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89-58

Power is root of voodoo religions, professor says

By Scott Collins

F-10  
(SWBIS)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Voodoo worshippers who killed and mutilated 12 people as part of their satanic cult's ritual in Matamoros, Mexico, were "attempting to control the universal powers," according to a Southern Baptist expert on the occult.

"This is all based on magic, and magic is the idea that you can control the universal powers with certain techniques such as sacrificial rituals," said John Newport, vice president for academic affairs at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Newport, who wrote the book "Demons, Demons, Demons," said occult groups such as the one involved in the slayings believe their satanic leader or priest "knows rituals that can control the universal powers and can manipulate them for good or for bad."

"This is obviously a version of that," Newport said. "This occult leader said to these people, 'If we will make this sacrifice to this power we worship, he will protect us.'"

Mexican and U.S. officials discovered the bodies buried in graves on a ranch just across the Mexican border about 20 miles west of Matamoros near Brownsville, Texas.

Authorities found items believed to have been used as part of the ritual. The bodies were found during a drug search April 11, and officials noted "overtones of Santeria," a type of voodoo practiced in south Florida and the Caribbean featured in the movie "The Believers."

Investigators linked the slayings to a gang leader known as El Padrino, or the godfather. They believe the leader convinced the drug smugglers that the offerings would protect them from harm and allow them to prosper.

"It's all related to power and is based on magic," Newport said. "Magic is as old as mankind."

Kenny Lewis, pastor of First Baptist Church in Brownsville, said the reaction in his church and the community at large is one of "shock that something like this has happened in our own neighborhood."

But Lewis is encouraging his church members not to succumb to fears. "God has commanded us not to be afraid of Satan," Lewis said. "Our fear is to be reserved for God."

The murders have heightened interest and awareness of the occult in the Brownsville area, he said. The discovery of the satanic cult is "an open door, an opportunity because people are looking for answers," he explained. "Reality is being thrown in their face. This is a true opportunity to share about Christ."

The Brownsville church is hosting between 600 and 800 youth and college students this summer for its 10-week mission program. Lewis said he fears the groups will overact and back out. "My prayer is that they will respond in a level-headed fashion" and come, he said.

While authorities investigating the 12 murders in Mexico are uncertain about the exact type of cult involved, they concluded the sacrifices tie in with Satanism.

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"Since these people are revolting against the Judeo-Christian way of life, especially as it has been practiced in the West where it has become identified somewhat with the upper class, they worship Satan because he is the opposite of that," Newport said.

Archaeologists have uncovered evidence showing that the ancient Canaanites of the Old Testament practiced magic, he added: "The Bible is against this. The Israelites were forbidden from going to the witches and from having anything to do with the occult world."

Pagan practices such as magic and voodoo worship occur in countries where people are oppressed, he said, noting, "People used magic to terrify their masters and get revenge on their tyrants."

Increased interest in the occult today is related to "general rebellion against all authority and all established religions," Newport said. Modern occult practices are a "religionizing of lust, a religionizing of selfishness and inordinate promiscuous sexuality," he said.

Quoting from his book, "Demons, Demons, Demons," Newport said Christians define magic as "the divinely forbidden art of bringing about results beyond human power by recourse to superhuman spirit agencies. Magic is deception and superstition even if it does not enlist the power of darkness."

Christians should respond to Satanism by "putting on the armor of God," he said. "Paul claimed the victory against evil powers and principalities. God is a God of power. He is the true God of power and holiness."

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Missionary's stats aiding  
world evangelization efforts

By David Williard

F - FMB

Baptist Press  
4/13/89

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Whether he's helping a preacher in the Philippines discover why no one from a nearby neighborhood is attending church services or contemplating world evangelization, missionary Jim Slack enjoys the cutting edge.

Slack's forte is statistics -- numbers and charts. His mission is to start churches that thrive and replicate themselves.

"Bold Mission Thrust (Southern Baptists' call for world evangelization by the year 2000) is possible," Slack says. "Mathematically, we can prove it. Success, however, is contingent upon many intertwining factors, one of which is our ability to integrate new technologies with our age-old missions theology and quest.

"We must take advantage of every opportunity. People cannot be accidentally won to the Lord."

The Minden, La., native is meshing recent advances in statistical analysis with Southern Baptist evangelization efforts. During his 24 years as a missionary, statistical analysis has become his specialty. He first used it casually in mission work in the Philippines, then refined it while working as a college Bible instructor. He has come to depend upon it as Southern Baptist church growth director for the Philippines.

Recently he has been working at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's research office in Richmond, Va., in part to record many of his insights.

Those insights provide much of the core material in Slack's "Handbook for Effective Church Planting and Growth," a resource for all Southern Baptist missionaries. The book and its companion, "Church Growth Statistics, a Handbook for Planning," may prove to be his greatest contribution to the Bold Mission Thrust initiative, observers say.

The value of Slack's work is recognized by the board President R. Keith Parks. He describes Slack as a "rare combination -- an energetic preacher-evangelist and a person with a keen analytical mind."

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Parks believes statistical analysis has great potential as a tool for world evangelization. "Greater use of statistics has become a strong element in our planning for the future," he says. "It is an element that is consistent with the Foreign Mission Board's goal of evangelism that results in churches."

Slack points to two biblical mandates that statistics can help carry out: "We must expose every human being to the opportunity to understand the gospel and make a knowledgeable, personal decision about Christ. But we must not stop there. That would be seed-sowing. We must continue to work with them until they become congregationalized."

In the Philippines, one of the top countries in responsiveness to the gospel during the past 10 years, Slack has long observed the growth of numerous churches. In 1969, Parks, then FMB area director for Southeast Asia, asked him to find out if some factors consistently contributed to church growth and whether they could be measured accurately.

"I told him there were some indicators," Slack says. "I knew that the number of baptisms, preaching points and the emphasis on Sunday school would foreshadow church growth. As I began to pay more and more attention to these indicators, I was amazed to find just how intertwined they are."

During two decades of study, the factors Slack observed grew to include discipleship participation by church members, the ratio of Sunday school enrollment to church membership, per capita giving and the percentage of preaching points or mission churches in relation to established churches.

He discovered that a deficiency in any one area directly affects other areas. In his handbook, he attaches rating scales to some of these measures:

-- Discipleship scale. "A church can normally grow positively only as the discipleship base can be numerically increased," he writes. "(Then) all other ministries can be increased." A disciplined member is one who, as a result of training, will naturally evangelize and teach others in a church. A disciplined membership of 25 percent or greater is considered excellent; 10 percent or less is considered poor.

-- Membership growth. The primary factors affecting church growth are annual baptisms and the moving of believers' membership from church to church. Growth of 20 percent or greater is considered excellent, for church membership doubles every five years or less; growth of 14 percent to 19 percent is considered good.

-- Baptism ratio: The ideal is to achieve a one-to-one baptism ratio, meaning the efforts of one church member produce one baptism each year. But ratios up to eight-to-one are considered excellent.

-- Sunday school scale: This measures average Sunday school attendance against total church membership. To remain healthy, a church should sustain Sunday school attendance equal to or greater than total church membership. Excellent growth and discipleship potential exists when the level is 125 percent or greater.

Charts and numbers, however, need not focus only on people participating in an existing church, Slack says. They can effectively indicate groups of people who should be targeted for evangelization efforts.

Slack recalls the pastor of a fairly large church in metropolitan Manila. The pastor sensed he was failing to reach people in a neighborhood located just north of his church. He wanted to find out why and what he could do about it.

First, Slack verified the pastor's concern by superimposing over a map the home addresses of all church members. Research revealed the target neighborhood had become an Islamic enclave. A subsequent evangelistic campaign geared toward Muslims resulted in several conversions.

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"I have seen many missionaries, fresh on the field, who have all the zeal of Christ's calling, but who don't know what to do, how to begin to evangelize," he says. "We need to train these persons to have 'church-growth eyes' ... to identify groups that may be responsive and witness to them."

While at the Foreign Mission Board office, Slack also has worked on "mapping" the traits of populations and churches in various cities and geographical regions.

"These groups can be hidden in nations, they can be hidden in neighborhoods. There are, however, indicators that give evidence of their subtle differences. The methods of finding them are the same," Slack says.

"I am not interested in doing any research that doesn't lead to church growth. I am only interested in research that results in churches. That keeps me on the cutting edge."

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Williard is assistant editor of The Commission, the Foreign Mission Board's magazine.  
(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Demanding church schedules  
can weaken family life

By Terri Lackey

N-55B

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NASHVILLE (BP)--The church, often viewed as a healing agent in time of pain, can unwittingly inflict wounds when its demanding schedule pulls family members apart, a family enrichment leader, a pastor and members of an Ohio family said.

"Too many times churches get into a competitive stance and compete for family time as opposed to providing families ways to undergird their time together," said Gary Hauk, manager of the family enrichment section in the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department.

"We say, 'Come, come, come to visitation, church training or worship,' and then we segment families when they get here," said Hauk.

Dean Register, pastor of First Baptist Church of Gulfport, Miss., agreed that churches "must be on guard against becoming so program oriented that their activities actually work against strengthening families."

"We just don't want families here at church every night of the week," Register said.

"Families Practicing God's Love" is the theme of the 1989 Christian Home Emphasis, a sixweek focus on the family that begins on Mother's Day in May and ends on Father's Day in June.

The family ministry department, which sponsors the event, hopes pastors will find ways to bring families together during this time, Hauk said: "Through the emphasis this year we hope families will be able to better express unconditional love. We want them to do that through giving and receiving emotional support and through communication."

The six weeks of Christian Home Emphasis can highlight the importance of parents teaching their children responsibility and morality as well as giving them spiritual direction, he said, noting, "Primarily, Christian Home Emphasis should teach families how to apply the biblical message where they live."

Mike and Charlene Milovich of Grove City, Ohio, are examples of a family doing just that.

Assembling four married children and five grandchildren is tough to do even on holidays. But the Miloviches, their three daughters, one son, and their spouses and children have gathered every Monday night for "nine or 10 years" to study the Bible.

"We study the Bible together each week just to grow better, know the Lord together and have a better understanding of the Bible," Mrs. Milovich said. "The Bible study allows our families to grow together spiritually."

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But gathering every week for Bible study gets difficult, she acknowledged: "The Bible study does get hard. But we took a vote and agreed to continue it. We were so afraid if we stopped for any reason we would never get it back. We enjoy the unity and loving the Lord together."

The Miloviches and their daughters' families also spend Sundays together at church. All are members of Grove City Southern Baptist Church.

"We get excited about going to church together every Sunday morning," she said.

The Miloviches allow the church to support and strengthen their family rather than compete with it for family time -- a role more churches should adopt, he said.

"A church needs to intentionally plan programs that meet families' needs instead of competing with family scheduling," he said.

Some of the programs that could benefit the family include communication and conflict-management skills, Hauk said. "Parenting by Grace" and "Covenant Marriage," two courses developed by the family ministry department, are designed to strengthen relationship skills between families members, he said.

The purpose of the annual Christian Home Emphasis is to focus attention of the entire church on home and family needs, to spotlight any special needs of families in the church or community and to plan ways to meet those needs, he said.

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Politics, religion mix;  
church, state don't, Dunn says

By Mary Wimberly

N- (O  
(Ala.)

Baptist Press  
4/13/89

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--"Discipleship and citizenship are intersecting values, and both the state and religion have legitimate claims on our lives," James M. Dunn told Samford University students April 7 in Birmingham, Ala.

However, those claims are different, said Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The Baptist Joint Committee is comprised of nine Baptist bodies in the U.S. and Canada, including the Southern Baptist Convention.

"The Bible Scripture says to render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's and unto God those things that are God's," said Dunn. "But it didn't give us a list. We are still wrestling with what is God's and what is Caesar's."

Dunn spoke as the second in a series of lectures on social justice sponsored by Samford's Student Government Association. His lecture also was part of the school's annual Christian Emphasis Week program, which had discipleship as its theme.

Dunn urged the Samford students always to be involved in politics: "When you decide not be involved in politics, you have voted wrong. You will pay in the form of bad government and bad laws. We must get into politics. Common sense demands it. We must mix politics and religion."

Dunn suggested a basic theological standard for public policy that should call for the pursuit of peace, stewardship, the affirmation of justice, vision and a commitment to freedom.

Stewardship, he said, is about being good managers: "We are trustees of what we've been given, including the environment. We are to be caretakers, not undertakers.

"Since it is inevitable that we will mix religion and politics, we ought to do it by the Christian rule of thumb and apply Christian principles to our roles as citizens."

But Dunn cautioned against mixing church and state. He recalled Roger Williams' dealings with Indians and settlers in America's early Colonial days: "He had a distinction between toleration and liberty. Toleration implies superiority and inferiority. Liberty is a gift of God, the right of all human beings.

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"Williams went beyond tolerating others' beliefs, he fought for their right to believe as they wanted."

Dunn added: "The separation of church and state is a fence. It is the American way of protecting the value of religious liberty ... the precious treasure that is ours."

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Cooperation converts drive-in  
into new Texas Baptist mission

By Orville Scott

F - Texas

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DALLAS (BP)--An abandoned drive-in theater near Reno, Texas, was transformed overnight into the site of a new mission, thanks to cooperation at every level, said Ernest Easley, pastor of the sponsoring congregation, First Baptist Church of Springtown, Texas.

A growing missions awareness in 100-year-old First Baptist Church gave birth to the new mission, said Easley, but many people helped. The mission was launched with a revival under one of the Texas Baptist evangelism tents.

"It is the fruit of cooperation at all levels," affirmed Clinton Watson, director of missions for Parker Baptist Association. "As a result, Texas Baptists are one new work closer to the Mission Texas goal of 2,000 new churches and missions."

The seeds for the new Midway Baptist Mission were sown by concerned Baptists including volunteer Jack Medford of Azle, Texas, who led a Thursday night Bible study in the home of Ronnie and Brenda Lynch. The Lynches live in Reno, a growing community between Springtown and Azle.

They helped distribute thousands of flyers announcing a revival crusade to be held at the former theater site.

On a Saturday morning in March, members of the Springtown church's Baptist Men organization erected the tent and leveled the site for the crusade to begin the following day. Women of the church prepared a lunch and visited homes in the area, inviting people to the revival.

Eight people joined Midway Mission during the revival, providing it with a start-up membership of 16. During its first three months, Easley will preach at Midway at 9 a.m. Sunday, and Medford will preach at evening services on Sunday and Wednesday.

The drive-in theater's concession stand and projection booth have been converted into Sunday school and worship space. Additional space is available in a portable building provided by Parker Association to help begin new work.

Texas Baptists throughout the state have a part in beginning the new church, said Easley, who is associational missions committee chairman. Gifts through the Cooperative Program unified budget and the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions helped purchase the abandoned theater site and are providing assistance for several months to help the mission get started.

The mission was launched when 75 members of the Springtown church had made commitments to be involved in the Share Jesus Now evangelism campaign, which had a statewide goal of 89,000 trained Christians sharing the gospel with 1 million non-Christian Texans in February and March.

Easley challenged the members to "lead as many people to Christ in as short a time as possible and train them to be soul winners."

Beyond local missions, members of First Baptist Church have put feet to their faith in world missions. They led the association last year in Cooperative Program gifts, with nearly 16 percent of their undesignated church receipts going for missions through the unified budget.

In addition to giving to help support home and foreign missions, last year a group from the church traveled to Burkina Faso in West Africa to erect a building for a Baptist church.

Amid the financial difficulties brought on by the economic crunch in Texas, First Baptist Church has reached an average Sunday school attendance of 488 and outgrew its existing space. So the members pitched in and remodeled a nearby residence for additional education space.

"In the past few years, our missions awareness has really grown," said Easley, "but with the establishment of the Midway Mission, our involvement has moved from our hearts to our hands."

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