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Lewis emphasizes outreach  
mission of Baptist centers

By Pat Cole

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Planting churches through Baptist centers can help the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board reach its overarching goal of evangelizing America, stressed HMB President Larry Lewis.

Lewis told a meeting of Baptist center directors he could not "think of a finer facility to start a new work" than in the compassionate environment created by the centers. About 70 HMB-sponsored Baptist centers serve the physical and spiritual needs of people, primarily in the nation's inner cities.

"It's a place where people come and gather, and their needs are being met," he said. "It's a place where there's a loving, caring atmosphere that's reaching out."

Lewis spoke in October at the Baptist Centers Conference on Church Planting in Louisville, Ky. The event was jointly sponsored by the HMB and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Paul R. Adkins Institute for Research and Training in Church Social Work.

Lewis, a former church planter, said he discovered "quite early in my ministry that the best way in the world to reach people for Christ is to minister to their needs."

Emphasizing the importance of social ministries for urban evangelization, Lewis said: "I'm convinced you'll never really evangelize the great cities of America unless it's through the ministry that gives entry to heart and home. That's the way you open doors to effective evangelism."

Lewis acknowledged Baptist center congregations may never totally be self supporting. Nevertheless, he said, some type of congregational expression would help both evangelistic and social ministry efforts.

A Baptist center congregation can help provide the human resources to staff and support Baptist center ministries, he said, noting such assistance is necessary in order for Baptists to make an impact on the nation's social needs.

"The Home Mission Board does not have the resources to employ enough people, even if we used every dime we had at our disposal, to greatly affect the needs of this nation," said Lewis.

However, he noted, Baptist center directors may be able to develop "functioning, loving and caring ministry units" that can significantly impact the nation's pressing social needs.

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Unreached peoples:  
missions' last frontier

By Erich Bridges

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TEHRAN, Iran (BP)--It was a slow news day, so the TV networks picked up a story from the long, faceless Iran-Iraq war: the near destruction of a Kurdish village.

Who are the Kurds? They are an ancient, close-knit, fiercely independent tribal mountain people, possibly descended from the Medes of Old Testament times. Most of them live in areas now recognized as parts of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria and the Soviet Union. They lost control of their homeland, Kurdistan, when maps of the Middle East were redrawn after World War I.

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The Kurds number about 24 million people -- the world's largest nationality without a nation. They also may be the largest single people-group virtually untouched by Christianity.

Nearly all the Kurds are Sunni Muslims; probably no more than a few hundred are Christians. A Kurdish translation of the New Testament was completed in 1872, but it is practically unavailable where most Kurds live. Kurdish Christian broadcasts and Christian literature do not exist. All five countries where they live are closed to missionaries.

Although numerous, the Kurds are only one of thousands of distinct ethnolinguistic people groups in the world. An ethnolinguistic group is a people tied together by name, language, race, heritage, culture and sometimes geography, though many groups extend across national boundaries.

Among the world's 5.1 billion people, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board researchers have identified as many as 11,500 ethnolinguistic groups. Information about each group can be found in the board's computerized World Evangelization Database. Of that number, researchers say some 2,000 people groups, plus more than 1,000 closed cities and 30 countries -- representing a total of 1.3 billion people -- are largely unevangelized by any acceptable definition. That's more than one of every four people on earth.

Narrowing further, research reveals as many as 500 of those people groups are totally unevangelized. That means "No Christian disciples, no churches, no missions, no missionaries, no evangelists, no visiting evangelists, no radio, no television, no Bible, no portion of the Bible," says David Barrett, British missionary researcher and editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia, who is working with Foreign Mission Board strategists. "And they continue in that state from one year to the next."

The modern missionary movement first docked at the great coastal cities. From there it moved inland. But to finish evangelizing the world, a "third wave" of Christian workers must reach the one-fourth of humanity still untouched by missions. And to reach the unreached peoples, Christians must understand who they are, where they live and why they remain strangers to the gospel.

National borders mean little to many of these people. They have seen their historic homelands divided and subdivided by international politics, wars, and the rise and fall of empires.

"The emergence of political nations is a fairly recent historical phenomenon," explains David Garrison of the Foreign Mission Board. "Oftentimes these artificial political boundaries imposed from the West completely disregarded ancient demographic ties of race, language, culture and religion. Since the collapse of Western colonial power after World War II, these contrived nations have begun to unravel like cheap woven cloth."

The same could happen in the future among the increasingly restive peoples of the Soviet Union and its satellites, experts say.

"What does this mean for Christian missions?" Garrison asks. "It may mean we need to readjust the lenses through which we view the world. Instead of clinging to colonial models of national boundaries, we should see the peoples of the world as they see themselves, as distinct ethnic and linguistic people groups.

Unreached peoples can be found throughout the world, but most of the larger groups live behind political, religious or geographical barriers, such as those erected by communist countries and Islamic states, where the ruling ideologies regard Christianity and general openness to the outside world as a threat.

The Kurds fit that profile. Other examples include:

-- The Sindhi people of southern Pakistan and western India. Size: 13.8 million. Most are Muslim; some are Hindu. Christians: 0.01 percent of the population. A complete Sindhi Bible was published in 1954, but no known ethnic Sindhi churches exist in Pakistan.

-- The Zhuang people of southern China. Size: 14 million, the largest minority ethnic group in the country. They have no Bible, New Testament or Scripture portion in their dialect.

-- The Uzbeks of central Asia, mostly in the Soviet Union and Afghanistan and a few in China and Mongolia. Size: 14.6 million. They are the largest non-European group and third-largest nationality in the Soviet Union. They are almost entirely Muslim, with older practices of shamanism, witchcraft and magic mixed in. Known Christian believers: 10.

Political and cultural barriers have stymied Christian outreach to such peoples. But mission researchers also point to self-inflicted wounds among Christians themselves: ignorance, parochialism, lack of cooperation, a sense of helplessness, stubborn reliance on traditional methods that won't work in restricted areas and inequities in distribution of mission resources.

Still, the vision and desire to reach all the world, not just the "open" parts of it, have been around since the beginning of the Christian mission. "Anybody who reads a bit of church history can see that it's always been there," says Barrett. "Perhaps it hasn't been articulated to the same degree, and people didn't use computers to compile lists of peoples and show what needs to be done, but it's been there."

In recent years, valuable contributions to understanding the task of reaching all peoples have been made by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, World Vision's Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, the U.S. Center for World Mission and others, including Barrett.

What has been lacking until now is accurate, reliable information that all evangelical mission groups can use to determine strategy and take action. The advent of the information age and the personal computer is changing that. And Southern Baptists -- with research data, increasingly comprehensive strategies and the willingness to share them with others through computer networking -- are emerging as players in the global evangelization movement.

The Foreign Mission Board is spearheading ongoing efforts to link up with world Baptists and other Christian groups committed to fulfilling Christ's Great Commission to carry the gospel to all people. This year the board is exploring strategies to reach 25 unevangelized groups, six restricted countries and unreached people groups in 50 countries where Southern Baptist missionaries or overseas Baptists already work. Thousands of other Christian mission agencies have their own contributions to make.

Southern Baptists' Bold Mission Thrust and 30 or more similar plans under way in the Christian world are aimed at achieving world evangelization by the end of this century. Barrett has identified about 700 earlier plans that have failed since the time of Christ.

Yet despite the vastness of today's population and the challenge of reaching the thousands of unreached peoples, those who understand the task believe it is now actually possible -- if Christians are willing to work together.

The "third wave" of Christian missions could be the final one.

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

#### Analysis

What is evangelization?  
Christians need answer

By Erich Bridges

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--If today's Christians really want to evangelize the whole world, they need a common understanding of what evangelization means.

Jesus Christ left this challenge to the church: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ..." (Matthew 28:19) During nearly 20 centuries since, Christians have debated what he meant and proposed hundreds of plans for carrying out his command.

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His first century disciples, once they understood the gospel was intended for all mankind and not the Jews alone, shook much of the known world with the power of their preaching. But the Emperor Constantine, who institutionalized Christianity in the Roman Empire by legalizing it in A.D. 313, took a different tack. He forced his subjects to be baptized. So did Justinian and Charlemagne, on pain of death for refusing. The Roman Catholic Church followed a tragically similar course during the Crusades and the tyranny of the Inquisition.

Evangelization by force, most believers hope, is a thing of the past. The missionary movement of the last two centuries has greatly advanced the proclamation of the gospel through love and good works, not coercion. But "to evangelize," although it is the chief task of the church in the world, remains one of the most misunderstood and ill-defined verbs in the Christian vocabulary.

Missionary researcher David Barrett traces the long, fascinating history of the word "euangelizo" and its cognates from the Greek Old Testament to the present day in his book "Evangelize! A Historical Survey of the Concept," published by New Hope Press of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union. In English alone, Barrett reports, more than "300 different definitions of the concept 'evangelize' have been proposed in print, using vastly differing terminology and employing over 700 different terms or synonyms."

The long theological debate among Catholics, mainline Protestants and evangelicals about the nature of evangelization is not likely to be settled anytime soon. But Barrett demonstrates that even evangelical, missionary Christians who agree on the necessity of evangelizing the world have failed to reach consensus on what evangelization means.

In essence, two distinct understandings of evangelization have developed during the last century, as illustrated by the two definitions of "evangelize" in the 1986 edition of Webster's New World Dictionary: to preach the gospel to and to convert to Christianity.

Evangelical Christians have generally divided into these two camps. One understands "evangelize" to mean the clear preaching, proclamation or announcement of the gospel to all people, whether or not the invitation to believe is accepted or rejected. The other holds that evangelization includes not only proclamation but the positive response and salvation of listeners, followed by baptisms, church starting, discipleship training and a whole range of other Christian activity.

Southern Baptists are members of both camps, sometimes simultaneously. The denomination's Bold Mission Thrust challenge of 1976, which has guided its mission efforts in the years since, stated " ... that every person in the world shall have opportunity to hear the gospel in the next 25 years ... (and) understand the claim Jesus Christ has on their lives."

Yet Southern Baptist missionaries are involved in far more than direct evangelism alone. The Foreign Mission Board stresses "evangelism that results in churches" -- strong indigenous churches that multiply the message -- along with a wide variety of supportive and compassionate ministries.

Regardless of how Christians define evangelization, they still have a duty not only to "evangelize the world and all its populations but also to win them, build them into churches, then minister to their needs to the fullest extent," Barrett observes. "But to undertake the whole task of Christian global missions properly, and to be faithful to Christ's Great Commission, we need to understand clearly what the component we call 'evangelize' means."

Why is some kind of consensus among "Great Commission" Christians essential? Because the lack of it has contributed to the collapse of their past attempts at cooperation, Barrett contends. He compares this breakdown to the failure of the human race to feed its starving millions, despite the existence today of the technology, resources and food to end hunger.

Both of these "global failures," he writes, "have resulted from absence of any clear idea of what it means to reach every soul on earth, absence of any all-embracing global strategy, absence of the ability to match up needs and resources, and absence of any serious attempt to grapple with the logistics required."

Meanwhile 1.3 billion people -- one-fourth of the world's total population -- are not evangelized by any acceptable definition of the term. The vast majority are members of unreached people groups or citizens of highly restricted countries and cities. Another 2.1 billion people have had an opportunity in one way or another to hear and respond to the gospel but remain non-Christian. The remaining third of the population -- 1.7 billion people -- claims some form of Christianity.

Those who have heard and rejected still need to be challenged with the gospel, as well as large numbers of people who have adopted the Christian religion without personally committing themselves to Christ.

But the 1.3 billion people in the first group have had no opportunity to hear about Christ, much less accept or reject him. Christians cannot claim to be evangelizing the world without reaching that one-fourth of humanity.

Mission strategists are not pressing the notion of a wholesale transfer of existing missionary programs from relatively evangelized areas to unreached peoples and places. What they are calling for is a more equitable distribution of total evangelization resources.

Something is wrong, they suggest, when Christians continue to pour new missionaries and money into countries where the gospel is readily available through strong local churches, Scripture and literature distribution, broadcasts and the like, when whole populations in other places have had no real opportunity to hear of Christ and his message.

"Each year hundreds of mission bodies and service agencies open up new work in relatively easy areas, in most cases already heavily overworked and overevangelized," Barrett observes. "The tragedy is that in doing so they imagine that they are rapidly completing the task of world evangelization."

If mission decision makers take such thinking seriously, revolutionary changes are on the horizon for the evangelical mission movement.

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Northeast moves closer  
to educational goal

By Lee Hollaway

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PITTSBURGH (BP)--Members of the Southern Baptist Northeast Task Team on Theological Education heard progress reports on the first two educational centers in their area and elected new leadership during their fall meeting in Pittsburgh.

Applications have been filed with state agencies in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts to offer the Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Christian Education degrees through the centers to be set up in Pittsburgh and Boston, announced Willis Bennett, provost at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Pending approval, the centers will begin operation in the fall of 1989, Bennett said.

The presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention's six seminaries have designated Southern Seminary as the lead seminary to work with the Northeast team in opening the Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry.

The task team is made up of representatives of the Baptist state conventions of New England, New York, Pennsylvania/South Jersey, Maryland/Delaware and the District of Columbia.

The Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry is a joint project of the task team, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the six seminaries. Doran C. McCarty coordinates the project as part of his assignment as executive director of the convention's Seminary External Education Division.

David D'Amico, executive director of the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, was elected task team chairperson. He assumes a role performed for the past two years by Larry Martin, executive director of the Greater Boston Baptist Association.

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Introduced as director of the Pittsburgh center was Wilmer Bennett, a retired school administrator from Washington. Bennett and his wife, Miriam, will work with the center as Mission Service Corps volunteers.

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Women in Ministry names 1st  
man to steering committee

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MCLEAN, Va. (BP)--The Southern Baptist Women in Ministry steering committee has named the first man in its five-year history to serve on the committee.

Edgar Tanner, coordinator of field supervision at Houston (Texas) Baptist University, was elected to fill a one-year term created by the resignation of Isabel Austin of Washington. The steering committee met in mid-October in McLean, Va.

Other steering committee members were elected during the organization's annual meeting this past June in San Antonio, Texas. Tanner received the highest number of votes beyond those selected to serve and, therefore, was the next choice, Women in Ministry leaders said.

He will join the 20-member committee to carry on the business of the organization between annual sessions, to plan annual meeting programs and to propose plans for the future of the organization.

"I have great respect for Edgar Tanner and look forward to working with him," said Women in Ministry President Betty McGary, minister to adults at South Main Baptist Church in Houston. "Obviously, as the first man to serve on the steering committee, he is a pioneer. But Southern Baptist Women in Ministry is an organization for professional women in ministry and their supporters.

"Edgar is one of many men who feels deeply about the issue of full participation of women in the life of our denomination. He will be an asset to us."

Tanner was unavailable for comment.

In other business, the steering committee outlined plans for the group's annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., June 10-11, 1989. The theme for the meeting will be "Stories of Faith: A Rich Tapestry."

Topics for the two Saturday sessions and the Sunday morning session will be: "The Story," "My Story" and "Our Story."

The location for the meeting has not been determined.

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