



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

November 30, 2000

(00-108)

IN THIS ISSUE:

- New CBF value statement puts funding of schools in limbo**
- Phil Roberts nominated to lead Midwestern Seminary**
- Former ABC official moves to Bread For the World office**
- High court accepts marijuana, Texas death penalty cases**
- Best way to get teens to church is to take them with you**
- Churches could aid family faith by talking about it, professor suggests**
- Researcher says Americans support religious liberty mostly in concept**
- Researcher proposes biological theory for why women more religious than men**
- Researcher: Promise Keepers was about revivalism more than gender issues**
- Religious researchers still puzzling over flaws in church attendance polling**
- News briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

**New CBF value statement
puts funding of schools in limbo**

By Craig Bird

ATLANTA (ABP) -- An anti-homosexual "organizational value" recently approved by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is putting the funding spotlight on two of the 11 theological-education "partners" that receive partial funding from the Atlanta-based moderate organization.

The Fellowship's key leadership council adopted in October a new policy barring financial support of "organizations that condone, advocate or affirm homosexual practice" to be used in developing future budgets.

The policy, described by a CBF leader as "welcoming but not affirming" of gays, still would allow funding of scholarships for students at schools with an open-admissions policy that includes sexual orientation. It could place the future of Baptist-studies programs at two Methodist universities at risk, however, because they rely on CBF money for operating support.

Administrators of "Baptist houses of study" at Duke University in Durham, N.C., and Emory's Candler School of Theology in Atlanta have no power to change open-admissions policies that govern the universities to which they are connected. Nor would it be a simple matter to shift CBF funding to scholarships.

Since churches and individuals would rather give to scholarships than operating funds, making up lost revenue through fund raising would be difficult. Also, both the sponsoring schools and the law frown on scholarships that are "negatively designated" to exclude a certain class of people.

Because of that, questions are being raised about whether a relationship that CBF leaders readily acknowledge as beneficial will continue.

"I certainly agree that the Baptist houses bring a number of strengths to the process of theological education and to the community of faith that makes up CBF," said Gary Parker, the Fellowship's coordinator for Baptist principles. However, he said, Fellowship leaders now must determine how the new value statement "applies to each organization or institution with which we have a relationship."

Directors of the Baptist houses at Duke and Emory said they hope the relationship continues.

"The CBF Coordinating Council has been very affirming of Candler," said David Key, director of Baptist studies at Emory. "Hopefully the process will work out. The loss of CBF funding would devastate us, perhaps shut down our program."

Duke's Baptist house could survive without the operating money from CBF but "just barely," said Director Furman Hewitt. "We certainly would not be able to expand our program to give students and local churches the assistance they require from us."

The Fellowship funds theological education through a variety of approaches, including freestanding seminaries, divinity schools attached to Baptist-affiliated universities and Baptist houses in an ecumenical setting.

Supporters of the Baptist-house approach believe it has distinctive benefits.

A third CBF-supported Baptist house of studies, at Texas Christian University's Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas, uses CBF funding for scholarships and therefore would not be affected by the new policy. The program's acting director, former Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Jeff Pool, said learning in a diverse setting produces graduates with a stronger Baptist identity.

"At a non-Baptist school like Brite, Baptists share in healthy dialogue with people who represent different biblical and theological perspectives," Pool said. "That requires our students to think explicitly about their Baptist identity. Such a context does not exist in Baptist schools where all-Baptist faculties and virtually all-Baptist student populations assume or presuppose the meaning of being a Baptist Christian."

Courtney Kruger, pastor of First Baptist Church in Pendleton, S.C., and an alumnus of the Duke Baptist house, agreed.

"My pastor told me I would never serve in a Southern Baptist church if I went to Duke," Kruger recalled. "And I went with the thought in the back of my mind to become a Methodist. But after the first six weeks I knew I could never do that. As wonderful as Methodists are, I realized they were not what I was. I was, and am, a Baptist! So I wound up being much stronger in my Baptist ideology because I went to Duke."

Candler graduate Stacey Simpson, pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church in Edison, Ga., said she began her theological education doubting she would remain in a denomination that was increasingly telling women they could not be called to ministry. Instead, she came out deeply committed to Baptist positions and principles.

"It was incredible, figuring out who I was and why," she said. "I became increasingly proud of my Baptist heritage." Rather than viewing her Baptist affiliation as an accident of birth, she said she came to see it as a "commitment" that had to be continually re-evaluated and challenged by comparison with another faith tradition.

"I learned so much about the historical Baptist emphasis on soul liberty and the impact that has had on Baptists and others," Simpson said. "That has stayed with me, and I see that in the members of Fellowship Baptists -- they are deeply committed to living out the obligations of being accountable to God without intercessors."

Duke's Baptist house director Hewitt, a former professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, said the programs are good stewardship of Baptist dollars. "Quality training of quality leaders comes at a cheap price for Baptists, because we are building on the foundation laid by our colleagues at Duke," he said.

Hewitt said the budget for Duke's Baptist house is \$100,000, of which CBF provides \$20,000. "You can't build or operate a new divinity school for that," he said. Duke's Baptist-studies program added a record 33 new students this year, pushing enrollment to 105.

Candler's Key agreed: "The Baptist-studies model, the way it is set up at Brite, Duke and here, is the best stewardship of Baptist-education money going. We don't have to pay the light bill, hire the faculty or acquire library books. CBF funds are invested to nurture students in Baptist life, and place them in productive relationships with Baptist churches."

Scott Hudgins, who directed the Candler program 1994-97 and is now director of admissions and student services at Wake Forest University Divinity School, said another stewardship issue is accountability.

"The Baptist houses and study programs are the most streamlined and accountable [of CBF partner schools,]" he said. "All monies go to scholarships or program support of Baptist students. At the larger Baptist schools, CBF block grants are utilized for buildings, heat and air, faculty support and for reducing or subsidizing tuition for all students -- Baptist or not."

Hewitt said students at Duke benefit from a world-class education. "Our students study under faculty members who write many of the textbook professors in other divinity schools and seminaries use," he said. "They have the opportunity to study, within a Baptist context, at an historically great ecumenical divinity school."

Interaction with other Christian denominations benefits both Baptist and non-Baptist students, Key and Hewitt added.

"It is beneficial for Baptists that we are in a place to help fellow believers, in our case Methodists, understand who Baptists are and the biblical basis for what we believe," Key said. "We get to help them understand some of the things the Southern Baptist Convention does."

Hewitt noted that "Baptist students learn from colleagues and professors about alternatives for doing worship and church life." Enriched by traditions and experiences of the wider Christian community, they are better equipped to minister because they don't live and learn in a "just Baptist" world, he said.

Added Hudgins: "The only ecumenical dimension of CBF's current list of programs and partnerships is its partnership with Duke, Candler and Brite. These schools invite CBF in to assist in the guidance of their large Baptist student populations. That is a great privilege and lends credibility to CBF."

Directors of the three Baptist studies program said they hope CBF will learn from other denominations about handling tough moral and theological issues.

"Candler understands why this [homosexuality] is an issue with Baptists, because it's a big thing for Methodists too," Key said. "The United Methodists have been very clear in forbidding the ordination of homosexuals and same-sex marriages -- much clearer than the CBF statement. Candler's board includes seven bishops from the Southeast Jurisdiction, which is the most conservative of the five jurisdictions in the United Methodist Church.

"But they also are clear on what is the role of the church and what is the role of the academy. CBF needs to understand that too. The Methodists have taken a clear-cut stand on the gay/lesbian issue, but no one protests Candler working with them as students. Part of the academic process needs to allow open and honest discussion of differing positions."

Key said issues surrounding Christian baptism are much more divisive than homosexuality when Baptist and Methodist students interact. "Our beliefs about baptism go to the heart of who we are as Baptists, he said. "Yet there is not a Baptist student at Candler who feels threatened or ostracized, because it is accepted and expected that we will argue from our theological perspective in a learning environment."

Phil Roberts nominated to lead Midwestern Seminary

By Bob Allen

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- North American Mission Board administrator Phil Roberts has been nominated as the next president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Mo.

Roberts, 50, is a former seminary professor and pastor who has worked seven years at the Southern Baptist Convention missions agency in Alpharetta, Ga. He led the board's interfaith-witness program five years and in 1999 was named vice president of a new "strategic focus cities" plan identifying major metropolitan areas for priority evangelism and church-planting efforts.

Roberts' nomination, announced Nov. 28, ends a year-long search for the seminary's fourth president, prompted by the September 1999 firing of former President Mark Coppenger, who now works as a church planter in Evanston, Ill.

The full trustee board will vote on Roberts' nomination at a called meeting Jan. 8-9 in Kansas City.

"Dr. Phil Roberts is an outstanding Christian leader and theologian, and we are excited to have a man of his caliber to recommend to the full board," said trustee chairman Carl Weiser, pastor of Hyland Heights Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Va.

Weiser said between eight and 10 candidates were interviewed for the job by a seven-member search committee named last October. Of the long search process, Weiser said, "We were going to keep at it until we found God's man."

Roberts is a former missions-and-evangelism professor at Southeastern and Southern Baptist theological seminaries. He also taught and was acting dean at a Baptist seminary in Romania and was pastor of churches in Belgium, England and Germany.

He was raised in the Midwest. His father, the late Ray Roberts, was the first executive director of the State Convention of Baptists in Ohio.

-30-

Former ABC official moves to Bread For the World office

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Robert Tiller, an ordained American Baptist minister, has been named director of government relations at Bread For the World, a Christian anti-hunger organization.

Tiller served as director of government relations at the Washington office of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. for 14 years. The last three years he worked for an organization seeking to abolish nuclear weapons.

"I have long appreciated Bread's unique approach to the problem of hunger in the United States and abroad," Tiller said. "Eliminating hunger is clearly possible, and I look forward to the day when we celebrate that accomplishment."

In a phone interview, Tiller said Bread For the World will try to increase aid to Africa and in 2002 will seek substantial changes in the welfare laws that must be re-authorized by Congress.

-30-

High court accepts marijuana, Texas death penalty cases

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to take on two major ethical issues of the day, accepting a death-penalty case out of Texas and a plea by the Clinton administration to prevent a California group from providing marijuana for medical use.

Supreme Court justices blocked the execution of Johnny Paul Penry just hours before he was to be put to death in Texas. The court will next seek to clarify the standards by which jurors can consider a defendant's mental capacity.

Penry's lawyers say the convicted killer has the reasoning capacity of a 7-year-old, but Texas prosecutors disagree. According to news reports, Texas Attorney General John Cornyn has said Penry is "a schemer, a planner and can be purposefully deceptive."

Penry was sentenced to death for killing Pamela Moseley Carpenter in Livingston, Texas, in 1979. The execution will remain on hold until the justices issue a ruling expected no later than the July 2001.

Also Nov. 27, the high court agreed to decide whether "medical necessity" is a legitimate defense to laws that prohibit the distribution of marijuana.

California voters approved a measure in 1996 authorizing the possession and use of marijuana for medical purposes as long as a doctor recommends it. The Oakland Cannabis Buyers' Cooperative provides marijuana "to provide seriously ill patients with safe access to necessary medicine so that these individuals do not have to resort to the streets," according to a court document.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had said the group may go forward with the drug distribution.

But the U.S. Department of Justice is arguing that Congress has decided that marijuana has "no currently accepted medical use." And government lawyers say the 9th Circuit ruling "threatens the government's ability to enforce the federal drug laws."

In a separate case, Supreme Court justices refused to hear the appeal of South Carolina gambling officials, who challenged the state's new ban on the possession of video-gambling machines.

-30-

Best way to get teens to church is to take them with you

By Mark Wingfield

HOUSTON (ABP) -- The best way for parents to ensure their children will attend church once they leave home is to make a regular practice of attending church as a family while the kids live at home.

That's the conclusion of a yearlong study by Carol Lytch, coordinator of Lilly Endowment programs for strengthening congregational leadership at Louisville Presbyterian Seminary. She presented her findings during the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Houston this fall.

"Families who cultivate the collective understanding that 'our family attends church' tend to produce teens who believe they should be there," she said.

Over a year's time, Lytch followed the lives of 41 high school seniors in Louisville, Ky. The teens were at least loosely affiliated with Catholic, evangelical Protestant or mainline Protestant churches. She

interviewed both the teens and their parents, and she attended school and church functions to observe their lives.

Issues of race, class and social status were largely held constant to focus strictly on the issue of how faith values are transmitted to teens in a particular sample. The sample was almost all white, middle-class and suburban.

The focal question she asked the high school seniors was, "Do you intend to be active in the church after you leave home?"

While admittedly a premature indicator of what the young adults actually will do after high school, this question provides a window into the motivation they carry, Lytch said. And it is a question she cross-tabulated with responses from teens and parents alike to create a picture of what factors most influence teens toward a lifestyle of church attendance.

Teen responses about future church attendance fell into three broad categories, which she labeled "loyalty," "provisional loyalty" and "unlikely loyalty."

Lytch found the No. 1 factor influencing older teens' commitment to church attendance is the personal behavior of their parents.

This is true for church attendance while living at home and predicted church attendance after leaving home.

Regarding current church attendance, nearly 93 percent of the teens she studied replicated the pattern of church attendance lived out by one or both parents. "If parental frequencies differed, in all cases the teen replicated the pattern of the less-frequently attending parent," she noted.

Likewise, "if parents living in the teens' household both attended church weekly, teens tended to predict they would be active in the church after they left home. If just one of the parents attended less than weekly, teen religious loyalty plummeted."

Parenting style also plays a predictable role in this finding, she reported. Teens from families with the most permissive parenting styles were less likely to attend church regularly as teenagers and said they would be unlikely to attend church regularly once they left home.

Teen commitment to church attendance was shaped more positively by every other style of parenting along the continuum, except the most permissive style.

More than half the families in Lytch's study maintained a rule that "in our family, we attend church." Among these families, all but one teen predicted she would attend church after she left home. None of these teens predicted they would be unlikely to attend church.

In contrast, only two teens from homes where one or both parents did not attend church regularly were in the habit of attending church regularly themselves now.

"Teens, in and of themselves, cannot be expected to have the inner strength to keep participating in church on their own unless their parents urge them to do so," Lytch reported. "After young teens are confirmed and/or baptized and become active members of the church, they still are not mature enough to be committed to their community of faith.

"If they are going to continue in their religious tradition in the late teen years, they benefit from the help of their parents or other adults who are close to them. The religious individualist stance that emphasizes choice actually hinders the teens' choice for religious participation unless the adults in the family have exercised their choice in favor of regular church participation."

Further, teens living in families where church attendance is required told Lytch this rule is a supportive push rather than a dreaded requirement.

One teen told her: "When I was little, I would say, 'Oh, do I have to go to church today?' and my mom would say, 'Get up and you have to go to church,' and it was just something I did. ... Now I want to go to church, and I want to go to camp, and I want to go on choir tour, and it's because I want to."

Despite the best intentions of churches to make their programs accessible to all, family finances do play a role in determining teens' participation, Lytch also found. Parents in lower-income families may be less likely to attend church themselves because of work commitments, which in turn produces a lower attendance rate among teens, she said.

Church leaders should understand the monetary factor behind extra church activities has a bearing on church attendance as well, Lytch added.

"Lower- and middle-income families have fewer resources to spend on church ski trips and church camps, as much as churches try to keep all activities affordable. Having to miss church activities for any reason, including working a part-time job, weakens the teen's church-based social network. If the teen participates in the full range of church youth activities, worship attendance tends to rise."

The bottom line, Lytch said, is that the transmission of faith values is primarily influenced by parental role modeling, mixed with lesser influences from other variables.

"When the link between home and church is strong, when teens assess their relationship with the parents as warm, and when there is a parent/teen social network in place, there is a higher level of religious loyalty exhibited by the teen."

-30-

Churches could aid family faith by talking about it, professor suggests

By Mark Wingfield

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Churches could encourage faith development in families by helping families talk more about their shared experiences, says a Baylor University researcher and educator.

"Family is one of the contexts in which individuals develop and live their faith," said Diana Garland, director of Baylor's graduate program in social work.

"Perhaps one of the simplest and most important places to begin in ministry with families is to ask them to teach us about faith -- and to hear for themselves the strength faith gives them for living," she added.

Individuals joined together in a family may develop a "family faith" that provides remarkable comfort and meaning in each member's life, Garland told members of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. She addressed the group's annual meeting in Houston, reporting on her Lilly Endowment-funded study of how faith influences family life.

Garland conducted two-hour, face-to-face interviews with 110 families in four regions of the United States. Families interviewed represented Southern Baptists, National Baptists, United Methodists and Presbyterians. Family members were asked individually and corporately how faith shaped their lives.

The responses she recorded could be grouped at four points along a continuum, she said:

- Those who saw faith having little influence on their families.
- Those who saw family as a context for defining faith.
- Those who saw family as the shaping influence on their faith.
- Those who told a family faith narrative shaped by the family group.

The ability of individuals to trust in God appears to be strongly influenced by their ability to trust their families, Garland found. "When family relationships are not trustworthy, then faith in God may also be shaken, for adults as well as for children."

Faith also provides the impetus for some individuals to take heroic steps in caring for family members, Garland reported.

To illustrate, she told this story: "An African-American middle-aged woman, divorced when her children were young, describes the schedule she carried for years in order to support her children, working at night full time while they were sleeping, coming home to get them off to school in the morning, then working a full-time day job. For seven years, she averaged two to three hours of sleep a night. When she began earning enough to quit one job, she enrolled in college and began carrying nine hours each semester to earn her bachelor's degree. Now she is raising her 10-year-old niece.

"In response to how this was possible, she responded, 'The Lord did it. I know I didn't do it.' This theme was repeated over and over, as many respondents gave their favorite Bible verse: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'"

Families also view faith as a vital means of coping during difficult times, Garland found. In some cases, faith inspires a belief that things will "work out" in time or that "all things work together for good." In other cases, faith provides the context for believing God will take bad things and bring something good out of them.

Garland related the story of a Midwestern couple who lost a young son in a fire at the home of a babysitter. Sitting in their own home during the interview, the father explained his beliefs:

"I think this house pictures the way things have been with us -- these rooms, these two rooms. They look great. But if you had seen what it was like before we got hold of it, you wouldn't have believed it. I put the floor down. Kate and I patched and sanded and primed and painted those walls. I put the moldings up. Whatever you see here is because we did it. Sometimes people come into those rooms and say, 'Oh, this is beautiful,' and I feel like, 'Do you want to see the scars? Do you want to see how it got to look beautiful?'"

At the most faith-filled end of the spectrum, Garland found families that had woven together a common faith narrative. These were the instances in which family members told their story together, sometimes interrupting each other, affirming or modifying the story as it was told.

"Family members sometimes build on and develop one another's faith definitions, stretching individual definitions into family definitions of faith," she noted.

Such faith narratives "tell stories for a reason," Garland said. "The stories illustrate a family principle, define their identity as a family unit or in some other way describe or underscore the meaning of family life."

-30-

Researcher says Americans support religious liberty mostly in concept

By Mark Wingfield

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Americans support religious liberty as a concept but often are willing to restrict the religious liberty of others in practice, according to research by a political science professor.

"There is widespread support for the idea of religious freedom as a symbol, but many Americans are quite willing to restrict the actual religious liberty of specific groups considered dangerous or strange," said Ted Jelen, professor of political science at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas.

He made this assessment during a presentation on the persistence of church-state conflict given at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in Houston.

He said Americans might best be described as "abstract separationists" and "concrete accommodationists."

"Large majorities of respondents in opinion surveys in the United States endorse such concepts as a 'high wall' of separation between church and state," he reported. "However, many Americans also are supportive of particular public support for religion, such as organized school prayer, public displays of religious symbols (especially during the Christmas season) and the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools.

"Many citizens of the United States appear to experience little tension between these attitudes," he added.

Likewise, many Americans want rights for themselves they are not willing to grant others who hold different religious views.

While professing to support religious liberty for all, "a great many Americans would deny so-called Moonies or Satanists the right to recruit among high school students or deny Native Americans the right to use hallucinogenic drugs as part of religious rituals," Jelen reported from his own research.

The key to understanding these paradoxes is realizing most Americans have little exposure to "genuine religious diversity," he suggested.

"In focus groups we conducted ..., we found many respondents favored various accommodationist practices, such as organized school prayer. However, we also found it was quite easy to persuade these respondents to switch to more separationist responses when we raised the issue of accommodating the religious beliefs of non-Christians such as Muslims or Hindus."

For example, the idea of rotating a daily school prayer among members of different religious groups "was rejected with virtual unanimity" when respondents understood that Muslims or Buddhists might be included in the rotation, Jelen said.

This dynamic is further illustrated by understanding that politicians who take the most strident stands on issues such as school prayer tend to be running for local or state offices rather than national offices, he continued.

"American presidential candidates typically do not take strong positions on church-state issues and tend to confine themselves to pious generalities about the importance of religion in public life," he noted. This is because at a national level, candidates must appeal to a much more diverse constituency than candidates for a city's mayor, for example.

And although most church-state cases hinge upon the U.S. Constitution -- a federal document -- most church-state cases revolve around local issues, Jelen said. "A very high percentage of church-state questions have dealt with elementary and secondary education, which is a policy area in which decentralized local control is a prized political value.

"When local governments deal with issues such as Sabbath observances or school curricula, they are operating at an applied level, in which many citizens and some public officials are unaware of the possible relevance of a more general constitutional principle."

A trend that affects churches is seeing church-state issues through the lens of one's own smaller community, Jelen said. Those who believe government ought to accommodate their form of religion tend to think they are in the majority because people of like mind congregate together at like-minded churches, he explained.

For these and other reasons, church-state conflicts in the United States are not likely to diminish any time soon, Jelen predicted.

Researcher proposes biological theory for why women more religious than men

By Mark Wingfield

HOUSTON (ABP) -- Many studies have shown that women are more religious than men, and at least one researcher is convinced there is a biological reason.

Sociologist Rodney Stark is urging his colleagues to track down the connection between gender and spirituality. "This is a big can of worms, and I think it's time we open it," said the University of Washington professor known among his colleagues as someone who pushes traditional boundaries and sparks innovative research.

The evidence of this gender disparity can be seen in most any church across the nation, Stark said in an address during the annual convention of the Religion Research Association in Houston Oct. 21. Churches are filled with more women than men -- and always have been, he noted.

This trend is found not only in the United States but in nearly every other country he has studied, Stark said, handing out multiple charts to support his research.

Women expressing greater religious involvement than men is an "enormously common phenomenon," he said, noting evidence even from the first century Christian church.

Various non-biological reasons for this disparity have been put forward in the past, Stark said. For example, some have suggested the gender gap was created because of fewer women than men working outside the home or because of women taking more responsibility in childcare.

However, no significant difference can be found between the religiosity of working women and stay-at-home women, Stark reported. Likewise, no difference is seen when comparing the religiosity of women who are mothers and women who are not.

In his quest to solve this puzzle, Stark found surprising help from criminologists. The other major social behavior in which there is a significant gap between men and women is the commission of violent crime.

Criminologists are increasingly finding evidence that men are more inclined than women to commit violent crimes because of biological differences specifically linked to hormone levels, Stark said. For example, elevated testosterone levels have been linked to men engaging in more risky behaviors.

The gender gap in crime relates mainly to violent crimes -- what Stark called "stand-up" crimes -- but fades when examining what he called "sit-down crimes." For example, women are not likely to bludgeon someone, but they might poison someone. And women are just as likely as men to embezzle, he reported.

The difference, some criminologists contend, is in shortsighted risk taking. Men are far more likely than women to be extreme risk-takers.

The connection between this risk-taking and testosterone has been confirmed in other studies over the last two decades, including analysis of athletes using steroids and extensive research on Vietnam veterans.

Stark thinks these findings may be the missing link to the gender gap in religious behavior.

If women are more likely to avoid risk-taking, they naturally would be more likely than men not to take chances on the hereafter, Stark reasoned. He pointed to the famous philosophical tool known as Pascal's Wager, which says believing in God is the most logical option available, because even if God doesn't exist and doesn't promise eternal life, the believer loses nothing in the end. But if a person gambles on the belief that God does not exist, there's much more to lose if in fact it turns out God does exist.

The bottom line, Stark said, is that "being irreligious is risky." So if women are genetically inclined to take less severe risks than men, it stands to reason women would be more likely than men to avoid the risk of eternal damnation, he suggested.

This theory gets further support, Stark said, by looking at variations in the gender gap in different types of religions. For example, Judaism offers less emphasis on the afterlife than Christianity, and there's virtually no gender gap in religiosity among Jews, whereas there's a significant gap among Christians. Further, the gender gap widens in Christian denominations that place a greater emphasis on heaven and hell, he added.

Stark's hypothesis drew mixed reactions from respondents and participants in the conference. Two women, one a self-described feminist, gave formal responses to the paper.

"As a feminist, I am uneasy with biological arguments," said Paula Nesbitt of the University of Denver. "Biology is too often used as an explanation of convenience."

At the same time, though, "I cannot stand here and tell you hormonal levels don't have an effect," Nesbitt added.

Biological factors could prove to be a contributing factor to religious behavior, but ultimately will not be found to be the primary factor, she predicted.

Marion Goldman of the University of Oregon found more promise in Stark's ideas, but she too expressed caution. "We should think of Rod Stark as a sociological alarm clock," she suggested. "You may want to throw him against the wall, but you have to listen to him."

-30-

Researcher: Promise Keepers was about revivalism more than gender issues

By Mark Wingfield

HOUSTON (ABP) -- The Promise Keepers movement was more about revivalism than about gender differences, according to a prominent researcher of religious trends.

Those who criticized Promise Keepers events as being rallies for social and family dominance by white males missed the point entirely, said Larry Iannaccone, professor of economics at Santa Clara University in California.

Iannaccone made his comments during a presentation at the annual meeting of the Religious Research Association in Houston. His topic was "Bringing White Guys to their Knees: How Promise Keepers Faked Right, Ran Left and Scored Big."

Critics of Promise Keepers have been inaccurate in their accusations in part because they do not understand the evangelical context in which Promise Keepers flourished, he asserted. "Promise Keepers is a contemporary evangelical movement patterned after revivals," he explained. "It is all about revivalism, not about gender."

For example, he challenged criticisms that Promise Keepers focused on a "mostly white" crowd.

At the huge Promise Keepers "Stand in the Gap" rally on the Washington Mall, the crowd was about 80 percent white, Iannaccone confirmed. About 60 percent of the speakers at the rally were white, he added.

Then he compared those figures with the overall American population, which is 83 percent white, and the rolls of mainline Protestant churches, which are 88 percent white.

Further, Promise Keepers demonstrated far more racial diversity than its primary critic, the National Organization of Women, he said, saying NOW doesn't report racial backgrounds of its adherents but his research demonstrates the group is "overwhelmingly white."

Charges that Promise Keepers promoted "anti-women and patriarchal" attitudes also don't hold up under scrutiny, Iannaccone said.

"Compared to what?" he asked. "Where would a 22-year-old unescorted female feel least threatened, at the end of a Promise Keepers rally or when a sporting event lets out?"

Rather than promoting hatred or exclusion, Iannaccone's research found Promise Keepers actually created an "extraordinary blend" of old-fashioned revivalism and new sensitivity for men, he said.

He compared older evangelical models -- such as the Bill Gothard seminars that advocate a strong model of male headship -- with this newer model of accountability and sensitivity to wives and children.

"Take everything women might want their husbands to do better, and in front of it put the phrase 'Real men ...,' and that's what Promise Keepers advocated," Iannaccone said.

From this perspective, rather than representing a shift of American society to the right, Promise Keepers actually represented a shift of evangelical society to the left, he suggested.

-30-

Religious researchers still puzzling over flaws in church attendance polling

By Mark Wingfield

HOUSTON (ABP) --If you want to start a polite fight, put a group of religious researchers in a room together and ask them to discuss why traditional polling methods consistently overstate Americans' church attendance.

Just such a conversation occurred at the annual meeting of the Religious Research Association in Houston this fall. Three panelists presented their theories on the subject, and then the audience got to chime in afterward.

Among those in the audience, of course, were other researchers who had published work with different theories on the same problem.

While some see the issue cutting to the very core of social research of all kinds, not everyone even agrees there is a problem.

Hardly anyone had even suggested there was a problem until 1993, when a trio of two Southern Baptists and a Catholic took the unprecedented step of actually counting heads in every congregation in a small Alabama county one Sunday.

That research by Kirk Hadaway, Penny Long Marler and Mark Chaves rocked the world of religious research because it called into question the results of Gallup telephone polls that have been taken for decades.

Gallup studies have shown a consistent pattern of church attendance in the United States across the 20th century, hovering above 40 percent for both Protestants and Catholics. Those results were obtained through telephone surveys in which participants were asked if they had personally attended a church or religious service in the preceding seven days.

The research by Hadaway, Marler and Chaves reported much lower rates of church attendance -- 20 percent for Protestants and 28 percent for Catholics -- based on the actual head counts.

Their explanation: People interviewed on the telephone about church attendance tend to paint a rosier picture than reality because it is socially desirable to say you attend church regularly.

In research terms, this is called a response bias.

And in this case, if response bias is the culprit, it is so big that it indicates a problem for all kinds of surveys, said Larry Iannaccone, a professor at Santa Clara University in California. "We might as well give up on all survey-based research," he told the group.

Like many others, Iannaccone has his own theories of what's gone wrong: "This isn't a sign of response bias. It's just a sign of us researchers being stupid."

He contends the basic Gallup question and others like it are flawed or the results gathered by such questions are misunderstood.

"If I claim to attend church every week, what do I mean?" he asked. "That I never get sick? That I never go on vacation? That I never oversleep? ... No, I mean I go whenever I reasonably can."

Researchers have applied a level of literal interpretation to church attendance data that they never would apply to other data, Iannaccone said.

For example, if researchers asked people how often they go to work, respondents might answer, "Every day." But few people actually go to work seven days a week. What the answer really means is that person normally goes to work on every scheduled workday, he said.

It is possible, Iannaccone suggested, that people give answers to the Gallup question based on their customary habit, realizing there are "excused absences" for things such as vacations, church mission trips, illness and business trips. "Dedicated attenders probably miss 15 to 20 weeks for reasonable reasons."

A second problem, he suggested, could be sample bias. The people most likely to answer the phone and talk with pollsters also are the most likely to have attended church, he said. Likewise, those least likely to attend church may be least likely to be home to talk with pollsters.

Yet another warning was sounded by Sean Everton, a graduate student in sociology at Stanford University. He presented an analysis of how church attendance varies dramatically according to seasonal patterns.

His analysis shows Easter Sunday is the highest day of church attendance nationwide, with three other special days nearly tying for second place -- Palm Sunday, Mother's Day and Thanksgiving.

Church attendance also gets a boost during Advent -- the four weeks leading up to Christmas -- but the impact is spread out more because the focus isn't on a single Sunday.

Everton also documented a pattern of low-attendance Sundays generally following high-attendance Sundays.

The basic cycle of church life in America shows attendance dropping off each spring, bottoming out in summer, then picking up again by September, leading to the peak days of Thanksgiving, Advent, Palm Sunday, Easter and Mother's Day.

"The seasonal effects of church attendance are very clear," he reported. "Religious holidays and special-event Sundays attract more people."

Not all congregations experience the same degree of variation in attendance, though. The relative strictness of a church's doctrine has a direct bearing on this, he said, noting that the stricter a congregation is the less variation is found in attendance.

"There is far less variation among evangelical congregations" than among mainline Protestant congregations, he explained.

This understanding of the seasonal cycle of church attendance sheds light on the polling problem, Everton said, by demonstrating that it makes a difference when the polling is done.

That difference was highlighted by Bob Woodberry, a graduate student in sociology at the University of North Carolina. He compared the results of research based on time-use surveys from two periods of time.

Other researchers have published data suggesting church attendance has declined precipitously, based on records individuals have been asked to keep of how they use their time. The problem with this research, he said, is that one of the most prominent case studies uses data from one year that falls over the Palm Sunday/Easter Sunday period, while data for the second year does not include those high-attendance Sundays in the sample.

The bottom line, he said: "If you look at comparable data, you find no decline in church attendance on time-use surveys."

The problem, though, is that the level of church attendance indicated on these time-use surveys turns out to be around 30 percent -- still 10 points below the results obtained by the traditional Gallup question.

That leaves unanswered the question of why.

Meanwhile, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see there's a problem with traditional polling results on church attendance, one participant in the discussion noted. "Where are the cars? If 40 percent of the population really was attending church, you'd have more traffic on Sunday mornings."

-30-

News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

Southern Baptists of Texas reaffirm ties to national group

SAN ANTONIO, Texas (ABP) -- Southern Baptists of Texas tightened its relationship to the Southern Baptist Convention Nov. 14.

The 2-year-old convention, formed to protest moderate domination of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, affirmed June revisions to the Southern Baptist Convention's "Baptist Faith and Message" statement and approved a budget sending 51 percent of receipts to the national denomination.

The convention voted to add the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message," which was earlier challenged by the much-larger BGCT, to its constitution.

Resolutions affirmed the SBC's unified budget, the Cooperative Program, "the greatest and most effective mission-giving program in the history of the Christian church" and endorsed SBC seminaries, the Executive Committee and Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission that were targeted for reduced funding by the BGCT.

Baptists intervene in armed robbery

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- Nov. 5 was anything but a usual Sunday at New Hope Baptist Church near Little Rock, Ark. Shortly after 11 a.m., 17-year-old Larren Howell burst into the sanctuary and said the convenience store next door was being robbed.

Howell, a clerk at the store, had been forced to empty the cash register. He fled as two suspects ordered his 69-year-old boss, Shannon King, to lie on the floor.

Pastor Danny Taylor recognized Howell and told church members to call 911. Some church members rushed outside to help, and one of the robbers fired a weapon at them.

As the church prayed for safety of store employees and fellow members, two worshippers chased the robbers as they drove away. They called police on a cellular phone and rammed the getaway vehicle from behind when the suspects jammed on the brakes. The pursuers were unhurt but their vehicle sustained damage.

Police arrested Frederick Smith, 32, and Antonio McClendon, 18, both of Little Rock, on charges of aggravated assault and aggravated robbery.

A police spokesman praised the Baptists for their action. "It was really something," said John Rehrauer, public-information officer for the Pulaski County Sheriff's Office.

Taylor said the congregation was only looking out for a neighbor in need. "As Christians, we need to always help look out for each other," he said. "But I surely hope history does not repeat itself."

Georgia Baptist church named 'outstanding' congregation

EDISON, Ga. (ABP) -- A Georgia Baptist church with a woman pastor has been named one of America's outstanding Protestant congregations by a nationwide study funded by the Lilly Foundation.

Fellowship Baptist Church in Edison, Ga., will be among 300 Protestant churches and 300 Catholic parishes that "nurture the human spirit, draw people closer to God, bring them into loving service and exemplify what is best in local churches throughout America" in an upcoming book.

Stacey Simpson, pastor of the 25-member congregation, said the church is not "successful" by numerical standards but "has tried to remain faithful" in preaching and worship, nurturing children across racial lines, caring for one another and reaching out to the community in creative ways.

Baylor launches new Baptist-studies program

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Baylor University has established a new graduate-level program in Baptist studies.

William Brackney, chairman of Baylor's religion department, will direct the program, which will offer the M.A. and Ph.D. degree in religion with a focus on Baptist studies. The program will work with other departments, including the George W. Truett Theological Seminary and the J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies.

Football players expelled over sexual-assault charges

BOLIVAR, Mo. (ABP) -- Four students of Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo., were expelled Nov. 1 after allegedly sexually assaulting a female student.

The students, all members of the SBU football team, were accused of sexual assault during a party Oct. 29. A 22-year-old woman said several students assaulted her on a picnic table. She later declined to press charges. A total of 12 students were disciplined for violating the school's code of conduct.

Pinson joins faculty at Dallas Baptist University

DALLAS (ABP) -- Retired Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Director William Pinson has been appointed distinguished professor at Dallas Baptist University. Pinson, who recently retired after 18 years with Texas Baptists, will work part time in helping the university to develop an emphasis on the integration of Christian faith and learning and development of "servant leadership." He will continue to serve as executive-director emeritus of the Texas convention, write, teach and preach.

CORRECTION: A Nov. 17 ABP news brief incorrectly identified former President Roy Honeycutt as chancellor of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. ABP has learned that Honeycutt was chancellor from 1993 to 1997 but no longer holds that title.

END
