

Baptists among victims of Missouri tornadoes
By Vicki Brown
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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee

CAMDENTON, Mo. (ABP) – At least three Baptist church members died in Missouri when tornadoes ripped through the state May 4.

George and Betty Jones of New Home Baptist Church in Camdenton, Mo., were killed when a twister ripped through a row of homes in southern Camden County. And Dale Taunton, a deacon at First Baptist Church in Pierce City, reportedly was killed when he sought shelter in the National Guard armory.

At least 38 people were killed by multiple tornadoes that swept through the Midwest overnight.

In Missouri, early reports from the Kansas City, Springfield and Camden County areas confirmed at least one church was completely destroyed by the storms. Buffalo Prairie Baptist Church in Lamine Baptist Association has been declared a total loss, with most of the roof gone and structural damage to several walls.

Unconfirmed reports indicated that First Baptist Church in Pierce City also may have been destroyed. The historic downtown of Pierce City was almost a total loss.

Terry Lamberth, director of missions for Clay-Platte Baptist Association, said the Riverside, Gladstone and Liberty areas were hardest hit in the Kansas City region. In addition to extensive damage at William Jewell College, Second Baptist Church of Liberty apparently sustained some minor damage, he said.

"None of the other churches were damaged as far as I know," Lamberth added.

Stockton in Mid-Lakes Baptist Association suffered considerable damage to its downtown area. First Southern Baptist Church, which was not hit, was being used as a Red Cross center.

Communities south of Springfield sustained damage as well, according to Mike Haynes of the Greene County Baptist Association. The Red Cross set up a center at First Baptist Church, Battlefield, to assist storm victims.

"Battlefield is the heart of where tornadoes hit here," Haynes said, noting that early reports indicated about 400 to 500 homes were damaged in that area.

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SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Nashville, Tennessee

MAY 19 2003

Tornadoes cause major damage at William Jewell College**By Vicki Brown****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****May 6, 2003****Volume: 03-42-3568**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- William Jewell College was hit hard by tornadoes that roared through Kansas City May 4. "Very preliminary" figures released May 5 estimated damage to the Baptist school at \$15 million to \$20 million. Despite heavy property loss, no one was injured.

"It is unbelievable as much damage as there is that there were no injuries," explained Mark Van Tilburg, the college's executive director of college relations. "It's an amazing blessing that we got away without any injuries."

He added the campus had received "a fair amount of warning" to get organized before severe weather struck at around 5 p.m. Sunday. "All students were able to get to basements," he said.

Of the school's approximate 1,200 students, about 1,000 live on campus, Tilburg said. He noted, "We didn't have a full house," because many students had gone home for the weekend and some who did not have finals also had already left campus for the semester.

William Jewell lost the steeple from Gano Chapel, which had been added less than two years ago. Dorms, particularly married student housing, were hard hit. Tilburg said that because the married student dorm sustained substantial structural damage, it probably will not be used again.

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City escaped damage, according to a statement released Monday. Only some downed tree limbs littered the yard around the Vivion Farm Home on campus.

Central Baptist Theological Seminary in nearby Kansas City, Kan., also escaped major damage from the, according to president Tom Clifton.

At William Jewell, administrators cancelled all final exams scheduled for May 5-9 and sent students home Monday. According to Tilburg, commencement will take place as scheduled Saturday, May 10.

The roof on both the library and student center were also damaged. Classrooms, including the fairly new computer lab, in Jewell Hall sustained water damage after a tornado hit the roof and set off the sprinkler system.

Although summer term and activities may be impacted, Tilburg said the campus should be restored for fall term. "We fully expect to be up and running for the fall," he said.

The college community already has responded to the school's need. "This morning students and faculty had on their work gloves and had started clean up," Tilburg said.

Two local firms, Dunn Construction and Universal Construction, "just showed up" Monday morning to voluntarily examine buildings and help remove debris.



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Deadly tornadoes strike Tennessee once again
By Todd Starnes and Marcia Knox
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JACKSON, Tenn. (ABP) -- A series of deadly tornadoes ripped across Tennessee overnight May 4 killing a reported 14 people in the state and injuring more than 65.

The tornadoes left damage in 24 counties. At least two Tennessee Baptist churches reported damage. Hillcrest Baptist Church in Jackson lost its steeple and roof and Adams Chapel Baptist Church, Dresden, reported damage to its education building. Tennessee Baptist disaster-relief units were activated May 5.

The city of Jackson was among the hardest hit. The twisters slammed into downtown and south Jackson, leaving the area in ruins. Students at Baptist-affiliated Union University, who underwent a similar experience last November, huddled in bathrooms and closets, but the tornadoes missed the campus. University president David Dockery said no students were injured but the campus sustained moderate damage. "We give thanks to God that no one was hurt," Dockery said. "We have many broken windows and much water damage but the extent of the damage to the campus, thank goodness, is quite limited."

The twisters hit Jackson around 11 p.m. on May 4 as students were winding down their weekend activities. The damage was the result of a fierce storm that pounded the campus with "baseball size" hail. At least 130 automobiles were damaged and the windows in about 50 dorm rooms were blown out by the hail. Several university commons areas also sustained heavy water damage and a number of trees were either uprooted or damaged.

Larry Murphy, director of missions for Madison-Chester and Crockett Baptist associations noted there was damage countywide. A Hardeman County Baptist Association feeding unit was activated and stationed at West Jackson Baptist Church.

A total of six Tennessee counties reported power outages, other counties report numerous road closures, trees downed, and flash flooding. In addition, 50 homes in Williamson County were damaged, along with homes in Rutherford, Weakley and Stewart Counties.

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Virtues guru Bill Bennett pledges to quit gambling after losses revealed**By Robert Marus****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****May 6, 2003****Volume: 03-42-3570**

WASHINGTON (ABP) – While most conservative Christians in the United States see gambling as a vice, Bill Bennett doesn't think so. Or at least he didn't until many of his fellow conservatives began criticizing him for recently publicized revelations about his massive gambling habit.

Bennett is a conservative hero for his many books, speeches and columns calling for a return of virtues to public life. He served as education secretary under President Ronald Reagan and as drug czar under the elder President George Bush.

On May 5, he announced he was giving up gambling after an investigation by two magazines revealed he had a gambling habit that, according to casino records, cost him \$8 million in losses over the past 10 years.

Bennett disputed the numbers, saying that casino officials' numbers did not accurately reflect his winnings. But he did not dispute reports by Newsweek and the Washington Monthly that he was a regular VIP customer at several casinos in Atlantic City and Las Vegas. He has been known to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in a single night on slot machines or poker games, the online publications said.

Bennett also said he is not addicted to gambling. "I play fairly high stakes. I adhere to the law. I don't play the 'milk money,'" Bennett said, according to Newsweek. "I don't put my family at risk, and I don't owe anyone anything,"

According to USA Today, Elayne Bennett said her husband gambles only four or five times a year and that the family is financially solvent. Bennett regularly receives fees as high as \$50,000 for speaking engagements and has made millions from his book deals and columns.

Bennett, a Catholic, also told Newsweek that he first learned to gamble by playing church bingo, and that he has never criticized gambling as a moral failure – although he has criticized many public figures for other moral slips.

The Roman Catholic Church does not condemn all forms of gambling, although most Protestant traditions do. The Catechism of the Catholic Church – their official doctrinal statement – says of the actions of gamblers: "They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for one's needs and those of others. The passion for gambling risks becoming an enslavement."

Several prominent columnists, such as Slate magazine's Michael Kinsley, criticized Bennett for hypocrisy. On May 5, several of Bennett's usual allies among conservative Protestants also criticized him.

"We were disappointed to learn that our longtime friend, Dr. Bill Bennett, is dealing with what appears to be a gambling addiction," said Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, in a May 5 press release. "One of the reasons Focus on the Family continues to be strongly opposed to any form of gambling is because it has the power to ensnare and wound not only its victims, but also those closest to them. 'Gaming,' as the industry emphatically refers to itself, is a cancer on the soul of the nation."

In his May 5 statement, Bennett did not say gambling was wrong, but that he has "done too much" of it and that his "gambling days are over."



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Newspapers, faith groups oppose Pipes nomination

By Robert Marus

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WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Washington-based Interfaith Alliance has become the latest religious group to publicly oppose President Bush's nomination of a man described as "anti-Islamic" to a federal position.

Bush has experienced a firestorm of criticism since nominating Daniel Pipes to the board of directors of a government-funded agency April 2. Bush recommended Pipes for the U.S. Institute of Peace, a federal "think tank" devoted to promoting peaceful solutions to world problems.

But Muslim-Americans and religious-freedom groups have repeatedly accused Pipes of prejudice against Muslims and Islamic groups. In a Jerusalem Post article in January, Pipes was quoted as recommending special government surveillance of Muslims who are federal employees "for connections to terrorism." The newspaper also quoted Pipes as saying that Muslim visitors and immigrants should undergo "additional background checks" and that "mosques require a scrutiny beyond that applied to churches, synagogues and temples."

In a letter to senators, Interfaith Alliance president Welton Gaddy said the nomination is a bad idea. "As Americans who have witnessed hate crimes against Muslims and Sikhs in a post-September 11 world, and as people of faith and goodwill who fear backlash against these communities in a time of international unrest, we believe this nomination by the president is ill advised and antithetical to the very purpose of the organization that Dr. Pipes has been nominated to serve," he said.

Several newspapers, including the Chicago Tribune and the Washington Post, have issued editorials opposing Pipes' nomination.

Pipes has said repeatedly that he is only opposed to "militant Islam" and that his Muslim critics in the United States are merely trying to distract attention from their own secret agenda of imposing Islamic rule in the U.S.

Pipes writes a regular column for the New York Post and his writings on Islam and in defense of Israel have appeared in Baptist Press.



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Groups file brief opposing 10 Commandments monument

By Robert Marus

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MONTGOMERY, Ala. (ABP) – A Baptist public-affairs group and several Alabama Baptist pastors are taking the lead in formally opposing a state monument they say violates the Constitution's religious-freedom protections.

At the end of April, the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs filed a friend-of-the-court brief – joined by a diverse coalition of religious leaders and groups – opposing Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore's placement of a large monument to the Protestant version of the Ten Commandments in the rotunda of the state's judicial building.

Moore has already been ordered by a lower federal court to remove the monument because it constitutes a state endorsement of Protestant Christianity, in violation of the First Amendment. U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson handed down that ruling in November, but later halted its implementation pending the outcome of an appeal that Moore promised.

Moore has argued that his monument – erected in the middle of the night and without the approval of his fellow justices – merely constitutes an "acknowledgement of God" as the basis for the state's laws, and does not establish a religion.

But Holly Hollman, general counsel for the Baptist Joint Committee, disagreed in the brief. "Many faith communities in Alabama, including Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims, do not adhere to the tenets of Judaism or Christianity and thus do not share the faith from which the Ten Commandments are taken," she wrote.

The Atlanta-based 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is scheduled to hear arguments in the case June 4.

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White House supports 'under God' in Pledge
By Robert Marus
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WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Bush administration has asked the Supreme Court to overturn a lower court's ruling on the Pledge of Allegiance without listening to arguments in the case.

Solicitor General Ted Olson, acting on behalf of the White House, filed a motion asking the justices to overturn a June 2002 decision by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, based in San Francisco.

That ruling declared the teacher-led recitation of the pledge in public schools with the phrase "under God" included is an unconstitutional government establishment of religion. It also declared Congress' 1954 act inserting the phrase into the pledge -- which had existed since the late 1800s without it -- was unconstitutional.

The ruling came in response to a suit filed by self-described atheist father Michael Newdow, who said a California school district violated his elementary school-aged daughter's rights by requiring teachers to lead the pledge every day. Earlier Supreme Court decisions have affirmed the right of children to opt out of saying the pledge. But Newdow said that wasn't enough because the endorsement of the pledge by his daughter's taxpayer-funded teacher in her public-school classroom created a coercive effect.

The San Francisco court's decision was greeted by an overwhelming public outcry in opposition. The court later declined to review the case. But the judges did limit the decision's scope and delay its implementation.

Olson, in his filing for the Bush administration, said the phrase's recitation by public-school teachers does not violate the Constitution.

"Whatever else the First Amendment's Establishment Clause may prohibit, this court's precedents make clear that it does not forbid the government from officially acknowledging the religious heritage, foundation and character of this nation," Olson wrote.

In rare move, Olson asked the justices to discard the 9th Circuit's ruling in the case without even listening to arguments. He said previous Supreme Court decisions are so clearly opposed to the lower court's ruling as to render further arguments unnecessary.



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Message of 'Cotton Patch' drama still needed today, playwright says

By Mark Wingfield

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DALLAS (ABP) – As if having a teenage girl impregnated by God give birth to the Messiah isn't scandalous enough, the "Cotton Patch Gospel" ups the ante.

Mary, according to the stage play, is the daughter of a deacon at First Baptist Church of Opp, Ala. And Jesus isn't crucified by Pontius Pilate but lynched by the Ku Klux Klan working in concert with Gov. Pilate of Georgia.

More than 20 years since its off-Broadway premiere, the dramatic uprooting of Matthew's Gospel from Israel to Georgia continues to both shock and amuse audiences.

The audience at a recent performance of "Cotton Patch Gospel" at Dallas Theater Center gave the seven-member cast a standing ovation. After one memorable scene, a woman shouted out "Amen!"

But not all the shouting remains positive. At performances around North America, some theatergoers still walk out in protest of the play's inference of racial equality as a gospel cause.

"I used to think we've really evolved with race," said co-author Tom Key, who created the musical's main role and currently stars in the Dallas production. "But sadly, that's not the case. Sadly, this story is still essential."

"Cotton Patch Gospel" is a story Christians like to see in the secular theater but won't let in their churches, explained Key, who was raised at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala. "People who profess Christianity will come to the theater to see it but will not bring it into their churches because that endorses a theology," he surmised.

As evidence, he cites the fact that the show continues to be a theatrical hit and has been performed in both professional and amateur theaters across the country and into Canada. But a movie version intended to draw heavy use in churches did not fare nearly so well.

Nevertheless, Key speaks with passion about the joy he finds in lives changed through the production. Recently, a Jewish friend who played the title role of Matthew in a production of "Cotton Patch Gospel" directed by Key became a believer in Jesus as Messiah, in part through the influence of the musical.

Key said he has collected "many amazing stories" about how those who have seen the show or acted in it have been changed.

That's part of what keeps the Atlanta-based actor invigorated to reprise the role he not only created but which accounts for about one fourth of his acting career. The current production at Dallas Theater Center is his 10th production in 20 years, and he stopped counting performances after he surpassed 1,000.

"Every time I do it, I think, 'This is going to be the last time.'"

Despite being spiritually fulfilling, the role carries heavy physical demands. In the current production, Key plays Matthew the narrator, as well as Jesus, Simon Peter, deacons in the Baptist church, angels, televangelists and dozens of other characters that sometimes interact with each other as he flips personas faster than pancakes on a country stove.

The show originated as a one-man play, born out of Key's own passion for telling the gospel story in a fresh way. He developed the script after reading Clarence Jordan's "Cotton Patch" translation of Matthew's Gospel. Jordan was a Georgia Bible scholar and social activist who founded Koinonia Farms, a ministry that in turn played a pivotal role in birthing Habitat for Humanity.

From the shorter one-man play, "Cotton Patch Gospel" evolved into a full-blown musical with unexpected help from composer Harry Chapin, best known for hit songs such as "Cat's in the Cradle" and "Taxi." Key met Chapin through a friend of Russell Trezy, who became his co-author in expanding the drama.

Chapin was enthralled by the project, Key said, and declared, "I was born to write music for this." He completed the project in June 1981, one month before he was killed in an automobile accident. Three months later, the musical opened off-Broadway for what proved to be a successful run.

Today, the show still is evolving, Key said. "Over a period of 20 years, you learn things."

In 1995, for example, he directed a production in Atlanta in which he restored use of the word "nigger" to emphasize the severity of the cultural context.

One of the main reasons he created the play in the first place, he said, is to remind people that the Christian gospel is scandalous. "We're so familiar with the story we forget the shock value of a girl being impregnated by God."

Through "Cotton Patch Gospel," Key said, he intended to use the context of the American South to help people understand the scandalous nature of the gospel in a new way.

So in the musical, Mary becomes Mary Hagler from Clayton, Ga., and Joseph becomes Joe Davidson. Nazareth becomes Gainesville, Ga. — "a helluva place to be heaven-sent," according to the show's opening number.

Mary gives birth to Jesus in an abandoned trailer "out back of" the Dixie Delights Motor Lodge as she and Joe travel to Atlanta for an income-tax audit.

When Jesus is 12, he stays behind at the Baptist Sunday School Conference in Atlanta to teach the Bible to denominational leaders, worrying his parents who cannot find him.

John the Baptist baptizes people in the Chattahoochee River. Judas is named Judd. And Jesus' fate is sealed not during Passover but during the annual Believe in the Bible Society Convention in Atlanta.

The script resounds with familiar Bible quotations spun in a Georgia vernacular as in Jordan's translation. Jesus says, "Come on to me, everybody who's got a belly full of emptiness."

As in the Gospel of Matthew, the theme of the show is Jesus' appeal to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and might, and love your neighbor as yourself."

Although Key appreciates the influence of "Godspell" and "Jesus Christ Superstar," he said he wanted "Cotton Patch Gospel" to go beyond where those shows stopped. Neither addresses the Resurrection in a significant way.

"I wanted to go all the way with Jesus being both human and divine," he said. "I wanted a Christ who could come back and have a cup of coffee and a piece of pecan pie."

Surprisingly, the translation into Southern idioms hasn't been lost on audiences beyond the South, Key reported. In fact, he noted, audiences in New York warned him he shouldn't take the musical to the South because "they'd lynch you." Likewise, audiences in Atlanta told him: "You could never do this outside the South. They wouldn't get it."

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News journal honors Dilday for integrity, leadership

By John Pierce

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DALLAS (ABP) – Russell Dilday, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, received the annual Judson-Rice Award for leadership and integrity from the independent news journal Baptists Today April 25.

During a dinner that also commemorated the publication's 20th anniversary, former Southern Baptist Convention president Jimmy Allen presented the award on behalf of the news journal's board of directors.

Allen said Dilday reflected the commitment and integrity of early Baptist leaders Adoniram and Ann Judson and Luther Rice, for whom the award is named. "Russell Dilday richly deserves the Judson-Rice Award for courageous and consistent leadership," said Allen.

Allen recounted how Dilday lead the Fort Worth, Texas, seminary "to its highest peaks in missions, scholarship and equipping leaders to forward the principles of the kingdom of God around the world" before being terminated by fundamentalist trustees in 1994.

"The single event that causes this award for courageous leadership, however, was when he refused to yield his convictions as a free and faithful Baptist to the credalists who had taken over the seminary board as well as the Southern Baptist Convention," said Allen. "The grace and consistency of his courageous response qualifies him for this award."

Dilday, upon receiving the award, urged "Baptists today" to "never forget our spiritual birthright."

"Tragically, there is an effort being made by some to re-write our history," said Dilday. "They want to erase the true Baptist vision and reshape it. Some have called them pseudo-Baptists, rogues inside the family who never knew or have forgotten what our true identity is and are distorting it."

Dilday said unless this effort is addressed, "the species called Baptistus Authenticus is threatened with extinction and a new breed called Baptistus Counterfeitus will be grafted in its place."

He urged "Baptists today" to help shape "Baptists tomorrow" by preserving the authentic heritage of "Baptists yesterday."

The Judson-Rice Award was established in 2001, with Allen receiving the inaugural award. Author and speaker Tony Campolo was presented the 2003 award.

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Roger Moran blasts CBF, says SBC lacks holiness

By Steve DeVane

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GARDEN, N.C. (ABP) – As expected, a conservative Baptist political activist from Missouri had harsh words for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Mainstream Baptists Network during a speech to North Carolina conservatives April 24. But, perhaps not as anticipated, Roger Moran also criticized some "conservative, Bible-believing Southern Baptists."

Moran is credited with leading a movement that gave conservatives control of the Missouri Baptist Convention. Many observers believe November's meeting of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina could prove equally decisive. In the presidential election, moderates are backing Winston-Salem pastor David Hughes while conservatives support Greensboro pastor David Horton.

Moran, now a member of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, was the featured speaker at a rally for the Conservative Carolina Baptists. He spent most of his speech accusing CBF and Mainstream Baptists of being liberal. He said the Apostle Paul was talking about groups like CBF in Acts 20:30 when he told the church in Ephesus: "Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."

CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal released a statement saying that Moran's accusations feed the "cynicism and mistrust that those in the world feel toward Christians."

"This kind of demeaning and abusive rhetoric is an insult to our missionaries who proclaim the gospel in some of the most difficult places in the world," Vestal said. "It hurts the chaplains, the seminary students, the church planters and the Baptist congregations who are a part of the CBF family."

Moran listed 22 "points of contrast" between CBF and the more conservative Southern Baptist Convention, then spent several minutes talking about how he believes Mainstream leaders are linked to groups he considers liberal.

CBF and Mainstream leaders have said Moran uses guilt-by-association tactics and that the views of their individual members do not necessarily reflect the views of the groups. CBF recently launched a Web site to respond to such accusations at www.truthaboutcbf.net.

Toward the end of his speech, Moran changed the subject. He said conservatives are losing their "biblical understanding of the seriousness of sin."

"When conservative, Bible-believing Southern Baptists can sing along with secular music that trivializes and glorifies sin, then for what do we tell people Christ died and shed his blood?" he asked. "When conservative, Bible-believing Southern Baptists can sit in front of a television and sit in a movie theater and constantly feed on the godless wickedness of this world, then have we not indeed forgotten that whichever nature we nurture will become dominant in our lives? And have we forgotten that when we feed the flesh it grows stronger?"

Moran said everything that God expects from Christians flows from holiness.

"Evangelism and the making of disciples, that hard work of making disciples, is not the natural outgrowth of carnal Christianity even if our doctrine is sound," he said. Moran said conservative Southern Baptists need to realize that "boldly proclaiming the truth of God's word is only half the equation."

"We are in desperate need of a passion and a commitment to live the truth that matches or even surpasses our passion for preaching," he said.

Other speakers at the rally spoke against liberalism and in favor of Conservative Carolina Baptists.

Emir Caner, assistant professor of church history and Anabaptist studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological

Seminary, said, "A liberal will never lead anyone to Jesus Christ – never."

He also spoke against what he called "a Dalmatian theology" which views the Bible as inspired only in spots. "The Bible is either absolute or it's obsolete," he said. "It's either all or nothing."

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