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81-148

Itinerant Singer Not
Who He Says He Is

By Dan Martin

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (BP)--A man, claiming to be the son of a noted Bible scholar and the brother of a Christian music star, is visiting Southern Baptist churches trying to solicit money.

The man, who says he is the son of the late Clyde T. Francisco, noted Old Testament professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the brother of gospel singer-songwriter Don Francisco, has visited at least two churches within the last few months, attempting to set up concerts or to perform in worship services.

Francisco, the John R. Sampey professor of Old Testament at Southern Seminary, died Aug. 21, after suffering an apparent heart attack while conducting a Bible conference in Helena, Ga.

Don Francisco, 35, his son, is a noted Christian recording artist and was the 1980 songwriter of the year of the Gospel Music Association.

"The family of Dr. Francisco consists of his wife, Nancy Lee, a son, Don, and a daughter, Carol Lee," said Don Francisco. "Anyone else claiming to be a relative is an imposter."

Francisco, who now lives near Crested Butte, Colo., added: "He has been following my dad around for a couple of years. At first, he showed up and begged food or however much money he thought he could get. The singing and concerts, however, seem to be something new."

The most recent appearance occurred Sept. 23, when he went to Red Bank Baptist Church near Chattanooga attempting to perform at the Wednesday night service, to set up a "city-wide concert," to sell records and to obtain a "love offering."

Billy Appling, Red Bank's minister of music, said the man gave his name as "B.J. Francisco. He walked into my office and said, 'Well, I guess you have heard we have lost our father.' He got real emotional about it, saying he was with his father when he passed away, and that he had been asked to fulfill Dr. Francisco's commitments for the next few years."

"He told me he had sung the previous Sunday at both worship services at First Baptist Church of Orlando, Fla., and mentioned revivals he had held in which huge numbers of professions of faith resulted," Appling said.

Appling became suspicious of the man's manner, and even more skeptical after listening to him play the piano and sing one of his own compositions. "He was barely adequate," Appling said.

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As they parted, Appling was introduced to the man's pregnant wife, and given a record album. The album, called "B.J.'s Inner Feelings," featured two photographs of a group of singers, and the misspelled legend, "B.J. Fransico presents the Fransicos."

Appling described the man as "about medium height, with long medium brown hair, thinning out pretty much." He was dressed in white sneakers without socks, jeans and a white knit shirt, and driving "an old white van."

While the man failed in his try to perform at Red Bank Church, he did perform at a worship service of First Baptist Church of Jonesboro, Ga., in late June.

Charles Carter, pastor, said the man telephoned the church and identified himself as he later did in Red Bank. He also claimed to have sung with the Gaither Trio at the 1981 SBC in Los Angeles.

"He was rather convincing," Carter said. "He knew enough about us to know all the right things to say."

Carter, a graduate of Southern Seminary, added he knew the elder Francisco "but was not clear in my mind whether he had more than one son. I wanted to treat him (B.J.) with respect because of my respect for Clyde Francisco, a renowned scholar and one of the finest men we have ever had in the convention."

Through a lapse of regular procedures, the man was allowed to sing, but was denied permission to give his testimony or to sell his record.

"It was atrocious," Carter said. "I was very embarrassed. He was completely out of sync with the tape. I just hoped they would get through at nearly the same time."

Carter said a church staffer checked the license plate on the man's automobile and discovered it was from Kentucky. No further inquiries were made, and Carter gave the man "only enough money to get out of town."

The man's claims are a fabric of lies, Baptist Press has learned.

Gene Fore, pastor of Helena Baptist Church, where the elder Francisco was stricken, said he had never heard of the man. "I can assure you such a person definitely was not here," he said.

Lou Hildreth, who books the Gaithers through New Direction Artist Management of Nashville, said: "I can assure you that a B.J. Francisco or Fransico has never, ever appeared with the Gaithers." She added Don Francisco, however, had been a featured guest artist with the Gaithers for several years.

Ragan Vandegriff, minister of music at the Orlando church, when told of the claim, said: "Who?" He added he had never heard of B.J. Francisco or Fransico.

Don Francisco said the family does not wish punitive action against the man, but only that he be stopped from making his impersonations and that churches not get taken by the bogus relative.

FCC Powerless To Prevent Ban On Religious Programs

WASHINGTON (BP)--A chief policymaker for the Federal Communications Commission said his agency has no authority to overturn decisions by local stations to exclude religious broadcasting.

Asked specifically about the case of television station KVIA-TV in El Paso, Texas, whose owner recently announced a policy banning paid religious programming from the ABC affiliate, the FCC's Martin Blumenthal confirmed that the agency has no legal or regulatory power to reverse such a decision.

Blumenthal, acting chief of the policy and rules division, said that although existing law includes a "general public interest requirement that programming be designed to serve the community," it does not require making air time available to "any particular group" within the community.

Congress is currently considering a number of changes in broadcast law, including repeal of the "fairness doctrine" and the "equal time" requirements. The fairness doctrine requires broadcasters to air differing viewpoints on controversial subjects, while the equal time provision requires that air time be made available to competing candidates for public office.

Probable repeal of these and other requirements on broadcasters are seen here as evidence of the prevailing mood for deregulation of federal agencies, a principle important to the Reagan administration.

But the move to deregulate broadcasting may have an adverse impact on churches and church causes at the grassroots level. Some observers are predicting that once current restraints are removed from local station owners and managers, they will feel even more free to bump religious broadcasts.

Deregulation may become the handle for others to emulate El Paso's KVIA-TV owner Stanley Marsh, whose decision to drop the weekly services of First Baptist Church provoked a local uproar. In announcing the new policy, Marsh attributed it to "religious profiteering that takes place in some religious programming, and because of political implications reflected in some programming."

Southern Baptist church-state expert James M. Dunn said here that the decision by KVIA-TV "may be an early hint of the anti-clericalism we've been expecting and dreading ever since the marriage just over a year ago of the fundamentalists and the extreme right wing of the Republican Party."

Dunn said further than "an anti-religious tide may be rising in the country because of a handful of hucksters who have found the formulae for taking in millions of dollars by appealing to spiritual sensibilities."

Whether or not such a flood of anti-religious feeling gathers, the FCC's Blumenthal insists there is nothing government can do to prevent repetitions of the conflict between KVIA-TV and El Paso's First Baptist Church.

Southern Seminary Students
Comfortable With Statement

By C.R. Daley

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--An overwhelming percentage of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary students say they could minister without controversy in a denomination whose theological views are expressed in the Baptist Faith and Message statement.

The discovery of student opinion came from a survey conducted as part of this year's matriculation.

The questionnaire asked the students for a yes or no to whether they could minister without controversy in a denomination which uses "The Baptist Faith and Message" as a doctrinal statement and asked them to place an "X" beside each article with which their views were not compatible.

Of the 1,974 matriculating students, 1,396 Southern Baptists or 82 percent participated in the poll.

Of the Southern Baptist students responding 1,248 or 89 percent said they could minister without controversy under the statement, 81 or six percent said they could not and 67 or five percent did not answer.

While only about one out of 10 students would find difficulty ministering under the statement, twice as many indicated they had difficulty with the position expressed or the wording used in one or more of the articles. Students also reacted to the statement as a whole, generally agreeing with the statement but only as interpreted by each person, not some official interpretation forced upon all.

One student insisted the doctrinal statement be "understood as a statement and not the statement.

Fear of creedalism was the dominant theme in student reactions to the statement. "I object to creedalism, even when it is my creed," said one.

The article most students checked was Article One on the scriptures. One out of every 10 students marked the article as one giving difficulty. The comments on this article which, though not asked for, indicated inerrancy was not the only or the main concern of the students. The placement of the scripture article in front of the articles on God and Jesus and the description of the Bible as "the true center of Christian union" created problems.

Other articles with which students found most difficulty were Article Five on security of the believer which eight percent marked, Article Seven on baptism and the Lord's supper which seven percent marked and Article Eight on the Lord's day which also seven percent marked.

Article Five troubled eight percent of the students because of its stress on eternal security. On the specific wording in Article Five, "All true believers endure to the end," one student said "neither the New Testament writers nor the church fathers made this assumption."

Article Seven on scripture and the Lord's supper disturbed seven percent of the students because it seemed to them to restrict the supper to the local church and to those with "Baptist" baptism.

Article Eight on the Lord's day drew objection from seven percent of the students mainly because it calls for refraining from worldly amusements. One student said, "If playing softball with my friends is worldly amusements, please count me in disagreement with this article."

Of the remaining articles, only 23 or 1.64 percent found anything wrong with the statement on God, 37 or 2.65 percent with the statement on Jesus and 43 or 3.08 percent with the statement on the Holy Spirit.

The statement on man was compatible with 96 percent of the students' beliefs, salvation by 97 percent, the church by 97 percent and last things by 96 percent.

Article 16 on peace and war drew most agreement with 99 percent.

Seminary officials generally were surprised at the high level of consensus in the students' answers, as well as by the number of comments students added since no comments were requested.

The idea of the questionnaire originated with President Duke McCall.

Students in all programs of study (church, music, religious education, theology) were included. Those responding included 1,067 men and 329 women.

Music and education students had less trouble with the statement than divinity students. Only 13 percent of the senior church music students had reservations about any of the articles and only four percent indicated they would have difficulty ministering under the statement.

Religious education students demonstrated heightened awareness of tension with some articles in the statement. Almost 19 percent of the senior religious education students expressed disagreement with one or more of the articles. This disagreement, however, had little effect upon their feeling about performing their ministry under the statement. No first year religious education student and only 1.8 percent of the senior religious education students indicated any difficulty ministering under the statement.

Students in the theology school reported more difficulty with the statement. Fifteen percent of the first year divinity students, almost 29 percent of the second year students and 32 percent of the seniors expressed concern over one or more of the articles in the statement. However, less than eight percent of the senior theology students said they could not minister without controversy in a denomination using the Baptist Faith and Message as a doctrinal statement.

Ph.D. students have most difficulty with the Baptist Faith and Message statement. Thirty-five percent of the 99 Ph.D. students expressed concern about one or more of the articles in the statement and nine percent indicated they would have difficulty ministering under the statement.

While the overwhelming majority of students found no fault with the Baptist Faith and Message statement, every one of the 17 articles was questioned by at least a few students.

Several students questioned the phrase "without controversy." One asked, "Why does the president ask this question? It is my view that he has been unable to minister without controversy."

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CORRECTION:

In (BP) story mailed Sept. 23, "First \$100 Million Budget Recommended," please change first word in sixth (6th) paragraph from messengers to members.

Thanks,

Baptist Press