
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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Christians may be winning
'culture war,' speakers say

By Greg Warner

DEL CITY, Okla. (ABP) -- For conservative Christians, America's "culture war" is not only a battle they must fight but one they are beginning to win. That was the message of preachers and politicians who spoke to the annual seminar of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission near Oklahoma City.

"Something is stirring in America," said William Bennett, former Reagan-Bush appointee and likely 1996 presidential candidate, who cited evidence that conservatives are making "inroads."

"I think we are on the edge of a moral, religious revolution in this country," said the Republican Bennett, the meeting's headliner.

"The Family in Crisis" seminar featured the standard laments about America's moral failures but also cautious optimism that conservative Christian principles are winning out in the struggle to redefine American culture.

"There is a significant awakening within the heart of America," offered host pastor Tom Elliff. "I'm not saying it is coming as rapidly as I think it ought to come," he cautioned, but there is "growing uneasiness" in America about who is shaping the culture. Elliff's primary target: "the entertainment and media elite."

"Many people are waking up to the fact the media is into mind control," said Elliff, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., one of the largest congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Richard Land, the SBC's top ethicist, said he too sees moral Americans waking up and taking charge. "I think I can hear the stirrings of the sleeping giant," he said, quoting Japan's emperor after the World War II bombing of Pearl Harbor.

"There is a real sense of urgency" about America's sad moral state, "but also a sense that God is moving and God is working," said Land, executive director of the Christian Life Commission and organizer of the Feb. 28-March

seminar, which registered about 400 people and attracted 592 to the largest session.

Bennett, who served as secretary of education under President Reagan and drug czar under President Bush, found three evidences that the conservative cause is making inroads:

-- Americans are beginning to recognize the need for change.

-- A book by Harvard law professor Stephen Carter, "The Culture of Disbelief," is convincing many that religious Americans have been unfairly criticized for exerting influence on the culture.

-- "People are starting to fight back in the right way ... by good arguments, good examples, good reasons."

Despite a myriad of social ills, Bennett said, some critics still argue that America suffers from too much religious influence, not too little. "The foolishness and emptiness of that is now becoming more apparent to people."

But Bennett was reluctant to say conservatives are yet winning the culture war. When his new book, "The Book of Virtues," moved passed "Private Parts" by shock-radio's Howard Stern on the New York Times' best-seller list, Bennett said a friend was ready to announce that conservatives had "turned the corner."

"We've not turned the corner yet," Bennett cautioned.

The prime casualty in the culture war is the family, speakers agreed. Pornography, trash TV, feminism, gay rights, abortion, euthanasia, abuse, adultery, promiscuity and "condomania" all undermine the family structure.

Several speakers also decried attempts to redefine the family as anything other than the biblical ideal -- one man and one women in a faithful, lifelong union perhaps blessed by natural or adopted children.

The attempt of homosexuals to "reconstruct" the family as "any physically intimate grouping willingly entered" violates God's plan and the country's good, said Daniel Heimbach, ethics professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Heimbach, who served the Bush administration as domestic-policy adviser and assistant Navy secretary, recently led a lobbying effort to keep gays out of the military.

While the family is the primary target in the culture war, ironically it is also the cure for what ails America, seminar speakers said.

The family is the first institution God created, but it is also the most important, said Jimmy Draper, president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School board. And it is God's primary tool for influencing society, he said.

"It is a more important religious institution than the church, a more important educational institution than the school, a more important law-and-order institution than the government."

"The family is the first and most important department of health, education and welfare," concurred Bennett, a Roman Catholic. "Its dissolution is the most important fact about America."

Education reform is a critical element in America's culture war, warned Bennett and others. "Who wins gets to teach the children," the former education secretary said. "Who gets to teach the children is not a small part of what matters, ... it defines what matters."

Nancy Schaefer denounced outcomes-based education, a strategy that evaluates learning according to expected academic and value-driven goals. She charged that President Clinton's "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" is built around the objectives of outcomes-based education, which she said will mandate state-approved thinking.

"Families are denied in this federal takeover of American education," said Schaefer, president of Family Concerns and a former mayoral candidate in Atlanta. Parents will find themselves "looking into the eyes of a potential totalitarian state headed for a one-world government," she warned.

The stakes are high in America's culture war, the speakers agreed. What is at risk, however, is more than the family and more than a way of life; it is a battle for the soul and survival of America.

"When a nation forgets that ultimately the law originates in the mind and heart of Almighty God, that nation is already on the way to destruction," said Mike Huckabee of Arkansas, a preacher turned politician.

Huckabee, elected lieutenant governor of Arkansas in 1993, said America's cultural crisis is owing to three factors -- a rejection of absolutes, reckless lifestyles and religious impotence.

Public opinion and the consent of the governed are insufficient bases for government, said Huckabee, former pastor of Southern Baptist churches in Pine Bluff and Texarkana, Ark. "Hitler had the consent of the governed," he warned. Hitler's rule of Germany was wrong because "it violated a higher law, the law of God," Huckabee said.

"When a society doesn't believe it has the right to establish boundaries based on the highest value and the highest good, that society will fall."

Like President Bill Clinton, Huckabee is a Southern Baptist politician from Hope, Ark. But Huckabee, a Republican, has little else in common with Clinton, whose Democratic social policies were targets of much criticism during the three-day seminar.

"There are Southern Baptist politicians, and then there are Southern Baptist politicians," quipped the CLC's Land after Huckabee spoke.

Bennett said he wanted to give some credit to Clinton, who in recent speeches has touted the importance of parenting, character and the social influence of religious faith.

"Now that he has spoken it, may he live it. Now that he has spoken it, may we all live it," Bennett said to thunderous applause.

Like Huckabee, theologian Albert Mohler traced the roots of the culture war, which he said stems from the Enlightenment, an intellectual movement of the 17th and 18th centuries that celebrated the power of human reason.

American culture now suffers because of the rise of individualism and the glorification of personal fulfillment, said Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. He cited five factors in the demise of American culture:

-- Social engineering, which views the role of the family as subordinate to the interests of the government. This approach is typified by the utopian vision of French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, Mohler said. "Like almost all utopians, he cared deeply for humanity as a concept; it was human beings he couldn't stand."

-- Ideological feminism, which is in "open and declared" war on the family. "The nuclear family is, by this view, a trap, a tomb." Feminism teaches that "the family is not a biological given but a social intervention."

-- The therapeutic cult, which focuses on "liberating the individual" through psychotherapy. "There is no longer sin; there is just a lack of self-esteem." This force convinced parents they were incompetent to raise children, Mohler said.

-- The consumer culture, in which materialistic desires keep fathers from assuming responsibility in the home and force mothers out of the home and into the work force. "A culture that has abandoned itself to materialism ... is one that will automatically sacrifice the family," Mohler said.

-- The media elite, who promote values in opposition to average Americans. "It is very difficult to find anything that is recognizable as resembling the traditional family" on television, Mohler said, and that demonstrates "how socially separated the media are from contemporary culture." Television watching is itself anti-family, Mohler added, "because

t is not a shared experience."

Host pastor Elliff was more direct in his attack on the media. He called the country's entertainment and media industry "a malignancy on the soul of America."

"The entertainment and media industry, consciously or unconsciously, are working in concert to undermine the very core of our country," he said. The media "have ceased becoming a reflection of the values of America and are pressuring us to share their values."

He prescribed both avoidance and confrontation for Christians.

"Avoid association with anything in the entertainment industry that smacks of evil. ... There must be no compromise. It is time for you and me to become selective."

But turning off the TV "is not a good enough answer" to immoral content, he said, because "what happens to my neighbor does affect me. ... It lowers the moral value of our community."

Therefore, Christians should confront broadcasters, video store owners, grocery store managers and others who sell smut, he said.

In the long haul, however, Americans will change the moral climate only when they get "changed hearts" through trusting Christ, Elliff said. "You can't expect lost people to want the same things saved people want."

Until then, he urged Christians: "Bury yourself in the Book of God and the values of God, and you can make a difference in the values of our nation."

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- This story contains information from Tammi Ledbetter.

Annuity Board considering
'sin free' fund, Powell says

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (ABP) -- Some consideration has been given to establishing a "sin free" fund at the Southern Baptist Annuity Board, in which people could designate their retirement funds to be invested with the understanding they would earn considerably lower interest than other funds, Annuity Board President Paul Powell told trustees recently.

Some critics believe the Annuity Board's current policies do not go far enough to safeguard that none of the funds managed by the agency of the Southern Baptist Convention are invested in corporations which promote or provide abortion.

"The water hits the wheel at the point of our investing in companies that make contributions to Planned Parenthood," Powell told the Annuity Board trustees.

That concern was voiced clearly in discussions at a recent meeting of the SBC Executive Committee, Powell told Annuity Board trustees meeting in Dallas Feb. 28-March 1.

Both Powell and trustee Chairman William Willis spent much of their reporting time with trustees explaining the discussions concerning the Annuity Board during the meeting of the Executive Committee Feb. 21-22.

Powell told trustees he and Willis spoke to questions asked by Executive Committee members about the board's position on abortion and how it affected its investment policy, about whether some of the services being offered by the agency violate its official program statement, and why the Annuity Board manages the retirement program for the SBC-rival Cooperative Baptist

Fellowship.

At one point in the Executive Committee meeting it was proposed that the board's Cooperative Program allocation be made dependent on a tougher stand against abortion. That was dropped, however, Powell said, when he explained the board's policy against investing in companies that are publicly perceived as providing services or products that aid, support or promote abortion.

The Annuity Board invests retirement funds in 750-to-1,000 companies, many with complex holdings. As a result, Powell said, it is almost impossible to determine if some are contributing to Planned Parenthood or other causes. Many, he explained, establish separate charitable foundations which make such contributions.

Powell said he personally opposes abortion and has called the offices of Planned Parenthood to ask about the sources of their support, but was told they would not reveal them.

The Annuity Board has a stated policy against investing funds in companies that are publicly perceived as providing services or support for abortion, Powell noted. But, he added, the board "walks a fine line of Christian concern and fiduciary responsibility" to manage retirement funds in the best interest of its participants.

A new "sin free" fund would require \$10 million to establish, Powell noted.

Willis noted that during a discussion in an Executive Committee subcommittee, a list of the salaries of the top administrators of the Annuity Board was distributed by one of the Executive Committee members.

Willis said he told the Executive Committee members that distribution of the list was contrary to Annuity Board trustee action. Many of the Executive Committee members apologized to him for the member's impropriety, Willis said.

Powell, in turn, said if an Annuity Board trustee had provided the list it was an example of "very poor trusteeship."

Another matter receiving Executive Committee attention, Powell said, concerned charges that the Annuity Board is offering investment services to SBC agencies not specified in the agency's official program statement.

Because of questions raised by some state Baptist foundations, the annuity Board will seek a change in its program statement to permit it to manage additional funds, Willis said.

Powell noted that funds are not those from wills or estates but from institutions which can profit from the investment leverage available through the Annuity Board's \$4.5 billion in assets.

Another question was raised, Powell and Willis noted, about the board's providing retirement plans for agencies outside the SBC.

In addition to its church and SBC/state convention institutional plans, the Annuity Board also administers plans for Criswell College, Mid-America Baptist Seminary and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. At the Executive Committee's request, the board will not expand to other institutions outside the SBC, Powell said.

The Executive Committee is currently studying what to do about future relations with the Fellowship, and the Annuity Board will abide by whatever "bounds" it establishes, Willis said.

In his report to the board, Powell said that trust is the greatest asset of the board, not its almost \$4.5 billion in financial assets or its \$1.4 billion daily growth rate.

"The people of the Southern Baptist Convention trust us," he said.

The board has a stewardship to protect that trust, he added.

Annuity Board proposing
changes in retirement plan

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Annuity Board is proposing changes to its basic retirement program for churches that officials say will make the plan easier to administer and understand.

"We are trying to make the Church Annuity Plan more understandable so the people can feel better about it and about us," Gordon Hobgood, executive vice president and chief operating officer, told Annuity Board trustees meeting in Dallas Feb. 28-March 1.

The proposed changes would bring the Church Annuity Plan into conformity with standard provisions of other plans, simplify and clarify it and conform to administrative practice, a summary stated.

To encourage the state conventions to allow the changes, the Annuity Board is offering to fund the states' entire protection section -- which pays for supplemental disability protection and survivor benefits -- for five years, at a cost of \$35 million, Hobgood said.

"We are proposing it because we are able to do it and because of the ease in administration that it will provide," said Hobgood. "It is very difficult now to have people understand the difference between the church plan and other corporate plans."

The changes must be approved by Baptist state conventions, which participate with the Annuity Board by offering matching funds to encourage churches and ministers to invest in the retirement program.

The proposed amendments to the Church Annuity Plan, Hobgood said, would:

-- Allow state conventions to determine requirements for coverage of non-ministerial employees. The current provision is that all employees of a church are automatically covered as of Jan. 1, 1998.

-- Provide for withdrawals of funds from the plan regardless of a participant's age if he or she discontinues service. Currently, if a person has \$20,000 or more in the retirement plan, it cannot be withdrawn until the person is 55.

-- Permit participants to borrow from their retirement accounts. The amount of the loan has not been established.

-- Allow participants in the old Plan A program to receive a reduced retirement benefit at age 55, regardless of whether they have terminated service with all churches and associations, which is the current provision.

The state conventions will be asked to consider the changes this fall. If all approve, the changes will go into effect Jan. 1, said Hobgood.

In other business, the trustees were told that Annuity Board assets had risen to almost \$4.5 billion through Jan. 31 and are growing at the rate of \$1.4 million daily. Treasurer Harold Richardson reported that total contributions to retirement accounts were \$223 million in 1993 and \$140 million in retirement benefits were paid. The total number of persons covered in the adopt-an-annuitant program, providing supplemental retirement benefits, is now 1,506.

Richardson noted that beginning in October all funds received by the Annuity Board through the Cooperative Program -- \$1,080,000 -- will go to relief.

Pastor leaving church
that was ousted by SBC

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (ABP) -- The pastor of a church kicked out of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1992 for licensing a homosexual to the ministry has said she will resign the pastorate, citing repercussions from the episode.

Linda Jordan, senior pastor of Olin T. Binkley Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, N.C., mailed a letter in late February to the congregation announcing she would step down Aug. 31.

Nearly all of Jordan's four-year pastorate has been tumultuous, the Raleigh News & Observer reported March 2. When the church voted to call her in May 1990 as its first woman pastor, several members left.

A decision in April 1992 to license John Blevins, an openly gay Duke Divinity School student, created another split, with seven of Binkley's 20 deacons resigning in protest and a number of longtime members deserting their pews.

That decision gained national attention when the Southern Baptist Convention voted in 1992 not to recognize messengers from Binkley and another church in North Carolina -- Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh -- which held a marriage-type ceremony for a gay couple.

Although neither church requested to have messengers at the SBC, it marked the first time a church had ever been excluded from the nearly 150-year-old convention for doctrinal deviation. Because of the episode, the SBC amended its constitution to expressly exclude from membership any church which acts to affirm, approve or endorse homosexual behavior.

The two churches were also voted out of the Baptist Convention of North Carolina.

"It goes without saying that the last four years have been strenuous ones for the Binkley congregation and for me," Jordan said. "We have dealt with some very difficult and controversial issues."

"Nevertheless," she said, "change demands a high price, especially of those in leadership."

Jordan told the congregation she was not being fired, but that she felt the "need to make a change."

"I have felt supported by the majority of the membership. I was not asked to resign, nor has there been undue pressure to force my resignation," she said.

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Court rejects fetal-life case,
will review pornography law

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court Feb. 27 refused a request to clarify how far states may go in protecting fetal life but agreed to decide whether defendants convicted of distributing child pornography must be aware that the materials involved actors under 18.

Patrick Murphy, a Cook County public guardian for Baby Boy Doe, wanted the Supreme Court to intervene after lower courts refused to order the mother to deliver the baby by Caesarian section for medical reasons. The high court, without comment, rejected the case.

Cook County officials had sought an injunction to force the Caesarian

delivery because the fetus was not receiving enough oxygen. Doctors testified that without a Caesarian-section delivery, the unborn fetus was at risk of sustaining brain damage and of not surviving a normal delivery.

The mother refused the Caesarian procedure because of religious beliefs.

Murphy had asked the nation's high court to force the lower courts to balance the rights of the unnamed mother to practice her religion and make decisions concerning medical care against the state's compelling interest in preserving the life of a fetus capable of living outside the womb.

"It is important to note that in the most fundamental sense, the interests of the mother, the unborn child, and society are not in conflict here," Murphy's appeal to the high court states. "The mother wants to give birth to a healthy child. It is certainly in the unborn child's best interests to be born, and to be healthy.

"The state has an interest in insuring that Baby Boy Doe is born alive and well, so that he can become a productive citizen of the State of Illinois."

In the child pornography case, the Supreme Court agreed to review an appeal court's decision striking down a federal pornography distribution law because it allows a defendant to be convicted without knowing that at least one of the performers in the sexually explicit materials was a minor.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which covers California and other Western states, concluded that the First Amendment requires that persons charged under a law barring distribution, shipping and receipt of child pornography must know that the materials involve underage actors.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Boy Scouts cannot require
oath to God, court rules

LOS ANGELES (ABP) -- The Boy Scouts of America cannot exclude members who refuse to swear duty to God, a California appellate court ruled Feb. 28.

The 4th District Court of Appeals allowed 12-year-old twins Michael and William Randall of Anaheim to remain Boy Scouts. The boys had been kicked out for refusing to recite "God" in the Scouts' oath.

The court ruled that Scouting is essentially a business and therefore cannot discriminate based on religious belief.

The boys were kicked out in 1991 and reinstated by a lower court in 1992. The Boy Scouts appealed the ruling, now upheld by the appeals court.

Last December, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear another challenge to the Scouts' requirement that members affirm a belief in God.

In that case, the high court left standing lower court rulings that a federal anti-discrimination law did not apply to the Boy Scouts.

The case involved an Illinois youth, Mark Welsh, an agnostic, who was prevented from joining a suburban-Chicago Cub Scout pack for refusing to sign a pledge promising "to love God."

Last year, the Girl Scouts of America changed their oath to allow members to substitute for "God" other words they deem appropriate.

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Rapist who was HIV-positive
convicted of attempted murder

MIAMI (ABP) -- A jury in Miami has found a man guilty of attempted murder because he knew he carried the AIDS virus when he kidnapped and raped an 11-year-old boy.

The jury accepted the virus as a deadly weapon, convicting Ignacio Perea Jr., 32, of attempted murder, kidnapping, sexual battery and lewd and lascivious assault.

Perea and an accomplice who has not been identified kidnapped the boy while he was riding his bicycle in 1991. The boy was blindfolded, taken to a warehouse, raped and forced to perform sex acts on the men.

Perea faces similar charges involving 11- and 13-year-old boys in November 1991. The three boys have tested negative for the AIDS virus.

Lawyers and other legal experts said the Feb. 28 decision is the nation's first attempted-murder conviction for an HIV-positive rapist.

In a related case in Oregon, a man was convicted of attempted murder in 1992 for exposing a 17-year-old girl to the AIDS virus in consensual sex.

In another case, also in Oregon, an HIV-positive man was charged with attempted murder and rape for sex acts with children, but charges were reduced in a plea bargain in 1993.

Also in Oregon, an HIV-positive woman was convicted of attempted murder last year for biting a deputy.

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