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Seminary board chairman nominated for 'rector' post

By Bob Allen

PRAGUE, Czech Republic (ABP) -- The chairman of a trustee board which orchestrated a radical "refocusing" of an international Baptist seminary in Europe is being nominated for the school's top administrative job.

Keith Jones, deputy general secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, has been nominated as rector of the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic.

Jones was nominated to the newly created post in April by the seminary's board of trustees and by the executive committee of the European Baptist Federation.

In addition, trustees also nominated Davorin Peterlin, a seminary administrator in Croatia, to be pro-rector, academic dean and director of the biblical studies program at IBTS, a position not in the original refocusing plan.

Both appointments must be ratified by a majority of voting unions in the EBF. The confirmation process is expected to be completed by June 1. If elected, the men will assume duties Sept. 1.

Jones is the current chairman of the IBTS board, which last fall approved sweeping changes in the school's academic program in an effort to adapt to Europe's changing political landscape. Under the refocusing plan, the 50-year-old seminary, formerly located in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, will no longer grant traditional seminary degrees but instead will provide specialized programs to supplement basic coursework offered at 40 national Baptist seminaries and Bible schools across the European continent.

The refocusing, which displaces current faculty and forces students to transfer to complete their degrees, won broad support among Baptist leaders in Europe but has been criticized by alumni and former teachers who say the changes will diminish the quality of theological education and alter the campus' international flavor.

In response to critics, the European Baptist Federation's executive committee in April reaffirmed its support for the new direction. "Many excellent pastors, educationalists, missionaries, theologians and union leaders have been products of IBTS," said EBF president David Coffey of Great Britain. People opposing the changes, however, are overlooking "seismic changes in Europe," he said. "The Europe of today and the EBF of today are not as they were," Coffey told European Baptist Press Service.

Jones is an ordained Baptist minister and a former pastor. He also is former general secretary of the Yorkshire Baptist Association and a past chairman of the Baptist Union of Great Britain council. He holds the bachelor of arts in theology from the University of Manchester and the master in peace studies degree from the University of Bradford. He has an interest in Baptist history and has written several books and articles.

Jones will resign from the school's board of trustees if his election is confirmed, according to European Baptist Press Service.

Peterlin is currently theological dean of the Theological Seminary in Osijek, Croatia, and for the past year has been a visiting professor of New Testament at IBTS in Prague. He is a member of the EBF executive committee and is chairman of the federation's division of theology and education.

He is a former Baptist pastor who received his bachelor's degree from the University of Zagreb, Croatia; a master's degree from Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia; and his doctorate from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

At the April meeting in which they nominated Jones and Peterlin, IBTS trustees also changed the title of the top administrator's post from "general director" to "rector" and added a biblical studies program.

Jim Smith, a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary and member of the IBTS board, said the term "rector" is used more widely in academic settings in Central and Eastern Europe, while "general director" relates more often to the business world. He said the biblical-studies program was developed because such courses for lower-level students are available at nearby schools in Czech or German, but not in English.

Officials said searches are underway for directors of new academic programs in Baptist and Anabaptist studies, missions and evangelism, human rights and Christian education.

The Prague seminary has been without a top administrator since Cooperative Baptist Fellowship missionary John David Hopper retired as its president in 1997. German scholar Stefan Stiegler was nominated to the vacant post last June, but he withdrew following a dispute with faculty over the proposed hiring of a female professor.

After that, seminary trustees called off the presidential search and decided to proceed with the refocusing, which had been discussed for several years and was to have been implemented over time by the new president.

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Religious leaders respond to harsh words in debate

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Three religious groups have criticized a U.S. Congressman for suggesting that judges who have ruled for the separation of church and state are going to hell.

During May 5 debate in the House of Representatives on a proposed "Religious Freedom Amendment" to the Constitution, Rep. Jack Kingston, R-Ga., discussed with the bill's sponsor, Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., court decisions which they said stifle religious expression and create a need for the proposed amendment.

Kingston, who supports the Istook proposal, said: "There is no doubt in my mind that there is a special place in hell for a number of federal court judges, as I am sure there will be for members of Congress."

Three religious leaders released a joint statement calling on Kingston to apologize for the remark.

Joan Brown Campbell, general secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., said the comment removes any doubt about what can be expected if the amendment becomes law. "Representative Kingston's remarks tell us precisely what we can expect: intolerance, incivility and nastiness," she said.

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee said: "Let's let God separate the righteous from the damned, the sheep from the goats. Last time I checked, it wasn't in the job description of a member of Congress."

Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism said Kingston's remarks foreshadow "the angry, divisive, sectarian debates that will follow passage of this amendment as students argue about whose prayers would be said over the loudspeakers and religious groups argue over who will receive limited government funding for their religious activities and whose religious symbols will be displayed on which public buildings."

Kingston told a Savannah newspaper that he made the comment in jest. "We need a little levity in the U.S. Congress," he told the Savannah Morning News. "We need people to quit eating persimmons for breakfast and taking themselves so seriously."

The Istook amendment would allow some forms of government-endorsed religious speech and school-sponsored prayer and would insert for the first time the word "God" into the Constitution.

It would also open the door for religious groups to receive education vouchers and other government benefits which otherwise might be unconstitutional under the First Amendment's establishment clause. The U.S. Supreme Court has yet to rule on whether funding religious groups through vouchers violates the Constitution.

The text of the Istook proposal reads: "To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: Neither the United States nor any state shall establish any official religion, but the people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage, or traditions on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed. Neither the United States nor any state shall require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, prescribe school prayers, discriminate against religion, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion."

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Senate approves bill protecting tithes, giving

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Senate unanimously approved a bill May 13 that would shield tithes and other charitable gifts from bankruptcy actions.

The Religious Liberty and Charitable Donation Protection Act would protect gifts donated by individuals who later declare bankruptcy. The U.S. House Judiciary Committee is expected to consider the bill in the next few days.

The measure, sponsored by Sen Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, and Rep. Ron Packard, R-Calif., would prohibit bankruptcy courts from seizing contributions to religious organizations and other charities to pay creditors. The law would protect tithes and other contributions up to 15 percent of the debtor's annual income.

It would also permit debtors in Chapter 13 bankruptcy to tithe during their repayment period.

"My proposal responds directly to recent decisions made by federal judges which leave churches open to bankruptcy lawsuits and force churches and charities to return money given through donations," Grassley said.

Grassley said that under current law "a person can budget money for pizza and a movie but not for a charitable contribution to his or her church, even if that person believes his or her faith requires that."

"Religious freedom should not be trampled upon by our federal courts," he said.

An aide to Grassley told Associated Baptist Press the bill in its current form would prevent the type of lawsuit directed at Cedar Bayou Baptist Church of Baytown, Texas.

A Texas state judge ruled last year that the church had to turn over to a creditor \$27,687 -- four years of tithes -- given by church member and deacon Leland Collins. The ruling hinged on the contention that Collins' contributions amounted to a "fraudulent transfer" because he gave them "without receiving a reasonably equivalent value in exchange."

Reacting to such cases, religious organizations have been urging lawmakers to protect the offering plate.

"Churches and charities should be treated as fairly as casinos and luxury cruise lines," said Steven McFarland, director of the Christian Legal Society's Center For Law and Religious Freedom."

"Presently, if a debtor blows every last dollar on gambling and liquor, the trustee cannot recover that money from the casino or liquor store, but if the debtor donates that same money to his church or the Red Cross, the creditors can force repayment," McFarland said.

The bill was drafted to include secular charities as well as religious groups to head off a possible court challenge that it violates the constitutionally required separation of church and state.

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GOP leaders strip more provisions out of religious persecution bill

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Curbing religious persecution abroad is a popular idea in Congress, but lawmakers have yet to agree on how to achieve that goal.

The Freedom From Religious Persecution Act, a once-popular bill intended to curb religious persecution abroad, has undergone repeated alterations in the House. It is sponsored by Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., and Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa.

The Wolf-Specter bill would establish an office of religious persecution monitoring in the U.S. State Department. It would require the office's director to make an annual report on religious persecution and would give the director power to impose automatic sanctions such as denial of U.S. foreign assistance, denial of visas and prohibitions on certain exports to countries which engage in persecution.

To the dismay of several conservative religious leaders and advocacy groups, the original Wolf-Specter underwent numerous changes before it was reintroduced earlier this year. Then on May 6, lawmakers on two House panels altered the bill even further.

Another barrier to the Wolf-Specter measure is a competing Senate proposal sponsored by Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla. The International Religious Freedom Act would establish an ambassador-at-large post at the State Department, a special adviser on religious liberty on the National Security Council staff and a seven-member commission appointed by Congress and the president.

Instead of imposing automatic sanctions, the Nickles measure would require the president to choose from a list of several sanctions to wage against countries engaged in persecution and it would broaden the definition of persecution.

An official at the National Association of Evangelicals said the Wolf-Specter proposal, which the organization supports, "isn't going anywhere in the Senate."

Lawmakers on the House Ways and Means Committee, angry at another committee for adding measures that are in the Ways and Means panel's jurisdiction, stripped a provision that would have banned imports from the Sudan, a country often named as one of the world's worst religious-freedom violators.

In March, the House International Relations Committee cleared the Wolf-Specter measure with the sanctions against Sudan intact. The panel also included a narrow exemption, allowing the import of gum arabic, a valuable Sudanese product.

Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer, R-Texas, said the other "committees in the House should follow the rules, including the International Relations Committee."

Archer also said that religious leaders from Sudan "believe that the bill will not work as its authors intend and may in fact bring about the opposite result. Unfortunately we are learning the hard way that unilateral sanctions rarely work, especially when they are misapplied."

Archer said the effect of stripping the provisions against the Sudan would be to leave in place the current trade embargo on the country issued by the president through his executive powers.

Earlier in the week, the House Judiciary Committee removed provisions that would have made it easier for victims of religious persecution to receive asylum in the United States.

An aide to Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, said the original bill would have lowered the standard of proof for those seeking refugee status for religious persecution reasons. Smith led the charge to strip the provision.

"In the past, we have seen that when we lower the standard of proof, we have increased the level of fraud," the aide said.

In a recent White House meeting with officials from the NAE, President Clinton voiced his opposition to any legislation that would impose mandatory sanctions on countries guilty of religious persecution. According to a news wire account of the meeting, Clinton told the group he shares the goals of the legislation's sponsors but believes there are better ways of addressing the issue.

Conservative Christian advocacy groups, along with some Jewish groups, have lined up behind the Wolf-Specter measure. Some of the supporters are the Christian Coalition, Family Research Council, NAE, Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Anti-Defamation League and Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.

Groups such as the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A and the Baptist Joint Committee support the intent of the legislation but oppose the bill. The groups are seeking changes such as the removal of automatic sanctions and fear that the bill may do more harm than good to people of faith in countries engaged in persecution.

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Bill allowing government to fund faith-based programs introduced

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Seeking an expansion of his "charitable choice" initiative in the 1996 welfare reform package, Sen. John Ashcroft, R-Mo., has introduced a bill that would allow more government contracts and vouchers for faith-based programs.

Under the Charitable Choice Expansion Act introduced May 7, houses of worship could get public funds to provide services such as low-income housing, juvenile crime prevention and substance abuse, according to Ashcroft.

Ashcroft, a possible candidate for the GOP presidential nomination, said the bill would "encourage successful charitable and faith-based organizations to expand their services without the fear that they will have to extinguish their religious character when receiving government funds."

The charitable-choice provision in the 1996 welfare package allowed governments to contract with houses of worship to provide certain welfare services. Under previous law, houses of worship could create separate nonprofit groups and receive money as long as the separate groups did not use the funds to promote religion. Welfare reform, however, allowed houses of worship to receive grants and vouchers to provide services without creating a separate organization.

Ashcroft's plan would require government to consider equally faith-based organizations when contracting or using vouchers for government services. It would require that houses of worship not use grant money to proselytize or provide religious instruction. However, they could provide those religious services with government vouchers, a distinction the U.S. Supreme Court has yet to rule on.

The plan is opposed by advocates of the separation of church-state who argue that it would violate the Constitution's ban on government advancing religion. They also say government regulation would accompany the public money.

"It is the wrong way to do right," said Melissa Rogers, associate general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee. She warned that churches which accept government funds "may come to be viewed as arms of the government."

"As a result of this legislation, the traditional role of religion as a prophetic critic of government may suffer," Rogers said. "Like every other government-subsidized group, religion will be less likely to bite the hand that feeds it."

Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said Ashcroft "wants to run a bulldozer through the wall of separation between church and state, and a lot of people will get hurt in the process."

At a press conference announcing the introduction of the bill, leaders from religious groups which provide social services said faith-based groups can offer spiritual resources for problems like drug addiction that the government cannot.

"Faith and God works because the crisis in America today is not crisis of program but a crisis that is moral and spiritual in nature," said a representative from the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

Ashcroft, however, said his bill would not allow government resources to be used for indoctrinating religion.

Asked how faith-based programs will be able to offer spiritual guidance if funds for religious worship and instruction are barred, Ashcroft said "there is a climate in these organizations ... of love and compassion, a climate of dignity and respect that comes when it's known that the organization cares for individuals on a far broader basis than just on a client basis."

Steven McFarland, director of Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom, said a voucher program, instead of a grant program, would enable a faith-based group more freedom in its services.

"This is all about eliminating discrimination that has previously been justified erroneously on the basis that somehow the First Amendment requires religious citizens to be treated less favorably when it comes to government funding than nonreligious ones," he said.

"This is not about coming to the public trough, it's not about appropriating any new money, it's about choice through vouchers and other creative programs," McFarland said.

According to an Ashcroft press release, some of the bill's protections for religious groups and social service beneficiaries include:

- a religious organization is not required to alter its form of internal governance;
- a religious organization cannot be required to remove art, icons, scripture or other symbols from its premises;
- religious organizations may discriminate on a religious basis in the terms and conditions they establish for their employees;

- the government must ensure that a beneficiary receives notice that he/she has a right to ask for and receive services from an alternative (non-religious) provider;
 - faith-based providers must establish a separate account to segregate monies received under government programs from funds received from non-governmental services;
 - faith-based providers are subject to the same fiscal audits as are all other providers;
 - no funds provided directly to religious organizations through government contracts and grants to provide services may be expended for sectarian worship, instruction or proselytization; and
 - faith-based organizations that operate with vouchers are not subject to prohibitions on sectarian worship, instruction or proselytization, since the beneficiary has chosen to redeem services with a religious provider.
- Supporters of the Ashcroft plan include Call to Renewal, the Christian Coalition, the Christian Legal Society, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Salvation Army and others.

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Most Virginia trustee nominations affiliated with new conservative convention

By Robert Dilday

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Most trustees from Virginia serving on the boards of Southern Baptist Convention agencies will be members of a conservative state convention started two years ago, if a slate of nominees released in April is approved at the SBC annual meeting in June.

Every Virginian on a report released last month by the SBC committee on nominations is a member of a congregation exclusively aligned with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia. In addition, six Virginians named to committees by SBC President Tom Eliff also maintain membership in SBCV congregations.

The SBCV separated from the Baptist General Association of Virginia in 1996, charging the 175-year-old BGAV is theologically liberal and is weakening its ties to the SBC. BGAV leaders deny both charges.

The report from the SBC committee on nominations -- which is appointed by the SBC president and assigned the task of nominating trustees for each of the SBC's 12 boards, commissions and seminaries -- is likely to be approved at the denomination's June meeting. When the new Virginia trustees are added to those already serving, SBCV members will represent 54 percent of Virginia's trustees. Another 25 percent will come from churches affiliated only with the BGAV, while 21 percent will be members of churches that are "dually aligned," affiliating with both the BGAV and the SBCV.

T. C. Pinckney, a retired air force general who is one of Virginia's two representatives on the SBC committee on nominations, noted almost all Virginia trustees were appointed to their four- or five-year terms prior to 1996 -- when the SBCV organized as a state convention -- and were members of churches then affiliated with the BGAV.

And, he stressed, most of this year's Virginia nominees were trustees eligible for a second term. The nominations committee named only two new trustees from Virginia to fill vacant spots.

Nevertheless, BGAV leaders expressed dismay at the growing imbalance in the General Association's representation on Southern Baptist Convention boards.

"This latest list of nominees confirms the ongoing discrimination and prejudice against loyal Virginia Baptists," said BGAV president Bill Wilson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Waynesboro, Va. "These nominations have become political prizes distributed by an inner group to those who have led in the effort to destroy the BGAV."

BGAV Executive Director Reginald McDonough said he was "disappointed" by the nominee slate. "I know that a formula for dividing trustee positions among BGAV and SBCV churches would be unworkable, but given

the comparative support of Southern Baptist Convention ministries by the two Virginia conventions, I would expect some members of BGAV churches would have an opportunity to serve in these significant areas of responsibility."

During fiscal 1997, the 1,460 churches affiliated with the BGAV gave more than \$9.5 million to Southern Baptist Convention causes. During the same period, the SBCV's 150 congregations contributed about \$1.9 million.

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University of Richmond elects new president

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- William Cooper, executive vice president at Georgetown University in Washington, has been elected president of the University of Richmond.

Cooper will assume the position July 1. He succeeds Richard Morrill, who will retire this year after 10 years as president of the school, which has historic ties with the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

Cooper, who has been at the Catholic university in Washington since 1996, is also a professor of linguistics and psychology there. He is a graduate of Brown University and holds a doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Prior to serving at Georgetown, Cooper was dean at Tulane University from 1989-96.

Although the university is affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia, Cooper, a Methodist, is the third president of the 168-year-old school not to be Baptist. Morrill is a Presbyterian and Samuel Banks, president from 1986-87, was an ordained Methodist minister. E. Bruce Heilman, who retired in 1986, was the school's most recent Baptist president.

The BGAV allocates funds to the school annually, totaling about \$177,000 in 1997. Most of the money provides scholarships to five students from BGAV churches each year. The BGAV also nominates four trustees to serve on the university's 40-member board.

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-- By Robert Dilday

Christian family therapists warn of 'Saint Elsewhere' syndrome

By Marv Knox

SALADO, Texas (ABP) -- The Saint Elsewhere Syndrome can kill Christian marriages, family therapists Walter and Francoise Becker warned couples at a retreat sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics.

The syndrome takes its name from a statement by a minister's wife whose marriage was failing: "He's a saint elsewhere, but he always comes home tired. He just wants to crash; he retreats to his own space. He's never 'there' for anyone in our family."

The Saint Elsewhere Syndrome afflicts countless clergy couples, said the Beckers, who operate Gray Fox Ranch, a private marriage retreat for ministers and their spouses near Ruidoso, N.M.

But the syndrome also afflicts many Christian lay couples, particularly when one partner has a high-profile position and is well-known for the good he or she does, said Walter Becker, who previously taught at Fuller Theological Seminary in California.

A Saint Elsewhere exhibits three primary predispositions, he said. The person feels overly responsible for everything that happens, wants to be a peacemaker at all costs and has a "pseudo-self" or public identity that is very strong.

That last trait particularly is problematic, he added.

"The public self is the part of me I want you to see," he explained. In a Saint Elsewhere, "the public self gets strengthened, and the real self gets smaller and smaller. The public self becomes who I am. Then, not only do I not know myself, but others -- including my spouse -- don't know me."

On the home front, that leads to a loss of intimacy, which begins to erode the foundation of the marriage, he said.

Symptoms include "a lack of support and lack of understanding on the part of both partners," said Françoise Becker, who also taught at Fuller Seminary. "This leads to criticism, blaming, a breakdown of communication and feelings of separateness."

The troubled couple might remain together, but theirs is only a "functional relatedness," revolving around the day-to-day functions of the household, she explained, noting, "Emotional connectedness dies out."

Another symptom is a desperate search for approval, usually on the part of both partners, Walter Becker reported.

The "performer" -- the Saint Elsewhere -- goes seeking approval outside the home, he said. "The performer is outward-focused and goal-oriented. This person is rewarded for performance and is going to do the job right, whatever it takes. In the process, the performer cuts off personal feelings, because they just get in the way."

That attitude hurts the spouse, the "caretaker," he added. This person, too, is highly responsible and seeks to maintain the relationship at all costs. "The caretaker needs to be loved and tries to secure it actively, through self-sacrifice."

In the process, however, the dynamics of the couple's relationship sour, the Beckers said.

"One (the performer) will become disconnected and distant, and the other (the caretaker) will become the pursuer," he noted. "The more the pursuer tries to fix things, the more the distancer backs away. Then comes the blaming cycle. The pursuer says, 'You're so distant.' And the distancer responds, 'You're so critical. How can I measure up?'"

"They actually become enemies," she said. "It gets personal."

Sometimes, the caretaker tries to make up for the deficiencies of both, becoming virtually a "single parent" within a marriage, he added.

"At its worst, it gets to be an addiction," he stressed. "The performer gets more out of work than coming home and thinks of reasons to stay away. And for every addict, there is a co-addict, who tries to help but puts more blame and pressure on the performer. Then the performer, who gets more praise elsewhere, stays away more, and this increases the syndrome."

"Then they have an empty shell of a marriage," she said. If the couple stays together at this point, the marriage is "purely functional" for public appearances and perhaps for the children.

Couples afflicted with the syndrome need "early intervention," he advised, noting help with communication can increase the chances of heading off serious problems.

Christian couples also need to develop a content spirit, they added.

"We must get to contentment," he said. "Our hope is in the Lord, not in some form of success 'out there.' A sense of contentment ... is the very opposite of the Saint Elsewhere Syndrome."

Couples should work on communication and intimacy regularly, she urged, advocating that couples make time for some form of "date" every week.

Christ is at the center of the circle of true marital intimacy, they insisted, for only Christ can produce unconditional love.

"Unconditional love is covenant love," he explained. "It's based on God's covenant with his people: 'I shall be your God, and you shall be my people.'"

"It's love that will not let us go," she said.

That kind of love enables couples to "grace" each other, they noted. Grace provides for complete acceptance of each other, forgiveness and "allowing for the uniqueness of the other," he said.

Then couples are able to empower each other, he added, noting each one uses all her or his resources to help the other be all she or he can be.

And the natural result of all this, they said, is intimacy -- a powerful vaccine against the Saint Elsewhere Syndrome.

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