



# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Bob Allen  
Executive editor: Greg Warner

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

September 18, 2001

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES (01-76)  
Nashville, Tennessee

## IN THIS ISSUE:

- Baptist senior-adult group witnesses tragedy up close
- California Baptists approve offering to aid relief after terrorist attacks
- Students at White House as terror hits Washington
- Christians seek answers about why evil exists
- New York Baptist leader says all churches affected
- Muslims in America grieve, fear for safety, since attacks

## Baptist senior-adult group witnesses tragedy up close

By Sue Ann Miller

CHELSEA, Ala. (ABP) -- Had their chartered bus left the hotel on time, a group of senior adults from Alabama would have been in the immediate vicinity of the World Trade Center at 8:48 a.m., Tuesday, Sept. 11.

As it turned out, the group from Liberty Baptist Church in Chelsea, Ala., touring New York and Canada, pulled away from a hotel in Times Square around 8:40 -- a few minutes behind schedule -- and headed toward Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty.

On the way they noticed smoke billowing out of one of the World Trade Center towers. They were unaware that a commercial airliner jet, hijacked by terrorists, had just crashed into the famous landmark.

The bus driver turned on the radio for information about the fire.

"When we first tuned in to the radio the announcers were saying a small plane had hit the World Trade Center and initially they were all but making light of it," said Earl Nivens, who with his wife, June, was leading the tour group. "We started seeing fire trucks, police cars and ambulances flying by us so we pulled off the road," he said. By this time they were within four to five blocks of the twin towers.

As they watched the clouds of billowing smoke and fire, June Nivens said, she noticed an airplane in the distance flying toward the building. "There were helicopters flying around the building and I remarked out loud, 'Why would they send an airplane to try and rescue people from a burning building? It's too big to do any good.'"

About then she lost sight of the plane as it disappeared behind buildings.

Then the unthinkable happened. The unsuspecting spectators watched in frozen horror as the second airliner crashed through the massive skyscraper spewing what many said looked like atomic balls of fire, surrounded by black clouds of smoke and tons of missile-like debris soaring through the air.

Joe Bob Mizzell, director of Christian ethics and chaplaincy ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, was also on the trip with his wife, Peggy. "We were taking pictures out of the bus window when all of a sudden we heard this incredibly loud explosion," he said.

"There was so much smoke you could only see halfway up the building," Mizzell added, noting he then saw people jumping to their deaths.

"We assumed the first plane crash was an accident, but after the second one hit we knew something was terribly wrong," Earl Nivens said. "We heard the radio announcer saying terrorists were suspected and we immediately got the bus turned around and headed back to our hotel."

Even though they were only a short distance away it took the bus an hour and a half to get back to the hotel. During this time Earl Nivens asked Mizzell if he would lead the group in prayer. "We all held hands and prayed that God would comfort those people trapped and dying in the building along with their loved ones and that he would guide our government leaders," Mizzell said.

Arriving at the hotel, the group encountered more chaos. "Everyone was in shock. All you could hear was the sound of ambulances rushing up and down the streets," Earl Nivens said. "We probably saw 50 to 60 ambulances and state troopers coming in to assist."

Most of the seniors had never been to New York and June Nivens said they had really been looking forward to the experience.

"We never dreamed that this would be a memory we would be taking back with us," she said. "When you witness a tragedy it's so different from watching it on television. It's just so much more real. You personally experience these people's sadness. You immediately realize that God is near and that your life is in his hands."

-30-

-- Sue Ann Miller is a news writer for The Alabama Baptist

## **California Baptists approve offering to aid relief after terrorist attacks**

By Mark Wyatt

FRESNO, Calif. (ABP) -- Southern Baptists in California will collect a special offering Sept. 30 to aid sister Baptist conventions already ministering to victims and relief workers responding to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The executive board of the California Southern Baptist Convention voted unanimously Sept. 14 to approve a "special offering Sunday" for the state's churches.

The offering invites "California Southern Baptist Convention churches to give for ministry by state Baptist conventions affected by terrorist acts."

Convention leaders were eager to respond quickly to the unfolding need even though the special offering falls during an annual offering for state missions, a month-long emphasis that raises money for key missions projects.

"I do not believe that picking up our state mission offering would be handicapped by us assisting others in need, especially at this time," Fermin A. Whittaker, CSBC executive director, declared. "I'm trusting the Father who owns it all to deliver."

Montia Setzler, president of the state convention, first proposed the idea for a special offering in a phone call to Whittaker just hours after attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania occurred. Setzler, pastor of Magnolia Avenue Baptist Church in Riverside, said he believes there is an "unprecedented opportunity for evangelism and ministry among those who are experiencing this tragedy."

The executive board voted unanimously to establish the offering without discussion.

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks involved three hijacked passenger jets, all headed for California.

More than 5,000 people perished when two airliners collapsed the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York and another struck the Pentagon in suburban Washington, D.C. According to published

reports, federal officials believe passengers on the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania may have thwarted a plan to crash the aircraft into the U.S. Capitol or another Washington landmark.

The doomed aircraft, two each operated by American Airlines and United Airlines, all were bound for California destinations before being diverted by hijackers. Included in the massive death toll were more than 100 killed at the Pentagon as well as 19 suspected terrorists among 266 persons aboard the four hijacked planes.

-30-

## **Students at White House as terror hits Washington**

By Stella Prather

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (ABP) -- Terrorist attacks on the United States hit close to home for a group of Arkansas Baptist High School students visiting the nation's capital Sept. 11.

Twenty-three students and six adults from the Little Rock school were at the White House when American Airlines flight 77 crashed into the nearby Pentagon, reportedly killing hundreds of civilians and military personnel. Hijacked from Washington's Dulles Airport, the jet plane carried 64 passengers and crew, all of whom perished in the crash.

Patrick Salman, assistant principal, said the group of juniors on a class trip arrived at the east wing of the White House just after 9:30 a.m. and was awaiting a facility tour, along with many other tourists. Within minutes, a troop of security personnel, armed with automatic weapons and dressed in black, approached the group informing them of a bomb threat and ordering them to immediately "move away from the building."

Unaware of the terrorist assault already underway, the somewhat bewildered tourists began to retreat casually. Salman said the security team shouted, "Run very quickly and get away from the White House."

Heeding the stern warning, Salman said the students and others hastily bolted from the premises. As they headed to their tour bus, a billowing cloud of black smoke could be seen spewing forth from the direction of the Pentagon across the Potomac River.

Describing the scene as "tense and anxious, yet calm" Salman said many tourists, as well as students, were confused, upset and distraught. "At this point, we, of course, did not fully understand what was going on around us," explained Salman. "Our first priority was to get the students to safety."

The Arkansas group soon learned from radio reports of the horrible events of the day. Alarmed by the news, many students became emotional and "a bit afraid," he noted. This anxiety became even more real when they saw firsthand the crash site of the Pentagon from bus windows.

The students joined together to pray for the victims and for the United States. Some cried both tears of sadness and thanksgiving for their safety.

"I just couldn't believe what was happening," shared Brook Bradford of her experiences. "I was not worried too much about myself, but I began to feel so bad for those who had lost their lives and for the many kids who lost their parents.

"It is just unbelievable. I will never forget it," she said.

Back in Little Rock, school officials contacted each student's family to inform them the group was safe and would soon be returning home. Anxious parents, however, were still glad to receive telephone calls from their children, according to several students.

"My mom was hysterical when I finally got through to her," noted Bradford. "She was glad to hear from me."

The students later learned that the White House had possibly been a target of the hijackers. Consequently, they are counting their blessings.

"We know God was totally protecting us," shared Bradford. "We had people back home praying for us, and for weeks we had been praying for the trip, not knowing of course what would happen. I know God was working and had angels around us."

Echoing Bradford, student Drew Tollett said he is convinced God's hand was upon the group. "It wasn't our time. I know that God has a plan for each student and wants . to use that plan to touch people's lives. He spared us for his service."

Chaperone Mary Kay Parr, a school coach, said she is anxious to see how God will use this tragedy for his glory. "I can't wait to see how God will work through all of us. His word tells us that 'he works all things for good,'" shared Parr. "I hope he spurs a spiritual revival in our country."

After a long bus trip, the students arrived back in Little Rock Wednesday night, Sept. 12. They were greeted with hugs and embraces by a host of family members, friends and school officials.

Noting her longtime anticipation of her class trip to Washington, Bradford said, "I had been so excited to go to D.C, but when we arrived home, I was so happy to be home . in the comfort of my family."

School administrators held a counseling session and prayer meeting Sept. 14 on campus for the 23 students. Led by area youth ministers, Salman said the meeting allowed students to talk about their experiences and pray for each other, national leaders and the victims.

-30-

-- Stella Prather is associate editor of the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine.

## **Christians seek answers about why evil exists**

By David Winfrey

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Be it the chaplain in Manhattan, the pastor in Pittsburgh or the farmer in Kentucky, Christians across the country searched for answers to explain what happened Sept. 11 and offer a God-centered approach to personal healing and the country's response.

From the Oval Office to the pulpit, one word came up consistently to describe the terrorist hijackings and crashes of four commercial airliners: evil.

But charting a Christian response to such evil requires prayer, pause and purpose, according to theologians, ethicists and others who wrestle with such issues.

"You have what Paul called the 'mystery of iniquity,' and evil is there," said Henlee Barnette, professor emeritus of Christian ethics at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "It's everywhere, and the challenge to the Christian is to respond in an intelligent, reasonable way to evil in his or her own life, in the lives of others and in the life of our nation."

All crises bring out basic questions of meaning and purpose, but a number of Christian observers outlined three major questions that Christians must answer in the wake of recent events:

-- How could this happen?

"I have been asked hundreds of times in my life why God allows tragedy and suffering," evangelist Billy Graham said during a prayer service at the National Cathedral. "I have to confess that I really do not know the answer totally, even to my own satisfaction."

Understanding the human potential to cause such destruction leads Christians back to the basic doctrines of their faith, including sin and the freedom to choose right from wrong, said ethicist David Gushee.

"Why this happened is really in a sense the same answer to 'Why did Adam and Eve sin?'" said Gushee, professor of moral philosophy at Union University in Jackson, Tenn. "It happened because we have the freedom to make bad choices."

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, agreed. "We need to be very clear that the problem behind all of this does not come down to a lack of security in an airport," he said. "Ultimately, we still have to deal with the reality that God has allowed a sinful world to exist and for some time he is allowing sin to take its toll."

Mohler and Gushee said Christians should avoid answers about the existence of evil that either are simplistic -- such as "God will always protect me" -- or outright heresy, such as "God must have caused this to happen."

Romans 8:28 often is cited in times of suffering, proclaiming "that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." But Mohler said that doesn't imply that God causes tragedies. The Bible consistently insists God does not cause suffering, Mohler added.

"No way can we dignify these murderous acts by proclaiming in a glib way that some good is going to come of it," he said. "The biblical affirmation is that even in the face of such awful evil, God's grace will triumph."

But God's ability to redeem a tragedy doesn't eliminate the challenge for Christians to insist that God is loving and powerful even though he permits sin to cause terrible consequences.

Theodicy, the branch of theology that seeks to vindicate God's permission for evil to exist, is nothing new.

Evil is a major theme in both Psalms and Job, according to George Klein, an Old Testament professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

But while both books contain agonizing petitions to God in the face of evil, neither holds God's answer for why he allows suffering, Klein said.

Many psalms that lament evil have a common structure, Klein noted. Rather than staying focused on the evildoer or how God will judge him, the psalm reviews one of God's previous great acts, such as creation or protection during Israel's exodus from Egypt.

"They jump fast-forward to their conclusion, and their conclusion is that the Lord is righteous, the Lord is powerful and he should be revered even in the midst of uncertainty and trouble," he said.

"The Psalms do emphasize God's role as king and righteous holy creator. But the way they function is to help God's people lift up their eyes, to look on the Lord to realize that he is good. The fact that somebody appears to do well even though they are evil does not undercut God's righteousness. He will deal with them in his own way," Klein added. "It's not a nice bumper-sticker theology, but it really is a hope, a confidence."

Likewise, the book of Job never defends God for allowing the central character to suffer.

"It just doesn't. Instead it just quickly jumps and says that God is worthy of worship, . God is good and in his way, in his time, what is mysterious, unknown, troubling to us will be seen in a different light. But for now, our responsibility is to accept the painful mysteries and uncertainties and to trust in God wholeheartedly and his righteousness and his power and his knowledge, his providence."

-- What should America do?

Christians dare not shrink from their responsibility to influence a government's response to evil, several theologians and ethicists said.

From "just war" theories of combat to an introspective view of American policies, Christians must lead the country to develop a moral response, they said.

"When the public discourse turns from grief to retaliation, the community of faith must offer a different language and articulate different solutions," said Robert Parham, founder and executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics.

Beginning with St. Augustine 1,600 years ago and modified since, a "just war" doctrine requires that government military action be measured and appropriate, said Chuck Colson, a Christian author and former adviser to President Richard Nixon.

"Augustine's formulation was that it has to be, obviously, a just cause," Colson said on his BreakPoint radio program. Military action also must be a last resort and intended to prevent more evil or damage than it will cause.

"There's got to be a good chance of success, and, most importantly, civilian casualties have got to be limited. You cannot target civilians," he said.

Mohler said Romans 13 outlines government's responsibility to maintain order and punish evildoers. Biblical admonitions to turn the other cheek do not apply to a proper response to last week's attack, Barnette added.

"As Christians we should respond with love, even to our enemies," he said. "Jesus taught us to love our enemies. But let me add, love without justice is pure sentimentality."

"Now personally, I'm a man of peace, but this is a defensive war against a destructive evil. As a Christian ethicist, I believe that the most loving thing to do is to seek out the evil perpetrators and their supporters and bring them to justice," Barnette added. "If someone comes up and strikes me on the right cheek, I turn the other one. But if someone comes to destroy my family, love becomes justice."

But Christians also must lead the country in controlling its emotions, Gushee added. "We may be setting ourselves up for a deep sense of national rage if we are not able to achieve the kind of perfect justice that we appear to be looking for."

Like the Jews around the world who lost a more massive 6 million lives in the Holocaust, Americans might have to come to terms with an inability to balance the scales of justice in this life, he said.

"The theme that there is an eternal Judge and that we don't have to hinge all of our future hopes on achieving some earthly justice is very important right now," he said.

"The most powerful nation in the world, unable, perhaps, to get the full and perfect justice that it's looking for, could be a pretty dangerous nation," Gushee said. "Let's hope we have more wisdom and sobriety and realism than that."

The Christian command to love one's enemies also dictates a willingness to understand the motivation of perceived injustice behind such hateful acts, he said.

"That doesn't make the decision any less evil," he quickly added. "But I think a distinctively Christian response says there is humanity in the image of God, even in the adversary. And you seek to recognize that even while you deal with appropriate responses to protect yourself from being harmed like this in the future."

-- As a Christian, what should I do?

A Christian personal response to evil begins with a willingness to base one's actions on something other than simple human nature, Barnette said. "We should respond and not merely react."

Part of that response begins with a simple decision to engage in the experiences and suffering of others, said Vicki Hollon, director of the Wayne Oates Institute, an agency in Louisville, Ky., dedicated to Christian-based ethics and pastoral care.

More than just showing compassion or being a good civic person, a Christian's involvement in assembling care packages, donating money, giving blood or praying for victims should be based on God's instructions and be intended to help others find God, she said.

"We have ... a framework out of which we do what we do very clearly, very intentionally with a purpose of serving as a light that points back to God," she said.

Prayer is a basic response to any tragedy, many noted. "I heard one person say all we can do is pray, but you know that's not a little thing," Mohler said. "Prayer is one of the most important ministries that a Christian can perform in order to reach out to those we cannot see, we do not even know."

Individual Christians also should recognize that evil is not entirely an outside force, Barnette noted. "I

have to say this: The more optimistic theologians overlook the evil within," he said. "Wherever there is an overwhelming desire for power, for the accumulation of things for self or for a nation, you're going to have this kind of evil."

Christians leaders also must be prepared to interpret events through the lens of the Christian faith, Gushee added.

During his address at the National Cathedral, Billy Graham noted that victims entering the World Trade Center, the Pentagon or any of those four planes probably didn't think it would be their last day.

"That's why each of us needs to face our own spiritual need and commit ourselves to God and his will now," he said.

Likewise, all Christians have an opportunity to offer a distinctive moral vision and spiritual presence, Gushee said.

"I cringe when I think about the inevitable Sunday school classes that will mainly consist of 'We need to go nuke those guys' kind of response. We can do, and must do, so much better than that."

-30-

## **New York Baptist leader says all churches affected**

By David Winfrey

NEW YORK (ABP) -- It's too early to know what impact terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center will have on New York-area Baptist churches, says a missions leader, but they all are affected.

"Everybody knows somebody [affected by the tragedy]," David Dean, executive director for the Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, said days after the attacks. "There's nobody in New York that's going to be untouched."

At least one Liberian and Chinese Baptist church knows it had members working in the massive office buildings during the crashes.

The association doesn't have many churches in the immediate area of lower Manhattan, Dean said, but suburban churches in New Jersey serve the communities where many World Trade Center commuters lived. "I'm just sort of sitting on pins and needles wondering how bad it's going to be," he said.

Dean's office is about four miles from the wreckage, but "I could just as well be in Louisville, because I can't get down there."

Instead, he spent his first few days following Sept. 11 talking with people near his office. New Yorkers usually don't socialize with strangers, but this event has people opening up and talking about their emotions, he noted.

Dean recalled telling a group of policemen he was praying for them. "And then I just asked them, 'Did you lose any buddies?' And this big old guy just dropped his head and said, 'Yep, a couple.' That's just repeated over and over."

Already Dean said he's seeing some evidence that God is at work despite the tragedy. "There are more people, probably, praying for New York City in the last 25-30 hours than there have in a long time, and I know God will honor that."

-30-

## **Muslims in America grieve, fear for safety, since attacks**

By Greg Heyman

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- A police car parked outside the Islamic Academy of Alabama Sept. 14 was a reminder that Muslims in the United States felt vulnerable following the attacks three days earlier on New York City and Washington, D.C.

But while Muslims living in the U.S. fear retaliation against them, they are also Americans and deal with the same grief as other citizens.

"I fear for my family; I fear for myself," said Ashfaq Taufique, president of the Birmingham Islamic Society.

"On one hand, there is a feeling of fear," he said. "As Americans, we are feeling the grieving of all Americans."

Taufique said America is home for many Muslims. He has been in this country 27 years, longer than he lived in his native Pakistan. His children were born in the U.S.

Following the attacks, Taufique said his 19-year-old son received an e-mail telling him to go home. "This is his home," Taufique said. "This is my home."

Nationwide, Muslims are showing their support for their fellow countrymen. Yahya Basha, chairman of the board of the American Muslim Council, said the sight of Muslims donating blood should "soften the heart" of Americans.

"Hopefully people will realize that we're part of the fabric of America -- we are your neighbors, your customers, your clients," he said. "People like to rush for the easiest reaction, but it's like with the IRA (Irish Republican Army) -- whenever they do something wrong everybody doesn't rush out to attack every Irish person."

Taufique said Islam does not foster hate. "Muslims don't hate anybody," he said. "Muslims hate oppression."

Addressing the attacks, Taufique said a distinction has to be made between criminal acts that may have been committed by Muslims and law-abiding citizens of the Muslim faith.

Fahmi Abdein of the Birmingham Islamic Society said he and others do not support terrorist activities.

"American Muslims ... utterly condemn what are apparently vicious and cowardly acts of terrorism against innocent civilians," Abdein said in a statement issued to the media. "We join with all Americans in calling for the swift apprehension and punishment of the perpetrators. No political cause could ever be assisted by such immoral acts."

Echoing Abdein, Taufique said there is no rationale -- religious, political or otherwise -- for the attacks.

"We don't believe in violence to achieve our goals," Taufique said. "Violence and terrorism, there's no justification for them."

-30-

**END**

---