

# Associated Baptist Press

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## In this issue:

- Plight of women worsening, according to BWA report
- Senate bill would require EEOC to drop religion from guidelines
- Revival is coming to America, but has not arrived, evangelists say
- Court allows teacher to sue over teaching about evolution
- Ku Klux Klan may display cross on public grounds, court rules
- Article in Arkansas newsletter rekindles flap over Freemasonry

## **Plight of women worsening, according to BWA report**

McLEAN, Va. (ABP) –Worldwide, the outlook for women is getting worse, but there are some signs of hope, according to a recent report from the Baptist World Alliance's women's department.

"Together," a newsletter published by the BWA women's department, says women worldwide are suffering more today than in the previous decade.

It cites three trends which are "driving women into despair":

- Economic recession hurts women first and worst.
- Political upheaval, often resulting in war, turns women into victims.
- Religious trends are oppressing women, particularly in regions dominated by Islam, Hinduism and other traditional religions.

Half a million women die every year in pregnancy and childbirth, the report says. "All but 5,000 such deaths occur in developing countries."

Another 200,000 women die every year in botched abortions, the report continues. "This is the leading cause of death for Latin American women ages 15 to 39."

During this decade, the number of women and children dying of AIDS will increase to 3 million per year, the report says. "Already in many African cities and in some major cities of America and Western Europe, AIDS is the leading cause of death for young women. The World Health Organization estimates that 10 million children in Africa will be orphaned by AIDS during this decade."

A revival of African traditional religions and Muslim fundamentalism has increased the incidence of female genital mutilation, the report continues. "Current estimates show that more than 100 million women in Africa alone have suffered this crippling blow to their health and status."

Worldwide, women also are far more likely than men to be illiterate, the victims of violence and live in poverty, the report continues. "According to the International Labor Office, women do two thirds of the world's work

and receive 5 percent of the world's income."

On a happier note, however, the BWA reports that "where Christian women are numerous, the status of women is dramatically higher than in areas without Christian influence."

This is particularly evident in India, the report says, where Christianity is growing faster than the rate of population growth. Women fare better in most respects in the northwestern-most states of India, where Christianity has a significant influence, than in the southern-most states, which are predominantly Hindu, according to the BWA.

Women are playing a critical role in advancing the gospel around the world, the report says.

The newsletter cites as examples:

-- The house church movement in China has grown largely through the ministry of uneducated women evangelists.

-- The most successful church planters in the jungles of Myanmar, Burma, are women evangelists supported by the women's organization.

-- Of the 50,000 prayer cells in Paul Cho's church in Korea, 47,000 are led by women.

-- Baptist women around the world are operating ministry centers in their homes and elsewhere and witnessing one-on-one in places otherwise closed to the gospel.

-30-

-- By Mark Wingfield

## **Senate bill would require EEOC to drop religion from guidelines**

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate voted July 22 to require the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to remove religion from proposed comprehensive guidelines dealing with workplace harassment.

The guidelines were drafted to help interpret what constitutes workplace harassment based on race, color, religion, sex or national origin.

Many religious and civil-liberties groups, including the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and the Baptist Joint Committee, have criticized the guidelines as vague and open to misinterpretation. Some groups argued the guidelines would lead to "religion-free" workplaces, and asked the EEOC to drop religion from the guidelines. Others, meanwhile, urged the EEOC to keep religion in the guidelines but clarify them so they do not stifle legitimate religious expression in the workplace.

The Senate action came in the form of an amendment to an appropriations bill. The House of Representatives has already approved the appropriations bill with a different provision concerning the EEOC guidelines. The House action would bar the EEOC from using funds to implement the proposed guidelines as drafted. The differences in the bills must be resolved in conference committee before final passage.

The Senate amendment, introduced by Sens. Hank Brown, R-Colo., and Howell Heflin, D-Ala., would require the EEOC to hold public hearings on any new guidelines related to religious harassment and to receive additional comment before issuing any new regulations. It also would require any new regulations to "make it explicitly clear that symbols or expressions of religious belief" are not to be restricted.

"This amendment forces the EEOC to withdraw these dangerous guidelines and respect people's freedom of expression," Brown said. "Harassment can be restricted without extinguishing a person's freedom to express their beliefs."

-30-

## Revival is coming to America, but has not arrived, evangelists say

By Ken Walker

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- A deep spiritual hunger. Different denominations coming together for prayer. An increasing number of pastors talking about spiritual awakening. Those are a few of the signs Southern Baptist evangelists cite as evidence of a coming revival.

Billy Graham's recent speech at the North American Conference for Itinerant Evangelists, the first such meeting on the continent, sparked a renewed interest in revival throughout the evangelical community.

"I think historians will look back and say this has been a great period of revival," Graham told the 2,500 evangelists at the Louisville, Ky., meeting. Graham urged evangelists to respond to the impending spiritual awakening by redoubling their efforts to spread the gospel. "Wouldn't it be awful if you slept through the revival?" he asked.

Evangelists interviewed by Associated Baptist Press concur that revival has indeed broken out in other parts of the world but debate whether it has yet reached American shores.

"It seems like we're on an upward swing," said Rudy Hernandez of Dallas, who travels to such nations as Russia, South Africa, India and Cuba. "On a scale of 1 to 10, it's a 5 or 6 in America. Abroad, it's a 9."

For example, he said, Russia is seeing a return of New Testament days reminiscent of the book of Acts. People there run to hear a portion of the Bible, he said, and tears flow freely down the cheeks of those who pray to receive Christ as savior.

Hernandez said people abroad may be turning to Jesus faster because the gospel has been around the U.S. so long that people have grown hard-hearted. But he believes the pendulum is swinging back and many are conscious of the need for godly values.

"If this keeps up, by the turn of the century we'll see a real revival in America," he said. "I hope it's much sooner."

Sammy Tippit of San Antonio, who has traveled to every continent since 1971, said signs of revival are much more apparent abroad than in America. "But in this country, I think there is a new thrust of the people of God seeking God."

While that can't be termed a revival, the former Jesus Movement leader said, the seeds are beginning to take hold as a grass-roots movement. Too many churches are full of carnality and immorality, he said, yet growing numbers of people are saying, "Hey, we want God."

"Our nation is in a great spiritual darkness," Tippit said. "But the darkness has caused a deepening of the Christian."

Evangelist Alvin Reid agrees revival has not yet come to America but believes it may be near. "I personally don't think we're in the middle of one, but I am more optimistic that we're on the verge of a movement of God in our country than I have been for years," said Reid, a professor at Houston Baptist University.

Reid, who preaches half a dozen evangelistic meetings a year, said for a long time he thought people romanticized spiritual awakening but were unprepared to pay the price for revival. But he cites two indicators that is changing:

— In Houston, various denominations are meeting for prayer. Not only do the participants show a hunger for spiritual awakening, but the subject is being regularly discussed by pastors, he said.

— On trips through the Midwest, Reid said he has heard considerable conversation about spiritual awakening. "I haven't seen the likes of this since I was converted back in the Jesus Movement in 1970," Reid said. "That's why I'm optimistic. I think we're on the verge of something happening. But I don't think we're quite there yet."

Dale Griffith, a Southern Baptist Mission Service Corps volunteer in Ashland, Ky., said he has observed "pockets" of revival in various places as he travels across the country, such as Georgia, Texas and Florida. The evangelism consultant said a renewed focus on prayer, both in sermons and Christians' daily lives, will help bring revival.

Often believers make the mistake of thinking revival comes through a great speaker or is worked up by the church, he said, when actually revival is prayed down from heaven.

To accompany prayer, Griffith said Baptists need a renewed emphasis on personal evangelism. "The first thing Jesus did when he came off the mount of temptation was go directly to the people, one-on-one," he said. "Philip preached to the multitudes in Samaria and then to one man. It shows God is interested in both."

Jack Stanton, a professor at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., says a recommitment in the lives of young people is evidence of revival stirring.

"It's not just those related to church vocations," said the director of the university's International Institute of Evangelism. "Some of my most exciting classes are in lifestyle evangelism, where (non-church) folks are part of them. As far as witnessing, some of the finest people are those who are not ordained."

The major problem at many church revivals, Stanton said, is a lack of non-believers. He advocates moving revival meetings outside the church walls.

"We need to go where the people are," he said. "More people feel free to go to neutral ground, stadiums or whatever. I think we need to be intelligent enough to know (non-believers) have different needs and aren't cut out of the same cloth."

Price Harris, a music evangelist based in Shreveport, La., said he sees a lot of spiritual hunger in his travels throughout the South. Since he doesn't preach, his observations come through personal contacts within the church. And in recent times more members are seeking him out to share their burdens.

"I see a variety of reactions to revival," Harris added. "Much of it depends on the pastor of a particular church and his burden for his community -- how he leads the church to prepare in prayer and ministry."

-30-

-- Ken Walker is a free-lance writer in Louisville, Ky.

## **Court allows teacher to sue over teaching about evolution**

SAN FRANCISCO (ABP) – A California high school biology teacher may sue his employer on grounds that requiring him to teach evolution as a fact rather than a theory violates his religious beliefs, according to a federal appeals court.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled July 25 that the teacher, John Peloza, may attempt to prove that the Capistrano Unified School District in Orange County "supported atheism" and showed hostility to religion by requiring the teaching of evolution as an undisputed fact.

While the court voiced skepticism that Peloza could prove the allegation, which would require demonstrating that the district ignored its own policies which describe evolution as a scientific theory, it said he should have a right to gather evidence to build a case against his longtime employer.

The appeals court overruled a U.S. district judge who dismissed Peloza's suit, declaring it frivolous and ordering him to pay the school district \$32,000 in court costs. The appeals court voided the payment order, saying the lawsuit raises some legitimate legal claims, including whether the district violated its responsibility of neutrality toward religion by government.

## **Ku Klux Klan may display cross on public grounds, court rules**

CINCINNATI (ABP) -- Ohio cannot ban the display of a Ku Klux Klan cross on the square surrounding its statehouse in Columbus, a federal appeals court ruled July 25.

The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously rejected an argument by state officials that allowing the cross on the Capitol grounds violates the constitutional ban against establishment of religion.

The court ruled that because a private party, and not the government, sought to display the religious symbol on public property, a reasonable observer would not perceive the display as government endorsement of religion.

The Klan sued a state agency which refused to let it display a wooden cross on the square, which has been used over the years for rallies and speeches by various groups. It also has been the setting for holiday displays including Christmas trees and Jewish menorahs.

## **Article in Arkansas newsletter rekindles flap over Freemasonry**

WEST MEMPHIS, Ark. (ABP) -- A newsletter article urging Masons in northeast Arkansas to boycott a Southern Baptist home missions offering drew a swift rebuke from a state Baptist official, eliciting an apology from a Masonic leader.

The flurry came after excerpts of an April 28 letter by Fred Kleinknect, head of the national Scottish Rite organization in Washington, were reprinted in a newsletter mailed to nearly 1,300 members of the William Nash Scottish Rite Temple in West Memphis, Ark.

In the letter, Kleinknect voiced concern that "God-called Masons may soon be disqualified from service as missionaries" through the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He urged Southern Baptist Masons to stop supporting the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions and consider channeling their offerings to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or "designate all offerings for local church use only."

In April, Home Mission Board directors voted 31-30 against a study of whether to bar Masons from serving as home missionaries. After the vote, however, the board's chairman commented that given the current climate, it is unlikely a Mason could win approval for home mission service.

A Scottish Rite member shared the newsletter with his pastor, who contacted Don Moore, executive director of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention in Little Rock. Moore responded in writing to leaders of the William Nash Scottish Rite Temple.

Moore objected to what he called "an attack" on the SBC and "stooping to become embroiled in the struggle of a single denomination and taking sides in the affair." Moore explained that the 1993 SBC approved a report calling for no action against the Masonic Order but left membership in lodges a matter of personal conscience.

An Arkansas pastor, Carroll Evans, who chairs the northeast Arkansas Scottish Rite Temple's executive board, responded to Moore in a letter apologizing for publication of the letter.

Evans, pastor of First Baptist Church of Hughes, Ark., said Kleinknect had sent his letter to all Scottish Rite

groups, advising them to disseminate the contents at their discretion. Evans said he was unaware the article was included in the newsletter until after it was published. He said he will seek to clarify the issue in the organization's next quarterly newsletter.

"My personal advice would be to continue supporting the Cooperative Program and the missions offerings," Evans told the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine. "The convention has expressed itself and I'm hopeful that Southern Baptists have put this anti-Masonic issue behind them. I don't really think we've got a quarrel with the convention."

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