

Black Pentecostal Group Denounces Carlton Pearson as a Heretic

The Oklahoma-based pastor said he will continue teaching his gospel of inclusion and plans to write a related book

After fielding questions about his controversial “gospel of inclusion,” Bishop Carlton Pearson has been officially denounced as a heretic by a group of African-American Pentecostal bishops.

In a 17-page paper released in March and written by the group’s doctrinal commission chairman, Bishop Clifford L. Frazier, the Joint College of African-American Pentecostal Bishops’ Congress said it “will no longer offer to Bishop Pearson our hand of fellowship. We will strongly urge all of our fellows to refuse Bishop Carlton Pearson access to their pulpits.”

Headed by Bishop J. Delano Ellis, senior pastor of Pentecostal Church of Christ in Cleveland, the Joint College was founded in 1995 to provide training for ministry leaders within the African-American Pentecostal-charismatic community. Today it has more than 700 affiliated ministers and represents more than 100 independent black churches.

The group invited Pearson to its annual meeting in 2003 to present his doctrine, which promotes the idea that confession of Jesus as Savior is not a requirement to go to heaven. “Our hope was to appeal to him to abandon his teaching,” Frazier told Charisma. “We tried to respect his position as a bishop

and ... as a child of God.”

But when Pearson didn't recant his position, “we felt that it was important for us to say something in light of the fact that this young man is of tremendous influence in the Pentecostal-charismatic community,” Ellis said. “We felt that if we were to keep quiet it would be like tacit approval of his error. And since so many of our people have been subscribers of his ministry, as good stewards of God's mysteries and shepherds of the flock, we felt to say nothing would be like turning our people over to error.”

In a response posted on his ministry Web site, Pearson reiterated his views that all people, not just Christians, are saved, and he cast himself as a prophet ahead of his time. He added that he plans to soon release a book titled *God Is Not a Christian*.

“I happen to believe in the God who is big enough to save an entire world from perceived, ultimate destruction and spiritual death and that, in fact, He has done so,” Pearson wrote. “All that's needed now, is for people to be informed—to know and enjoy this powerful and liberating Truth. Therefore I am committed to the proclamation of the ‘Gospel of Inclusion.’”

Since Pearson began teaching universalism, attendance at his Azusa Conference has declined, and insiders say his Tulsa, Higher Dimensions Family Church now hosts just one Sunday morning service instead of two and has roughly 600 people attending. Though several Christian leaders, including the members of the Joint College, say they are praying for Pearson and do not want to disparage him as a person, many have distanced themselves from him.

"I grieve over Carlton Pearson's drift toward shipwrecking his faith and endangering others," said Foursquare leader Jack W. Hayford, chancellor of The King's College and Seminary in Los Angeles. "The danger of isolation from accountability and from interaction that can adjust any of us from vain suppositions is the reason I have implored greater accountability among all leaders—especially in these last days so filled with deception, delusion and departure from God's Word."

Ted Haggard, pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., and president of the National Association of Evangelicals, described Pearson's teaching as "inaccurate and counterproductive to the cause of Christ."

He said because Pearson has rejected calls from Christian leaders to return to orthodox teaching, "the body of Christ at large should now ignore him. Don't support him, don't acknowledge him, don't attend his events and don't dignify his position with time and attention. And, where necessary, protect the unaware from his teaching."

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