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Baptist Youth World Conference
opens with mass choir salute

By Steve Evans

Baptist Press
8/20/93

HARARE, Zimbabwe (BP)--As the rhythms of Africa thundered throughout the Harare International Conference Centre on Aug. 11, the combined voices of the 250-member Baptist International Mass Choir opened the 12th Baptist Youth World Conference by proclaiming, "Bayete Inkosi! We salute you, Lord!"

The drums continued throughout the roll call of nations, which concluded with a standing ovation for the host country of Zimbabwe. "Peoples of the world," the voices rang, "risk your all for him. Christ is the hope. Christ is the hope for the world."

It was an emotional moment, and the emotion had been building for days as youth from around the world arrived for this meeting of Baptists affiliated with the 38-million-member Baptist World Alliance.

The moment could be compared to the opening ceremonies of an Olympic games, but this was no game. It was a time of celebration, yes, but it was also a time of seriousness as over 4,000 registrants and observers were challenged with the theme "Risking All For Christ ... Our Only Hope" by Romanian pastor Paul Negrut.

Addressing the conference on behalf of Zimbabwe Vice-President Joshua Nkomo was John Nkomo, minister of the public service, labor and social welfare. "We are one world, one people," the official said. "We are to share experiences; share in the gift of life; share in worshipping him; and share in the oneness of life."

He said somewhere in the world was an agent manipulating the youth of the world. "Banish this evil one," Nkomo said. "Lead righteous lives and behave in an exemplary manner."

Additional opening remarks were given by BWA President Knud Wumpelmann and BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz. BWA Youth Department President Chamunowra Chiromo and BWA Youth Director Paul Montacute officially declared the conference in session.

Displaying an ostrich egg and remarking its size was in direct proportion to the size of the ostrich, the world's largest bird, Wumpelmann said, "This big gathering says something about the size of the BWA."

In addition to its membership of 38 million, the BWA is comprised of 170 Baptist unions and conventions throughout the world. "This represents a community of over 80 million Baptists ministering in more than 200 countries," he said.

"An egg is the beginning of new life," Wumpelmann continued, "and this egg is a symbol of this conference, a meeting which can bring new life through the youth of the world."

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Referring to historic Baptist leaders Martin Luther King Jr., former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and evangelist Billy Graham, Lotz said Baptists of the world were concerned with social justice, political involvement and world evangelism.

Prior to Negrut's address, conference participants sang praises to their Lord in English and a combination of African languages -- Zulu, Ndebele and Shona.

"Jabulani, Africa, take joy," they sang as hundreds took to the conference floor to worship in traditional African style. "Let us worship Jesus, King of the nations ... Come nations, let us sing God's praise."

The time of praise and worship concluded as the 4,000 plus participants joined hands in intercessory prayer for Africa. "God bless Africa -- Inkosi Sikelele," they sang. "God bless her children."

Negrut, a Baptist pastor persecuted under Romania's communist rule, challenged the youth to risk all for Christ. "Before we proclaim Jesus Christ as the hope of the whole world, there must be a willingness to give our whole lives to God," said Negrut, who was persecuted 13 years because of his faith in and commitment to Christ. "We are here to speak the language of love, reconciliation and hope."

Baptist youth, in conference from Aug. 11-15, addressed the issues of AIDS, sexuality and spirituality, human rights, Christians in politics, violence, poverty, the earth and its resources, theology, culture, the arts, faith and witnessing. The first conference was held in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1931. The last meeting was in 1988 at Glasgow, Scotland. The Harare conference is the first for the continent of Africa.

The 12th Baptist Youth World Conference was sponsored by the youth department of the BWA, and hosted by the Baptist heads of denominations of Zimbabwe.

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EDITORS' NOTE: A group of six stories related to the BWA Youth World Conference, including articles on particular speakers is available in the Newsroom in SBCNet under BWA.BP.

Deadlines set for
human rights award

Baptist Press
8/20/93

HARARE, Zimbabwe (BP)--Baptists around the world who belong to the Baptist World Alliance have until Jan. 1, 1994 to submit nominations for the BWA Human Rights Award, the first of which will be awarded at the 17th Baptist World Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Aug. 1-6, 1995.

According to the conditions of the award, judging for it must be completed one year before a BWA Congress, held every five years.

The award is to be given for "significant and effective activities to secure, protect, restore or preserve human rights -- those rights inherent in our nature as human beings."

The award defines "human rights" as those stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other rights set down by the United Nations' Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council and the International Court of Justice.

The BWA Human Rights Award was established by Olive Tiller and her late husband Carl Tiller who have been leaders of human rights concerns to Baptists around the world.

During the August 1991 general council meetings of the BWA in Montreal, the Tillers presented a \$10,000 check to the BWA to establish the Human Rights Award Program.

The award consists of a \$1,000 cash prize, a plaque and full scholarship to attend the BWA Congress at which the award will be presented.

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Messianic Jews finding
more success, leader says

By David Winfrey

ATLANTA (BP)--Despite some protests, Jewish Christians have found increasing success presenting Jesus as the Jewish messiah, says the president of the Southern Baptist Messianic Fellowship.

"About 20 years ago, Jewish people found out that they could accept Jesus without having to act like a gentile," says Jerry Young, pastor of Temple Beth Tephillah, or house of prayer, in Cooper City, Fla. Young and other "Messianic Jews" met recently in Atlanta for the fellowship's annual training workshop.

As with any ethnic group, the key to reaching Jews is presenting the gospel in their cultural context, says Young.

"The way to reach the Jewish community is the same way you reach the Hispanic community," he says. "We don't try to westernize people, we try to evangelize."

Young and others like him call themselves Messianic Jews, not Christians, signifying their acceptance of Jesus as the fulfillment of Scripture's prophecy of a Messiah.

The fellowship has 10 Southern Baptist Messianic congregations. Messianic Jews don't use the term church, which might alienate some traditional Jews, Young says. Sam Nadler, president of Chosen People Ministries, says there are about 130 Messianic Jewish congregations nationwide.

A conference last year established a goal of 60 new Jewish congregations by the year 2003, according to figures from the Home Mission Board's language church extension division.

Although many congregations are started and led by Messianic Jews, rabbinic Jews have objected to Christian evangelism efforts, says Maurice Smith of the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department.

"It is not uncommon in the worldwide Jewish community to consider that when a Jew converts to Christianity he or she ceases to be a Jew," says Smith. "In some cases, practicing Jews will think of groups of Messianic Jews as cults."

Lori Forman of the American Jewish Committee said a Messianic Jew is still Jewish but is practicing outside the boundaries of authentic Judaism.

"It is not that the Jewish community no longer considers them Jews, they consider that they have erred and committed the offense of idolatry because they are worshipping a human being as God," said Forman, a program specialist in inter-religious affairs for the committee.

Young says he has heard charges of "cultural annihilation" from other Jews, but simply answers that Jesus doesn't violate Scriptures but fulfills them.

"We tell Jewish people that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. All the original followers of Jesus were Jewish," he says. "When gentiles were added to the church, the gentiles converted to the Jewish Messiah."

Nadler agrees being Christian and Jewish aren't mutually exclusive. Twenty years after Paul's conversion, he still referred to himself as a Jew from Tarsus, Nadler points out.

Nadler says a "remnant" of Jews will always be receptive to the gospel. "I just don't know who they are, so I have to tell everybody," he adds laughing.

Gentile Christians with Jewish friends should learn more about them and be willing to share their faith in the Jewish context, Nadler says.

"God holds them responsible to bring the message of Messiah to their Jewish neighbors and friends," he says. "The worst form of anti-semitism is to know that without Jesus there is nothing but eternal damnation and not tell your Jewish friends and leave them to an eternal holocaust."

College students seek
challenging Bible study

By Linda Lawson

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Today's college students want Sunday morning Bible study that challenges their thinking and changes their lives, Paul Westbrook told Sunday school workers attending the Student Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

"We have been feeding them cotton candy for too long and we are paying a terrible price. We have lots of students who are biblically illiterate," said Westbrook, minister with students at University Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

Preparing Sunday school lessons takes work and requires understanding the Bible, background information such as biblical archaeology and geography and questions students are asking about life and about God, Westbrook said.

"A lesson is only a skeleton," he emphasized. "They are never meant to be more than that. You sketch it in."

In planning for Sunday, Westbrook urged teachers to look to students for the right questions to pose. Otherwise, "most of your questions will be based on your life questions, not theirs."

Rather than planning for life application at the end of the session, Westbrook suggested building application into examination of the scripture passage.

For example, in a study of the Bible characters, David and Jonathan, "you have the opportunity to say to guys who've just become roommates, are you going to be Jonathan to him?" Westbrook said.

He urged teachers to read lessons, or at least lesson themes, at least three weeks ahead. "Allow time to percolate, for the Holy Spirit to work."

He urged teachers to teach for depth and challenge those who want to grow in their faith.

"If you preach and teach at a shallow level, that's who you'll get (in your class)," Westbrook said.

"My goal is to give these kids (those who want depth in Bible study) more than they can wrestle with in 50 minutes," he added. "If you have kids who are hungry and expectant, that is your best advertising."

Westbrook said he plans Wednesday weekly workers meetings to provide quality Bible study for teachers and officers.

"I bust my chops to give them steak. I make teachers and officers meetings a Sunday school class. I model what they should do in their classes," he said.

Sunday school is a tool for spiritual growth, not a sacred cow, Westbrook said.

"Structure is not sacred. It is a tool to mold around the leading of the Holy Spirit, the needs of your students and the gifts of your teachers," he said.

Student Conference was sponsored by the Baptist Sunday School Board's national student ministry.

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Listening to world's voices
makes ministry intentional

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
8/20/93

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Intentional listening can result in intentional ministry, a Southern Baptist seminary professor told Baptist Student Union directors during a leadership conference Aug. 14-20 at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

Doug Dickens, associate professor of pastoral ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, said sometimes campus ministers hear more than the voices of the students with whom they counsel.

"There are many voices that clamor for our attention," Dickens observed, "some of them inside our own heads."

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Dickens said ministers need to evaluate the voices they hear, internally and externally, so they can minister intentionally to persons they encounter.

"Ministers need to learn how to monitor their own internal voice, the voice of God and the voice of the hurting person," he said. "If we are going to decide what to do with our calling, we need to look at what's happening in the world, in churches and in ourselves. With all that is happening, what does this mean for me and the way I do ministry?"

Dickens said he believes today's young adults don't want to hear about taking up their crosses, but they want to hear about self-fulfillment. For this reason, he said he believes churches are going to face difficult times finding ways to present the gospel to both young adults and to older Christians who were taught to sacrifice.

He said the challenges ahead demand ministers understand how they listen and why they do what they do in order to hear the messages of persons with "shrill, loud, angry or soft voices that are hardly heard. How do we hear their voices? It isn't the facts people respond to," Dickens said he has come to believe. "It is the body language, pitch and volume."

He said ministers must learn to "hear through what people are saying and decide what to do to create meaningful relationships. These are days that call for us to be more sensitive than ever to the angry, broken, driven, fearful voices."

Dickens urged campus ministers to hear the voices in the world and the voice of God to "be intentional in how we relate to people to help them to find the abundant life and to take up their cross."

He said he would advise all ministers, including those who work with students, to:

- engage in nurturing spirituality. "Like Moses at the burning bush, we've discovered that the call of God is challenging, exhilarating and troublesome. Take time in silence to listen for the still, small voice."

- affirm their own uniqueness. "Develop opportunities to listen to your own voice. Who am I? How do I feel about my ministry? What are my unique gifts? Am I letting the clamor and clatter of others distort or drown out my uniqueness?"

- attend to the message of others. "Discern what others are saying, feeling, wanting, needing. What is the conversation of the world about?"

- apply the gospel with intentionality. "Discipline yourself to apply the gospel message like a skilled craftsman creating art."

- accept the support and affirmation of a peer group. "Dare to find support, clarification and challenge by being part of a peer group of persons who will be honest with me."

- trust God with your ministry. "Trust God enough to risk your ministry, even if it seems inadequate or unworthy."

The Glorieta student ministry conference was sponsored by national student ministry of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

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Jew comes to Christ
during Passover Seder

By Jon Walker

Baptist Press
8/20/93

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--As a Jewish boy, Sheldon Alexander participated in many Passover Seders, never suspecting they would one day introduce him to his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Alexander, the registrar at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, grew up as a member of the only Jewish family in Hereford, Texas, where he often spoke to community groups about the difference between Judaism and Christianity. He prided himself on "walking the straight and narrow line," representing what Judaism was suppose to be to all the people in the community.

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"I was content to be a Jew," Alexander said. "My tradition, culture, and heritage were rooted in Judaism, and even though I was very open to other people's religions, I knew I would always be a Jew."

Alexander's openness to other religions included dating a Christian woman, Carolyn, who eventually became his wife.

"We were going to solve our religious problem by going together to the Temple on Friday nights and then going together to church on Sunday mornings," Alexander said.

Carolyn said she understood Sheldon did not recognize Jesus as his Messiah when they got married, but the magnitude of the conflict did not become evident until she was pregnant with their first son.

"We heard some children singing 'Jesus Loves Me' and I said, 'I can't wait until we can teach our son songs about Jesus,'" Carolyn said. "Sheldon looked at me and very seriously said, 'I can't wait until his Bar Mitzvah.'"

Carolyn began praying that their son would have a Christian father, yet the conflict appeared to get worse when Sheldon stopped attending the Baptist church because he was offended by the pastor's reference to "obstinate and stiff-necked Jews."

It was not too long before the Alexanders began to experience financial difficulties and Sheldon, in a state of depression, began to notice Carolyn's consistently positive outlook. About the same time, a business friend of the Alexanders invited them to hear a man from "Jews for Jesus."

"Although I kept telling our friend that I would go, I really had no intention of going until the day of the talk and then something compelled me to go hear this Jewish man speak on his new found faith in Christ," Sheldon said.

The man's testimony had little impact on Sheldon, but he invited the Alexanders to a Passover Seder at a church the following Sunday night.

"I got excited because that was something I understood," Sheldon said. "My family had observed Passover since I was a baby and I always had a part in the ceremony."

"We went to the Seder, and for the first time, I understood the true significance of the wine and the broken bread. That night the Lord spoke to me and I accepted Christ as my Messiah."

"Jesus showed me my tradition, culture, and heritage - the things I had taken pride in - were nothing compared to Him: what I needed was a relationship with Jesus Christ."

It also meant a whole new relationship with his wife. Sheldon told her he thought she had been crazy all those years because she kept talking about Jesus.

Sheldon's public profession of faith did not come without a price: for years he had worked in his family's business, but his new faith caused a strain in that relationship so Sheldon sought employment elsewhere.

Although Sheldon eventually went back to work for his father, he felt God calling him into Christian ministry. After graduating with a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Sheldon came to Southeastern as registrar.

Ironically, just a few months after Sheldon was saved, a church found out he was a completed Jew and asked him to do a Passover Seder for them. Although he had participated in Passovers his entire life, Sheldon now had a different reason for doing it: to glorify his Lord Jesus Christ.

"The last supper was really a Passover Seder and Jesus was celebrating the Passover that night with his disciples in the same way Jews do today," Sheldon said. "Christ gave the complete meaning to the wine and bread."

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Sheldon Alexander is available to churches for demonstrations of the Passover Seder. He can be reached through Southeastern Seminary at (919) 556-3101.

EDITORS' NOTE: This first person account of the Last Supper can be used as a sidebar for the preceding (BP) story.

Sidebar

The Lord's Supper
as the Passover Seder

By Sheldon Alexander

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--Each of the Gospels tells of the Last Supper of our Lord and how he instructed the disciples and the Church to take the bread and the wine as a symbol of his body and his blood. Jesus said to do this in remembrance of him until he comes again.

The Gospels also emphasize that this was not a new celebration, rather it was a very ancient one, the Passover Seder. From Exodus chapter 12, we learn that God moved through his prophet Moses to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage and into the land which he had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. On the evening of his arrest and beginning of his trials, Jesus and his disciples were celebrating this event.

Jesus gave a new meaning to the Passover Seder which, as believers, we celebrate in the Lord's Supper or Communion.

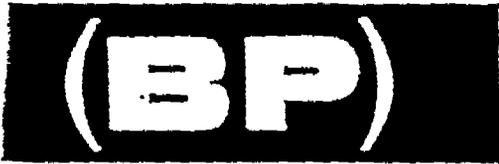
First, the bread (Matzoth) is an unleavened wafer much like what the Children of Israel made in haste as they left Egypt just ahead of Pharaoh and his army. (Ex. 12:34 ff.) Jesus tells us that this unleavened bread is a symbol of his body - leaven in Scripture often represents sin and he was without sin.

Second, the wine symbolized new life, which was to belong to the Children of Israel when they left the slavery in Egypt and entered into God's promised land. Our Lord tells us that this represents his blood which gives us the new life in salvation and in eternity with him in heaven.

As in Jesus' day, Passover is a time when Jews were anticipating the coming of the Messiah. At the end of the service, the door is opened in the hope that Elijah will come, bringing news of the Messiah.

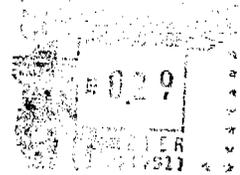
Jesus told his disciples that Elijah had already come, in the person of John the Baptist and that he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life through which both Jew and gentile could come to the Father.

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