



# Associated Baptist Press

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## Christian leaders divided over invasion of Iraq

By Robert Marus

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Some in the Religious Right support President Bush's proposal to invade Iraq, but other religious leaders say it's too early to rush into war.

Bush and congressional leaders are currently wrangling over the terms and extent of a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq, suspected of harboring chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. Bush also faces stiff opposition from the United Nations Security Council on a similar resolution.

The White House has argued that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein might use "weapons of mass destruction" against his own people, neighboring nations or even targets in the United States. Bush advocates striking Iraq to remove Hussein from power before he attacks anyone else.

"The dangers we face will only worsen from month to month and year to year," Bush said Sept. 28 in a radio address to the nation. "To ignore these threats is to encourage them -- and when they have fully materialized, it may be too late to protect ourselves and our allies."

Bush's policy of "pre-emption" marks a departure from previous U.S. foreign policy of containment of potential foreign threats and deterrence of rogue states.

Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, says Bush's approach meets "just war" criteria used for centuries to determine whether military action is moral.

"I believe just-war theory first of all says it must be defensive. And I believe we are defending ourselves against several acts of war by a man who does not keep treaties and who has already used weapons of mass destruction," Land said during a recent appearance on the PBS television program Religion and Ethics Newsweekly.

Land said he would like to see support from the U.N. Security Council for a pre-emptive approach, but the U.S. has "appropriate authority" to proceed with or without international support.

Prominent Southern Baptist pastor Jerry Falwell also supports Bush's policies and has criticized U.N. and congressional leaders for their "wait-and-see" approach.

Many other religious leaders, however, say the Bush administration has not made a case for meeting "just war" criteria.

Representatives from several different Protestant and Eastern Orthodox denominations lobbied Congress in late September against giving Bush wide authority to wage a pre-emptive war against Iraq. The National Council of Churches organized the lobbying effort.

"Pre-emptive military action now being contemplated by the [Bush] administration cannot be morally justified," said Bob Edgar, the NCC's general secretary and a former member of Congress.

Edgar said that by attacking Iraq, the U.S. would "present a model of aggression that may encourage other nations to attack neighboring countries that threaten them."

Earlier, the heads of 48 Protestant and Orthodox denominations and Catholic religious orders wrote Bush to oppose unilateral action.

The religious leaders said Bush's approach "could result in a large number of civilians being killed or wounded, as well as increasing the suffering of multitudes of innocent people."

"It is detrimental to U.S. interests to take unilateral military action when there continues to be strong multilateral support for a new weapons inspection regime and when most governments in Europe and the Middle East resist supporting military action," they said.

The leaders also said U.S. military action might "further destabilize" the Middle East, already the site of intense conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

Baptists signing the letter included Lindsay Penn-Matheson, president of the board of directors of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America; Stan Hastey, president of the Alliance of Baptists; and William Shaw, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA.

Another group of 100 Christian ethicists -- including some conservative evangelicals -- issued a one-sentence declaration opposing the war.

"As Christian ethicists, we share a common moral presumption against a pre-emptive war on Iraq by the United States," said the statement, signed Sept. 25.

Signers included Beth Newman of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond; Glen Stassen at Fuller Theological Seminary, formerly of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Tokunbo Adelekan of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, an American Baptist school; William Tillman of Hardin-Simmons University; Paul Lewis of Mercer University; and Andrew Pak of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary.

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## **News briefs from Associated Baptist Press**

### **Richmond seminary gets \$1 million gift**

RICHMOND, Va. -- A Virginia Baptist couple has made a commitment of \$1 million to Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond to help retire the debt on the seminary's main campus building.

Concerned about the \$2 million debt on the building that BTRP purchased in 1997, the donors, who wish to remain anonymous, have agreed to retire one half of the amount, with the hope that the gift will encourage others to provide the remaining \$1 million needed. The gift will be received within the next six months.

"Until we have cleared the indebtedness on what we already have, we are hindered from moving on with our plans for expansion," said seminary President Tom Graves. "These friends have clearly seen our problem and have made an extraordinary move toward its solution."

Over the past five years, the Virginia seminary has purchased three buildings from Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education for use by the Baptist seminary. The first building purchased has been completely renovated for classroom and office space, as well as a dormitory. Two other buildings, one containing additional classrooms and the seminary chapel, the other a dormitory, will be renovated as funds become available. (ABP)

## **CBF receives Lilly Endowment grant to sustain pastoral excellence**

ATLANTA -- The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has been awarded a \$2 million grant from the Lilly Endowment to participate in a national program called "Sustaining Pastoral Excellence." The program is part of a new effort by the Indianapolis-based Lilly to maintain excellence in the nation's pastoral leaders.

"This is an enormous grant for CBF in this important area," said Terry Hamrick, CBF's coordinator for leadership development, who coordinated the grant writing process. "We are most pleased that the Lilly Endowment saw the need in this area and recognized CBF as a worthy partner in this endeavor."

The grant will be spent over four years through the Fellowship's "Initiative for Ministerial Excellence," which includes peer-learning networks, sabbatical study and a residency program for prospective ministers studying at CBF "partner" schools.

Seminaries taking part include Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Truett Theological Seminary, Campbell University Divinity School, McAfee School of Theology, Logsdon School of Theology and The Center for Congregational Health.

Lilly Endowment awarded 47 grants for a total of \$57.9 million to religiously affiliated organizations across the country. The three-to-five-year awards range from \$250,000 to \$2 million. More than 700 institutions submitted proposals for this program. (ABP)

## **Executive Board recommends hospital sale**

DALLAS -- The Baptist General Convention of Texas executive board has recommended that the state convention consent to the sale of San Antonio's Baptist Health System to Vanguard Health Systems, a for-profit, investor-owned company.

With only one dissenting vote, the more than 200-member board voted at its Sept. 24 meeting in Dallas to affirm the deal. Messengers to the annual BGCT meeting, Nov. 11-12 in Waco, must approve the sale before it is final.

The hospital system, which operates five hospitals with 1,500 beds in and around San Antonio, has struggled financially for the last four years. Vanguard, a corporation based in Nashville, Tenn., has promised to pay off about \$200 million in debts and spend another \$200 million on capital improvements by 2008.

Earl Cutler of San Antonio, chairman of the Baptist Health System board of trustees, told the BGCT executive board that the health care system needed the rapid "capital infusion" that Vanguard offered.

The system currently has no access to capital funding, is in default of bond covenants, has lost doctors and is having difficulty keeping other employees, experienced a drop in patient volume, and is in jeopardy of losing its accreditation in some areas, he added.

"We came to the conclusion that without substantial additional capital, Baptist Health System will continue in a downward spiral," Cutler said. (ABP)

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-- By ABP staff

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