



# Associated Baptist Press

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### Key factors in family life often hidden, scholar says

By Mark Wingfield

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Most people's stories are rooted in their families, but those life-giving roots are not often visible on the surface, according to sociologist Robert Wuthnow.

The professor from Princeton University made the observation during the inaugural Barbara Chafin Endowed Lectureship in Family Ministries at Baylor University April 10. Wuthnow's topic was "The Hidden Side of Spirituality and Ministry."

Housed in Baylor's School of Social Work, the lectureship was established by former Texas pastor Ken Chafin before his death earlier this year to honor his wife, Barbara.

In attempting to do family ministry, churches must learn to look beyond the surface needs that are easily visible, Wuthnow said, drawing on years of personal research he has done through in-depth interviews. What lies beneath, and what has shaped the needs of the person and the family, may be unknown even to the person the church attempts to minister to, he explained.

Wuthnow illustrated with an experience from his own family. Only a few years ago, he stumbled across a family secret his mother had labored for years to keep. The secret was that his great-grandfather, whom he and other family members had been told died young, had spent most of his adult life in a mental institution.

Keeping this secret had placed a great strain on his mother and aunt, neither of whom knew the other knew the true story, he said.

Such family secrets are not the rarity many believe, the researcher said, citing physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, estranged children, bankruptcy, depression and extra-marital affairs as other examples of family secrets.

Among his research subjects, whom he described as "ordinary people," Wuthnow found 81 percent had experienced some family history in these areas.

"Most people have troubles," he surmised. "Not everything goes swimmingly for them all the time."

Yet at church, people operate under the impression that "these things happen to other people," he added.

"It's acceptable to give and receive help if one is stricken with breast cancer or suffers a heart attack," Wuthnow said. But it's far more difficult to know how to respond to many other problems.

Despite the difficulty the church has demonstrated in addressing such problems, people continue to look to the church for help, Wuthnow explained. The reason is that unsettling life experiences often cause people to become spiritual seekers, he added.

Yet the solution is not preaching on "five easy steps to a happy marriage," Wuthnow said.

Instead, churches that own up to these real-life challenges will find family ministry to be "messy and unpredictable," he suggested. "It will be less like a place people come and more like a referral service."

Among possible ministry points he suggested to churches were small-group ministries such as prayer groups and Bible study groups, which he called "the most effective ways to experience forgiveness."

Wuthnow also encouraged churches to explore the role of music and art in spirituality. Spiritual practices and teachings often are embedded in songs and visual reminders, he explained.

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## **Religious Right criticizes Bush on homosexual appointment**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- As President George Bush seeks a fine line on policies to appease both parties in Congress, some members of the Religious Right are attacking him for appointing an openly gay man to lead the White House HIV/AIDS policy office.

And more criticism is coming from religious leaders who fear Bush is backing away from his pre-election stance against abortion. One group says Bush's budget proposal includes funding for family planning initiatives that amount to abortion.

Bush announced in April the appointment of Scott Evertz, leader of the Log Cabin Republicans in Wisconsin, to lead the new Office of National AIDS Policy. Evertz is the first openly gay person to be nominated to an office in the executive branch by a Republican president.

The Bush team initially had planned to scrap the HIV/AIDS policy office. But after a firestorm of criticism, Bush stepped in to not only keep the office first opened by President Clinton, but to expand it.

"The president picks the best people for the job . regardless of what their background may or may not be," said White House spokesman Ari Fleischer. "And that's why he has chosen Scott."

Fleischer said the president respects Evertz, recognizes him as an expert and will welcome him at "this White House."

News reports have indicated that Bush believes that one solution to the AIDS epidemic would be to reduce the stigma of homosexuality in the African-American community.

Fleischer said it is "important to allow the office to develop and to come up with as many ideas as they can, to fight what has been just a growing international problem that is wreaking terrible, terrible problems in many communities across our country and around the world."

Religious Right leaders normally supportive of Bush criticized the Evertz appointment, claiming the AIDS pandemic cannot be stopped without addressing homosexual lifestyles.

"We and other pro-family organizations are concerned about the appointment of Scott Evertz as director of the White House Office of National AIDS policy," said James Dobson, president of Focus on the

Family. He said the appointment advances a "fundamental misunderstanding" of the cause of AIDS in the United States.

"AIDS is primarily spread by promiscuous sexual behavior, and such behavior is rampant among male homosexuals," Dobson said in a statement. "This appointment sends a disturbing message that the problem of AIDS can be resolved without dealing with the promiscuity of many in the homosexual life. As long as that lie is perpetuated, Mr. Evertz cannot be successful in this position as head of the White House AIDS office."

The Centers for Disease Control, however, report that the fastest growing population being infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS is heterosexual women.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, did not return a reporter's phone calls to respond to inquiries about the Bush appointment. However, Land opposed President Bill Clinton's 1999 appointment of James Hormel as the nation's first openly homosexual ambassador abroad.

"The majority of Americans do not want a self-acknowledged homosexual living in a domestic partnership with another homosexual as his mate who funds and advocates a radical homosexual-rights agenda to be an official representative of their government as an ambassador to another nation," Land said at the time.

Some religious leaders, meanwhile, praised the Bush decision.

Stan Hastey, executive director of the Alliance of Baptists, told Associated Baptist Press that he applauds the choice of Evertz. "The president is to be commended for considering and offering a position to one who clearly is concerned about the plight of victims of HIV/AIDS," he said.

"I disagree vigorously with the criticism of James Dobson and others that it sends a disturbing message," Hastey said. "On the contrary, I think it sends a reassuring message to those who need reassurance the most -- and that is the victims of AIDS and their families."

Hastey described the appointment as a good example of Bush's announced stance of "compassionate conservatism."

"The appointment of a compassionate conservative and a gay man sends just the right signal, it seems to me," he said.

Bush is also drawing criticism from the Religious Right on abortion, as top leaders warn that he must get tougher on the issue.

Family Research Council President Ken Connor issued a statement accusing Bush of "finger-in-the-wind leadership on abortion."

"The White House is not called 'the bully pulpit' for nothing," Connor said. He urged Bush "to express his commitment to the American people on abortion by showing real leadership on the issue in order to 'fashion a culture of life' in America."

Connor was responding to statements made by White House chief of staff Andy Card in newspapers that Bush does not feel that he'll be able to eliminate abortions and that the right to life is not a public-policy priority for the president.

"Leadership is not jumping in front of a parade or waiting for a comfortable political climate before pressing for change," Connor said. "President Bush's election was a mandate for a new era of leadership, driven not by polls, but by example and conviction."

He called on Bush to "make his voice clear that his administration will be proudly pro-life."

Another anti-abortion organization praised a Bush proposal to eliminate contraceptive coverage for federal employees but criticized funding for another program.

The head of STOPP International, a division of the American Life League, said many of the "so-called contraceptives Title X funds as 'family planning' often act to kill a human person before he or she can implant in his or her mother's womb."

## **Robertson seeks to clarify statement on forced abortion**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Christian Coalition founder and President Pat Robertson claims he was misunderstood in comments taken by some as justifying forced abortions in China.

Robertson's recent statement aired on CNN that Chinese officials are "doing what they have to do" to curb population growth by implementing a one-child policy has bewildered and angered pro-life advocates.

In a recent interview, CNN's Wolf Blitzer asked Robertson about "the so-called forced abortions in China?"

"Well, you know, I don't agree with it," the televangelist and one-time presidential candidate said. Robertson went on to say: "But at the same time, they've got 1.2 billion people, and they don't know what to do. If every family over there was allowed to have three or four children, the population would be completely unsustainable."

"So, I think that right now they're doing what they have to do," Robertson added. "I don't agree with the forced abortion, but I don't think the United States needs to interfere with what they're doing internally in this regard."

When Blitzer said his critics would claim Robertson was "justifying abortions in China," Robertson responded, "Well, I just think they need to get involved in what's happening."

Robertson continued his statements and appeared to be concerned about the "racial purity of the Han Chinese."

"When they're having abortions, they're picking the girl babies for the slaughter, and they're allowing only the males to be born," Robertson stated. "And in another, say, 10 or 20 years, there's going to be a critical shortage of wives. The young men won't have any women to marry, so it will, in a sense, dilute the -- what they consider the racial purity of the Han Chinese. And that to them will be a great tragedy, because then they will have to be importing wives from Indonesia and others countries in order to fill up the population."

Fellow members of the Religious Right objected to what they called Robertson's backing of "forced abortion" in China.

The American Life League issued a statement by President Judie Brown, saying, "Of all people, Pat Robertson should have faith that God will find a way to provide for the Chinese people that doesn't require slaughtering millions of babies in the womb." The group said Robertson sounded "like a Ted Turner clone."

And Robertson's clarification statement did not do much to appease the criticism.

The statement, according to a press release by the Family Research Council, said: "In my CNN interview, I did not preface my remarks with my long-held view [favoring the right to life], but I merely expressed what to me seemed obvious . that the Chinese people with a population of 1.2 billion will face a dilemma of massive proportions if they permit their population to explode upwards of 2 billion people." He added that the one-child policy reflects "an obvious necessity."

FRC President Ken Connor said, "I have profound respect for Pat Robertson and all he has done to champion faith and family, . but these statements, and the clarification that failed to clarify, are misguided and just plain wrong."

"It may not be pleasant to point it out, but the role of racism in the protection and promotion of abortion is a nearly universal phenomenon," Connor said. "It was there at the beginning in the negative eugenics and racist theories of Planned Parenthood's Margaret Sanger. It is there outside our own legislative chambers where, as debate raged, members whispered to me, 'Connor, how are we going to build all the prisons and schools we need for those people if we limit abortion?'"

A Christian Coalition spokesman told Associated Baptist Press that Robertson wrongly assumed his audience would understand his comments in the context of his long-held views against abortion. The Christian Coalition aide also said that Robertson's subsequent clarification statement was "a bit mucky."

But the spokesman cited a more-recent television interview in which Robertson stated: "I am unalterably opposed to forced abortion. I am opposed to abortion as a means of population control and that has always been my position for the past 40 years or so."

The spokesman attributed criticism from the Religious Right in part to competition that sometimes occurs between various organizations and the desire to keep each other in check. He added, however, that the Christian Coalition still "works closely" with the Family Research Council on legislative issues.

In the CNN interview, Robertson also discussed religious liberty in China, pointing out that "there is a tremendous religious revival, and I have seen an emerging middle class come on in China that ultimately is going to win the day."

When asked to grade the Bush presidency so far, Robertson said a B-plus or A-minus. He also reiterated his new skepticism of Bush's faith-based initiative to fund religious social service programs with tax dollars.

"If the government forces these faith-based institutions to give up their unique distinctives and no longer preach the gospel or read the Bible or have prayer or use spiritual counseling, if that's denied them, then of course the government will ruin the organizations," Robertson said.

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## **Nonprofits announce support for non-itemizer deduction plan**

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Seeking a boost in charitable giving from Americans "whose hearts are often larger than their wallets," a coalition of more than 500 nonprofit organizations announced support for a proposal that would allow non-itemizing taxpayers to deduct charitable gifts.

Leaders of the Coalition to Help America Give say the move could help the 85 million households -- 70 percent of all taxpayers -- who do not itemize their returns and could increase giving to charities by \$14.6 billion every year.

"Our tax system should acknowledge and reward the generosity of all taxpayers, including those whose hearts are often larger than their wallets," said John Seffrin, co-chair of the coalition and CEO of the American Cancer Society.

Marsha Johnson Evans, national executive director of Girl Scouts of the USA, told the crowd at the kickoff of the coalition's work that "it takes a lot more than cookies" to fund the girl scouts.

An official from the coalition said the proposal has been introduced in Congress in the past but has never gained momentum. Now, with the plan being touted as part of President George W Bush's sweeping faith-based initiative, it has gained new momentum and stands a good chance of becoming law, the aide said.

President Ronald Reagan signed a sweeping tax-reform act in 1986 that ended the short-lived ability of non-itemizers to deduct charitable gifts. Baptists at that time lobbied against the change.

The new proposal by Bush is attached in the House of Representatives bill to a more controversial funding measure, known as "charitable choice." In the Senate version, charitable choice has been separated from the tax deduction measure, giving it a better chance of passage.

Officials from the 550-member coalition said the group agrees only on supporting the tax-deduction provision and not other portions of the Bush plan.

The group, spearheaded by Independent Sector, includes Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina; Baptist Memorial Health Care Foundation in Memphis, Tenn.; the American Heart Association; Salvation Army; National Council of Churches and hundreds of other local and national nonprofit and advocacy groups. Both the Baptist Joint Committee, a church-state watchdog group representing several Baptist conventions, and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention support the deduction for non-itemizers but have not yet joined the coalition.

Reps. Phil Crane, R-Ill., Jennifer Dunn, R-Wash., have introduced legislation to enact the initiative. Reps. J.C. Watts, R-Okla., and Tony Hall, D-Ohio, have also introduced legislation but it is attached to the more controversial "charitable choice" plan to send tax dollars to religious social service ministries.

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## **Washington news briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

### **Jack Kevorkian loses Supreme Court bid**

WASHINGTON -- Euthanasia doctor Jack Kevorkian lost a Supreme Court bid April 23 to revive his libel suit against medical groups that called him a criminal and a "reckless instrument of death."

Without comment, the nation's top court turned down Kevorkian's argument that the statements were false and not protected by the First Amendment.

Kevorkian is serving a prison sentence in Michigan for second-degree murder after being convicted in the 1998 death of a terminally ill man whose death he videotaped. He says he has attended more than 130 suicides.

Kevorkian contends that people have a right to choose to die when facing extreme illnesses or painful fatal diseases. (ABP)

### **GOP reaches out to ethnic, Catholic groups**

WASHINGTON -- GOP leaders are launching a new effort to reach out to ethnic and religious groups by creating a division of the Republican National Committee to build the party's base, targeting Hispanics and Roman Catholics.

According to news reports, GOP party chairman Jim Gilmore wrote a letter to groups affiliated with the national party to announce the party's increased ethnic and religious focus.

"If the Republican Party is to succeed in the future, we must double our efforts in attracting more people," said the letter from Gilmore and RNC co-chairwoman Anne Wagner. "Retaining the White House and the majorities we now hold in the Congress, governors' offices and the statehouses across America demands that our party extend its reach into every diverse community in America," Gilmore added.

In news reports, Ana Gamonal, who is coordinating the RNC's outreach to Catholics, said that "religiously active Catholics should naturally be voting Republican," pointing to the Republican stance on issues such as abortion.

Bush and Gore virtually split the Catholic vote in 2000 after Bill Clinton won it handily in the previous two presidential elections. GOP officials say that Catholics have been migrating toward the GOP in recent years and are a natural fit. (ABP)

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