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Phone: (904) 262-6626 Fax: (904) 262-7745 CServe: 70420,73

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Midwestern prof denied  
tenure over inerrancy

By Bob Terry

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Wilburn Stancil was denied tenure by trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Oct. 18 because the theology professor does not accept biblical inerrancy.

Stancil also was criticized for his views on baptism and Adam and Eve. But the primary complaint was over inerrancy, the belief that the Bible is free from any error. Stancil "rejects inerrancy as an appropriate model for understanding the nature of Scripture," said trustee Roger Oldham of Tennessee, chairman of the instruction committee.

"If he will not avow inerrancy, he doesn't believe it and I will not support him," said trustee Tim Harvey of Georgia.

Given time to defend his views, Stancil told trustees: "I believe all of the Bible is inspired because men moved by the Holy Spirit wrote it. ... I do not know how God inspired the men who wrote the Bible, but I believe he did. I believe God inspired not only their thought but also their words. In other words, I believe in verbal inspiration."

"I urge you to get beyond terminology," Seminary President Milton Ferguson urged trustees. "Lay aside whether he speaks kindly of inerrancy or is friendly to current (Southern Baptist Convention) leadership. He believes more about the Bible than some folks who call themselves inerrantists."

In the end, however, trustees rejected Ferguson's plea and the recommendation for tenure.

The controversy surrounding Stancil has been brewing since April, when he received a 17-16 vote for tenured status. But the trustee chairman ruled a two-thirds vote was necessary for approval, although the bylaws did not specify.

Ferguson convinced trustees to reconsider their action and then postpone a vote until their Oct. 18-19 meeting, during which they agreed only a

majority vote was required for current faculty.

But at that October meeting in Kansas City, Mo., the instruction committee, which handles tenure recommendations, voted 5-0 not to recommend Stancil again. Ferguson presented the recommendation for Stancil's tenure anyway, but the trustees voted it down 24-9.

After the vote, Stancil said he had fallen victim to "illegal manipulation" of the seminary bylaws by trustees pursuing the political agenda of "denominational power brokers."

"It is clear," Stancil said, "... that many trustees are threatened not only by beliefs that do not fit their dogmatic fundamentalism but by a professor who refuses to mindlessly parrot their theological jingles or obediently be their political puppet."

In his earlier hour-long defense of his beliefs, Stancil answered trustee criticism on several other issues:

-- "The Baptist Faith and Message." The seminary's doctrinal statement says the Bible has "truth, without mixture of error, for its matter." Instruction chairman Oldham said Stancil understands "matter" to refer to the history of salvation, not any realm of reality to which the Bible speaks.

In response, Stancil said he uses "matter" to refer to the "whole history of salvation from the beginning of God's dealings with Israel all the way to the final Second Coming."

"I did not state, nor would I state, that the other 'matters' are full of errors. I do not believe the Bible teaches error."

-- Adam and Eve. Stancil believes that Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-3 are "historical symbols" reflecting the existence of a real first man and first woman. Oldham said. However, the Adam and Eve in Genesis 4, according to Stancil, are not necessarily the same ones as in Genesis 1-3, Oldham said.

Stancil said the viewpoint of symbolic language -- one of several interpretations of Genesis he presents to students -- does not eliminate the historicity of Genesis 1-3, but expresses that historicity through the use of symbol. "... Symbols do not deny history but rather open it up and universalize it."

"The fact that Satan is depicted symbolically as a snake (in Genesis 3) does not detract from the reality of the devil," he said. "In the same way, my use of the term 'historical symbol' is meant to embrace the historicity of the text, not to evade it."

-- Baptism. A speech by Stancil on "Rebaptism in the Southern Baptist Convention" sparked opposition from some trustees. Several questioned whether he was committed to believer's baptism if he would not counsel rebaptism for one whose first baptism experience occurred before one was a believer.

Stancil said he is concerned about attempts to pressure people into feeling they have never been saved and need to be rebaptized after a later Christian experience. He noted that at least 40 percent of his students had been baptized more than once.

The professor said he would counsel a person to examine his or her initial Christian experience to determine if it were a genuine salvation experience.

He added: "I believe that the only person who should be baptized is a person who shows evidence of the signs of regeneration. I further believe that the local church should do all it can to discern whether the person is saved or not prior to his or her baptism."

-- Attitude. The instruction committee observed "a different spirit, tone or content" in Stancil's published works and his written replies to questions furnished by the committee. Committee members described the written replies to committee questions as more open.

"It is hard to say what you believe when people are asking you what you do not believe," Stancil responded. He explained that in the two-and-a-half-hour interview with the instruction committee, he was given "very little time to deal with anything other than controversial matters."

In the debate that followed, 13 trustees spoke to the recommendation -- only two in favor of Stancil.

Marvin Nobles of Missouri identified himself as an inerrantist and said he wished Stancil would use the term. "But when I define the term, I define it like he believes. Even though we use different words, we believe the same thing."

Other trustees differed. Trustee Anthony Mattia of Kansas pointed out that a speaker at the first SBC-sponsored Conference on Inerrancy said that "people don't use the term inerrancy because they don't believe the Bible."

Ronnie Rogers of Arkansas declared, "The whole conservative resurgence (in the SBC) is about inerrancy, and he fails to meet that standard."

After the secret-ballot vote, Stancil again was allowed to address trustees.

In a stinging rebuke, Stancil said he was denied tenure because "some trustees are more interested in furthering a political agenda imposed by denominational power brokers than in arriving at the truth about my theology."

"Having been told by the (SBC) power brokers that their job is to weed out liberalism, they will stop at nothing to further their unholy causes," Stancil declared.

"For many trustees truth and justice are negotiable, and unethical behavior and power politics are acceptable and effective methods to carry out kingdom work," he continued.

Two trustees walked out as Stancil spoke. Others attempted to get trustee chairman James Jones of Michigan to rule Stancil out of order, but Jones did not acknowledge the calls from the trustees.

Stancil said he was "at peace with God, my theology and myself." He said he took comfort in knowing that some day trustees will have to give an account for the "shameful action" taken toward him.

The remarks infuriated some trustees, who privately called for accepting Stancil's own suggestion that trustees buy out his contract if they distrust his teachings. Instead, the president and dean were urged to communicate the "bounds of proper conduct for faculty."

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Conservative strategists meet  
in Louisville after inauguration

By Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Leaders of the conservative movement across the Southern Baptist Convention gathered in Louisville, Ky., Oct. 15-16 for a strategy session, just weeks prior to the annual meetings of Baptist state conventions.

Participants have described three earlier, similar meetings as forums for expressing concern about the SBC and for sharing information about the conservative movements in the state conventions.

The first meeting was held at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., in August 1992. The second meeting was at Two Rivers Baptist Church in

Nashville, Tenn, last February. The third meeting was at a Louisville motel.

The Louisville meeting was held immediately after the inauguration of Albert Mohler as president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. Organizers explained many who participated in the strategy session were already in town for the inauguration of Mohler, whose election was viewed as a victory for conservatives.

Key organizers of the strategy group have been T. C. Pinckney, a retired Air Force general from Alexandria, Va., and Perry Ellis of Dallas, executive director of the Texas Baptist Conservative Fellowship.

Also present at the Louisville meeting was Paul Pressler of Houston, a retired judge and one of the key leaders of conservatives' successful movement to control the SBC.

"We get together for fellowship and understanding what we're facing in our conventions -- just the situation across the convention," said Ellis.

"There is no concentrated effort to lay out a plan for every state. We just sit and listen to each other. We learn from one another, encourage each other and pray for each other."

"This was more or less a follow-up, touch-base type of meeting, to compare notes from state to state and the overall picture of the conservative resurgence," added LaVerne Butler, president of Mid-Continent Baptist Bible College in Mayfield, Ky., who participated with the group for the first time in Louisville.

Both Butler and Ellis cited the new moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as a major point of concern.

"The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is moving so rapidly and developing so many things," said Butler, who described the Fellowship as "anti-Cooperative Program and anti-Southern Baptist."

"We are really concerned about the efforts of folks like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship who are spiriting away our Southern Baptist churches," Ellis added. "These are longstanding Southern Baptist churches leaving the 'rock from which they are hewn.'"

Butler and Ellis insisted a "matter of integrity" mandates that people whose sympathies are with the Fellowship should own up to that and not pretend to be Southern Baptists so they can court churches for the Fellowship.

"It's like Dr. (Herschel) Hobbs said, 'Get in or get out,'" Ellis said.

That exodus won't be a large number, he predicted: "I don't see much ever coming of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. I don't see great numbers of Southern Baptists flocking to the Fellowship. I see disgruntled pastors flocking to the corner."

The Fellowship also is to blame for caucus meetings such as the Louisville gathering, Ellis added.

"Everybody is tired of this struggle. There would be no need for the struggle if the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship were not in the churches trying to get Southern Baptist funds."

Fellowship leaders consistently have denied similar charges. The organization exists to provide like-minded Baptists with an opportunity to support ministries in which their voices are heard, they have said, noting a significant portion of the money the Fellowship collects still goes to SBC causes.

Participants cited Pinckney as the chief organizer of the group. Pinckney was backpacking following the meeting and could not be reached for comment.

Fellowship distracts trustees  
during recent board meetings

By Greg Warner

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Criticism of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was a hot topic during the recent round of trustee meetings at Southern Baptist seminaries and mission boards.

The topic surfaced during at least four trustee meetings held Oct. 11-13.

The Fellowship is an organization of Southern Baptist moderates opposed to the conservative direction of the Southern Baptist Convention and its agencies. Funds collected by the Fellowship support both Southern Baptist causes and Fellowship-endorsed efforts.

But many SBC leaders consider the Fellowship to be in competition with SBC agencies for the loyalty and financial support of rank-and-file Baptists. Some agencies have tried to avoid any dealings with the Fellowship for that reason.

Among the recent actions:

-- At Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, trustees authorized a study of the seminary's relationship with the Fellowship. Among the issues is whether or not Southwestern's alumni should be allowed to host meetings during Fellowship functions. The study reportedly will also consider whether or not to continue accepting financial support from the Fellowship.

Trustees debated at length whether or not to give an award to a couple of seminary supporters because of the couple's involvement with the Fellowship. And the election of David Music as dean of the music school was postponed after trustees raised questions about his membership in Broadway Baptist Church, a Fort Worth congregation that supports the Fellowship.

-- At Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, trustees passed a resolution urging faculty members to support the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget, and to encourage their churches to do likewise -- an indirect criticism of the Fellowship, which receives support from several churches located near the seminary.

-- At the Home Mission Board, trustees appointed Rebecca Waugh of New York City as a missionary but not her husband, David, who is on the Fellowship's Coordinating Council. It was an exception to HMB policy, which requires both missionaries and their spouses to be appointed.

-- At the Foreign Mission Board, trustees debated a motion to delete the name of Keith Parks from the dedication of a book on the FMB's history. A decision was postponed until December. Parks, who resigned last year as FMB president in a dispute with trustees, has since become missions coordinator for the Fellowship.

FMB trustees also asked their chairman to "investigate" reports that Woman's Missionary Union, an SBC mission-support agency, is promoting a Fellowship book on missions. WMU officials told Associated Baptist Press they are distributing the book but the Fellowship is handling promotion.

Southwestern's trustees gave the most attention to the Fellowship.

Trustee Lyle Seltmann of Michigan said giving one of the seminary's most prestigious awards to C. J. and Ophelia Humphrey of Amarillo, Texas, made "a mockery" of the honor, despite the couple's longtime support of the seminary. Ophelia Humphrey is a member of the Fellowship's Coordinating Council.

Seltmann made a motion that the award be rescinded, but he later withdrew it.

Concern over alumni displays at Fellowship meetings arose because of a

motion referred from the June SBC meeting. The motion called for the SBC to withhold Cooperative Program funds from seminaries whose alumni continue to exhibit at the Fellowship.

Seminary President Russell Dilday suggested the seminary respond by saying it is "important to relate appropriately to all of our alumni across the world."

But trustee Don Taylor of Asheville, N.C., proposed a substitute motion instructing the administration to "discourage the alumni association from exhibiting at CBF gatherings."

"It is very apparent," the motion said, "that the CBF exists for the purpose of maliciously creating a chilling and adversarial relationship within the Southern Baptist Convention for the purpose of depriving the SBC of the needed funds to finance the Cooperative Program missionary endeavors...."

Trustees finally approved a motion to table Taylor's motion until a trustee committee completes its study of the Fellowship.

If Southwestern decides not to accept funding from the Fellowship, it will be the first SBC agency to do so. Trustees at Golden Gate Theological Seminary debated a similar proposal before deciding against it.

Cecil Sherman, Fellowship coordinator, accused SBC trustees of "talking out of both sides of their mouths."

"If they are going to take our checks, then they ought not talk bad about us," he said. "And if they are going to talk bad about us, they ought to send the checks back. But to cash the checks and then turn around and talk bad about us, first of all isn't good manners and then it's bad religion."

"I'm not suggesting they send (the money) back," he continued. "We send it to them in the hopes they put it to godly purposes. ... Although we are a different organization, if we're sending money to Southern Baptist Convention agencies it means that we wish them well. We pray for them."

"It's not dirty money, it came from God-fearing people who gave it 'as unto the Lord.'"

Sherman said Fellowship supporters "still are giving quite generously to the SBC agencies."

So far this year, the Fellowship has sent \$2 million to SBC agencies, including \$120,868 to Southwestern, \$92,292 to Southern Seminary, \$1,190,455 to the Foreign Mission Board, and \$327,836 to the Home Mission Board.

But Sherman said money -- either for SBC agencies or the Fellowship's efforts -- is not the real issue for trustees.

"It's not that we are getting a lot of money, but we are beyond their control. That seems to be what is distressing a lot of these people."

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John Hewett resigns  
Asheville pastorate

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (ABP) -- John Hewett, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., resigned suddenly Oct. 20, citing personal problems.

Hewett, 41, has been pastor of the church -- one of the state's largest -- since 1985. He was the first moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a national organization of Southern Baptist moderates.

Hewett's resignation was read to the congregation during its Wednesday night prayer service.

"I need to tell you that our pastor and friend, John Hewett, is in an

emotional and spiritual crisis," said Michael Hester, a church member and Asheville family counselor, who made the announcement.

"Although he has struggled for some time, his personal problems reached crisis proportions within the past week," Hester said. "Last Friday (Oct. 15) John made the difficult decision to resign."

Hester said Hewett is in counseling and that his wife, June, and sons Martin and Joel "will be getting care as well."

Hewett, considered one of the best preachers among moderate Baptist churches, holds master's and doctoral degrees from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. A native of Palatka, Fla., he previously was a pastor in Missouri and Kentucky. He currently is president of the Council on Christian Higher Education for North Carolina Baptists.

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-- By Greg Warner

Kentucky association splitting  
over women's ordination issue

By Mark Wingfield

DANVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Kentucky may soon get a new Baptist association due to a split in the South District Baptist Association over the issue of ordaining women as deacons and ministers.

By a four-vote margin, the association Oct. 19 declined to withdraw fellowship from Lexington Avenue Baptist Church in Danville, Ky., for ordaining women.

Two churches who strongly oppose ordaining women as deacons and ministers immediately withdrew from the association as a result of the vote, and as many as nine others are expected to follow suit.

Those dissenting churches -- perhaps 11 in all -- likely will form a new association, said Bob Kiper, pastor of Forks of Dix River Baptist Church in Lancaster, one of the departing churches.

Messengers entered the annual meeting knowing this would be their last gathering as an association of 28 churches and one mission, regardless of how the vote turned out. Either Lexington Avenue would be removed or a number of other churches would remove themselves, their pastors had warned.

True to that promise, just moments after the vote was reported, Kiper announced his church was withdrawing from the association. The church previously had voted to take such action if Lexington Avenue was not removed from the association, he said.

Terry Cornish, pastor of Mount Freeman Baptist Church in Junction City, Ky., also said his church had voted unanimously to withdraw from the association in such an event.

Other churches opposing the ordination of women likely will vote to leave the association in the weeks ahead, Kiper predicted in an interview after the meeting. He said representatives of at least five churches told him that night that their churches would vote to leave.

The split in the association began in September 1991, when Lexington Avenue ordained Evelyn Crooke as a deacon. Kiper raised an objection to that ordination at the October 1992 meeting of the association, offering a motion that Lexington Avenue either revoke the ordination or be removed from the association.

The issue was referred to a special study committee.

Three months later, Lexington Avenue ordained Jo Garnett to the ministry. Garnett, the church's minister of education, has been a member of the church 25 years and has been on the ministerial staff eight years. She also served the past year as associational clerk and Sunday school director.

After Garnett's ordination, seven pastors in the association wrote a letter saying Lexington Avenue should rescind the ordination or leave the association -- either voluntarily or involuntarily. If neither of those options happened, the pastors said, their churches would leave the association.

The special study committee recommended Oct. 19 that messengers vote on the motion to remove the church immediately, without allowing any further Scriptural debate on whether or not women should be ordained.

Jeff Fox, pastor of Hedgeville Baptist Church, made an emotional appeal for messengers to reject the committee's report and then table the motion to remove Lexington Avenue and "leave it tabled until Jesus comes back."

"There are far more important issues we could be voting on," he added.

But the committee's recommendation passed on a voice vote, and debate on Kiper's original motion began.

Ironically, because of her duties as associational clerk, Garnett was responsible for distributing ballots for the vote prompted by her ordination. A tellers committee counted the votes, however.

Passage of Kiper's motion required a two-thirds majority, or 168 of the 252 registered messengers. The vote was 164 for and 88 against, leaving the ouster effort four votes short.

Tim Noel, pastor of Lexington Avenue, said after the meeting that he had mixed feelings about the outcome.

On one hand, Noel said, he was encouraged that Baptists, "by however small a margin," reaffirmed their historic belief in the autonomy of the local church. But on the other hand, Noel said he was saddened that "nearly two-thirds of the messengers here would vote against the autonomy of the local church."

Despite the deep feelings messengers had on both sides of the issue, the meeting remained mostly cordial.

Noel said Baptists in the association probably behaved better than Baptists sometimes do at state and national meetings because in this case they all know each other well. "Unlike the Southern Baptist Convention, we live next to each other," he said. "I see these people at the store every week."

If a new association is formed by conservative churches in the Danville-Lancaster area, it would have to petition for affiliation with the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

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Groups call for alcohol-tax  
increase to fund health care

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- National health-care reform should be funded in part by increasing the federal tax on alcohol, according to Baptist ethicists and a Washington alcohol-policy expert.

No such increase is included in President Bill Clinton's health-care reform proposal. However, Clinton's proposal does call for an increased tax

on tobacco to help fund health care.

Both tobacco and alcohol should be taxed to fund health-care reform, argues Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics in Nashville, Tenn.

Parham wrote Clinton Oct. 1 to express this opinion on behalf of the center, which is supported by moderate Southern Baptists.

The Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission also supports increased taxes on alcohol and tobacco, said Louis Moore, CLC media director. The CLC will sponsor a national conference on the president's health-care reform proposals in January.

The CLC conference has been announced primarily to deal with concerns about funding for abortion, euthanasia and living wills, but it also will address issues such as alcohol and tobacco, Moore said.

Parham, meanwhile, has called on Clinton to reconsider his position on alcohol taxation. He cites an array of reasons for this point:

-- Alcohol is the second leading cause of premature death in the United States.

-- Alcohol is a major contributor to the nation's social dysfunctions, including domestic violence.

-- Alcohol is a major contributor to the nation's health-care bill.

Parham's sentiments are echoed by George Hacker, director of the alcohol-policies project with the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington, D.C.

Increasing the tax on alcohol "could raise substantial amounts of revenue" and "would help reduce consumption and reduce health-care problems," Hacker said. Ultimately, that means lower health-care costs.

"One of the most important results is the effect it will have on youth drinking and drinking among heavy drinkers," he continued. "The economists find that those drinkers are much more likely to be influenced -- that is reduce their consumption -- than are other moderate or light drinkers.

"The reason is that about 10 percent of the drinkers in this country consume over half the alcohol. All the rest of the drinkers consume very modest amounts of alcohol. Another 35-40 percent of the American adult population doesn't drink at all."

This explains why polls consistently show wide support for higher taxes on alcohol, Hacker said.

For example, a Harris Poll conducted the first week of October shows 71 percent of Americans favor a \$2 tax on a bottle of liquor to help fund health care for all citizens. That compares with 69 percent who favor a \$1 tax on a pack of cigarettes and 68 percent who favor a 25 percent tax on guns and ammunition.

Currently, federal tax on alcohol amounts to \$2.14 for a fifth of liquor, 33 cents for a six-pack of beer and 21 cents for a bottle of wine.

Increasing that tax to \$2.83 for a fifth of liquor, 83 cents for a six-pack of beer and 76 cents for a bottle of wine could generate about \$4 billion annually in additional revenue, Hacker said.

Even though the president's proposal doesn't call for such an increase, the debate is not over, both Hacker and Parham said.

"As the Congress gets more and more involved, it is likely that alcohol may be picked up again. I'm not sure if the administration is going to propose it. But I don't think the administration will oppose congressional action to raise alcohol taxes."

Senate approves measure  
restricting abortion funding

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate overwhelmingly approved Oct. 18 a bill that would loosen the ban on government funding of abortions for poor women.

The measure was included as part of the appropriations bill for the Department of Health and Human Services, which was approved 80-15.

Abortion rights advocates tried to lift the ban but were only successful in modifying it. Current law allows Medicaid funding for abortions only if the life of the mother is in danger. The measure would expand that provision to allow funding for abortions in the cases of rape and incest.

The measure is ready for presidential action.

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-- By Pam Parry

Experts say Yeltsin working  
for religious freedom in Russia

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Russian President Boris Yeltsin is making a good-faith effort to bring religious freedom to his country, according to an official at the National Security Council.

Richard Schifter, NSC special assistant to the president and counselor, told Associated Baptist Press that "Yeltsin and the people around him are making a major effort to move the country into a mode of operation that is in keeping with" human-rights standards set in the Helsinki Accords.

The Helsinki Accords are an international agreement among nations in Eastern and Western Europe and North America that protect a range of human rights, including religious freedom.

Schifter's observation follows comments by officials loyal to Yeltsin that Russian Baptists would be vital in the creation of a new society. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board reported that the government officials made that overture during the 29th Russian Baptist Congress.

Vladimir Shumejka, first deputy prime minister of Russia, said that societal changes would include equal rights for all religions, according to an FMB story.

"That is good news," Schifter said, adding that Russian officials have a new recognition that reform should include religious freedom. "That religious freedom means freedom for all denominations, not just for a particular established church.

"In the struggle that we have seen in Russia between President Yeltsin on the one hand and Parliament on another, we see a commitment by Yeltsin and the people who support him to fulfill the obligation taken by the Soviet Union when it signed the (Helsinki) Final Act."

A Baptist congressman active in international human-rights issues agreed with Schifter.

Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-Md., co-chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (commonly referred to as the Helsinki Commission), said: "It is very gratifying to see that Russian government officials have recognized the importance of the Baptist church in the spiritual rebirth of Russia. It was only a few months ago, when the Parliament passed restrictive

amendments to the law on religion, that I called (Yeltsin's) attention to the many shortcomings in the legislation.

"I was pleased that President Yeltsin rejected the law and hope that the upcoming parliamentary elections will bring into the new Parliament legislators who are committed to religious freedom."

The Helsinki Commission is an independent agency created by Congress to monitor compliance with a series of human-rights accords.

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-- By Pam Parry

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