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Baylor Cancels Play,
Reprimands Professor

By Bob Darden

WACO, Texas (BP)--A recent performance of a Baylor University theater production has resulted in the cancellation of all Baylor performances of the show, the virtual dismissal of a professor and doubts about the future of the university's interpretive theater program.

Baylor president, Herbert Reynolds, confirmed that James Pearse, associate professor of communication studies, has been reprimanded and recommended to receive a terminal contract after directing "The Moon In Its Flight."

The interpretive theater production drew fire from Reynolds for "vulgar" language and "trashy" content. The production, adapted from a short story by Gilbert Sorrentino, involves the audience in the story of a young man growing up in the late 1940s and his infatuation with a younger girl.

The reprimand comes 20 years to the month since Paul Baker, then chairman of the Baylor drama department, resigned in a dispute with the administration concerning the production of Eugene O'Neill's "Long Day's Journey Into Night" at Baylor.

While Pearse and some students have described the university's action as "censorship," Reynolds disagrees. "I simply believe it is a matter of trying to uphold the high standards of Baylor University with regard to the arts and public presentations we sponsor," he said. "We are trying to combat, I hope, the increasing secularization of human life." Reynolds defined secularization as "the moving away from everything sacred to a position that we do not believe anything is sacred."

Pearse has presented several interpreter's theater productions since coming to Baylor from Western Kentucky University two years ago. The program offers undergraduate and graduate classes and Pearse said it has attracted top flight students from across the country, continuing a 50-year history of interpreter's theater at the university.

Pearse said he became interested in "The Moon In Its Flight" several years ago while speaking at a National Endowment for the Humanities conference.

The Baylor theater group participated in a North Texas State University festival Feb. 25-26 and Pearse scheduled four performances at Baylor for the following week. Reynolds said he first learned of a possible controversy concerning the production when he received three or four telephone calls after the performance at NTSU.

"They (the callers) said they were appalled at the presentation of the Baylor University group," Reynolds said. "The callers said it was far and away the most vulgar and tasteless of all the productions."

Pearse said "The Moon In Its Flight" received the highest marks from the judges at the festival.

Ted Coleson, a professor of speech and communications at NTSU and organizer of the festival, said although "The Moon In Its Flight" contained sexual implications and descriptions, he did not agree with Reynolds that the production was "vulgar."

"I certainly would not use that language in describing it," he said. Of those

performances it was the most contemporary in language and most experimental and innovative as well," said Coleson.

Reynolds said he does not screen theatrical productions or scripts in advance, leaving decisions on taste and description to Baylor faculty and staff members, but after receiving complaints concerning "The Moon In Its Flight," Reynolds said he arranged for a meeting Feb. 28 with Pearse; Lee Polk, chairman of the communications study department; John Belew, Baylor's vice-president and provost, and William Toland, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

"When I finished reading the script," he said, "I looked up and said, 'As of this moment, the production is cancelled and I don't care if the whole world knows why. We will not have this kind of tasteless trash performed at Baylor.'"

Pearse said Reynolds only scanned the script while questioning him and said he objects to the president's "assessment of the inherent worth of the writing based on superficial qualities and a quick reading. And I didn't think it was fair to generalize about an entire program based on their reactions to one play," he added.

Reynolds said he and Pearse also discussed Pearse's definition of "metafiction" which Reynolds termed "gobbledygook." "I tried to explain to them about metafiction and the purposes of the program," he said. "What we've been doing over the past few years is an attempt to perfect performance skills in order to communicate the performer's understanding of literature."

Advertisements for three performances of "The Moon In Its Flight" were scrapped following the Feb. 28 meeting. Reynolds also said he wrote Pearse an official reprimand. "It is our practice to have the recipient of a reprimand sign it and send it back indicating they understand the reasons for the reprimand. But the reprimand was returned by Pearse with a long disjointed statement on criticism and metafiction that indicated a lack of understanding about the process. It also suggested to me that this was not an individual who should necessarily be employed by Baylor University," Reynolds added.

Pearse said he understood Reynold's statement but could not sign it because he disagreed with the president's conclusions concerning "The Moon In Its Flight." "I could not sign a letter that stated the script and production of "The Moon In Its Flight" were tasteless, offensive and trashy as the letter claimed," he said. "They have not seen the production and had only skimmed the script and I felt it was a judgment call on their part."

Under the rules of the American Association of University Professors, a professor entering his third year of employment must receive a full year's notice that his contract is being terminated. This fall Pearse will begin a one-year leave of absence to direct the interpretation division at the University of Hawaii, a position he accepted before "The Moon In Its Flight" was presented.

A subsequent letter to Pearse stated should he return to Baylor in the fall of 1984, his duties would be limited to introductory speech classes. Reynolds said Pearse still has the option of resigning.

Pearse said he is concerned with the censorship he believes Reynolds' actions represent. "It is censorship when a text is chosen for study and the president says you cannot use that text. But more dangerous than this tug-of-war of a case is the act of censorship takes on wider implications," Pearse added. "One example of difference in taste becomes the reason for halting a program. Our travel funds were cut and there is a serious challenge to the continuation of the program. That is censorship. The students are the big losers here," he said. "Two have already transferred. Others have said they will. Therefore, Baylor's communications studies department is also the loser."

Kenneth Chafin Resigns
Billy Graham School Job

By Dan Martin

HOUSTON (BP)--Kenneth Chafin, pastor of South Main Baptist Church, has resigned the deanship of the Billy Graham Schools of Evangelism, a post he has held for 15 years.

In his letter to Graham, Chafin said "the time has come for me to step aside as dean ..." in order to spend more time with the 6,800-member downtown Houston congregation. Chafin, former professor of evangelism at both Southern and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminaries and director of the Home Mission Board department of evangelism, has been pastor of South Main for 10 years.

Since assuming the deanship, Chafin has given at least four weeks each year to conduct the schools, plus time to recruit faculty members and organize the five-day sessions.

According to the Graham organization, the schools "equip pastors and pastoral staff for the work of evangelization. Specifically, this means both the spiritual and physical preparations necessary to do evangelism, as well as the appropriate discipling of those who place their faith in Christ."

Chafin, 57, told Baptist Press the schools "indicate the tremendous commitment Billy (Graham) has to the local churches and their leadership. This really sets him apart from many of the people you see on TV. These schools are continuing theological education in its best form. It helps ministers who are burned out, discouraged, disheartened and gives them a tremendous boost."

According to John Dillon, director of the schools for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, some 60,000 to 80,000 ministers have participated during the 15 years he has been involved with the schools.

Lewis Drummond, who succeeded Chafin as the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism at Southern Seminary, said he has "taught in these schools all over the country and in the Philippines, and they are just marvelous."

He said he participated in a school in the Philippines in November of 1978 and when he "went back the next summer to work on the island of Iilo, I found that Baptists alone had founded 70 new churches as a direct result of this school of evangelism. Stories like that could be multiplied over and over."

Graham, from his home in Montreat, N.C., said he was aware Chafin was considering resigning the deanship "but I didn't know he was going to resign quite this soon."

He added: "When we asked him to come with us, I never thought it would be for so long. The relationship just went from year to year. He (Chafin) has been absolutely marvelous; he is the best person we could possibly have gotten. He is a man of God; he believes the gospel; he loves the Lord. He has both an academic and a church background. Kenneth sort of made the job...it just grew with us."

Graham said he probably will not make a decision on a replacement for Chafin until "after Amsterdam (The International Conference for Itinerant Evangelists, sponsored by Graham). Then we probably will make it a fulltime job. I have talked with three or four people to see if they were interested."

Although both Graham and Chafin cited increasing responsibilities at South Main Baptist Church as the primary reason for the resignation, both did say the controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention had an impact on the decision.

"There are rumors to the effect that it (the resignation) had to do with a fight in the SBC," Graham said. "I have to admit that was a small factor, but not more than 20 percent."

The issue, the evangelist said, was "not which side he took, but that he might get us into the fight. As evangelists, we don't want to be involved in any fight...we want to stay above and beyond church battles. We did not want to become involved, but some of our team and some on the board felt we were being involved."

He added that if the controversy in the nation's largest protestant denomination were the only reason, "I just never would have accepted Ken's resignation."

Chafin and Cecil Sherman, pastor of First Baptist Church of Asheville, N.C., have been vocal leaders in a moderate-inerrantist battle in the convention. In the past two conventions, Chafin has played a prominent part in pre-convention activities as well as on the platform.

The controversy has been centered on control of denominational boards of trustees. Inerrantists (those who believe in a literal Bible) claim the denomination has gone liberal and are seeking to control the appointive process in order to fill boards with persons with more fundamentalist concerns. Moderates have claimed the issue is evangelism and missions and that the political efforts are merely a "power grab."

Chafin told Baptist Press: "It has not been any secret that the fundamentalist people have tried to attack all my relationships in the past several years...local church involvement, trusteeship at Southwestern Seminary and my relationship with Billy Graham.

"I don't think it is any secret that when this group attacked me, they tried to confuse the issue of my debate with Paige Patterson over whether inerrancy was crucial to the survival of the Southern Baptist Convention. They tried to make everybody believe I was trying to prove the Bible was full of errors.

"I sat down and discussed this with Dr. Graham. He acknowledged people had been lying (to him) about me," Chafin said.

Chafin participated in a debate with Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas, immediately prior to the 1981 SBC in Los Angeles. Following that discussion, at the annual meeting of the Religion Newswriters Association, Chafin was under increasing fire and rumors circulated freely that efforts were underway to get the Graham organization to "dump" Chafin.

Patterson confirmed that the "nature of the debate was on the question of whether inerrancy was an important issue for the SBC," and not whether the Bible had errors.

Patterson added that while he regrets the resignation "for Ken's sake...I would agree that this is the best thing that could happen for the Billy Graham schools simply because I do not think Ken Chafin is in broad agreement with the Graham theological position."

"I also believe that Kenneth has probably lost whatever following he may have had at one time among conservative evangelicals. His rather intemperate statements have been one of the causes. It is not that he has been controversial; it is the way he has carried on some of the controversy. I think his comments calling Dr. Graham's pastor a senile old man have been very hurtful," Patterson said.

Graham is a member of First Baptist Church of Dallas. The pastor is W.A. Criswell, who was president of the SBC in 1969-71. Criswell also is chancellor of the Criswell Center of Biblical Studies, which Patterson heads and which also is a part of the Dallas church.

Adrian Rogers, of Memphis, Tenn., a leader of the inerrancy faction who has participated as a faculty member in several schools, praised the schools of evangelism, and said: "In my estimation, Ken Chafin is a warmhearted lover of souls. I thank God for that, and love him for that. While I do not agree with him at every point of theology, I count him a friend and a brother.

"I believe the Graham organization may have backed away from him because of his controversial remarks which wounded and alienated many conservative preachers."

Cecil Sherman, who participated in denominational wars with Chafin, commented: "This is the price Kenneth has paid for caring enough about the Southern Baptist Conv ntion to be involved, to comment, to go public with his concerns. That our convention does not have men like Kenneth Chafin in leadership roles speaks volumes about the course of the SBC."

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Ministers Receive
Bad Advice on Social Security

By Ray Furr

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DALLAS (BP)--Consulting firms advising ministers to opt out of Social Security by declaring themselves employees of non-profit corporations and to exclude the rental value of a parsonage or housing allowance from their net self-employment income are giving information contrary to the Social Security tax laws, a Dallas Social Security official said.

D.S. O'Neil, external affairs office, Social Security Southwestern regional office, said consulting firms headquartered in the Dallas area have been giving ministers in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Tennessee erroneous information in opting out of Social Security coverage and "are asking for a share of the 'tax savings' and maybe offering to sell alternative pension plans."

O'Neil said the Social Security tax law views ministers as self-employed and that they cannot be considered employees of the church, denomination or corporation.

Gary S. Nash, general counsel of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board, said "even if ministers could declare themselves employees of a non-profit organization (the church) they would still be subject to Social Security tax due to the recent Social Security amendments."

He said the new Social Security Amendments of 1983 require employees of non-profit organizations to be covered by Social Security with respect to service performed after December 31, 1981.

Unlike most other occupational groups, O'Neil said only ministers whose religious beliefs will not allow them to accept public insurance may elect out of Social Security coverage when they begin their ministerial careers.

"However, they must request an exemption from Social Security coverage by the tax return due date for the second year in which they have a net income of at least \$400 from their services as a minister," he said.

O'Neil said approximately 90 percent of the ministers do participate in Social Security and report their ministerial earnings as self-employment income for Social Security tax purposes.

He also noted there were other firms across the nation disseminating what he termed "misinformation" that ministers living in a parsonage or receiving a housing allowance not include them in net self-employment income.

"These amounts count for Social Security self-employment tax purposes, even though they are excluded from the gross income for income tax purposes," O'Neil said.

"The erroneous information stems from a recent court ruling which excluded the value of employer provided housing for certain wage earners," he said, adding the ruling does not apply to ministers self-employment income because they are not considered wage earners or employees for Social Security tax purposes.

O'Neil suggested ministers obtain a copy of IRS publication 517, "Social Security for Members of the Clergy and Religious Workers" to avoid being misled by these firms.

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