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May 4, 1990

90-63

Radio-TV elects
Johnson president

By Toby Druin

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(TEXAS ST.)

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Jack Johnson, 55-year-old executive director of the Arizona Southern Baptist Convention, was elected president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television commission in a called meeting of the commission May 3.

Jackson implied he would accept the call to head the Fort Worth, Texas, agency but said a formal announcement would have to wait until he had talked with the Arizona convention's executive board May 7.

"I am very excited about the prospects and impressed with the opportunity," he told the commission. "You can assume what you will assume."

Commission Chairman Michael S. Hamlet, pastor of First Baptist Church of North Spartanburg, S.C., announced Johnson's election following two closed sessions of the commission lasting almost two hours at the Sheraton Grand Hotel near the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport.

A vote count was not announced, although the vote apparently was not unanimous, observers noted.

In announcing Johnson's election following the second of the two closed sessions, Hamlet added that with the election the commission had given Johnson an "expression of our unanimous support."

He declined to say following the meeting, however, if the search committee had been unanimous in recommending Johnson or if the vote had been unanimous for Johnson.

Johnson spoke briefly to the commission following Hamlet's announcement that he had been elected and said that he knew it had been difficult for them.

"But it is important that I know I have your support," he said. "We can build so long as I have your support."

He asked if anyone on the board "could not or would not support me" and if they could support one another after the decision.

"The challenge we face is more important than our differences," he said, adding that if anyone had "any sacks to empty," then was the time to do it.

"It is important that we be together, together," he said. "If you aren't big enough to work with people who disagree with you, we are not together."

None of the trustees indicated any disagreement with the election.

In presenting Johnson to the commission, Hamlet said the search committee had worked through 20 to 25 recommendations and had interviewed three people before settling on Johnson.

They had followed a five-point set of criteria, he said, that included: energy, commitment and a vision for the future of the RTVC; denominational experience and knowledge; ability to communicate with grassroots Southern Baptists; denominational acceptance; and administrative skills.

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Johnson spoke to the commission, explaining he felt it necessary "you know who I am, not to get your vote." He had not sought the presidency, he noted.

He shared his Christian testimony and how he had been called to the gospel ministry and eventually from the pastorate to be executive director of the Arizona convention in 1979.

He described himself as "pro-active" rather than reactive and said his leadership style is characterized by synergism -- working together.

Johnson noted he had radio experience as a pastor and some "intermittent" television association in Arizona.

"But a good leader will surround himself with people who have skills he doesn't have," he said.

Several of the commissioners asked questions about his plans for the future, why he would want to leave Arizona, how to improve relations with other SBC agencies, interpersonal relationships and his doctrinal stance.

Johnson said he "was an inerrantist before it became popular" but wouldn't disagree with someone who has a different interpretation of Scripture.

Asked about his weaknesses, Johnson said he tends to try to do too much and that he has a "flash point," but seldom displays it publicly. "But I also don't have a problem with going to someone and saying I am sorry," he added.

The commissioners discussed the recommendation that they elect Johnson for almost an hour and a half behind closed doors before summoning him and others back into the room to ask him to clarify why he resigned as an RTVC commissioner in 1985 and about a statement he had made in his presentation about hiring his son-in-law at the commission if he were elected.

Johnson said he resigned in 1985 because the Arizona convention was in a period of cutback and the RTVC was having a series of called meetings and he couldn't give it the time required.

He said he would hire his son-in-law, Steven Wayne Pearson, minister of education at First Southern Baptist Church, Scottsdale, Ariz., because he is qualified. "It's not cronyism when he is qualified," he noted.

Johnson said, however, that if the commission established a policy of not hiring relatives, he would follow it.

A second closed door session was called to discuss the election further and to take the ballot. After 10 minutes, Hamlet summoned Johnson and others back into the meeting and announced Johnson's election.

Hamlet praised the efforts of Richard T. McCartney who has served the past year as acting president. "There is no way to express the gratitude of this board for what you have done," he told McCartney, who received a standing ovation.

McCartney and his wife were named the commission's representatives to the Baptist World Alliance in Seoul, Korea, in August.

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Christians lag behind
Muslims in urban impact

By Art Toalston

N-FMB

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ROCKVILLE, Va. (BP)--Islam is more effective in permeating the world's cities than the style of evangelical Christianity practiced in the West.

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That is no Muslim leader's boast; it is the opinion of Robert Douglas, director of the Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies, an evangelical Christian organization in Altadena, Calif.

"Islam always has been able to survive -- and thrive -- in the cities, whereas Christianity in the West has tended to withdraw from the cities," said Douglas, who led a seminar on Islam at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's Missionary Learning Center in Rockville, Va.

Although Christians have made significant contributions in urban social ministries, Douglas identified such issues as employment, medical care, housing and education as factors in Western Christianity's decline in cities.

"Many Christians are inclined to say, 'All of those are elements of life, but what do they have to do with the gospel? Those are social issues.' But Islam just automatically assumes that all of those issues are important," Douglas said. "Islam comes prepared to develop a social agenda, to develop the social implications of its religious message.

"Islam is holistic and is willing to tackle a wide range of problems and issues. Muslims feel this is what people who are submitting to God really ought to be doing."

Social issues are reflected in the Bible, Douglas said, but many evangelicals lack the vision for addressing such concerns.

Nothing in evangelical theology keeps it from influencing the cities, he said. In fact, it fared well in urban areas during much of the 19th century, he noted, "but it's been in a gradual downward trend since then."

Meanwhile, Muslims address social concerns in major cities stretching from Indonesia to Turkey, he said: "In some places, a lot of things are being done. In other places, not much. Part of it has to do with the availability of resources and the initiative of the people."

In Cairo, Egypt, for example, numerous storefront medical clinics have been opened by the Muslim Brotherhood, a fundamentalist organization active throughout the Middle East and elsewhere. The clinics offer an attractive alternative to crowded government hospitals, Douglas said.

"The Muslim Brotherhood, in doing this, has a number of agendas," he recounted. "One is to further elicit the support of the masses for their political agenda," which calls for strict adherence to Islamic faith.

"But at the same time the Muslim Brotherhood is doing this because they feel it's right, it's Islamic."

Evangelicals in the West began finding more and more comfort in small and medium-sized towns, suburbs and rural areas as city populations swelled, urban ethnic makeup changed and urban social problems became more numerous and complex, Douglas said.

For many evangelicals today, cities are "gigantic, complex and often scary places," he said. Yet cities must place high among the evangelical community's priorities, he added. "If we're interested in people, then we've got to be interested in the cities, because that's where more and more of the world's people are winding up." Disinterest in cities "is maybe just shorthand for saying we don't care about people."

Evangelicals entering foreign missions should avail themselves of seminary-level urban ministry studies and hands-on ministry opportunities in inner cities, Douglas urged.

"We need to ask ourselves how to prepare people to function in the cities, to address some of the cities' problems," so preaching will help urban dwellers find faith in Christ as well as cope "with all the forces of life," he said.

Southern Baptists
to teach in Romania

N- FMB

RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (BP)--A six-member team of Southern Baptists will spend 11 days in Romania during May and June teaching in a program called "School of the Prophets."

They will teach a series of courses on the Bible and ministry to about 70 Baptists, some of whom may enter the ministry to meet Romanian Baptists' pressing need for pastors, said Southern Baptist missionary Earl Martin. Martin heads the Institute of Missions and Evangelism at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

Martin began the teaching program in cooperation with Romanian Baptists in 1987, two years before the revolution last December that ended the rule of Romanian communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

Ten men who now are full-time Baptist pastors came out of the first group of students, said Paul Negrut, a minister at the 2,500-member Second Baptist Church in Oradea, Romania.

The teaching program was prompted by government restrictions, which had set the maximum number of students at the Baptist seminary in Romania at just 10 per year. Negrut and other Baptists were questioned for hours by secret police and harassed after the first teaching sessions. But Baptists persisted because of the desperate need for pastors and a hunger for training, he said.

The Southern Baptist team will teach classes in the cities of Arad, Oradea and Bucharest between May 28 and June 8. The teachers are Martin; Robert Cochran, a Southern Baptist missionary to Belgium; and Bob Ellis, Tommy Lea, Paul Stevens and Jim Spivey, all faculty members at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

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Baptists meet with
Brazil's new president

N- FMB

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BRASILIA, Brazil (BP)--A delegation of Brazilian Baptists and Southern Baptist officials pledged their prayer support during an April 26 meeting with Brazil's new president, Fernando Collor de Mello.

The group met Collor, who took office March 15, at the presidential palace in the capital city of Brasilia. The visit was arranged to introduce the president to Brazilian Baptists, who number nearly 700,000, and to assure him of their prayers.

At 41, Collor is Brazil's youngest president and its first directly elected president in 30 years. During the 30-minute meeting, Collor reportedly told Baptist leaders: "I would not be here if I didn't have faith in God. This faith I will never deny as long as I live."

Boyd O'Neal, a former missionary to Brazil, coordinated the Baptist delegation. O'Neal, now an associate director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's volunteer department in Richmond, Va., has known the president since Collor's childhood.

O'Neal used to pray and read the Bible with Collor's father, who was elected governor of the state of Alagoas in 1951, when O'Neal came to the capital city of Maceio there. He continued that practice with the younger Collor when he was elected mayor and later governor.

Collor, a Roman Catholic, "is a great respecter of evangelical people," said O'Neal, who was named an honorary citizen of Alagoas state during his missionary career. O'Neal is from Novice, Texas.

In the meeting with the new president, Brazilian Baptists pledged their support in a statement read by evangelist Nilson Fanini, president of the Brazilian Baptist Convention.

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O'Neal led in prayer for the president, and the Baptists gave Collor two Portuguese Bibles. The president broke from protocol and embraced O'Neal during the ceremony. The group also included 10 other Brazilian Baptist leaders and Bill Richardson, the Foreign Mission Board's area director for Brazil and the Caribbean.

The day after Collor took office, he announced a plan to curb Brazil's runaway inflation. Between March 1989 and February 1990, prices in Brazil jumped 2,751 percent, according to press reports. Collor's measures created a new currency, froze wages and prices and blocked access to savings and financial assets.

"Brazil right now is going through a tremendous crisis," said O'Neal. But in spite of economic turmoil, "The whole country seems optimistic. ... There's a feeling that good is going to come out of this."

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Churches resolve 19-year-old
split in Here's Hope revival

By Mark Wingfield

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MONTEVALLO, Ala. (BP)--Two worlds torn apart 19 years ago were symbolically reunited during a "Here's Hope" revival in the small Alabama town of Montevallo this spring.

It's not the kind of thing that will show up in statistical reports of Southern Baptists' nationwide simultaneous revivals. But to the members of both churches -- and the 5,000 residents of the community -- it was a statement of faith nonetheless.

This was a revival of reconciliation.

University Baptist Church and First Baptist Church cooperated April 22-25 to hold a joint revival during the season of simultaneous revivals sponsored by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. The nationwide revival emphasis carried the theme "Here's Hope. Jesus cares for you."

Pastors of both churches said the joint revival brought hope to Montevallo because it was the first thing First Baptist Church and University Baptist Church have united to do in almost a decade.

University Baptist Church was started in 1971 in an angry split from First Baptist Church, primarily over the race issue. Although the two churches have not fought with each other since and the current pastors were not involved, each church has gone its own way.

One church ordains women as deacons, the other allows only men as deacons.

One church has a traditional Baptist sanctuary with stained glass, the other has a multi-purpose sanctuary with folding chairs, a panoramic view of the woods and religious-themed artwork on the walls.

One church is a member of the Southern Baptist Alliance -- a group of churches troubled by the conservative turn the SBC has taken over the past 11 years --, while the other maintains a more conservative position.

As members of both congregations readily admit, the difference between the two churches is obvious.

Yet the Here's Hope revival proved to be something both churches could rally behind as a witness to their community. The joint meeting "will show people in the community that we are kin to each other," said Grady Parker, a layman who led the splinter group away from First Church Baptist to form University Church.

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"This is going to show the community that we don't have hard feelings," said Betty Hix, a longtime member of First Church. "If we're going to reach out, we can't have hard feelings toward other churches. Before you can witness to somebody, you've got to show you have love.

"I think God will bless us for being able to do this.

Jim Evans, pastor of First church, said the two churches wanted to clear the air and show that "two churches with a history and some noticeable differences can lay aside those differences and do something cooperative.

"We both wanted this to be a model of what can be done. You don't have to be the same to work together to win people to the Lord.

"It might be hard for a church to give a witness to Christ if there is even a perception of enmity. How can we tell a fractured world the path to wholeness if we're fractured within ourselves?"

"If Christ can do this in churches, what can Christ do in people's lives?" added Bob Albritton, pastor of University Church. "There is hope."

Albritton said the revival exceeded his expectations: "It's a beautiful image of Baptists who are different yet can come together and worship. I think something bigger is going on than we are aware of or planned."

Although every old wound was not easily forgotten, the joint meeting is the beginning of reconciliation, he explained: "Revival is not just having people come down the aisle, but changing the attitudes of the people so they will go out. This is the beginning of evangelism."

Two services of the revival were held in First church's Baptist's sanctuary and the other two in University's. Both pastors said the singing was a highlight of the revival.

"It was exciting for me to see people from our church sitting in the choir loft at First Baptist Church where they used to sing," said Albritton. "They sang together in harmony to make a joyful noise before the Lord."

Two of those choir members were family members who had gone separate ways at the time of the split. Mimi Lawley and her father, Carl Edfeldt, sang together in the revival choir. Lawley and her husband had left First Baptist in 1971, while Edfeldt and his wife remained.

Although family ties were not severed over the church split, the situation was tense for a time, Lawley recalled: "There was a period of time when we didn't talk about church. It was too close."

As the two churches reunited for the first time, the father and daughter were reunited in the choir loft. "This has helped us realize the biggest thing in our lives we have in common," Lawley said.

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Photo mailed to state Baptist papers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press

Baptist budget remains
1.45% ahead of last year

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists' unified budget remains 1.45 percent ahead of last year's pace after seven months of the current fiscal year.

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The national Cooperative Program received \$11,667,118 in April, reported Harold C. Bennett, president and treasurer of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee.

The April total brought year-to-date receipts to \$82,539,644, Bennett said. That is \$1,177,881, or 1.45 percent, more than the Cooperative Program took in during the first seven months of 1988-89, he said.

The gain did not keep pace with inflation, which reached 6.5 percent at the end of the first quarter of 1990, according to the Wall Street Journal.

April receipts dropped \$1,626,759, or 12.24 percent, below receipts for April 1989, the best April in the Cooperative Program's 65-year history.

The current fiscal year will end Sept. 30. The 1989-90 Cooperative Program has a \$134,787,543 basic operating goal on top of a \$2.5 million "priority item" to pay off the debt on the five-year-old Southern Baptist Convention Building in Nashville.

The Cooperative Program is funded by contributions from individual Southern Baptists. Their gifts are processed through budgets of local churches and state Baptist conventions before reaching the Executive Committee for distribution to convention organizations, which conduct evangelistic, missionary and educational ministries worldwide.

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Appeals board reverses
compensation ruling

By Cameron Crabtree

N-50
(Calif.)

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SAN FRANCISCO (BP)--Reversing an earlier decision, the California Workers' Compensation Appeals Board ruled a Southern Baptist church does not owe compensation to a transient injured while working at the church in exchange for financial assistance.

After reconsidering its 1989 opinion on appeal, the state board decided Thomas A. Hoppmann was not an employee of First Southern Baptist Church of Cupertino while performing odd jobs in 1987 as part of a funds-for-work relief ministry operated by the church.

The relief ministry allowed transients to perform various tasks in exchange for assistance, said Scott Southard, who was pastor of the church at the time.

Hoppman was working on the church roof and fell to the ground, fracturing his heel and elbow, Southard said.

Rendering the April 5 decision, workers' compensation Judge John R. Sullivan ruled Hoppman was excluded from being an employee, according to labor codes. The law protects religious, charitable or relief organizations from having to compensate for injuries sustained as a result of performing services for aid.

"When one in need seeks aid from a charitable or religious organization, the organization may ask that some task be performed to assist in its program in exchange for the aid without making the recipient an employee," Sullivan wrote in his opinion.

The labor code exemption seems intended to prevent religious or charitable entities from having to discontinue benevolence programs because of litigation and liability issues, the judge added.

The ruling is a victory, according to charitable workers, who feared a legal precedent, had the previous ruling been upheld.

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