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Evangelize the unevangelized now,
Baptists repeat in India meeting By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
2/7/95

MADRAS, India (BP)--A renewed appeal for reaching the world's least-evangelized people was sounded during the Baptist World Alliance's "Baptist International Conference on Unevangelized People," Jan. 16-19 in Madras, India.

The meeting, which focused on Asia, followed an initial BWA focus on the unevangelized in Larnaca, Cyprus, in January 1994.

India is the perfect prototype of "World A" or the "20/40 Window," the unevangelized world dominated by Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and animism that is increasingly the focus of evangelical missions. There are more than 900,000,000 people in India, more than 1,000 languages and a variety of religions, the most dominant of which is Hinduism -- all of which make it highly resistant to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Most of the world's unevangelized live in Asia.

"We are here to encourage Asian Baptists to engage in this task if they are not already doing so and be inspired by those who are," said Tony Cupit, BWA evangelism director in addressing more than 300 people from 21 countries who attended the conference. "We are also here to encourage foreign mission societies to redeploy resources to World A."

"It is a sin that 99 percent of Christian resources remain within the church," said Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary. "A new vision is what we need because much of Protestantism has become weary in well doing, or even worse, has lost the vision and passion for preaching the gospel to a lost world.

"The command of our Lord is as valid today as it was 2000 years ago," Lotz said. "The New Testament is replete with the announcement that the gospel is for all."

Baptist leaders enumerated various reasons for reaching the unevangelized, emphasizing the missionary nature of God, obedience to the missionary command of the gospel and the promise in Matthew 24:14 that the gospel will be preached to the whole world before the return of Jesus Christ.

The task will require great faith in God's promises, prayer, a radical Christian lifestyle, partnership, money, creative strategy, cooperation and suffering, the leaders said.

"Jesus has come to give life abundant to all humanity, not just a few in the West," Lotz said.

Wati Aier, president of the Nagaland Oriental Theological College, Dimapur, Nagaland, recounted the spiritual needs in his native India.

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"To come to a true knowledge of God in Jesus Christ would dispel the 'avidya' (ignorance) of a Hindu who is seeking God; would be an intuitive dawning of the 'dharma' (whatever increases generosity and wisdom and leads to enlightenment) in the life of a Buddhist and would liberate the Sikh from the fear of 'karma' (the consequences of past deeds) and bring them to God in Jesus Christ," Aier said.

Aier appealed to Asian Christians to live their faith "in a radical way to bring joy and hope to a needy world."

"The gospel is hard to put into reality in Asia," Aier noted. "For us, Jesus Christ means a new relationship to persons ... to the poor who are homeless and hungry, victims of economic injustice; the oppressed still dominated by caste systems and traditional culture"

Johnny Gumban, dean of the College of Theology of Central Philippine University, added, "Our 10/40 world in Asia is chaotic, overpopulated, dirty, full of diseases and suffering. It is in need of a powerful Savior who can perform miracles."

"It is not easy to live in a society with a lot of cultures," said Jason Das, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church, Dhaka, Bangladesh. But, he reminded, "Day is here but night is coming for Asia and the whole world. Many will die without knowing Jesus if we do not sincerely obey God. This is the time to bring the light and hope to Asia."

"The people in World A are God's lost sheep -- real people with real names. And Christ gave his life that they might have life," said Jimmy Maroney, director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board global desk for World A.

"This is the last frontier, the last great challenge of Satan's stronghold," Maroney said, noting, "We have been conditioned to say, 'Go and make disciples of friendly nations' ... almost risk-free." And, he said, "We keep spending money on ourselves instead of sending money to places where people have the least opportunity to hear of Jesus Christ."

Mike Stroope, Southern Baptist Cooperative Services International coordinator, underscoring the necessity of evangelism, said, "There is no other provision for mankind's rebellion, no other way back to the Creator. ... It requires our being sent and our obedience unto death, just like the Son."

"Impossible is not a word in God's vocabulary," said Avery Willis, vice president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, who said of Matthew 24:14, "You can take these promises to the bank."

From his own missionary experience in Indonesia, Willis said God is already "in the midst of the people who have not heard the gospel. I thought I was taking the gospel to Indonesia. When I got there I found the Lord was already there waiting for me."

"The Holy Spirit is the administrator of missions," Willis said. "We need to find out where God is going and go with God."

Most of the person-to-person strategy for reaching their people must come from Asians, various speakers noted.

"We will never have Asian minds, never think or strategize like them," said Max Meyers of Missionary Aviation Fellowship. "We will always be foreign and so is our role."

Meyers pleaded with Western missionaries to listen to their Eastern brothers and sisters and work in relationship with them.

"Sometimes we need to hang our heads in shame," Meyers said. "We always want to talk and never listen, always teach and never learn."

"We in the West must offer ourselves in servanthood, to help, enhance and increase the effectiveness of Asian believers," Meyers said. "God's strategy for the evangelization of the world is international, not Western."

"Paul and others did not stay long, but Westerners feel a necessity to stay forever," Meyers said. "Please do not put up with our paternalism," he told the Asian audience. "We need to be exposed to the rich spiritual life God has developed in you."

**Asian Baptists report response
among unevangelized peoples**

By Wendy Ryan

MADRAS, India (BP)--Asian Baptists feel the burden -- and are committed to reach their share -- of the 1.3 billion unevangelized people on earth.

Numerous Asian Baptist leaders voiced that commitment during the "Baptist International Conference on Unevangelized People," sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance and the Asian Baptist Federation Jan. 16-19 in Madras, India, and attended by 300 people.

Among Baptists in India alone, 15 groups reported they have more than 1,000 missionaries to tribal and other unreached people in India and across the Indian borders.

Most of these indigenous or homegrown missionaries are sponsored and supported by their local churches; five Baptist groups, meanwhile, have their own missionary societies.

The two largest missionary organizations are the Nagaland Missionary Movement, with more than 58 cross-cultural missionaries and 322 pastors and evangelists, and the Baptist Church of Mizoram, with 17 overseas missionaries and 433 missionaries working in tribal settings and among other people in India.

Four conventions also have more than 100 missionaries to neighboring countries, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar and China.

The Samavesam of Telugu Baptist churches (STBC), which served as host for the conference, has more than 50 missionaries from 860 churches.

One of the tribal groups among which the STBC works is the Yannadis, more than 2 million animistic people in southern India. D. Paul Johnson, STBC youth minister, reported 58 congregations already established among the Yannadis and 204 baptisms last December.

One of the reasons for the conference was to share stories of God at work in the unevangelized belt across the globe known as "World A" to encourage others to join the effort. The stories poured out of the evangelists about how God is at work.

Deep in the forest of Assam, India, are more than 50,000 Amri Karbi people, unevangelized until 1983 when missionaries Puna and Esther Ao went to them. The Aos were the first non-Amris allowed in the village.

Today more than 2,700 Amri Karbis have been baptized, and they are now evangelizing their own and other tribal people, in an initiative supported by BWA's evangelism fund.

"After receiving Christ they are transformed," said Esther Ao. "You can see this in every area of their life. There is no more fear of black magic."

The Amri Karbis have seen the darkness of their lives of fear and sacrifice to their gods shift to prayer, healings and other miracles which attract others as they see God's power to change lives.

"Now they have turned from fear, their prayer life is so simple, so trusting," said Esther Ao, "and there is much power in their prayer."

While the gospel already has entered 46 of their villages, the Amri Karbis have 19 established local churches with nine theologically trained pastors and four Bible graduates.

Once they stop drinking, Ao said, they use their money to care for their families. Their economic status has improved and their families are receiving health and education benefits they did not have before.

The ministry among the Amri Karbis is often difficult, but a weeping Puna Ao said, "Joy comes when a person says, 'Yes, I accept Jesus Christ as Savior.' When we baptize, people come out with smiling faces and this brings us joy."

In another report, leaders from the Tripura Baptist Christian Union, where evangelists face persecution for their ministry, reported 300 tribal people were baptized between Christmas and New Year and over 2,005 joined the church in 1994.

"We Christians in India are minorities and we have enemies who are trying to destroy us," one evangelist said.

The Amri Karbi and Tripura reports were just two of many that described ministries to temple prostitutes, 1 pers, tea plantation workers, slum dwellers and illiterates.

"To advance the gospel in Asia, you have to be ready for suffering," said Jas n Das, pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Asians also described how they use their culture to introduce the gospel.

In Malaysia, pastor Isaac Yim said Christians have the same mourning rit s of the tribal groups but sing gospel songs instead, and this has opened the way to the Torajah tribal group.

Kunjomon Choko, general secretary of the India Baptist Convention, said they change the story about killing the fatted calf in the prodigal son to "sweet meats" since the cow is sacred to Hindus who reject the killing of a cow as a fitting celebration.

Kent Parks, Southern Baptist missionary to Indonesia, said the 35 million unreached, animistic Sundanese people in Java believe when they die a piece of hair split seven times makes a bridge to take them to heaven. Most times, however, if one's hair is too light, God sends a lamb. Christians then tell them about Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Bill Scott, of India Bible Literature, B.K. Pramanik, of the India Bible Society, and David Stravers of the Bible League all spoke of Scripture as a powerful evangelistic tool among the unevangelized when they can read it in their own language.

Pramanik reported the India Bible Society has either whole or partial portions of Scripture in 182 of India's official 1,652 languages. "With 300 Indian dialects, we can reach 900 million people," he said.

"The average person is starved for God's Word even though he doesn't know what he is longing for" said Stravers. "My experience in giving people the Bible is they cannot put it down."

Stravers urged God's Word be central to any church planting strategy.

"Literature is the hope for a needy world," said evangelist C. Kamalakar of Nellore, India, who said 58 congregations had been started among tribal people from literacy groups. "We have the possibility to reach all the tribes through literature," he said.

Ministry in Asia to the unevangelized also is on the heart of Western Christians, as evidenced by several reports to the conference.

Jim Diedrich, Southern Baptist Cooperative Services International worker for Mongolia, recounted that five years ago Mongolia was closed to the gospel. Then, communist rule was overthrown, the New Testament published, the Jesus film released and foreign Christians arrived.

From a start of two believers in 1990, there are now more than 3,000 Christian believers today, with nine churches that meet publicly and many small groups in homes, Diedrich said.

Much of the Baptist work in Mongolia was led by Baptists from Hong Kong who sent their first missionary team in 1992. The first Baptist church was started with 17 people in 1994. There are now 143 in worship in the Ulan Bator church and five preaching points elsewhere.

Working with Hong Kong Baptists, Southern Baptists plan to establish a Baptist community center for such things as family counseling and alcohol rehabilitation to teach new believers how to live the Christian life. To respond to the 45 percent unemployment rate in Mongolia, they also plan to do vocational training.

"This ministry is open to all Baptists in Asia to help," Diedrich said.

**Focus on unevangelized women,
say Baptist women leaders**

By Wendy Ryan

MADRAS, India (BP)--Since more than 55 percent of the world's 2.6 billion women live in Asia, any efforts to reach the unevangelized in Asia must include women.

At the "Baptist International Conference on Unevangelized People," Jan. 16-19 in Madras, India, Baptist women leaders described some of the desperate conditions in which women in Asia live -- and ways in which their lives are being changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Former prostitutes in Thailand, where prostitution has been called "a national pastime," are now finding hope in Jesus Christ at the New Life Center.

Lauran Bethell, American Baptist Churches missionary to Thailand, started the center which ministers to young hill tribe women in northern Thailand at risk of being tricked or sold into prostitution or who formerly were prostitutes.

Most of these girls choose or are forced into prostitution in the cities to help their families back in their villages.

At the New Life Center, the young women are taught skills to help them find jobs other than prostitution.

While the center does not require the women to be Christians to receive help, "98 percent of those who come participate in our Bible studies," Bethell said.

Sometimes the parents of non-Christian resident students have told them they would not be upset if the girls became Christians because "'our religions are not working for us anymore. If you become a Christian, come back and teach us about it.' And they have," Bethell recounted.

"When we first opened the center, people asked me why we were spending so much time and energy working with 'those girls,'" Bethell said. "Luke 4:18 was the verse that guided us, when Jesus said, 'He has appointed me to preach good news to the poor ... to release the oppressed.'"

"The girls we sought to serve had no choices for their lives and were in the gravest danger of experiencing the worst possible things," Bethell said.

The greatest "unreached peoples group that the church could minister to might just be those in our midst whom we ignore because of their low status or because we ourselves are wearing cultural blinders," said Bethell.

"There is no doubt that women and children in most societies suffer the most from situations of abuse and exploitation, primarily because of their low status roles within the culture," Bethell said.

Bethell spoke about the ministry of Jesus to women and asked, "Do we attach the same priority that Jesus did to ministering to those who are of the lowest status in our societies?"

Bethell pleaded with those present to "pray, how you might be used of God to help women and children out of their perilous situation." Several Indian Baptist leaders also described ministries to women that included vocational training for prostitutes, a slum ministry and literacy programs.

"Prayer is the most important thing for reaching women in Asia," said Young Shim Chang, president of the Baptist Women of Asia.

Chang said there has been a slight improvement in the lives of women in Asia, but she urged Baptist leaders to continue working for the betterment of women and to evangelize them.

Underscoring the role of evangelizing women in Korea, Chang said she and 77 people in her family are now Christians, stemming from her mother-in-law's acceptance of Jesus as her Savior.

Chang told how Korean women were reaching out to the unreached in the former Soviet Union, describing a time of prayer in her home with two women from Kyrgyzstan who had become Christians after a Korean medical team visited there.

"Before we pray I asked them to sing a song, and they did not know one single song," Chang said. "I taught them the first song I learned as a Christian."

**Baptist World Aid responds
to Chechenya refugee needs**

By Wendy Ryan

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptist World Aid, the relief and development ministry of the Baptist World Alliance, has sent \$5,000 to Russia to help feed and care for thousands of refugees from Chechenya.

The BWAid money was sent to Peter Lunitchkin of the North Ossetian Christian Mission who is working with former Russian Baptist leader Mikhail Zhidkov of Baptist Compassion Ministries.

A report to BWAid from Dave Foster and Gary Cox of Euroevangelism, a United Kingdom based mission agency, says there are more than 300,000 Chechenya refugees who fled the fighting between their own and Russia's military forces. But current news reports say there are now more than 400,000 refugees.

"Refugees are housed in barracks, schools, rest houses and even parked railway carriages," the report says.

Current news reports say Chechenya residents are continuing to flee as the heavy Russian shelling continues. Thousands of people have already been killed in the fighting.

"The situation is tragic and we are appealing for further funds to help," said Paul Montacute, BWAid director. The money will be used for food parcels of flour, sugar, spaghetti, rice and sausage.

Lunitchin's team of helpers also are sharing the gospel with the refugees by giving them Christian literature. "Some Chechens, when they discover this help is coming from Christians (whom they think are against them in the war), start praying to God."

Funds for the Chechenya refugees should be sent to Baptist World Aid, Baptist World Alliance, 6733 Curran Street, McLean, VA 22101-6005.

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**Book's claims labeled
'outrageous, false'**

By Sarah Zimmerman

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ATLANTA (BP)--A book alleging modern versions of the Bible are a part of a New Age conspiracy is "both outrageous and false," said the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's associate director of world religions.

Written by G.A. Riplinger, "New Age Bible Versions" denounces translations such as the New International Version, New American Standard, New King James, Phillips, Good News and Revised Standard.

In the introduction of the self-published book, Riplinger claims her research uncovered an alliance between the newer versions of the Bible and the "chief conspirators in the New Age movement's push for one world order."

Bill Gordon of the HMB staff said he studied "New Age Bible Versions" after receiving a number of inquiries about it and noticing a discussion of the book on SBCNet, the Southern Baptist on-line computer service.

Gordon said the author uses faulty logic and research as well as "character assassination of godly Christian men who are well-known, conservative scholars."

One example of faulty logic, Gordon said, is the author's warning to "watch out for the letter 'S'" because it is the "hiss of serpent." The author lists sin, Satan and Sodom as examples, but she did not explain the letter 'S' in salvation or sacrifice.

The book also claims the five points of Calvinism form a satanic pentagram.

The book includes a letter from Frank Logsdon, identified as a co-founder of the New American Standard version. Logsdon, who died several years ago, is quoted as writing, "I must under God renounce every attachment to the New American Standard Version. I'm afraid I'm in trouble with the Lord The product is grievous to my heart."

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However, the New American Standard version is produced by the California-based Lockman Foundation, and a letter from the foundation noted Logsdon was acquainted with its late president, but Logsdon was never a member of the board of directors or a foundation employee.

"Mr. Logsdon had no authority to hire employees or translators for the foundation, to set policy, to vote, to hold office, to incur expenses, etc.," according to the foundation's letter. "He cannot be considered 'co-founder' of the NASB or part of the Lockman Foundation."

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