



BAPTIST PRESS

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Southern Baptists Pray
For Reagan's Recovery

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptists, like Americans everywhere, responded with dismay, sadness, shock—and prayer—to the "ghastly" attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan.

R. Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, led prayer over the public address system of the Richmond-based agency, praying for the president, the three other wounded men, their families and the accused assassin and his family.

In Jackson, Miss., William G. Tanner, president of the Home Mission Board, interrupted revival services at Alta Woods Baptist Church to lead the congregation in prayer for the quick recovery of the president and his three companions.

James H. Landes, executive director-treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and Glen Braswell, executive director-treasurer of the Colorado Baptist General Convention, both interrupted meetings to have special prayer.

Reagan was shot in the chest as he left a speaking engagement in Washington, D.C., Monday afternoon (March 30), and underwent surgery for removal of a bullet from his left lung. He was reported in excellent condition and recovering rapidly Tuesday (March 31).

Three other persons—press secretary James Brady, Secret Service agent Tim McCarthy and District of Columbia policeman Thomas Delahanty—were more seriously injured. Arrested and charged in the assassination attempt was John W. Hinckley Jr., 25, of Evergreen, Colo.

Lynn P. Clayton, editor of the Baptist Message, journal of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, commented that the United States "united in prayer" for the wounded men. "God answered that prayer," Clayton said, "...in the fact that the president will not be incapacitated for long. And while the prognosis for Jim Brady at first was terrible, after a night filled with prayer by Christian people, he is showing strong recovery."

Across the convention, leaders responded to the event.

Harold C. Bennett, executive director-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, commented: "I am heartbroken and extremely disappointed that such a tragedy happened. We have prayed for President Reagan and the other victims, and extend our deep concern to each family. My prayer is that God will help us as a nation at this critical time in our history."

Landes, who said he was stunned when he heard the news, said "the anguish of Dallas has been renewed" in the attempted assassination, referring to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

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"There is deep hurt in this community and a real concern about the terrorism and lawlessness in our nation," Landes said. He added community-wide prayer meetings are scheduled.

SBC President Bailey E. Smith of Del City, Okla., immediately wrote to the White House "expressing deep regret and sincere prayer."

He commented he spent 20 minutes with Reagan last summer, and said he was "impressed that Mr. Reagan really believed that the real hope of the nation is to return to godly principles. It is my hope and my prayer that America will awaken to its need to turn to God and see our need for a spiritual revival."

Violence and its causes also drew comment from some Southern Baptists.

Harry N. Hollis Jr., a staff member of the SBC Christian Life Commission, commented: "In a culture where the gory 'Chainsaw Massacre' is showing in neighborhood theaters and where television routinely uses violence as a way to solve problems, we should not be surprised when violence breaks out in real life.

"As Christians, the place to begin understanding such an act is in the reality of sin and evil. The taproot of violence is sin. This is not a time to engage in guilt-ridden breast beating, but rather a time to share the good news that Jesus Christ can change individuals and energize those individuals to do something to change our 'shoot-em-up' society."

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, D.C., said the attempt "reflects the collective insanity which attempts to solve problems with the force of arms. We must work together to eradicate the Wild West ethic that sees guns as problem solvers from the city streets to the social turmoil."

He added it is "senseless for a nation to refuse to limit the manufacture, sale and distribution of easily hidden handguns."

C.R. Daley, editor of the Western Recorder, journal of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, noted the assassination try reflects "the price we pay for being a free and open people... of putting very few restrictions on individual liberties. Such a thing could not happen in a country like Russia, but I think it is better to live in an open society and to take these kinds of risks, than to live in a rigidly controlled society."

Daley also urged some sort of gun control: "I do not favor registration of all guns, but this shows we are far too careless in the ownership of handguns."

William M. Tillman Jr., also a CLC staffer soon to be on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, commented the act "is symptomatic of the violence inherent in our natures. I believe the 1980s will continue to be violent and full of extremist acts. Perhaps this (the assassination) will cause all of us to be more committed to drawing on the power of the gospel in dealing with violence in society as a whole and in ourselves."

Larry Chesser, correspondent with the Washington bureau of Baptist Press, called the act "scary...unsettling," and said such an event "can't be disconnected from the everyday variety of violence which we have been lulled into accepting. But it is the everydayness of violence which makes me look over my shoulder when I walk to the parking lot, and provides the best reason to change it."

Italian Quake Victims Say 'Grazie' for Baptist Aid

SENERCHIA, Italy (BP)--"We don't know who sent the money for all of this," the woman said, pointing to the prefab community dining room and food boxes being passed to a crowd of more than 200 people, "but you know, and you can thank them for us."

The woman was only one of many who expressed her "grazie," or "thank you" for Baptist help after the Nov. 23 earthquake which devastated many small towns in southern Italy, says Helen Ruchti, Southern Baptist missionary press representative for Italy. "They appreciate help; they still need it," she said.

Southern Baptists, through the Federation of Evangelical Churches, have given more than \$300,000 in hunger and relief funds to help the earthquake victims.

Much of the Southern Baptist aid has been used in Senerchia in a food distribution project that has fed 200 to 600 people daily since late November. Early this year a prefab building became the dining facility, replacing the tent which had been ripped apart by strong winds.

The six-month food project in the largely agrarian population of Senerchia is scheduled to be phased out in May after harvest, Ruchti says. Southern Baptist missionaries in Italy have voted to use some remaining funds to start farm cooperatives for stricken farmers. Plans are already under way to build stalls for 20 cows donated by Swiss farmers.

The building project is part of the federation's rehabilitation plans for this poorest section of Italy. They have appealed for \$7.5 million for prefabricated structures for some of the thousands still homeless five months after the quake.

The federation already has taken advantage of a bankruptcy action in Holland and purchased 97 prefabricated houses for \$700,000. The houses are valued at nearly \$3.5 million. These are in addition to 45 German structures acquired earlier.

The project calls for 64 houses in Ponticelli, near Naples; 23 in Salerno; 10 in Senerchia and six in Ruvo Del Monte. Most will be used for family housing, although some will become social centers. In San Gregario Magno, five large houses will form a center for the elderly. Another will be used to house a pastor and his five children in Boscoreale.

The federation, made up of Baptists, Methodists, Waldensians and Lutherans, has sent more than 150 volunteers to the earthquake area and there are plans to continue these efforts, the federation reports.

"Direct contact with the population in that difficult area of southern Italy has been a great stimulus for the Protestant church in Italy," a federation report said.

Piero Bensi, federation president, said, "Not all in Italy are happy to see the Protestants giving this kind of testimony. But we are working for the Lord and the poorest people of our country; our firm hope is that the Lord will enable us to reach our goals."

Southwestern Trustees
Adopt Record Budget

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Groundbreaking for a new library center, election of new faculty and the adoption of a record \$11.9 million operating budget highlighted the spring meeting of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary board of trustees.

Construction will begin immediately on the new library center, with completion expected during the summer of 1982. The \$6.6 million facility will house the largest theological library in the United States, according to seminary President Russell H. Dilday Jr.

The \$11.9 million operating budget is a 22 percent increase over the 1980-81 operating budget of \$9.2 million. New programs and increased maintenance costs are reflected in the budget, according to Dilday, as well as an average 12 percent salary increase for all faculty and career staff members. The SBC Cooperative Program will provide 54 percent of the general budget.

Six new faculty members were elected by the trustees, including two each in theology, religious education and church music.

J. Darrel Baergen, 46, was named professor of communication arts and acting director of the Center for Christian Communication Studies. He is now professor of communication and theater at Southwest Texas State University. William H. Bellinger Jr., 31, was elected instructor in Old Testament. Currently is he assistant professor of Old Testament at Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minn.

William J. Reynolds was elected associate professor of church music. He is former church music secretary for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and was guest professor at Southwestern during the 1980-81 academic year. Robert Carl Smith, 37, was named instructor in piano. He has been guest professor for two years and previously was on the music faculty at Dallas Baptist College.

William M. Tillman Jr., 35, was elected as assistant professor in Christian ethics. He is director of research and editorial services for the SBC Christian Life Commission. William Rick Yount will be instructor in foundations of education. Yount, 32, is minister of education for the Columbia Baptist Church in Falls Church, Va.

-30-

Baptist Pastor Exposes
Illegal Refugee Traffic

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SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (BP)--Costa Rican judicial authorities are investigating mass forgery of passports and illegal trafficking of Cuban refugees through Costa Rica to the United States following exposure of the scheme by a Baptist pastor.

Adrian Gonzalez, pastor of First Baptist Church of San Jose, went to Costa Rican radio and newspapers with his knowledge only after government officials spurned his requests to take internal action and his attempts to see President Rodrigo Carazo went unanswered, he says.

Since the investigation began, one official has been indicted in the scheme and another has resigned. The judicial investigation organization said other current and former top officials may have been involved.

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Some 150 Cubans enter Costa Rica each week and about 40 percent eventually qualify for legal admission into the United States. Gonzalez, who works closely with the Cuban exile community, said that many were approached by racketeers and swindled of \$1,500 (U.S.).

Gonzalez claimed that San Jose lawyers accepted the \$1,500 payment to process each illegal visa for the refugees and arrange transportation to the Bahamas. There their documents were destroyed and they slipped into the United States illegally, or entered using forged Costa Rican passports.

-30-

High Court Declines
'Deprogramming' Case

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court has let stand a Minnesota ruling that parents' detention of their 21-year-old daughter in efforts to "deprogram" her from a religious cult did not constitute false imprisonment.

In 1977, Susan Louise Peterson sued her parents, their minister and three other persons for false imprisonment and intentional infliction of emotional distress after being held captive for 16 days in an attempt to deprogram her from affiliation with a group called The Way Ministry.

The trial court found that the defendants were not guilty of false imprisonment, a decision which was later affirmed by the Minnesota Supreme Court.

In requesting the high court to review the Minnesota decision, Peterson charged that the false imprisonment and attempted deprogramming by her parents as well as the admission as evidence of the religious organization's financial backing for her lawsuit violated her First Amendment rights.

Arguing against Supreme Court review, her parents contended that the federal constitutional questions presented in Peterson's request for review had not been raised or considered in the lower court proceedings.

Though the Supreme Court did not give reasons for not hearing the case, the justices apparently were influenced by the parents' argument and did not get to the question of whether deprogramming by parents violates First Amendment rights of adult children.

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