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Accrediting agency delays
decision on Southeastern

By Marv Knox

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools has delayed until December its decision on continued accreditation of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Two accrediting agencies -- the Southern Association and the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada -- are investigating the Wake Forest, N.C., school following 16 months of controversy.

Conservative trustees changed the school's faculty-selection process during their October 1987 meeting, vesting more responsibility with the president and trustees.

President W. Randall Lolley and seven other administrators subsequently resigned. Lolley cited the policy change -- which he said ensures that only biblical inerrantists can be added to the faculty and disallows faculty leadership in selecting new teachers -- as the reason.

Consequently, the Association of Theological Schools sent investigators to Southeastern in March 1988. A Southern Association fact-finding committee followed in September.

The initial Association of Theological Schools report on Southeastern called the seminary "a very troubled campus and divided institution." It added, "The provisions and principles internal to an academic institution have been severely threatened and in some instances abrogated."

The Southern Association committee's report said Southeastern does not conform to some accreditation standards in matters of faculty selection, academic freedom, and organization and administration. And while it did not cite violations regarding the effectiveness of the institution, it raised "serious questions" concerning that issue.

A committee of trustees has responded in writing to both reports, dealing with the criticisms "point by point, paragraph by paragraph," said trustee Chairman Robert D. Crowley.

The Southern Association announced its intention to defer action on Southeastern until December in a letter to Southeastern President Lewis A. Drummond from James T. Rogers, executive director of the association's commission on colleges.

Rogers cited three reasons for the delay: the seminary's response to the association's fact-finding committee was not received until Dec. 10, the day the association's committee on criteria and reports met to review the situation; the seminary's response had not been reviewed by the entire board of trustees; and that response "contained a substantially different interpretation of the recent controversy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary from that indicated by the special (fact-finding) committee."

The Southern Association made two requests, Rogers' letter noted:

-- "That the institution develop a plan by July 1, 1989, which addresses the following areas of concern: the current image of the seminary, faculty involvement in the employment of other faculty members, perceptions of academic freedom and the role of the board of trustees in governance.

"This plan should seek to develop a more cooperative relationship among all parties on the campus and should be developed in the spirit of a self-study based on the principles of shared governance. The plan should address both the spirit and the content of the (association's) criteria" for accreditation.

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-- "That a (Southern Association) committee be appointed to review the institution's plan, visit the campus in the fall of 1989 to assess the seminary's environment and make recommendations to the institution and to the commission on colleges."

Drummond said of the Southern Association's plan of action: "I'm very gratified that they're giving us this extended period to meet their criteria, which we and the trustees fully intend to do.

"Our accreditation is as firm as it has always been, and we have ample time to satisfy the needs. We thank God for that."

Crowley expressed a similar opinion. "As I have said all along, I have never felt we were in danger of losing accreditation," he told Baptist Press. "The charges that have been made against us have been answered so thoroughly that there is no basis whatever of any citations or withdrawal of accreditation."

Rogers' letter revealed the Southern Association "recognized there was another side" of the issue, said Crowley, pastor of Montrose Baptist Church in Rockville, Md. The Southern Association fact-finding committee's report was offset by the trustee's report, resulting in the more balanced tone of Rogers' letter, he said.

"I believe the matter is essentially at rest," Crowley added. "We will certainly comply with the request of the Southern Association to give any information they desire and submit a report before July 1."

The seminary's faculty hopes to make progress in the coming months, said C. Michael Hawn, professor of church music and president of the Southeastern chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

The faculty has not yet seen a copy of the trustees' response to the Southern Association, Hawn said, noting, "We would need to see that document before we could respond fully."

But he added: "The faculty's hope is that this is a chance for us to seek reconciliation in a joint report. We would like to do that, but we would need to know what the trustees presented. We obviously have differences, but we do not know exactly what they told the Southern Association."

Asked for a response to Hawn's proposal for a joint report, Drummond said: "We surely want to work together. I'm not going to predict anything. It's basically a trustee matter, but I'm sure they will want input from all sources."

Crowley added: "I think it is extremely unfortunate that I hear that for the first time through the press. I would question the sincerity when I have to hear it for the first time through the press."

Crowley has authorized that the faculty be given copies of the trustee reports to both the Southern Association and the Association of Theological Schools. "I'm concerned there would be openness, that they have adequate opportunity to study our report and respond," he said.

Rogers told Baptist Press he feels good about the process. "We had a very fine committee that reviewed the operation in September," he said. "I had a great deal of confidence in the way the committee wrote their report and went about carrying out their responsibilities.

"We're dealing with facts that may be perceived differently by different groups. Our commission was not interested in getting into a theological debate, but to investigate and review issues that related directly to our criteria. The committee exercised great restraint."

The situation now is in Southeastern's hands, he added: "Responsibility is going to rest on their shoulders to review their operation in light of the criteria and ensure they are in compliance. We don't want to tell the institution how to conduct its affairs or what to do, but it's obvious there are violations and problems of morale on campus.

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"The bottom line is that we had identified what we see as problems and weaknesses and have given the institution time to address those in a collegial manner and a typical spirit of shared governance. That means people sitting down and talking and resolving problems."

Asked to predict if Southeastern might lose its accreditation, Rogers said: "I would like to think the best, to approach this in a positive way. From assurances we have received from the president and board members, I think the problems will be resolved."

Southeastern is in a similar relationship with the Association of Theological Schools, Drummond said: "We stay in communication and tell them how we're progressing. They won't meet until June. ATS has had their on-site committee, and the trustees have responded to them. We just stay in liaison with them, to tell them how we're progressing."

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Hunger gifts increase;
first time since 1985

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
1/26/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists in 1988 reversed a downward trend in giving to the denomination's program of world hunger ministries, according to figures released by the Southern Baptist Foreign and Home mission boards.

Southern Baptist contributions for domestic and foreign hunger last year reached \$9,009,764, representing an increase of about 1 percent over similar giving in 1987. It is also the third-largest amount ever given by Southern Baptists to hunger causes.

The figures do not reflect receipts for "general relief" at the Foreign Mission Board nor money given for hunger that were utilized in local Baptist churches, associations and state conventions.

In 1985, Southern Baptists gave a record \$11,830,146 to hunger causes. Giving dropped in 1986 to \$9,089,279 and then dipped in 1987 to \$8,931,339.

For 1988, the Foreign Mission Board reported receipts of \$7,629,452, an increase over 1987. Receipts for domestic hunger through the Home Mission Board were \$1,380,312 and continued a five-year trend of increases.

"The upswing in hunger contributions in the midst of declining giving across the convention signals that the hunger issue is a priority issue among Southern Baptists and that Southern Baptist have a growing confidence in the hunger ministries of our mission boards," said Robert Parham, associate director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, which coordinates education and action on hunger issues among Southern Baptists.

"Once again, the observance of World Hunger Day played a pivotal role in the amount of money Southern Baptists gave," Parham said. "More than 40 percent was contributed in the last quarter of 1988."

John Cheyne, director of the human needs department at the Foreign Mission Board, said the increase in giving from 1987 to 1988 is more significant than the figures show. The 1987 figure reflects a one-time \$1 million gift from one individual. Without that money, the decline from 1986 to 1987 would have been much greater, as would the increase from 1987 to 1988, he said.

Nathan Porter, national consultant for disaster relief, domestic hunger and migrant ministries with the Home Mission Board, said gifts to hunger programs "are extremely important because if the funds were not available many people would simply not be fed."

"These funds enable small churches, particularly in rural areas, who have no big budgets and no staff, to establish food pantries and food distribution systems," he said.

"But despite the importance of the giving and this increase, what we are able to do to fight hunger is still just a drop in the bucket because poverty and hunger in America have been increasing every year."

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Also, the Foreign Mission Board reported receipts for meeting human needs was up in 1988 over 1987. Receipts for "general relief" were \$733,095. Although general relief appropriations may be spent on hunger-related projects, general relief funds are applied most often to non-hunger-related efforts, such as the reconstruction of homes, churches and schools damaged by natural disasters.

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Southern Baptist rejects
'cultural conservatism'

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
1/26/89

WASHINGTON (BP)--A new political philosophy could alienate millions of evangelical Christians who became politically active during the last decade, warned a Southern Baptist who helped mobilize those Christians.

E.E. McAteer, who left a 28-year career with Colgate-Palmolive Co. to help shape the conservative Christian political movement, said he objects to "cultural conservatism" because it does not require its supporters to have a belief in God. Proponents of the philosophy run the risk of losing the Religious Right's support, he added.

In a mailing to about 400 people, McAteer -- a Southern Baptist layman from Memphis, Tenn. -- wrote: "I generally agree with and practice the philosophy of cultural conservatism, to a point. I firmly believe in coalition building to broaden the base of the conservative political movement in the United States.

"However, I submit that we must understand that the conservative political movement in America has its roots firmly planted in the Judeo-Christian ethic and that God is the center of this ethic. ... To embrace people who do not believe in God is morally wrong and will result in the building of a political tower of Babel."

But in a subsequent mailing, Paul Weyrich, a sponsor of cultural conservatism, said such a description is misleading.

Weyrich, director of the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, described the movement as committed to restoring Judeo-Christian values in every aspect of society. The suggestion "that cultural conservatism is some sort of godless philosophy or that those who support it consider God irrelevant to America's future" is wrong, he said.

"What I do say, however -- and perhaps this is the source of the misunderstanding -- is that I welcome the help of all people who reach the same moral conclusion even if they have not reached it on the basis of the faith," he wrote.

Weyrich, along with William S. Lind, director of the Institute for Cultural Conservatism, co-wrote the book "Cultural Conservatism, Toward a New National Agenda."

The Memphis Commercial Appeal quoted Weyrich, who did not return telephone calls from Baptist Press, as stating: "We don't require you to believe that this is God's revealed truth in order to work with us. All we require you to do to be a cultural conservative is acknowledge that traditional values are functional values and when you deviate from them, you destroy society."

McAteer, founder and president of the Religious Roundtable, told Baptist Press he fears the possibility of an attempt to use evangelical Christians for purely political purposes. His motivation -- and that of others within the Religious Right -- has been to return, retain and strengthen biblical morality in American society, he said, adding he believes others may be motivated more by politics.

"I did see some of these fellows, very frankly, just welcome us eagerly and enthusiastically -- that is the evangelical Christians -- into this movement," he said. "The people who were putting together the so-called New Right political movement in America knew there were Bible-believing people out there who wanted to retain their values in society. They knew there were a number of us out there, but they also were smart enough to know that we really didn't have any leadership in the political arena."

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Because the Religious Right's "narrow Christian views" have made some people uncomfortable, they may welcome a philosophy like cultural conservatism, McAteer said. "They could say," he explained, "'Well, we get the benefit of what the Christians are doing, but then we don't have to feel restricted by their narrow religious views.'"

Although public debate on the subject is in its infancy, McAteer said he thinks cultural conservatism will result in a controversy among people in the conservative political movement.

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Rogers resigns
Southern deanship

Baptist Press
1/26/89

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--William B. Rogers Jr., dean of the School of Christian Education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary since 1984, has resigned effective July 31 to return to full-time teaching duties at the Louisville, Ky., school.

Rogers, a native of Birmingham, Ala., came to the seminary in 1983 from the faculty of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Prior to his teaching career, Rogers was on ministerial staffs of First Baptist Church, Alexandria, Va.; Western Hills Baptist Church, Fort Worth, Texas; and First Baptist Church, Longview, Texas.

He is a graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Rogers will take a sabbatical leave before returning to the classroom as professor of the history and philosophy of Christian education.

Seminary Provost G. Willis Bennett said he expects a new dean to be presented for election by the seminary trustees at their April meeting.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is the second of a three-part series on child sex abuse.

Child abuse:
Breaking the silence

By Greg Warner

Baptist Press
1/26/89

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--For victims of child sex abuse, many of whom have been forced to suffer in silence by a society that ignores their plight, a hint of hope now glimmers.

Slowly, cautiously, society and some Christians are beginning to rethink their attitudes about the abused and the abusers, abuse workers say. They cite a new openness to discuss child molestation and offer help -- both intervention and prevention.

Among Southern Baptists, the "unmentionable sin" also is being discussed, at least in whispers. And evidence exists that Baptists are ready to hear about it: In a 1986 survey by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Southern Baptists ranked child abuse as their second highest moral concern, a mere 1 percentage point behind drug abuse.

Abuse expert Marie Fortune of Seattle credits sex victims themselves with bringing about the increased openness of the last decade. "The courage of survivors to come forward, even at great risk, has been a great help," says Fortune, a minister in the United Church of Christ and founding director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle.

Fortune, who has conducted workshops on abuse for the Florida Baptist Convention, notes Southern Baptists still are behind other denominations in dealing with the issue, however.

But Baptist social workers and counselors agree the problem of child sex abuse is affecting Baptists and their churches. More people will become aware of the problem, and be more willing to help, when they feel free to speak about it among other Christians, the specialists add.

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Baptists in Florida learned they are not exempt from the problem when a Jacksonville pastor went to prison last year after being arrested for soliciting sex from a boy. And a pastor in Delray Beach, Fla., has become involved in a court case after a teenager in the church told him the teen's adoptive father had molested him and his brothers.

Although these situations still are rare, abuse workers say they demonstrate that Christians are among both the abused and the abusers.

"When as many as one in three females is molested by age 18 and one in 10 males, then it's got to be in the church," says Brenda Forlines, director of church and community ministries for the Florida Baptist Convention. Forlines conducts workshops on sex abuse and spouse abuse, but only a handful of churches and associations in the state have participated, she says.

Libby Potts, who works on abuse issues for Texas Baptists, agrees the problem is real: "There's a lot of sexual abuse going on in our churches and families that is not talked about. In most situations, we don't create an environment in our churches that gives permission to families who are hurting to deal with this."

Texas Baptists are concentrating on prevention of child abuse rather than intervention, Potts says. By developing materials to teach nurturing skills to parents, they hope to keep some abuse from happening, she explains.

At the Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina, administrators are trying to sensitize staff members to potential child-abuse problems among the children, according to Robert Stump, director of social work. Still, some staff members are reluctant to discuss it, he adds, "They think a Christian doesn't have sex problems, therefore you don't have to talk about it."

Barry Jones, program administrator for the Florida Baptist Children's Homes, says he sees the effects of child sex abuse both in his private counseling of families and in working with residents of the homes.

One resident of the Florida Baptist Children's Homes recalls finding nude photographs of her older sister that had been taken by her mother and stepfather. When her mother later asked her to have similar photographs taken, she refused and left home.

She was placed in emergency foster care and later sent to the children's homes, where, she says, "I learned to trust people more than I ever had before."

Richard Ross, a youth ministry consultant at the Sunday School Board, says the effects of sexual abuse show up in Baptist youth groups. "You won't find any youth minister who will say the problem is overstated," says Ross, also a part-time youth minister in Nashville, Tenn.

Ross developed a 12-part series of cassette tapes for teenagers called "The 24-Hour Counselor" in which professional psychologists discuss sexual abuse and other sensitive topics, such as AIDS, suicide and pregnancy. Already the tapes are among the board's most popular products, he noted, indicating Baptist youth are confronting those issues.

Most abuse victims are not lucky enough to get help from Christians, however, observers say.

Liz Mattern works with an incest-survivors' group in Fort Myers, Fla. Herself a victim of abuse, she says many of the women who have come through the group found little help in church. As children, several had been molested by pastors -- one during baptism, Mattern says. As adults, some were exploited by Christian counselors, she adds.

Mattern's own tale of sexual abuse began at age 3. By the time she finished junior high, she had been abused by seven men, including family members. She says she had no conscious memory of the abuse for most of two decades until she saw a TV program about child sex abuse.

Afterwards, she felt "the only solution was clinging to the Lord," notes Mattern, 33, who had been a Christian since 17. "The thing that gave me the most courage and stamina was Scripture. I never felt condemnation from the Scripture, but always tenderness."

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But pastors accused her of being unforgiving of her abusers, prideful, at fault for the abuse, demon-possessed and lesbian, she reports. She warns victims not to accept all the "advice" offered by well-intentioned Christians.

Victims and their counselors say the "second abuse" victims get from judgmental Christians is more than insensitivity and ignorance. It is willful disbelief. People shocked by the horror stories look for reason to doubt -- even if it means blaming the victim.

Abuse counselor Fortune says she knows that response well: "None of us want to believe this ... But we've got to force ourselves to keep our eyes open to what people are telling us. These people are coming forward at great risk."

Fortune says she also believes the frequent stories of later exploitation at the hands of Christian counselors. The researcher, who is completing a book on ministerial misconduct, says no less than 10 percent of the clergy are sexually involved with their parishioners.

Christians wrongly blame childhood sex victims who continue to be victimized as adults, Fortune says: "When a child has been manipulated, the power of that offender carries over into adulthood. That is what prevents the person from doing anything about it. It's not something they can deal with alone."

Fortune recommends a three-pronged approach for Christians who want to help victims:

The pastoral response, she says, is to learn how to deal with victims and offenders, how to answer the victims' religious questions and how to find the available community resources.

The prophetic response, she adds, is to speak to the issue in the church, particularly from the pulpit, clearly indicating that sexual contact with children is inappropriate.

The preventive response, she notes, is to educate members about abuse, such as through premarital counseling for adults and Sunday school curriculum for children.

Mattern's advice for abuse victims is fivefold: "First, realize you're not alone. There are people who know what you're going through. Second, you have to get it out. You need to share it with someone that you know can be confidential. Third, get into the Bible. Look for loving Scriptures. Fourth, don't go back into denial. Allow yourself to experience your feelings and not deny them."

Finally, be patient: "It's a long process. Sometimes you wonder, 'Am I sentenced to this forever?' This happened to me when I was 3, and I still cry."

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Workgroup seeks
balanced growth

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
1/26/89

NASHVILLE (BP)--Almost two-thirds of the churches in the Southern Baptist Convention are plateaued or declining, and many pastors are seeking ways to renew growth in those churches, according to the chairman of a new interagency workgroup addressing the problem.

To stress balanced, biblical growth, a total growth plan will be introduced that includes contributions and strengths of all church programs, said D.G. McCoury, head of the workgroup and pastoral leadership consultant in the church administration department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

The group includes representatives from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Woman's Missionary Union, Brotherhood Commission and the Home Mission Board.

"With the Bold Mission Thrust Directions 2000 (evangelism/missions campaign) goals just before us, growth in all areas in the life of our churches is imperative if we are to accomplish our mission," he said. "Our workgroup is stressing biblical growth which includes evangelism, discipleship and missions.

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"Historically, when denominations turn inward to spend excessive amounts of time and energy on internal concerns, numerical and financial growth take a downward turn."

The goal of the workgroup is to have a denominational church growth system in place with resources available and field services planned by 1990, he said.

In the initial meeting of the group, Gary Cook, vice president for church program organizations at the Sunday School Board, said the denomination needs a "holistic church growth plan so pastors and other staff members can implement and experience growth in their churches."

"Southern Baptists historically have believed that church growth is more than getting a person down the aisle and baptized," Cook said. "We believe in a more holistic plan, that if the church is really growing, the person is also disciplined, assumes a leadership position, becomes a good steward and becomes mission minded."

In preparing for the coordinated growth effort, members of the workgroup heard about a plan that is being tested in several churches in the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention and that could become the basis for the conventionwide effort.

"We have been hearing requests for years from states wanting SBC agencies to get together on a coordinated approach to church growth," Cook said. "This plan could be the handle to do that."

"In these materials from Arizona, we saw the potential to meet a need. It encourages me that this idea was started in a new-work area where the grassroots work is going on."

Cook said he hopes the plan "will provide the tools for pastors in small churches, especially, who have decided for one reason or another that they cannot grow."

McCoury also explained that the workgroup would use information from research to provide some direction in the development of materials and implementation of plans.

Several characteristics of growing churches in metropolitan areas came to light in a recent survey from the research services department of the Sunday School Board.

Kirk Hadaway, urban/church growth research specialist, said characteristics of growing churches include: location near population growth, 65.8 percent; more than 30 percent of adult members ages 30-44, 70.8 percent; more than four years pastoral tenure, 72.7 percent; recent participation in a growth campaign, 66.8 percent; and weekly visitation, 75.8 percent.

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Church planting expert says
lack of new churches hurts SBC

Baptist Press
1/26/89

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptists are in the midst of a storm which could destroy their heritage, and it is not the theological/political controversy, an official from the convention's Home Mission Board told students and faculty at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Jan. 24.

Charles Chaney, special assistant to board President Larry Lewis, said Southern Baptists are "in a tropical depression of declining and plateaued churches that can seriously destroy what Southern Baptists have been."

Only 33 percent of Southern Baptist churches are growing, Chaney said, adding 16 percent are in decline and just more than 50 percent are "barely holding their own."

"And I personally don't believe it's related to the controversy," he said. "I think that's another storm. We've been in a growth crisis since 1955, and if we don't do something about it, this storm is going to engulf us."

Chaney made the remarks during a visit sponsored by Southwestern's Church Planting Fellowship. He challenged the students "to evangelize this whole nation" by "planting churches in every segment of American society."

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To accomplish these goals, Chaney said, church planters first must learn the lesson of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the 5,000 -- "determine to attempt what men say is impossible."

"What we have been aiming for is unworthy of Jesus Christ," Chaney said, pointing to a statistic that showed more than 43 Southern Baptists were needed to reach one non-Christian in 1988.

"I remember when we talked about how bad it was when it was 1 to 20, and we were shooting for one to eight," he said.

Chaney pointed to several reasons for declining church growth, including poor methodology and the failure of the denomination to come to grips with its emerging pluralism, both culturally and socially.

In a dialogue with students, Chaney said Southern Baptists have been fairly successful during the past few years in planting churches in lower- to middle-class white communities, adding more churches with indigenous leadership need to be established in predominantly black areas. He also said more bi-vocational church planters are needed to reach the goal of 50,000 Southern Baptist churches by the year 2000.

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Northern Ireland:
'the troubles' at 20

By Martha Skelton

Baptist Press
1/26/89

BELFAST, Northern Ireland (BP)--A Baptist woman in Belfast, Northern Ireland, got a call from a Catholic friend one day last year. The friend's husband had just been gunned down before her eyes by Protestant terrorists.

"Please come to me," she begged the Baptist woman. "I need to know there are good Protestants."

As the sectarian violence -- locals call it "the troubles" in Northern Ireland -- marks a grim 20th anniversary this year, outside observers continue to ask questions. Who are the "real" Catholics and Protestants? Why do they seem bent on destroying themselves in the name of their faiths? How can the deaths of more than 2,600 people and the injuring of at least 20,000 more contribute to any cause?

Northern Ireland, a part of the United Kingdom, was created in 1920 out of the six counties that chose to stay British when another 26 counties formed the Republic of Ireland to the south. It has a population of nearly 2 million people, two-thirds of whom are Protestant and one-third Catholic.

Hostility has existed for centuries between Irish Catholic families and the descendants of Scottish Protestants who settled in Ireland, mostly in the northern Ulster counties. The current wave of violence, which erupted in 1969, was fomented by this tradition and heightened by housing problems, unemployment and calls for political action to enforce the positions on both sides. Northern Ireland's capital, Belfast, with a population of 304,000, is the central focus of "the troubles."

"You inherit an ideology," explains a Belfast student. "You don't think it out. If you're born in a loyalist area, you're British. If you're born in a republican area, you're Irish, and you want to see the British out."

The student's father was gunned down by the Irish Republican Army. As a teenager, the son joined a Protestant terrorist group, the Ulster Volunteer Force. His main motivation: revenge.

"The organization became my god. I swore by that organization. I would have died for that organization," he recalls. When told to kill a UVF man suspected of being an informer, he obeyed and was caught -- a convicted killer at age 17.

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Another young man grew up in a Catholic neighborhood of Belfast. Unemployment for young Catholic males in Northern Ireland runs between 70 and 80 percent. He joined an IRA youth group because "it was just another something else to do." He carried out minor duties -- informing, marching in partisan parades, bringing in people for interrogations or beatings.

He grew up suspicious of non-Catholics. People from Catholic areas "always had that wee bitterness," he says. "If they were Protestants, then you were the opposite. These traditions were drilled into you from no age." He also was arrested and jailed for a time.

Both of these young men, now committed followers of Christ, once claimed a religion and a heritage. But neither grew up with a personal understanding of God in his life.

"The devout Catholic is not murdering the devout Protestant," says a Baptist man born in Belfast. "They may have theological differences and see their country through different eyes, but they do not actively hate or attack the other."

A complex set of cultural and historical factors have condensed into the "Protestant" and "Catholic" extremes that terrorize the majority of Northern Ireland's citizens, observers report. Terrorists at each end of the spectrum share more in common with each other than with other members of their own religious groups -- secrecy, gangsterism, robbing and stealing for money, ties to drug and weapons trafficking, manipulation of the young and the idealistic.

"People who are doing the fighting have no interest in God," contends one Belfast pastor. "Transfer a thousand (criminals) from New York over here. They won't be muggers and rapists any longer. They will be involved in terrorism."

Class structure and economics also contribute to the violence. Belfast's middle class suburbs have both Catholic and Protestant families living peaceably as neighbors and working in businesses together. But the poor neighborhoods, with their high unemployment and crime rates, are bastions of the alienated, the active partisans.

Separate education, social contacts and neighborhoods make meetings between people of different faiths and traditions difficult, observers say. "The troubles" have further decreased contacts, solidified Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods and increased suspicions.

Northern Ireland's religious community reflects a variety of responses to the situation. Most churches maintain traditional ministries to their own flocks. Certain Catholic and Protestant groups, such as the Free Presbyterian Church established in the 1950s by Ian Paisley, tie their theology to a particular political position.

But some Christians are taking public stands against violence and for a positive expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Cliftonpark Avenue Baptist Church in West Belfast, for example, found itself surrounded by the horrors of street fighting, bombings and partisan neighborhoods in the late 1960s. Some members moved away, but others held on. Now led by a young pastor, Gary Mason, the church is trying to reach out.

Church members invite non-Christians to "guest services." Former paramilitary fighters or others with compelling Christian testimonies speak. Joined recently by a team of American volunteers from First Baptist Church of Atlanta, members made 2,000 community contacts in one week.

Cliftonpark may be in "a bit of a wasteland" between partisan boundaries, Mason admits. But quitting the area never has been discussed by the congregation.

Other evangelical groups visit prisoners and hold street meetings. In West Belfast, Christians run a coffee house for disadvantaged young people, both Catholic and Protestant. A Baptist church in a predominantly Catholic neighborhood has begun a day-care center for local children.

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Both Protestant and Catholic leaders speak against violence. One is Tom Toner, curate of St. Agnes Catholic Church in West Belfast, an area identified with the IRA. He has taken a stand against terrorism while supporting the goal of a united Ireland. Sometimes Toner splashes whitewash over the stark wall murals painted by paramilitary organizations that glorify violence.

Toner believes a person can be be "very Irish, anti-British, also anti-IRA." But one of his Parishoners responds, "It's hard for us to practice what you preach."

Believers in Northern Ireland work in many personal ways to bring the love of Christ to "the troubles."

Bill McConnell, a Baptist layman in Belfast, was shot dead several years ago as his wife, Beryl, and 3-year-old daughter stood by. As a prison employee, McConnell knew he was a "legitimate target" for terrorists.

Mrs. McConnell felt she must tell others of God's grace and sufficiency in the midst of great tragedy. "I hold no bitterness at all," she says. "What they (the gunmen) did was sinful, but it's no more or less a sin than me telling a lie. My small sins in human terms are very black sins in God's eyes."

Another Belfast layman who lost family members in an IRA attack says the experience helped him empathize with others. "The tragedy of our own family gave me an insight into human suffering I would not have had," he reflects. "I've had to visit many homes where people have lost loved ones through terrorism, and I have been able with the grace of God to enter into the suffering more deeply. Personal tragedy very often does that. God can use it for our good and for his glory."

After 20 years, a quick solution to "the troubles" will not come. Neither politics nor religion is going to break down the barriers, says a former IRA member: "The only way they're going to be broken down is through the person of Jesus Christ. He is the mediator between man and God and he is even the mediator between Protestant and Catholic."

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