
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

Phone: (904) 262-6626 Fax: (904) 262-7745 CServe: 70420,73

December 16, 1993

IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Seminaries renewing focus on spirituality, profs say
- * Dispute over Freemasonry lands Baptist church in court
- * Arab Baptist pastor granted temporary visa to Israel
- * ACLU mounts campaign against 'far right'

Seminaries renewing focus
on spirituality, profs say

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Facing two generations that have lost interest in institutions and traditions, churches must recover an emphasis on spirituality, says a noted Baptist scholar.

"The Baby Boomers and Baby Busters are not plugged into the traditional programs and other institutional aspects of church life, but they are very interested in spirituality," said Glenn Hinson, who teaches spirituality at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.).

"What we need going out from the seminary are ministers who are capable of being spiritual guides," he said. "Otherwise we have lost two whole generations."

Under Hinson's leadership, the seminary has revamped its curriculum this year to make spirituality one of three major emphases, along with missions experience and church-focused education. Hinson's course on spirituality is required for all students, and other degree requirements have been scaled back to make room for the new emphasis.

"We have become increasingly aware that ministry places great personal demands on ministers," Hinson said, "but in the recent past in Protestant theological education there has been almost nothing offered to help ministers mature so they would be able to handle these demands."

A recent survey, conducted by the Fuller Institute, showed those demands are taking a toll on pastors. Of those surveyed at a pastor's conference, 50 percent said they felt inadequate for the ministry, 70 percent said their self-image was worse than when they entered the ministry, 37 percent admitted to sexual misconduct, and 50 percent said they get less than five hours sleep a night.

Other Baptist seminaries, including the six affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, teach spiritual formation, though not always as part of the required curriculum.

A course called Formation for Ministry is required at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and others are offered. Southwestern Seminary has an endowed chair of prayer and spiritual formation and offers a course on

spirituality. "It's not required but it is popular," said seminary spokesman Scott Collins.

New Orleans Seminary likewise has an endowed chair in discipleship, and a course on spiritual growth is required of theology students.

Edward Thiele, professor of discipleship at New Orleans, said some Protestant seminaries have rediscovered spirituality in the past decade. "There is a real recovery in the emphasis. We are seeing we presumed too much. We assumed those going into Christian ministry had their own spiritual disciplines in place."

At the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, which is not SBC-affiliated, the required spirituality course has a practical slant. Students keep a journal of their prayer life, consider how their personality affects their spirituality, and develop a plan for long-term spiritual growth.

"I consider getting in touch with the working of grace in your life as being the key thing," said Hinson, professor of spirituality, worship and church history. "I try to help them learn to do that, to develop a discernment of how we engage God through experiences, through Scripture and other writings, through the church and other persons."

"I am concerned that we graduate persons who would have openness to others, who would be able to listen and have discernment about the personal needs of the people whom they serve. I think basically that is what spirituality is all about."

The Richmond seminary also requires a course on Ministers as Spiritual Guides, which teaches students how to nurture spiritual growth in their church members.

While most ministers offer pastoral counseling to members, Hinson said, that touches only a small portion of the church membership. "As I understand it, the role of the minister is to be a spiritual guide for all the members. There's a tremendous hunger for that."

By preparing themselves spiritually, ministers are laying the proper foundation for ministry, said Tom Graves, president of the Richmond school. "Ministry should come forth from a spiritual center of being rather than from a bag of tricks picked up at seminary," Graves said. "To train students only in technical competence is like teaching sailors to use a rudder while neglecting to stress the importance of keeping wind in the sails."

Richmond student Cindy Ring said Hinson and his spirituality course have changed the way she looks at life and ministry. She said she is pleased with the emphasis on spiritual growth. "Other classes give us background information and intellectual knowledge, but without spirituality none of it would work."

The course also has been popular with Richmond-area church members, 32 of whom took the class without credit in the fall term.

Some Baby Boomers and those in the succeeding generation, the Baby Busters, tend to "privatize" their faith and de-emphasize institutional religion, said Thiele of New Orleans. But true spirituality is expressed through a "body of believers," the local church, he said. "We don't want to see it privatized so that it's not true biblical discipleship."

Properly applied, spirituality will allow students to integrate their faith, Hinson said, helping them balance their experience, intellect, social relationships and institutions.

"Sometimes we rely too much on one aspect," said Hinson, who formerly taught at Southern Seminary. "We get into experience too much and it causes us to burn out, or we get into just intellectual pursuits and need to counterbalance that with social concerns, to get some of the blood away from our brains and more around our hearts."

"As (Catholic author) Thomas Merton has said, life has to be either all spiritual or it's not spiritual at all."

-30-

-- By Greg Warner and Beth McMahon

Dispute over Freemasonry
lands Baptist church in court

By Bob Allen

LINCOLNTON, N.C. (ABP) -- What began as a dispute over Freemasonry has landed the pastor and 28 members of a North Carolina church in court, according to the attorney defending the Westport Baptist Church against a lawsuit filed by disgruntled members.

The 860-member church, located in a small community 30 miles northwest of Charlotte, hired Mark Cooke as pastor in January 1992. After coming to the church, Cooke learned several long-term members and contributors were also long-time Masons and Shriners, according to his attorney, Tom Bush of Charlotte.

Cooke said from the pulpit and in other settings that Freemasonry contradicts biblical teachings, Bush said. He also preached against abortion and homosexuality.

Bush said a small moderate minority, about 10-to-15 percent of the congregation, were offended and tried unsuccessfully to force the pastor to resign.

Seven church members later disputed the September election of a slate of deacons sympathetic to the pastor. The seven filed a lawsuit in Lincoln County District Court in November which alleges church bylaws were violated in the election.

The group's attorney, Randy Isenhour of Newton, said Freemasonry is not germane to the case. Some of the plaintiffs reportedly are Masons, however.

The plaintiffs charge that a group of church members improperly substituted a list of deacon nominees without prior notice and that the new deacons attempted to change the church's bylaws to the detriment of members with opposing views. The plaintiffs have asked the court to declare the September deacon election invalid.

But Bush, the opposing attorney, said the dispute instead centers on Cooke's controversial statements -- a viewpoint echoed by more than 20 church members who have filed affidavits with the court.

Cooke, the pastor, did not return phone calls from Associated Baptist Press. But in a court affidavit he said the plaintiffs "have taken this foolish and unbiblical action because of their blind rage towards me."

Under the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment, Bush told ABP, the court has jurisdiction to resolve only property disputes and not matters of doctrine.

"The meat of the issue," Bush told the court, "is a pastor's preaching, which is strictly barred ... from intrusion by secular courts."

Larry Holly, who has led a campaign against the influence of Masons in Baptist churches, recently held a seminar on revival at Westport Baptist, one of the largest churches in Lincoln County. Holly also conducted a separate session on Freemasonry for those interested.

The case is scheduled to go to trial Jan. 3. District Judge George

Hamrick, who is scheduled to hear the case, is a former chairman of deacons at First Baptist Church of Shelby, N.C.

-30-

-- Randy Hawkins of the Lincoln Times-News contributed to this story.

Arab Baptist pastor granted temporary visa to Israel

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Arab Baptist pastor Alex Awad just received a long-awaited Christmas gift -- one that took more than four years to secure.

Awad, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, has been working to obtain a visa so he can return to his homeland of Israel and serve as pastor of East Jerusalem Baptist Church. The Israeli government repeatedly has refused to grant him a work visa or even a temporary tourist visa -- until recently.

He has been granted a tourist visa to return home for the Christmas season, and Awad hopes it will lead to a permanent visa. Awad said he believes the recent action represents a change in policy and attitude that will allow him to return to the West Bank perhaps this summer.

He planned to spend Christmas Eve with his wife and children in the United States and then travel to Bethlehem Dec. 25 to spend Christmas with his extended family.

Awad, 47, was born in Jerusalem and spent more than 10 years in the United States, becoming an American citizen. He was ordained to the gospel ministry by First Baptist Church, Ellijay, Ga., and became pastor of Clayton Baptist Church, Canton, Ga., in 1977.

In 1979 he returned to Israel to become dean of students at Bethlehem Bible College and worked among Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem until 1987.

In 1987 the Israeli authorities refused to renew work visas for Awad and his wife, Brenda, so they returned to the States. In 1988 East Jerusalem Baptist Church called him as pastor. He traveled there on temporary visa to iron out details, but the Israeli government would not renew his visa.

Two major factors impacted the government's recent decision, he said. First, the religious community rallied around him. The volume of support from American Christians made the Israeli government understand that "my case was not going to go away," he said.

The United Methodist Church has been his principle sponsor, but the Baptist Joint Committee and Baptist Peace Fellowship also have worked on his behalf.

The Baptist Joint Committee became involved at the request of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. BJC General Counsel Brent Walker has written to and met with government officials and religious leaders to solicit support for Awad.

Another reason the Israeli government granted the visa, according to Awad, is the changing political atmosphere in the region as its leaders are seeking peace.

Awad said he hopes his Christmas visit will set the stage for a work visa. If all goes well, he plans to return to his homeland this summer with his family to begin his new ministry as a New Testament professor at Bethlehem Bible College and a minister among Palestinian Christians.

"I have enormous respect for Alex and Brenda," Walker said. "They have

faithfully sought to follow God's leadership despite the intransigence of the Israeli government. I hope the temporary visa becomes a permanent one."

-30-

-- By Pam Parry

ACLU mounts campaign
against 'far right'

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The American Civil Liberties Union is mounting a national campaign to counter what it calls "misleading assertions by the far right" about religion in public schools.

The ACLU has distributed a new legal bulletin to more than 16,000 school superintendents around the nation and released its first-ever video titled "America's Constitutional Heritage: Religion and Our Public Schools."

The new products are described in an ACLU press release as part of a continuing effort to "combat misleading information being distributed by Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice." Robertson's group has mailed letters to school administrators around the country arguing that certain religious practices, including graduation prayer, are constitutionally permissible.

The ACLU said its video is a direct response to "America's Godly Heritage," a video being distributed by several religious right groups. It was produced by the Texas-based Wallbuilders, an organization which argues America was founded as a Christian nation.

The 35-minute ACLU video, meanwhile, features a longtime Baptist pastor, W. W. Finlator, as narrator, as well as constitutional scholars and families who have challenged the religious practices in their public schools.

Finlator, former pastor of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C., says on the video that he shares the widespread concern about "the seeming lack of faith and values in America," but that he fears those who want to usurp the family and "bring religion to our children in another way. Not through parents at home, or in church, but through the public schools."

"Since the birth of this nation," he continued, "we have debated the issue of separation of church and state Most Americans -- myself included -- don't want the government interfering in any of our most private affairs, especially not our religion."

Finlator acknowledged that public schools are important for building character and teaching values, but added that no school or other government body can substitute for churches, synagogues, mosques, homes or other places of worship.

The video also outlines historical development of the concept of the separation of church and state and challenges some assertions of the right, such as that SAT scores have declined since the 1962 Supreme Court ruling banning state-sponsored prayer in public schools.

Prepared by the ACLU legal staff, the bulletin addresses constitutional implications of graduation prayer, Bible distribution, displays of religious symbols and observance of religious holidays. It also explains the equal access and free speech rights of religious groups that are protected by the First Amendment.

Ira Glasser, ACLU executive director, said that all Americans who care about religious freedom should be concerned about efforts of the "far right."

"In many parts of the country, school administrators and school board

members are coming under increasingly intense pressure from organized groups to sacrifice the nation's commitment to religious liberty," he said.

Glasser added that misunderstanding of First Amendment protections for religion has led to the mistaken belief that separation of church and state was motivated by the founders' hostility toward religion.

"An environment in our public schools that is hospitable to religious diversity, and that fosters respect for the Constitution, is in the best interest of us all," Glasser said.

A spokesman for the Virginia Beach, Va.,-based American Center for Law and Justice could not be reached for comment.

-30-

-- By Pam Parry

.....

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the only issue of ABP for this week. Only one issue is scheduled for each of the next three weeks, probably on Wednesday or Thursday. We will resume our twice-weekly issues Jan. 11. Of course, if events warrant additional issues, we will adjust our plans. Thanks.

Merry Christmas,
Greg Warner
Editor

***** END *****