

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **State Department official optimistic about religious freedom in China**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Clinton delivered strong messages on religious freedom both publicly and privately during his recent trip to China, a U.S. State Department official told religion reporters at a July 10 briefing.

John Shattuck, assistant secretary of state at the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, spoke with six members of the media in his State Department office.

Shattuck said freedom of religion and other human rights in China "is an agenda that is now not only legitimate, but it will be at the center of what U.S. foreign policy working with other governments will seek to promote in the next period of time in China."

He said Clinton's recent trip to China -- which included two unprecedented live broadcasts of Clinton's comments on Chinese television -- was a "major development for the message of human rights."

"The delivery of a message without censorship was a major objective of the president's trip and one that we had made very clear to the Chinese government as something very important to make this trip a success," Shattuck said.

Shattuck said serious concerns remain over religious-freedom abuses in China, but Clinton's raising the issue in such a public and uncensored forum "is a major development from this trip."

During his nine-day trip, Clinton spoke to students at Beijing University, attended a service at a registered church and led several question-and-answer sessions, similar to town hall meetings made popular during recent election campaigns.

Clinton also held a press conference that was broadcast live, an uncommon practice in China, in which he and President Jiang Zemin spoke openly of their differences in the area of human rights and particularly the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident.

Shattuck told reporters that he met personally with Xiaowen Ye, director of China's bureau of religious affairs, and reviewed cases of religious leaders who had been imprisoned. He said several religious leaders have been released recently.

"We talked about getting beyond individual changes and the importance of systemic change in China on both issues of freedom of religion and generally on political freedoms and freedoms of speech," Shattuck said.

Shattuck said he and the Chinese leader also discussed the possibility that a second delegation of U.S. religious leaders might visit China to build on a February visit by three U.S. religious leaders. Shattuck said he also extended an invitation for Chinese religious leaders to visit the United States.

Shattuck called the February trip of three U.S. religious leaders to China "ground-breaking." The delegation included Don Argue, past president of the National Association of Evangelicals; Roman Catholic Archbishop Theodore McCarrick of Newark, N.J.; and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation.

During Clinton's visit, Shattuck said: "The climate of discussion, I would say, was much more favorable on the issue of freedom of religion than it has been in the past. Religious restrictions and serious human rights violations in the whole area of freedom of religion are still very much a part of the daily life in China. There's no question about that."

"And that -- we have made very clear to Chinese officials -- is completely out of step with the basic principles of international human rights," he said.

Shattuck noted that China has signed the international covenant on civil and political rights. "Clearly issues of religious freedom are going to have to be addressed in order for that treaty to be complied with," he said.

He noted that both Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright attended church services in Beijing and "delivered messages of religious freedom."

"In the case of the secretary's message," Shattuck said, "even though in a registered church, she made reference to house churches and the importance of freedom of worship in a house church context."

Shattuck said Clinton did not attempt to visit an unregistered church. "The president wanted to make the appeals that he made publicly effective, and he felt that making public appeals did not depend on where they were made but what he said," he explained.

Albright and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visited Ohel Rachel Synagogue, now a museum in Shanghai.

Albright also addressed a religious roundtable in Shanghai. At that event, she said people around the world are "taking a fresh look at the place of religion in times of change."

"I want to stress that America's interest in religion, and religious freedom, does not grow out of some desire to interfere in Chinese affairs or to favor one religion over others," she told the Chinese group. "Rather, it comes from our belief, and our experience, that spiritual values are not Western or Eastern, capitalist or socialist, but deeply human -- and that they help build and sustain the kind of societies we all hope to live in."

Shattuck told reporters: "Perhaps the official Chinese government attitude toward religion is improving. We certainly hope so. We made it very clear that further crackdown on those engaged in religion will only set back U.S.-China relations."

## **House passes bill aimed at hindering teens from crossing state lines to have abortions**

By Ashlee Ross

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A bill lauded by conservatives, which makes transporting a minor across state lines to get an abortion a federal crime, passed the U.S. House of Representatives July 15 by a vote of 276-150.

The Child Custody Protection Act, introduced by Rep. Ineana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., and Sen. Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., would make it illegal for anyone to avoid a state's parental consent and notification laws by transporting a minor across state lines to have an abortion.

A Senate version of the bill also passed the Senate Judiciary Committee the following day and will now go to the full Senate.

The bill was first introduced in the Senate in February and in the House in April. However, the bill received renewed attention after conservative leaders met with Republican lawmakers this spring.

The Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the National Right to Life Committee, the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council and Concerned Women for America endorsed the bill in a joint letter to Congress.

Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., managed House floor debate Wednesday and said the bill "is about protecting young girls who are in a very vulnerable and difficult situation."

"Parents are best equipped to help their own daughter as she faces an unintended pregnancy, and to care for her needs if she makes the grave decision to have an abortion," Canady said.

Opponents to the bill sought an exemption for the minor's siblings or grandparents.

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## **Lawmakers hear differing views from conservatives on RLPA bill**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Some conservatives are opposing a federal law that would bolster religious freedom because the method for enforcing the measure would not protect everyone, a witness told a U.S. House of Representatives panel July 14.

The Religious Liberty Protection Act would enhance religious liberty by making it harder for governments to pass generally applied laws which happen to burden religious practice. The act would permit the passage of laws which substantially burden religious practice only if they use the least restrictive means of furthering a compelling state interest such as health or safety.

The Supreme Court struck down a similar law last year, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, saying that Congress lacked constitutional authority to impose the law on the states. In an effort to skirt that issue, the new measure would be implemented under commerce and spending powers of the federal government.

But Michael Farris, founder and president of the Home School Legal Defense Association, told the House panel the proposed law would protect only large and powerful faith groups.

"A home school run out of religious conviction will be unable to claim the protection of RLPA because the family will be unable to establish that their faith has any material effect on interstate commerce," Farris said. "We are left out while the big guys are protected."

Farris said the law also would denigrate religion by regulating it as commerce. "This reduction of worship to 'big business' is highly offensive to many people of faith," he said. "The Bible instructs that we cannot serve both God and money."

Farris, who was a member of the coalition formed to pass RFRA, said other conservatives supporting his position include Ed Meese, former attorney general; Phyllis Schlafly of the Eagle Forum; Beverly LaHaye of Concerned Women for America; and two leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention: Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in suburban Memphis, Tenn.; and Paul Pressler, a former Texas appeals court judge in Houston.

But Farris found little or no support for his views from other conservatives testifying at the House Constitution Subcommittee's second hearing on RLPA.

Will Dodson, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said RLPA "is the best practical alternative" for restoring religious freedoms eroded in recent Supreme Court rulings. He said churches and individuals would have greater protections under RLPA than without it.

"While not providing protection for all religious activities, RLPA would provide protection for the vast majority of them," said Patrick Nolan, president of Justice Fellowship, the public-policy arm of Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship.

"The opponents say they would prefer to use other means, but none of their alternatives are being actively pursued," Nolan said. "So, by opposing RLPA, they would leave us with no statutory protection for our religious liberty, and leave the court's power grab unanswered."

Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, denied that the bill defines religion in terms of tax dollars. "RLPA recognizes that Congress is constitutionally limited in its powers," McFarland said. "That does not denigrate religion. It recognizes that fortunately we live in a country where Congress and the federal government is not omnipotent."

Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., head of the House Judiciary Committee, seemed sympathetic to Farris' views. "I think you have a strong view of the Constitution's original intent," he said, noting that the problem was Supreme Court justices who have misinterpreted the Constitution.

Other witnesses included Colby May, senior counsel at the American Center for Law and Justice; Bruce Shoulson, a New Jersey attorney; Elenora Giddings Ivory, director of the Washington office of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.; James Raskin, professor at American University's Washington College of Law; and Douglas Laycock, associate dean for research at the University of Texas Law School.

Steven Green, legal director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, also testified in support of RLPA.

Green said the diverse Coalition for the Free Exercise of Religion and other religious and civil-liberties groups that supported RFRA and now support RLPA often disagree on many particular religious-liberty issues that would arise under the law. "What has kept them working together is the understanding that RLPA will merely apply the legal standard that existed prior to 1990 and not seek to predetermine particular events," he said in a written statement.

## **Baptists celebrate reconciliation at global meeting in South Africa**

DURBAN, South Africa (ABP) -- Meeting in South Africa, Baptist leaders from more than 50 countries hailed the "miracle" of reconciliation in the nation formerly separated by apartheid.

About 500 Baptist leaders sat in rapt attention during a July 5-11 meeting of the general council of the Baptist World Alliance in Durban as Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu described South Africa's efforts at reconciliation, even as new stories of atrocities under apartheid continue to come to light.

"It is not me who is accomplishing reconciliation," said Tutu, chairman of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "It is God who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. It is the work of God that God's Holy Spirit moves and moves so powerfully."

"Thank you one million times for your life," BWA President Nilson Fanini said to Tutu. "We have, in you, one of the greatest examples of [leaders in] human rights."

Baptist leaders also applauded reconciliation efforts among South Africa's divided Baptist community.

Terry Rae, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and Desmond Hoffmeister, general secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa, described a May meeting of reconciliation in Colesberg as "a move of God's Holy Spirit."

Rae described how, on the first day of the meeting, a sheet of paper 120 feet long was filled with the difficulties and hurts of the past years. The next morning, after a time of confession and forgiveness, the sheet was placed under the communion table as participants celebrated the Lord's Supper. "We placed it under the blood of Jesus Christ," he said.

"After the communion we had a mandate from God to reconcile with each other," Rae said.

"This is a process, not an event," said Hoffmeister. "However we are prepared to trust the process, to say wherever he leads we will follow and God helping us, the days of the ugly, hostile fights that we as Baptists had in South Africa are over."

Hoffmeister and Rae thanked Baptists worldwide for their prayers and the challenge to reconcile. They called on Baptists around the world to accept the same challenge for reconciliation in their countries.

Denton Lotz, BWA general secretary, said moves toward reconciliation in South Africa, Bengal, Zambia, and other areas of the world are vital for Baptist evangelism. He announced that Coretta Scott King and Billy Graham will be honorary co-chairs of an International Summit of Baptists Against Racism and Ethnic Conflict to be held in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta in January 1999.

Resolutions passed in the general council spoke to racial and ethnic conflict in Nagaland and called on Baptists everywhere to work for reconciliation.

Resolutions also condemned recent nuclear bomb tests by India and Pakistan and urged the forgiveness of debts owed by poor nations.

Also at the meeting, Southern Baptist leader Morris Chapman was elected president of the North American Baptist Fellowship, a regional branch of the BWA. Chapman, president and treasurer of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, succeeds Daniel Weiss, general secretary of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

The BWA Women's Department announced the appointment of Patsy Davis as its new executive director. Davis, a Southern Baptist missionary to Latin America for the past 21 years, succeeds Willene Pierce, who resigned from the post last summer citing philosophical differences with the department's elected leaders.

## **Family meetings integrate faith, life for children**

By Ken Camp

GLORIETA, N.M. (ABP) -- Parents instruct their children best in spiritual matters by creating an atmosphere where faith is a normal part of life, a children's minister told a Texas Baptist family life conference.

"Values are caught, not taught," said Nancy Conlin, minister of childhood education at First Baptist Church in Bryan, Texas. She led a conference on "Giving Spiritual Instruction in the Home" during the recent Texas Baptist Family Reunion at Glorieta Conference Center.

The starting place for parents is their own relationship with God, she said.

"To enhance faith development in children, acquire a healthy image of God yourself," Conlin said.

Parents can communicate positive images of God both through spontaneous and planned teachable moments. Drawing on an idea she initially learned from the late Grady Nutt, Conlin said she and her husband have used weekly 15-to-20-minute family meetings and regularly scheduled family activities to create effective teachable moments for their children.

A different family member is in charge of the meeting each week, and the family member responsible for the meeting also gets to select the family activity for that week. Only during the first week of the month is the family activity allowed to cost anything.

The first part of the family meeting is devoted to schedules. Each member of the family discusses his or her plans for the week, including events that other family members should attend. "This helps minimize surprises," Conlin said.

The second portion of the meeting is dedicated to discussing problems. Family members are encouraged to freely express any frustrations with others, as long as they are willing to discuss options for solving disputes and to treat everyone with a sense of respect, she said.

The next part of the meeting is reserved for a devotional. Conlin suggested active learning -- problem solving, role playing or other activities -- rather than lecture, particularly for younger children.

Before closing in prayer, the final section of the family meeting is given to affirmation. One at a time, each family member turns to the person to his right and completes the statement, "You are special to me because ... ."

Conlin recommended starting family meetings when children are young, since teenagers might resist the idea unless they were used to it. Once they become accustomed to the family meetings, children look forward to them, she said.

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## **Instilling values best weapon against media smut, couple says**

By Ken Camp

GLORIETA, N.M. (ABP) -- No filter that parents can install will keep all high-tech smut out of their homes as effectively as will instilling a sense of family accountability in their children, two Fort Worth teachers told a Texas Baptist group.

Nancy Crossley, a high school English teacher, and her husband Lyle, a parochial school physics teacher, led a conference on "When Technology Hits Home -- Blessings and Boundaries," one of more than 100 family-related seminars offered during the Texas Baptist Family Reunion at Glorieta, N.M.

Broadcast television, cable and satellite TV, video tapes, video games and the Internet all present challenges to parents, said the Crossleys, members of Western Hills Baptist Church in Fort Worth.

"Don't assume just because it's on broadcast TV that it's OK," she said. "Be aware of the ratings."

The couple recommended that parents view TV shows with their children. That enables them to monitor and discuss content, as well as to regulate the amount of time spent watching television.

Realizing that some programs appropriate for older youth may not be appropriate for younger siblings, Nancy Crossley suggested reminding older children that they are responsible and accountable for what younger children in the household view.

Particularly on cable and satellite television, some sexually explicit and graphically violent programs are just "over the edge" and not acceptable, she said. For instance, in their household, MTV is banned.

"Sometimes it's just a broccoli situation," she said, noting that not every parental decision will be popular. "Sometimes you just have to be the adult."

Parents need to consider where VCRs are located in their homes, the Crossleys noted. A video player in the living room is easier for parents to monitor than one in a child's bedroom.

Parents should pay attention to ratings noting violence, rough language, sexually explicit material, nudity and other objectionable content in entertainment media, the couple said.

Ratings are particularly important with video games, Lyle Crossley said, because they are multi-leveled and more difficult for parents to evaluate. A game that may be completely innocent at the introductory level may be interspersed with highly objectionable content as the player's skill level increases and playing time lengthens.

In addition to violence and sexual content, video games also can contribute to addictive behavior, produce short-term aggression, be upsetting to younger children and be counterproductive for children with attention deficit disorder, he noted.

The computer, particularly if it has Internet access, is another medium that is difficult for parents to regulate and monitor. The Internet is a tremendously helpful tool for research and communication, but it also "brings the big bad world right into your house," Nancy Crossley said. Supervision and communication are crucial when it comes to keeping children safe on the World Wide Web, she said.

Drawing ideas from a number of organizations committed to making the Internet safe for all ages, the Crossleys offered several rules for children:

- Don't talk to strangers. Never enter private chat rooms with only one other person.

- Don't arrange to meet privately and in person someone you encounter in a chat room.

- Never give out personal information such as a home address, telephone number, last name, photo, or any other information that would enable someone to pinpoint your whereabouts.

- Don't answer questions that make you feel uncomfortable. "If it feels wrong, report it to your family," Crossley said.

- Learn to use the "back" button to escape an objectionable Web page.

The Crossleys suggested that parents learn how to "surf the Net," that they keep their computer in the family room or common living area, that they set limits on the amount of time children spend online, and that they never reveal personal information on a family web page.

They also recommended controls such as blocking or filtering software for the Internet, just as some parents choose to use lock boxes to keep objectionable cable channels out of their homes.

"Use the technology that is out there. Fight fire with fire. Ride that wild beast," Nancy Crossley said.

However, parents need to realize that no filtering system is foolproof, and any technological blocking system can be circumvented. The Crossleys suggested that parents establish acceptable use agreements with their children.

"It all comes back to family accountability. Stay involved," she said. "We want to be responsible parents, and we want our children to become responsible adults."

## Parenting brings pressures, educators tell Texas Baptists

By Ken Camp

GLORIETA, N.M. (ABP) -- Sometimes parents are harried because they make bad choices, and sometimes they're harried just because they are parents, two Fort Worth educators told a group of Texas Baptists at a conference on parenting.

"I'm glad Mary and Joseph lost Jesus at the temple. I find that comforting," said Scott Floyd, assistant professor of psychology and counseling at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Schedules and expectations -- self-imposed or imposed by others -- contribute to parents' harried feelings, said Floyd and his wife, Mollie, an instructor of speech and theater at Tarrant County Junior College.

Relating many of their own misadventures, the Floyds led a conference offering "Helps for Harried Parents" during the recent Texas Baptist Family Reunion at Glorieta (N.M.) Conference Center.

"Parenting is a busy time in life," Floyd said, noting that a certain amount of stress just comes with the job. "As children move from the preschool years toward adolescence, parents may move from physical to emotional harriedness."

Some parents become harried because they never learn to say "no," either to the demands of their children or to requests from others for them to do "good things" at church, school, work or in civic organizations, the Floyds said.

Some have difficulty saying "no" because of pressure to keep up with others, they noted. That may come from other parents, from grandparents or from the children themselves. It may also come from the parents' own desire to give their children the best or to compensate for something they thought was lacking in their own childhood.

There may also be spiritual reasons for parents feeling harried, the Floyds noted. Some parents are unable to trust God to work out his plans for their children's lives. They feel the need for control.

The Floyds offered seven tips to help harried parents:

-- Pray. "Pray about what your family mission and ministry is, about your purpose or goal as a family. Pray about what activities your children should be involved in. And pray for grace, either to tolerate situations or to change situations," she said. "I often pray, 'Lord, I need grace, and I need it right now.'"

-- Identify values. "Decide what you value as a family, and spend time doing it," he said. He suggested that parents devote time to things that are most important rather than that which is most urgent.

-- Evaluate. "Ask if an activity fits into your family's values. Ask if a child is too busy," he recommended. The couple also suggested talking to other parents whose children have been involved in an activity, asking them, "Is what you put into it worth what you got out of it?"

-- Choose. Make deliberate choices as a family rather than drifting from one activity to another.

-- Be practical. Plan ahead. Keep a family calendar that everyone can check. Schedule adequate time to get from one activity to another.

-- Communicate. Spouses need to talk to each other and to their children to communicate expectations. "Tell children what you want from them in advance," he said.

-- Embrace your choices. Don't feel the need to apologize for carving out time for family. "Delight in the little moments alone with your children," she said.

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