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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Gospel response continues
in Algeria despite threats

By Mike Creswell

Baptist Press
11/10/93

BRUSSELS, Belgium (BP)--Neither death threats against Christians nor civil unrest in Algeria has stopped the gospel in its spread across the country, according to recent eyewitness accounts.

Civil violence grips the North African nation as militant Muslims battle the government in an attempt to install an Islamic-controlled regime similar to Iran's. More than 2,000 people have been reported killed in the fighting and terrorist attacks during the last two years.

An Islamic militant group claimed responsibility for the assassination of two Russian military officers in October. Other foreigners have been killed and kidnapped as militants apparently followed up on threats against them.

Muslim militants also have threatened Christian families inside Algeria as well as Christian workers outside the country, although no killings of Christians have been reported.

Some threats have appeared in letters sent to Christian radio programs broadcast in the region. One recent letter vowed: "You are our target. Your blood will be shed in Kabylia, land of Islam. Here is the result of your 'mission impossible.' Death!"

Another letter warned: "We know that you attack Islam in order to earn your bread and butter. But you have forgotten that you are in the process of digging your grave -- causing your death -- which will soon happen."

But threats haven't stopped many Algerians from responding to the gospel. Recent reports from inside the country confirm house churches and home Bible study groups continue to be established in many villages -- especially in the northern mountainous area where Kabyle Berbers predominate.

One observer told of believers who walked more than nine miles through the rain to attend Bible studies. Men and women, young and old, are responding. And Christian outreach continues in the capital city of Algiers, but in a more subdued way, according to the witnesses.

Baptisms also are increasing, the sources say. They reportedly number in the tens, not the hundreds. But Christians familiar with the country still use words like "miraculous" and "amazing" to describe the growing movement.

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Any response from Kabyle Berbers is considered significant. Historically almost 100 percent of them have been Muslims. Kabyles are one of the four main groups within the Berbers, a people group of 20 million spread through several North African countries. About 5 million Kabyles live in Algeria.

Berbers are considered to be part of "World A," a term used by Christian missiologists to describe people groups virtually cut off from the gospel. Such isolated peoples constitute the "final frontier" in Christian missions.

Positive response to a Christian radio program in the Kabyle language also continues. In recent weeks the program has received dozens of responses, including requests for Bibles and other Christian literature.

"For a long time I have been listening to your program ... and I have begun to be interested ... little by little in Christianity. Now I am a believer in your religion," a 23-year-old Berber man wrote to the program. "My problem is those around me, who despise and detest me because I am leaving their religion. This is difficult for me to accept."

The letter illustrates the tremendous family and social pressure exerted against new believers in North Africa.

The violence and threats of recent months have increased security concerns among Christian workers who record the programs and do follow-up. But the workers said they will continue their ministry.

Southern Baptists provide about \$20,000 per year for the Kabyle broadcasts. But most funding comes from another Christian organization, Thru the Bible. Other financial and technical support comes from three other Christian groups.

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First \$5 million CP goal
adopted by Illinois Baptists

By Bill Webb

Baptist Press
11/10/93

EFFINGHAM, Ill. (BP)--Messengers to the Illinois Baptist State Association annual meeting Nov. 2-4 unanimously approved the first \$5 million Cooperative Program goal in its 86-year history.

Meeting at the Thelma Keller Convention Center in Effingham, Ill., the 794 registered messengers also increased the percentage of CP gifts to be forwarded to Southern Baptist Convention national and international ministries in 1994 by one half percent.

The 1994 Cooperative Program goal of \$5,038,328 is 3 percent higher than the 1993 goal.

Beginning Jan. 1, CP gifts in Illinois will be divided 59.25 percent to IBSA causes and 40.75 percent to SBC causes, compared to 59.75 percent IBSA and 40.25 percent SBC in 1993.

The half-percent change was triggered by a policy adopted by the association's board of directors three and a half years ago linking changes in the CP ratio to actual CP giving by IBSA churches.

In 1992, the last completed fiscal year, Illinois Baptist churches contributed about 6.5 percent more through the Cooperative Program than in 1991.

Next year will be the first year Illinois Baptists have had a goal to send as much as \$2 million to Southern Baptist causes, \$2,053,118 to be exact.

Messengers also approved a 1994 general fund budget calling for expenditures of \$4,593,480 (not including the SBC portion of CP) and income of \$4,529,070 (not including the SBC portion of CP). An additional \$182,500, to be taken from the \$317,123 general fund balance from 1993, was approved by messengers for completion of one-time projects. In addition, messengers voted approval for 1994 expenditures of \$1,056,200 for the operation of the Baptist Children's Home ministry, including a group maternity center at Mt. Vernon, and \$46,450 for capital needs.

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By acclamation, both Charles Dampeer, pastor of Herrin First Baptist Church, was re-elected to a second one-year term as IBSA president while Roger Ellsworth, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Benton, was elected to a second term as vice president.

Elected by acclamation to a first term as recording secretary was Martha "Marti" Bingham, a member of First Baptist Church in Vandalia.

New Executive Director Gene Wilson, formerly director of missions of Calvary-Arrowhead Baptist Association in California, was welcomed during his first week on the job. During his first address as executive director he challenged messengers to "take Illinois for Christ."

Messengers approved seven resolutions, including one opposing the influence of cults and non-Christian religions; one affirming Christian family values; one affirming the Baptist Sunday School Board's True Love Waits program; and one expressing gratitude to Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi and North Carolina volunteers who assisted in flood relief in Illinois during the past several months.

The association's 1994 meeting will be Nov. 2-4 at First Southern Baptist Church in Alton, Ill.

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Oklahoma Baptist Symphony
begins inaugural season

Baptist Press
11/10/93

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--History was made in October when the newly formed Oklahoma Baptist Symphony presented its inaugural concert at Quail Springs Baptist Church in Oklahoma City.

Sixty musicians were selected from scores from over the state who auditioned. "This is history in the making," Bill Green, BGCO church music department director, told the musicians at one rehearsal, noting the Oklahoma group is unique among Southern Baptist state conventions. The symphony is directed by Jon Duncan, music department associate.

The symphony's second appearance will be during the Baptist General Convention in Oklahoma's annual meeting, Nov. 15-17 in Bethany.

"We want to call attention to the Lord through a myriad of musical styles," Green said. "Remember the days when very few instruments were used in church -- mostly just a piano and organ? It's time to pull the instruments off the shelves. To inspire and encourage other musicians will be a monumental part of this ministry."

He reminded the musicians it's not voices alone that bring praise to God, noting David wrote in Psalms to praise God with trumpets, brass, woodwinds and all other modes of musical instruments.

Duncan said the symphony members come from across the state and range in age from college students to retirees nearing their 70s.

Three members are Russian immigrants who have lived in Oklahoma the past two and a half years, Duncan said. "We have two pastors, eight OBU (Oklahoma Baptist University) students, four full-time and bivocational music ministers, plus several laypeople," he added.

Occupations represented include certified public accounts, students from other universities, insurance representatives, school teachers, band directors and homemakers. Because of the work schedules of the members, concerts will be presented mostly on Sunday evenings.

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Reva Franklin-Archer of Glenpool, Okla., contributed to this story.

Romanian prof knows hardships,
triumphs of Christian faith

By Brian Smith

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--As an engineering student at the University of Bucharest, Otniel Bunaciu stood in a small room, face-to-face with interrogators from the Communist Youth Organization. "So you believe in God? How can you be so stupid?"

It was the early 1980s in Romania. Nicolae Ceausescu was in power. The secret police owned the streets.

Bunaciu withstood the ridicule. "They made fun of you, but you were forced to stand up for your faith," he said.

Life wasn't easy for Bunaciu, visiting guest professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, this fall, and other Christians in communist Romania.

He remembers when the secret police raided the Bucharest Theological Seminary, where his father was president. Bunaciu said police confiscated and burned all the Bibles they found. When the seminary's building was damaged in an earthquake, they weren't allowed to rebuild. Enrollment was limited to as few as four students per year.

"When my father started in ministry, he received threatening phone calls," Bunaciu said. "He kept a small suitcase packed with warm clothes under the bed in case he got picked up and sent to a labor camp overnight."

Bunaciu's background, coupled with a theology degree from Oxford University, offers Southwestern students an uncommon perspective.

"He's teaching an area that he's uniquely qualified in," Steve Lemke, associate professor of philosophy of religion, said. "He's been inside as a Romanian and outside as a student in England so he has a perspective that few people have."

Lemke and Bunaciu became friends when Lemke and other professors traveled to Romania to teach pastors. Fluent in German and English, Bunaciu, who has a degree in mechanical engineering, served as a translator for many of the foreign missionaries who came to Romania.

"Through interpreting, I felt God drawing me closer to the ministry. I eventually decided to choose ministry over engineering," he said.

He maintained both his engineering career and his translating duties until the opportunity for theological study in England arose. In 1985, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board offered to sponsor him at Oxford. But the communist regime refused to let him leave Romania. He applied for a study visa but for three years received no answer.

"I finally got a 30-day tourist visa," he said. "I went out on that and didn't return, even though it was technically illegal to stay out without a permit."

Bunaciu considers it "providential" Ceausescu was overthrown during Bunaciu's final year at Oxford.

"Had it not been for the revolution, I would probably still be in England," he said. "I was always committed to go back but I was a little bit afraid."

Relieved to be able to return to Bucharest, Bunaciu, known as "Oti" to his friends, took full advantage of the new freedoms democracy allowed. He accepted a position teaching at the seminary in Bucharest. He rode the overnight train two nights a week in order to teach at the new seminary in Oradea, in far northwestern Romania.

Serving with his father as co-pastor of the Ferentari Baptist Church in Bucharest, he started an English-language course as a way to attract people to the church.

"English is very fashionable in Eastern Europe these days," he said. "Naturally, we use the Bible and we've been able to reach a lot of people for Christ."

The English class wasn't only a vehicle to reach people for Christ. Through it, Bunaciu met his future wife, a young Christian pharmacist named Camelia.

"It took me two years to ask her out," he recalled. But once he did, romance progressed rapidly; they were married just few weeks before arriving at Southwestern. Even though they don't think of being in the United States as their honeymoon, they are excited about being here. "America has such a positive image for Romanians," he said. "It's like the land where milk and honey and cars and McDonald's just flow."

As much as Bunaciu enjoys being in the United States, he is committed to returning -- in January -- to the challenges of ministry in Romania.

"There are so few trained people in Romania that our seminary is understaffed. My being here means extra work for the other people. My church has the same problem; my father has taken all my responsibilities. They were kind to let me leave to be here."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary.

Church added family fun
to town's annual festival

By Raymond Daye

Baptist Press
11/10/93

CROWLEY, La. (BP)--Old men inspected antique farm machinery, reminiscing about their early years as farmers when that equipment was modern.

Children shot basketballs, bounced on a large air mattress and played with balloons.

A musical group tuned up for an open-air concert.

To a casual observer, the scene at First Baptist Church's first Harvest Fest in Crowley, La., would look like any other festival in a state known for such events.

But there was a major contrast between the Harvest Fest and the more famous and better-attended International Rice Festival a block away. The emphasis at Harvest Fest was on family fun while the Rice Festival focused on a more worldly form of fun.

And while many were getting soused on spirits a few blocks away, lives were being changed by the Spirit at Harvest Fest.

At least 20 professions of faith were made during the mid-October weekend, says Alan Knuckles, First Baptist's pastor. About 3,000 gospel tracts were handed out. Members of First Baptist, other area churches and trained street witness ministries combined their efforts to spread God's Word among the festival crowd.

"The Rice Festival originally started out as a family celebration of the harvest," Knuckles says. "This is the 57th annual Rice Festival, and over the years residents of this city have seen it deteriorate into a typical south Louisiana festival. There is a lot of public drunkenness on the streets with beer being sold all up and down the street."

The Rice Festival reportedly attracts 100,000 people to this south Louisiana city. Harvest Fest attracted probably 1,000.

"What really clicked for us was the tractor museum exhibit," Knuckles says. "Having those tractors earned us a lead spot in the Rice Festival parade and opened doors for us to be included as part of the festival."

In the days immediately following the Rice Festival, "people all over town would stop me when they saw me and tell me how much they enjoyed Harvest Fest and thank us for bringing family values back to the Rice Festival," Knuckles adds.

First Baptist had tried an alternative festival of strictly gospel music for a few years. Harvest Fest chair Ron Lawson says the event had some success when it was held in a large tent by the church but failed to attract enough people when it moved to the Crowley Civic Center. "The crowds were right outside the Civic Center, but they wouldn't come in without beer," Lawson says.

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After a three-year absence, the church decided to come back with another alternative. This time the emphasis was on a family fun day with free entertainment, including some music performances.

There was no charge to shoot basketballs, jump in the inflated dragon, throw horseshoes or play dominoes. Balloons and balloon animals made by amiable clown Helen Knuckles also were free. Singing groups, storytellers and First Baptist youth's puppet ministry provided live entertainment.

The exhibit of vintage farm and harvest equipment attracted numerous visitors, from old men who told stories of when they once farmed with such equipment to youngsters viewing them as ancient oddities.

Concessions were sold for about half what vendors on Main Street were charging Rice Festival patrons. Proceeds were used to benefit the Louisiana Baptist Children's Home.

The church's WMU Circle sold cookbooks for \$10 each, with proceeds donated to Southern Baptist missions. They also gave away marked New Testaments and placed religious tracts in the cookbooks they sold. Linda Booth says people kept coming by the table and saying, "Thank goodness you are doing something like this."

Knuckles says he was pleased with the festival and expects it to become bigger, better and more evangelistically effective. "The Rice Festival totally embraced us, which surprised me," he says, adding he had expected officials and merchants to view the church as an unwelcome competitor.

Instead, Harvest Fest was included in the official Rice Festival program. The Rice Festival board members visited the churchgrounds on the first day of the festival and stayed for more than a half hour, enjoying the family atmosphere and free entertainment and games.

Knuckles came to Crowley from Fredericksburg, Texas, in January. He says he hopes to help change the image of Baptists in this predominantly Catholic region of the state by showing a spirit of cooperation without compromise. "I want to build relationships with the lost and other denominational groups in this community. We thought Harvest Fest would be a way to do this. We wanted to answer a need for the Rice Festival and that need was for free, fun, family entertainment. Our emphasis is on the family and the relationship with the community and its history.

"In the past, members of this church have fought the Rice Festival and merchants over the sale of alcohol during the festival," Knuckles says. "Members have led petition drives to have the city enforce the open container law during Rice Festival."

A city law makes it a ticketable offense to have an open container of an alcoholic beverage in an automobile parked or moving on a public street. Enforcing that law would put a crimp in the hard-partying style of many attending the Rice Festival and severely reduce the economic impact of the festival. For that reason, it is unlikely such a campaign will be successful.

"My main focus this year was to set the stage for the future, to develop a rapport with the festival officials," Knuckles says. "In future years we will turn up the heat on evangelism."

Ideally, and perhaps idealistically, the hope is Harvest Fest can "convert" the Rice Festival by example and the large event will return to the family festival it once was.

Knuckles says he also hopes the lost in the community will see the church as a positive force interested in what is best for Crowley and not as a negative, adversarial entity. He notes he already has seen the church start to grow, primarily by attracting inactive members back into the fold, with new members also being added slowly.

Church member's bonfires
beckon youth to Christ

By James L. Watters

PORT ANGELES, Wash. (BP)--Jeremy Saxton has a bonfire ministry; homeless youth and other town kids in this Washington port city are drawn to a gospel witness through a Saxton's simple hot dog roasting on the coals.

As regular as clockwork early on Friday nights, Saxton, a member of Hillcrest Baptist Church, roams the streets of Port Angeles' downtown by the bay, searching for the lonely single or the clots of kids all dressed up with nowhere to go. To his experienced eye, either condition could mean trouble.

Early in the evening the invitation is gentle, almost casual. Wary of spooking kids who need a friend, Saxton passes along the simple message there will be a bonfire down on the waterfront. If the kids look hungry, he mentions the hot dogs and sodas.

Later in the evening the talk is still easy, but the topic moves from hot dogs and keeping warm to more pressing matters of home and family and God's love.

Saxton knows the heart of a troubled youth. He has been there.

Born at Fort Ord, Calif., to a military family, Saxton learned about the tough side of life early on. "Alcohol was a problem in my family," he says. "My sister and I were physically and emotionally abused," at times for example, "stripped and beaten if we sneaked into the refrigerator."

"At 6 years of age I was adopted. It was a beautiful experience -- they were Christians and took me to a Baptist church.

Saxton looks back on that experience with a good bit of concern for Baptists. He grew up in that Baptist church but "never did learn about salvation. They even had an invitation and I always had a feeling that I probably ought to go up there to the altar. But I did not understand what God had done for me and how I could respond."

Saxton stuck to his Baptist exposure, however, and some years later heard a sermon at a Baptist church in Alaska that left no question about what God has done in redemption and what man must do in response.

"When they finally got the invitation, I almost ran up there!"

Wondering why someone hadn't told him earlier, before all the pain he encountered in his youth, Saxton gave his very best -- "I wanted to give my all to Christ."

But the circumstances of his life at the time made discipleship very difficult, and after some months he dropped out and began drinking again. "I got things all fouled up -- went into a second marriage which also failed and plunged into a bad depression.

"About 10 months ago my aunt who has always been so supportive and loving had a stroke. It hit me pretty hard and was what the Lord used to bring me back to him again."

The aunt was in a coma, on extreme life support measures. "Sometimes she would squeeze my hand, so I asked her if she had Jesus Christ in her heart. She squeezed my hand.

"I got down on my knees and asked God to take me back. I made a rededication of my heart and life that has given me a track to run on ever since."

Going to say goodbye to his aunt, Saxton was surprised to find her sitting up in bed with a tray of food. When he spoke to her she opened her eyes. "I asked if she was hungry. She grabbed out for my hand and shook it in reply. I fed her her dinner."

The aunt has progressed slowly for the past seven months and can now even stand a bit.

Recounting how his bonfire ministry began, Saxton said, "Well, I started going back to church last November. I went to Hillcrest because Fred Jewel, my neighbor, has been praying for me for years. I walked into the church and was amazed at the feeling of God's presence. He was there in those people -- for me.

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"It was in that church I announced my rededication. They accepted me as a member and took me into their hearts. They are people who welcome every soul who comes along into their fellowship of God.

"They asked me right away what I wanted to do for Christ as a member of their church," Saxton continued. "I replied that anything would be OK -- except working with youth. I felt I had washed out in that category. But it was a street ministry to which God led me.

"I walk up and down the streets of Port Angeles wearing my big sweat shirt that says, 'Jesus is Lord.' Going wherever the Lord leads, talking to those God puts in my path."

Voicing love for his pastor, Saxton said, "Marty Schafer is my brother. He says so -- has stated that many times.

"He came over to my house when I first got back to the Lord, wanting to know my spiritual needs and my spiritual desires. He must have made a list of what I said, because he is going down that list in giving me the support I need.

"Marty publicly says that he loves me as a brother. He attends the bonfire ministry and gives it his full support. What I am able now to do is so much the result of what my brother Marty Schafer gives. As a pastor he relates to his church family and his love just oozes out of every pore for his people."

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(BP) photo available upon request from the Northwest Baptist Witness, newsjournal of the Northwest Baptist Convention based in Portland, Ore.

Return to 2-week revivals,
says 90-year-old retiree

By Dana Williamson

Baptist Press
11/10/93

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--J.A. Pennington doesn't like four-day revivals.

"The evangelist doesn't even have time to get to know the people," said Oklahoma's first director of evangelism.

Pennington, who turned 90 in October, in 1948 became director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma's newly created evangelism and Brotherhood department, serving there 22 years, counting three years as evangelism director after the departments were divided.

Looking back on his career, Pennington said the greatest joy of his job was seeing pastors and churches working together in wholehearted cooperation.

Pennington introduced simultaneous revivals to the state, recounting, "We encouraged churches to have two revivals a year, a two-week meeting in the spring and an eight-day revival in the fall."

The spring revival meetings were to be held in every church across the state during the same two weeks.

Pennington also began an annual religious census and week-long cottage prayer meetings.

Asked what advice he would give the new state evangelism director (Wayne Bristow resigned from the post in September and a new director has not been chosen), Pennington hesitated to give an answer, but when asked what he would do if he were to return to the position, he said he would go back to two-week revivals.

"It was proven that decisions doubled during the second week of revival," Pennington said. "For example, if there were 45 decisions the first week, there would be 90 by the end of the second week."

Two-week revivals would not be easy today, Pennington acknowledged. "People took time for revival back then. Evangelists were strong in preaching on sin, repentance and faith, on heaven and hell.

"We used to spend the first week of the revival preaching to church members building up the spirit of revival and then, the second week, preaching to the lost."

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In a four-day revival, there isn't time to build up the spirit of revival, Pennington reiterated, and "until you have revival, it's hard to bring lost people to Christ."

Pennington, who estimates he has preached about 500 revival meetings, said he would tell today's evangelists to "preach the Word and call people to repentance."

The next-to-the-youngest of seven children who grew up on a 40-acre farm near Hugo, Okla., Pennington became a Christian at age 11 during a brush arbor revival and was baptized in Nubby Creek near Hugo.

His first pastorate was a half-time position at First Baptist Church in Valliant, Okla. He moved to Portland Avenue Baptist Church in Oklahoma City in 1933 and in five years the membership grew from 38 to 600, baptizing 260.

After serving as Oklahoma's east central district missionary and as a general missionary for the state convention, Pennington was called to First Baptist Church in Mangum and then Nogales Avenue Baptist Church in Tulsa as pastor.

Because of his zeal for evangelism and his ability to organize for success, his name was at the forefront in 1948 when the BGCO established the evangelism and Brotherhood department.

When the BGCO's then-executive director, Andrew Potter, asked Pennington to take the job, the pastor said he would be interested in the evangelism position but knew nothing about Brotherhood.

"No one else does either," said Potter, "so we'll learn together."