



Nashville, Tennessee
Associated
Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen
Executive editor: Greg Warner

Phone: 800.340.6626
Fax: 904.262.7745
E-mail: bob@abpnews.com

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**Welton Gaddy asks candidates:
How will faith impact leadership?**

By Kenny Byrd

PHILADELPHIA (ABP) -- Rather than being satisfied with Al Gore and George W. Bush's claims that both are born-again Christians, U.S. voters ought to be concerned about how the presidential candidates' religious views would influence their policies once in office, an interfaith leader says.

When John F. Kennedy ran for the highest office in the land, a group of Baptist pastors in Houston asked the candidate how his Catholic faith would impact his decision-making as president, recalled Welton Gaddy, executive director of the Interfaith Alliance, a group of religious leaders formed in 1994 to counter the Religious Right.

"And he answered it straight out," Gaddy said. "That's what we need from Gore and Bush," Gaddy said. "We need a straight-out answer to, 'How does your personal religious faith impact the way you will make decisions in the Oval Office?'"

Gaddy spoke to Associated Baptist Press after an Interfaith Alliance press conference in a Philadelphia church on the meaning of "compassionate conservatism."

"We've got two major candidates for the presidency that are up-front identifying themselves as Christians, saying Jesus is the most important person in their lives," Gaddy said. "I think in this campaign they absolutely have to -- for the sake of voters -- explain how their Christian faith will impact not only their personal character but the way they make decisions that influence every aspect of the life of the nation."

Gaddy said he is glad the two major candidates are talking about their faith. "But once they have chosen to identify themselves as people of faith, they have to talk about what that means," he said.

Gaddy pointed to the fact that Gore has said he would ask the question "what would Jesus do?" in considering policy decisions. And Bush says Jesus is the most important person in his life. "Does that mean now that the Sermon on the Mount is a blueprint for both administrations' policies?" Gaddy asked. "That would not be a leap of logic."

But Gaddy, a Baptist minister, said the positions of both Gore and Bush in support of the death penalty seem to contradict those statements. "How do you reconcile your positions on the death penalty with letting

Jesus be the central person of your life?" he asked.

Is this talk about religion "political strategy or is it personal faith?" Gaddy challenged. And, "how does that relate to the way you'll do public policy in this country?"

Gaddy also challenged the concept of "compassionate conservatism" espoused by Bush and first coined by author Marvin Olasky.

"Not to discourage proceeding with compassionate conservatism," Gaddy said Aug. 3 in the First Unitarian Church, but he raised questions about what the term really means. He said he doubted that Bush really embraced all of the views in Olasky's book "Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America," for which Bush wrote the foreword.

"Bush says he embraces Olasky's views," Gaddy said. "That is a scary statement for a religiously pluralistic nation, because Olasky's philosophy is tied narrowly to a Christian evangelical theology."

For example, Gaddy said Olasky believes the welfare system went wrong when "people changed their views of God." Gaddy charged that view is built on a faulty theological "view of a God who rewards those of good character and makes life difficult for those who fail."

Gaddy also questioned an Olasky view that "the only ultimate solution to reforming people is conversion to Christ."

"Now, for a person running for the president of the United States, you have to ask, 'Do you believe that statement?' And if so, how does that affect the way you relate to people of other faiths? Would you allow your administration to fund the ministry of other religions when you think the only real solution ... is through Christianity?"

Olasky ignores the plight of religious minorities, Gaddy said. "And my predecessors in the Baptist tradition went to jail in the older colonies because of just such an uncritical view of church and state."

He added, "Government dollars have never gone anywhere without government regulation."

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Campolo criticizes both parties on poverty reduction, Israel

By Kenny Byrd

PHILADELPHIA (ABP) -- Both major political parties are "under the judgment of God, because they are neglecting the poor," said Baptist preacher Tony Campolo to a group of politically disenchanted activists meeting blocks away from the Republican National Convention.

Campolo, who has been a spiritual counselor to President Bill Clinton in the aftermath of the Monica Lewinski scandal, said neither party will do what ought to be done in the areas of foreign aid and full-scale forgiveness of debt by impoverished countries.

Campolo, a sociologist and popular evangelical author and speaker, addressed the Shadow Conventions, which met in Philadelphia to address issues sponsors say are being ignored by the two major political parties. The group plans a second convention to shadow the upcoming Democratic convention in Los Angeles.

Campolo specifically addressed a movement known as Jubilee 2000 to cancel the debts owed by impoverished countries to wealthy ones as an example of the government's failure to help the poor.

He said of the 17 top industrialized countries of the world, "We are dead last in per-capita giving to the poor of the world."

The United States likes to give the appearance of "being great generous people," Campolo said. "We're not," he added. Campolo said, "For every \$1 Americans give on a per-capita basis to the poor of the world, Norway gives \$70."

"As we sit here today 44 children will die of either starvation or malnutrition," he added. "What's worse is that most Christians don't give a damn. And what's worse than that is that most Christians are more upset over the fact I said damn than the poor dying children."

Campolo said both parties should be ashamed at their policies.

Roughly half of all U.S. foreign aid goes to Israel and it's not for food, education or health care, he said. "It's to build a military machine. That scares me."

Campolo said he is "absolutely committed to the maintenance of the state of Israel," but "if we do not simultaneously stand up for justice for the Palestinian people we are failing as a people."

Campolo said he recently met with a British Cabinet member to discuss debt relief. Britain has agreed to pay money necessary to cancel third-world debt and pay its share to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to cancel debts.

But the cabinet member wanted to know, Campolo said, why the U.S. government, which is on an unprecedented economic roll and expecting a \$2 trillion surplus, "will not put up its \$600 million" to the international groups so that debt will be canceled.

"In this convention in Philadelphia -- as they will in LA -- they're talking about a \$60 billion Star Wars system ... that doesn't even work," Campolo said. "But they won't put up \$600 million to cancel third-world debt, which I think is the best insurance for peace in our lifetime."

He said that in some impoverished countries as much as 60 percent of every tax dollar is used to pay interest. "Those people that say they should not have taken out those loans ought to think twice," he added.

He said the reasons for the loans in the first place was because "during the Cold War there were dictators whose favor we were trying to nurture, and we gave them money to build military machines to oppress people, and now the poor have to pay it back."

Campolo also applauded Christian Coalition President Pat Robertson, who is one of many conservative leaders in support of Jubilee 2000.

"Whether you agree with his politics or not," Campolo said, Robertson "is committed to biblical revelation, and there is no question that Leviticus 25 says that the year of Jubilee should be a year of debt relief."

Campolo said the move for debt-relief appears to be gaining ground. He pointed out that Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C. now supports debt relief along with President Bill Clinton. Since Helms and Clinton are both Baptists, Campolo said, "Maybe there's something good about being Baptist after all."

However, in an interview with Associated Baptist Press at the convention, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott said he opposed the debt-relief initiative.

"I think that the emphasis should be on trying to help people in America," Lott said. "We should not be insensitive to the needs of the rest of the world, but I'm not an advocate of third-world help that some people are advocating ... because it's an awful lot of money."

"This is the taxpayers' money," Lott said. "I think we should return as much of the taxpayers' money (as possible). I think it's over the top and too much."

On another matter, Campolo said he is "disgusted with both parties" for their leadership supporting the death penalty.

"They have done polling and decided that the American people are in favor of the death penalty," Campolo said. "You can't read the Sermon on the Mount and come out in favor of the death penalty."

Pat Robertson says Bush will appoint 'righteous judges

By Kenny Byrd

PHILADELPHIA (ABP) -- Christian Coalition founder and president Pat Robertson predicted Aug. 1 the group would soon elect a president -- George W. Bush -- who in turn would appoint "righteous judges" to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Those judges would in turn reverse rulings that have blocked laws banning abortion and allowing school prayer, Robertson told a few thousand inspired Coalition members gathered Aug. 1 at a downtown Philadelphia hotel near the Republican National Convention.

The group heard several rousing messages from conservative lawmakers and stood and cheered as a picture of a crucified Jesus draped with an American flag appeared on a video screen with "Proud to Be an American" playing in the background.

Robertson recounted the rise of the conservative group that has been effective in electing candidates to school boards and in other local elections around the nation.

Robertson said once, conservative Christian voters would go to the polls and "elect certain people," but then politically appointed judges would undermine the policies they sought.

"I saw little children being denied the right to pray," Robertson said. "I saw crosses being taken down out of public places. I saw statues of Jesus being pulled down." And he said abortion-rights decisions "launched genocide" in America.

But Robertson said formation of the Christian Coalition in the 1980s awoke a "sleeping giant" in American politics.

More recent news reports have described a group struggling with financial troubles and massive reorganizations that have shaken the group's leadership.

But Robertson said reports of the organization's death were "premature."

And now, with at least two or three Supreme Court justices expected to be appointed by the next president, Robertson said of Bush, "We have a candidate who will appoint righteous judges." And, he added, "the other side," knows "what the prize is" in the upcoming presidential race.

Robertson said the Supreme Court's Roe. vs. Wade decision, which legalized most abortions in 1973, needs to be reversed. He also criticized a recent Supreme Court decision that struck down school-sponsored prayer before football games and another decision that struck down a Nebraska law banning "partial-birth abortions."

Robertson detailed several goals that were set by the Christian Coalition years ago and have been met or are about to be met. They achieved a conservative majority in Congress in 1994, two years before the group's target.

The coalition also set the goal of having a significant voice in one of the two major political parties, he said. "I think we have a pretty significant voice in the Republican Party," Robertson said.

The next goal, he pointed out, was by the year 2000 to elect a "born-again man" to the White House. "We're just before seeing that goal realized this year," Robertson said as the crowd cheered.

But Robertson departed from Bush's support of keeping intact the U.S. Department of Education. In 1996 the GOP platform called for the abolition of the department that provides funds to public schools as well as some resources to private and parochial ones. But this year, Bush led the effort to remove the abolition of the department from the platform.

Robertson would still like to see it abolished. He told the crowd he could educate all of America's children better than public schools "if I had one-tenth of the Department of Education's budget."

And Robertson, who ran an unsuccessful bid for the White House in 1988, lamented his tax burden. "I pay a lot of taxes," he said "I don't want my money going to fund dirty pictures or the Planned Parenthood abortion clinics."

Robertson said his group plans to distribute 75 million voter guides and register conservative Christians in churches across the country. The controversial guides have been criticized as supporting candidates, which is prohibited under IRS rules for non-profit religious organizations, but Christian Coalition leaders insist the guides are non-partisan.

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Clinton spiritual counselor says divorce counts in morality, homosexuality debate

By Kenny Byrd

PHILADELPHIA (ABP) -- As several speakers at the Republican National Convention alluded to womanizing by Bill Clinton, Baptist preacher Tony Campolo said the president ought to be given credit for keeping his family together and raising a good daughter.

"Many of the people who are attacking the president have had similar problems in their own lives and have moved toward ending their marriages with divorce," said Campolo, who has been acting as one of three spiritual advisors to Clinton following the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Campolo responded to questions from Associated Baptist Press prior to an Aug. 2 speech by GOP vice presidential nominee Dick Cheney.

In that speech, Cheney said, "On the first hour of the first day [Bush] will restore decency and integrity to the Oval Office." Cheney also said members of the military would have a commander-in-chief in Bush that once again "they can respect."

GOP delegates held signs on the convention floor calling for the restoration of integrity to the White House. A recurring theme of discussion among delegates was Clinton's "immoral" actions.

But Campolo said: "A good moral statement to this country is that sin and unfaithfulness is not the final word. ... There is possibility for restoration and renewal. The president has held his marriage together and has nurtured a great daughter. That, too, is a family value."

Campolo also questioned a silent protest led by the head of the Texas Eagle Forum during a speech by Rep. Jim Kolbe, R-Ariz., an openly gay member of the House of Representatives.

"If you are going to start protesting lifestyles that are contrary to your personal convictions, seems to me they should have bowed their heads and closed their eyes and prayed when a divorced person got up on the platform to speak," Campolo said. "Jesus says a great deal about divorce."

Campolo has said he does not agree with homosexuality, but he asked: "Why do we single out homosexuality and say we will not tolerate it ... when in reality we tolerate a lot of other stuff? The gays are not the danger to the American family. They're not the ones that want to get divorced. They want to get married."

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