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91-126

Draper calls SSB past
a prelude to future

By Linda Lawson

F-SSB

NASHVILLE (BP)--"Get up and go. The past is prelude. The future is now. The challenge is there," exhorted James T. Draper Jr. as he was inaugurated Aug. 20 as eighth president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

About 1,500 Southern Baptist leaders, board employees and friends crowded into Van Ness Auditorium and overflow viewing areas for the inauguration at the church programs and publishing agency's Nashville headquarters. Draper, 55, was elected July 18 and assumed the helm of the board Aug. 17 after 16 years as pastor of First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas.

Two of the three living former board presidents, Lloyd Elder and James L. Sullivan, attended the inauguration. Sullivan also is a former convention president. Former SSB president Grady Cothen, now living in Florida, was unable to attend but sent a letter of greeting.

SBC President Morris Chapman and former SBC president Adrian Rogers participated in the service. Other former SBC presidents attending the service were Atlanta evangelist Bailey Smith and H. Franklin Paschall, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church of Nashville.

"There ought to be a restless discontent with what we are as we look at where we ought to be," said Draper, who served as 1982-84 SBC president. "We are to dream and plan big."

He praised the "strong structure" of the board, noting revenues for the year ending Sept. 30 likely will reach an all-time high. However, he expressed concern unit sales will continue a downward trend of recent years.

"There is certainly a wonderful foundation and a wonderful success that we will build upon, but we have some things that we must acknowledge and must deal with," said Draper.

He pledged to emphasize four dimensions of leadership -- spiritual, business, organization and people.

"We need to be reminded that we are first and foremost in the business of meeting the spiritual needs of people. That's why we exist," said Draper.

Business leadership will include a focus on customers -- "knowing who they are, what their needs are, how to satisfy those needs completely every time we deliver to them a piece of literature" -- he continued.

"We need to clarify and to explicitly communicate to everyone the performance factors that are critical to the success of the Sunday School Board," said Draper. Factors may include finances, operations, services and ministry.

"Not everything we do needs to make money," said Draper.

In the area of organizational leadership, he called for flexibility.

"If we're going to be a viable company in the 20th century and on into the 21st century, we're going to have to continue to be flexible in the midst of enormous uncertainty and world change," said Draper.

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Strengthening the board and meeting customer needs will require developing mutual trust, exploring new ways of doing things, sharing power and opportunity, improving quality and encouraging "intelligent risk taking," he said.

In people leadership, Draper noted "the success or failure of this enterprise rests entirely upon the people who work here and who reach out to touch Baptists and evangelicals across the world."

To employees, he pledged to see "that you grow in the profession and in the task that you have, that you participate in the problem-solving and decision-making processes and, most of all, that you are treated fairly and with dignity and respect and that you're compensated equitably."

Of his role as president, Draper said he will represent the board to its constituencies -- churches, associations, state conventions and SBC agencies and institutions.

Providing leadership "for continued growth and success of our organization" also will be a priority.

"It will be my task to try to give us a clear and compelling vision for us to aim at, to aspire to, and I will work hard at enabling necessary changes to be meaningful and to take hold," said Draper.

He also promised to keep the 100-year-old institution "on track."

Illustrating the board's heritage, he quoted from J.M. Frost, the board's first chief executive, in an introduction to a book, "Baptist Why or Why Not," published by the board in 1900.

"We accept the Scriptures as an all-sufficient and infallible rule of faith and practice and insist upon the absolute inerrancy and sole authority of the word of God. We recognize at this point no room for division, either of practice or belief, or even sentiment. More and more we must come to feel as the deepest and mightiest power of our conviction that a 'thus saith the Lord' ends all controversy," Frost said.

Of Frost's use of the word "inerrancy," Draper quipped, "that new word that people say we never had around here before.

"That's our history. That's where we have been," said Draper. "We'll not deviate from that. So when I say that's the track we're going down, don't look at me like a calf at a new gate. That's where the track has been going all this time."

Earlier in the service, representatives of the SBC, state convention, associations and churches presented charges and affirmations to Draper.

Chapman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, predicted, "Under the leadership of this dear man of God, all Southern Baptists will experience the heart of God emanating from this great institution."

D.L. Lowrie, executive director of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, noted state conventions and the board were "created by the churches for the churches.

"May the Lord Jesus Christ who loves the church enable you to guide this board to do those things to make it easier for the churches to be what God wants them to be in this difficult day in which we live," said Lowrie.

Luther Dyer, a retired director of missions from Lakeland, Fla., called for the board to give increased emphasis to the Holy Spirit.

"There is no more potential force in the Southern Baptist Convention than the Sunday School Board to influence sound doctrine and the practice of that doctrine," said Dyer.

Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., challenged Draper to spiritual vitality, moral purity, doctrinal integrity, denominational sensitivity and professional ability.

"Don't try to manage spiritual things or spiritualize management things," he urged.

Two employees and Frank Palmer, a member of the presidential search committee and pastor of Forrest Avenue Baptist Church in Redmond, Ore., presented Draper the symbols of office -- presidential medallion, a Bible and the certificate of presidential investiture.

Leland Cunningham, a 35-year employee, said in presenting the medallion: "This is more than just a job. We work here because we believe this is part of a worldwide ministry."

Joy Lang, a 45-year employee in the Houston Baptist Book Store and the longest-tenured employee of the board, presented Draper a Bible. "When you came into the store 40 years ago, I was there," she said.

In assuming the presidency of the board, Draper joins a line of chief executives that includes: Frost, 1891-93, 1896-1916; T.P. Bell, 1893-96; I.J. Van Ness, 1916-35; T.L. Holcomb, 1935-53; Sullivan, 1953-75; Cothen, 1975-84; and Elder, 1984-91.

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

Iranian Christian defends
nation's religious toleration

By Art Toalston

FMB-7

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Iran tolerates Christianity more than most countries in the Middle East, according to one of its Christian citizens.

Sam Yeghnazar, pastor of the Iranian Christian Fellowship in London, said even converts from Islam don't inherently face persecution in Iran. If a Christian encounters opposition, it usually comes from a relative or in a small town, village or rural area, Yeghnazar said. More often, however, a decision to embrace Christianity is accepted.

"In a large country like Iran, with 54 million people, there are all different types of reactions to Christianity," said Yeghnazar during an Aug. 9 visit to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond.

Yeghnazar retains his Iranian citizenship and often travels back to his homeland. From 1974 to 1986, he was involved in Bible society work in the Philippines, Lebanon and England. He moved into Iranian ministry five years ago and is pastor of a London congregation which draws about 100 Iranians and other internationals to worship each week.

He played a key role earlier this year in linking Southern Baptists with Iranian Christians in relief efforts among Kurdish refugees. Yeghnazar helped arrange for Southern Baptists to airlift four field kitchens to Iran and send 12 volunteers to work with a team of 10 Iranian Christians to feed 15,000 Kurds in a refugee camp in mountainous southwestern Iran.

The Iranian Christians said the volunteers were the first Americans to labor with them since the late Ayatollah Khomeini rose to power in 1979. They were in Iran for just a week, but Yeghnazar said they left "a beautiful testimony" behind. They helped the Iranian Christian team learn to operate a feeding program and left the field kitchens for them to use in future relief efforts in Iran as a visible witness for Christ, Yeghnazar said.

The Iranian relief workers are part of the small evangelical community in Iran of 3,000-plus believers in 25 congregations, half of them in Tehran and most Presbyterian or Assemblies of God.

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Many believers come from ancient Armenian or Assyrian churches of the region or from the Muslim community, Yeghnazar said. A few are converts from Judaism or Zoroastrianism (the religion prominent in Persia before Islam).

While Islam is the state religion, Iran also officially recognizes Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. The Bahai faith, which began in Iran during the 1800s, has no legal standing and, according to human rights groups, has endured various forms of persecution.

Yeghnazar acknowledged a 55-year-old Assemblies of God pastor was executed by hanging in December 1990 in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashad. Some sources at the time said the execution was part of a harsh round of persecution against Christians, especially converts from Islam.

But Yeghnazar said Muslim extremists orchestrated the execution. "It was not an action all the people in the city would have approved. Ordinary people -- Muslims -- were angry at what happened." In Tehran, he added, "I have my doubts that the central government would have endorsed such an action.

"Many Iranians have become Christians," Yeghnazar said, "and they have not suffered the same fate."

Iranian believers "would have no hesitation to tell you that they are Christians, even in public," he added. "They would witness with courage."

Stereotypes don't fit Iran, Yeghnazar said. When, for example, an Iranian official employs the Ayatollah Khomeini's rhetoric against the United States as the "Great Satan," it's a statement against the U.S. political system, not individual Americans, Yeghnazar said.

Even though Iran has battled with Kurdish freedom fighters in the past, he recounted, posters in Iran to raise funds for Kurdish refugees cited Persian poetry that states, "Humankind are the members of one another, as in the creation they were formed from the same substance."

Iran has a lengthy biblical heritage, Yeghnazar said. In the New Testament, people from ancient lands now part of Iran are listed first among those present on the day of Pentecost: Parthians, Medes and Elamites.

And in the Old Testament, Esther, a Jewish orphan, became queen of Persia. A Persian king, Cyrus, liberated Jews from Babylonian captivity, and Persian authorities enabled Nehemiah to organize the rebuilding of the Jerusalem wall.

In Chapter 49 of the book of Jeremiah, the prophet recounts God's intention to inflict calamity on Elam for sinfulness. But the chapter closes with the assurance, "I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come."

"A lot in Scripture talks favorably about Iran," Yeghnazar said, "and we trust that God, whose promises are all true, will look favorably toward Iran again."

Up to 7 million Iranians live outside Iran, Yeghnazar said, and many are disillusioned by the Islamic revolution sparked by the Ayatollah Khomeini and thus open to Christianity. Iranian Christian fellowships have formed in such countries as Japan, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore. A half dozen fellowships are in California, where about 750,000 Iranians live.

"It wouldn't be very strange to meet Iranian believers in any country in the world," Yeghnazar noted.

FMB-N

Yugoslavian Baptist camp burned;
Croatian churches pray for peace

By Art Toalston & Stanley Crabb

ZAGREB, Yugoslavia (BP)--Baptists in Yugoslavia have lost their "God's Valley" camp facilities to mounting violence that continues to disrupt the republic of Croatia.

The two buildings at the camp, located on the Adriatic Sea about 40 miles from Zagreb, were reported burned in mid-August. But fighting in the area has made it impossible to assess the damage firsthand.

Meanwhile, many people continue to die in daily clashes in the conflict. They range from unarmed civilians to Croatian freedom fighters, soldiers from the republic of Serbia who comprise Yugoslavia's federal army, and armed Serbian insurgents, or "terrorists" as they're described in Croatia, reported Danica Jrgovic. Jrgovic is a Christian worker in the Croatian capital of Zagreb and a member of First Baptist Church there.

A Baptist pastor who also teaches in a high school in the city of Petrinja said one of his top students, a 16-year-old girl, was among a number of people killed in gunfire between Croatian fighters and Serbian soldiers when the soldiers attacked several villages in July.

Warfare in Croatia has made refugees of about 36,000 people, Jrgovic said in a telephone interview Aug. 20. About 15,000 refugees have come to Zagreb, and Christians in the city have initiated relief efforts in cooperation with the Croatian government to provide shelter, food, clothing and medicine. Some of the refugees' homes have been burned or bombed, Jrgovic said.

"In Zagreb we're still safe, but there's fighting 30 kilometers away," she said.

"In the churches all over Croatia, and on the squares every night with candles, there are prayer meetings," Jrgovic said. The prayer movement was initiated in early August by the Catholic bishop of the predominantly Catholic republic.

At First Baptist Church in Zagreb, the nightly prayer meeting starts at 7 p.m. and continues for at least an hour, Jrgovic said. Prayers are for peace and "for Christians in areas where there's fighting every day." Bible readings focus on passages "where God is promising he will protect us."

The Catholic leader, Bishop Kuharic, appealed to Metropolitan Paul, the key religious leader in predominantly Eastern Orthodox Serbia, suggesting they meet to discuss ways to resolve tensions between Croats and Serbs. But the Orthodox leader refused the offer, Jrgovic said.

Yugoslavia's tensions also have affected Baptists. They amicably divided their national Baptist union into four republic-level unions, but still plan to work together in home missions and theological education. More than half of Yugoslavia's 120 Baptist churches and missions are in Croatia.

Some of the worst fighting, including bombing attacks by the Yugoslav military, has taken place in eastern Croatia where the republic borders Serbia. The federal army has barred any reporting of the fighting there, Jrgovic said. "Nobody knows the real truth of what has happened. Maybe one day we will ... but until now we really do not know what has happened to the villages there."

A 20-member youth team was working at the Baptist camp in mid-July when a threat against the camp was received. It was immediately reported to local police, who came to escort the group from the area.

Jrgovic expressed concern for the Baptist church nearest the camp, at the village of Barcuga. "We haven't heard from them for a long time. There were about 30 members in this church, and others from the villages attended church there as well."

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Baptists had suspended the camp's regular summer sessions this year after the country's mounting tensions caused camp registrations to tumble to 15, compared to several hundred youth and adults in a typical season. The camp, which opened in 1971, was built by Yugoslav Baptists with the help of volunteers from the United States and England.

"We don't know what may happen to our church buildings," said Zelimir Srnee, home missions secretary of the Baptist Union of Yugoslavia, after the camp was burned. "In some areas they are endangered also."

Srnee also reported two pastors departed their churches in strife-ridden areas to leave Yugoslavia, and at least two other pastors have moved to more secure regions of the country.

"The economic situation in Yugoslavia is a disaster," Jrgovic said, citing reports the country has lost an estimated \$5 billion in tourist income along the Adriatic Sea. "Really, there is no Yugoslavia anymore; the country is falling apart."

Srnee commented: "No one expected the situation would become so critical for us. We feel the need of help from our brothers and sisters all over the world."

At the same time, the strife is stirring spiritual interest among Yugoslavs. In one village, for example, 300 people joined about 100 Baptists for a worship service in a "culture hall" originally built to promote atheism. The villagers stayed for the entire two-and-a-half hour service and many gladly received devotional booklets as they left, reported Branko Lovrec, president of the Baptist Union of Croatia.

In Zagreb and the neighboring republic of Slovenia, where the government also seeks autonomy, occasional warning sirens in June sent people scurrying to bomb shelters -- and gave Baptists and other evangelicals opportunities for impromptu worship services with many neighbors who had never been to church, Lovrec recounted. "People were very interested in learning more about the gospel" and in receiving tracts and other Christian literature, he said.

Joesip Mikulic, lay pastor of First Baptist in Zagreb who works with a Yugoslav oil company, received permission from the government ministry of justice to conduct a worship service inside a large prison in July.

"We thought we would have a small room with a few prisoners," Mikulic said. "Instead, the hall was large and every seat was taken." A deputy to the minister of justice attended the service and commented to the Baptist pastor, "You have God's Spirit among you."

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Fellowship begins search
for executive director

By Sarah Zimmerman

71-HMB

ATLANTA (BP)--The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the moderate group of Southern Baptists organized in May this year, is looking for its first executive director.

In a press release announcing formation of the executive director search committee, John Hewett, moderator of the Fellowship, said, "We are now at the place where we need professional staff to support and implement the actions of the Fellowship.

"We are looking for a free and faithful Baptist who shares our vision for the future and can direct the day-to-day operations of this new organization," said Hewett who is pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C.

James Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., is search committee chairman. He said the committee has not met and he did not want to speak for the group about its plans.

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Recommendations for the executive director position can be sent to Slatton at River Road Baptist Church, Ridge and River Road, Richmond, Va. 23229.

In addition to Slatton and Hewett, the committee includes Kirby Godsey, president of Mercer University in Macon, Ga.; Carolyn Cole Busy, youth minister at Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, Texas; Lavonn Brown, pastor of First Baptist Church in Norman, Okla.; Dorothy Sample, former national Woman's Missionary Union president of Flint, Mich.; Walter Shurden, professor of Christianity at Mercer University; and Martha Smith, piano teacher from Gastonia, N.C.

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Baptist leaders lay groundwork
for deaf ministry in Soviet Union By Sarah Zimmerman

M-HMB

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ATLANTA (BP)--Before the ouster of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, Southern Baptists were working to establish ministries to the deaf in the Soviet Union.

Now Christian leaders in both countries are praying they will be allowed to build on that foundation.

Vladimir Boev, superintendent of a union of 40 churches in the Soviet Union, was in the United States in August to study deaf ministries. His trip came three months after Carter Bearden, Home Mission Board consultant for the deaf, spent three weeks in the U.S.S.R.

Boev said his dream is for each person in the Soviet Union to have a New Testament and respond to the gospel.

"Pray that our people don't seek silver and gold. Pray that they will seek the church and seek the Word of God," Boev said. "When many people repent in our country, then God will bless."

While Gorbachev's policies opened the door for bolder evangelistic ministries, Boev noted non-Christian groups also took advantage of the opportunity.

"All kinds of people are coming to Russia -- 300 groups are trying to get in. We must move very, very fast. We mustn't wait," Boev said a week before the coup which ousted Gorbachev.

As Gorbachev's policies opened the door for religious groups to enter the Soviet Union, they also made it easier for people who suffered religious persecution to leave the country.

"Many pastors and deacons left our country," Boev said. "We need leaders." He said he has no plans to leave because regardless of where he is, life's end result is the same.

"Do Americans die? In the Soviet Union do people die? I will stay in my country."

When Bearden was in the Soviet Union, he traveled to Moscow, Leningrad, Tver and Voronish. He preached in churches and distributed copies of the Gospel of John in schools for the deaf, businesses that employ deaf people and theaters with deaf performers.

The purpose of his trip, Bearden said, was to "help the Baptist Union share the gospel with the deaf and to create an awareness of deaf people among the churches we visited." Bearden said there are about 200,000 deaf people in the Soviet Union.

One stop on Bearden's tour was the Leningrad Society of the Deaf. He met with the society's president, spoke with a group of deaf people, watched their skits and invited them to a worship service at a local Baptist church.

In response, 150 to 200 deaf people attended their first Baptist worship service that afternoon. Bearden said several decisions were made during the invitation.

Next year, a trip to the Soviet Union is planned for deaf leaders from the United States to train Russian pastors and interpreters to begin deaf work in their churches and other areas.

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