about the Christ of Christmas.

"When I wear my Santa Claus suit to tell the story of Christ, the children are all ears," noted Kooistra. "I reach more kids at Christmas than most ministers can reach in a year."

When people insist that Christians shouldn't have anything to do with Santa Claus, partly because they say it confuses a child's perspective on the Christian's reasons for celebrating Christmas, Kooistra disagrees; "One woman handed me a gospel tract. I said that I was a Christian, so she said, 'I thought there was something different about you.' She brought her friends to see Santa after that."

Another plus for Santa is that Kooistra gives his earnings from playing St. Nick to the Southern Baptist Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions.

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Missionary Recounts
Beirut Experiences

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By Charlie Warren

RICHMOND (BP)--Why, in the midst of civil war, violence and danger, are Southern Baptist foreign missionaries remaining in Beirut?

"People are afraid," said missionary James K. Ragland. "They are faced with death. They need the witness that we have to offer. That's why we're there. That's why we're staying."

Ragland made these comments in a telephone interview just two days after leaving Beirut for a two-week stay in the United States to visit his father in Oklahoma, who is ill, and his wife and children who earlier evacuated Lebanon.

But Ragland planned to return January 2. He wants to reopen the Beirut Baptist School, which he directs.

"We're called to live with the people," he said, "to share with them their dangers, their successes, their sorrows. As long as we can live there, get food to eat and medical attention, we're going to stay.

"We're there to encourage the local believers and lend a helping hand. We're there to witness."

Ragland told of his exit from Beirut to the airport outside the city. The bus in which he rode was under an armed escort by government security forces. No other way seemed safe, he said.

He told of terrorists from both Muslim and Christian groups who have stopped cars on the road to the airport, kidnapping those of opposing religious and political groups. Many of the hostages are either held for ransom or executed, he said.

"They're calling it a civil war even in Lebanon," Ragland said.

He admitted being afraid on several occasions, but said he felt "victory" at these times because he knew people were praying for him. During recent months, his wife and children were gone, his neighbors were gone, and for more than a week telephone lines were cut between his house and the seminary where the other remaining Southern Baptist missionaries live.

"I couldn't even make contact with my colleagues," he said. "I felt rather alone--cut off."

Ragland left four workers living in the basement of the Baptist school. The school has received only minor damage. One stray rifle shot hit the building, and explosions nearby have broken window panes.

In another section of Beirut, the Baptist seminary is open and functioning smoothly, according to Ragland. Even though shells fired toward and from a nearby refugee camp have passed over the seminary and there is no electricity except for a generator, the students are continuing their study.

Most churches are still holding services, Ragland said, with high attendance in some and poor attendance at those churches in areas where fighting has been heaviest.

He challenged Baptists to pray, keep informed, and be ready to lend a financial hand for additional relief efforts. He explained that people have lost their jobs as well as personal property and that rebuilding will take a long time.

Ragland and his missionary colleagues stand ready to assist in whatever relief efforts are needed, he said. The Finlay Grahams and the David Kings will remain at the seminary, although the Kings and two volunteers, Miss Isabelle McLelland and Mrs. Ann Pfaender are spending Christmas in Jordan. The Bill Trimbles are also temporarily in Jordan. William O. Hern is returning to the United States to join his family. As one Lebanese Baptist leader expressed; "You (Baptist missionaries) have thought many times you'd have to leave, but you haven't left yet. I think you're here to stay."