

(BP)---FEATURES

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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All White Faces Look Alike,
Negro Student Says of Seminary

EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is an interview with Robert M. Dickerson Jr., 24, one of 10 Negro students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. Conducting the interview is Robert Hastings, editor of the Illinois Baptist. In the interview, Dickerson shares some of his experiences at the predominately white school, and tells of his plans to marry a seminary student who is a former Southern Baptist Missionary Journeyman to Liberia.

HASTINGS: What do you prefer to be called?

DICKERSON: Well, since I'm not a militant, I don't insist on "Black." You can use Negro...colored...whichever you prefer.

You're from Arkansas?

Yes--Pine Bluff, where my father, Robert M. Dickerson Sr., has been pastor of the St. Paul Baptist Church for 10 years. The church is affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, Inc., and it has about 500 members.

When did you decide on the ministry?

Just three months before I graduated from Arkansas A & M, where I was a pre-med student. Although I had already been accepted by the University of Arkansas medical school at Little Rock, this conviction kept growing on me to preach.

What changed your plans?

A big influence was the four summers I spent as a student missionary under the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board. Too, the influence of my preacher-father.

Why did you choose Southwestern Seminary?

When I switched from medicine, I hadn't even heard of Southwestern. I applied to the divinity schools at Harvard and Yale, as well as Union Theological Seminary. Then Clyde Hart, who was with the interracial department of the Arkansas Baptist Convention, suggested the idea of a Southern Baptist seminary. He helped me get a scholarship here at Southwestern, and I suppose that finalized my decision.

You say you had never attended school with a white person?

Not until I enrolled at Southwestern. I attended all-Negro grade and high schools. And when I was a college student at Arkansas A & M, it was all colored, although now there are a few white students there.

How did you feel your first few days on a white campus?

You may find this hard to believe, but I was absolutely bewildered by so many white faces. You know, they all looked alike. I had trouble distinguishing one from another.

Did you have any misconceptions?

I remember two. First, I thought all white people made all A's. Second, I thought all white people were prejudiced. Both impressions proved false. Most students have accepted me for what I am--not the color of my skin. Surprisingly, some of my best friends are from such "so-called" prejudicial states as Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina.

And the faculty?

It was a pleasant surprise to find my white professors on the whole more accessible than most black teachers I had known. They meet you on your own level. Many Southwestern professors know me by my first name.

Do you have to study harder?

At first, I thought I did. In fact, I almost knocked myself out the first few months. I was so intent on disproving the myth that whites are more intelligent than blacks. Here at Southwestern is the first place I have studied all night. I never did in pre-med, even in chemistry and physics.

Have you "proved" yourself?

To my own satisfaction, yes. I no longer feel the pressure to prove that blacks can do as well as whites. It depends on how you apply yourself. When I study, I make good grades. When I don't, my grades suffer, just like anyone else. I see no difference in the "black" mind and the "white" mind.

Have you done any preaching?

As a pastor, No. But several classmates have invited me to their church fields for a weekend, so I have preached in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. I was courteously received, and made to feel they wanted me back.

Do you have any plans for marriage?

Yes, I am engaged to Virginia Abian, a student from West Texas who graduates from the seminary this July. We met two years ago, after she returned from two years at Ricks Institute, Monrovia, Liberia, where she was a missionary journeyman under the Foreign Mission Board. She taught math, science, and girls physical education at the Institute.

How did your friends react when they learned you are engaged to a white girl?

Reaction was mixed. None was openly negative. But some were silent. Others have felt free to congratulate us openly, as they would any other couple.

Have you met Virginia's family?

I spent a weekend last Christmas at her home, and we attended her home church together. Spring vacation, she visited my family in Pine Bluff. In both communities, we were received warmly in the homes and churches--at least outwardly.

After graduation, what?

I'm open on that. If my grades hold up, I may try for a doctorate at the divinity school at Harvard University. I might return to Pine Bluff and co-pastor with my dad at St. Paul's. Another possibility is medical school (my mother is a nurse). I have also considered medical missions. Virginia has felt a mission call since she was in high school.

Have you honestly faced the problems of an inter-racial marriage?

Both of us feel we are going into it with both eyes open. We know any marriage has some obstacles, and we are aware that ours perhaps has more than the average.

Have you asked the advice of others?

Primarily from our pastor, Lloyd Elder, Gambrel Street Baptist Church, Fort Worth. He gave us his regular premarital counseling. Too, he raised some additional questions we had not considered. His questions humbled us, and made us search for the realities in our relationship.

How do you feel about your seminary training?

I am grateful to Southern Baptists for opening one of their seminaries to me, for granting me a scholarship, and most of all, accepting me for what I am. I hope I can repay this kindness as I give my life to minister to others, whether primarily as a healer of souls or a healer of both body and soul.

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WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Editor, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226**BUREAU**BAPTIST SUNDAY SCHOOL BOARD Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203,
Telephone (615) 254-1631**Volunteers Sought
For N.D. Flood Area**

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board here has issued an emergency call for 50 volunteers to help repair and rebuild flood-revaged homes in the Minot, N.D., area.

By May 25, ten volunteers from Michigan and South Carolina already were on their way to flood-stricken city, and the Home Mission Board and Brotherhood Commission were contacting superintendents of missions to assist in recruiting some 40 more building tradesmen.

According to Minot Area Missionary John T. Burdine, the volunteer work force will devote its time in homes of "the aged, the widowed and those unable to afford repairs."

Working with the Red Cross to locate needy families, Burdine said he hoped to have five volunteers each in the following trades: carpentry, electrical work, plumbing, furnace work and sheetrocking. An additional 25 men are needed to assist in the categories.

Some 2,000 homes in the city of 35,000 were damaged when the Souris River flushed out of its banks twice in late spring. About 12,000 residents were forced to leave their homes.

Warren Woolf, of the Home Mission Board's special mission ministries department, said volunteers could call his office collect in Atlanta. They will be expected to pay their own way--or be assisted by churches or associations--but room and board will be provided, he said.

The Home Mission Board already had sent \$5,000 to John Baker, superintendent of missions for the Northern Plains Baptist Convention, to be used in aiding evacuating families. About \$1500 was donated immediately to the Red Cross, and the one Southern Baptist church building--the North Hill Baptist Church--was established as a hot food distribution center.

Apparently no Southern Baptist families were stricken by the flood. Efforts will be directed toward helping those in most desperate need, Burdine said.

Banks, labor unions, and city inspectors already have approved the plan, Burdine said.

"We are not trying to interfere with the local economy," he said. "If a family can afford a loan they will be expected to get it. We are out to help those who can't stand the added weight of costly repairs."

Burdine said the home of one 80-year-old couple was severely damaged and that the Red Cross had referred this situation to him.

Woolf said that volunteers would be encouraged to drive to Minot in carloads to share expenses.

Some 100 volunteers responded two years ago when flood waters severely damaged homes and church buildings in Fairbanks, Alaska, only weeks before the first winter freeze.

Ironically, Burdine, at that time, was pastor of University Baptist Church in Fairbanks, and both the church building and Burdine's home were seriously damaged then. He now lives in Bismark, N.D., and serves in an area that includes Minot.

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C O R R E C T I O N

On Baptist Press story mailed 5/21/69, headlined: "Mrs Quinn, College President's Wife, Dies," please change headline and graph 1 and line 1 to read: "Guinn" instead of "Quinn" as sent. Thanks.

Baptist Press

Militants, Not Christians,
Willing To Die, Hill Says

MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--A Negro Baptist minister from the Watts area of Los Angeles lamented here that the only ones in America who are willing to die for their cause are the hippies and militants, not American Christians.

E. V. Hill, prominent Los Angeles Negro civic leader and pastor of the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, told the second annual Urban Church Institute at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary that the militants and hippies don't always know what to call their cause, yet they are willing to die for it.

"We Christians know what to call it; we even have schools to tell us what to call it; but we're not willing to die for it," Hill said.

The Negro leader charged that "too many white ministers are sold out to what they can do next without rocking the boat of that which secures their future."

He chided conservative Christians who complain about the black man's questionable alliances, saying: "You white Christians stand in your ivory tower of suburbia and watch the black man drown in the ghetto.

"When the Communist is the only one who throws him a rope, and he grabs it, you say, 'Ah, see he's grabbing the Communist rope.' But he's not grabbing that rope to become a Communist, he's grabbing it to save his life."

The Watts area minister said that many black Christians feel the same way black militants do, but they just "bite their tongues." He said that the black militant is mad, and quipped: "I'm mad too, but as a Christian, I have a thermostat in me."

Another major speaker at the Urban Church Institute, Ethics Professor Robert Lee of San Francisco Theological Seminary, listed five basic crises of American life: the human rights crisis, the identity crisis, the silence crisis, the organizational crisis, and the freedom crisis.

He challenged the urban church to provide a strategy of "conflict management" and to "prepare the roof for the rain that's coming."

Lee added that if the church plays a creative role in venting the conflicts when they are small, it would help to prevent the major conflicts that become so disruptive in society.

The two-week institute is under the direction of Golden Gate Professor Francis M. DuBose, and has become a major part of the new emphasis of the seminary on the Christian outreach in the urban age, seminary officials said.



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