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Baptists In Jamaica
Celebrate 200 Years

By Bill Webb

KINGSTON, Jamaica (BP)--Ten thousand Jamaican Baptists poured into Kingston's National Arena Feb. 27 to end their 133rd annual assembly and celebrate 200 years of Baptist witness in their Caribbean island nation.

The work dates back to 1783 when a Baptist ex-slave, George Leile, secured passage on an English ship to flee Georgia for Jamaica. As Leile worked on the Kingston waterfront to pay back the cost of his passage, he preached at the local race course. One of his early converts, Moses Baker, became Leile's assistant and an outstanding preacher in his own right.

With them, Baptist witness on Jamaica was established.

Today, 273 churches with some 38,000 members make up the Jamaica Baptist Union, the largest and best developed Baptist work in the Caribbean.

The recent celebration combined both international and local participation. Gerhard Claas, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, brought the morning message while one of Jamaica's own, Burchell Taylor, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Kingston, preached at night.

Raymond Anglin, general secretary of the Jamaica Baptist Union, said the week-long meeting combined "business and moments of inspiration" as Baptists recalled their rich heritage and planned future work.

And the celebration of those first 200 years has only begun. A new film commemorating Baptist history, "Glory to God," premiered in February. A biography, "George Leile," written by Clement Gayle, of United Theological College in Jamaica, was released during the assembly meeting.

In July several Jamaican Baptists hope to make a pilgrimage to Georgia, where K ile spent his early years. The union will initiate a series of eight emancipation rallies Aug. 1 to note the accomplishments of Jamaican Baptist forebears. Later in August, Jamaica will host the triennial meeting of the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship.

All of the island's Baptist churches have planned evangelistic crusades, concentrated between September and November and culminating in a rally at the national stadium Nov. 27.

Southern Baptist missionaries worked in Jamaica from 1963-79 as fraternal representatives. Today, relationships between Southern Baptists and Jamaican Baptists are maintained through the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship.

Baptists figure prominently in Jamaica's history. Among the country's seven national heroes, three are Baptists: Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle and George William Gordon.

Sharpe, born a slave around 1780, was a leader both in his church and in the slave revolt of 1831-32 in Jamaica. He planned a strike among slaves to bring down slavery without violence. Instead, a bloody revolt ensued. Sharpe was hastily tried and hanged on May 23, 1832, less than a year before the Emancipation Act abolished slavery on the island.

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Bogle, a Baptist deacon and Gordon, Baptist pastor and member of the Jamaican House of Assembly, were both hanged following attempts to call the attention of Jamaica's governor to economic hardships faced by Jamaica's Negroes in the 1860's. They attempted non-violent marches but violence erupted when marchers interrupted a town council meeting in Morant Bay.

Gordon had established missions in remote areas of Jamaica and ordained deacons to minister in rural areas. He had pressed for the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Jamaica, claiming the church drained the island's finances at a time when the church no longer ministered to the mass of Jamaicans.

Jamaican Baptists have long displayed missionary zeal. In 1842, seven years before the Jamaican Baptist Union was formed, they declared themselves independent of the Baptist Missionary Society of London (with whom they still cooperate) and organized the Jamaica Baptist Missionary Society.

By the end of the century, the society sponsored missionaries to West Africa, Haiti, Cuba, Costa Rica and Panama. Later missionaries were dispatched to the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Today the society sponsors Rev. and Mrs. Hervis Green on the island of Grenada in a joint project with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. Baptists in Guyana have requested assistance and Jamaican Baptists hope to send a pastor to serve there later this year.

Baptists helped foster the concept of education for Jamaica's masses. Calabar College was established in 1843 primarily for the training of ministers and teachers.

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Senate Hearings Begin
On Abortion Amendment

By Larry Chesser

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The Senate subcommittee on the Constitution began the 98th Congress' consideration of the abortion issue with the first of two hearings designed to get a proposed constitutional amendment to the Senate floor this spring.

The panel is considering a proposal by its chairman, Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, designed to overturn the Supreme Court's landmark decision in Roe v. Wade by declaring that the Constitution does not secure a woman's right to an abortion. As proposed by Hatch, S.J. Res. 3 would give federal and state governments joint authority to restrict abortion but states could not pass legislation less restrictive than federal laws.

Hatch said the hearings are a supplement to the "exhaustive examination" of abortion the panel made in nine days of hearings during the 97th Congress. Following those hearings, the full Judiciary Committee voted to send an identical Hatch proposal to the Senate floor, but the Utah Republican agreed to delay its consideration in exchange for a promise from majority leader Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr., R-Tenn., to provide time for the full Senate to debate a constitutional amendment on abortion this spring.

A Senate floor debate on a constitutional amendment on abortion, Hatch said, would be the first since the Supreme Court's controversial 1973 decision.

Two senators who led off the hearing congratulated Hatch for going the constitutional amendment route instead of trying to overturn a constitutional decision of the high court by statute, but disagreed over whether Congress should act at all to restrict abortion.

Sen. Thomas F. Eagleton, D-Mo., a consistent supporter of constitutional amendments banning abortion, urged Hatch to pursue the amendment but suggested he streamline it to: "A right to abortion is not secured by this Constitution."

Eagleton said the streamlined version would reverse Roe v. Wade, leaving abortion as a matter for each state to decide.

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Eagleton added the lack of progress on legislation pushed by the anti-abortion movement has convinced him the simple amendment he backs "well may be the most politically feasible, yet meaningful step th Congress can take toward promoting the fundamental right to life of the unborn."

The Missouri Democrat emphasized his support for a constitutional amendment is compelled by logic, not theology.

S n. Bob Packwood, R-Ore., a strong pro-choice advocate on the abortion issue, cited polls showing most Americans oppose a ban on abortion and vowed to fight the anti-abortion amendment if it reaches the Senate floor.

Packwood said it is possible for Congress to pass a constitutional amendment that would legally prohibit abortion, but quickly added, "I think we are all aware it would not actually prohibit it."

The nation's anti-abortion movement, Packwood said, has a sense of urgency about achieving its legislative goal. "If they do not get it in this Congress, I think they are finished and I think they know they are finished."

At the hearing a pair of law school professors came down on opposite sides.

Harvard University law professor Laurence H. Tribe criticized the Hatch proposal for giving states the authority "only to restrict or prohibit abortion."

Tribe discounted claims the Hatch amendment would return the law to where it was before 1973, charging the proposal would make the "states and Congress indirect vehicles for bans on abortion," but would not give states and local governments a "free choice" on the issue.

Brigham Young University professor Lynn D. Wardle urged the panel to pass an amendment reversing Roe v. Wade. To accomplish that, Wardle joined Eagleton in recommending an amendment containing only the first sentence of the Hatch proposal.

"Congress should not now try to do more," Wardle said.

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Marsh Now Highest Ranking
Southern Baptist Chaplain

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Gerald Marsh has been promoted by the Air Force Reserve to the rank of major general, making him the highest ranking Southern Baptist chaplain in the U.S. military services.

Marsh, professor of pastoral ministry at the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary, will maintain his current responsibilities as mobilization assistant to the Air Force chief of chaplains, Maj. Gen. John A. Collins. In that role, Marsh is responsible to Collins for all matters relating to Air Force Reserve chaplains.

The promotion, announced by the Air Force early this year, was confirmed by the U.S. Senate Feb. 24.

Marsh, who has 30 years of service in the reserves, said his promotion to the highest rank possible for a chaplain is a "climax to a process."

"That process", he said, "is one of being able to participate as a leader in the preparation of people to minister within the armed forces to the very people whose lives are totally involved in maintaining peace in this world."

"Within the reserves," he added, "we can prepare people to minister who we hope will never have to serve on active duty, but if called upon would be ready to function. My role of leadership in that process is the thing I see as a real opportunity."

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Since last summer, Marsh has been in Washington, D.C. on sabbatical leave from Southwestern, studying in the field of war and peace. Specifically, Marsh said his studies have focused on the "minister's responsibility is pastoring or shepherding his people through these issues." Based on his sabbatical studies, Marsh plans to write articles and possibly a book.

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(BP) photo mailed to the state Baptist papers by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Starting Churches Demands SBC's
Full Attention, Redford Says

By Patti Stephenson

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SEATTLE (BP)--"The greatest goal ever set by any Christian group"--having 50,000 churches by 2000 A.D.--"can't be done with business as usual, part-time thinking or splintered strategy," Jack Redford says.

Redford, church extension director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, addressing state convention missions and church extension directors at the church extension leadership conference in Seattle described the denomination's Bold Mission Thrust goals as massive but said Southern Baptists' efforts do not yet match their vision. Last year's record 1,373 new church starts reflect growing interest but, he warned, "at that rate, we'll only have 40,000 churches by 2000. That's a big miss."

Redford noted the need for "more effective mission pastors who can grow congregations quickly to self-support." Such pastors must be recruited, equipped, compensated adequately and carefully placed, he stressed. "Then we need to pay attention to the growth of these new congregations, making sure they become well-rounded and stable."

Redford also urged church extension leaders to use seminary interns, church planter apprentices and volunteers to start churches and to encourage local churches to hire "ministers of missions" to focus on church-starting full-time.

"A maintenance mentality won't start or grow churches," Redford claimed. "Neither can new churches start without aggressive evangelism. We need to remember the real reason for starting churches is because people are lost."

James Engel, communications professor at Wheaton Graduate School, told the Baptist leaders "many evangelistic efforts are based on the false premise that America is just waiting for the gospel" when, in fact, "some people are happy with life as it is."

"Americans are sovereign--they control what they want to see and hear," Engel said. Southern Baptists must communicate the relevance of the gospel to their lives "and earn the right to be there as a church in their community."

He warned "there is no magic strategy key" that makes starting churches easy or always successful. Southern Baptists must also decide "whether you're trying to create clones of one kind of Southern Baptist church, or create a custom-designed church for each particular area's needs. Church growth should not be your goal, but the outcome."

SBC President James T. Draper Jr., applauded the denomination's effort to begin 3,000 new churches on May 22, "Pentecost Sunday." He observed, "Asking churches to start a new work is not asking them to make a sacrifice but to do themselves a favor."

"The way we're going to do what God wants done is through starting new churches," Draper emphasized. Yet, he called on the missions leaders to remember "God doesn't give everyone the same vision. What works for one won't necessarily work for all. We must avoid rigid prototypes and allow God's spirit to lead."

Critical to the success of church planting is "hearing and heeding the cries of people in our communities," Draper stressed. "Any theology that doesn't let you hear the cries of hurting people is a bad theology."

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While Southern Baptists "debate about the Bible," Draper said, referring to the current inerrancy controversy within the denomination, "we must remember to proclaim it if we're serious about starting new churches."

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Crismond Eager
To Resume Ministry

By Don Kirkland

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GREENVILLE, S.C. (BP)--When Gary Crismond quit as minister of education and youth at Central Baptist Church, Greenville, a year ago, he didn't know whether he had a future. Now he is eager to resume his ministry.

Last September Crismond underwent a rare heart-lung transplant that took nine-and-one-half hours. Today he says, "I'm sure there will be some limitations, but the doctor said to try to live as normal a life as possible."

He and his wife, Tammy, both natives of Vinton, Va., have sold their home in Taylors, N.C., and moved in with his parents in Virginia. He hopes to return to work by spring or summer and his wife already has a job lined up in the Roanoke area as a dental assistant.

Crismond went to Central church in 1979, his first full-time work after graduating from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky. His bout with what was later diagnosed as primary pulmonary hypertension began in April of 1981.

"I was in great health until then," he recalled. "The first time I noticed something was wrong, I was walking up a hill with a bunch of guys. They made it up easily, but I was short of breath."

For the next 13 months Crismond was in and out of hospitals. In early September he got a call to go to Presbyterian University Hospital in Pittsburgh.

He knew there was a possibility of a transplant but still thought he was waiting for test results when doctors told him Sept. 20--his 29th birthday--a donor had been located.

Told he would die within a year without a transplant, Crismond decided that a 50-50 chance of success was better than nothing. (At the time of his surgery, five of the ten patients who had undergone this type of surgery had lived to leave the hospital.)

"I never doubted I would make it through the surgery all right," he said. "I had felt confident of my calling to the ministry and hadn't even scratched the surface of what I wanted to accomplish."

Convinced God had more for him to do, Crismond prayed as the time for surgery approached, "Here I am, Lord, if you want me now. If you have something more in store for me, bring me through this."

Crismond said there always is the chance his body will reject the new organs--even after many years, and sometimes it worries him. For now, though, he wants to get back to work and think about his family. "I've got to take it by faith, day by day," he said.

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(Don Kirkland is assistant editor of the South Carolina Baptist Courier)