

# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner  
Associate Editor: Bob Allen  
Phone: (904) 262-6626  
Fax: (904) 262-7745

December 2, 1997

(97-104)

## In this issue:

- **Parents strong influence on teens, Gallup Poll says**
- **America looking for inclusive religious vision, Moyers says**
- **Gunfire disrupts prayer group in Kentucky high school**
- **South Carolina Baptists defund Christian Action Council**
- **Supreme Court rejects minister's appeal of dismissal from human rights panel**

## **Parents strong influence on teens, Gallup Poll says**

By Marv Knox

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) -- Parents have more influence on their teens than they might think, according to a new Gallup Poll.

"Teenagers are looking to their parents for help in decisions that might affect their future and to friends for issues of the moment," Gallup's Princeton Religion Research Center reported in its Emerging Trends newsletter.

The center's Gallup Youth Survey asked American teens to report the amount of influence they attribute to parents and peers in the decisions they make.

"The issue is not cut-and-dried," researchers reported. "Many decisions are made with considerable input from both parents and friends."

Parents exert the most influence regarding long-term decisions, while friends win the day in the short term, they said.

Gallup researchers divided their findings on who influences teen behaviors into three categories:

-- Strong parental influence.

"The decisions most heavily influenced by parents are those that affect the teen's future and what kind of person he or she eventually will be," the researchers discovered.

For example, the highest degree of parental influence, 77 percent, shapes whether or not teens should go to college, the survey found. That compares to just a 5 percent margin of influence for friends.

Seventy percent of teens said their parents provide the greatest influence regarding whether or not they should attend religious services. Only 9 percent said their friends primarily help shape that decision.

Parents are more influential than friends in ensuring that teens do their homework, with a 66 percent/15 percent division between parental and peer influence. Parents also provide the greatest input in whether or not to drink (50 percent) and whether or not to have sex (48 percent).

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Nashville, Tennessee

-- Similar influence between parents and peers.

Both groups are influential in helping teens determine whether or not to smoke, with parents strongest for 47 percent of teens and peers strongest for 26 percent.

Similar influences shape whether or not teens date, with parents still holding the edge, 45 percent to 29 percent.

The influence is more evenly divided concerning what teens choose to read. Parents' influence matters most for 36 percent of teens, while peers influence 23 percent the most.

-- Strong peer influence.

Half of teens said their friends provide more influence than their parents regarding whether they should cut classes from school, with parents influential for only one-third of teens.

Friends out-influence parents when teens determine whom to date, 44 percent to 25 percent, and concerning the way they wear their hair, 47 percent to 19 percent. Peer pressure is strongest when teens choose clothes, with 59 percent saying their friends influence them the most, compared to just 16 percent who wear what mom and dad think they should wear.

The Gallup survey also showed parental influence decreases in the later teens.

"The number of teens who report that parents have more influence than do their friends over decisions about attending religious services, drinking, having sex, smoking, dating, choice of books, hairstyle and whom to date decreases as they grow older," researchers reported.

The poll also indicated girls respect their parents' influence more than boys in matters of having sex, whether to date and whom to date. Boys are more influenced by their parents than girls when they choose what to read.

The level of education attained by parents also affects their influence on teenage children.

"Teens whose parents did not attend college are more likely to credit their parents with greater influence over their drinking decisions, whether or not to have sex and whom they date," the Gallup researchers said.

-30-

## **America looking for inclusive religious vision, Moyers says**

By Bob Allen

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (ABP) -- America is searching for the power and authority of religion that is inclusive and not sectarian, broadcaster Bill Moyers said in a Nov. 19 fall convocation speech at Wake Forest University.

Moyers compared discussions at Wake Forest about how to retain the school's Baptist heritage while serving an increasingly diverse student body to interfaith conversations in his recent PBS series on Genesis.

Despite its simple format -- seven people in a circle discussing the first book of the Bible -- Moyers said the show created more media response than anything he had done on television for 25 years.

One explanation, he said, was the 10 Bible stories framing the Genesis discussions were "great stories." Another was the fact that panelists represented different backgrounds, faiths, professions, ages and genders.

"When I was growing up in east Texas, Baptists talked about the Bible with Baptists, Presbyterians with Presbyterians, Episcopalians with Episcopalians, Methodists with Methodists, Jews with Jews, be we never talked about the Bible across our faiths, not to mention with other races," Moyers said. In starting the Genesis series, "We wanted to be sure our participants in the series didn't come from the same neighborhood."

America's religious discourse is no longer dominated by "male, white Protestants of a culturally conservative heritage -- people like me," Moyers said. When he first moved to New York City in 1968, Moyers said he was

impressed to see people on the subway reading the Bible in Hebrew or Spanish, things he had never seen growing up in Texas. Today, he's just as likely to see someone reading the Koran.

"There are more Muslims in America than Episcopalians or Presbyterians," Moyers said. "And within a few years there may be more Muslims in America than Jews."

"Someone told me Muslims are the fastest-growing religion in America," Moyers continued. "Then someone told me Pentecostals are the fastest-growing religion in America. Then someone told me the fastest-growing Christian denomination is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Mormons, doubling in number every 15 years since World War II."

"We are recreating our nation right before our eyes," Moyers said. "We are living in a new religious reality so that the most interesting story of our time, to me, as a journalist, is emerging in the intersection between the secular and the spiritual. We're searching in America for a new vision of our country that has the authority and power of a religious vision but is inclusive and not sectarian."

With its religious heritage and increasing diversity on its campus in Winston-Salem, N.C., "Wake Forest is poised for one of the most important of all missions in its long and gifted history," Moyers said.

"You're helping to write the new story of America. One nation under God? Whose God? And how can we, a pluralistic America, governed by the dictates of democracy, avoid the intolerance, the murderous fanaticism, the bitter fruits of religion that occur any time holy scripture is used as a wedge to drive people apart?"

Among American Protestants, liberals and conservatives in many cases have grown estranged, Moyers said. He cited Baptists, which are diverse enough to include people on one side like Moyers, Bill Clinton, Al Gore, Richard Gephardt and Jesse Jackson and those like Pat Robertson, Newt Gingrich and Jesse Helms on the other.

Moyers said he finds particularly "baffling" the attitude of Baptists of "the other stripe" on the separation of church and state.

"They invoke it to protect themselves against encroachment from others but denounce it when it protects others from encroachment from them," he said. "They use it to shelter their own revenues and assets from taxation but then insist taxes be paid by others to support private sectarian instruction in pervasively religious schools.

"They loathe any government intrusion into their sphere but are laboring mightily to change federal tax laws so that churches may more easily influence government. They stand foursquare behind the First Amendment when they exercise their own right to criticize others -- sometimes with a vengeance and often with vitriol, as when Jerry Falwell circulates videos implicating the president of the United States in murder -- but when they in turn are challenged or criticized, they whine and complain that they are being attacked as 'people of faith.'"

Moyers said "I couldn't believe my eyes" when he saw Newt Gingrich on television telling the Christian Coalition they were victims of "Christian phobia."

"Christian phobia? When the president of the United States, the vice president of the United States, the speaker of the House of Representatives, the minority leader of the House of Representatives and the majority leader of the United States Senate are all Baptists? Come on."

"This is the crowd that acts as if the Bible belongs to them," Moyers said. "They would have us concede that they speak for God when they bring their opinions to bear on all kinds of secular issues -- from abortion to the environment to the public funding of the arts. ...

"For too many years now, the religious discourse in America has been dominated by the Religious Right, and the media have cooperated, giving fundamentalists most of the coverage when the subject of religion and society comes up."

As a result, Moyers said, "religion has become just another political-action committee."

Moyers said he would prefer to see "a wide embracing coalition of people from across denominational lines -- people who care deeply about the sacred texts and also understand that others who read them differently care deeply about them as well."

"I'd like to see us take the scriptures back from the grip of those who think they have an exclusive right to their meaning," Moyers said. "So let everyone join the conversation of democracy, but let no one monopolize it."

Moyers said acknowledging such diversity does not require shedding of distinct traditions. He said he is more "deeply a Christian" and "more firmly a Baptist than ever."

"And yet, I am so much richer for having learned from Buddhists about contemplation and the infinite within; from Muslims about the beauty of sobriety and surrender, the ecstasy of union with God; from Jews about the imperatives of justice as the foundation of our society; from Hindus about a universe charged with divinity, realms of gold hidden in the depths of our hearts; from Confucianists about the quality of empathy, and the connection of inner harmony to social ethics."

"To see what others see, to transcend the visible spectrum of feeling, you don't have to give up your own faith," Moyers said. "You just have to dig deeper into it. Because down there below doctrine and dogma, beneath the particularity of your individual experience, is the ultimate source of life, the common water table of humanity."

The lecture was part of the 1997-98 Year of Religion in American Life at Wake Forest. Special events include a national conference on higher education sponsored by the Lilly Endowment, lectures by Moyers and Rabbi Harold Kushner, classes on religious themes and a film series.

-30-

## **Gunfire disrupts prayer group in Kentucky high school**

WEST PADUCAH, Ky. (ABP) -- An informal prayer group in a high school in West Paducah, Ky., was violently disrupted by gunfire Monday, Nov. 1.

Eight Heath High School students were wounded, three fatally, when a fellow student fired into a group of 35 holding an informal prayer session in a school hallway.

Police did not release the name of the suspect, but the Associated Press said other students identified him as Michael Carneal, a 14-year-old freshman and self-professed atheist who had previously mocked the prayer group but was not considered a danger by classmates.

Police said the youth admitted to the shooting but said he had no particular motive.

According to reports, Carneal inserted ear plugs and quietly began to squeeze off shots from a stolen semi-automatic pistol.

Heath High senior Ben Strong, a pastor's son and a leader of the prayer group, said Carneal fired 11 shots before he realized what was happening. Strong said he approached Carneal and told him to drop the gun. Carneal "kind of slouched down and dropped the gun" and said, "I can't believe I'd do this" and "'Kill me now,' or something like that," Strong said.

Three girls wounded in the attack -- Kayce Steger, 15; Jessica James, 17, and Nichole Hadley, 14 -- later died. Carneal was charged as a juvenile with murder and attempted murder and with burglary for allegedly stealing the murder weapon and four other guns on Thanksgiving Day.

Strong said Carneal had told him a week earlier to stay away from Monday's prayer circle because something was going to happen. Most students expected a stink bomb or similar prank, but none thought the boy was dangerous.

Others in the prayer circle said Carneal ran with a group who said they didn't believe in God and would occasionally heckle the religious group. But Strong said Carneal regularly attended a Lutheran church.

"It was pretty much making fun of, stupid little things like that," 16-year-old Michael Zink told Associated Press. He said Carneal and the others who called themselves atheists were "just trying to be rude and obnoxious."

-30-

-- By ABP staff

## **South Carolina Baptists defund Christian Action Council**

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- The South Carolina Baptist Convention has ended financial support for the state's Christian Action Council after the council supported efforts to remove the Confederate flag from the state capitol.

Baptists at the Nov. 11-12 convention in Columbia approved a budget amendment transferring \$15,000 from the interdenominational CAC to the state convention's own Christian Life and Public Affairs Committee.

The Christian Action Council, begun as a temperance organization in 1933, represents 16 denominations in South Carolina in civic and religious affairs.

Bobby Eubanks, pastor of Ridge Baptist Church in Summerville, proposed the amendment. In a letter to the editor published in the Baptist Courier newspaper, Eubanks said he learned that South Carolina Baptists supported the CAC when the group joined with Gov. David Beasley to call for removal of the Confederate flag from the statehouse dome in Columbia.

According to news reports, Eubanks and 15 other ministers objected to the council holding a silent vigil and march in January to support the governor's call to move the flag. They said Beasley was driving a wedge in churches by making the flag a moral issue.

The group issued a paper called "The Moral Defense of the Confederate Flag: A Special Message for South Carolina Christians," reportedly modeled after an 1863 document defending the Confederacy.

Eubanks said the Christian Action Council is "too theologically diverse" to represent South Carolina Baptists and that the state convention's committee is better equipped to represent their stand on social and moral issues. He also said the interdenominational group has been inactive in opposing abortion.

"My intent was to distance ourselves from an ecumenical group that cannot speak for us as Southern Baptists," Eubanks said.

In another letter to the editor in the same issue, Methodist minister McKay Brabham of Columbia expressed "dismay and profound sadness" at the decision, citing South Carolina Baptists' long association with the action league.

In a column, Editor Don Kirkland called the defunding "hasty and unwise," and said it sent a message that "South Carolina Baptists will not cooperate with Christian organizations we do not control or with whom we do not agree."

-30-

-- By ABP staff

## **Supreme Court rejects minister's appeal of dismissal from human rights panel**

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court refused to revive a Baptist minister's complaint that San Francisco officials violated his rights by removing him from the city's Human Rights Commission because he condemned homosexuality.

Without comment, the high court let stand lower courts' dismissal of Eugene Lumpkin's complaint against the city and its mayor.

In removing Lumpkin from the commission in 1993, city officials cited the minister's anti-homosexual public statements, including one that the "homosexual lifestyle is an abomination against God."

Then-Mayor Frank Jordan removed Lumpkin, backed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, who said Lumpkin's words and demeanor "undermined the role and responsibilities of the Human Rights Commission."

Lumpkin sued the city and the mayor, claiming his removal violated the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

A federal district court dismissed the suit, saying Lumpkin's public statements were inconsistent with his "broad responsibilities for formulating, implementing and explaining" the policies of the commission.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed, finding that "neither the First Amendment nor the Religious Freedom Restoration Act requires San Francisco to tolerate members of its Human Rights Commission who make public statements that are antithetical to the Commission's official charge 'to eliminate prejudice and discrimination because of race, religion, color, ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or place of birth.'"

The appeals court said Lumpkin, as a private citizen, has the right to preach that homosexuality is a sin, "but the First Amendment does not assure him job security when he preaches homophobia while serving as a city official charged with the responsibility of eliminat[ing] prejudice and discrimination."

The appeals court also rejected Lumpkin's claim that the city violated the First Amendment ban against establishment of religion by endorsing a religious faith that interprets Scripture less literally than Lumpkin's. The city's reasons for removing Lumpkin were secular, not religious, the appeals court said.

In a separate action, the Supreme Court also declined to review another 9th Circuit Court ruling dismissing a gay couple's complaint that their constitutional rights were violated when they were ousted from their elected posts on the El Dorado County Republican Party Central Committee.

Paul Johnson and Kevin Wadsworth filed suit claiming that the ouster violated their First Amendment rights to free speech and participation in the political process and their 14th Amendment right to equal protection.

A federal district court and the 9th Circuit panel rejected the complaint, concluding that the Republican county committee "is a private political organization, not a government actor."