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Popular seminary professor Bill Hendricks dies at 73

By Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Bill Hendricks, a Baptist professor of theology known for his sharp wit and keen intellect, died in Fort Worth Dec. 8 at age 73.

Hendricks taught at three Southern Baptist seminaries -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth from 1957 to 1978, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., from 1978 to 1984, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., from 1984 to 1995.

He retired in 1995 but soon after took the helm of the emerging Baptist studies program at Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, where he also taught. He retired a second time in 1998 but remained active as a lecturer and preacher.

"He was able to take great truths and put them in the language of laypeople," James Leo Garrett told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. Garrett, distinguished professor of theology emeritus at Southwestern Seminary, was a longtime friend of Hendricks.

While renowned as a theologian, Hendricks also made his mark by drawing attention to the connection between faith and art.

A memorial card distributed at his Dec. 11 funeral at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth highlighted one of his favorite sayings: "When you cannot agree upon truth, then lean into goodness and learn from beauty so you can approach truth in a new way."

He wrote eight books, including *A Theology for Children*, *The Doctrine of Man*, *Who is Jesus Christ?* and *A Theology for Aging*.

He served on a team of Southern Baptist theologians in several rounds of formal dialogue with Roman Catholics, seeking to identify areas of mutual understanding about the Christian faith.

Hendricks earned the bachelor of arts degree from Oklahoma Baptist University, the master of divinity and doctor of theology degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the master of arts and doctor of philosophy degrees from the University of Chicago.

In addition to his seminary classroom teaching, Hendricks served numerous congregations as an interim pastor and guest speaker. He also taught in seminaries in Taiwan, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Malaysia and Singapore.

Born March 10, 1929, in Butte, Mont., Hendricks was adopted by Homer and Ruby Hendricks and was raised in Wichita, Kan. In 1995, he discovered his birth family.

He is survived by his wife of 51 years, Lois Linsey Hendricks; a son, John Lawrence Hendricks of Dallas; four brothers, George Marsh, Emmett Casey, Daniel Casey and Jerry Casey; and one sister, JoAnn Benson.

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Judges say pledge case may go forward

By Robert Marus

SAN FRANCISCO (ABP) – The “under God” case may go forward, according to a panel of federal judges.

The same three-judge panel that declared the addition of the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance unconstitutional ruled unanimously against a challenge to the case Dec. 4.

A panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said that Sacramento, Calif., father Michael Newdow had the right to sue his daughter’s school district for reciting the pledge. Earlier this year, Newdow, an atheist, argued -- and the panel agreed -- that his rights to raise his eight-year-old daughter were violated by the school district’s policy of reciting the pledge.

Although the pledge has been around since the late 1800s, Congress added the phrase “under God” to the oath in 1954, partially as a reaction to the perceived atheistic threat of Communism.

The judges said that both Congress’ action to add the phrase and the Elk Grove Unified School District’s policy of teachers leading recitation of the pledge constituted government endorsements of religion. The two-judge majority said this violated the First Amendment’s ban on government establishment of religion.

The decision caused a national firestorm of controversy when it was announced in June. A large majority in Congress as well as President George W. Bush and California Gov. Gray Davis condemned the ruling and reaffirmed the addition of “under God” to the pledge.

Later the child’s mother, Sandra Banning, told the press that she and her daughter were practicing Christians and not offended by the pledge. She also said that the fact that Newdow -- to whom she was never married -- did not have custody of the child meant that he lacked standing to file the lawsuit.

In their Dec. 4 ruling, the same three-judge panel that made the original ruling disagreed with Banning’s argument. In an accompanying opinion written by Judge Alfred Goodwin, the court reaffirmed its original decision in strong language. “The pledge to a nation ‘under God,’ with its imprimatur of governmental sanction, provides the message to Newdow’s young daughter not only that non-believers, or believers in non-Judeo-Christian religions, are outsiders, but more specifically that her father’s beliefs are those of an outsider, and necessarily inferior to what she is exposed to in the classroom,” Goodwin wrote.

Goodwin was joined in the opinion by Judge Stephen Reinhardt. Judge Ferdinand Fernandez, who dissented from the original ruling, concurred in the most recent decision, but did not join Reinhardt and Goodwin in the opinion accompanying it.

In dissenting from the earlier ruling, Fernandez said it was the product of “persons who most fervently would like to drive all tincture of religion out of the public life of our polity.”

Fernandez is an appointee of former President George H.W. Bush. Goodwin was appointed by Richard Nixon and Reinhardt by Jimmy Carter.

The federal government has appealed to the 9th Circuit to review the case en banc, meaning a larger 11-judge panel will hear the case again. Many legal experts have said they expect the decision to be reversed if the court agrees to re-hear the case.

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When is buying a camel good church stewardship?

By Mark Wingfield

VICTORIA, Texas (ABP) -- The newest purchase of Northside Baptist Church in Victoria comes with one hump, not two.

The church recently acquired its own live camel for use in annual Christmas pageants.

In the off-season, 7-year-old Lucille will live on a ranch owned by a church member. But right now, she's a star of the church's pageant, which runs twice daily for seven nights in this Gulf Coast town. This year's pageant began Dec. 9 and runs through Dec. 15.

"When she makes her entrance in the pageant, the crowd just lights up," said Mickey Ewing, associate pastor for worship and Lucille's up-line supervisor.

Between performances, Lucille greets children on the church yard.

Northside Baptist has produced its elaborate pageant for 18 years. For the last several years, the church rented a camel for a scene where the magi come to visit Jesus. But this year, the price to rent a camel "just skyrocketed," Ewing said. For the equivalent of two years' rent, the church could purchase its own camel.

"It's not something that when I started in ministry I ever thought would pass my lips, but buying a camel was good stewardship," Ewing explained.

Besides the initial cost to acquire Lucille, ongoing expenses will be minimal, he predicted, noting she eats grass and hay.

Ewing's not sure of all Lucille's vital statistics, but on height, he has a pretty good measure: "She's an inch shy of being door height."

The pageant is held in the church's sanctuary, where Lucille stoops her head to enter and then passes her hump under the door frame with barely room to spare.

About 12,000 people were expected to attend this year's Christmas pageant performances at the church. About 500 church members work in the pageant in some capacity, Ewing reported. "We plug in people who can swing a hammer but who can't sing a lick, who can sew or use a hot-glue gun. People who wouldn't dream of teaching a Sunday school class can carry a prop."

And then, there's Lucille, who has been gladly accepted for who she is.

"The church's response has been delightful," Ewing said. "She's ours, and she has a personality. They've already grown attached to her."

And camels carry a long life expectancy as well, he added. "A camel lives to be 40 to 50 years old. In all likelihood, Lucille's ministry will exceed my own."

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Former Bush 'faith-based' official says White House driven by politics

By Mark Wingfield and Robert Marus

PHILADELPHIA (ABP) -- President Bush's former "faith czar" says the White House's desire to advance faith-based welfare stalled in Congress because of "Mayberry Machiavellis" in the administration who are more concerned with politics than policy.

John DiIulio has since retracted his comments. But some Bush critics are unconvinced by the retraction. And DiIulio's comments have created a firestorm inside the Washington Beltway.

DiIulio was appointed by Bush as the first head of the newly created White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives but served only eight months, resigning in August 2001. He was responsible for spearheading legislation that would have expanded the government's ability to provide direct grants for social services to overtly religious charities. That legislation still has not passed.

DiIulio's assessment of how the Bush White House operates and what went wrong with the legislation is reported in the January 2003 issue of Esquire magazine, in a story on Bush political adviser Karl Rove.

After the Esquire story broke, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer lambasted the article as "groundless and baseless." DiIulio then quickly offered an apology and called his comments in the magazine "groundless and baseless due to poorly chosen words and examples."

However, several commentators have pointed out, DiIulio has not offered any retraction of specific facts from his comments. Esquire later posted on its website the entire text of a lengthy letter DiIulio wrote to reporter Ron Suskind Oct. 24.

In that letter, DiIulio praises Bush as a "godly man and a moral leader" who is smarter than people give him credit for being and who is genuinely compassionate.

The problem, DiIulio wrote, is that the White House is driven by political decisions designed to rally popular support, rather than policy decisions based on research and conviction. That opinion contrasts with Bush's promises during the 2000 presidential campaign, in which he pledged to be a "compassionate conservative" not motivated by poll numbers or political maneuvering.

"There is a virtual absence as yet of any policy accomplishments that might, to a fair-minded non-partisan, count as the flesh on the bones of so-called compassionate conservatism," DiIulio said of the White House in his letter to Esquire.

In his eight months serving as an adviser to Bush, DiIulio said, "I heard many, many staff discussions but not three meaningful, substantive policy discussions. There were no actual policy white papers on domestic issues. There were, truth be told, only a couple of people in the West Wing who worried at all about policy substance and analysis...."

The result, he suggested, was "Mayberry Machiavellis -- staff, senior and junior, who consistently talked and acted as if the height of political sophistication consisted in reducing every issue to its simplest, black-and-white terms for public consumption, then steering legislative initiatives or policy proposals as far right as possible."

This atmosphere spelled death for the president's first faith-based initiative bill, said DiIulio, who teaches government and public policy at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

The president's best interests would have been served by working with centrist Democrats in the Senate to extend the charitable choice bill signed by President Clinton in 1996, DiIulio argued.

Instead, the White House "winked at the most far-right House Republicans who, in turn, drafted a so-called faith bill that (or so they thought) satisfied certain fundamentalist leaders and Beltway libertarians but bore few marks of compassionate conservatism and was, as anybody could tell, an absolute political non-starter."

Further, this gesture to the right wing of the House Republicans did not reflect the president's own stated agenda or the research that had been done on what would be most effective for the nation's needs, DiIulio added.

“The West Wing staff actually believed they could pass the flawed bill, get it through conference and get it to the president's desk to sign by the summer. Instead, the president got a political black eye, when they could easily have handed him a big bipartisan political victory.”

Despite Bush's best intentions, the White House has a “virtually empty record on compassionate conservatism,” DiIulio charged in his Esquire letter.

According to the Washington Post, however, an unnamed White House official said it was unlikely that DiIulio and others quoted in the story were as aware of policy discussions at all levels in the White House as the story would lead readers to believe.

Indeed, in expanded apologetic remarks in the Philadelphia Daily News, DiIulio said his letter to Esquire was “sloppy.” He added: “... As entire books are written by ex-administration officials who were there much longer and saw much more than I did, and as historians do their work, we will all know better how things really worked there.”

The complete text of DiIulio's letter may be found at www.esquire.com.

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