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Fellowship leaders deliver
check, promise to Ruschlikon

By Greg Warner

RUSCHLIKON, Switzerland (ABP) -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship delivered \$240,898 and a promise of continued help to the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland, Feb. 20.

The check, representing gifts to the embattled seminary from churches and individuals in the United States, was presented to Ruschlikon President John David Hopper by Fellowship moderator John Hewett.

Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., described the gift "as the first installment of what we expect to be an ongoing commitment from your brothers and sisters in the United States."

Although Hewett was not specific about the Fellowship's future relationship with the seminary, he and other Fellowship officials met privately for more than an hour with Hopper and other seminary personnel to discuss the school's needs and the possibility that the Fellowship could support some of the staff members currently paid by the FMB.

The Fellowship, an organization of moderate-conservative Southern Baptists, has been considering ways to help the international seminary since October, when trustees of the Foreign Mission Board cut all FMB funding for the school in a dispute over the theological direction of the seminary.

Trustees said the seminary, which was founded by the FMB in 1949 and deeded to the European Baptist Federation in 1989, is too expensive and not conservative enough for their liking.

Hewett, who led 50 people on a fact-finding tour of Ruschlikon and other mission sites in Germany and Switzerland Feb. 17-21, said the Fellowship group did not come to "investigate" the school's theology. "We are convinced without any doubt that you are God's people," he told an appreciative seminary chapel audience.

Hopper, a Southern Baptist missionary serving as seminary president, held back tears as he accepted the Fellowship check. "We appreciate this commitment to partnership because we need each other," he said. "It

represents lives. It represents scholarships, faculty salaries. It represents investment in the kingdom of God."

The decision by FMB trustees to defund Ruschlikon will cost the seminary \$365,000 for 1992 -- about 40 percent of its budget -- and an estimated \$3.1 million over the next 10 years, since FMB trustees had agreed to fund the school until 2003.

The decision also prompted the retirements of two top FMB administrators, raised questions about the tenure of FMB President Keith Parks, and sparked an international controversy that now poses a threat to Southern Baptist mission work in Europe.

Hopper told the visiting group the defunding decision "has brought the biggest crisis perhaps in history between the Foreign Mission Board and a major segment of Baptist life across the world."

Hopper said the Ruschlikon dispute signals a change in the missions philosophy of the Foreign Mission Board -- from a "partnership" with Baptist unions in Europe, many of which are older than the SBC, to an insistence that "the Southern Baptist way of doing things is the only way."

"For us, it's not the money," Hopper said. "The money can be replaced but not the trust on which everything else is built."

That loss of trust was evident in the words of Ruben Richards of South Africa, Ruschlikon's student body president, who thanked the Fellowship on behalf of students.

"You meet people who want to manipulate your thinking, who want to manipulate your life, and personally, as a black South African, that doesn't go down well," Richards said. "I'm sick and tired of being pushed around, especially by white people. Your presence here today, and your tangible gift, is an expression of your solidarity with us, and affirms that we are one in Christ."

Hewett, in a chapel sermon prior to presenting the check, tried to reassure Ruschlikon students and administrators.

"You have had a whole year of Baptists giving to you with one hand and reaching out with the other hand to take away -- changes of trust that make you question every commitment," Hewett said. "We understand what that feels like. We live with those Baptists too."

"We have not come to you today to give with one hand and take away with another. We have come to stand in solidarity with you and to say to you that there are brothers and sisters in Christ who when they say the word 'Ruschlikon' wholly thank God for who you are and what you are about."

Hewett told the seminary audience the purpose of the Fellowship trip was "not to come and investigate you or to find out what parts of the gospel you have missed or overlooked. We did not come to teach you how to be American Christians. We have simply come to hold your hand, to sing praises with you, and listen to you, and ask you to tell us about your journey in Jesus Christ so that we might learn what God is up to in your midst."

Four participants later said they were impressed with what they found at the seminary.

"Baptists back home don't know how crucial and central Ruschlikon is to Baptists in Europe," said Mike Jamison, a pastor from Greensboro, N.C.

The Ruschlikon seminary is small by Southern Baptist standards, with eight teachers and about 50 students on campus. Another 150 church leaders receive training each year through one of three short-term or off-campus institutes -- the Summer Institute for Theological Education, the International Baptist Lay Academy in Budapest, Hungary, and the Institute for Mission and Evangelism.

The seminary, which is staffed in part by FMB missionaries, offers a variety of degrees on the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as certificates for pre-bachelor's study.

Over the years, Ruschlikon has trained 1,500 church leaders from 60 countries through its various programs. The seminary also hosts conferences and other meetings for European Baptists and serves as a hub for Baptist activity on the continent.

Hopper said the ministry of Ruschlikon is distinct from seminaries in the United States, which primarily train pastors to minister in America's "white, middle-class society," and from national seminaries, which are geared for specific cultural contexts.

"We are not trying to do the work of the national seminaries anymore," Hopper said. In light of the new spirit of "international cooperation" sweeping Europe, he said, Ruschlikon is attempting "to transcend national and cultural boundaries...to create a cooperative partnership that can reach across the world."

Half of Ruschlikon's students are on scholarship, four participants were told, and 80 percent participate in campus work programs. Many would be unable to attend without financial help, Hopper said, and the scholarships make Ruschlikon more affordable than some national seminaries.

As a way to help the school, several tour participants said their churches will consider sponsoring one or more student scholarships, which cost \$3,000 per year.

"They (the students) are sacrificing all they can to be there," Kentucky pastor John Dunaway said later. "We can't afford to lose this significant group of students."

With the financial support from the Fellowship, Ruschlikon has been able to more than recoup the first-year cut in FMB funds. Since Feb. 1, the seminary has received \$419,275 in stateside donations, administrator Murphy Terry said. The total includes money from five state Baptist conventions.

"So far the smart bomb of October 1991 has not found its target," Terry told the Fellowship group.

But, he said, Ruschlikon "has been dealt a severe blow," since the 1988 agreement with FMB trustees would have provided \$3.1 million over the next 10 years. The seminary has launched a fund-raising campaign to replace the money.

The challenges facing the seminary are more than financial, Hopper told Associated Baptist Press.

Swiss visa restrictions have made it harder for students to attend. Married couples both have to enroll in order to be granted visas, and a law that went into effect in 1989 prohibits students from bringing their children. Hopper said a legislative remedy is being sought.

But, meanwhile, political and financial changes in Europe have led seminary officials to question if Switzerland is the most strategic location for the school.

Moving the seminary to a more central European location would be a major step, and one Ruschlikon's trustees would approach cautiously, Hopper said. But he added, "Our trustees are very, very astute people and I trust their wisdom."

The prospect of a move should not discourage potential donors, Hopper said. The seminary's seven-acre site -- the former estate of a wealthy industrialist on the shores of Lake Zurich -- currently is valued at \$12 million. Whatever improvements are made, Hopper said, could be recouped in the sale of the property.

"We won't waste anything that we put into it," he said.

European Baptist leaders say
Fellowship's help welcome

By Greg Warner

OESTRICH-WINKEL, Germany (ABP) -- Baptists in Europe would welcome the help of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in doing mission work, according to three Baptist leaders on the continent.

The European leaders, who met with a 50-member fact-finding delegation from the Fellowship Feb. 17 near Frankfurt, Germany, said the Fellowship's missions philosophy is more in keeping with their traditional partnership with Southern Baptists than the course currently charted by trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

"You have the understanding of mission partnership that the Foreign Mission Board had for so many years," Hans Guderian, secretary of home missions for the Baptist Union of Germany, told the Fellowship group.

Southern Baptist mission work in Europe has been in turmoil since October, when FMB trustees defunded the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon, Switzerland -- European Baptists' only international seminary -- in a dispute over the school's theological direction. In January the FMB's top two administrators for Europe quit in protest, saying trustees were trying to impose their view of theological orthodoxy on European Baptists.

Within days the Fellowship, a group of moderate-conservative Southern Baptists, offered to hire missionaries in Europe who no longer want to work for the FMB. Since then, Fellowship leaders say they have heard from "scores" of missionaries interested in the offer.

The European leaders said the Fellowship's offer is important.

"We want to try every way possible to keep the missionaries that we have here and keep the same kind of missionaries coming," said Karl-Heinz Walter, executive director of the European Baptist Federation, the organization of 32 national Baptist unions on the continent.

Although appointed by the Foreign Mission Board, Southern Baptist missionaries serve in Europe at the invitation -- and usually under the supervision -- of the Baptists in each country. Baptist unions in at least two countries have suggested they may no longer accept missionaries from the FMB. Meanwhile, the European Baptist Federation has issued a set of principles which it says is "basic to any (future) partnership" with the FMB.

The controversy has caused "a great unrest and instability" among FMB missionaries in Europe, said John Merritt, general secretary of the European Baptist Convention, the association of English-speaking churches on the continent. As a result the Fellowship's promise to help Baptist missionaries in Europe is "very important," said Merritt, himself an FMB missionary.

Walter and Guderian, both German Baptists, agreed the dispute over SBC missions in Europe is taking a toll on FMB missionaries there. "The missionaries in Europe are just torn up in pieces because they don't know the real future," said Walter.

And both leaders said many of the FMB's 400 missionaries in Europe will not remain at their posts if future changes are made in the agency's strategy and personnel.

Walter estimated "98 percent" of the FMB's European mission force disagrees with the new direction set by FMB trustees. "They are in line with you," he told the Fellowship group. But most missionaries are "helpless" to do anything about it, he said, and morale is quite low.

"They are hoping you will send some help," said Walter.

One of those missionaries, Rick Dill of Germany, told the group that charges by FMB trustee Ron Wilson that missionaries in Europe are liberal and neo-orthodox have left every missionary suspect. "How long will it be before we're called to (FMB headquarters in) Richmond on furlough to answer to some body?" he asked.

While a few Baptist unions in Europe would be able to pick up the financial support of missionaries that leave the FMB, Dill said, Baptists in most European countries lack the resources to do that.

Missionary Ray Reynolds, however, said response to the brewing controversy varies among missionaries. "We grieve over the development but we are pressing on," said Reynolds, a church planter in Germany.

But the EBF's Walter disagreed. The missionaries "are in a very difficult and dangerous position," he said.

Walter predicted some missionaries will be fired. Others will resign, he said, if there is further disruption of the FMB administration, an apparent reference to the widely held concern that FMB President Keith Parks will soon leave the agency.

If Parks' tenure as president is shortened, Walter said, it will create "a very new situation" for European missions.

Some members of the U.S. delegation asked if working with the Fellowship might hurt the Europeans' standing with the FMB. "I do not see that talking with you, with your interest in foreign missions, is a problem," responded Walter.

Guderian suggested ways for the Fellowship to begin aiding missions work in Europe.

"We would not want to have funding of missionaries for years and years and years," the German leader explained. The help they would welcome, he said, typically would begin with full funding of a project for a year and then diminish over time as the Germans take over sponsorship.

Such an approach would mesh with the Fellowship's recently adopted missions statement, which commits the group to work through short-term missionaries commissioned for specific purposes rather than through traditional career missionaries.

Guderian said German Baptists have worked successfully with FMB missionaries in the past, including the nine missionary couples now serving in the country. But unlike current FMB trustees, he said, those missionaries have never tried to "bring in any kind of ideology."

While German Baptists are theologically conservative, Guderian said, they are not "ideological fundamentalists." "I heard one of these persons preaching and it frightened me," he said.

Merritt said the traditions of the European Baptist Convention's 58 English-speaking congregations "come in very sharp contrast with the stated objectives of some trustees of the Foreign Mission Board."

The English-speaking churches, many of which were started by and for American military families overseas, historically have worked closely with the FMB, Merritt said, noting FMB missionaries often serve as church staff members and the churches donate to Southern Baptist causes. "We have formed our character in great part out of the character of the Foreign Mission Board," he said.

"Now we are wondering whether or not we will be able to continue...if the Foreign Mission Board appoints (missionaries) only of one persuasion," he said.

Merritt said the shift at the FMB has been "orchestrated by the same group" that caused the decade-long controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention. "It has come to Europe and we didn't want that," he said.

Merritt said recent actions and statements from FMB trustees indicate the Foreign Mission Board now intends to function less in partnership with European Baptists and more like a "parachurch organization."

"Historically the Foreign Mission Board has helped churches withstand the parachurch influence (in Europe)," Merritt said. "I'm very much afraid the Foreign Mission Board is becoming a super-parachurch group itself by going about foreign missions itself instead of working through the European Baptist unions."

Walter acknowledged the European Baptist Federation has agreed to meet with FMB leaders to try to work out differences over missions work in Europe. But he warned the new direction of the FMB will make that difficult.

Steve Hardy, chairman of the FMB trustee committee that oversees missions work in Europe, offered a different view of the dispute when contacted by Associated Baptist Press.

"I do not consider that the trustees of the Foreign Mission Board are moving us in a radically new direction in terms of our mission work in Europe," said Hardy, a North Carolina pastor. "The primary emphasis of the Foreign Mission Board is evangelism that results in churches. If that's a new direction, then I wonder what the old one was."

The dispute over Europe concerns the Ruschlikon seminary only, Hardy said. Trustees have indicated they want to continue their partnership with the EBF and have assured missionaries that the FMB will continue to function on the same philosophical basis as in the past, he added.

Hardy would not speculate on suggestions that most missionaries in Europe -- perhaps as many as 98 percent -- are in sympathy with the Fellowship. "I have heard from more than 2 percent who would not take that approach," he said.

"Among some missionaries the morale is low," he added. "Among others there is a great desire to get on with the work."

The FMB will not interfere with the Fellowship's mission efforts, he said, "but we would insist that the Fellowship do the same."

"The Foreign Mission Board is the foreign mission program of the Southern Baptist Convention, and I think that's all that's needed," he said. If the Fellowship wants to start a mission program, he said, "they ought to do it outside the convention and quit pretending."

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FMB trustees get credit for
protest vote by Belgian church

By Thomas Mullen

BRUSSELS, Belgium (ABP) -- A Belgian Baptist congregation says two trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board encouraged the church to cut its support of a European Baptist group in protest against funding for the Baptist Theological Seminary in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

The trustees named are William Hancock, the board's chairman, and Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas and an influential trustee leader. Hancock strongly denied he exerted any influence, and Patterson was unavailable for comment.

But European Baptist leaders say privately the dispute is the first indication that the decade-long Southern Baptist controversy has infiltrated Baptist churches in Europe.

The dispute centers on the International Baptist Church of Brussels, Belgium, which voted Jan. 26 to slash its contribution to the European Baptist Convention, the association of 58 English-speaking congregations on the continent.

According to the transcript of the church's business meeting, the

decision to cut the contribution was a protest against the European Baptist Convention's support of the Ruschlikon seminary. Funding for the seminary was cut in October by the Foreign Mission Board, which accused the school of liberalism.

The Ruschlikon dispute has renewed the controversy between Southern Baptist fundamental-conservatives, who control the FMB, and moderate-conservatives, who are upset about what they say is an attempt to impose fundamentalist views on European Baptists.

Critics on both continents say FMB trustees are using the action by the church in Belgium to gain support for their controversial defunding of the Swiss seminary.

"We've spoken with Paige Patterson and Bill Hancock, chairman of the Foreign Mission Board," Nick Hine, chairman of the church's deacons, told church members before the vote.

"We do have the wholehearted support in this motion from the Southern Baptist Convention and the Foreign Mission Board," Hine said. "They are supporting what we're proposing."

Although church members were asked to keep the results of the meeting quiet, a transcript was made from a tape of the meeting by a church member who attended. The Richmond News Leader and Associated Baptist Press obtained copies of the transcript and verified its contents with a European Baptist leader familiar with the situation.

"A lot's at stake here," said the leader, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Interference, not income, is the issue at stake, the leader said. One of the issues revolves around the complicated relationship between the Baptist groups.

Most congregations of the European Baptist Convention are located near American military facilities in Europe, and many of them are staffed by FMB missionaries.

The EBC is loosely tied to the Southern Baptist Convention through contributions to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program, the denomination's basic plan of financial support, and the FMB's annual missions offering.

The International Baptist Church of Brussels, by way of its support and membership in the European Baptist Convention, also maintains a loose relationship with Southern Baptists, although some members report the church has fewer and fewer ties to the SBC.

Missionaries served as pastors of the Brussels church until the early 1980s, when the first non-missionary, Phil Roberts, became pastor on the recommendation of Patterson. The current pastor, Swiss native Ulrich Dolder, is a graduate of Criswell College in Dallas, which Patterson serves as president.

By cutting its pledge to the European Convention from about \$3,800 to about \$360, the International Baptist Church effectively reduced its contribution to the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program.

Although transcripts indicate the congregation's vote was supported by Patterson and Hancock, Hine said Feb. 21 he personally didn't speak with the two leaders. He said other deacons and church officials did. Hine declined to answer directly whether the two U.S. leaders influenced his church.

"If I say yes or no, I don't know how that will be understood," Hine said in a telephone interview. "We are an independent evangelical church.... We will speak to anyone who will help us."

Hine declined further comment. He said the church will write to European and U.S. Baptist leaders to explain its decision in the way it wants to have the news told.

Hancock, pastor of Highview Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., said he

had nothing to do with the church's decision.

"I don't even know Nick Hine," he said. "I didn't encourage them (church members). I knew they were considering that, but I didn't encourage them."

Hancock charged that accounts of his alleged interference in the Belgian church sprang from members of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and "disgruntled staff people" of the Foreign Mission Board.

"I'm fed up with this," said Hancock.

John Merritt, general secretary of the European Baptist Convention, said the EBC's seven-member executive committee discussed the Brussels situation during its Feb. 26 meeting but he declined to comment on the dispute.

"The committee decided at this point we have nothing to act on because the church has not sent us anything," Merritt said from Wiesbaden, Germany.

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-- This story, reprinted with permission from the Richmond News-Leader, includes information from Greg Warner of Associated Baptist Press.

Young likely nominee
for SBC president

By Toby Druin

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Houston pastor Edwin Young will consider allowing his nomination as president of the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis, Ind., June 9-11.

"I am just trying to seek the mind and will of God; that is all I am doing," said Young, who acknowledged he has been asked by fellow Texas pastor Joel Gregory to allow his nomination. Young said he has no timetable for giving an answer.

Gregory, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, told the Baptist Standard of Texas he had approached Young, pastor of Second Baptist Church of Houston, to invite him to be a presidential nominee.

"If he acquiesces in that invitation, I will nominate him for the presidency of the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis," Gregory said.

"I feel that Edwin has demonstrated in this generation that he is one of the most creative and effective church builders and leaders in America. He has demonstrated that leadership at Second Baptist Church, Houston, in an exemplary way, and as well at First Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C. (Young's previous pastorate).

"I feel that he is a man whose spirit in an exemplary way can bring us together."

Gregory said the decision to nominate Young was his alone but added that he and "some of the fellows have talked together" about it in informal conversation over "a period of some months."

If Young agrees to be nominated, it will be Gregory's first nomination on the SBC level. However, Gregory's endorsement of current SBC president Morris Chapman played a key role in Chapman's election to a first term in 1990.

Young is the third person named as a likely nominee at the Indianapolis meeting. Jess Moody, pastor of Shepherd of the Hills Church in Chatsworth, Calif., announced last September that a group of non-aligned pastors and others had asked for permission to nominate him.

Nelson Price, pastor of Roswell Street Baptist Church in Marietta, Ga., current first president of the SBC and identified with the fundamental-conservative movement, announced Feb. 21 that he would permit his nomination.

Gregory said he was unaware of Price's announcement.

In recent years, the fundamental-conservative element of the SBC has come forward with one nominee and has successfully elected the president of the convention since 1979.

Asked about being identified as the "fundamentalist" nominee, Young said he would fight the term and believes "all labels we put on Baptists are pejorative. I don't identify with any of them. I am a Southern Baptist, theologically a thorough-going conservative who believes in the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement. I am not for theological pluralism. I am a Southern Baptist. I believe in the Cooperative Program, and I won't change."

"It is time we move on" beyond the politics of the last dozen years, he said. "If we spend any more time with all our labeling and divisiveness, we are making a serious mistake."

His agenda, whether it be as pastor of Second Baptist Church or as president of the SBC, he said, "is strictly two things -- missions and evangelism around this world."

Young has been pastor at Second Church since 1978. Under his leadership it has been one of the fastest-growing congregations in the SBC, moving from a membership of 4,431 in 1978 to more than 18,000 in 1991.

The church led the SBC in baptisms in 1990 with 1,007 and last year baptized 838. Gifts to the Cooperative Program in the 1990-91 church year totaled \$400,000 out of total receipts of \$12,345,655, which includes money for debt service. The church gives 2.35 percent of total receipts to the Cooperative Program, according to its Uniform Church Letter.

Second Church, which in 1984 moved into new and remodeled facilities in Houston costing \$34 million, voted recently to purchase 180 acres about 15 miles west for a second location. No date has been set for construction.

Young frequently has been mentioned as a possible nominee of fundamental-conservatives for the SBC presidency. He told the Standard several years ago the office should go to older men who have served the denomination well. Whether he now fills that description remains to be seen, he told the Standard last week.

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Grace applies to homosexuals,
Jackson tells Kentucky audience

BOWLING GREEN, Ky. (ABP) -- Applying grace in evangelism requires Christians to love all people as they are -- even homosexuals, Richard Jackson said at the Kentucky Baptist evangelism conference.

Jackson, pastor of North Phoenix Baptist Church in Phoenix, Ariz., said attempts to exclude churches because they associate with "sinful" people hinders evangelism.

Jackson spoke specifically to the issue of homosexuality, making a veiled criticism of a recent decision of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

One week earlier, Executive Committee members took a strong stand against two North Carolina churches dealing with homosexuality issues. The committee proposed excluding from participation in SBC meetings any church taking what could be considered a pro-homosexual stand.

Jackson did not endorse homosexuality as a lifestyle, the ordination of homosexuals as ministers or the blessing of homosexual unions. He called homosexuality sin, but said no Baptist body should tell another Baptist body what defines acceptable ministry to homosexuals.

"The very idea that somebody up here says somebody down here can't do something" is wrong, Jackson said. He charged that Southern Baptists "are getting to the point of saying you can't minister to sinful people."

"Whether they are liars, homosexuals, or gossips doesn't make any difference to me," he said. "Don't tell me I can't have homosexuals in my church. I will die saying North Phoenix Baptist Church wants to win everybody to Jesus, not just some people."

During the past decade, Jackson's church consistently has been a leader in baptisms among Southern Baptist congregations.

"We all come with zero, dead in trespasses and sin," Jackson explained. "It takes the same marvelous grace of God to save us all."

Baptists too often say, "You clean up your lifestyle and then we'll minister to you...if you meet our criteria first," Jackson said.

Jackson explained he was taught as a young boy it was proper to hit drunks and homosexuals. "It wasn't a sin but a cinch," he said. He recalled as a 15-year-old punching a homosexual. He said he was "absolutely confident I'd done God a favor by hitting one of his children."

But now he said he has discovered the message of evangelism is one of grace. "God has delivered me from the burden of being anybody's moral policeman or theological watchdog," he added.

"It will deliver you from all kinds of bondage if you will remember your job is to carry God's love to people living in sin. It is God's love in Jesus Christ that will change the hearts of men and women."

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Literal belief in Bible hits new low, poll reveals

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Most Americans no longer interpret the Bible literally word for word, but a majority still believes it is true and inspired by God, according to a recent survey.

Only 32 percent of Americans believe that the Bible should be taken literally in every instance -- even though in 1963 this was the predominant view (65 percent). The 32 percent marks is a new low for those holding to biblical literalism.

The findings released by the Princeton Religion Research Center indicate nearly half of those surveyed (49 percent) see the Bible as the inspired word of God that should not always be interpreted literally. This new dominant view was held by only 18 percent of the American people in 1963.

Another 16 percent view the Bible as a human-authored book of fables, legends and history. That category has grown by 5 percent since 1963.

The Princeton center noted that biblical literalism still has a foothold in the South, where 46 percent of the population maintains that belief. The center credits this exception to the large number of groups in the South that maintain a higher-than-average belief in biblical literalism, including Southern Baptists.

Sixty percent of Southern Baptists hold to biblical literalism. Forty-nine percent of other Baptist bodies hold this view.

Evangelical Christians (59 percent) were more likely than non-evangelical Christians (14 percent) to take this position. Protestants (39 percent) were more inclined than Catholics (24 percent) to interpret the Bible literally.

The increase in the belief that the Bible is the inspired -- not literal -- word of God matches the rise of higher education within the general populace, according to the center. Most biblical literalists are not high school graduates (58 percent), while college graduates (29 percent) are the most likely "to reject claims that the Bible is either the literal or inspired word of God."

The center based these findings on telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,005 adults, and the results contain a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

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-- By Pam Parry

Administration signals retreat
from requiring church reports

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Bush administration is sending strong signals that it may back away from its proposal to require churches and tax-exempt organizations to report to the Internal Revenue Service the charitable contributions of donors who give more than \$500 annually.

Perhaps the clearest indication that the administration may change its mind about the proposal came from Vice President Dan Quayle's remarks Feb. 23 on the CBS program "Meet the Press."

Quayle told reporters that the proposal, part of the administration's 1993 budget package, "was a nonsense regulation. I don't know how it got in there in the first place."

"It was in the budget, but you know how big that budget is, and I can assure you that I didn't know it was in there," Quayle said. "The president didn't know it was in there, and unfortunately, sometimes these things get in there. And when it's brought up to us and brought to our attention, we do what is right. And what is right is to say that that piece of legislation is not going to have our support."

Quayle's comments came one day after The Washington Post quoted a White House source as saying the administration was putting the proposal on hold.

While the vice president's remarks appeared to be a clear indication that the administration no longer supported the proposal, the White House media office declined to comment on the matter.

Oliver Thomas, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, said the Treasury Department is non-committal on whether the proposal is still under consideration. However, he said, Fred Golberg, assistant secretary for tax policy, has accepted Thomas' invitation to meet with representatives of the religious community to discuss the matter.

Thomas said he told the Treasury Department that churches are sensitive to the government's need to ensure that taxpayers claim only deductions to which they are entitled, but that the administration's reporting proposal was unacceptable.

The administration had proposed the reporting requirement to help IRS distinguish between gifts to churches and other charitable organizations and payments for goods and services, such as admission to entertainment

events or the purchase of educational services or consumer items.

Religious groups reacted strongly against the proposal, complaining that it would create a burdensome record-keeping assignment for churches and that its provision requiring churches to determine the potential deductibility of gifts would violate acceptable limits of church-state entanglement.

Churches and their related organizations now are exempted from filing annual reports (Form 990) that are required of most tax-exempt organizations that receive tax-deductible contributions.

Congress is showing little indication of its willingness to support the church-reporting requirements, as well as other elements of the administration's plan.

In a Feb. 26 vote, the House rejected 427-1 a measure introduced by Democrats that contained most tax elements of the administration's budget plan. Votes were scheduled Feb. 27 on a seven-point tax plan backed by House Republicans and the administration, which features a capital-gains tax cut, and a Democratic proposal that emphasizes middle-class tax cuts.

The Senate Finance Committee delayed its consideration of a tax bill until the first week of March.

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Supreme Court rejects
religious school's claim

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has refused to hear a Virginia religious school's claim that its free-exercise rights were violated by enforcement of local zoning and fire regulations.

Operators and patrons of Fairfax Christian School charged in a 1989 federal district court lawsuit that their constitutional rights were violated when enforcement of zoning and fire regulations prevented them from locating and operating the school at the sites of their choice in Fairfax County.

The school, founded in 1961 by Robert Thoburn, was operated at a rural Fairfax County site for 20 years until that site was sold in 1984. School officials then were unsuccessful in their efforts to obtain special exceptions to build or operate the school at various residential sites in the county.

School officials complained that their free-exercise, equal-protection and due-process rights were violated, along with their right to be free of an established religion.

A federal district court granted a motion for a directed verdict in favor of the local jurisdictions named in the lawsuit -- Fairfax County and Vienna, Va., a city in Fairfax County.

The 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the district court's ruling, concluding that the "various zoning and public health and safety policies at issue here did not violate the constitutional rights" of the school officials and patrons.

Noting that the zoning rules permit private schools to locate at commercial and industrial sites without obtaining special exemptions, the court said the plaintiffs failed to establish the first element of a free-exercise claim by proving that the zoning and fire rules burden their exercise of religion.

The appeals court said the fact that the zoning laws made it more difficult for the religious school to locate on property of its choice did

not prove that the plaintiffs' free exercise rights were burdened.

The appeals court reasoned that there must be a link between government regulation and the impairment of ability to carry out a religious mission.

"It is not enough that the entity conducting a religious program or mission would prefer to locate on residential property," the appeals court said. "That preference must be linked to religious imperatives."

In rejecting the plaintiffs' contention that Fairfax County's and Vienna's actions violated the First Amendment's ban against a governmental establishment of religion, the appeals court cited Supreme Court decisions that the establishment clause did not exempt religious organizations from governmental activities such as fire inspections and zoning regulations.

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-- By Larry Chesser

***** END *****