

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Views on women, letter derail seminary appointment**

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- His view that women in ministry is a local-church matter and opinions expressed in a letter to the Baptist Standard more than two years ago may have cost Steven Harmon a position on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Harmon, 29, who is expected to receive a doctor-of-philosophy degree from the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, this December, was to be recommended to the seminary trustees March 10-12 for election as an instructor in theology.

Seminary President Ken Hemphill and Academic Dean Tommy Lea withdrew Harmon's nomination, however, after two interviews with trustee members and discussion of the appointment in the trustee Academic Affairs Committee. Both administrators said they felt it was "God's will" that they terminate the proposal, which had been unanimously recommended by the Department of Theology and endorsed by both Hemphill and Lea.

"Our selection process has numerous checkpoints where candidates may be removed from consideration for various reasons," Hemphill said in a prepared statement. "At any point in the process the dean and president may remove the name. In light of input from our trustee body we came to believe that it was not God's will to bring this candidate and, therefore, removed him from consideration. We prayed fervently, followed due process, and I believe we made an appropriate decision. This illustrates that the process works."

Neither Hemphill nor Lea would say what was discussed in the closed-door Academic Affairs Committee meeting. Lea noted, however, "After I listened to what the board was saying and looked at what was best for all concerned, I prayed about it, thought about it and reflected on it and decided to withdraw the nomination."

Trustee Arthur Mallory of Missouri, former president of Southwest Missouri State University and current Baptist-state-convention president there, said there was "excellent discussion" in the committee and that the apparent impression was "it wasn't time for this excellent young man to join this faculty."

Both Hemphill and Lee praised Harmon. "We believe Steve is an outstanding scholar and believer," Hemphill said in his statement. "This should not be interpreted negatively toward him any more than a pastoral-search committee's choice of a particular pastor makes a negative statement toward others not chosen."

Lea described Harmon as "a young man of piety and ability."

Harmon told the Baptist Standard newspaper he was given no reason why his appointment was withdrawn except that Lea told him his beliefs were somehow apparently "not in conformity" with the "Baptist Faith and Message," a confession of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963.

No further explanation was offered, Harmon said, although he pressed for an answer, saying such a statement placed a cloud over his theology.

Harmon said he considers himself a conservative scholar who believes in biblical inerrancy. Inerrancy, the idea that the Bible is literally true, has become the watchword of the six Southern Baptist seminaries, controlled by conservatives since the late 1980s.

Harmon said he was questioned by trustees, however, about his views on women in ministry. He told them he felt the question of ordaining or hiring a woman as senior pastor should be left up to each local church, he said, apparently dissatisfying trustees.

Both trustee groups also asked Harmon about a letter-to-the-editor he wrote that was published in the Baptist Standard in August 1994 following the announcement that Hemphill was to succeed Russell Dilday as president. Trustees fired Dilday in March 1994, charging he did not embrace the conservative course charted by the school's trustees.

In the letter, Harmon advised Texas Baptists should be "wise as serpents" regarding a statement by Hemphill that "no one has led me to believe that the faculty [of Southwestern Seminary] is sprinkled with liberals."

"Having recently completed 135 semester hours in two degree programs at the seminary, I concur wholeheartedly that the faculty is not 'sprinkled with liberals.' Texas Baptists should be reminded, however, that the members of the board of trustees that elected Hemphill have claimed quite the opposite," Harmon wrote.

"Before a gathering of Tarrant Association pastors and in written responses to letters from concerned Texas Baptists, individual trustees have adduced allegations that specific Southwestern faculty members were guilty of liberalism in their efforts to justify the dismissal of Russell Dilday.

"If Hemphill's statement means that these trustees have reversed their position that liberalism is a problem at the seminary, then better days may be forthcoming for the seminary family. If, however, these trustees have not changed their position, then one can only conclude that the trustees have deliberately misled Hemphill or Hemphill has deliberately misled the public."

Harmon said he expected the letter to create problems when the theology department voted unanimously to recommend his appointment but had been assured by Hemphill and Lee it would not become an issue.

In the first interview with a trustee team, Harmon said, the letter was the first issue raised. The week before he was to be nominated the letter resurfaced in the second interview. One trustee "suggested I was an unrepentant sinner," Harmon said.

The appointment withdrawal and the reasons for it were expected to be considered by the seminary's Ombudsman Committee, but neither Tommy Brisco, the faculty chairman on the committee nor Ralph Pulley of Dallas, who heads the trustee representatives on the panel, would comment.

Harmon, who is pastor of Round Grove Church, Dublin, said he intends to continue his work toward his Ph.D. degree "and trust God has something else for me."

## **Congress re-examines how often late-term abortion procedure is used**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- New figures suggesting that the number of "partial-birth abortions" was underreported in debate last year has added fuel to legislation that would prohibit doctors from using the controversial procedure to terminate a pregnancy.

Abortion-rights advocates originally said the procedure was used roughly 500 times each year.

Recently, however, Ron Fitzsimmons, the executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, sent shock waves when he said he lied last year when he said the procedure was used rarely and only on women whose lives were in danger or whose fetuses were damaged.

That admission has given new momentum to bills in Congress that would ban the procedure, which foes have termed "partial-birth abortion." Opponents of the ban say that is not a proper medical term but an inflammatory description used by ban supporters.

As worded, the bill would ban a medical procedure known as "intact dilation and evacuation" that is performed in second and third trimester abortions, pro-choice groups say.

At a March 11 Congressional hearing on the matter, abortion-rights advocates still insisted the procedure was rare but refused to estimate specific numbers, saying there is no scientific gathering method to obtain an accurate count.

Kate Michelman, president of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, said that "99 percent of all abortions in this country are performed prior to 20 weeks of pregnancy."

"The procedure at issue here, truly, is essentially a subset of that 1 percent of abortions," she said. "It is rare."

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, a supporter of the ban, however, said "at least several thousands of these abortions are performed each year in the United States." He added that it is reported that a New Jersey clinic has acknowledged performing 1,500 procedures annually.

Abortion-rights groups argued that they were calculating lower numbers because last year's debate focused on late-third-trimester procedures and after "post-viability" when a baby can live outside the mother's womb.

"Pro-choice groups were criticized for not being forthcoming about intact D-and-E figures regarding second-trimester abortions before viability," said Gloria Feldt, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. "The truth is that until recently, the framers of this debate talked almost exclusively about late, third-trimester abortions and that is what our response addressed," she said.

Helen Alvare, director of planning and information for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said "proponents of partial-birth abortion were repeating false information -- and getting away with it in the press."

President Clinton vetoed a bill last year that would have banned the use of the procedure except to save the life of the mother. Doctors convicted under the measure could have served up to two years in prison along with paying fines.

Clinton said he vetoed the measure because Congress refused to allow for exception in cases that pose serious health consequences to the mother. He said he would sign the bill if the health exception were included.

The procedure involves delivering the entire fetus, except for the head, through the birth canal before a syringe is inserted in the brain to end its life.

Rep. Charles Canady, R-Fla., said the procedure "is performed routinely on the healthy babies of healthy mothers primarily during the fifth and six months of pregnancy." Canady, who is a primary sponsor of the ban, rejected Clinton's proposal for a "health" exemption.

"The truth is that partial-birth abortion is never necessary to protect a mother's health," he said. He said the courts would define a health exception too broadly, including even minor psychological problems to a prospective mother.

Opponents of the ban said lawmakers should not begin a precedent of interfering in a doctor's decision about what procedure is best for a patient. They also argued that the ban would violate the decision in Roe vs. Wade, a landmark court ruling that protected a woman's right to privacy in abortion decisions.

Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., said the legislation introduced to ban the procedure is "doubly unconstitutional" under Roe vs. Wade. "It imposes a serious burden on a woman's right to choose to have an abortion before the stage of viability. And the limitations imposed after the stage of viability contain no exception to protect the health of the woman," he said.

Kennedy said, "I also wonder if the men in Congress who are so critical of the women who find themselves in these tragic circumstances would be so quick to cast the first stone if the men were the ones who were pregnant."

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said although he voted to override Clinton's veto last year, he is concerned about the Senate proposal because it does not limit the scope of criminal and civil liabilities as last year's final version did.

"Not only the physician, but also anyone involved in, or who knows about, the performance of such an abortion, could face potential liability. This would cover medical personnel, friends or family who drive the woman to the clinic or who counsel her before or after the abortion," Leahy said.

As always, tensions were high in the abortion debate. Feldt told Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., that they see the issue through different lenses. "You look at it from the perspective of the fetus. I think that many of us ... most Americans can see a broader context than that. And understand that we must have concern for the woman involved and for the medical judgment involved," she said.

Hyde said: "I can only answer by saying I want to love them both. I don't think you have to have an either or." He said he did not trivialize the woman but asked why ignore "this child, this developing human being -- that is the thing that is ignored."

"Don't say to me that I don't care about the fetus," Feldt shot back after explaining that she was expecting a grandchild soon. "By and large women choose abortion, not because they don't care about children but because they care so much, they want to have children when they can care for them."

Hyde asked, "Does it bother you that 40 percent of abortions are repeat abortions?"

Feldt responded, "I think that if that bothers you, then you need to work with us to prevent unintended pregnancy."

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## **Worldwide Baptist leaders adopt millennium theme for meeting**

By Wendy Ryan

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Baptist leaders from around the world have adopted a theme of "Jesus Christ Forever. Yes!" for the 18th Baptist World Congress to be held in 2000 in Australia.

"We want to say something to the world at the start of the millennium, and this theme says it for us," said Denton Lotz, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance. He called the theme "biblical, Christological and millennium related."

Preparation for the new millennium was a recurring theme in reports at a March 3-6 meeting of the BWA executive committee.

Brazilian evangelist Nilson Fanini, the BWA's current president, described visits to Chile, several countries in Eastern Europe and Italy during the last six months. In each place, Baptists accepted Fanini's challenge to double their work by the year 2000, he said.

Edwin Lopez, regional secretary from the Asian Baptist Federation, reported a vision to establish Baptist work in Nepal, Cambodia and Mongolia had been realized. Asian Baptists are now working toward reaching Bhutan, Tibet and China by 2000, he said.

Bill Hogue, a Southern Baptist serving as BWA vice president, described a recent visit to Cambodia. In one village, 300 people were converted to Christianity, he said. In another, 400. "Cambodia would explode with the gospel if there were enough trained leadership," Hogue said.

Daniel Carro, regional secretary for Latin America, reported that Baptists there will soon meet to approve an evangelism plan through 2000, culminating in a combined Latin America evangelistic crusade in 1999.

British Baptists are being asked to baptize new believers on the first Sunday of the new millennium, said David Coffey, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. "The millennium opportunity is a 'kairos' moment," Coffey said.

Baptists in the United Kingdom are issuing a call to repentance under the theme "Whose Birthday is it Anyway?" and emphasizing "Jubilee 2000" in which Baptists will ask the government and agencies to cancel debts of the world's poorest nations," Coffey said.

Fanini has asked more than a million Baptists to pray for revival meetings and millennial emphases around the world.

Other reports described growth and challenges facing Baptists.

Three women who recently visited Cuba told of packed church services and faithfulness in the face of difficulties. The women said they visited Cuba's office of religious affairs and helped get permission for a home for elderly women to be built.

At one service, more than 100 young people responded to a call to dedicate themselves to the ministry in the Western Convention of Cuba, said Mercy Jeyaraja Rao, president of the BWA Women's Department. There currently aren't enough places to use them, however, she said.

Samuel Fadeji, president of the All-Africa Baptist Fellowship, said Baptists in Nigeria and Ghana noted increases in church planting. There are 5,600 churches and more than a million baptized Christians in the Nigerian Baptist Convention, he said.

Karl Heinz Walter, regional secretary for Europe, reported growth and revival in certain areas of the Middle East, with reports of many people converting to Christianity after just reading the Bible. He described seeing one man "with a glow on his face" reading the Bible "as if it were the only book in the world."

Walter also reported that Baptists in the former Soviet state of Georgia recently received long-sought permission to build a second church. For years, four congregations have shared one building, he said, while several requests to the government to allow a second building were denied.

Caribbean Baptists, with growth stalled at 190,000 members, pledged to reclaim a focus on sending missionaries to other countries, said Peter Pinder, regional secretary for the Caribbean Baptist Fellowship. While there had been a long history of Caribbean missions, that has not been the focus in recent years. "We in the Caribbean must start to send missionaries to other countries," Pinder said.

Daniel Weiss, president of the North American Baptist Fellowship, described racism as a problem troubling Baptist work in North America. "It ought to be of deep concern to Baptists that leadership on civil rights today in North America comes from the Nation of Islam," he said.

Weiss urged North America's 60 million Baptists to denounce racism. He reported that Baptists raised more than \$1 million to help rebuild churches in the United States that had been destroyed by racially motivated arson attacks.

In another report, Ignacio Loreda, president of the Argentine Baptist Convention, described a first-time meeting of Baptists and Roman Catholics in the country as "a historic moment."

Loreda called the December meeting "a very considerate and positive gesture" by Catholic officials and an indication that "doors are now open on both sides" in the predominantly Catholic country.

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## **Foreign Mission Board projects record Lottie Moon Offering**

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Officials at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board are projecting a record \$93.5 million from the 1996 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.

March projections for the annual foreign missions offering, which closes its books in May, are 5 percent above the amount received last year. That would be the fourth straight annual increase and the largest growth in eight years.

Don Kammerdiener, executive vice president at the Richmond, Va.,-based Foreign Mission Board, said the projection indicates that foreign missions are "still of bedrock importance" to Southern Baptists.

The offering will help Southern Baptists continue to expand their missions efforts, Kammerdiener said. "With this offering ... we will be able to continue appointing missionaries at the rate the Lord sends them to us."

The Lottie Moon Offering is Southern Baptists' largest funding source for foreign missions. It provides 47 percent of the FMB's annual budget. The Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program unified budget provides another 36 percent. Remaining funds come from investments, designated gifts, hunger-and-relief receipts and other sources.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Contract with agency head reported binding on NAMB**

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (ABP) -- An agreement that allows Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission President James Williams to continue employment after the agency is dissolved in June need not be approved by the North American Mission Board, as was first reported.

Trustees of the Memphis, Tenn.,-based Brotherhood Commission approved in February a "contract of agreement" allowing Williams, 62, to remain as a consultant after the Atlanta-based North American Mission Board succeeds the agency June 19. Under the agreement, Williams will be a consultant to NAMB until age 65 and will assume duties as executive director of the Baptist Medical-Dental Fellowship.

Announcing the agreement, Williams told reporters it was contingent on approval by trustees of the North American Mission Board.

Baptist Press reported March 11, however, that while Williams made the statement in good faith, the contract is in fact legally binding on the new mission board, which assumes liabilities and assets of the three agencies being dissolved in the merger.

Williams told Baptist Press he hoped the North American Mission Board would use him in a consultant role. Whether or not he is used as a consultant, however, he will receive a \$75,000 salary stipulated in the contract until Nov. 1, 1999, the news service reported.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Texas Baptist leaders write letter over possible Baylor hospital sale**

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Possible sale of the Baylor Health Care System raises questions about historic relationships and issues of missions, ministry, morals and ethics, according to a letter written by three Texas Baptist leaders.

Baylor University's regents are considering several options, including selling the \$1.2 billion Dallas-based health care system or forming an alliance with other health-care providers.

Those possibilities have prompted protest, particularly in North Texas, where Baptist and non-Baptist residents alike describe Baylor Health Care System as a vital and stabilizing component of the community.

And they led to the letter of concern from the Baptist General Convention of Texas leaders: President Charles Wade of Arlington, Executive Board chairman Bob Campbell of Houston, and Administrative Committee chairman Charles Davenport of Tulia.

"We thought it important to share with you concerns -- often expressed with great emotion -- which we have received from Texas Baptists throughout the state," the letter noted.

Among concerns detailed in the letter are that the largest of Texas Baptist health-care systems "be maintained as a part of our Texas Baptist Christian mission" and that "the distinctive Christian witness of the medical center be maintained."

The leaders also urged continuance of the close relationship with the state convention that has existed throughout the institution's history. Ending that relationship could be viewed as "a breach of trust" the leaders said.

Similarly, a "loss of trust" could affect donors, the letter warned. "Persons have contributed large sums of money and have affiliated with the Baylor Health Care System on the basis that it was a Baptist Christian institution," it observed.

The Baptist leaders also noted that Texas Baptist churches and individuals have contributed "many millions of dollars" to the health-care system over the years, giving the state convention an added stake in the decision.

Calling the health-care system "an integral part of the Texas Baptist mission effort," the leaders said losing the system could damage Baylor's integrity in the eyes of many Texas Baptists. "The way you handle the matter will have far-reaching and long-standing impact on how the university is viewed by Baptists and the public at large."

Allowing Baylor Health Care System to lose its Christian mission and Baptist relationship could cause turmoil, bringing "potential harm to Baptist mission, ministry and fellowship," the letter said.

The leaders urged both the university's regents and the health-care system's board to consider the "historical, relational, financial, ethical, missionary, moral, ministry and perhaps legal relationship between" the BGCT and the health-care system.

Boone Powell Jr., president of the health-care system, called the letter "a reaffirmation" of the commitment of many Christians to the healing ministries. "It covered why many health-care people are attracted to work with church-health-care institutions," he said.

Following a closed-door regents' meeting March 3, Powell expressed "a lot of confidence" in a joint committee of university and health-care board members working with two consultants on options regarding the health-care system.

Stan Madden, Baylor's vice president for marketing, told The Baylor Lariat, the university's newspaper: "Very little of the information concerning this situation has come out. We have agreed with BHCS not to respond to press in any significant way."

Madden declined to comment on options available to the two boards, saying he does not "want to tie their (regents') hands."

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## **Texas Baptists help build first college on San Andres**

By Orville Scott

SAN ANDRES ISLAND, Colombia (ABP) -- Southern Baptists in Texas have joined hands with volunteers in Colombia to help establish the first college on San Andres, a Caribbean island off the coast of Costa Rica.

About 500 volunteers from nine San Andres churches and from Colombia, Costa Rica and the United States worked to found the university.

George May, a native of San Andres and pastor of the island's First Baptist Church, is president of San Andres and Providence Christian University, which held its first convocation March 7.

May had a vision for the school a decade ago, when he was pastor of South Park Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. In the past, students seeking higher education had to leave San Andres. Many never return.

"Many people have helped to make possible the dream of higher education for San Andres and Providence," May said.

A four-acre site was donated for the new university and an additional acre and a half was purchased later. About 200 San Andres volunteers cleared the site with machetes prior to ground-breaking ceremonies in 1994.

Texas Baptists provided a large number of volunteers for the project.

First Baptist Church in Kingwood, Texas, established the San Andres Foundation to raise money and recruit volunteers.

Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, sent volunteers to work with others from Costa Rica to frame the first two floors of a classroom building. About 50 volunteers from First Baptist Church in Richardson, Texas, are scheduled to perform construction and to lead vacation Bible schools in June.

"Texas Baptist churches and individuals are joining hands with the people of San Andres and Colombia to make a better world through educating and training dedicated hearts and minds at San Andres and Providence Christian University," said William Pinson, executive director of the 2.6-million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Baylor University in Texas is donating more than 1,000 books for the school's library. Baylor also signed an agreement of cooperation with the school, as did universities and seminaries in Colombia.

Baylor President Robert Sloan endorsed the school enthusiastically. "In the highest spirit of Christian love and fellowship, we welcome San Andres and Providence Christian University to the ranks of higher

education and look forward excitedly to a mutually beneficial relationship in training the hearts and minds of students for greater service to God and humanity," he said.

Three annual telethons helped raise money for the school. A fourth is scheduled March 22. Offerings for the school are taken four times a year in San Andres churches.

Other buildings to be erected soon include a library and an outdoor amphitheater to accommodate large groups and to serve as a student center.

Beginning in September 1997 classes will be offered in English, math, science, Bible and western civilization. Technical and vocational courses will be offered in conjunction with Island authorities. Later, more specialized courses such as marine science and computer science will be offered.

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## **Mac Charles Jones dies; led NCC's anti-arson effort**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Black Baptist leader Mac Charles Jones, who gained national prominence last year by calling for action to stop a series of arson attacks on African-American churches, died unexpectedly March 6.

Jones, 47, had recently taken a new job as deputy general secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. He was pastor of St. Stephen Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo., a congregation affiliated with the National Baptist Convention of America.

Jones reportedly collapsed at the Dallas-Fort Worth airport while traveling to an NCC meeting. He responded at first to treatment at a hospital in a Dallas suburb but then died the same evening from a blood clot.

As the NCC's part-time officer for racial justice, Jones led the ecumenical group's program to help halt arson attacks on black churches in the south last year. "He brought that concern to us," reflected NCC General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell. "We would not have been in that issue if it were not for Mac."

Jones was a graduate of Virginia Union Theological Seminary and United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. He was a pastor in Arizona, Virginia and Georgia before moving to Kansas City in 1984.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Robert Spinks tapped for development post**

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Veteran seminary administrator Robert Spinks has been named director of development at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Starting April 1, Spinks, 53, will head the Virginia seminary's development efforts, including a \$10 million capital campaign.

Spinks recently raised more than \$11 million for a divinity school at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C. He has worked in Baptist higher education more than 25 years, including 10 years at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

"We are delighted to have a development professional of Bob Spinks' proven ability directing our development efforts," said Tom Graves, BTSR president. "He is a leader in Baptist development, and his experience in working with seminaries and divinity schools makes him a perfect fit for us."

Spinks was a founding member of the Alliance of Baptists, the group which began the Richmond seminary.

"I'm looking forward to joining a team of colleagues who share a vision for a new way of preparing ministers for the new millennium," Spinks said.

"BTSR has the faculty, the location, the facilities and the plan," he said. "All it needs now is the help of its friends."

A major focus of Spinks' work will be the seminary's five-year, \$10 million "Building the Dream" campaign, which will finance the purchase and renovation of the seminary's first permanent home, annual operating expenses and endowment.

Earlier the seminary announced that long-time Baptist development officer Pat Pattillo would work with the capital campaign. He will continue in a consultant's role after Spinks comes on board, a seminary spokesperson said.

The Baptist school, which began in 1991, purchased a building and nearly three acres of land from partner school Presbyterian School of Christian Education last October. Renovation on the 45,000-square foot Watts Hall is to be completed in August. The building will house all seminary offices and classrooms as well as provide dorm space.

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-- By ABP staff

-- Photo available from Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond

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