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Baptist food arrives first  
to help Malawi flood victims

By A.S. Evans

*N-FMB*

PHALOMBE, Malawi (BP)--Baptists have been at the forefront of emergency relief provided to thousands left homeless by flash flooding in this densely populated area in southeast Malawi.

Malawi radio reported Baptists were the first to respond with much-needed aid after the worst flooding in the country's recent history. Thirty-six hours of heavy rains March 9-10 caused flooding that has claimed nearly 500 lives and left more than 20,000 people in need of emergency help. The first delivery of Baptist supplies was airlifted by the Malawi government to flood victims who could not be reached by road.

Southern Baptist missionaries worked around the clock for five days making plans, delivering emergency supplies, evaluating, and making new plans. They took a much-needed rest March 17, only to resume again the next day.

"Don't you Baptists ever sleep?" a government worker asked as a load of maize meal (cornmeal), dried beans and cooking pots arrived at the emergency relief headquarters set up at Phalombe secondary school. It was 2 a.m.

A Dutch medical doctor pulled a missionary aside and said, "I just want you to know that it was Baptist food that was first airlifted to those inaccessible by road."

According to Southern Baptist missionary Rendell Day, authorities from Malawi's presidential office and cabinet, as well as the district health officer, were pleased and surprised Baptists could get food to the relief operations center as quickly as they did.

Day and missionary Steve Baker spearheaded the delivery of 10,000 kilograms (22,000 pounds) of maize meal; 3,150 kilograms (6,930 pounds) of dried beans; and 220 cooking pots to the affected area. The aid was purchased with \$5,000 in Southern Baptist emergency relief funds. Day, a general evangelist who also coordinates disaster relief for the Southern Baptist mission in Malawi, is from Phenix City, Ala. Baker, church developer in the Phalombe-Chiringa area, is from Dallas.

Baptist Mission personnel from across Malawi have assisted in the relief effort, including Mission Service Corps volunteer Clay Moss of Coral Gables, Fla. Moss coordinates basketball activities for the Malawi government.

In a conversation with Moss, George A. Trail, U.S. ambassador to Malawi, asked the mission to distribute \$10,000 worth of emergency supplies on behalf of the U.S. government. Already, the mission has delivered 1,200 blankets to victims of the floods on behalf of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Malawi.

Plans for U.S. aid include 20,000 kilograms (44,000 pounds) of maize meal; 6,300 kilograms (13,860 pounds) of dried beans; and 440 cooking pots. This may change, however, based on the latest needs identified by the Malawi government.

The Council for Social Welfare Services in Malawi is trying to meet the emergency needs of 20,000 to 40,000 people. "People directing the operations have asked that we pray for their work, responsibilities and strength," Day noted. "The responsibilities and pressures are great."

The 36 hours of rain caused waters to rush down hills surrounding Mount Mlanje and flood the Phalombe and Chiringa areas at the base of the mountain. Observers say it's hard to imagine the intensity of the force that hit the region, but the evidence is everywhere.

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Around Phalombe, the mountainsides show scars where tons of water, rock and debris rushed down to destroy fields, villages and towns in its path. Boulders, some as tall as an adult man, are strewn everywhere. Trees, bushes, rocks and debris stand in piles as high as the buildings they washed against.

Baker, Day and other missionaries say they have seen God's hand in the relief efforts. Baker recounted an instance when a man stopped a Baptist delivery truck to ask for a lift and the truck's oil light came on. The hitchhiker was a mechanic. Another man who lives in a mud hut on the side of the road offered the tools he needed to repair the truck.

"In the African bush, you can go for miles without there being tools like that!" Baker said.

"Not only are people being helped during this time of crisis," Day said, "but also people are seeing that Baptists care.

"The road to Phalombe is terribly bumpy, muddy and rough," Day continued. "A few times I've asked myself, 'Why am I doing this?' But, when I saw the need and how much our help is appreciated, it's worth it all!"

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Evans is a Southern Baptist media missionary in Malawi.

Supreme Court review  
brings Baptist debate

By Herb Hollinger

NCO

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Two Baptist agencies offered differing opinions on the latest U.S. Supreme Court action regarding prayer in public schools.

The court has agreed to review a lower court ruling barring invocations and benedictions at public school graduation ceremonies. The Rhode Island case involves lower courts ruling the inclusion of clergy prayers at public school promotion or graduation exercises violates the First Amendment's ban on establishment of religion.

Taking different sides on the question are the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. The BJC, based in Washington, is composed of nine Baptist bodies, including Southern Baptists, with a special interest in the separation of church and state.

The Christian Life Commission was given an additional responsibility of religious liberty by the Southern Baptist Convention last year. The CLC, the longtime moral concerns agency of the SBC, now has an office in Washington as well as in Nashville.

In the Providence, R.I., case the argument centers on references to God at a junior high commencement exercise. Attendance at the ceremony by graduates was optional.

The optional aspect was cited by Richard D. Land, executive director of the CLC, as alleviating the "special concerns about subtle coercion many people have about the classroom setting with compulsory attendance.

"While we clearly want to protect against an establishment of religion and oppose entanglement of the church and the state, we must also seek to accommodate religious expression, which is a concomitant part of religious liberty, and free exercise of religion, which is also protected by the First Amendment.

"I think that an acknowledgement of the religious nature of the American people in a commencement setting, which is more of a civic ceremony than a classroom situation, is fitting and appropriate as long as students are not required to attend."

BJC General Counsel Oliver S. Thomas disagrees.

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"There's a lot more going on in this case than graduation prayers. The court is being asked to begin dismantling Mr. (Thomas) Jefferson's wall separating church and state and to replace it with a picket fence," said Thomas.

"If the school board is successful, the government would be allowed to sponsor non-denominational religious services as long as no one was forced to attend."

BJC associate counsel J. Brent Walker said he believes the Department of Justice, which asked the court to reconsider the use of the Lemon test in its deliberations, wants the court to do more than simply adjudicate the prayer issue.

"Although the Supreme Court could decide this case without disturbing Lemon, the chances of that happening are slim," said Walker.

The Lemon test asserts governmental practice must pass three areas to avoid being an establishment of religion: (1) must have a secular purpose, (2) can neither promote nor restrain religion, and (3) must avert excessive entanglement with religion. Lower courts ruled Rhode Island failed the second part of the test.

Both sides agree conflicting appeals court decisions in recent years require the Supreme Court to provide guidance for lower courts.

"In 1987, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals said invocations and benedictions in public school graduation ceremonies may be permissible under the Establishment Clause," said Michael Whitehead, general counsel of the CLC. "In 1990, the First Circuit reached the opposite conclusion about the same practice."

Four high court justices already have indicated a willingness to depart substantially from the strict Lemon standard and the court's newest member, Justice David Souter, may prove to be pivotal, according to the BJC.

"The new 'coercion' test advanced by the (government) would tend to allow more government promotion of religion and move away from the time-honored notion of neutrality," said Walker. "Just as government should not be allowed to inhibit religion, neither should it advance religion."

Whitehead insists parents should be permitted to make a choice, through their local school boards.

"This is not a case of government-mandated, government-led prayer during the school day," said Whitehead. Schools should be able to invite a local rabbi or minister to pray at a public ceremony, outside school hours, in the presence of parents and loved ones, he said.

The high court will probably not announce its decision before the fall term begins Oct. 1, and it possibly could be as late as spring of 1992 before it is made public.

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Baptist Press writers Tom Strode of the CLC and Larry Chesser of the Baptist Joint Committee contributed to this release.

Kennedy, Thurmond introduce  
alcohol-labeling bills to Congress

By Tom Strode

NCO  
(CLC)

Baptist Press  
3/21/91

WASHINGTON (BP)--Legislation requiring health and safety warnings to accompany all broadcast and print advertising of alcoholic beverages has been introduced in Congress by Sen. Strom Thurmond, R.-S.C., and Rep. Joseph Kennedy, D.-Mass.

The bills, The Alcohol Beverage Advertisement Act (S. 664) and The Sensible Advertising and Family Education Act (H.R. 1443), would require all advertising and promotional materials for alcohol to carry one of five messages on a rotating basis. The proposed warnings are:

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-- SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Drinking during pregnancy may cause mental retardation and other birth defects. Avoid alcohol during pregnancy.

-- WARNING: Alcohol impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery.

-- WARNING: Alcohol may be hazardous if you are using any other drugs such as over-the-counter, prescription or illicit drugs.

-- WARNING: Drinking alcohol may become addictive.

-- WARNING: It's against the law to purchase alcohol for persons under age 21.

Print advertising and promotional materials will include a toll-free telephone number callers may use to receive information.

The legislation was introduced for the first time last year with Rep. Kennedy and Sen. Albert Gore, D.-Tenn., as the main sponsors. Gore, who, like Thurmond is a Southern Baptist, is a co-sponsor this year.

The legislation would "counteract the millions of dollars of misleading alcohol advertising that Americans are inundated with every year -- advertising that promotes the glamour of alcohol use with no mention of its consequences," Kennedy said.

Alcohol advertisement and promotion costs are estimated at \$2 billion per year in the United States.

"We have an opportunity here to do something for humanity," Thurmond said at a press conference March 14 when the companion bills were introduced. "We have an opportunity here to do something not only for the young people but for all the homes in America."

Four other congressmen voiced support for the bills during the press conference. Among them was Rep. Ben Jones, D.-Ga., who described himself as a recovering alcoholic who has been sober since 1977.

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission gave "unqualified and enthusiastic endorsement" to the bills in a statement from Executive Director Richard D. Land distributed at the press conference. He called the legislation "a much-needed and long-overdue counterbalance."

The Christian Life Commission was active in its support of the legislation last year. Robert M. Parham, a CLC staff member who specializes in drug and alcohol issues, testified on behalf of last year's bill before a congressional subcommittee in July 1990.

The CLC is part of a coalition supporting the bill that includes The American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, National Parent Teacher Association, Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, Christian Action League of North Carolina, National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, American Council on Alcohol Problems and Center for Science in the Public Interest.

"The seductive imagery of alcohol advertising must be tempered by the facts concerning this drug's harmful effects on our society," said James A. Smith, the CLC's director of government relations. "The Thurmond/Kennedy bill attempts to address this social plague.

"We believe this legislation deserves the support of all Southern Baptists. The CLC staff urges Southern Baptists to contact their representative and senators and urge them to cosponsor H.R. 1443 and S. 664."

Kennedy said he expects advertisers and broadcasters as well as the alcohol lobby to fight the bills, adding, the legislation has more support than last year but approval by committees and Congress could be a long-term goal.

"I believe very strongly that if we can get this out on the House floor and the floor of the Senate it will sail through," Kennedy said.

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"Why should any member of Congress even consider not voting for a piece of legislation like this?" asked Thurmond, who co-authored the 1988 act requiring warning labels on alcoholic beverage containers.

Lon Anderson, vice president of public affairs for The Beer Institute, said, "We don't believe the chance is very good (for passage of the legislation), but we're very concerned about it."

Among the alcohol industry's disagreements with the legislation is it would be "tantamount to an advertising ban," he said. It is unlikely alcohol advertisers would spend "a third of (their) revenue saying, 'Our product is bad and may cause health problems.' ... many of the health-related assertions we don't agree with in any case," Anderson said. It would have "a very adverse impact" on the amount of advertising purchased by the alcohol industry, he said.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Patterson approaches Bible with greater humility," dated 3/19/91, the last 10 paragraphs were inadvertently left out. Following are those paragraphs. Please add them to the end of the story as previously run.

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

... have wide use among the laity as well, he said.

The Baptist authorship (All of the commentary's authors are Baptists, and the overwhelming majority are Southern Baptist.) of the commentary is an important plus for the series, Patterson said.

"It was important to us first of all because we wanted it to represent Southern Baptists in the marketplace," he explained. "We agreed with the Sunday School Board that we should not put Southern Baptist in the title because we were not interested in limiting readership to that, but we were quite interested in making the point that this represents Southern Baptist scholarship."

Patterson believes the commentary will have appeal to inerrantists and non-inerrantists.

Many non-inerrantists will find the commentary helpful, Patterson believes, "even if they remain unconvinced of the perspective of inerrancy. And if they find the commentary helpful and useful, then it changes the attitude that unfortunately has persisted across the years that anybody who is an inerrantist certainly could not have done his intellectual homework."

Patterson believes some have been surprised by what he described as "the openness that we've exhibited in the choice of editors and authors. I think there has been a certain number of people who have been surprised by the number of our professors from our six seminaries and from our Baptist colleges that are writing (for the commentary)," he added.

A "tremendous" response to the commentary from pastors throughout the SBC has encouraged Patterson. "Pastors are impatient," he said. "They want to know why all 40 volumes didn't come out last year. They want it now."

A "wait-and-see" attitude about the commentary has characterized the response of theological students, college and seminary professors, "which one would expect," Patterson said.

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The publication of the commentary comes at a critical time in the development of Southern Baptist preaching, Patterson said.

"For years and years the overwhelming emphasis in Baptist pulpits was on topical preaching," he explained. "That began to change in our era I think with Dr. (W.A.) Criswell (senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas) who began to insist that the best preaching, and perhaps the only preaching, which should be done should be expository. Now we are seeing a large swing in the pulpits of the denomination back to the exposition of God's Word, so that just makes (the commentary) that much more of an important item."

The first volume of the commentary to be released in June will be "Philippians, Colossians and Philemon" by Richard R. Melick Jr., professor of New Testament and Greek at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tenn.

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

SBC celebrates 25 years  
of interfaith witness

By Mark Wingfield

N-HMB

Baptist Press  
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptists' program of interfaith witness turned 25 this year -- making it an infant in comparison to the ancient religions it studies but a mature adult in comparison to new religions it tracks.

Former interfaith witness workers, current Southern Baptist Home Mission Board staff and state interfaith witness coordinators gathered in Fort Worth, Texas, to celebrate the anniversary and look toward the future.

Although an interfaith witness department was not established formally until 1966, the work began as early as 1867. In that year, messengers to the annual Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution on the need for Christians to present the gospel to Jews.

Then in 1921 the HMB appointed Jacob Gartenhaus to serve as missionary to the Jews. In 1954, William Mitchell became the first full-time Southern Baptist worker among Jewish people on a local field, working in Houston.

Two years later, the HMB employed William Burke as Catholic information field worker.

These early efforts culminated in the formation of an official HMB department Jan. 1, 1966, under the leadership of then-president Arthur Rutledge. Joseph Estes became the first secretary for the department of work related to non-evangelicals. The name was changed to interfaith witness in 1970.

In the early days, a primary emphasis was placed on establishing dialogues with people of other faiths. Southern Baptists broke new ground with these dialogues, including a Jewish-Baptist scholars' conference in 1969 and a Christian-Muslim dialogue in 1974.

Through the years, the interfaith witness department expanded its work through research, writing and training seminars. Members of the department's staff lead seminars across America every year on topics as diverse as Mormonism, New Age Movements and Islam.

Among the department's best-known literature is the Belief Bulletin series, a set of brochures outlining the basic beliefs of other faiths with suggestions on how Christians could share their faith with these groups.

Another hallmark of the department is the interfaith witness associate program, started in 1978. Through this program, ministers and laypeople are certified to lead seminars in certain topics.

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During its first 23 years, the interfaith witness department was housed in the HMB's missions section. During the board-wide reorganization of 1989, the department was moved to the HMB's evangelism section.

Evangelism section vice president Darrell Robinson addressed state coordinators during the anniversary meeting.

"I see interfaith witness being extremely important in helping Southern Baptists interpret who Jesus is," he said. "Many of our churches are not aware that the Jesus some preach is not the Jesus of the Bible."

Interfaith witness plays an increasingly important role in America's pluralistic society, taking the gospel to the "hard cases," Robinson said.

"We cannot become exclusive in our outreach," he said. "Jesus said to take his message of love to everyone."

Gary Leazer, HMB interfaith witness department director, echoed that thought in explaining the importance of the department's work.

Americans do not face the problem of no God but too many gods, Leazer said. "There are many people sincerely trying to find God who are on the wrong road."

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Evangelism requires explaining  
faith, seminary prof says

By Mark Wingfield

N- HMB

Baptist Press  
3/21/91

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Evangelism requires Christians explain their faith as well as challenge others to accept it, a seminary professor told Southern Baptist interfaith witness leaders.

Danny Sanchez, associate professor of missions at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, spoke to the annual meeting of state interfaith witness coordinators in Fort Worth, Texas. He challenged them to study other religions to be able to present the Christian gospel clearly to people from non-Christian backgrounds.

Sanchez cited the biblical account where Philip ministered to the Ethiopian eunuch. He noted the question Philip asked the man was not, "Do you accept the gospel?" but, "Do you understand?"

"We need to be able to share the gospel in such a way that people might understand it," Sanchez said.

Too often Christians assume non-Christians have a blank mind toward the gospel and will easily understand it when challenged to respond, he continued. Other times, Christians assume others already know the basics of the gospel and just need to be firmly challenged to repent.

"We must take into account a person's background and world view," he explained. "The more we know about a person's background, the better we'll be able to present the gospel."

Sanchez illustrated by telling about witnessing to a man on a city bus. He began by telling the man, "The Bible says ..."

The man interrupted him to ask, "When you say Bible, what do you mean?"

With an increasingly pluralistic society in America, evangelism will require more cultivation, Sanchez claimed.

"Many people who have grown up in our churches see decision-making as a point. They remember when they made a decision. But for most people that come from other religious backgrounds, the decision-making process will be different.

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"For these type people, sharing the gospel is a process; it takes time.

"I'm concerned that all too often we don't want to pay the price for this type of involvement," he said. "But I'm also concerned that there are many people who will never be reached without this type of commitment."

Sanchez also warned against the opposite extreme of waiting until people understand every minute detail of the Christian faith before challenging them to commitment. "We don't have to straighten people out theologically in every single way before we share the gospel with them," he said.

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Worship called central  
to Christian integrity

By Sarah Zimmerman

F-NMB

Baptist Press  
3/21/91

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--The path to Christian integrity begins with worship and manifests itself in blessings, Southern Baptist chaplains were told.

Forty chaplains and pastoral counselors were challenged to become givers of blessings during a conference on contemporary ethical issues at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo. Bill Tillman, associate professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, led the three-day discussion.

Ethical conduct is shaped by factors such as heroes, loss, courage and commitment, Tillman said. Yet he said worship is central to integrity.

"Worship is the way we get in touch with holiness," Tillman said. "To behold the Holy One is to look and look and look. Eventually you begin to reflect what you behold because you've looked so long."

Such encounters with God leave their mark on people, Tillman said, just as Jacob's hip was affected in his wrestling match with God.

Before that experience, Tillman noted, Jacob's life was self-centered and cunning. After the meeting, Jacob became a man who gave blessings rather than seeking them.

"Each of us is involved in a search for blessing, trying to get somebody to say you're OK," Tillman said.

People typically seek blessings in relationships and careers. However, Tillman noted, "The ultimate place to find emotional filling is from God. It's a worship dynamic.

"You are a people of blessing," Tillman told the chaplains. He challenged them to "go and give blessings, starting with those who are closest to you."

Chaplains attending the conference included those working in hospitals, prisons and military installations. They are among 2,231 chaplains endorsed by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, which sponsored the conference.

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Southwestern Seminary students  
switch to the Lord's army

By Kathy Wade

F-CO  
SWBTS

Baptist Press  
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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--For Vietnam veteran John Dubose, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has been a lot like boot camp.

After 22 years in the U.S. Air Force, Dubose had learned to use the tools at his disposal to fight the good fight. But when he retired from the military last fall and enrolled at the Fort Worth, Texas, school, Dubose had to begin training all over.

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"In the Air Force, I had pretty much achieved what I was going to. Here, it's like starting at the bottom again," Dubose said.

Dubose is one of a growing number of Southwestern students who are switching armies after successful careers in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Alan Sanders is another soldier-turned-student. He spent more than six years in the Marine Corps before coming to Southwestern in 1988 to pursue a masters in divinity. A native of Birmingham, Ala., he left the Marines as a captain but remains in the reserves as a radar intercept navigator.

Although his reserve unit wasn't activated as part of Operation Desert Storm, Sanders said he was ready to answer the call. "I'm committed to do what the president says to do. I really have made a commitment to that personally."

Having served two tours of duty in Vietnam, Dubose is all too familiar with war. With the crisis in the Middle East, "there's a certain desire to be part of it, and a gladness not be part of it," he said. "You can empathize with the people, the anticipation, anxieties they have.

Dubose was in the Air Force for 22 years, achieving the rank of master sergeant. Originally from Mobile, Ala., Dubose hopes to go into full-time evangelism.

While stationed in the Netherlands in 1976, Dubose expressed faith in Jesus Christ. Two years later he was transferred to Arizona where he was pastor of Tucson Boulevard Baptist Church for three years and was an interim pastor for one year at a mission church.

Like Dubose and Sanders, Ray Woolridge left an aspiring military career to enter the ministry. A graduate of West Point Military Academy, Woolridge planned a career in the Army. But when God called him to be a pastor, he decided to enter seminary. "I always thought when I retired that I wanted to go to seminary and learn Greek and Hebrew," said Woolridge, who made a profession of faith in Christ in 1978 while at the military academy.

The transition to seminary life has been easy in some ways. "I don't feel like I have to tell somebody where I am all the time," Woolridge said. But he did have to adjust from being an Army captain responsible for 120 men to being "one of many on campus."

Regardless of the changes all the former servicemen agree ministers, like soldiers, need training too.