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SBC Challenged To
 Double Membership

By Dan Martin

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Southern Baptists have been challenged to begin a "13 Million Campaign" to double SBC membership.

F. Jack Redford, director of the church extension department at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, told more than 2,000 participants at Home Missions Week at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center that Southern Baptist churches currently do well to equal the birthrate of their membership in new converts.

"It would seem that biological growth is the mainstream of SBC growth," he said, noting the decline in baptisms and enrollment in church organizations last year.

During 1977, the more than 35,000 Southern Baptist churches recorded the lowest level of baptisms in 27 years, a dip generally attributed to the decline in enrollment of pre-teenage children in Sunday School because of lower birthrates.

"Only a few of our churches have demonstrated the ability to really burst outside the rut and explode with growth other than biological," Redford said. "The most effective growth and penetration beyond SBC culture and mere biological growth is in new work situations," he said. "Multiple studies indicate new churches baptize more people per member and penetrate outside the SBC culture more effectively than do churches more than 10 years old."

Redford cited statistics which indicate "more than 100 million Americans are unchurched--lost" and noted that if there are 100 million unchurched and 100 million churched, the "logical burden for the SBC is to reach 13 million more people." The SBC currently has members in 35,255 churches in all 50 states. It has shown a growth in membership every year since 1926.

"In 1889, there was one SBC church for every 4,000 persons," he said. "The ratio is now one church per 6,000 persons. If we returned to the 1889 ratio of evangelistic penetration, we would need to start 15,000 new churches immediately.

"However, we had one church per 4,000 persons when other mainline denominations were 'blowing and going' in evangelism growth," he continued. "Today, many of those mainline denominations have declined in membership by the millions. Even if we returned to the 1889 ratio, we would still have a tremendous vacuum left by the disbanded churches of other denominations."

Redford also said that once there were Baptist churches on every corner in New England, but "now there are more Howard Johnson restaurants there than Baptist churches. This same pattern is true in many other regions of our nation as well."

In making the challenge for a "13 Million Campaign," Redford said Southern Baptists would need a minimum of 35,000 new churches and that Baptists will have to win and baptize more persons outside SBC life, persons "other than our own children."

As he traced the need for a major evangelistic, church-planting push, Redford noted: "We have had the '30,000 Movement,' 'Project 500,' 'Extend Now,' 'Two-Win-One,' 'A Million More in 54.' All of these emphases did some good things, but all fell far short of the goal.

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"Is Bold Mission Thrust (the SBC plan to evangelize the world by the year 2000) going to be the dying gasp of a disintegrating denomination?" he asked.

"Or, is it going to be the devil's waterloo, as a great national revival sweeps across America with churches born, lives changed, needs met?"

"Is this a wild thought?" he asked. "Do you think such a disaster could happen to us Southern Baptists? Other mainline denominations have gone the cycle before us, characterized by declining statistics, lagging baptisms, negative attitudes toward starting new churches, a substitution of minor concerns for major activities, and absence of confrontation evangelism.

"Today those denominations are shrunken relics--gaunt hulls--of once great denominations which proclaimed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord," he said.

"A continued refusal to plant new churches in needy areas of the South will move us down this same cycle. A similar rising attitude in the pioneer areas will stagnate growth there and build in reversal and decline for the Southern Baptist Convention," he added.

Redford challenged Southern Baptists to accept the responsibility of winning at least 13 million converts and of planting 35,000 new churches, to evangelize and disciple those who are won.

"We do not need to let decline happen," he said. "But if we prevent decline, we must be bold in our mission endeavors. We must deliberately, intelligently, cheerfully plan to plant new churches and missions in every nook and corner of America.

"They cannot, however, be 'business as usual' churches," he declared. "They must be evangelistic churches which will reach the millions of unchurched Americans for Jesus Christ."

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Famed Baptist Pastor,
R. G. Lee Dies July 20

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Robert G. Lee, three-term president of the Southern Baptist Convention and a leading SBC pastor for 50 years, died at home July 20 after a long illness. He was 91.

Lee, son of a former South Carolina share cropper, was pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis for 33 years, during which time the congregation grew from 1,430 to 9,200--the largest SBC church east of the Mississippi and then the second largest in the convention.

He retired from the church in 1960 at age 73, but continued to keep a full schedule of evangelistic services until a series of heart attacks hospitalized him 15 months ago in Oklahoma City where he was preaching during a revival meeting. Lee convalesced at home before he began having heart problems again three months ago.

Lee was best known for his "Pay Day Someday" sermon, first preached at the First Baptist Church, Edgefield, S.C. in 1919 and over 1,300 times since. The slow but powerfully developed story of divine retribution takes a full hour to preach, has been filmed, recorded and translated into several other languages.

Lee wrote 53 books, averaged 12 visits to church members and prospects per day, and baptized converts every Sunday he was in the pulpit at Bellevue.

When asked by a young preacher in 1949 the secret of his renowned preaching, Lee "shook with emotion," a letter from the admirer said. "His voice trembled. His heart broke open."

"I suppose," Lee said, "it is that I love Jesus. I love him more than anything in the world. He is so real to me. I would die for him. I would be a human bonfire for him." He turned to wipe tears away. "I love my wife. I love my daughter," he sobbed lightly, "but I love Jesus more. There is nothing I would not do for him."

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Lee's wife of 57 years, Beulah, who died in 1971, once said that the only time she ever saw her husband lose his temper was when a little girl he baptized swam out of the water.

Lee was president of the Southern Baptist Convention for three terms, 1949-50-51, the last man in four decades to serve three terms. He was pastor of the First Baptist Churches of Edgefield, and Chester, S.C., and New Orleans, La.; Citadel Square Baptist Church, Charleston, S.C., and of Bellevue. He graduated from Furman University in 1913 and from Chicago Law School in 1919.

The power of his presence was impressive enough as he chaired the 1949 SBC annual meeting in Oklahoma City to warrant mention in even a London Baptist newspaper. When a motion was presented that threatened to divide the convention and appeared to have considerable support, he stepped to the podium and said, "Brethren, this motion is a mistake; it ought not to pass. I move that the whole matter be tabled." It was.

Lee planned his funeral in detail five years ago, specifying the "present pastor" of Bellevue, (Adrian Rogers) to preach the main message. He put a time limit on each participant, including Rogers.

Lee's body laid in state in the Bellevue sanctuary and the funeral was July 22.

Lee is survived by two daughters; Mrs. Ed King, Shelbyville, Tenn., and Hildred Phillips, Memphis; and a son, John, of Florida.

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Youth Told To Share Faith
In Their Own Languages

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
7/20/78

MANILA (BP)--A Taiwan pastor urged 1,623 delegates attending the opening session of the ninth Baptist Youth World Conference to share their Christian faith in their own language and culture.

Convening for the first time in Asia, the Baptist World Alliance-sponsored youth meeting is held every five years. In addition to the registered delegates, 900 Manila citizens participated in keynote sessions.

Addressing the conference theme, "Jesus Christ--The One Light for All People," Lien Hwa Chow, pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Taipei, said God is the same for all people and "there cannot be African, Asian, European or American gods. Many see God as only a white god because we have failed to introduce him in the language and culture of our own people."

The two-hour session featured an international mixture of music groups from three nations, a pantomime duet and Oscar, the talking computer, who introduced program personalities.

"While darkness is a sign of the age," Chow said, "the real darkness is the spiritual need of human beings. If we believe Jesus is the one light, we are to tell others, to proclaim, to shout our faith."

Chow said people are all the same, yet different. "Some of us eat with chopsticks; some with forks," he said. "But we all eat. Some express affection openly; others do not. But we all love each other."

The common need of people is to recognize that they are sinners and need forgiveness, Chow said.

BWA General Secretary Robert Denny told the youth he saw great potential in their lives. "I see the leaders of tomorrow--not just of the church, but of the state and business world as well," said Denny, directing his last youth conference before retiring in 1980.

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Jose Borrás Elected
President of Seminary

MADRID, Spain (BP)--Jose Borrás, 51, has been elected president of Spanish Baptist Seminary in Madrid, the first Spaniard to serve in the capacity.

Borrás, president of the Spanish Baptist Union, 1970-1976, succeeds Gerald A. McNeely, Southern Baptist missionary who had served as president for 10 years. McNeely will continue at the seminary as vice president, but resigned the presidency to devote more time to teaching and Sunday School promotion.

Borrás started teaching at the seminary in 1960 and had served since 1974 as dean. He was educated for the Roman Catholic priesthood but as a young man became a Baptist. He studied at the seminary, received his bachelor of divinity degree from the Baptist Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, and a master's degree from Union Theological Seminary in New York. He did further study during the 1977-78 school year at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, where he also taught.

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Peter Vins Beaten in Jail;
Family Ready to Emigrate

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--Peter Vins, son of imprisoned dissident Soviet Baptist pastor Georgi Vins, was beaten by a prison guard upon his arrival at a Ukrainian labor camp to serve a one-year sentence for "parasitism," according to a British group which monitors religious liberty developments in communist countries.

The Centre for the Study of Religion and Communism at Keston College in Kent reported July 6 that the younger Vins was beaten by a Soviet prison warden "for no apparent reason." Subsequent to the beating, however, Vins' mother visited him and "found him in good spirits."

Vins was first warned on Dec. 1, 1977 that he would face prosecution if he did not find a job within one month. A week later, however, he was arrested and detained until Jan. 6, 1978. According to the centre, he required medical attention on several occasions during this first imprisonment and was admitted to a hospital three different times.

After his release, he was physically "unfit for work," the centre reported.

He visited his father in Yakutia, a labor camp in Siberia, to inform the elder Vins that the family had received invitations from relatives in Canada to emigrate to that country.

According to the centre, Georgi Vins informed his son in a written statement "certified by the labour camp administration" that he is ready to leave the Soviet Union and join the Canadian relatives. One week after returning to Kiev from Siberia, Peter Vins was re-arrested for "parasitism," the standard Soviet charge against persons "unwilling" to work.

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