

April 25, 1974

Russian Religious Freedom
'More than Czars Allowed'

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Russian people "unhesitatingly declare they have more religious freedom now than they had under the Czars when the Orthodox Church was the Soviet Union's official religion," even though there are still certain government controls on religion, the president of the Baptist Sunday School Board said here.

James L. Sullivan, board president, and his wife, were members of a group of Baptist leaders from North America invited to Russia by the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists of the USSR.

Other Americans in the group were Warren Magnuson, executive secretary of the Baptist General Conference, Evanston, Ill.; Robert C. Campbell, executive secretary of the American Baptist Convention, Valley Forge, Pa.; Jerry Moore, the pastor of Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and a member of city council by presidential appointment. Mrs. Campbell and Mrs. Magnuson were also in the group.

The American guests were received cordially during their stay in Moscow by Ilya G. Ivanov, president of the Baptist Union of the USSR. They took part in worship at the Moscow Baptist Church, observed a baptismal service and became acquainted with the church's life.

The American group toured Moscow, visited the Moscow University and went to Kiev, where they visited three churches.

The Sullivans had to leave the tour early, due to a death in their family, and Magnuson suffered a ruptured appendix on a train en route to Kiev. Surgery was performed in Kiev, and he remained eight days in a hospital. He attended church in Kiev on Easter Sunday morning and was greeted as an answer to prayer because the people there had been praying for him all week.

Magnuson then flew on to Moscow for the Sunday night service there, where the same "answer-to-prayer" greeting was given him, a spokesman for the American group recalled.

Sullivan recounted the trip to Russia and gave some observations of Baptist life there.

"The Russians recognize that their religious freedom will not parallel ours in North America, but they do have more religious freedom than under the Czars," Sullivan said.

"Every other religion and type of worship was forbidden by law back then and often punishable by death. The Baptist philosophy today is that they should move through doors as they open, taking fullest advantage of every opportunity afforded them...abiding by the laws of the land."

Initial steps by the Russian Christians which made the American Baptists' trip to Russia possible were taken at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) in Einsiedeln, Switzerland in summer, 1973. The BWA coordinated the preparations.

Individual invitations were formally extended later, with clearance made through the Russian Embassy. The group was classified as a delegation and "given every courteous consideration that their (the Russian) government could provide," Sullivan noted.

A formal dinner welcomed the Americans their first evening in Moscow, and the following evening they attended a churchwide meeting with a special baptismal service of some 20 persons at the Moscow Baptist Church. Only two of the people baptized were men, Sullivan recalled. "All were adults."

The "spirit of reverence and commitment ran exceedingly deep throughout the service," Sullivan said. "Three of us preached for 20 minutes each and the rest of the service

consumed an hour and a half. There were masses of people standing for two and one-half consecutive hours in rapt attention to participate in the services...The singing was spirited and the blessings were many."

Sullivan said there were no restrictions on the Americans' preaching in the Russian churches.

"We were told in advance that the government would not allow teaching since all schools were declared to be under government control. Churches have not been granted the right to operate Sunday Schools since they were abolished in 1924," he noted. "Still, they indicated one of their greatest needs is for Bibles."

"Even though it is against the law for religious workers to be evangelistic among persons under 18 years of age, even with children in their homes, they still find ways of creating a spiritual environment that will give children religious impressions," Sullivan continued. Later, these pay "great dividends" after the children reach the legal age when they can make their own decisions, he said.

Some of the churches had great numbers of young people present, Sullivan noted; "They sang as enthusiastically as anyone. They participated in the presentation of special musical numbers...sang in the choirs."

The young people gave "declamations during the main program and participated in other ways which are allowable, and they were effective," he said.

The American group met also with theological students from the correspondence school which holds classes in the Moscow Baptist Church building. The school is engaged in special training of students for "pulpit work and church leadership in Russia."

Sullivan said the Americans' journey took them to only three of the 1,050 churches in the Ukraine.

"We preached at each of the locations. Our wives brought greetings. We found the same warmth and welcome, cordiality and openness, attentiveness, hospitality and thanksgiving everywhere," he said.

The visit to Moscow included meeting with the Baptist leadership of Russia to discuss similarities in Baptist work in North America and the Soviet Union.

And a special meeting was held during a banquet with the religious leadership of the nation, including the representative from the government's Department of Cults, the head of the Orthodox Church of Russia, leaders of other faiths operating in the country, and the entire Baptist leadership. Sullivan said the interchange of ideas and concepts was "full" and "free."

Another formal reception was held in the Liberian Embassy, through the "courtesy" of President William Tolbert of Liberia and former president of the Baptist World Alliance. The event was attended by religious leadership and by ambassadors and their wives from the major countries of the Protestant world.

Sullivan noted some controls on the Russian churches by their government.

"Churches are assigned locations by the government. Generally, they're put in areas that we would consider isolated spots, difficult from the standpoint of access and transportation

"The churches are on back streets and difficult alleys, far removed from the main arteries of transportation. Worshipers walk a great distance to go there, yet the churches are neat and clean...They have beautiful curtains with handwork most beautifully done.

"The buildings show that the people love everything about the church and are interested in what it does and what it stands for.

"The people received us with open arms and open hearts. They embraced us in love, kissed our cheeks with affection, patted their hearts as we passed by even though they could not say one English word. They pointed to heaven with expressions of hope written all over their faces."

(BP) Photos mailed to Baptist state papers

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April 25, 1974

High Court Avoids Issue
In Discrimination Case

By Stan L. Hastey

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court avoided confronting the issue of reverse discrimination by declaring moot (no longer in dispute) the case of a student who was denied admission to law school because of the University of Washington's admissions policy affecting minority groups.

In announcing its 5 to 4 decision, the majority acknowledged that the problem of so-called "reverse discrimination" cannot be ignored much longer. "If the admissions procedures of the law school remain unchanged," the unsigned majority opinion said, "there is no reason to suppose that a subsequent case attacking those procedures will not come with relative speed to this court."

In 1971 Michael Defunis, an undergraduate honor student at the University of Washington and a recipient of a Phi Beta Kappa key, applied for admission to the university's law school. His application was denied, but a number of students from minority groups with grades and test scores lower than Defunis's were admitted. Defunis then brought suit against the university's policy and the trial court ordered him admitted. The school complied in September, 1971.

Upon appeal the Washington (state) Supreme Court reversed the lower court and held that the law school admissions policy did not violate the Constitution. By this time, Defunis was in his second year at the law school.

He then petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court for writ of certiorari. Justice William O. Douglas stayed the judgment of the Washington Supreme Court, pending final disposition of the case.

Arguing its case before the Supreme Court, the university maintained that it had the right to base its admissions policies on grounds other than grades and test scores. This includes, the university argued, admitting minority students with lower marks because of previous discrimination against them.

Two main reasons were given by the court in defending its decision declaring the case moot

First, the court was assured by officials at the University of Washington that Defunis had registered for his last quarter at the law school and will be allowed to complete this semester and receive his degree.

Second, the majority held that "Defunis brought the suit on behalf of himself alone, and not as the representative of any class." Had he filed a class action suit, the court would have found it more difficult to declare the case moot.

In a dissenting opinion, Justice William Brennan argued that the case was not moot because "any number of unexpected events--illness, economic necessity, even academic failure--might prevent his graduation."

Brennan, who was joined by Justices Douglas, Byron R. White and Thurgood Marshall in his dissent, also scored the majority opinion because it "disserves the public interest." "Few constitutional questions in recent history have stirred as much debate," he insisted, "and they will not disappear."

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In a separate dissenting opinion, Justice Douglas tackled many of the questions brought in the case on their merits. He concluded by saying that the case should have been sent back to the lower court for a new trial.

The issues raised in the Defunis case have broad implications for a number of religious and denominational institutions. The survival of programs designed to benefit minority groups over others, both in admissions policies and in employment practices, hinges on their resolution. Likewise, the constitutionality of reverse discrimination is at stake. Both questions must now await a new suit, one that will unquestionably reach the Supreme Court for final decision.

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National Acteen Luncheon
Set, June 10, in Dallas

4/25/74

DALLAS (BP)--Acteens, the Southern Baptist missions organization for girls in grades 7-12, will hold a national luncheon here June 10.

The luncheon, an event of the Woman's Missionary Union annual meeting, will be held in a ballroom adjacent to the Dallas Convention Center Arena (Memorial Auditorium) at noon. Theme for the meeting will be "Act 1, Acteens Lunch Theatre."

The WMU annual meeting, June 9-10, precedes the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, June 11-13.

Mrs. R. L. Mathis, president of WMU, says that the Acteens luncheon is being scheduled for the benefit of teens who attend the convention with their parents and for Dallas area Acteens who will drive in for the sessions. It is the first time a youth activity has been scheduled as part of the WMU annual meeting.

"Acteens are just as much a part of WMU as adults are," said Mrs. Mathis, "and we want them to experience the excitement of a national missions meeting. We hope every adult who attends will bring a young person."

Representatives of the Southern Baptist mission boards will introduce missionaries whose work has a youth slant. Missionaries and WMU program personalities will circulate among the audience for personal conversations.

Tickets for the event are being sold in advance through the Dallas office of Texas WMU.

The opening session of the main WMU meeting will begin at 7 p.m., June 9. Sessions on Monday are scheduled for morning, afternoon and evening.

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Georgia Convention Moves
Offices to DeKalb County

4/25/74

ATLANTA (BP)--The offices of the Baptist Convention of Georgia will move from a location of more than 30 years at Peachtree and Baker Streets in downtown Atlanta to temporary headquarters in DeKalb County.

A new \$5.5 million Georgia Baptist Convention Administrative Center is under construction on Flowers Road near the intersection of I-285 and I-85 in DeKalb County and will be completed in 1975.

Temporary convention offices will be located across the street from the building site in the Kroger Executive Park. After May 1, the mailing address will be Baptist Center, 2939 Flowers Road, South, Atlanta, Ga. 30341.

Offices of the state's Woman's Missionary Union, Georgia Baptist Foundation, Georgia Baptist Children's Home and The Christian Index, the state convention's newsmagazine, are also involved in the move. Atlanta's Baptist Book Store will move its location to Flowers Road at the same time.

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Christian Artist and Writer
Launch Movie Project

By David A. Risinger

Erwin Hearne has a big challenge.

That challenge is the entertainment media, which the Baptist deacon calls the greatest mission field in the world.

"Many seem to be fearful of moral contamination so often associated with the entertainment business and shy away from entering that profession.

"But, it's the greatest mission field because so much influence for good can come from it," he said.

Hearne is putting his beliefs into practice. He's producing a family film--"Benji"--to be premiered in May.

For several years, he has worked as co-writer of television scripts but has shifted into the production of family films.

"The real reason I'm in movie production now," he said, "is because this kind of film is a challenge to the movie industry. We are trying to prove a family market for decent quality films still exists."

Many family films in recent years, he maintained, have been aimed so low that just the smallest children could enjoy them. He is striving to entertain the whole family.

Hearne has long used his talent as an advertising artist to assist with work of agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention and Baptist General Convention of Texas.

In 1964, he was commissioned by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and the Southern Baptist Historical Commission for a series of eight paintings, illustrating Baptists' early history, to appear on Sunday School periodicals that year.

Since then, he has done an additional 60 black and white illustrations in the "Great Moments in Baptist History" series.

Hearne also was requested to depict Texas Baptist and Baylor University history in 12 paintings presented to Baylor in 1967 by U.S. Sen. William A. Blakley.

Additional requests for his artistic talents have come from the Southern Baptist Radio-TV Commission and the Annuity Board.

Ten years ago, he met Joe Camp, an advertising copywriter, who had an intense desire to write quality scripts for television and movies but felt he lacked the ideas.

"And I had great ideas but was not such a hot writer," said Hearne.

Consequently, the two, along with another partner, Harland Wright, have written scripts for the "That Girl" television series and also a television comedy pilot about a minister starring Jerry Van Dyke which never sold.

Hearne, a deacon at First Baptist Church, Dallas, admitted, "I have always been pretty bold in my approach to people and in my witness which often shocked my young partner."

Camp said, "I had always been an intellectual Christian who believed in God and Jesus Christ but Erwin helped me put it all together,"

The two men helped form Mulberry Square Production Company three years ago which is distributing the "Benji" film.

One of the co-stars of the film is actor Tom Lester who has given his testimony before numerous Southern Baptist meetings and crusades and is a former fraternity brother of Camp at the University of Mississippi.

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"Tom and I enjoyed the opportunity of talking to the stars and crew of our film about the Lord when it was shot in the Dallas area last year," said Hearne, who also heads the Dallas chapter of the Fellowship of Christians in the Arts, Media and Entertainment.

"Here again we are encouraging talented, Christian people to infiltrate the entertainment media and make a statement for Christ," Hearne said.

Hearne and Camp are continuing to map out plans for further movie properties as well as "going all out" to promote the first one.

Camp admitted their ambition is to become "another Walt Disney Productions. . . to be one of the very few entities in the entertainment world that philosophically and spiritually stands for something."

He concluded, "To be able to stand up for family entertainment and say God is guiding us in this is our testimony."

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(BP) Photo mailed to state Baptist papers.

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Wake Forest University
Buys Property in Venice

4/25/74

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Nixon signed into law a bill authorizing the secretary of state to sell the former consulate office building and residence in Venice, Italy, to Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N. C.

Wake Forest, a Southern Baptist school, has been leasing the property since 1971 for a nominal sum and using it to operate a regular two-semester school year in Venice.

The consulate was closed in 1963 when its functions were transferred to the American Consulate in Milan. In addition, the United States maintains an embassy in Rome.

Among the courses offered by Wake Forest in Venice are art history and criticism, international relations and renaissance history.

According to provisions in the act, the university is to pay the government \$250,000. The United States originally purchased the property in 1952 at a cost of almost \$77,000. Since that date, the government has made capital improvements amounting to \$60,000, making its total investment just under \$137,000.

The bill stipulates that Wake Forest shall not offer the property for sale to a third party before first giving the government a one-year option to repurchase. In addition, the university agreed to provide suitable office space for U.S. Government employees on official business in Venice whenever so requested by the embassy in Rome or the consulate in Milan.

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