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Phone: (904) 396-0396 Fax: (904) 396-4441 Cserve: 70420,73

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Smyth & Helwys, Oxford college
agree to co-publish books

GREENVILLE, S.C. (ABP) -- Smyth & Helwys, the new Baptist publishing house, has reached an agreement with Regent's Park College at Oxford to co-publish books for Baptists in the United States and England.

Under the agreement, the two will co-publish about two books a year, and other joint projects are under consideration, said Cecil Staton, publisher of Smyth & Helwys.

A book and curriculum publisher based in Greenville, S.C., Smyth & Helwys was started in 1990 as an alternative to materials from the Sunday School Board, the official publisher of the Southern Baptist Convention, which in recent years has come under control of SBC fundamental-conservatives.

Regent's Park is a member college of the Oxford University system. As the only Baptist school in the Anglican-dominated Oxford system, it is a popular base of study for Baptist scholars from the States.

Officials for Regent's and Smyth & Helwys said the idea for the joint venture surfaced last year when the two publishing houses realized they are targeting similar audiences.

"We launched our publication program in Regent's Park College," said President Paul Fiddes, "because we thought there was a need among Baptists in Britain for books that would make the best of theological scholarship relevant and accessible to those involved in practical Christian ministry.

"We discovered to our delight," Fiddes continued, "that Smyth & Helwys has the same aim for Baptists in the United States, and so a partnership between us seemed natural and important."

"One of our initial goals for Smyth & Helwys was to publish materials which would bridge the gap between biblical scholarship and the church," echoed Staton, who was a member of Regent's Park College while studying at Oxford.

Like Smyth & Helwys, the publishing arm of Regent's Park is a new undertaking. The first project in the joint venture is also the British publisher's first book -- The Gospel of John by Larry Kreitzer, a New Testament tutor at the college.

The book, which is already available, is the first volume in the Regent's Study Guides, a series of books for biblical study.

"These volumes will be excellent resources for church study groups or

individuals who wish to invest time and serious thought in reading them," Staton said.

Staton said Smyth & Helwys and Regent's Park share not only a commitment to practical scholarship but a similar commitment "to love God with the mind as well as the heart and soul."

Regent's College also will help the American publisher distribute its materials in Great Britain by offering Smyth & Helwys products through the college's book club, Staton said. "So it is kind of a distribution agreement as well," he said.

Smyth & Helwys published 13 books in its first year and plans to boost production up to 15 or 20 titles a year, Staton said. Its adult Sunday school curriculum made its debut last October and is used by more than 500 Baptist churches. Curriculum materials for all other age groups will premiere in September.

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-- By Greg Warner

Carey's missions strategy still provokes debate, historian says

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Missionary pioneer William Carey's vision of "indigenous" and "holistic" ministry, which was controversial when first preached in the late 1700s, has once more become the subject of debate and division among Baptists, according to a church historian.

Carey, a poor English shoemaker turned Baptist preacher, founded the modern missionary movement at the end of the 18th century. Baptists worldwide are celebrating the 200th anniversary of that turning point in missions history.

Carey developed a missions strategy that "emphasized the centrality of Christ, the power of Scripture, the necessity of partnership, the importance of contextualization, an indigenous focus, a holistic evangelism and a Christocentric ecumenism," said Baptist historian Thomas Halbrooks.

"In recent months, some mission leaders have again rejected components of Carey's vision, while others have stood strong and defended it," said Halbrooks, professor of church history and dean of the faculty at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

"The vision begun by Carey has again become the subject of debate and division," he said.

Debate over mission strategy has intensified among Southern Baptists since last year, when the denomination's Foreign Mission Board cut contributions to a European Baptist seminary because of its alleged liberal theology.

That action brought charges that the FMB is imposing its brand of theological orthodoxy on Baptists overseas, a charge the board's trustees vigorously deny.

Southern Baptists "would do well to pay heed to Carey's vision as a guide for the 21st century" said Halbrooks, who was keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the Virginia Baptist Historical Society in Richmond in May.

May marked the 200th anniversary of Carey's famous sermon at Nottingham, England, which served as a catalyst for the modern missions movement.

Carey's address -- which coined the now famous phrase "expect great things from God; attempt great things for God" -- challenged the prevailing resistance to evangelistic efforts overseas and radically altered the face of Protestant Christianity.

Within months, English Baptists formed the Baptist Missionary Society and sent Carey to India as their first missionary. He served there from 1793 until his death in 1834.

Although many 19th-century Christians maintained a "colonialist, imperialistic, domineering approach" to missions, Carey's vision "came into its own" during the 20th century, said Halbrooks.

"Many turned to these same principles, and they became important components of modern missions work," the historian said.

Carey's "broad and wide-ranging" missions strategy had seven components, said Halbrooks:

-- The centrality of Christ. "He was willing to work with anyone who put Christ at the center and tried to follow his teachings and preach the gospel."

-- The power of scripture. "There was great value simply in getting the Scripture into the language the people could read. The Scripture could then do much of the work itself."

-- Partnership. Carey "was far beyond most in his day in seeing the need for mutual respect and partnership among all Christians."

-- Contextualization. "Only as the gospel was communicated within the given cultural context could it be most readily understood and appropriated."

-- Indigeneity. "Carey believed that the most effective evangelists of Indians were Indians."

-- Holistic evangelism. "He keenly desired to help India learn to feed its peoples. He also argued vigorously against infanticide, against "sati" or widow-burning and against slavery.... He desired the establishment of medical facilities to meet the vast health needs he experienced."

-- Ecumenism. "He was willing to work with all Christians for the cause of Christ."

The historical society presented honorary membership to three missions leaders: Keith Parks, retiring president of the Foreign Mission Board; his wife, Helen Jean; and Alma Hunt of Roanoke, Va., former executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union.

They were the first honorary memberships the society has presented since 1896.

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Top California court asked to keep strong religious-liberty protection

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- In a dispute over a California couple's refusal to rent an apartment to an unmarried couple, that state's highest court is being asked to reject the U.S. Supreme Court's new watered-down view of religious freedom.

A friend-of-the-court brief filed in the California Supreme Court argues that the weakened level of protection for the free exercise of religion, announced by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Employment Division vs. Smith* in 1990, conflicts with both the federal and California constitutions.

The brief was filed by a diverse coalition of 21 religious groups and other organizations advocating religious freedom.

In the California case, John and Agnes Donahue refused to rent an apartment to an unmarried couple because of the Donahues' belief that sexual intercourse outside of marriage -- and assisting such behavior -- is sinful.

The unmarried couple sued the Donahues for violating the California Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of marital status. The Donahues were ordered to rent to the couple and pay over \$7,000 in damages for lost wages and emotional distress.

The California Court of Appeals reversed that decision, however, concluding the state did not have justification for forcing the Donahues to

The California Court of Appeals reversed that decision, however, concluding the state did not have justification for forcing the Donahues to violate their religion.

The state attorney general has since asked the California Supreme Court to reverse the appeals court's ruling.

The Baptist Joint Committee and other signers of the friend-of-the court brief are urging the top California court to maintain its longstanding view that the state constitution allows government to restrict religious freedom only when it has a compelling reason.

Until the Smith decision, the U.S. Supreme Court also viewed the free exercise of religion as a fundamental constitutional right that could be restricted only for compelling reasons.

But in the 1990 Smith decision, the high court held that government needs only a rational basis, not a compelling reason, to justify generally applicable laws and policies that restrict religious practice.

"Rarely has a case generated as much scholarly criticism in such a short time," the brief says of Smith, noting that legal specialists have written nearly 50 scholarly articles critical of the decision.

"Experts ranging from the president of the American Civil Liberties Union to the dean of Notre Dame Law School have condemned Smith as a radical departure from settled principles of American constitutional law," the brief states.

Before the Smith decision, when courts applied the compelling-interest test to balance government's power with individual religious liberty, "government prevailed about as frequently as religious organizations and individuals," the brief states.

Since Smith, 91 percent of free-exercise claims have been denied, according to the brief.

"The compelling interest standard does not place an undue burden on government...but serves as an effective mechanism for balancing the rights and interests of both claimants and the state," the brief says.

The brief also argues that other state supreme courts, including those of Massachusetts and Minnesota, still interpret state constitutions to require government to have a compelling reason to restrict religion.

"This (California) case will give yet another state supreme court the opportunity to interpret its own constitution in a way that maximizes religious liberty," said Brent Walker, associate general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee and one of five attorneys drafting the brief.

In addition to seeking relief through state supreme courts, critics of the Smith decision are supporting the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, federal legislation that would make the compelling-interest standard the rule of law in free exercise cases.

"Until the Religious Freedom Restoration Act becomes law, this is where the battle must be waged -- at the state level," Walker said. "California is particularly important. Many states look to California's lead, and what California decides becomes persuasive precedent for other states to follow."

In addition to the Baptist Joint Committee, other signers of the brief include the American Jewish Committee and other Jewish organizations, Association of American Indian Affairs, Christian Advocates Serving Evangelism, Christian Legal Society, Concerned Women for America, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, National Association of Evangelicals, and National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

U.S. Congress urges Iran
to respect religious freedom

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- If Iran wishes to join the international community, it must respect the religious freedom of all citizens, according to the U.S. House of Representatives.

That message was embodied in a resolution approved by the House June 2, calling on Iran to recognize the rights of its largest religious minority -- the Baha'i community.

The House approved the resolution (H. Con. Res. 156) by a voice vote, marking the fifth time in a decade the U.S. Congress has passed resolutions concerning human-rights conditions in Iran.

The Senate approved a similar resolution earlier in the year. Concurrent resolutions must be approved by both houses. They represent the sentiment of Congress but do not carry the force of law.

The resolution noted that Congress:

-- Continues to hold the government of Iran responsible for upholding the rights of all citizens, including members of the Baha'i faith;

-- Notes that Iran summarily executed a prominent Iranian Baha'i, Bahman Samandari, in March 1992 -- the first such execution in more than three years;

-- Expresses concern that some recent improvements in the treatment of individual Baha'is have not led to legal recognition of the Baha'i community;

-- Urges the government of Iran to extend to the Baha'i community the rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international covenants on human rights, including the freedom of religion, thought, conscience and equal protection under the law;

-- Calls upon President George Bush to continue to urge Iran to emancipate the Baha'i community; to emphasize that the United States regards Iran's human-rights practices, particularly its treatment of religious minorities, as a significant element in developing its relations with Iran; and to cooperate with other governments and international organizations in efforts to protect the religious rights of the Baha'is and other minorities.

Rep. William Broomfield, R-Mich., said: "Freedom of religion is enshrined not only in our Constitution, but also in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which has been signed by virtually every nation in the world.

"Since it came to power in 1979, however, the self-styled Islamic government of Iran has constantly persecuted the Baha'i religious community...", he continued. "The truth of the matter is that the Baha'is were singled out for persecution solely on the basis of their religious beliefs."

Rep. Wayne Owens, D-Utah, added: "Iran is attempting to work its way back into the civilized world. But satisfying the West outside of its borders, while depriving its citizens of their fundamental human rights inside its borders, is unacceptable."

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-- By Pam Parry

Senate votes to lift ban
on fetal-tissue research

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- By a veto-proof margin, the U.S. Senate approved June 4 a measure that would lift a four-year-old ban on federally funded research using fetal tissue from induced abortions.

An expected presidential veto still could prevail, however; the U.S. House of Representatives earlier approved the bill but not by the two-thirds margin necessary to override a veto.

The Bush administration has staunchly opposed use of fetal tissue in medical research, upholding the ban imposed by the Reagan administration in 1988. Both administrations have maintained that such research would provide an incentive for women to have abortions.

Ban opponents say the moratorium has stopped promising research on the treatment of Parkinson's disease, juvenile diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and other genetic disorders.

The provision lifting the ban is part of a bill reauthorizing the National Institutes of Health and would fund research in several areas, including women's health, cancer and AIDS.

The Senate approved the measure (H.R. 2507) by a 85-12 vote. In May the House approved the measure 260-148.

If vetoed, the bill returns to Congress for an override vote. Some have speculated the fetal-tissue debate could hand Bush his first veto override but not unless ban opponents can garner more votes in the House. Bush has had 28 consecutive vetoes sustained.

Bush must veto the bill within 10 days, excluding Sundays, after receiving it or it automatically becomes law.

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-- By Pam Parry

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