



## - - BAPTIST PRESS

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March 13, 1986

86-35

Tanner Says Statistics  
 Indicate SBC Not Racist

By Jim Newton

ATLANTA (BP)--Statistics compiled by a Methodist weekly newspaper have shattered the stereotype image of the Southern Baptist Convention as a racist denomination, the president of the SBC's Home Mission Board said in a report to the agency's directors.

William G. Tanner, president of the board, said the data indicate the Southern Baptist Convention is now the most ethnically diverse Protestant-Evangelical denomination in the United States.

Tanner said research--compiled by the National Christian Reporter, the world's largest weekly religious newspaper with a circulation of 550,000 published in 450 editions--documents a belief he and other mission leaders have had for a long time but could not support with solid statistical data.

The statistics revealed American and Southern Baptists now have more ethnic members than United Methodists, who have claimed for decades to be the most ethnically inclusive denomination.

Since 1974, ethnic membership in Southern Baptist churches has increased by 70 percent, making it the fastest-growing denomination in ethnic membership growth, the data indicated.

Based on 1984 data, Southern Baptists reported 590,000 ethnic church members, slightly behind the 610,000 ethnic members in the American Baptist churches.

At the present rate of ethnic membership growth, SBC ethnic membership will exceed that of American Baptist churches sometime this year, Tanner told the board.

The Southern Baptist Convention has work with 84 language and ethnic groups. In the last 10 years, the SBC has started 3,271 language units (churches or missions) and 400 black Baptist congregations, Tanner said.

"We ought to be excited about what God has been doing in our midst in the past decade; but we need to be careful that we don't become smug and proud. We have not eliminated racial prejudice and racism from our midst. We've made amazing progress, but we still sometimes have a paternalistic attitude toward language missions sponsored by predominantly white churches."

The SBC has not done well at hiring ethnic leaders for key positions in the denomination and accepting them as equal partners and leaders, Tanner added, saying, "Indeed, we should be most concerned that there are so few black and ethnic presidents of state conventions, members of our boards of trustees and staff members of state conventions and SBC agencies.

"While we have a long way to go, we ought to rejoice that the statistics shatter the stereotyped Southern Baptist image the media has projected for decades that ours is a racially exclusive denomination."

Tanner began his report to the board of directors by reading a statement on "theological diversity" released recently by the Southern Baptist Convention's Peace Committee. "I believe no other agency is affected by diversity within the convention as much as the Home Mission Board," he said, referring not only to theological but cultural, language and ethnic diversity.

He pointed out the board has 3,636 appointed missionaries, some with no seminary training and others with training from many seminaries. The board works with 37 state conventions and 1,215 associations in diverse situations.

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Quoting the statistics compiled by the National Christian Reporter, Tanner pointed out United Methodists' number-one "missional priority" since 1975 has been to develop and strengthen ethnic-minority churches for witness and mission.

Just one year later, 1976, Southern Baptists initiated Bold Mission Thrust, the denomination's effort "to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in America, and in the world, by the year 2000," Tanner noted.

He pointed out neither United Methodists nor Southern Baptists entirely have been successful in meeting their mission goals. "We're on target in meeting many of the goals, but we are woefully behind in achieving some others," he said.

Tanner expressed alarm because 6,669 Southern Baptist churches did not report any baptisms (conversions) last year, and the 351,071 baptisms reported last year was the third-lowest level in the last 35 years.

A recent SBC goal in Bold Mission Thrust is to baptize 1.5 million people between the years 1982-85, Tanner said. "The data shows we actually baptized 1,117,705," Tanner said. "We therefore were short of that goal by 383,295."

Another goal, he said, was to organize 1,500 new churches during 1982-85. "Once again, we fell slightly short of the goal," Tanner said. The SBC actually started 1,321 new churches, missing the goal by 179.

A third goal was to appoint 2,554 new (home and foreign) missionaries and 300,000 short-term mission volunteers during 1982-85. In this case, Tanner said, the SBC exceeded the career missionary appointment goal by 273, by appointing 2,773 missionaries. This includes 1,733 new home missionaries and 1,040 new foreign missionaries.

Although final data was not available on the number of volunteers, Tanner said the board estimated about 160,000 volunteers were involved in home and foreign missions. "It is apparent that the volunteer goal was unrealistic, but we could have done better," he notes.

"We may be doing better than most other denominations in reaching ethnic America and in starting new churches among black and language groups, but the challenge is so great," Tanner said. "There are more than 46.3 million ethnics in America, and if our data is correct, almost 28.8 million of them do not have a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Acknowledging the task is greater than any one denomination can do alone, Tanner urged Baptists to thank God for what other denominations are doing and to "join hands with them, and pray for them, and reach out in love to people of all races, ethnic and language groups...."

"May God give us the vision and power to commit ourselves to helping break down the barriers of race, language and misunderstanding as we attempt to share the gospel with all people," Tanner concluded.

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HMB Votes To Keep Atlanta  
Headquarters, Elects Officers

By Joe Westbury

Baptist Press  
3/13/86

ATLANTA (BP)--Directors of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board voted to keep the agency's headquarters in Atlanta rather than relocate elsewhere in the city or nation.

The vote came on the heels of a report by the board's long range site committee which recommended the board remain in its midtown Atlanta location and develop the property as future needs necessitate.

Site committee chairman Marvin Prude of Birmingham, Ala., in presenting the report during the board's March meeting, said the committee ruled out a relocation due to the general economy and inadequacies of proposed sites.

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The committee, appointed in March 1984, studied but then eliminated 13 metro Atlanta locations as well as five cities. Cities considered were Dallas; Denver; Forth Worth, Texas; Kansas City, Mo., and Oklahoma City.

Citing land costs of up to \$200,000 per acre in the vicinity and a current location considered ideal by area developers, Prude said the committee felt the agency should maintain the site it has occupied since 1968. The report also said the location currently includes room for expansion as long range plans develop.

In other business, Travis Wiginton of Norman, Okla., was re-elected chairman of the board and Prude was given a second term as first vice chairman. Wiginton is pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, Norman. Prude is a retired Birmingham, Ala., businessman.

D.F. Norman of Atlanta was re-elected second vice chairman while Frank Wells of Atlanta was elected secretary. Barbara Fain of Atlanta was re-elected assistant secretary.

In a major staff appointment, Huey D. Perry of Conyers, Ga., director of institutional and business-industrial chaplaincy for the board, was promoted to director of the board's chaplaincy division.

Perry, 49, will succeed A. Carl Hart, who took early retirement at the end of 1985 and now is chaplain for Motor Transport Inc., based in nearby Decatur. Later in the meeting, the board adopted a resolution expressing appreciation for the work of Hart, and of Leonoar C. Adams, who retired in February as administrative assistant to the president after 42 years with the board.

The board also named Thang Nguyen national ethnic missionary for Vietnamese church growth in the language missions division. In the new position, Nguyen will initiate work among Vietnamese, be a consultant in development of programs and materials, and assist in refugee resettlement.

Responding to a request by the 1985 resolutions committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, the board concluded after a study by its interfaith witness department that dealing with Freemasonry does not fall within the scope of the board's assigned responsibilities.

A resolution by convention messengers Larry Holly of Beaumont, Texas, and Charles Burchette of Kirbyville, Texas, entitled "Freemasonry Not Compatible with Baptist Faith and Message, Bold Mission Thrust, or Cooperative Program," had been referred by the resolutions committee to the Home Mission Board. No action was taken on the resolution by the convention itself.

In presenting the report, Norman said while the department recognizes the possibility of any group becoming a form of religion, neither Freemasonry nor other fraternal orders currently are viewed as such.

In other matters, the board appointed four missionaries, two missionary associates, three church planter apprentices, 15 church pastoral assistants, two mission pastor interns and a language pastoral assistant.

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Baptist Editor Testifies  
Before Postal Rate Commission

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press  
3/13/86

WASHINGTON (BP)--A Baptist state newspaper editor described the importance of his and other such newspapers and the devastating effects recent postal rate increases have had on those publications during testimony before the Postal Rate Commission.

Bobby S. Terry, editor of Missouri's "Word and Way," testified before the commission during a non-profit mail hearing. Other witnesses included representatives from such non-profit organizations as the Disabled American Veterans, Council for Advancement and Support of Education, and American Red Cross.

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Terry, immediate past president of the Southern Baptist Press Association, told the commissioners members of that press association annually mail almost 100 million pieces using second-class, non-profit rates.

He contended the role of Southern Baptist state newspapers is "critical to the welfare of the denomination" due to the denomination's congregational nature.

"The only authority that can be exercised among Southern Baptists is the authority that goes with sharing common information," Terry said. "Southern Baptists understand that from common information come common goals, from common goals comes common action."

A person must be aware of the pertinent news and information of the denomination if he is to participate in and support it, he said.

"Without this news and information available to interested members, they cannot exercise soul liberty," Terry continued. "Instead, they become vulnerable to manipulation by those who subscribe to spiritual elitism whereby a select group of individuals with access to reliable and accurate information subjugate the majority of members who, because they lack adequate information, become weak and dependent."

He added, "Take away the common base of information and one sows the seeds of destruction for all the ministries supported by the 14 million people who make up our national denomination."

Terry said the dramatic postal rate increases experienced by non-profit mailers since the beginning of 1986 threaten the vitality, if not the existence, of state Baptist newspapers. He offered several specific examples of increases experienced by his own publication, including the fact that "Word and Way's" postage has risen 75.83 percent since the end of 1985.

He argued information released through the U.S. Postal Service about the first in a series of recent rate increases was inaccurate. The Postal Service information predicted an initial increase of approximately 30 percent, he said, adding the actual increase for his newspaper was 58.74 percent.

"The experience of 'Word and Way' was not isolated," he said. "Every Southern Baptist state paper experienced substantially more than a 30 percent increase in postage. The Postal Service information shared through the news media was misleading."

Recent postal rate increases probably will force his newspaper to cut its annual number of issues by 25 percent, Terry said. Although such a cut might provide a short-term solution, it could have disastrous long-term effects, he added.

"The future of second-class, non-profit rates is vital to 'Word and Way' and to the other member publications of the Southern Baptist Press Association," he concluded. "In fact, the rates are vital to almost two million Southern Baptist families. These families may never think about postage rates but their participation in the life of their local church, as well as their state and national conventions, will be impacted by postal rates."

The Washington hearing was the first in a series of eight hearings on non-profit mail to be held by the Postal Rate Commission. Two other Southern Baptist Press Association representatives have asked to testify during those regional hearings. They are Jim Newton, bureau chief of Baptist Press' Atlanta bureau, and Presnell Wood, editor of Texas' "Baptist Standard."

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Widow Of Marine Killed In Lebanon  
Sends \$100 For Missions Work There

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
3/13/86

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--It was not just a \$100 contribution for missions in Lebanon. It was a sign that Thomasine Baynard is recovering.

She was getting ready for church and tending to her one-month-old son in October 1983 when she saw Sunday morning news reports that terrorists had blasted a U.S. Marines command center in Beirut, Lebanon.

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She felt sorry for the victims' families. But she didn't worry about her husband, James, relying upon his "Don't-worry-about-me" statements.

The next two days, she began to wonder, "Why doesn't he call and tell me he's all right?"

Wednesday, a Marine chaplain and another officer visited her twice, initially to report that James was missing and presumed dead, later to report that his body had been found. In all, more than 230 Marines were killed as a truckload of explosives destroyed their four-story building.

The young widow now works at a Christian bookstore in Richmond, Va., and attends a Methodist church. She is growing in her acceptance of what she believes God has told her through prayer: "You don't have all the answers. Just be satisfied that I do." Still, she wonders why he had to die, because she prayed for him daily.

Bitterness toward Lebanon or even the terrorists has not crippled her. "I can't get angry with Lebanon and its people," she says. "I can't get angry at some misguided guy who sacrificed his life for a cause he believed in."

In fact, "I feel kind of attached (to Lebanon) because that's where James was when he was killed."

The 28-year-old widow found an avenue for ministry to Lebanon during a Richmond art show last year. Intrigued by the work of David Kreider of Harrisonburg, Va., she stopped to talk. Kreider, she learned, is the son of Mennonite missionaries in Israel and his wife, Mary Ann, is the daughter of Southern Baptist missionaries Ed and Anne Nicholas in Lebanon.

The next day, she returned to the art show with a \$100 check, asking the Kreiders to forward it to Lebanon for missions work.

Southern Baptist missionaries in Lebanon decided to use the money in a new program for homebound, limited-income people in need of physical therapy. Physical therapist Maria Daoud, a member of Monsourieh Baptist Church in Beirut, is heading the program.

"I just wanted to contribute something to missions in Lebanon," Baynard says. "I just can't imagine anybody having to live where you don't know the next day whether you're going to live. There's not just hunger. There's killing and fighting and suffering."

She feels compassion "towards the people in Ethiopia, in Calcutta and everywhere else where people are suffering." She voices "a burden" for Christians who seek prosperity "instead of getting on their knees for people who don't have the basic necessities and then getting up and doing something to help."

She remembers her husband writing that Beirut is "not a nice sight at all.... When I see the kids in such a place, I think of how blessed we are." He had been in Lebanon about six months when he was killed. He had never seen his son, Stephen, but had gotten a couple of pictures of his wife and child in the hospital and a couple of tape recordings of the infant crying.

After her husband's death, she became depressed and withdrew from people. She credits the prayers of fellow Christians for the way "the Lord just really broke through," giving her an ability to take life "a little at a time."

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CORRECTION: The two stories by Roy Howard Beck on ministry to ethnics contained an error apiece. Please note--

In the 11th graf of the first story, "Baptists, Assemblies Excel In Ethnic Inclusiveness," (dated March 10) the final sentence should read: Their ministry in languages other than English includes nearly 250,000 members in 4,600 congregations divided among 87 languages.

The 29th graf of the second story, "Church Planting Pays In Ethnic Communities," (dated March 11) should read: Included in Romo's language ministries are 798 "congregations/units" for deaf people.

Mexico Earthquakes  
Are 'Still With Us'

By Erich Bridges

MEXICO CITY (BP)--Remnants of the day the earth shook still clog the streets around First Baptist Church in Mexico City--debris, collapsed buildings, empty lots where families once lived and died.

The two earthquakes that killed thousands of people and destroyed much of central Mexico City just six months ago are fading from the world's memory. But the city's suffering goes on. The homeless still number in the tens of thousands. Experts agree the disaster's contribution to Mexico's staggering economic problems will be felt for years to come.

The psychological impact of the earthquakes will be felt even longer. "It's still with us," says Southern Baptist representative Guy Williamson, who lives and works in the Mexico City area. "I don't guess you'll ever know (the impact) on the children. You hear about the fatalistic type of philosophy in Latin America and that it's something so common to them that they take it in stride. But I think the scars are far deeper than maybe their philosophy permits them to evaluate."

But for Mexican Baptists there are some bright spots in the darkness. A significant result of the initial Baptist earthquake ministry came recently when the Mexican government and the National Baptist Convention of Mexico signed a contract to allow medical equipment into the country.

Originally donated by a Texas Baptist medical group to Mexican-American Hospital in Guadalajara two years ago, the equipment has been stalled at the border, awaiting official entrance papers. It will be lent for three years to the heavily damaged Juarez Hospital in Mexico City and then be shipped to the Mexican-American Hospital, owned and operated by Mexican Baptists.

The contract represents the first measure of official recognition extended to Mexican Baptists by the national government.

The Mexican Baptist convention is small, Williamson says, but its "contribution during the earthquake was way beyond its numerical size. I think the government has recognized that."

Another bright spot for Baptists exists in the continuing opportunities for ministry. Baptist aid to homeless earthquake survivors, originally scheduled to end in December, has continued at the request of Mexico City officials. Baptists still are working in four shelters where thousands of homeless people have received help.

Assisted by Southern Baptist relief funds, Mexican Baptists are providing equipment, supervision, clothing and blankets in the four shelters. Most of the food comes from the government. Four field kitchens--brought in and set up after the earthquakes by Southern Baptist volunteers from Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Mississippi--still are feeding people daily. The kitchens also function as training centers for teaching hygiene and nutrition to people living in the shelters.

Baptists also are handling spiritual follow-up, counseling and Bible studies in the shelters, Williamson says. They hope several new churches will result from the ministry.

Meanwhile, the major demolition training project initiated by Baptists is in full swing. At least 1,000 ruined buildings in the earthquake area still wait to be demolished. Designed to train some 3,000 jobless earthquake survivors to use demolition equipment, the Baptist project began in early January with a group of 100 students. More groups have received training at two-week intervals.

The unemployed workers are learning how to operate metal cutters, jackhammers and other demolition equipment to help clean up Mexico City. They're also participating in basic evangelistic Bible study courses as well as classes in family relationships and home financial management.

The project is a cooperative effort involving the National Baptist Convention of Mexico and the Aristos-Apicosa hotel and construction group. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board appropriated \$406,500 last October to feed the workers and buy equipment for the training effort, including air compressors for the jackhammers.

The feeding aspect of the program has been suspended because of logistical problems, but the Foreign Mission Board is funding half of the workers' minimum-wage salaries while they're in training. The Aristos-Apicosa company is providing the other half. First Baptist Church is handling the spiritual side of the program.

Mexican Baptist leader and First Baptist Church member Raul Castellanos, an Aristos-Apicosa executive, is overall director of the project. He has pledged to arrange full-time employment for qualified trainees in building demolition.

"I am confident that this project is an instrument of evangelism," Castellanos told a Mexican Baptist publication. "The way it is planned it will train a great number of people and evangelize even more."

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Haitian Baptists Helping  
Countrymen To Advance

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press  
3/13/86

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP)--Salimy and Brunette Helias are two of many Haitian Baptists investing their lives in the future of their country.

The Helias are banking on Haiti's children. Two years ago they gave up stable jobs in the busy port city of Gonaives on the northwest coast. Now, in a section of Port-au-Prince where mothers wash clothes in filmy mud ditches and call a piece of bread dinner, the Helias are teaching children things their parents have never known.

The Helias join the ranks of a growing number of Haiti's seven million people who are leading their countrymen to improve schooling, farming, hygiene and self-esteem. Many are products of the 90 churches and 585 preaching points in the Baptist Convention of Haiti, with which Southern Baptists work.

The couple's nutritional schooling program, supported through the Baptist Convention of Haiti, is one of many that throws open a door for the Haitian peasantry population.

"When they leave the school, they are different from the rest of the children who grow up around here," says Brunette of her 150 students. "They can become engineers, nurses, doctors, agriculturalists and technicians. They will be the ones who can change our country."

Changes in Haiti have come slowly--too slowly for many. A mass movement toppling the dictatorship of Jean-Claude Duvalier in February began as demonstrations by Haitians blaming the rich ruling class for their impoverishment. Scores were left dead and maimed, and property damage was reported to be widespread in the wake of angry mobs that roamed the countryside for several weeks.

But the Helias are taking a different tack. They are among those who have invested their lives in the notion that Haiti will change only as its people change. In fact, during two weeks of the time schools were closed before Duvalier left the country, the Helias secured government permission to run their nutritional program just so the children would stay nourished and alert.

Like the Helias, educated, ambitious Haitians who at one time might have moved away instead are getting dirt under their fingernails.

A Baptist lay leader near the north coast breeds pigs to share with neighbors--only after they promise to build a pen and share their piglets, too. A gainfully employed mason has abandoned urban life and moved to remote mountains to teach at a Baptist vocational-technical training center on the south peninsula. An 88-year-old Baptist lay preacher has teamed up with 49 families from a church he started in 1940 to pitch in \$50 apiece--a sacrifice equal to many thousands of dollars in the United States--and assemble a cooperative providing pigs, crops, medicine and schooling in the area.

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"When I came here seven years ago, people (various mission workers) told me, 'Haitians can't do anything,'" says Southern Baptist missionary Jack Hancox. "I said to them, 'If I'd spent 25 years working in a country and still felt like that, then I'd go on home.'"

Hancox came to Haiti as a development consultant to the Baptist convention. Over the years, some Haitians have proven his colleagues wrong.

Samson Nere raises six sows and a boar for Lemonade Baptist Church under guidelines of a nationwide pig-replenishment plan. The hogs and their feed were provided to replace one million that had to be slaughtered after Swine Fever turned up in the late 1970s. Nere receives no pay, and neither does the church.

"The people are encouraged about the possibility of having pigs again, because they have always depended on pigs," says Nere. "I, and others like me, are demonstrating it is easier to raise a pig in this modern way." Nere points to the royal palm logs and thatching he has fashioned into a pen on a gentle slope behind his house. In the past, pigs were allowed to run loose among homes and commons, poking infested snouts into anything that looked edible.

"I am showing people in the community how it can be done. Some are doing things now. Others are waiting to see what will happen," he says.

Nere believes Christians will lead Haiti into a new day: "They are the change-makers. I see the hog project as a material expression of the gospel. We are helping to fill the stomach while we are saving souls."

The same motive is cited by members of a cooperative at Carrefour La Branle, a junction in the midst of rocky hills dense with cactuses and mud huts. "Everywhere we looked, there was poverty and need," says Ceus Linviloire, a co-op board member. "We saw if we voluntarily put our heads together, we could help."

The group bought about 10 acres of irrigated farmland. "The people who founded the co-op had in their heads the concept of the good Samaritan. The result is we are not only helping ourselves, but we are helping others," Linviloire explains.

Co-op members raise coconut, mangos, avocados, bananas, beans and millet in an area behind a stream and on their own properties. They breed cows and pigs, some of which were stolen during the recent violence. They administer a grade school and a clinic staffed with a government nurse who dispenses medicine. To their knowledge many of their ideas have never been tried in Haiti, but it doesn't matter.

"One of the things about the cooperative is to be a light shining so everyone can see," says Linviloire. "Then others will do it, and all will benefit."

The very idea of benefit for all is foreign to Haitian heritage. Development agencies figure 93 percent of the people don't get the water they need, 85 percent are unable to read or write, three of every 10 die by their fifth year, and fewer than half of the children are able to attend school—while less than 5 percent of the population clings virtually to all of the country's wealth.

Since 16th century Spaniards named the Caribbean island Hispaniola and made the native Arawak Indians their workhorses, a mass of peasants in Haiti has lived in poverty, while a few have lived in great wealth. Even the imported African slaves who drove out their French masters in 1791 soon became victims of tyranny by members of their own race.

An American Baptist missionary who works with Southern Baptists in helping Haitians believes the hope for Haiti lies in resurrecting self worth and restoring the desire to excel. New ideas must work their way to the masses through the most progressive nationals, says Ken Heneise, who runs an agricultural center.

"If those families can make it work, then some of their neighbors will try," he says. "This is hard for some people to follow, because they say, 'Then you are only helping the wealthiest people.' But I say if you just help the poorest, you will always be giving something away."



Heneise, whose part in pig repopulation included using about \$202,000 of Southern Baptist development funds over a two-year period, believes outside groups should provide the framework for Haitians to help themselves. He explained, "I feel we should help Christians realize the solution is in their own hands, to equip the most innovative ones so they can realize the poor people in Haiti are their responsibility. It is the Christian people in Haiti who have already made the break from tradition in the area of religion. And they are ready to do it here (in methods of living), too. The time is right."

There are signs that peasants want to break from old patterns. Outside the south-peninsula town of Mussotte on a windy plateau some 3,500 feet above the Caribbean Sea, Eric William directs Baptist Agro-Technical Center's program of sewing and tailoring, carpentry, crafts, welding and masonry.

Most who attend come from peasant farming families. As the sun rises on weekdays, four rows of men and women, ages 17 to 25, line up outside, sing the national anthem and salute while the Haitian flag ascends its pole. Then they file into a crowded assembly for William's 15-minute devotional before attending classes all day.

William is one of many Haitian Baptists who believes new life through Jesus Christ will transform even the most defeated Haitian. He actively is looking for Haitians who will do as he did and vacate more comfortable jobs to move to the mountains and teach their people.

"We need to enlarge the size of our classrooms," he says. "More people want to come than we have space for, and we have to refuse them."

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(BP) photo mailed in February to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Western Gospel's Many Faces  
Mingle With Voodoo In Haiti

By Marty Croll

Baptist Press  
3/13/86

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (BP)--Jesus Christ has made it to Haiti. Church bell towers rise from villages. Haitians say "if God wills" as easily as Americans say "how do you do." The people even have painted nearly all of their multicolored pickup-truck buses with phrases like "The Living God" and "Jesus of Nazareth."

But most of these seven million people know only as much about Jesus as others have told them. Only 20 percent can read. And until recently no one had translated the Bible into the common people's language.

Is Jesus a man who hangs limp on crucifixes in their Catholic churches? A god whose magic expands the power of voodoo? Someone who told followers to give things to those who obey certain rules?

A Southern Baptist missionary and an Episcopal priest say he is some of all three to many Haitians. They blame this confusion about who Jesus really is on the narrow and often culturally influenced interpretations of the gospel by missionaries and preachers from many American denominations.

Not all Americans with connections to Haiti feel so strongly. But Jack Hancox, sent seven years ago by Southern Baptists to open their work in Haiti, has a simple analysis: "We've taken all the polarity of religion in America, with its 239 million people, and forced it onto this little country of seven million."

As a consultant to the Baptist Convention of Haiti, Hancox has supervised a number of development projects in which American volunteers have helped provide pure water and agricultural, nutritional and educational programs. The convention, largest of five such mission-related Baptist groups in the country, is made up of some 90 churches and more than 560 missions and preaching points that grew out of work by the American Baptist denomination, which started work in Haiti in 1923.

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Traveling throughout the country, Hancox has seen how various regions reflect the flavor of the many denominations whose missionaries taught their faith there and offered their financial support. Collars, ties and hats the people wear or don't wear, social structure, methods of hygiene or the lack of hygiene--these are signs of various teachings of the Christian groups.

Only the most isolated Haitians live more than a few miles from a Christian church. In many back-country communities, the mission congregation is the hottest business going. Missions mean money and jobs.

A flight from the United States to Haiti is cheap and easy to make. Because of this, the country has absorbed mission activity. Hancox paints a picture of the American stepping off a jumbo jet with a suitcase full of dollars, seeking a Haitian pastor to set up in ministry. Some Americans, who have tied their ministries closer to their own culture than to the pure gospel, have saddled communities with more baggage than they could balance.

Churches that have preached specific doctrines and then supplied their membership with a new standard of living have caused some Haitians to view Christian ministers like they have voodoo priests--as a channel to get their physical needs met, says Hancox. The majority of the people's ancestors practiced Haitian voodoo, which blends African spirit worship with Catholic saint idolatry. The Baptist Convention of Haiti takes a firm stance against practicing voodoo. But voodoo has left its mark on the Haitian mindset.

Much like the role of superstition in the United States, voodoo sometimes forms a backdrop for Haitian life. As pockets of Americans find security in blaming misfortune on Friday the 13th, black cats or walking under ladders, a traditional Haitian may blame the power of spirits over his own will for his pitiful circumstances. Voodoo ignores the inborn gifts, God-given purpose or ability to change that a Christian discovers within himself. "The (traditional) Haitian's religious approach is looking for spiritual power to give him security and protection to help him go through the hardship of life," says Roger Desir, a Haitian Episcopal priest who attended Baptist Sunday schools while growing up in Port-au-Prince in the 1930s and '40s.

"It is not redemption he seeks. Rather, he says, 'Here is an outlet,' and he'll plug into the outlet to get the power," explains Desir. At one point when Desir battled with personal problems, Christian friends warned him to proceed with caution because maybe someone was giving him the evil eye.

Such confusion has crippled many Christians' efforts to break cleanly from voodoo, and a Western gospel polluted with cultural requirements has failed to stress the power of Jesus to fully transform lives, Desir claims.

"Christianity has been something not completely replacing voodoo in the mind of the (traditional) Haitian, but rather completing voodoo. To him, God is a power that can be used," he notes. With this attitude, Jesus Christ is seen simply as the best way to wield spiritual power rather than an avenue to spiritual rebirth.

Since 1970 Desir has been working with others to translate the Bible into basic Creole, the language of the uneducated masses. Creole is an unspecific dialect spoken with varying amounts of French, depending on social status. The new translation has just begun to be distributed. Desir believes its effect will be far-reaching, because many people will be able to read the gospel for the first time.

"Development is not so much having cars, having Frigidaires, having all these gadgets--this is secondary," he says. "But there is this development of our humanness, when we become more with ourselves, with our fellow man, with who we are in Christ."

Desir believes the church can help restore faith which the Haitian has lost, even in himself. "The church can help him realize he is a child of God, that he has within him all the potential to develop as a full-fledged human being," he says. "By having this new perspective we will improve our education, we will improve our health system--we will improve all kinds of services. And we will not look down anymore on the peasant. We will realize he also is in the image and the likeness of God; that Jesus Christ lives in him, too."

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