



Associated Baptist Press

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January 17, 2002

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee

(02-04)

JAN 22 2002

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Judge orders halt to funding of 'faith-based' program

By Robert Marus

MADISON, Wis. (ABP) -- Taxpayer funding of a program once touted by President Bush as an example of the kind of partnerships he hopes will flourish under his "faith-based" initiative has been ruled unconstitutional by a federal judge.

On Jan. 8, U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb of Wisconsin ordered the state's Department of Workforce Development to discontinue the giving of direct grants to Faith Works -- a Milwaukee addiction-recovery program for fathers.

The group has a specifically Christian mission and includes Bible study, prayer, religious counseling and a "faith-enhanced" Alcoholics Anonymous program among its treatment regimen.

President Bush touted the program during his 2000 presidential campaign as the kind of activity he would like to encourage. The program had been partially funded by block grants from the office of then-Gov. Tommy Thompson, who is now the head of Bush's Department of Health and Human Services.

The Madison-based Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a lawsuit arguing that the unrestricted grants from the governor's discretionary fund, as well as pay-for-service grants from the state's department of corrections, violated the religious-liberty clauses of the First Amendment.

The judge agreed that even though the Faith Works program has "secular purposes" that courts have said can qualify religiously sponsored organizations for public funds, religion permeates its content. The U.S. Supreme Court has said direct grants cannot go to "pervasively sectarian" programs unless safeguards are in place to ensure that government funds aren't used for religious indoctrination or proselytizing.

The judge disagreed with attorneys for Faith Works who argued that sufficient safeguards existed to separate the program's secular and religious components, citing in particular the potential for state funding of religious counselors.

"State money and private foundation money are deposited into the same bank account from which counselors' salaries are paid," she wrote in her judgment. "At any given time, it is not possible to trace the source of bank deposits, to determine that money from private grants has been earmarked to pay counselors' salaries or to determine that state funds are not being used to pay counseling staff."

Bush's "faith-based initiatives" plan has already passed in the House but stalled in the Senate late last year. It would have made it easier for the government to offer direct grants to pervasively religious organizations.

It now appears that a watered-down Senate version of the bill may be introduced when the Senate returns to work Jan. 23. The Senate bill would be co-sponsored by Sens. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Rick Santorum (R-Penn.).

The Wisconsin judge did not rule on a second allegation in the lawsuit that grants to Faith Works by the Department of Corrections also violated the First Amendment. The judge said church-state conflicts were less clear with the corrections contract than in the governor's grants. She ordered a trial to determine whether the corrections program was also unconstitutional.

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Alliance of Baptists considers revisioning

By Sue Harper Poss

OAKLAND, Calif. (ABP) -- As it prepares to celebrate its 15th anniversary convocation in April, the Alliance of Baptists has formed a task force to reassess its role in Baptist life.

The Alliance recently co-sponsored a one-day mini-convocation in Oakland, Calif., with the Pacific Coast Baptist Association, an association of American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

The meeting, rescheduled from last fall because of travel difficulties following Sept. 11, included morning and afternoon worship services, a town hall meeting at which the effects of Sept. 11 were discussed, and several workshops including one on conflict resolution and another on Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations.

A small organization numbering 105 churches, the Alliance's strength has been its ability to make connections, said Executive Director Stan Hastey. Those denominational connections include international partnerships in Cuba, Zimbabwe, and Canada. In the United States, the Alliance works closely with the United Church of Christ, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In 2000, the Alliance was accepted as a member of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, and it maintains a relationship with the Institute of Christian and Jewish Studies.

Prior to the convocation, the Alliance board of directors discussed a process for looking anew at the organization's role.

"We are at a point where the challenges we face strongly suggest an organizational reassessment," said immediate-past president Welton Gaddy of Washington. "The niche that we filled 15 years ago is now much larger and has much more potential for ministry than we are equipped for."

Gaddy's comments sparked lengthy conversation about what the role of the Alliance should be, and prompted current president Paula Clayton Dempsey, chaplain at Mars Hill College in North Carolina, to appoint a four-member task group to bring a suggested "revisioning process" to the board in April.

Appointed to the task group were Cherie Smith of St. Louis, Relma Hargus of Baton, Rouge, La., Cathy Tamsberg of Raleigh, N.C., and Gaddy.

"One of my ongoing concerns is the degree to which we are providing resources to our churches," Tamsberg said. "Members of our progressive Baptist churches need materials to teach children, youth and adults, materials to help people form spiritually. I would hope that, as we begin this revisioning process, we would look hard at what our capacity is and what do we want our capacity to be."

Currently the Alliance does not provide regular ongoing study material for congregations but does have several resources available on specific subjects, including human sexuality and the environment.

Also at the Oakland meeting, the Alliance board approved a 2002 operating budget of just under \$290,000 and a mission offering goal of \$95,000 to be distributed among 24 organizations. The board also heard a report from Donna Poyner of Gainesville, Fla., that 53 chaplains have been endorsed by the Alliance since it attained endorsing status in 1999.

The board also heard a report about the upcoming annual convocation, scheduled April 5-7 at Wake Forest Baptist Church and Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, N.C. Past Alliance president Richard Groves, pastor of the host church, chairs the convocation committee. The theme of that meeting will be "Serving You by Loving All," focusing on one point of the Alliance covenant that emphasizes servant leadership.

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Criswell remembered as larger-than-life pastor

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Legendary Baptist preacher W.A. Criswell was remembered as a larger-than-life figure, evoking comparisons to the Apostle Paul, King David, Elijah and others, in eulogies Jan. 16 at First Baptist Church of Dallas.

Criswell, pastor of the Dallas church for more than 50 years, died nearly a week earlier at age 92. For two days prior to the funeral, his body laid in state at Criswell College and First Baptist Church.

Thousands of people filled the sanctuary and overflow rooms at First Baptist Church and Criswell College, where the service was broadcast via closed-circuit TV.

In a highly unusual move, several miles of Dallas' North Central Expressway were closed after the funeral for a procession to Hillcrest Memorial Park for burial.

The two hour and 10 minute service featured six speakers: Richard Wells, president of Criswell College; Cliff Barrows of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls and a product of Criswell's ministry at the Dallas church; Paige Patterson, former longtime president of Criswell College and now president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina; O.S. Hawkins, former pastor of First Baptist Church and now president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board; and Mac Brunson, current pastor of First Baptist Church.

Wells provided extensive biographical information about Criswell's life and ministry and read testimonies from family members and friends.

Barrows brought greetings from Graham, who has been a non-resident member of the church for years and was unable to travel to Texas for the service.

Jeffress testified to Criswell's influence on his own ministry and the ministry of thousands of other young pastors.

Patterson brought a bit of comic relief, sharing self-deprecating anecdotes related to his tenure with Criswell that elicited both laughter and tears. In the manner adult children sometimes tell stories on their parents, Patterson recounted how Criswell taught him to display proper decorum when seated on the platform during Sunday morning worship.

But more than anything, Patterson said, Criswell taught him how to weather life's storms.

"All your life you will be in a storm," he recalled Criswell advising him. "You can't do anything about that. All you can do is be certain you are in the center of God's will."

Hawkins spoke of Criswell's theological influence on the Southern Baptist Convention and beyond, calling Criswell "our standard bearer."

Brunson delivered a sermon based on the books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings, in which he called Criswell God's "defender of the faith." Brunson ended his sermon with a call to spiritual commitment, urging anyone listening who was not a Christian to make that commitment as the church choir sang Handel's "Hallelujah."

The congregation included a host of Baptist and local dignitaries, including the presidents of SBC seminaries, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, former Dallas Mavericks owner Don Carter, SBC President James Merritt and other SBC officials, Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director Charles Wade, BGCT Executive Board Chairman Brian Harbour and other BGCT representatives.

Throughout the service, Criswell was portrayed in larger-than-life terms including "giant," "genius" and "visionary." But speakers constantly returned to the theme of Criswell's obsession with Bible study, preaching and evangelizing.

Brunson recalled his last visit with Criswell, which he said was about two weeks prior to his death. Criswell's mind was clouded by medicine, but his heart was still set on God, Brunson said.

Criswell did not recognize Brunson. But upon seeing him, Criswell asked: "Are you here for the revival?"

His answer, Brunson said, was, "I pray so."

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Sidebar: Quotable quotes from Criswell's funeral

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Following are some memorable quotes from W.A. Criswell's funeral:

"I am a Christian because of Dr. Criswell. . I was a lost pastor . when I came to the School of the Prophets." Richard Wells, president of Criswell College

Criswell's personal touch with many was "putting his hand on your head, if you were under 80, and saying, 'Lad.'" Richard Wells

"A pastor that tried to destroy this great church couldn't stop him." Cris Criswell, grandson and adopted son of Criswell, speaking of Criswell's perseverance in a letter read by Wells

Other family members will continue to honor Criswell here "until Dad calls us to be there with him." Cris Criswell, who called his grandfather "Dad"

"He was the kindest man I have ever known." Longtime friend Jack Pogue in a letter read by Wells

"He was one of the great Christians of the 20th century." Billy Graham, in a letter read by Cliff Barrows

"Anything and everything I've learned about being a pastor, I learned from Dr. W.A. Criswell." Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, and a product of First Baptist Church of Dallas

"His influence will be felt for generations to come." Robert Jeffress

"He lived to see men and women come to faith in Christ." Paige Patterson, former president of Criswell College and associate pastor at First Baptist

"Oswald Chambers . said giants fade into ordinary people when you meet them. But Oswald Chambers never met W.A. Criswell." O.S. Hawkins, former pastor of First Baptist

"W.A. Criswell was our Apostle Paul. . Paul may have left us half of our New Testament, but W.A. Criswell left us his influence to stand on the word of God." O.S. Hawkins

"When W.A. Criswell drove into Dallas, no one had any idea . what God would do in his life and through his ministry." Mac Brunson, pastor of First Baptist

"When God needed a defender (of the faith) in our day, God reached down and anointed W.A. Criswell." Mac Brunson

"Dad was always able to see the treasure in the ordinary." Criswell daughter Mabel Ann, as related by Pastor Mac Brunson in the eulogy

"I have prayed . to be a man of God like him." Mac Brunson

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Baptist Foundation collapse similar to Enron, Arizona official alleges

By Mark Wingfield

PHOENIX (ABP) -- Arizona's attorney general is asking the federal government to compare the recent collapse of Enron with the alleged swindling of \$600 million from investors in the Baptist Foundation of Arizona to see if accounting giant Arthur Andersen is guilty of a pattern of deceptive auditing.

Andersen was auditor for both the Texas energy giant that recently filed for bankruptcy and the Arizona Baptist foundation, which went bankrupt in 1999.

Arizona Attorney General Janet Napolitano said Andersen's role in the foundation collapse might shed light on what went wrong at Enron.

"I am very troubled by the similarities between the allegations against Andersen by Enron's investors and the facts our office has discovered in our various investigations of Andersen," Napolitano wrote in a Jan. 2 letter to three leaders in the U.S. Senate. "I am seriously concerned that Andersen has engaged in a pattern of deceptive auditing practices that have had the effect of defrauding the investing public, including the state of Arizona and the Arizona State Retirement System, out of hundreds of millions of dollars.

The Baptist Foundation of Arizona matter alone cost investors about \$590 million, Napolitano said. Investor losses in Enron are estimated in the billions of dollars.

Napolitano urged the Senate Commerce, Transportation and Science Committee "to closely examine Andersen's role in auditing Enron's financial statements."

The public needs to know, she said, "whether Andersen has undertaken a systematic campaign or practice of fraudulent financial auditing."

Congress and federal law-enforcement officials are investigating what role the accounting giant might have played in hiding Enron's financial instability from investors. Andersen, meanwhile, currently is defending itself against allegations that its auditors were complicit in misleading investors about the true financial condition of the Baptist Foundation of Arizona.

Pati Urias, public information officer for the Arizona attorney general, said Napolitano made the offer to Sens. Tom Daschle, John McCain and Ernest Hollings.

Andersen has denied any wrongdoing in the foundation collapse. Response to the Enron bankruptcy is still unfolding, with internal investigations underway, one key employee fired and others suspended.

Andersen media representatives did not return a phone call seeking comment on the cases.

Enron's collapse is the largest bankruptcy of a publicly traded company in United States history. The Baptist Foundation of Arizona's collapse is the largest bankruptcy of a non-profit charity.

Arthur Andersen faces a series of legal actions and accusations related to the collapse of the Baptist Foundation of Arizona.

Criminal charges have been filed against eight people formerly associated with the foundation. Three of the former foundation officials have entered guilty pleas to the criminal charges, while five others are awaiting trial.

Civil litigation has been filed against Arthur Andersen, including a class-action lawsuit. The Arizona State Board of Public Accountancy also has filed an administrative complaint against Arthur Andersen, seeking \$600 million in restitution to victims of the foundation bankruptcy.

Andersen is battling in court now to prevent the class-action suit from proceeding. The accounting firm contends foundation investors should be required to bring individual lawsuits rather than a class action.

Depositions on Andersen's claims should be completed by Jan. 25, and a hearing date is set for Feb. 25.

Meanwhile, the BFA Liquidation Trust has distributed \$56 million to creditors of the foundation to date. The trust is charged with liquidating assets of the foundation, such as real estate, and distributing the proceeds among those who lost money in the bankruptcy.

Foundation investors, many of whom are elderly Baptists who wanted their money to be invested in ministry causes, have their eyes on the Enron debacle now, according to individuals involved in litigating the class-action suit.

"We're obviously very alert to what's going on with Enron," said one of the Arizona attorneys related to the case who spoke on condition of anonymity.

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