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Clinton offers nation 'new social compact'

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The religious community must help Americans forge a "new social compact" of responsibility, opportunity and citizenship, President Clinton said in his Jan. 24 State of the Union Address before a joint session of Congress.

Clinton, a Southern Baptist, said he is proud that the United States has more houses of worship per capita than any other country in the world.

Religious leaders "can ignite their congregations to carry their faith into action, can reach out to all of our children, to all people in distress, to those who have been savaged by the breakdown of all we hold dear," he said.

"And our religious leaders and their congregations can make all the difference."

Clinton revived a promise to establish a "new covenant" between government and the citizenry. The biblical image, when first used two years ago in his inaugural address, angered some conservative Christians, who object to some of the Democratic president's social policies.

The 80-minute speech was delivered to a Congress which, for the first time in 40 years, is controlled by Republicans. Clinton proffered bipartisan, centrist themes, calling for a leaner and less intrusive government that focuses on civic responsibility.

"Our civil life is suffering in America today. Citizens are working together less and shouting at each other more. The common bonds of community which have been the great strength of our country from its very beginning are badly frayed."

He continued, "All Americans have not just a right but a solemn responsibility to rise as far as their God-given talents and determination can take them, and to give something back to their communities and their country in return."

He called on the leaders from every sector to help with a national campaign against teen pregnancy. He has

sent to Congress a plan to target schools across the country with anti-pregnancy programs.

But government is limited, he said, and sweeping social change requires responsibility from every citizen. He pointed to six citizens sitting in the gallery with First Lady Hillary Clinton as examples.

Two of them were ministers, John and Diana Cherry of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Temple Hills, Md. In the early 1980s, they left government service to begin a house church. Today the church has 17,000 members -- one of the largest in the nation, growing by an average of 200 a month, Clinton said.

The president said he is impressed with the Cherrys' commitment for two reasons. First, he learned they were building a new sanctuary closer to a higher-crime area "because they thought it was part of their ministry to change the lives of the people who needed them." Second, Clinton said, he recalled John Cherry left a White House meeting of religious leaders so that he could meet with 150 couples he had brought to the church for marriage counseling.

"This is the kind of work that citizens are doing in America; we need more of it, and it ought to be lifted up and supported," Clinton said.

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Little Rock BSU director asked to resign over beliefs

By Bob Allen

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- A veteran Baptist campus minister in Little Rock, Ark., has stepped down because of questions about his beliefs.

Dan McCauley, 50, Baptist Student Union director at the University of Arkansas in Little Rock since 1977, was asked by supervisors to resign or face firing following recent complaints about his theology by two students and their pastor, according to sources.

Don Moore, executive director of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, told members of the state's executive board that McCauley's views on biblical authority, extra-biblical revelation and security of the believer "differ significantly from our commonly held faith" as Southern Baptists, the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine reported in its Dec. 29 issue.

Moore did not give the executive board a detailed description of McCauley's views that he found troublesome.

He told the Arkansas newspaper, however, that McCauley's disputed views "have not been taught in formal settings but have been communicated in conferences with individuals and with the staff from time to time."

As a condition of his severance agreement, McCauley said, he is not free to discuss details of the resignation. He is on leave of absence with pay until March 31.

However, in a text of a sermon he preached Jan. 15 at a Little Rock church, McCauley said he believes "there is some misunderstanding" about his views.

McCauley said he believes the Bible is "fully inspired by the Holy Spirit" and "totally sufficient in leading us into an understanding of who God is and our responsibility in that relationship."

However, he said, "I believe the Bible is a tool to lead us to God, not a substitute for a relationship with God."

"We are not 'born again' through our relationship to the Bible but through our relationship with God," he said. "My position is that ultimate authority should only be given to God as revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy

Spirit."

Without the Holy Spirit's role to "convict" the believer of the truths contained in Scripture, commitment to the Bible can descend into "bibliolatry," a "heresy (that) is hindering people from entering the kingdom of heaven," he said.

McCauley said he does believe God is revealed outside the Bible as well. "Even though I believe the Bible to be sufficient, I do not believe the Bible to contain all there is to know about truth," he said. "I believe the scriptures when they testify that God is truth. And whereas neither science nor philosophy nor religion can contain the whole of God, where there is truth in science, it is of God; where there is truth in philosophy, it is of God; and where there is truth in religion, it is of God."

Concerning the possibility that believers may "fall from grace" and lose their salvation, McCauley said, "I believe that what God holds in the palm of his hand cannot be snatched by any other power on earth or in the spiritual realms, but I believe we do not lose our free will just because we are saved or born-again."

Acknowledging that some people regard the possibility of apostasy as being "contrary to Scripture," McCauley countered that the issue "is just a matter of interpretation and emphasis."

"Why would I even suggest to a student that it may be possible to reject our covenant with God?" McCauley asked. "Cheap grace. For decades we have been baptizing young people in our churches who see Jesus only as Savior, not Lord."

"Can I, in good conscience, sit back and allow my students to believe that all God desires from us is our name on a church membership role somewhere?" he asked. "I think not."

Some of McCauley's supporters say that his views were not only misunderstood but did not get a fair hearing before he was asked to resign.

While Moore insists that McCauley's theological positions have been a concern for years, his supporters say the problem surfaced only recently, when two students discussed their concerns with their pastor. The pastor reportedly arranged a meeting with Moore, at which the students repeated their concerns.

Later, at an annual performance review, McCauley learned for the first time he was in danger of being fired, according to Fred Ball, pastor of Lakeshore Drive Baptist Church in Little Rock and a long-time friend of McCauley.

McCauley was sent back to work with a warning against aberrant teaching, Ball said. Then, a few weeks later, McCauley was called in for another meeting, where Moore told him "he just didn't have a peace about" the arrangement and demanded McCauley's immediate resignation within four days, according to Ball.

McCauley's pastor, Walter Draughon of Calvary Baptist Church in Little Rock, intervened to negotiate a postponed resignation date to give McCauley time to find another job. Moore and McCauley at first agreed he would work through May 15 and receive six weeks' severance pay in accordance with personnel policies. Under pressure from members of the state executive board at a meeting Dec. 13, Moore went back to McCauley to renegotiate a Dec. 31 termination with full pay and benefits through March 31, followed by six weeks' severance pay.

Other than the two students who initiated the complaint against McCauley, "no other student from the BSU was ever talked to," said BSU president Joey Cobble, a senior at UALR. Cobble said he was never invited to meet with state convention leaders about concerns over McCauley's alleged teachings, even though he faxed a letter to the state convention office asking for a meeting. Cobble said he received only a phone call from David James, the state BSU director.

An attempt was made to contact Moore or James for further comment, but neither was available.

The controversy over McCauley's termination divided the BSU, pitting friends of the two students "who got the ball rolling" against other active members close to the minister, said Cobble.

When the two groups sat down together, "We found out some of the ministers involved were kind of

turning the two factions in the BSU against each other," Cobble said. Since that discussion, "a healing process of sorts" has begun, he said.

An interim director from out of state has been hired for the semester, he said.

"The mood in the BSU right now is a lot better than I ever thought it would have been," said Cobble. "The ministry -- I don't think has been hindered. I think there still might be some problems with trust for a while."

Cobble said support for McCauley was strong among BSU members, even for students who did not agree with everything he taught.

"Dan was a real deep thinker who would challenge you. Some people respond to that better than others," he said. "Even those people who weren't as close to Dan felt an injustice had been done."

Students were aware that McCauley's mother had died only a few days before he was asked to resign and that he was also dealing with other family problems. Also, it was right before Christmas. "It was just a really, really bad time for a person to be told to resign quietly before Monday," Cobble said.

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Dunn identifies problems with 'Christian Right' label

NEW YORK (ABP) -- The so-called "Christian Right" is "stronger, more focused, more dangerous than ever," a Baptist church-state specialist told a Jewish women's organization in New York Jan. 24.

The movement has raised money, mastered electronic religion and talk radio, and taken over the Republican Party mechanisms in 18 states, said James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee.

While acknowledging the movement's strength in an address to Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, Dunn questioned whether "Christian Right" is an appropriate label.

Elements of the movement are Christian or religious in aspiration, he said: "Who quarrels with the idea of fostering families, curbing crime, diminishing drug abuse, protecting children and expecting government to work?"

But tactics sometimes identified with the "Religious Right" are only Christian in the sense that the Crusades of the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries were Christian, he said. "The current politics of personal destruction regrettably have historical precedent."

In addition, many Christians are unwilling to attach the label "Christian" to some aspects of the movement's agenda. Many strongly resent the "promotion of mean, merciless economic extremism as Christian," he said.

It's not the movement's religiosity but its platform that is troublesome, Dunn said, citing Yale law professor Stephen Carter.

He criticized the movement's support for government-sponsored religion in schools, tax dollars for private and parochial students, and slashing federal food programs by \$60 billion, three times the cutbacks of the early Reagan years.

Equally troubling, Dunn said, is the movement's use of "extreme distortion and outright lies" to advance its agenda.

"The voter guides, routinely distributed at churches, often without church consent, distort by drastic oversimplification the positions of politicians on the issues," he said.

But a spokeswoman for the Family Research Council, a Washington lobby group often associated with the Christian Right, said the movement is getting a bad rap. A media bias against "a faith-based approach" to politics gives many people the wrong impression of Christian conservatives, said Christy Hamrick, press secretary for the Family Research Council.

"Let us not be so naive as to believe that the way we are portrayed in the media is the way we are," she told Associated Baptist Press.

Hamrick said political differences between Christians are to be expected. "As people who do have strong moral concerns, it will be impossible for all of us to agree," she said. "We are not always going to like the way that some Christians get involved in issues we care about."

What is needed, and often lacking, is tolerance from both sides, she said.

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-- By Larry Chesser and Greg Warner

Children's advocates at capitol rally urge changes in priorities, programs

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Children are precious to God, and any society that fails to value and protect them is disobedient to a divine mandate, a Baptist preacher told about 1,000 children's advocates who marched on the Texas Capitol in Austin on Jan. 25.

"Our state needs to change its policies to demonstrate love for people who really matter," said community activist Bill Lawson, pastor of the Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, an African-American congregation in Houston. "We need to change the priorities of this state."

Lawson spoke from the steps of the Capitol as part of Children's Advocacy Day at the Capitol. The event was sponsored by Texans Care for Children, an advocacy group whose membership includes about 75 non-profit organizations.

The goal of the day-long gathering was to unite a thousand voices in presenting the needs of children who have no voice in public policy decision-making, said Phil Strickland, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and Texans Care for Children founder.

Children's potential for learning and productivity is shaped largely by environment during the first three years of life, former Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby reminded the children's advocates, citing research. He called for better prenatal and early childhood medical care, expanded parenting education, quality child care and improved coordination of social services.

And as changes are made in the welfare system, Hobby said, the needs of children need to be remembered. "My concern is that we not make a bad situation worse, that we not forget what we have recently learned about the critical importance of the first years in the life of a child. Whatever changes are made in welfare should improve what happens in those first years," Hobby said. "We cannot afford to make it worse, and we cannot afford business as usual."

Texas is paying a price for failing to make children a priority, according to Shirley Hammond, president of Texans Care for Children.

"Consider the price Texas pays for child abuse. Studies show that many victims of abuse become

criminals, alcoholics or mentally ill. But in our state, 40 percent of the children who are identified as abused receive no services beyond initial identification and investigation," Hammond said.

Speaking to the children's advocates at First Baptist Church of Austin, the starting point for the march to the Capitol, state Sen. Jim Turner also emphasized the link between crime and child abuse, neglect and poverty.

"The best way to wage war on crime and to fight drugs is to be serious about prevention and early intervention in childhood," said Turner, chairman of the Texas Commission on Children and Youth and a deacon at First Baptist Church of Crockett, Texas. "It is not only the right thing to do, but also a wise investment in the future of Texas."

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