

Associated Baptist Press

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March 2, 1995

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

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Convicted killer now says anti-abortion violence wrong

By Paul Pinkham

OLUSTEE, Fla. (ABP) -- A man convicted of killing an abortion doctor in 1993 says he no longer believes violence is an appropriate tool for people opposed to abortion.

"I used to believe it was justifiable homicide. I don't anymore," Michael Griffin told the Florida Times-Union yesterday.

A jury convicted Griffin of fatally shooting David Gunn outside a Pensacola abortion clinic two years ago. Although he maintains someone else shot Gunn, Griffin is serving a life sentence at Baker Correctional Institution with no chance of release for 25 years.

Since Griffin's conviction, former minister Paul Hill was sentenced to death for killing another abortion doctor in Pensacola and John Salvi was arrested on charges of murdering two clinic workers in Massachusetts.

Griffin, 33, remains staunchly opposed to abortion. During the hour-long interview, he referred to abortion practitioners several times as people who kill babies and said God will hold governing authorities accountable for allowing abortions.

Although peaceful protest is fine, violence at abortion clinics isn't the answer, he said.

"My change of mind has come from reading the Bible and praying," he said. "I've had two years to think about it and look at everybody's viewpoint.

Although his change of heart came gradually, Griffin said it was fully realized in December when he was listening to tapes from the New Testament book of Romans in the prison chapel library. The verses spoke about how Christians should submit to government authority because it is instituted by God.

Other abortion-clinic slayings also affected him, he said.

"Mental anguish comes into play as I consider how a child would react when told a doctor had to die that he may live," he said.

Griffin said he mailed a statement to anti-abortion groups March 1 asking that clinic violence and illegal trespassing stop.

"I'm trying to keep some harm from other people. I'm trying to prevent violence around the abortion industry," he said.

The statement says, in part: "If we view this issue in its proper perspective, we will see that we are under no obligation to forcibly rescue those offered for death by abortion. It is the members of the governing authorities who are accountable for the laws enacted and enforced. They are the ones who will stand judged on the day of reckoning. ... The attributes of love include gentleness, meekness and a soft answer, all tempered with wisdom. Love does not include violence of any sort."

Griffin said he wanted to mail a copy of the statement to Hill, but Florida prison regulations forbid one inmate from sending mail to another. Hill advocates clinic violence.

Griffin said he and others who advocated violence took certain Biblical passages out of context.

"You really have to read the Bible in its full context," he said. "You can't just take one scripture or two and use it the way you want it."

But that's just what Griffin is doing now, said one anti-abortion activist.

The Bible, taken as a whole, justifies those who kill to prevent abortion, said Cathy Ramey, associate editor of Life Advocate Magazine. She said the magazine circulates to about 3,400 anti-abortion activists around the world.

"I still believe that it is morally justified to offer the unborn child the same protection as the born," Ramey said. "The individual in Scripture is given the right to protect innocent life that is in danger. ... What I want done for my own care and protection, I should not deprive another person of."

On the other side of the issue, Linda Lanier, executive director of Planned Parenthood of Northeast Florida, said she has no way to gauge Griffin's sincerity but finds hope in his message. Planned Parenthood clinics provide abortion information.

"I hope his voice from prison is a message to those who might be contemplating violent acts," Lanier said.

Pete Gunn, father of the doctor Griffin was convicted of killing, said from his office in Kentucky that he doesn't think Griffin understands how many people were affected by his actions.

"You hurt so many people by an action like that," said Gunn. "He may have decided he made a bad deal and now he wants to get out.

"I do not want to escalate this thing. My family has been through enough, and we would like to be able to bury our dead."

Gunn, who described himself as opposed to "abortion wholesale," said Griffin has never apologized to the Gunn family.

But Griffin, whose conviction is being appealed, said in yesterday's interview that he was framed for Gunn's murder by prosecutors and his court-appointed lawyer. They manufactured evidence and witnesses, he said.

He said he suffers from memory loss about the day Gunn was shot but denies confessing when he was arrested, as police said he did.

Whoever killed Gunn should be punished in accordance with Florida law, Griffin said. But he said he has no idea who that is.

"I've been trying to figure out who killed David Gunn for the past two years," Griffin said. "And I still can't figure it out."

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

Central Texas revival spreads to Southwestern campus

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Spiritual renewal that began in the Texas town of Brownwood in January spread to the campus of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary March 1, producing a day-long chapel service filled with prayer and confession.

Some classes were canceled and students remained in the seminary's Truett Auditorium until late into the night.

Ken Hemphill, president of the Fort Worth, Texas, school, called the experience "a genuine moving of God and the beginning of authentic spiritual awakening."

It began with a 10 a.m. chapel address by John Avant, a Southwestern graduate and the pastor of Coggin Avenue Baptist Church in Brownwood, who described the spiritual renewal that has gripped his congregation, nearby Howard Payne University and other churches in that rural section of central Texas.

Avant's stirring message was followed by what many students are calling an "outpouring" of spiritual healing and cleansing among students, faculty, staff and administrators. The service lasted past 11 a.m., when classes were scheduled to resume, but many teachers canceled their classes so they and students could remain in the auditorium.

"Dr. Avant and I have been very sensitive to the moving of the Holy Spirit," Hemphill said March 1. "We are encouraging everyone to stay as long as they need to."

The service lasted throughout the day and into the night. Pat Gentry, a second-year counseling student, said he saw seminarians "expose themselves to one another and ask for renewed accountability in their personal lives."

Wesley Loveday, a third-year theology student, commented: "A lot of people at Southwestern have realized that the holiness of God has been lacking, and God is reminding us that his holiness is more than morality. It's being set apart from the world."

With over 4,000 men and women in training for ministry, Southwestern is the largest theological seminary in the world. The campus has been in turmoil for a year since the sudden firing of former president Russell Dilday in a dispute with trustees. Hemphill, elected last July, has emphasized the need for spiritual renewal to help heal the emotional and spiritual scars of the past year.

During his address, Avant told how fervent prayer by church members had dominated Coggin Avenue's worship services beginning in January and spread into members' homes. The congregation continues to witness three-and-a-half-hour worship services with 45-minute altar calls, he said.

Confession, repentance, forgiveness and restoration of broken relationships have spread into the Brownwood community and beyond, he said. Frequent conversions and baptisms of young people have caught the attention of Howard Payne University, a Baptist college in Brownwood.

The revival at Coggin Avenue began in the early-morning worship service Jan. 22. Chris Robeson, a Howard Payne student, stood in front of the congregation and tearfully read from the book of Joel about God's judgment.

He shared his burden for his classmates' spiritual lives, Avant said. An older woman in the church joined him at the altar, expressing sorrow that she and the congregation had not been praying for the community.

"People flooded the altar to pray, and that continued through the Sunday school hour," Avant excitedly recalled. "Then the 11 a.m. service came and we were live on the radio."

Avant said he later heard about a man leading a co-worker to Christ as they listened to the service on their truck radio on a Texas ranch. The new convert was immediately baptized in a feeding trough.

That same day, at another Brownwood church, members responded to a challenge from Pastor Mark Bryant, lining the front pews to pray. The movement at Rocky Creek Baptist Church lasted two or three weeks. Meanwhile, the same day, at First Baptist Church in Santa Anna 25 miles west, the 100-member church saw 41 people make spiritual commitments.

The spiritual revival at Howard Payne apparently started a few days later, during a Jan. 26 "celebration" service. Student testimonies led to all-night prayer meetings in dormitories.

A couple weeks later, Henry Blackaby, prayer leader from the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, visited the campus to lead five nightly services. One lasted until 11 p.m. "Once we saw the Spirit move, we didn't want to leave," said Andrea Collins, a junior from League City.

"There was no pressure, no intimidation," said Don Newbury, Howard Payne president. "The anointing of God was just so evident."

"I would say this has taken many of us to a higher plane in our prayer life and our Christian walk," Newbury said. "In general, there has been an upsurge of prayer and service, and interest in spiritual matters has stepped up several notches."

James Hahn, a senior from Schulenburg, said: "I had grown somewhat cynical about revival. I'd heard it so much since I came to college. But when God started moving, there was no doubt about it."

Pastor Avant summarized the happenings in Brownwood: "God is shaking us -- something no person could do."

"God began by doing some things in isolated ways," he said. "He transformed the life of a prominent man in the community who was considering suicide. And couples who were within days of divorce were walking the church aisle to seek God's forgiveness at the altar. When (church) members began to hear this, their eyes began to open."

With the Coggin Avenue Baptist congregation's unanimous vote to join in a mission project with a nearby charismatic church, God has begun to bring a spirit of unity to Brownwood, Avant said.

"Southern Baptists, Nazarenes, Pentecostals, Independent Baptists, and Presbyterians are getting together just to kneel and pray for revival."

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-- By Bob Murdaugh and Ken Camp. Photos available through Associated Baptist Press or Southwestern Seminary.

African-American prof resigns Southern over tenure, race issues

By Marv Knox

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- An African-American professor has resigned from the faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary amid charges of broken promises and racism.

Timothy Johnson, an associate professor in the seminary's Carver School of Church Social Work, submitted his resignation Jan. 31, effective July 31. He will teach at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, N.Y.

In a letter to Southern President Al Mohler, Johnson blamed his decision to leave on the seminary administration's failure to recommend him for tenure.

Johnson was hired as a contract professor in 1991. In academic institutions, tenured professors are elected by trustees, and their appointments are considered permanent. Contract professors are hired by administrators for specified time periods.

"This resignation brings to an end an extremely painful year in which my future prospects at Southern Seminary began to erode because of your actions toward me," Johnson wrote to Mohler. "Specifically, I refer to your adversarial stance regarding initiating a process that would move me into tenure.

"By your actions, you failed to honor or even consider promises regarding the same made to me by the Honeycutt administration."

Roy Honeycutt preceded Mohler as president.

Mohler countered: "Persons who come on contract come on the basis of that contract. Issues of tenure are of a completely different nature.

"I do not recognize an implicit pledge to presume upon the action of the trustees" to elect Johnson to tenure, he added. "That was not implied by either administration."

Honeycutt acknowledged that election to tenure is a trustee prerogative. However, he recalled Johnson began his career at Southern with a clear expectation he would be recommended for tenure.

"We discussed with Timothy that, based on his years of experience and age, we would be ready to offer him tenure upon completion of his (doctor's) degree and satisfactory evaluations of his performance," he said. "He has earned the degree, and I never had any cause to question his performance.

"Of course, the president has no power to grant tenure; only the trustees can. But when the president says, 'We will give you tenure,' it is understood that it will be recommended."

Honeycutt noted the actions of his administration are not binding. "It was not automatic," he said of a recommendation for tenure. "I could not bind another president any more than (Johnson's) performance could bind me."

Still, Honeycutt regards the seminary's commitment to Johnson as more than an agreement between individuals. "It was an institutional commitment that the president on behalf of the institution made to a faculty member," he said.

Mohler contended Johnson's decision to leave the seminary pre-empted the possibility that he might be elected to a new tenured faculty position.

"This is not an issue that was finalized by Southern Seminary but by Professor Johnson," Mohler said. He added he "would not presume" to speculate whether Johnson would have been recommended and elected to the new post.

Ironically, Johnson's departure has created a scenario in which a tenured professorship is open.

"I had requested a tenure-track position, and with his leaving that created a vacancy," said Diana Garland, dean of the Carver School. "If Tim had stayed on the faculty, he would have been a candidate for the position (which) ... is open first of all to anyone on the faculty."

Although Johnson declined to be interviewed for this story, his resignation letter indicated his doubts about his chances for tenure.

"The ultimate indignity was that of having been given an 18-month contract at a time when the Carver School of Church Social Work was short of faculty," Johnson wrote. He contrasted his contract with three-year contracts offered to two other faculty members.

"I and all of my constituents have yet to understand why no place was made for me to continue in ministry at Southern Seminary," his letter stated. "But we have concluded, from your actions regarding me, that it was your intent that I not be a part of the seminary's future."

In his letter, Johnson claimed race is a part of the issue.

"Actions on your part also valorized surreptitious communication processes regarding material on racism and African-American teaching styles used in my classes," he wrote. And he added that the communication about

him was allowed to "subvert contract discussions."

Mohler denied race is an issue. "Race was not a factor on the part of the administration," he said. "We are committed to racial and ethnic inclusivity."

He cited the seminary's "heritage of fairness and equality in racial issues." Southern was the first Kentucky school to confer a doctoral degree upon an African-American, he said, and noted the seminary has "a strong representation of minority students and faculty" and has "actively sought out African-Americans to serve on our faculty."

"Any assertion or inference that racial bias plays a part in decisions regarding personnel, including the awarding of tenure, is false," he said.

Although Garland said she could not comment on the specifics of personnel matters, she said no administrative actions have involved "racism or teachings about racism."

Johnson reportedly angered or offended some white students on campus, who have said his teaching is "too Afrocentric," and who have complained to Mohler, circumventing the normal grievance procedure.

Mohler declined to comment directly on complaints regarding personnel. But he said, "It is imperative that professors maintain a constructive relationship to students."

Garland also downplayed racial overtones. "Looking back on 150 years of history, it's important that we as Southern Baptists acknowledge that we have been guilty of racism," she said. "We need to continue to examine our institutions and our actions and our policies, and we need to continue to examine ourselves personally. But if I thought racism were an issue here, I would have raised it myself."

For his part, Johnson concluded in his letter, "I have great sorrow that with my departure and that of Dr. Molly Marshall (the seminary's first female theology professor), this faculty moves back toward the kind of homogeneity that stands as a shameful part of its past history."

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State historians protest plan to nix Historical Commission

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A group of Southern Baptist historians is protesting the plan to eliminate the Southern Baptist Historical Commission, saying the move would hurt the study of history among Baptists.

The Historical Commission, based in Nashville, Tenn., is slated to be eliminated in a massive downsizing and restructuring approved by the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee Feb. 21.

Fifteen state Baptist historical directors from 11 states signed a statement released March 1 objecting to parts of the plan, which will take two years to enact and will reduce the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12.

Lynn May, executive director of the commission, is the only agency head to protest the reorganization, drafted by a blue-ribbon Program and Structure Study Committee. The plan, which would eliminate the commission and distribute some of its duties to other agencies, would not give historical studies their proper priority in Baptist life, May said.

The state historians agreed. They called the 44-year-old Historical Commission the "collective memory" of Southern Baptists and "the single most effective and efficient means for Southern Baptists to continue to preserve, interpret and communicate our heritage."

"Any restructuring of historical work within the SBC should be done to enhance and strengthen Southern Baptists' understanding of our heritage," the statement said. "The recommendation of the Program and Structure Study Committee does neither."

Under the plan, the commission's archives and the responsibility of teaching history would be assigned to the six SBC seminaries and their presidents. The duty of producing historical materials goes to the Sunday School Board.

"Dividing these duties among six institutions will lead to duplication of effort and unclear understanding of responsibilities -- problems that the study committee was designed to eliminate," the historians said.

Since many of the committee's recommendations consolidated and centralized denominational tasks, the group said, scattering the Historical Commission's duties "does not make sense."

One member of the study committee voiced disagreement, saying the traditional structure "is no longer the most effective option."

"I understand and affirm the concern of the state Baptist historical directors regarding the preservation of our Baptist heritage," said Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "Nevertheless, I am convinced that the new structure will facilitate expanded and extended work toward this end: that the Baptist heritage be preserved and promoted."

The historical directors signing the document are: Alan Lefever of Texas, Susan Broome and Robert Gardner of Georgia, Fred Anderson of Virginia, John Woodard of North Carolina, Earl Joiner of Florida, Sue Lynn McGuire, Steve Baker and Earnest Heard of Tennessee, Doris Yeiser of Kentucky, Ray Granade of Arkansas, Betty Danielson of New Mexico, Nelda Kent of Arizona, and Lucille Boyd and Max Daly of Oregon.

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-- By Greg Warner

Oklahoma director of missions tapped for CLC media post

By Bob Allen

RALEIGH, N.C. (ABP) -- An Oklahoma director of missions known for his pro-life stance has been named director of media and product development for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Bill Merrill, 51, has been director of Comanche-Cotton Baptist Association in Lawton, Okla., since 1991. Previously he was a pastor of churches in Texas and Oklahoma for a total of 28 years.

Merrill was elected unanimously to the post March 2 by trustees of the Christian Life Commission, the Southern Baptist Convention's moral-concerns agency, at their semi-annual meeting in Raleigh, N.C.

Merrill will fill a position left vacant by the recent resignation of Louis Moore, who is now vice president for communications at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

CLC Executive Director Richard Land said "our needs have changed" since Moore was hired in 1988. Then, Land said, "we needed a journalist with a seminary background." Now, he said, the agency needs "someone who can give us more help with program areas."

Merrill brings no journalism experience to the communications post but does have "journalistic aptitude," Land said. Merrill will write press releases for Baptist Press and secular media and will edit "Light," one of the CLC's two periodicals. Other program assignments will be determined, Land said.

The agency now has adequate technical staff to remove much of the hands-on journalism from the position, Land said. The department employs support staff and a Washington news office staffed by Tom Strode, a full-time journalist. Strode edits "Salt," the CLC's other periodical.

Merrill is a founding member of Southern Baptists for Life. He has written a Sunday school lesson on the sanctity of human life for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board and has been featured in a National Right to Life periodical for his abortion-alternative ministries, Land said.

He will begin his new job on or about May 1. His base salary will be \$45,000. With benefits, his compensation package totals \$57,851.

In other action, the commission voted to give its 1995 John Leland Religious Liberty Award to Charles Lyons, pastor of Armitage Baptist Church in Chicago.

Land praised Lyons for "the stand he's taken for religious liberty and free speech against what can only be termed vicious harassment by the homosexual community."

On Easter Sunday in 1992, six people identified as members of homosexual activist groups were arrested for attempting to disrupt the church's morning worship service. A staff member at the church said the congregation apparently was targeted for its pro-life activities. Several church members regularly picketed at a nearby abortion clinic, he said.

Land said Lyons was selected because, "We felt he needed some positive affirmation for the courageous stand he has taken at Armitage Baptist Church."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following four stories report on the annual seminar of the Christian Life Commission.
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Racism, denominational pride hindering work in cities, leader says

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (ABP) -- "Denominational pride" and racism have rendered the witness of Christ ineffective in many of America's cities, an African-American pastor and Southern Baptist Convention leader told a Baptist meeting in Wake Forest, N.C., Feb. 28.

Gary Frost, second vice president of the SBC and pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church in Youngstown, Ohio, spoke on "The Struggle for the Inner City" at the 28th annual seminar of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, held Feb. 27-March 1 on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Frost endorsed the Promise Keepers' men's movement as an example of moving "beyond the barriers of denomination and race to demonstrate to the world the beautiful body of Christ."

Racism "is holding back the wind of revival" in America, Frost said, noting that the appeal of Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan speaks to the "bitterness" felt in black America.

Frost noted that the occasion for the founding of the SBC was an effort to defend slavery and urged the convention to adopt a "declaration of repentance" being promoted by a group of urban directors of missions at the convention's 150th anniversary this summer.

"If we can rejoice in our corporate successes, should we not also repent for our corporate sins?" he asked. "If we can celebrate our forefathers' love for Jesus and their love for souls, should we not also lament the fact that they rendered certain human souls as inferior to their own?"

"There is a need for healing in the body of Christ," Frost said.

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-- By Bob Allen

Environmental issues prominent in 'culture war,' Land says

By Bob Allen

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (ABP) -- Christians must carve out a biblical environmental ethic that values the earth yet avoids extremes of the environmentalist movement, the head of the Southern Baptist Convention's moral-concerns agency said March 1 at a conference in Wake Forest, N.C.

Environmentalism is "a leading area in the culture wars," particularly for young people, who care about the environment, Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission, said at the CLC's 28th annual seminar, held Feb. 27-March 1 on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Quoting the biblical book of Genesis, Land said the earth "is the Lord's." Humans are stewards of God's creation, and must treat the world with respect. However, when societies attempt to elevate the value of animal life to the same moral standing as human life, "what happens is human life is lowered to the level of animal life."

Land said that confusion is already evident in America. "Unhatched turtle eggs in Florida, the spotted owl in the Northwest, the snail darter in east Tennessee, all have more protection under the laws of the United States than an unborn human being has anywhere in the nation," he said.

"I believe God created everything for a purpose," Land said, adding "it's in our self-interest" to protect some endangered species "until we discover why God created it."

However, he said, the survival of species is less important than human need.

"If you want to know where the radical environmentalists would take us, look at India, where people starve on the streets but they won't kill the rats who eat the grain because they think they're sacred or eat the cows because they think they're sacred. I think the Bible tells us we are to exterminate the rats and kill some of the cows and have a barbecue," Land said.

At the opposite extreme, Land said, were communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe which "totally disregarded the environment."

"We have got to, with an informed biblical ethic, go forth in a world where you've got tree huggers and tree worshippers on the one side, who are nothing more than pantheists -- they want to worship the god in the tree rather than the God who made the tree -- and on the other side those who think human beings are not just in dominion and to be stewards of another's goods, but we are lords of the earth."

"It is an issue where our young people, unfortunately, if they do not hear a certain sound from us, a biblical, informed ethic, they're going to be seduced by the tree huggers and they're going to swallow a lot more than an environmental ethic," he warned.

"There are people who think human beings are parasites on the earth," Land said. "That's the language they use."

"Some of these people argue the automobile was a terrible tragedy for the earth. Well let them walk to work," he said.

Life's ultimate value, Land said, "is human beings under God's authority."

"It's OK to cut down trees to build buildings. That's what God wants us to do," Land said, adding that "we ought to plant more trees."

"Another assumption made by these people is the earth is somehow moral and human beings are immoral," Land said. "The earth is contaminated by the fall," he added. "Nature and animals are cursed by the fall. That's why we have mosquitos. Mosquitos had some use before the fall, maybe to feed frogs."

The three-day conference featured numerous speakers who addressed a theme of "The War of the Worlds: The Struggle for the Nation's Soul."

Ethics defends use of 'war' imagery in discourse about social issues

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (ABP) -- Christians should ignore pleas to avoid the use of terms like "culture war," a Baptist ethicist said, because it is language used in Scripture and because the issues of abortion, assisted-suicide and euthanasia are "life and death issues."

Some critics maintain Christians "ought not to use war or battle imagery in our public discourse" because such language might incite violence, Ben Mitchell, consultant for biomedical ethics and life issues for the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission, said March 1 at the CLC's 28th annual seminar on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

"If it's not war, what is it?" Mitchell asked. "We're engaged in nothing less than a war of the worlds, a battle for the sanctity of human life."

Human life is "under horrible assault" in America, Mitchell said, offering a litany of examples:

-- More than 30 million abortions have been performed in the U.S. since the 1973 Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision which made most abortions legal.

-- A government panel recommended last year the creation of human embryos for research purposes.

-- Testing is underway of the French abortion pill RU-486 for use in the U.S.

-- Research is being conducted on an abortion vaccine to be used for population control in Third World countries.

-- An Oregon law passed last fall allows doctor-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients.

-- "Unless God intervenes," active euthanasia will eventually be legal, he predicted.

Mitchell rebutted two propositions employed in the "pro-death strategy" in America.

The "autonomy thesis," Mitchell said, "posits an inalienable right to self-determination and the exercise of unfettered human choice."

Mitchell challenged that thesis, noting, "There is no escaping the fact that every human being is under the absolute totalitarian rule of Jesus Christ."

Mitchell said Baptist churches should stop describing themselves as autonomous, because it relates only "to an ecclesiastical hierarchy." "The local church is under the rule of the head of the church, namely King Jesus," he said.

The other weapon is "the use of euphemism," or substituting a less-direct word for one that is offensive. An example, he said, is the term euthanasia.

"It should be remembered that what we call the Holocaust was, in fact, a massive euthanasia campaign. This campaign was carried, in large measure, by the use of euphemisms for murder."

Christians should avoid the use of euphemisms for acts of taking life that are legal.

"Our contention is that abortion, except to save the life of the mother, and euthanasia are morally unjustifiable killing -- and that's murder."

"Americans will have to get used to hearing us say it," Mitchell said. "As long as they are killing babies in the womb and patients in their beds, we will shout it from the housetops: it's murder," he said.

WRAP-UP:

Speakers at CLC seminar describe 'war of worlds'

By Bob Allen

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (ABP) -- Speakers described conflicts between biblical Christianity and post-modern culture as a "war of worlds" in a three-day seminar sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention.

The SBC's moral-concerns agency, the Christian Life Commission, held its 28th annual seminar, titled "The War of the Worlds: The Struggle for the Nation's Soul," Feb. 27-March 1 on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Charles Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship, said Western civilization's post-modern culture no longer believes there is such a thing as absolute truth.

"We have lost the battle for truth," Colson said in a keynote message titled "The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation." However, Colson said, Christians should not be discouraged.

"There is a culture war that is a battle for truth, for the heart and soul of Western culture. Don't give up. Yeah, it's going bad. It's going against us. But in every single human heart there is a desperate yearning for truth, and they're only going to get it from us," Colson said.

SBC President Jim Henry sounded a similar theme. He said the ultimate weapon in the cultural struggle is the gospel message.

"All of the things we're fighting in our cultural war will change when people's hearts and minds are changed by Christ," Henry said. "We will reclaim the land when the cross is raised again in this society."

SBC second vice president Gary Frost, an African-American pastor, said racism hinders evangelism in America's cities. He urged the convention to adopt a "declaration of repentance" being promoted by a group of urban directors of missions at the convention's 150th anniversary this summer.

"If we can rejoice in our corporate successes, should we not also repent for our corporate sins?" he asked. "If we can celebrate our forefathers' love for Jesus and their love for souls should we not also lament the fact that they rendered certain human souls as inferior to their own?"

CLC Executive Director Richard Land, in a message titled "The Struggle for the Right to Be Involved," defended his recent opposition of the nomination of Dr. Henry Foster as U.S. surgeon general.

Based on recent SBC resolutions opposing abortion and condom distribution, Land said, he and Henry "would have been derelict in our duties if we had not come out in opposition" to the nomination.

Ben Mitchell, consultant for biomedical ethics for the CLC, defended the use of "war" terminology in social discourse against critics who say it promotes violence. "If it's not war, what is it?" he asked.

"We're engaged in nothing less than a war of the worlds, a battle for the sanctity of human life," Mitchell said.

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., called revisionist biblical scholarship on the issue of homosexuality "one of the clearest challenges that the church of Jesus Christ has faced in this generation or any generation."

Citing the first chapter of Romans, Mohler described homosexuality as "Exhibit A of a people who have corrupted the knowledge of the one true God" in his address.

"The Christian Right is not a playground, it's a battlefield," said James Merritt, pastor of First Baptist Church of Snellville, Ga. "I submit tonight in this war of the worlds the key battleground is the mind."

Movies, television and music are all purveyors of anti-Christian attitudes, Merritt said.

"We consume more garbage than any other nation in the world," Merritt said. "It is vital to this nation that we recapture the fortress of the mind."

Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Seminary, said war accurately describes the struggle between Christianity and Western culture, but that situation is nothing new.

"I am in fact somewhat disturbed by the paranoia I sense in the church of God about the culture war and differing beliefs," Patterson said. "What I want to suggest to you is things are no different now than they've always been."

In a message titled "War of the Worlds: A Perennial Battle," Patterson observed: "This is not time to despair. On the contrary ... because it is that way, it now offers us our greatest opportunity."

Other topics included "The Struggle for Hearts and Minds," "The Struggle for the Environment," and "The Struggle for the Media."

Bolstered by large crowds of students at two sessions held during regular seminary chapel hours and an opening-night rally open to the public, attendance reached 892, making it the second-largest CLC meeting in history. Paid registration was 567. The seminar's attendance record is 1,163, set in 1982 in Atlanta.

At one time, with its emphasis on the social implications of the gospel, the CLC seminar was one of the most popular annual meetings for Southern Baptist moderates. Since the election of conservative Richard Land as executive director of the CLC six years ago, however, the tone has turned decidedly conservative.

Land said a reporter asked him about the "narrow perspective" of speakers on the seminar's program. "We have a point of view and we're not ashamed of that," Land said. "In fact, we'd be ashamed if we didn't."

Asked if he felt the CLC had an obligation to provide a balance of viewpoints, Land said he responded, "We are the balance to the secular media and news of our culture."

A local paper ran a story in advance of the meeting noting the meeting had changed its focus under Land's leadership the last six years. "I must tell you I would have been awfully disappointed if they hadn't noticed the difference," Land said. "This is not your father's Christian Life Commission."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The following five stories report on the family conference of the Baptist Center for Ethics.
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Say 'no' to both extremes in debate over religion in schools, Thomas says

By Mark Wingfield

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- It's time for reasonable people to find common ground on the relation between religion and public schools, according to Oliver Thomas, a prominent Baptist attorney on First Amendment issues.

Thomas, a consultant with The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center and legal counsel for the National Council of Churches, spoke in a small-group session during the "Family Works" conference sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics Feb. 27-28.

Thomas said he is tired of hearing accusations thrown from both extremes in the battle over religion and public schools.

"It's time to say 'no' to extremists on both sides," he declared. "It's time to say no to the theocrats on the right who would use schools as an evangelistic tool of their church. ... It's time to say no to the far left, the religion police, who run around the public schools looking for any reference to God so they can file a lawsuit."

Those on the left need to understand "it's not against the law to be religious in public schools," he said. And those on the right need to appreciate the First Amendment rights of people who are not Christian, he added.

"We've not done an adequate job of putting religion in perspective in public schools," Thomas said. "We've over-reacted to Supreme Court rulings ... and chased all religion out."

Students can pray in school, hold Bible studies and study about religion in the curriculum, he said. But the current climate has caused some teachers and administrators to censure legal activities just because they are religious, he added.

At the same time, some overzealous Christians have created more problems by trying to take advantage of their majority status in a community or failing to respect the rights of others, Thomas said.

Despite the appearance that Americans are poles apart on issues of religion and the public schools, common ground can be found -- and must be found, he asserted.

"What's at stake is the future of our nation," he said. "We must be citizens -- people who take responsibility for one another."

Thomas served as legal editor for a new guidebook designed to help parents and school administrators constructively handle these difficult issues. The book, called "Finding Common Ground," is published by The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center of Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

The book's editor is Charles Haynes, whom Thomas said has been embraced equally by people on the right and the left.

Thomas said the book has been well-received in California schools and currently is being introduced in Tennessee schools.

Topics covered include religious liberty in American life, Supreme Court decisions on religion and public education, religion in curriculum, teaching about religion, religious holidays in public schools, religious expression in public schools, character education in public schools and more.

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Setting media viewing standards should be family affair, author says

By Mark Wingfield

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Families ought to develop standards for how they use media, but that means more than an edict from parents about what their children may watch.

That's the message media expert Quentin Schultze delivered at a Feb. 27-28 "Family Works" conference sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics at First Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn.

Schultze is a professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., and author of several books on Christians and the media, including "Winning Your Kids Back from the Media."

The lack of parental involvement in the lives of children is the primary reason few families have media standards, Schultze said. But even the most well-intentioned Christian parents may not establish coherent media standards, he added.

Effective standards must be more than a list of approved and disapproved programs, he said. Rather, family media standards should be a set of guiding principles that will help children develop a sense of what to do in different situations.

Establishing media standards is a process more than a proclamation, Schultze said.

While Christians generally gripe about the negative aspects of media, the goal ought to be to "help each other seek out things worthwhile," he said. "We need to find the good stuff, nurture it and pass it along to other people."

A proper evaluation of media will not get bogged down in the relatively unimportant while missing the big picture, Schultze suggested.

For example, while boycotting glimpses of nudity on some television shows, Christians have been blind to broadcast media's overall treatment of women, he said.

Another big-picture issue that ought to concern Christians is the fact that most media messages promote the value of excessive materialism, Schultze said.

This can be countered by involving children and teenagers in projects which allow them to produce something or give service to others, he suggested. "We need to provide opportunities for young people to be productive ... to do things that make a difference in the world."

In addition to being a process, establishing family media standards must be a relational process, he said.

"In most families, there can be no media standards because the relationships are not adequate to produce godly standards," Schultze said. "In some Christian homes this takes a sick form where parents try to dictate a standard from top to bottom. That's not relational."

Parents must be willing to listen to their children, understand the culture in which they live and submit themselves to family standards as well, Schultze said.

When done properly, this can build better relationships between parents and children, he said, because it fosters conversation and understanding.

For example, he told about his 12-year-old son asking to see the movie "Wayne's World," which was rated PG-13. Although Schultze didn't think it was an especially worthwhile movie to be seen, he agreed to go with his son to the movie and they spent time afterward evaluating the movie together.

"We can use media to bring us together," he said, explaining how watching the movie "American Graffiti" with his teenage children helped them understand the culture in which he grew up and opened dialogue on their contemporary issues.

Even unwanted, negative media exposures can provide opportunities for teaching values, Schultze said. But most parents miss these opportunities out of embarrassment or fear, he suggested.

He cited a survey which found if parents were watching a television program with their children and suddenly encountered an objectionable scene, only 11 percent would explain to their children why they objected to the scene.

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Government alone can't make strong families, Clinton aide says

By Mark Wingfield

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Public policy can strengthen families only when linked with moral commitment by the people, a White House domestic-policy adviser said.

William Galston, White House deputy assistant for domestic policy, was a keynote speaker for "Family Works," a Feb. 27-28 conference sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics at First Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn.

The American people have more power to impact families than does the federal government, Galston said. "The only power government has in many family matters is to stand for the truth" and provide "acts of public witness," he said.

And government rule-making alone will not create strong families, he added. "Public policy has power when linked to moral commitments."

Galston said research has shown three "crucial choices" made by young adults strongly influence the strength of families. Those choices are to:

- Graduate from high school.
- Marry before having children.
- Wait until an adult to have children.

Only 8 percent of children born to people who have met all three of these indicators live in poverty, Galston said. But 79 percent of children born to people who haven't met any of the three criteria live in poverty.

Galston outlined seven things government can do to strengthen families through public policy.

First, public policy can begin to relieve the economic squeeze families feel, he said. Men with high school degrees but no college degrees have experienced a 20 percent decline in wages over the last 20 years, he said. And men without high school degrees have experienced a 30 percent decline in wages, he added.

Second, public policy can attempt to "relax tensions parents feel between work and family," Galston said.

Economic decisions have forced most two-parent families to send both husband and wife into the work force, he said, thus weakening support for families. More should be done to restructure a federal tax system that is not "friendly" to families, he said.

Galston also cited President Clinton's signing of the Family Medical Leave Act as one example of government seeking to relieve the pressure between families and work.

Third, public policy can address the "epidemic of violence" in public schools, he said.

Fourth, government can create a welfare system that "strengthens families rather than undermining families," Galston said.

Fifth, public policy must address the "epidemic" of teenage pregnancy, Galston said. Programs proven to work in this fight always include a strong moral message, peer counseling and ways of getting the message directly to children and teenagers, he said.

Sixth, government should help reconnect fathers with families, he suggested. This may include proactive measures, such as the National Fatherhood Initiative to be launched in March, or reactive measures, such as enforcing child-support laws.

There is a \$24 billion annual gap between child-support payments owed and child-support payments actually paid, Galston reported.

Finally, government has a limited role to play in how television influences children and families, Galston said. "People of faith could do more to push this dialogue forward," he suggested.

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Strong homes, extended families called key to battling culture wars

By Lonnie Wilkey

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Creating strong homes and building extended families through churches are keys to winning today's cultural wars, according to a Baptist pastoral counselor.

"We need to intentionally work to make home a priority, because culture will pull us to make work a priority," said Doug Ezell, clinical director of the Pastoral Counseling Center at Mercy Baptist Medical Center in New Orleans.

Ezell was a keynote speaker at a "Family Works" conference sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics Feb. 27-28 at First Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn.

Having strong homes will mean working toward a Christian view of the family, Ezell said in one of his three presentations.

Strong families will have spouses who complement, not compete with each other and who respect and honor each other for the God-given qualities they have, he said. In doing that, he added, they will have something they can pass on to their children: the knowledge that marriage requires both parents working together.

Ezell observed Americans today live in a corporate society that advocates power, control, success and consumerism. Such cultural factors eventually infiltrate the church and the family, he said.

Another major cultural factor shaping society is the media, he said. "We're living in the media and are letting the media shape our thinking."

Ezell observed that television teaches every problem can be solved in 30- or 60-minute segments. "Young people today live in episodes. They don't have a sense of history," he said.

In one sense, churches can benefit from cultural fallout, Ezell said, because of people's unfulfilled spiritual hunger. This hunger is evidenced by the rapid growth of cults and religious groups and Americans' "deep yearning for spiritual depth and a connection with God," he said.

Teaching morality in the home is not enough, Ezell said. "It has to be modeled and lived out."

And that cannot be done alone, he said. "Two people cannot raise children. You need others living out those same values -- people who model truth."

Since corporate America has destroyed the community and village concept of the past, the church can help recreate that sense of community, he noted. "We need to build communities of faith," an extended family of people who can be role models, he said.

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Counselor's advice: good marriages require work from both partners

By Lonnie Wilkey

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Entering marriage with the idea you can do it "just right" sets couples up for disappointment, said Christian counselor James Hightower.

Instead of blindly assuming everything will be fine, couples should enter marriage understanding "if we keep working at it, we will have a better chance of making it go," said Hightower, minister of pastoral care and acting pastor at First Baptist Church of Huntsville, Ala.

And couples should find help from the church in working on their marriages, Hightower said in a seminar on "Seven Things that Can Go Wrong in a Marriage" Feb. 27-28. He spoke as part of the "Family Works" conference sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics at First Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tenn.

Hightower cited seven potential problems couples face and must solve for healthy marriages:

-- Communication. There are two basic problems in this area, he said. The first is "speaking the truth in an unloving way" and the second is "saying what we think is the loving thing whether it is the truth or not."

The first is the lesser of the two problems, Hightower said, noting that in the second case one spouse will eventually get "a gut full" and that will result in a "gargantuan explosion."

-- "You've got to be different" syndrome. One of the hardest things to do in a marriage is to let the partner be who he or she is, Hightower said. "A lot of destructive time is spent on trying to change that person into who we want them to be."

-- "I'm not in love with you anymore." When couples marry, they let their "ego boundaries" fall, Hightower said. The boundaries begin to rise again later in the marriage. And as a result, one morning one of the couple wakes up, look at the spouse and wonders, "I can't believe I married you."

"At that point real love begins," Hightower said, explaining that when the ego boundaries go up, a person decides whether he or she really can love the mate.

-- Responsibility for relationship. In marriages, it's hard to figure out who is responsible for the relationship, Hightower said. As a result, it is easy to act like no one is, he said. "One of the fundamental issues in marriage is: we all want to be free, but who wants to be responsible?"

-- Money. "I think in marriage money is about one thing -- power," Hightower said. "Who is in control?"

-- Relatives. Couples must deal with priorities in relationships, Hightower said. In some cases, extended family members make it difficult for a new couple to live their own life.

-- Sexual problems. Many times sexual problems are related to one of the six issues listed above, Hightower observed. "When you start clearing out the underbrush, the sexual problems clear up." An underlying issue in marital problems is that, especially after the arrival of children, couples lose "play time" when they can get away together for dinner or a movie.

Thus one way churches could strengthen marriages is by providing periodic "family night out" child-care programs.

Hightower concluded that the core issue of every marriage is one of "near and far."

"How near can we get without swallowing each other up and how far can we get without getting a divorce?" he asked.

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Supreme Court hears dispute over funding religious journal

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to decide by summer whether it will permit, for the first time, direct government subsidies for religious activities.

The court heard arguments March 1 in a dispute over the University of Virginia's policy of denying student activity funds for religious organizations and activities.

Ronald Rosenberger and other students challenged the policy in 1991 after the university refused their application for \$5,862 to print Wide Awake, a Christian publication.

The university's \$14-per-student activity fee is used to support a variety of student organizations and publications. School policy bars the use of student activities funds for fraternities, sororities and political and religious organizations and activities.

A federal appeals court agreed that the university's policy discriminated against religious speech but held that the policy was justified by the state school's need to comply with the First Amendment's requirement of church-state separation.

Michael McConnell, a University of Chicago Law School professor and attorney for Rosenberger, told the Supreme Court that the case is about equal access and that the university unconstitutionally discriminates against religious speakers.

Representing the school, University of Virginia Law School professor John Jeffries insisted the case is not about religion but about setting priorities in distributing limited funds.

"In our country, religious speakers and people with religious points of view have the same free-speech rights as anyone else," McConnell told reporters after the arguments.

"When the government gives money to some but not to others, that is a denial of free speech rights," he said.

Jeffries insisted that Wide Awake was "turned down because it is a religious activity, not because of its religious views."

The publication was "start-to-finish proselytizing particular religious beliefs," he said. "We have no problem with that activity. We simply don't want to pay for it."

Jeffries emphasized that all groups, including proselytizing religious groups, are given free access to campus classrooms, computers and facilities.

"We do everything we can for Wide Awake and all other groups except pay for their activities," he told reporters.

During arguments, Justice Antonin Scalia asked whether it was a "major step" between providing a room and providing money to rent a room. "Is that the step off the cliff?"

Jeffries responded that "access to a budget is a major step."

He told reporters later that the "difference is very great." Because of the surplus of classroom space after hours, all student groups can be accommodated, he said. But when a student group requests money, "every dollar you give one group is a dollar you cannot give another group, and it becomes essential to set priorities and make judgments."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg asked McConnell if the court previously had permitted a direct cash contribution in support of religion.

McConnell said the closest such case was a 1986 ruling that upheld a blind student's decision to use a vocational assistance grant to pursue a theological education.

McConnell later told reporters that the First Amendment bars government from giving "preference to one particular church or to religion in general as against non-religion, but it does not require the government to discriminate against religion."

U.S. religious groups have sided with both parties in the dispute.

The Christian Legal Society, in a brief on behalf of itself, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, the Family Research Council and the Home School Legal Defense Association, argued that the university's policy discriminates against religious speech.

"The First Amendment forbids rather than requires discrimination against citizens because of their religious views," Steven McFarland, director of the CLS Center for Law and Religious Freedom, told reporters following oral arguments. "Nobody has a right to have their views published with public funds, but when government chooses to subsidize private speech in the public square, it cannot disqualify those with a religious perspective."

The Baptist Joint Committee, joined by the National Council of Churches of Christ, three Jewish organizations and others, filed a brief arguing that the students were seeking equal advancement, not merely equal access.

"We applaud the fact that (the students) take their religion seriously enough to publish a magazine advocating their beliefs," BJC General Counsel Brent Walker told reporters. "But we strongly oppose the claim that the state has the duty to pay for it. In fact, we think the Constitution forbids it."

Oliver Thomas, special council for religious and civil liberties for the NCC, told reporters it would be a "big step off the cliff" if the court holds that direct subsidies to religion are permissible.

"I say that because, if the government is required to subsidize religious speech and activities, it unsettles not only this particular decision but a whole line of cases saying that we give grants and subsidies to certain secular activities that we don't give to religion."

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-- By Larry Chesser

Measure introduced to bar flag desecration

WASHINGTON (ABP) - Hundreds of U.S. veterans rallied on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Feb. 28 in support of a constitutional amendment to prohibit desecration of the American flag.

Congress tried to pass a similar bill in 1991, but it fell short of the two-thirds majority necessary for passage.

Nearly 200 members of Congress from both political parties already have co-sponsored the bill. Another 80 members have indicated strong support for the proposed amendment, according to the Citizens Flag Alliance, a national organization assembled to lobby for the bill.

"Protection of the American flag is important to both Republicans and Democrats in Congress, but most of all it's important to the American people," Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said to the placard- and flag-waving crowd, which cheered as he and other co-sponsors stepped to the podium.

The push for a flag-protecting amendment to the Constitution stems from a controversial 1989 U.S. Supreme Court decision that flag burning is protected as a form of free speech under the First Amendment.

Congress responded to the ruling in 1990 by approving a bill banning flag desecration. However, the Supreme Court declared that law unconstitutional in a subsequent case.

Hearings are planned for later in the legislative session.

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-- By Shannon Harton

Lawmakers grapple with children's rights

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The phrase "equal justice under law" is etched in marble atop the entrance to the U.S. Supreme Court. But across the street and under the Capitol Rotunda, lawmakers continue to disagree over how that principle applies to children.

At issue is an international treaty, known as the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, that has been ratified by more than 150 nations, including China, Kuwait and Rwanda, but not the United States.

The dispute in U.S. political circles is not whether children have rights, but rather how far to extend them without impinging on parental domain.

The United States participated in the 10-year drafting process that began in 1979 under the auspices of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights. The 21-page document addresses the right to:

- health-care services;
- education;
- protection against discrimination based on race, gender, religion, etc.;
- protection against abuse, neglect or injury;
- a name and nationality;
- have the child's "best interests" be a primary consideration in all proceedings concerning the child;
- be protected from economic exploitation or hazardous work;
- be protected against torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment; and
- thought, conscience, religion and expression.

The Clinton administration supports the measure that has come under attack by others who argue that it would provide children special rights that override parental authority. One common argument is that the measure would give children carte blanche to sue their parents.

A major hurdle to ratification is Senate approval. The measure's most formidable adversary is Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., who chairs the committee that must approve the measure before it can be sent to the upper chamber for ratification.

But the measure does have support from some key Republicans.

Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., who is a Baptist, said that several of the basic principles in the agreement are based on American law and practice and are intended to continue promoting strong families.

"The convention has been carefully drafted to support and protect the traditional, legitimate role of parents and the family," Hatfield said.

"In ratifying this treaty, the United States would neither relinquish its sovereignty to the United Nations nor diminish the protections guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.

"In addition, the convention itself contains no enforcement mechanisms. It does not directly grant children the right to sue, nor does it give the United Nations the power to uphold the convention in the United States."

In a letter to President Clinton, another Republican senator, Richard Lugar of Indiana, said the "strength of the treaty comes from widespread publicity of child abuse and the focusing of world opinion on the exploitation of innocent children."

He urged Clinton to consult with the Senate before forwarding the measure to Capitol Hill for consideration. An extensive review of the document is essential because it contains ambiguous language that lends itself to diverse interpretation and uncertainty, he said.

"Subsequent consideration of this treaty must be predicated on fully addressing the concerns of parents," he wrote.

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-- By Pam Parry

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