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Oklahoma City bombing takes lives, robs nation of sense of security

By Dave Parker

OKLAHOMA CITY (ABP) -- An April 19 car bomb explosion at the federal building in Oklahoma City sent shock waves reportedly felt by people 66 miles away in Stillwater. But on a more profound level, it shattered for a nation the illusion that anyone, anywhere, is safe from terrorist attack.

Local television and radio stations interrupted regular programming with the chilling announcement that a large explosion had rocked a building downtown. As word spread about the bombing, people gathered around television sets in disbelief. Impromptu prayer meetings were held for the victims and families of the bombings.

Twenty-four hours after the explosion, 36 deaths had been confirmed -- including 12 children from a day-care center operated on the building's second floor -- though the death toll is expected to rise much higher. Another 460 people had been treated in 12 area hospitals, and many remained in serious or critical condition.

Another 200 people remained unaccounted for by midday April 20. As many as 800 people -- both employees and others -- were believed to be in the building at the time. As rescuers continued to pry through the rubble of the nine-story building searching for signs of life, hope dimmed that more survivors would be found.

Meanwhile, police arrested three men of Middle Eastern extraction in connection with the explosion. Two of the arrests were made in Dallas and the other in Oklahoma. A fourth person -- described as a possible witness and perhaps a suspect -- was being returned from London, where he had flown April 19.

The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building is located at Fifth and Robinson in Oklahoma City. First Baptist Church is seven blocks away at 12th and Robinson. The stained-glass windows of First Baptist were blown out and damage to the roof is suspected.

The church had only two members who worked at or near the bomb site and both escaped injury, said Gene Garrison, pastor of First Baptist. Garrison said one was in California at the time and one had moved to a new location six weeks earlier.

There were several known casualties among friends and relatives of church members, though. One former member had a son working on the eighth floor of the nine-story building. He was still missing more than a day afterward. A former staff evangelist at First Southern Baptist Church in Del City lost two grandchildren in the blast.

Nicoma Park Baptist Church reported four members and one former member still missing and presumed dead.

Because of the severity of the blast and the amount of rubble, though, it is expected to take days or weeks before a complete death count is known, and before churches know how many members are affected.

First Baptist, because of its location, became a staging area for firefighters and other emergency personnel in the hours after the explosion. Church workers were already gearing up for the Wednesday night meal, so they decided to start making sandwiches for emergency crews.

Rescue efforts were slowed by several additional bomb scares, and ambulances were kept two blocks away from the building, stretching back past the church.

"Around 12:30 or 1, our staff just spontaneously began making sandwiches and handing them out," Garrison said. "They made more than 1,000 sandwiches, and First Christian Church brought over 300. They started walking up the street, handing out sandwiches."

Later that evening, the BGCO Brotherhood department's disaster-relief unit began serving meals out of the church parking lot.

"Our people are still in shock," Garrison said. "Last night (April 19) in our prayer service, we had a lot of people there. More than half were rescue workers. Instead of me speaking, I let them talk about their feelings and concerns."

Regular Sunday worship services April 23 are being revamped into a prayer and Scripture-sharing time.

"I don't know what is the right thing to do," Garrison said. "We do need to be praying for the doctors, nurses, chaplains, counselors and ministers, so that they will know how to deal with these people."

Employees of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma felt the Baptist Building shake three or four times, as if in an earthquake, three-and-one-half miles away. Peering through windows, they saw a plume of white smoke rising from the downtown area. The white smoke turned to black as cars in the federal building parking lot caught fire.

Ministers from across the metropolitan area helped counsel victims and families at an Oklahoma City church. Even people not directly affected are trying to deal with the loss of security they once felt.

"This just proves that we don't have any security in this world," Garrison said. "Apart from our personal faith in God, there is no security. Here we are in a good Midwestern town, with good neighbors, but you can be driving downtown at Fifth and Harvey and have it all end in an instant."

Ted Kersh, pastor of Village Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, agreed.

"This should cause us to be real aggressive for evangelism," he said. "Eternity was bombarded with souls Wednesday morning. We need to get people ready, so they will spend eternity with Jesus Christ."

Kersh said Village Church only had one member hurt in the blast, but many members were affected emotionally, like Police Chief Sam Gonzalez.

Kersh said the church is involved in counseling people. "I immediately sent some staff to high schools in the area, because we got a call" about some high-school students whose parents were in the building. He also said two church members who are psychologists are providing counseling free of charge.

Charles Graves, pastor of Quail Springs Baptist Church in Oklahoma City and president of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma, said Quail Springs Baptist Church only had one member who suffered a minor injury but had a couple of near misses. He said one woman who stopped to put gasoline in her car got to work one minute after the explosion.

Graves said the Baptist convention is asking churches to take up a love offering April 23 and April 30 to help those in need. "This is so localized, and people are not displaced from their homes. So supplies we normally provide are not needed. The people do, however, need money to help with hospital bills."

Graves said he did not detect so much a sense of insecurity as anger among Oklahoma City residents.

"This can happen anywhere," he said. "Any terrorist with half a brain -- which is about what I think these people had -- knows that the way you terrify people is to do things in places not expected, in ways not expected.

"I just hope this doesn't turn into racial hatred. We need to find those responsible, but not blame the innocent."

The arrest of the three Middle Easterners and similarities with other terrorist bombings raised fears among some of an anti-Arab backlash.

"I'm concerned there is going to be hysteria and all Arabs are going to suffer as a result, including Christian Arabs," said Baptist layperson Linda Adams, a Middle East expert and assistant professor of political science at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. "In this society, we are so willing to stereotype people without really understanding that everybody from a certain group isn't that way."

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College staff, students aid bomb rescue effort

By Marty O'Gwynn and Ray Fink

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. (ABP) -- When Juanita Johnson heard of the explosion at Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, she knew what she needed to do.

Working in her office at Oklahoma Baptist University's school of nursing -- 37 miles from the blast -- Johnson grabbed a lab coat and began the trip from the Shawnee campus west to the heart of Oklahoma City.

A former nurse at St. Anthony's Hospital, Johnson called the hospital from her car and was guided through a maze of emergency vehicles to arrive at St. Anthony's -- just a few blocks from the blast site -- within an hour of the April 19 explosion.

Within another hour, five nursing students from the Baptist university also arrived at St. Anthony's and linked up with Johnson to help in the aftermath of the worst terrorist attack in United States history.

At around 10:30 a.m., fear of a second bomb sent rescue workers racing from the federal building. Meanwhile, medical teams prepared for a second wave of victims they expected to arrive when rescuers returned to the devastated building.

But as workers re-entered the facility, they did not locate large numbers of trapped people as they had hoped. "We worked with two units to prepare for more victims, but there weren't any patients to take care of," Johnson said.

Later, about 18 more OBU students left a campus prayer vigil to lend a hand in the rescue operation. Some packed and distributed meals for Feed the Children, an Oklahoma City-based international ministry led by a Baptist layman. Others were given badges at the emergency scene and asked to counsel and comfort the people there, mostly firemen and policemen who were dealing with the carnage.

Back at St. Anthony's hospital, the nursing students assisted families of victims who sought word on the status of loved ones. Hundreds of family members were directed to a gymnasium inside the hospital.

"There were at least 200 family members in that gymnasium," said Johnson. "You could walk over to anybody and experience an outpouring of anguish, misery and fear. ... For most of the families, we didn't have any information to give them. It was chaotic."

"We sat and talked with them and just supported them," said Therese Miner, a senior from Seminole, Okla. "We'd get them water, or if they had been there all day, we tried to get them to eat."

Miner said the students' emotions were pulled the hardest as they stood by parents who learned their children had died in the building's day-care center. "I think it was all really tragic, but the babies are the ones that really stick out in our minds," Miner said.

Hospital officials dealt with an overflow of volunteer medical personnel across Oklahoma City, as people sought to aid the victims and their families. Area emergency services personnel often work on disaster preparation in a region where the most common disasters are caused by spring storms and tornadoes.

"They were very well organized," said Claudine Dickey, dean of OBU's school of nursing. "Obviously there were more victims than you would ever expect to see from a tornado. Oklahoma did what we were prepared to do."

Miner and Debbie Birney, a senior from Shawnee, arrived in Oklahoma City about 11 a.m. and worked until about 6 p.m. The three other students, LeAnn Richardson, a senior from Shawnee; Ronda Edmonson, a junior from Lawton, Okla.; and Angela Kersh, an Oklahoma City junior, arrived shortly after Birney and Miner.

The OBU students, working closely with Johnson, were able to provide assistance throughout the day and evening.

"They were more like colleagues to me than students," said Johnson.

The nursing professor stayed at St. Anthony's until late in the afternoon. She left the students working with two counselors as they continued assisting families.

People with ties to the Baptist university also were among the victims. A relative of one OBU staff member who worked in the HUD office inside the Murrah building was among the estimated 200 people missing on the morning of April 20.

Among the injured were Capt. Randy Norfleet, a 1987 OBU graduate and a naval aviator who was in the building at the time, and an OBU student's father, who fell at least two floors as the north side of the building crumbled.

Southern trustees OK budget with impending \$900,000 cut

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Nearly \$1 million in expenses will be cut from the budget of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in a largely unexplained "budget reduction" approved by trustees April 19.

Documents approved by trustees say this \$918,497 reduction "will be realized substantially through a program of restructuring, an early retirement incentive program, a change in post-retirement benefit policy and other budget reductions, if necessary."

In a news conference after the trustee meeting, seminary President Albert Mohler and trustee chairman Rick White declined to say how many positions might be eliminated or when news of the staff cuts would be made public. They also declined to say how many faculty members would be eligible for the early-retirement package or what the terms of that package would be.

The trustee-approved budget for the 1995-96 fiscal year assumes that the reductions will have been made by July 31, 1995, the day before the new fiscal year begins. Mohler has authority to make the reductions in consultation with the seminary's financial board, a small group of trustees.

Both Mohler and faculty sources said the early retirement incentive was not an attempt by the administration to get rid of faculty members. The idea was developed by the faculty and presented to the president and trustees before the recent crisis related to the Carver School of Church Social Work, they said.

Although details of the retirement package were not made public, the deal reportedly would be available to any faculty member whose age and number of years with the seminary equal at least 65 when added together. The incentive reportedly would give eligible candidates one year's salary and an additional \$500 for every year served.

As added incentive, some who accept the deal reportedly would be the last to receive full payment of post-retirement benefits such as supplemental health insurance and life insurance. As part of the seminary's overall budget reduction, trustees approved a change that would cancel payment of those post-retirement benefits for anyone who retires after July 31, 1995.

Speculation about an inevitable staff reduction has circulated on campus for several months. But even though staff members now know it is coming before year end, they have not been told how it will be enacted or who will be impacted.

The budget adopted for 1995-96 totals \$17.3 million, a \$434,131 decrease over the current year's budget. Even with this decrease in the total budget, the \$918,497 "budget adjustment" is needed to balance the budget because some fixed expenses such as salaries are increasing while some income sources are decreasing.

Mohler said seminary officials had not speculated on the number of faculty who might take early retirement, the number of administrative positions that might be cut or the possible decrease in enrollment -- all factors that will impact the next budget.

As part of the 1995-96 budget, student matriculation fees will be raised from an average of \$800 per semester to \$900 per semester. Rent for campus housing will increase 5 percent. Faculty and staff will receive a 3 percent salary increase.

Throughout their three days of meetings, trustees heard reports of declining revenue and enrollment at the seminary.

Alumni giving has declined from a peak of \$400,000 per year in 1986 to \$100,000 in 1994, Mohler said. Only 5 percent of alumni gave anything to the seminary in 1994, down from a previous high of 20 percent participation, he added.

While the seminary received a couple of major donations in 1994, overall giving to the school is down, officials said. The budget adopted for 1995-96 anticipates a further reduction of \$400,000 in gift income. With that reduction, the total income budgeted from gifts will have been cut in half since the 1991-92 fiscal year.

Endowment income has held steady, and Cooperative Program gifts from the Southern Baptist Convention have increased slightly. However, Cooperative Program gifts are accounting for an ever-smaller portion of the seminary's total budget, with the difference made up largely by increases in student fees.

For the first eight months of the current fiscal year, gift income is \$202,000 below budget goals, reported T.J. McGlothlin, seminary treasurer. Also during the same eight-month period, overall income is \$630,000 below budget projections, he said. However, the seminary continues to operate in the black, McGlothlin reported, because expenses have been cut to meet income.

On-campus enrollment in all degree programs this spring is 1,373, down 4.7 percent over last spring and down 13 percent over the year before that.

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Three elected to faculty at Southern Seminary

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Three new faculty members were elected at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary April 18.

Trustees elected Daniel Block as professor of Old Testament, Craig Blaising as professor of Christian theology and Mark Terry as professor of Christian missions. All three positions were granted with tenure.

Block, 49, currently is professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Bethel Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., where he has taught since 1983. He holds the bachelor of arts degree from the University of Saskatchewan, Canada, the master of arts degree in Old Testament from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Ill., and the doctor of philosophy degree in Semetics from the University of Liverpool, England. He is a member of a Baptist General Conference Church in Roseville, Minn.

Blaising currently is professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 1980. In the current year he has been a visiting professor at Southern Seminary. He holds the bachelor of science degree from the University of Texas, the master of theology and doctor of theology degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary and the doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He is a member of First Baptist Church in Dallas.

Terry, 45, has been in a non-tenured teaching position at Southern Seminary since 1993. He previously taught at Clear Creek Baptist Bible College in Pineville, Ky., and in two overseas Baptist seminaries as a missionary. He holds the bachelor of science degree in education from John Brown University and the master of divinity and doctor of philosophy degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He is a member of Hurstbourne Baptist Church in Louisville.

In other action, seminary trustees:

-- Re-elected Rick White of Nashville to a third term as trustee chairman. The board had to amend the seminary's bylaws in order to elect White to more than two terms. Other trustee officers are Ruffin Snow of Del City, Okla., first vice chairman; Dorothy Barker, homemaker from Morton, Texas, second vice chairman; John Hicks of Louisville, secretary.

- Approved two new graduate degrees, the doctor of missiology and doctor of philosophy in Christian education, which replaces the doctor of education degree.
- Approved plans for a three-phase construction of the North Building of the Honeycutt Campus Center, based upon the availability of funds. The North Building will be a continuing education facility.
- Renamed the Boyce Bible School Board of Overseers to Advisory Council of the Boyce Bible School and elected one new member to that council, David Butler of Louisville.
- Approved promotions for five faculty members and sabbaticals for six others.

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One of two professors awaiting tenure vote leaving Midwestern

By Bob Allen

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- One of the two professors whom Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees refused to consider for tenure last fall because board members said they didn't know enough about the teachers' views is leaving his post at the seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

James Hines, associate professor of religious education and church administration at Midwestern, has announced his resignation, effective July 31. He has accepted a position as academic dean and professor of religious education at Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan.

Hines said he begins his new job Aug. 1. It will be a cabinet-level position with tenure at the seminary affiliated with the American Baptist Churches in the USA.

Hines said he would be excited about the opportunity to teach at Central Seminary under any circumstances, but acknowledged that he began looking for a job after becoming "personally convinced" he was not going to receive tenure at Midwestern, one of six seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Last fall, following a two-hour executive session, Midwestern trustees postponed a vote on whether to grant tenure to Hines and another teacher, Larry McKinney, assistant professor of biblical studies. Trustee chairman Lewis Adkinson of Colorado Springs, Colo., said board members needed more information on the two professors, adding the trustees "didn't know the men well enough to vote on them" in October.

Instead, the trustees voted to extend their teaching contracts another year and to consider recommending them for tenure at the board's spring meeting, scheduled April 24-25.

But Hines told Associated Baptist Press that in October "it was made very clear from the administration to me that my church membership and my support for women in ministry were key issues."

Hines said it was communicated to him that "marquee issues" in any trustee discussions related to tenure would involve membership in churches which identify with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and affirmation of the ordination of women as ministers or deacons.

Hines said he belongs to a church that sends the bulk of its missions gifts through the Cooperative Program, the SBC's unified budget, but also permits individual contributors the option of designating that their offerings be channeled instead through the Fellowship. The church also, he said, supports the ordination of women.

"I can put the two together," Hines said. "I don't have to have a picture drawn for me."

After the October trustee meeting, Hines said he "chose to pursue other directions" than continuing to teach at Midwestern. "I didn't sense the need to wait around and hear the trustees say, 'No, we're not going to grant you tenure,' " he added.

The Fellowship is an Atlanta-based alternative missions/ministries venture established by moderates unsupportive of the SBC's conservative leadership.

While the tenure dispute at Midwestern was a factor, Hines said, "the bigger part of the story" is the appeal of Central Seminary.

"I am excited about the opportunity to teach at Central," he said. Hines described the school as "a beacon for persons who want to be trained toward a quality theological education," where students with diverse viewpoints can be "challenged and nurtured."

Before Southern Baptists opened Midwestern Seminary in 1958, Central Seminary served both Northern and Southern Baptists in the Midwest for more than half a century. More recently, Central has appealed primarily to American Baptist students. Last May, however, the school's trustees adopted a resolution expressing "full support" for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and encouraging moderate and progressive Southern Baptists to consider the school as an alternative to SBC seminaries, which are becoming more conservative.

Other Southern Baptists working at Central Seminary include David May, assistant professor of New Testament and former faculty member at Midwestern, and Gayla Sherman, vice president for development and public relations, who formerly worked on the development staff at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

Another Southern Baptist, Gregory Hunt, a Kansas City pastor and past moderator of the Missouri Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, serves on Central's board of directors.

Also, Molly Marshall, who was asked to resign last year as a theology professor at Southern Seminary over theological differences with the school's president, has accepted an appointment to teach theology, worship and spiritual formation at Central Seminary, beginning this fall.

Hines was elected to the Midwestern faculty by seminary trustees in April 1990. Previously, he was associate professor of religion at Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas, for five years. He also was interim minister of education and administration at First Baptist Church in Plainview and minister of administration, pastoral ministries and adult education at Shiloh Terrace Baptist Church in Dallas.

From 1972 to 1974, Hines served under appointment of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board as a journeyman missionary in Ghana, West Africa, where he was a hospital administrator.

He is a graduate of East Central State University in Ada, Okla., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

-- Brenda Sanders contributed to this story.

Robertson's legal arm challenges revocation of church's tax status

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Pat Robertson's legal organization is challenging the Internal Revenue Service's enforcement of a law barring churches and other tax-exempt organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates.

The American Center for Law and Justice filed the suit April 17 in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., challenging the IRS decision to strip a New York church of its tax-exempt status.

The IRS took the action against the Church at Pierce Creek in Vestal, N.Y., after the church placed advertisements in USA Today and The Washington Times urging Christians to vote against then-presidential candidate Bill Clinton. The ads, published four days before the 1992 election, denounced what they purported to be Clinton's views on abortion, homosexuality and teen pregnancy.

"Bill Clinton is promoting policies that are in rebellion to God's laws. ... How then can we vote for Bill Clinton?" the ads asserted.

ACLJ chief counsel Jay Sekulow accused the IRS of targeting the church and punishing it "because the church dared to speak out."

The ACLJ suit asserts the IRS violated the church's First Amendment rights and the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which bars government from restricting religious practice unless it can show a compelling reason.

The lawsuit claims that the IRS exceeded its authority by imposing the campaign ban on the church and that the action is discriminatory.

Sekulow said the church merely exercised its right to speak out on moral issues, a description disputed by the head of a church-state organization that asked IRS to investigate the matter.

"There's no gray area here," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "This church was delivering a partisan political speech, not a sermon."

Federal tax law permits churches and other tax-exempt organizations to address issues but bars them from endorsing or opposing political candidates or engaging in excessive lobbying activities.

"The ads clearly violated the (federal law's) prohibition on electioneering," said Brent Walker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee.

The ACLJ's lawsuit challenges the constitutionality of the ban on partisan involvement by churches.

Walker said the Supreme Court previously has upheld the ban on excessive lobbying by tax-exempt groups but not in a case involving a church.

Clinton pledges to go 'to the mat' for Foster

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President Clinton vowed he is "going to the mat" to defend Henry Foster's embattled nomination for U.S. surgeon general against threats to block confirmation of the Baptist obstetrician.

Asked during an April 18 press conference about comments made by Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., that he may block a Senate vote on Foster, Clinton said the nominee deserves better than to be sidetracked by politics.

"Dr. Foster is a good man with a good record -- as a family doctor, as someone who has helped thousands of mothers to give birth to their children and as an academic and as someone who has supported policies that are pro-family and pro-child," said Clinton, who is also a Baptist.

"He is qualified; he should be confirmed; he should not be caught up in any kind of politics, presidential or otherwise," Clinton continued.

Most controversy around Foster's nomination stems from his performance of abortions during his career. Foster's abortion record prompted top Southern Baptist leaders -- Jim Henry and Richard Land -- to publicly denounce his nomination. Henry is Southern Baptist Convention president, and Land is executive director of the SBC Christian Life Commission.

Later the full Christian Life Commission adopted a resolution opposing Foster's confirmation.

But not all Baptists joined the SBC leaders' opposition to Foster.

The National Baptist Convention U.S.A. -- the nation's largest African-American denomination -- has endorsed the nominee, who is a member of First Baptist Church of Capitol Hill in Nashville. Officials of the Progressive National Baptist Convention also joined with others to solicit support for Foster.

Another Baptist -- NBC "Nightly News" commentator Bill Moyers -- decried the SBC leaders' action on a Feb. 23 broadcast.

The confirmation hearings have not yet been scheduled.

Clinton also discussed issues of welfare reform, moral virtue, taxation and Middle East peace during the prime-time press conference.

He said he favors welfare reform that encourages work without being too harsh on children.

America is the "most religious" of the major countries of the world because "we are the most likely to believe not only in God but in absolute rules of right and wrong here on Earth," he said.

Clinton said that American society faces problems that social action alone cannot solve. These problems require personal changes in individual lives, he said.

High court sides with brewers in alcohol labeling dispute

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- A unanimous U.S. Supreme Court ruled April 19 that a 1935 federal law cannot be used to stop brewers from disclosing alcohol content on beer labels.

The high court said the restriction violated the brewers' commercial speech rights.

Lower courts had sided with Coors Brewing Co.'s challenge to the labeling restriction in decisions now upheld by the Supreme Court.

The government argued that the labeling ban was necessary to prevent "strength wars" among brewers. The court acknowledged that the government had a substantial interest in curbing "strength wars" among brewers, but ruled the law was unconstitutional because it failed to directly advance the government's stated interest.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Religion seen as losing impact, but not relevance, Gallup says

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) -- Most Americans believe religion is losing its influence in public life but still consider it relevant to solving life's problems, according to pollster George Gallup.

Opinions about religion's impact in America have changed dramatically over the years, but the sense that religion remains relevant to contemporary problems "has been remarkably constant" over the last 20 years, Gallup said.

A number of studies in the 1990s show that two out of three Americans believe religion is losing influence, Gallup said. As recently as 1990, only 48 percent believed religion's influence was waning, while 33 percent said it was on an upswing.

However, 62 percent of Americans believe religion can answer all or most of today's problems, a level of response that has shown "no significant change over the past 20 years," he said.

Two generations ago, in 1957, Gallup said, 69 percent of the populace thought religion was in an upswing, while only 14 percent said it was losing ground. Religion, along with other institutions, took a hit during the Vietnam era, he added. In 1970, 75 percent felt religion was rapidly losing influence, he said.

Changes in opinion about religion's influence can change rapidly, Gallup said. Most young adults under 30 -- 80 percent -- believe religion is losing influence. A third of adults aged 30-49, meanwhile, believe religion is gaining momentum. People in that age group are most active in church, because they bring children to receive religious education, Gallup observed.

The Gallup organization findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national sample of 3,040 men and women conducted throughout 1994. The study's margin of error is plus-or-minus 1 percent.

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