

JAN 22 1996

(BP)

Historical Commission, SBC

Nashville, Tennessee

- - BAPTIST PRESS

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January 18, 1996

96-9

MISSISSIPPI--Lewis Nobles pleads guilty to Mississippi College theft.

WASHINGTON--House to hold more hearings on constitutional amendment.

VIRGINIA--Bill Cashion to lead FMB human needs program; photo.

TEXAS--Trustees revise RTVC budget, affirm staff facing transition.

GEORGIA--Home mission study offerson-line chaplaincy files.

TENNESSEE--Editors' note.

Lewis Nobles pleads guilty
to Mississippi College theft

Baptist Press
1/18/96

JACKSON, Miss. (BP)--"You are now a convicted felon," a U.S. judge told 70-year-old Lewis Nobles after the former Mississippi College president pleaded guilty Jan. 17 to two counts of mail fraud, two counts of income tax evasion and one count of money laundering to conceal theft of donations to the Baptist-affiliated college.

U.S. Attorney Brad Pigott for the Southern District of Mississippi, in a Jan. 17 news release, stated, "In pleading guilty, Nobles admitted that continually during a period of more than 16 years, he devised and perpetrated a scheme to defraud Mississippi College of money which private donors had intended to go to the benefit of the College and its students."

Nobles' 25-year tenure at the college ended with his Aug. 3, 1993, resignation after being confronted with college officials' allegations he had stolen donations totaling \$3 million.

However, Nobles was indicted for taking \$1.7 million during the five-year period within the statute of limitations -- and only two thefts, totaling \$197,000, were cited in the Jan. 17 disposition of the case.

Statutory penalties for the guilty charges are a maximum 40 years in prison and \$1.5 million in fines, although Assistant U.S. Attorney Jack Lacy recommended a sentence in the lower half of federal sentencing guidelines that would apply to Nobles' case, taking into account such factors as his background and acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoing.

Sentencing is scheduled April 15.

In exchange for Nobles' plea, federal prosecutors agreed to drop 15 charges, including additional counts of mail fraud, money laundering and tax evasion and Mann Act allegations that Nobles transported women across state lines to perform unlawful sex acts.

The (Jackson) Clarion-Ledger reported Jan. 18, "At least a half dozen women who testified before a federal grand jury said Nobles had paid them for companionship or sex. Court documents claim the price tag for those women topped \$389,000 in a period of 4 1/2 years."

As part of his Jan. 17 plea, Nobles agreed to turn over to the college four parcels of land in Clinton, Miss., where the college is located, and stock in four brokerage accounts -- assets Piggott estimated to be worth between \$400,000 and \$500,000, but all that federal authorities could find and freeze.

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To further recover funds, Mississippi College has filed lawsuits in a state court against Nobles and OmniBank, one of the banks where Nobles set up secret accounts in what The Clarion-Ledger described as "a complex scheme that funneled contribution checks to private accounts then into cash for his own use."

Also, according to an IRS spokesman, Nobles owes about \$199,000 in taxes.

The newspaper recounted Nobles, as the college's president, "often outlined the moral standards students were expected to meet." It quoted Nobles as saying, "Teaching moral values is difficult, but that is no reason to abandon it," during a 1992 convocation honoring his 25-year tenure.

Nobles' saga included a flight from justice in 1995, when he fled the state two days before a Jan. 26 hearing preceding a scheduled Feb. 7 trial date. Nobles swallowed cyanide as FBI agents closed in to arrest him the night of Jan. 26 at a San Francisco hotel. At one point, according to The Clarion-Ledger, Nobles was so disoriented he didn't recall his own name.

He was hospitalized 35 days in San Francisco, undergoing two emergency surgeries to repair damage to his stomach and esophagus and suffering a stroke that, at the time, left him partially paralyzed. Psychiatrists at the U.S. Medical Center for Federal Prisoners in Springfield, Mo., where Nobles was treated for two months, declared him incompetent to stand trial, but later reversed their recommendation after further treatment.

In court Jan. 17, however, the newspaper reported Nobles "was firm in his answers to a battery of questions from U.S. District Judge William H. Barbour Jr. about his understanding of the charges, his competency and the government's burden of proof."

Nobles' wife, Joy, sat behind the courtroom crowd of mostly lawyers and journalists.

The newspaper noted Nobles' friends "have remained supportive, collecting thousands for a defense fund and insisting on Nobles' innocence. ... 'If I'd been incarcerated for a year and stuck in with convicted felons, I might plead guilty to something I didn't do just to get out,' said longtime supporter Ed McDonald." Nobles was held in jail without bond after fleeing the state; previously, he had been free on \$15,000 personal recognizance bond since his September 1994 arraignment on a 20-count federal indictment.

Harry Vickery of Greenville, Miss., the college's trustee chairman, was quoted by The Clarion-Ledger as saying, "While we are relieved that the criminal legal processes have been completed, we take no pleasure in the outcome, which is a tragedy for all concerned."

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Compiled by Art Toalston.

House to hold more hearings
on constitutional amendment

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
1/18/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--Attempts in the U.S. House of Representatives to adopt a constitutional amendment prohibiting discrimination against religious expression await a new hearing after the recent introduction of such a proposal in the U.S. Senate.

The Constitution Subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee hopes to have a hearing on the religious equality amendment in the next month, a subcommittee aide said Jan. 16.

After saying in late October he did not know if he supported an amendment, Sen. Orrin Hatch, R.-Utah, introduced one in late December. Hatch's text is identical to that introduced in mid-November by Rep. Henry Hyde, R.-Ill. Hatch is chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, while Hyde is chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.

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On the floor of the Senate, Hatch said he was introducing the amendment "after careful personal consideration and considerable public debate. I revere the Constitution and do not take lightly the proposal of new amendments to it.

"But after long study and discussion, and a series of hearings in the Judiciary Committee which I chair, I believe that a constitutional amendment is necessary to protect the rights of believing Americans. These rights are now often denied as a result of a confused and often erroneous constitutional jurisprudence in the courts and discrimination against religious groups and individuals by administrative agencies."

The Hatch/Hyde text says:

"Neither the United States nor any State shall deny benefits to or otherwise discriminate against any private person or group on account of religious expression, belief, or identity; nor shall the prohibition on laws respecting an establishment of religion be construed to require such discrimination."

There is a competing proposal in the House. The text introduced in late November by Rep. Ernest Istook, R.-Okla., says:

"To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: Nothing in this Constitution shall prohibit acknowledgments of the religious heritage, beliefs, or traditions of the people, or prohibit student-sponsored prayer in public schools. Neither the United States nor any State shall compose any official prayer or compel joining in prayer, or discriminate against religious expression or belief."

The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission has endorsed Hyde's proposal but has declined to support Istook's. The CLC has expressed concern Istook's amendment would pave the way for government funding of religion, including false religion.

"We feel very strongly that the religious equality amendment offered by Mr. Hyde in the House of Representatives is an outstanding amendment," said Will Dodson, the CLC's director of government relations. "It would effectively restore the freedom of religion that the original framers of the Bill of Rights intended for all Americans to enjoy.

"The text of the amendment offered by Senator Hatch is, of course, identical to the Hyde amendment," Dodson continued. "Obviously then, we are extremely pleased that Mr. Hatch has introduced in the Senate an amendment which is of vital importance to the future of our nation.

"Our founding fathers understood the admonition of Proverbs 14:34 that 'Righteousness exalteth a nation.' They further understood that true religious liberty is the best climate in which true morality can prosper. It is gratifying that we have leaders in Congress who share the vision of our founding fathers. We believe this is a vision consistent with the Word of God."

Focus on the Family, the Christian Legal Society, the Family Research Council, the National Association of Evangelicals and the Traditional Values Coalition also have endorsed Hyde's proposal.

The Istook amendment's supporters include Concerned Women for America, Free Congress Foundation and Wallbuilders, according to a spokesperson for the congressman.

The Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United for Separation of Church and State are among the groups which have expressed opposition to all of the proposals.

The Hatch proposal, which was introduced Dec. 22, is Senate Joint Resolution 45. Hyde's amendment is House Joint Resolution 121, while Istook's is H.J. Res. 127.

While the text of the Hyde and Hatch versions is identical, the preambles differ.

At its annual meeting in June, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution endorsing a constitutional amendment protecting prayer and other forms of religious exercise by private individuals, including students, and prohibiting discrimination against such expression in public.

At least two state Baptist conventions meeting in early November passed resolutions opposing a religious equality amendment. Messengers to both the Texas and Virginia conventions expressed their concerns before the Hyde/Hatch or Istook versions were introduced.

In order for an amendment to become part of the Constitution, two-thirds of each house of Congress must vote for it. The amendment then has seven years in which to be ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states.

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**Bill Cashion to lead
FMB human needs program**

**Baptist Press
1/18/96**

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Missionary Bill Cashion, a church planter known for his innovative baseball ministry in Venezuela, has been tapped to lead the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's human needs program.

Cashion, from Slater, S.C., replaces Jimmy Foster, a former missionary who left the board this past summer to work as a civil engineer for the city of Colleyville, Texas.

Cashion, 47, begins his new role Feb. 7. He currently is pastor of First Baptist Church, Marietta, S.C., while on leave from his assignment in Venezuela.

Cashion brings to his new position "a practical insight of where human needs fits into the big picture of planting and developing churches overseas," said his former missionary supervisor, John Murphy, who now leads the board's furlough and study program for missionaries.

During their 10 years in Venezuela, Cashion and his wife, Kathy, started churches through sports and medical projects. During language school in Costa Rica, they also worked in human needs ministries among Nicaraguans living in refugee camps there.

Cashion also was a "principal architect" of a Venezuelan Baptist church-starting plan that doubled the number of churches in the capital city of Caracas from 1992-95, Murphy said. That plan -- now under way in Valencia, Venezuela -- includes medical, evangelism and sports projects involving Southern Baptist volunteers, Venezuelan Baptists and missionaries.

But Southern Baptists probably know Cashion best for his baseball ministry, featured in the denomination's 1991 foreign mission study on Venezuela. His outreach through baseball -- Venezuela's top sport -- has touched professional players, baseball officials, fans and young amateurs.

"He's a team player, a team builder and a team leader," said Bill Bullington, the board's vice president for overseas services, which encompasses human needs ministries. Those characteristics will serve Cashion well in his new position, he said.

Bullington also cited Cashion's good communication and interpersonal relationship skills. "We need someone with those abilities to help us communicate to Southern Baptists the importance of hunger and relief funds in reflecting Christ's compassion and reaching people for Christ overseas," said Bullington.

Hunger and relief offerings from Southern Baptist churches support human needs projects that open doors for evangelism and church planting worldwide, especially in World A, encompassing regions where people have little or no access to the gospel. Human needs contributions are at an all-time low, according to Bullington.

"We're at a crisis point," he said.

That's a challenge Cashion feels strongly about. "If we (Southern Baptists) are going to be people of the Book, we've got to be a caring, sharing people," Cashion said.

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Cashion recently led First Baptist in Marietta to give 236 percent of its goal for the 1995 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions. But while supporting evangelism and church planting overseas, Southern Baptists shouldn't neglect hunger and relief giving, Cashion said.

"For me, evangelism without ministry is not (biblical) evangelism," he said. "The Bible says the Lord smiles upon those who consider the poor. Jesus himself sought to win the souls of the lost, but look how many times he touched the hurting."

Before Cashion and his wife were appointed by the Foreign Mission Board in 1985, he was pastor of Washington Baptist Church, Greer, S.C. He has been a teacher and coach in Raleigh, N.C.; youth director at Slater (S.C.) Baptist Church; pastor of New Hill (N.C.) Baptist Church and Carolina Pines Baptist Church in Raleigh. He also has been a chaplain for Baseball Chapel, an evangelical organization sponsoring clubhouse services and Bible studies for professional baseball players.

Cashion holds the bachelor of science degree from Baptist College at Charleston (S.C.) and the master of divinity degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N.C. He is working toward a doctor of ministry degree from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tenn.

The Cashions have two grown daughters, a 6-year-old daughter adopted in Venezuela and a granddaughter.

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(BP) photo (vertical) mailed 1/17/96 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline posted in SBCNet News Room.

**Trustees revise RTVC budget,
affirm staff facing transition** By C.C. Risenhoover

**Baptist Press
1/18/96**

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--A budget revision and staff affirmation resolution were approved by Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission trustees during their Jan. 15-16 meeting in Fort Worth, Texas.

The operating budget was revised from \$8,020,000 to \$9,007,000, an increase of \$987,000. The major increase was an additional \$401,000 for television program acquisition, from \$912,000 to \$1,313,000. Some programs will be produced by the RTVC staff and others will be acquired from other sources, trustees were told.

Funding also was provided for a church consulting office to be directed by Stan Grubb and a multimedia emphasis to be directed by John McGlothlin. Both men were already on the RTVC staff in different positions.

Trustees last September approved an austerity budget for the 1995-96 fiscal year to compensate for a possible lack of revenue from ACTS, the RTVC's cable program service. Since that time, ACTS reached an agreement with the "Faith and Values" (F&V) channel enabling the commission to forecast revenue for its cable program service.

"The staff affirmation resolution was prepared at the request of trustees who wanted to pledge support for the staff during the transition to the North American Mission Board," said Jack Johnson, RTVC president, of the Southern Baptist Convention restructuring. "A copy has been given to each RTVC staff member, along with a list of trustee prayer requests developed to identify specific concerns board members want to express."

The restructuring, approved by messengers to the 1995 SBC annual meeting in Atlanta, will reduce the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12. Messengers are scheduled to vote on a bylaws change at this year's annual meeting in New Orleans, with implementation of the restructuring slated by July 1997.

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The RTVC staff appreciation resolution reads in part: "... that this board of trustees expresses its profound appreciation for each member of the staff and administration for his or her devotion to the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ through electronic media ... that the trustees affirm the calling and dedication of each staff member to the missionary task of Gospel proclamation ... that the trustees pledge their support for the staff and administration through personal encouragement, counsel, influence and prayer."

There were 15 specific prayer requests related to the transition to the NAMB. Johnson said the requests were "very positive" and that trustees made a covenant to pray on the issues relating to the transition.

Specific prayer requests generated by the staff included that the RTVC and NAMB, along with the SBC, belong to God; that God is in this matter with a plan "beyond all our understanding;" that there be a sensitivity to the direction of the Holy Spirit; that the final solution is "bigger than all of us;" and that the RTVC wants nothing less than a God-sized future.

Prayer requests also called for godly wisdom on the part of the Implementation Task Force appointed by the SBC Executive Committee and new NAMB trustees to fully understand all the present entities, how they work and how their functions would fit into the new mission board; and that politics would give way to a genuine seeking of God's will in the transition decision-making process.

In other business trustees reviewed financial statements for the first quarter of the fiscal year and received the audit for 1994-95.

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Home mission study offers
on-line chaplaincy files

Baptist Press
1/18/96

ALPHARETTA, Ga. (BP)--Southern Baptist churches participating in the 1996 home mission study can access supplemental study material this year from SBCNet, the convention's on-line computer service.

With material for all age levels, the study focuses on the role of Southern Baptist chaplains in reaching the nation for Christ.

"We are very pleased with the initial response to the material since we went on-line in August," said Joe Westbury, editor of the study materials. "In the first five months, the information was accessed more than 700 times -- and that is before the bulk of the Home Mission Study materials reached churches."

Seventeen files are available electronically. One file updates statistical information and another lists prayer requests from individuals featured in the adult study. Fifteen files contain text from free brochures which explain a variety of chaplaincy ministries and how to become a volunteer or full-time chaplain.

The files are found in the HMB library of SBCNet. Each file relates to the adult home missions study book but could be used to supplement the youth or children's study material.

"Until now, it would take up to three weeks to receive the brochures when ordering them through the mail," Westbury said. Now churches with SBCNet can receive material the same day.

People still can order the color brochures by calling Home Mission Board customer services at 1-800-634-2462.

"This link with SBCNet enhances the new emphasis of the home mission study to involve as many individuals as possible in personal ministry and evangelism," Westbury said.

"With this year's study, we are expanding the channels we use to reach our audience by placing more home missions material where more Southern Baptists are located -- on-line," he continued. "We want to make it easier for our audience to study about home missions and to become personally involved."

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The suggested time for churches to conduct the study is Feb. 18-21. The home mission study is part of the season of home missions, which also includes the Week of Prayer for Home Missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions, and home missions day in Sunday school.

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EDITORS' NOTE: In the note at the bottom of the (BP) story titled "Seniors recycle literature in worldwide ministry," dated 1/17/96, please add the following sentence:

A brochure about Project Africa may be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to The Gleaners International, 11904 Windmill Rd., Oklahoma City, OK 73162.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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