



BAPTIST PRESS

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76-202

Two Russian Baptists Oppose U. S. Pressure on Soviets

By Michael Duduit

LOUISVILLE (BP)--Two Russian Baptist leaders do not believe that American pressure on the Soviet government is necessary to bring more religious freedom to their country.

Michael Zhidkov and Alexei Bichkov made their statements during a visit to the campus of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary here. Zhidkov, senior pastor of Moscow Baptist Church, is a vice president of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), and Bichkov currently serves as president of the European Baptist Federation and as general secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB).

Zhidkov indicated that Georgi Vins, a Russian Baptist pastor currently serving a prison sentence of five years hard labor, was jailed because of his refusal to register his church with the Soviet government rather than for normal religious activities.

"Georgi Vins' church in Kiev is registering itself and now functions officially," he said in an interview here.

Vins, general secretary of the dissident Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB), has been the subject of much debate in the United States, including a Congressional resolution demanding his release. The two Russian Baptists, whose churches are registered with the state, believe this type of action is unnecessary and may prove counterproductive.

"Imagine some tension exists in one family," Bichkov illustrated, "and a neighbor wants to come in and give advice. Then the tension begins to go away, but the advisor insists on coming in anyway, and sometimes makes the situation worse than before."

Instead of pressure tactics, their philosophy is "to knock at the door of the state without noise--politely but constantly," Zhidkov said.

"We agree with the policy of the Baptist World Alliance, that we use the method of personal approach to governments. We stand for the rights of believers in this way, not in passing resolutions, protesting loudly and so on," Zhidkov asserted.

As support for their method of action, the two Russian Baptists said the Soviet government plans to release a number of religious prisoners in the near future.

But opinion is divided, both on the part of Christians in and outside the USSR, about the benefit of outside pressure, observers point out.

The Mission Possible Foundation (MPF) of Washington, D. C., for example, which recently announced the release of Boris Maximovich Zdoroviets, leader of an unregistered Baptist church who has been imprisoned for 13 years, cited his release as evidence that "public pressure in the West and within the USSR will not aggravate existing situations and in most cases will probably help to improve them."

MPF seeks to provide Bibles and Christian literature to believers in the Soviet Union.

In a recent editorial in the Baptist Standard, publication of the Texas Baptist Convention, editor John J. Hurt said, "No Soviet Baptist allowed to visit outside the Iron Curtain will speak factually about conditions in his own country."

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"We must never accept any of their propoganda until there is evidence of freedom, including entry of gift Bibles," Hurt wrote.

The two Russian pastors disagreed with Hurt's assessment, claiming that the government's attitude toward religion has become more liberal than in past years.

"It's not as militant as before," Zhidkov said.

As support for this position, the senior pastor said, "A new possibility has opened for us to import Bibles. With the help of the Baptist World Alliance, we were recently able to import some 3,000 Bibles and 20,000 hymn books."

C. Ronald Goulding, an associate secretary of the BWA and former general secretary of the European Baptist Federation, said in Washington that Baptists affiliated with the registered churches in the AUCECB are "happy as long as they are free to preach the gospel, make converts, baptize believers and develop the life and witness of the church, freedoms which they now enjoy throughout the USSR."

On the other hand, he said, Baptists affiliated with the dissident, unregistered churches in the CCECB "are not happy as long as they are not able to do anything their consciences demands, despite the laws of the country."

Zhidkov said in the Louisville interview that many members of the unregistered Baptist group believe the only true church is the persecuted church.

Goulding said that a number of CCECB churches are now becoming registered and enjoying the same freedoms as the AUCECB, although they usually cannot practice these freedoms unless their buildings have become registered.

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World Baptists Adopt
Resolutions on Human Rights

Baptist Press
11/30/76

VALLEY FORGE, Pa. (BP)--The Executive Committee of the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), meeting in annual session here, adopted three resolutions on various aspects of human rights and further recommended that its General Council establish special days of emphasis on peace and human rights.

Recommendations to the General Council, scheduled to meet next July 11-15 in Guatemala City, ask that the BWA establish an annual Day of Prayer for World Peace and that Baptists join in the United Nations' designation of each December 10 as Human Rights Day.

Other resolutions opposed torture, the taking of hostages, and the violent destruction of health and life.

O. K. Zimmerman, vice chairman of the BWA relief division, reported that Baptists have contributed more than \$503,000 to the Alliance's programs of relief and development during the first 10 months of 1976. Besides meeting human needs in natural catastrophes, the program includes developmental programs for economically needy areas and assistance to churches working in difficult places, he said.

A current program in church aid includes cooperation with United Bible Societies in sending 20,000 new church hymnals into the USSR. The shipment of hymnals and an earlier shipment of Bibles is being done with the approval of the Russian Government, the BWA said.

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In other action the BWA Executive Committee approved Bible study, witness, and world outreach as the initial three annual emphases for the Baptist World Alliance's new division of evangelism and education. The three annual objectives were approved on recommendation of the division committee chaired by James L. Sullivan of Nashville, president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

"The division of evangelism and education is moving forward and upward in its plans and actions within the guidelines given it by the 13th Baptist World Congress (in 1975 in Stockholm) and the BWA General Council," Sullivan reported.

The resolution on torture said, "It is a matter of grave anxiety that torture and secret imprisonment are being used by many governments, anti-government groups, and others to extract information, to suppress criticism, and to intimidate opposition, so that throughout the world countless numbers of men, women and children are suffering inhuman treatment.

"We believe in the worth of every individual as a creation in God's image, and that no circumstances whatever can justify practices intended to break bodies, minds, and spirits," it continued.

"The Alliance calls on its affiliates, their churches, and members, as well as members of other religious organizations, to create a force of public opinion which will oblige those responsible to dismantle everywhere the administrative apparatus which permits or encourages torture, and to observe effectively those international agreements under which its use is strictly forbidden."

The statement on hostages noted that the taking of hostages, whether airline passengers or other innocent persons, "is a particularly cruel act of violence which indiscriminately claims or threatens the lives of helpless people."

It called "upon the United Nations to draft a covenant banning the taking of hostages and providing that the alleged perpetrators are either subject to extradition or are brought before the courts in the country in which they are seized."

The fourth statement noted "that, in various countries, persons of opposing views and criminal attitudes engage in wanton acts of violence which result in the maiming and death of defenseless people . . ." It called "upon society to direct efforts of education, law enforcement, and judicial process toward the elimination of such violent destruction of health and life."

Expanding its program of international conferences, the Alliance elected Miss Betty Lee Smith to a newly created position of assistant secretary with responsibility for conference and youth work. Miss Smith has been active as a staff member the past 11 years, but the vote made her the first woman executive in the BWA's 71 year history.

Andrew MacRae, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Scotland, was named chairman of a coordinating subcommittee for a 1977-78 emphasis on "New People Through Bible Study." The 1978-79 emphasis on "New People for Witness and Service" will be chaired by Mrs. Letha Casazza of Washington, D. C., director of promotion for the BWA Women's Department.

The 1979 emphasis, "Into all the world. New People for a New World," will focus on international responsibilities, climaxing at the 14th Baptist World Congress in Toronto, July 6-13, 1980.

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Court Considers Death
Penalty, Abortion, Sodomy

Baptist Press
11/30/76

By Stan L. Haste

WASHINGTON (BP)--In an unexpected development, the U. S. Supreme Court announced it will decide whether states may apply mandatory death sentences to persons convicted of killing police officers.

In other actions, the high court upheld a lower ruling which overturned an Indiana abortion law, refused to disturb the conviction of a Virginia couple convicted of sodomy, and agreed to decide if an Alabama law discriminates against women in violation of the federal Civil Rights Act.

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The court's surpris mov to hear arguments on the constitutionality of death s nt nc s for convicted murderers of policemen.com s in the wake of its historic ruling in July striking down mandatory death sentences.

Last July 2, the high court declared that death penalty laws in Louisiana and North Carolina violated th U. S. Constitution's ban on cru l and unusual punishment by imposing mandatory death sentences which deprived both the presiding judge and the jury from taking into account such factors as previous criminal record, potential rehabilitation, or extenuating circumstances surrounding the killing.

At the same time, however, the justices upheld three other states' capital punishment laws, ruling that the death penalty does not, in and of itself, constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

Th court will now decide whether the state of Louisiana may execute Harry Roberts, 21, th convicted murderer of a New Orleans police officer during the city's Mardi Gras cel bration two years ago.

In its abortion action, the high court upheld 6-3 a ruling by a federal district court in Indiana that the state's law requiring all first trimester abortions to be performed in hospitals is unconstitutional.

The lower court cited the high court's 1973 ruling that the state has no compelling interest in regulating abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. The decision to have an abortion during that period must be left to the woman and her physician, the court ruled.

Chief Justice Warren E. Burger and Associate Justices Byron R. White and William H. Rehnquist dissented, as they have done in most of the majority's abortion rulings over the past three years.

In the Virginia sodomy action, the justices declined to hear the appeal of a Virginia Beach couple who engaged in oral sex acts in the presence of a third individual. The couple had argued that their subsequent conviction for sodomy, a crime in Virginia, violated their right to privacy.

A federal court of appeals had earlier disagreed with them, noting that they had voluntarily committed the illegal acts in the presence of an invited guest and had ther by forfeited any constitutional claim to privacy rights.

The justices did decide to hear the complaint of an Alabama woman who is challenging the state's law prescribing height and weight requirements for prison guards.

Diane Rawlinson, 22, who at 5 feet 3 inches meets the height requirement but weighs five pounds less than the 120-pound minimum weight requirement, argues that such regulations violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964. She also contests the state's view that such physical requirements are bonafide occupational qualifications.

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NAB Will Appeal 'Family
Viewing' Court Ruling

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) said here it will appeal the decision of U. S. District Court Judge Warren Ferguson that television's "Family Viewing Hour" violates the free speech provision of the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution.

F rguson said in a ruling in Los Angeles that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the NAB may not force networks to set aside an hour of prime time nightly for programming which minimizes sex and violence.

The 223-page decision also points out that while the court cannot force the networks to abandon the family hour, each network must be allowed to schedule its own programming, without interference from the FCC and NAB.

The commercial networks contend their participation in the Family Vi wing Hour is voluntary. ABC and CBS have already announced decisions to appeal and NBC is studying that possibility.

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The NAB statement on its decision to appeal said:

"Judge Ferguson's decision in the Writers Guild case strongly and correctly reaffirms the First Amendment prohibition against government interference with broadcast programming.

"It appears, however, that portions of his decision have the potential for effectively destroying the viability of the NAB Television and Radio Codes," it continued. "The NAB believes that the public and the broadcasting industry support the concept of self-regulation as an essential means of assuring that the nation's broadcasting stations serve the public interest.

"Judge Ferguson's decision, even if read in its narrowest terms, also establishes a precedent for the imposition of damages on the NAB for alleged violations of the First Amendment," the statement said.

"Accordingly, NAB will appeal any imposition of damages and those portions of the decision that appear to preclude broadcasting's right to engage in meaningful, voluntary industry self-regulation. This decision (to appeal) is subject to review and ratification by the full board at its meeting in January, 1977."

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Armed Men Steal
Missionary's Car

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil (BP)--Two men held Southern Baptist missionaries Mr. and Mrs. J. Boyd Sutton at gunpoint and stole their car here Thanksgiving Day.

According to Edward G. Berry, also a Southern Baptist missionary, the Suttons were having Thanksgiving supper with Mr. and Mrs. Jerry S. Key, Southern Baptist missionaries.

After supper the Suttons apparently went to the car. While they waited for their 16-year-old daughter, Cecilia, the two armed men robbed them of the automobile.

"The men took only the car," Berry stated. "No documents or money were taken. No personal harm was done to any of the family, for which we are thankful."

"Police and mission (organization of missionaries) lawyers have been notified of the incident," Berry said. "Now we have only to wait for the results."

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Reynolds Is President-elect
Of Hymn Society of America

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SPRINGFIELD, Ohio (BP)--William J. Reynolds, secretary of the church music department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, was named president-elect of the Hymn Society of America, Inc., the recently reorganized inter-church, inter-faith organization.

W. Thomas Smith, lecturer in church music at Wittenburg University, a Lutheran school in Springfield, Ohio, was elected executive director, and L. David Miller, dean of the school of music at the same university, was elected president of the more than 2,000-member group.

Four other Southern Baptists were named to society offices or committees.

Harry Eskew of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary faculty was named editor of "The Hymn," quarterly publication of the society.

Southern Baptists named to committees were Hugh T. McElrath of the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville; Robert Fort of the faculty of Stetson University, Deland, Fla.; and Mrs. Donald Winters, recently retired from the music faculty at William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Miss.

The Hymn Society of America is devoted to "preservation of the great hymns of the past, creation of new hymns to serve the present and future, and the many practical aspects of their use in and outside the churches," according to Smith.

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In a major reorganization move in May 1976, the group moved its national headquarters from New York City to the campus of Wittenburg University.

Fourteen hymns owned by the Hymn Society were included in the new Baptist Hymnal (published in 1975), according to Reynolds, who edited the hymnal and headed the committee responsible for putting the book together.

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Explorer Coed 1st to Earn
The 'God and Life' Award

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NASHVILLE (BP)--The first person in the nation to earn a newly-begun "God and Life" Award under the Explorer scouting "God and Country" program went to Miss Nancy Evans, 16, a member of Sea Explorer Ship 121, chartered by Woodmont Baptist Church here.

Miss Evans, a member of First Baptist Church, Nashville, completed award requirements in the areas of faith, church, family, love and service, future and God's Word, according to Ship 121 counselor Charles W. DeWeese.

The high school coed is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James H. Evans Sr. Mrs. Evans is an occupational nurse for the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville.

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Thief Failed to Get Money,
But He Might WIN After All

Baptist Press
11/30/76

NEOSHO, Mo. (BP)--Southern Baptist minister John Wallen was almost glad when a pick-pocket lifted some items from his left coat pocket here.

Wallen, pastor of the Lanagan (Mo.) Baptist Mission, was standing at a busy corner waiting for traffic to clear, when the stranger with a coat draped over his arm brushed by him and disappeared.

The pastor immediately checked his wallet; he still had it, but something was missing from his coat pocket.

"Slight anger gave way to humor, then prayer," Wallen said.

The pickpocket, he said, faced a "momentous decision."

Instead of money, the thief had stolen a handful of WIN (Witness Involvement Now) tracts on "How to Have a Full and Meaningful Life."

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