

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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80-84

**Sense of Place Vital
To Rural Church Future**

BLUE MOUNTAIN, Miss. (BP)--When a tornado destroyed the rural church where David Sapp was pastor, he couldn't understand the heated debate that took place prior to rebuilding. Members argued over whether to rebuild over the old foundation or on a new one.

"It was clear to me the church should build on a new and safe foundation," Sapp said during a conference at Blue Mountain College on "Applying the Gospel in the Rural Church Community."

"The church voted, however, to rebuild over the old foundation," Sapp told the mostly rural pastors attending the conference. "I didn't understand why until an older woman told me that she was baptized in the first baptism service in the old church," Sapp recalled. "She told me she really was glad there was going to be a little of it left."

Sapp, now on the staff of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said that among rural people there is often a strong "sense of place" and that the church building can be a "symbol of their life with God."

Sapp told the ministers that it is important to recognize this fact but still encouraged them to move people to know that God isn't tied to "this ground or these bricks."

Sapp noted an intimacy in the rural church, but acknowledged that this intimacy can breed exclusiveness. He recalled one woman who told him she was a newcomer to the community, although she had moved there ~~30 years ago~~. Sapp said other distinctives, however, between rural and urban communities "seem to be blurring."

Sapp told the rural ministers that implications for evangelism in the rural church include the fact that adult men are often under-represented. He observed, however, that "men will respond when they hear how the gospel applies to their life on Monday and Tuesday...."

Other segments of the conference which was sponsored by the Christian Life Commission and the Mississippi Christian Action Commission, included a Christian perspective on the family farm, the biblical basis of applying the gospel, and the relationship between evangelism and Christian social action.

David Currie, a Texas rancher who is now pastor of First Baptist Church, Mason, population, 1,963, spoke on the importance of preserving the family farm. He said that 65 percent of Southern Baptist churches are in communities of under 2,500 population, "the backbone of the Southern Baptist Convention."

The family farm is nevertheless declining, he stressed. In 1945 there were six million farmers. Today there are only 2.7 million, with only 1.7 million of these considered commercial farms of at least \$2,500 in gross income.

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Currie said consolidation of small farms into big business holdings changes farming operations. Today, he said, only six percent of the farmers make 51 percent of total sales, and 13 percent of the farmers control 70 percent of the farmland.

Messengers to the 1979 Southern Baptist Convention in Houston, Texas, passed a resolution, Currie noted, supporting "the family farm as a vital part of the food production system."

Currie said cost-price squeezes, government programs, and costly technology are forcing small family farmers out of business. He noted that 2,000 farmers go broke every week.

For the local church, Currie suggested conducting Bible studies on stewardship of the land and preaching on ethical issues including nutrition and support of World Hunger Day, Aug. 6.

Charles Myers, pastor of Alta Woods Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., spoke to the rural preachers on application of the gospel in rural communities.

"The same gospel that talks about salvation by grace also calls us to provide a cup of cold water in Jesus' name," said Myers. "A half gospel is a dangerous thing, no matter which half you have. When Jesus was asked by John the Baptist if he really was the Messiah, he responded by telling John what he had been doing."

In a conference wrap-up session, John Wood, director of program development for the Christian Life Commission, told the rural pastors that there are still people in Southern Baptist churches who believe there is no relationship between evangelism and social concern. "This approach is characterized by an unbiblical view of spirituality," Wood said. "It is a twisted heresy that comes close to edging the church right out of any vital relationship with people into a monastery of irrelevance."

Wood went on to say that "social ministry and social action sometimes constitute a form of pre-evangelism and sometimes flow from evangelism."

"But the main point," Wood added, "is that evangelism and Christian social action belong together in the gospel ministry."

Wood said, "Social action that is not informed by a lively sense of Christian community, rigorous prayer, and disciplined Bible study tends to degenerate into warmed-over liberalism."

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Kelm New Archaeology
Professor at Southwestern

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—George L. Kelm of New Orleans, La., has been named professor of biblical backgrounds and archaeology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, effective Aug. 1.

Kelm has been professor of biblical introduction and archaeology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary since 1968.

Kelm will be responsible for expanding the archaeological museum, a part of the seminary's library center. He will also direct work at Timnah, an excavation site in Israel.

Kelm has participated in several archaeological excavations in the Holy Lands, and he has been academic and administrative field director for the American Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem. He holds degrees from Pacific College, Conservative Baptist Seminary and New York University.

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Soviet Bloc Steps Up
Religious Repression

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--Despite provisions of the Helsinki accords calling for religious liberty, violations of religious rights are on the increase in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe according to testimony before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, commonly known as the Helsinki Commission.

The commission, composed of 12 members of Congress and three executive branch representatives, is holding hearings to prepare a report on how well the 35 signers of the Helsinki Final Act have complied with its provisions. The signers of the 1975 agreement promised to "respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practice...religion...in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience."

An increasing lack of compliance among Soviet bloc countries has drawn protests from both religious and political circles.

"The increase of Baptist prisoners has been dramatic in the past six months," said a commission representative, who indicated that the approximately 60 Baptist prisoners now in the Soviet Union is double the number of a year ago.

"The breakdown in detente has sharply reduced the western capabilities to influence Soviet and satellite policies on religion," said Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, of Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, and one of those testifying at the hearings.

Thomas E. Bird, of Queens College in New York, told the commission that the status of the Catholic Church in the Soviet Union had not improved since the signing of the Final Act. "In fact, the state apparatus is employing a variety of measures designed to tighten effective control over these communities," Bird said.

A recent Russian emigre, Irina Zholkovskaya-Ginzburg, said it was the "spirit of genuine God-given freedom" preserved in Christian teaching that causes communist totalitarianism to be "so hostile" to Christianity. She cited drastic drops in the number of Russian Orthodox priests (300,000 to 14,000), churches (60,000 to 6,500), and monasteries (800 to 10) during this century.

It is unclear what effect the commission's report will have on religious liberty in the Soviet bloc nations after it is presented at a conference in Madrid this fall. But a commission spokesman refused to be totally pessimistic.

"One never knows," she said. "What we have learned beyond doubt is that they (Soviets) react to western pressure. Publicity helps."

In addition, resolutions have been introduced in the House and Senate calling for the release of religious prisoners in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Romania and for compliance with the religious provisions of the Helsinki accords.

South Carolina To Tape
Official Newsmagazine

COLUMBIA, S.C. (BP)--Blind persons in South Carolina soon will be able to hear the Baptist Courier, the state Baptist convention's newsmagazine.

The convention missions department plans to make the newsmagazine available free to the blind on 90-minute cassette tapes, starting with the first issue in July.

One other Southern Baptist newspaper now offers this service to the blind. North Carolina's Biblical Recorder is taped and mailed to approximately 100 persons each week.

Larry Bryson, director of the missions department, said his department also intends to put on tape the mission study books used to promote special offerings for foreign, national and state missions.

The missions department also hopes to tape the Southern Baptist devotional guide, Open Windows, to provide devotional material and give the blind the prayer calendars for missionaries.

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Ashcraft Leads Effort
To Endow Bible Chair

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BOISE, Idaho (BP)--Charles H. Ashcraft, retired executive secretary of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, has been named director of promotion for a chair of Bible named after him at Boise State University.

Ashcraft was the first executive secretary of the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention. There is no Baptist college in Idaho and the director of the effort to endow the Charles H. Ashcraft Chair of Bible says the chair "is a very much needed institution in this new convention territory."

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Cooper Doing Well
After Heart Surgery

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Edgar R. Cooper, editor-manager of the Florida Baptist Witness, is progressing satisfactorily after undergoing open heart surgery May 23 at University Hospital in Birmingham, Ala.

Doctors used veins from Cooper's left leg in performing four arterial bypasses on the 61-year-old editor who has headed the Witness since 1971.

Cooper, who is on the board of directors at Baptist Medical Center in Jacksonville, Fla., where he lives, elected not to have the operation there because of the natural tension that would exist among hospital personnel serving a director. The medical center administrator, Ed Montgomery, said Cooper's personal "sense of modesty" also prompted him to have his operation at another hospital.

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La. Baptists Secure Pastor Retirements

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)--The Louisiana Baptist Convention's executive board has taken innovative steps to secure sufficient retirement benefits for church staff members in the state.

Beginning in January 1981 Louisiana will be the first Baptist state convention to contribute to the retirement program of all vocational church staff members. In addition, the convention will supplement the income of currently retired ministers to provide them a minimum annual income.

The state convention will contribute \$200 per year to the retirement of all staff members in Louisiana Baptist churches who wish to participate, whether or not the staffer is already in the convention's annuity program. That \$200, if begun at age 25, will provide \$4,400 annual benefits for a minister who retires at age 65.

There are 1,309 Southern Baptist churches in Louisiana. Of those, 547 do not now participate in the annuity program.

The supplemental retirement program calls for a minimum annual income level from all sources of \$4,800 for a single person or \$6,000 for a married couple.

If, for example, a single person's annual income totals \$4,200, the Louisiana Baptist Convention will supplement that with \$600. The minimum goal will be restudied as economic conditions change.

The retirement policy changes, estimated to cost \$120,000 per year for three years, follow an extensive survey conducted by the state convention. The survey showed, among other things, that the average retired Baptist minister in Louisiana received \$80 a month benefits and the average Baptist retiree widow received \$40 a month.

A third program approved by the executive board will establish an endowment of \$1.5 million with the Louisiana Baptist Foundation with earnings dedicated for relief and supplemental incomes of retired preachers, retired staff members and their widows.

Lucian Conway, SBC Annuity Board representative in Louisiana, who has worked with Louisiana ministers for a number of years, said, "We are not giving them anything. They have earned this by their contributions to the spiritual lives of Louisiana Baptists and the churches over the years."

Glen Edwards, director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention's church-minister relations division, said the goal is for the endowment to cover the income supplement after three years. Final details for all three programs are yet to be worked out by the convention program committee.