

**(BP)**

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

**-- BAPTIST PRESS**  
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

**NATIONAL OFFICE**

SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8919  
CompuServe ID# 70420,17

**BUREAUS**

ATLANTA Martin King, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232  
NASHVILLE 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

July 21, 1993

93-118

MOSCOW -- Russian Orthodox ploy to curb freedom meets Western opposition.  
NASHVILLE -- Inaccurate reports cause confusion over availability of Cothen book.  
WASHINGTON -- Baptist young people need help to attend BWA meeting in Africa.  
NASHVILLE -- Herschel Hobbs honored for 25 years of commentary writing; photo.  
DALLAS -- Texas pastor Pleitz announces retirement.  
KENTUCKY -- Missionary's walk in the park yielding fruitful ministry.

Russian Orthodox ploy to curb  
freedom meets Western opposition By Marty Croll

Baptist Press  
7/21/93

MOSCOW (BP)--A Russian Orthodox ploy to backpeddle from bold advances in religious freedom has brought forth a resounding shout of opposition from human rights groups on both sides of the Atlantic.

A measure awaiting President Boris Yeltsin's approval would give the government new authority to say what religions can legally operate on Russian soil. It would also ban foreigners from mission work in Russia without special accreditation, unless they are attached to a registered religion.

Passed by Parliament July 14, the measure is a backlash against the proliferation of groups from the West sharing a wide range of beliefs in Russia. It amends the 1990 law on religious freedom that swept away seven decades of repression under communists.

Americans -- and Baptists in particular -- are prominent among foreigners working to spread the gospel among the people of Russia.

Many in Moscow believe the only hope to keep Yeltsin from signing the bill is for President Bill Clinton or former President Jimmy Carter to intervene by contacting Yeltsin, said Norman Lytle, chairman of the organization of Southern Baptist representatives in Russia.

"The greater majority ... feel (that with) the pressure of the Orthodox leadership and Yeltsin's need of their support ... that he will probably be inclined to sign," said Lytle. Knowing Western reaction could sway him, supporters were urging Yeltsin the day after its passage to return home from vacation and sign the bill before international reaction hit.

Clinton, defending his economic package and stance on homosexuals in the military, referred the matter to his National Security Council July 19, according to a White House source. Carter was in Canada and unavailable for comment.

The Baptist World Alliance, a coalition of world Baptist bodies, has launched an offensive against the law, including a letter from General Secretary Denton Lotz to Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexei asking him to reconsider his support for the measure.

"In the long run this amendment will be counterproductive because it goes against the spirit of the Gospels and against human desire of all people to have religious freedom without indoctrination or hindrance from the State," Lotz wrote. "Can we really return to the 19th century state church mentality where only one church controls the religious life of the people?"

--more--

Lotz told Patriarch Alexei the common experiences of state treachery and evil shared by both the Orthodox and Baptists had given Baptists a respect for the Orthodox. "We pray the feeling is mutual," he said.

The law finds strong backing from Patriarch Alexei and from hardliners left over from communist days. It was introduced under the leadership of Vyacheslav Polosin, an Orthodox priest and chairman of Parliament's Committee on Freedom of Conscience.

Some Baptists in Russia say the Orthodox Church restricted religious freedom even more oppressively than the communist regime that succeeded it in 1917. Since the fall of communism, evangelicals have feared the return of Orthodox domination in politics.

"I'm not surprised at the attempt by the Orthodox Church to do this," said Richard Land, executive director of Southern Baptists' Christian Life Commission. "But I'm a little surprised at the timing, while Russia is trying to get Western aid. There's nothing the Russian government could do to more clearly undercut support from Americans than limit human rights and freedom of conscience."

The Christian Life Commission monitors religious liberty issues worldwide in cooperation with the Foreign Mission Board. In a July 19 letter to Yeltsin, Land strongly protested passage of the law. "Evangelicals have been among the strongest supporters of the tremendous reforms and liberties ... in your country in recent years," he wrote.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board released a similar statement July 20. "This law might seem to be pointed at foreign citizens, but it equally threatens Russians ... ideologically or organizationally connected with fellow foreign believers," said Don Kammerdiener, executive vice president. Newly elected President Jerry Rankin was traveling outside the country and unavailable for comment.

Kammerdiener oversaw deployment of missionaries and other personnel into republics of the former Soviet Union during a recent stint as interim president. The organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in Russia -- now numbering about 20 -- has received "legal person" status, clearing the way to buy and sell property, hire people and bring supplies into the country.

"We're praying he (Yeltsin) will discern that religious liberty is at stake," said Kammerdiener, who has written to Yeltsin and Clinton. "These amendments are actually a step back toward the totalitarian control of the communist era. There are still strong forces in Russia that would like to see complete state control of religion."

"This law is a flagrant violation against norms of international law," said James E. Wood Jr., president of the International Academy for Freedom of Religion and Belief, and director of church-state studies for Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

In March, Wood and the Russian parliamentary committee that later authored the law co-sponsored an international conference in Moscow on religious freedom. Without dissent, conferees adopted a statement urging efforts to bring national laws in line with international norms and agreeing all religions should work to foster religious liberty on the basis of mutual equality, he said.

"The July 14 action taken by the Russian Parliament came as a great surprise," Wood said. "The law is substantially more oppressive than the draft that was under consideration in March or anything we could have anticipated in light of our conference. I'm trying to determine how this thing happened."

Wood will ask the U.S. government to review its decision to send money to Russia in light of this law, which, he says, discriminates against Americans.

"We've got to do something to get Russia back on track and out of this 18th- or 19th-century mentality," he said.

Also opposing the law is the U.S. delegation of the Helsinki Commission, a joint committee of representatives from the U.S. Congress and the executive branch that monitors implementation of the Helsinki accords. Among other things, the Helsinki accords guarantee the exchange of beliefs across international boundaries. Russians have supported such efforts since 1976.

Communication from the U.S. commission could have an intensified impact because of a friendship between Yeltsin and U.S. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D.-Md.), co-chairman of the commission.

"It would be a great embarrassment to the nation and a reversal of their public pledges if Russia were to back away from the agreements," said James Dunn, who worked with Russian leaders to encourage approval of the accords.

Dunn is executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a religious liberty agency in Washington supported by 10 national Baptist bodies, state Baptist conventions and individual donors including some Southern Baptists.

In a July 14 fax to Mikhail Mityukov, chairman of the committee for state legislation in Parliament, Dunn warned: "Should these severe measures be taken, authentic religious pluralism would be denied, the goals of the Helsinki accords ... violated and advances ... for religious liberty ... reversed."

In another letter to Mityukov, the Europe-based International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty (IADRL) declared: "An article that would prohibit or limit foreign citizens living in Russia to manifest their religions would be considered as a form of intolerance and of discrimination."

The letter was signed by the group's president, Edwin Ludescher, and the secretary general, Gianfranco Rossi. "If such an article were adopted, IADRL would not hesitate to denounce it with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the Council of Europe," it said. The association holds consultative roles with the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe.

European Baptist leader Karl-Heinz Walter said the law limits the freedom of any non-Orthodox group working in Russia. "The Russian government would again have the power to control religion, much as the government of the former U.S.S.R. did," said Walter, general secretary of the European Baptist Federation and regional secretary for Europe for the Baptist World Alliance.

Since an April meeting between Yeltsin and Russian religious leaders, newspapers throughout Russia have accused Baptists with originating the idea of restricting missionary activity in the nation. They have also widely espoused Orthodox leaders' rationale in supporting restrictions.

Russian writer James Krolav, in analyzing the development of the amendments, said Orthodox leaders teamed with journalists using tactics of old to discredit foreign missionaries.

"The mechanism of bolshevistic propoganda still works," he wrote. "Its results are in the wide newspaper drive against foreign missions. Bolsheviks during their campaigns against religion always used a simple method: to write about the worst sects as typical representatives of religion."

Vasile Logvinenko, president of Russian Baptists, said press reports quoting him as supporting the law were "a deception," twisting his misgivings about the wide range of ideologies coming into Russia. He failed in repeated attempts to be heard on the committee that adopted the new law, he said. "We made a number of statements before it was passed, through our representative in Preparatory Committee, but they did not take any notice of it."

--30--

Inaccurate reports cause confusion  
over availability of Cothen book

Baptist Press  
7/21/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--An inaccurate article published by an Alabama newspaper has been perpetuated by some Baptist and para-church news media, causing confusion for Baptist Book Store customers.

A book by a former Baptist Sunday School Board president, Grady Cothen, centering on the controversy among Southern Baptists since 1979, can be ordered through the BSSB's 63 bookstores, noted Charles Wilson, vice president for trade and retail markets, countering reports to the contrary in other media.

--more--

Not all Baptist Book Stores have copies of Cothen's book in stock, Wilson said, because of varying interest levels in the volume, which was released earlier this year.

"In many stores we have had no inquiries about the book," Wilson said, "but in any Baptist Book Store, we will be glad to order it for those who request it."

An article by William C. Singleton III, published in the May 13 issue of the Birmingham (Ala.) Post-Herald, indicated Cothen's book -- "What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention? A Memoir on the Controversy" -- "might not make Baptist Book Store shelves." The assessment was part of an article about Cothen, BSSB president from 1975 until his 1984 retirement, who was interviewed during the annual meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

In a statement faxed to Singleton on the afternoon of May 13, Wilson said the Cothen book was available in the Birmingham Baptist Book Store on May 13 and would be available through the chain's other stores.

"Baptist Book Stores received a review copy of 'What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention' by Grady C. Cothen on Tuesday, May 11," Wilson's statement read. "We expedited the review process because of the approaching meeting of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in Birmingham. The book is available in the Birmingham store today and will be available through other Baptist Book Stores."

The faxed message was confirmed with Singleton by a representative of the board's communications department, but a correction was not published by the Post-Herald.

Two weeks later, Associated Baptist Press reprinted Singleton's article. ABP editor Greg Warner promised a correction when he was notified on May 27 that the report was in error. A correction was never issued by the news service.

Wilson said plans had called for offering the book at the Southern Baptist Convention in Houston in the store the chain provides during annual SBC meeting, but the book's publisher, Smyth & Helwys, was unable to provide copies.

Immediately after the convention, inaccurate information about availability of the book resurfaced. A June 19 editorial by R.G. Puckett in the Biblical Recorder, journal of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, included a discussion of Cothen's book. Puckett wrote, "It remains to be seen whether the book will be available through the Baptist Book Stores . . . ."

In the June 29 issue of Baptists Today, an independent newspaper, editor Jack Harwell wrote, " . . . as this issue of Baptists Today went to press, Smyth & Helwys was trying to get Baptist Book Stores to stock the book on their shelves because of Cothen's long-time affiliation with the BSSB. But no marketing decision had been made in Nashville yet."

Harwell told a BSSB communications representative he would correct the error in a subsequent issue, admitting he had not talked with anyone at the board about the book's availability in its stores.

--30--

Baptist young people need help  
to attend BWA meeting in Africa

By Wendy Ryan

Baptist Press  
7/21/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--A call for help has been issued by the Baptist World Alliance youth department asking Baptists around the world to help send young people to the 12th Baptist Youth Conference Aug. 11-15 in Harare, Zimbabwe.

"We still need \$30,000 more for the youth scholarship fund to help most of the delegates from Africa and non-Western countries," said Paul Montacute, BWA youth department director.

Much of the fund will go to provide food and housing for the five-day conference, Montacute said, and \$50 will cover such costs for one young person.

Five hundred dollars will help subsidize airfare for those who can raise some funds and \$1,000 will match the average grant now being given.

--more--

Montacute added he is particularly concerned about young Baptists from Africa for whom the cost of transportation from their countries to Zimbabwe is as much or even greater than the costs of delegates traveling from other parts of the world.

"This is the first time a worldwide Baptist youth meeting is being held in Africa and we want to encourage our people there," Montacute said.

"Already we have helped Baptist leaders from India, the Dominican Republic, war-torn Liberia and Mozambique but the cries for help have far exceeded our money.

"We know that many young Baptists will arrive in Harare with no money and we will need to provide this," Montacute said.

Baptists who want to help should send contributions to the Youth Department, Baptist World Alliance, 6733 Curran Street, McLean, VA 22101-6005.

--30--

Herschel Hobbs honored for  
25 years of commentary writing

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press  
7/21/93

NASHVILLE (BP)--Time and discipline.

Those are two things a good writer can't do without, Herschel Hobbs told a group of editors gathered for an informal dialogue session July 19 at the Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville.

Hobbs, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City, should know. Even after writing more than 150 books and a quarter of a century's worth of Sunday school commentaries, the 85-year-old author and speaker continues to find time to put pen to paper.

Two or three times a night he gets out of bed to exercise his legs. But while he's up, he also takes 15 to 20 minutes to work on one of two or three manuscripts he always has laying on top of his desk.

"I think God's given me a gift of writing. It's nothing to brag about. Any quality or gift that you have, God gave it to you," said Hobbs, regarded by many as one of the few remaining Baptist statesmen.

Hobbs was honored July 20 at a special chapel service at the Sunday School Board for completing 25 years as author of "Studying Adult Life and Work Lessons," a quarterly commentary on lessons from the Life and Work curriculum series.

Hobbs began writing the lesson commentaries in 1968 after Sunday school teachers at his church complained other study helps provided by the BSSB were "too simple."

Determined to provide a useful, challenging study help, he gave an expository treatment of each focal passage in the Life and Work lessons. He introduced the materials, examined background material, clarified the central teaching of the passage and discussed applying lesson truths to everyday life -- the same format he uses today.

The success of the commentary was phenomenal. Soon other churches in his association got wind of it and began requesting copies, followed by numerous churches across the country.

"Pretty soon we were mimeographing it and sending it to more than 250 churches, including First Baptist, Dallas, and First Baptist, Nashville," Hobbs remembered.

The Sunday School Board, which earlier had granted permission for Hobbs to write the commentary, later suggested the publication might represent a "conflict of interest" and suggested Hobbs cease distribution outside his church. He did so, informing churches on his mailing list of the reasons for his decision.

"I think the Sunday School Board got quite a bit of mean mail," Hobbs said, laughing. He was soon asked by then BSSB President James L. Sullivan to write the commentary as a quarterly board publication, and he has done so ever since.

In the last quarter century, Hobbs has gone through the Bible five times with his commentaries. But he insists the work never becomes boring.

"I see something new every time I go through it," he said.

--more--

Southern Baptists aren't tiring of his wisdom. The commentaries are more successful today than ever before, selling about 94,000 copies each quarter.

Hobbs has no plans to stop writing; he's currently working on the lesson commentaries for 1995. He won't use a word processor, insisting on writing out everything by hand.

"I refuse to use anything that knows more than I do," he said, explaining his aversion to computers.

"Just how much I've written for the Sunday School Board I couldn't begin to tell you," said Hobbs, a frequent contributor to "Open Windows," the board's daily devotional guide, and author of numerous books for Broadman & Holman Publishers and Convention Press. "One thing I can tell you; it's been a joy and a privilege."

Hobbs said he believes the Baptist Sunday School Board still provides the best quality Sunday school literature on the market.

"I've said all along we have the greatest body of Sunday school literature that ever existed. I still think so.

"The Sunday School Board is the difference between the Southern Baptist Convention being just a so-so denomination and what I believe is a super denomination," he said.

In a short sermon preached during the special chapel service, Hobbs challenged board employees to walk worthy of their calling.

"The one indisputable thing we have in our work is our character. . . . If we are not what we claim to be, the world will know it even before we do," he said.

--30--

(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the BSSB bureau of Baptist Press.

Texas pastor Pleitz  
announces retirement

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press  
7/21/93

DALLAS (BP)--Texas Baptist minister James L. Pleitz, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas, announced to the church's deacons July 19 his intention to retire with his last Sunday in the pulpit being Sept. 26.

Pleitz, 64, formally will announce his retirement plans to the 8,400-member north Dallas congregation during worship services July 25.

"Park Cities has been a beautiful climax to my active pastorate," Pleitz said. "Park Cities is a strategic church filled with many gifted people who have responded positively. I've just tried to be a shepherd to the people."

During his 15-plus years at Park Cities, total membership grew by more than 3,200 and the church's annual budget to \$5.6 million.

Currently, Park Cities is the 20th largest church in the Southern Baptist Convention, 10th largest in the Baptist General Convention of Texas and third largest Baptist church in Dallas.

Prior to accepting the Park Cities pulpit, Pleitz served some 18 years as pastor of First Baptist Church in Pensacola, Fla. Previous pastorates include churches in Fort Smith and Bentonville, Ark.

Pleitz's denominational service included a term as chairman of the SBC Executive Committee, 1968-69; chairman of the SBC Cooperative Program Study Committee, 1981-83; and president of the board of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, 1972-73.

He was elected president of the Florida Baptist Convention in 1971-72, was president of the Southern Baptist Pastors' Conference in 1974-75, and preached the annual convention sermon at the 1983 Southern Baptist Convention in Pittsburgh.

"The denomination has been good to me," Pleitz said.

And under Pleitz's leadership, observers note, Park Cities Baptist Church has been very good to the denomination.

In total missions giving to causes beyond the local church, Park Cities ranked second only to First Baptist Church in Midland, Texas, in the SBC, according to Roger Hall, treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

--more--

"Our church is very missions-minded," Pleitz said. "Our people have a world view."

Pleitz is a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

--30--

Missionary's walk in the park  
yielding fruitful ministry

By Melanie Childers

Baptist Press  
7/21/93

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Ministering to people is like a walk in the park for Michael Bowling.

As pastor/director of a new mobile home ministry in Louisville, Ky., Bowling knows building personal relationships with people often makes a greater impact on their lives than preaching to them.

Sometimes a walk through the Holiday Mobile Home Park helps him do just that.

"Job description: be available," he said, emphasizing flexibility and innovation as requirements for his work.

And you can't do that if you don't live among the people, he added. "You have to be one of them."

Bowling said he believes "the single key factor" to his success in the ministry is he and his family live in a mobile home at the park with the other residents.

Bowling said his work started simply, after the family moved into the park in August 1992.

Bowling and his wife, Beth, opened their home so neighborhood children would have a place to play; they delivered Christmas cards to the 300 families in the park; Bowling took the children sledding; and whenever an emergency vehicle entered the park, he, too, went out to help.

Gradually, Bowling said, his rapport with residents grew and the needs they brought to him became more pressing.

He was asked to counsel troubled teen-agers and families in crises. He found volunteers to donate food and clothing for a family whose mobile home burned. He ministered to a woman terminally ill with cancer.

The ministry resulted from a Southern Baptist Home Mission Board survey which targeted the park as a place where a ministry was needed.

The Louisville-area Long Run Baptist Association made a financial commitment and took initial steps toward beginning the work. Associational leaders asked local churches for further support.

"Our church was looking for someplace to get involved in local missions work," said pastor Dallas Vincent of Ormsby Heights Baptist Church in Louisville. Ormsby Heights committed to support the ministry and began looking for a "non-traditional person" to fill the "non-traditional need," Vincent said.

Bowling, a student at Boyce Bible School and a former HMB church planter in Kalamazoo, Mich., seemed the perfect choice.

"He knows how to relate to all kinds of people," Vincent said. "And he has the wherewithal to get to the source" when a need arises.

Vincent, too, had the wherewithal to get the ministry off the ground, Bowling added. In one day, members of Ormsby Heights pledged adequate funds to purchase a large mobile home for Bowling's family.

Ormsby Heights now is the leading sponsor of the mobile home ministry. Several other churches, in addition to HMB funds, also offer financial support and guidance, Vincent said.

While admitting neither he nor leaders at Ormsby Heights had a well-developed vision for how the ministry should materialize, Bowling said both parties agreed an overtly evangelistic approach was not the answer.

--more--

"We tried holding Bible studies in homes, but they weren't very effective," he explained. "It's foreign and threatening" to non-churched people.

Bowling said building relationships and being a friend to residents in the park was more effective.

Soon after Bowling began directing the mobile home ministry, he also was asked to preach at Minor's Lane Baptist Church, which is almost directly across the street from the mobile home park, Bowling said.

After serving as interim pastor for several months, Bowling was called to Minor's Lane as pastor last February.

"It's been a real good marriage between Minor's Lane and mobile home ministries," Bowling said. "Both of them complement each other."

Minor's Lane Baptist Church has "grown tremendously in every area" in the last year, he continued. For example, Vacation Bible School was held for the first time in three years, the church's day care has been reopened and the building no longer is in disrepair. Attendance at the church currently averages 80-100 people.

Still, Bowling said, the mobile home ministry meets some needs a church can't meet through traditional means.

That may mean giving someone a ride to the welfare office and sitting with them all day. Once it involved co-signing a lease with a family that had been unemployed and living in a car.

And sometimes, he said, it means experiencing the joy of leading someone to make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Bowling said 16 people from the park have made decisions for Christ in the last year. Also, about 35 people from the park have begun attending Minor's Lane Baptist Church since last August.

Bowling said he is pleased with the progress at Holiday Mobile Home Park, but that doesn't change his strategy. "I'm just trying to be available to fill in the gaps and meet the needs."

HOUSE MAIL



**BAPTIST PRESS**

901 Commerce #750  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

So. Baptist Library & Archives  
901 Commerce  
Nashville, TN 37203

HOUSE MAIL