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Americans complicit in 'villainy' in White House, Bennett says

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The American people are complicit with "villainy in the White House," William Bennett told the National Religious Broadcasters Feb. 3.

Bennett, a former Reagan administration official who has made a career out of trumpeting the need for character and values in public life, was keynote speaker for a public-policy breakfast during the NRB's annual convention at the Washington Sheraton.

Bennett said the current allegations of sexual impropriety by President Bill Clinton and the public's reaction represent the most depressing episode in American society in his lifetime.

"What bothers me is not the prevarication in the White House, perhaps the villainy in the White House. What bothers me so much is that the people seem complicit with it," Bennett said.

He was referring in part to public opinion polls that have shown Clinton registering his highest popularity rating ever in the days after the scandal. Pundits say voters may dislike the president's personal problems but differentiate those from his job performance.

What's most disturbing, Bennett said, is that Americans don't want the truth as much as they want a good economy.

"Many don't seem to care," he said. "Others do care but think it's sophisticated to pretend not to care."

Bennett said this is not an "inside-the-beltway" problem but a problem afflicting the whole American public. "The state of moral outrage right now is higher in the Washington media than it is in the country as large."

While demurring on a question from the audience about the role of his brother, who is Clinton's personal legal counsel and defender, Bennett took a bipartisan swipe at all who have refused to push the president for full and prompt disclosure.

"Both major political parties are dead in the chest," he said.

"Is there not one Nathan in the Democratic Party who can go to the president and say, 'Tell us the truth'?" Bennett asked. He was referring to the Old Testament story of Nathan the prophet who confronted King David over his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Bathsheba's husband.

Such a confronting word must come from within the president's own party, from someone the president trusts but who has the courage to speak boldly, Bennett said.

Clinton and his wife, Hillary, have said the truth about his alleged relation with a 21-year-old intern will come out in time but they cannot tell it now because the issue is the subject of a federal investigation.

For now, Clinton has said, he needs to cooperate with the investigation and get back to work for the American people.

Bennett doesn't buy that. "There is no more basic business than the relationship between the president and the people he serves."

Bennett took equal exception with Republicans whom he said are waiting in silence until they can take political advantage of the president's situation.

"With few exceptions, the Republicans are being silent, and they think that silence is statesmanship," he said. "But if they remain silent, they cannot lead."

He added: "This is no time for partisan gain. This is a time for truth."

Bennett, co-director of Empower America and a high-level official in both the Reagan and Bush administrations, said the current controversy carries significance because of what it is teaching the nation's children and the rest of the world.

"The president is the symbol of who the people of the United States are," he said. "He is the person who stands for us in the eyes of the world and the eyes of our children. ... Children believe they should imitate the president of the United States."

How the American public react to the current White House crisis is part of "teaching our children what the most important things are," he said.

Bennett's speech, which came on the final day of the four-day convention, was the first significant mention of the president's troubles in a general session, although the topic was a favorite of hallway conversation.

The NRB is a notably conservative and Republican-leaning group, having hosted Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush as keynote speakers while they served as president but never having hosted Clinton.

Apart from Bennett's speech and a speech later that night by American Red Cross director Elizabeth Dole, about the only other mention of Clinton's troubles came in calls for prayer.

"If ever our nation has needed prayer, it is now," was the phrase uttered by several program leaders.

It also was the plea of Shirley Dobson, coordinator of the National Day of Prayer.

She said her husband, James Dobson, founder and president of Focus on the Family, was seriously depressed over the American public's reaction to the allegations against Clinton.

"Our value system is under attack," she said. "We're in a battle for the very heart and soul of America. It won't be won with tanks and guns. It will be won on our knees in prayer."

Ironically, Dobson was followed at the podium by Mike Huckabee, governor of Arkansas and also a native of Clinton's hometown of Hope, Ark.

"I'm not sure this is the greatest time to be a politician from Hope, Ark.," he quipped.

However, Huckabee, a former Baptist pastor who came to office after Gov. Jim Guy Tucker was convicted in another scandal related to the Clintons, steadily avoided any direct comment on the Clintons' current problems.

As an official body, the NRB's board of directors passed resolutions urging Congress to override Clinton's veto of the Partial-birth Abortion Ban Act and on the "moral foundation of America."

The latter resolution noted that "the moral foundation of America is under attack as perhaps never before" and that "the moral credibility of leadership in all our institutions such as government, the business community, the educational systems and even the church has been called into question."

It called on all Americans to "repent and confess our sins to God, both individual and national sins."

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Southern Baptists moving up in ranks of religious broadcasters

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Southern Baptists know Adrian Rogers and Charles Stanley as former presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention. But members of the National Religious Broadcasters primarily know both men as two of the nation's most successful broadcast preachers.

Outside the SBC, media personalities like Rogers and Stanley bring more recognition to Baptists than the denomination brings to them. Both have been keynote speakers at recent NRB annual conventions.

That's significant exposure for Southern Baptists, but it's only the tip of the growing influence the SBC appears to be having inside NRB, the nation's professional organization for Christian radio and television.

Longtime participants and observers of the NRB agree that the Southern Baptist profile is on the rise within the organization, which in the past has been dominated by non-denominational or loosely denominational figures.

The program at this year's NRB convention, held Jan. 31-Feb. 3 in Washington, featured no less than nine Southern Baptists in prominent roles, starting with Stanley as keynote speaker for the opening session and ending with an anniversary banquet sponsored in part by the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Other Southern Baptists on the program included Bob Reccord, president of the SBC's North American Mission Board; Jack Graham, pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas; Mike Huckabee, a former Baptist pastor who now is governor of Arkansas; Ron Phillips, pastor of Central Baptist Church in Hixon, Tenn.; Texas humorist Dennis Swanberg; Robert Jeffress, pastor of First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas; and Richard Land, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

And presiding over much of the meeting was another Southern Baptist, David Clark, a member of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas and director of NAMB's media and technology unit in Fort Worth, Texas.

Clark is thought to be the first Southern Baptist to serve as NRB chairman. This is his second time in the office.

He's joined on the NRB board of directors by at least nine other Southern Baptists, including Stanley and Paul Pressler, the retired Texas appeals court judge who masterminded conservatives' capture of the SBC's denominational structure.

Clark, who left a post as head of the KMA Companies, a media consulting and fund-raising firm, to go to work for NAMB in June, agrees Southern Baptists are gaining an increasing profile within NRB.

"And we should be," he said. "We're evangelistic."

On top of that, Southern Baptists have "the best preachers" in America, and therefore have much to offer both NRB and the nation's viewers of religious programming, Clark said.

From the perspective of other NRB members, Clark said, "there's an understanding that there's an openness in the SBC that hasn't been there before."

Part of that openness is explained by the growing awareness among Southern Baptist pastors and denominational officials that broadcast media is an essential part of taking the gospel to the modern culture, he added.

"We can't just do things as we've always done them," Clark said. "Half the population will never go to any of our churches until we have some contact with them."

Broadcast media is one excellent way to make such a contact, he said. And while new creative religious programming is one key, the impact of biblical preaching on radio and television never will fade, he added.

While the SBC as a denomination has been in the broadcasting business for decades, last year's denominational restructuring has brought media to an even higher profile.

Media technology is a major component of the new North American Mission Board, which assumed the old Radio and Television Commission and is merging its work directly with home missions efforts.

And the newest SBC entrant into the broadcasting world is the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, which later this month will launch a daily 30-minute radio program.

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Southern Baptist radio show set to premiere Feb. 16

By Mark Wingfield

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- A new call-in radio show hosted by Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, will premiere nationwide Feb. 16.

The 30-minute program, called "For Faith and Family," will tackle hot-topic issues such as abortion, homosexuality, pornography and racism, according to promotional material published in the agency's current magazine.

The radio program will "tackle these issues from a biblical perspective head-on, no matter how controversial, and ... without compromise," Land said in a column about the new show.

"For Faith and Family" has been developed "in response to the deeply felt providential leadership of the Holy Spirit and our answer to the throngs of people who have expressed their desire for a live, interactive radio program where they can ask about the issues in today's headlines," Land said.

"Each day my guests and I will seek to lift up the divine truth of Scripture and to explain God's changeless standards in everyday language to the listening audience," he added.

"We hope and pray that 'For Faith and Family' will help listeners develop a Christian worldview which will enable them to fully understand and address the critical social, moral and public policy issues facing our nation."

The program initially is scheduled to air live at 12:30 p.m. Eastern Time on seven radio stations serving Phoenix; Fort Wayne, Ind.; Kansas City, Mo.; St. Louis; Red Lion, Pa.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Dallas. The program also will be carried live in the Internet at www.AudioNet.com/LightSource.

"For Faith and Family" also will be carried initially on another 35 stations by tape-delay. Those confirmed markets include Atlanta; Louisville, Ky.; New Orleans; Raleigh, N.C.; Oklahoma City; Memphis, Tenn.; Houston; and Lynchburg, Va.; as well as other cities in Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

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Bill sponsors modify persecution measure

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Hoping to attract more support, congressional sponsors plan to revise a bill intended to curb religious persecution abroad.

The Freedom From Religious Persecution Act is sponsored by Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., and Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va. The original bill would have created a special White House officer who could impose automatic sanctions on countries that engage in religious persecution or fail to take steps to end such persecution.

It attracted more than 100 co-sponsors, but its approach to fighting persecution was opposed by the State Department and religious groups such as the Baptist Joint Committee and the National Council of the Churches.

A Wolf spokesman said planned changes in the bill include: moving the office of religious persecution monitoring to the State Department; giving the president broader authority to waive sanctions as long as doing so would "advance the objectives of the act," and narrowing the provision that bans the export of products that facilitate persecution.

The new language would require the director of the new office to identify products used "directly" for persecution whereas the earlier language identified "any" product used for persecution.

The Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission sponsored a Feb. 4 gathering with other Wolf-Specter supporters to coordinate passage of the revised bill.

House Majority Leader Dick Armey, R-Texas, said the measure "is not optional, it's a moral imperative." Armey said the House would take up the bill as early as mid-summer.

Wolf said a subcommittee markup where changes can be made to the bill will take place in March.

He said the bill will help "those who are being persecuted today that we know about, but it will also help those who are persecuted in other parts of the world."

Wolf-Specter supporters at the gathering included representatives of the National Association of Evangelicals, the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, the Christian Legal Society and the Southern Baptist ERLC.

Some support the bill reluctantly, saying it waters down the earlier version. Charles Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship, said the bill, "weakened though it is in an effort to get support from the administration and Congress, ... is a defining moment for America."

Opponents to the original measure said the issue of sanctions remains a major concern in the revision.

"We are still anxious to see a version of the bill that doesn't include automatic sanctions," said BJC Executive Director James Dunn.

In October, the BJC adopted a statement commending Specter and Wolf for addressing the persecution issue but urged that any final persecution bill should, among other things, call for sanctions to be imposed only after other avenues have been pursued.

Oliver Thomas, special counsel at the NCC, called changes in the bill a step forward but said they did not eliminate NCC concerns about the bill. He said NCC partners abroad say the bill is "wrongheaded."

"We maintain that sanctions should be a matter of thoughtful last resort, not automatic first resort," Thomas said.

Thomas also said the measure's provisions providing asylum for victims of religious persecution should be broadened to include victims of other human-rights abuses.

"Jesus didn't say 'I was naked and a Christian' or 'I was hungry and a Christian,' ... he just said, 'I was naked, hungry and homeless,'" Thomas said. "If we immediately elevate the victims of religious persecution, we, at the same time, devalue the victims of other human-rights abuses."

At the gathering of Wolf-Specter supporters, William Fay, associate general secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference, said the bill "does not create a hierarchy of human rights any more than it creates a hierarchy of religious freedoms. It simply offers a practical corrective to U.S. policy in one area where that is much needed."

"While the bill focuses on religious freedom, its practical benefit would be to end U.S. aid given directly to governments that, in most cases, are abusing not just religious rights but a whole range of basic human rights," he said.

Rep. Christopher Smith, R-N.J., predicted that the bill will face tough opposition from the Clinton administration. He said there is "an institutional bias within our State Department" against dealing with religious persecution. "We're up against a very formidable force," Smith said.

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Virginia philanthropist gives \$1 million to Richmond seminary

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Virginia trucking executive Harwood Cochrane and his wife, Louise, have donated \$1 million to Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, officials at the school announced Jan. 26.

Cochrane has headed two successful trucking companies. He founded Overnite Transportation Company in 1935 and sold it in 1986 to Union Pacific Corporation. In 1991, he came out of retirement to establish Highway Express, Inc.

The Cochranes, members of Richmond's Tabernacle Baptist Church, have given to numerous civic and Baptist causes.

Cochrane said turmoil at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., sparked his interest in the Richmond school. "The seminary stands for basic Baptist principles of freedom, and it offers the best alternative we have for preparing our future ministers," he said.

The gift is part of a \$10 million capital campaign launched by the seminary last fall.

"We are deeply grateful to the Cochranes for this generous gift," said BTSR President Tom Graves. "Ownership of facilities is a signal of permanence for this seminary, and the Cochranes are helping to make that possible in a very substantial way."

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-- By ABP staff

Support for Israel brings Christians and Jews together

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- On a recent morning, several hundred people turned out for a kosher breakfast at a prominent Washington hotel to honor survivors of the Holocaust, to rally against Israel ceding any more land to the Palestinians and to mark the 50th anniversary of Israel's modern statehood.

Dignitaries present at the overflow event included a presidential hopeful, two governors' wives, congressmen, rabbis and the Israeli ambassador to the United States.

The program began with the blowing of the shofar, the Jewish call to prayer. Elaborate banners symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel processed through the crowd as a speaker passionately described each tribe.

What may be surprising, though, is that most of the people in the audience were not Jewish. Instead, they were fundamentalist Christians who believe God will bless them in direct proportion to how well they bless the Jewish people.

The main purpose of the Feb. 2 breakfast was to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem," a biblical mandate found in Psalm 122:6.

Throw a group of Jews and evangelical Christians together for a prayer meeting, and you have an awkward alliance at best. It is an alliance, however, that has been going strong for decades and now is building to a fevered pitch as Israel marks its 50th year as a modern nation amidst the uncertainties of a failing Middle East peace process.

The annual prayer breakfast, organized by conservative religious and political guru Ed McAteer of Memphis, Tenn., is but one of dozens of formal links between evangelical Christians and the nation of Israel. Perhaps half a dozen evangelical para-church ministries are working year-round to champion Israel's cause.

And the state of Israel solidifies the links with extensive promotion of Israeli tourism, drawing upon evangelical Christians as a significant part of the 2.5 million tourists who journey to the Holy Land each year and bring not only political support but money as well.

This cozy relationship goes on display in full bloom every year during the annual convention of the National Religious Broadcasters. McAteer's prayer breakfast for Israel usually happens during the NRB, and all the Israel-supporting para-church ministries are on hand working the exhibit area.

This year, the morning before McAteer's \$35-a-head breakfast, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism sponsored a free breakfast attended by more than 300 people. The Israeli-sponsored breakfast featured not only Israeli officials but Christian speakers and a contemporary Christian singer.

At both breakfast meetings, NRB President Brandt Gustavson delivered impassioned pleas against Israel giving up any more land for peace.

"No claimant holds the moral high ground of right to land more than the modern state of Israel," Gustavson said to thunderous applause. "We stand with the nation, with the prime minister, for an undivided Jerusalem."

For this crowd, unflinching support for Israel and the Jewish people is a deeply rooted religious conviction -- a conviction linked both to history and end-times prophecy. And a conviction they assert all true "Bible-believing" Christians should embrace.

"As Bible-believing Americans, we believe there exists an iron-clad bond between the state of Israel and the United States," McAteer wrote in a "proclamation of blessing" read at his breakfast. "We believe that bond to be a moral imperative."

The proclamation also stated that "Israel and the United States are not separate and distinct -- we are one. We share common ideals and common democracy. What unites us across the ocean, and brings Jew and Christian together, is the recognition that Israel is a nation that is a manifestation of what America was and is."

McAteer said the views expressed at his prayer breakfast represent "the vast majority of Bible-believing Christians in the United States."

David Sudlow, director of Christians for Israel, agreed, adding in an interview that this "doesn't just touch evangelicals."

Christians who don't show the same loyalty to Israel just don't know all they should, he said. "Bible-believing Christians in all denominations, when they run across this message, say, 'Why have I not heard this from the pulpit?'"

Sudlow and McAteer appeal extensively to Old Testament passages about the importance of Israel as a nation and inheritor of the Promised Land to make their case. For example, God's promise to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 13: "All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever."

Yet not all Christian scholars see that promise to Abraham extending to Israel today. God's covenant with Abraham was broken when the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, according to this other view, held by many theologians, including many conservative evangelical scholars.

Carey Newman, a conservative evangelical New Testament scholar who lives in Louisville, Ky., said he knows of no statistical basis for the claim that most "Bible-believing" Christians embrace the perspective outlined by McAteer, Sudlow and Gustavson.

The biggest problem with the Christian Zionists' position is their assumption that the modern Jewish state can be equated with biblical Israel, Newman explained. "That is just a huge leap that cannot be supported by the Bible. In fact, the New Testament redefines biblical Israel as the church. This redefinition is part of a larger process whereby the Old Testament is reread through the New Testament, especially the life and death of Jesus."

Regardless, the Christian Zionists see a biblical imperative to stand up for Israel. Again, they cite God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, where God says he will "bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you."

McAteer explains: "Historical research will prove that nations that have blessed Israel have been blessed. ... I really believe one of the reasons America has been blessed is because we have supported Israel."

Amid current world events, this moral imperative leads Christian Zionists from religious conviction to political action.

One way they "bless" Israel is by advocating the Israeli position that no more land should be swapped for peace.

"The issue is not land; the issue is survival," McAteer explained. An Israel weakened by giving up land would face a greater struggle to survive in the Middle East, he said.

That Israel is entitled to the Holy Land is an "irrefutable historical fact," said the NRB's Gustavson. Islam was not formed as a religion until the seventh century A.D., he said. "The Jewish people occupied the land for 1,600 years before Islam even saw the light of day."

Texas televangelist John Hagee put it even more bluntly in a prayer at McAteer's breakfast: "Let the nations know there is no question over Jerusalem."

Later at the same breakfast, Israeli ambassador Elihu Ben-Elissar received a thunderous standing ovation when he declared: "There will be no peace without security. ... We shall not permit that Jerusalem will be divided once again. ... Jerusalem is ours, and so it will remain."

On a pragmatic level, agreement on hot-topic issues such as this may explain how Christians and Jews can come together so easily for prayer breakfasts.

McAteer admits it's sometimes touchy lining up all the Jewish participants for his events. Often he's asked in advance, "Will there be prayer?"

"Yes, this is a Christian program," he responds. "We are going to pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

McAteer said he will "bend right up to the edge" to make his Jewish friends comfortable, but he won't bend in denying his belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

It all works in the end, he said, because "they know who their friends are."

Prophecy buffs take note of Israel's 'jubilee' year

By Mark Wingfield

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- In three months, Israel will celebrate its 50th anniversary as a modern nation.

Is that a sign of Israel's political savvy and determination, or is it a sign of God's working in the world to bring about the end times?

How you answer that question depends largely on how you view end-times prophecy in the Bible.

"Israel is God's time clock," prophecy author Tim LaHaye told a recent breakfast gathering sponsored by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism.

LaHaye, a Baptist author and speaker who is considered one of the foremost advocates of an end-times theology known as premillennial dispensationalism, said understanding Israel's history is a key to understanding biblical prophecy.

His perspective, though at odds with most Christian scholars, is shared by many Christian Zionists who feel a moral imperative to advocate Israel's cause.

The formation of the modern state of Israel on May 14, 1948, is "the greatest sign of our times," said David Sudlow, director of Christians for Israel, an advocacy group based in Woodstock, Va.

That God is "continuing to bring back Jews from the four corners of the earth" is a sign of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, Sudlow said.

He cites Ezekiel 39 as an indicator of this: "When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will show myself holy through them in the sight of many nations."

Sudlow interprets that passage with this explanation: "This fulfillment of prophecy is a great trumpet sounding in the ears of the church pointing to the imminent return of Jesus Christ, the king of the Jews."

The 50th anniversary of Israel's reconstitution as a state has "a whole lot of importance" for the future, Sudlow said. He sees this anniversary fitting a pattern of events that have been marked in 50-year cycles.

Ed McAteer, a champion of conservative Christian and political causes who sponsors an annual prayer breakfast for Israel, agrees that this year's anniversary is a major milestone.

"When you pull together all the prophecies ... and see the prophecies being fulfilled, it is significant," he said.

The prophecies referred to by McAteer, Sudlow and LaHaye are found throughout the Bible, but especially in the writings of the Old Testament prophets such as Daniel and Isaiah.

Premillennial dispensationalism is one of four major systems for interpreting Scriptures that relate to the end-times, a part of theology known as eschatology.

Adherents to this system are the most conservative of the conservatives, who believe every word of the Bible must be understood literally.

The name premillennial comes from this group's assertion that in the end-times Christ will return to earth to set up his kingdom for a literal 1,000-year period during which Old Testament prophecies will be fulfilled on earth.

Dispensationalists see seven distinct epochs or dispensations of time described in the Bible, starting with a time of innocence and ending with a time of Christ's kingdom on earth. According to this perspective, the current epoch is the period of grace, sometimes called the church age.

Premillennial dispensationalists place a high value on numbers and patterns. Thus they find significance in the modern state of Israel's 50th anniversary as representing the "year of jubilee" described in the Bible. The

Old Testament book of Leviticus called on ancient Israelites to observe a "sabbath" by refraining from planting crops every seventh year in the Promised Land and a special "jubilee" after seven sabbaths, in which land that had been sold was to be returned to its original owners and slaves released.

Premillennial dispensationalists also are especially interested in so-called "signs of the times," because they believe certain Old Testament prophecies must be fulfilled before Christ will return. Thus the creation of the modern state of Israel in 1948 is viewed as God's movement to regather his chosen people, leading to fulfillment of Ezekiel 39.

McAteer sees signs of the times all around. "What will be the sign of his coming? Jesus says it will be as in the days of Noah ... every thought continually wicked."

That describes the modern world precisely, McAteer said. "Even though it is sad all we see today, Jesus said that will be the sign."

Even so, Israel is "the main barometer" of God's movement to ultimately fulfill prophecy, he said.

Christians who are not premillennial dispensationalists have a hard time accepting much of this system's beliefs, especially the heavy attention to predicting what events must happen before Christ can return.

"Scripture seems to affirm that Jesus' return is imminent and that nothing stands in the way between us and that event," said Carey Newman, an evangelical New Testament scholar who rejects dispensationalism. "The Apostle Paul said nothing stood in the way between the return of Jesus and him."

Further, Newman noted, premillennialists, by attempting to predict what certain "signs" mean, fall into a trap the Bible warns Christians against. "Scripture warns of this very sort of specific prognostication," he said. "Even the risen Jesus in the book of Acts warns against it."

Also, premillennialists assert that God will save the Jewish people in the end times, a literal reading of Romans 11:26, which says "all Israel will be saved."

The danger other Christians see with this view, Newman said, is that it sets up more than one way to salvation. "This perspective leads one ultimately to affirm two paths of salvation, one for Jews and one for Christians. Christians are saved by faith in Jesus; Jews ultimately will be saved by simply being Jews."

"I think Paul argues otherwise, as do other New Testament authors," he continued. "The whole world will be judged through Jesus Christ and by the gospel. Any way of talking about the future of Israel that does not have the gospel and the church as its center because of the death and resurrection of Jesus must be a misreading of the text."

Premillennial dispensationalism is largely an American Protestant phenomenon, Newman noted. "The question is how does this square with European, African and Latin American Christians who are just as conservative, just as biblically oriented?"

"What we really have here is politics of the United States, seeing us as the great protector of Israel."

That concern is shared by James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee in Washington.

The Religious Right, of which the Christian Zionists are a part, mix piety and politics to the point of being inseparable, Dunn said.

"My problem with their focus on the year of jubilee is they have distorted Scripture by putting a civil-religion overlay on a biblical concept," Dunn added. "Just as it is possible for someone who loves animals to anthropomorphize them and give them human characteristics, it is possible to take an Old Testament Scripture and civil religionize it and make it say things it doesn't say."

Dunn said he fears the Christian Zionists do not have the right motive for befriending Israel. "There is a major flaw in the desire of Christian Zionists to cozy up to the nation Israel if they see the Jews and Israel as nothing more than pawns for their eschatology or prospects for their evangelism."

Dunn predicted the emphasis on Israel and the year of jubilee could backfire on Religious Right figures such as Jerry Falwell, who has been an outspoken advocate of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"I think the linkage of Falwell with Netanyahu may very well prove as embarrassing as his support for apartheid in South Africa and Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines," Dunn said.

Numerous events are planned in the U.S. to mark this year's anniversary of Israel's new history. Perhaps the biggest in the Christian world will be "Israel's Jubilee," planned for April 29-May 3 in Orlando, Fla.

This event, billed as "the largest gathering of Christians and Jews in support of Israel ever convened," is sponsored by the Christian Alliance for Israel, based in Jacksonville Beach, Fla.

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Four views of the end-times

DOWNER'S GROVE, Ill. (ABP) -- Following are four commonly held views of the end-times by evangelical Christians. The descriptions are condensed from the introduction to "The Meaning of the Millennium," edited by Robert Clouse and published by Intervarsity Press.

-- Amillennialism. Views most biblical prophecy figuratively rather than literally. Thus the 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth referenced in Revelation 20 is said to symbolize Christ's present rule from heaven with the souls of deceased believers. Amillennialism teaches that at the Second Coming of Christ, the dead shall be raised and the last judgment held, with a perfect kingdom of God to come afterward for those who have trusted in Jesus as the Messiah.

-- Postmillennialism. Views the kingdom of God as being extended through Christian preaching and teaching that will cause the world to be Christianized and result in a long period of peace and prosperity called the millennium. This period will close with the Second Coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. Not a widely held position today.

-- Historic premillennialism. Based on a strictly literal reading of Scripture, anticipates the Second Coming of Christ to be preceded by certain signs such as the preaching of the gospel to all nations, a great apostasy, wars, famines, earthquakes, the appearance of the Antichrist and a great tribulation. Christ's return will be followed by a period of peace and righteousness before the end of the world. During this time the Jews will be converted and figure prominently in the unfolding drama.

-- Premillennial dispensationalism. Based on historic premillennialism, but with the added view that the purposes of God in Scripture may be understood through a series of time periods called dispensations. Sees the coming of Christ before the millennium in two stages, with the first being a secret "rapture" of the church before the great tribulation. This view came to prominence in the 1800s, and was spread widely by C.W. Scofield, who integrated the doctrines into his Scofield Reference Bible.

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Entrepreneur offers pilgrims a piece of the Holy Land

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- While Jews and Palestinians continue to fight over who should inhabit what part of the Middle East, an entrepreneur has staked a claim to allow people of lesser means to own small pieces of the Holy Land.

For just \$35, including postage and handling, you can receive a deed for one square inch of property in Galilee, overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

And if you visit the Holy Land, just call up Holy Land Parcels Ltd. and they'll arrange for you to visit your property, although you'll have to stand on several dozen other parcels in addition to yours to get a look up-close and personal.

"You are invited to join an exclusive family of Holy Land landowners by acquiring an everlasting possession which cannot be purchased anywhere except in Israel," a promotional brochure explains. "Now you can own a symbolic plot of land in the Holy Land as your personal biblical heritage."

Owning this square-inch of land "will reinforce your ties with the land of the Bible," the brochure promises.

There's more good news, though: Holy Land Parcels will pay the taxes on your property as well.

Benjamin Shavit, director of Holy Land Parcels, said his company's offer is intended as a promotional idea for fund-raising. The company offers a special discounted deal to Christian ministries that want to buy the one-inch parcels and deeds to give to their donors as incentives.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

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