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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(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, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201-3355, Telephone (214) 720-0550
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

July 30, 1985

Chinese, Western Christians
Explore Cooperative Efforts

By Martha Skelton

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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LOS ANGELES (BP)—Chinese Christians interested in contributing to the "New China" and western religious groups interested in helping believers in that country are exploring a cautious cooperative effort.

That project surfaced at the 15th Baptist World Congress at the Los Angeles Convention Center in early July.

The Chinese Protestant groups last April established the Amity Foundation, an agency to act as clearing house and channel for western assistance. The foundation is a part of the officially recognized "post denominational" Protestant presence in China. Also included are the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement, begun in 1954, emphasizes Chinese Christian autonomy—self government, self support and self propagation. The China Christian Council was begun in 1980 to oversee such areas of Protestant church life as theological education, Bible printing and pastoral care.

Han Wenzao, general secretary of the Amity Foundation and associate general secretary of the China Christian Council, was invited to attend the congress as part of a month-long visit to the United States.

While he did not enter the conference hall due to the presence of a Taiwanese flag, Han sat in an observation room for the sessions. He came to Los Angeles for fellowship and meetings with representatives of several Baptist groups interested in cooperating with the Amity Foundation.

The American Baptist churches in the USA will have one representative in the first project the Amity Foundation launches this fall, a group of 18 westerners to teach language and western philosophy courses at the university level. Among the 18 will be five West Germans to teach German, 12 Americans and one Hong Kong resident. The contracts are for one year, renewable if mutually agreeable.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va., has established a liaison office to explore possibilities of a joint effort with Chinese Christians.

Established in April, the Cooperative Services International office of the Foreign Mission Board will help identify and meet needs as expressed by Chinese Christian and secular institutions. Lewis Myers, former missionary to Vietnam, has been named office director.

Southern Baptists are discussing the possibilities of educational and animal husbandry assistance through the foundation, Han said.

In addition to these activities, the foundation hopes to send Chinese students for at least short-term study periods in western schools.

The foundation is one of the ways Chinese Christians can both assist in the effort to develop China and give a Christian witness, Han says. The foundation board of 17 includes 14 Christians and three non-believers with strong social expertise, but they are considering adding more non-Christians.

"This is one way to reach out to society," says Han. He was baptized a Presbyterian as a college student in 1940.

Christian witness is a subject of differing interpretations in societies such as China.

"We are trying our best to make Christ's presence felt," he said. "The work is God's, but we ask, what should we do on the human side. We encourage our fellow Christians to bear witness to Christ by deeds--rather than words--where they live and work. The message of the gospel is unchanging, but the method should suit the local context. A beautiful witness draws people to ask, 'Why?'"

At this point Christians can make a verbal witness, Han said. This method is simple, powerful and effective in their context.

"We make ourselves felt by engaging in the social development program," he added. The efforts of the Amity Foundation make a Christian statement and bring Christians to the attention of the Chinese society in general. The Amity Foundation is to get Christians to lay a floor to make Christians known to the people."

Christian work in China is growing on a number of fronts, Han reports. He cited these developments:

OPENING CHURCHES---Beginning in 1979 with two, there are now 3,400 churches with reopened buildings. The decision on what churches are reopened begins with local congregational requests and discussions through local and provisional Christian councils. Church buildings occupied by factories or businesses draw rent until these occupants are relocated, after which the buildings can be reclaimed by the congregations.

Some churches in rural areas pool resources and effort to build themselves the buildings their churches need. In areas where people are allowed private ownership of small lots, groups of Christians have offered their lots to the local government in exchange for a plot large enough for a church building.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION---The Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, reopened after the Cultural Revolution, has an enrollment of 185 and graduated a class of 40 in June 1985. This is the first graduating group since the school reopened.

Part of an expanded Christian publishing effort will include a study syllabus from the seminary for training lay leadership. There are 40,000 subscribers to this service, 85 percent of whom are lay church leaders in rural areas.

BIBLE PRINTING---Since 1980, 1.6 million Bibles have been printed in China. A recent agreement with the United Bible Societies will bring new press equipment to China with a UBS projection of several hundred thousand Bibles and 500,000 New Testaments. Bibles are printed in several languages in addition to the basic Chinese language.

Also to be printed are new hymnbooks, a new catechism, a collection of sermons, a series of booklets for lay training, a daily devotion book.

Bibles are distributed through the churches and Christian Council offices, and are available to all interested believers, including members of the so-called house church, Han said. After Christian needs are met, they hope to be able to make Bibles available to the more general Chinese public.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Baptist Press

Adolescence Presents Challenges
To Christian Parents

By C. William Junker

Baptist Press
7/30/85

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)---"Mothers do better by their daughters than fathers do by their sons in explaining to adolescents what's happening to their bodies," observed William L. Hendricks, professor of Christian theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

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Hendricks was addressing a conference for Southern Baptist chaplains during Home Missions Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center on the role of chaplains in family ministry to adolescents, part of a week-long series of lectures on Strengthening the Family.

Zeroing in on understanding and ministering to the 13-22 age group, Hendricks identified physical maturation as a key element in their self-concept and spiritual development. But, he added, parents often find talking about physical development difficult.

"Fathers need to find some way to talk about these things without using the crude ways boys use with one another. And mothers need to speak to their daughters not only of hygiene, but also of the life process in which they will be involved. And single parents, especially, have some real problems" because they have to act as both father and mother, he lamented.

"Many of us form our lifelong body images based on what we looked like in early adolescence," he said. "Therefore it is important never to make fun of an adolescent's appearance; he may never get over it."

Adolescents need to be considered as persons in their own right, he added. "Parents err in thinking of youth as being extensions of their own personalities," Hendricks explained, observing sometimes adolescents rebel to establish their own identity. Hendricks related his own son said to him at one point in his teen years, "Dad, if I don't resist you, I won't have any personality of my own."

The need for peer group identity among younger adolescents is very important, Hendricks said. "Often, when they come across strong to parents, they don't mean what they say. But they can't afford to cotton up to us." In fact, the drive for group identity is so strong among the 13-17 age-group that "we need to be cautious about loners," according to Hendricks. "They may have serious problems; many criminal types have been loners."

"That's why church experience for this age group is so important," he continued. "Adolescents need to be with others in their peer groups."

During later adolescence, ages 18-22, however, the emphasis is more on personal identity, said Hendricks. He indicated a search for identity is the force behind the typical statements of "I've got to be free; I've got to be me." He added such statements are expressed in religious terms as conversion and commitment.

Hendricks said it is important in relating to adolescents to take their concerns seriously. "Don't make fun of the first serious emotional involvement with someone of the opposite sex, for instance," he said.

"I found it helpful with my own son, in cases where we had serious disagreements, to use the terms 'let's negotiate,'" he said. To negotiate with this age group is much better than to 'pontificate,' or make dogmatic pronouncements."

Hendricks used Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares to suggest a possible parental or ministerial model in relating to the adolescent struggle for self-identity.

"Sin consists of four essential elements: pride, greed, rebellion and sloth," he explained. "But we can't rip these out all at once because they are a valid part of most adolescents' attempt to establish their own personality, Hendricks suggested.

"The essence of our sinfulness is also the essence of our goodness," he continued, pointing out in the case of pride "we say to our offspring on the one hand, 'Don't be vain,' but also say, 'Take pride in your appearance.'"

"Help adolescents find ways out of their crises," advised Hendricks. "Suggest some alternatives. Try to inject some humor."

Above all, he concluded, "Adolescents need to learn to love themselves."

While the Bible says love your neighbor as yourself, "If you can't love yourself, you can't love your neighbor. Ultimately, you probably won't be able to love God as you ought."

Baptist Addresses U.N.
Delegation; Calls For Hope

NEW YORK (BP)--A Southern Baptist missionary challenged more than 300 United Nations officials, delegates and Christian leaders to intensify their efforts to "be part of the solution for this suffering world and bring hope for the next generation."

David D'Amico, executive director of Metropolitan New York Baptist Association and a missionary of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, outlined several solutions for suffering in the world and offered reasons for having hope instead of despair. D'Amico's comments, his first major address since being installed June 24, 1985, as executive director for the metropolitan New York association, were given at a recent dinner celebrating the 40th anniversary year of the United Nations and the International Year of the Youth.

D'Amico said he "admires the human rights declaration of the United Nations" because it addresses suffering and hope. Though he admitted philosophical and economic solutions for world problems "have some positive aspects," D'Amico claimed the biblical theme that "history is coming to a climax and right will prevail over wrong" offers more hope.

D'Amico also said belief in "an orderly universe," the understanding that all humans are equal, and the necessity of upholding "freedom and self-determination over our own destiny" are reasons for hope today.

He lauded Bishop Desmond Tutu, the anti-apartheid South African leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner, and Martin Luther King Jr., slain American civil rights leader, for their ability to give hope to suffering people.

Ted Mall, associate director of Christian Ministries to the United Nations Community, which sponsored the banquet, read a resolution passed by the Baptist World Alliance during its meeting July 2-7 in Los Angeles. The resolution expressed support for the U.N.'s efforts toward establishing global peace.

Mall, whose offices are located near the United Nations building, assists diplomats and their families with personal and religious needs. A Bible give-away program in more than 100 languages, a home hospitality link for diplomats and Baptists, Bible and English language classes and other special events are some of the on-going projects sponsored by Christian Ministries to the United Nations Community, a ministry supported by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Jean Gazarian of France, special advisor for the United Nations' general assembly affairs, also addressed the diplomat-Baptist banquet, held at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in New York.

Gazarian called the U.N. a "living organ, a healthy phenomenon," which is "based on justice and harmony--the same principles as religion." He called the growth of the United Nations since its founding in 1945 "wonderful progress" toward the goal of world peace.

Gazarian, who has been employed at the U.N. for 39 years, said the organization's original 59 member nations have nearly tripled to 159, making the U.N. "practically fully universal."

Also participating in the dinner was the chapel youth choir from Second Baptist Church, Houston, and gospel recording artist Willa Dorsey.

The Second Baptist Church group had been involved in a week-long urban evangelism and music project in New York and New Jersey. Gary Moore, minister of music at Second Baptist Church, directed the group's efforts, which included street evangelism and concert performances in parks, plazas and places of worship in New York and New Jersey.

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(This story was reported by Daniel J. Nicholas, chairman of communications for Metropolitan New York Baptist Association.)

Hendricks Gives Perspective
On Conversion Of Children

By C. William Junker

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)—Parents' overconcern about their young children's conversion may sometimes be due to a combination of parental anxiety and lack of trust in God, claims William L. Hendricks professor of Christian theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and author of the recently published book "A Theology for Children."

Addressing the family ministry role in a week-long conference for Southern Baptist chaplains during Home Missions Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center, Hendricks discussed theological perspectives of developmental tasks and psychosocial crises which family members experience as children, youth, young and middle adults, and senior adults.

He said parents from "conversionist" (evangelical) churches often have more anxieties about their offsprings' conversion than those from liturgical churches since liturgical churches use a process—baptism and confirmation—to take care of becoming a church member.

In those churches which major on a "conversion experience," however, "conversionist parents are concerned to have a safety zone," he explained, a time during which a child is safe from condemnation while coming to conversion.

"Sometimes parents go along theologically with the development theory of children until 'the time' for conversion, then we dump our child on the pastor and expect him to convert him quickly," Hendricks said.

As Hendricks sees it, parents' treatment of their children about conversion is similar to the way they relate to their children about other areas of development.

"Society tends to provide immediate gratification to lower and lower ages for everything, including conversion and church membership," he said. "Parents want to take care of everything. If they can't handle something, they push their children off on specialists. In affluent communities, especially, parents want their offspring to keep up with other children."

There are two dangers when parents adopt this immediate gratification approach to conversion and church membership for their children, Hendricks claimed. The first is in our anxiety we "might bring them to a too quick, too slick theological stillbirth," he explained.

"We need to listen to the children," Hendricks continued. "There is a great danger of getting ahead of their timetable and getting a false response. They need to know what they are hearing. The essence of Christian faith must be explained to them in terms of their life events, not in adult theological language," he said.

The second danger in rushing conversion and church membership upon children, according to Hendricks, lies in placing undue expectations on their participation in church affairs.

"As soon as this five-year-old is baptized, we expect him to vote on the church's multi-million dollar budget and (the church's) leaders," observed Hendricks. "The church is probably the only institution in society which allows small children to influence its direction. This is wise procedure neither for a local church nor for the Southern Baptist Convention."

"Parents can lessen their anxiety about a safety zone for their children by increasing their trust in God," Hendricks advised. "Children, until they choose to reject God, are within the covenant mercies of God."

"It also helps to realize that conversion is a process as well as a moment," he added. "The perspective of (the Bible book of) Hebrews is that conversion is both moment and process."

"There is a moment in which you receive God's grace, but there is a process leading up to it and a process following it. We need to consider both (the Apostle) Paul (moment) and (the Apostle) Peter (process) to get the total biblical perspective on conversion."

The words and approach we use in sharing the gospel with children must be in keeping with their developmental stage in life as well as their life experiences to that point, he closed.



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Nashville, Tennessee 37203

LYNN MAY HO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
901 COMMERCE
NASHVILLE, TN. 37203

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