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81-48

Smith Predicts Harmonious Convention in Los Angeles

ATLANTA (BP)--Saying he wanted to be "somewhat of a prophet," Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith predicted the denomination's 1981 convention in Los Angeles would be harmonious rather than controversial.

"I believe when we get to Los Angeles, it's going to prove to be the greatest, most harmonious expression of love that our denomination has ever known," Smith told directors of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Repeating his pledge to be a peacemaker between conservative and moderate factions in the denomination, Smith said he was "totally committed" to doing whatever he can to see that love and harmony characterize the convention in Los Angeles.

"It's not perfect," Smith said, "but I believe the Southern Baptist Convention is the greatest force ever put together for winning this world to Christ.

"Frankly, I don't want anything to bother that. I want God to keep blessing it and enriching it and strengthening it and binding it together in love and harmony."

Smith, who had just returned from Africa, praised the mission work of both the Home and Foreign Mission Boards of the SBC. He told home board directors "What you emphasize is what I emphasize and what almost every Southern Baptist emphasizes."

He challenged Baptists to match the missions commitment of the denomination's missionaries, saying too many Christians are so busy going to church that they never have time to get personally involved in missions.

"One reason we meet is to avoid doing what we ought to be doing," charged Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla.

He told of speaking at one church where more than 400 Baptists attended a banquet on a rainy night. When asked how many would have come if there had been no steak dinner or program but instead a visitation effort to tell others about Jesus, more than 90 percent admitted they would not have come.

"We have trained our people to think that to meet and talk is synonymous with going and caring, but that's not true," Smith said.

"We must quit meeting and talking about strategy and start doing what we already know to do. I know people who pass 100 mission opportunities on the way to church to talk about mission opportunities," he said.

Graham's Second Mexican Stop Brings More Crowds, Decisions

VILLAHERMOSA, Mexico (BP)--In sharp contrast to his Mexico City crusade, evangelist Billy Graham's meetings in Villahermosa, Mexico, received support from all areas.

The five services held March 13-15 "were probably the largest gatherings of evangelicals in one place in the history of Mexico," said Southern Baptist representative Harvey Walworth.

Approximately 35,000 squeezed into the 12,000-seat baseball stadium each of the last two nights. Additional bleachers in the outfield still left many standing. Total attendance was approximately 110,000.

The Mexico City crusade, held earlier in the month, was fraught with confusion about meeting place and time, stemming from Mexico's constitutional law regarding separation of church and state. But more than 3,500 people made professions of faith and approximately 3,000 others indicated a desire to know more about Christianity.

A total of 10,899 made inquiries during the Villahermosa crusade, with 7,597 of these making decisions to accept Christ as their Savior.

All services were broadcast live on radio and three were videotaped and telecast a day later, Walworth said.

"The broadcast represented a sharp departure from the government's nationwide bans on religious radio and television programs announced last July," said David Danell, Baptist media consultant in Mexico.

Recordings of the services in Mexico City and Villahermosa will be broadcast later on 33 shortwave stations in Latin America.

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EEOC Appeal in Lawsuit Against Seminary Heard

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--The Fifth United States Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans is expected to issue a decision in "two or three months," after having heard arguments on a government lawsuit against Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

After hearing arguments in the case, the court's three-judge panel has taken the case under consideration and attorneys say a decision is "probably several months away, at least two or three months."

The case went to the appeals court after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission lost a suit against the seminary in early 1980.

The original lawsuit was filed by EEOC in May 1977 after seminary officials, headed by then president Robert E. Naylor, refused to file EEOC Form Six, which would have given information on the sex, race and salary of employees.

EEOC contended the information was necessary to fulfill its obligations to prohibit discrimination in hiring practices, and said filing was required because some federal assistance was received in the form of clerical fees from the Veterans Administration.

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The seminary denied the fees constituted federal assistance and claimed the government has no jurisdiction over hiring practices because of the seminary's wholly religious purpose.

In a hearing in Fort Worth, U.S. District Judge Eldon Mahon ruled against EEOC, upholding the seminary's claim. He added the school's purpose as an ultimate religious activity entitles it to "the highest degree of First Amendment protection."

After Mahon's decision, EEOC appealed. The suit is considered a test case for the five other Southern Baptist seminaries and other religious education institutions.

Jenkins Garrett, attorney for the seminary, said it is the first time "that I know of that any federal agency has moved into the heart of a church operation."

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Chaplaincy Groups Form
New Joint Organization

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Two interreligious chaplaincy organizations have disbanded to form the "National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces," an interfaith conference that may become one of the most pluralistic in the nation.

A. Carl Hart, director of chaplaincy for the Southern Baptist Convention, was named chairman of the steering committee to organize the new conference. He said the disbanding and reorganization of the General Commission on Chaplains and Armed Forces Personnel and the Conference of Ecclesiastical Endorsing Agencies for the Armed Forces will open the doors for new groups that have been a part of neither. It will include Catholic, Jewish and Orthodox groups as well as a wide spectrum of Protestant denominations.

The new National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces will meet twice each year with the chiefs of chaplains of the armed forces to share information and work toward common objectives, said Hart, director of the chaplaincy division for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. The first meeting will be in March 1982.

Hart said it is not an endorsing agency, for each religious group and denomination endorses its own chaplains. But each group faces common problems, such as quotas for chaplains, problems faced by the families of military chaplains, etc.

The new organization will give the churches of all denominations a stronger voice and influence with the chiefs of chaplains, and will give the churches a better opportunity to share their feelings and the feelings of the chaplains on the fields with military and government officials, Hart said.

"This conference will add a new dimension to the voice of the church that is long past due," he said.

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Families In Trouble,
Only Church Can Help

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Declaring the American family in serious trouble, counselors, pastors and ethicists warned that only the church can effectively prevent the destruction of the family as an American institution.

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"The 1980s must be the decade of the family for Southern Baptists," said Joe Hinkle of the Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department. "Research for denominational emphasis and program planning for the past 25 years showed the family to be the number one and number two areas of critical concern among Southern Baptists."

Hinkle told the 235 participants of the Family Ministry Conference at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, "The reason concern has reached such intensity is that almost every family in the land has been smitten with serious trouble."

We must affirm the potential of the family, Hinkle said. "Human potential is not merely a recent discovery which has been mass-marketed to a hungry, consuming public and branded as humanism by Christian fundamentalists. Human potential is a gift of God!"

Author-evangelist Jack Taylor, SBC first vice president, added that the minister has the "blueprint" (the Bible) and the "architect" (Christ) to accomplish these tasks, thus becoming "extensions of his presence, expressions of his person and exhibits of his power."

"If statistics do not deceive us, we can assess that one-half of all families in our communities are in trouble," said Lavonn Brown, pastor of First Baptist Church in Norman, Okla. He maintained that pastors must develop a style of preaching that opens doors to counseling by being approachable, compassionate and redemptive.

Harry Hollis of the SBC Christian Life Commission said the church is the best friend a family can ever have and that Southern Baptists must reach into communities to evangelize and energize other families.

Many of the speakers during the three-day conference, the first of a series of family life emphases at Midwestern, stressed that ministers must be role models to their church and family.

Psychiatrist Louis McBurney said the pastor must first have his own house in order before he could effectively help others. "Your family is the most important ministry you have," he said. "The minister's family and home needs the focus of our creative energies. Often our lives and homes become so enveloped with religiosity that our children don't have the opportunity to find God."

McBurney told the pastors, church staff members and seminary students that ministers must create a lab for learning relational skills. "The home is the place where those skills are used, whether they are learned in a negative or positive way."

Bible Makes Friends
On Lonely Drilling Rig

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By Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr.

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DE RIDDER, La. (BP)—Rodney Farmer was reading his Bible on an oil rig off Louisiana's gulf shore when someone asked for a copy.

"I'll give you one if you promise to read it," Farmer told him and others who asked. Soon his supply was gone. The next week he took more and "they went like hotcakes, 30 of them."

Giving out Bibles on an offshore oil drilling rig is not as easy as it might seem. Farmer gives them only if they're requested. "If I tried to force them to take Bibles they might take one, but it would go overboard the next minute," he said.

Farmer is in one of the riskiest occupations around. Men on the rigs risk their lonely lives 50 or 100 miles away from land where the elements are boss and the water is deep. When they go to work they ride a boat or helicopter and stay a week at a time.

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Jimmy Brossette, an associate in the Louisiana Baptist missions division, said approximately 10,000 men work each day on drilling and production rigs off Louisiana's shore, some as far as 135 miles out.

Only a special kind of person accepts the constant wind, waves slapping the rig and vibrations of the machinery pounding eardrums for 24 hours a day, seven straight days.

Brossette realized these were special persons and he started looking for ways to minister to them. Plans for volunteer chaplains to visit the rigs were scratched by libel laws and insurance regulations prohibiting anyone on the rigs except employees.

So Brossette and others decided to get back to basics letting Christians minister who are already there. Brossette would provide enough Bibles to men who agreed to use their off-time for study and personal devotion so that they could give a Bible to anyone who asked for one.

Farmer is one who asked Brossette for Bibles.

Farmer is a 41-year-old toolpusher who has come through the ranks, including oil fields in West Texas and more than three years in the North Sea off the coast of England.

Farmer, 6-5 and barrel chested, left his home in Jonesville, La., when he was 17 and traveled with gypsies, selling lightning rods and watching them tell fortunes. He and Patsy, an Oklahoma native and daughter of an oil field worker, were married in 1962. He was 19.

His wife's uncle, who was so small he bought boys' size cowboy boots, gave him a New Testament to read, and underlined some scripture. "He said 'big as you are, you're not too big to need God,'" Farmer recalled.

As the toolpusher, Farmer supervises 24 men. He recalls Mac, one of the crew, picked up a Good News for Oil Workers Bible on the seat of the car when they returned home for the week.

"Mac, who was divorced, was called to assist his ex-wife when she got sick at work in Mississippi. He picked her up and took her home. She saw the Bible in the seat and asked about it.

"Mac gave it to her and said he would get another one at the rig. To make a story short they started reading the Bible, got back together again and in September 1980, remarried. Now they are Christians and the whole family goes to church."

Farmer's black eyes sparkle when he remembers what God's word accomplished. And he tells many other experiences. "Men all over the coast are reading the Word of God now because someone cared enough to take the Bible to them."

Brossette said more than 1,000 Bibles with Offshore Insignias on them have been distributed since 1979. Most of them have been provided by Woman's Missionary Union and churches.

There is no pressure to enlist men to read the Bible on the rigs. Most of the time those who are interested gather in a bedroom for Bible reading and prayer so not to interfere with those who want to watch TV, read or relax in other ways.

"At first many of the men were skeptical," Brossette says. "Later they saw the men who read the Bible were different; their lives were changed. When they realized this was not a fly-by-night thing, many began to participate."