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Book says individuals with AIDS deserve church's help, compassion

By Keith Hinson

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- It is a dangerous thing for Christians to hide their weaknesses and sins, suggest the authors of a recent book, "Broken Dreams: Journal of a Life Shattered by AIDS" (Birmingham: New Hope, 1995).

The book traces the life of Scott Cameron (not his real name), who began struggling with homosexuality as a teenager. Later, he attended a Christian college and became involved in homosexual activities off-campus.

Eventually, Cameron renounced the gay lifestyle and urged teenagers to remain celibate until marriage. He died in his late 20s from AIDS.

"Broken Dreams" is based largely on the authors' reading of Cameron's journals, which he kept from the time he was 11 years old until his death, said Karen Linamen, co-author of the book and a freelance writer living in Duncanville, Texas.

Linamen said she was struck both by Cameron's "profound loneliness" and his "sincerity about his relationship with the Lord."

"Our goal in writing the book was to look at the importance of transparency and vulnerability in our lives as believers," Linamen said. "Every believer struggles somewhere. ... When Scott was struggling with loneliness early on -- he was not transparent or vulnerable about an area of struggle."

In his journal, Cameron wrote, "I know I'm a Christian. ... I've never doubted that, (but) ... it's hard, because I've never been able to talk to anybody about any of this. I couldn't tell a friend, or family, or my pastor, because I feared their reactions."

"Broken Dreams" describes in story form the life of Cameron from high school through his death several years later. Excerpts from Cameron's journals are interspersed throughout the book.

Linamen became aware of Cameron's testimony during her job in Los Angeles as a producer for a television

talk show, "Faith Waves," which aired locally and examined issues from a Christian perspective.

Research led her to the story of Cameron, who had died six weeks earlier. Linamen learned that Cameron had recorded an audiotaped interview with his church's youth pastor, in which Cameron urged teenagers to remain celibate until marriage.

Linamen's program offered the tape to viewers. She met Cameron's mother, who allowed her to read his journals and eventually use them in writing a book.

"It struck me how sincere he was in his faith," Linamen said. "Early on, as a kid, he talked about how he wanted to be a missionary. ... He wanted to serve God when he was older. He wanted to write a book and tell people about God."

A key goal of the book is to help Christians "be more sensitive to people with AIDS and people who are struggling with the gay lifestyle," said Keith Wall, co-author of "Broken Dreams" and a book editor at Focus on the Family in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"Many churches are resistant to accepting and helping people with AIDS," Wall noted. "I think that's beginning to change. ... The church should be the place where hurting people of all kinds -- including people with AIDS and people struggling with homosexuality -- can receive support, find compassion, and get help to address their struggle."

The book presents homosexual behavior as sin, Wall said: "This is a story of the consequence of the gay lifestyle, and I think the story speaks for itself and what happens when someone such as Scott is entangled in a lifestyle that's wrong."

In journal excerpts, Cameron's struggle was evident: "How I wish I could change the past, ... undo the things I've done. But it doesn't work that way. All I've got now is the future. The future. What a scary thought. Oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

"Broken Dreams" was first published a few years ago by NavPress under the title "Deadly Secrets." Since the initial publication, Wall and Linamen have received dozens of letters praising the book.

"One young man wrote and said that this book literally saved his life because of the path he had been on," Linamen said. "... He said he could identify with every stage of what Scott had gone through. He said, 'Now I can see where the path ends. I have been on that same path Scott was on.'"

Other letters came from parents who had learned about the homosexuality of a son or a daughter. The book helped them understand something about the kinds of issues and problems their families would face after learning a family member is homosexual, Linamen noted.

Late in the book, Cameron reconciles with God, repents of homosexual behavior, and suffers from the physical agonies brought on by AIDS. But the very end of the story comes on a happier note, just moments before Cameron's death: "Scott ... stood poised at the threshold of the brightest chapter of his life. ... The best part of Scott's story awaited, just a heartbeat away."

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Risk called integral part of Christian living

By Keith Hinson

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Christian living should be a risky business, according to Bill Leonard, chair of the religion department at Samford University in Birmingham, Ala.

"I strongly believe that we, like those who have gone before us, must discover what it means to risk the journey of faith," writes Leonard in his new book "Risk the Journey" (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union/SBC, 1995).

"Risk the Journey" is also the 1995-96 theme currently being emphasized by the national WMU organization. Leonard said the phrase caught his attention when WMU editors spoke with him about writing the book.

"I was very taken with this idea that they proposed with the idea of risk and the relationship between faith and risk," Leonard said in a recent interview.

In the book, Leonard describes several categories of Christian risk and illustrates each chapter with numerous anecdotes from the history of Christian missions from several denominations.

"I was very fascinated about these early missionaries, most of whom went out knowing that the odds were that they would die before they ever did ministry -- and many of them did," Leonard said.

Chapters in the book discuss the relationship of risk to several aspects of the Christian life, including faith, identity, place, community, ministry, sacrifice, conscience, and the Holy Spirit.

In the chapter titled "The Risk of Place," Leonard notes that not all missionaries who leave home adapt to their new place of residence. He recounts a story about Edmonia Moon, who went to Asia as a missionary in the 19th century.

"Edmonia Moon preceded her sister Lottie as a Southern Baptist missionary to China by almost one year," Leonard writes. "... (She) experienced profound culture shock. ... She had chronic health problems and received little sympathy from the veteran missionaries."

Though Edmonia Moon returned to the United States, her sister Lottie proved adaptable and became an effective missionary. Lottie Moon is now the namesake of Southern Baptists' annual foreign missions offering.

"Not every person can live and work, minister and witness in every environment," Leonard writes. "Place is a risk. Not everybody can find a home in the same place."

How could a Christian become involved in the "risk of place" today? Two examples, Leonard suggests, are by ministering to those who are different from oneself -- such as people with AIDS or disabilities -- or by joining a religious community that others may shun.

Such a decision can lead to unexpected and immeasurable blessings, Leonard suggests, noting that he, his wife Candyce and 20-year-old daughter Stephanie are members of Sixth Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham -- a congregation that is dually aligned with the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention.

Though some may perceive the family's relationship to the church as a risk, Leonard said the predominantly African-American congregation has enriched their lives.

"I have learned more about being a Baptist from my four years at Sixth Avenue than I can possibly ever appropriate. It has changed me in ways I don't even realize. It has kept me a Baptist," Leonard stated.

At the Sixth Avenue church, Leonard noted, he sits "next to people who grew up in a segregated society and participated in the marches and did that not only as black people but as Baptists. ...

"All those black Baptists -- black people who got together in Montgomery and decided not to ride the buses any more -- I think they did it primarily because of their faith and not because of their politics," Leonard said.

As he prepared the book, Leonard read numerous documents, books, journals, and other writings. "In reading these materials, I was struck once again as I have been for years about the radical nature of Baptist action," Leonard said.

"The early Baptists were absolutely radical in so many of their activities and ideas on church and state and their ideas on mission," Leonard stated. "... Some may go out and 'do missions,' but everybody is called to be on mission."

Leonard distinguishes between risk taking for its own sake and risking for God's kingdom. "I think there's a difference in risky behavior -- like bungee jumping or gambling -- and then risking for the sake of ideas and reputation," Leonard said.

Risking for the sake of God's work is still a responsibility for Christians today, Leonard suggests.

"As we enter the 21st century, the Holy Spirit is still out there ahead of us," Leonard writes, "calling us to missions old and new, challenging us to take the good news to the poor, the broken, and the imprisoned -- risky business."

Southern Baptists sending aid to flood-stricken North Korean

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Southern Baptists have launched an effort to collect and send food to North Korea, where flooding last summer has caused famine.

Cooperative Services International, a Southern Baptist aid agency, will work with the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission and Woman's Missionary Union to collect and ship food to communist North Korea.

An estimated 5 million North Koreans are affected by food shortages, and 120,000 may die before the next harvest, according to the Red Cross.

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-- By ABP staff

Longtime seminary prof Max Rogers dies

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (ABP) -- Longtime seminary professor Max Rogers died Feb. 12 after an illness. Rogers, 63, taught Old Testament 35 years at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

Seminary President Paige Patterson said he did not meet Rogers before coming as president in 1992, but since that time "he became a precious friend and always an ardent supporter of the seminary."

Though Rogers, a moderate, disagreed with changes at the school under Patterson's conservative leadership, Patterson said the professor was "notable for his kindness and generosity toward those who held different views than his own."

Funeral services were scheduled Feb. 15 at Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, N.C., with burial in Enfield, N.C.

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-- By ABP staff

Pastor of FBC Nashville leaving to start new church

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Dan Francis has resigned as pastor of the historic First Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn., to begin a new "seeker-targeted" church in nearby Brentwood.

Francis, 43, has been pastor four years of the downtown church near headquarters of both the Southern Baptist Convention and the SBC's mammoth publishing house, the Baptist Sunday School Board. His resignation is effective March 10, according to a statement.

"We support Dan Francis in his acceptance of this new call and appreciate the work he has done through the Lord at our church for the last four years," said Tad Harris, chairman of deacons at First Baptist.

Francis came to the Nashville pastorate from Central Baptist Church in Winchester, Ky.

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-- By ABP staff

Abortion-clinic slaying suspect insane, lawyer says

DEDHAM, Mass. (ABP) -- A lawyer for John C. Salvi III told a jury Feb. 14 that his client was insane when he killed two abortion-clinic workers Dec. 30, 1994.

In an opening argument in Salvi's trial in Dedham, Mass., defense attorney J.W. Carney told a jury that Salvi's shooting rampage "was the plan of someone who was mentally ill and acting on his delusions," Associated Press reported.

Prosecutors, meanwhile, argued that Salvi, 23, is sane and is legally responsible for the shootings.

Salvi, of Hampton, N.H., is charged with killing two receptionists and wounding five other people at the Planned Parenthood and Preterm Health Services clinics in the Boston suburb of Brookline, Mass.

If convicted, he faces life in prison without parole. If found not guilty by reason of insanity, Salvi would be sent to a mental institution and released when found sane.

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Former Episcopal treasurer admits stealing \$1.5 million

NEWARK, N.J. (ABP) -- The former treasurer of the Episcopal Church in the United States has admitted to stealing more than \$1.5 million from the church but says that a psychiatric disorder prevents her from recalling the crimes.

"I now believe and understand that I did embezzle funds from the Episcopal Church," Ellen Cooke said in a court appearance Jan. 24 in Newark, N.J., according to Ecumenical News International. "I can't say for sure that at the time I knew what I was doing, but I do accept responsibility."

Cooke, who was treasurer for the 2.4-million-member Episcopal Church from 1986 until 1995, pleaded guilty to transferring stolen money across state lines and tax evasion. She will be sentenced April 29. If convicted, she could receive prison terms totaling up to 15 years and fines of \$350,000.

An audit in February 1995 alleged Cooke stole \$2.2 million from the church during a five-year period.

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