

RELIGION

Shaw Divinity School Announces Accreditation

President Talbert O. Shaw announced Monday, March 17th at the Shaw Divinity School's 24th Annual Alexander Pegues Minister's Conference that the Shaw Divinity School has been granted accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS). Shaw Divinity School has been an associate member of ATS since 1986 and applied for and was granted candidacy for accreditation status in 1994. President Shaw also spoke about the process of merging Shaw University and the Shaw Divinity School. Once the merger is complete the school will be housed on the campus of Shaw University in the Leonard Medical Building, which is currently under renovation. During

the luncheon the Divinity School received \$47,000 in cash donations and a \$10,000 pledge, \$1,000 of which was paid.

The beginnings of Shaw Divinity School date back to the founding of Shaw University in 1865. Henry Martin Tupper, a Union soldier and chaplain from New England, established Shaw University as an academy where newly freed slaves could learn to read and study the Bible in preparation for the ministry. While Shaw University went on to become a distinguished institution with law, pharmacy, and medical schools, theological education remained central to its mission and, subsequently, to the freestanding Shaw Divinity School. Hence, Shaw Divinity School

stands on a one-hundred-and-thirty-year-old tradition that makes it one of the oldest African-American theological academies.

The Theological Department conferred its first bachelor of theology degrees on four students in 1900. The program eventually evolved into the School of Religion as a graduate school for theological education and in the 1960-1961 academic year, the School of Religion became Shaw Divinity School. In 1969, a charter establishing the Shaw Divinity School as a non-stock, non-profit corporation was granted by the Secretary of State of North Carolina and a separate Board of Trustees was created. In 1988, the Shaw Divinity School moved to a new three and a

half acre site in Southeast Raleigh. Currently the Divinity School offers the Master of Divinity Degree.

The recent accreditation makes Shaw Divinity School one of four Black Divinity Schools in the nation to receive ATS accreditation. The other three are Howard Divinity School in Washington D.C., Virginia Union in Richmond, VA, and Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta, GA. In addition, the Divinity School is one of only three divinity schools in the state of North Carolina to earn full accreditation from ATS. The other two North Carolina Schools are Duke Divinity School in Durham and the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest.

Earth Day '97

Earth Day '97 is being celebrated on Sunday, April 20, 1997 at the First Congregational Church (11th & SW Park). The name chosen for this conference and celebration is ONE FAMILY, ONE HOME. I would like to share my joy in being a part of this truly ecumenical group that has come together to sponsor the Earth Day celebration. The word is spreading and at each meeting there our new faces eager to participate in the creating of this sacred event. I choose the word, sacred, because as we recognize that our life and our earth are sacred, we begin to act with compassion, respect, and caring. We are all finding this to be a rewarding experience, yes, we are all united around the need and desire to heal our earth.

This event initiated by the Earth and Spirit Council is the result of the support and cooperation from many businesses, faith communities, environmental, educational, scientific, and cultural organizations. The purpose of the conference is to enhance these cooperative efforts to restore our planet. It is also our hope to encourage and support people in their involvement with environmental/healing projects.

The conference begins at 1:00pm with a keynote address by Jean Houston. From 3:00pm-5:30pm there will be a number of workshops available, some focusing on the various religious perspectives and others focusing on the various environmental perspectives. These workshops will be facilitated by local business, religious, educational and environmental leaders.

The Inter-Faith Earth Day Celebration begins at 7:00pm. This includes music, stories, and ceremony from Bahai, Buddhist, Christian,

Church of Scientology, Hindu, Jewish, Moslem, Native American and other traditions all focused on the theme of "One Family, One Home."

There will be tables for co-sponsors and supporters providing information on the various environmental and religious activities in the region. In this way, we hope to build a bridge between the religious and environmental communities. Our outreach will extend throughout the faith communities and environmental organizations to encourage the widest degree of attendance at the conference. We also hope to provide scholarships to some who could not otherwise afford the \$20.00 participation fee.

This is the sixth annual interfaith Earth Day celebration held in the Northwest. The first was sponsored by Earth Day Oregon as part of its 20th anniversary of Earth Day. The celebration was a small but very important part of the overall project. Since that time, the celebration has grown and is sponsored by an interfaith committee under the auspices of the Earth and Spirit Council. The present day committee is the most diverse group of religious and environmental organizations to plan an event in the Northwest. The Honoring of the Creation was the theme for last year's celebration which was attended by over 700 people. This event was highly praised and many thought it would do well to expand the celebration. This would give attendees the opportunity to consult about the various environmental issues facing humanity. This year's format of a short conference with a main speaker, workshops, and celebration originated with the Interfaith Celebration Organizing Committee.

Vantage Point:

Envisioning a "Table" of Reconciliation and Community

BY RON DANIELS

On March 6, 1997 the book was closed on the life of the Rev. Mac Charles Jones who passed away at the age of 47 in Dallas in route to a meeting of the Racial Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches. He died as he had lived his life, on a perpetual journey in search of racial and economic justice, reconciliation and community. Rev. Jones was not among the most renowned figures in Black America, but in many respects he was one of the most courageous and visionary leaders of our time.

In the last year Rev. "Mac," as he was affectionately called, gained national prominence as the principal voice which called the nation's attention to the epidemic of Black church burnings. As the Associate for Racial Justice for the National Council of Churches, Rev. Jones used his exceptional leadership skills to forge a core coalition comprised of the Atlanta based Center of Democratic Renewal and the Center of Constitutional Rights in New York to force the church burnings issue onto the national agenda.

Emphasizing the gravity of the crisis of Black church burnings, Rev. Jones attributed the growing "epidemic" of church arsons to "white supremacy and domestic terrorism." Never content to simply identify the problem, Rev. Jones spearheaded a national campaign to rebuild the burned churches. Time and time again, however, he called the nation's attention to racism as a cancer eating away at the very fabric of this society. In that regard, Rev. Jones saw the burning of Black

churches as merely symptomatic of a much larger and deeper crisis--racial oppression, economic injustice and fractured community. Hence, the imperative, constantly reiterated by Rev. Mac, to engage in a process of building/renewing community as the ultimate prescription for healing the maladies of this nation. Without question this was his greatest contribution, the constant exhortation to envision the possibilities of a new community, nation and world.

For the Rev. Mac Charles Jones the "table" came to symbolize the prospects and promise of reconciliation and renewed community. He was deeply influenced by his early exposure to Nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the era of the '60s, the tenets of the social gospel and liberation theology and his worldwide travels as a leader within the National and World Councils of Churches. As a result Rev. Jones evolved a concept of inclusiveness and truthful dialogue as preferred means of confronting and resolving conflicts and disputes. He was a passionate advocate of the table as the place where all sides could gather to engage frank and truthful conversations, a place to diagnose the ills blocking the development of true and lasting community in America and the world--wealth, inequality, power, privilege, racism, sexism, homophobia, religious bigotry.

It is around the table that the difficult but essential process of building/renewing community must unfold. It is around the table that the denial about various forms of oppression must be challenged. In the words of

Rev. Mac Charles Jones, there must be "confession" that oppression exists, "repentance" on the part to the perpetrators and a willingness by those guilty of committing, sustaining or tolerating injustice to provide "reparations" to the victims of oppression. Confession, repentance and reparations he contended are the necessary pre-requisites to peace, healing, reconciliation and the building/renewing of community.

Out of the ashes of burned Black churches the Rev. Mac Charles Jones not only envisioned the rebuilding of edifices of religious worship, he dreamed of a table where protagonist and antagonist, friend and foe, the lion and the lamb could sit down to engage the bitter/sweet conversation/dialogue which could lead to a new society and a new world. This is where Rev. Mac was preparing to lead us at the moment of his untimely death. Under his leadership, the National Council of Churches and the core coalition which the NCC had assembled was preparing to call for a national ecumenical summit on racism as a prelude to a series of local conversations about racism, economic injustice and other human rights violations in this country. Rev. Mac's dream of bringing people to the "table" was about to be operationalized across this nation.

This remarkable leader, teacher, healer and pastor departed this life before his dream could come to fruition. But during his lifetime we were blessed that he touched our lives. He took us to the mountain top and gave us a glimpse of what the future could hold in terms of reconciliation and a new community. He did not com-

plete that journey. That task remains for those of us who were inspired by his leadership and teachings.

On June 9-10, one year after Rev. Mac Charles Jones mobilized scores of pastors of burned churches to descend on the nation's capital, we will gather again in Washington D.C. to celebrate the triumphs of our collective labor. Those of us who embrace the vision of Rev. Mac Charles Jones must use this occasion to rededicate ourselves to creating that magnificent table he talked about so often. In his memory our challenge is to complete the unfinished work of ridding this nation of all the ills which cripple the human spirit and block the development of community. As we gather around the table this must be our testimony to the life and legacy of Rev. Mac Charles Jones, our youngest ancestor. A luta continua - the struggle continues!

AOL criticized for Klan site

Caught in an escalating debate over online censorship, America Online is facing strong criticism for a Web page stored on its system that promotes the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Anti-Defamation League said late today that it sent a letter to AOL chief executive Steve Case, calling on the company to adhere to its own guidelines regarding "hate material with equal vigilance as those regarding pornography."

The case raises difficult questions involving the First Amendment for AOL and other online services.

AOL, for example, must balance its family-oriented image and business model while preserving the constitutional right to free speech.

In response to the Anti-Defamation League's letter, AOL spokeswoman Wendy Goldberg said: "This is the sort of issue that concerns us, [but] we have no editorial control of the Web." She added:

"For the time being, we are looking at this as a site on the Web. We're constantly reassessing our policies."

Michael Lowe, regional director of the KKK in Waco, Texas, which operates the site, said: "We are just exercising what we think are our beliefs. There's no hate on our Web site. Hopefully they will not censor it."

The Web site has been offered for about a month and has attracted about 7,400 visitors, Lowe said.

In his letter to Case, ADL National Director Abraham Foxman said: "Your 'Rules of the Road' prohibit attacks based on a number of characteristics, including a person's race, national origin, ethnicity or religion. They clearly state that hateful language is not allowed."

Foxman went on to say: "While we strongly believe in freedom of speech and do not advocate censorship on the Internet, we expect these companies that have created guidelines to adhere to them."

The letter came after reports surfaced last week that

an AOL member in Texas canceled his subscription because he was angry about the Ku Klux Klan Web site. He called on AOL to remove the page.

The page states: "The great calling of our movement is to secure the preservation, protection and advancement of the White race and to enrich our people spiritually, morally and materially. We must begin to restore order in the places where we live and work."

It also includes links to other Klan Web sites. It also explains Klan traditions. For example: "The fiery cross is used as a Klan symbol representing the ideals of Christian civilization."

According to the AOL, "While the materials accessible through the Klan pagemay not contain explicit calls for violence, they reflect hate, vulgarity, and abuse far more profound and troubling."

Slavery persists in parts of Ghana

The practice involves giving young girls to priests--Because it's religion-related, it's often dismissed.

Slavery has long been a part of Ghanaian culture and still exists in remote parts of the country, widely shrugged off as just an unusual religious prerogative.

Trokosi — a word in the Ewe language meaning "wife of the gods" — is practiced at dozens of isolated animist shrines in the southeastern Volta region.

Some families believe they are responsible for the misdeeds of their ancestors, and to appease the war gods they must sacrifice a vestal virgin from every generation.

Daughters as young as 10 are handed over to temples, where they are servants until they begin to menstruate and then typically become the exclusive concubines of the priests.

It is often not until they are middle aged and have given the priests children that the women are released, only to be replaced by yet another virgin from the same family. They are usually illiterate, have no employable skills and likely will never have husbands and children of their own.

"I personally think that it's Ghana's most fundamental human-rights problem," said Karen Gladding, human-rights officer at the U.S. Embassy in Accra.

The bondage dates back to the 17th century and also is practiced in neighboring Togo, Benin and Nigeria, where it is believed to have originated.

The U.S. Embassy estimates at least 4,500 girls have been made religious slaves. Local humanitarian groups say the figure could be as high as 10,000 to 12,000.

A proposed law would outlaw the practice. But trokosi slavery practiced in President Jerry Rawlings' ethnic group has generally been ignored.

"To pacify the gods, the virgins are brought in to serve the priests," Togbe Akliokpo, priest of the Avekedome temple, told Ghanaian filmmaker Kofi Boateng in his recent documentary on trokosi. "Even in the Bible, you have the Virgin Mary — so that's not anything bad."

Akliokpo said he had 20 trokosi, but claims to have let 16 go. He said he had about 300 children from the slaves and his numerous wives.

"They become the wives of the gods," he said of the trokosi. "This is to compensate for the deprivations suffered by the family of the victims."

Boateng, who received a grant from the U.S. Embassy, said it took him two years to gain the trust of the

shrine priests for permission to interview them and trokosi.

"I really wanted to bring out the problem for people to analyze and make up their own minds," said Boateng, who is from the Ashanti ethnic group, which has no slaves. "I just wanted the film to speak for itself, to show a way of life, the abuses and suffering."

Advertise In
The Portland
Observer
Call 503-288-0033

Cox Funeral Home

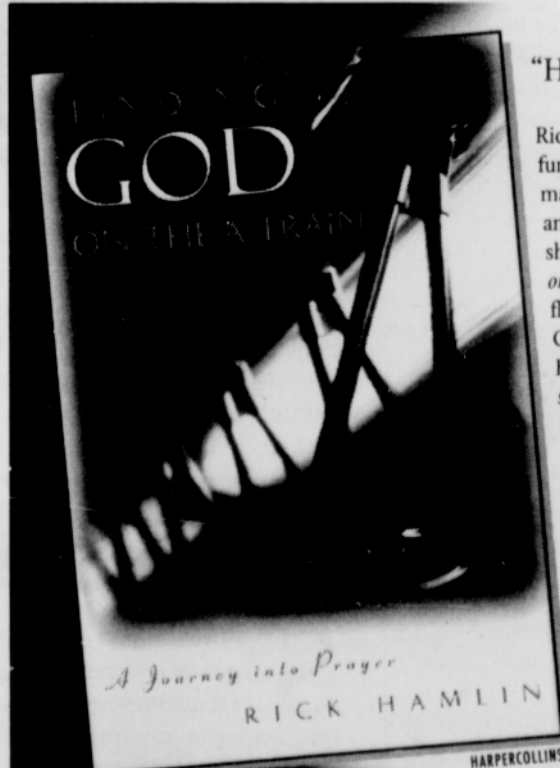
2736 N.E. Rodney, Portland,
Oregon (503) 281-4891

"Before You Must Make a Decision"

Inspect the Beautiful Cox Funeral Chapel

"Planning your funeral is our first consideration. Equipped to serve all religions, races, veterans and fraternal organizations."

—Jerome Tanner, Funeral Director



"How should I pray?"

Rick Hamlin offers an engaging, funny, and touching tale of one man's lifelong pursuit of the answer to the question, "How should I pray?" in *Finding God on the A Train*. A fresh and fluent new voice on the Christian writing scene, Hamlin offers the candid story—sure to appeal to the millions today rediscovering the joy of prayer—of his search for an authentic spirituality.

POWELL'S BOOKS

• 1005 W Burnside, downtown Portland 503-228-4651 www.powells.com
• 8725 SW Cascade Avenue, Beaverton 503-643-3131