



April 4, 1979

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Changes Bring New Interest,
New Hope to European Baptists By Ruth Fowler

Europe is changing. Political, economic and social upheavals rock the continent. Baptist witness there is changing, too. New emphasis on evangelism and an increase in baptisms mark what missionaries hope will be a new era in church growth.

Since the beginning of World War I, Europe has been unstable politically. Monarchies have been replaced--sometimes with dictators, sometimes with democracies. Some people who once worshipped freely are now restricted. Others, once restricted, now worship freely.

Political changes affect the legal standing of Baptist churches and their freedom to witness publicly. A new church building in Madrid visibly marks the beginning of a new era of religious liberty in Spain. It stands, clearly labeled as a Baptist church, on land purchased more than 30 years ago when no building could be publicly identified as a non-Catholic church.

Less than a decade ago, Spanish Baptist churches could not openly advertise their existence or hold meetings in public squares. That, too, has changed.

Spanish Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries in Spain have responded to the new freedom with plans for public crusades, mass media usage and literature distribution. In an ambitious five-year plan, Spanish Baptists and missionaries anticipate establishing new work in places unreached by Baptist witness and strengthening existing work.

Early reports of this plan's progress indicate 21 persons accepted Christ during the first month of intensive evangelical efforts in Gandia, Spain. In the seven years prior to the new efforts, the small congregation had gained eight members.

In communist eastern Europe, Baptists continue to worship and grow in membership at a faster rate than any other place in Europe--in spite of government restrictions. According to Baptist World Alliance totals, Romania had 164,000 Baptist church members and Russia, 540,000, at the close of 1978. This compares with 4,909 in Italy and 4,686 in France.

Southern Baptist missionaries have a fraternal representative to these eastern European nations who travels through the communist bloc countries for special preaching engagements.

In other parts of Europe, years of declining church membership have finally ended. But Europeans still do not express the same eagerness for the gospel found in some parts of the world. The witness has been slow, painfully slow, with missionaries sometimes waiting several years before seeing a small congregation established.

The historical and cultural patterns for Europe are one reason for the lack of interest in evangelical churches. For many years the Roman Catholic Church has led religious life. Now, according to missionaries in France, large percentages of the people are no longer active in the Catholic church.

In some countries, only 20 to 30 percent of the professed Catholics are active church members. In France, a 1974 study shows that some 28 percent of those calling themselves Catholic deny the deity and role of Christ in their faith. Another 33 percent call themselves non-practicing, according to Jackie (Mrs. Gene A.) Phillips, Southern Baptist missionary press representative in France.

Other statistics claim that less than 1 percent of France's population is in church on any given Sunday. Yet these same people, some 93 percent of the population of France, say they wish to have their children baptized. They disclaim belief but cling to the practice of ordinances.

Most missionaries in France agree that apathy and ignorance are their biggest obstacles, and not just on the part of nonbelievers. In years past, a minority of missionaries and local Baptists has fought an uphill battle to make evangelism a part of every church's ongoing work.

With traditions taking the place of personal faith, witnessing becomes more difficult. For people to accept the message from Baptists, they must first realize their own religious practices without faith are empty.

Italian Baptists face the same problems as French Baptists, but on a different scale because more Italians attend Catholic services.

Many Europeans have heard about Christ without really hearing Christ's message. Missionaries in Italy say the people are not tired of the message; they have never really heard it.

Now, Italian Baptists are experiencing a growing interest in evangelism, led in part by Saverio Guarna, the Italian convention's secretary for evangelism. Several churches have held crusades or revivals and many others have organized visitation or personal witnessing programs.

In May 1978 Giuseppe Pavoni was the first person ordained in the Italian Baptist Convention in five years, according to Helen (Mrs. William C. Jr.) Ruchti, Southern Baptist missionary press representative. For several years the convention encouraged prospective pastors to take secular jobs and be lay pastors. Runaway inflation has made it practically impossible for some churches of Italy to support a salaried pastor. In this bleak economic picture, Pavoni's ordination marks a willingness to try for more salaried, full-time pastors.

Individual families are feeling the impact of inflation, but Baptists are giving more and more to support evangelism and theological education. They gave and pledged more than 185,500 Swiss francs to keep open the financially troubled Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

The struggle for financial stability and a new interest in evangelism are not confined to Italy and France, although those nations are good examples. In other European nations--Scotland, Britain, West Germany, Spain, Portugal--Baptist leaders and pastors are putting a new or renewed emphasis on evangelism while struggling to keep ahead of inflation.

Some Baptist leaders see the increase in members and new commitments to personal and financial support of evangelism efforts as an open door to Christian witness at the end of a long, dark tunnel.

In the middle of all the changes taking place in Europe today, Baptists have every intention of stepping through that open door. (BP)

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(BP) map mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond Bureau of Baptist Press.

White-Collar Crime Fight
Inadequate: GAO Report

Baptist Press
4/4/79

WASHINGTON (BP)--A General Accounting Office report reveals that federal funding to combat white-collar crime and political corruption is inadequate.

Released in Washington by Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Mich., chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, the report shows the Justice Department spent only 5.1 percent of its total budget in 1977 and 1978 in the fight against white collar crime. Conyers' subcommittee estimates that white collar crime costs the American public at least \$200 billion per year compared to \$4 billion annually for all street crimes against property.

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Conyers noted that "the attorney general and the director of the FBI have designated white-collar crime and public corruption as 'top priority areas'. The GAO report will help... match the rhetoric regarding the alleged elevation in importance of combatting such crime against the reality of actual spending levels."

Conyers pointed out that the GAO report shows federal assistance to the states through the law enforcement assistance administration (LEAA) amounted to only 0.7 percent of block grant funds and 4.3 percent of federal discretionary funds for fighting white-collar and organized crime from 1969 through 1976.

"It is disturbing to note that while the president and the attorney general have been proclaiming white-collar crime to be a number one priority within the justice department, LEAA has been slashing funding for white-collar crime projects," said Conyers. GAO reports that LEAA discretionary grants for fighting white-collar crime were cut from \$4.57 million in 1976 to \$2.24 million in 1977.

Conyers conducted hearings on white-collar crime during the last Congress and announced they will continue throughout the 96th Congress. He has also introduced legislation which would make white-collar crime one of four national priority programs for future funding.

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Believers' Baptism Termed 'Most Attested' NT Practice

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Theologians from nine countries started a bridge across baptismal waters, but no one crossed it during a consultation on baptism at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The 33 participants dissected the theology around baptism, for four centuries more a source of division than unity among Christians, and agreed that believers' baptism, a traditional Baptist doctrine, is the most clearly attested practice of baptism in the New Testament.

The consultation, sponsored by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, marked the first time a commission conference on baptism provided equal representation by churches which baptize only mature believers and churches which baptize infants.

A report issued by the participants from the U. S., Nigeria, Jamaica, Germany, France, Switzerland, Denmark, England and the Soviet Union, was optimistic, indicating differences of opinion on baptism had not been resolved, but at least participants on both sides better understood the reasoning behind each method.

"Although the divide between the two practices of baptism remains, nevertheless, there are signs of bridge building from both sides," the report said. "Discussion indicated that for some from both groups of churches, the bridge is sufficiently complete to allow for mutual acceptance of each others practices. For others, the gap remaining has narrowed sufficiently to permit mutual respect and growing understanding of the reasons for the different practices."

The report included five significant areas of agreement: 1.) The participants agreed that believers' baptism is the most clearly attested practice of baptism in the New Testament and acknowledged that infant baptism developed within the Christian tradition and witnesses to valid Christian insight.

E. Glenn Hinson, one of the conference organizers, and a professor of church history at Southern, said that does not represent an endorsement of infant baptism by Southern Baptists, but rather indicates an understanding of how the practice could have developed.

2.) The group agreed that personal faith and involvement in the life of the church are essential to the fruit of baptism.

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3.) It recognized that both forms of baptism emphasize the importance of Christian nurture and instruction.

4.) The report recognized the effect of special circumstances and environment on both groups' practice of baptism and the need to rethink both practices in the light of contextual pressures.

5.) It was agreed that indiscriminate baptisms would seem as an abuse to be eliminated.

"We agreed we need to bring all our people to a genuine relationship to Christ, which is what baptism signifies," said Hinson, a member of the Faith and Order Commission. "But we went away disagreeing on how that's to be done."

Other statements of agreement from the consultation made the following points:

--the justification and basis for infant baptism rest on the conviction that "in sacraments God acts in Christ and his spirit for this child" and "infant baptism rose out of the historical experience and the instinctive faith since of Christians..."

--"From the prospective of orthodoxy, baptized infants are believers. Therefore, a distinction between infant and believers' baptism does not arise."

--"We reject the doctrine of inherited guilt as a valid motive for infant baptism."

J. Robert Nelson, a Methodist theologian from Boston, long associated with the ecumenical movement, chaired the consultation. Baptists presenting papers included Morris West of England, Horace O. Russell of Jamaica, George Beasley-Murray of Southern Seminary and Thorwald Lorenzen of Switzerland.

Other papers were given by Joseph Eagen, S. J., of San Francisco (Roman Catholic), Lawrence Stookey of Washington, D. C. (Methodist), William Carpe of Lexington, Ky. (Disciples of Christ). Other church groups represented included Greek and Russian Orthodox, Lutheran, Netherlands Reformed, Episcopal and Mennonites.

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CORRECTION: In Baptist Press story mailed April 2 entitled "Brazil's Flooding: Worst of Nightmares" please change comparison of Brazil's size in paragraph four to read: Brazil is a little larger than the United States, minus Alaska.

Thanks, Baptist Press