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M I S S I O N A R Y

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WHO CARES ABOUT REFUGEES STREAMING
OUT OF BHUTAN?

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Cover picture:
Bhutanese refugees
arriving in Nepal

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HERALD

THROUGHOUT THE main BMS BiCentenary celebrations the presence of many visitors from overseas has kept our eyes focused on the needs of the wider world. It has been a great privilege to meet members of the 'BMS family' who come from places which are unknown to most of our contemporaries.

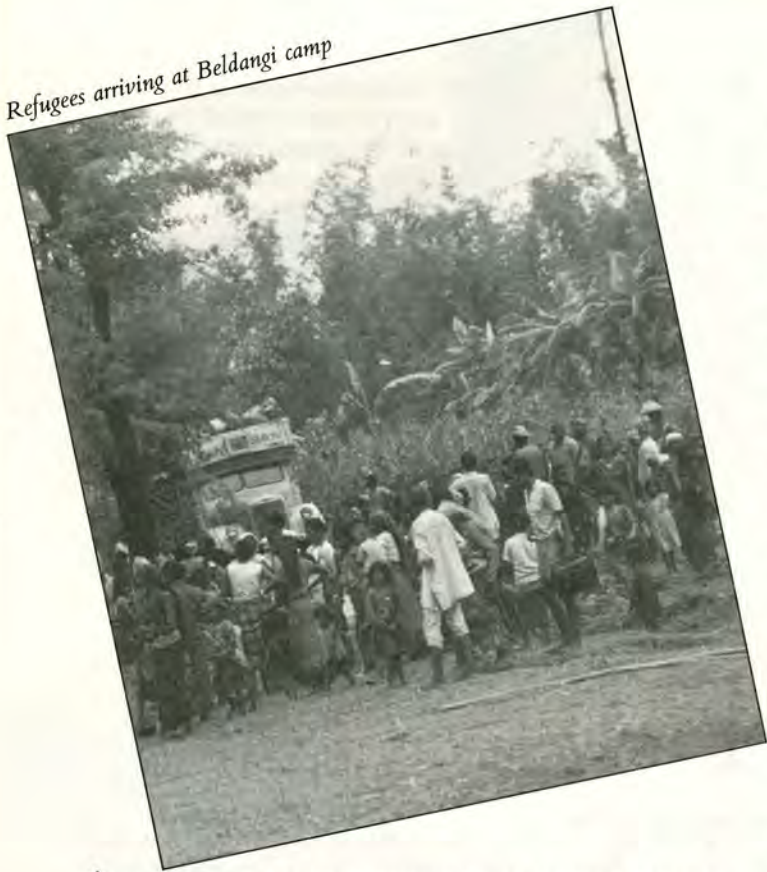
How many people, apart from *Herald* readers, know where the Indian state of Mizoram is? And yet the lively Baptist Church in this small north-eastern state is beginning to have an impact on the whole of the Indian sub-continent as it follows in the footsteps of Carey. It was born in mission and lives and breathes mission today.

Those of us who had the privilege of hearing the Karen choir now know something of their home in northern Thailand. But what about the larger part of the Karen tribe which lives in Myanmar (Burma) and is facing great persecution at this time? The world's media has said little about them in recent months. At least two of the choir members were originally from Burma and Karen Baptists are involved in helping Karen refugees from that country.

And now Bhutan, that small independent country in the Himalayas, isolated, forgotten or unknown until refugees started to arrive in Nepal. 'Ethnic cleansing' is surely no more acceptable there than in Bosnia, yet where are the indignant headlines? Who is speaking up in the world's debating chambers for this latest group of victimised people?

'Maybe the world doesn't care,' writes Jerry Clewett and it may be something of a platitude to say 'but of course God cares.' We know He does. That is not in question. But do Christians care? And how far does our caring take us?

Refugees arriving at Beldangi camp



THE FORGOTTEN REFUGEES

Jerry Clewett is working with Bhutanese refugees now streaming into Nepal.

REFUGEE STORIES dominate the news these days. People are being forced to leave their homes, their jobs, their land, their friends, their security. They pour out of the former Yugoslavia. Hundreds of thousands leave Burma for Bangladesh. Somalians and Zairians flee to Britain. But who has ever heard of Bhutanese refugees? In fact, who has heard of Bhutan?

Maybe the world doesn't care for Bhutan. With an estimated population of a little over 600,000 it is easy to ignore. Yet of these 600,000 about 100,000 are now exiled as refugees with no prospect of an end to the flow. Most of them, about 60,000, have found shelter in six refugee camps in Nepal. These are situated in Jhapa district in the south-east of Nepal and it was to these camps that I was asked to go and work.

The needs of the people are great, and under the umbrella of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) many agencies are working together to provide the basics – shelter, food, water supply, sanitation, health care and education.

Maybe things will improve, but at present only basic needs are met during this emergency phase. Resources are stretched to the limit – both organisational and individual. Ruth Berry, a BMS nurse working for the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) was seconded to Save the Children Fund (UK) who had been asked to take responsibility for health care. Ruth was involved in the feeding ▶

REFUGEES

programme for malnourished children (see separate article)

I was also seconded from UMN, but to the Lutheran World Service (LWS). My work as a coordinator of site planning means that together with the other LWS staff, I help to provide the infrastructure of the camps. Planning in this context is a bit of a misnomer. 'Planning' implies there is time to do so. Everything is an emergency and is needed immediately. Having said that, I was given six days to develop an 80 hectare forest area in Beldangi as a refugee camp.

Here is an exercise for bored

readers: take a blank piece of paper, draw a square which represents 900 metres by 900 metres, and design your own refugee camp! What would you put in first before the first refugees arrive in six days time?

For those six days I moved house to the town of Damuk near the new camp. With a team of technical staff and hundreds of volunteers from another refugee camp a few minutes walk away, we set to work. We cleared the bush, built the access road, and put up a store for food distribution, a health centre, and reception shelters for new arrivals.

THE FORGOTTEN REFUGEES



Jerry Clewett had six days to prepare a campsite before the refugees began to arrive — up to 400 a day



The week was exhausting and not without its frustrations. Latrine digging failed because of a high water table. 'Never mind, there are plenty of trees nearby.' Heavy rain impeded building work. The pressure to complete on time increased as we heard that 1,000 refugees per day were arriving at another camp where the new arrivals from Bhutan had been sent. The night before the refugees were due to start arriving everything was ready except the most vital ingredient — water.

The plan was to use a borehole which had been drilled a few hundred metres away from the new camp. The pipe had been

laid, only the pump had to work. We were eventually defeated by nightfall, heavy rain and some obstinate parts which refused to fit together. However, the next day the water, together with the refugees, began to flow.

The refugees arrive by truck.

Here is an exercise for bored readers: take a blank piece of paper, draw a square which represents 900 metres by 900 metres, and design your own refugee camp!

They bring with them what they can, but beds and basic pots are often all they can manage. The two day journey from Bhutan to Nepal is not comfortable if you're sitting or standing in the back of a truck. Their faces show more tiredness than any other obvious emotion. Yet behind the blank expressions are many stories of imprisonment, torture and rape.

All are of Nepali origin, but mostly many generations back. According to the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB), 'The crux of the current crisis in Bhutan stems from the insecurity of a feudal system . . . awareness of the sweeping political changes that took place globally during the 1980s . . . and the resulting implementation of the old age strategy of divide and rule.'

In practice, the ruling elite (from the West of Bhutan) wanted to build support for the feudal system, and branded the southern



Each family was given five bamboo sticks, a plastic sheet and a plot of land

planning department I have been working closely with a refugee surveyor, Mr D B Barnet. In fact most of the refugees contribute in some way to the development of the camp. Education is provided by the Student Union of Bhutan.

Mr Barnet's own situation is fairly typical. He was forced out of Bhutan about eleven months ago, losing all his property. He brought nothing with him except a little money. He still has family in Bhutan, including one brother in prison. He hopes his brother will be able to come to Nepal soon, together with his sister.

After arriving in the camps, the refugees show great resourcefulness. Each family is given five bamboo sticks, a plastic sheet and a plot of land measuring six by three and a half metres. Hardly luxurious, but it will be home for an indefinite period. The effort and care and skill that goes into this house building would put most weekend DIY fanatics to shame!

A real problem is boredom and only in Timai camp are regular extra activities arranged. There it is an Oxfam project for women's skill development. But survival is as far as the camps have been able to get in service development and most enthusiasm is definitely seen on food distribution days!

Boredom may be an increasing problem but I was glad to contribute a little to its alleviation. The camp at Goldhap has a river which cuts off the entrance road after heavy rain.

The first time this happened at the start of the monsoon, the only means of crossing was a single log spanning the river, about 15 metres long and several metres above the water. My two Nepali colleagues trotted over the log making it look like a Sunday afternoon stroll.

Foolishly and thinking I had good balance, I followed. Both



hands were full and I took a few tentative steps tottering from side to side, being urged on by a crowd of jeering, laughing, refugees. Realising I'd gone about one third of the way I made the mistake of looking down and realised that I certainly would not make it all the way. Amid a multitude of shouted advice I decided to retrace my steps and just this time to the cheers of the crowd, made it back to safety. I then waded across, and cursed the person who told me that was not possible before I attempted the log!

The refugees are still coming from Bhutan. As I write, another 400 have arrived at the new camp at Beldangi, its second day after opening. We have heard from HUROB that 200 trucks (8,000 people) will arrive within the next two weeks. Maybe the world doesn't care for Bhutan or its refugees. But thank God for the privilege of working with them. I pray that, one day, they will be able to return to their own country, and live in peace. ■

◀ Bhutanese, those of Nepali origin, as anti-nationals. Laws were passed which make it almost impossible for the southern Bhutanese to prove citizenship. Hence they have been branded 'illegal immigrants'.

In order to encourage these 'illegal immigrants' to leave the authorities have, according to HUROB, resorted to the torture of whole communities, rape of women, indiscriminate arrests, torture in prison, closure of schools and hospitals in the south and blockage of job opportunities.

Before leaving Bhutan, the refugees say they were forced to sign documents relinquishing their right to citizenship and their property in Bhutan. Their houses were destroyed after they left. The authorities in Bhutan now seem to be working systematically and it is reported that whole districts of Bhutan are now almost empty.

The Southern Bhutanese (Nepali origin) form about 53 per cent of the population. So far one third have left and without a political solution, many thousands more are expected to arrive in Nepal in the coming weeks and months.

Most refugees are farmers and usually illiterate. However, we have been able to employ some of the more educated in technical and professional jobs. In my



A CASUAL WALK around any of the five refugee camps revealed some very thin, sickly looking children. The worst ones were tucked away inside the huts, too lethargic to be out playing in the mud and rivers.

A feeding programme was a high priority, and that was what I'd come to help set up in Beldangi camp. First of all mass screening of all under-5s, then height and weight of all 'at risk'. Two wildly chaotic days of screaming kids and crowds of people, there were some pretty inaccurate weights recorded in those first two days! Hundreds of children assessed as to whether they should be admitted for 24 hour care, come for daily feeding, or be given a 'dry ration' to take home for the week.

Thirty children were admitted to the 24 hour care, which was housed in six ridge tents initially. These children, mostly under five

PERHAPS SHE NEEDS *Ruth Berry has been working in the special feeding centres for Bhutanese refugees in Nepal* HER FATHER



years of age, were all severely malnourished, and the majority sick as well.

Reeta Gurung was a nine year old who managed to slip into the under fives feeding programme. She weighed 12.5 kg (two stones, the weight of an average 18 month old in the west). She'd had a diarrhoeal illness seven months before and had not picked up since, she'd not walked in all that time, and from lying semi-curlled ▶

World MISSION Link

An important question – Have you included world mission in your winter church programme?

When we introduced WML we hoped it would help churches, groups, Associations to put world mission on their agenda. Has this happened in your church? In your House Group? In your Youth Group?

There are resources to help you –

The Speakers List –

Made up of people willing to speak about world mission and BMS involvement. Some have lived abroad, some have served with BMS. To use the list contact your BMS Representative.

AVA material, information sheets, maps, leaflets, Prayer letters –

Look through the Resource Catalogue, and ask us for what you need. If you can't find what you want, contact us and discuss what's needed.

Ideas and suggestions for things to do –

Here is one idea you could try. You will need lots of BMS magazines and resource materials, large sheets of paper, scissors, glue, coloured pens. Wall sheets are common in some countries as a way of telling people what is happening and for sharing information. Divide the meeting into small groups. Give each group the task of producing a wall sheet on a specific topic using pictures, stories, etc, cut from the material provided. All the wall sheets are then displayed and everyone given time to read them. *For more ideas ask for the 'What Can We Do?' booklet.*

The effort, care and skill that go into house building would put DIY enthusiasts to shame

up, was now unable to straighten her legs, or even sit unsupported. She had no appetite and had to be persuaded to eat small amounts, negotiating on how much of the plate of porridge she should eat this time!

Each day we'd try to straighten her legs and encourage her to move them herself. She was talking more, and occasionally I'd catch her smiling!

After three weeks she was taking her first hesitant steps, and had topped 17 kg in weight. Most important she'd regained an appetite for food and an interest in life.

The mother of Bishnu Maya was one of the neatest and most beautifully serene looking women of those staying with their children in the feeding centre. She was gentle and patient with Bishnu Maya, trying persistently to get her to eat and drink.

I asked who of her family had come to Nepal from Bhutan. Her husband had not come. He had been put in prison two years before, and nothing had been seen or heard of him since. Two brothers and a brother-in-law had also just 'disappeared' with no news.

A few days later Bishnu Maya was still reluctant to eat, a number of us were sitting in the tent chatting and spooning milk into the various open mouths, (or not so open!). A father who was caring for his daughter threw in the comment, 'Perhaps she needs her father here to feed her.'

Her mother made a quick retort, laughing at the same time. My language was not good enough to follow six people talking and laughing in Nepali at the same time, but it seemed that Bishnu Maya's mother was laughing louder than the others,



with a hint of hysteria that counteracted the humour. Confused, I didn't want to be a wet blanket on a good joke, but was unsure about what was happening.

I was sitting just in front of Bishnu Maya, so tried gently to bring her mother back to the immediate task of feeding her daughter, to keep her focused on that present moment.

So many in the camps have suffered physically as well as psychologically. They need to express the pain that they've been through. At the moment those needs are being pushed behind the need for housing, food and health care.

She really was the angriest 18 month old I think I've ever met! Anything you tried to do with Anuka resulted in furious screams throwing her head back, arching her back, and kicking wildly with her legs. If it involved food it also meant a rigid clamping together of her jaw! Her 13 year old sister could do little more with her, despite very determined efforts.

It wasn't until she'd been in the feeding centre a couple of weeks, that I heard more of their story. Their mother had died two



FUND FOR THE FUTURE

Training/Retreat Centre –
France

ONE of the projects which your money is helping to fund is the building of a training/retreat centre in Provence, South of France. This is a vision of the Social Department of the French Baptist Federation (ABEJ – Association Baptiste pour l'Entraide et la Jeunesse). The construction of this building will take place on land that has been owned by the church since 1930, but has only been able to be used for youth camps in the summer. Once a well-constructed, multi-purpose building is erected, it will be able to be used all year round by French Baptists and other churches outside the Federation. There is a shortage of such centres in this part of France. Once operational, it will be self-funding.

This location is one in which Baptist work has only recently opened up. Ten years ago there was one Baptist Church; today there are six. It is an exciting and demanding work in an area wedged between the two great urban areas of Marseilles and Nice, and with few other evangelical churches to witness.

£18,000 has been set aside, as ten per cent of the total cost of the project, in the Fund for the Future budget. Share the vision of French Baptists – and help them to fulfil it!

months before, of 'jaundice', so now there were eight children and Dad. Anuka had been breast fed and quite healthy until Mum became sick. She'd then had dysentery, and never really recovered. She seemed angry with the world, and to pay the world back was refusing to eat!

The first significant breakthrough came after two and a half weeks. We were sitting outside chatting when it started to rain. Her sister grabbed up some mattresses to take them inside, leaving Anuka sitting. I reached out to pick her up, and she stretched her arms up to me!

My last day before leaving the camp I greeted Anuka with namaste and she smiled! It was a very special leaving present!

It certainly wasn't all success stories. Mangali, a three year old, died in the feeding centre. She was the third child in her family to die in the few months that her family had been in the camps. I heard of another family where all eight of the children had died since they had left Bhutan. For every child we were able to help there were probably another three or four who were not coming to the feeding centre, people so

defeated there was no point in trying any more.

Walking through Timai camp one day I heard some singing from one of the huts. Along with about 20 other curious people I too peeped through the bamboo! About 15 adults were packed into the small room, met together for Christian fellowship. I made my way to the door, and was invited in.

It was a privilege to hear a Bhutanese refugee speaking of how they belonged to Christ, that they had no country, no land, no work, many had been separated from family, but that there security was in Jesus, and nobody could take that from them.

In another camp I met several other small groups of Christians. One told with joy how he was able to freely use his Bible now. In Bhutan his Nepali books had to be kept hidden, or they would have been confiscated and burnt. He also showed a photograph of 16 Christians who had been baptised a few weeks before in a town near the camp.

All the Christians I met asked for only one thing from me – that I should pray for them, and for all in the camps. ■

The Conference Centre

top right
Delegates talking to Daniel Ortega

bottom right
Inside the Conference Centre



MISSIONARY MATTERS were central to this meeting of 200 Baptists from all over the world. One theme of the conference was the consequences of 500 years of Western influences, including that of missions, on the peoples of the Americas but current crises kept breaking through during the discussions. How could we talk about peacemaking without remembering the troubled times in Burma, Zaire, Rwanda, Yugoslavia or Sri Lanka?

It was appropriate to hold the meeting in a 'Third World' country – a culture shock for people like myself with experience of only the affluent 'North'. To arrive in Managua is a saddening experience. This capital city has been largely left derelict following the earthquake of 1972, such that it seems like a giant squatters camp. On the roadside and at each crossing there are adults and children trying to sell anything from sweets to wing mirrors – the unemployment level in Nicaragua is 65 per cent.

The conference met at La Boquita, a rather down-at-heel resort on the Pacific coast. Our

PEACEMAKING ALL TALK AND ACTION?

THE INTERNATIONAL BAPTIST PEACE CONFERENCE, LA BOQUITA, NICARAGUA, 14-18 JULY 1992

by Norman Kember

theme was 'Thy Kingdom Come' and this was worked out through worship, study, formal lectures, panel discussions and, most importantly, through encounters over meals. The keynote address was given by the prominent Nicaraguan Baptist, Dr Gustavo Parajon. He reminded us that the struggle for justice and peace is an integral part of the Good News. The churches of the North as much as the churches of the

South must be committed to this evangelical task. He took Isaiah 58:6-11 and Matthew 25:31-46 as key scriptures.

One day was given to issues of race. There was a note of anger in the speeches of the black South Africans. 'Conferences like this are all talk and result in no action.' 'White Christians are more concerned with the troubles of "white" Eastern Europe than the crisis in South Africa where



Nicaraguan pastors how they found these ideas – ‘Interesting,’ they said, ‘but far too academic to be relevant to our pastoral work.’ I enjoyed the company of these men who seek against seemingly impossible economic constraints to build up their churches and to act as community co-ordinators for local projects in agriculture and manufacture. It is with some of these pastors that the BMS has entered into partnership.

In panel discussions on ‘the Work of Reconciliation’ and on ‘Peacemaking and Evangelism’ we shared in the problems faced by Christians in the ‘South’. Many delegates gave accounts of civil war, and conflicts between races, always aggravated by poverty and the rising burden of debt whereas some churches were inward looking and concerned only with their own survival. These reports would have brought unrelieved gloom if we had not also received witness from those who work out Christian peacemaking in their daily lives:

Saboi Jum works as a mediator between the Government and the rebels in Burma – and is therefore considered a traitor by both sides.

Aduke Akirole seeks reconciliation between Muslim and Christian in Nigeria.

Baptists in Bolivia work to relieve the poverty of women in tin mining areas.

The pastors of churches in Nicaragua and El Salvador reconstruct their divided communities through programmes for health and employment.

I also met Bill and Virginia Neilsen from Seattle Baptist Church who brought supplies and money for their twinned church in Managua. Their example shows how we in the prosperous North can support our fellow Baptists through prayer and action. We must also work for justice in international trade so that our friends in the South can be empowered to build their own future. ■

YOUR KINGDOM COME

Taken from a statement from the 1992 International Baptist Peace Conference to the global Baptist family.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, such a kingdom, such a world order of relationship, is in direct conflict with the Reign of our Lord. The issues involved in this conflict are not merely flesh and blood. The struggle is not simply one of competing economic and political systems. Rather it is a profoundly spiritual struggle, a struggle involving idolatry, a conflict requiring all to choose whom we will serve. The choice is clear. If we are to be called followers of Jesus, our lives must reflect the pattern of his life, a pattern of preaching good news to the poor, sight to the blind, release to the captives (Luke 4). To announce such news leads finally to the declaration of the ‘acceptable year of the Lord,’ the occasion of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) when debts are forgiven and land is redistributed.

Despite the profound despair which grips all creation, we live in hope. We have been captured by the vision of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:10), a kingdom based on peace through justice. Therefore, with the power of the Holy Spirit, we pledge ourselves in the struggle for God’s Kingdom on earth through the following means:

- 1 Study the Bible for the witness of justice and peace, particularly in international relations.
- 2 Complete our prayers with actions (‘Doers of the word and not hearers only’ – James 1:22).

NO

British colonial policies had sown the seed of apartheid. Why had we not repented?’ A black sociologist from New York detailed the failings of the white churches in the USA and the structural racism of that country. An uncomfortable day.

Olivia Dominguez from Mexico re-examined the pre-Columbian religions of America. This is part of the attempt to disentangle the Gospel from the overlay of Western culture and values. I could accept that early religions were ‘greener’ in their emphasis than much of Christianity. It is harder to believe that the practice of human sacrifice included the acceptance of suffering by the victims on behalf of their community.

Over breakfast, the next morning, I asked some



- 3 Urge governments and international financial institutions to cancel usurious debt.
- 4 Support the United Nations to reach its potential as an instrument of God's reconciliation. For instance, demand from it to make every effort in favour of the economic recovery of El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the entire region affected by the US foreign policy.
- 5 Call for the ending of the economic embargo and the cessation of the political and diplomatic hostility against Cuba and for the recognition of the right of the people of Puerto Rico to decide their own future, free of 500 years of colonial oppression.
- 6 Focus our resources and efforts on the exploding crisis of racial/ethnic conflict.
- 7 Reclaim our responsibility as stewards of 'the earth and all that dwells therein' (Psalm 24:1).

Brothers and sisters, God is not yet done – with us or with the world. We give up our lives to that coming day when creation itself will be released from its bondage (Romans 8:21), when every tear will be dried, when death will be no more (Revelation 21:4). Thanks be to God!



EX-PRESIDENT INSPIRED BY THE GOSPEL

THE PRESENCE of Daniel Ortega, the former President of Nicaragua and current General Secretary of the Sandinista Party (FSLN), at the International Baptist Peace Conference in Nicaragua, captured the enthusiastic attention of conference delegates.

No less than 19 people, representing twelve countries, took the opportunity to raise issues. Some enquired into the Nicaraguan situation, while others asked for comments about their areas.

Before responding, ex-President Ortega spoke of the inspiration that the Sandinista cause had found in the gospel and expressed gratitude for the participation of Catholic and Protestant Christians in the process which led to the Revolutionary government of 1979 to 1990.

'There has never been a conflict between the Revolution and religion – religion has always been a liberating force.'

He acknowledged the strong Roman Catholic influence within Nicaragua.

'I was introduced to the faith through the Catholic church. I and Cardinal Obando come from the

same, poor area of the country. When we meet we talk of issues like repression, poverty, hunger and the preferential option for the poor.'

Reflecting on the lasting changes brought about by the Nicaraguan revolution, Señor Ortega put foremost the sense of dignity that had been given to the people.

'Prior to 1979 a succession of conservative and liberal governments did nothing to narrow the gap between rich and poor. Now the people have gained dignity and have learnt not only to read and write but to speak out, to criticise and to be masters of their own destiny. This helps them to resist the capitalist avalanche. This is a fight about hunger and unemployment.

'The Revolution has changed bullets to ballots. Electoral defeat does not mean the defeat of the Revolution. The FSLN is still the principal political party.'

He spoke of the needs of the Atlantic Coast region.

'These are partly due to the meddling of the USA and to past mistakes by the FSLN. There is a need for continuous efforts on behalf of the Miskitos, Sumos, Creoles and other people of the region.

'In Nicaragua 70 per cent live in a state of continual poverty but on the Atlantic coast that figure is higher,' he said.

'Much has been done to raise the status of women but this is in danger of being eroded and extra efforts are necessary. The achievement of total integration is not only a problem for women but for all.

'The question of gays and lesbians prompted the passing of a law through the National Assembly, but it has produced double standards – public posturing not matching private practice. There is not complete agreement on the issue.'

Looking at Cuba, the former President said that the cases of Cuba and Nicaragua were quite distinct.

'It is easy to focus attention on secondary issues. In Nicaragua there are appeals to send pencils and notebooks for school children in Cuba. This implies that Cuban children are worse off than those in Nicaragua. In fact here children not only lack pencils and notebooks but also schools. Perhaps we should ask Cuba for help.'

Sympathising with the one and a half million refugees in Croatia, Señor Ortega said that what was happening in Yugoslavia and other developed countries in the West, including the United States, showed the destructive power of violence on human character.

'Individualism and selfishness

produce poverty and misery. As we focus on what is happening within Eastern Europe there are signs that capitalism is exhausting itself.'

He noted the presence of South Africans at the Conference and there was applause when he declared, 'The South African struggle is our struggle too. Are the bullets which are killing people in South Africa made in the USA, Europe or parts of Latin America?'

He was highly critical of the USA and other rich nations seeking to determine strategies for less developed countries.

'The US is trying to assert its global leadership in political terms to compensate for its lack of leadership in moral and economic terms.

Wealthy nations are using the United Nations to impose anti-democratic and fascist foreign policies on others.

'Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union the basic struggles have not changed. The issues are as old as history. "How can we get on with others different from ourselves?" Individualism is a denial of the rights of others. The challenge before Nicaragua and Latin America is to deal with issues like hunger, misery and unemployment. Words must be turned into deeds; debate into action.'

NEEDED OVERSEAS

Here are some of the needs that our overseas partners have asked us to fill.

ANGOLA

- Doctor for Community Health Programme.

BANGLADESH

- Couple for theological teaching

BRAZIL

- Church-based community/ social workers
- Nurse for training nurses
- Hostel parents
- Pastors, especially in inner cities in *favela* areas working with the poor

CHINA

- TEFL teachers

EL SALVADOR

- Pastor

INDIA

- Volunteer teacher of Western Music

INDONESIA

- Couple for theological/ discipleship training, 1995 or 1996

ISRAEL

- Anaesthetist

ITALY

- Two pastors

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THE ELDER SON

*The BiCentenary
Sermon preached at
Westminster Abbey,
2 October 1992*

Now the elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in (Luke 15:25-28).

A renewed call

MY FIRST WORD must be a word of appreciation to the officers and members of the Baptist Missionary Society for inviting me to preach on this occasion of the BiCentenary Celebrations. My wife and I together with countless numbers of Jamaican and Caribbean Baptists are conscious of the great honour bestowed upon us for it tells us that we are recognized and truly accepted as brothers and sisters in the one missionary enterprise which owes so much to William Carey and his colleagues. At the same time, we who are the descendants of African slaves will never forget how Carey proposed in the *Enquiry* a boycott of West Indian sugar because it was manufactured by slave labour and on this day we salute not only the foundation of the BMS but his memory.

Of course, West Indian-BMS ties go back a long way to the mission in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, to the fight against

slavery led by William Wilberforce, Thomas Fowell Buxton and William Knibb to the joint endeavours in Africa in the 19th century with Alfred Saker, John Clark and Joseph Sturge of Birmingham.

So my being here is more than a symbolic gesture, it is a renewed call to those who have been blessed by Christian missions to participate more fully as equal partners with you in the evangelisation of the world. And it is because there is this new realisation needed on our part, and also on yours, of the necessity for increased involvement in evangelisation that our text, this sad commentary on lost opportunity for the renewal of salvific fellowship at the table of Thanksgiving, speaks.

Miracle, mercy and motivation

The Christian Church has always had at its core thanksgiving for the one who was lost and found, Jesus himself spells it out for us in parable after parable and modelled it for us in every miracle and at his Resurrection appearances. There stands at the centre of the Christian faith the table of the Lord and the fellowship of God's people around a table of thanksgiving. It is a fellowship and a thanksgiving

for what God has done for us and it has always been this unexpected, overwhelming grace of Divine pardon and mercy that has motivated men and women in every age and generation to forsake family and friends, home and nation to preach the Gospel of reconciling grace in far away places that others may become a part of that fellowship.

But in our time sometimes I wonder. This parable begins with 'Another time tax gatherers and other bad characters were all crowding in to listen to Him and the Pharisees and the doctors of the law began to grumble saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them".'

Where is the joy?

And sometimes I wonder if, as a church, the grumbling and discontent which have so often been a part of our own agenda, have not robbed us of that sense of thanksgiving and joy which is constituent of the Gospel and of the Missionary Movement? Yes, I am aware that on Sunday in several places of the world there will be large churches with many people jumping and singing to the beat of the Gospel band. Oh yes, I am well aware that in other places there will be those who will sit quietly, yet thrill to the majestic music of great and





Dr Horace Russell rehearsing the BiCentenary Sermon at Westminster Abbey

become a microcosm of the world itself, and the recovery of joy and Christian courage and nerve within the Church itself. And the both are interrelated. They both come from a response to a fellowship given by God in Jesus Christ to which in joy we live and witness. But if in our time this is to occur then we need also to remember that God's table of fellowship is also a table of forgiveness, not only of God of us but of us to each others.

A woman's tears

There is in the Caribbean a Congress which meets once every four years. It is called Congress on the Evangelisation of the Caribbean and this year it met in Santo Domingo chiefly because it was Columbus 500. I want to close with what happened there. During an evening presentation a hand appeared and it was clear the lady wished to speak but time was limited and so the Chairman ignored her hand. Frustrated, she jumped to her feet and said, 'I must speak. God has given me something to say and I will not be intimidated.' The urgency in her voice was such that the Chairman invited her to the platform and she spoke. She began in tears to confess that as a citizen of the Dominican Republic she had come to feel ashamed at the way Haitians were being treated in the Republic. And she spelled out in no uncertain terms the abuse. Then she said, 'I have come to ask your forgiveness for myself and for my nation.'

And she went on to say to the Haitians that they should appropriate for themselves the promise of Jeremiah 29:10, *I will take up your cause and fulfil the promise of good things I made to you by bringing you back to this place. I alone know my purpose for you, says the Lord, prosperity and not misfortune. . . . I will restore your fortunes and gather you again from all nations and bring you back to that*

place from which I have carried you into exile.

There was not a dry eye in the auditorium.

At this point a revered Haitian pastor got up and went to the platform. He was in tears and he embraced the weeping lady.

He said, 'Madam, I admire your courage. This auditorium belongs to the government whom you openly here have indicted. In the audience is one of the ministers of government and you knew it. I admire your courage. But Madam, I too know my history. There was the time when it was the other way around, when Haitians butchered Dominicans and kept them captive. I now ask forgiveness for that for my people of you.'

At this point there was nobody in the room left seated. We turned to each other to seek forgiveness because each island state, each denomination, had need of forgiveness.

The city of God

My brothers and sisters, that evening the City of God, the New Jerusalem, did not altogether descend upon the assembled company in Santo Domingo. But we got a glimpse of that new city set upon the foundations of God's forgiveness, a forgiveness which even now invites us to sit together at the table of fellowship. For it is a forgiveness across the boundaries of race and tribe and colour and clan; a forgiveness across the lines of gender and class, yes, even across the widening chasm of Living Faiths; a forgiveness and fellowship which neutralizes remembered hate and entrenched historical positions because despite it all we know deep in our hearts that we are all God's children, who by God's grace must sit down as sons and daughters, not as anything else, to table in the Father's House.

The Revd Dr Horace O Russell is Dean of the Chapel and Professor of Historical Theology at the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

mighty organs and the cadences of robed choirs. And yet others in shanties and in the sticks will in acapella lift their hands to heaven and sing and shout, 'Hallelujah, thank God for saving grace.' But where is that joy to be found and that thanksgiving to be seen on Monday morning in the face of sexism, racism, famine, hunger, disease and unemployment, and the other ills which face society at large?

The city has become in our time the haunt of 'the bad characters' of which our text speaks and they are pressing to come in. I speak of the marginalised of society, the poor, the single parents, the homeless and those of alternative life-styles, the victims of AIDS and of child abuse, the drug abusers and the alcoholics. But the city is the place to which all the people come. Unfortunately for so many of us, it is as it was for the elder brother a disturbing of the church-like peace. Ray Bakke may just be right when he observes that the last seven words of the Church are 'It was never done like that before' and that goes for Missionary Societies too.

Recovered joy

Two challenges confront us as church and as Christians at this time: The evangelisation of the cities of the world which have



Vandals

The visit of the Karen Baptist choir to Britain was marred by the action of vandals thieves.

Twice over the same weekend, whilst in Ebbw Vale, their coach was vandalised. The emergency door was broken and wing mirrors smashed. They were still able to use the coach, after some temporary repairs, and fortunately nothing was actually stolen on that occasion.

Here to take part in the BMS BiCentenary celebrations, the choir delighted packed audiences wherever sang.

The performances in Wales, according to BMS Area Representative, Jim Clarke, who organised the tour, 'all went brilliantly. And on the Sunday afternoon in Wales, in spite of everything, they sang at the closing service of the Garden Festival in Ebbw Vale.'

Later the same week, in South Norwood, the coach was attacked again. This time the thieves were more 'successful' taking £90 in cash and three cameras.

Tidal Wave

According to scientists, many lives could have been saved if an alarm, similar to those in place in Japan and Chile, had been installed in

Nicaragua. As it was, on September 8, 105 people were killed, 63 are missing, 489 were injured and more than 14,000 others directly affected by the tidal wave that swept onto the Pacific coast.

A majority of the dead and injured were children and the elderly – people incapable of withstanding the force of the waves.

The government claimed 1,143 houses were destroyed. More than 250 fishing boats were ruined or lost and boat motors, fishing nets and other equipment were smashed or carried away by the waves.

Nicaragua possesses only three seismographs, none near the coast, and no funds are available for installing a warning system.

Evangelical Rebellion

'There is nothing to celebrate, nothing to rejoice about in this quinquennial,' said Argentine pastor, Felipe Adolf, secretary general of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI). He was speaking at a continental meeting on the theme '500 Years of Martyrdom and Hope,' since Columbus landed in the Americas.

'The only thing that we can do as Christians is to be sincerely repentant and ask for forgiveness for all

the injustices committed against the indigenous nations and the black people of the continent.

'Our obligation today is to put ourselves on the side of the oppressed, of the displaced, of the marginalised of our land and struggle as Christians so that their clear right to liberty, to life, to health, to education and to housing be recognised and accepted.

Bishop Federico Pagura, president of CLAI since its foundation in 1978, said that an 'evangelical rebellion' is necessary on the continent to bring and end to the current system that 'for too long has used the cover of Christianity to hide the most aberrant and scandalous acts against the dignity and sacred character of humanity and of all creation.'

Pagura believes that a conversion in the ethics and conscience of Latin American society is essential to change the systems that 'negate life.'

The CLAI meeting called for the churches and Christians to leave behind the paternalistic character that marked their work with indigenous communities during the last decades and to begin accompanying these oppressed peoples in a life-giving project that they themselves lead.

Nepal Crashes

The United Mission to Nepal has lost personnel in two successive air disasters. Andrew and Helen Wilkins with their three children, who were returning to Nepal for a second term of service, died when a Pakistan International Airline plane crashed on its approach to Kathmandu. Andrew was an

engineer with Interserve.

Two months before, Martin Hoftun, who was also seconded to UMN, was killed when an aircraft of Thai Airways crashed in similar circumstances.

The United Mission said, 'It is very hard to deal with this new loss of an entire family who had so much to give to God's mission in this land and so much of life yet to enjoy. We thank God for the Wilkins family and their dedication to serve others in the name of Christ. May we all be reminded of the uncertainty of this life and love in joyful service that whatever comes we face in the confidence that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.'

A service of memory and prayer was held at UMN Headquarters on 29 September.

Take Less – Give More

A call for Europeans to 'take less and give more' was made to 70 representatives of church denominations, missionary organisations and development agencies in Britain and Ireland when they met in Glasgow for the second annual meeting of the Churches' Commission on Mission (CCOM).

Walter Eigel of the Brussels based Catholic Africa Faith and Justice Network, described the plight of the typical migrant driven to Europe from Africa by poverty caused by low commodity prices, debt repayments and structural adjustments imposed by Europe and North America. 'The solution to the "refugee problem" in Europe,' he said, 'is to tackle these root causes by Europeans taking less and giving more.'

Frans Bouwen, of the

Conference of European Churches, urged the Commission to be clear about the distinctions between refugees with recognised rights, asylum seekers (often treated as technical problems or as 'potatoes') and displaced persons who are usually unrecognised.

He said that there should be no distinction made between 'political' and 'economic' refugees. Both are persons made in the image of God and driven from their homes by dire circumstances.

In the Bible studies Christopher Duraisingh of the World Council of Churches called on European Christians to re-discover Biblical understandings of God's mission. Over against the rising xenophobia, mission in Europe should aim to create a household of companions in which all are welcome.

Modern Europe is after everything and before nothing, reproducing trivia and holding nothing sacred,' said Sister Gill Goulding, another participant. She urged the cleansing of 'the doors of perception' and a readiness by an increasingly cut-off church to attend to the people without power in our society.



BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS 2-3 OCTOBER

*Top left:
The Baptist crowd outside
Westminster Abbey*

*Top right:
Paina Tangtrakulpaisan from
Thailand led part of the
intercessions in the Abbey*

*Top right centre:
Reg Harvey led the opening
prayers in the Abbey*

*Top left bottom:
Helen Matthews played
Widow Wallis at Kettering*

*Top right bottom:
Both Westminster and
Kettering gave opportunities
to meet people from all over
the BMS world*

*Bottom left and right:
More than 3,000 people
attended the Welsh Family
Day at Llanellwedd on
3 October*



THE GROWING CHURCH IN CHINA

David Edwards, former BMS missionary in China and Bangladesh, revisited China in 1985 and again in July this year.

THE CHURCH is growing at an amazing pace. The evidence of this is widespread among the provinces and cities visited. These included Guangzhou, Guilin, Xian, Nanjing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shandong and Beijing; and we met church leaders at each centre.

In Xian the Dong Guan church was packed, with several hundred seated on forms outside. People everywhere, all with Bibles and hymn books.

Shanghai, at Grace church. Two church buildings in use, with 6,000 in attendance. The church uses closed TV to relay the services, also runs a Sunday School, and a free medical clinic after services.

At Jinan during the Theological Seminary vacation, a one month lay preachers course was in progress, 120 attended at their own expense.

At Hangzhou. The church has five associated meeting points (house churches). At Zhoujiang a new church has just opened; the building is six stories high and the auditorium seats 3,000.

In Shandong, in 1985 there were 60 churches open. By December 1991 that had expanded to 851 churches. Eighty-three new churches were opened last year, and the present number of meeting points is 2,672.

In at least four provinces there are over one million Christians in each, and in Henan it is estimated there are at least one and a half million believers. As meeting points become



Top: David Edwards receiving a scroll at Shandong congratulating BMS on 200 years. Bottom: Handing it to the BMS Chairman at Kettering

established they gradually apply to the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) for permission to build a church and this often includes a land grant. In recent times the RAB have been informed they are to adopt a more open policy towards religious minorities, and so are proving helpful and co-operative.

We visited Zhouping (Chouping) and Zhoucun (Choutsun) former BMS mission stations. In the Zhouping area there are five churches and eleven meeting points. Since 1981 there have been 1,200 baptisms, with 324 last year. In the Zhoucun area there are nine churches with 67 meeting points. A new church is soon to be opened at Wangcan; it will seat 800 but the comment made even before the building is completed is, 'Too small!' The senior pastor of the Zhoucun church, Pastor Zhu Xiu-lin said, 'BMS missionaries sowed the seed, and we are reaping a wonderful harvest.'

Since we were the first representatives of the overseas church to visit them for 43 years, we were able to bring blessing and rich encouragement. In turn they expressed their gratitude to the BMS for the dedicated services rendered by so many in decades past, and requested us to bring a beautiful scroll home to the UK as their token of sincere thankfulness.

What are the reasons for this overwhelming growth?

The principal of the Hangzhou summed it up:

1. The evangelical nature of the Church in China. Those who had endured the cultural revolution were now convinced of the power of the death and resurrection of our Lord to redeem everyone.

2. The failure of the traditional religions. During 1966-1976 all temples, mosques and churches were closed. Since Buddhist temples

and Moslem Mosques are slow to reopen, people are finding comfort and new life in the Christian church.

3. The great contribution of the United Bible Societies in creating the Amity Press at Nanjing. Over six and a half million Bibles have been printed and distributed; this includes scriptures in Korean for Korean Christians in North East China, and tribal editions for the south. Arrangements are being made to supply the meeting points with Bibles, so it will be preferable for Bibles not to be smuggled in from abroad, as this flouts Chinese law, and Christian leaders in China have to apologise to the communist authorities for the illegal activities of overseas Christians.

4. Perhaps the greatest reason for church growth is the quality of Christian living. There is such a strong commitment to Christ that non-believers keep coming to Christians and express their desire to get the hope and peace that Christians enjoy.

So the church is expanding. In Zhejiang province in one district that covers nine counties 50 per cent of the people are believers. It is called 'The Jerusalem of China' and it is where the intention was for it to be a communist stronghold.

On the occasion of the BiCentenary of the BMS let us give thanks to God for this wonderful harvest. It exceeds anything that the Mission or missionaries could have hoped for. Their devotion and endeavours through evangelism, medicine and education have indeed been blessed by almighty God. Today the Holy Spirit is guiding the church in China and we can continue to share in their progress through believing prayer that they will bring great glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer and ours. ■

MISSIONARY MOVEMENTS

DEPARTURES

*Jane Andrews to Nepal
John and Norma Clark to Brazil*

CONGRATULATIONS!

*To Jane and Les Bromley
on the safe arrival of a daughter
on Monday 5 October*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LEGACIES

| | |
|------------------------|-----------|
| Mrs Mabel Nicholls | 100.52 |
| Mrs Dorothy Vera Tyler | 1,000.00 |
| Miss M C Snow | 15,000.00 |
| Mrs Vera Rosalie Cook | 1,000.00 |
| M V Bamford | 468.91 |
| Mrs Doris Lake | 794.56 |
| The Revd George Hicks | 1,600.00 |
| C A Gibbon | 148.69 |
| Miss E McCandlish | 793.97 |
| Mrs M A Elcock | 100.00 |
| Violet Hedger | 10,000.00 |
| Mrs May Harvey | 10,000.00 |
| Margaret Flemons | 1,021.10 |
| Mrs G M Rose | 2,780.37 |
| M R J Whitton | 2,301.30 |

GENERAL WORK

Medway: £46.00; Anon: £10.00;
Borehamwood: £5.00; Anon: £50.00;
Darlington: £50.00; Wembley: £30.00; Anon:
£9.37; Merton: £500.00; Rugby Fund for the
Future: £16.00; Rugby Fund for the Future:
£15.00; Rugby Fund for the Future: £100.00;
200 coins Harvest Appeals: £30.00; 200 coins
Harvest Appeals: £200.00; Swanage: £40.00;
Anon: £80.00; Notts: £10.00; Notts: £20.00;
Anon: Fund for the Future: £500.00; Give as
you earn: £58.45; Anon: £25.00; Anon: £6.00.

