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Large numbers of Americans view Bible, Quran as equal

By ABP staff

VENTURA, Calif. (ABP) -- A large percentage of Americans believe the Bible, Quran and the Book of Mormon are equal expressions of the same spiritual truth, according to a recent survey by pollster George Barna.

A plurality of polled adults (44 percent) agreed with a statement that "the Bible, Quran and the Book of Mormon are just different expressions of the same spiritual truths." Thirty-eight percent rejected the idea. Among evangelicals, 10 percent agreed with the statement and 84 percent disagreed.

Barna, head of Barna Research Group in Ventura, Calif., said the results of the survey reflect a nation with theological views that are increasingly inclusive of other faiths. Barna, an evangelical Christian, viewed the trend with alarm.

"Over the past 20 years we have seen the nation's theological views become less aligned with the Bible," he said. "Americans still revere the Bible and like to think of themselves as Bible-believing people, but the evidence suggests otherwise."

Barna said Christians increasingly are adopting spiritual views from Islam, Wicca, secular humanism, eastern religions and other sources. His evidence includes the following poll results.

Six out of 10 Americans (59 percent) said they believe Satan is a symbol of evil, and not a literal being. In a seeming contradiction, however, 54 percent said they believe a person can be controlled by spiritual forces, such as demons. More than a third believe it is possible to communicate with the dead.

While most Americans are aligned with a Catholic or Protestant church, 42 percent said they believe Jesus committed sins while on earth. Half agreed with church teachings that Jesus did not sin.

Half believe that people who go to heaven get there by doing good works, and three fourths said people are neither good nor evil when they're born, a rejection of the doctrine of original sin.

By a two-to-one margin, (53 percent-27 percent) Americans said the Bible specifically condemns homosexuality, but 20 percent said they didn't know if it does or not.

A majority (54 percent) said truth is discovered only from "logic, human reasoning and personal experience," rather than from holy texts.

Four adults in five, meanwhile, affirmed basic Christian doctrines of the Trinity and that people have souls that will live forever. Three fourths rejected a statement that "the Bible can only be correctly interpreted by people who have years of intense training in theology."

Barna based his findings on telephone surveys of 630 adults in the 48 continental states in August 2002. The sampling margin of error is 4 percent.

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Korean Baptist churches adapt in second generation

By Anthony Wade

ENTERPRISE, Ala. (ABP) -- Korean Baptist churches first cropped up in the United States in the 1950s so people new to the country could worship God in their own language, culture and customs.

As those churches enter their second generation, the American-born children of their founders are confronted by similar needs.

Korean churches are still strong, but they aren't as purely Korean as they once were, said David Park, pastor of First Korean Baptist Church in Enterprise, Ala.

While virtually all Korean churches started in the U.S. up through the 1970s worshiped in the Korean language, that is no longer the case. "The second generation uses English -- English worship, English Bible study and English in the Southern Baptist Convention," Park said.

Park, recently elected president of the 700-church Council of Korean Southern Baptist Churches in North America, said Korean-born pastors like himself will be the exception in 10 to 20 years.

Korean churches have been using English for years to meet the needs of children and youth that either were born in the U.S. or immigrated as infants. Today, however, as those children are reaching their 40s, many are more comfortable using English across the board.

Some have established English-speaking Asian churches, independent of the traditional first-generation Korean churches.

"If the current trend does not change by a dynamic increase in immigration, there will soon be more Korean-American and American-Korean youth than adults," said Dan Moon, director of Korean ministry for the Southern Baptist North American Mission Board. "This younger generation does not have the rigid cultural ties to the old world that the older generation retains. Therefore, the new generation needs ministry on different sociological value levels."

Jason Kim, multicultural evangelism associate with NAMB, said today's Korean church faces three real challenges: a growing demand for English, "enormous shortages" of English-speaking ministers and conflicts between first- and second-generation Koreans over worship. Like many in their generation in Anglo churches, the English-speaking Korean congregations tend to prefer a more contemporary worship style.

"Across the nation in language missions we've been struggling with this for years," said Richard Alford, director of language ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "Most of our language congregations are built around the language of the culture. But, as they live here, the second and third generations become more assimilated and a different culture group emerges."

They also are more diverse.

"About 90 percent of our members are American families," said Michael Kim, pastor of Pensacola Korean Baptist Church in Pensacola, Fla. Many are a mix of Korean- and American-born. Some members are Anglos who have married Korean spouses.

"As pastors, we discuss how we can put the two together at such a level -- that's our responsibility," Kim said. "We try to come up with some ideas and exchange them."

Moon said for most Korean churches, the best solution is to hold separate services in Korean and English.

"The Korean language church is intensely homogeneous and monolingual, and the language itself causes an unavoidable condition for their worship experience," Moon said. "The average Korean church needs to have separate services."

Even after the language barrier disappears, Alford said, a need continues for Korean and other ethnic churches.

"The absence of the need for a particular language does not mean the absence of the need for association by common culture," he said. "It's language culture. Language is part of, but not all of, your culture."

NAMB's Asian Church Planting Unit estimates that by 2005 there will be 1,000 Korean Southern Baptist churches in the United States.

Moon said a new Korean Southern Baptist church begins each month, and 75 percent of Koreans in North America have a church affiliation of some kind. Of the more than 3,000 Korean-speaking Protestant churches in America, 750 are Southern Baptist, making it the largest group.

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-- Anthony Wade is a correspondent for The Alabama Baptist

News briefs from Associated Baptist Press

By ABP staff

Bush speech ignored 'just war' criteria, ethicist says

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- A Baptist ethicist says President Bush's case to the American people for military action against Iraq didn't meet moral criteria for a "just" war.

In a nationally televised speech Oct. 7, Bush passed one principle of "just war" criteria used for centuries to determine the morality of armed conflict but failed others, said Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics.

Parham welcomed a pledge by the president to use war as a last resort. One just-war principle requires every effort at conflict resolution be exhausted before going to war.

But the ethicist said Bush skipped other principles of just-war theory, including a reasonable hope of success, civilian immunity and just cause.

Bush "correctly asked the rhetorical question, 'Why now?'" Parham said in an editorial on EthicsDaily.com. "He simply failed to give a good answer. Yes, 9-11 was horrible. But does that justify more horror? Revenge or pre-emptive strikes are not considered just causes for war." (ABP)

Baptist youth volunteer sentenced for indecency

GASTONIA, N.C. -- A former volunteer youth worker at a Baptist church in North Carolina was sentenced to 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to 33 counts of taking indecent liberties with a minor.

Marty Eugene Meadows, 34, of Bessemer City, N.C., was arrested in June, on charges he had sexual activity with seven girls, ages 12-15, between May 2001 and May 2002, according to a report Oct. 1 in the Charlotte Observer.

Meadows allegedly met his victims through a youth praise team at Sunset Lane Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in Bessemer City.

A prosecutor said on about 10 occasions, Meadows tried to broadcast games of sexual truth or dare with up to five of the girls on the Internet using a Web cam in his home. The games involved oral sex and other physical acts. It is unclear whether anyone was able to view the sessions.

Tom Hogan, interim pastor of the church, said Meadows was not on the church staff, but volunteered as co-leader in the youth department. He worked with the youth on Wednesday nights and taught a youth Sunday school class.

Meadows also served as custodian, pianist, music director and a member of the pastor search committee, Hogan said. He said Meadows had resigned from all his duties at the church. (ABP)

Falwell criticized for comments about Muhammad

NEW YORK -- Well-known Baptist Jerry Falwell branded Islam's founder and most sacred figure a "terrorist" in a television interview. Other religious leaders quickly challenged his characterization.

"I think Muhammad was a terrorist," Falwell said in an interview broadcast Oct. 6 on "60 Minutes."

"[H]e was a violent man, a man of war," Falwell said, based on his reading of Muslim and non-Muslim authors. "In my opinion ... Jesus set the example for love, as did Moses, and I think Muhammad set an opposite example."

The executive board of the National Council of Churches passed a resolution condemning Falwell's remarks as "hateful and destructive" and urged President Bush to repudiate them.

Falwell also defended the Religious Right's stalwart defense of Israel, saying turmoil in the Middle East fulfills Bible prophecy forecasting the return of Christ. (ABP)

CBF leader sounds alarm against 'fundamentalism'

JACKSON, Miss. -- Many Southern Baptists have their heads in the sand about the dangers of encroaching fundamentalism, according to Mississippi Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Coordinator Steve Street.

Speaking at the state CBF's fall meeting, Street said he has heard people boast about staying above struggles between conservatives and moderates in the Southern Baptist Convention, dismissing them as "preacher wars."

"We righteously say, 'Now if they ever start messing with our missionaries, then you well see people in the pews rise up in protest,'" Street said.

Now, he said, Southern Baptist missionaries are being asked to affirm the 2000 "Baptist Faith and Message" in order to serve. "As we sit here today, missionaries are leaving the field rather than surrender their historic Baptist freedom from creedalism," he said. "And unless my hearing is failing me, I have heard little more than a grunt from Baptists in Mississippi. In fact, our response has been to stick our heads in the sand and continue pretending the controversy does not affect us." (ABP)

Baptist Center for Ethics hires associate director

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- Jan Turrentine, a book editor who has worked for Woman's Missionary Union since 1983, has joined the staff of the Baptist Center for Ethics.

Turrentine, managing editor for products at the WMU in Birmingham, Ala., for five years, has been elected associate director of the Nashville-based BCE. She is responsible for educational resources. Specifically, according to a news release on EthicsDaily.com, she will develop new on-line materials for adults.

Directors of the ethics agency hired Turrentine during a Sept. 30-Oct. 1 meeting in Atlanta. A native of Louisiana, she is a graduate of Louisiana College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In other business, Karen Zurheide, director of Positive Tomorrows in Oklahoma City, was elected chairwoman of the BCE board, replacing David Crocker, pastor of Snyder Memorial Baptist Church in Fayetteville, N.C. (ABP)

Commission lists worst violators of religious freedom

WASHINGTON -- A federal commission monitoring international religious liberty lists Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkmenistan and Sudan as "countries of particular concern" for failure to protect religious freedom.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Liberty asked Secretary of State Colin Powell to officially cite the nations, which include allies in America's war on terrorism, for failure to protect the religious liberties of their citizens.

For the first time, the commission also named a "watch list" of countries that violate religious freedom to a lesser degree. Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria and Uzbekistan are on that list. (ABP)

Law bans 'forced' conversions

The southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu announced a law Oct. 5 banning religious conversions by "force, allurements or fraudulent means."

The ordinance, which imposes a three-year jail term and hefty fines, comes a month after reports of mass conversion of Hindus to Christianity in Madurai. Christian workers said the conversions were voluntary, but media reports attributed the activity to "exploitation" of poverty conditions.

The government also reportedly is concerned because untouchability issues are rampant in Tamil Nadu, and some Dalit Hindus have converted to Islam to escape "outcaste" status.

The National Council of Churches in India protested the ordinance as "draconian" and called for its repeal. (ABP)

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