

Briefly noted

News in the [May 4, 2004](#) issue

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* movie about the death of Jesus earned \$17 million over the Easter weekend, making it the eighth-highest grossing film of all time. Gibson's self-financed blockbuster had earned \$354.9 million since it debuted on February 25, Ash Wednesday. Other *Passion*-related products have also done well—a book, *The Passion: Photography from the Movie*, issued by Tyndale House Publishers, ranked No. 3 on the *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list. The book started with an initial printing of 150,000 copies and was up to 650,000 by Easter. Tyndale plans to publish it in eight languages.

Although Southern Baptists have not altered intentions to sever ties with the Baptist World Alliance this year, top leaders of the two organizations met for six hours April 13 in Nashville and agreed to meet annually for an ongoing dialogue. They also agreed that the SBC could rejoin the alliance “in the not too distant future” —if some issues can be resolved. The acceptance of the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship into the BWA and allegations of theological liberalism (disputed by the BWA) were the principal issues when the Southern Baptist Executive Committee in February voted 62-10 to withdraw, subject to an expected confirmation at the SBC's annual meeting in June. The SBC will provide its current year's \$300,000 allocation to the alliance. The international group faces a financial crunch thereafter.

Methodist cleric Sam Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, has apologized on behalf of the churches for having failed to raise a voice during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 that claimed an estimated 800,000 lives. Kobia made the apology during an April 8 news conference during his first official visit to Africa as WCC general secretary. “We failed as church to address the genocide in Rwanda. We could have done more, we could have spoken loudly earlier, but regrettably that did not happen,” said Kobia, a native Kenyan. He pledged that the church will never again remain uninvolved if and when people are facing massacre.

The religious activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses have been banned in Moscow, allegedly for destroying families and fostering hatred, in a decision that critics call a

step back for democracy and religious freedom, the Associated Press reported. Moscow's Golovinsky district court on March 26 granted the request of prosecutors that the Witnesses be outlawed in the Russian capital under a provision that allows courts to ban religious groups considered to incite hatred or intolerant behavior.