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Rankin writes missionaries,
calls election 'a miracle'

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
6/25/93

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--In a letter to nearly 4,000 missionaries around the world, the new president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board called his June 14 election by board trustees "a miracle."

"With all that has been happening in the Southern Baptist Convention as well as a sequence of discouraging developments related to the Foreign Mission Board, few of us would dare hope that a new president would be selected, not only from within the staff, but even from off the field!" wrote Jerry A. Rankin, the veteran Asia missionary and mission administrator elected president.

"I am grateful for the many people who had confidence enough in me to recommend me to the search committee," Rankin said, adding in a humorous acknowledgment of the difficult job ahead: "I'm still not sure if they were friends or enemies!"

In his first full week in office, Rankin also met several times with Foreign Mission Board staff to get acquainted, share views, answer questions and assure them of his focus on a worldwide missions agenda. He told them he plans no immediate restructuring of the staff or organization and foresees no additional staff "downsizing" in the near future. In May the board eliminated 37 jobs, or 8 percent of its 450 home office positions, because of downturns in financial support.

He praised staff members for "staying with the task and sticking by the stuff" during demoralizing times.

Rankin was elected June 14 by a 59-14 vote in a called trustee meeting in Houston, despite opposition by some trustees and SBC leaders because of his openness to the continuing operation of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit outlined in the New Testament. Trustee Paul Pressler of Texas, who voted against Rankin in the previous roll call vote, successfully moved that the vote be made unanimous "in the spirit of harmony."

Now Rankin faces the task of restoring full confidence and support for an agency shaken by repeated differences between trustees and some staff and missionaries over mission philosophy and administration.

Rankin said it would be "premature" to project changes in mission strategy before consulting trustees, FMB staff and missionaries. But he listed three "general areas of personal concern and vision" in his letter:

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(1) A need to "move back toward field-generated strategies. We have such a great diversity in history, culture, responsiveness and maturity of Baptist work throughout the world; local missions and area staff should have more ownership in planning and methodologies."

Earlier, he told Baptist Press he would seek to find "balance" between the heavily field-oriented approach under the 26-year presidency of Baker James Cauthen and the more centralized strategy during the 13-year presidency of his predecessor, R. Keith Parks.

(2) Continue "and even enhance" efforts to reach World A -- a quarter of the globe that has had little or no chance to hear the Christian gospel. "But we should also concentrate on reaping the harvest that God has ripened on fields that are open and responsive."

(3) Provide "channels for Southern Baptist churches in the U.S. to be involved in missions overseas. They represent tremendous potential and resources, and we are an SBC agency to serve our churches. This will be a challenge and will take some restructuring, but God will give us wisdom and his kingdom will be extended as we work together in unity."

Glarifying his third point, Rankin told Baptist Press that although the board has been a continuing channel for Southern Baptists to serve overseas, he feels it must broaden that channel.

"We've had too narrow a strategy to utilize people other than career missionaries and International Service Corps personnel," he said. "We've missed opportunities for tapping extensive resources and manpower in Southern Baptist churches that could help us impact a lost world. We must broaden strategies to mobilize the vast resources available directly from our churches, associations, state conventions, agencies and other organizations."

Rankin's nomination by the trustee search committee surprised and delighted many missionaries who had appealed for an experienced missionary as their new leader, but had expected the naming of a more prominent convention leader to the board presidency.

In his letter to the missionaries, Rankin admitted he never expected to be nominated, even after meeting with the search committee.

"I felt the initial interviews were simply opportunities God had given me to share some insights and convictions with the committee," he wrote. "I was reticent to meet with them later in the process, but recognizing that all of you and thousands of others were praying for them, I felt compelled to respond to their sense of God's leadership. It was obvious that nothing would come of my involvement with them except through God's control. The unanimous recommendation was evidence of His intervention.

"I feel that having served with you for 23 years as a missionary and field administrator will enable me to identify with you and the struggles and challenges you face. I trust my selection will restore hope and confidence in our trustees and give us a renewed vision that God has a purpose for us as Southern Baptists."

Rankin praised Executive Vice President Don Kammerdiener for his "superb leadership" as interim president after Parks retired last October, earlier than he had planned. He said he is excited that Kammerdiener, a 30-year veteran of foreign missions, has agreed to continue as Executive Vice President, a post he has held since 1989.

He cited encouraging statistics from the mission fields for 1992, such as more than 250,000 baptisms and 1,600 churches started by Baptists associated with Southern Baptist missionaries, and noted an upturn in candidates for career and short-term missions.

"Although there has been a downturn in finances, the final report on the 1992 Lottie Moon offering was the second highest in history -- \$80,980,881," he reported.

"That's encouraging, and I'm convinced Southern Baptists will have renewed confidence in the FMB and will provide the support we need."

Consultant shares steps for
guiding youth to sexual purity By Chip Alford

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Making wise sexual choices is the path to perfect love, participants in a June 23 seminar at Glorieta Baptist Conference Center were told.

"Perfect love is not flawless, but it is God-guided, others-centered, lasting, and committed," Chuck Gartman, a youth ministry consultant at the Baptist Sunday School Board told youth Sunday School workers attending his seminar, "Decision Making for Youth in a World of Sexual Pressure." The seminar was held during the Church Growth-Sunday School Leadership Conference at Glorieta.

Gartman used an acronym to describe the steps necessary to guide youth to resist sexual temptation and remain sexually pure until marriage.

"L" is for loving youth unconditionally.

"O" is for offering resources such as your time and attention, as well as books and Bible studies that focus on sexuality from a Christian perspective.

"V" is for valuing God's ways. If adults don't value God's ways in their own lives, they will have a hard time communicating His truths and standards to teenagers.

"E" is for equipping youth with the "whys" and "hows" and not just the "whats." In other words, don't just give teenagers information about the physical aspect of sex, but explain to them why they should abstain and how they can experience the perfect love of Christ.

Referring to the Baptist Sunday School Board's recently released Christian sex education resources for children, youth and parents and the BSSB-sponsored sexual abstinence campaign "True Love Waits," Gartman said he is glad Southern Baptists are beginning to talk about sexuality.

"We've talked a lot about abortion, but we haven't talked much about why teenagers are getting pregnant," he said, adding the new resources offer an excellent opportunity for dialog on the subject.

"All of us have difficulty dealing with this issue, whether it is talking with our own teenagers about sex or youth in our church," Gartman said. "There are no easy answers, but there is a good answer -- valuing God's ways."

Gartman suggested parents and/or youth Sunday school workers check out the following resources to learn more about how to teach teenagers about the biblical view of sexuality:

-- "Sex, What's That," by Susan Lanford, for preadolescents; "Sexuality: God's Gift" by Ann Cannon, for adolescents; and "Christian Sex Education: Parents and Church Leader's Guide." All three resources are part of the BSSB's Christian sex education series.

-- "Ministry with Youth in Crisis," compiled by Richard Ross and Judi Hayes.

-- "Ministry with Youth and Their Parents," compiled by Richard Ross and G. Wade Rowatt, Jr.

-- "Youth Sunday School Workers Notebook: Breakthrough."

-- "Living With Teenagers," a BSSB magazine which sometimes includes articles on sexuality.

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Church starter specialist offers
reminders to volunteers in Russia

Baptist Press
6/25/93

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--People planning mission trips to Russia should remember that Christianity is not new to the former Soviet Union, said a Southern Baptist church starting specialist.

Christians have been in Russia more than 1,000 years, and Baptists have been there more than 100 years, said Charles Chaney, Home Mission Board vice president for church extension.

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Chaney spent two weeks in Moscow earlier this summer in a partnership program between Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Baptist Union of Russia. He shared church-starting strategies with pastors as part of a training institute for Russian Baptists.

Ten of his 50 students had been in prison for their faith during past oppression from the state church or the communist regime, Chaney said. All of his students were bivocational church leaders who spent their vacation time at the training institute.

"Who am I to talk to them about dedication to Christ, commitment or willingness to go the second mile?" he asked. Christians traveling to the former Soviet Union need to realize the commitment level of Russian Christians may be considerably above that of American Christians, he said.

Russian Christians may resist foreigners promoting evangelism without discipleship, he added. American Christians need to be as helpful in follow-up as they are in evangelism, Chaney said.

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Russian Baptists, Southern Seminary
open theological school in Moscow By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
6/25/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The Evangelical Baptist Union of Russia recently began its first endeavor into theological education at a school jointly sponsored by the union and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

A total of 59 students enrolled during May and June at Moscow Theological Institute, where they took courses in church planting, evangelism and New Testament. The classes were taught at the Baptist union's headquarters by a Southern faculty member and two other Southern Baptist professors enlisted by the Louisville, Ky., seminary.

"I thought (the first courses) were extremely effective," said David S. Dockery, dean of the school of theology at Southern. "Over and over students said they learned more in these two weeks than in all other Christian education experiences combined."

Dockery's faculty colleagues in Moscow were Charles Chaney, vice president for extension at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, and Ron Johnson, director of the evangelism department of the Georgia Baptist Convention.

"I've never been in a place where people were more eager to hear the Word of God," said Dockery, who taught New Testament in Moscow. Chaney and Johnson taught courses in church planting and evangelism, respectively.

The Moscow school will offer two-weeks of intensive training twice a year. Those who complete all courses offered over a three-year period will receive a certificate from Southern Seminary. Most classes will be taught by Southern Seminary faculty members or other professors recruited by the seminary.

Students in the school's first courses ranged in age from 19 to 45 and included professional people, tradesmen and factory workers, said Dockery. While most students had been converted since Perestrioka in 1987, some had suffered severe persecution for their faith prior to the loosening of restrictions on religious practice, said Dockery.

Much of the spiritual fervor that initially swept the nation after the collapse of communism is still alive, Dockery said, adding, however, that churches are in desperate need of trained leadership to sustain new believers, "There's still an openness to the gospel, but the novelty of Christianity is wearing off," he said. "The photo sessions are over and it's time for education, training and hard work to help churches grow."

The devotion of the Russian students was evident both inside and outside the classroom, Dockery said, noting that after class students and professors went into the Moscow streets to share the gospel.

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Dockery stressed that the two weeks in Moscow helped expand his own understanding of the Christian faith. "I taught them some things about the New Testament, but they taught me some things about faith and discipleship," he said.

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Upcoming Parliament expected
to influence American religions By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press
6/25/93

ATLANTA (BP)--An international conference on world religions this summer in Chicago is likely to increase America's interest and acceptance of other religions, predicts Maurice Smith, associate director of the HMB interfaith witness department.

The Parliament of the World's Religions, Aug. 28 to Sept. 6, is an indication of the increasing plurality of religions, Smith says. Southern Baptists are not sponsoring the meeting, but it should remind Southern Baptists to be prepared to witness to people of other religions and to people who believe all religions are equally valid, Smith says.

The international meeting will mark the 100th anniversary of the World Parliament of Religions, which was also held in Chicago. Observers at that time called the meeting "perhaps the most important religious gathering which has ever assembled" and the beginning of a "new era in the evolution of religious life for the world."

This year's meeting will "offer a wide range of opportunities for interfaith dialogue, understanding, cooperation and experience," according to Parliament organizers. The nine-day program will include presentations by leaders of various religions and special interest groups on topics such as the monastic life, sacred music and art and religion and medicine.

The meeting's more than 125 co-sponsors range from the Chicago Association of Reform Rabbis to the Institute for Muslim Minority Affairs and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Although the 1893 Parliament was primarily planned by Christian denominations in America, representatives of other groups attended and gained credence for their religions, Smith says. The 1893 Parliament contributed to America's acceptance of Hinduism, Buddhism and Shintoism as well as Theosophy, which serves as a background for many New Age teachings, Smith says.

Similar consequences can be expected from this year's Parliament, Smith suggests. He expects the Parliament to:

- Encourage the popularity of religious relativism -- the idea that all religions are valid and all religious viewpoints have merit. Some leaders teach that all religious paths lead to the same end.

- Give visibility and wider public acceptance to groups such as the Unification Church, Unitarian-Universalists and American expressions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Sikhism.

- Stimulate an increased interest in scholarly study of religions, first in universities and private secondary schools and later in public secondary schools.

- Quicken the resolve of minority groups such as Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists to receive more acknowledgement and more benefits in government programs, public schools, prison systems and military services.

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Flynn hearing held;
groups criticize haste

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
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WASHINGTON (BP)--The Senate Foreign Relations Committee recently heard testimony by Boston Mayor Raymond Flynn on his appointment as ambassador to the Vatican, but some opponents of diplomatic relations with the Holy See criticized the committee's hurried handling of the nomination.

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The committee is scheduled to vote on Flynn's nomination June 29. The full Senate may consider the appointment before the July 4 recess. In its hearing on Flynn, the committee heard only the Boston mayor and the two senators from Massachusetts. The June 23 hearing followed the committee's formal reception of the nomination by only six days.

"Obviously, the administration and the committee wanted to forestall any potential for a serious campaign of opposition to Flynn," said James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Therefore, they rushed it through in the way that they did.

"Our position is that this is a matter of significant constitutional question" which deserves more careful consideration, Smith said.

"We are deeply disappointed that the committee has chosen to move full steam ahead to continue the official relationship between the United States government and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, in a prepared statement.

"We are sorry the committee has ignored the wide range of criticism from religious and civil liberties groups about the dangers inherent in such a relationship."

After the hearing, Flynn, who is a Catholic, told reporters former President Ronald Reagan, who appointed the first ambassador to the Holy See in 1984, accurately "saw that the Vatican [is] a sovereign state, a separate country" and has an important position in the world.

Clinton also understood the "unique role" of the Vatican and how important it is to have diplomatic relations with it, Flynn said.

The hearing followed by a week a resolution adopted by messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention reaffirming their opposition to diplomatic ties with the Vatican.

"One has to wonder what could have been if the religious left had truly been engaged in this matter," the CLC's Smith said. "It would seem that Bill Clinton got a free ride from the religious left, and that's unfortunate. ... by the religious left, I mean mainline protestants and others who aggressively opposed Ronald Reagan's nomination in 1984, who were absent in this battle."

Reagan appointed the first ambassador to the Vatican. George Bush continued the policy while he was president.

In letters to Clinton in December, the CLC and Americans United both called the Vatican ambassadorship a violation of church-state separation and asked him to reverse the policy. The National Association of Evangelicals did as well. In February, the CLC, NAE and three other groups, Church of the Brethren, Presbyterian Church of the USA and Seventh-day Adventist Church mailed a similar letter to the president. Clinton is a Southern Baptist.

A coalition of groups announced at the hearing its opposition to Flynn because of his pro-life views, not because of a church-state problem. Among the 27 groups were Catholics for a Free Choice, Planned Parenthood, National Organization for Women and National Abortion Federation.

In presenting Flynn, Sen. John Kerry, D.-Mass., called the job a "perfect fit" for Flynn and described the mayor's concern for the poor and needy as at the "center of the teaching of the Holy See."

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D.-Mass., who also introduced Flynn, said he would be an "extraordinary representative for the American people."

He is eager to work on "these critical issues of human suffering," Flynn told the committee, "wherever the U.S. and the Holy See can work shoulder to shoulder to alleviate hunger, dislocation and disease; to eliminate racism and religious discrimination, and to restore hope and basic human rights to the world's most oppressed peoples."

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