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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 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 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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DALLAS -- Holocaust denial 'inexcusable,' 'just plain mean,' Baptists say.
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Holocaust denial 'inexcusable,'
'just plain mean,' Baptists say By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
5/12/93

DALLAS (BP)--Five decades after Nazi Germany's extermination of 6 million Jews, a survey has revealed one in five American adults is unconvinced the Holocaust occurred -- a belief variously labeled "callous indifference," "inexcusable ignorance" or "just plain mean" by Baptist scholars.

And for World War II veterans such as Baptist layman Junius Kendrick, Holocaust denial is a rejection of the nightmarish reality they witnessed firsthand.

A recent survey of 992 American adults and 506 high school students showed:

-- 22 percent of adults and 20 percent of high school students think it "seems possible" the Holocaust never happened.

-- 28 percent of adults and 39 percent of high school students do not know to what the term "Holocaust" refers.

-- 21 percent of adults and 26 percent of high school students do not believe the Holocaust is relevant today.

The survey, taken by the Roper Organization for the American Jewish Committee, is believed scientifically accurate within plus-or-minus 4 percent for adults and 5 percent for students.

The survey results reflect not only "an amazing level of ignorance and/or misunderstanding" but also a disturbing pattern of denial by those lacking the moral courage to criticize events such as the Holocaust, according to Dan McGee, professor of religion and ethics at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

"That group which says they think the Holocaust never happened is the most distressing part," McGee said. "I can tolerate ignorance better than I can tolerate callous indifference."

But historian William R. Estep Jr. offered little sympathy for either the ignorant or the indifferent.

"It is inexcusable ignorance," said Estep, distinguished professor emeritus of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. The belief is "symptomatic" of a society that gets virtually all of its information through electronic media, he added.

Anyone who denies the reality of the Holocaust hasn't spoken to veterans of the European Theater of Operations, according to Junius Kendrick, a member of White Pond Baptist Church in Prattville, Ala.

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"We were pulled in from 80 miles away for the express purpose of seeing just what had been going on in the concentration camps," Kendrick said.

Kendrick, who served as a medic with the 456th Anti-aircraft Battalion, entered the Buchenwald concentration camp April 21, 1944, the third day after it was liberated by Allied forces. More than 51,000 people died in the camp.

Forty-nine years later, he still vividly recalls his first impressions of the camp: naked human bodies stacked like firewood, five and six deep in four-wheeled carts. The gut-wrenching stench of human waste and unspeakable filth rising from open pits. And towering above brick walls and barbed wire -- smokestacks, bearing mute testimony to the camp's infamous furnaces.

"I did not think personally that society could do such a thing. I could not believe the populace would permit such a thing to happen," Kendrick said.

He recalled the stark contrast between the 40- by 150-foot barracks where up to nearly 2,000 prisoners were forced to sleep on board beds four decks deep and the lavish quarters of Nazi SS officers where they kept female prisoners as concubines.

"Some of the living quarters had lampshades made of human skin," he said, recalling the still-visible concentration camp tattoos of prisoners on the shades.

Visiting with concentration camp survivors, he remembered them telling in broken English how their Nazi captors forced prisoners with no medical training to perform surgery on fellow captives.

"At the time, it made me despise the German people," Kendrick said, adding he was able to deal with the bitter experience only after returning stateside through the loving support of Christian friends at a Baptist Student Union at Auburn University.

But Kendrick also remembers the reaction of German civilians who were forced by Allied soldiers to tour the concentration camps.

"They said, 'We just can't believe this has been going on here in our cities,'" he recounted.

Hitler's Germany and its allies were operating 20 concentration "death" camps and some 5,900 other detainment sites of various kinds at the close of World War II, according to the American Jewish Committee in New York City. In 1939, by comparison, the Nazis were operating six such camps, a committee spokesman said.

Holocaust denial has been a strong part of neo-Nazi propaganda since the war's end. But the belief broke into the mainstream in the 1970s with the publication of "The Hoax of the Twentieth Century" by Arthur R. Butz, a professor at Northwestern University, and the creation of the Institute for Historical Review in California -- an organization devoted to a revisionist interpretation of 20th century history.

Ray Higgins, assistant professor of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, pointed out writing history is always a mix of objective reality and subjective interpretation.

"This phenomenon of not believing that something really happened is not new," he said. "It is evidence that a Dark Age mentality still plagues us. It happens with scientific discoveries, historical events and family problems such as incest."

Higgins suggested three reasons why people do not believe an event such as the Holocaust really occurred: 1) They are naive and cannot believe it happened; 2) They are in denial and don't want to believe it happened; or 3) They are "just plain mean" and know it happened but choose to lie about it.

A revisionist approach to Holocaust history "creates an atmosphere in which evil can continue or be repeated" and it "further victimizes the victim," according to Higgins, vice chairman of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Recalling his own experience in clinical pastoral education at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas, Higgins remembered visiting one elderly woman who still bore concentration camp tattoos on her arms and scars upon her soul.

**SBC resolutions committee asks
to preview messengers' proposals**

NASHVILLE (BP)--The resolutions committee for the 1993 Southern Baptist Convention has issued a call for preliminary copies of any resolutions messengers intend to introduce during the June 15-17 annual meeting in Houston.

Committee chairman James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church in Snellville, Ga., noted messengers still must formally introduce their proposed resolutions during the convention's business sessions.

But the committee welcomes preview copies, Merritt said, adding, "We'll circulate them among the (committee) members in anticipation of our meeting in Houston."

During the convention, the resolutions committee will recommend specific resolutions for adoption to messengers at the SBC, which will meet in Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center.

Preliminary copies of proposed resolutions may be mailed to Convention Relations, SBC Executive Committee, 901 Commerce St., Nashville, TN 37203.

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**HMB commissioning service
to celebrate ethnic diversity**

Baptist Press
5/12/93

HOUSTON (BP)--Home missionaries from 19 states, Puerto Rico and four foreign countries will be commissioned June 13 at Second Baptist Church in Houston. The 86 missionaries to be commissioned serve in 26 states.

Sponsored by the Home Mission Board, ethnic leaders of Union Baptist Association and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the program will celebrate ethnic diversity and state partnership.

"Cooperation is a key to our Baptist way of carrying out the Great Commission," said William M. Pinson Jr., executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. "In regard to reaching our nation for Christ, this calls for partnering between churches, associations, state conventions and the Home Mission Board.

"The commissioning service affords a wonderful opportunity for Baptists to be part of a great missionary moment and testimony to Baptist cooperation," Pinson said.

The service will begin at 6:45 p.m. with a concert by the Agrepacion Bautista Latino American choir. The Chinese Choir of Union Baptist Association also will present special music.

Program participants include Pinson; Rudy Sanchez, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Houston and president of the Mexican Baptist Convention of the BGCT; Jim Herrington, executive director of Union Baptist Association; and Rose Zamora, language specialist for Woman's Missionary Union. Larry Lewis, HMB president, will present a message of challenge to the newly commissioned missionaries.

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**Evangelism leader C.E. Autrey
dies at age 87 in Florida**

Baptist Press
5/12/93

PENSACOLA, Fla. (BP)--Longtime Southern Baptist evangelism leader C.E. Autrey died May 8 at age 87 in Pensacola, Fla. Funeral services were held there May 11.

Autrey was evangelism division director at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta from 1960-69 and associate evangelism director from 1952-55 when the board was based in Dallas.

"He was one of the finest evangelism leaders our convention has ever known," said C.B. Hogue, a close friend and executive director-treasurer of the California Southern Baptist Convention. "He didn't talk about evangelism or teach evangelism -- he practiced it."

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"Can we think of anything more evil than the Holocaust? Yes -- to tell those who suffered the Holocaust that it did not happen," Higgins said. "This false belief takes the evil of the Holocaust to the nth degree."

Estep, likewise, spoke of the revisionist view of Holocaust history and indifference to its significance in moral and theological terms.

Extending beyond anti-Semitism, Estep said it is part of a "rising crescendo of prejudice that ends in violence." It is "an expression of sin that exists not far beneath the surface and that is breaking out today in Bosnia" where it appears in the guise of "ethnic cleansing," Estep said.

McGee agreed denial of the Holocaust fits into a pattern of global anti-Semitism in particular and intolerance in general.

"This appears to be part of not only the growing anti-Semitism in our country and around the world, but also part of a larger, general fracturing of the human race. All around us are signs of growing racism and intolerance toward those of different religious persuasions," he said.

McGee linked this intolerance to a worldwide movement toward fundamentalism in Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism.

"Fundamentalism tends to view all those who are outside the 'select of God' as unworthy -- objects of at least scorn, if not outright persecution," he said.

This rising tide of intolerance could be seen as part of a "survival" mentality that expresses itself variously in religious fundamentalism, nationalism or tribalism, according to Henry Smith, assistant professor of world religions at Southwestern.

It may be an understandable and rational response by people fearing the loss of their sense of identity, he said, but it simply will not work in the modern world.

"The whole world would end up like the Balkans if we all chose that tactic," he said.

Instead, Christians should seek a clearer understanding of the "absolute importance" of the Holocaust to Jewish identity, Smith said.

"To the Jews, the Holocaust was a decisive moment in their peoplehood, not just a historical event," he said.

Furthermore, rather than direct disproportionate attention to the few heroic Christians like Corrie ten Boom who stood with the Jews in their suffering, non-Jews should give primary focus to the trauma inflicted upon the Jewish people, Smith maintained.

"Many Jews wish Christians would just be more honest about Christian complicity in the Holocaust rather than attaching themselves after the fact to the few who acted nobly," he said.

Baptists in particular, Smith said, need to get back to their roots, reclaiming their commitment to freedom of conscience by standing forthrightly for religious liberty -- a cause that historically united Baptists and Jews.

"Rather than engaging in a revision of history that is hurtful to everybody, we should seek mutual understanding, mutual respect, and stand up for religious liberty," Smith said. "If we did, a lot more healthy relationships would develop."

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EDITORS' NOTE: The missing pastor in (BP) story titled "Videotape deepens mystery of pastor's disappearance," dated 5/11/93, has been located in Montgomery, Ala., according to the story's writer, Dusty Perkins, who is working on an update for Baptist Press.

Autrey began his ministry in pastorates in Louisiana and Tennessee and was evangelism director for the Louisiana Baptist Convention from 1948-52.

From 1955-60, he was professor of evangelism at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and he held the same post at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary for 17 months after leaving the HMB in 1969.

He moved to Utah in 1974, serving as pastor and an evangelism consultant. He next taught at Mid-America Baptist Seminary in Memphis, Tenn., from 1976-77 and was professor of Bible at Utah University while serving as pastor at University Baptist Church in Salt Lake City. He moved to Pensacola in the spring of 1983.

Hogue noted Autrey started his churches in Utah "by going door to door, knocking on doors and winning people to Christ in a hostile environment. He proved it could be done anywhere."

A native of Mississippi, Autrey was a graduate of Louisiana College in Pineville and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Survivors include his wife, Aline; a son, Jarry, of Arlington, Texas; and three grandchildren.

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Pluralism restricting
the gospel, speakers say

By David Winfrey

Baptist Press
5/12/93

PORTLAND, Ore. (BP)--Religious pluralism prevents Christians from sharing the gospel and non-Christians from wanting it, according to speakers at a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board conference on metropolitan missions.

"Many of the people who sit in the pews week after week think Christianity is the right way for them, but they are not convinced it's the right way for everybody," said Ken Hemphill, director of the Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth.

Church members must first be convinced of the need for reaching others before a church will grow, he said. "Until there is an absolute compassion for the lost people, there's no need for (church growth) training."

James Engel, a former director of faculty ministry for Campus Crusade for Christ, questioned the effectiveness of confrontational evangelism in today's pluralistic world -- a point later questioned by Darrell Robinson, HMB vice president for evangelism.

"The message we are presenting is not one that has any teeth in it in a pluralistic age," said Engel, who is now distinguished professor of marketing at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa. "They believe there are many ways, and they don't like our way."

Engel and Hemphill spoke on reaching the increasing secular and pluralistic population during the Home Mission Board's Models for Metropolitan Ministry conference in Portland in April.

A 1992 survey of the World Evangelical Fellowship found members believed religious pluralism to be Christian evangelism's greatest barrier, Engel said.

"We're just seen as narrow-minded bigots" for contending Christianity is the only way to God, Engel said. "Our logic and our confrontational styles (of evangelism) are going to come up empty."

Lifestyle evangelism will play a greater role in reaching a pluralistic society as Christians seek to show their faith makes a difference in their lives, Engel said. "The message is lived out in community, and if it's not seen, felt and observed, what proof have we got?"

The HMB's Robinson, however, disagreed confrontational evangelism is less effective in a pluralistic society, adding conditions in America today parallel those of the first century world.

Confrontation was unpopular in those days "but it was then and is now essential to the conversion of the lost," he said. "It is not either confrontation of the lost with the gospel or building meaningful relationships. It is 'both-and.'"

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Hemphill said Christians will have to use multiple methods to reach today's secular world.

"The gospel itself will be confrontational at some point," he said. "The person who is the witness need not be confrontational." Most evangelism tools are based on the assumption that even non-believers accept the Bible as the Word of God, said Hemphill, who added that assumption is not valid among secular people.

Today's world will require more bridge builders who invite non-Christians to church or Bible study. "We will never ever replace going to their door if we are to reach secular people for Christ."

Engel, co-author of a 1975 book on communication strategies for the church, said too many churches have adopted a "managerial missiology" that measures its success in terms of numbers. "Church growth is the outcome of a healthy church, not a goal."

The topic of reaching secular people is especially important for Baptists in the Northwest.

Oregon and Washington have the nation's third- and fourth-lowest percentages of population claiming any religious faith, with 32.2 percent and 33.1 percent, respectively, according to a 1990 study by the Glenmary Research Center. Only Nevada (32.1) and Alaska (32.2), rank lower, according to the study.

Northwest residents aren't hostile to the gospel, just poorly exposed, said Harold Hitt, director of missions for the Northwest Baptist Convention.

"It is not a gospel-hardened area," Hitt said. "You run into people here who have never heard the plan of salvation, never owned a Bible in their life."

The region's beauty and sense of independence contributes to its residents being so secular and underchurched, he added. "The beauty has made a lot of people, I think, more worshipful of the creation than the creator."

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Family's nightmare a trial of faith

By Ray Waddle

Baptist Press
5/12/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Jimmy Allen, a former Southern Baptist Convention president, thought he left seminary with God in his pocket -- a fix-it God he could capture in a Sunday morning sermon.

But in the middle of a distinguished career, he became wrapped in a nightmare.

His youngest son's entire family got AIDS and a panicked Disciples of Christ church kicked them out. A baby grandson died. So did the baby's mother.

Just when Allen thought it couldn't get any worse, his middle son also contracted AIDS.

Suddenly, the traditional Sunday school answers no longer made sense.

"When I left seminary, I pretty much had God set down in my notebooks," said Allen, now a Georgia pastor who is wrapping up an academic year as a visiting scholar at Vanderbilt University's First Amendment Center.

"Now, I don't know nearly as much about God as I did after seminary. But what I have learned about God is so real it takes your breath away. Sometimes you learn about God only through suffering, things you learn no other way."

Allen, 65, is a statesman in a denomination that prides itself on finding answers in the Bible to life's toughest questions, but life has tried to mock him by swallowing his loved ones in a disease that has no cure.

Allen's son Scott's wife, Lydia, died of acquired immune deficiency syndrome last year after receiving a transfusion of contaminated blood 10 years before. His two grandsons were born with the disease; one died in 1986.

Unrelated to that tragedy, Allen's son, Skip, also contracted AIDS. Skip Allen is gay, a lifestyle his father does not accept.

Intensifying the hurt even more, Jimmy Allen witnessed a string of churches abandon his loved ones when the Allens needed the church most.

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Scott Allen, an ordained Baptist minister working at a Disciples of Christ church in Colorado Springs, Colo., had to resign in 1985 when the senior minister learned Scott's wife and sons were struggling with AIDS.

"That was the most excruciating pain of all -- seeing that those churches were unable to muster the courage to do the hard thing, the threatening thing, and follow the Founder," said Jimmy Allen. He was president of the SBC in 1978, the last moderate leader before conservatives took control of the church body.

Some would see Allen as a latter-day Job, an upright man whom God cruelly tested by destroying his family. But Allen resists that image.

"I don't ask, 'Why us?'" said Allen, whose family was profiled in the April issue of Texas Monthly magazine.

"We live in a twisted world with a twisted genetic code, and we make mistakes with each other. But God promises to walk with us through it."

Allen has managed to hang onto his faith and even go deeper into his relationship with Jesus Christ.

Not so his son Scott, 37, who watched his wife and their infant son die of AIDS.

Scott who never contracted the disease, has given up organized Christianity and now lives in Dallas with his son, Matthew, 10, who is living with AIDS.

"I certainly made great attempts to make sense of their deaths," Scott Allen said in a phone interview from Dallas.

"But I finally decided I don't have to have an answer. There is a preciousness to life, and there is suffering, and both fit into the flow of life."

Scott Allen now works with AIDS patients at the University of Texas Medical School and is a member of the National Commission on AIDS.

Trained like his father in a Southern Baptist seminary, Scott now has no patience with religious labels, he said.

But he still feels connected to God.

Seeing his wife and son die gave him a transcendent experience that words cannot hope to grasp, he said.

"Those experiences took me to the edge of eternity.

"When you see those who suffer walk on through it, there's something reflected in their souls that's beyond words. The trouble with Christian faith is it's so afraid of death and the unknown that it always comes up with clear-cut answers. That's not how life works."

Jimmy Allen and his son, having taken conflicting spiritual paths in the wake of family death, spar on religious questions but remain close, they said.

Jimmy Allen said he is also close to his older son, Skip, despite his difficulty with Skip's lifestyle.

"From the biblical understanding I have of the way God made us, homosexuality isn't acceptable behavior," Jimmy Allen said.

"I love him, I'm proud of him. He's one of them most caring guys I know. I think you can love someone and still not approve a lifestyle."

Skip Allen, 38, who runs his own business in Dallas, declined to be interviewed.

At the center of family concern now is Matthew, who has weakened lately but still attends school and has defied doctors' predictions of an early death.

"He knows there's a God and that he'll be with his brother and mother if he dies," Scott Allen said.

Matthew's illness made several churches balk at embracing the family because of concerns about his mixing with other children.

"You rescue good out of evil -- a lot of churches that rejected them were forced to confront their fears and now have policies regarding people with AIDS," Jimmy Allen said. "But it's too late to undo the wound in Scott's life."

A Church of Christ congregation in suburban Dallas finally accepted Matthew into a day-care program, after three years of rejection from other churches.

"Even in Colorado Springs, individual church members were wonderful, but the institutional church is run like a business, and AIDS is bad for business," Scott Allen said.

Tornado strengthens faith,
binds together Texas town

By Orville Scott

DALLAS (BP)--It came from the southwest, a swirling, funnel-shaped monster chewing a path of destruction three miles long across Wylie, Texas, about 25 miles northeast of Dallas.

Thomas and Betty Maynard had just returned home from Sunday morning services at First Baptist Church and were preparing to celebrate Mothers' Day with their children and grandchildren.

Looking out the window, Mrs. Maynard exclaimed, "Those trees are practically touching the ground."

"Children, get in the bathroom," yelled one of the daughters.

Everyone got into the bathroom except Maynard. He saw his patio roof sail over the house, and behind it came the roof of the house. Sheet metal was blown in through the windows of the master bedroom.

"It happened so quickly that we didn't really have time to get frightened," Thomas recalled.

"But when it was over, we held hands in a circle and thanked God for sparing us."

The Maynards' expression of thanksgiving was repeated again and again by people who lost homes or businesses but survived the tornado which claimed one life while destroying or damaging more than 160 homes and businesses in Wylie and about 50 in nearby Sachse.

Several families who were members of First Baptist Church lost their homes to the storm, and two had their places of business destroyed. Many others were among residents whose homes were damaged.

There were no reports of damage to churches or nearby Lake Lavon Baptist Encampment, said Collin Baptist Association director of missions Gilbert Callaway.

Members of First Baptist rallied immediately to the aid of tornado victims, providing food and clothing and opening its buildings as a shelter.

Within a few hours after the storm, more than 100 volunteers were on hand, some bringing portable generators to serve until electrical power was restored.

"We're a loving community," said a member of the church, Dorothy Strickland, while making sandwiches for storm victims and relief crews. "In a crisis, politics are forgotten as everybody pulls together."

Jerry Smith of First Baptist was food coordinator for disaster relief and her son, Ron, a deacon in the church, coordinated volunteer clean-up operations.

More than 100 of the church's young people helped with clean-up after school, said pastor A.L. Draper.

"One elderly woman marveled that her yard was covered with debris, but 20 minutes after the young people arrived, it was clean. They have been an inspiration."

Also, said Draper, "Children were amazed to see their teachers after school, wading in the mud, helping clean up.

"Baptist churches from far and wide have responded," Draper noted. "We got a call from Sunset Hills Baptist Church in Anchorage, Alaska, wanting to know what they could do to help."

One of the business facilities destroyed by the tornado belonged to Joe Edge who was recently ordained as a deacon at First Baptist.

Edge had lost his business to fire in 1989, and many people were comparing him to Job in the Bible who lost everything but refused to curse God and die, said Draper.

"I found him looking at the remains of his business and thanking God nobody was working when the tornado hit. It's only served to strengthen his faith."

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