

# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner  
Associate Editor: Bob Allen  
Phone: (904) 262-6626  
Fax: (904) 262-7745

November 8, 1994

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- Baylor University ready to elect new president
- Resurgent Calvinism renews debate over who has a chance at heaven
- Does Calvinism help or hurt missions and evangelism?
- Nothing comical about SBC's shift on Calvinism, some scholars say
- Sidebar: Calvinism shaping force in Reformation, Baptist life
- Boy, 14, readjusting to Tanzania after receiving artificial arm

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

## **Baylor University ready to elect new president**

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- The governing board of Baylor University, the nation's largest Baptist college, is poised to elect a new president but officials are not saying who it is.

The board of regents of Baylor, a 10,000-student school in Waco, Texas, has scheduled a special meeting for Nov. 17-18 to hear a recommendation from its presidential search committee.

The committee has not announced its choice, but published reports in Waco have focused on Thomas Corts, the popular and widely respected president of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

Both Corts and Paul Powell, president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board in Dallas, have been mentioned recently as the top candidates to replace Herbert Reynolds, who will retire as Baylor president May 31, 1995. One unconfirmed report, however, said Powell, a Baylor regent, withdrew his name from consideration.

Corts, 53, has been president of Samford since 1983. In September he led trustees of the 3,200-student school to distance itself from the Alabama Baptist State Convention, eliminating the convention's role in election of the university's trustees. That action is expected to draw opposition during the Nov. 15-16 meeting of the Alabama convention.

Baylor took similar action in 1990 in a bitter fight with conservatives in the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Powell, then a trustee, was elected first chairman of the newly created Baylor regents board, the university's chief governing body.

Powell is a graduate of Baylor. Corts has no Baylor ties.

Powell was traveling and could not be reached for comment. Thomas Miller, Annuity Board senior vice president, said he could not confirm reports Powell has withdrawn his name from consideration. "It would not be

appropriate for him to have any comment, both because he is a regent and because he has been mentioned as a candidate," Miller added.

Corts could not be reached for comment. A spokeswoman for Samford said she was unaware of the upcoming Baylor regents meeting and did not know if Corts was the nominee.

Both the Baylor regents' chairman and search committee chairman declined to discuss the identity of the nominee.

Chairman Gale Galloway notified the 36 regents of the called meeting, which he said was for the purpose of hearing and acting on the report from the presidential search committee. But he told the Waco Herald-Tribune that the nominee would not be announced before the vote.

Reynolds, 64, has been president fo Baylor since 1981. He announced his intention to retire last year.

Corts, a native of Terre Haute, Ind., is a graduate of Georgetown (Ky.) College and holds master's and doctor's degrees from Indiana University. For nine years before going to Samford, he was president of Wingate College, a Baptist college in North Carolina.

-30-

-- By Greg Warner

---

EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is a three-part series (and a sidebar) on a resurgence in Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention.

---

## **Resurgent Calvinism renews debate over who has a chance at heaven**

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Southern Baptists created a public debate last year by producing estimates of how many Americans are headed for hell, but a greater internal controversy could be forming over how many of those "lost" people even have a chance of going to heaven.

A number of Baptist historians, theologians and missions leaders see a renewed influence of Calvinist theology among Southern Baptists today. This theology -- and particularly its belief that God has preselected only a certain number of sinners to be saved -- is alternatively condemned as a looming threat to missions and evangelism and praised as a way for Southern Baptists to return to their historical roots.

Some observers say the issue could produce a split among Southern Baptist conservatives, now in control of the 15 million-member denomination after a long, bruising fight with Baptist moderates. This prediction is based on the idea that most Southern Baptist conservatives hold strongly to the revivalistic notion of free will -- that "whosoever will may come" to faith in Jesus Christ -- an idea said to be in conflict with strict Calvinism.

But proponents of the new brand of Southern Baptist Calvinism contend their view that God predestines some to salvation does not preclude the need for missions and evangelism.

This debate has surfaced in recent weeks on the campus of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., where President Albert Mohler is an outspoken Calvinist. Mohler advocates each of the five points of classic Calvinism, including the idea that God has preselected some people for salvation and others for damnation.

Mohler's position reportedly has drawn criticism from both members of the seminary's faculty and its board of trustees -- unlikely allies due to the trustees' desire to turn the seminary in a more conservative direction

against the will of the more moderate faculty. The conservative-dominated trustee board hired Mohler last year, praising him as the man to return Southern Baptists' oldest seminary to its conservative roots.

He has begun to do that, mostly under the banner of recovering the true intentions of the seminary's founders. And to his understanding, the seminary's founders were five-point Calvinists.

"Five-point Calvinism" is theological shorthand for a doctrinal system generally attributed to 16th century theologian John Calvin. Again in theological shorthand, these doctrines have been summarized as total depravity of all people, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints.

Total depravity says all humans exist in a fallen, sinful state and cannot save themselves. Unconditional election says those who are saved are saved only because God has chosen to save them, not because of any merit on their part. Perseverance of the saints -- more commonly known as "once saved, always saved" -- says a person who receives God's gift of salvation cannot lose it.

These three ideas find general acceptance among Southern Baptists. And to that extent, most Southern Baptists could be classified as three-point Calvinists.

The other two tenets of Calvinism, however, have been the more controversial throughout Baptist history.

Limited atonement, as opposed to a general atonement, says Christ's death on the cross effectively bought salvation for only a limited number of people -- the elect -- rather than having the potential to save all of humanity. Irresistible grace says this act of God's grace through Christ is so complete that all the elect will be compelled to profess faith in Jesus Christ.

Taken to an extreme, these ideas historically have led Christians to abandon interest in missions and evangelism. Baptists in America have split over this issue in the past, most notably giving rise to the "hard-shell" Baptists and "primitive" Baptists still found in parts of the country today.

Pioneer English missionary William Carey faced down Calvinist objections to his desire for missionary activity. His opponents argued that if God wanted to save the heathen he certainly didn't need Carey's help. Carey, an English cobbler, rebelled against this "hyper-Calvinism" and began the modern missionary movement in the late 18th century.

But Carey still was a Calvinist, as most modern-day Baptist Calvinists are quick to point out.

"William Carey and others reacted against that, still within the framework of Calvinism," noted Timothy George, dean of the Beeson Divinity School at Samford University. "He simply said the Great Commission is still in effect. It was that stream of Calvinistic Baptist life that most influenced the origins of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Though Calvinists, the SBC's founders were "missionary-minded people," George said. And so were other giants of Baptist heritage, including the famed London preacher Charles Spurgeon, he added.

"The greatest evangelists in the history of the church have been Calvinists," George said.

Mohler believes even the Apostle Paul could be classified as a Calvinist. "I firmly believe the Apostle Paul held to these convictions, and he was the greatest missionary in the history of the church," he said.

But other scholars take a different perspective on the issue.

While Carey and other early Baptists were influenced by Calvinism, they were "Calvinists with a difference," said Leon McBeth, Baptist history professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. "The way I read the story, Baptists were never doctrinaire Calvinists in the sense that some of the European groups were."

James McClendon, professor of theology at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in California, argues that modern Baptists owe more of their heritage to the 17th century Mennonites and Anabaptists of Denmark than to Calvin.

"The very reason there are Baptists is because we couldn't stand the domination of Calvin," he said. "If we had been able to stand it, we'd still be Presbyterians or Congregationalists. The existence of a Baptist movement in any century has always depended upon this lure of the Baptist idea, or Anabaptism, that breaks the bounds of old Calvinism, even though there's a lot of truth in Calvinism."

Cal Guy, retired professor of missions at Southwestern Seminary and an outspoken supporter of the

SBC's rightward shift, said Baptists have thrived on a mixture of Calvinism and Arminianism, a theology in opposition to Calvinism.

"The Baptist life I've known has always been basically Calvinistic but with enough Arminianism to suit it more to a totally Scriptural interpretation. For example, II Peter says it is not the will of God for any to perish. I don't see how you can base limited atonement on that."

"Five-point Calvinism is not biblically grounded," added Robert Sloan, a New Testament scholar and dean of the George Truett Seminary of Baylor University. "It cannot be sustained by the Scriptures. It is a dagger to the heart of evangelism.

"The simple historical fact is that it is a deterrent to evangelism. It has the functional effect on people of creating a spiritual passivity," Sloan said.

This danger could signal a potential rift between Southern Baptist conservatives and Southern Baptist conservatives who also are Calvinists, he said.

"If the true five-point Calvinists in the conservative movement dare to speak up and declare their views and publicly have the courage of their convictions, it will produce a division within the politically conservative movement," Sloan said.

That sentiment is shared by Jesse Fletcher, author of a newly released history of the SBC. "The oldest Baptist fault line runs along the theological question of God's sovereignty and human free will," he wrote in "The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History."

"The question of election, predestination and atonement may be the new divisive question among Southern Baptist fundamentalists," added Bill Leonard, a Baptist historian and chairman of the religion department at Samford University. "In the popular mind, most Southern Baptists do not understand how you can be evangelistic and believe in limited atonement. Calvinists think you can, but most people do not."

For his part, Mohler said there is not and must not be division between Southern Baptist conservatives on this issue. "I do not believe Southern Baptists are going to allow their energies and their commitment to biblical doctrine to be sidetracked in a divisive way," he said.

But while wanting to get along with fellow conservatives, Southern Baptist Calvinists remain firm in their own theological convictions.

"There can be and ought to be a genial and amiable fellowship between Christian brethren who disagree on these points," said Tom Ascol, a Florida pastor who helped start a loose association of Baptist Calvinists called the Founders Conference. "But at the end of the day, once we've decided we've got an inerrant Bible, somebody's got to decide what it means."

-30-

## **Does Calvinism help or hurt missions and evangelism?**

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- Does belief that God has preselected some people for eternal life and others for eternal damnation run counter to a passion for missions and evangelism?

Absolutely not, say some Baptists who adhere to such a theology.

Probably so, say others who see such theology as a slippery slope to anti-missions sentiment.

Larry Lewis, conservative president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board, said Calvinism can be the "death blow" to evangelism and missions if carried to an extreme.

"If it is somehow concluded, for one reason or another, that all people cannot be saved, it diminishes the imperative to share Christ with all people," he said. "I don't think it has ever been the doctrine of Baptists that the gospel should not be shared with all people to the end that everyone can, if they will, be saved."

This doctrine that worries Lewis is part of a belief system commonly known as five-point Calvinism. Among its most controversial elements is a doctrine called "limited atonement."

Tom Nettles, a Baptist and Calvinist who teaches at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, defines limited atonement in his 1986 book, "By His Grace and For His Glory."

Nettles says limited atonement "affirms that Jesus Christ in dying bore the sins of his people, enduring all the punishment that was due to them by becoming for them the curse that the law demanded. It pleased the Lord God to set him forth and bruise him for this purpose, for in so doing he gained -- by his meritorious death -- forgiveness, righteousness, sanctification and eternal glory for a large and definite number of people, all of whom he knew and to whom he was joined before the foundation of the world."

Modern Baptist Calvinists, who often describe themselves as evangelical Calvinists, say this doctrine does not erase the need for missions and evangelism. They explain that since they don't know who is among God's elect and who isn't, they must preach the gospel to everyone.

"I can't concern myself with a person's election," said Tom Ascol, a founding member of the Founders Conference, an annual meeting of Southern Baptist Calvinists. "We're not to go around and look somebody in the eye and determine if they're elect. That's impossible. We're to preach the gospel to everyone with the assurance that God is going to save his elect."

Ascol and other Southern Baptist Calvinists -- such as Albert Mohler of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Timothy George of Beeson Divinity School -- draw a distinction between evangelical Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism.

"Hyper-Calvinism is a deadly, deadly error, and we renounce it," Ascol said. "It says mankind and people in general do not have a duty to repent and believe. We do believe in the obligation of everyone everywhere to repent and believe, whether or not they are elect."

But while all people are accountable to repent, only God's elect are able to repent and believe, they add.

George explained this belief in terms of a two-edged truth: "The atoning work of Christ is sufficient for the sins of the world. Whosoever will believe may be saved. But it is efficient only among those whom God has elected to salvation."

Mohler added: "Any way you resolve the issue, all biblical Christians must agree based upon the New Testament that there will be those who are saved and those who are not. An honest reading of the New Testament must acknowledge that it is God who determines who will be saved."

Believing that God alone determines who will be saved also requires a belief that God has chosen some people not to be saved, Mohler admitted. "I believe that is the consistent biblical position."

But that does not constitute an anti-missions sentiment, Mohler asserted. And the reported concern among seminary faculty and trustees about Mohler's Calvinism is "a false issue," he said.

Others, including members of Mohler's own faculty, disagree.

"There is a clear and substantial difference between the president's personal theological position and the vast majority of the faculty," said James Chancellor, professor of missions and world religions and chairman of the faculty-trustee liaison committee.

Chancellor said he believes Mohler has given good evidence of his own commitment to evangelism and missions. But the Calvinist theology Mohler espouses does not naturally foster missions and evangelism, Chancellor said.

"The position itself does not lead to a passion for missions," Chancellor said. "This is so obvious that it doesn't even need to be explicated. ... Missions does not spring naturally from a position of five-point Calvinism."

Yet one of Mohler's most heralded achievements as president has been the formation of a new Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth.

Some critics see an irony in that.

One such person is Ken Chafin, retired pastor of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville and former Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism at Southern Seminary.

"I've heard Mr. Graham preach in many of the capitals of the world and have heard him preach in most of the major cities of North America," Chafin said. "Always he preaches that the love of God for the entire world is

manifest in Christ's death for us all and there is no limit to his 'whosoever will may come.'

"To even tie his name to anything that spoke of limited atonement or irresistible grace is a contradiction."

But Mohler and other Baptist Calvinists point again to the fact that William Carey, the founder of the modern missions movement, was a Calvinist, as were many other founders of Southern Baptist missions efforts and the great English preacher Charles Spurgeon.

Still, recognized Baptist leaders in missions and evangelism express concern about where five-point Calvinism leads.

"I believe in the doctrine of election. It's a biblical truth. But I certainly don't believe God elects anybody to be lost," said evangelist Bailey Smith. "We need to assume what God says, that he is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. If we believe that, then we try to win everybody."

Evangelist Jay Strack agrees: "I believe five-point Calvinism is a great hindrance to the missionary zeal and a hot heart for souls.

"I know what happens when folks come to that theological conclusion," Strack said. "It affects their eyesight. It affects how they look at people."

-30-

## **Nothing comical about SBC's shift on Calvinism, some scholars say**

By Mark Wingfield

(ABP) -- After 150 years, Southern Baptist theology has progressed from Calvin to Hobbs, and that's nothing to laugh at, according to some theologians.

"Most people in the pew, if you asked them what they thought about Calvin, would think you were talking about that little cartoon character," said Leon McBeth, Baptist history professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, referring to the "Calvin & Hobbes" comic strip.

But the Calvin and Hobbs of Southern Baptist theology are not fictional. Calvin is the 16th century theologian John Calvin. Hobbs is Herschel Hobbs, the retired longtime pastor of First Baptist Church in Oklahoma City and chairman of the committee that drafted the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement, an enumeration of consensus Baptist beliefs.

McBeth and other Baptist historians generally agree that Southern Baptist beginnings were strongly influenced by theological ideas articulated by Calvin. The basics of his theological system have been labeled "Calvinism" for short.

But somewhere, by the early 20th century, Southern Baptist thought shifted from a strict Calvinism to a modified Calvinism, particularly on the idea of who is able to be saved from God's wrath. Many scholars point to the influence and writings of Hobbs as the best illustration of this modified theology.

Hobbs has become a sort of denominational theologian-at-large and more than any other person is credited with popularizing Southern Baptists' belief system today.

While five-point Calvinism declares that God has elected only some people for eternal life before the foundation of the world, Hobbs asserts that God's salvation is equally available for all.

In his 1971 book interpreting the Baptist Faith and Message, Hobbs wrote: "There are certain pitfalls to be avoided in considering the doctrine of election. One should not magnify certain aspects of God's nature (sovereignty, will, power, pleasure) to the neglect of others (righteousness, love). Neither should one forget the free will of man and his power of choice.

"Also, election should not be regarded as God's purpose to save as few as possible rather than as many as possible," Hobbs said. "The tenor of the Bible is that God loves all men and wishes to save as many as possible."

Then he adds: "If some are saved and others lost regardless of what they do or do not do, what incentive is there to seek the Lord or to preach the gospel?"

While popular today, this is not the view held by many early Southern Baptists.

"It is an incontrovertible fact that the theological convictions held by the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary were ... Calvinist," said seminary President Albert Mohler.

According to Tom Nettles, a Baptist professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, the presidents of the SBC during the convention's first 50 years were strong Calvinists as were "the first educators in both college and seminary circles and the first theological writers of Southern Baptist life." Nettles discusses the influence of Calvinism on Southern Baptists at length in his 1986 book, "By His Grace and For His Glory."

The opposing view to Calvinism is known in theological shorthand as "Arminianism," named for the 16th century theologian Jacobus Arminius. "Arminius taught that salvation was meant for all who would believe, or a general atonement, rather than just the elect, or a particular atonement as advocated by John Calvin," Jesse Fletcher explained in his new history of the SBC.

"You move within a 60-year time period -- from the middle of the 19th century to the first two decades of the 20th century -- from a five-point Calvinism to a three-point Calvinism," explained David Dockery, vice president and theology dean at Southern Seminary. "Limited atonement in particular is no longer a key point, and irresistible grace is modified as well."

More than a dozen theologians, historians and missiologists interviewed for this article cited several common factors which led to this change in theological perspective. Among them:

-- The modernist debate. The fundamentalist-modernist debates of the early 20th century diverted attention from the complete truth of theology, some suggest. "In the effort to defend the fundamentals of the faith, some of the distinctives were left undefended," said Tom Ascol, editor of "Founders Journal," a publication for Baptist Calvinists.

-- Pragmatism. "As Baptists became large and more wealthy, we wanted something that worked. There was a de-emphasis on Christian teaching, on doctrine, on theology. We became more interested in what worked," said Timothy George, dean of the Beeson Divinity School at Samford University.

-- Revivalism. The Great Awakening "with its strong evangelistic fervor really moved us into a proclamation approach of 'whosoever will may come,' said Fletcher. "That was further simplified ... in frontier evangelism."

Revivalism affected Baptist preaching styles, which in turn set the stage for a redefined theology, according to Bill Leonard of Samford University. "If you see your task is evangelizing the world, then you have to suppose that everybody could be evangelized."

-- American democracy. Southern Baptist theology in some quarters melded with the growth of American democratic idealism, Leonard noted. In short, the same ideas about individual freedom and responsibility that are uniquely American merged with Baptists' understanding of God.

-- Prominent figures. Both Calvinists and non-Calvinists today point to the influence before Hobbs of W.T. Conner and E.Y. Mullins as pivotal in the early 20th century. Conner was an influential theology professor at Southwestern Seminary, and Mullins was president of Southern Seminary. Both emphasized the need for individual acceptance of salvation over God's absolute sovereignty to provide salvation.

To reverse this theological shift, the Calvinists among Southern Baptists today are sounding a call to theological renewal. If Southern Baptists would pay more attention to theology, they naturally would see the truths of Calvinist doctrine, they contend.

SBC biographer Fletcher characterizes this movement as "a rather small group of well-trained theologians in some ways reacting to the last 100 years and trying to bring back a more formalized approach to theology."

Aside from prominent figures such as Mohler and George, this movement's strength may best be seen in the Founders Conference. From a group of seven young men in 1982, this annual conference of Baptist Calvinists has grown to crowds of about 250 pastors and theologians. The conference has a mailing list of about 1,200 people, according to Ascol, one of the group's organizers and editor of the group's publication, the Founders

Journal.

"One of the strong convictions I have is that we are living in an atheological age," Ascol said. "People don't know theology anymore. Seventy percent of our people don't even know what justification is. More than that can't distinguish between justification and sanctification. Why is this? What's gone wrong?"

"What's gone wrong is we have de-emphasized the doctrinal foundation of our faith," he said.

-30-

## **Calvinism shaping force in Reformation, Baptist life**

(ABP) -- The influence of John Calvin, the 16th century French scholar whose writings molded the Protestant Reformation in Europe, frames a current debate among Southern Baptist conservatives. Following is a sketch about Calvin's legacy, drawn from history books.

-- Life: John Calvin, born July 10, 1509 in Noyon, France, was a graduate in law, at his father's insistence. After a "sudden conversion" between 1532 and 1534 about which little is known except the two basic convictions it instilled -- that God spoke through the Scriptures and God's will must be obeyed -- Calvin turned exclusively to study of religious questions.

A Catholic, Calvin joined a group of reformers which drew the wrath of the French King Francis. Calvin left the Catholic church, was imprisoned a short time, and fled France.

From Protestant Basel, Switzerland, Calvin wrote in defense of Protestant friends whom he felt were being slandered in France. He published his Institutes of the Christian Religion in 1536, prefaced by a letter to the king, at age 26. The work grew over the years into an extensive final edition, published in 1559.

-- Theology: Borrowing from earlier reformers, including Martin Luther, Calvin compiled a view emphasizing that God is good and the source of all goodness everywhere. Man was created good, but because of the fall is incapable of goodness, Calvin said. No human effort at goodness has any merit, and all people deserve damnation.

Because of divine mercy, God chooses to rescue some individuals from their deserved condemnation through the work of Christ, whose death paid the penalty for sins of those on whose behalf he died, Calvin taught.

Salvation is attained through personal faith in Christ, which, Calvin believed, is initiated by the Holy Spirit, who prompts repentance and faith among the elect, those chosen for salvation by God.

Since who is able to respond to faith in Christ is up to God, critics of Calvinism have charged it is fatalistic. But for Calvin election was primarily a doctrine of Christian comfort -- that God has a plan of salvation for individuals -- during a period when many minority Christians were persecuted for their beliefs, historians say.

-- Legacy: Calvin's work focused in Geneva, Switzerland, established as a model community for Protestant refugees, where he died May 27, 1564, but through his writings and academy, his influence spread to mold Protestantism in France, the Netherlands, Scotland and the English Puritans.

In England, where the modern Baptist movement emerged, reformers were divided over Calvin's views. The earliest Baptist churches, beginning about 1609, were called General Baptist, emphasizing a "general atonement" advocated by Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius. General Baptists believed that anyone who believes in Christ can be saved, and not only Calvin's "elect." General Baptists emphasized free will and taught the possibility of "falling from grace" or losing one's salvation.

By the late 1630s, other churches arose describing themselves as "Particular Baptists," emphasizing Calvin's view. Particular Baptists taught that Christ died not for all mankind, but only those chosen for salvation. The elect would inevitably be saved and once saved, could never become "unelect" or lose their salvation.

-- In America: Both types of Baptists migrated to America, but gradually most General Baptist churches

"reformed" to Particular Baptist views by 1800. The Free Will Baptist movement, which emphasizes every person's freedom to believe in Jesus Christ, over against Calvinistic predestination, continues today, however, with three major associations numbering about 3,000 churches with 300,000 members.

In the Southern Baptist Convention, the merging of Baptist streams emphasizing the missionary mandate and frontier revivalism softened the dominant Calvinism of many of the denomination's founders, scholars say.

One historian, Leon McBeth, in his 1987 history, "The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness," notes a small but growing resurgence of Calvinistic theology. That resurgence is in part a rebuttal to what its proponents call Arminian tendencies in SBC evangelism, including "shallowness," emotional manipulation, and a tendency of some churches to baptize younger children, even preschoolers. That tendency, McBeth said, is sometimes characterized as "infant baptism with bigger infants."

-30-

-- By Bob Allen

## **Boy, 14, readjusting to Tanzania after receiving artificial arm**

By Sandy Strickland

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- He's grown 3 inches, can use his artificial arm well enough to pick up a pen and is attending school for the first time at age 14.

John Meguliki returned to his native Tanzania in April after five months in Jacksonville, Fla., and a crash course in American culture.

The lanky teen's right arm was bitten off below the elbow by a crocodile in a near-fatal accident three years ago. He was playing in the river about five miles from his parents' hut when the 6-foot reptile attacked.

The Florida Baptist Convention brought the boy to Jacksonville last November in hopes that he could be fitted with a prosthesis.

He went from a one-room hut in an arid African village to a humid Florida city preoccupied with the Gator emblem, mascot for the University of Florida.

During his lengthy treatment process, his physician, orthopedic surgeon Bruce Steinberg, tried an experimental procedure to save his arm from amputation above the elbow as the bone grew. Steinberg inserted an inflatable rubber bladder inside his arm to stretch the tissue so there would be enough skin to cover the stump. The procedure worked, and he was able to be fitted with a prosthesis donated by J.E. Hanger Inc.

Then it was time for him to return to Tanzania, along with five trunks of clothes, gifts, toys and candy.

"Those of us who brought him here knew it would be difficult for him to go home," said Jack Brymer, former editor of the Florida Baptist Witness who served as one of John's host families. "When you go from nothing to everything, how can you go back to nothing?"

Indeed, when he returned to his Masai village, he found his mother and father, who is blind, facing near starvation.

"Life is so hard," his tearful mother told one of the Southern Baptist missionaries in a letter sent to Brymer. "Other families are dying. We have no crop now. The land is wasted. Our only hope is in John, if he can get some schooling and then find a way to take care of us when he is finished."

Shortly afterward, Meguliki left the village to attend school and live with a Tanzanian pastor and his family in the capital city of Dar es Salaam, population 3 million.

The pastor receives a stipend for the boy's care from a trust fund set up by friends in Jacksonville and managed by the Florida Baptist Foundation.

He is doing well emotionally and physically, though he still faces a period of readjustment, said Cecil Williams, who recently visited him with a group from Shindler Drive Baptist Church. He is using his arm, climbing trees, riding the bike Brymer bought him and impressing everyone with his grasp of English.

Meguliki's message to friends in Florida: "I am going to go back another time and see them. They loved me so much, and I love them."

-30-

-- Reprinted from the Florida Times-Union. Used by permission.

END

---