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October 18, 1985

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Romo Cites Crucial Need For SBC Refugee Sponsors

By Jim Newton

ATLANTA (BP)--It has been ten years since the fall of Vietnam, but the need for sponsors for Indochinese refugees is still crucial, the director of the SBC Home Mission Board's refugee resettlement program said after a three-week tour of refugee camps in Thailand, Hong Kong and the Philippines.

Oscar I. Romo, director of the HMB language missions division which coordinates efforts to find Southern Baptist sponsors for refugees, made an appeal to Southern Baptists to respond to the need as he reported to the board's language missions committee about his trip.

"When you see the needs of these people in the refugee camps and their intense desire to live in peace and freedom, you come away feeling God is saying something to us," Romo said in an interview.

"Maybe God brought them out (of Indochina) for some reason, and maybe we can reach them here (in the United States) when we couldn't reach them over there," Romo said.

Romo and Wallace W. Buckner, director of multiethnic ministries for the Home Mission Board who traveled with Romo to the camps, both said they were surprised that conditions in the refugee camps were not as bad as they had expected.

"Some of the camps were in better shape than some of the migrant farm worker camps in the United States," Romo observed.

It was the first time Romo or any Home Mission Board refugee resettlement official had toured the refugee resettlement camps in Southeast Asia for a first-hand look at conditions. The trip was under the auspices of the United Nations, which operates the camps in cooperation with the host governments.

The visit to the camps "gave us a better understanding of where these people (refugees) are coming from and what they have faced," Romo said. "We hope it will help us in the selection of sponsors and the mesh of sponsors and refugees."

Buckner added it harder now to enlist Baptist churches and individuals as refugee sponsors because the plight of the refugees is not currently receiving heavy media coverage. Buckner said the HMB is planning to produce a new packet of materials helping build awareness of the need for refugee resettlement, and how an individual can lead a church to sponsor a refugee.

Romo said he and Buckner came away from the visits feeling "we've got to do something to help these people." But they also struggled with the questions: "How much can you do, and for how long?"

After interviewing dozens of refugees in the camps, Buckner said he is convinced they did not leave their homeland primarily for economic reasons to find a better life, but rather for political reasons. "They have left their homeland to find peace and freedom and live in a place where they can enjoy basic human rights," Buckner said.

Buckner said he was more depressed by conditions at the Chimawan Center in Hong Kong than any other place they visited. About 10,000 refugees, most of them boat people, are in Hong Kong's "closed camps" and are not allowed to leave the barb-wire enclosed facilities. Buckner said they have little hope of ever being resettled, since only 20 to 30 percent are allowed to go to the USA.

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"We struggled with what motivates people to go by boat from Vietnam for 19 days and then be put into a prison-like camp and told there is no hope for resettlement. Yet they still want to stay," he said.

Buckner added one of the major problems the boat people face is pirates who sail the seas between Hong Kong and Vietnam, attacking the boats and kidnapping the women for sale into prostitution.

In Thailand, sometimes as many as 500,000 refugees are living in three different types of camps, called border camps, holding centers and transit centers, Romo and Buckner reported.

Thailand officially closed its borders to refugees in 1982, explained Buckner, but the refugees continue to come. So the Thai government, in cooperation with the U.N., allowed them to stay in border camps just inside the Thailand/Kampuchea border.

Only refugees cleared by the United Nations can stay in the holding centers and transit center camps located further interior. "They may have the opportunity to be processed and resettled, and have more hope than those in the border camps," Romo said.

To qualify for resettlement, the refugees must be interviewed by United Nations officials and be approved for refugee status. In addition, priority is given to refugees with family members in the United States, families with Amerasian children and refugees with special status.

Since most refugees in these categories already have been resettled, the majority of refugees still in the camps have been there for six years or longer, Buckner added.

Refugees who can qualify for resettlement eventually may be able to go from the transit centers to the resettlement center in Bataan, Philippines, or to Canada, Australia or Europe, Romo and Buckner said.

The camp in the Philippines is the best run and most encouraging of all the camps they visited, said Romo and Buckner, because there the refugees have hope for starting a new life. The Philippines camp has taken over responsibility handled in the mid-70s by the refugee resettlement camps at Camp Pendleton, Calif.; Fort Chaffee, Ark.; Elgin Air Force Base near Fort Walton Beach, Fla., and Indiantown Gap, Penn., all now closed.

In the Philippines, about 17,500 refugees spend 15 weeks going through intensive English language, vocational training, and cultural orientation classes.

Romo praised the Baptist Refugee Ministries vocational training program led by Steve Allen, a SBC Foreign Mission Board Mission Service Corps volunteer. The program teaches the refugees vocational job skills such as carpentry, electrical wiring, maid service and ways to get a job in the United States.

About 1,000 refugees per week complete the training in the Philippines and are resettled in the United States, Buckner said.

But no refugee is allowed to enter the United States without a sponsor, Buckner and Romo said. And that is how Baptists can help most—by agreeing to sponsor a refugee or refugee family, they said. Baptists interested in serving as sponsors should contact the SBC Refugee Resettlement Office at 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, GA. 30367, telephone (404) 873-4041.

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Religious Distinctives
Must Be Safeguarded

By Lonnie Wilkey

Baptist Press
10/18/85

WASHINGTON (BP)—Safeguarding religious distinctives is the most important task faced by evangelical Christian colleges today, a leading Southern Baptist educator said.

Arthur L. Walker Jr., executive director of the Southern Baptist Convention Education Commission, told presidents of the Christian College Consortium at their annual meeting in Washington Oct. 16 Christian colleges must clearly define their distinctives.

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Walker pointed out distinctives of Christian colleges often are not recognized even by their own constituencies. "Even church leaders are not convinced there really are differences between religiously-related institutions and all other institutions of higher education."

He noted several problems which make "safeguarding religious distinctives" a complex task. One major item, he said, is a growing lack of sympathy with religious beliefs that tend to distinguish a group from the general society.

"If a belief is contrary to 'public policy,' it is untenable in today's society," Walker said.

According to the SBC agency head such public policy arbiters have forgotten the struggle for religious freedom. "What's different between the divine right of kings and the divine right of Congress? Can Congress tell you what to believe religiously?" he asked. Yet, that is what is being faced today, Walker said. "Any position contrary to public policy is unacceptable in law today."

Walker said church-state relations are unsettled because of the difference in understanding of "freedom of religious expression and association, government's respect for religious-based conscience and government's appropriate relationship to religion."

The politicization of issues which previously had religious motivations, thus catching some institutions and religious figures in political crossfires, is another roadblock to safeguarding religious distinctives, Walker said.

He cited issues now being heard by courts that could have a profound impact on Christian educational institutions including limitation of tax-exempt status for all religious groups and preferential hiring, the policy of hiring only those with the same religious beliefs.

Walker also pointed out the problems for institutions which claim to be "pervasively religious," yet accept financial assistance. While such schools claim to accept no federal aid, Walker said the Supreme Court has ruled aid to a student enrolled at a college is aid to the college (Grove City Case, 1984).

"Christian educators must realize that we are not going back to the 'good ole days,'" Walker said. The only time religious institutions can be totally free from government regulations is when they are totally free from government finances, he added.

For institutions to safeguard their religious distinctives, they must begin a massive public relations effort, Walker said.

Christian institutions need a strategy that will give attention to legitimacy and credibility. Both of these elements, he contended, seem to have been lost in today's society by religious colleges.

He also noted emphasis needs to be placed on "reverse communication." Religious institutions must find out if the message they are sending is the same one their constituencies are receiving.

And finally, Walker said, religious colleges must look at issue management. "Religious institutions must analyze particular issues important to their specific audiences, and then speak directly to those needs."

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Housing Forms
Opened For SBC

Baptist Press
10/18/85

ATLANTA (BP)—Requests for housing for the 1986 Southern Baptist Convention were opened Oct. 9, filling the 4,000-plus rooms available through the Atlanta Housing Bureau.

"It all went very smoothly this year," said Tim A. Hedquist, convention manager for the SBC. "Since all of the available rooms have been filled, there is no need for potential messengers to send additional forms."

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All of the rooms were filled with requests postmarked Oct. 1 and 2, Hedquist said. "They were opened Oct. 9 in order to allow people in California the same opportunity as those who live in Atlanta," he added.

Hedquist said most of the forms were filled out correctly and mailed on either Oct. 1 or 2. "There were only about 50 postmarked before the Oct. 1 date. They were all put behind the Oct. 1, 2 or 3 postmarks. Therefore, people who mailed the requests earlier than allowed did not get rooms," he said.

This year, he added, only a few attempts to "shortcircuit" the system were found. "One man sent in 50 requests, all in his own name. The very professional staffers at the Atlanta Housing Bureau discovered this very quickly. The man did get one room, but that's all," Hedquist said.

The system of housing requests was established several years ago primarily to benefit individuals seeking room reservations. Therefore, each of the requests is handled individually, even if 10 or 12 come in a single envelope, he explained.

Since a majority of the housing requests listed a first choice of the Westin Peachtree Plaza Hotel--the convention headquarters hotel--only "about one in eight" got the first choice. Attempts were made, however, he said, to put the people in second or third choice hotels.

Hedquist said the 10 hotels included in the Housing Bureau block have been notified and are expected to send confirmations soon.

For those who did not get rooms through the Housing Bureau, Hedquist said there should be no problems in obtaining reservations for the annual meeting, scheduled for June 10-12.

"There are 23,000 hotel rooms in Atlanta," Hedquist said. "We have prepared a list of 100 hotels and will be happy to provide the list to to anyone who requests it."

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National Religious Coalition
Sets Sights On Elections

By David Wilkinson

Baptist Press
10/18/85

WASHINGTON (BP)--Conservative Christianity embraced conservative politics in a three-day meeting in the nation's capital aimed at getting more "born again Christians" elected to public office.

The conference on "How to Win an Election," held Oct. 15-17 at the Shoreham Hotel, offered a blend of spiritual enthusiasm and political pragmatism in a series of addresses and "nuts-and-bolts" workshops.

Sponsored by the American Coalition for Traditional Values, the meeting attracted more than 300 pastors and laypersons interested in running for public office themselves or in supporting campaigns for other candidates who support ACTV's list of "traditional values."

ACTV, a political umbrella of fundamentalist leaders begun 18 months ago, claims to represent "some 45 million Christians" who want to "restore traditional moral and spiritual values" in America. Southern Baptist Convention President Charles Stanley and former SBC presidents James T. Draper and Adrian Rogers serve on the coalition's executive board.

An ACTV staff member said none of the three Southern Baptist members of the executive board were present for the meeting.

Three of the conference's nine major speakers were Southern Baptists: Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and ACTV Chairman Tim LaHaye, an ordained Southern Baptist minister.

Other speakers included Sen. William Armstrong (R-Colo.), Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell, Rep. Jack Kemp (R-N.Y.), James Kennedy, senior minister of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Rep. Robert Dornan (R-Calif.).

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The battery of speakers urged fundamentalist and conservative Christians to begin to gear up now for the 1986 and 1988 national elections.

Helms told the group that winning the 1986 elections "could determine the survivability of this nation." Conservative values "need to be revised, restored and expanded" through political action, he said. But Helms also cautioned the group to "be careful. There are powerful forces in our country who want to make sure you don't succeed. They don't mind if you get into politics as long as you leave your values behind."

To help conservative candidates succeed in 1986, LaHaye announced that ACTV's executive board had agreed during the conference to launch a massive direct mail campaign, using the mailing lists of its supporting organizations. The goal, he said, is to enlist 500 volunteers from "Bible-believing churches" in each of 100 targeted congressional districts. The project, LaHaye said, would require about \$3 million, but "I think it's a plan God wants us to fulfill."

LaHaye pointed out 1986 will be a critical year for consolidating the gains made by the New Right in the 1980 elections. "We're approaching the sixth anniversary since the great conservative groundswell swept 11 conservatives into the Senate and, thank God, swept out 11 liberals," he said. "But four defeats in 1986 could change control of the Senate—and the liberals already control the House."

LaHaye also announced the executive board approved a resolution asking the President and Congress to declare Nov. 17, the Sunday before President Ronald Reagan's summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, as a national day of prayer. He said the resolution called for an emphasis in the negotiations "away from offensive nuclear weapons toward a strategic nuclear defense system" proposed by the administration.

The board, LaHaye said, wanted President Reagan to negotiate from a position of strength. "We were concerned that the President will be pressured by those do-gooders who want to treat them (the Soviets) as credible human beings rather than the vicious gangsters that they are," he said. "What we have to understand is that we're negotiating with gangsters."

While opposition to communism, along with abortion and "secular humanism," dominated the meeting, speakers addressed a variety of other issues, including prayer in the public schools, terrorism, pornography and the federal budget deficit.

Participants also got practical advice from New Right political strategist Paul Weyrich and others on how to run a campaign, raise funds, deal with the news media and organize volunteers in the local church.

While Weyrich said "more races have been lost by our kind of people because of a lack of strategy more than virtually anything else," he and other speakers commended the fundamentalist political movement for its growing involvement and increasing sophistication.

Falwell, whose Moral Majority claims 6.5 million members, noted that "a few years ago, it was a sin to vote" in the eyes of many conservative religious leaders. "I used to preach against political involvement," he confessed. But he said the questions of his children caused him to realize that "America was going to hell because millions of Christians weren't doing a blooming thing about it."

Falwell said there is a diversity of opinion among New Right supporters about the best presidential candidate for 1988. "But whoever the candidate happens to be, we will be unanimous in backing the one who supports the sanctity of human life and has a commitment to the moral values upon which this nation was founded," he added.

In his address, Gingrich urged the audience to help continue America's "revolution from a liberal welfare state to a conservative opportunity society."

He said President Reagan, who sent formal greetings to the conference, "has done more than any other person to redefine American life. He has made the right speeches. He has delegated the right authority. He is doing his job. What we need to do is to open up new opportunities so that he has better options from which to choose."

Gingrich was joined by other speakers in an appeal for more forceful opposition to communism. Dornan criticized the "wimps" in Congress and "even in the administration" who have "refused to support the freedom fighters" in Afghanistan, Africa and Central America. "What's been wrong with American foreign policy is all this whimpering," he said. "We've got nothing to be ashamed of." America, he said, has a "God-ordained role" to "carry the torch of freedom" around the world.

In addition to fighting communism abroad, conference participants also were urged to confront "secular humanism" at home.

Kennedy, a speaker at the 1985 Pastor's Conference in Dallas, said the problem in American society is that "humanism is being installed as the established religion in America today."

He listed "three great deceptions" which have been "fixed upon the minds of many Americans": (1) the idea that America is a pluralistic nation, (2) the belief that "you can't legislate morality," and (3) the principle of separation of church and state.

The idea of pluralism is a "halfway house on the road from Christianity upon which this country was founded to the humanistic, secularistic way it has been heading," Kennedy said.

"Legislation," he added, "is always the imposition of someone's morality on someone else. "The question is, whose morality?"

Kennedy said the concept of separation of church and state is a "distortion of the First Amendment" never intended by the nation's founders or the framers of the Constitution. Rather than being understood as a "one-way street" that restrains only the power of the government, the "so-called wall of separation" has become a "two-way street" that results in "taking the shackles off government and putting them on the church."

Like Kennedy, LaHaye decried the influence of "secularists" in America who "with the aid of the Supreme Court have seemingly expelled God, the Bible and morality from the public school system. And what the secularists have done with the public schools, with their hostility toward religion, they want to do with all of America."

The "secularists," LaHaye said, already "control" three of the four "major spheres of influence" in America: government, education and the media. A spiritual revival in the fourth sphere, the church, is "the only thing that has saved America from secularization," he said.

LaHaye called for legislative reform, without which there is "little chance" for lasting spiritual revival.

"We need to challenge God's people to run for office," he said. "If every Bible-believing, Christ-loving church would trust God to raise up an average of just one person over the next 10 years who would get elected, we would have more Christian candidates than there are public offices."

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Palau Preaches At Baptist
Rally In New York City

By Daniel J. Nicholas

Baptist Press
10/18/85

NEW YORK (BP)--Argentine-born evangelist Luis Palau told a predominantly Southern Baptist crowd in the nation's largest city he has observed "a great thirst and hunger for God in America," and that "only Jesus satisfies the soul."

More than 1,000 attended the rally at New York's historic Riverside Church sponsored by the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association.

"Psychologists can analyze guilt, but only Jesus can cleanse the conscience," Palau said.

The bilingual, Argentine evangelist now based in Portland, Ore., traced the breakdown of American families to mankind's quest for eternal life, for satisfaction, for fulfillment and for love apart from a relationship with God.

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Palau, sometimes described as "the next Billy Graham," has preached to more than five million persons in 37 nations, in both Spanish and English.

Dennis O'Neil, evangelism chairman for the Metro New York Baptist Association, described the rally as "one of the best evangelistic meetings our association has ever sponsored." The association includes about 150 churches in three states.

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Learning Not Just Child's Play,
Rigdon Tells Educators

Baptist Press
10/18/85

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)—When it comes to formal education, most adults act like children, a Southern Baptist educator told correspondence program officials.

"Most adults assume responsibility for every other area of their lives before they assume responsibility for their formal learning," said Raymond M. Rigdon, executive director of the Seminary External Education Division (SEED) of the Southern Baptist seminaries. "Long years of dependency on the educational system have given them a continuing dependence on any educational system in which they enroll."

Adult education programs often encourage this dependency, Rigdon charged. "Adults in these programs simply are not given either encouragement or the opportunity to become self-directed learners."

Rigdon addressed the annual educational directors' workshop of the National Home Study Council, meeting at Maxwell Air Force Base.

Besides learning how to learn, adults need to organize their learning within goals that are meaningless to them, Rigdon said. The role of the distance educator is to serve as a resource for adult learners. Contrary to long-standing tradition, he contended, adults do not have to be in the physical presence of a teacher in order to engage in significant learning experiences.

The Seminary Extension Independent Study Institute, the correspondence component of SEED, has been an accredited member of the National Home Study Council since 1972.

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