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- - BAPTIST PRESS

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November 24, 1992

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Oprah Winfrey Show gives boost
to New Age 'Course in Miracles' By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
11/24/92

ATLANTA (BP)--"A Course in Miracles" sounds like a Bible study topic -- and it has gotten TV talk show host Oprah Winfrey's attention.

But a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board interfaith witness specialist warns it is one of the most influential teachings in New Age movements.

"A Course in Miracles," often referred to as "The Course," is gaining acceptance due in part to a book by Marianne Williamson, "A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles." Williamson's appearance on the Oprah Winfrey Show impressed the host so much that she bought a copy of the book for everyone in the studio audience. Williamson now has appeared on the show twice.

Exposure on the Winfrey show sparked "one of the biggest book selling wildfires of 1992," with 750,000 copies of the book sold, according to one book review. The book made the New York Times best-seller list and Williamson appeared on the covers of People magazine and New Age Journal.

Williamson's book is based on her experiences in "A Course in Miracles," a three-volume, 1,188-page set of books first published in 1975. The set includes a textbook, a workbook with 365 lessons and a manual. It serves as a New Age self-help study course, said Maurice Smith, associate director of the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department.

More than 800,000 people have purchased the book set and about 1,500 U.S. groups meet each week to study The Course, according to Christianity Today magazine.

Contents of the books were supposedly channeled by a voice claiming to be Jesus Christ, Smith said. Channeling is the New Age term for people receiving direct messages from spiritual entities.

Though the voice claimed to be Jesus, the course "is a radical denial of every basic biblical teaching," Smith said. The contradiction may not be immediately evident, though, because the material uses words familiar to Christians.

The title is a prime example. Christians think of miracles as a personal God acting beyond natural circumstances or explanation, Smith said.

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To students of this New Age philosophy, however, miracles are "changes in your understanding of reality," Smith said. The New Age Encyclopedia says The Course defines miracles as "shifts in perception which allow people to relinquish illusions." Such illusions include believing in the reality of time and space, sin, pain, death and illness.

"The primary focus (of A Course in Miracles) is that what you see is not real and you can change your own reality," Smith said. "The past and the future are not important. Only the present as you create it by your thoughts is important. Only what is pleasant is real."

A Course in Miracles teaches that people can save themselves and heal themselves by changing the way they think, Smith said.

According to the course, sin is not a transgression against God, Smith said. Instead, it teaches that sin is allowing anything negative to happen.

Atonement is refusing to accept evil as real, and God is something each person can become, consequently people can have or do anything they want, according to A Course in Miracles.

Southern Baptists can best deal with such teachings by equipping people to understand theological errors, Smith said. Yet he warned that churches should not study New Age material itself.

Instead, pastors and church leaders need to teach biblical principles about the nature of reality, God, humanity and the created order, Smith said. Christians also need to clearly understand the biblical meaning of words such as love, sin and forgiveness and recognize that New Age material often attaches different meanings to the words.

For more information about New Age movements, contact the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department at (404) 898-7468. Other resources for study of New Age movements include the January 1993 study material for adult Discipleship Training produced by the Baptist Sunday School Board and a book titled "Meeting the World: Ministering Cross Culturally" offered by Woman's Missionary Union.

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Texas dentist takes bite
from Donahue sponsor list

By Tim Tune

Baptist Press
11/24/92

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--While a prime-time television audience joined celebrities to honor Phil Donahue's 25 years as America's premier talk-show host, a Texas dentist tuned in "just out of curiosity."

Curiosity may have motivated Richard Neill to watch the recent NBC special -- but a much more intense interest in The Phil Donahue Show's daily content launched him on a crusade to let America know what is regular fare one of the top-rated syndicated daytime shows in TV markets across the country.

Neill, a Southern Baptist layman, considers many of the topics Donahue discusses unsuitable for 300,000-plus children a day who watch the show, according to the A.C. Nielsen ratings service.

He has circulated a petition in the Dallas-Forth area to have the show moved from its morning time slot to a late-night time when children won't have such wide access to it. But the petition has been generally ignored by the manager of Dallas television station WFAA, said Neill, who lives in Fort Worth.

When the petition effort failed, Neill began approaching Donahue sponsors asking them to withdraw support. He has persuaded 112 sponsors, including numerous national advertisers, to quit buying time on the program.

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Among those who have withdrawn nationwide advertising are Albertson's grocers, Baskin-Robbins ice cream, Circuit City consumer electronics stores, Dole fruit packers, Dr Pepper soft-drink bottlers, Hancock Fabrics, Hillshire Farms meat pack rs, Jenny Craig weight-loss centers, Keebler snack foods, Kmart department st res, Luzianne tea, Nestle foods, Orkin pest control, Rainbo bakeries, Sara Lee bakeries, S.C. Johnson household products, Star-Kist tuna and Wendy's hamburgers. Despite losing some major advertisers, America's original talk-show host seems as strong as ever.

Neill expected those who appeared on the TV tribute "... to make (Donahue) out to be a great guy -- and they did" But Neill didn't anticipate seeing on prime time what he's come to expect from the daily show.

"They came out with all this outrageous stuff," Neill said.

The last half of the program, which showed clips from years of Donahue tel casts, "was totally sleazy," Neill said. "One five-minute segment was nothing but strippers," he said. There were also clips from programs about homosexual marriages and group sex. Another clip showed two naked people discussing nudity while they sat in front of Donahue's studio audience. Portions of the nudists' bodies were blacked out for TV viewers.

"I really didn't think that on a prime-time show they would have that," Neill said, "but they did."

Moreover, Neill said, "... it was pretty representative of what people can see every day on the show."

Before beginning his campaign, Neill didn't watch The Phil Donahue Show, but for years he had noticed spots for the program that included sound bites from discussions with homosexuals and transvestites. When he saw the spots, he said, he asked himself: "What's the world coming to?"

Once he had his own children -- three now -- Neill said, "I realized how vulnerable kids are to outside influences." He said the Donahue spots eventually became the last straw.

"Before I ever started anything, I did a lot of research," Neill said. He began his research in last April, working with transcripts dating back to December 1991. In May 1992, he started recording all the shows.

"I wanted to make sure that I wasn't misquoting anyone, that I was fair to them," Neill said. His wife continues to monitor the show and records the daily telecasts.

During his research he began circulating his petition to churches and he also "sat down with some people who had done this before. We set a goal to have four sponsors pull out by the end of the summer," he said. "We thought that was as realistic a goal as we could set."

Neill's first contact with a sponsor -- a local eye surgeon -- was successful.

"I thought the first one would be hostile and upset but he wasn't," Neill said. "He was very supportive." He started with sponsors who buy time only for ads to be shown in Dallas-Fort Worth because "I could sit down with them easily," he said.

After he had contacted several other local advertisers, he began contacting national sponsors -- those who buy time on Donahue telecasts for ads to be shown coast to coast. Generally, he contacts the national sponsors by registered letter. "Sometimes it takes six or eight letters," he said, but many respond on the first letter.

In his letters and presentations to advertisers, Neill offers several pages describing the content of daily Donahue programs. His transcripts document such content as penile transplants, masturbation, mother-daughter stripper teams and spouse-swapping orgies. He also gives executives a 22-minute video showing clips of some of the programs.

"Most of these executives are family people -- they don't have any idea what they're advertising on," he said. "When they hear who is supporting me," he said, "they're eager to pull out."

One of Neill's most notable supporters is Christian psychologist and author James Dobson, who learned of Neill's campaign by a fluke.

Once Neill had some success with advertisers, he got the attention of the president of Multimedia Entertainment, the company that produces The Phil Donahue Show. Neill said Robert L. Turner, Multimedia president, apparently knew of Dobson's influential reputation in the Christian community and Turner wrote Dobson, asking the Christian family expert to "do something" about Neill's campaign. Of course, Neill said, Turner's appeal backfired.

Instead, Dobson invited Neill to appear on his national radio show, Focus on the Family, aired on more than 1,300 stations. Neill's story also was reported in the Dobson organization's magazine, with a circulation of 2 million, and radio news show Family News in Focus. He also has been a guest on the radio show Point of View, which originates in Dallas and is carried on 250 stations nationwide. The Voice, a publication of Concerned Women for America, whose president is Beverly LaHaye, had a feature on Neill in the October edition.

His media exposure has had an impact on sponsors, Neill said. He said once he names a company on the air or in print, they usually respond. "When they find out that their name is going to be associated with this stuff (Donahue's content), most of them are very polite and they withdraw and they agree that it is trash," he said.

In his appearances and when he talks about his campaign, Neill encourages others who are concerned to get involved.

"This is something anyone can do. It's a cookbook thing," he said. "I'd like for people to start this in other cities and towns." Neill has a packet of materials to help those who want to get involved. "I've got everything they need," he said. Those who want his materials can write him at P.O. Box 330128, Fort Worth, TX 76163.

He also encouraged concerned people to write letters to sponsors who haven't yet withdrawn support from Donahue and is circulating a list of four sponsors that have been particularly reluctant -- Procter & Gamble, Pillsbury, Nutri/System Weight Loss Centers and Hasbro.

The formula he is following "will work in every case," Neill said. But, he continued, "... you have to stick to it, you have to learn to love the word no -- from people you try to recruit (and) the sponsors."

The nos have had some influence on him, Neill admitted.

"It's an emotional drain," he said. "Real early on I got rejections from huge companies. I got real discouraged."

At one point, he said, "I was ready to hang it up. I told my wife we need to pray about this because I don't want to do this anymore." But "about two hours later," Neill said, "we got a letter from Dr Pepper saying they would drop."

"I have to remind myself that if I continue to pray the Lord will do things I never dreamed," Neill said.

"If I turn it over to him it will work; if I don't, it won't."

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Christian journalists tell
of life in secular world

By Terry Mattingly

Baptist Press
11/24/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--The room was full of journalists, so, naturally there were stories to tell.

But first they bowed their heads and prayed.

The first National Conference of Christian Journalists wasn't organized by the Religious Right and religious broadcaster Pat Robertson didn't pop out of a cake during the closing banquet. The one-day event drew about 70 mainline Protestants, Catholics and evangelicals to the National Cathedral's College of Preachers.

Many applications were sent back, due to lack of room.

Famous foreign correspondents had stories to tell, but so did rookie reporters.

Talking about religion and journalism -- let alone praying about these subjects -- would certainly disturb many journalists, said Terry Anderson, former Associated Press correspondent held hostage for nearly seven years in Lebanon. Many Christians clearly feel out of place in the cynical atmosphere of the newsroom, he said.

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In his own case, Anderson said, he never felt much tension between his faith and his work -- primarily because his renewed commitment to Catholicism came shortly before he was kidnapped. He read his Bible from cover to cover 50 times while in captivity.

"I interpret this very strange attitude the (journalists) have toward committed Christians ... not as antagonism, but as nervousness," said Anderson, the keynote speaker. "I don't think many non-Christians, and even some Christians, are very comfortable dealing with the idea of Christianity and journalism. ... They just don't know what to do with it. Americans in general don't like to talk about religion, at least not on a very personal level."

Others shared their views in private prayer meetings or in open seminars. Many stories were painful. Christian journalists often report intense feelings of loneliness.

One reporter said she is criticized when she seeks balanced coverage of hot moral issues, such as homosexual rights. After these clashes, she visits the empty desks of editors and prays for them. If no one is looking, she makes the sign of the cross as a blessing.

Another participant said a few co-workers tried to have him removed from his job, claiming his pleas for even-handed coverage of abortion proved he was tainted with "pro-life bias."

A TV news producer said she was stunned by the drugs, alcoholism and sexual politics she saw in her first newsroom. During her second day, she fled to the bathroom and got sick.

It would be wrong to say all newsrooms resemble Sodom and Gomorrah. But surveys show journalists make up one of America's most secular packs of professionals. For example, 70 percent of the public claims membership in a religious group and 40 percent say they attend services once a week. Meanwhile, 50 percent of the journalists in one survey wrote "none" in the space for religion, and 86 percent say they seldom or never attend services of any kind.

"Anyone who says there are no atheists in foxholes have never been in a newsroom," said David Aikman of Time magazine.

Conference organizers were determined to offer fellowship and sound advice, not just another round of reports about the prejudices of the "media elite."

Several speakers said many journalists also feel like strangers in their churches because they are committed to open debate on controversial issues. Often, religious leaders would like to replace reporting that bashes churches with a different brand of biased reporting -- one that sets out to bash secular groups.

Today Christian journalists may have a unique role to play, said Aikman. They may be the only people who are talking to people on both sides of our nation's "culture wars."

Christian journalists need to "find a balance between what it means to be a good journalist and what it means to be a good Christian," said Anderson. "That isn't going to be easy. ... Christians are people who truly believe, while so many journalists claim that they don't believe anything."

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Used by permission from Scripps Howard News Service. Mattingly teaches media and popular culture at Denver Seminary.

Tennesseeans list differences
with Clinton on moral issues

Baptist Press
11/24/92

GATLINBURG, Tenn. (BP)--Tennessee Baptists have asked President-elect Bill Clinton and Vice President-elect Al Gore to "prayerfully reconsider" their stances on abortion and homosexual rights.

Nearly 2,300 messengers registered for the Tennessee Baptist Convention's 118th annual session Nov. 17-18 in the Gatlinburg Convention Center, where the message to Clinton and Gore was approved with minimal opposition on a show of hands.

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The resolution, to be mailed to Clinton and Gore, described abortion as "unquestionably contrary to Biblical teachings regarding the sanctity of life" and "a national tragedy of unspeakable proportions."

Opposing special civil rights status for homosexuals, the resolution said it is "another critical moral issue of the national political agenda and is a practice and lifestyle that is glorified and justified in the secular media" -- yet the Bible "is very clear in its teaching that homosexuality is a manifestation of a depraved nature."

The resolution called for Tennessee Baptists to "pray diligently for the decisions and leadership" of the nation's incoming top two leaders.

It also praised the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission for leadership in areas of moral concern.

After a ballot for convention president among three nominees, Leonard Markham, pastor of Bluegrass Baptist Church in Hendersonville, defeated Jerry Sutton, pastor of Nashville's Two Rivers Baptist Church, in a runoff.

John Holland, pastor of Knoxville's Salem Baptist Church, was elected first vice president in a runoff after an initial ballot with three nominees; Marvin Cameron, pastor of Gatlinburg's First Baptist Church, second vice president in a runoff after an initial ballot with five nominees.

Messengers approved a 1993 budget of nearly \$27.2 million, a 4 percent decrease over the current year's budget which had been increased to equalize funding for the state's three Baptist colleges.

The same allocations of Cooperative Program receipts will be in force during the coming year's budget, 62.5 percent for Tennessee Baptist causes, 37.5 for missions and ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

In another finance matter, messengers approved a 35 percent cut in funding, down to \$328,000, for the Harrison-Chilhowee Academy, a 94-student Baptist high school in Seymour.

In other actions, messengers:

-- approved a resolution opposing any effort to create a state-run lottery, urging Tennessee's political leaders "to work for responsible financial policies which provide for the general welfare rather than exploiting the misery of citizens in economic stress"

-- approved the creation of a nine-member committee to study the method of electing members of the convention's Committee on Committees and Committee on Boards. The committee was named by outgoing TBC President Ron Phillips of Chattanooga.

Next year's meeting will be Nov. 16-17 at Nashville's Two Rivers Baptist Church.

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Wm. Fletcher Allen and Lonnie Wilkey contributed to this report.

New York Baptists
focus on missions

By Quentin Lockwood Jr.

Baptist Press
11/24/92

ALBANY, N.Y. (BP)--The 23rd annual session of the Baptist Convention of New York culminated a year-long missions emphasis with the adoption of the "Albany Declaration" in a "Missions Fest" setting sponsored by the Foreign Mission Board.

The annual session followed simultaneous world mission conferences held in a majority of the churches during October. The theme for the convention was "A New Day for Missions Advance" and focused on the words of William Carey, "Expect great things; attempt great things." This year is the 200th anniversary of the modern missionary movement inspired by Carey.

In other business, the convention received a \$20,000 gift from the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina and authorized a campaign to raise a Great Commission endowment reserve fund during the Nov. 5-7 meeting at a Holiday Inn in Albany.

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The "Albany Declaration," proposed by R. Quinn Pugh, executive director of the Baptist Convention of New York, highlighted six areas: every Baptist, a missionary; every Baptist congregation, a missionary fellowship; every Baptist church member, a missionary in training; every Baptist meeting house, a missionary outpost; every Baptist ministry, a missionary outreach; and every Baptist budget, a cooperative missions budget.

In the president's address, Larry Brown challenged the convention to set a goal for the "Albany Declaration" of 800 churches and church-type missions by the year 2000 in the Baptist Convention of New York. The convention currently has 350 churches and church-type missions. The convention enthusiastically adopted the "Albany Declaration" in a resolution.

Harlan Spurgeon, vice president for mission personnel at the SBC Foreign Mission Board, preached at the missions rally that attracted more than 350 people. A number of decisions were made during the service. Some longtime convention participants said the missions rally was the highest moment they had ever experienced at an annual session.

Roy Smith, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, presented the Baptist Convention of New York a check for \$20,000 for Baptist work in New York. The North Carolina and New York conventions are entering the third year of partnership, and churches and individuals from the two conventions have cooperated together on a number of projects.

Larry Pridmore, pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Whitehall, was elected president of the convention by a narrow margin over Charles Long, pastor of Somerset Hills Baptist Church in Basking Ridge, N.J.

Elected first vice president, in a ballot with two other nominees, was Jean Meredith, a layperson from the Buffalo area, and second vice president, in a ballot with one other nominee, Florence Hui, a layperson from New York City. Steve Blake, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Kingston, was elected recording secretary by acclamation.

The 1993 budget of \$2,687,091 adopted by the convention is a 5.7 percent increase over the 1992 budget. The percentage of budget going to the Cooperative Program was increased 0.25 percent to 26 percent. Included in the budget was a raise of 2.5 percent for staff, the first increase in two years.

In other action, the convention authorized the development of a Great Commission endowment reserve with a goal of \$500,000 by 1994. The first priority will be to eliminate the indebtedness on the convention's Center for Missions and Ministry headquarters in Syracuse. The remaining funds will be invested with the Baptist Convention of New York Foundation with the use of annual earnings to be determined by the convention or the executive board.

Alton and Fairy Harpe were recognized for 22 years of service at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Harpe is director of the Baptist Student Union at West Point and also has been pastor of the West Point Baptist Church the past six years. Mrs. Harpe has served in the ministry at West Point as well as WMU president for the Baptist Convention of New York for two years. The Harpes will retire in December and move to Phenix City, Ala.

The convention received a spontaneous offering of \$1,632 to provide for the quipping of a vehicle to be used in emergency relief by the Baptist Men's organization.

The 1993 annual meeting will be Nov. 4-5 at a yet-to-be-determined site in the southern tier area of New York.

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Baptist leaders encourage
Baptists in former USSR

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
11/24/92

MOSCOW (BP)--Baptist leaders from the United States and Europe offered encouragement to Baptists in the former Soviet Union during Nov. 8-14 Congress of the Union of Evangelical Christians Baptists.

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Karl-Heinz Walter, general secretary for the European Baptist Federation and regional secretary for the Baptist World Alliance, announced he had secured EBF financial support -- two years' salary -- for 40 new home missionaries.

"We in the EBF are aware you need help," Walter said. "We want to support your missionaries to new places.

"Freedom means you are free to serve the whole world," Walter said, adding, "The Baptist family of the world is inviting you to come to other places and preach the message from your experience."

Sam James, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, told the union, "The commitment of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) is to walk with you. ... We have never tried to bring from outside any more than you need."

James described Baptists of the Commonwealth of Independent States as "among the most praying people on earth."

"We need to come to you and learn what it is to live in the Lord Jesus Christ," James said. "While we want to share our missionaries ... (and) many U.S. Baptists want to come here to share in the witness of the gospel ... we also want to learn from you."

Keith Parker, director of mission for Europe for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, spoke of partnership with the UECB especially in home missions and in sending missionaries from the former Soviet Union to Albania.

Saying, "You have been through the fire and the world cannot put out the fire of Christ," BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz said top Soviet leaders had repented of what they had done to the church and "now your governments need help."

"What will you do with your freedom?" Lotz asked. "God has put you through the fire so that the fire of his love will shine all through the commonwealth."

Walter, in a reference to the rise of Neo-Nazism in his country, told the congress, "I am deeply ashamed about my country of Germany.

"I dream of a day, maybe in 1993, when Baptists in Europe will unite in a day of fasting and prayer and decide to take one concrete step for reconciliation to raise our voices before God and the world for peace," Walter said.

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Baptists in former Soviet Union
ask prayer for violent conflicts

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press
11/24/92

MOSCOW (BP)--Baptists in the former Soviet Union have called on Baptists in their countries and around the world to pray for an end to conflicts in their countries by Christmas.

Baptists who attended the second Congress of the Union of Evangelical Christians Baptists (UECB) Nov. 8-14, many from some of the deadliest areas of conflict, approved an appeal to be sent to their churches asking them to observe Sunday, Dec. 6, as a special day of prayer.

They also gave the UECB their approval to send a letter to the heads of governments and their parliaments asking them to work to end the various conflicts.

"Dozens of our people are now dying," said Alexi Bichkov, UECB vice president for education and communication.

Bichkov made the appeal for prayer after Baptist delegations from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Tadzhikistan were tearfully prayed for by Baptist leaders from Estonia, Latvia, Russia and the Ukraine.

"It is a miracle that we are here among you," said one Baptist from Georgia.

A Baptist woman from Kazakhstan told how she braved shooting at her bus to get out to the congress.

"We need a spiritual transformation," prayed Alexander Firisuk, UECB vice president for administration and finance. "This society can only be built by born-again persons."

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**Baptist work growing
in former Soviet Union**

By Wendy Ryan

MOSCOW (BP)--Baptist work in the former Soviet Union continues to grow in spite of economic and social upheaval and lack of resources, according to reports presented during the second Congress of the Union of Evangelical Christians Baptists, Nov. 8-14, in Moscow.

In the Ukraine, some 100 new churches have been opened since the congress last met in 1990, said Jakob Dukhonchenko, president of the Ukraine Baptist Union.

Some 100 Ukrainian missionaries are preaching the gospel and starting new churches in the republic, Dukhonchenko reported.

He also reported Ukrainian Baptists have purchased one hectare of land (approximately two and a half acres) to build a Bible school.

Prison ministry was also growing, Dukhonchenko said, and Ukrainian Baptists are now planning to build a rehabilitation center.

In Russia, 216 new churches have been established, reported Vasily Logvinenko, president of the Russian Baptist Union.

Among other things, Logvinenko listed 31 missionaries trained in the last six months and sent with other believers to organize churches; growing prison ministry; a radio program twice a week; TV evangelism for unbelievers; 170 students in correspondence courses; organized women's, children's and youth work.

Ivan Bugati, superintendent of the Baptist churches of Byelorussia, reported a growing prison ministry in the republic. "Earlier we were sent to prison forcibly," Bugati said. "Now we work where our mothers and fathers died."

Boris Serin, superintendent of Baptist churches in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tadjikistan, spoke of the difficulties Baptists face in these heavily Muslim areas.

"This is Muslim territory," Serin said, "nevertheless believers continue to serve."

Four new churches have been opened in the Asian region and there is a growing prison ministry with several prisoners on death row waiting to be baptized, Serin said.

The situation in Tadjikistan is especially "horrible," he noted.

He told of 30 church members, 50-70 years old, who want to be relocated but, while they can go to the rural areas, there is no food, fresh water or electricity. It is also dangerous, because lack of food has caused authorities to release dangerous criminals from prison.

Serin appealed for food to help these believers.

Serin also appealed for a missionary to Uzbekistan, where emigration to Germany has hurt Baptist churches. "We have a flat (apartment) there; we just need a missionary," Serin said.

UECB President Gregory Kommendant said Baptists in the former Soviet Union are struggling to keep up with the rapid changes in their republics.

"We have to move with the circumstances," Kommendant said. "The pace has changed so rapidly that our very conservative, slow-moving union has had to set aside certain standard procedures and run with the events or be left behind. Our principles are unchanged but our methods have changed."

While Kommendant and other UECB leaders are looking to the West for help, they are equally concerned that Baptists in the former Soviet Union provide most of the resources they need for their ministries and needs.

But financial contributions from Baptists have decreased because of the economy, Kommendant said.

"People are poorer. Now there are more opportunities," he said. However, Baptists are now learning to give. "We were not taught to sacrifice because we did not need money," Kommendant said.

In seminary education plans, the UECB has purchased approximately five and a half acres of land in Moscow to build another seminary to train pastors, in addition to the seminary now operating in Odessa. Plans also are under way in St. Petersburg for a Baptist academy with help from Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif.

Additionally, more than 1,000 students in UECB churches are enrolled in Bible correspondence courses in several Bible institutes.

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Want a Bible for Christmas?
Study to get the right one

By Mark Wingfield

Baptist Press
11/24/92

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Christmas shoppers, beware: buying a Bible may not be as easy as it sounds.

In fact, gift-wrapping it may present fewer choices than selecting just the right translation and format.

Would you like the King James version or New International Version? Genuine leather-bound or bonded leather? A children's Bible with pictures or a reference Bible with charts, maps and cross-references? A "regular" Bible or a specialty Bible with specific applications for mothers, fathers, singles, youth, students or recovering addicts? A printed Bible or one on computer disk or audio tape?

Standing in the Bible section of a bookstore, the choices seem almost endless.

Ben Williams has been selling Bibles at the Baptist Book Store in Louisville, Ky., for 12 years and, during that time, has seen a revolution in the product line.

"When I first started, you had a choice of King James, Scofield Reference or Thompson Chain Reference," he recalled. "Those were the major choices."

Contemporary translations like the New International Version and New American Standard were just beginning to gain in popularity at the time. And specialty Bibles with applications to specific people groups were all but unheard of.

At the Baptist Book Store's previous location in downtown Louisville, the Bible section took up about one-third the space it occupies in the newer store on Hurstbourne Avenue. Now, Bibles of all colors, sizes and editions fill a 30-foot section of floor-to-ceiling shelves at the store.

"Most of the annotated Bibles are the ones selling now," Williams reported. "The footnotes make it a lot easier to understand."

Annotated Bibles include a variety of styles and translations, but generally feature extensive footnotes and biblical references that expound upon the text, as well as cross-referenced background information.

The expanding Bible market coincides with changing buying patterns among consumers, Williams said. Many Christians now own more than one Bible -- perhaps one to take to church and another to use for intensive Bible study at home, he explained.

Also, more churchgoers are taking notes during Bible study and worship sessions, Williams said, prompting a need for wider margins or Bible accessories.

Across the aisle from the bookstore's long Bible shelf is a stack of Bible covers in quilted and denim designs, with pockets for pens and notepads.

The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Holman Bible division even produces a "Notetaker Bible" which features a notepad and pen holder as part of the Bible's leather cover. The "Notetaker" comes in left-handed and right-handed editions.

Among Bible translations, the most popular choice nationwide is the New International Version, Williams said. The King James Version is second, with the New American Standard and New King James Version vying for third.

The Living Bible, which rose to popularity in the 1970s, is not as popular today, but still sells, he said.

Once the buyer decides what translation to purchase, he or she still faces a decision about what type of Bible is appropriate. "Each translation probably has 15 to 20 styles or models," Williams said.

These styles can be broken down into at least four broad categories:

-- Standard Bibles are the plain, no-frills Bibles. They sometimes include maps, limited footnoting and perhaps a brief concordance.

-- Study Bibles might be called those with "the works." They usually include extensive footnoting and cross-references, maps, charts, historical background information and sometimes character sketches of biblical figures and authors.

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-- Application Bibles are targeted to specific groups such as women, men, professionals, families, students, recovering addicts or people facing grief. Interspersed amid the biblical text are practical applications of the truths taught there. For example, the Holman Family Bible includes helps for family devotionals and activities related to certain passages.

-- Children's Bibles now come with multiple options as well, ranging from what Williams calls "kiddie Bibles" with easy-to-read translations and bright pictures to the Adventure Bible, a study Bible for children.

A fifth category currently gaining in popularity is the computerized Bible. An expanding line of products are available that offer the entire Bible on disk for a personal computer, as well as quick access to concordances and cross-references.

Several companies produce hand-held electronic Bibles, about the size of a portable Nintendo game. These units allow users to search for a passage by verse number or subject and even allow for the addition of personal notes into the database.

However, computerized convenience has a price. The hand-held electronic Bibles sell for about \$200 -- roughly five times the price of a plain leather-bound Bible.

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Doctrine, age among factors
involved in Bible purchases

Baptist Press
11/24/92

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--How should a shopper select a Bible as a gift from among the 7,000 versions and 15 translations available?

Ben Williams, Bible salesman at the Baptist Book Store in Louisville, Ky., suggests considering these factors:

-- The person. Different people have different needs in a Bible, he said. For example, a pastor or Sunday school teacher might want the added features of a study Bible, while a new Christian might want something easier to handle.

-- Reading level. While a King James study Bible might be appropriate for someone with good reading skills, a simpler translation, such as the New Century Bible, might be better for someone who struggles with reading.

-- Doctrine. Most Bibles with study materials emphasize some doctrinal perspective. Other Bibles, such as the Full Life Study Bible for charismatics, are designed specifically for certain faith groups. Williams said he often asks Bible shoppers about their church affiliations to help them find translations that will most likely complement the preaching of their pastors.

-- Age. This could be a factor in selecting a translation, as older adults are more likely to want a translation they are familiar with while younger adults might be interested in some of the newer translations. The youngest readers, meanwhile, might do best with one of several Bibles especially for children.

-- Binding. Bibles come in a variety of covers -- most frequently genuine leather, bonded leather, hardback or paperback -- and a variety of colors. Women generally are more concerned than men about color, Williams noted, and often want something for Sunday use that won't clash with their wardrobes. Genuine leather is the top-of-the-line choice, made as Williams noted "from the parts of the animal that don't sleep on the ground." Bonded leather also comes from animal skins, but is composed of various skin parts compacted together.

-- Price. For a good leather-bound Bible, plan to spend a minimum of \$40-\$50, Williams said. Prices for study Bibles and application Bibles range from there to about \$125.

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