

**(BP)****-- BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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82-04

**SBC Annual Meeting  
Top 1981 News Story**

CO

**NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--**The annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Los Angeles--preceded by furor and followed by seeming harmony--has been voted the top Baptist Press news story of 1981.

Editors of 34 state Baptist newspapers and personnel in five Baptist Press bureaus from around the United States were polled to determine their selections of the most significant Baptist news stories of the year.

The Baptist Press list includes stories of particular significance and newsworthiness to Baptists, and does not include other stories, such as nuclear energy, weapons proliferation, or Reagan economics.

The 1981 annual meeting of the SBC was preceded by name-calling and in-fighting, which led some observers--both within and without the denomination, to predict a split might occur in the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Factions formed, and rumors flew; meetings were held and divisions drawn in advance of the June meeting. For the first time in recent history, an incumbent president was challenged in what is usually an unopposed second term.

However, when the convention was over, Bailey E. Smith of Del City, Okla., had been re-elected president, a long-standing doctrinal document had been reaffirmed, and seeming harmony prevailed.

The second top news story of the year concerned the establishment of the American Christian Television System (ACTS), a proposed television network based on satellites and low-power television stations.

The system, announced at the beginning of the year by Jimmy R. Allen, president of the denomination's Radio and Television Commission, was still in the planning stages when the year ended.

Simultaneously, the denomination's Sunday School Board worked to establish a satellite system to feed churches, associations, state conventions and others.

Lawsuits impacting various agencies was voted the third top story.

During the year, a woman secretary filed suit against the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist Brotherhood Commission and three Brotherhood executives charging sexual harassment and seeking \$3 million in damages.

In the summer, a five-year old lawsuit against the Baptist Sunday School Board by a former board personnel officer was settled when the BSSB paid Donald Burnett \$60,000 in damages.

A jury in a Nashville court awarded Burnett \$400,000, but the judge reduced the damages to \$60,000.

Two other Baptist entities--Mississippi College in Clinton, Miss., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas--also went to court.

They were featured in federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission disputes over employment records and practices.

Bailey Smith figured in the fourth as well as the first top story of the year. Smith made news in 1980 when he told a national political rally that "God doesn't hear the prayer of a Jew," and later said he thought Jews "have funny looking noses."

The remarks led to widely publicized meetings between Smith and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. During 1981, Smith and a contingent of Southern Baptist leaders toured Israel under sponsorship of the ADL, and relations between Southern Baptists and Jews seemed on the upswing.

The other top 10 stories are:

Five: Furor followed publicized remarks of Robert Bratcher, one of the main translators of the Good News for Modern Man version of the Bible. Bratcher, of Chapel Hill, N.C., said in March that belief in an inerrant Bible is either "willful ignorance" or "intellectual dishonesty." He later "resigned" from the American Bible Society, where he was research associate.

SIX: Leadership changes saw Abner McCall retire as president of Baylor University, Waco, Texas, to be replaced by Herbert Reynolds; Duke K. McCall announced his retirement as president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; and A. Harold Cole stepped down as executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, replaced by Ray P. Rust, president of Anderson College. Also, James H. Landes of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and Roy Gresham of the Maryland Baptist Convention announced their retirements, and J. Marse Grant, editor of the Biblical Recorder, journal of the North Carolina convention, announced he will leave his post in 1982.

SEVEN: After a slight increase in 1980, statistics indicate Southern Baptists baptized fewer converts in 1981. Still, the statistics indicated Southern Baptists are baptizing an average of 1,000 persons a day.

EIGHT: In January, an intruder brutally murdered Ethyl Louise Robbins, 68, the wife of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary professor Ray Robbins, in her campus apartment. Nearly a year later, no suspects had been apprehended.

NINE: Southern Baptists continue their efforts to alleviate world hunger. The denomination's Foreign Mission Board sought ways to improve delivery of the funds and contributions continue to increase.

TEN: In February, Gene Medaris resigned as editor of the Indiana Baptist, journal of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, after he was censured by the executive board. His censure and resignation were upheld by the board and, later, the chairman of the board, David Simpson, was named editor of the 9,500 circulation weekly newspaper.

Chinese People Impressive  
To Southern Baptist Leader

By Dan Martin

CO

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--The people. That's what most impressed Harold C. Bennett, executive secretary-treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention, on a recent trip to mainland China.

"The strongest impression I have is people," he said. "They were just wall to wall... people everywhere. They were most impressive. They were very friendly and very anxious to talk to us. Wherever we stopped, they would crowd around. Maybe two or three in a crowd could speak English and that would attract more."

Bennett was one of 10 evangelical church leaders from the United States who made a two-week trip to China in late 1981, visiting Shanghai, Nanking and Peking.

Although meeting the people was the highlight of Bennett's trip, the purpose was to visit Bishop K. H. Ting, chairman of the Three-Self Protestant Movement--the officially recognized Protestant Christian church in China--and chairman of the newly-organized Chinese Christian Council.

Bennett and the other evangelicals spent three hours with Ting in Nanking.

"The main purpose of our trip was to visit with Bishop Ting and to share with him the concern of groups of Christians in the United States," Bennett said. "We wanted him to know of our prayer support for China and our interest in what he and the Christian church are doing there."

The trip was made under the sponsorship of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), an interchurch agency of evangelical denominations and churches. Bennett was the only non-NAE member of the group since the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, is not a member of NAE.

Bennett said the Chinese leader expressed concern that the Christian church in China be an expression of Chinese culture and "not just a transplant of Western Christianity."

Protestant Christianity in the communist country has a nationalistic tinge, reflected in its official name: "Three-Self Protestant Movement," and Bennett explained: "The Three-Self Protestant Movement could be called a political movement. That is part of what the Chinese are all about today. They want to be self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. That is the official Chinese position and the Three-Self Movement is part of those ideas."

"Bishop Ting thinks there are probably one million Christians in China today. There may be more, but he uses the conservative estimate of a million," Bennett said. "At the time the missionaries left China in 1949, there were 700,000. Now, there are a million."

While a portion of the Christians meet in regular churches, most of them meet in 20,000 "house churches," around the nation.

"Bishop Ting told us he feels the greatest problem facing them today is that there is such an increase in the number of Christians that they are not able to help them in Christian growth and Christian nurture. That is why the Chinese Christian Council was formed. It aims to help give better pastoral care to the many church leaders," Bennett said.

He indicated that while the churches are served by trained pastors, many of the house congregations "are served by people who are completely untrained. They are more enthusiastic, more energetic, more dynamic, but untrained," Bennett said. "Some of them do not teach the Bible the way they ought to, so they need training in that area."

The hunger for training is so great, Bennett said, that when a booklet on how to study the Bible was published, leaders had to turn it into a correspondence course, in which 30,000 persons are now enrolled.

While on the trip, Bennett and the other evangelicals also visited the Nanking Theological Seminary, which was reopened in March of 1981, after being closed 13 years.

When it opened, Bennett said he was told, 308 prospective students took the examination; 47 were selected as students. Now, the seminary has an enrollment of 51.

"Through the seminary, Bishop Ting hopes to prepare a new generation of leaders who will do pioneer work in developing Chinese forms of Christian witness," Bennett added.

The group of evangelicals also visited services in Peking, which Bennett characterized "as services very similar to what we are familiar with." He added the opening hymn was "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee."

"The missionary movement of years ago--Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and others--is certainly there and evident. But they are trying to evolve their Chinese interpretation of Christianity. They are trying to set themselves out as being the 'Chinese Christian Church,'" Bennett said.

Bennett adds he does not expect China to admit missionaries "in the immediate future," but adds: "I do believe God has ways of helping us in ministering with the Chinese that are not apparent now."

In addition to visiting the worship services, the Bishop, the seminary and worship services in Peking, the evangelicals also "did the tourist things," of seeing the Great Wall, visiting communes, shopping centers, cultural centers, a zoo and historical places.

"I was very impressed by China," Bennett said. "I would like to go back someday."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers.

California Storm Hits  
Some Baptist Families

CO  
By Don Hepburn

Baptist Press  
1/8/82

MARIN COUNTY, Calif. (BP)--A savage winter storm which has left millions of dollars of property damage and hundreds of families homeless has also disrupted the lives of several California Southern Baptist families and churches.

First Baptist Church in Boulder Creek is the only church which has reported extensive damage. A mud slide from a hillside broke through a wall in the church's educational building, causing an estimated \$35,000--\$40,000 damage to classrooms and a nursery area. Pastor Mike Miller said that despite water, mud and structural damage, they were trying to ready the unaffected portions of the building as a relief center for the Boulder Creek community.

Miller also reported that cleanup operations were hampered by the lack of gas and electricity which had been disrupted four days earlier.

Compounding his problem, Miller said, standing water in the church building was turning into ice as a result of below freezing temperature.

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In southern and central Marin County, where the most severe damage has been reported, church leaders say no churches have been directly effected. However, several Baptist families have experienced some water and mud damage to their homes and businesses.

Following a tour of Marin County, Redwood Empire Director of Missions Bill Ryan and six area pastors are planning ways to involve Baptist laity and Southern Baptist agencies in relief efforts.

Referring to the extensive damage in general, Ryan said, "It's unbelievable." One pastor characterized some areas as "looking like a war zone."

Tom Provost, pastor of Tiburon Baptist Church, reported that several Baptist families are involved in cleanup efforts as well as providing shelter for other families left homeless by the flooding.

At Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, located on a hill in southern Marin County, no damage has been reported.

According to Larry Baker, vice president for communications for the seminary, highway closure made it impossible for some faculty and staff to pass to the campus on Monday and Tuesday.

Some persons, like Baker, were stranded on the campus Monday night because closed roads made it impossible for them to travel home. Most roads are open, but restricted to local residents.

Baker also reported that the student government association had informally organized relief work teams to assist area residents whose homes had suffered water or mud damage.

In Fresno, Edd Brown, director of the California convention's men's ministry department, said the disaster relief teams were being organized to assist in the cleanup effort.

By Jan. 11, Brown expected to have 30-50 Baptist relief workers in Marin County with Baptist and non-Baptist families. Bob Williams, director of the department of Christian social ministries, said the Home Mission Board had made \$10,000 available to individuals and families who have needs which will not be met by Red Cross, government or insurance agencies.

Reflecting on the storm's effects, Provost said, "Some of us (pastors) have prospects whom we are going to try to help. This will provide us a chance to reach out and demonstrate in special ways that we care."

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CORRECTION:

In BP story mailed 1/4/82--"RTVC Test Marketing Evangelistic TV Pilot"--please change call letters of Midland-Odessa, Texas, station in fourth paragraph to KTPX-TV, rather than KPPX-TV, as sent.

Thanks,

Baptist Press