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80-21

Preacher's Job
Most Dangerous

By Mike Livingston

PRINCE OF WALES ISLAND, Alaska (BP)--Lewis McClendon may have one of the most dangerous jobs in some of the world's largest logging camps.

McClendon is not a powderman, a rigging slinger, or a hoop tender. He seldom swings a double-bit ax, or operates a chain saw.

He is a Southern Baptist home missionary assigned to minister to the men in the logging camps on the Prince of Wales Island, off the coast of Ketchikan, Alaska.

Why is his job dangerous? It's not the work; it's getting there.

"If we travel to a logging camp on the water it is dangerous; if we are in the air, it is worse; and if we are on land, we are constantly dodging huge log trucks," he explains. "It's wild."

"It's a good ministry, if you can get there," adds McClendon. "But there are so many 'ifs' about travel to the camps, and most of them are weather-related."

Weather is the greatest hazard, not only to McClendon's ministry, but to most of the residents in the Ketchikan area who must rely heavily on air travel. It's the wettest spot in Alaska, and has been known to rain there 50 inches in a month, every day for weeks on end. Complete rain gear always calls for the familiar red rubber boots, often called Ketchikan sneakers.

But Ketchikan area residents take the rain in stride and because the climate is mild year-round, couples picnic and boat in the rain while Little Leaguers play baseball on soggy fields.

On the bright side, the rain gives Ketchikan its salmon creeks and lush forests, as well as a low forest fire danger. Louisiana-Pacific Ketchikan Pulp Mill is the largest employer in southeast Alaska.

The long sloping waterfront is a scene of constant sound and activity, especially alive with the deafening buzz of the many arriving and departing floatplanes.

In mid-August 1978, 31 people were killed in six small plane crashes around Ketchikan and Prince of Wales area. Forestry Service employees even receive hazardous duty pay because of the weather.

But McClendon knew all of the dangers of travel in southeast Alaska when he decided in 1975 it was time to leave his pastorate in Ketchikan and devote fulltime to the island ministry where he was needed most.

Travel by charter plane became increasingly expensive, so McClendon bought a 28-foot fiber cruiser with twin 200-horsepower engines. While the boat has solved the transportation problem, the uniqueness of the ministry presents other problems.

"We have a floating membership of 175 people who have never met each other," laughs McClendon. "But because we're all part of the island ministries of Trinity Baptist Church, we all have to vote on something when the need arises. We're thinking of having an annual meeting soon and we'll probably have to rent some motel rooms in Ketchikan for a meeting place."

McClendon sees his ministry as more of a chaplaincy than a pastorate. "It is a more personal one-to-one service than a service to a congregation. And our ministry is to all people, not just to a Baptist membership. At the service I just left, we had four Baptists, four Methodists, maybe two Presbyterians, and one or two Nazarenes. I am the only pastor they have."

Unless the weather or other factors interfere, the camps open up anywhere from March 1 to April 15 and operate almost continuously until about the first of November. From December until March the only people who live in the camps are home guards.

"Generally by Christmas there won't be more than 50 to 60 people around and Bible study drops to 12 or 15," states McClendon.

"One of the keys to our success has been to let the people know that we will be there on the day they are expecting us, and that sometimes makes the fight against the weather even tougher.

"We've found that in Alaska you have to do whatever it takes to reach the people," he says. "You shed all the old theories about when you hold services and you take them to the people when they can attend."

McClendon, 49, had gone to Alaska in 1968, looked it over and returned home thinking "It was too raw and we were not quite ready for it."

"But in five years we were ready," he says, "and when we came to Alaska we knew it was to stay. This work is so strange I don't think I could ever fit in anywhere else anymore. Up north you run into a little more of the pioneering-type spirit which seems to suit my style."

"And perhaps because of transportation, Alaska will never be anything but a pioneer state."

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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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Southeastern Conference
Affirms Biblical Authority

By Larry E. High

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--"Southern Baptists should not allow themselves to become embroiled in debate as to how God inspired the Scriptures," declared the chairman of the committee which authored a revision of "The Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963.

During an address to the Conference on Biblical Authority at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Herschel H. Hobbs said the statement's prologue "clearly protects the conscience of the individual. Without this protection Southern Baptists would not have adopted the Baptist Faith and Message, a statement which sets forth certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been closely identified."

The two-day conference was sponsored by the seminary "to celebrate a very positive and profound commitment to the absolute trustworthiness of the Bible," Southeastern President W. Randall Lolley explained.

"Disagreements among us seem to reside on how the Bible was inspired, not whether it is. Of course the Bible is inspired. The absolute trustworthiness and authority of the Scriptures themselves is not debatable," Lolley said.

"Our people have a concern to know what Southeastern Seminary believes and teaches about the Bible," Lolley continued. "The conference gave us a chance to affirm those beliefs and teachings, and gave Baptists an opportunity to hear and talk with those who teach their students and future ministers," he said.

Conference speakers included Hobbs, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, Okla., and former president of the Southern Baptist Convention; Donald E. Cook, professor of New Testament at Southeastern; and Lolley, who was pastor of First Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C., before assuming the seminary's presidency in 1974.

No mention was made of the Heart of America Bible conferences being conducted in selected cities by biblical inerrancy advocates James Robison, W. A. Criswell, Paige Patterson and others. At this point, one of the Heart of America conferences has been held at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., and another is scheduled at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

Although not mentioning those conferences by name, Hobbs did say, "No Baptists or group of such has any right...to endeavor to force upon others one's own particular interpretation of the Baptist Faith and Message.

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"To make such an effort is to violate its purpose," Hobbs said. "The statement declares the principle of the competency of the soul in religion. Ignore that and the statement becomes a creed, something which Baptists avoid," he added.

During an open forum with seminary students, faculty and visitors, Hobbs said, "Those that take their own interpretation and try to force it on other people are ignoring the statement's preamble altogether. They are making it a creed even though they might want to deny that. The end result is that such is an abuse of the use of the Baptist Faith and Message."

Hobbs also declared, "We do well to heed E.Y. Mullins (president of Southern Seminary, 1899-1928) when he reminds us that the most important matter is not the method but the product. The product is the divinely inspired Word of God."

"Neither the word inerrant nor infallible appears in the Bible. But the strongest statement about inerrancy is found in 2 Timothy 3:16. All Scripture is God-breathed. And God does not breathe error. Problems still remain to be solved. But in light of past experience, where seeming discrepancies exist you may rest in faith that they are the result of our incomplete knowledge--not upon errors in the original manuscripts of the Bible," Hobbs concluded.

Cook told the conference, "The question of the authority of the Bible is not a detached, theoretical matter which can be packaged neatly in a creedal formula or reduced to a question that can be answered 'yes' or 'no.'"

"One of the great blessings which God has bestowed upon his people is the privilege of reading and interpreting Scripture. Every Christian is, or ought to be, a biblical interpreter," Cook said.

"The first step in scriptural interpretation is to seek to understand what the author intended to communicate," Cook continued. "In order to interpret for the present, we must begin in the past. Meaningful interpretation must construct a bridge from the 'then' of the biblical writer to the 'now' of the reader or hearer. We must determine what the text meant in order to comprehend what it means."

"Authentic interpretation is the freeing of Scripture to speak to the present. Admittedly, there are hazards in this, but to force the text to conform to some external doctrinal or philosophical system, ancient or modern, is to destroy its message," Cook explained.

"Jesus Christ: the Living Word of God" was the final address delivered during the conference. In it President Lolley said, "The title 'Christ' affirms this man, Jesus, as the climax not only of a people's history but of the world's history also."

"Jesus Christ is 'monogenes'--the only one of his kind, absolutely unique. There is no one who does share or who can share his relationship to God. He is not a son of God. He is the Son of God. To call him that is to affirm that Jesus is thoroughly divine. His relationship to God is not one which is in any way achieved. It is a given in his very nature."

"He lived a thoroughly blameless life, yet was tempted as all of us are tempted without sinning," Lolley continued. "It startles us to think that one so good should come to an end so cruel. Hardly had he begun his work when the unprincipled, expediency-serving religious leaders turned against him. You see, Jesus Christ did not please many of his countrymen. In time, they killed him."

"But God's miracle usually works silently. So, on the third day, from amidst the quietness of an Arimathean garden, there came a voice: 'He is not here. He is risen.' To affirm Jesus Christ as Lord is to be willing to give oneself away. Simply put, this means that a Christian is a person who knows that he possesses his own will to do the will of the Lord," Lolley said.

Norm Simpson, a Southeastern Seminary student from Glen Burnie, Md., said the conference was needed and of benefit because "I see a conflict coming in the Southern Baptist Convention. I hope any potential conflict will be met on the grounds of biblical authority and not biblical interpretation." Simpson also said he is not being taught anything in a seminary classroom which is contrary to what most Southern Baptists believe. Some in the biblical inerrancy movement have charged there is "liberal" teaching in SBC seminaries.

Another Southeastern student, Asa Finklea of Pamplico, S.C., said he did not agree with everything said at the conference but noted that he felt a "good spectrum of differing thought was being taught at the seminary."

-30-

Boy Dies In Bizarre
Bus Accident in Virginia

By Tom Miller

Baptist Press
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MECHANICSVILLE, Va. (BP)--A deep sense of grief combined with one of thanksgiving at Walnut Grove Baptist Church here, following a bizarre bus accident which took the life of a 10-year-old boy but miraculously preserved the lives of 35 others.

Troy Doggett was killed and his widowed mother Barbara was among persons injured when the bus plummeted out of control down a steep mountain road, after an engine part malfunctioned. The brakes were not enough to hold the bus back without its engine.

Soon after leaving a resort some 35 miles southwest of Charlottesville, after a ski-outing was rained out, the bus began gaining speed. It hurtled down steep Route 664, passed a dump truck, crossed route 151, and went onto unpaved Route 622. About a quarter mile down the gravel road the bus, unable to negotiate a curve, left the road, finally tipping onto its side in a small stream a short distance from a house.

"Doug Lee was the hero of the hour," said David Hughes, minister of music and education at the Mechanicsville church. Hughes, who was not on the bus, said passengers credited Lee, a member of East Hanover Rescue Squad, with preparing them for the crash, then giving first aid to the injured. He hadn't been scheduled to make the trip but took the place, at the last minute, of another passenger who had to cancel.

"He probably saved Mrs. Doggett's life," said Hughes. "He found her unconscious, pinned in the wreckage and already turned blue." Lee reportedly gave mouth to mouth resuscitation to the woman who received a severe concussion and remained unconscious for some 24 hours.

Sixteen members of the party were treated and released. Those still hospitalized were O.L. "Pat" Oatman, 55, who underwent surgery for implantation of a pin in a broken hip; Kelly Webb, 15, who has a back injury; and Mary Alice Goode, 12, who sustained fractures of both collar bones and a leg.

Mrs. Doggett, who was widowed about a year ago, lost one of her two sons who were with her on the bus. The dead boy, Troy, had recently made a profession of faith and was awaiting baptism. Another son, Brian, age 12, escaped injury.

-30-

Tom Miller is associate editor of "The Religious Herald," Richmond, Va.