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88-78

Both sides at fault, Bisagno says of SBC

By Marv Knox

HOUSTON (BP)--Southern Baptists' controversy may be contributing negatively to their evangelical witness, and both sides are to blame, one of the convention's most widely known preachers has charged.

Political excesses of the right and traditional tendencies of the left have fueled "The Controversy," a nine-year theological/political battle within the Southern Baptist Convention, said John Bisagno.

Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston and preacher on the ACTS television network's "Invitation to Life" series, expressed his concerns in an eight-page document mailed to Baptist state newspapers. He told Baptist Press he has been working on the statement for two years.

Bisagno chided both of the SBC's theo-political parties, urged unity built around biblical reliability and called upon the denomination's presidential candidates to state their positions on the issues.

He cited the convention's own statistics, which reveal decreases in baptisms, church starts and membership growth, as evidence of decline and need for reconciliation. "'The Controversy' appears to be a contributing factor to the declining witness of our beloved Southern Baptist Convention, as massive energy has been drained and attention shifted from our major task," he said.

Stressing that unity is vital for Christ's followers to have an effective witness, he warned: "A church or denomination experiencing a public battle may have to wait as much as 20 years to regain its witness to a future generation that never heard about the controversy. But Southern Baptists don't have 20 years.

"Today, in what may be the twilight hours of world history, the greatest evangelistic and missionary tool in the history of the kingdom of God stands like a crazed animal, chewing itself to death -- and that before the very world to which it seeks to be a witness."

Although the report of the SBC Peace Committee -- which was adopted by about 95 percent of messengers to the convention's annual meeting last summer in St. Louis -- asked Southern Baptists to stop their political activities, "before the ink dried on the document, both sides were gearing up to press the battle" to this year's annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, June 14-16, he said.

"Diplomacy and movement are needed from each side for the greater good of the common cause," Bisagno urged. "I strongly believe that most 'grass roots' Southern Baptists are frustrated because, in some ways, both sides are right and both sides are wrong.

"First is the problem of the Right. The Right has gone too far. They have, for example, gone beyond the position of an infallible Bible and have imposed certain issues as tests of orthodoxy. Unfortunately, those issues are ever changing."

The ordination of women, a current issue, "goes far beyond the question of the nature of Scripture," he said, then reciting a litany of theological issues not currently in the limelight: speaking in tongues, premillennialism, closed communion and alien immersion.

"But those issues aren't in vogue on the ever-changing list of so-called Christian orthodoxy," he said. "The nature of Scripture was initially purported to be, was established by the Peace Committee as and must ever remain the only issue.

"When you move beyond that, who has the right to determine orthodoxy? This kind of thinking sacrifices the historic Baptist position of the priesthood of the believer and leads to the graveyard of legalism."

Bisagno affirmed "the positive commitment of the Right to biblical infallibility" but urged "a less legalistic, less issue-oriented approach" and more reasonableness in SBC appointments. "Such attitudinal concessions would certainly make the position of the Right more palatable," he said. "Certainly this must be the posture of the next president of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Turning to the other side, Bisagno said: "The second problem, that of the Left, is just as real. History has well documented that once you tiptoe down the path of neo-orthodoxy, you will ultimately walk full stride on the liberal highway.

"The sands of time are strewn with the shipwrecks of once-mighty denominations that drifted from neo-orthodoxy onto the treacherous reef of liberalism. The death of evangelistic fire and missionary zeal are the heritage of the liberalism to which neo-orthodoxy has historically moved."

Focusing on the controversy at large, Bisagno added: "I believe the majority of Southern Baptists are unhappy with both sides. The Left has gone too far to the left, and the Right has gone too far to the right. Our institutions and agencies must perpetuate our commitment to a Bible that is absolutely reliable. That and that alone must be the common theological ground of Southern Baptists."

He cited two Southern Baptist documents that ought to be instruments for unity and reconciliation.

The Baptist Faith and Message statement, adopted in 1963 and reaffirmed last summer in St. Louis, provides one foundation for peace, he said: "Southern Baptists must never permit a professor, trustee, employee or head of any institution or agency to depart from the position that the Bible is totally accurate when it speaks. ... A Bible that is 100 percent accurate is our only basis for evangelism and world missions.

"A man or woman who cannot stand on the St. Louis platform, which commits to ensuring the perpetuation of the Baptist Faith and Message view of Scripture, ... has no right to be president of this convention."

The Peace Committee report also sounded a theme similar to the Baptist Faith and Message, Bisagno noted, citing the committee's reaffirmation of "the Baptist commitment to the absolute authority of Scripture and to the historic Baptist position that the Bible has 'truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.'"

The committee illustrated "truth, without any mixture of error" to mean belief in direct creation of mankind and a real Adam and Eve, the stated authorship of biblical books, the supernatural reality of miracles and the accuracy of the Bible's historical narratives. And the committee urged SBC entities to "build their professional staffs and faculties from those who clearly reflect such dominant convictions."

Against this background, Bisagno asked: "Who should be president of the Southern Baptist Convention? The answer must be that person who will stand on that platform and use all available tools to ensure opposition to the neo-orthodoxy of the Left and the excesses of the Right."

He added: "I call upon the candidates to state their positions. We have a right to know who we are electing." The probable candidates are moderate Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church, and conservative Jerry Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.

"The candidate who will commit himself to perpetuating the St. Louis platform -- who is non-issue-oriented, who can be gracious and conciliatory in victory and who is beholden to no group -- should be elected. If neither is, then let us find one who is. If both are, then let the people vote; or better still, let one nominate the other."

Bisagno acknowledged: "Any institution or cause must periodically be called back to its roots. But leftward swings of the pendulum invariably adjust too far to the right. ...

"If we act decisively, courageously, selflessly and quickly, perhaps history will be kind to us. Perhaps our children and their children will honor us for having acted expeditiously and wisely, and in so doing, having saved the greatest human instrument in the hand of God at the most important juncture of world history -- and that we did it in time."

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Texas board asked to request
Return of Hispanic Seminary

By Orville Scott

Baptist Press
5/10/88

DALLAS (BP)--The State Missions Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas has voted to propose that the convention's executive board request Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to transfer Hispanic Baptist Theological Seminary back to the Texas convention.

Hispanic Seminary in San Antonio became affiliated with Southwestern Seminary in 1982 after operating for 19 years as an arm of the State Missions Commission.

The institution, which trains leaders for Hispanic Baptist churches, has an enrollment of about 105 students on its San Antonio campus and 160 at satellite centers.

D.L. Lowrie, director of the State Missions Commission, said the proposal to transfer was initiated by Hispanic Seminary President Daniel Rivera and Southwestern Seminary administration "out of concern that the school in its present form is not broad enough to meet the goals of Mission Texas."

Mission Texas is Texas Baptists' plan for presenting the gospel to more than 8 million Texans who are not members of any church.

Rivera, who has resigned as president effective Dec. 31, said he made the proposal because he "felt the school needed to be more at the forefront of Mission Texas goals, particularly in carrying out the goals from an educational perspective."

The proposed transfer had no bearing on his resignation, he said, noting, "I have for quite a long time felt the Lord leading in a different direction."

"The seminary is in an excellent, exceptionally fine condition in terms of financial solvency, student growth, excellence of programs, competent staff and faculty and a beautiful debt-free campus," Rivera said.

The State Missions Commission has been seeking ways to increase the number of trained leaders for the greatly expanding numbers of ethnic churches that have been started under the Mission Texas goal of 2,000 new churches by 1990, Lowrie said. "Forty-five percent of the 973 new works started in the past four years are ethnic," he added.

"The proposal is based on the feeling that we could better meet the responsibility for programs for which the institution was formed by taking it back to its original purpose in partnership with Southwestern Seminary, a partnership in theological training that meets every level of need," Lowrie noted.

The commission proposed that Southwestern Seminary continue to offer associate and master's degree programs at Hispanic Seminary. The State Missions Commission would strengthen the missions emphasis through certificate/diploma programs, concentrating on the practical training and continuing education opportunities, he added.

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For example the proposed plan should assist older pastors who feel led to preach but lack the time or background for formal education. Also, it would help younger pastors who do not have the formal education to qualify them to attend college.

If the proposal is approved, the transfer of property at the seminary would take effect in October, and the State Missions Commission would begin administrative responsibility Jan. 1, 1989.

Southwestern Seminary President Russell H. Dilday said that with the expanding number of ethnic churches started through the Mission Texas challenge, Southwestern's administration initiated steps toward reappraising the partnership relationship.

"From the beginning of the formal relationship between the two schools, Southwestern has been meeting the emerging needs of Hispanic churches through Hispanic Seminary," Dilday said.

"We are seeking solutions that will meet the needs of the Hispanic churches and population. Although the structure may change, Southwestern will continue to be a full partner in seeking to meet the training needs of Hispanic church leaders."

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Belize pastor jailed
Overnight in Miami

By Eric Miller

Baptist Press
5/10/88

MIAMI (BP)--A Belize Baptist pastor was jailed overnight in Miami when immigration officials found he did not have a proper visa to enter the United States.

Norman Willacey was scheduled to travel to Sarasota, Fla., April 30 to provide orientation for Florida Baptists participating in Caribbean '88, a partnership evangelism project sponsored by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Willacey did not realize more than one visa exists, he said in a telephone interview from Belmopan, Belize, where he is pastor of a Baptist church. He had a "C1" visa, which allows passage through a United States airport while a traveler is en route to another country. He had passed through Miami en route to Jamaica in previous trips.

Immigration officials told Willacey he needed a "B1" visa, which allows travelers to stay in the United States for months at a time. Willacey understood he had the wrong visa, but he said he did not understand why he was handcuffed and locked up overnight.

It "was utterly humiliating that I was handcuffed with another guy who apparently was breaking the law," Willacey said. "They led us out of the airport together, handcuffed to each other. I was utterly embarrassed. I wasn't trying to break any U.S. law."

Before being taken to the detention center, immigration officials called the mission board's Richmond, Va., office, left a message with the board's answering service, but got no response during the next hour, Willacey said. He did not ask them to make any other calls, he said.

Immigration officials offered to parole him for a week, said Perry Rivkind, district director for the U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization. He could have traveled anywhere in the United States for a week. But when Willacey asked for an additional week to visit a friend in California and a relative in Nevada, they revoked the parole, Rivkind said.

The officials offered him a hearing before an immigration judge, but he would have been required to wait four days, and if the judge granted him entry, he would have had to wait inside the detention center for two weeks to be released. So he refused.

Willacey appeared to be a polite, educated gentleman, one official said, but many others have appeared that way and have tried to escape. For this reason, immigration officers routinely handcuff and detain aliens, Rivkind said. About 2.3 million people from other countries enter the Miami airport annually, he said.

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Once inside the detention center, Willacey asked if he could call someone, but he was told only local calls could be made. He had been traveling with eight Belize pastors who had proper visas and were admitted. While he was detained, several Florida pastors became concerned and had a Miami detective look for Willacey.

The next day, an immigration officer escorted Willacey to a plane for the return trip to Belize. In Belize, he obtained a proper visa and was to return to Miami. Rivkind said Willacey would be allowed entry into the United States with the proper visa. Willacey planned to travel to California and later provide orientation at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Sarasota.

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Seminary presidents multiply
Scope of McCarty's assignment

Baptist Press
5/10/88

NASHVILLE (BP)--Doran C. McCarty, a former faculty member at both Golden Gate and Midwestern Baptist theological seminaries, will assume his full responsibilities Aug. 1 as executive director of the Southern Baptist Seminary External Education Division.

The six Southern Baptist seminary presidents, acting in their role as governing board of the division, have selected McCarty for the new duties. Since January of 1988, McCarty has been coordinator of a pilot ministry education program in the Northeast cosponsored by the seminaries.

McCarty "will help the seminaries bring together two significant efforts in off-campus theological education," said Russell H. Dilday, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and current chairman of the president's group.

"As executive director of the Seminary External Education Division, Dr. McCarty will be directing our strong, established programs of seminary extension and seminary studies. In his work with the northeastern state conventions, he will be leading in the development of an entirely new model, yet one that will be in harmony with other ongoing efforts."

The pilot project to deliver ministry training in the Northeast is a cooperative project of the Baptist state conventions in the District of Columbia, Maryland/Delaware, New England, New York and Pennsylvania/South Jersey, as well as the six seminaries and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Its goal will be to provide on-site ministry education opportunities "in context" for people in the northeast region.

McCarty was professor of ministry and director of the doctor of ministry program at Golden Gate Seminary for more than six years before accepting the current assignment. He also worked 14 years on the faculty of Midwestern Seminary, where he became recognized as a specialist in field education.

While the program in the Northeast is in its infancy, McCarty will operate temporarily out of an office in New York City, with regular visits to the division's Nashville offices.

"I have met with the division staff and fully expect that they will perform in the effective way they have in the past," said McCarty. "Their goals and operating budget for 1988-89 already have been approved."

McCarty will succeed Raymond M. Rigdon, who will retire July 31 after more than 19 years as head of the seminaries' joint off-campus system. Rigdon became director of the Seminary Extension Department in 1969 and was named executive director of the Seminary External Division when it was created in 1981.

Rigdon's tenure is the longest of any director since the seminaries began working together in 1951 to provide ministry education opportunities for persons who had been unable to attend a seminary.

Under Rigdon's leadership, both the enrollment and curriculum have doubled in size. In recent years about 8,000 students annually have enrolled in one or more of the 70 course selections, primarily on the college level.

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Rigdon introduced in 1971 the only series of courses in the country designed for ministers with less than a high school diploma. Ten years later he developed a series of six telecourse that allowed master's-level students in multiple locations to interact with a seminary professor teaching the course on campus.

Dilday noted Rigdon's "cutting edge accomplishments" and credited him with making the division "one of the flagship programs of its type in all the world."

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Stetson ousts fraternity, students
Following alleged sexual assault

By Jack E. Brymer Sr.

Baptist Press
5/10/88

DeLAND, Fla. (BP)--Stetson University President H. Douglas Lee has suspended five students and the charter of Stetson's Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity following a three-week investigation into the alleged rape of a female student.

An unnamed female student alleged she was drugged and raped by more than one member of the fraternity April 9 at the fraternity's house on the campus of Stetson, a Baptist-affiliated college in DeLand.

According to Lee, evidence of sexual assault is inconclusive, and the female student has refused to press charges, desiring to maintain her right to privacy.

"Alcohol use and sexual misconduct, in gross violation of the university's student code of conduct, did occur at the fraternity, which resulted in a young woman being placed in a compromising situation," Lee said in a press conference following the investigation.

Had there been sufficient evidence that an assault had occurred, Lee said, the university would have reported such evidence immediately to proper law enforcement agencies, even in the absence of a formal complaint.

Lee suspended five students for two semesters after determining two of the male students had some sexual contact with the young woman and three other students were aware of this contact and did not intervene.

Two other students have been placed on probation for the remainder of their studies at Stetson, and a third received a disciplinary reprimand, Lee said, because they could have intervened and did not.

Lee suspended Pi Kappa Alpha indefinitely, but in no case for less than the 1988-89 academic year, for violations of the university's student code of conduct.

The fraternity must vacate its house at the end of the spring semester, May 15. For the duration of the suspension, the group cannot hold any social activities in the name of the fraternity or participate in intramural sports and must permanently dissolve its little sister program.

The group must participate in an ongoing confrontational education program that addresses alcohol abuse, preservation of human dignity and responsibility for individual actions.

Lee acknowledged the full cooperation of the fraternity in the investigation.

In a statement released to the press, fraternity President Todd Kennedy said the events of April 9 were tragic for the individuals involved, the fraternity, the Greek system and the campus at large.

"We have dealt severely with this situation, and it is our intention to make sure that something of this nature never happens again with Pi Kappa Alpha," he said.

Calling the event a tragedy in the lives of the individuals involved as well as the university, Lee said that it occurred at Stetson, which by mission and programs fosters Christian values and a caring environment, violates the very heart and soul of the institution.

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"I find it repugnant and very difficult to come to terms with," he said.

During the 1988-89 academic year, the university will do a thorough review of its entire environment, Lee announced. The self-study will include a clarification of the moral values, examination of rules governing residential housing, the quality and quantity of campus activities for students and the relationship between the Greek system and Stetson's values as a Christian university.

"It is not sufficient for Stetson to punish individuals and organizations," he said. "Equally important is to take a hard look at ourselves as a university community to determine how our environment permitted such an incident to take place."

The findings and recommendations of the study will be reported to the student affairs committee and the board of trustees.

Pi Kappa Alpha is the second Stetson fraternity Lee has suspended in the past year. Pi Kappa Phi was suspended for one year for a hazing incident.

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Spiritual superlatives
Pronounced by preachers

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5/10/88

RIDGECREST, N.C. (BP)--Preachers from across the Southern Baptist Convention pronounced a litany of spiritual superlatives during the SBC Conference on Biblical Interpretation at Ridgecrest (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center April 25-27.

The five pastors presented inspirational messages during the meeting, which primarily focused on the doctrines of creation, women in ministry and the end times. The conference was hosted by the six SBC-affiliated seminaries.

The sermons exhorted 301 conference participants to focus on supreme attributes of God and the Christian gospel:

-- Christians must hold fast to the awesome sense of wonder about their faith, said Richard Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church.

-- In times of social disaster, Christians also should maintain faith in "a future secured by a sovereign God," encouraged Daniel Vestal, pastor of First Baptist Church of Midland, Texas.

-- They also need to rest assured in the "incredible, indisputable, indispensable love of God," noted Jerry Vines, co-pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla.

-- To be as bold as their slogans, Southern Baptists must rekindle their faith to "white-hot heat," urged Kenneth Hemphill, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va.

-- And they need to cling to the gospel, which is "powerful in its effect and universal in its extent," added Jon M. Stubblefield, pastor of First Baptist Church of Shreveport, La.

Both Jackson and Vines, who have been mentioned as candidates for the SBC presidency this summer, avoided convention politics and the theological/political controversy that has marked the convention for nine years.

Jackson warned against spiritual callousness that leads Christians to take their faith for granted.

"It is possible that we have become so familiar with all the words of our faith that we have lost the wonder of our faith," he said. "We are so used to hearing what we consider to be the 'basic facts' about our Lord Jesus that we tend to skim right past them and lose their wonder."

He cited miracles that should remind Christians of the wonder of their faith: God's coming to earth as a human, Christ's resurrection, the proclamation of the gospel that is intended for all people, the spread of the gospel and the hope of heaven.

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"I know me, and I know my sin like you can't know my sin. I know his grace in my sin. I am wondered by it all," he said. "I don't have time for ecclesiastical argument. I don't have time for theological gymnastics."

Vines preached on John 3:16, which he called one of the greatest texts of the Bible, "the gospel in a nutshell."

"God's love is so wide that it reaches out to all men everywhere," he said. "God's love is so long that there's no one beyond the reach of his reconciling arm ... so deep that it reaches down to the uttermost sinner ... so high that it takes that hell-deserving sinner and carries him all the way to heaven."

The Christian's job is to tell others of that love, realizing the reality of hell, he said. "Hell is God's insane asylum for the spiritually deranged. Hell is God's garbage dump of the universe. ... Do we really believe that people who die without Jesus Christ go to hell? It ought to break our hearts."

And the full meaning of God's love will only be unveiled in heaven, he said, noting when a Christian gets to heaven and asks why God did all he did for people, the answer may be, "Just because I love you."

Vestal encouraged Christians to respond to social disaster with hope and hope-filled tasks.

"In time of social disaster and crises, we must keep our eyes firmly fixed on the future, a future secured by a sovereign God," he said. "We must busy ourselves with tasks that show our confidence in that future and in that God. ... Whatever social disaster we face, we must not give up. We keep our eyes fixed on a future that is in God's hand."

Hemphill said embers of faith and promise still glow among Southern Baptists, but controversy, lack of fundamentals, theological drift and normal institutional cycles may contribute to a lack of boldness. But those embers can be stirred to a "living flame" if Southern Baptists could "remember their past, kindle afresh the gift of God within and recognize God's provision."

"We've been called to tasks beyond our natural abilities," he said. "But all we need to be empowered for ministry has been given by the graciousness of God."

Stubblefield said the gospel declares the righteousness of God's character, reveals the sinfulness of the human condition, affirms the new standing before God of Christians and offers the challenge to the church, which is continuing Christ's ministry.

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Southern Seminary names
Alumni of the year

Baptist Press
5/10/88

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Five graduates of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., have been chosen as 1988 alumni of the year.

Robert B. Ford Jr., Allen W. Graves, John David Laida, Paul Truett Langston and Charles Carman Sharp will be honored June 15 at the annual Southern Seminary alumni and friends reunion held during the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas.

Ford, Baptist campus minister at Jacksonville (Ala.) State University, previously was campus minister at the University of Montevallo in Montevallo, Ala., and at Livingston University in Livingston, Ala. He also has been a pastor in Alabama.

Graves, a retired Southern Seminary administrator, was dean of the seminary's School of Religious Education, administrative dean, vice president for student affairs and executive director of Boyce Bible School. He also has been employed by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and has been pastor of churches in Oklahoma, Virginia and Florida.

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Laida retired last year after 27 years as pastor of First Baptist Church of Clarksville, Tenn. Church membership at Clarksville grew from 676 to 3,416 while he was pastor. Prior to going to Clarksville, Laida held pastorates in Kentucky.

Langston, a professor of music at Stetson University, joined the DeLand, Fla., school's faculty in 1960. He was dean of Stetson's School of Music from 1963 to 1985 and has been an organist-choirmaster for churches in North Carolina and New Jersey.

Sharp retired in 1984 as pastor of Louisville's Deer Park Baptist Church following 23 years of service. He also has been pastor of Clarksdale (Miss.) Baptist Church and Bardstown (Ky.) Baptist Church.

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Chinese Christians want
Bibles in bookstores

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
5/10/88

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Chinese Christians hope Bibles soon will be sold in public bookstores in China.

"We feel Bibles should be purchasable in the bookstores, but we haven't yet succeeded" in gaining permission for the sales, said Bishop Ding Guangxun (K.H. Ting), leader of the China Christian Council. Ding discussed the possible Bible sales during a visit April 28 to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va.

Christian leaders are negotiating with the national New China bookstore chain, which already sells the Koran, the holy book of Islam. But they are encountering some official resistance to the idea, Ding said, because of apparent concern that the Bible "would affect people more" than the Koran.

The new Amity Press near Nanjing, begun by Christians and other Chinese, will have printed 4 million Bibles by the end of this year, Ding said. The press also is shifting from an older version of the Chinese Bible to the simplified text now used in China so young people can read the Scriptures more easily.

Bibles are distributed through more than 4,000 churches in China, Ding reported. Bibles also are available to Christians who meet in homes, he asserted, contrary to critics' charges that only official churches have access to Bibles.

"We have tens of thousands of home meetings," Ding said. "We have no reason not to provide them with Bibles."

The bishop, who also heads Chinese Protestants' Three-Self Patriotic Movement and national seminary in Nanjing, was in the United States at the invitation of the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries. He made an unscheduled stop at the Southern Baptist mission agency before delivering a public lecture on religion in China at Randolph-Macon College in nearby Ashland, Va.

"It has been my wish for a long time to visit the headquarters of the foreign mission work of the Southern Baptist Convention," Ding said during an informal session with agency leaders. In a subsequent interview, he said recent Southern Baptist efforts to serve Chinese Christians and society through education and other assistance have been helpful.

Despite the recent growth of the Chinese church, Ding acknowledged the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom are not applied evenly throughout China. Christians remain a small and weak minority in the vast nation, he said, but added Protestants have been increasing at least twice as fast as the population growth rate.

Outside the churches, Ding said, evangelism happens in places "where Christians live and where Christians work" -- like Shanghai, where numerous believers have been recognized by their non-believing colleagues as model workers. As another example, many Christian women in China are activists in neighborhood organizations, Ding said, noting they help mediate family disputes, win the respect of non-Christians and lead people to faith in Christ.

Ding said he believes Chinese Christians have achieved their "three-self" ideals of self-support, self-government and self-propagation since the departure of Western missionaries.

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But on a national scale, he noted: "We are aware that we haven't done these things well. Many Chinese Christians are disappointed."

Church leaders are discussing possible changes to encourage mutual respect and more freedom of worship among Chinese Christians of differing traditions, he added.

"We think religious freedom should include ways for Christians to organize themselves in ways they feel right," he explained.

Asked to compare Chinese and American churches, Ding observed that churches and worshipers abound in the United States, but faith is taken for granted.

"If a Chinese Christian enters a church in the United States, he or she will probably feel there is a lack of enthusiasm and a lot of formality," he said. "A (U.S.) religious service has to be interesting, the sermon has to be short, the music has to be good and all that sort of thing. In China, I think the Christians have a greater sense of joy in worship, because the privilege of worship we cannot take for granted. We have just come out of a period when worship was not permitted."

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

Mexican healthcare providers
Attend binational conference

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
5/10/88

OJINAGA, Mexico (BP)--More than 100 healthcare professionals from Texas and northern Mexico attended the Binational Medical and Nursing Conference May 5-7 in Ojinaga, Chihuahua.

The first-of-its-kind meeting, sponsored by the Texas Baptist Rio Grande River Ministry, included technical presentations on various aspects of health care, as well as roundtable discussions featuring doctors and nurses involved in the medical-dental services program of River Ministry.

"We want to provide an opportunity for continuing education to the doctors and other healthcare providers of northern Mexico," said Wayne Grant of San Antonio, Texas, medical services coordinator for the Rio Grande River Ministry. "Our desire is to improve communication between professionals on both sides of the border and between River Ministry participants and medical professionals over here in Mexico.

"Also, we hope this kind of meeting will allow some of our Christian physicians to befriend the professionals here and to be a witness to them."

That purpose was foremost to Joann Goatcher of Richmond, Va., former River Ministry healthcare coordinator and foreign missionary.

"I hope we can be a positive witness for the Lord to physicians here who are not Christian," she said. "The testimony that most of these doctors have dedicated time on a volunteer basis to minister to Mexican citizens should say something to them about our love that comes from God."

The meeting was representative of a new phase in the River Ministry's medical services program, said Elmin Howell, coordinator of the ministry.

"The healthcare program has come a long way in the last 20 years, bridging gaps of understanding and helping local people along the border to understand River Ministry's concern for both physical and spiritual needs," he said. "This meeting demonstrates how we now are not only supplying medical services ourselves but also working more with local healthcare providers. This is an important step in indigenous missions development."

Currently, the healthcare services program of River Ministry operates 50 clinics along the Texas-Mexico border. Through this program, doctors and nurses provide medical and dental care for acute and chronic illness, practice preventive medicine and dentistry, and teach local residents about health and nutrition while simultaneously conducting a continuing ministry to spiritual needs.

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