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Clinton could be lucrative
fund-raiser for conservatives

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Although conservative groups promoting "family values" may have opposed Bill Clinton as a presidential candidate, his election could be one of the best things that ever happened for their fund-raising efforts, experts predict.

Even before Clinton took office, some conservative groups began citing his social positions as evidence that they needed more money.

The standard line: With someone in the White House who favors abortion rights and homosexual rights, "pro-family" groups need more financial support to fight him every step of the way.

"I think Clinton being in office is to the advantage of conservative fund-raisers," noted Stephen Winzenburg, professor of communications at Grand View College in Des Moines, Iowa. "They have an enemy, and they can fight him.

"They can particularly use his first two weeks in office to help rally the troops," said Winzenburg, who specializes in studying conservative Christian causes and television preachers. "He has certainly given them enough material in his first two weeks to gather support for conservative causes."

Another expert who monitors such issues agreed.

"I was talking to several of these (conservative) movement leaders last week, and they said: 'We could not have scripted the first two weeks of the Clinton administration any better. He's mobilized a lot of our people we couldn't reach,'" reported John Green, director of the Bliss Institute, a bi-partisan research group associated with the University of Akron.

"These movement organizations will prosper under the Clinton administration because they will have a target they can be unambiguously opposed to," Green added. "All movement organizations -- on the right or the left -- prosper in opposition."

The same situation happening this year occurred in reverse 12 years ago when Ronald Reagan was elected, Green explained: "Liberals love to hate Ronald Reagan. He helped their fund raising."

Early examples of this process being used both directly and indirectly with the new administration include:

-- James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family ministries. In a monthly fund-raising letter sent out nationwide immediately after the election, Dobson cited page after page of reasons Clinton's election spelled doom for all who treasure "family values."

Dobson said he had waited until after the election to speak his mind due to IRS restrictions, but now felt compelled to warn of what would happen if organizations like his didn't prepare to fight Clinton and Congress.

The longer-than-usual direct-mail piece included a reply card for pledges and contributions.

-- The Kentucky Right to Life Association. A January fund-raising letter sent by Executive Director Margie Montgomery -- contribution envelope enclosed -- declares the "horror" coming to America via Clinton's presidency.

"You'll see that your contribution has never been more desperately important than it is now," she wrote. "There has never been a president more committed to legislation which will allow the destruction of unborn babies than Bill Clinton. It's the one campaign promise he'll keep unless he has a change of heart."

-- The Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission. During deliberations of an SBC Executive Committee subcommittee in January, Clinton's election was cited as a primary reason for not cutting the CLC's allotment of Cooperative Program unified budget funds.

While every other SBC agency, institution and commission is recommended to take at least a 1.4 percent reduction in 1993-94 due to declining contributions, the CLC alone was spared and will keep the same allotment it is receiving this year. Many subcommittee members wanted to find a way to give the CLC an increase.

The CLC needs the extra funds more than other SBC entities, some subcommittee members reasoned, because of its important work against abortion and homosexual rights. The CLC's voice will be more important now than ever before because of Clinton's election, they suggested.

Whether grass-roots appeals for funds based on Clinton's election will produce more cash remains to be seen.

"Our mail has been up recently," Paul Hetrick, spokesman for Focus on the Family, noted Feb. 2. "In the last two weeks, we've had some record-setting days. But it would really be inappropriate of me to link that to anything the Clinton administration has done."

January traditionally is a good time for fund-raising at Focus on the Family, Hetrick said. Because of that and the diversity of issues the organization addresses, crediting opposition to Clinton with recent increases would be "presumptuous."

"All I can tell you for sure is we have had some record-setting days both in letters and calls coming into our organization in recent days," he said again.

Likewise, Kentucky Right to Life has noted a jump in calls and letters since Clinton's election and the January fund-raising letter, said Cathy Daugherty, secretary and office manager.

"Ever since the election, I have had some increase in people calling in and saying, 'How can I join Right to Life?'" she explained.

The fund-raising letter, which was intended to raise money for television ads, also has produced "a pretty decent return," Daugherty said. "We're not flowing with money, but we're getting a nice response."

Interestingly, television preachers may be among the last to get on the bandwagon, noted Winzenburg, who regularly monitors religion on TV.

"I'm surprised they haven't used Clinton to do more fund raising," he said. "I think TV preachers have been laying low, waiting to see how the public reacts to Clinton.

"They're being very cautious. The main thing is because he's Baptist. They hate to cross someone who is of a denomination which is evangelical. A lot of religious broadcasters want to be very careful that they don't offend Christians."

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Compromise reached on gays in military;
gay-rights bills introduced in Congress

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- After striking a compromise with key Senate leaders, President Bill Clinton took the first step Jan. 29 toward lifting the ban on homosexuals in the armed services.

"This compromise is not everything I would have hoped for, or everything that I have stood for, but it is plainly a substantial step in the right direction," Clinton said at a White House press conference in which he announced a two-step plan.

The military will no longer ask recruits about their sexual orientation, and Clinton has asked the secretary of defense to submit by July 15 a draft executive order that would lift the ban. Clinton said the final order would be drafted after "full consultation" with military and congressional leaders.

His announced intention to lift the ban has met opposition from both the military Joint Chiefs of Staff and Congress. Some Democratic senators, particularly Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, urged Clinton to delay lifting the ban until hearings could be held in March.

Clinton said the draft order will be accompanied by a study conducted during the next six months on "the real, practical problems that would be involved in this revision of policy, so that we will have a practical, realistic approach consistent with the high standards of combat effectiveness and unit cohesion that our armed services must maintain."

The agreement, reached among Clinton, Nunn and Sen. George Mitchell, D-Maine, focused on treatment of openly homosexual personnel during the interim period.

Clinton said he wanted to stop legal proceedings to discharge known homosexuals from service. As a compromise, openly homosexual personnel will not be formally discharged during the interim, but they may be separated from active duty and placed in stand-by reserve until final action is taken.

Stand-by reservists receive no pay and benefits and would have to petition to re-enter the service if the ban is lifted.

Clinton said the agreement is a step in the right direction and reveals that Congress and the administration can end gridlock. Clinton will not waver from his commitment to repeal the ban, he added.

"The issue is not whether there should be homosexuals in the military," Clinton said. "Everyone concedes that there are. The issue is whether men and women who can and have served with real distinction should be excluded from military service solely on the basis of their status.

"And I believe they should not. ... I believe that American citizens who want to serve their country should be able to do so unless their conduct disqualifies them from doing so."

The announcement still met resistance. Some Republican senators said they will try to write the current ban into law, perhaps by attaching an amendment to the Family Leave Bill.

Resistance also came from some religious leaders, including Southern Baptists.

Richard Land, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, criticized Clinton, a Southern Baptist, for using "the power of his office to extol and defend such reprehensible, immoral behavior" as homosexuality.

"Our commander in chief is pursuing a policy which is dictated by the homosexual political lobby and is opposed by the overwhelming majority of military personnel," Land said in a prepared statement.

Land warned that after relaxing the ban on gays, Clinton might permit male and female soldiers to share sleeping quarters or require military chaplains to perform same-sex marriages.

In addition to homosexuals in the military, bills that would prohibit discrimination in employment, education, credit or housing based on sexual orientation also have been introduced into the new Congress.

Similar measures have been introduced in the past and have not received congressional approval. In the 102nd Congress, the bills (S. 574, H.R. 1430) died in committee without receiving any hearings.

Rep. Edolphus Towns, D-N.Y., introduced a bill Jan. 5 that would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Housing Act to prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation (H.R. 423).

Another bill, introduced by Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., would prohibit discrimination in employment, education, credit, housing, the sale of goods and services, use of public facility or any federally assisted program because of sexual orientation (H.R. 431).

Both bills have been referred jointly to the Judiciary and Education and Labor committees. No hearings have been scheduled.

While these bills essentially have been dead upon introduction in previous sessions of Congress, they have been the subject of fund-raising appeals by the Religious Right.

Oliver Thomas, general counsel at the Baptist Joint Committee, said should the bills begin to move in the 103rd Congress, the religious-liberty agency would work for an exemption for churches and other religious organizations and would oppose any version of the bills that did not contain such an exemption.

According to religious leaders who met with President Bill Clinton Jan. 14, the president made clear his belief that such anti-discrimination laws should not apply to churches and religious organizations.

President Clinton signs
family, medical leave bill

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Bill Clinton signed a bill Feb. 5 that will provide millions of American workers with unpaid leave for family and medical emergencies.

Clinton signed the first major legislation of his administration less than 12 hours after it received congressional approval. The law will become effective in six months.

The family and medical leave bill (H.R. 1, S. 5) requires employers with 50 or more workers to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during a year for family or medical reasons, such as birth of a child or taking care of a spouse or parent.

In a Rose Garden ceremony, Clinton thanked Congress for moving expeditiously on the legislation before its first recess. Congress approved similar measures in the past but they were vetoed twice by former President George Bush.

"This sends a clearer signal than any words any of us could utter that we have tried to give this government back to the American people," Clinton said.

Less than a day before Clinton signed the major social legislation it appeared as if gridlock would stall the measure.

A fight in the U.S. Senate over lifting the military's ban on homosexuals in the armed services delayed the measure. The Senate debated at length an amendment offered by leading Republicans that would have codified the ban, which President Clinton has taken steps to repeal.

The Republican proposal failed 37-62.

The Senate then approved the family leave bill 71-27 Feb. 4. One day earlier, the House approved the bill 265-163.

Ben Mitchell, director of biomedical and life issues at the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, said the CLC is generally favorable toward the legislation but has some concerns about its application.

"It's definitely an idea whose time has come," Mitchell said.

"It's safe to say there is a great deal of sympathy for people who need leave for medical emergencies and family difficulties," he said. "But there's also a sympathy for the burden that this may bring to businesses."

"If they can balance the benefits-burdens equation, then wonderful," Mitchell said. But Mitchell questioned whether the legislation will truly benefit many workers.

Some reports indicated half the American workforce will qualify for leave, based on the size of American companies. But other estimates are much lower, Mitchell said.

And of those who qualify, "how many of them can afford to take 12 weeks off work without pay?" he added.

"In the end, will this in fact be more than cosmetic?" he asked.

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-- By Pam Parry and Greg Warner

Defenders of freedom face
serious enemies, Dunn warns

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The indivisible freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment are under attack, a Baptist church-state specialist told Capitol Hill staffers at a Feb. 2 briefing.

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said: "If freedom of religion suffers, freedom of the press is in danger. If the press is stifled, the pulpit is not free. If the arts are censored, no dissenter is safe.

"Full freedom of conscience is essential to the search for truth," Dunn said. "There can be no government thought control."

Dunn's remarks were delivered at a briefing on First Amendment freedoms sponsored by the Free Expression Network. The meeting drew approximately 100 staff members from the U.S. House of Representatives.

Dunn warned that defenders of the First Amendment have real enemies, including Pat Robertson's grass-roots political organization, the Christian Coalition.

"The Christian Coalition, falsely so called, organizes hate, focuses fear, plays on prejudice and exploits ignorance in its role as the hand maiden of divisiveness," he said. "Worse, there are many members of Congress ... who curry the favor of extremists, count on their votes."

But the Religious Right and cowardly Congress do not pose the greatest threat to the First Amendment, Dunn said. "We have lively enemies in what should be the first line of defense for human rights."

He pointed to recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions, most notably Oregon vs. Smith, that have weakened the First Amendment religion clauses. In Smith, Justice Antonin Scalia gutted the free-exercise clause, calling it "a legal luxury we can no longer afford," Dunn said.

The Smith decision, which virtually abandoned a long-standing court test that provided a high level of protection for religious practice, drew immediate fire from legal and religious circles. A coalition of more than 50 religious and civil-liberties organizations, including the Baptist Joint Committee and Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, has backed a bill that would restore that protection.

"This 103rd Congress must pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Every friend of the First Amendment should get on board or lose their freedom-lovers' credentials."

Dunn acknowledged that "lunacies abound that test the fabric of our life together."

"Individual logic and societal limits generally emerge to reign in excesses. But if they do not, if we as a people make mistakes regarding the limits of liberty, if we err, let us err on the side of freedom rather than force, conscience rather than control, opportunity rather than oppression."

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-- By Pam Parry

Congressman wants repeal
of right to bear arms

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A New York congressman has offered a resolution that would repeal the Second Amendment to the Constitution, which gives Americans the right to bear arms.

The Second Amendment states: "A well-regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed."

Rep. Major Owens, D-N.Y., recently introduced the measure (H.J. Res. 81) for the second year.

"The Second Amendment is unnecessary in 1992," he said in a speech on the House floor last year. "The purpose of the Second Amendment is to assure the people's right to bear arms in a well-regulated militia."

His resolution would not interfere with that very limited purpose but would regulate guns in a culture that is replete with crime, he said.

When he first introduced the resolution, Owens said he did not expect it to succeed. His goal is to raise the level of debate about the need to control the sale, manufacture and distribution of guns, he said.

A constitutional amendment must be approved by Congress and ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures before it can take effect.

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Tennessee Baptist leader,
pastor Jack Prince dies

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Andrew Jackson Prince, 63, pastor emeritus of West Hills Baptist Church in Knoxville and a recent scholar-in-residence at the Baptist Joint Committee, died Jan. 29 at his home following a brief illness.

A native of Stonega, Va., Prince was the first senior pastor at West Hills Baptist Church and served the congregation in that role for 32 years before retiring in 1992.

A graduate of Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tenn., and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., Prince served in numerous Baptist leadership roles. He served as vice president of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, as a trustee of Carson-Newman College and East Tennessee Baptist Hospital, and as a charter member of the Advisory Board of Ruschlikon International Seminary.

Most recently, he preached the annual sermon at the Tennessee Baptist Convention meeting last November.

Prince is survived by his wife, Frances Willson Prince, who served with him last fall as a scholar-in-residence at the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based religious-liberty group.

"Jack and Frances made an invaluable contribution to the work of the BJC," said James Dunn, the agency's executive director. "Their understanding of Baptists, love and warmth for them advanced the BJC cause.

"Jack fought for soul freedom, wrote longhand letters to Baptists in Tennessee trying to enlist their support, and gave his best energies and thought to the cause of soul liberty to the very last of his days.

"He was the friend of all free and faithful Baptists."

Other survivors are two daughters, Karen Prince Roden of Jefferson City, Tenn., and Fran Prince DeLozier of Knoxville; two sons, Ty L. Prince of Chattanooga, Tenn., and Andrew Judson Prince of Knoxville; a brother, Kenneth Ray Prince of Streamwood, Ill.; and four grandchildren.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Speakers ask legislators to put children first

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Every child should have a head start, a healthy start and a fair start, Sharon Daly of the Children's Defense Fund told more than 70 members of the Texas Legislature and about 300 Texas Baptists at a statewide meeting in Austin, Texas.

Daly, director of community and government affairs for the children's advocacy organization in Washington, D.C., was keynote speaker at a breakfast scheduled in conjunction with the annual conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission Feb. 1-2 at Austin's First Baptist Church.

Both Daly and Texas CLC director Phil Strickland said government funding for children should take priority.

"Balancing the budget at the expense of society's most needy and vulnerable people reveals a misplaced sense of priorities," said Strickland. He challenged Texas lawmakers to "take a hard look at putting children first in the funding process."

Daly said poor families have endured economic hardship during the past 12 years. "We must act fast to make sure the effects of the economy do not permanently damage another generation of children," she warned.

Spiritual and other developmental goals are hard to achieve when the basic needs of children are not met, she said. "It's awfully hard to make children aware of the wages of sin when the wages of virtue are so slim."

Daly said full funding for Head Start, an early childhood development program for poor and disabled children, and full immunizations for every child by age 2 are among the goals of the Children's Defense Fund in 1993.

Currently fewer than 60 percent of the 2-year-olds in most states are fully immunized, she noted.

Daly also urged full funding for WIC, the nutritional program for pregnant and nursing mothers and infant children, and encouraged support for the Child Welfare and Family Preservation Act.

That bill, which passed both the House and Senate in 1992 but was vetoed by President Bush as part of the urban aid tax bill, is designed to prevent child abuse and neglect and to help strengthen families.

Concerning economic pressures on families, Daly noted the median income of young parents plunged by one third from 1973 to 1990. Forty percent of the children of young parents live in poverty. One child in three born to parents with a high school education lives in poverty.

"We are not a poor country, but increasingly income and wealth are concentrated at the top," she said.

Noting that there are 77 registered lobbyists on Capitol Hill for every U.S. Senator, Daly challenged the Texans to "be a voice to put children first."

Strickland also urged legislators to see that sex-education programs in public schools are responsible and abstinence-based. Responsible programs do not encourage sexual activity or give tacit approval to such behavior, he stressed.

Healthy families have spiritual resources, take time for each other, make family a priority commitment and are willing to respond to their "unhealth" when necessary, according to Bill Turner, pastor of South Main Baptist Church in Houston.

Turner provided interpretation of the theme, "Families and the Family of God," at the annual conference of the Texas Baptist Christian Life

Commission. Jesus' commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" is foundational to family relationships, he said.

"Busy lifestyles can be a convenient dodge, providing an accepted escape from spending time and experiencing closeness with our nearest neighbors -- our family," he said.

Healthy marriages are built on commitment, conflict resolution and communication, Turner said.

"There is no intimacy between strangers," he said. "Relationships die when communication stops."

Healthy parenting happens when parents clearly understand their identity, consistently live out their faith, treat each other with loving respect and are willing to "be there" and "be real" for their children, according to Turner.

"Making time for a child is a way to say, 'You matter.' Jesus was a special child, but someone had to tell him that and show him that," Turner said.

Mary and Joseph apparently performed all of the traditional Jewish rituals in their family, having Jesus circumcised and dedicated as an infant and bringing Him to the temple at age 12. In the same way, families should establish their own rituals, according to Turner.

"Rituals matter. They are an occasion for quality time. Rituals may get old. They may be burdensome. But rituals reinforce the sense of specialness in our children by giving them significant chunks of our time," he said.

Strong families are characterized by cohesion, flexibility, good communication skills, shared spiritual beliefs and the ability to resolve conflicts, according to David Olson, director of the marriage and family therapy program at the University of Minnesota.

"Most of the problems with individuals and society either begin or end up in the family," said Olson, a Lutheran layman and president of the National Council on Family Relations.

Proper preparation before marriage and consistent enrichment opportunities throughout marriage are key ingredients to successful families, Olson said.

"Marriage these days is a very high-risk venture. Yet, people enter into it voluntarily -- again and again and again. Our society values marriage and intimacy but doesn't know how to maintain it," he said.

Olson suggested the creation of couple support groups -- "a caring community of couples" -- in congregations that would prepare couples for marriage and provide enrichment for others.

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Gallup finds stronger beliefs among Americans than Europeans

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) -- Americans may not practice the religious beliefs they claim, but they still identify with religious beliefs more strongly than do Western Europeans.

That's the conclusion of new research recently reported by the Gallup Organization through the Princeton Religion Research Center.

The findings are based on a large study of the values of Europeans begun in 1990 but only recently reported.

The Gallup Organization previously has found a significant gap between what Americans say they believe and how they practice those beliefs. But on

most issues, Western Europeans don't even claim a level of religious practice similar to Americans, the new study found.

Here are some comparisons:

-- Belief that there is a God or universal spirit: 96 percent of Americans, 79 percent of Europeans.

-- Belief in life after death: 65 percent of Americans, 52 percent of Europeans.

-- Belief in heaven: 78 percent of Americans, 47 percent of Europeans.

-- Belief in hell: 60 percent of Americans, 24 percent of Europeans.

-- Belief in the devil: 55 percent of Americans, 27 percent of Europeans.

-- Religious upbringing as children: 89 percent of Americans, 74 percent of Europeans.

-- Belong to a religious denomination or express a religious preference: 89 percent of both Americans and Europeans.

-- Attend church or synagogue weekly: 42 percent of Americans, 24 percent of Europeans.

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US teens believe more strongly in angels today

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) -- American teenagers are more likely to believe in angels today than at any time in the past 15 years, according to a new Gallup poll.

More than three-fourths (76 percent) of American teens believe in angels, the study found.

That represents a significant increase from 1978, when only 64 percent of teens thought angels were real. The percentage of teens believing in angels has been generally increasing since that time.

Teenagers' belief in ghosts also is on the rise, but their belief in astrology, ESP, clairvoyance, witchcraft, Bigfoot and the Loch Ness monster is declining.

About one-third (31 percent) of U.S. teens believe in ghosts, the latest survey found, compared to only 20 percent in 1978 and 15 percent in 1986.

Belief in astrology (54 percent) has increased over 1978 levels, but has declined from 1984 and 1988 levels.

Of the eight supernatural topics included in the survey, belief in Bigfoot has dropped most precipitously over the years. While in 1978 40 percent believed in the giant creature said to stalk the woods, only 12 percent hold that belief today.

On other topics, 43 percent of teens say they believe in ESP, 21 percent in clairvoyance, 19 percent in witchcraft and 11 percent in the Loch Ness monster.

The telephone survey was conducted with a representative national sample of 502 teenagers ages 13-17 in the fall of 1992. Results were reported through the Emerging Trends newsletter of the Princeton Religion Research Center.

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Legendary W. A. Criswell casts
powerful shadow over SBC fight

By Ferrell Foster

BENTON, Ill. (ABP) -- W. A. Criswell speaks with a voice that is both strong and soft, measured and powerful. The words flow in a lyrical cadence that makes listening easy. And his smile and expressions add a warmth that is winsome.

The legendary senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, who was in Illinois recently to preach to an evangelism conference, took time to be interviewed by the Illinois Baptist newspaper.

Criswell, 83, is one of the giants in Southern Baptist life. He is a man who elicits strong opinions from others. Some hold him in the highest honor, almost revering him. Others ridicule him, almost despise him, for his role in a controversy that has ripped the denomination.

An unabashed "fundamentalist," Criswell has been the theological and inspirational backbone behind fundamental-conservatives who now control the Southern Baptist Convention.

He is a man of strong convictions who speaks with both energy and tenderness. That is how he responded to questions about the SBC controversy.

Now that the controversy has been won, how does he feel about what has happened?

"About 99 percent of the time I cannot understand what is happening," Criswell said. "Now that may be a strange thing to say, but it is all so different than when I was growing up.

"I've always thought of Baptists as being people of the Book. Jesus wants us to accept him as Savior. Jesus wants us to be baptized. Jesus wants us to be faithful in our relationship to him through the church, through the congregation. All of those things, to me, is what it is to be a Baptist.

"All of this division I cannot understand," he continued. "And the teaching in ... so many of our universities I cannot understand. When a teacher avows that the first 11 chapters of Genesis are mythological and legendary, when a teacher will teach that Jesus did not rise from the dead physically, that it is a spiritual resurrection, and when a teacher avows that the Bible is full of contradiction and mistakes and errors, I do not understand. I cannot enter into it.

"When professors in the university and when preachers in the pulpits avow those things that I have just mentioned ... I have a sadness of heart that is almost indescribable."

Criswell said he realizes many moderates do not discount Genesis and the resurrection of Christ. But he asked in a soft, pleading voice, "Then why do they champion those people who do say those things?"

"Many of those moderates are just as I am, and I'm just as they are," he added.

In a now famous remark during a 1988 sermon, Criswell likened moderates to skunks. He said he didn't plan to make that remark. "It just came out of my mouth. ... I grew up with the word 'liberal,' and all the years of my upbringing you had conservatives and liberals. Well, this nomenclature of a moderate was new, you know, and so I made the remark just on the spur of the moment that a skunk by any other name still stinks."

Has the SBC controversy been worth it all?

"The sadness that has come to me in it is the loss of our institutions and the breach that is created between some of our dearest, sweetest pastors and people," Criswell stated. "That to me is a tragedy."

What does he see for the future?

"I may be mistaken in this but I have always felt that the great body of our Baptists would stay ... in the confines and organized life of the Southern Baptist Convention as we have it now -- the Cooperative Program, the seminaries, our great mission enterprises, our Sunday School Board, our mission boards," he said. "I've always felt that the great mass of our churches and our pastors would follow in that train."

Why does he think some Baptists feel uncomfortable with the new leadership?

"That's a mystery to me. I cannot understand it. The breach that has been created between the so-called moderates and the conservatives is largely in the attitudes of the people involved. Many, many of them basically believe the same thing and love the same programming. It carries with it an overtone of sadness that is almost inexplicable."

The pastor's sadness also reaches to his own congregation.

First Baptist of Dallas was rocked last year by the sudden resignation of Pastor Joel Gregory. He complained that the transition from Criswell's leadership to his own was taking too long.

"I cannot understand Dr. Gregory. It's beyond my imagination. ... I cannot understand why he resigned," said Criswell, who has not spoken with Gregory since the resignation. "It broke my heart."

People in the church are discouraged, the senior pastor said. Weekly worship attendance has fallen to about 2,500 from a high of about 5,000 a couple of years ago.

The drop has brought yet another disappointment. After 25 years of broadcasting its worship services on television in Dallas, the church had to drop it at the end of December.

Criswell described the final day of broadcasting as "one of the saddest days of my life."

"It was a matter of money," Criswell said. "The church has so gone down in its financial response." It cost about \$14,000 a Sunday for the air time.

The future of the church depends on the incoming pastor, he said.

"If the church is able to bring into the leadership, into the pulpit, a wonderful man of God, in five minutes all of this in these recent years will be forgotten," Criswell said. "It depends upon that pastor, and that's why I pray day and night that God will bless that search committee in wisdom in seeking that leader for our people."

A pastor search committee of four men and four women is now "assiduously working" to call a new pastor, Criswell said. "The church is in prayer as I have never seen it."

"I no longer enter into the administration of the church," the pastor said. "Whoever comes is going to be 100 percent the leader, the pastor, and the pulpiter. ... I'm a fellow member of the church, and that's all."

Criswell now focuses his attention on Criswell College, which is owned by the church. "I'm at the college, and until I die I'll be at the college."

These are difficult times for Criswell's church and denomination. And, he said, "If not for my faith in God I would be indescribably despondent."

On his visit to Illinois, the aging leader still preached with a power and forcefulness that seized the attention of pastors and lay people who attended the event at Immanuel Baptist Church in Benton.

And, as a mark of his stature among Baptists, people stood in line for his autograph after each service. Others grabbed moments of his time for quick photographs by his side.

Pastor works steadfastly
for racial harmony

By Melanie Childers

JEFFERSONTOWN, Ky. (ABP) -- Baptists often demonstrate better race relations on the basketball court than elsewhere, the longtime pastor of a Kentucky church contends.

Thurmond Coleman, an African-American and pastor of First Baptist Church in Jeffersontown, Ky., cites the basketball league at his church as a winning model of race relations.

For the past two years, the league has been organized in coordination with Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, a predominantly white church. The league's distinguishing characteristic is that black and white Baptists play together on the same teams.

Coleman said he applauds the teams for their spirit of cooperation.

However, his experience trying to bring white and African-American churches together for worship indicates Baptists accomplishments aren't so stunning off the court.

Many Southern Baptist churches will observe Race Relations Sunday Feb. 14, an annual event intended to improve interaction and understanding between races.

Much work remains, Coleman said. "Black and white Baptists in local towns don't even know each other," he said of congregations. "That's sad."

Society has made far greater strides in sports and music, he said. "Christianity always drags behind."

But Coleman's life is a testimony of his commitment to change all that.

He recently celebrated his 37th anniversary as pastor of the Jeffersontown church, a predominately African-American congregation averaging nearly 300 in weekly worship.

Throughout his career, Coleman has been heralded by black and white Baptists alike for his efforts to work with the General Association of Baptists and the Kentucky Baptist Convention to reconcile racial divisions.

The pastor's first introduction to Kentucky Baptists came about 20 years ago when he was asked to speak at an evangelism conference. Since then much of Coleman's work with white Baptists in the state has been through Baptist joint committees, local and state organizations established to serve as a "bridge to bring together black and white" Baptists, he explained.

With representatives from black and white churches, the groups plan joint activities and help engender harmony and understanding between the two races.

He said progress is a little slower than what he would like to see. "I've become frustrated at times in our efforts." At the meetings and joint worship services, for example, black and white participants too often just "shake hands and then go home. It's got to be more than that," the pastor insisted.

African-American and white Christians do have a lot to give to each other, Coleman said, but that won't happen until the two groups develop a respect for each other's culture and worship experiences.

For example, white congregations should "get beyond the idea that black worship is entertainment," he said.

Among contributions African-American congregations can make to white churches is a freedom in worship, where open responsiveness is welcomed, Coleman said. Preachers especially can help worship become alive with excitement and anticipation, he added.

On the other hand, he said, "whites have organization and organizational skill. They have resources and literature and the know-how."

Acclaimed as a civil rights advocate and community activist, Coleman has received numerous community service and distinguished citizen awards. Most recently, he has been appointed by Kentucky's governor to the state Human Rights Commission.

Yet, Coleman admitted, he fights discouragement when confronting continual setbacks. At one recent interracial luncheon, Coleman said he sensed such an attitude of discouragement.

"I told them, 'I know you're tired and weary, but you can't quit,'" he said. "We've come a long way. But still, we ask 'How long, Lord, how long?'"

"I thank God for men across the state who will come together and see people as people. Loving always brings risk. But, oh, what dividends to recognize our oneness in Christ."

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