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-- BAPTIST PRESS

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February 24, 1995

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Bangladesh missionary Tom Thurman
injured in struggle with robber

By Mark Kelly

Baptist Press
2/24/95

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Mississippian Tom Thurman has become the fourth Southern Baptist foreign missionary in a month accosted by robbers on the mission field.

The string of incidents should remind Southern Baptists that 4,000 missionaries around the world are on the front lines of a spiritual warfare and need prayer for their ministries and safety, said Randy Sprinkle, director of the Foreign Mission Board's international prayer strategy office.

Thurman, 61, of Monticello, Miss., was stabbed in the hand Feb. 19 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in a struggle with a man who demanded his briefcase.

The slight injury required two stitches. Thurman, a 30-year veteran of missions, fulfilled a preaching assignment that evening, his son, Philip Thurman of Jackson, Miss., said in a telephone interview.

Three other Southern Baptist missionaries also recently reported attacks by robbers. On Jan. 20, Keith Stamps suffered serious shotgun injuries to his right arm and shoulder in a highway robbery attempt in Guatemala. On Feb. 8, Kristi Pennington was abducted and robbed at gunpoint in Caracas, Venezuela. The same day, Don Cole was robbed at gunpoint and held hostage for about 45 minutes in Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Stamps underwent a skin graft Feb. 16 and continues a painful recovery in Guatemala. Pennington and Cole were released unharmed.

"I can't remember when there's been such a string of attacks on our missionaries," Sprinkle said. "As intercessors, it's important for us to heed (the Apostle) Paul's reminder that 'our struggle isn't against flesh and blood' and wield the mighty weapon of prayer on behalf of all Christ's ambassadors around the world."

Thurman, an evangelist, was riding in an open, three-wheel taxi when another taxi pulled alongside and a passenger with a pistol demanded the briefcase. Thurman offered his money but refused to release the briefcase. A struggle ensued.

When a truck driver intervened, the attacker stabbed at Thurman with a knife and fled. Thurman was injured when he raised his hand in self-defense. The incident occurred about a half mile from the Southern Baptist mission guest house near Dhaka.

"It could easily have been much worse," said Philip Thurman, whose father and mother, the former Gloria Philpot of McWilliams, Ala., were appointed missionaries to Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in June 1964. "We're thankful God protected him."

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board offers resources for people interested in prayer for world missions. Among those resources:

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-- CompassionNet is a comprehensive database of timely prayer needs from Southern Baptist missionaries worldwide. Requests are available 24 hours a day and accessible through a personal computer and subscriptions to CompuServe and SBCNet. For more information, call 1-800-325-7749.

-- The Foreign Missions PrayerLine provides missionary prayer requests toll-free by telephone -- 1-800-395-PRAY. It offers new messages three times a week and logs more than 15,000 calls a month.

-- "Global PrayerGram" and "Your Guide to Foreign Missions" are available free from FMB Customer Services, 1-800-866-FMB1. "Global PrayerGram" is a monthly prayer guide listing specific requests and answers to prayer. "Your Guide to Foreign Missions" has information about Southern Baptist work in each of the countries where missionaries serve, including a guide for daily prayer.

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**Blasphemy charges dismissed
against Pakistani Christians**

**Baptist Press
2/24/95**

LAHORE, Pakistan (BP)--Two judges dismissed blasphemy charges Feb. 23 against Pakistani Christians Rehmat Masih and his 14-year-old nephew, Salamat Masih. The pair had been sentenced to death by hanging for allegedly blaspheming Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

The death sentence, announced Feb. 9 after a three-day trial in Lahore, Pakistan, touched off an international furor. Human rights groups organized protests that overwhelmed the Pakistani embassy in Washington with phone calls. Christians around the world prayed and took part in the protests.

After the dismissal, Muslim militants in Pakistan flooded streets outside the courthouse, vowing to kill the defendants, lawyers and judges in the case. Police in riot gear armed with automatic weapons encircled the courthouse and took up positions on rooftops to protect those inside.

The two judges who heard the appeal of the death sentence in Lahore High Court ruled there was no evidence against the boy and his uncle.

The two were accused of writing derogatory statements about Muhammad on a wall in Lahore and throwing into a Muslim mosque pieces of paper with insulting words written on them. However, the slogans were immediately rubbed off the wall, and witnesses refused to repeat them in court, saying they were too offensive.

Salamat Masih, who was only 11 years old at the time of the supposed crime, is said to be illiterate.

Both Christians were found guilty of blasphemy against Muhammad, an offense which carries a mandatory death sentence under Islamic law adopted several years ago in Pakistan. But the death sentence has never been carried out. A similar sentence against another Christian was overturned last year.

A third Christian defendant in the case, Manor Masih, was murdered by Islamic extremists last April 5 as the three left the High Court in Lahore, where they had been granted bail. One of the two suspects in the killing is the same Muslim cleric who filed the original charges against the three.

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**Spiritual renewal studied,
prayed for in Little Rock**

By Russ Dilday

**Baptist Press
2/24/95**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Spiritual leaders from five countries joined hundreds of Arkansans for services focusing on revival and spiritual awakening during the Feb. 14-16 North American Convocation in R vival in Little Rock, Ark.

Pastors, denominational leaders and para-church organization heads called for unity and prayer in preparation for worldwide revival during sessions at First Baptist Church.

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"The American way will never bring revival. Only God's way will," Paul Cedar told participants during a Feb. 15 worship service. "And most of us know enough about revival to know you can't organize one," said Cedar, president of the Evangelical Free Churches.

Preaching from the third and fourth chapters of Acts, Cedar insisted "the basic ingredient for revival is prayer."

Cedar, one of several nationally known leaders speaking during the convocation, noted the passage recounted "the first controversy in the early church." After Peter and James healed a crippled beggar, they were brought before the Sanhedrin for questioning.

"What did Peter and James do at this time of crisis?" Cedar asked. "The first thing they did was that they went back to the church and did what the church always should do. They lifted their voices in prayer."

Cedar emphasized the three parts of the prayer: "They acknowledged God, affirmed Scripture and asked for help."

"What happened?" Cedar asked. The place was shaken. This sounds like Acts 2. Could this be the first reviving or renewing of the early church? I believe this is God's norm for the church. It is how he wants us to live: in his presence."

Calling participants to join in prayer for revival across denominational lines, Cedar said, "Brothers and sisters, it is time to pray and it is time to pray together."

Cedar's comments were mirrored by a statement of "Affirmations and Commitments" adopted by participants during the closing session Feb. 17.

The statement summary read, "We, the participants, call all churches and ethnic groups to join with us in prayer and fasting, humbling ourselves, turning from our wicked ways, and seeking God's face for the visitation from Him we so desperately need."

In the document participants also committed to: "Repent of our sins as spiritual leaders," teach and preach "more accurately and courageously the whole counsel of God" and to "labor specifically for the recovery of the biblical gospel in this day of increasing biblical illiteracy."

The document also affirmed "God is stirring His people all across our continent, on a scale we have not seen in our lifetime, to pray and fast for revival and to consider our desperate spiritual condition. This along with Scriptural promises, we take to be an encouraging sign that God may come soon among us in holiness and power."

The event, planned by brothers Bill and Jim Elliff, was sponsored by First Baptist Church, which Bill serves as pastor, and Christian Communicators Worldwide, which Jim serves as president.

"Bill and I wanted pastors and leaders, many of them exemplary of everything we have ever thought of," said Jim Elliff, "to leave with a flaming burden to be much deeper, more serious theologians and preachers of the truth."

The convocation's day sessions, attended by invitation only, attracted more than 180 spiritual leaders from 30 states as well as Canada, Indonesia, Korea and China. The sessions concentrated on lectures and dialogue on the theology, experience and history of revival and reformation.

Bill McLeod, who works with Canadian Revival Fellowship in Winnipeg, said he attended "because I am deeply interested in revival. When people are meeting together as this body is here, I wanted to come and just be part of it."

"One thing I am certainly getting out of it is fellowship with other believers who are concerned about revival," McLeod said. "It is not everybody that cares about revival even in churches today."

Jim Elliff said they targeted "people who have had direct and serious interest in the subject of revival, including pastors who have had a hunger for revival. Many of the major denominations are represented."

At least seven denominations were represented at the meetings, as well as non-denominational churches and several para-church organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ, Precepts Ministries and God's Love in Action.

In addition to Cedar, featured speakers included Richard Owen Roberts, president of International Awakening Ministries; Henry Blackaby, director of the department of prayer and spiritual awakening for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board; Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University, Birmingham, Ala.; and David Bryant, president of Concerts of Prayer International.

Daytime session topics were varied. They ranged from a lecture on Martin Luther's involvement in the Reformation to a panel discussion in which participants answered questions on church discipline, salvation and family television watching.

"It's been challenging," said Jim Hale. "It's been challenging thinking of some of the ideas and being able to gather with others that have an interest in this."

Hale, a pastor of a congregational church in Malta, N.Y., said he attended because of a "deep interest in revival and awakening. This was not only from a historical perspective, but because I felt that perhaps there are things that may be happening today that could be beneficial not only to me but all of us here together. We might experience something similar to things that occurred (during revivals)."

The evening worship services held each night of the convocation were open to the public. They included sermons by feature speakers, special music and prayer sessions.

The evening services attracted more than 1,200 participants nightly from many central Arkansas churches. Participating laypeople also seemed to sense an urgency for revival.

Melinda Martin, a member of South Highland Church, Little Rock, attended the Wednesday evening session because "for the last several years we've sensed God's moving and calling his people to revival."

She said "just knowing the people who would be at this conference and knowing their walk with the Lord" attracted her to the service. "They say that God is truly bringing revival to us and I did not want to miss that. I wanted to be a part of that."

Martin said she appreciated most "the outspoken boldness of the Word of God" preached in the services. "So many times we have drifted from that. This convocation is calling us back to that."

"What we were trying to do is to first of all discover what is authentic revival, because there can be false fire," Jim Elliff explained. "Then we were trying to discover different types of revival and wanted to know what the characteristics of lasting revival are. Third, how can we prepare for revival. We are doing that by studying the history, theology and the experience of revival. "In this way we felt like we could prepare them," he noted, "that they will be most prepared for what God might choose to do himself in the future."

Bill Elliff said the idea for the convocation stemmed from the Elliff brothers' mutual burden for revival. "I've had a 20-year burden for revival. I traveled for two years with Life Action Ministries, which is totally devoted to nationwide revival."

"One of the things we were particularly interested in emphasizing," Jim Elliff said, "is that we not only need revival, but we need a great reformation, particularly of (church) leaders.

"Revival without reformation will be short-lived and prone to aberrations," he noted. "But in revival with reformation there is much more stability and strength and longer life for the revival."

He noted there has not been a nationwide revival, "or 'Great Awakening,' in 135 years. Our early history was periodically punctuated by revival. It brought us back to our knees, back to the faith of our fathers, back to fervency and many church members would be converted.

"I don't suppose anything among Baptists would be more important in our day than for the millions of church members who are on the rolls to be converted," he said.

Program featuring Tony Evans
to air weekly on FamilyNet

By C.C. Risenhoover

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Tony Evans, one of the nation's most popular and influential African American preachers, now can be seen on FamilyNet on the weekly 30-minute program, "The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans." Viewers should check local listings for time and channel number.

FamilyNet is the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission broadcast television service that reaches into more than 65 million homes. The RTVC also operates ACTS, a cable television service that reaches into almost 23 million homes.

"Dr. Evans is a man of God who combines a unique blend of expository Bible teaching and storytelling," said Deborah Key, RTVC vice president of network operations. He preaches the Word with clarity and motivates his viewers to action."

Evans has been a speaker at numerous Southern Baptist meetings, including the Southern Baptist Convention, and for large gatherings such as "Promise Keepers" and National Religious Broadcasters. He is author of seven books and has a weekly radio program, "The Urban Alternative," aired on more than 200 stations across the country.

His most recent book is "Let's Get to Know Each Other: What White Christians Should Know About Black Christians." Others are "Our God is Awesome," "The Victorious Christian Life," "Beyond Roots II: If Anybody Asks You Who I Am," "Are Blacks Inferior to Whites?: The Dispelling of an American Myth," "America's Only Hope" and "Guiding Your Family in a Misguided World."

He is also author of "The Urban Concern" booklet series and has two video series: "God's Blueprint for the Christian Family" and "Unleashing the Power of the Word."

Evans, the first African American to graduate from Dallas Theological Seminary with a doctoral degree, appeals to people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

He currently is senior pastor of the 2,500-member Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas and president of The Urban Alternative, a national organization seeking spiritual renewal in urban America through the church.

He also is chaplain of the National Basketball Association Dallas Mavericks and has served as chaplain of the National Football League Dallas Cowboys.

Evans, a native of Baltimore who received his undergraduate degree from Carver Bible College, serves on the board of Dallas Theological Seminary, Black Evangelistic Enterprises and National Religious Broadcasters.

Evans and his wife, Lois, have two daughters, Chrystal and Priscilla, and two sons, Anthony Jr. and Jonathan.

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Baptist peace group 'welcoming
place' for gays and lesbians

Baptist Press
2/24/95

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--The board of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, meeting in Fort Worth, Texas, Feb. 9-11, declared the organization a welcoming place for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons and pledged to work with them for their personal security and full equality.

The BPFNA, founded in 1984, is a network linking Baptists involved in justice and peace issues throughout North America. Its board of directors is composed of members affiliated with seven Baptist conventions and five racial/ethnic groups in Canada, the United States, Puerto Rico and Mexico. The organization has no official sponsorship of any convention.

In its Feb. 17 news release, the directors said they believe "all human beings are created and loved by God."

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"We welcome into the (BPFNA) all persons who desire to be peacemakers and workers for justice. Specifically, we welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons and pledge ourselves to work with them for the personal security and full equality of all persons whose sexual orientation has caused them to suffer persecution and alienation."

The board pledged specific action in several areas "to work for justice:"

-- to actively oppose any action which will lead to violence against any lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered person or group.

-- to take an active role at denominational meetings to oppose any homophobic resolutions which assault the integrity of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons and prevent them from becoming members of churches, being ordained, being credentialed for chaplaincy and pastoral counseling and being employed in denominational structures.

-- to encourage and support regional groups (of the BPFNA) as they work to defeat any anti-gay laws and church resolutions and actions.

-- to encourage local congregations to structure an open dialogue with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons and groups and also provide practical resources for their use.

"Many congregations are struggling with responding to our gay, lesbian and bisexual sisters and brothers who ask for full inclusion in the church," said Glenda Fontenot, president of the BPFNA board. "In responding to numerous congregations asking for help, the BPFNA board has committed itself with human and printed resources.

"One of the strengths we bring to this dialogue is our strong Baptist history and practice that each congregation must make these decision of conscience for itself," she said. "Our hope is to help congregations have the kind of dialogue that will enable them to become clear about the issues which keep gay, lesbian and bisexual church members from being included.

"Another strength is that the board itself has struggled over a period of time and represents many congregations who have struggled and are continuing to struggle with this question of conscience," Fontenot said. "We celebrate this opportunity to help congregations."

The statement by the board is the outgrowth of a process of vigorous dialogue over the course of several years. The dialogue, directors said, has included hearing the stories and concerns of BPFNA members who are gay or lesbian as well as those who are related by family or congregation to gays or lesbians and their struggle for justice.

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