



# BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 12, 1992

92-26

Virginia conservative group  
urges seminary prof firing

By Herb Hollinger

DANVILLE, Va. (BP)--A group of conservative Southern Baptists in Virginia have called for the firing of a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor for "arrogant misuse of her position."

Molly T. Marshall, the seminary's first tenured female professor, was the Staley Lecturer at Averett College in Danville, Va., Jan. 27-28. The addresses by the associate professor of theology, as reported in a local newspaper, drew criticism for what was cited as "contempt for the Gospel of the Christian faith."

Austin E. Jones Sr., a retired real estate broker in Blairs, Va., and spokesman for the group, Concerned Baptist Laymen, said a letter was sent to Virginia members of the seminary's board of trustees following Marshall's visit to Averett last month.

However, officials from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky., and Averett College were adamant in their displeasure both in what the Danville newspaper reported and the method the conservative group is using in attacking Marshall.

"This is a hatchet job of the first order by an individual who was not even present at the lectures and based on faulty newspaper reporting of those lectures," Larry McSwain, SBTS provost told Baptist Press. "There is no room in the gospel, especially according to Matt. 18:15 and following, for a follower of Jesus Christ to make public accusations that are grossly inaccurate, without even an attempt at face-to-face conversation."

Frank R. Campbell, president of Averett, told Baptist Press he was not present for Marshall's lectures but reports from staff who were there indicated nothing faintly resembling the article in the paper.

"There was no strong feminist theological approach in her lectures, according to staff," Campbell said. "My initial report was very positive from both faculty and students."

The Danville-based conservative group "urgently requested" the removal of Marshall. The group cited the speech by Marshall as reported in the local newspaper, Danville Register and Bee, Jan. 29.

According to Jones, the stance taken by Marshall in her Averett addresses "constitutes a violation of the trust placed in her by the Baptist faithful. We feel, as God-fearing Baptists, that it is a violation of our First Amendment right for anyone to use a position created, funded and supported with our prayers to promote their own personal radical opinions."

Jones said he had tried to get tapes of Marshall's lectures but was told by the college they were not available.

Concerned Baptist Laymen was formed, Austin said, as an informal group "to answer continuous charges by the liberal-moderate minority groups in the (Southern Baptist) Convention who refuse to accept majority rule." Until Marshall's addresses, Concerned Baptist Laymen was an "informal" group of about a dozen men, Jones said, "but that speech crystallized us."

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In the group's letter to the three Virginia trustees -- Frank Caffey of Martinsville; Tim Piland of Suffolk; and Julian Pentecost of Richmond -- Marshall was charged with grossly misusing "the powers of the position of professor of theology and by so doing has violated the trust of Southern Baptist Seminary and 15 million Baptist people.

"She has used this position of trust as a platform from which to express her radical feminist views. The statements she made at Averett College are not only a violation of her responsibilities to the Baptist people, but are an open affront to the very foundations of our Christian faith," the group said in its letter, provided to Baptist Press by Jones.

The group charged Marshall with claiming Christianity has been an insult to women.

"The Gospel has not been good to many women," the group quoted Marshall as telling the Averett faculty and students.

The newspaper quoted Marshall as disturbed that the supreme power of the universe is assigned a sexual identity. Not only is it a "deformed image of God," the paper quoted Marshall, but "the dignity and equality of women is at stake."

Marshall also called for the church to abandon gender-exclusive language about God, according to the newspaper account.

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Southern Baptists asked  
to join hunger campaign

By Tom Strobe

Baptist Press  
2/12/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--Bread for the World, a Christian advocacy group dealing with hunger issues, is asking Southern Baptists to help influence Congress to increase funding for three government programs aimed at needy children.

The Washington-based organization is encouraging Southern Baptists and other religious groups to participate in an "Every Fifth Child" Offering of Letters campaign to enlarge budget allocations for Head Start, the Job Corps and the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

In an offering of letters, a church invites its members to write letters to their senators and representative urging support for selected programs. Some churches ask their members to write the letters Sunday and place them in the offering plate as a gift of citizenship before being mailed, according to Bread for the World.

"Southern Baptists are a generous and caring people," said Richard D. Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "We are encouraged by a recent Home Mission Board survey which found that 92 percent of all Southern Baptist churches have some form of ministry to needy people. And yet the fact that poverty and hunger persist calls for a redoubling of the ministry efforts of our churches.

"We encourage individual Southern Baptists and their churches to consider prayerfully the role which they believe God would have them play in this effort," Land said.

One of five children in the United States is either hungry or at risk of hunger, said David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World. "But now we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shift resources that have been lavished on the Cold War into programs that meet basic human needs," Beckmann said.

President George Bush's recently proposed 1993 budget calls for increases of \$240 million for WIC and \$600 million for Head Start but a reduction of \$45 million for the Job Corps.

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WIC seeks to reduce infant mortality by providing food to low-income pregnant women and children. Head Start offers a comprehensive preschool program for low-income children. The Job Corps provides education and vocational training to disadvantaged youth.

Southern Baptists have participated in offerings of letters campaigns since 1976, according to Bread for the World.

For information or to order an offering of letters kit, individuals or churches may write Bread for the World, Attention: Katherine Smith, 802 Rhode Island Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20018, or call (202) 269-0200. Include \$8 when ordering a kit.

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CORRECTION: In (BP) story titled "Overseas baptisms set record, yet critical need for leaders remains," dated 2-10-92, please substitute this sentence for the first sentence in the second paragraph: "A record 233,334 baptisms in 1991 reversed a decline in 1990, when baptisms fell by 8.4 percent." (The original story erroneously reported the decline to be 19 percent.)

Thanks,  
Baptist Press

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Authors urge help for  
'Kids on the Street'

By Chip Alford

Baptist Press  
2/12/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--The statistics are sobering.

Of the more than one million children and teen-agers who run away from home each year, about half end up living on the streets of America's cities.

Most come from broken homes or families with a history of troubled relationships. Some are victims of physical and sexual abuse. All are vulnerable to a variety of dangers.

"Every runaway knows why they want to leave home but they don't know what they are going to run into. They put themselves into an adult world with an adolescent's mind," said Carl Resener, executive director of the Nashville Union Mission and co-author of "Kids on the Street." Published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's Broadman Press, the book takes a look at the tragedy of America's homeless children, what help is available and how churches can provide assistance.

Not all kids on the street are runaways. Co-author Judy Hall, a senior social work executive with Travelers Aid International in Washington, said thousands of children and teen-agers live on the streets with their homeless parents.

But regardless of how they get there, the authors said, the damaging effects on children of life on the street are the same.

"Children are at critical developmental stages in their lives, both physically and emotionally," Hall writes in the book. Living on the streets "interrupts the normal process of growing up" and "is a shock which undermines children in every aspect of their lives," she said.

The authors cite numerous dangers and problems faced by homeless kids, including poor health/physical development caused by poor nutrition, lack of shelter and increased vulnerability to disease; poor education resulting from limited or interrupted school attendance; and an increased likelihood of becoming involved in or victims of acts of violence which surround criminal activities such as prostitution, theft and illegal drug sales.

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Confronted with problems like these, desperation is common among homeless kids. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources estimates 48 percent have attempted suicide at least once during their time on the streets.

"It's not an easy life," Resener said of the kids' plight. "A young person on the streets is unlikely to write home, 'Having a good time. Wish you were here.' Street life is the other side of the coin of misery for those who make the city streets their home. If home life is intolerable, then street life is worse."

What can churches do to help? Soup kitchens, food and clothing closets are helpful and needed but Resener said they address the symptoms of homelessness, not the problem. The authors offer a variety of suggestions for people who are concerned -- from offering tutoring and job training to increasing awareness of the need and speaking out for the creation of more low-cost public housing units and shelters for homeless families and child and teen-age runaways.

"We have a lot of church involvement here (at the mission) in Nashville 'after the fact,' and I'm thankful for that," Resener said. "But it would be better if they would do more to prevent the kids from winding up on the front steps of the mission in the first place."

To accomplish that, Resener said it is vital for churches and community agencies to work together.

"A lot of the community agencies are doing a good job of meeting the kids' physical needs but they aren't addressing their spiritual needs. The church has to step in and fill this gap. The church cannot do everything and the community (agencies) cannot do everything but together we can get the job done."

Resener said churches can help prevent runaways "by doing a little more work in their own back yard." Offering family counseling and educating family members about the importance of communication are two good ways churches can help, he said.

"We also need pastors who are still willing to make 'house calls' and get involved if they need to," he said.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by SSB bureau of Baptist Press

Most Americans believe Jesus Christ  
offers only assurance of eternal life

Baptist Press  
2/12/92

By Sarah Zimmerman

ATLANTA (BP)--Most Americans believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only assurance of eternal life, according to research by the Princeton Religion Research Center.

The research also shows that while most Americans believe religion is the answer for today's problems, they think religion is losing its influence on society.

In telephone surveys of 1,005 adults, 59 percent agreed personal faith in Jesus Christ is the only assurance of eternal life. Seventeen percent said they "agreed somewhat" with that statement.

Regional differences were evident in the study. In the South, 75 percent of people questioned said they believed Jesus is the only way to eternal life. In the West, only 45 percent agreed with that claim.

In another telephone survey of 1,012 adults, researchers found 59 percent of those polled said religion can answer all or most of today's problems. The majority of people who expressed confidence in religion were blacks, 79 percent; Southerners, 73 percent; and women, 65 percent.

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Twenty-two percent of the people questioned said religion is old-fashioned and out of date while 19 percent said they were undecided.

That compares to a 1957 study that showed 81 percent of Americans believe religion has the answer to current problems.

The current research, however, indicates only 34 percent of Americans believe religion is increasing its influence on American life and 57 percent said religion's influence is decreasing. As lately as 1986, 49 percent of people questioned said religion's influence was increasing in America.

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HMB trustees elect staff,  
new national missionary

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
2/12/92

ATLANTA (BP)--The first missionary to work with abortion alternatives and an assistant director of refugee church growth were elected during the February meeting of the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Barbara Noakes was appointed to work as a national missionary in alternatives to abortion. Noakes has been director of the Crisis Pregnancy Center in Oklahoma City for four years.

Noakes will move to Atlanta where she will work with Sylvia Booth, HMB coordinator for alternatives to abortion ministries. Noakes will be available to churches throughout the nation to help them develop abortion alternative ministries.

William M. Fulkerson was elected to the refugee church growth position to administer the HMB immigration and refugee resettlement program. Since 1983 the Kansas native has directed language ministries for the Atlanta Baptist Association.

Fulkerson, 54, holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Southern Illinois University. The former pastor also is a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

During the meeting it was also reported the chaplains commission endorsed 81 chaplains, bringing the total number of Southern Baptist-endorsed chaplains to 2,338.

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Jim Ponder urges seminarians  
to confess failures to God

NEW ORLEANS (BP)--It is "entirely possible ... to be diligent in our work and negligent in our watch," Jim Ponder told students and faculty at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary during the annual campus revival.

"Before you know it, the cutting edge, the sharpness, has slipped out of your ministry," said Ponder, an evangelist from Orlando, Fla., in stressing the importance of genuine repentance necessary for regaining lost spiritual power.

"The hardest thing for ministers to do," Ponder said, " ... is go back to the scene of our failure and confess it. God insists on it! We tend many times, as the leaders of the spiritual life, to forget the very significance of confessing our sins."

Ponder offered a solution to those needing true revival in their lives: "The word confess ... means to acknowledge a point at which I departed from the way, at which I began to follow a lesser level, at which I lost my spiritual power. Confess the actual failure -- tell God about it.

"Show God where you lost your power, and apply the cross. Once you apply the cross to the point of defeat in your life, God will restore ... revive ... and renew you."

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