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-- 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, CompuServe 70420,250
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232, CompuServe 70420,115
NASHVILLE Linda Lawson, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300, CompuServe 70420,57
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151, CompuServe 70420,72
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223, CompuServe 71173,316

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**Ambassador signs treaty;
opponents mount campaign**

By Tom Strode

**Baptist Press
2/17/95**

WASHINGTON (BP)--The United States ambassador to the United Nations recently signed the U.N Convention on the Rights of the Child, and opponents quickly attempted to halt its progress with a telephone campaign aimed at the Senate.

Ambassador Madeleine Albright signed the treaty Feb. 16, six days after First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton announced the United States would endorse it. By the time Albright signed it, some home-schooling and pro-family organizations already had launched an opposition campaign aiming to shut down the Senate's switchboards.

While treaty supporters have said it is needed to protect children, some critics have charged the treaty's effect would be to damage the parent-child relationship.

After signing the convention, Albright said its intention is to end the "many abuses committed against children around the world." The treaty's goal is the "opportunity for all children to enjoy adequate living conditions, to have access to education and health care, and to be free from exploitation and abuse," she said in prepared comments.

Michael Whitehead of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission said the language might be "stretched by activist lawyers to expand government power over families."

"This treaty tries to do far, far more than just protect children from sexual and other abuse," said Whitehead, the CLC's general counsel. "It enumerates broad, sweeping rights which a child might assert against outsiders or against his own parents.

"Nothing in the history and purpose of the U.N. qualifies it to teach the world how to raise children."

In a written statement, the Home School Legal Defense Association said the treaty "would give the United Nations control over a significant portion of the domestic policy of the U.S. regarding families, parents and children. No amendments or reservations can salvage this treaty."

The White House plans to attach "reservations and understandings" to the treaty before sending it to the Senate for ratification.

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Whitehead said, however, the convention "states that any attempt by a party to make reservations will be invalid." Reservations are equivalent to unilateral amendments, he said.

The Home School Legal Defense Association has led the attempt to blitz the Senate with phone calls. HSLDA has communicated its concerns not only within its own network but by way of national Christian radio shows and news reports.

A receptionist for Sen. Jesse Helms, R.-N.C., said the office had received "an overwhelming number" of calls on the treaty. Helms is chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, which will consider the convention when it is submitted to the Senate. A spokesperson for Sen. Claiborne Pell, D.-R.I., said she did not have a numerical estimate but his office had received numerous calls on the issue each day of the week.

Albright expressed gratitude for four senators' support of the treaty: Bill Bradley, D.-N.J.; Mark Hatfield, R.-Ore.; Patrick Leahy, D.-Vt.; and Richard Lugar, R.-Ind.

Approval by the Foreign Relations Committee is questionable, largely because Helms is an opponent of the treaty.

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Two Pakistani Christians sentenced to death

Baptist Press
2/17/95

LAHORE, Pakistan (BP)--Pakistani Christians Rehmat Masih and his 14-year-old nephew, Salamat Masih, have been sentenced to death by hanging for allegedly blaspheming Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

The sentence, announced Feb. 9 by Judge Muhammed Mujahid Hussain after a three-day trial in Lahore, Pakistan, has touched off a furor.

Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who supports a more moderate form of Islamic law, said the sentence "surprised, shocked and saddened" her. Her public statement infuriated hard-line Muslim clerics, who filed contempt charges against her Feb. 15 for criticizing the court ruling.

Militant Muslims rioted outside the Lahore High Court the next day in an attempt to disrupt an appeal of the death sentence by the Christians' lawyer, Asma Jehangir, Pakistan's most prominent champion of human rights. Protesters jeered her, smashed her car windows and attacked her driver after threatening the two judges hearing the appeal.

Both Christians were found guilty of blasphemy against Muhammad, an offense which carries a mandatory death sentence under Islamic law adopted several years ago in Pakistan. But the death sentence has never been carried out. A similar sentence against another Christian was overturned last year.

Lawyers for the defendants were shocked at the decision, given the dubious quality of evidence, said a worker with the International Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity, a London-based watchdog group that surveys treatment of Christians in Islamic countries.

The two were accused of writing derogatory statements about Muhammad on a wall in Lahore and throwing pieces of paper with insulting words written on them into a Muslim mosque. But witnesses against them reportedly have contradicted each other repeatedly. Further, Salamat Masih, who was only 11 years old at the time of the supposed crime, is said to be illiterate.

A third Christian defendant in the case, Manzoor Masih, was murdered by Islamic extremists last April 5 as the three left the High Court in Lahore, where they had been granted bail. One of the two suspects in the killing is the same Muslim cleric who filed the original charges against the three.

Rehmat Masih and Salamat Masih remain in prison, awaiting the outcome of the appeal on their behalf to Pakistan's High Court. Pakistani Christians prayed and fasted for them Feb. 12 and were planning to do so again Feb. 22.

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Several foreign governments and the human rights group Amnesty International have called for the release of the two and a change in the law. Prime Minister Bhutto, who will visit the United States in April, is trying to improve Pakistan's human rights record, but faces powerful opposition from Muslim extremists.

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Rankin: Foreign missions results
suggest return of Christ imminent

By Dwayne Hastings

Baptist Press
2/17/95

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--While noting Scripture reveals it is not for man to know the time or the season for Christ's return, Jerry Rankin said it is a distinct possibility those living today could be the end-time generation who will see the bodily return of Christ.

Saying he has never gotten caught up in speculating about the time of Christ's return, Rankin, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, said he has become "awesomely" aware of a missiological eschatology that may signal the approaching end time.

"Jesus said the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a witness to all nations and then the end will come," Rankin told FMB trustees and students at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Feb. 14.

"As we move toward the year 2000, every mission organization has been caught up in the prospect of fulfilling the Great Commission and that prophecy of Jesus by the close of the century."

While there is the subtle suggestion Christ might return as calendars click over to a new century, Rankin said he did not believe God was so enamored of the arbitrary digits of the Roman calendar to act on man's time.

Whether it is the year 2000 or sometime in the 21st century, "there is every indication we are moving toward the fulfillment of that prophecy and the culmination of the kingdom," Rankin insisted in remarks at the Wake Forest, N.C., school.

The FMB has sent out more than 12,000 missionaries in its 150-year-old history, with over half of those going out in the last 20 years, Rankin said. Just two years ago, the FMB surpassed a quarter of a million baptisms for the first time and this year, he said, the count has passed 300,000 baptisms -- a 50 percent increase in just the last year.

"There is no barrier that can stand against God's purpose for the gospel to be proclaimed to every tribe and people and tongue," Rankin said, noting you can count on one hand the countries that remain closed to missionary witness.

He said at the end of 1994, 554 SBC missionaries had been deployed to previously unreached people groups, with 147 churches started among peoples who until recently had never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Careful not to claim credit for these missiological advances, Rankin said the progress is not necessarily the result of sound FMB strategy and committed missionaries. "I see reflected the prophecy of Haggai that says God will shake the heavens and the earth, overthrow the powers of kingdoms and destroy the thrones of nations so that his purposes might be fulfilled," Rankin said.

He pointed to the state of Southern Baptist foreign mission work as an example of God moving in providence and power. "He is calling us to be a part of that generation that would have the privilege of being the one who sees every nation touched by the gospel," he said.

"If we will submit our lives in humility and weakness to be empowered by the Lord, compelled by a vision to reach the nations, determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified," Rankin said, "it could be that we would live to see the kingdom of God, the lamb of God, coming in power and glory."

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Texas Baptists challenged
to 'do good' in public square

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (BP)--Christians could learn most effectively how to "do good in the public square" by community involvement through their local congregations if they were just given the chance, according to the keynote speaker at a Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission conference.

"Doing Good in the Public Square" was the theme of the annual statewide conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, Feb. 13-14 at First Baptist Church, Austin. Speakers examined the theme from historical, constitutional, congregational and public school perspectives.

"American political history and Baptist polity unite in identifying the local arena as the most foundational level at which to learn how to do good in the public square," said Bill Hull, provost for academic affairs, Samford University, Birmingham, Ala.

But many churches are hesitant to enter the public square because pastors are afraid of having the "social gospel" label hung on them, they were never trained in applied Christianity, they are under relentless pressure to meet their congregations' internal needs, and they are not rewarded for involvement in the community, he said.

"Pastors quickly learn that the way you make brownie points with pulpit committees is through membership growth, and the way you make brownie points with denominational leaders in a position to recommend you is through missions giving," he said. "The only thing most pastors ever get out of civic involvement is a plastic paperweight for speaking at Rotary."

Christians can recover public concern by fashioning a public theology for a public church that embodies the ministry of Jesus and fosters the concept of the church as debtor to its community, Hull said.

Churches need to learn how to build coalitions in the public square without compromising their relationship to God, according to Chris Hamlin, pastor of the historic Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Ala.

"If society is to change -- if Christians in general and Baptists in particular are to engage the world -- we much learn how to value partnerships," Hamlin said.

African-American Baptists particularly have been willing to build partnerships -- even with government -- when doing so advanced causes of social liberation and economic justice, he said. And in the coming years, these partnerships will become even more imperative.

"In order for a better, healthier and stronger America to emerge, it will become essential for government and the church -- and Baptists -- to enter partnerships of mutual respect," Hamlin said.

If the church wants to "do good in the public square," it must be left alone to carry out its mission. But increasingly, government entities and zoning boards are defining the church's mission for it, according to Doug Laycock, professor of law at the University of Texas, Austin.

If the rights of religious believers are to be protected, he stated, the rights of persons with whom Christians would disagree must also be defended.

It is time for Baptists to "do a little peacemaking" in the area of public education, saying "no" to the theocrats on the right and the secularists on the left and "yes" to those who are helping public schools deal with religious concerns in a proper and serious manner, according to Oliver "Buzz" Thomas, legal consultant with the National Council of Churches and also the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tenn.

"The public square in America is neither naked nor sacred. It is civil," said Thomas, former general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. "It is a place where all religions are welcome, but none is promoted by the state. The common vision for the common good is the vision we must pursue in our public schools."

The Baptist vision of Christian faith is at its best on the edge of exile and is compromised when it becomes too cozy with the establishment, according to Bill Leonard, chairman of Samford University's department of religion and philosophy.

As exiles from Massachusetts Bay Colony, Roger Williams and the early Baptists gave the New World a radical notion of religious liberty -- that faith cannot be compelled or nationalized. But as they grew to be the majority in the 19th century South, Baptists sought to legitimize slavery and discrimination against African Americans, Leonard said.

"What is the Baptist -- no, the gospel -- message for today? Beware of the majority and turn loose the gospel," he said.

Pointing out majoritarian religion banished Williams from Massachusetts, boarded up Baptist churches in Virginia and hanged a female Quaker preacher on Boston Commons, Leonard said, "Sometimes the religious majority has come out on the backside of grace. The will of the majority is not always the same as the will of the living God."

Southern Baptists in particular have developed an "establishment mentality" and lost much of their dissenting heritage, becoming more comfortable with the Puritan John Cotton than the seeker Roger Williams, Leonard said.

"We're always tempted to exchange radical faith for a mess of establishment pottage," he said. "At their best, Baptists have maintained a healthy suspicion of majority religion, ever living on the edge of exile."

America will never be a Christian nation in form and structure as long as constitutional liberties are protected, but it can be more Christian in its character as believers exercise their citizenship with integrity, according to Rosalie Beck, associate professor of religion, Baylor University, Waco.

Just as Jesus accepted the possibility of rejection and the limits of non-coercion, Beck said, Christians need to proclaim their view of truth while guarding the rights of others to reject it.

"America is a Christian nation as long as freedom to be an American does not contain within it the necessity of advocating a particular religious perspective or a certain interpretation of the Bible," Beck said. "It is a Christian nation if the people who responsibly accept that label live as Christ in the land."

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Gambling costs catastrophic,
economist tells lawmakers

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
2/17/95

AUSTIN, Texas (BP)--Gambling's social costs, if introduced throughout the United States, would equal one Hurricane Andrew or two great Midwest floods every year, according to economist Earl Grinols.

Grinols, who served as research economist for the Department of the Treasury and senior economist for the Council of Economic Advisors in the Reagan administration, was featured speaker at a legislator/constituents breakfast held during the annual statewide conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

More than 50 Texas lawmakers attended the breakfast at First Baptist Church, Austin.

Gambling costs at least \$100 to \$300 per adult each year in an area where gambling has been prevalent for three to five years, said Grinols, professor of economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. These social costs include regulation, lost productivity and direct crime costs such as apprehension, adjudication and incarceration.

Citing estimates by the American Insurance Institute, Grinols said 40 percent of all white collar crime has its roots in gambling, and \$1.3 billion annually in insurance fraud is due directly to gambling.

"That works out to a little bit more than \$10 per working person in the country each year," he said.

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States considering expanding forms of legalized gambling can learn from those states where gambling has been prevalent for an extended time, Grinols said. For example, Nevada has the nation's highest rate of suicides, drop-outs, child deaths by abuse and deaths per vehicle mile driven.

While most casinos are taxed at only the 20 percent rate, if they were fully taxed at the maximum rate of 40 percent of gross revenues, casino gambling still would cost \$2.25 to \$4.75 in social costs for every dollar raised, Grinols said.

Gambling can bring economic development only through the "beggar thy neighbor" practice of sucking money out of other regions if there is a nearby population base from which to draw, Grinols said. For instance, Las Vegas draws from southern California, Atlantic City draws from Philadelphia, and Tunica, Miss., draws from Memphis.

Noting the presence of major casinos in other states, he said it is "virtually certain" that legalization of casinos in Texas would not result in economic expansion or creation of jobs for the state.

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Attendance remains at zero
for fund-raising banquet

By Tim Nicholas

Baptist Press
2/17/95

BILOXI, Miss. (BP)--Just like last year, no one came.

"Another, Not Another Banquet" was the theme of the second annual banquet to raise summer ministry funds for Gulf Coast Community College, Biloxi Miss.

The event, designed by BSU director Tim Thomas, had to be moved to Jan. 14 because of scheduling conflicts during the Christmas season. Said Thomas, "There was simply too much going on during the Christmas season to guarantee a big response of non-attenders."

Among the guests -- all of whom paid not to attend -- were novelist John Grisham, concert pianist Phillip Fortenberry and motivational speaker Zig Ziglar. Ziglar was motivated to pay not to attend. Robin Roberts, sports anchor for ESPN, paid not to be master of ceremonies of the evening.

This year's banquet was slated to take place at Vrazel's, a Gulfport restaurant, whose chandeliers twinkled through lightly smoked windows on place settings for more than 100 guests who failed to attend the banquet.

But that doesn't mean they don't care. Nearly \$8,000 has been collected by students to date to go for local and world hunger relief projects.

This year's event began with 17 BSU student who studied hunger needs and completed a 30-hour fast to raise more than \$1,200. At their noonday luncheon they presented their first check for \$1,000 to East Howard Mission Center in Biloxi.

Last year's non-event gained recognition in newspapers and TV stations across the country including coverage by Peter Jennings on ABC news radio, Paul Harvey and CNN world news.

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Wife of former RTVC exec
dies in Fort Worth at 80

By C.C. Risenhoover

Baptist Press
2/17/95

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Norma Stevens, wife of former Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission President Paul Stevens, died Feb. 15 after an illness of several months.

The couple, who had been married for 57 years, have lived in Fort Worth, Texas, since 1955.

Interment will be at 10 a.m. Feb. 17 at Greenwood Memorial Park in Fort Worth, followed by a memorial service at Broadway Baptist Church, Fort Worth.

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Stevens, who was 80, was a native of Abbeville, La., and was secretary of Broadway's Felicia Class. Sh also had been a member of the Fort Worth Woman's Club and an Edna Gladney Home volunteer.

"Our prayers are for Paul, other family members and friends during this period of grief at having just lost a loved one," said Jack Johnson, president of the RTVC. "We rejoice in the fact that Norma has gone to be with the Lord she honored, trusted and faithfully served for so many years. As Christians, we both grieve at the loss of one who has contributed so much to God's kingdom and celebrate that she now has the ultimate reward of being with Jesus."

Richard T. McCartney, retired executive vice president of the RTVC who is now executive consultant to the commission and a longtime friend of the Stevens family, said, "Norma Stevens was a gracious lady. She was a good friend to the staff of the Radio and Television Commission and a faithful Christian and church member. We will miss her. Few people will ever know the many contributions she made to the ministry of Southern Baptists through the Radio and Television Commission."

Stevens is survived by her husband; sons Paul M. of San Diego, John Charles and Mark Len of Fort Worth; daughter Mary Margaret Stevens of Fort Worth; six grandchildren and one great-grandchild; and her brother, Frank Charles Stebbins.

The family has requested memorials be given to Broadway Baptist Church or the Radio and Television Commission.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Overseas baptisms top 300,000 for first time," dated 2/16/95, please make the following correction:

In the 27th paragraph the last name of missionary Larry Pritchett is misspelled "Pritchard" on second reference. Please correct it to read Pritchett.

Thanks,
Baptist Press

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