

RESEARCH

REVIEW

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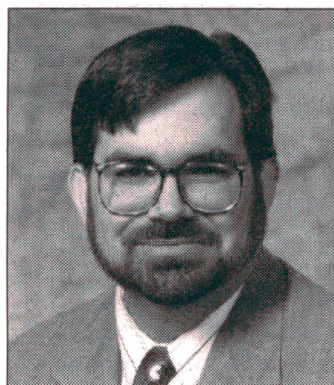
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NO. 3, WINTER 95



New Research Staff

Robert (Bob) A. Rennie is the newest member of the research team. Bob was elected to the position of associate director, Program Research Department, in June 1994. He comes from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he is a PhD candidate in church and community, with evangelism as a secondary field of study. While at the seminary, he served as coordinator of prospect research in the Development Office and as research director of the Dehoney Center for the Study of the Local Church.

Bob's responsibilities at the HMB include conducting research for the Evangelism, Extension, and Ministry Sections. He also provides research services for Mega Focus Cities and for state convention long-range planning.

Adults Baptized in Southern Baptist Churches, 1993

A study of adults baptized in Southern Baptist churches has recently been completed by the Research Division. This study is based on telephone interviews with more than 1,350 people. The respondents were selected to be representative of the 152,681 adults reported as baptized on the 1993 Uniform Church Letters (now called Annual Church Profiles).

The study examined each respondent's prior religious experience, demographic background, motivating factors in joining a particular church, and meaning of the recent baptism. For those people who were baptized as the result of recent conversion experiences, it examined influences leading to conversion.

Previous Baptism

Six of 10 respondents had been baptized previously. Of those, 1 of 3 were previously baptized in a Southern Baptist church. If all (not just those previously baptized) respondents are

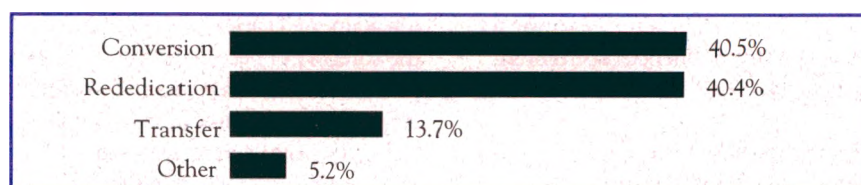
considered, then 1 of 5 adult baptisms are rebaptized Southern Baptists.

Classification of Baptisms

Interviewers asked each respondent to think about his or her recent baptism and indicate one of four responses that best describes the experience. Figure 1 shows the self-classification of respondents.

Only 2 of 5 adults baptized in Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches identified first-time commitments to Jesus as the primary reason for being baptized. Projecting to the population, this means that, of the approximately 150,000 adults baptized, only 60,000 represented conversions of the lost to Christ. An almost equal number were baptized as a result of rededicating their lives to Christ. Thus, Southern Baptists may not be reaching as many lost adults as the raw baptism figures indicate, and rededication is a major motivation in people being baptized.

Figure 1—Classification of Baptisms



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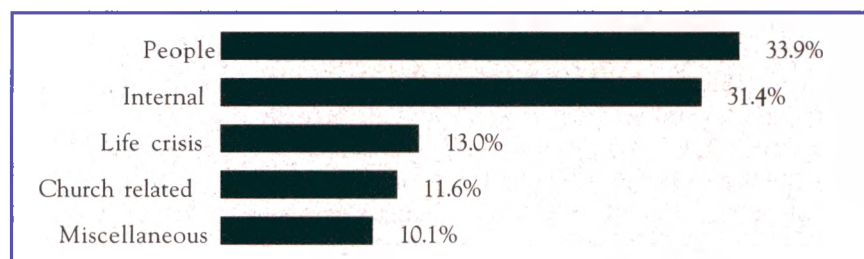
Primary Influences for Conversion

The following open-ended question was asked only of those who indicated that their baptisms were the result of accepting Christ as their personal Savior for the first time.

Other than the work of the Holy Spirit, what was the one, single most important influence that led you to accept Christ as your Savior?

Figure 2 shows categories of responses that were developed from answers to this question.

Figure 2—Primary Influence for Conversion



People influence—This category includes all those who identified particular people or groups of people as the most important influence. The influence may have come from a spouse, a parent, or another family member; it may have been a friend, a coworker, or a pastor. That influence may have been a personal witness, an example, or a friendship.

Internal factors—Other than the work of the Holy Spirit, these influences seemed to have no external sources. These people were motivated primarily by an inner desire, a feeling, or a realization. The desires ranged from wanting to go to heaven to wanting to have a positive influence on children and family.

Life crisis/problem—Some adults named a life crisis or problem as the most important influence in their decision to

accept Christ. These events caused people to open themselves up to the presence of God in their lives. Examples are divorce, sickness, alcoholism, and a death.

Church-related religious activities—This category of influence includes a wide variety of responses, all related to some church event, program, activity, or religious practice. For example, preaching, teaching, Bible reading and study, Sunday School, and revivals were grouped in this category.

Miscellaneous/don't know—There were a variety of other responses that were difficult to categorize. In addition, a number of people simply could not name the single most important influence on their decisions to accept Christ—they just did it.

Responses to the question were in no way prompted and probably represent the most important influence in the lives of recently converted adults. There are a wide variety of primary factors that influence people to become Christians.

The largest number of the external factors identified can be classified under the category of people influence. Thus, people are very influential in bringing other people to Christ. These people were often family members—the spouse being the most important. Almost half of the personal influence

responses referenced the primary influence of a family member.

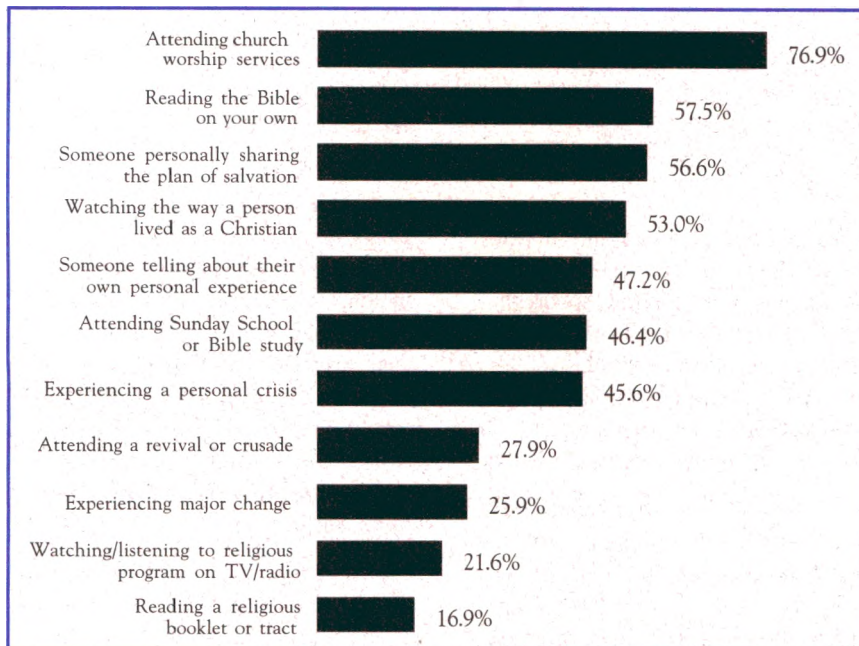
The influence of the pastor is divided between two of the major categories. Influence related to a pastor's teaching or preaching is combined with church-related religious activities. Responses that reference a relationship with a pastor, his personal witnessing, or his example as a Christian are listed under the people influence category. When the total influence of the pastor is considered, 1 of 8 new converts indicated that the pastor was the primary influence in their decision to become a Christian. His teaching and preaching were cited most often. This information affirms the role of the pastor in bringing people to Christ.

Contributing Influences for Conversion

Realizing that influences on a person making a decision for Christ are probably many and varied, questions were developed to probe other factors believed to be important in conversion. Respondents were asked about 11 different items thought to be an influence in the lives of people making a decision for Christ. Figure 3 shows the percentage of new converts who said each item was a major contributing influence in their decisions to become Christians.

Attending church worship was clearly the most important of the contributing influences indicated by new converts. When combined with those who cited *attending Sunday School or Bible study* as a major influence and those who cited *attending a revival or crusade*, then these church-related events, programs, or activities underscore the effect that a church environment has on the unsaved. Of those people who are new converts, 83.6 percent indicated that at least one of these three items was a major contributing influence in their

Figure 3—Contributing Influences for Conversion



becoming Christians. These results lend support to the importance of bringing people to church as a strategy for effectively evangelizing them.

The second most-cited contributing influence was *reading the Bible on your own*. If this question is combined with *attending Sunday School*, then 71.5 percent of new respondents indicated that Bible study, either personally or corporately, was a factor in their conversions.

More than half the adults who were baptized as a result of a first-time commitment to Christ reported that *someone personally sharing the plan of salvation* was important. Almost half said that *someone who told them about their own personal experiences with God* was a major influence in their decisions to accept Christ. More than half indicated that *watching the way a person lived as a Christian* was a major influence. Combined, 81.3 percent of new converts cited at least one of these personal witnessing methods as a major contributing influence in becoming Christians.

Almost half reported that *experiencing a personal crisis* was a major influence in their coming to Christ. When asked to share what that personal crisis was, the largest group said it was a death. Divorce, illness, drug/alcohol problems,

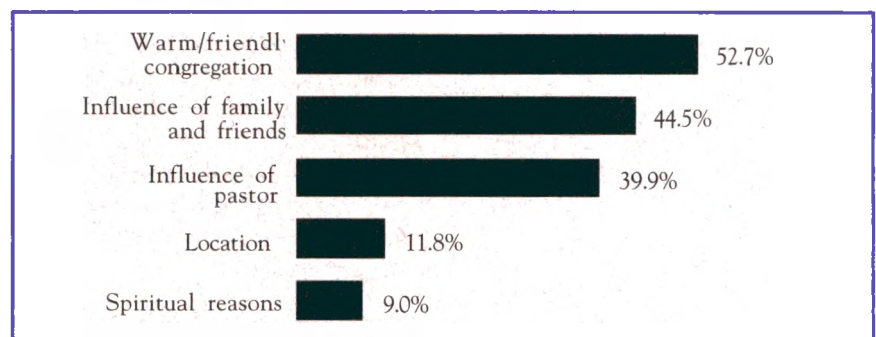
times in a person's life when he or she is open to the presence of God. Combined, 56.9 percent of new converts responded that one or the other of these circumstances was an important contributing influence in accepting Christ. Those seeking to minister should be particularly aware of times of major change or crisis in the lives of people.

About 1 of 4 new converts indicated that *attending revivals or crusades* was a contributing factor in his or her experience. One of 5 new converts said that either *watching a religious television program* or *listening to a religious radio program* was a major contributing influence. *Reading a religious booklet or tract* was the least influential of the items listed.

Church Growth

All respondents were asked why they decided to join the particular churches in which they were recently baptized. The primary reasons for joining a church are listed in figure 4.

Figure 4—Reasons People Join Churches



and job problems were the other crises often cited. One-fourth of new converts indicated that *experiencing a major change* was a significant influence in their decisions to receive Christ. The changes mentioned most often were the birth of a child, getting married, a new job, and moving to a new residence. Both of these influences (personal crisis and change) represent

The most important reason for selecting a particular church was *the warmth and friendliness of the congregation*. The *influence of family and friends* was the second most important category. Third was the *influence of the pastor*—from his preaching and teaching, to his personal relationships, to his personal witness. A combined 86.9 percent of respondents

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(continued from page 3)

listed at least one of these three factors as the reason they chose their particular churches.

Religious Background

The majority of adults interviewed participated in some form of organized religion prior to baptism in a Southern Baptist church. Only 17.5 percent of respondents said they had little or no prior church experience. In contrast, among new converts 28.6 percent had little or no prior church experience before their 1993 baptisms. Since new converts comprise 40.5 percent of recently baptized adults, this means that 1 of 9 baptized adults is converted from a non-church background.

Implications from the Study

- Baptisms do not equal conversions. This brings into question the traditional use of baptism counts to measure the effectiveness of evangelism among Southern Baptists. Unless there is a large number of people who are making professions of faith but not joining Southern Baptist churches, then Southern Baptists are not reaching as many lost adults as the baptism figures indicate.

- Rededication is a major motivation for people being baptized. This raises questions about why they feel a need to be rebaptized.

- There is an apparent lack of clarity, or perhaps consensus, about the meaning of baptism. These data suggest some serious questions: Are pastors assuming responsibility for clarifying the response of people to the invitation call? Is the pressure to baptize so great that pastors are encouraging people to be rebaptized rather than counseling them on assurance of salvation? Is the true meaning of baptism being taught in our churches?

- People are led to accept Christ for a wide variety of reasons; consequently, there is not just one evangelistic method that will be effective with all people.

- Relationships are important in people coming to Christ. In particular, family members (especially spouses), friends, and pastors tend to be most influential. Christians should be encouraged to share their faith—especially with those with whom they already have established relationships.

- Getting people to church is important. Church involvement exposes the unsaved to a wide variety of positive influences for Christ. While the church should always look for those opportunities to minister outside the walls of the church building, inviting the lost to come in and participate should not be minimized. There is substantial evidence that the environment of worship, Bible study, fellowship, and activities that take place inside church buildings provide a significant influence in people accepting Christ.

- Encourage Christians to be sensitive to and respond to people in times of crisis or major change in their lives. Ministry-based evangelism can provide an effective witness during times of life crises. These appear to be teachable moments when people need help, comfort, or reassurance.

- The friendliness, warmth, and acceptance of a congregation are key to drawing people into the fellowship and, ultimately, the membership of the church.

- Relationships are crucial for church growth. The invitation and the presence of family and friends, in particular, are important.

- The pastor plays a key role in attracting people into a congregation.

Preaching, teaching, and interpersonal skills are viewed as important by potential members.

- Most recently baptized adults have some prior church experience, even though the majority of them have not been very active in church—at least as an adult. That previous contact with a church is probably very important in their return to church as adults. In a long-term kingdom strategy of evangelism, it is vital for SBC churches to attract, involve, and reach children and youth in church activities, even if those youth wander away.

- Although not addressed in this article, churches sometimes were unable to provide us with up-to-date names and phone numbers of their recently baptized adults. This leads to concern that a significant portion of newly baptized adults are not being adequately cared for and disciplined. **RR**

Source: A Study of Adults Baptized in Southern Baptist Churches, 1993, by Phillip B. Jones, Stephen P. Whitten, Richie C. Stanley, and Robert A. Rennie. For a copy of this report, contact Marilyn Kelly, (404) 898-7676; as of June 1: (404) 410-6576.

New Research Staff

(continued from page 1)

Bob has pastored in Arkansas, Indiana, and Michigan. He and his wife, Judy, served on a Praxis team in metropolitan Detroit.

Bob earned his bachelor's degree from Arkansas State University and holds the Master of Divinity Degree in urban church ministry from Southern seminary.

Bob and Judy have two children—a son, Ryan, and a daughter, Robin. **RR**

HMB Demographic Update Now Available

The Research Division's geodemographic database has been updated to include population estimates for 1994 and projections for 1999. Estimates and projections are available for total population, number of households, race and Hispanic origin, 5-year age cohorts, males and females, household income, and group quarters population.

The *HMB Demographic Update*, a newly designed one-page supplement to the *HMB 1990 Census Report*, contains the new data for 1994 and 1999. The update will be included with all geodemographic requests filled by the Research Division, or it can be ordered separately for areas where the *HMB 1990 Census Report* has already been provided. To request demographic information, contact Connie Anthony at (404) 898-7608; as of June 1: (404) 410-6581. **RR**

HMB Demographic Update									
Area: UNITED STATES									
	1980	1990	1994	1999	1990-1994 Change	1990-1994 Percent Chg			
Population	226545805	248709873	260741054	274581426	12031181	4.8			
Households	80389673	91947410	96376583	101537695	4429173	4.8			
1994 RACE			1994 AGE			1994 HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
	Number	Percent of Total Population	Ages	Number	Percent of Total		Number	Percent	
White	206492543	79.2	0-4	20055845	7.7	HH Income Base	96375877	100.0	
Black	31700627	12.2	5-9	18708716	7.2	\$100,000+	6062694	6.3	
American Indian & Aleut	2068670	0.8	10-14	18667664	7.2	\$75,000-99,999	6479097	6.7	
Asian & Pacific Islandr	9136741	3.5	15-19	17510253	6.7	\$50,000-74,999	16510650	17.1	
Other Races	11342473	4.4	20-24	18847686	7.2	\$35,000-49,999	17898317	18.6	
Hispanics	25746913	9.9	25-29	19751086	7.6	\$15,000-34,999	29997565	31.1	
			30-34	22454104	8.6	\$0-14,999	19427554	20.2	
			35-39	21815652	8.4				
			40-44	19479514	7.5	Median Household Income		33900	
			45-49	16237742	6.2	Per Capita Income		16535	
			50-54	12931209	5.0				
			55-59	10842908	4.2	Average HH Size		2.63	
			60-64	10317364	4.0				
			65-69	10090816	3.9	1994 GROUP QUARTERS			
			70-74	8731357	3.3	Group Quarters Pop		6944615	
			75-79	6547212	2.5	As a Percent of Total Population		2.7	
			80-84	4295614	1.6				
			85+	3456312	1.3				
Male Median Age		32.6	Under 18	67814484	26.0				
Female Median Age		34.9	65+	33121311	12.7				
			Median Age	33.7					
1999 RACE			1999 AGE			1999 HOUSEHOLD INCOME			
	Number	Percent of Total Population	Ages	Number	Percent of Total		Number	Percent	
White	213736631	77.8	0-4	19648471	7.2	HH Income Base	101536989	100.0	
Black	34180634	12.4	5-9	20613682	7.5	\$100,000+	6736234	6.6	
American Indian & Aleut	2210991	0.8	10-14	19637550	7.2	\$75,000-99,999	7047755	6.9	
Asian & Pacific Islandr	11236071	4.1	15-19	19754340	7.2	\$50,000-74,999	17621563	17.4	
Other Races	13217099	4.8	20-24	17656852	6.4	\$35,000-49,999	18858492	18.6	
Hispanics	29839157	10.9	25-29	18875659	6.9	\$15,000-34,999	31233522	30.8	
			30-34	20331839	7.4	\$0-14,999	20039423	19.7	
			35-39	22771096	8.3				
			40-44	22019796	8.0				
			45-49	19138644	7.0	Median Household Income		34564	
			50-54	15942125	5.8	Per Capita Income		16830	
			55-59	12516423	4.6				
			60-64	10436750	3.8	Average HH Size		2.64	
			65-69	9767778	3.6				
			70-74	9057063	3.3				
			75-79	7368223	2.7				
			80-84	4857074	1.8				
			85+	4188061	1.5				
			Under 18	71561688	26.1				
			65+	35238199	12.8				
			Median Age	35.2					

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