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Illinois Baptist Woman
Befriended Execution Victim

By Robert Hastings

BELLEVILLE, Ill. (BP)--When John Evans died in an Atmore, Ala., electric chair April 23, his change in attitude toward life and his remorse for the crime may have been due to the efforts of an Illinois woman he never met.

After Joy Flahan, a member of Winstanley Baptist Church in Fairview Heights, Ill., for 31 years, read a newspaper article in March 1979 telling how Evans wanted to die for his crime, she wrote him a letter and enclosed a gospel tract.

Evans answered her and for four years they corresponded. His last letter, dated April 6, reaffirmed his faith in Christ and his belief that whatever happened, he would be at peace with the Lord. At that time his appeal for clemency was pending. It was not granted.

In a message videotaped before he was executed, Evans said he "wouldn't even hesitate a second" to give up his life for that of his victim.

Evans, convicted for the murder of Edward Nassar, a Mobile, Ala., pawnbroker, made the tape "because he had a real desire to try to help young people so they wouldn't have to suffer the way he did," Martin Webber, Alabama state prison chaplain, said.

"My name is John Evans and I am on death row in Alabama and I am scheduled to be executed in about four days," he said in an excerpt of the tape which was broadcast on the CBS Morning News. "I felt there are some important things I should say and, if you're smart you're going to listen and you're going to learn a little something."

Evans, who appeared calm on the tape, said he was "oversome with a sense of remorse" for his crime. "I am here for committing murder, for killing a man. I cannot give back the wife her husband. I cannot give back the kids their father. Taking the life of another human being is just almost too horrible to think about.

"I guess I've relived it over in my mind a hundred times and lots of times I've been overcome with a sense of remorse for him and his family. And God knows right now I've reached a point where if it were possible to give up my life to give his back, I wouldn't even hesitate a second to do so."

Webber said Evans had hoped the tape would be viewed by young people 12-15 because "as he looked back in his life, that's where it all began."

Flahan does not claim her letters were a major factor in his conversion because she wants "the Lord to have all the credit." However the tenor of his letters indicate such.

Evans' attitude changed after his conversion and he set out to rehabilitate himself while still in prison. At the time of execution he was working on a law degree by correspondence.

Flahan said the Sunday school of which she is a member often sent him small sums of money to buy postage and paper and to help with his tuition for the correspondence course. "I guess I identified with John more since he was so near the age of my daughter, who is 35," she said. Evans was 33 at the time of his execution.

Flahan said her pastor, Wendell Garrison, also wrote to Evans and as far as she knows, no similar correspondence was carried on with other persons outside his immediate family. Flahan has preserved most of the letters, which she is sharing with the Illinois Baptist newspaper for possible publication or quotes.

McEwen Resigns Post
At Southern Seminary

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Jack H. McEwen has resigned as dean of the school of religious education and as professor of religious education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., effective July 31, 1983.

McEwen came to Southern three years ago from First Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tenn., where he had been senior minister for seven years. He has accepted a position as professor of psychology and director of community development at Chattanooga State Technical Community College.

In his letter of resignation to seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt, McEwen said the decision to leave Southern and to go to another position was not easily made. However, the challenges provided by Chattanooga State Technical Community College and the opportunity to return to the Chattanooga area attracted him.

McEwen has been pastor of six churches in Texas and Tennessee. From 1966-73, he served at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga at various times as assistant professor of education and psychology and also as dean of students.

He is a graduate of the University of Tennessee (E. Ed. in 1972); the University of Chattanooga, (B.S. in 1957 and M. Ed. in 1966); Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas (B.D. in 1961); Baptist Bible College, Springfield, Mo. (diploma in 1952), and has studied at Baylor University and the University of Colorado.

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Baptist TelNet
Funds Approved

Baptist Press
5/2/83

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Funds for a Baptist TelNet uplink and preparation of a site near downtown Nashville were approved April 28 by the executive committee of the Baptist Sunday School Board's trustees.

When the board satellite network to churches becomes operational in mid-1984, the uplink will transmit the Baptist TelNet signal to the Spacenet I satellite which will retransmit the signal to receiving earth stations.

The uplink will be purchased from Scientific Atlanta which submitted the lower of two bids received. The uplink will cost approximately \$435,000.

Planning and site preparation, which include an access road, equipment building, foundation, microwave tower and fencing, are expected to cost \$145,000.

The uplink will be located on property owned by the board on Thompson Lane, three miles south of downtown Nashville. Site preparation will begin immediately with installation of the uplink due to be completed early in 1984.

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Converted Nunez Changes Tune
About Revolutionary Activity

By Norman Jameson

Baptist Press
5/2/83

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--When Cuban authorities arrested Alcides Nunez at a bus stop in 1962 for conspiring against the Castro government, he little dreamed he would later urge Christians to stay out of political upheavals.

Nunez, a theology student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, thinks a Christian should not conspire against the government.

"Sometimes the government is bad," said Nunez, 44. "But a Christian must serve his church and community and be concerned with spiritual things rather than public or civic things."

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Nunez's concern is that Christians will unwittingly support a government that is later proven evil, or will resist a change that is later proven beneficial. Many Baptists supported Castro in his early reign, he said. Too, he does not feel a Christian could participate in terrorist activities that would take lives.

Today, the only Christian activity permitted in Cuba is in the church, said Nunez, who visited family there in 1979. No Christian activity can take place in the home, such as neighborhood Bible study. Young people study free at the universities. Consequently, they are reluctant to criticize the atheistic teachings of their professors. Nunez said parents cannot contradict their children's professors at home, even if they are wrong.

Nunez was imprisoned for conspiracy, not because of his faith. He had been exposed to Christianity through a Boy Scout troop which met in a Baptist church. He thinks a New Testament he carried in his pocket when he was arrested earned him a harsher prison term. Others arrested with him received terms of two months to three years. Nunez languished in prison seven years.

An imprisoned Baptist pastor led Nunez in daily Bible study for two years. There, Nunez understood the gospel and later, at Riverside Baptist Church in Miami, became a Christian.

Nunez was arrested with his brother. Their family became Christians while the boys were in prison, primarily because of the outpouring of love and help they received from Christians when their sons were imprisoned.

David Fite, Southwestern's director for continuing education for ministry, then a Southern Baptist missionary, was imprisoned in the same place as Nunez, at the same time, though they did not meet until Nunez came to Southwestern. After Nunez was released, he could not get permission to leave the country.

So on Dec. 29, 1970, he slipped into the Caribbean and swam four hours to Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. base in Cuba, where he slid under the wires in water and stumbled onto the beach. From there he flew with 11 other refugees to Miami. He went to Puerto Rico to study French, and there met his wife, Miriam, a religious education student at the seminary. He later graduated from Sorbonne University and considered going to Latin America to study and teach.

Then Nunez thought how God had blessed him with good health in prison, even though maggots in the food one time caused a riot. He thought of his family and of the men who had influenced him. "I decided the best thing I could do was to consecrate, dedicate my life to the ministry," he said. He wants to prepare to take the place of his pastor father-in-law and the prison preacher "because they will pass."

While in seminary, Nunez teaches French at the Lake County Christian School and directs the Spanish department at Mansfield Baptist Church.

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CORRECTION: In BP mailed 4/28/83, please make the following corrections. In story entitled "SBC Broadcast Ministries Conference Explores Future," please change the word "parallel" in the first graf to "an unparelleled". In the second graf, please substitute: 'The third annual conference was the last before the launch next spring of the American Christian Network (ACTS) and Baptist TelNet (BTN), Southern Baptists' two satellite networks will be launched.' for the second sentence. Also, in graf 17, please substitute: 'Coordinator Doug Day said VTS will fill in the gap when TelNet is not feasible for some churches, providing teaching, training and inspirational video tapes through state conventions.' for the second sentence.

Thanks,

Baptist Press

Racism Still Problem
For SBC, Panel Says

By Dan Martin

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Despite gains in racial reconciliation, racism is a continuing problem in the 13.9 million member Southern Baptist Convention, according to a panel of experts called together by the SBC Christian Life Commission.

"Racism continues to exist at various levels in the SBC," said Foy Valentine, executive director of the CLC, pointing to national, state, associational and local church levels. "If Bold Mission Thrust (the denomination's plan to present the claims of Christ to every person in the world by 2000 AD) is to succeed, we must address this matter of racial attitudes."

Valentine added the "very word 'Southern' in our name is a red flag which identifies us in the minds of many people with racism and noted "many people outside the SBC do not know who we are or what we are doing."

The 12-member panel discussed the "religious dimension of racism and what the SBC needs to be doing in the area."

Emmanuel McCall, director of the department of black church relations at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta, commented that racial tensions are "solidifying" today because of economic pressures and Southern Baptists "are perceived as joining the mentality around the (Reagan) administration."

"There is a lot of negative attitudes...a great deal of hostility (over race), and Southern Baptists don't seem to be speaking about racial reconciliation. If the National Council of Churches and the United Methodist Church are speaking, we as the largest non-Catholic denomination ought to be saying something," he added.

While other ethnic groups were represented, much of the discussion centered on the "black-white" problems. Lou Beasley, director of the department of social work at the University of Tennessee in Nashville, commented that studies have shown racial prejudice "follows a color continuum (from dark to light)" and said if the black-white problems are solved, the others also will find solution.

When asked the "most embarrassing" thing about being a black Southern Baptist, Sid Smith, consultant with the ethnic liaison unit at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, enumerated 10 things which cause him distress.

Smith said, "despite the progress, we have not arrived (in racial reconciliation) and in fact we are not even in the ballgame in many instances. The whole idea of racial reconciliation is not bringing people together, but what ought to happen when we get them together."

Other "embarrassments" he listed include that he believes the SBC to be very sexist and that the denomination has a Moral Majority mindset. "We also are perceived to be very narrow in our focus and are not paying attention to social concerns such as unemployment, the economy, Reaganomics."

Smith said Southern Baptists are "very insensitive" in that race relations have been deprioritized and put on the back burner. "Southern Baptists also are perceived as being tardy, getting there long after the issue has been defused."

Other comments Smith made included that Southern Baptists are perceived as being "wealthy but tight...resourceful without really sharing those resources...hypocritical because Bold Mission Thrust promises one thing (equality) but churches deliver another...(and) hyperindividualistic because we find no place for the corporate ministry of the denomination."

The think tank proposed a number of suggestions to improve race relations. Included were providing literature and resource materials to churches, using Bible study time to look at biblical models of reconciliation and exploring alternatives which will move quickly, rather than waiting on long lead-time publications.

David Lockard, director of organization for the CLC, told the panel of plans to focus on racial reconciliation at the 1984 CLC Conference at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center.

McCall said Southern Baptists leaders should be urged to use SBC-related black pastors on their programs, rather than always reaching out to non-Southern Baptist blacks for their program and platform personalities.

Smith urged the denomination "to develop a plan which would develop strong, qualified blacks as agency employees. It may be this should start at the seminary level, or maybe even before."

Other suggestions include encouraging state convention planning meetings, getting race relations on the agendas of states, associations and local churches, involving laypersons in the race relations struggle, working with others in observing race relations emphases, and working with black churches during February, in which Black History Month as well as the SBC race relations Sunday are observed.

"We also must work to raise the consciousness of Southern Baptists to realize we still have a problem related to race relations," Valentine said.

Valentine indicated to participants their suggestions will be seriously considered by the agency, charged with the responsibility for promoting race relations in the SBC.

Other participants included Kenneth Chadwick, assistant director of ethnic church growth at the HMB in Atlanta; Bob Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pompano Beach, Fla.; Bill Givens, director of the department of cooperative ministries with National Baptists, Missouri Baptist Convention in Jefferson City;

Mike Lundy, associate director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, Dallas; Joe Ratliff, pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church in Houston; Powell Brewton, a layman involved in interracial concerns and member of First Baptist Church in Dothan, Ala.; James Porch Jr., pastor of First Baptist Church of Tullahoma, Tenn., and Ho Kihl Kahng, Korean consultant and editor at the BSSB in Nashville.