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Rabbi Condemns 'Fire of Hatred';
Jerusalem Church Eyes Rebuilding

By David A. Smith

JERUSALEM (BP)--One year after an arsonist believed to be a Jewish extremist set fire to Narkis Street Baptist Church in Jerusalem, another member of the Jewish community condemned the "fire of hatred" from the church's pulpit.

But Reform Rabbi Tovia Ben-Chorin added, "Maybe part of this fire of hatred also had in it a holy fire that brought us together."

Ben-Chorin, from the nearby Har-El Synagogue, was on the Baptist church grounds Oct. 8, 1982, just hours after the fire, offering his congregation's support to Narkis Street pastor Robert Lindsey. A year later he filled the church's temporary pulpit.

"For years I passed the street here on Narkis and in my wildest dreams I would never have believed that one day, as a Reform rabbi, I would be preaching in this church," Ben-Chorin said. "I do consider this a small miracle. Everyone can talk about the big miracle (but) I think we are sometimes blind to the small miracle."

The past year has been full of miracles for the Baptist congregation.

Attendance in a tent sanctuary--made of heavy plastic over a frame of irrigation pipes--has increased 25 percent to more than 350 for Saturday worship services. Lindsey has observed a closer fellowship, especially with the church's Jewish neighbors.

"We found out there are many Jewish people who are unhappy about what happened," he said. "It (the fire) was not the act of the Jewish people but just a few radical people and every community has those."

Support has come through contributions for a new multi-purpose sanctuary and a three-story educational building. Groundbreaking is expected early next summer.

The church has collected \$200,000 and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has appropriated another \$100,000 toward the new facilities, which Lindsey said will cost at least \$700,000.

Driving up the cost are construction requirements unique to Israel, such as an air raid shelter. The Israeli Civil Defense has been reasonable, asking the church to build a bomb shelter only 25 percent of the size it could require and saving them as much as \$100,000, Lindsey said.

When Ben-Chorin preached at the church, Lindsey joked since both congregations were in building programs, perhaps they could share a bomb shelter.

A Jerusalem requirement that buildings have a stone facing on their outside walls also escalates costs. "It makes for a nice city but also for more expensive buildings. It pushes the price up 15 to 25 percent," Lindsey said.

Contributions have come from synagogues and Protestant groups in Israel, Jerusalem civic organizations, students and other individuals. Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek and the municipality of Jerusalem contributed and Kollek even opened an account at one of Israel's largest banks for others wishing to help.

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International news coverage of the fire made Narkis Street the best-known Baptist church in the Middle East and resulted in contributions not only from Israel but Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.

"We, as Jews, have learned destruction is also a sign for a new beginning," Ben-Chorin said on the anniversary of the fire. "We learned it when the first temple was burned down, when the second temple was burned down and after the Holocaust.

"Rather than talking about the ashes, we have learned to take this as a sign to try once again," he said. "And out of these ashes we will pray for a spirit that will unite us so when we walk in Jerusalem, each one walks with his belief but hand in hand together."

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(David A. Smith is a Southern Baptist representative to Israel.)

Muskogee Baptist Church
Builds Jewish Temple

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MUSKOGEE, Okla. (BP)--First Baptist Church, Muskogee, Okla., is building a Jewish temple.

When completed, it will be traded to the Jewish congregation of Betha Ahaba Temple for its property adjacent to the chapel of First Baptist.

The old temple used since 1916 then will be razed to make way for construction of a First Baptist adult education building. Some 30 families meet in the temple which has been located on the same block with the Baptist church some 70 years.

Pastor Bob Woods said the project grew out of the church's needs for more adult Sunday school space.

The trade of property and the building of a temple for the Jewish congregation was a suggestion of Howard Garrett, realtor and member of First Church.

One church member commented every pastor since W.A. Criswell has wanted to buy the Jewish group's property, but, for some reason, the Jewish group couldn't sell it. However, the trade arrangement was agreeable to the temple members.

Cost of the new temple with 4,104 square feet of space will be about \$200,000.

The design provides for the pews from the present temple to be used and a large memorial stained glass window will also be moved to the new facility. Places of honor are also provided for the cornerstone of the original temple and for marble tablets on which are carved the Ten Commandments.

The building will have a free-standing Ark of the Covenant, a departure from usual Jewish procedure, with the customary "eternal light" burning above it.

Woods observed for a great portion of this century, the congregations of Beth Ahaba and First Church have enjoyed "a wonderful relationship of mutual trust and respect."

He added: "We are deeply aware of the deep emotional ties Betha Ahaba has for its present temple and what they are giving up. Therefore we are doing everything possible to make the transition as easy as possible."

"When this joint venture is concluded, one of the most significant examples of cooperation, good will and mutual respect in the history of Muskogee will have been written," the pastor said.

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Illinois Church Withdraws
Fellowship Over Women Ministers

LOCKPORT, Ill. (BP)--A Southern Baptist church in Illinois has decided to treat two other Southern Baptist churches in the state, "as we would a Methodist, a Presbyterian or other non-New Testament churches," over the issue of women ministers.

Lockport Missionary Baptist Church has "withdrawn fellowship" from Cornell Avenue Baptist Church in Chicago because it called a woman as pastor and from Crawford Avenue Baptist Church in Skokie, Ill., because it has licensed a woman to the ministry.

James R. Mathenia, pastor of the Lockwood church, told the Illinois Baptist the other churches had committed scriptural heresy.

"This means we will no longer recognize your church as being a New Testament church," Mathenia wrote the pastors of Cornell Avenue and Crawford Avenue churches. "We will not transfer or receive letters (of membership) from your church and we will not accept your churches' baptism as being valid. We will simply treat you as we would a Methodist, a Presbyterian or other non-New Testament churches."

Mathenia also sent a form letter to other pastors in Illinois, encouraging them to attend the state convention of the Illinois Baptist State Association to oppose the seating of messengers from Cornell Avenue "or any other church that may have a woman as their pastor."

Cornell Avenue is believed to be the only IBSA-affiliated church with a woman pastor.

Temple Baptist Church in Champaign, Ill., has had one or more women deacons since the mid-1970s, according to the Illinois Baptist. Messengers from Temple church have never been refused seating at annual meetings of East Central Association (of which it is a member), or the IBSA convention.

"About three pastors in our association raised questions at the time Temple church ordained the women around 1975," said Kenneth Wood, longtime member of Temple. "We aired the problems at one of our monthly associational board meetings but the issue never came up at an annual meeting."

George Davis, East Central Association missions director, said although not every Baptist in the association approves of women deacons, it is not an issue as far as the churches cooperating. "We can live with the doctrinal differences, for we feel it is more important that we join hands in a common purpose," Davis said. "It is not a test of fellowship."

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20th Anniversary Of JFK Assassination
Brings Back Memories To RTVC Staffer

By Bonita Sparrow

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DALLAS (BP)--As the 20th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy nears, a nation angry over murdered Marines in Beirut and anxious about police action in Grenada remembers only bits and pieces of the weekend when Camelot came crashing down.

Most Americans with first hand memories of those dark days in Dallas recall only the startling finality of the news, the sad profile of a new widow's exercise in courage and a small boy saluting his daddy's casket outside St. Matthew's Cathedral in New York City.

But Bob Thornton, director of television production for the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, has other memories as well, including one that comforts him.

Thornton and a group of international people were standing in the basement of the Dallas City Jail, unwilling witnesses to the horror before them, when Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby pulled a pistol and shot Lee Harvey Oswald to death.

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The date was Nov. 23, 1963. It was Sunday morning and while church people were in their pews Thornton was on the job as reporter (he was later named news director) of Dallas' WFAA Radio-TV.

Thornton sat in his office at the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission recently and recalled those days, his reaction to the event and what has happened in his life since.

"I'd not covered the parade in which Kennedy was shot. I'd covered the Kennedy speech in Fort Worth earlier in the morning and had seen Kennedy, Vice President Lyndon Johnson and Texas Governor John Connally all standing together on the platform at the hotel. When I left, there on the fringes of the crowd, I saw a guy with long hair and a robe parading around with a placard that read, 'The End Is Near.' The irony of it hit me later. Of course, he was aiming his message at sinners, but he was very prophetic.

"Before they brought Oswald in that morning, the news folks had discussed whether we should stay to try to get a final picture of Oswald before he was transferred to county jail where we couldn't photograph him, or whether we should attend the news conference Nellie Connally had called at Parkland Hospital." (Mrs. Connally is the wife of Connally, who was injured in the gunfire that killed Kennedy.)

Some of them, Thornton recalled, left for the Connally news conference. Thornton and about 100 others stayed.

"Jack Ruby was in the crowd," Thornton said. "I didn't know him, but a lot of folks there had seen him in and about the police station at various times through the weekend so it didn't occur to anyone he was out of place.

"When Oswald came through the door he had an angry sneer on his face, a hostile, defiant look. There was no sign of remorse. The police were heading him toward the armored car that had been backed into the basement when Ruby stepped out of the crowd, within a couple of feet of Oswald, yelled a profanity and shot him."

The police, not knowing whether Ruby was acting alone or not, ordered the press to take cover and subdued Ruby. "We scattered as best we could," Thornton said. "I got behind a concrete pillar and looked around it to see what was happening."

It never occurred to Thornton he might be shot. "I kept talking all the time," he recalled. "My most immediate concern was trying to remain calm enough to describe it on the tape recorder. I had a tremendous sense of history and I knew it had to be preserved for the future.

"When I got the event on tape, then I had the problem of getting together enough press credentials to get out of there and get the film and the tape back to the studio. It's not exactly the moment you ever forget."

The good memory that lingers with Thornton came earlier. "The evening of the day the President died, I interviewed Mrs. Tippett, the widow of the policeman Oswald shot. It was the day before her husband's funeral and she was in the living room of their modest home with a lot of people around.

"She was gracious and receptive," Thornton said, "and a perfect Christian lady. As a matter of fact, she was a Southern Baptist. She maintained her composure until the very end of the interview when she broke down and sobbed that she didn't know what she and her children were going to do. In addition to being a policeman, Tippett was working two part-time jobs to support his family.

"ABC-TV aired the interview coast-to-coast. The next day money began arriving for the Tippett family and when it was over they had more than \$600,000. I've always felt good about that."

And he feels good about his work at the Radio and Television Commission. Thornton is responsible for production of programs for the ACTS network. "My goal is to get the best quality programs possible in order to attract viewers to the network so we can speak to them with the message we have.

"You must deal with artists, with the hundreds of other people involved in each ACTS (American Christian Television System) production, with the time factor, with the budget. And you must do it in the light of what you want to accomplish with the programs."

Thornton, with a television production background from Baylor University in Waco, Texas, knows what he wants to accomplish.

"I want to reach the largest number of people possible with ACTS productions. I want it to change people spiritually to have some impact and effect on their lives. I hope work with some shows like the ones on the ACTS network will lessen the chances of such tragedies as the Kennedy assassination ever happening again."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Radio and Television Commission.

Former SBC President Thinks
Clergy, Laity Should Reexamine Roles By Patti Stephenson

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HARRISBURG, Pa. (BP)--Owen Cooper, the only living layman who has served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, charged the denomination's tradition of "reserving God's call for clergy and denominational workers" is untrue to New Testament teaching.

Cooper, a retired Yazoo City, Miss., businessman who led the SBC 1972-73, told participants at the Home Mission Board-sponsored lay renewal conference because of the emphasis on professional clergy, "most Southern Baptists are willing to sit on a pew and do nothing, which is theologically rationalized and accepted."

Claiming "you can't find those lines of distinction in the New Testament," Cooper blamed the dichotomy on tradition and some pastors' reluctance to recognize laity's call to minister alongside them. "Christ didn't give the disciples a certificate to hang on their wall setting them apart as his ministers," Cooper said. "He commissioned every believer to do his work."

Laypersons' commitment should be no less than the clergy's "since Christ paid the same price for their salvation," Cooper said. The laity must also be expected to "relinquish their love of mammon" and adapt a lifestyle in harmony with Christ's teachings just as clergy are expected to do, he added.

The former SBC leader denounced the idea that "laity are amateurs while clergy are experts at serving Christ." Southern Baptists "have a tendency to live up to what's expected of them," he declared. "If our churches don't expect much from the average person in the pew, then we're going to fail at Bold Mission Thrust."

The only hope for achieving BMT goals is to move the masses into the mainstream of ministry, Cooper suggested. "Southern Baptists spend \$7,200 to win one person to Christ," he noted. If just one-fourth of the estimated 48,000 Southern Baptists who work overseas would commit themselves to share the gospel where they are, "we'd have four times as many foreign missionaries at no extra cost."

Cooper criticized Southern Baptists' practice of "almost idolizing missionaries. Christ said, 'As you go, take the gospel with you,' and he was talking to every Christian, not just those we commission."

Change in attitudes is slow, Cooper acknowledged, and must come through Southern Baptists' seminaries. "A lot of Baptists are comfortable with the way things are," Cooper said. "It's going to take a new crop of seminary graduates and a new crop of funerals" before the line between clergy and laity blurs.

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