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**Fired editor said 'darkest day' came  
when personal faith was questioned**

By John Pierce

COLUMBUS, Ga. (ABP) -- William Neal, former editor of the Christian Index, said he was ousted from that position earlier this year because he would not carry out the agenda of fundamentalist leaders who had gained control of the Georgia Baptist Convention and its historic newspaper.

"The reason I'm not editor of the Christian Index today is because I was not sold out to this new agenda," Neal told a breakfast meeting of the Baptist Heritage Council of Georgia Nov. 11.

However, Neal said his "darkest day" came a few months before his termination when the Index board held a hastily called meeting to air concerns over an editorial in which Neal urged sensitivity to persons of different faiths during civic events.

Neal described the lengthy, confrontational meeting as an "inquisition" concerning his work and personal faith. "They questioned whether I was really a Christian," said the mild-mannered Neal. He called the event "one of the darkest days of my life."

Neal, 56, said he had been "a little naive" in thinking Baptists of differing opinions could get along and the state Baptist newspaper could serve the needs of all cooperating churches in Georgia.

Fundamentalists have a strong commitment to uniformity and a misunderstanding of freedom, said Neal. "They believe you are free to believe as they do or you're free to go to hell."

After working 28 years for the Georgia Baptist Convention, Neal said he was abruptly forced into retirement in January 2003 by Robert White, executive director of the convention. The GBC released a statement through the Index and Baptist Press claiming Neal had voluntarily sought early retirement. Other news sources provided more accurate accounts of his dismissal, he said.

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Neal told the Baptist Heritage Council, which met in his hometown of Columbus, Ga., that he dislikes theological and political labels because they are often arbitrarily assigned by others based on what church or friends one chooses. While editor, Neal said he was called everything from a Nazi to a bleeding-heart liberal.

"I'm liberal on some issues, conservative on some issues and, frankly, haven't made up my mind on some issues," said Neal.

He is now comfortable calling himself a "moderate," he said, because it "comes closest to explaining who I am." Though more legalistic and judgmental in his younger years, Neal said, he disagrees strongly with fundamentalists who insist on full agreement before acceptance.

"Where we are different is in the length of our list of fundamentals," said Neal. "Questioning the SBC Executive Committee doesn't make you any less Baptist than questioning the policies of the president and Congress makes you less of a patriotic American."

Gerald Harris, who replaced Neal as editor of the Index, declined to respond to Neal's comments. "I don't know that I want to get into that because I considered Bill a friend and he was always very gracious to me," Harris told Associated Baptist Press. "As best as I know how, I want to report good news. I don't want to get into this business where people get their characters assassinated."

Neal told the Columbus group he was hurt deeply by convention leaders but refuses to harbor bitterness or leave the Baptist fold. Of others who have left, Neal said, "One of the greatest disappointments of my life has been to witness the loss of friends and family -- especially women."

A member of Smoke Rise Baptist Church in Stone Mountain, Ga., Neal said he will remain a Baptist as long as there is a local church where he is free to practice his faith.

Neal urged fellow Baptists who feel displaced by fundamentalism not to become cynical or bitter. Fundamentalists always insist that no one believes the Bible more than them, said Neal, but moderate Baptists must make their consistent theme: "They will know we are Christians by our love."

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### **Conservative Episcopal bishops form network opposed to gay bishop, unions**

By Greg Warner

PITTSBURGH, Pa. (ABP) -- Thirteen Episcopal bishops opposed to the appointment of a gay bishop in New Hampshire are forming a rival network they hope will eventually win recognition as the authentic American branch of the worldwide Anglican church.

The dissenting bishops represent 13 conservative dioceses among the 100 dioceses in the Episcopal Church U.S.A. Bishop Robert Duncan of Pittsburgh has been named the "moderator and convening authority" of the new network.

The group opposes the August decision by the Episcopal Church U.S.A. to confirm Gene Robinson as the bishop of New Hampshire and to acknowledge that some dioceses are permitting gay union ceremonies. Those decisions violate biblical teaching against homosexuality, Duncan said.

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Many Anglican bodies worldwide also oppose the American church's approval of homosexuality and have asked the American bishops to rescind their actions.

Duncan insists the new group, called the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes, is not withdrawing from the Episcopal Church U.S.A. but instead hopes Anglican bishops overseas -- as well as Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches -- will recognize the new network as the authentic representative of U.S. Episcopalians.

If the dissidents are successful, it could provoke a crisis of authority within the worldwide church, called the Anglican Communion. But Duncan said the objective is not schism but repentance.

"What we trust is going to happen," Duncan told the New York Times, "is that the rest of the world and the rest of the Christian community are going to bring such pressure to bear on the whole of [the Episcopal Church U.S.A.] that it steps back from this event."

Of the 38 Anglican unions worldwide, 16 have said they will recognize the new network, according to one American official.

The dioceses that have agreed to join the network are Pittsburgh, Albany (N.Y.), San Joaquin (Calif.), South Carolina, Florida, Central Florida, Southwest Florida, Dallas, Fort Worth (Texas), Quincy (Ill.), Springfield (Ill.), Western Kansas and Rio Grande (which includes parts of Texas and New Mexico). The group hopes to include dioceses and parishes in Canada and Mexico, as well as individual clergy and laypeople.

In order to avert a schism, the Episcopal Church U.S.A. is suggesting that conservative congregations in liberal dioceses be allowed to come under the authority of conservative dioceses elsewhere.

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### **Stacy expected to leave Gardner-Webb divinity school for Jacksonville pulpit**

By Greg Warner

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Wayne Stacy, dean of the divinity school at Gardner-Webb University, is expected to leave to become pastor of a church in Florida.

Stacy, 53, will be recommended Jan. 11 to lead Southside Baptist Church in Jacksonville, according to the congregation. The 64-year-old church, located in a historic section of Jacksonville, has about 1,600 members and has played a leadership role in the Florida Baptist Convention, which is headquartered nearby.

Since 1997 Stacy has been dean of the Christopher White School of Divinity, which is named for the former Gardner-Webb president who resigned in 2002 after admitting he changed a star athlete's grades, prompting an NCAA investigation.

Stacy, a vocal supporter of White, recently requested and was granted a sabbatical leave from the divinity school, according to Frank Campbell, the university's interim president. But Campbell told Associated Baptist Press Stacy was not pressured to leave and had been expected to return.

Stacy could not be reached for comment. He recently became interim pastor of First Baptist Church in Greensboro,

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N.C. Robert Canoy has been named interim dean of the divinity school.

A tenured member of the Gardner-Webb faculty, Stacy previously served on the faculty of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and as pastor of First Baptist Church of Raleigh, N.C.

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### **Special court will hear Moore case after Alabama justices recuse selves**

By Robert Marus

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (ABP) -- A specially appointed judicial panel, led by a former Alabama governor, will hear Roy Moore's appeal after Moore's former state Supreme Court justices withdrew from the case.

Alabama Gov. Bob Riley (R) announced Dec. 16 that former Gov. John Patterson will lead the panel of seven retired judges from around the state. The special temporary court will hear Moore's appeal to be reinstated as the state's chief justice.

The day before, Moore's eight former colleagues on the Alabama Supreme Court recused themselves from hearing the case, saying judicial propriety precluded their further involvement in the case.

Patterson -- himself a retired judge -- and the rest of the panel were chosen at random from a list of more than 100 retired state judges that was compiled by the Supreme Court's clerk.

It includes two judges to whom Moore's attorneys specifically objected -- retired Circuit Judge Braxton Kitrell of Mobile and retired Alabama Supreme Court Justice Janie Shores of Birmingham. Moore said both were biased against him.

Moore was removed from his office Nov. 13 after the state's Court of the Judiciary ruled unanimously that he had violated judicial ethics by defying federal court orders.

Earlier this year, Moore was at the center of a highly publicized legal battle regarding a 5,280-pound granite monument to the Protestant King James version of the Ten Commandments. Moore had the statue installed in the rotunda of the state's judicial headquarters building in 2001.

Two federal courts ruled that the monument was a violation of the First Amendment's ban on government establishment of religion. After the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear Moore's appeal, a federal judge ordered the monument removed.

Moore refused to comply with the order, saying it would violate his oath of office. That oath to uphold the Alabama and federal Constitutions required him to "acknowledge God," he said.

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### **Baptists going to Super Bowl, with or without tickets**

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By John Hall

HOUSTON (ABP) -- The Dallas Cowboys and Houston Texans may not make it to the Super Bowl this year, but Texas Baptists plan to be there anyway.

They hope to share the gospel with many of the 200,000 people, including 35,000 media personnel, who will descend on Houston for the Feb. 1 game. Most of the crowd will not go to the game but will attend events surrounding the competition.

"We have a great opportunity to share God's love through Christ. It's not only people in the Houston area but the whole world," said Wayne Shuffield, an evangelism consultant for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

The Super Bowl evangelism steering committee is looking for churches to reach out to football fans the week leading up to the game by holding block parties or Super Bowl-watching gatherings. The group also is organizing volunteers to do street evangelism and encouraging mission teams to do projects throughout the city. Believers will distribute tracts and Bibles.

About 10,000 volunteers are needed to serve in 30 projects. Available positions include airport greeters, halftime volunteers and game managers. Volunteers can work events such as Taste of the NFL and the NFL Experience. Workers are needed to stuff bags and put them on stadium chairs.

Opportunities to share the gospel evolve naturally as church members serve in secular capacities, said Timothy Knopps, who has been contracted by the North American Mission Board to work with the steering committee. When other workers ask why someone volunteered, a person can talk about their faith.

"It gets [church members] involved in the community," Knopps said. "What we've found is when a church member gets involved in the community, the community gets involved in the church."

Cooperation between Texas Baptists and Super Bowl officials benefits both parties, Knopps added. As many as 3,000 people have made professions of faith through efforts prior to the Super Bowl in the past, and the National Football League has looked to local groups to facilitate the events.

"The NFL wants to leave a legacy of good things they've done locally," he explained.

Because of the league's preference for area workers, there is ample opportunity for Baptists to minister during the Super Bowl weekend, Shuffield noted.

"Hundreds of churches carry a greater impact for the cause of the kingdom than any one single church has," Shuffield said. "All Texas Baptists are invited to Houston."

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### **Annual State Department report lists religious-freedom violators**

By Rob Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The State Department's annual report on the status of religious freedom across the globe is out, and it's chief villains have some familiar faces.

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According to the report, released Dec. 18, China, Burma and North Korea remain among the world's most egregious and systematic violators of religious liberty. Meanwhile, several nations with close ties to the United States -- such as Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and Israel -- continue to repress their citizens' religious freedom either through overt legal oppression or through unequal enforcement of laws that, on paper, protect religious freedom.

In remarks introducing the report at a State Department press conference Dec. 18, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage noted that major religious celebrations for four of the world's largest faiths -- Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism -- were currently taking place, or had recently passed. At this time of year, when so many Americans focus on matters of faith, Armitage said, "all Americans stand united in our freedom of belief.

"We wanted [with the report] to focus on the plight of people who are persecuted," Armitage continued.

John Hanford, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, also pointed to the report's importance saying, "In many respects, religious freedom stands as the first freedom."

Highlighting five broad categories of ways in which nations suppress religious freedom, the report's executive summary listed nations that exemplify each:

-- Totalitarian or authoritarian regimes that attempt to control their citizens' religious belief or practice. Nations such as North Korea, Burma and Cuba continue to "regard some or all religious groups as enemies of the state because of the religion's content, the fact that the very practice of religion threatens the dominant ideology..., the ethnic character of a religious group or groups, or a mixture of all three," according to the report.

-- Governments that exhibit official hostility toward minority or unapproved religions. Countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan, "while not necessarily determined to implement a program of control over minority religions, nevertheless are hostile to certain ones or to factions of religious groups identified as 'security threats.'"

-- Governments that neglect in some cases to prevent discrimination against, or persecution of, minority religious groups. In states such as India, Egypt and Indonesia, the report says, "governments have laws or policies to discourage religious discrimination and persecution but fail to act with sufficient consistency and vigor against violations of religious freedom by nongovernmental entities or local law-enforcement officials."

-- Nations with legislation or policies that single out specific religions for discrimination. According to the report, Belarus, Israel and Russia are countries that "have implemented laws or regulations that favor certain religions and place others at a disadvantage."

-- Nations with otherwise robust democracies that officially stigmatize religious minorities by "wrongfully associating them with dangerous 'cults' or 'sects.'" The report notes that government officials in many Western European nations -- such as Belgium, France and Germany -- have doggedly investigated minority groups such as Scientologists, even though their members or officials have not been found to have committed any crimes. In a question-and-answer session with reporters, Hanford was asked if Saudi Arabia would receive the State Department's "Country of Particular Concern" designation for gross violations of religious freedom. The report noted that religious liberty "does not exist" in the kingdom. It also said that the Saudi government in 2003 "continued to enforce a strictly conservative version of Sunni Islam and suppress the public practice of other interpretations of Islam and non-Muslim religions."

Hanford acknowledged that, although Saudi Arabia "has been very close to the threshold" for being designated a CPC, the State Department has chosen to work with the Saudis toward improvements in religious freedom.

Hanford also said that, although Saudi law officially represses all religions except for a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, other countries with more liberal laws on religious rights nonetheless repress their citizens' religious freedom far more violently than does Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has repeatedly recommended CPC designation for Saudi Arabia, and the State Department has repeatedly declined to confer it on the oil-rich kingdom, which has long had close ties to the U.S.

Responding to a reporter's question about French President Jacques Chirac's support for a ban on Islamic headscarves and other public expressions of individual religious belief in French schools, Hanford expressed concern. Noting Chirac's declaration that the French principle of official government secularism is "non-negotiable," Hanford said, "our hope is that religious freedom is non-negotiable as well."

Hanford also expressed concern in response to a reporter's question about the ongoing development of Afghanistan's new constitution. The ambassador said he was particularly concerned with a clause in the first public draft of that document that would provide that no Afghan law could be contrary to the principles of Islam.

"Who is going to interpret this clause, and how?" Hanford asked. "We want to be sure that we don't end up with 'Taliban lite'."

The annual report is in its fifth year since the International Religious Freedom Act established both Hanford's office and the independent Commission on Religious Freedom.

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### **China detains two for supporting unofficial Christian churches**

By ABP staff

GLENDALE, Pa. (ABP) -- Government officials in China have detained a computer technician, Zhang Shengqi, and a church historian, Liu Fenggang, and placed them in jail for posting articles on the Internet in support of the unofficial Chinese Christian church.

The arrests represent a widening crackdown on Chinese nationals who are suspected of ignoring the government's policy against unregistered religious activities, according to a watchdog group. The U.S. State Department consistently has cited China for violations of religious liberty.

According to the China Aid Association, a Pennsylvania-based organization, government officials inside China continually try to repress information about arrests such as that of Shengqi and Fenggang, but an active network of church activists spread the word about such arrests.

The Chinese government permits worship only in tightly controlled state churches. China Aid Association reports that those who meet outside the official church are routinely harassed and fined, and sometimes sent to labor camps.

Though China has promoted the Internet for commercial use, they have given long prison terms to people who send or post messages online that criticize the government or advocate greater political or religious freedoms.

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## **BWA's Lotz labels SBC proposal 'triumph of ideology over doctrine'**

By Trennis Henderson

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A Southern Baptist proposal to end a 99-year-relationship with the Baptist World Alliance is a "triumph of ideology over doctrine," according to BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz.

"SBC doctrine is a call to unity among its churches," Lotz said. "Why then separate from the world of Baptists? In the end, it became a question of power and control and the desire of forcing Baptists of the world to fit into one particular mode or mold or interpretation of thinking. This is contrary to all Baptist understanding of the competency of the individual and of soul liberty!"

Lotz also questioned the study committee's claim that SBC leaders have failed to "secure a just forum" to air their concerns.

Noting that study committee members Morris Chapman, James Draper, Paul Presser and other Southern Baptist representatives have key leadership positions in BWA, Lotz said, "If you go through our members who chair key committees, I am questioned (by other BWA members) for having too many Southern Baptists in leadership positions.

"We're family," Lotz insisted. "You can't have your way all the time. ... We don't have a lockstep-like mentality where everyone has to repeat the same thing" about issues being discussed or debated.

Responding to the committee's charge of liberalism, Lotz said, "Of course, the BWA rejects categorically this false accusation of liberalism. It is sad that in the 21st century we use loaded terms to end discussion and to eliminate the thoughts and hearts of other people. It is a form of McCarthyism.

"Since the conservative resurgence (in 1979), BWA leadership has bent over backwards to accommodate the concerns of the present Southern Baptist leadership, but alas now to no avail." Looking to the future, Lotz said, "We, of course, will be very sad if indeed the Southern Baptist Convention in June withdraws from the Baptist World Alliance. I think it will be bad for the SBC and will further isolate their missions work overseas.

"I think it will make it more difficult for Southern Baptist missionaries," he added. "How will they relate to national conventions that are members of the Baptist World Alliance?"

"Personally, I fear for the Southern Baptist Convention," Lotz said, "because this decision follows in a long line of other decisions that, I believe, will ultimately lead to the dissolution and self-destruction of the SBC."

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### **CORRECTION:**

Please make the following correction in the 4th paragraph of the story "Stacy expected to leave Gardner-Webb divinity school for Jacksonville pulpit" in Dec. 18 ABP:

Stacy is serving as interim pastor of First Baptist Church, Gastonia, N.C., not First Baptist, Greensboro, as reported.

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