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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE  
SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8919  
CompuServe ID# 70420.17

**BUREAUS**

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232  
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

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**Kansas-Nebraska told to  
seek God's courage**

HUTCHINSON, Kan. (BP)--Messengers to the 46th annual meeting of the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists were challenged to seek God's courage as they minister.

Messengers elected four new officers, passed a resolution on abortion after some discussion, approved the 1992 state convention budget, recognized KNCSB staff and board members for their service, expressed some concern about skyrocketing medical insurance costs, heard testimonies from chaplains, and listened to scripture readings led by pastors of ethnic churches.

Of the 350 people attending the Oct. 21-23 meeting in Hutchinson, Kan., 307 were registered messengers.

Lloyd Elder, immediate past president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, was the Bible study leader. Calvin Miller, pastor of Westside Baptist Church in Omaha, Neb., presented the keynote address in place of Esther Burroughs of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, who was ill and could not attend. Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, also was featured on the program.

The resolutions committee presented a resolution affirming the sanctity of human life and opposing abortion on demand "except in extremely rare cases." Churches were encouraged in the resolution to do everything possible to encourage pregnant women to have their babies. After an effort to amend the resolution to remove the words "except in extremely rare cases," messengers approved the resolution with its original wording.

Another resolution affirmed Harold Inman for his 27 years of service as KNCSB director of teaching and training. He will retire Dec. 31.

N.N. "Andy" Antonson, pastor of Tyler Road Southern Baptist Church in Wichita, Kan., was elected president by acclamation as the new KNCSB president. Antonson has been vice president for a year and a half after his election by the state's executive board. He was elected after the previous vice president moved out of the state.

During a runoff for vice president, Carl Garrett, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Overland Park, Kan., and this year's resolution committee chairman, was elected over two other candidates.

The recording secretary, assistant recording secretary, and historian all were re-elected by acclamation.

In other action, messengers approved the 1992 budget, which totals \$3,486,024, an increase of 3 percent over 1991.

Cooperative Program receipts are projected at \$1,839,996. Giving to the national CP unified budget was increased to 32.50 percent, up .25 percent from last year.

Messengers also welcomed six new churches into the convention and learned 17 new missions and Bible study fellowships were begun in Kansas-Nebraska in 1991.

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During Bible study, Elder said God is at work in the world, always moving toward his eternal purpose. Elder is now a professor at Belmont University in Nashville, holding the H. Franklin Paschall chair of biblical studies and preaching.

In introducing Elder during the Monday night session, R. Rex "Peck" Lindsay, KNCSB executive director, said Elder should "bear the label of 'statesman.'" Lindsay called Elder "a man of great personal integrity."

Elder told the crowd the Sunday School Board is "in my soul, in my thoughts and in my blood day and night." He called the board a "great, great agency."

During his three Bible study messages, Elder focused on the doctrine of providence, which he called "one of the neglected doctrines among Southern Baptists."

Miller warned Kansas-Nebraska Southern Baptists of the perils of the "theology of Sinai." God's people need a passion "that the dream of God gets finished," Miller said.

The 1992 KNCSB annual meeting will be Oct. 19-21 at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Overland Park, Kan.

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Liberation theology: has it  
helped evangelicals grow?

By Mary E. Speidel

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Two major changes have marked the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil since Pope John Paul II first visited the world's largest Roman Catholic country a decade ago.

When the pontiff returned to Brazil Oct. 12-21, he found the Catholic Church there losing members to evangelical churches. And liberation theology, which advocates social and political change based on biblical teaching, reportedly is losing support among Roman Catholic leaders. Some forms of liberation theology call for the poor to take up arms to fight for their rights.

In the past decade evangelical church membership has grown from 7 to 18 percent of Brazil's population (70 percent of the evangelicals are Pentecostals). At the same time, the number of Roman Catholics has dipped from 89 percent to 79 percent of Brazilians, according to reports. About 600,000 Brazilians join evangelical churches each year.

And what's happening in Brazil is just one part of the overall growth of evangelicals -- particularly Pentecostals -- in Latin America. Since the 1960s evangelical ranks have grown from 15 million to about 40 million people in the region.

Some analysts believe liberation theology, which many consider a Marxist theology, actually may have weakened the Roman Catholic Church among the poor in Latin America. As a result, many poor people are turning to evangelical churches, according to some observers.

David Stoll, author of "Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth," believes liberation theology has failed to "speak to the actual needs of the poor as opposed to the idealized versions of those needs." In addition, Stoll writes, evangelicals have "captured the poor emotionally, in ways highly politicized Christians often failed to."

These current trends in Latin America may indicate "the poor move in their own way, not in the way political theoreticians think they will move," added Samuel Escobar, a Peruvian Baptist missiologist who teaches at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

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"As some say, the liberation theologians opted for the poor but the poor opted for the Pentecostals. And that wasn't in the agenda of the thinkers," Escobar explained.

Liberation theology began among Roman Catholic priests in Latin America in the late 1960s. Gradually the theology passed from the church hierarchy to the common people through "base communities" -- small lay groups combining biblical study and political activism. Since the movement began, base communities have been strongest in Brazil.

With its Marxist overtones and calls for justice for the poor, liberation theology represented a dramatic shift for the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, noted Justice Anderson, who was a Southern Baptist missionary professor in Argentina when the movement began. Today Anderson teaches at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Among the common people, that sudden change caused some Roman Catholics to "react negatively to the church" and move toward evangelicalism, Anderson believes. In addition, Latin Americans were attracted to an evangelical emphasis on "strong morality" and living "a solid Christian life," he said. And evangelicals offered a focus on meeting spiritual needs that appealed to Latin Americans.

Argentine Baptist and church historian Pablo Deiros disagrees.

"The impressive growth of evangelical churches in Latin American in the last 10 years or so isn't due so much to liberation theology as to the work of the Holy Spirit," said Deiros, who teaches at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Deiros said he believes most evangelical churches in Latin America are experiencing "a kind of revival or awakening of the Holy Spirit." He attributed the awakening to the rise of Pentecostals in Latin America, who now number about 80 percent of the region's evangelicals, he said. The growth of evangelicals in general, Deiros contends, is a result of an emphasis on evangelization and the Holy Spirit.

Liberation theology has been a "very creative, interesting and in many ways positive" contribution of educated intellectuals, particularly Roman Catholics, said Deiros. "And as such it has remained a theology of the elite."

But liberation theologians' call for justice for the oppressed has caused evangelicals to take a closer look at social issues, according to Southern Baptist missiologist Daniel Sanchez. "For example, (Latin American) evangelicals are asking how they can be involved in the political process or the political life of a nation," noted Sanchez, who teaches at Southwestern Seminary.

Last year Peruvian Baptist Carlos Garcia was elected second vice president of Peru. In January Guatemala's Jorge Serrano Elias became Guatemala's first evangelical to be elected president. And evangelicals in Argentina recently have begun a political party, known as the Independent Christian Movement, to voice their concerns.

Political involvement doesn't mean these evangelicals advocate liberation theology, said Sanchez. But "perhaps liberation theology has caused evangelicals to pay greater attention to the social, political implications of the gospel," he said.

These implications of the gospel traditionally have been ignored by evangelicalism, according to Alan Neely, a former Southern Baptist missionary professor in Colombia. "Evangelicalism, and particularly fundamentalism, has tended to say, 'The only thing that needs to be done is to get people saved,'" said Neely, who now teaches at Princeton (N.J.) Theological Seminary.

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But in the United States, Neely noted, "getting people saved in the South didn't address the issue of slavery, racism, unjust wages and the exploitation of women in industry and the oppression of women in society. Getting people saved may be the first priority, but it's not the total message of the gospel, and it's not the total message of the Bible."

Escobar said he also thinks liberation theology has "forced evangelicals to really take seriously these questions of social concern and the social dimension of missions. I am hopeful that it will continue in a positive way."

He pointed out a major evangelical criticism of liberation theology has been its use of Marxism as an analytical tool. But with the worldwide collapse of communism, "the great problem for us as evangelicals is not the use of Marxism. That is already a thing of the past," he noted.

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Liberation theology: what's  
ahead as world changes?

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press  
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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--During his October visit to Brazil, Pope John Paul II urged Roman Catholic priests there to stay out of politics.

The pope's admonition reportedly was aimed at priests who support liberation theology, which advocates social and political change based on biblical teaching. Some forms of liberation theology call for the poor and oppressed to rise up and fight for their rights.

A decade ago most of Brazil's bishops taught and practiced liberation theology, which many consider a Marxist theology. But that situation is changing in Brazil, the world's most populous Roman Catholic country. Today close to half of Brazil's 298 bishops, appointed by the current pope, represent the conservative wing of the church.

Since liberation theology was introduced in Latin America, Brazil has been a stronghold for the movement's Christian "base communities" -- small lay groups combining biblical study and political activism. Some analysts now say base communities, which today number about 100,000 in Brazil, are losing ground. But base communities remain a significant political force behind the Workers' Party in Brazil. The party's presidential candidate, Luis Ignacio da Silva, was a major rival to Fernando Collor de Mello, who was elected Brazil's president in December 1989.

Recent global changes also affect liberation theology. With the spreading world collapse of communism, some Baptist observers believe liberation theology is on its way out. Others think it's here to stay.

Liberation theology is headed for crisis, according to Peruvian Samuel Escobar, professor of missiology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, an American Baptist institution in Philadelphia.

"That crisis isn't very visible now, but it will be more evident as time goes on due to events in Eastern Europe that put into question some of the assumptions that were very important in liberation theology -- assumptions about where history is going," said Escobar.

A number of liberation theologians have viewed history with "the idea that the world is moving towards socialism and that to work for the establishment of a socialist society is to work for the future," Escobar noted.

Marxist revolutions in Latin America became models of a new society for some theologians, added Argentine Baptist historian Pablo Deiros. But as those revolutions faltered or failed, the models disappeared.

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"It seems that this is part of the crisis of liberation theology, that they don't have an historical model to say, 'This is the goal. This is the kind of society that we're struggling for,'" said Deiros, who teaches at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Liberation theology, which began in Latin America in the late 1960s, got its name from another Peruvian, Gustavo Gutierrez, a Roman Catholic priest-theologian troubled by the plight of the poor. "A Theology of Liberation," published by Gutierrez in 1971, is a basic textbook for the movement.

Liberation theology gained impetus in 1968 when Latin American bishops met in Medellin for a conference initiated by Pope Paul VI. They deplored the conditions of the poor and the institutions that exploit them. They voiced a commitment to justice and liberation of the poor, hungry and oppressed. Some Roman Catholic leaders in Latin America praised the actions at Medellin, but others were disturbed. And the new focus put the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America at odds with wealthy landowners who had supported the church.

Since its beginning, liberation theology has developed into what analysts say is more accurately called "liberation theologies." Some of these theologies advocate violence when necessary to bring about justice for the oppressed. Others, more clearly grounded in Scripture, call the community of faith to practice theology by advocating change for the oppressed.

As the movement took hold in Latin America, it became especially popular as a Third World theology. Its followers are found among Africans, Asians, Europeans, Latin Americans and North Americans. It also has been embraced by some Jewish and feminist theologians.

But Deiros believes "the golden age of liberation theology" has passed. "Liberation theology grew out of the situation in the '60s, which was characterized by an attempt to change the political, social and economic situation of Latin America," he said.

More than 20 years later, Latin Americans have seen an end to military dictatorships and the emergence of new democracies, Deiros said. With these changes, "Liberation theology has found more difficulties at least in using a revolutionary vocabulary and asking for revolutionary changes in Latin America," he said.

"I wouldn't say liberation theology is on the way to disappearing. But some liberation theologians today are speaking of a new way of understanding their message. And they're changing, in some aspects, their attitudes."

Daniel Sanchez, who has analyzed liberation theology from the perspective of an evangelical missiologist, has a similar view.

"Liberation theology is being re-examined," said Sanchez, who teaches at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "Quite likely a number of people will lose interest. But I think the more committed liberation theologians aren't going to give up. They're simply going to modify their stance."

Sanchez said he believes liberation theology was in transition even before the recent collapse of communism in the Soviet Union. And in Latin America, liberation theologians will "keep on saying that they weren't concerned about Russia in the first place," he noted. "They're concerned about Latin America, where there's still a lot of suffering, still a lot of disparity between classes and oppression of the poor."

But one of Sanchez' colleagues at Southwestern, missiologist Justice Anderson, said he sees recent events in the Soviet Union as "a tremendous blow" to liberation theology.

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"I think the out-and-out liberation theologians are rather embarrassed," said Anderson, a former Southern Baptist missionary professor in Argentina. "I think they're in a state of shock over the sudden demise of the Marxist-Leninist countries. ... Most of them had depended on or used the Marxist economic analogy as part of their system."

In light of world events, Anderson predicts liberation theologians will "gradually disavow Marxist connections" and take a more biblical approach.

But Alan Neely, a former Southern Baptist missionary professor in Colombia, said he believes Marxism never has been the major focus of most liberation theologians anyway. "The relationship of Marxism to liberation theology as far as I'm concerned is incidental to the main thrust," said Neely, now a professor at Princeton (N.J.) Theological Seminary.

In the next 25 years, Neely predicts, the world will see a resurgence of the struggle for justice central to liberation theology. "I don't expect worldwide capitalism suddenly to become beneficent and to become concerned with issues of justice more than issues of profit," Neely said.

Neely acknowledges liberation theology as a fad or "theological moment" probably will diminish. But it will give way "to other understandings of what God is doing in the world, given the historical context in which we now live.

"On the other hand, the questions liberation theology addressed, and the answer it offered, aren't going to fade away unless injustice, poverty, malnutrition, and institutionalized violence fade away," he said. "And I don't think they are going to fade away."

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Midwestern noted increase  
in fall enrollment figures

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary registered a slight increase in enrollment this fall, with more than 400 students taking classes at the institution.

Admission records, as of Oct. 1, show 463 students enrolled at the seminary's main campus in Kansas City, Mo., and at four off-campus centers. The total contrasts with 457 students enrolled in fall 1990 classes.

Enrollment figures also include 90 new students who are engaged in seminary coursework for the first time this fall. This total shows an 18 percent increase over last year's new student count of 74.

The fall enrollment statistics are a positive sign, according to Vernon Davis, vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty at Midwestern.

"The enrollment figures for the fall are encouraging," Davis said. "They reflect a stable student body in a time when there is a decreasing pool of potential students and increasing educational options for persons seeking to prepare for ministry among Southern Baptists."

He added, "I am especially pleased to see the dramatic growth in the number of new students enrolling and the wide geographic area from which they come."

Students enrolled at Midwestern this fall represent 39 states and six foreign countries.

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Students from Uzbekistan change views  
on America after month at Samford By Debbie Sheffield

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--"I thought America would be filled with dark streets, advertisements for soft drinks and drug problems," said Ulugbek Khasanov, an exchange student from Uzbekistan, a former Soviet republic.

Timur Rasulov, another exchange student, said he thought all of the United States would be like New York City -- noisy and filled with homeless people.

After spending a month at Samford University, their views of the U.S. have changed. Khasanov and Rasulov are studying at Samford as part of the Cooperative Services International Education Consortium of Southern Baptist schools involved in international programs.

"The people are much friendlier than I thought they would be to us," said Khasanov. "Everything is so beautiful here," Rasulov added. And although Rasulov loves American food, he and Khasanov agree their favorite thing about America is computers, which students in Russia do not have.

University students attend class six hours a day minimum for six days each week, the students explained.

"Teachers are very strict and they are not interested in students' opinions," said Rasulov. "American students have much more freedom in the classroom. They can express opinions."

Russian schools have 10 grades, said Khasanov, and a student must pass a rigorous exam to be allowed to attend a university.

"In Tashkent, the capital of Uzbek and a city of approximately two million, almost 50 percent of the students pass the exam," he said. "But in rural areas, only about one percent pass."

Both exchange students are from Tashkent. Khasanov said his parents, both of whom are doctors, inspired him to do well in school. He is a student at the medical institute in Tashkent. Rasulov studies at Tashkent State Economics University. His father is a chemist and his mother a dentist.

Although both of them have found computers an exciting learning aid, mastering course material is difficult because of the language difference.

"It can take an hour to understand five pages sometimes," Rasulov said.

The two exchange students agree on what they miss most: their families. Rasulov is an only child: Khasanov has a younger brother and sister.

Both say they also miss being in close touch with the political upheaval in their homeland. The Uzbek Republic declared independence from the Soviet Union while Rasulov and Khasanov were on a plane headed to the United States.

Rasulov said the republics that have declared independence were right in doing so, but they should maintain some framework for cooperation. Since the failed coup by hard-line Communists in August, much of the Soviet Union's central authority has dissolved.

Uzbekistan can now use its resources at home, Khasanov said. But the Uzbek state may not be economically strong enough to survive by itself. He hopes for a confederation of sovereign states with a weak central power.

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Samford's CSIEC representative is Bill O'Brien, director of the Beeson Divinity School Global Center. Samford history professor Jim Brown and biology professor Robert Stiles traveled to Uzbekistan last year to help initiate the CSIEC exchange program.

"As a result of this program 10 Uzbek students came to America and Samford got two," said Brown.

"It is really important for us to have international students on Samford's campus just for the education of our regular students. What a great chance to get to know another culture," he added.

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(BP) photo available upon request from Samford University  
(Debbie Sheffield is a writer for the Samford Crimson newspaper.)