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September 23, 1991

91-143

Educator, religious liberty champion,
G. Hugh Wamble, dies in car accident

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--G. Hugh Wamble, a prominent Southern Baptist educator and religious liberty champion, died Sept. 22 in an automobile accident in Kansas City, Mo. He was 68.

Wamble, who had been battling the effects of a malignant brain tumor since January, died in the emergency room at Liberty (Mo.) Hospital after a car driven by his wife, Beverly, hit a guardrail on Interstate 35 in Kansas City and turned over. As of the morning of Sept. 23, Beverly Wamble, age 65, remains in serious condition in the intensive care unit at North Kansas City Hospital.

Professor of church history at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary since 1959, Wamble underwent surgery for a brain tumor Jan. 18. When pathology reports indicated the tumor was malignant, he was treated with radiation and chemotherapy, but doctors were unable to eradicate the malignancy.

Wamble's photographic memory and mental astuteness were something of a legend at Midwestern. Throughout his 32-year career at the seminary, students claimed the professor could end a lecture in mid-sentence one day, then complete the sentence at the beginning of the lecture period the following day.

A "self-taught" lawyer, Wamble was perhaps best known among Southern Baptists for his contributions to a U.S. Supreme Court religious liberty decision made in 1985.

His involvement in the case began in 1977, when he filed suit against the U.S. Commissioner of Education to prevent the federal government from using a private contractor to place federally-funded teachers in Missouri parochial schools. The case, Wamble v. Bell, came to trial in 1982, challenging the constitutionality of the administration of Missouri's Title I "bypass" program. Wamble personally argued the case before U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Stevens Jr.

In 1984, Judge Stevens ruled the practice in Missouri did, in fact, violate the constitutional separation of church and state. But Stevens then stayed the injunction pending the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on a similar New York case. In 1985, the nation's highest court ruled on the New York case, finding such parochial aid to be a clear violation of the separation of church and state.

Following that decision, in 1985 Judge Stevens lifted the stay of injunction imposed on the Missouri case. After an eight-year odyssey, Wamble v. Bell became a closed case.

In another religious liberty case, Wamble joined Rudy Pulido, a St. Louis pastor, in filing suit against the U.S. Secretary of Education in 1985, challenging guidelines established for allocating federal education funds to parochial schools. Four years later, Judge Stevens' decision in the Pulido v. Cavazos case found the federal funding plan to be an unconstitutional violation of church-state separation.

Wamble served the Missouri Baptist Convention as a lobbyist on church-state matters for eight years, and was president of the convention from 1973-75. He also was a member of the Missouri Baptist Christian Life Commission for many years and was chairman of the commission from 1971-74.

In April 1987 Midwestern Seminary trustees voted to establish the "G. Hugh Wamble Fund for Religious Liberty Studies" at the institution. The fund is to provide a continuing emphasis toward the Baptist understanding of separation of church and state.

During his years at Midwestern, Wamble held numerous interim pastorates in Missouri. Previously, he was pastor of two Kentucky Baptist churches. From 1955-58, he taught church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

A native of Georgia, Wamble was a Marine sergeant and radio operator during World War II, and was present when the island of Iwo Jima was secured by U.S. military forces. He held degrees from Mercer University, Macon, Ga.; Southern Seminary; and the University of Missouri, Columbia. He also studied at Duke University, Durham, N.C.

He was the author of three books and numerous articles published in a variety of periodicals.

Wamble is survived by his wife, Beverly, of Kansas City; and two daughters, Susan "Beth" Stiver of Louisville, Ky., and Grace Dunwamble of Austin, Texas.

Arrangements for funeral services are pending. In lieu of flowers, the Wamble family requests contributions be made to the G. Hugh Wamble Fund for Religious Liberty Studies at Midwestern Seminary.

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Virginia Supreme Court rules
in favor of FMB in Wade case

By Robert O'Brien

Baptist Press
9/23/91

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--The Virginia Supreme Court threw out a \$1.56 million judgment against the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in a unanimous opinion handed down Sept. 20.

The opinion of the seven justices reversed a July 1990 verdict in a jury trial in Richmond Circuit Court that awarded the sum to children of a former missionary couple who suffered sexual abuse from their father, G. Thomas Wade Jr. Diana Sue Wade, the children's mother, filed the suit on their behalf.

Since no constitutional issues were raised, the case will not go beyond the Virginia Supreme Court, according to attorneys for the mission board.

The crux of arguments in the appeal to the Supreme Court centered around interpretation under Virginia law about what contractual relationship, if any, existed between the Wades and the board that would call for the board to protect the children from abuse by their father.

The Supreme Court opinion, written by Justice Elizabeth Lacy, said the court found no evidence "which would support a finding that the parties contemplated (when they were appointed as missionaries in 1976) that the board would be obligated to protect one family member from the criminal actions of another family member."

"Although Mr. Wade's actions were unconscionable and the impact on the family tragic, no reasonable person could conclude that in 1976 either Mrs. Wade or the board intended that the oral contract regarding protection of the health, safety and welfare of the Wade family encompassed the board's protection of the Wade children from the felonious acts of Mr. Wade," Justice Lacy wrote.

In reversing the lower court and finding in favor of the Foreign Mission Board, the Supreme Court ruled the "trial court improperly submitted the question of the interpretation of the contract to the jury."

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The trial court had ruled an enforceable oral contract existed. The mission board disagreed in the appeal to the Virginia Supreme Court, declaring such a contract would have to be in writing to be enforceable and no one could have anticipated Wade's conduct.

Attorneys for the Wades disagreed, saying an oral contract existed that did not have to be in writing. They claimed the jury had the right to decide a contract existed and to require the board to pay for the consequences of Wade's molestation.

Justice Lacy's opinion also rejected a contention of the Wades' attorneys the trial court had erred in dismissing a charge of negligence against the board.

The original lawsuit contended board officials learned Wade was sexually abusing the couple's oldest daughter but did not disclose it to his wife so she could halt it.

The suit contended Wade continued to abuse the daughter as well as a second daughter and he began molesting a third daughter. The couple also has a son. The abuse began in 1979 in Botswana, Africa, when the oldest daughter was about 10 years old.

Board attorneys argued mission officials who handled the family's case acted reasonably under the circumstances by telling Wade to inform his wife of the abuse and by arranging for professional counseling. The official who first learned of the case testified he acted on the advice of a psychiatrist and a pastoral counseling expert in dealing with the family. He said he did not know the extent of the abuse and was assured it had stopped two years before.

Wade refused to tell his wife or to accept counseling. Board officials directed him to return to the United States with his family for counseling. He later was arrested and imprisoned for child abuse. The Wades are now divorced.

Diana Wade filed a second suit last November, alleging damages to herself. It was set for trial Jan. 13, 1992, to allow the Virginia Supreme Court time to rule on the appeal in the children's case.

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Seminary Extension honors
center directors of year

Baptist Press
9/23/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--In the year of his 90th birthday, Roy Johnson still directs the Seminary Extension center in Portland, Ore. For the past 30 years he has been helping deliver theological education to the people of Interstate Baptist Association.

The Southern Baptist Convention Seminary Extension program recognized Johnson's contributions in naming him Director of the Year for the Western United States. Michael Chance, director of education for the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, was honored for the Eastern United States.

Johnson already had spent 35 years as a Texas pastor when he moved to Portland in 1959 as associational director of missions. The Interstate Baptist Institute offered its first Seminary Extension course the following fall.

Johnson has been both a teacher and the director of the institute. Classes usually have been small, but the institute has been a consistent resource for training for ministers and lay persons.

"Roy Johnson's long and faithful service has earned him the respect of ministers in the Northwest," says Seminary Extension Executive Director Doran McCarty. Cecil Sims, executive director-treasurer of the Northwest Baptist Convention, told McCarty he hopes to build on Johnson's work to expand the program of Seminary Extension throughout the convention area.

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Chance took over responsibility for the New York center in 1987. His first task was to reactivate the center, which had been started in 1971. Under his leadership classes have been offered at least twice a year. In addition to the classes at the associational office in midtown Manhattan, ethnic/language branches are operated for Hispanics, Filipinos, and African Americans.

At various times in its history the center also has had classes for Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Polish, Rumanian, and Haitian groups.

"Because of the diverse composition of the city, it would be hard to imagine a more strategic location to offer ministry training, or a more strategic position than the one Michael Chance occupies as director of the New York center," said Jack Cunningham, Seminary Extension's director of undergraduate studies.

"Whether on the east coast or the west," Cunningham said, "thousands of people have missed getting to go to a seminary. Directors like Johnson and Chance bring study opportunities close to home for many of these."

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Baptists plan to cooperate
despite Soviet Union's demise

Baptist Press
9/23/91

By Mary E. Speidel & Art Toalston

MOSCOW (BP)--Despite the political fragmentation surrounding them, Baptist leaders in the former Soviet Union want no spiritual fragmentation, according to their words and prayers.

Baptists from the 15 former Soviet republics met in Moscow Sept. 18-19 for the first time since the August coup backfired, setting in motion the abrupt downfall of 70-plus years of Marxist-Stalinist communism.

Leaders of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists could not be reached by telephone after the meeting. But the meeting went "exceptionally well (with) a very positive spirit of cooperation," reported Keith Parker, a Southern Baptist observer.

The leaders "focused on being joined together in Christ however the governments decide to go," Parker recounted in a telephone interview from Zurich, Switzerland.

Parker, director for Southern Baptist work in Europe, attended the Moscow meeting with Isam Ballenger, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Two Southern Baptist missionaries in the Soviet Union, George Lozuk and Dan Panter, also attended several sessions.

Baptist leaders from the newly independent Baltic republics were "welcomed as equals" at the meeting, Parker said. "There was a sense of celebration in their independence." Baptists are organized at the republic level in most parts of the dismantled Soviet Union, and they are making gains in planting new churches and ministering in social institutions, Parker noted. Yet the representatives recommitted themselves to ongoing cooperation, especially in missions and evangelism in areas with few Christians such as the Muslim-dominated Central Asian republics.

Baptist leaders also plan to continue united efforts in theological education and in training programs for Sunday school teachers and other church leaders, Parker reported. The leaders discussed "the tremendous problem of finances and their desire to develop mission and evangelism efforts they could afford themselves," Parker said. "In fact, they said if they receive financial help from the West, they want it to be temporary."

Baptist representatives from a number of republics spoke of their desire for Southern Baptist missionary co-workers, Parker said. Formal personnel requests soon will be developed for Southern Baptists interested in career missions in the country, he said.

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Parker also will be working on volunteer opportunities, especially exploring ways to link smaller Southern Baptist state conventions with Soviet republics where Baptists are a decided minority.

Representatives discussed problems Baptists in various parts of the country are facing with Eastern Orthodoxy. For example, in the republic of Moldavia, which borders Romania, Orthodoxy is seeking to regain its former status as the state-preferred church which all people should be pressured to join, Baptists from the region reported.

Gregori Komendant, president of the Baptist union, had been hospitalized recently for a lung ailment and exhaustion but was able to preside over afternoon sessions of the meeting.

"The doctor is going to insist that he take two months of rest," Parker said. "They are all very prayerful for him."

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Nationwide Church Growth Conference
planned for summer of 1992

Baptist Press
9/23/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--Two Southern Baptist agencies and a state convention are joining forces next year to sponsor a national conference designed to provide a comprehensive view of church growth.

Officials from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Home Mission Board, and the Baptist General Convention of Texas recently announced plans for the Nationwide Church Growth Conference, Aug. 31-Sept. 3, 1992, at the Tarrant County Convention Center in Fort Worth, Texas.

"This may well be the most comprehensive conference on church growth that has ever been held," said James Semple, director of the state missions commission of the BGCT, and steering committee chairman of the National Church Growth Conference. "We will be addressing the needs of churches in all types of settings and situations all the way from the open-country, rural church to the inner-city church in a transitional neighborhood," he said.

Seminars will explore church growth issues from both traditional and non-traditional approaches, conference leaders said. Addresses also will be given by Ken Hemphill, pastor of First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va.; John Bisagno, pastor of First Baptist Church of Houston; and Richard Jackson, North Phoenix (Ariz.) Baptist Church.

Nine workgroups and committees are making detailed plans for the conference, which will include an exhibit area. Further details about registration and conference faculty will be announced later.

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Building effort
can unite, divide

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press
9/23/91

NASHVILLE (BP)--"For some churches, building is like a war," Gwenn McCormick told participants in the National Church Building Seminar at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in mid-September.

Opposition and antagonism may reach such a level, observed McCormick, director of the board's church architecture department, "when the building is finished, the pastor is, too."

Church building can unite or divide; it can keep the church on track in response to the high call of God, or it can help derail it, he observed.

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McCormick maintained the factors that determine the end result of a building program are the motive for construction and the organization to accomplish the task.

"The motive for building should be of the highest order," he told church staff persons and building committee members. "It should be tied closely to the mission and purpose of the church. A church has neither the time nor the resources to squander either of these on secondary motives. There are too many pressing and priority demands on the church's energies and resources to waste them."

Organization, the way the church brings its people and resources together, can affect how well the building task is accomplished, he continued.

"Don't pass over this factor as if it were not important; it can give you support and momentum or it can weaken and undercut your efforts."

McCormick said he believes "not all church construction is constructive." Some projects divert attention from the primary mission of the church and some drain energy and resources from priorities. And he cautioned against a construction project as a means of reviving the spiritual climate of the church.

"The church that is spiritually sick needs a revival, not a building program," he said.

"If the church is alive and growing, and if it has its priorities in order, the building venture will receive a powerful impetus," he said.

Failure to see building as an essential part of the church's mission can contribute to a disappointing building program.

"Too many congregations see the church's mission as spiritual and lofty; they see church building as mundane. But the kinds of facilities we build will influence the kinds of ministries and programs we offer. Planning and preparation for a building afford an opportunity for Bible study and reflection of the nature and mission of the church."

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Southwestern Seminary by satellite
hits the airwaves across America

By Lydia Murphy

Baptist Press
9/23/91

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--All systems are go for a Seminary By Satellite program launched this fall at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, according to the creator of the space age plan.

"We're really excited about the whole idea of a seminary class offered by satellite. It makes seminary education accessible to people from a wide range of backgrounds and innumerable places," said David Fite, director of continuing education at Southwestern.

The first class was beamed via satellite from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth Sept. 9, with 130 students enrolled. Those students are in classrooms in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Lubbock, Amarillo, and Odessa, Texas, and Shawnee and Tulsa, Okla. Other people are auditing the class from as far away as West Virginia and South Carolina.

One person called for satellite link-up instructions from Little Rock, Ark. He said 19 people are meeting there for the class. And while viewers like those are not enrolled in the class, they are able to view the class without charge, Fite said.

"In each off-campus classroom, there is a teaching assistant to help students call in and ask questions," Fite said. "To take the course for academic credit, a person must be in one of the classroom locations and be enrolled in Southwestern."

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However, anyone able to link-up with the Weststar IV satellite, Transponder 14, can view the class without charge. The lectures are copyrighted and are not to be duplicated without the written permission of Southwestern Seminary, according to Fite.

Students enrolled in the class for seminary credit are able to communicate with the professor in Fort Worth by way of a telephone hookup at each location where the transmission is being received.

According to Fite, the transmission, which originates at Southwestern, is sent live to the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission in Fort Worth, which uplinks the class to a satellite.

William Tolar, vice president for academic affairs, provost and professor of biblical backgrounds at Southwestern, is lecturing for the fall semester on the "Graeco-Roman World -- The World of the New Testament."

"I feel good about the first sessions," Tolar said. "I wanted to be informal and have the students relax. I told the students through the satellite classes to imagine that they were on the back row of my class and I would imagine that they were there with us. This helped psychologically while having to adjust to looking at the cameras and students.

"I didn't feel any awkward moments, although the only part that I was really concerned about was the question time and being able to interact through the system. But it all went smoothly and with the aid of monitors, I could even see who was speaking," Tolar said.

And while "Seminary By Satellite" offers easy access to seminary education, neither Tolar nor Fite said he thinks the classes will alter the traditional classroom approach.

"It will not replace the campus setting," Tolar said, "simply because the more reflective and interactive courses will still need to be on the campus where there can be more interaction within the academic environment. The satellite classes will supplement and compliment the classes that are on campus."

Another future aspect of the classes is increased cooperation between the six Southern Baptist seminaries. A class at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., currently is participating in Tolar's lectures.

Interest in the satellite class has come in from several states and even northern Mexico, Fite said.

Fall classes are offered on Monday evenings from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. through Nov. 25.

Registration is in progress for the spring session featuring John Newport, retired vice president for academic affairs and provost and distinguished professor of philosophy of religion, Emeritus. Newport will teach the class "Satanism, Occult & the New Age Movement" beginning Jan. 13.

More information is available by contacting David Fite, Office of Continuing Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 22000, Fort Worth, Texas, 76122, (817) 923-1921 ext. 2440.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southwestern Seminary