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America, churches losing
fight for truth, Colson says

By Norman Miller

Baptist Press
2/28/95

WAKE FOREST, N.C.(BP)--With an arm around his 11-year-old granddaughter, Chuck Colson sat as Caroline read the caption under a picture of the Bill of Rights in her American history textbook: "The Bill of Rights promised individual freedoms to many people, but not to women, blacks, and native Americans."

Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries and a former Nixon aide, related this story Feb. 27 at the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's annual seminar, "The War of the Worlds," meeting at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., Feb. 27-March 1. "Why would we publish a textbook that is not only wrong but also misrepresents American history in a negative way?"

Continuing with "signs of the times," Colson cited a professor at San Francisco State University who was suspended for teaching the theory of evolution was flawed. "He was readmitted to the classroom only after agreeing not to teach that evolution was flawed. Where is academic freedom?" Colson asked.

"The Federal Aviation Administration has a 'gender sensitivity' course" in which women view and then comment on pictures of male sex organs in the presence of male co-workers. Colson said many U.S. government agencies use this sort of training and asked, "Why do we do this -- consciously humiliate people -- why?"

Colson said a fourth-grade student was chastised by a principal in a St. Louis public school for praying before eating lunch. "He was threatened with expulsion, and the principal called the boy's parents, telling them, 'Your son can't do this because it violates separation of church and state laws.'"

In a northern Virginia community, you can sing Christmas carols on public property but only if "you do not mention the Lord's name," Colson said. "'Frosty the Snowman' is OK, but not 'Silent Night.'"

"Why, why do we want to exclude the symbols of our own faith, which belong to the vast majority of Americans?"

Saying Rep. Vic Fazio, D-Calif., "unfortunately survived the November elections," Colson quoted Fazio as saying, "This un-Christian, uncharitable, so-called religious right should keep its business out of politics." He also cited another congressman who said, "Things have come to a sorry state in America when religion is allowed to interfere in public life."

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Colson said amidst erupting applause that if not for William Wilberforce's religious convictions, England would never have outlawed its slave trade. "Thank God religion invaded public life, or we'd still have slavery.

"America's problems go much deeper than the distribution of condoms to teenagers and the appointment of Henry Foster as surgeon general. These events I have cited are all little skirmishes of a major war being waged not only for the heart and soul of America, but for Western culture as well."

Laying society's moral degradation at the feet of the Enlightenment era, Colson said for 1,800 years Western civilizations held to "transcendent moral standards by which people lived. We believed these came from God's revelation." But Colson added the rationalism of the Renaissance said, "We no longer have to rely on God for revelation of moral truth and physical order. ... We can find truth through our own reason."

Colson said these same ideas have persisted in the United States and were very prominent in the 1960s. "We went through a revolution in America, and we cannot understand the role of the church, or the crisis in America, or even our own country unless we understand the kind of revolution that occurred in America three decades ago," when objective truth and any knowledge of it was rejected.

The prevailing views were "there is no truth, and there is no God," Colson said. "The kids of the '60s believed this; there is nothing more than eat, drink, cheap drugs and free love -- why not?"

The era and philosophy has not left Western culture, said Colson. "The hippies have simply shaved their beards, traded their tie-dyed T-shirts for three-piece business suits, moved to Wall Street and become Yuppies." Colson said "live for yourself" and rampant relativism have become the "dominant ethos in American life."

Against all this stands the Christian world view, he said. "There is truth. It is knowable. God has spoken. We place a higher premium on truth than on tolerance."

Referring to national surveys, Colson said, "The statistics are chilling." A 1991 poll showed 67 percent of Americans rejected absolute truth, and three years later, the figure rose to 72 percent. Citing the same surveys (1991 and 1994) among "evangelical, born-again Christians," Colson said 52 percent and 62 percent, respectively, of American Christians did not hold to absolute truth.

"We are losing the battle for truth in our churches' pews faster" than in the realms of the "cultural elites," Colson said.

"Polls in this country show that Americans believe that something isn't right, and even politicians can't fix it," said Colson. He cited a Newsweek survey that said 76 percent of Americans have a "spiritual yearning" for fulfillment.

Noting President Clinton's appearance on an MTV forum, wherein a young woman asked him how he would propose to teach young people that life is worth living, Colson said Clinton missed it altogether. "The answer can come only from the people of God as they live the truth of God."

After challenging Christians to find ways to live out their faith in their own communities and the world, Colson said, "Never despair. The battle for Christian truth and world view must continue. It is our duty."

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Christians need to battle
for soul of culture, Land says

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
2/28/95

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--The United States of America faces either "a reformation or a new barbarism," and Christians need to be engaged in the battle to determine the outcome, Richard Land said Feb. 27 at the annual seminar of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"We are in a struggle to the death for the soul" of this culture, said Land, the CLC's executive director, on the first evening of the three-day meeting. The culture, however, has "made inroads" into the evangelical church, he said.

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The church needs to seek both reform and revival, which result in reformation, Land said. "What we need is a reformation that will shake our nation" as much as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, George Whitfield, the Anabaptists and others shook theirs, he said.

About 500 people had registered on the first day of the conference on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. The seminar is titled "The War of the Worlds: World Views and the Struggle for the Nation's Soul."

Christians need to be both salt and light to prevent society from being engulfed by a combination of "pagan moral views and technological expertise," he said.

"With the salt of the law, we can change actions, but it is only with the light of the gospel that we can change attitudes," Land said.

It has been OK for an atheist or agnostic to say he believes certain things based on his world view, but it has been "deemed to be unacceptable to say, 'I am a Christian, and therefore I believe,'" he said.

Land said a reporter asked why the CLC seminar's speakers were all conservatives and did not reflect more balance, as, the reporter said, they had in the years before he became executive director.

There will be no more George McGovern nor Sarah Weddington nor Anson Mounts at CLC seminars, Land said. McGovern was an unsuccessful liberal candidate for president in 1972; Weddington argued for the overthrow of abortion laws in the Roe v. Wade case; and Mount was an editor at Playboy magazine. They spoke at CLC seminars before Land's tenure.

"This is not your father's Christian Life Commission," Land said.

He also said some, including NBC commentator Bill Moyers, had criticized the CLC for announcing the previous week its opposition to surgeon general nominee Henry Foster.

"You rattle the empire's cage, and the empire strikes back," he said.

"They may mock" the CLC, Land said. "They won't silence us, and I promise you they won't intimidate us."

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EDITORS' NOTE: HMB President Larry Lewis was unavailable for comment Feb. 28, and the following story will be updated when he can be contacted by Baptist Press.

Dispute in Louisiana erupts over
evangelical-Catholic document By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
2/28/95

THERIOT, La. (BP)--A year after two Southern Baptist Convention leaders signed an affirmation of evangelical-Roman Catholic relations, the issue has erupted in a small Louisiana community.

So far, the dispute has encompassed:

-- a public confrontation of Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis by the pastor and several members of Bayou DuLarge Baptist Mission Church, Theriot, La., urging Lewis to repent of signing the widely publicized document, "Catholics and Evangelicals Together."

-- the subsequent firing of the pastor, Jerry Moser, a Southern Baptist home missionary, by the mission's sponsoring church, Christ Baptist in nearby Houma, La.

-- the intention of Moser and the 100-member mission he has led 11 years for him to continue as their pastor.

"I plan to continue to be missionary pastor on Bayou DuLarge, not as an act of rebellion but as an act of obedience to the Lord who called me to be here," Moser said Feb. 28. "That call was ratified by this mission church and has been confirmed over and over again in our hearts and minds."

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Moser continued, "We are determined to remain associated with our sponsoring church, our association of churches here, the Louisiana Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention."

Still, the evangelical-Catholic document, also signed by Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, "grieves us and hurts our witness ... in an area that's 98 percent Roman Catholic and Episcopalian," Moser said.

Lewis and Land have weathered criticism for compromises critics contend the evangelical-Catholic document makes to Catholic doctrine. Foreign Mission Board trustees voted unanimously in April 1994 to express concern that the document "is subject to interpretations harmful to the work of foreign missions." The Southern Baptist Convention, however, adopted a resolution in June 1994 affirming dialogue with Catholics and upholding Baptist beliefs about evangelism. The HMB board of directors embraced the SBC resolution the following August, although 11 directors signed a "statement of dissent" in September listing six areas of concern over the document. CLC commissioners unanimously affirmed Land's signing of the document the same month.

Moser received a termination notice from Christ Baptist Feb. 23 after a public confrontation with Lewis at a missions rally Feb. 10 sponsored by the local Baptist association -- and held at the mission church, which had just completed a new auditorium. According to Moser, the congregation had been selected to host the meeting more than a year earlier.

The termination letter from Christ Baptist's pastor H. Lynn Fontenot said the church in a Feb. 22 business meeting had approved the unanimous recommendation of its missions committee for Moser's immediate resignation as Bayou DuLarge's pastor. "The underlying reason for this action," Fontenot wrote, "is your continued insubordination" to the authority of Christ Baptist as the mission's sponsor.

The letter promised Moser \$2,000 per month in salary and rent for three months contingent upon him not attending any meeting of the mission church, not holding any public meeting at the building, not attending Sunday services of the mission prior to his family vacating their living quarters in the back of the building by March 8, and not soliciting any funds.

Moser reported he and the Bayou DuLarge congregation intend to respect Christ Baptist's wishes, except for "disobeying God" by abandoning the pastor-church relationship they believe God has ordained for them. The congregation will meet in members' homes until its relationship with Christ Baptist is settled, Moser said. The mission is 60 years old, predating Christ Baptist, and once functioned as a church with a mission of its own, he noted. He added that Christ Baptist did not consult with the mission in its vote to request his resignation.

Fontenot could not be reached for comment Feb. 28, but was quoted in an Associated Baptist Press story Feb. 27 as saying Moser was fired for a history of insubordination, not just for confronting Lewis. "What we're looking at with the incident with Larry Lewis is really the tip of the iceberg," Fontenot said, explaining that Moser regularly ignored policies over the course of several years. The missions committee became "just tired of dealing with Jerry Moser in this capacity," Fontenot said.

Lewis could not be reached for comment Feb. 28.

Moser, in a nine-page letter addressed to "associated churches," said his church unanimously approved a confrontation with Lewis after three meetings, encompassing more than 12 hours, to pray and discuss the matter.

"We decided that we were supposed to confront Dr. Lewis and not allow him to speak until he had a chance to hear us and consider how he is hurting us with this heretical document," Moser wrote.

Included in the rationale Moser gave for the mission's action were the autonomy of the local church and 1 Timothy 5:19's instruction that an accusation against a church leader is to be brought by two or three witnesses and, "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning."

"We maintained control of the meeting and gave permission to no others to speak but Dr. Lewis, four of our men, and myself," Moser recounted, acknowledging, "Most of the innocent congregation from other churches were shocked, stunned, or steaming mad at us. ... We are not prideful about what we did; we are sad that it had to be done. ... Common decency would have caused us not to act in this way. We are convinced that biblically defending the faith sometimes supersedes what man considers proper."

Moser said Lewis "conducted himself well and was respectful of the authority of the church," but "steadfastly refused to repent."

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Meeting mistakenly lists
Frank Pollard as speaker

Baptist Press
2/28/95

TAMPA, Fla. (BP)--Frank Pollard will not be among the speakers at a conference being organized by a Tampa, Fla., pastor as an alternative to the Pastors' Conference preceding the June 20-22 Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta.

Don Letzring, pastor of Tampa's Wellwood Baptist Church, told Baptist Press Feb. 27 he spoke with Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss., several days after the mid-February announcement of the June 18-19 "Preaching and Worship Conference" at Atlanta's Wieuca Road Baptist Church.

Letzring said Pollard recounted leaving a message on Letzring's answering machine prior to the public announcement that he had realized a conflict in his schedule between the conference and a summer teaching assignment he had accepted at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif. Letzring said he had missed Pollard's message and Pollard had called again when he became aware of the publicity.

Pollard, a former president of the seminary, also is the preacher on "The Baptist Hour" radio program of the SBC Radio and Television Commission.

The list of speakers previously announced for the conference otherwise has not changed, Letzring said.

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Cambodian recounts miracles
from refugee camp to pastorate

Baptist Press
2/28/95

By Michael J. Clingenpeel

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Twelve thousand miles, 12 time zones and several plane changes separate Phnom Pehn, Cambodia, and Richmond, Va. But for Samuel Nuon, pastor of a Khmer Baptist congregation, the distance is measured in miracles, not miles.

The miracles began 20 years ago, April 17, 1975, when Nuon, his wife, Chameroun, and their two infant sons narrowly escaped Cambodia when it fell into the brutal hands of communists, the Khmer Rouge. The miracles have been happening ever since.

Every Sunday Nuon leads about 70 Cambodians in Sunday school and worship as pastor of the Khmer mission at Richmond's Derbyshire Baptist Church, a role he has held almost since the mission began as a home Bible study in 1980.

But two decades ago Nuon was chief of veterinary services for the Pailin province in the Khmer Republic. He and his wife lived in Phnom Penh with their two sons, ages 2 and four months. As war in Southeast Asia spread, the communist Khmer Rouge seized control of Cambodia.

Th usands died in the aftermath of the communist takeover, a bloody purge chronicled in the movie "The Killing Fields." Some estimates say 90 percent of the Christians in Cambodia were executed during the reign of terror.

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The day before Phnom Penh fell, Nuon was summoned, along with other government officials, to the governor's house, where they were told to pack enough food for three days and head for the nearby border with Thailand. Because of his education in the Netherlands, Nuon knew he would not survive the purge.

When he and his family, including one sister and a cousin, arrived at the border, Nuon was held at gunpoint. Then came the first miracle. At that moment the governor arrived and paid off the border guards with rice to let Nuon and his family escape.

Once in Thailand, the young civil service worker and his family joined about 3,000 Cambodian refugees in a camp. It was there, the day after their escape, a second miracle occurred.

Ronald Hill, then a Southern Baptist missionary in Thailand, learned about the "desperate situation" of the refugees. He traveled to the growing camp, saw there was no Red Cross or United Nations assistance, and learned Thai officials would offer to help only one week.

Hill said he contacted Keith Parks, then area director for the Foreign Mission Board, who authorized \$5,000 in humanitarian assistance. Quickly Hill brought food, medicine, clothing and Bibles to the refugees living in the open by a river.

"Any missionary would have done the same thing," says Hill. "The reason we could do it was because Baptists had given. The money was there." Over the next seven years Southern Baptists gave almost \$1 million in humanitarian relief to the troubled region, according to Hill.

Nuon met Hill, who offered him a yellowed copy of the Gospel of John in the Khmer language. And because there was little else to do in the camp, Nuon attended an evening worship service each night. Although a Buddhist, Nuon confesses it was a faith he "didn't practice."

Nuon recalls how for days he watched the Baptist missionary distribute food, Bibles and pray with the refugees. "I could see Christ in his actions," says Nuon. "This is very effective evangelism."

Hill, now retired and living in Greensboro, N.C., vividly recalls the refugees' questions: "You're not part of our family, why are you doing this?" They also asked, "Where are the Buddhists?" Nuon, who could speak some English, was particularly impressed by the tangible concern.

Nuon soon announced his desire to become a Christian, and along with 71 other refugees was baptized in the Klang Yai River that flowed beside the refugee camp. Hill remembers Nuon telling him, "My family and I have decided to follow Jesus. There is no other way."

When Hill visited the camp a week later, he found a Cambodian pastor leading a communion service using Pepsi and crackers -- all that was available. Nuon had been appointed one of 12 men to serve as "deacons."

Life in the camp was difficult, and the thousands of refugees often lacked enough to eat. When local governmental authorities failed to give an adequate ration of food, a lethal riot broke out among the refugees. Thai authorities, hoping to end the riot, sprayed gunfire into the crowd where Nuon had stood moments before.

He and his family fell to the ground in their hut as bullets passed through the fragile walls. They watched as at least 40 Cambodians were killed. He and his family were spared -- "another miracle," he says.

After six months as refugees, Nuon and his family were accepted for settlement at Fort Chafee, Ark. There he translated for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

From there, in November 1975, they made their final move to Richmond, where they and another Cambodian family were sponsored by the Derbyshire congregation.

As Nuon and his family settled into life in Richmond, they watched news about their homeland. By 1979 the Vietnamese turned aside the Khmer Rouge rebellion, but mass starvation plagued the refugees who continued to swell the camps of Thailand.

In the years since his escape, Nuon had not heard from his mother and sister, who were left behind when the rest of the family escaped.

That same year the Foreign Mission Board asked Nuon to return to Thailand as a translator on a mercy mission to carry food and medicine to refugees. Through the assistance of the Carter administration, Nuon, still not a U.S. citizen, was able to get a passport and visa.

The day before leaving Richmond, he received a letter from his sister, his first word that she was alive and living in one of the camps.

For three weeks he worked in one of the camps, never having time to search for his family. During the final weekend before returning to Richmond, Nuon and missionary Dan Cobb drove three hours to a camp with more than 100,000 refugees, one of the largest in the country.

"We prayed desperately in the car," Nuon recounts, describing their arrival at the huge camp. "Just after we prayed we got out of the car and there was my mother and sister."

After that, adds Nuon, "We prayed and sang every evening. God saved all our family." Another miracle.

The next year -- 1980 -- Derbyshire started home Bible studies for Cambodians living in Richmond. Nuon led the studies, out of which developed the Khmer mission, which started in 1982. That same year Nuon was licensed to preach. Three years later he was ordained as a minister.

Although he worked eight years for A.H. Robins, a Richmond pharmaceutical company, as a biologist screening new medicines, Nuon felt his calling was to ministry.

When the Richmond Baptist Association sponsored off-campus classes for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Boyce Bible School, Nuon was the first graduate. Last May he was awarded a master's degree from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

His congregation has grown to more than 100 members from among the 2,000 Cambodians in Richmond.

The Khmer pastor is vice president of communications and worship for the Cambodian Baptist Fellowship of the Southern Baptist Convention, a national organization whose affiliates include 100 preaching points and mission churches.

But his burden for reaching the Cambodian people with the gospel extends beyond Richmond and the United States. In Cambodia today, a new generation of Christians is rising from the ashes.

"People are starving for the good news," says Nuon. "There is much more freedom of religion now. Christianity is more open now, there are more missionaries. I also keep praying for over 60,000 Cambodians resettled in Europe; there is no (Cambodian) church there."

Nuon knows it would be a miracle for the killing fields to become harvest fields.

"A movie could be made about our escape," he says, then adds: "It would not be about the killing fields, but about God's miracles."

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New battery pack represents
extended life-gift from God

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
2/28/95

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Tee Billingsley says she is "going into the hospital next week to have my battery pack replaced" as casually as one might mention a haircut.

But Billingsley knows the surgery is not minor and the battery implanted in her body and wired to her heart defibrillator represents added years of life that are a gift from God.

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A musician, composer, conference leader and consultant in preschool and children's music education, Billingsley has endured a long illness and recovery following a remarkable encounter with death.

When the telephone rang on July 16, 1991, Billingsley could not know the message would be the beginning of several nightmarish years. The sudden and unexpected death of an infant grandson, the prematurely born child of their oldest son, would lead Billingsley and husband Derrell, a music editor at Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., to mourn the next day at a Florida funeral home.

While Tee Billingsley had held their grandson once in his brief life, Derrell Billingsley had not. As they prepared to leave the funeral home that night, Derrell was handed the body of his grandson to hold. Tee, standing between her husband and son Todd, watched as Derrell, overcome with emotion, began to cry. Todd, touched by his father's grief, also began to cry.

At that moment, Tee said, she was so deeply affected by the mourning of the two men she believes she knows "what Jesus feels when he sees us grieve."

Later, she would learn it was then that her heart literally "turned off. I didn't have a heart attack. I felt light -- release. But I thought, 'My head is so heavy.' I put my head over on Derrell's shoulder."

Thinking Tee was crying, Derrell was not alarmed until he heard "a guttural sound, like snoring. She was already black," he said.

For the next 13 minutes, Derrell performed CPR on his wife until paramedics arrived. Another 25 minutes passed until her heart began to beat again.

In a coma, Tee had a mild stroke. Her heart quit beating three more times the next day. Her family was told she would not survive.

But after two days and a transfer to another hospital, a doctor whose work had been devoted to research rather than patient practice was able to stabilize her heart and implant the defibrillator.

For a time, her memory had lost the previous two years of her life. Derrell discovered she would tell nurses she had been married two years less and that their three children were each two years younger than they were. She did not remember the death earlier in the year of Derrell's father and did not remember anything of the grandson who had been born and had died prior to her hospitalization. In fact, she did not understand what had happened or why they were in Miami.

"I couldn't walk," she said. And as time progressed and she returned home, she had difficulty breathing. The slightest activity might cause her color to turn blue without warning, her weight ballooned and she began to experience allergic reactions to a wide range of foods.

Extensive tests and numerous visits to doctors failed to improve her condition or provide answers to her ever-frustrating health problems. Finally, in 1993 she was scheduled for exploratory heart surgery.

Her family was called to the hospital the night before surgery, and Tee told them, "If I live or if I go to be with the Lord tomorrow, at least you will know either way it is a miracle. If I am with the Lord, it will still be a miracle because I will be out of this."

Lying in her hospital bed that night, she asked God, "Have I made a difference at all?"

She said she didn't think about money she never had or fame she never achieved, or other things some strive for in their lives. She said she remembers thinking God had been her first priority -- "not church, but God" -- followed by Derrell, her children and, then, work in the church.

"I felt good," she recalled. "I didn't have anything to feel bad about. Then I thought about other children -- a whole slew who became ministers of music, organists, pianists, graded choir coordinators and three missionaries! All these had been in my classes or choirs at one time or another. I realized the importance of the little things. I was important in God's plan."

Surgery revealed scar tissue had formed between the two "terminals" attached to her heart, causing it to bulge downward in an unnatural shape. When the tissue was removed, the heart immediately resumed its normal shape. In the next 24 hours, she lost 27 pounds of fluid. As a result of the contortion of her heart, her kidneys had almost ceased to function. She remembers waking in recovery and knowing she felt better.

Today she is physically active and has resumed many of the ministry activities she once enjoyed. She takes pride in her children's careers: Todd, president of Coral Key Publishing, a music publisher in Miami; Susie, a minister to children at First Church of the Nazarene in Bradenton, Fla.; and Derry, a vocal performance major who will graduate in May from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

This summer, she is scheduled for a full teaching load during church music leadership conferences at Ridgecrest (N.C.) and Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Centers.

"God has given me some time. I don't know how much more time I have, but whatever it is, I want it to count," she declared.

And she said she has learned that while her priorities were in order all along, "the problems we have in our lives, and the opportunity to be back with some of those good old Southern Baptist church problems, is glorious!"

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed to state Baptist newspapers and uploaded in the SBCNet News Room by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press. The outline, tee.txt, is posted in the SBCNet News Room.

**Missionary surveys quake damage
in region of Armero disaster** By Mary E. Speidel

**Baptist Press
2/28/95**

ARMENIA, Colombia (BP)--Colombia has had its share of disasters during Rick Veazey's first year and a half as a Southern Baptist missionary there.

Veazey and other missionaries worked with Colombian Baptists to aid more than 400 people in Florida, Colombia, left homeless in February 1994 by a flash flood. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board sent \$12,500 in human needs funds. Veazey, a ham radio operator, helped with communications during the disaster, which swept away houses and covered some areas with a foot of mud.

About five months later an earthquake and avalanche left 11,000 homeless, 600 dead and 125 injured in Cauca state. Again, missionaries and Colombian Baptists provided food, shelter, medicine and spiritual aid -- using about \$15,000 in board funds.

So when an earthquake measuring 6.4 on the Richter scale rocked Colombia's coffee zone in early February, Veazey didn't waste any time. Even though shaken up by the temblor which rocked his own home about 25 miles away in Armenia, Veazey monitored the disaster by ham radio until government officials opened Pereira, the hardest-hit city, to outsiders the day after the quake.

Then he traveled to the scene. When he arrived, the missionary tried to find out how Baptists could plug into relief efforts. But he learned that this time officials didn't need their help.

"The government went into action pretty quickly" to handle the relief, said Veazey, from McGehee, Ark., in a phone interview. "If anything, they had too many (rescuers) trying to dig people out" of the rubble. In addition, most people didn't lose their belongings like others had in the earlier disasters, so food and supplies weren't widely needed.

But Baptists found other ways to minister behind the scenes. At Armenia's Gethseman Baptist Church, for example, they offered shelter to a street vendor whose home was destroyed.

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After the vendor went to stay with relatives, they let her lock up her belongings at the church. "It's a really rough neighborhood," said Veazey. "There was a lot of looting" after the quake.

Gethsemane church was among three Baptist churches to sustain damages during the worst earthquake to strike the region since the 1970s.

A support beam fell at First Baptist Church, Pereira, when the quake rocked western Colombia. The temblor caused minor surface damage at Gethsemane and another Baptist church in Armenia.

No one was injured at the churches, said Veazey. The quake struck during a mid-week lunch break in early February.

The quake killed about 40 people and injured at least 230 others in Pereira, where about 300,000 people live. Veazey heard of only one Baptist hurt -- a child who suffered minor injuries. At least 700 houses were wrecked; no Baptists lost their homes, Veazey said.

The earthquake struck a coffee-producing region known for the 1985 mudslide that buried the town of Armero. About 24,000 people died in that avalanche, triggered when the volcano Nevado del Ruiz erupted. Later two Baptist centers and churches resulted from Baptist relief work among Armero survivors.

Remembering Armero, Colombian officials worried the Feb. 8 quake might cause Nevado del Ruiz and other nearby volcanoes to erupt. "There were warnings. They were ready to evacuate some areas" if it became necessary, Veazey said.

Despite the earthquake's severity, some Colombians seemed to take it in stride.

"A lot of people said this was nothing like Armero. And after you've gone through something like that, it's like, what more can happen?" said Veazey, who can see the still-smoldering volcano from his home.

The recent temblor also caused minor damage at the apartment building where Veazey and his family live. But things seemed a lot worse when the missionaries felt the four-story structure swaying.

"When the piano began to move, we knew it was time to get to a safe place," said Veazey. He and his wife, Dena, from Harrisonburg, Va., are the only Southern Baptist missionaries in the disaster zone.

As they and their two teen-agers evacuated, "we heard the building popping. Some of the marble floors broke from the shifting. We found out later they were designed to do that to relieve stress," he said.

The Veazeys stood outside with neighbors until their building was deemed safe to go inside. "We tried to help (neighbors) calm down their children -- and our children, too," he said.

He added: "We always wondered about the panic" people experience in earthquakes. "Now we understand."

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(BP) photo (mugshot) mailed Feb. 28 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

Former Ob-Gyn underscores
sanctity of human life

By Douglas C. Estes

Baptist Press
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WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--As medical technology becomes more and more advanced, it is increasingly important to know the God who knows all of human life, from the embryonic to the elderly, a former Ob-Gyn physician told Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary students Feb. 22.

Bill Cutrer, pastor of Wildwood Baptist Church, Mesquite, Texas, who formerly served 15 years on the staff of Baylor Medical Center in Dallas, focused on Psalm 139 during his message at the Wake Forest, N.C., campus.

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A recognition "that we are created in the image of God ... distinguishes us from the dogs, the cats and the flowers which are truly alive, but are not made in the image of God," Cutrer noted.

"The psalmist's phrase, 'skillfully wrought,' is the same descriptor that was used for those who created the tapestries in the tabernacle. We are persons intimately and meticulously made, embroidered by God," he said.

"But no less important is the newborn life, or the child," he continued, adding, "God is not surprised that one is born blind, that one is born deaf. He will be glorified by that life, and how we treat that life."

Cutrer recounted a lecture he gave on Psalm 139 before the Christian Medical Society of the Ukraine, a country in which the average woman aborts three to eight babies in a lifetime.

Speaking to more than 1,000 physicians, most of whom had never heard the psalm before Cutrer's address, he said, "The power of Scripture was such that at the end of the lecture, they had decided to vote as an organization that life begins at conception and that abortion is wrong."

Reflecting on his years as a practicing physician, Cutrer stated: "Medicine is a tragic profession; it's fighting battle after battle in a war we know we're going to lose. Yet we can take hope that in the spiritual realm, we can make an eternal difference."

Science, as well as human understanding, reveals life does begin at conception, Cutrer said. "I can see hearts beating 4 weeks and 2 days after conception, and it's awesome. And nobody looks at that screen and says, 'Wow, a glob of tissue with a heartbeat.'"

Still, abortion tragically touches the lives of many people in one way or another, he said. Christians must love the victims of abortion, he advised: "Be gracious and be kind because there are people that have made that decision to abort a child. If we cannot reach out in love to those that have had abortions, then half of our ministry field is gone."

Sanctity of life begins with one's relationship to God, Cutrer said. If that relationship is applied to others with love, he said, then Jesus one day will respond, as in Matthew 25:21, "'Well done, good and faithful servant!'"

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Estes is a first-year master of divinity student at Southeastern Seminary.

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