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89-96

Christians face Muslims
in prayer confrontation

By Eric Miller

N-FMB

BERLIN (BP)--Nothing visible happened June 17 when hundreds of Muslims and Christians faced each other in Berlin for a two-hour prayer confrontation.

Fire did not rain down on the 100 Christians, nor did the earth open and swallow them, as the Muslims warned might happen to Christians who heard the Islamic message and refused to become Muslims.

A Turkish hoja -- a leader of an Islamic mosque in Berlin -- issued the challenge for a prayer confrontation to Christians in the German city in February, according to a Baptist from the United States who participated in the event. The American asked not to be identified.

The Christians prayed about the challenge for six weeks. After accepting it, they asked churches in the United States and Europe to pray for them. The hoja reportedly seemed surprised the Christians had taken the challenge so seriously.

The Christians, from several denominations, met about 200 Turkish Muslims gathered in a city park at 3 p.m. June 17. They formed semicircles facing each other. The hoja read from the Koran and said Jesus was a prophet who did not die on the cross and was not God.

He went on to read a Koranic passage that says when non-Muslims hear the Islamic message and do not become Muslims, then Muslims are to gather to pray that God will curse them.

One of the Christians read several New Testament passages, including Matthew 17:1-5, the account of Jesus' transfiguration in which the voice of God identified Jesus as "my beloved son." The leader explained the Christians would not pray for a curse on the Muslims, but would pray the Muslims would find God's love and blessing.

The hoja rebutted what the Christian said, and then a German Baptist pastor talked about Jesus and explained the only way to heaven is through him.

The hoja issued an invitation for the Christians to stand and make a public acceptance of the Islamic message. No one stood, so the hoja said the Muslims' only alternative was to pray for a curse on the Christians.

As the two groups began praying, the Muslim men sat apart from the women and children with them. The Christian men, women and children sat together.

The Muslims sat in rows, the Christians in circles. The Muslims, some wearing tiny hats symbolizing trips to Mecca, quietly knelt in prayer. The Christians prayed, sometimes aloud, and later played guitars and sang songs of praises.

"Theirs was a message of doom if we don't come to Islam and ours a message of love and forgiveness," a Christian woman said.

The Baptist man said he believed the Christians had planted seeds of Christianity among the Muslims.

"I believe we are not going to have to wait a long time before we see some harvest from that," he said. Muslims place much importance on dreams and visions, and God may speak to them through the prayer confrontation and dreams, he added.

2 Baptists question
Muslim confrontation

N- FMB

RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (BP)--Two Southern Baptist representatives in Europe questioned whether Christians should engage in prayer confrontations with Muslims such as the one held June 17 in Berlin, European Baptist Press Service reported.

Earl Martin, professor of mission and evangelism at Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, said his understanding of evangelistic outreach among Muslims would cause him to avoid such a confrontation.

"While it may be hoped that some seeds of the gospel were sown, it could very well prove to be an unfortunate precedent that will lead to further confrontation," he said. "Generally, such an approach to Muslim evangelism is counterproductive. ... There are better ways to reach Muslims for Christ."

Bill Wagner, who heads the Muslim awareness committee of the European Baptist Federation, reported that some Islamic sects have been challenging Christians to such debates in South Africa and England.

"Some groups within Islam have latched on to the idea of the 'power encounter,'" Wagner said. "Their approach is similar to that of Elijah's on Mount Carmel" against the prophets of Baal, as told in I Kings 18. Most Christians refuse to accept the challenges, he said.

"Spiritual encounters of this type are an increasing phenomenon in the present world," Wagner said. "I believe that Christianity can expect more challenges to come. This will mean that Christian believers will need to have a deeper understanding of their own faith in order to meet the challenge."

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Baptists minister
inside INS camps

By Ken Camp

F-Texas

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HARLINGEN, Texas (BP)--Central Americans in south Texas immigration service detention camps this summer will learn about English, embroidery and eternal life, thanks to volunteer efforts coordinated by the local association of Southern Baptist churches and the Texas Baptist Rio Grande River Ministry.

Currently, about 1,500 men and at least 300 women are in Immigration and Naturalization Service holding camps, and their population changes by up to 400 each week. At least 200 youth, ages 13 to 17, are in centers operated by independent contractors working with the INS.

Most of the detainees are from Nicaragua, while others are from El Salvador and Guatemala, said Jerry Johnson, director of missions for Rio Grande Valley Baptist Association.

Currently, Texas Baptists are leading evangelistic preaching services and distributing Spanish New Testaments supplied by River Ministry in the men's facility twice each week.

"The authorities are crying for something for these people to do," Johnson said. "They are bored to death. They are open to anything we can teach them."

Within the next month, Baptist volunteers will begin classes in English as a second language, as well as sewing, handicraft and hygiene classes in the women's unit. Plans also are underway for a Christian day camp in the youth facilities and a Vacation Bible School.

"We have permission from the authorities," Johnson said. "Now we need clearance for everyone going in. It just takes time."

Only two restrictions are placed on people entering the INS camps, Johnson explained. Visitors are prohibited from making political statements, and they are not allowed to assist with the specific immigration problems of individuals.

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"Other than that, it's wide open," Johnson said. "We're completely free to preach and evangelize. It's a tremendous opportunity.

"We have a good relationship with the INS. We've done several things to help them this year, particularly."

In February, at the request of the Texas Department of Human Services and at the invitation of the U.S. Justice Department, the Texas Baptist Men organization set up its disaster relief mobile unit on the grounds of the INS processing center at Bayview and fed more than 900 Central Americans in three days.

The concentration of Central American refugees in the Rio Grande Valley grew out of a series of changes in immigration procedures. In the December, the INS began restricting the travel of Central Americans seeking political asylum, reversing a previous policy that had allowed people to file asylum applications in Harlingen and then move elsewhere.

The new procedure was challenged in federal court, where a judge granted a temporary restraining order allowing the Central Americans a reprieve until the order expired Feb. 20. After that time, the immigration service announced yet another procedure of on-the-spot application processing and detention for those whose applications were denied.

During the time when the greatest number of Central Americans were seeking to file their applications, Texas Baptist Men provided them with hot meals, sandwiches, warm blankets and spiritual counsel.

Although the number of asylum-seekers has diminished since February, Baptists need to continue ministering to Central Americans passing through the detention centers, Johnson said.

"These people are not criminals. They're just trying to get out of that mess down there" in Central America, he noted. "It's kind of hard to get a handle on, but we're just trying to minister in some way to the needs of these people."

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Teen dating includes
sexual pressures

By Terri Lackey

N-SSB

Baptist Press
6/20/89

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Where teen dating in the '60s might have meant driving to the nearest hamburger hangout for a shake and fries, today it is synonymous with increased pressures to engage in premarital sex.

"The courtship years of young adults have expanded, making teenagers more at risk for sexual involvement," said Lane Powell, author of "The Dating Book" and assistant professor of sociology at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. She led conference sessions for youth during the Summer Youth Celebration in June at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

"Because men and women are marrying much later in life, a lot of sexual pressure is being put on teenagers for a longer period of time," Powell said. "There is more pressure to be sexually active, and there is more pressure for a male to push a female to go further."

While dating is still good social interaction for teens, it has changed significantly in the past 30 years, said Powell, who also is a contributor to The 24-Hour Counselor, a series of cassette tapes on issues youth face. She urged conscientious parents and leaders of youth to offer guidance about dating.

"No matter what TV implies, everybody is not doing it. But it is also true that church-related youth are not immune to peer pressure," she said. "We are fooling ourselves if we think church kids can resist pressure without our help.

"We as parents and youth leaders need to help our children stay on the right path. Guidance gives reasons and helps teens know why they should choose not to be sexually active."

In her book, Powell lists five guidelines to help teens make good decisions while dating.

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She said young people should ask themselves if the behavior is moral or ethically right: Are there laws against it? Does it go against the rules? Does the Bible speak against it?

Youth should determine if the behavior adds to or subtracts from their personal and spiritual growth and whether the behavior will hurt anyone physically or emotionally, she said.

Young people should ask themselves the consequences of the decision, and whether the decision will please God, she added.

While the church could play a major role in giving young people moral direction about their sexuality, it has traditionally been one of the last places a teen will go to seek answers to questions about sex, Bayne Pounds told a group of adult leaders.

Pounds, a doctoral student in Christian education at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, said when young people have questions about sex, they go first to their peers, second to their parents and third to a doctor or clinic.

Seeking out the help of a schoolteacher or pastor comes eighth and ninth, respectively, on a list of 10, according to a popular survey, Pounds noted.

Sources of information about sex and sexual relations teens identified in the survey included: friends, 38 percent; movies, 26 percent; parents and classes at school, 23 percent; TV, 22 percent; books, 17; the Bible, 13 percent; adult magazines, 11 percent; siblings, 10 percent; and church, 7 percent.

"Churches just don't want to deal with the problem of sexual activity," she said. "They have let the (secular) world take it (sex education) away from us."

Summer Youth Celebration is sponsored by the youth section of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Spring storms mean busy season
for disaster relief volunteers.

By Ken Camp

F- Texas

Baptist Press
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BULLARD, Texas (BP)--Bob Gilley of Bullard, Texas, had a busy spring.

Gilley, a volunteer from Bullard Southern Baptist Church, was one of several unit directors for the Texas Baptist disaster relief mobile unit at feeding operations throughout central and southeast Texas following torrential rains, tornadoes and flooding in May.

The mobile unit is an 18-wheel tractor-trailer rig that is specially equipped with a field kitchen manned by trained volunteers capable of serving up to 2,000 meals an hour.

After helping to serve about 2,500 meals in Jarrell, 8,800 in Houston and 4,000 in flooded areas around Beaumont, Gilley might have expected to spend a few quiet weeks at home.

But when storms swept through northeast Texas June 7, spawning tornadoes in Titus County, he once again was called into action.

Gilley and six other Smith Baptist Association volunteers arrived in the wind-ravaged area northeast of Mt. Pleasant at about 4 a.m. the next day. By 8 a.m., the volunteers had served 74 breakfasts, including many to electrical company linemen who had been working through the night to restore power to the area.

For the first time, the crew used a new disaster relief mini-mobile unit from Bullard Southern Baptist Church. The self-contained field kitchen has a serving capability of about 400 meals per day.

Fifteen homes in the area were destroyed or severely damaged. Others sustained minor damage due to high winds and golfball-sized hail.

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Gilley, a disabled veteran, has worked with Texas Baptist disaster relief volunteer efforts for about eight years. His wife, Doris, who has undergone chemotherapy for a malignancy that now is in remission, often accompanies him on disaster relief assignments.

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Fercho named vp
at Golden Gate

N- CO
(GGTS)

Baptist Press
6/20/89

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--Gordon E. Fercho, vice president of business and administration at California State University in Chico, has been named vice president of internal affairs at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif.

Fercho, unanimously elected by a mail ballot of the seminary's board of trustees, assumed his new post June 19.

As a member of the administrative staff, Fercho will oversee all business and financial affairs, personnel and facilities management. He will be on leave from Cal State-Chico for 6-18 months, after which he will become fully employed by Golden Gate.

Fercho, 56, has been a Golden Gate trustee since 1982. He has held numerous jobs in churches in Sacramento and Chico. In addition Fercho has been a lay renewal coordinator since 1974, leading renewal weekend activities in churches.

He also has been a member of the pastor salary study committee and strategic planning committee for the California Southern Baptist Convention, as well as the California Baptist Foundation Board.

Previously, Fercho held management and accounting positions with the State of California and spent 18 months as a financial management consultant in Recife, Brazil.

Fercho received the bachelor of arts degree in business administration from California State University-Sacramento.

He is married to the former Ruby Harlan and has three children.

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Baptist missions agree in substance,
differ in style of Jewish outreach

By Ken Camp

F- Texas

Baptist Press
6/20/89

DALLAS (BP)--Taking the Christian gospel "to the Jew first" is more than a first century admonition to two north Texas Baptist missions. It is a present-day imperative.

At opposite ends of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, Beth Messiah in Richardson and Tarrant Baptist Association Jewish Outreach in Fort Worth are using different approaches to present Jesus to Jews.

Beth Messiah, a mission of Richardson Heights Baptist Church, functions much like a typical synagogue, with believers worshiping together on Friday evenings, singing Jewish songs and offering prayers in Hebrew.

"The worship atmosphere is culturally and traditionally oriented to what Jewish people would accept," said Paul Rico, a messianic Jew who serves as "rabbi" at Beth Messiah. "The key difference between our services and those of a traditional synagogue is that we put back into it the concept of Yeshua as the Messiah.

"We began Beth Messiah with the concept that there should be a church where Jewish believers could worship and celebrate Jewish festivals and holidays."

Rico's family observes the traditional Hebrew holy days, and they maintain a kosher diet in keeping with the Old Testament dietary codes "for testimony's sake." The messianic rabbi disputed people who accuse him of legalism. He stressed that choosing to observe kosher diets and maintain Jewish culture is an example of freedom in Christ, not bondage to the law.

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"The preservation of the Jewish identity through the centuries has been a work of God," he explained. "For Jews not to recognize that is to be unfaithful to God. It is an affront, a slap in the face. To maintain our testimony among the Jews, we work to make sure that our culture and traditions are preserved."

Tarrant Baptist Association Jewish Outreach, better known in the Fort Worth Jewish community as the "Come, Let Us Reason" Bible study, began in January. Tuesday evening meetings include Hebrew songs and feature Jewish celebrations, such as Passover.

However, services are more akin to meetings of Israeli believers in Christ than to messianic synagogue worship services in the United States, said Pastor Mark Chapmond Davis, a Gentile whose parents were missionaries in Israel. For instance, the congregation will begin meeting on Sunday -- not the Jewish Sabbath -- when it grows from a Bible study into an established church.

Still, Davis agreed with Rico about the importance of being sensitive to the pain that often has been inflicted on Jews in the name of Christ: "There's 2,000 years of hatred and anti-semitism that has to be overcome. It hasn't been that long since millions of Jews in Europe were snuffed out by people who went to church on Sunday and had crosses around their necks."

Both Rico and Davis avoid potentially offensive terminology. At least initially, the Hebrew "Yeshua" is preferred to "Jesus," "Messiah" is chosen over "Christ," and the term "believer" is used rather than "Christian."

"The word 'Christian' has a bad connotation to many Jews. They think Christianity is something you are born into, just as you are born into a Jewish family," said Rico.

"They say, 'Why would I want to be a Christian? Why would I want the blood of Jews on my hands?' In their mind, you're telling them to accept guilt for the murder of about 15 million Jews down through the centuries."

Opposition is an ever-present part of outreach to Jews. Davis recalled having to write a letter to a local rabbi, explaining the difference between proselytizing by coercion and evangelizing by persuasion.

"We've received more intense persecution than other groups," Rico said. "There have been death threats, car explosions and rocks thrown through the window at night. The persecution comes from both ends of the spectrum. The most disappointing thing is the lack of support from Gentile believers."

"The neo-Nazis hate us because we're Jewish. The extremist Jewish groups hate us because we teach that Jesus is the Messiah, and they see that as a deterioration of Jewish culture. They think we will try to assimilate the Jews, to make them non-Jews."

While persecution has not been as intense in Fort Worth, Davis noted that he had a car window smashed during a recent service commemorating the 41st anniversary of Israel's independence.

Even so, Rico and Davis persevere in what they believe is their divine calling to take the gospel to Jews.

"Jesus didn't exclude Jews from the Great Commission," said Rico. "If we miss one nation, are we fulfilling the Great Commission? I'd say no."

"Every born again believer who is truly trying to follow the word of God will include Jewish people within his scope of outreach," said Davis. "I would say that if Texas Baptists aren't going to reach out 'to the Jew first,' I would appeal to them at least to reach out to the Jew also."