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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Craig Bird, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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82-183

Rapid Growth, Violent Conflict Reported In China House Churches

HONG KONG (BP)--Recent eyewitness reports filtering out of China portray rural Chinese "house" churches growing at a phenomenal rate but beset by increasing conflict with government and public church authorities.

The unconfirmed accounts, reported by the Hong Kong-based Chinese Church Research Center, estimate 15 counties in Henan province with an average of 100,000 Christians worshipping in house fellowships. House churches are reported in nearly all of China's 22 provinces, five autonomous regions and three metropolitan districts.

Estimates of the number of Christians in China vary widely. The Three Self Patriotic Movement, the government-recognized Chinese Protestant organization, estimates three to five million Protestants and Catholics nationwide. Several Christian "China Watch" agencies in Hong Kong and the United States count as many as 50 million believers, almost five percent of the population.

Independent verification of any estimate is impossible, but numerous accounts report rapidly multiplying house churches in the southern coastal provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong as well as interior Sichuan and Henan, where a religious revival has reportedly been in full force for several years. Extensive church growth also is reported in inner Mongolia.

Increases in the size and strength of the informal house fellowships, however, are causing their members to run afoul of some local authorities and public church officials, according to accounts.

Reports claim house church leaders and itinerant preachers have been harassed, arrested and sometimes beaten by local police and Three Self functionaries in several provinces. House churches in Shanghai, Shandong and parts of central China have been ordered closed or forcibly disbanded.

A few believers in Henan have reportedly threatened or engaged in violent reprisals against those who attempted to limit religious activities.

Some house church leaders--most of whom are untrained laymen--have accused Three Self leaders of cooperating with the government in limiting or suppressing unauthorized worship. Three Self Chief Ding Guangxun, also president of the Chinese Christian Council, denies the charges.

Ding has repeatedly rejected allegations the Three Self Patriotic Movement is controlled by the government, or that it opposes house churches. He has attacked the Chinese Church Research Center by name, calling its findings "fabrication" intended to drive a wedge between "open" churches and house fellowships and deceive Christians outside China.

Formed in 1951 with government consent, the Three Self movement (named for its ideals of self-support, self-government and self-propagation) has sponsored the reopening of more than 250 Protestant churches in China since 1979. Public church activity virtually ceased during

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the 1966-76 cultural revolution, when radical students and Red Guards violently suppressed religion. Similar public organizations oversee Catholic, Buddhist, Islamic and Daoist (Taoist) activity.

Three Self supervised the reopening of a Protestant seminary in Nanjing in 1981, and another seminary reportedly began classes for 50 students in Shen-Yang in November. The organization also distributes Bibles to churches and plans to publish a new Chinese hymnal in 1983. Some 270,000 Chinese Bibles were reported printed in 1981 and the official new China news agency reported in September that one million Bibles will have been printed by the end of 1982.

Three Self leader Ding also served on the committee that recently revised China's national constitution. Joined by Buddhist and Islamic representatives, he successfully lobbied for deletion of a phrase giving citizens the right to propagate atheism. No similar right is explicitly granted to religious believers to propagate their faith.

Three Self and the Chinese Christian Council are forming provincial and local organizations to meet the needs of local churches, officials say. But critics allege the organizations are seeking to "manage" and contain the growth of Protestant faith for the government.

Names of public church members and candidates for baptism are said to be reported to their place of employment or the government's religious affairs bureau, an action many Christians fear. Unconfirmed reports charge that Three Self or government officials also have distributed the following list of "ten don'ts" for believers in central China:

- Don't organize a church without government approval.
- Except for government-approved clergy, nobody should baptize.
- Don't have contacts with foreign religious bodies or buy books from abroad.
- Don't print or reproduce Bibles or other religious books without approval.
- Don't travel from commune to commune to spread religion.
- Keep religion to yourself.
- Don't pray everyday, but only on Sundays.
- Don't convey religious thought to persons under 18 years of age.
- Don't sing religious songs to persons under 18 years of age.
- Don't solicit contributions for the promotion of religion.

Verifying the origin of such a list is difficult, as is verifying the accuracy of Three Self pronouncements or reports from house church leaders monitored in Hong Kong, which often contradict each other.

Informed observers see a situation more complex than "Three Self versus the house churches." The Three Self Patriotic Movement, like all public organizations in China, must pursue its goals while promoting support for government policies and the Communist party. The organization's leaders, and their supporters outside China, insist Three Self is doing its best to open churches, train pastors and distribute Bibles within the strict limitations placed on its existence.

Members of the house church movement generally resist public association with Three Self or its open churches, some observers say, because of the religious repression of the cultural revolution era, when Christians of all stripes were persecuted. Many suspect Three Self motives, but others simply fear being identified by the government.

While it is growing rapidly the house church movement also is reportedly plagued by an extreme shortage of Bibles and trained leaders. This deficiency leaves members open to heresies and mixtures of Christianity and Buddhism, Daoism and Chinese folk religions.

-30-

Drunk Driving Panel Report
Warns Of Problem's Scope

By Stan Hastey

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WASHINGTON (BP)--As Americans approached the Christmas holiday season, the Presidential Commission on Drunk Driving issued a set of preliminary recommendations along with a warning that the problems caused by drunk drivers must receive continuing attention if the carnage on the nation's roads and streets is to be reduced significantly.

Appointed last April by President Reagan, the commission released a 52-page interim report containing dozens of recommendations calling on Americans to assault head-on the menace of drunk drivers. It will release a final report by April 1, 1983.

Reagan, appearing with commission chairman John A. Volpe at a White House ceremony marking National Drunk and Drugged Driving Awareness Week, declared that decisive action against drunk driving should be taken now because of Americans' obvious concerns about this problem. "Action can be taken when the people are concerned enough," he said, adding "people are not only concerned now, they're mad."

He said further, "Our loved ones are not being killed in drunk driving 'accidents'... They're dying because some of the nation's motorists have chosen to turn their vehicles into weapons."

Some 25,000 Americans die each year, and another 700,000 are injured, in auto crashes caused by drunk drivers.

At the same time, the commission's report sounded the hopeful note that increased public awareness of the problem and tougher laws in some states and localities have resulted this year in dramatically reduced fatality and injury statistics.

The report specifically recommends the immediate adoption by all states of 21 as the minimum legal drinking age for all alcoholic beverages.

Police at all levels should be encouraged, the report suggests, to apply "selective enforcement" techniques, including randomly selected and judicially approved roadblocks to get more drunk drivers off the roads. The commission estimates that as few as one in every 2,000 drunk drivers is ever arrested.

To help police in making DWI arrests, the report adds, preliminary breath test laws should be enacted by all states, and citizens should be encouraged to report to police suspected drunk drivers.

Once an arrest has been made, prosecutors and courts should not reduce DWI charges, and courts and judges should impose mandatory fines and jail terms.

In addition, the panel said state laws are needed to classify as felons those who cause death and serious bodily injury while driving intoxicated and to require any person convicted of drunk driving to pay restitution to his victims.

State and local governments should also enact laws to help drunk drivers' victims, he report concludes.

The report also recommends that rehabilitation and education programs for convicted drunk drivers should supplement, not replace, their punishment.

More general recommendations include:

--Establishment of a permanent national panel with the ongoing task of fighting drunk driving;

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--State legislation providing funding for increased efforts in enforcement, prosecution, adjudication, education and treatment;

--State and local task forces to call continuing attention to the problems associated with drunk driving;

--Support for grassroots citizen advocacy groups such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD); and

Involvement of the private sector at all levels, with special attention to the responsibility of the beer, wine and liquor industry to initiate or expand programs to warn the public of the hazards of drinking and driving.

-30-

Unified Ministry Mixes
Preaching And Planning

By Jim Lowry

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STONE MOUNTAIN, Ga. (BP)--Preaching, although a primary task of the pastor, must be integrated into a unified thrust for a church to accomplish crucial ministry efforts related to the varied needs of church members.

Pastors need a unified approach to serve as preacher, counselor and administrator, according to Bill Hull, pastor of First Baptist Church, Shreveport, La., and one of 19 pastors attending a recent Consultation on Preaching here.

Components of a successful church ministry include worship, outreach, nurture, fellowship, service and administration, Hull told the preachers, seminary professors of preaching and Sunday School Board representatives at the meeting.

"The pastor has to try to relate everything to a coherent agenda for ministry in a job that has more unstructured claims for time than any other in society," Hull said.

He said the pastor must be proactive in his planning and have objectives which he coordinates and balances to avoid excessive attention to one exaggerated achievement.

In the discussion about the pastor's role as preacher, 10 areas were considered which might aid in the effectiveness in this primary pastoral function.

Among those addressing the group were David Matthews, First, Greenville, S.C.; John Claypool, associate pastor, Second, Lubbock, Texas; Robert Bailey, South Side, Birmingham, Ala., and Lavonn Brown, First, Norman, Okla.

Relevance and faithfulness are two keys to preaching in the 1980s, according to Matthews. He said people today are striving for simplicity because they are bombarded daily by hucksters and quick fixers who mostly are long on promise and short on delivery. Sermons must not be just topical but speak the gospel to the understanding of the congregation.

Matthews issued a challenge of clarity to the preachers to be disciplined and simplify their preaching by focusing and purifying their message to promote understanding by church members. He added preachers have a credibility problem because of exaggerations, especially related to growth.

In a discussion about how short-cuts save time in sermon preparation, Brown questioned the legitimacy of preaching a sermon prepared by another preacher without giving any credit. He listed numerous possibilities to save time on sermon preparation, but underscored that there was no substitute for a lifelong study of the scriptures.

Claypool pointed out in the discussion that preachers have falsely pushed the idea of originality, however. He said the problem could be dealt with if preachers would acknowledge only God is original, and preachers take what God said and rearrange it.

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"There need to be some significant changes in preaching related to worship," commented Bailey. "We need to restore the thrust of God-centered worship where we worship God because of who He is, not because of what He can do for us.

"We are deceiving ourselves when worship is repetitive and unprepared," Bailey continued. Many churches have not had high expectations of worship services, which become an opportunity to prop up church programs and parade the skills of performers.

"Worship is not just preaching, but a balance between preaching and worship," Bailey said. "It also is the combined effort of both clergy and laity. A preacher has to be more than a prophet and more than just an evangelist. He has to be a worship leader."

Altus Newell, who was pastor of St. Matthews, Louisville, when the sanctuary burned and is now pastor of First, Opelika, Ala., spoke to the consultation about preaching in the context of crisis. He advised preachers to keep lists of books, copies of sermons and important records in two different locations so if materials in one place are destroyed, the preacher does not lose valuable information.

Other preachers attending included James Carter, University, Fort Worth, Texas; T.T. Crabtree, First, Springfield, Mo.; Roger Lovette, First, Clemson, S.C.; Cecil Sherman, First, Asheville, N.C. and Alton McEachern, First, Greensboro, N.C. Also participating in the consultation were Bill Bruster, Central Bearden, Knoxville, Tenn.; Welton Gaddy, Broadway, Fort Worth; Truett Gannon, Smoke Rise, Stone Mountain, Ga.; Brian Harbour, First, Pensacola, Fla.; Ralph Langley, First, Huntsville, Ala.; Fred Moffett, Heritage, Annapolis, Md., and Doug Watterson, First, Knoxville, Tenn.

Seminary professors attending were Harold Bryson, New Orleans, and William Tuck, Southern. James Barry, consultant in the board's church administration department, convened the meeting.

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McGlothlin Succeeds Broome
As Southern Seminary Treasurer

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--T.J. McGlothlin Jr., a 17-year veteran of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary staff, will succeed C. Richard Broome as seminary treasurer Jan. 1.

Broome, treasurer since 1974, have been a member of the seminary staff for 26 years. He will take early retirement from the seminary to become director of the business services division of the Florida Baptist Convention.

In addition to his duties as treasurer, McGlothlin will continue to supervise purchasing and personnel services for the seminary, which he has done for more than eight years.

McGlothlin was the seminary's assistant treasurer for nine years. He has almost 30 years of experience in business and personnel affairs and has earned three business degrees.

In connection with these personnel changes, Eddie Ashmore will become director of information resource management Jan. 1.

Like McGlothlin, Ashmore is a 17-year veteran of the seminary staff. He is currently director of data processing. In his new post, he will continue to supervise computer services and also supervise related departments of printing and duplication, office services, post office and the campus telephone system.

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