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Hope in Christ still unites
Baptists in Croatia, Serbia

By Stanley Crabb

Baptist Press
8/4/95

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--They clearly disagree on many issues regarding the causes of the civil war between their republics, but they agree strongly Jesus Christ is the only hope for the world.

Dane Vidovic is a Serbian Baptist who directs a student ministry in Belgrade. He is a member of the executive committee of the Union of Baptists in Serbia, one of the three Baptist unions which were spawned after the breakup of the former Yugoslavia.

Branco Lovrec, a medical doctor, serves as president of the Baptist Union of Croatia, another of the three. Lovrec edits several Christian publications printed in Zagreb and directs a large humanitarian aid organization in Croatia as well. He has been very active in organizing humanitarian help going to refugees in Croatia.

Dragisa Armus is general secretary of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. It is the third Baptist Union which replaced the once-united Baptist Union of Yugoslavia.

The three Baptist leaders are enjoying the rare possibility of being together in Buenos Aires to take part in the 17th Baptist World Congress.

In interviews, they spoke of their differences regarding the causes of the three-year civil conflict in the Balkan peninsula.

Before the civil war, Serbia and Croatia were both states within the Yugoslavian federation. In the three years since war broke out in 1992 between their republics, thousands of people have been killed. In some areas there has been total destruction of property. Worse still, relationships have been ruptured between peoples who, prior to 1992, were good friends and even members of the same family. Even Baptist believers often find themselves on opposing sides of the many-faceted political issues which the war has engendered.

Croatian publications, such as the devotional series, "Our Daily Bread," were distributed freely among the various republics of Yugoslavia prior to the war. Strict border controls now prohibit the Serbs from paying for this literature, even though the Croatians still can ship it.

Vidovic and Armus did not mince words in charging that in the early stages of the war certain magazines published in Zagreb by Croatian Christians contained political statements which were inflammatory and one-sided.

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Lovrec admitted certain publications, particularly in the early stages of the war, in fact did include statements which unintentionally could have been offensive to the Serbs.

"From our side, when we heard there had been negative reactions to some of our articles, we stopped sending literature altogether," said Lovrec. "At first, we did not know the people were unhappy with what had been printed."

According to Vidovic, terminology continues to divide Serbs and Croats. So also does the way the territory is divided. "I am from Krajina," he explained. "When anybody says we have 'occupied' an area as was printed in a Croatian evangelical publication, it means we have occupied ourselves, because my ancestors have been on these lands for over 400 years."

"Yes, but this area was always Croatian territory, ever since the 11th century," countered Lovrec. "The Serbs were trying to escape from the Turks and settled in the place now known as Krajina."

Part of the blame, according to Vidovic, lies with Christians in the West. "I believe that the war and the many humanitarian projects in which we are all involved have contributed to the tensions among us," Vidovic said.

Vidovic said it seems to him western Christians have placed more importance on the refugees than on helping the churches to evangelize. "I think we shouldn't spend all our resources on this," he said, explaining Christians in the former Yugoslavia became very involved in humanitarian projects, all of them necessary, but then "neglected a lot of our own Christian infrastructures."

"We have taken care of the refugees, but we don't even have salaries for our pastors," Vidovic said. "We need to spread the gospel and preach to them and hold evangelistic services for them."

Armus underlined his dissatisfaction with the unequal amounts of humanitarian help from the West going to south Serbia and to Croatia.

"Our Baptist humanitarian organization 'Love Your Neighbour' received a comparatively much smaller amount of aid than analogous agencies in Croatia, even though there was great need in southern Serbia, Montenegro and Srpska Republic," Armus stated.

"Our union needs help for pastors and for Christian literature, as well as many other church-related projects," Armus said. "We received no help for these matters."

Suddenly, the face of Lovrec brightened. "If we had had more resources for evangelism like Bibles, Christian literature, etc., before the war broke out, then perhaps Christians would have been able to prevent the war," he said.

"Whether in Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia, if we now can unite in the vision that the people need the gospel more than anything else, this might slowly diminish the animosity of the war."

Armus agreed. "We are praying for the war to cease and that the right solution may be found so that peace can come. Even when we are speaking as representatives of Serbia and Croatia, it is important to emphasize that we speak as Christian believers with the same faith. Our only hope is to emphasize the message of Jesus Christ. Only this message can unite us."

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Rwandan Baptist refugees
cling to hope in Christ

By Pam Parry

Baptist Press
8/4/95

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--War. The massacre of intimate friends. Loss of all personal property and vocation. Exile. Nothing can shake Eleazar Zihembere's faith in God and the belief that his story and that of his people is one of hope.

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Ziherambere, a participant in the Baptist World Congress and former general secretary of the Baptist Union in Rwanda, said despite the devastation and chaos wrought by tribal wars, he knows "the situation in Rwanda is not beyond God's control."

Ziherambere, Baptist World Alliance regional secretary for Africa, joined by Francois Havugimana, former president of the Baptist Union in Rwanda, told reporters Aug. 3 Baptists around the world should pray for peace and reconciliation in that land.

They refuted allegations that the Rwandan churches and religious leaders participated in the bloody killings. The religious leaders' call for peace and reconciliation resulted in either their murder or exile, they said.

"The people who are fighting believed we would interfere with their interest, because they wanted to get power by force," Ziherambere said.

Ziherambere, himself, was targeted for murder and narrowly escaped. His wife was in London when the fighting broke out, and he was alone with their children. They left everything they owned behind, fleeing by car to the Burundi border. Eventually, they made their way to Nairobi.

Fearing they had died, his wife went through a difficult time until they were able to contact her, he said.

Ziherambere, a member of the Hutu tribe, lost his position with the Baptist Union of Rwanda because he is unable to return safely to the country. The new general secretary is a member of the Tutsi tribe, and Ziherambere said he regrets his brother in Christ was not able to be with him at the press conference.

His life in Kenya has been difficult, he said, but compared to other tragedies, he called his situation a miracle of God.

Havugimana, who lives in a refugee camp with 42 other pastors, said more than 2 million people are living in exile. Even today, a dozen or so people are killed daily, Ziherambere added.

Many Baptists are among the casualties, including the union's finest leaders, Ziherambere said.

"I have asked God, 'How can you allow this to happen? Take me. Take me, but don't take (these leaders).' But the Lord has made his decision."

They said churches are still under persecution, but they continue to operate as best they can. Ziherambere said today there are a few people worshiping in the churches the union had prior to the outbreak of violence.

As refugees, they have experienced isolation as never before, and attending the Aug. 1-6 BWA Congress in Buenos Aires has allowed them to link with other Christians, they said.

"Taking part in this Congress is somehow another opportunity to allow us to indeed realize that we are human beings," Ziherambere said.

"We had asked ourselves what the BWA Congress could mean for us, Rwanda and the whole world, especially Africa," Havugimana said. The answer was simple: for the world to understand that brute force can never result in peace, he said.

"We are peacemakers," he said, adding, "I love my country. I want to go back, but how can I when the people who wanted to kill me and my children" are still in power.

Ziherambere said he is grateful to God that prior to an outbreak of violence the union completed a three-year partnership with the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware. The partnership, channeled through the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, sponsored mission teams from the two-state convention that resulted in thousands of decisions.

Even though many of the Rwandans have died since then, they had found true life in Christ as a result of the partnership, he said.

Even though the death of the multitudes will never "get out of my memory," Ziherambere said, "I am glad this (violence) began after they made it to eternity."

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If this life was all that the Rwandans had, it would be a miserable existence and their god would be a miserable god, he said. But Ziherambere said with all his heart he knows better.

"We will be reunited with one another in heaven."

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South Africans continue struggle
toward reconciliation, healing By Ron Packnett

Baptist Press
8/4/95

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--"How can God send revival if we are disenfranchised?" exclaimed a white Southern Baptist minister as he exited the second day of Baptist World Congress workshop discussions around the topic, "Baptists Against Racism."

"For repentance to be genuine, there must be a next step," said John Avant, pastor of the Coggin Avenue Baptist Church, Brownwood, Texas. "One must get to know his brothers and sisters through their experiences of pain and struggle."

At issue is a concern raised by members of the Baptist Convention of South Africa. On Aug. 2, the special Baptist World Alliance commission, Baptists Against Racism, raised the topic, "The Reconciling Power of the Gospel." Invited to make presentations to the world Baptist community were Branko Lovrec of Croatia, Dane Vidovic of Yugoslavia, Desmond Hoffmeister of the Baptist Convention of South Africa and Terry Rae of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.

The morning of Aug. 3, Hoffmeister, general secretary of the Baptist Convention issued an "open letter" to Rae, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. In Hoffmeister's words, the Aug. 2 presentation was a "lost opportunity" in advancing genuine reconciliation.

"I was shocked and deeply disappointed by the misrepresentations of the general secretary," Hoffmeister explained.

"Unless corrected," commented William Brown, a minister in the South African delegation, "the world community will leave Buenos Aires with the wrong impression."

"We are yet divided in the Baptist church in South Africa and the world must know the truth of our pain and struggle," he lamented.

In attendance at the workshop Aug. 2 was Charles Wallace Smith, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Washington, and a member of the BWA General Council.

Smith, in an interview, shared his observations regarding the presentations by both South African church leaders.

"The Baptist World Alliance must come to this reality ... as much as we want reconciliation, it (BWA) must recognize that historical issues must be healed before authentic reconciliation can occur. There are many issues affecting black brothers and sisters which have not been addressed; there are gaping wounds which must be healed," he continued.

In his Aug. 2 presentation, Terry Rae, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, admitted more must be done in the efforts of reconciliation in South Africa among the Baptist family.

"The laws are gone, but it will take the mighty power of God to take racism out of the hearts of the people," Rae observed. He further stated the white South African benefitted in every way from the system of apartheid.

"The impression given by our white African brother was false and misleading," was the passionate response of Hoffmeister and several members of the African delegation. "Not only did they benefit from apartheid," according to the open letter from Hoffmeister, "they tacitly supported this brutal system of oppression."

"Black Christians seek genuine reconciliation with their white brothers and sisters, yet there are historic scars which must first be healed," were the laments of these delegates.

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Responding to those concerns in an interview, Rae voiced deep sorrow for the reaction his presentation caused. "That was the farthest thing from my mind," he said. While he acknowledged much more could have been shared regarding the repentance of white South African Baptists, he said, "Nothing I said was untrue."

Racism and apartheid are horrible evils, Rae said. "The Baptist Union of Southern Africa has both formally and informally acknowledged that white southern Africans were implicated in the hurts of our brothers," he declared. "We could have and should have done more," he continued. Rae said he prays for "complete healing" and for forgiveness, both white to black and black to white.

Hoffmeister said he shares the same dream and vision for South Africa. However, he said, he feels the horrible history which is a reality must be dealt with adequately before any true and genuine reconciliation or healing can take place. "All I want is for the record to be set straight."

In his struggle for equal place at the table of God, Hoffmeister wants "repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing."

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Baptists urged to address
corruption wherever it exists By Jan Johnsonius

Baptist Press
8/4/95

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--The prosecutor of Argentina's military junta, in the wake of the "Dirty War" that left thousands dead and missing, joined Baptist leaders from Argentina, Nigeria and Australia in calling for solidarity in the mission of transforming corrupt society.

Luis Moreno Ocampo spoke to a packed workshop Aug. 2-3 at the 17th Baptist World Congress in Buenos Aires, addressing the topic "Private and Public Morality: Confronting Corruption and Its Effects." Other speakers included Daniel Montamat, former president of Argentina's largest oil company; Osador Imasogie, former president of the Baptist seminary in Nigeria; and John Robinson, Australian pastor and member of the Baptist World Alliance's Christian Ethics Commission.

According to Ocampo, there are two models of corruption in government and institutions. In the first, corruption is not the norm and exists on a small scale. In the second, corruption exists on all levels, and being honest is the exception. He said Argentina follows the latter model and gave results of a recent poll of Argentine citizens to support his claim.

That poll, Ocampo said, shows Argentines see considerable corruption in 91 percent of police, 79 percent of business executives, 66 percent of judges, 49 percent of ordinary citizens, 32 percent of church members and 34 percent of journalists.

"We have to learn to change the system and change public morals," said Ocampo. "In that, you as Baptists know more than I do."

Montamat, a member of Once Baptist Church in Buenos Aires and former president of YPF oil company, agreed with Ocampo on the need to raise moral values, but he noted the responsibility is not so much that of the politicians but rather families, schools and churches.

Imasogie echoed Montamat in saying, "The Christian church, as God's agent of change, must see the ethical transformation of corrupt society as a divine mission."

"To fold one's arms is tantamount to reducing one's self to a thermometer that simply reflects the societal ethos instead of a dynamic, divine thermostat that should set the ethical pace for society," Imasogie said, adding God expects the body of Christ to be "involved with God" in bringing about a just and corrupt-free society.

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Imasogie said the church, as the "salt of the earth," can carry out its responsibility by educating Christians on their social responsibility as a divine agent for spiritual and moral transformation; mobilizing Christian churches nationwide; organizing seminars for Christians in the corridors of power in government, industries, economy and academics; and by making powerful and well-informed representations to government and industry on the evidence of corruption in society and its destabilizing moral effects.

Imasogie admitted achieving such a vision is not easy, but added the "promise of God is that if his people are committed to him and want to do his will, he will be with them in their struggle."

According to Robinson, the problem is the church often accommodates itself to the values around it, instead of standing by Christian values and standards. "Confronting corruption is not easy. The church must accept its responsibility and must pray for God's wisdom to make the right decision, to stand with Christians throughout the centuries, following God and standing by his values."

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**Ministries to street children
thrive with love, persistence** By Brenda J. Sanders

**Baptist Press
8/4/95**

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--Baptists from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and India described their work with street children during a "Ministering to Street Children" Aug. 3 workshop as part of the Baptist World Congress in Buenos Aires.

Moderators David and Cathy Phillips, Canadians who have served 14 years as missionaries in Brazil and three in Bolivia, emphasized outcast children living on city streets is a tragedy experienced in many countries around the world.

"When we meet street children, they are filled with hatred for society, their parents and themselves," Phillips said. "But when they come to know Christ, these children become open vessels who desire to share the blessings of God with others."

Cathy Phillips told of a homeless teenager with whom she worked in Brazil. On his 16th birthday, she gave him a present. The boy turned the gift over and over in his hands and began to cry. He told the missionary he had never before received a present.

Today, the boy is a Christian who has memorized 500 Bible verses, Phillips said. "He wants to be a pastor and he wants to minister to other street children."

Saul Huayllani, a pastor in Cochabamba, Bolivia, reviewed a ministry to street children sponsored by his congregation and supervised by the Bolivian Baptist Union.

In an area near his church, Huayllani said, thousands of immigrants and unemployed miners live in small neighborhoods. Many adults there become involved in prostitution and drug abuse and their children are "left to fend for themselves on the streets."

The Cochabamba congregation became convicted of the need to provide care for the street children, the pastor said. Now, they collect donations of food from area markets, secure health care from local medical clinics and donate their offerings to meet the children's other needs.

In addition, a six-member instrumental and vocal group from the church, "Alpha and Omega," performs concerts of traditional Bolivian music with Christian lyrics, donating proceeds from their concerts to the ministry for street children.

Huayllani said the church also wants to initiate educational opportunities to teach the children skills to equip them to care for themselves and enter the work force. "We want to help them in their total development," he said.

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Gleena Lavanya of India told workshop participants she became aware of the needs of neglected children in her area after speaking to a woman sitting beside her on a bus. The woman told Lavanya she was a prostitute and was supporting eight family members, including children.

Lavanya shared her testimony of faith in Christ with the woman and then felt led by God to become involved in caring for the woman's family and educating her children. This effort led to establishing a school where street children and the children of prostitutes may receive a free education.

More than 30 street children who live near her home also are provided with a daily meal by Lavanya and her family. Once a month, she takes them to a local doctor for medicine.

"They have become my children," she said. "I teach them Bible stories and songs. I give them counsel. I love them."

Rosa Knauss of San Justo, Argentina, has been working with street children the past eight years. She is the director of a home for the children sponsored by Iglesia Evangelica Bautista de San Justo. The home has been named "Our Home" by children who have been helped there.

Local judges refer children to them who have been abused, Knauss said. "When they come to us, they lack trust and are arrogant," she recounted. "They show hatred toward adults, because they were abandoned or mistreated by their parents. They feel they have no value, so they hate themselves too.

"We show them a different way of life," she continued. "We show them love. We teach them that God loves them. Our church becomes like a large family to them."

These children completely turn their lives around when they accept Christ as their Savior, Knauss said. "Their hatred melts away, and they learn to love themselves and others," she shared. "Children who learn of God's love won't repeat what their parents have done to them."

Miriam Goytia of Bolivia described the ministry she directs for children who live in a prison where their mothers are incarcerated for drug trafficking. Currently working with 35 children, she said, "We give them lots of love and teach them about Christ."

The children's mothers often are physically abusive to them, Goytia said. One of the prisoners nearly killed her son when, in anger, she threw him against her cell wall and broke numerous bones in his body. Another mother gave her daughter an overdose of drugs to kill her, but the child survived.

The prison ministry provides food, education and affection to the children, Goytia said. They also operate a day care for the youngest prison children. Although they receive no government assistance, she expressed thanks to God for the opportunity to operate the ministry without hindrance.

Enrique Flores, an official with the federal police of Buenos Aires, recounted his involvement with a church-sponsored ministry to street children. A Christian since he was a child, Flores said he has found this ministry to be the best way he can help children and show them the love of God.

He and other area Christians support the work of a center which provides care for 150 needy children. Many are children of single-parent families; others have fathers who are in prison or are dying of AIDS. The center has 50 workers, including cooks, teachers, sports directors and others who provide care for the children.

In addition, Flores said, "we try to meet with their families to tell them about Christ."

Phillips concluded the workshop, reminding the audience: "The justice of God helps us to be just with each other. From the most affluent members of our society to the poorest and most needy, we must treat one another with respect and love."

**New Arab evangelical association
to support church s in Middle East**

By Mike Creswell

JERUSALEM (BP)--Arab evangelical leaders in the Middle East plan to form an association to encourage fellowship and cooperation and help support local evangelical churches.

Evangelical Arab leaders agreed in a late July meeting in Jerusalem that such an association is needed to "enhance and protect the existence, life and status of the evangelical church in the Holy Land." The leaders -- from Israel, the West Bank, Jordan, Egypt and several countries outside the Middle East -- were attending a conference with the theme "Prepare the Way."

A steering committee will be elected to develop the association, which hasn't been named yet. Formation plans should be presented to leaders for action by this fall, said Ray Register, Southern Baptist representative in Israel, who attended th meeting. The plans have grown out of meetings of Arab evangelical leaders from the West Bank in the past 18 months and prayer breakfasts held by local pastors in recent years.

Part of the July conference focused on Jewish-Arab relations, tense as always after a series of suicide bombings in the region has threatened to derail on-going peace negotiations.

One Arab conference leader told how God removed the hatred in his heart toward Jews and their language and gave him supernatural love for them. Jewish evangelism leaders in Israel also attended and expressed willingness to cooperate.

Baptist pastors from the West Bank who attended agreed to network with the new association and others like it in the Middle East, Register said.

Evangelical organizations represented at the meeting included the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Arab World Evangelical Ministers Association and Open Doors.

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**Second 'Christy'
video released**

**Baptist Press
8/4/95**

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A second segment of the CBS television series, "Christy," is being released in September by Broadman & Holman Publishers of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

The first "Christy" video, the original two-hour network pilot, has sold more than 200,000 copies. The new episode, "The Sweetest Gift," was originally broadcast by CBS on Thanksgiving Day 1994.

In the new video, Christy is torn between continuing her mission with the people of Cutter Gap and returning home to care for her father who has suffered a stroke.

"The first Christy video found a huge untapped market in American families," said Harold King, director of media for B&H. "This one, we hope, will reach even more."

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