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88-126

Missionaries abandon plans
for South Sea island work

By Marty Croll

N-FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptists have abandoned plans to assign missionaries to two South Pacific island nations and so far have been unable to secure visas for a third. But the change in plans could help ensure the success of a ministry from another island to people throughout the South Pacific, missionary leaders said.

Missionary couples who had been appointed to serve in Vanuatu and Western Samoa are seeking reassignments to another South Pacific nation, a cluster of islands named Fiji. A couple assigned to the French territory of New Caledonia is studying language in France and hoping to get visas through the influence of French Baptists there.

The three couples were planning to develop ministries relating to personal evangelism and discipleship, hoping to provide an evangelical witness where second- and third-generation Christianity has become tightly woven into tradition and culture.

"We were hoping that as missionaries went about their work, they would one day find themselves surrounded by people who wanted to identify themselves as Baptists," said Jerry Rankin, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's area director for South Asia and the Pacific. "Probably if we knew what we know now, we would not have found it strategic to assign people to these countries."

Early studies and preliminary talks in the island nations led missions administrators to believe local church bodies and government officials wanted help from missionaries. But the missionary couples have been stymied in every attempt to win rights to live in the countries.

The churches seemed to welcome the ecumenical approach. "But when it actually came to the point of getting visas, we found new missionaries with new groups were not welcome," Rankin said.

Most residents of the islands attend church; church groups set many of the rules for society. Churches are large. In one case the country's prime minister is a clergyman, Rankin said. Through contacts they made, one missionary couple talked directly with a prime minister after their visa was rejected repeatedly. "They were told they really weren't wanted or needed," Rankin said.

But for now, the visa rejections promise to benefit the Southern Baptist ministry in Fiji, where Southern Baptist missionaries work through a national Baptist convention. David and Karyn Carroll had planned to work in Western Samoa. But now they expect to work in Fiji at the University of the South Pacific with students from throughout the region, including the country to which they were unable to gain entrance. He is from Corsicana, Texas, and she is from Alexandria, La.

Missionaries Dwight and Gloria Fern, from Atlanta and Miami respectively, plan also to work in Fiji, filling in for Hugh and Kathryn Smith, who are on furlough in the United States. The Smiths opened Southern Baptist work in Fiji in 1985. Knocking on doors of homes and businesses to share the gospel, Smith helped organize three Baptist churches and several other meeting groups during his first term in Fiji, Rankin said.

Philip Holeman of Jenks, Okla., and his wife, Dixie, of Bartlesville, Okla., were appointed missionaries in August 1987 and now are studying language in Tours, France. They are working through the French Baptist convention to obtain visas to New Caledonia.

World Baptists, Catholics
complete conversations

By Glenn A. Igleheart

N-CO
(BWA)

WASHINGTON (BP)--Areas of agreement were reported by Baptist and Roman Catholic scholars at the fifth and final annual session of the International Baptist-Roman Catholic Conversations held in Norcross, Ga.

Agreement centered on God's saving revelation in Jesus Christ, the necessity of personal commitment to God in Christ, the ongoing work of the Holy Sprit and the missionary imperative that emerges from God's redemptive activity on behalf of humankind. Cooperative ventures in areas such as scripture translation and famine relief were noted.

"Christian Witness in Today's World" formed the overall theme of the conversations. Topics for each year included evangelism/evangelization, the person and work of Christ and the church as fellowship of the Holy Spirit, as well as such controversial issues as church-state relationships and the difference between proselytism and evangelism.

Current conversations also are taking place between the Baptist World Alliance and the Lutheran World Federation. The alliance earlier held conversations with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The next series will be with the Mennonite World Conference.

Co-sponsored by the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation of the alliance and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, the conversations began in West Berlin in 1984. Subsequent yearly sessions were held in Los Angeles in 1985, New York City in 1986 and Rome in 1987.

Conversations co-chairmen were Catholic Bede Heather, bishop of Paramatta, Australia, and Baptist David T. Shannon, vice president for academic affairs of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta.

At the Norcross meeting, participants completed a summary document. It states areas of agreement as well as areas in which further discussion between Baptists and Catholics is necessary. The completed report of all the five sessions will be presented to the sponsoring bodies for publication later this year.

As in previous years, the participants had opportunities to explain their work to representatives of local churches. They were welcomed to the Atlanta area by Eugene Marino, Roman Catholic archbishop of Atlanta, and by Russell Barker, executive director of the Atlanta Baptist Association.

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N-HMB

Hollywood Christian group
seeks changes in 'Temptation'

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press
8/8/88

VAN NUYS, Calif. (BP)--The pastor of the largest Southern Baptist church in California and a 200-member group of Christians involved in the movie industry have been seeking to influence producers of "The Last Temptation of Christ" to delete offensive portions of the controversial film.

Jess Moody, pastor of First Baptist Church of Van Nuys, said he and the church's Act I ministry, comprised of Christians in the entertainment industry, had not seen the movie but had reviewed the script being circulated by Donald Wildmon's American Family Association.

If the movie is released with the offensive sections uncut or unchanged, Moody said, Christians should continue to put heat not only on Universal Studios, which is releasing the film, but on local theaters in every community.

"We need to let them know they cannot get away with anti-Christian bigotry, which is rampant in the United States," said Moody in an interview with Baptist Press. Saying anti-Christian bigotry is just as evil as anti-Semitism, Moody suggested a Christian anti-defamation league be established similar to the B'nai B'rith's Anti-Defamation League.

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"It is my opinion that the Christian is in the same position in the United States that the Jew was in Nazi Germany about 1928," Moody said. "This must not be tolerated."

He warned, however, that Christians not use the controversy over the film as a pretext for anti-Semitism. Some right-wing fundamentalists opposed to the movie have publicly charged the film is a Jewish plot to attack Jesus and Christians, he said, noting, "There are Jews, Catholics and Protestants involved in the production of this film, not simply Jews only, as some radical right-wing groups are claiming."

Christians and Jews should detest and resist bigotry of all kinds, said Moody, a former president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference.

Moody and other members of Act I have been in direct contact with Tom Pollack, chairman of MCA, the parent corporation of Universal Studios, seeking to influence changes in the movie, he said, adding Pollack had assured him Aug. 1 that the controversial film would be previewed to a select group of respected ministers in mid-August.

Universal Studios announced Aug. 5 it will release the movie at selected theaters Aug. 12, and the final version will be shown Aug. 10 to key religious leaders, including Southern Baptists.

Act I has reserved judgment on the movie until pre-release showing, believing movies often are vastly different from the original scripts, Moody said. He added, however, he had specifically requested Pollack to take steps to remove five specific scenes from the script-in-hand:

-- Jesus' dream of sexual intercourse with Mary Magdalene.

-- Jesus' encouragement of Judas to betray him.

-- The inference by the Apostle Paul -- who meets Jesus as an older man in the dream sequence and discovers that Jesus escaped the cross -- advising Jesus to tell no one who he is because it would interrupt the success of Paul's movement.

-- The homosexual inference between Jesus and John, who mouth kiss, prompting Jesus to say that John's tongue "burned in my mouth."

-- Mary's statement that Jesus, her son, is deranged.

Moody claimed two theological heresies are involved in the script, both of which are mistaken and should be avoided.

The first, called the "docetic heresy," is the view that Jesus could not be tempted by a woman. This is the view that Jesus was truly God but was not human in the same way that people are human, Moody said, adding this heresy is contradicted by the Scripture in Hebrews 4:15, which states Jesus "was tempted in all points, like as we are, yet without sin."

The second, called the "antinomian heresy," is the view that Jesus allowed his temptation to go so far as to fantasize the complete sex act with Mary Magdalene. This would not have been possible, since Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-30, "He who looks upon a woman with lust hath committed adultery with her in his heart already."

Moody urged Christians to pray that the highly offensive parts of the movie will be removed before it is released, that the perversions on both sides will be blunted and that excesses may cease. He also urged Christians to support Act I's efforts to continue communications with the motion picture people and assist them in script consultation.

Most movie producers in Hollywood are ignorant of Christian theology, Moody said, adding that until Act I was established at his church, Christians were not well-represented in the motion-picture industry. Act I includes more than 200 actors, writers, producers, directors and technicians involved in the entertainment industry.

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The controversial nature of the protest against the film by well-meaning Christians has delighted the marketing experts at Universal Studios, because the controversy is "selling tickets by the millions for a mediocre film at best," Moody said.

The film would have died "a natural death" if it had not been for the controversy, he added, noting it now is likely to sell millions of tickets and make a major impression.

Act I members have discovered Universal Studios has been referring all protests to its legal counsel, Moody said. Universal and its president may be contemplating legal action because of personal harrasment and personal threats, he added.

"There is, however, no First Amendment issue here," Moody said. "They have a right to make a film, and we have a First Amendment right to protest it."

Moody urged Christians to respond with what he called "integralove," that is, integrity with love and mutual respect for people.

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Roles now reversed for
former national leaders

By Susan Todd

F-10
(WMU)

Baptist Press
8/8/88

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Alma Hunt and Helen Fling may be retired, but that doesn't mean they've quit working or learning.

Between them, they have 46 years of experience as national leaders of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union. Yet they believe they have more to learn, and they are willing to pay for that privilege.

This year they both attended WMU week at Glorieta (N.C.) Baptist Conference Center as conferees instead of conference leaders. And they did so at their own expense.

Hunt was WMU national executive director from 1948 to 1974. Fling was WMU national recording secretary from 1957 to 1963, national president from 1963 to 1969, and then she worked on the national staff as promotion associate in new areas from 1977 to 1985.

"You may be shocked to see me here, but I'm going to organize a Baptist Young Women organization in my church this fall, and I need to learn," Hunt told women at Glorieta.

She attended all of the conferences for Baptist Young Women leaders, joining women who probably are 35 to 45 years younger than she.

"I've tried to learn from the women in my conferences to know what they did to capture the attention of women before they organized BYW in their churches," said Hunt. She said she found a warm reception in the younger BYW leaders.

Hunt's new job came because of her special burden for younger women in her church who work and can't attend traditional daytime mission study meetings with the older women.

When her WMU director asked if she would be willing to help, her reply was, "I certainly would."

She added, "The practical side of it all is that I want to be a leader in my church, and to do that I need the training." She believes she will be ready for the task this fall after her training at Glorieta.

"I would rather have two or three to come and discuss or pray rather than nobody doing nothing," she said.

Fling also stressed the importance of the training given in summer conferences.

"We don't want to be left behind," she quipped. "I have led a conference every year I've come to WMU conferences except the one year I was working in Munich (in an English-speaking church) or the years I was presiding. I have longed to attend some of the conferences to learn.

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"And I'm excited about the things I'm learning. It's not coming to loaf. It's coming to learn. It's coming to get what these other women have been getting for years."

In addition, Hunt and Fling both note the joy of fellowshiping with women they have known through the years, as well as the new younger leaders of WMU.

"I've thanked the Lord many times for allowing me to live long enough to see GAS grow up," Hunt said. GAS, or Girls in Action, is the missions organization for girls in grades one through six.

Many young women now tell Hunt and Fling that they learned the duo's names as children completing requirements for Forward Steps, a missions learning activity for girls in GAS before 1970.

"It's the most humbling thing in the world," said Fling, describing encounters with women who tell of years of prayer support.

She also notes with excitement her experience of watching women in new areas of Southern Baptist work grow in their leadership abilities. Her years on the national WMU staff were spent nurturing these women and their fledgling WMU organizations.

Both Fling and Hunt stressed one last important reason for attending WMU summer conferences.

"We are both good friends with our successors (WMU Executive Director Carolyn Weatherford and President Marjorie J. McCullough)," said Fling. "We feel it is important to support them in any way we can, such as attending summer conferences."

Both former national leaders said they enjoy their present roles of serving and supporting WMU, as opposed to leading.

"My coming to WMU as a staff person was a calling," said Hunt. "And I don't believe anyone can ever retire from a calling. I believe in WMU as deeply today as I did then."

Fling added: "WMU and its future is one of the most important things in my life. It has been my way to fulfill my obligation to Jesus Christ."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by WMU

Chaplain's assistant
becomes his replacement

By Breena Kent Paine

F-10
(NOBTS)

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NEW ORLEANS (BP)--A retired mentor has chosen his apprentice to succeed him as a "dedicated Army chaplain."

Chaplain George W. Lassett, who retired several years ago from the U.S. Army, expects his "replacement" be a Christian dedicated to bringing others to Christ.

Ted Wilson, a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, is just that Christian.

Lassett was a chaplain in the 95th Training Division of the Army Reserve in Oklahoma City when he met assistant Wilson.

Lassett, who had "bounced a couple of assistants that weren't committed," said, "If you're not a dedicated Christian, you can't work for me."

But Wilson was "made out of the right kind of stuff ... He came out of a very enthusiastic Christian church in Oklahoma City, and we saw eye-to-eye what our calling was" -- to share the gospel boldly, Lassett explained.

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"I took specific interest in (Wilson) since I was retiring. I sort of looked on him as my replacement," he said. "I wanted someone to be my stand-in."

In the same way, Wilson looks to Lassett as his model of what a true chaplain should be. As assistant to Lassett, he came to see the 1956 graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary as a true minister of God, and tried to model his ministry after that example.

"I wanted to make a difference, whether it be active duty or reserves," said Wilson. "My whole stand of a good chaplain is Chaplain Lassett ... He was a minister before an officer."

Wilson saw Lassett as a "preacher who was not afraid to preach the gospel, even though he wore a uniform."

As a high school student, Wilson planned to join the Army and fight in the Vietnam War, but the United States pulled its forces out of Vietnam the year he graduated. Instead, he became a chaplain's assistant in the Army Reserve, where he met Lassett.

Wilson "began to tell me over a period of time that the Lord wanted him to do something more," said Lassett. "One day, he said to me, 'God's called me to preach.'"

"I threatened him that he was going to be a jack-legged preacher if he didn't go to seminary," Lassett continued. "Regardless of how much God calls you, he still calls you to be prepared."

"Chaplain Lassett said for me to quit fooling around" and start moving toward becoming a chaplain, said Wilson. "For about four years he had been after me" to get a college education and go to seminary.

After receiving his degree from Clear Creek Baptist Bible College in Pineville, Ky., Wilson, came to New Orleans Seminary in 1986 to work toward a master of divinity degree.

Lassett was "the one that brought me down here (to New Orleans Seminary). I asked him which seminary to go to. He said, 'Well, there's only one.' ... And when I came here to seminary, he said, 'It's about time.'"

Wilson became a commissioned officer in the position of staff specialist in the seminarian program March 2 of this year.

"I've learned a lot since I've been at seminary," he said. "It reinforces my knowledge ... It helps me to mature as a Christian in my walk with the Lord and in my decision-making."

Wilson said his wife, Janice, "has been very supportive all the way through ... because she has learned as I have learned you're not happy unless you're doing what the Lord wants you to."

Lassett also has been an encouragement through the years to Wilson. "There are times when he has financially assisted us without knowing we were in need," said Wilson of his "earthly spiritual father."

The replacement for the retired chaplain's ministry said, "If I could be half the minister Chaplain Lassett was, then I will make a difference -- the Lord through me."