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Foreign Missions Battered
By Inflation, Devaluation

By Jim Newton

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--A devastating combination of overseas inflation and devaluation of the dollar is threatening to squeeze the financial life blood out of Southern Baptist foreign missions.

That combination, plus a lack of "bold giving" by Southern Baptists, is also jeopardizing the denomination's Bold Mission Thrust plan to share the gospel with every person on the earth by the year 2000.

While Americans have been staggered by an inflation rate of almost 13 percent during 1979, astronomical inflation levels overseas have created financial havoc for many SBC foreign missions projects.

The problem is so critical it prompted R. Keith Parks, the new executive director of the Foreign Mission Board, to tell Birmingham pastors recently that Bold Mission Thrust will not succeed if the present trends continue.

"We're not going to get there at the rate we are going," Parks said frankly. "Last year, (Cooperative Program) gifts increased 7.8 percent, but worldwide inflation, compounded by dollar devaluation overseas, averaged 27 percent." Therefore, Parks said, Southern Baptists have lost "approximately 20 percent in buying power worldwide" in just one year.

"I'm convinced that Southern Baptists will respond if they have the facts," Parks said in an interview. "I don't believe Southern Baptists want to draw back during a time when we are on the verge of what I believe is our greatest breakthrough."

Parks observed that most Americans seem to be so caught up in their own inflation problems that they are not aware of what is happening in the rest of the world.

"We stagger under 13 percent annual inflation here, when several countries have 30 to 40 percent inflation," he said. The annual inflation rate in Argentina, believed to be the highest in the world currently, is about 180 percent.

Marvin West, an international banker, calculated on a computer the inflation rate for the past 10 years (1968-78 figures) for 15 countries. The figures showed the United States recorded an inflation rate of 87.6 percent during that 10-year period. In contrast, Chile, with the worst inflation rate over the 10-year span, had an unbelievable inflation level of 399,152 percent.

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Spiralling inflation has caused some missionaries to change their eating habits, using less meat and more fresh vegetables and fruits. Car pools are springing up in overseas settings as well as in the United States.

Parks said that the rampant inflation overseas has made it necessary for many of the budgets of Southern Baptist mission organizations in 94 countries around the world to be slashed. It also has created critical problems at the Foreign Mission Board in projecting budgets for 1980.

During the 10-year period between May 1969 and May 1979, the number of missionaries appointed by the board increased more than 22 percent, while inflation rose more than 96 percent.

Those two factors combined show a need for more than 140 percent in budget increases during the 10 years just to maintain the increased number of missionaries and their work, according to Winston Crawley, overseas division director.

Yet Southern Baptist giving to foreign missions during that period rose only 118.5 percent.

"This is not bold financing," Crawley suggested. "To be bold, we must do more than just keep up with inflation and increased missionary personnel--we're not even doing that now."

Bill O'Brien, the board's director of denominational cooperation, added: "Once the decreased percentage of dollars given to foreign missions actually gets on the mission field, it gets clobbered two more times--once by overseas inflation of that particular country's currency, and again by the devaluation of the American dollar overseas."

O'Brien, Crawley and Parks all expressed fears that the current inflationary spiral may eventually force the Foreign Mission Board into being only a mission sending agency, rather than a full-orb mission agency.

"That means we would foot the bill to get the missionaries on the field, but we couldn't put any tools or operating budget funds in their hands to work with, and we couldn't provide capital for buildings," O'Brien explained.

Parks said that in the past, the Foreign Mission Board has attempted to spend one-third of its budget for missionary support, one-third for capital needs (primary building construction), and one-third for operating expenses overseas.

"Today, about 60 percent goes for missionary support with less and less to capital needs," he said.

To help plan for the board's 1980 budget, Lewis Myers, associate to the overseas division director, prepared a complicated chart comparing the "actual" dollars budgeted over a 23-year period to the "constant" dollar factor--a figure adjusted to compensate for overseas inflation, dollar devaluation and U.S. inflation. Myers used 1967, the year used by the U.S. government, as the basis for comparison of "actual" dollars and "constant" dollars.

The study showed that over the past 10 years, buying power of foreign mission funds has been reduced by a total of 128 percent by the three factors of U.S. inflation, dollar devaluation overseas, and overseas inflation.

Using these factors, the \$46,768,000 budgeted by the Foreign Mission Board for missionary support in 1980 amounts to only \$36,946,000 in equivalent buying power compared to ten years ago, Myers said. That's a loss of almost \$10 million.

In operating budgets for the missions overseas, the \$14,165,000 budgeted amount has an actual buying power of only \$11,190,000; and the \$5 million budgeted for capital needs has an actual buying power of only \$3.9 million, Myers said.

What does it all mean?

The bottom line is that Bold Mission Thrust, without bold giving to undergird it, is likely to become little more than another denominational slogan.

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Adapted from the March 1980 issue of "World Mission Journal"

Meetings Set To Involve
Laymen in Bold Missions

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The minds of almost 200 key laymen in the Southern Baptist Convention will be tapped during the next four months for ideas on how to involve the laity in the denomination's plan to share the gospel with the world by the year 2000.

At the request of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, the Brotherhood Commission has arranged two-day meetings in 10 cities across the United States to gather the suggestions about Bold Mission Thrust.

James H. Smith, the commission's executive director, said the meetings will be held on April 4-5 in Memphis; April 18-19, Dallas; May 2-3, Raleigh; May 9-10, Lake Yale Baptist Assembly near Orlando; May 16-17, Indianapolis and Reno; and May 23-24, Atlanta, Washington, New Orleans and Kansas City.

Attending each meeting with the 15 to 20 laymen will be a member of "Laymen Concerned for Bold Mission Thrust," a state Baptist executive secretary, a state Brotherhood leader, a layman on the SBC Executive Committee, and a Brotherhood Commission trustee and staff member who will convene sessions.

The series of meetings grew out of a request a year ago to the Executive Committee by Laymen Concerned About Bold Mission Thrust, an organization of wealthy Baptist laymen. They expressed concern about using their talents more profitably in sharing their faith during the next 20 years.

Emphasizing that attendance at the meetings is by invitation, Smith said he expects to make a progress report to the SBC Executive Committee in June and a final report to the same group in September.

"We hope to use these meetings to help locate many men of unusual skills who are willing to be used by associations, state Baptist conventions, and SBC agencies on a consultation or advisory basis," Smith said.

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Other subjects the groups are expected to discuss include ways to secure sponsors for Mission Service Corps volunteers, how to communicate the denomination's witnessing plan to the churches, and how to motivate pastors and church members to see the emphasis as a local church program.

Planning the meetings, including desired outcomes and format, were Donald Gent of Indianapolis and George McCotter of Lillington, N.C., two lay members of the Executive Committee; J.T. Williams, a developer from Tallahassee, Fla., and Fred Roach, president of Centennial Homes, Dallas; and four members of the commission staff.

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Bold Mission Support System
Tops Seminary Extension Plans

Baptist Press
1/29/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A new curriculum system designed to support Bold Mission Thrust, a credit plan for clinical pastoral orientation courses, and long-range objectives through 1985 were among items approved in the annual meetings of the Seminary Extension curriculum and administrative committees here.

The first course in the Bold Mission Support System will be one on "church planting," developed in cooperation with the church extension department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. It will be used especially to help train bivocational ministers in establishing and serving new churches.

"This new curriculum system will allow the Seminary Extension Department to respond to requests for courses that do not fit into our three existing systems," said Raymond M. Rigdon, SED director. "Bold Mission Thrust calls for some fresh approaches, and we are pleased that we will be able to work with church extension and other programs that need special training resources."

Clinical training in pastoral counseling now may be credited toward one of Seminary Extension's diplomas or certificates when students meet certain conditions. If taken in a regular clinical pastoral education (CPE) program, the training may earn up to three SE units. If taken for a shorter period of time and under sponsorship of an individual extension center, the work must be supervised by a person certified by either the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education or the College of Chaplains of the American Hospital Association. The shorter, center-sponsored programs will be referred to as clinical pastoral orientation.

A "bold objective" approved for the Seminary Extension Department was the establishing of a Seminary Extension center in each association of Baptist churches which does not have a continuing program of education in ministry. The department's goal by 1985 is to have 500 of these locally based training centers in operation. During the 1978-79 fiscal year, 363 centers were reported in 41 states and two foreign countries.

Among a number of other objectives approved was one to magnify the contribution which ministers with limited formal education in ministry have made to Southern Baptist life.

The Seminary Extension administrative committee, made up of the presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries, gives general direction to the overall work of the department. A faculty representative from each school provides guidance in planning and developing the SED curriculum.

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January 29, 1980

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When Davidson's Computer
Talks, Pastors Listen

By Marv Knox

BAYTOWN, Texas (BP)--When Chester Davidson's computer talks, pastors listen.

That's because Davidson feeds his machine all kinds of raw data about their churches and communities, and it, in turn, provides them with information they need to keep pace with constant expansion in the metropolitan Houston area.

Davidson is research and planning consultant for the Baptist Associations Correlating Committee (BACC), a planning consortium of nine Southern Baptist associations and 540 churches. His microcomputer is the cog around which serious planning revolves--planning which means success for evangelism and Christian social ministry efforts throughout the area.

BACC was formed in 1973 to facilitate church extension, save churches in transitional communities and help Southern Baptists meet the needs of 3.5 million people, explained Mack Smoke, BACC convener and bay area director of missions.

A year later, the committee hired Davidson to take charge of demographic research and to help churches and associations prepare for the future. His responsibilities include keeping track of people and their lifestyles and reporting his findings back to the committee in relatively simple language.

He probed latest public records to learn all he could about area population. He charted construction of new single and multiple family housing, checked total population growth trends, surveyed racial and ethnic transitions. He digested every available piece of pertinent information and reported it back to BACC, explaining the ramifications of his data for area churches and associations.

Davidson's task was difficult during the first year, for he worked all his mathematical equations and forecast all his predictions on a small printing calculator. He later accelerated his progress by "buying" time on computers at the University of Houston and nearby Lee College, but the cost proved to be prohibitive for continued use.

Then high technology came to the rescue with the advent of affordable microcomputers. For about \$4,500, BACC bought a computer as useful in Davidson's work as the \$30,000 machines he operated at the schools.

More importantly, Davidson has access to his computer at all times, thus allowing him to keep specific tabs on the progress of churches and to work out computer programs that most efficiently meet their needs for planning information.

"We eventually plan to record data on all 500-plus churches in the area," he said. "We'll include 15 items (such as average Sunday School attendance, average church enrollment, average offering receipts) for about eight years, spread out over enough years to show definite trends within the church."

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Such information will help church staffs and lay leaders to evaluate their programs and efforts in light of an accurate, comprehensive, objective view, he said.

The combined data also will allow associational and area leaders to positively compare the work in various associations and geographical areas, he added. Additionally, it will aid them in comparing relative effectiveness of old and new churches, large and small congregations and other variables.

These comparisons--both intra-church studies and area analyses--should help leaders discover strengths and weaknesses and allow them to build upon the positive while reconstructing the negative.

Beyond these internal studies, Davidson's computer has a vital role in the future of BACC and its representative churches. Davidson already has assimilated housing statistics into predictions for population trends throughout the area. And after the 1980 U.S. Census is reported, he'll know even more about housing characteristics, poverty areas and the age, sex, ethnicity, and marital and educational status of the population.

The data will help churches prepare ministries to meet specific needs of their communities, he said.

"This kind of information once was outdated by the time we used it," he said. "But that's no longer true because of the computer and faster census service. "As we collect information, I'll begin to build files to share with associational and church leaders so that they can put the strength of their churches behind the needs of those around them." Those needs run the gamut from establishing bilingual daycare centers to starting new churches.

Davidson, whose work has earned praise from pastors and associational leaders, emphasizes the importance of computer usage by other Southern Baptists.

"Any program I've written and am using could be run by an inexperienced operator in 15 minutes," he said. "And if leaders looked around, nearly all churches or associations could find someone who would be happy to set up their programs.

"For a nominal investment, many churches and almost all associations can afford to buy computers that can help them with their membership and financial records and do the same kind of planning we're doing here," he said. "Associations need them, and churches can use them" to make the most effective use of their resources.

Only time will tell if Southern Baptist pastors and associational leaders will listen to Chester Davidson as well as BACC pastors listen to his computer.