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November 14, 1988

88-182

Koran can help Muslims  
understand Jesus, expert says

By Art Toalston

ROCKVILLE, Va. (BP)--The Koran itself says Jesus was "faultless."

Dudley Woodberry, a Christian expert on Islam, thinks that claim and other verses from Islam's holy book are "stepping stones towards Christ" for Muslims.

Woodberry, assistant professor of Islamic studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif., led a workshop Nov. 7-11 at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's Missionary Learning Center in Rockville, Va.

Woodberry's Christian work overseas has included two years in Lebanon, five in Pakistan, three in Afghanistan and three in Saudi Arabia. He has written two books on Islam to be released during the coming year.

Muslims generally regard Mohammed as sinless, but the Koran itself does not, Woodberry noted. In several passages, Mohammed is told to seek forgiveness for sin -- "sins of the past and those to come," as one verse puts it.

But Jesus, who is counted with several Old Testament figures as an Islamic prophet, is described as faultless in the Koran's 19th chapter, Woodberry said. The specific verse varies in different systems used for dividing the Koran's 114 chapters. Chapters in the Koran are called "suras."

He cited sura 3, verse 49, in the Koran as another verse affirming Jesus' uniqueness. It says Jesus gave sight to the blind, healed lepers and raised the dead. The Koran attributes no such miracles to Mohammed, although Muslims generally believe he performed miracles. They also regard the revelation of the Koran to Mohammed over a 22-year period as miraculous, Woodberry said.

In sura 10, verse 19, Jesus is called "the word of God." The Arabic language of the verse seems to mean that God created Jesus by speaking his creative word into Mary's womb, Woodberry said.

Although not in the Koran, two other passages in authoritative Islamic writings assert that every human is "touched" by Satan at birth except for Jesus and the Virgin Mary, he added.

Other Koranic verses describe Jesus as "a statement of the truth," and "a sign." Muslim tradition teaches that a sign of the approaching day of judgment will be Jesus' bodily return to earth, he said. Muslims believe Jesus will face death and that he and all other people will be resurrected for the judgment, he noted.

Three verses in the Koran also affirm the Bible, Woodberry said. In sura 3, verse 2, Mohammed is told that the Koranic revelation confirms "what was already present, as he (God) revealed the Torah and gospel before." In sura 10, verse 94, Mohammed is counseled to resolve any doubts by asking "those who read the Scriptures before you."

Such Koranic passages can help Christians who encounter Muslims to "start on common ground before we get to those very crucial areas where we differ," Woodberry said.

Three Koranic verses generally have been interpreted as meaning that the Bible has been corrupted, he said. The Koran denies that anyone could be the Son of God and denies that Jesus was crucified. Sura 4, verse 157, says Christ only "appeared" to have been crucified.

And Mohammed's centrality in Islam, Woodberry said, arises from numerous Koranic references to him, including the distinction of being the final prophet or "the seal of the prophets." Over the course of several centuries after Mohammed's death in A.D. 632, Muslims intensified their reverence for him largely as a reaction to Jesus' centrality in Christianity, the professor said.

Various dynamics have spurred Muslims to embrace Christ as the Son of God, Woodberry said. In a few instances, Muslims have been convinced simply by the references to Christ in the Koran. One underground group of Christians in Africa traces its start to this kind of realization, he reported.

Some Muslims compare Mohammed to Christ and turn to Christ. "Mohammed was a man of great stature," Woodberry said. "Yet he was a very warlike person who fought, raided caravans, even raided one caravan in a sacred month when even pagan Arabs would not raid caravans. He killed a poet who wrote sarcastic poems about him.

"When you compare this with Jesus Christ in the gospels, who was sinless and said to turn the other cheek, and when you see the beauty of the Sermon on the Mount and other teachings of our Lord, it becomes rather obvious that Jesus is far more than a prophet."

Numerous Muslims embrace Christ after visions and dreams, he said, noting dreams were a phenomenon he noticed during two years of gathering case studies of Muslim conversions.

In Afghanistan, for example, a Muslim recounted a vision of a man in white standing at a fork in the road saying, "Go this way; don't go that way." The Muslim felt he should ask a Christian about the vision, and he readily embraced the Christian's interpretation: John the Baptist was pointing him to Jesus.

A young Muslim woman in the Middle East embraced Christianity after seeing stars in the sky take the shape of a cross.

And many Muslims come to Christ in the midst of a personal crisis. "Because Jesus is considered the miracle prophet, Muslims are quite happy to have Christians pray for them when they are sick or in difficult circumstances," Woodberry said. "They may even be happy for Christians to pray in Jesus' name."

In seeking to spread the gospel among Muslims, Christians "have to win the right to be heard" because of centuries of hostility between the two faiths, Woodberry stressed. Outreach "has to be based on the fact that we have become genuine friends, and we really are willing to share our lives with them, whether or not they become Christians."

Christians must be willing to receive from Muslims, most of whom come from cultures placing a high premium on hospitality, he added.

In referring to the Koran, Christians should be careful to say, "The Koran says ..." and not "Mohammed said ..." Muslims believe the Koran is the actual speech of God, he explained.

And Christians should remember "there is a whole spectrum of Muslims. We see only one part of the spectrum in the militant activists on our television screens," Woodberry said. "There are also extremely pious, gentle Muslims."

By developing such awarenesses, he concluded, Christians may find many opportunities to share with Muslim friends "how our Christian faith helps us handle problems or how we feel the presence of God in trying times -- and then build from there."

Missionaries carry cross  
in Utah's land of spires

By Mark Wingfield

PROVO, Utah (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries serving in the Utah Valley carry the cross in a land of spires.

The valley is the heart of Mormon country, a stronghold for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormon settlers risked their lives crossing the Rocky Mountains to settle the area.

Churches now dot the landscape of a dozen small communities around Provo. But spires, not crosses, pierce the sky from their steeples.

That's a subtle distinction not everyone would notice. However, Southern Baptist home missionary Ron Smith says it symbolizes the struggle he faces.

"We're dealing with people who think they're saved but who don't know who Jesus Christ is," he says, explaining that the crucifixion of Christ is not central to Mormon theology, as it is for Baptists.

Mormonism teaches that Jesus is the son of God and that Satan is his half-brother, Smith says. Jesus' death was sufficient to cover only some sins, according to Mormonism.

Nearly 90 percent of the valley's 240,000 residents are members of the Mormon Church. One survey found only 2,200 Christians, less than 1 percent of the population.

The valley holds more than 400 wards, or congregations, of the Mormon Church and less than two dozen evangelical Christian churches. Some towns have no evangelical witness.

Payson, a town of 6,000 people, has 15 Mormon wards -- one within walking distance of every home. It also has two small evangelical Christian churches, one of them a Baptist chapel where Southern Baptist missionary Don Carrothers is pastor.

Carrothers and Smith are church planters, although a more appropriate title would be church re-planters. Like the rugged mountain terrain, the dominant Mormon culture forms hard soil for growing new Baptist churches, they say.

In less than a year, Smith and his wife, Fern, have breathed new life into First Baptist Church of Pleasant Grove. The 30-year-old church had dwindled to four members but now averages 25 in worship.

In the same amount of time, Carrothers and his wife, Marinell, have begun to grow the Baptist chapel in Payson. The work has been going on for seven years, with rollercoaster success. Attendance averages 18 now, a good number for the area.

Although the numbers appear low, members show high commitment, the pastors say. But bucking the accepted pattern and attending a non-Mormon church requires strong conviction.

"Nobody comes to our church to gain status in the community," Carrothers says.

He has scheduled four appointments with the president of the local Chamber of Commerce to inquire about joining. Each time the president has been unable to attend.

Such difficulties are the result of zealous individuals rather than organized persecution by the Mormon Church, reports Bruce Gardner, director of missions for the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention.

"It's not the kind of situation where they catch you and beat you up in the alley," he says. "People do not know us. They're suspicious of outsiders with religions they've never heard of."

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"The whole mentality and approach to life is in a different dimension," adds John Meador, pastor of First Baptist Church in Provo for 10 years. Meador moved to Utah from Oklahoma. His church sponsors the chapel in Payson.

Other than the Middle East, Utah is the most difficult Baptist mission field in the world, Meador claims: "The question out here is not, 'Should Christians go to dances?' but 'Who is Jesus Christ?' That's a major question, even on the third- and fourth-grade level."

Smith and Carrothers use Bible studies, social work and community involvement to address those questions in their communities. Some people who will not attend a non-Mormon church will attend a Bible study. Others just need the assurance that Baptists have come to town to stay.

Both missionaries also attempt to minister to segments of the population not touched by the Mormon Church. Smith recently began a mission among poor Hispanic farm workers.

The Mormon Church has an extensive social program but gives assistance only to church members in good standing. Migrant farm workers fall far short of the qualifications, Smith says.

Through the food pantry of the Pleasant Grove church, Smith has given the workers food, clothes, beds and Spanish-language New Testaments.

This illustrates a point Gardner makes about Utah: "Mormons are not the only ones who need Christ here. We're here to spread the gospel to anyone we can get to listen."

By traditional standards, Smith has six baptisms to report. That's not a denominational record, but it represents the first baptisms reported from Pleasant Grove in eight years.

More importantly, Smith says, people are being disciplined and learning how to live the Christian life. Also, the town has a positive impression of the Baptist church for perhaps the first time.

"From the secular point of view, our work may not be worthwhile yet," Carrothers explains. "But Southern Baptists are being faithful to the Great Commission to reach every person with the gospel."

"We're called to make disciples in all the world. Numbers are important because they represent people, but I'm glad we haven't put a stipulation on how big a place has to be before we send missionaries."

Even without many visible results, the Smiths and Carrotherses stick to their call because the need is so great.

Smith dreams of the day crosses will replace spires on every church in Pleasant Grove. "My vision is that every building that's called a church will become a church of Jesus Christ," he says.

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BP photo mailed to state Baptist papers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Former Mormon faced difficulty  
and joy in professing Christ

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press  
11/14/88

PROVO, Utah (BP)--"Dad said I could have committed murder and he would have liked that better than me becoming a Christian," former Mormon Ruth Cox recalled.

Conversion costs former Mormons like Cox dearly. In small, Mormon-dominated communities around Provo, Utah, Mormons who leave the fold likely will be cut off from family, friends and jobs.

However, Cox said that's a price she and other converts gladly pay to get answers to the spiritual questions they've carried for years--more--

Cox was raised in Utah in a Mormon family and is a descendant of Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith.

Her testimony of accepting Christ at age 35 is typical of many Mormons who join evangelical churches. It also illustrates the challenge small Southern Baptist churches face in an area dominated by thriving congregations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

As a 15-year-old, Cox attended a worship service at First Baptist Church in Provo that would change her life 20 years later. She was the babysitter for a Baptist family who lived across the street.

When the neighbor child was to sing in church one Sunday night, Cox reluctantly agreed to attend. The "warm and friendly atmosphere" stuck in her memory for the next two decades.

Cox married, had children and went on with her life in the Mormon church. When marital problems struck, she determined to solve them by becoming a better Mormon, one eligible to enter the sacred temple with her husband.

She began to read the Bible and the Book of Mormon and noticed inconsistencies, she remembered. But no one would answer her questions, she said, noting she was told not to question church authority.

Specifically, Cox wanted to know why the Bible didn't prophesy the coming of Joseph Smith, since it obviously foretold the coming of Christ, she explained.

At the height of her frustration, Cox remembered the Baptist church and warily attended a Sunday service. "I was scared to death," she said. "I sat on the next-to-the-back row so I could get out the door when the devils starting coming toward me." Her strict Mormon education taught her that all non-Mormon churches were of the devil.

The devils didn't catch her the first time, and neither did the pastor. Cox rushed out the door after the service before Pastor John Meador could greet her.

Five visits later, Meador finally beat her to the door. She flatly refused his offer for prayer or a visit.

However, with each passing month, Cox became more interested in what she saw at the Baptist church. She checked out every activity, including a Wednesday business meeting.

"That was the first time I had ever seen a church tell its people where the money was going," she said. "It was a wonderful experience."

Six months after her first visit, Cox left a Sunday evening service in turmoil. She drove to a nearby lake and sat in her car. "I didn't even know if God was still alive," she said.

Even so, she cried out to God in desperation, "If you really can do what you say, go ahead and save me."

There was no thunder or lightning, and she went home thinking her prayer had fallen on deaf ears. But when she got home, she found her Bible, opened it and understood it for the first time. "It was like it was alive for the first time," she said. "I was so thirsty, I devoured it."

The next Sunday, Cox literally ran down the aisle of First Baptist Church to make her decision public. The seed planted 20 years earlier had finally blossomed.

Cox is now secretary at First Baptist Church. Her children and mother have been converted through her witness.

In retrospect, Cox said, "I'm convinced God's Scripture is right when it says, 'My word will not return to me void.'"

Former Buddhist  
preaches now

By Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr.

VENICE, La. (BP)--Thy Sith took a giant step from being a priest in his native Buddhist religion in Cambodia to become a Baptist minister of the gospel in Venice, La.

Speaking at his recent ordination service, Thy said the change to Christianity was difficult because Buddhism is based on ruling others. Christianity teaches serving others.

He serves a congregation of about 45 Cambodians in Venice, nearly 70 miles south of New Orleans, where the locals say Louisiana begins.

As former residents vacated the community that was based on the oil industry, Cambodians moved in to work as fishermen, said Hebert Nettleton, pastor of First Baptist Church of Venice, sponsor of the mission.

"They have found a home-away-from-home," Nettleton explained.

Churches in Plaquemines Baptist Association sponsored an outreach ministry providing food and clothing for people in need. Cambodians responded to Baptists' offer of help and began to attend worship and other meetings.

Bibles in the Cambodian language were located in California and brought to Venice. "When the people could read it in their language, they began to understand," said Nettleton.

Thy was converted in a Thai refugee camp. He later was a Bible teacher in the Koa-I-Dang Camp in Thailand.

Following his arrival in the United States seven years ago, he was assistant mission pastor for the Cambodian Baptist Fellowship of Lynn, Mass., before moving with his family to Venice.

Bob Ellzey, chairman of deacons and member of First Baptist Church, surveyed the community and found 80 Cambodian families. The congregation was encouraged to pursue mission work with them, co-sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Louisiana Baptist missions division, with Thy as pastor.

Sok Doeung, Cambodian pastor in Dallas and Cambodian ministry consultant for the Home Mission Board, said, "Thy Sith is showing he is good fruit, and God will use him more."

Doeung's sermon taught that "ordination is for one to be appointed a servant, not one to rule."

As part of the ordination sermon and charge to the minister, Doeung extended an invitation for others to accept Christ. Sok Or, a fisherman living in Venice for about a year, made a profession of his faith.

Thy holds Bible study in various homes and has Bible study in his trailer for fishermen when they come by from offshore fishing.

Since January 1988, Thy has led worship at First Baptist Church. The Cambodian group meets in the fellowship hall at the same time the First Baptist congregation meets in the auditorium.

Thy has no plans to return to Cambodia but hopes "Christianity can be taken there," he said.

Filipino lives dream  
as American minister

By Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr.

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--Ed Moncada left the Philippines for the United States to "live out the American dream."

Instead he found the "good life of Christianity," he said.

Now he is pastor of two New Orleans Filipino missions here where a census estimate puts the Filipino population at more than 10,000.

He credits the warmth of Baptist students at the Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau with becoming a Christian.

His family moved from the "oppression of Marcos' dictatorship" in 1970 to join other family members in St. Louis, to become part of the American dream.

That dream meant to become a doctor, lawyer, business leader or anything that would lead to wealth, he said.

"I was basically a loner when I entered college. When I was invited to attend BSU (Baptist Student Union) events, I was afraid to go because my family was Catholic. But after I attended, I found a warmth there," Moncada recalled.

He credited Thomas Messer, recently retired BSU director at Southeast Missouri State, with demonstrating the effectiveness of a Christian leader. "When I decided to enter New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, he helped me receive financing from the Messer Scholarship Fund at the seminary," Moncada said.

After his conversion to Christianity, he became BSU director of international ministries. "We had the largest number of international students for three of the four years I worked with them," he said.

Before he and his wife, Angela, a native of Perkins, Mo., were married, they realized during a conference in 1982 "we wanted to serve the Lord."

They were married in 1984, and during a student meeting in Nashville a year later made the commitment to what "we felt would probably be foreign missions."

After graduating from New Orleans Seminary in 1988 and searching for direction, a friend asked if he had thought of ministering to Filipinos in New Orleans.

When he learned a Filipino family was in need and no one was available to help, he volunteered. The result is that Moncada started a Bible study that has grown into a small congregation.

Another ministry group was established in New Orleans near the French Quarter. "A widow and her family needed comforting following the husband's death. A teenage son received the Lord early," said Moncada.

"I put my seminary discipleship training to work, became their friend, and things happened. After prayers, jobs appeared. The mother accepted Christ, and other family members began to attend Bible study."

Keeping close to their former culture is important, he said: "This is why I can minister more effectively than a native American. One person said a church had tried to minister to her for three or four years, but until someone like me came along who knew the culture she would not respond."

As he works with Filipinos in New Orleans Moncada also learns from them of the Philippine culture, he said.

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His parents, who still live in St. Louis, divorced "because they were looking for the American dream and grew apart." Now his mother and sister are Christians. He hopes to see his father, a medical technician, make a profession of faith in Christ.

Ames Boulevard Baptist Church in New Orleans sponsors the mission. Also participating is the Baptist Association of Greater New Orleans and the Louisiana Baptist Convention's language missions department.

The mission will soon share a new home with the Spanish Baptist congregation.

"Mabuhay in Our Lord's Precious Name" is a term Moncada uses. "'Mabuhay' is a Philippine word meaning 'long live,' a word used during World War II," he said.

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Louisiana, Korea Baptists  
join efforts in evangelism

By Oscar Hoffmeyer Jr.

Baptist Press  
11/14/88

ALEXANDRIA, La. (BP)--More than 1,620 Korean Baptists have been trained in Lay Evangelism Schools during the past year as part of Louisiana Baptists' mission partnership, reported Calvin Cantrell, Louisiana Baptist associate evangelism director.

In addition, more than 1,740 professions of faith in Christ have been made during church-centered evangelism crusades in 40 churches, he said.

Louisiana Baptists also have sent teams to assist with teaching conversational English and developing budgeting strategy. The two Baptist groups have a three-year partnership ending in 1990.

Cantrell and Grady Welch, Louisiana Baptist stewardship director, and team members recently returned from Korea after two weeks of meetings.

"Our strategy is to train church lay members in witness training followed by crusades," Cantrell said. "We give them an effective example of witness training and help them apply these principles in their communities."

"Our purpose is to present the Cooperative Program (unified budget) concept so they can develop a total program for their Baptist work, including foreign missions," Welch added.

Korean Baptists are developing a national convention that includes nearly 1500 churches. No Chang U is the executive director.

In 1986, 80 churches gave to the Korean Baptist Convention budget, Welch said. By 1987, that number had increased to 150 churches, and this year 250 churches participated. In two years, they have increased financial contributions 80 percent for the national program.

During the recent trip, a Louisiana team held seminars at Ok Chun Retreat Center for 82 representatives from the convention's 51 associations. "During this three-day seminar, we presented the concept of financing their programs beginning with the local church, through the association to the national convention," Welch said.

In 1989, Welch and Louisiana teams will hold seminars in 19 locations for pastors, church treasurers and finance committee members teaching budget preparation using the Cooperative Program concept.

A Louisiana Baptist team went to 20 Korean churches in February when they trained 823 persons in Lay Evangelism Schools, Cantrell said. A total of 125 people made professions of faith in Christ during evangelistic services. In May teams went to the same 20 churches for evangelistic crusades, where 995 professions of faith were reported.

Evangelism training was given to 800 people in August, when 198 people were converted. In October, 421 made professions of faith during crusades in the same 20 churches, Cantrell reported.

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Louisiana teams consisting of an evangelist and lay witnesses work with Korean Christians, he explained: "We will visit with them in their communities. They have found it effective for an American to accompany them into homes of their families, relatives and friends. Many people are won during home visits."

Ten Louisiana teams are scheduled in February to lead evangelism training in 10 Korean cities to certify Korean pastors to teach evangelism strategy in their own churches.

This preparation is for crusades in May 1989, when 50 teams from Louisiana and 50 teams from four other states are scheduled to lead crusades in 500 churches in 10 major Korean cities, said Charles Lowry, Louisiana Baptist church programs director and co-director of the partnership program.

Before 1990, the two groups will have completed seminars and conferences on Sunday school techniques, family ministries, evangelism, education and other church programs, Lowry said.

Louisiana Baptists have been in mission partnership with Korean Baptists since 1970, when they participated in major cities crusades. In 1980, they had the church-related crusades. In 1985 Louisiana Baptists assisted with preparation of curriculum materials in the Korean language, along with evangelistic services in churches.

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Magician has no illusions  
about call to ministry

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press  
11/14/88

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Although he makes his living by the sleight-of-hand, Bruce Chadwick says he has no illusion about his call to the ministry.

Chadwick is a magician who uses his talent to share the message of Jesus Christ.

His interest in magic began at age 8, when his father bought him a box of magic tricks for his birthday. He soon discovered a magic shop in his hometown of Midland, Texas.

Chadwick earned \$5 for his first performance when he was 10. Years later, he used his hocuspocus to finance two degrees from Baylor University.

He traces his call to a youth revival his junior year in high school, when he made a public decision to combine his magic skills and Christian witness.

"I came to the realization that God was directing me toward an evangelistic ministry in order to share Jesus Christ with other people," he says. "I knew that when I performed magic I had the audience in the palm of my hand, so I decided to try using some of my magic as illustration tools to enhance a verbal presentation of the gospel."

Chadwick felt led to seminary to further his education. He enrolled at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and earned a master of divinity degree in 1985.

"The evangelism courses at Southwestern were a great help to me," he says. "I keep my performances Christian-oriented as far as the places I perform."

Chadwick does two basic shows -- a one-person, 40-minute comedy stand-up show and a stage illusion extravaganza he calls "Theatre of Magic." The latter requires help from his wife, Frances, who doubles as his assistant. The stage show, designed for larger audiences, features live animals and incorporates classic illusion effects such as sawing a woman in half, the sword cabinet and, at times, floating a person in the air.

His approach to "gospel magic" is to entertain his audience with a good old-fashioned family magic show filled with humor, mystery and excitement. Once he has established rapport, he takes 10 to 15 minutes for a verbal presentation of the gospel, using magic tricks to illustrate his message.

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Chadwick admits he occasionally encounters people who are skeptical of mixing magic and evangelism. "But I really have very little difficulty with that," he adds. "Most people in America today differentiate the supernatural from magic tricks and illusions."

Magic is the art of illusion, he says: "In fact, sleight-of-hand is a better word to use in describing what I do. Magic tricks are similar to puzzles. There is always a rational explanation behind the secret of how any effect works."

Chadwick also builds illusion sets in a workshop behind his home. He's built 60 major stage illusions in the past three years for himself and for sale to other magicians, but he says performing is his first love.

And Chadwick is performing quite well as a leader in magicians' organizations. He is president of the Texas Association of Magicians and a member of the Fort Worth Magicians Club.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary

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CORRECTION: Please change the second paragraph of the 11/10/88 BP story titled "Low relief funds threaten children's vaccinations" to read:

But that program will come to a halt if relief giving through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board does not increase soon, officials predict.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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