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State funding of religious groups is lure of 'Babylon,' Campolo says
By Robert Marus
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(EDITOR'S NOTE: This story provides additional information to an earlier version of the same story that ABP released June 29.)

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – Human governments are the Babylons referred to in the book of Revelation. And America's Babylon is tempting religious charities to accept government money, Baptist sociologist Tony Campolo said in a June 27 speech.

Campolo, a former professor at the American Baptist-related Eastern University in suburban Philadelphia, was speaking at the annual luncheon of the Religious Liberty Council of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The luncheon took place during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's General Assembly in Charlotte, N.C.

"Whenever the church finds itself in a particular political-economic system, then of course that system must be referred to as Babylon," Campolo said in reference to the allegory of the "Whore of Babylon" in Revelation 17.

"The system is out to seduce the church, and that is exactly what is going on right now with 'faith-based initiatives,'" Campolo continued. "It has become the most dangerous seduction that I've ever seen come down the pike."

Campolo referred to President Bush's bid to place thoroughly religious groups – such as churches and mosques – on an equal footing with secular groups in receiving government grants for performing social services. Many religious leaders have endorsed the idea as a more effective way of providing social services that work, while many others have viewed it as a violation of the Constitution's ban on government support for religious groups.

Campolo said churches and religious charities that think it's a good idea to take government money are looking to the wrong place for their funding. "The people of God have the resources to do what needs to be done, and we don't need to be looking to the government," he said.

Campolo said the risk is greater to the church's freedom than it was to the state's integrity. "We will lose our prophetic edge" if churches take government money, he said. "Separation of church and state is crucial if the church is going to influence the government."

But churches can't offer a meaningful critique of government if they are in debt to it. "Whoever pays the fiddler calls the tune," Campolo said.

Campolo, a sociologist by training and a popular Christian speaker on social-justice issues, also used the opportunity to opine on several other areas of public policy.

Discussing new restrictions on Americans' freedom, Campolo questioned why more Christians in the United States aren't speaking up for Muslims. "Following September 11, the religious freedom of Muslims is being seriously threatened" in the United States, he said.

Campolo condemned new laws and Justice Department policies that make it possible for government police – such as FBI agents – to spy on religious services and groups without probable cause. "They're sending spies into mosques and we're not saying a word," he said. Campolo pointed out that, during the Soviet era, American evangelicals would often express outrage over reports of KGB agents spying on churches and keeping intelligence files on Christian leaders, sometimes imprisoning them.

"If it was outrageous to send spies into churches, then it is also outrageous to send spies into mosques."

Campolo said excusing such surveillance of mosques because of national security concerns is missing the point. "You say, 'It's dangerous.' Freedom is always dangerous."

He also called on the U.S. government to pay particular concern to the peril that the prospect of a Shiite Muslim theocracy in newly liberated Iraq would mean for that country's religious minorities -- including hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Christians.

Campolo particularly took to task American Christian leaders who have made incendiary public statements about Islam in recent years -- including statements by former Southern Baptist Convention president Jerry Vines, who called Mohammed a "demon-possessed pedophile."

"I can tolerate difference of opinion, except when they're stupid," Campolo said of such comments. "Do these people understand how this plays out for our Christian missionaries in Muslim countries?"

He said he in no way meant to excuse the acts of Muslim extremists. But pointing to such acts doesn't absolve the American agitators of responsibility, he said. "You agitate people, and then you're upset when those people do violent and ungodly things."

Campolo said that a better approach to Muslim-Christian relations would be for American Christians to persuade leaders in Islamic countries of the value of religious freedom. "We've got to resist that seduction of Babylon," he said, "but we've also got to ensure that the New Jerusalem has the right to exist in every Babylon around the world."

During the luncheon, which was attended by more than 500, BJC leaders presented Campolo with the J.M. Dawson Religious Liberty award for his long advocacy of church-state separation.

The Religious Liberty Council is the means by which individuals and churches relate to the BJC, which is made up of every major Baptist denomination in the United States except for the Southern Baptist Convention. RLC members elected new co-chairs for the council. They are Reggie McDonough, the recently-retired executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia; and Sharon Felton, campus minister at Baptist-related Georgetown College in Kentucky.

RLC members also elected Mississippi attorney Mark Wiggs to the RLC board for a three-year term, and re-elected board members David Currie of Texas, Ed Massey of Kentucky, and Joel Avery of Tennessee to second three-year terms.

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Whitsitt Society honors Rauschenbusch, Campolo tells historians to be 'post-American'

By Michael Clingenpeel

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – The Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society honored a 19th century Baptist pastor and theologian of social justice and heard a present-day spokesman for social justice say 21st century Christians need to be post-Marxist, post-American and postmodern.

Baptist sociologist and preacher Tony Campolo used the society's annual St. Amant Lecture to say the Baptist social gospel in the 21st century is about the Kingdom of God, which involves "a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit, personal righteousness and social justice."

The Bible is about the Kingdom of God, said Campolo, and Jesus' own mission statement was "to declare that the Kingdom of God is at hand." Therefore, Kingdom people will discover that God is everywhere when they find God in the depths of their being.

The American Baptist minister rejected the socialist economic theories of Karl Marx, but he acknowledged that economics and social class play an important role in shaping our interpretation of the Bible.

"We in the church haven't paid enough attention to economics," he said. "We have become a political action group.... Forget the political structures and focus on the economic structures."

Campolo said Christians should become more attuned to the actions of corporations and the opportunity of shareholders to change companies in which they invest. He cited a group of Christian students who influenced the Gulf and Western Corporation to improve the lives of the poor in the Dominican Republic. He also mentioned "the mustard seed conspiracy" and Opportunities International, Christian organizations that champion the plight of the poor and try to find them jobs.

"Any Christian that doesn't speak to macro-structures is not doing the gospel. They are run by good people that do evil things." Campolo mentioned the leadership of Enron and WorldCom. "They are good men. At night they go to bed with their own wives. Privately they would not lie to you. But on the corporate level they rob millions."

In the 21st century individual Christians are to be "the instruments to bring principalities and powers into subjection," said Campolo.

The Philadelphia native also said Christians must become post-American. He lamented that it has become difficult to criticize America since 9/11, but warned that Christians must distinguish between the United States and the Kingdom of God and develop a justice that transcends national loyalty.

"Anybody that says, 'My country, right or wrong,' is an idolater and is mocking Jesus," said Campolo. "But we've created a God who is an American."

The hope for our world in the 21st century, continued Campolo, is from the Third World, and he blamed Southern Baptists for creating a "white, Anglo-Saxon, Republican Jesus."

The gospel in the 21st century, concluded Campolo, also must be postmodern.

"Something mystical is happening in church, and we better wed the sophisticated social gospel with individual piety, personal conversion and new forms of worship."

Unfortunately, he added, many evangelical Christians are still in the modern era. "The Southern Baptist Convention is in trouble but doesn't know where it's coming from," he said. "They think it's coming from the left. There is a leaching, and it's going to the Pentecostals, because they are postmodern."

Claiming that he is no friend of contemporary praise music ("The only difference between the new music and a machine gun is that a machine gun has only 100 rounds") Campolo acknowledged that chapel worship at Eastern College in Philadelphia, where he taught for 38 years, is largely Pentecostal.

"They're in love with Jesus in a way that transcends anything I understand. I have learned to, in Bob Dylan's words, 'not criticize what you don't understand.'"

Prior to Campolo's lecture, society granted their Baptist Courage Award posthumously to American Baptist pastor and theologian Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch served 12 years among New York City's poorest residents in the "Hell's Kitchen" neighborhood of Manhattan before he became professor at Rochester Theological Seminary and wrote several works that were the intellectual basis for the Social Gospel movement of the early 20th century.

His great-grandson, Paul Rauschenbusch, received the award on behalf of the family. The younger Rauschenbusch, also a minister, said his great-grandfather was "a proud Baptist" who "valued personal experience above creed." The 19th century reformer re-read the Bible to see what it said about the poor, and concluded "Jesus came not only to save souls but to save society."

The younger Rauschenbusch called his great-grandfather "my greatest human inspiration."

This is the 12th year the award has been presented.

Officers of the Whitsitt Society are James Dunn, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, president; John Pierce, Macon, Georgia, vice-president; Doug Weaver, Waco, Texas, secretary and Loyd Allen, Atlanta, Georgia, executive director/treasurer.



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Mainstream meeting features terminated IMB missionaries

By Mark Wingfield

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – Two missionary couples who lost their jobs with the Southern Baptist Convention for failure to sign a new faith statement expressed gratitude to God for allowing them to serve as missionaries at all.

Larry and Sarah Ballew and Houston and Charlotte Greenhaw told their stories at a breakfast meeting sponsored by the Mainstream Baptist Network June 27, but neither couple dwelled on the negative.

"We may have lost our jobs, but brothers and sisters, there are Christians who lose their lives...for not bowing to heavy-handed authoritarianism," said Larry Ballew. He and his wife, who have served in Macau, China, were fired by the SBC's International Mission Board in May for failure to sign the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

The Greenhaws, veteran missionaries to Brazil, took early retirement from the IMB when given a final ultimatum to sign the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

Charlotte Greenhaw spoke of her "gratitude to our awesome God" for allowing her to serve as a missionary. And despite the current challenges, she said, "I know the Lord is with me. I will not be afraid."

"I have had joy that knows no limits, but I have had some moments in the last year (that were)...very devastating," added Greenhaw, who is a granddaughter of the legendary Edgar "Preacher" Hallock of Oklahoma.

The breakfast meeting, held during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's general assembly in Charlotte, N.C., featured the ongoing struggles between moderate Baptists and the fundamentalist-controlled SBC, the convention to which most CBF churches once belonged and to which some still relate. The Mainstream Baptist Network is a distinct organization from the CBF and seeks to foster what it calls "mainstream" Baptist ideals in churches and state Baptist conventions.

Both the Ballews and the Greenhaws intend to return to their mission posts and continue the same work they had been doing through the IMB, although with different support networks. Neither couple will be CBF-appointed missionaries.

Each couple explained why they refused to sign the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

"We did not do this to get your approval" but rather out of a sense of what was right in God's eyes, Ballew said.

Nor was the issue for him merely that the content of the SBC's faith statement had changed. He would have made the same decision if requested to sign the 1963 Baptist Faith & Message, he said.

Signing blind allegiance to a faith statement written by someone else in a different cultural context is "bad missiology" and a "bad witness," he declared.

In China, "our people experience heavy-handed, top-down authoritarianism all the time," he said. Signing "would have been a bad witness" to them. "If we had signed that document, yes, we could have continued with the IMB. But it would have ruined us as missionaries."

The choice was so clear even their 9-year-old son understood it when the ultimatum first was given to sign the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, Mrs. Ballew said. He said to his mother, "This reminds me of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego," referencing the three Hebrew teens who in ancient times were thrown into the fiery

furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar because they would not bow down to an idol.

The Greenhaws knew from the moment they received the IMB's request that they could not sign the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, they each said.

"It was not my statement of faith," Mrs. Greenhaw said.

Her husband held up a sheet of paper with 10 questions they were asked when first appointed as SBC missionaries. Then he read from the current affirmation required by the IMB, indicating agreement with the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message and pledging to work "in accordance with and not contrary" to it.

When first appointed, they were not asked to sign a specific faith statement written by someone else, he asserted. "The Baptist Faith & Message is prepared in a U.S. context. To promise to work in accordance with something that is created in another culture – you can't do that."

Holding up both pieces of paper, he declared, "The difference between these statements is immense."

Both couples described how they believe God miraculously has provided a way for them to return to their mission fields, citing evidence such as unlikely encounters that led to new housing and just-in-time arrangements on visas.

Mrs. Ballew called it a "step of faith" that God has honored.

Neither couple expressed animosity toward the IMB, although both acknowledged the trauma of the past year and a half.

Ballew quoted the apostle Paul's words from the eighth chapter of Romans to say of God: "These present sufferings are nothing compared to the glory he will reveal in us."

He added: "Every temporary problem is an opportunity for the glory of the Lord to shine out."

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Vestal challenges CBF supporters to incarnate Christ, work together

By Mark Wingfield

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – To be the presence of Christ in the world, members of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship must work together today, Daniel Vestal said at the CBF general assembly, June 27 in Charlotte, N.C.

In his annual address as coordinator of the Atlanta-based Fellowship, Vestal called Baptists to be the hands and feet and mouth of Jesus in a needy world.

But that will not be as easy to do as to say, he acknowledged, "because Jesus himself is not quite as simple or as easy to understand as we have thought him to be. Perhaps this Jesus of history, this Christ of faith, is far more beautiful and far more radical and far more profound than we have imagined."

Vestal listed various emphases different Christian traditions place on the person of Jesus, based on their own special interests or needs. For example, to those concerned primarily with social justice, Jesus is a prophet; to those concerned with evangelism, Jesus is the Savior; and to those in need of liberation, Jesus is emancipator.

Rather than living in isolation, these and other views of Jesus must flow together into a common stream of witness within the Fellowship, he suggested.

"CBF is a place where we affirm each other's gifts and also recognize that none of us is the body of Christ by ourselves. No one of us can stand alone. No one of us has a corner on the truth. No one of us has a complete understanding of the gospel."

Vestal pointed to I Corinthians 3:9, which in the King James Version says, "We are laborers together with God."

Emphasizing this and other "together" passages of the New Testament, he called for cooperation, partnership and multicultural interaction.

"From our formation, we have said we wanted to be inclusive and egalitarian in leadership and membership," he explained. "It's in our DNA, it's in our desire, to balance leadership between male and female, laity and clergy, and different parts of the country. But as painful as it is for us to admit, we are too white with too few people of color in our midst."

The time to be the presence of Christ is now, Vestal said. "This is our time. God has given us this day. And it makes no sense to retreat into an idealized past or always be wishing for a perfect future."

Baptists must press on with the gospel despite the burdens of the times, Vestal insisted.

"I realize many of you live and work in very stressful places.... Many of you serve God on what seems to be an island surrounded by a sea of fundamentalism. Others of you work daily in an environment where people are hostile to Christian values. Some of you are in churches characterized by conflict, and others of you see little fruit in your ministry. ... Yet this is our day."

Vestal called on Baptists to seize the day by making their churches relevant in their communities rather than merely "playing church." He urged churches to make God's mission their passion, to train effective congregational leaders and to have a global vision.

In the weakness of churches, God can bring strength, Vestal assured.

CBFers challenged, encouraged in Charlotte annual meeting**By Robert Marus****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****June 30, 2003****Volume: 03-61-3683**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – They were challenged by alarming reports on giving and a keynote sermon that assailed their lack of diversity. Nonetheless, supporters of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship heard some words of encouragement during their general assembly, June 26-28 in Charlotte, N.C.

"I'm bothered that this group is so white," said Baptist sociologist and popular speaker Tony Campolo, scanning the Fellowship audience during a bombastic hour-long sermon at the assembly's opening session. Besides imploring the organization to involve more African-Americans and Hispanics in its life and leadership, Campolo challenged Baptists to do more to fight poverty, advocate for a just peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and fight for the civil rights of homosexuals without necessarily endorsing their lifestyle choices on a theological or moral level.

"I'm not asking you to be conservative or liberal. I'm asking you to be loving," he said of Christians' response to gays and lesbians. Christians are divided on their response to homosexuality, he conceded, noting he and his wife do not agree. He doesn't believe homosexuals should be married, while she does.

"But I believe in justice for all people," he said. "I am asking you to show love and compassion for people who have had their teeth kicked in for far too many years."

The Fellowship took a step toward increasing the movement's diversity June 27, when supporters approved a missions partnership between CBF and the Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas. The Texas convention already had voted to affirm the cooperative effort to plant 400 new Hispanic churches and baptize 10,000 new converts by 2010.

CBF supporters also heard news that the Fellowship's Hispanic presence was already increasing. CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal told the organization's Coordinating Council that, of the 241 churches that contributed to CBF for the first time last year, about 25 were predominantly Hispanic congregations.

Outgoing CBF Moderator Phill Martin, a layman and member of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, said that was one of the encouraging aspects of an otherwise bleak budget picture for CBF. "Things really are great with CBF, but there is one thing that is of concern," he told assembly participants. "Our corporate vision and dreams for CBF are greater than our commitment to funding," he reported.

The assembly approved a \$17.1 million CBF budget for fiscal year 2003-2004, plus an additional \$2.6 million in designated giving.

Most of the designated giving comes from two multimillion-dollar gifts that have already been given to CBF but will be disbursed over a several-year period.

Vestal told CBF supporters that without those gifts the Fellowship would not have been able to appoint any new missionaries in this fiscal year. During a June 27 missionary-appointment service, he said, "Honestly, we could not be here tonight without the support of a generous donor."

The Fellowship was projected to end the current fiscal year June 30 with a \$650,000 shortfall in undesignated receipts over expenditures, even while keeping expenditures at 85 percent of budget. That budget shortfall will be covered by reserve funds, said finance committee chair Philip Wise, pastor of Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, Texas.

Total income for the year is projected to reach about \$15 million, said Jim Strawn, CBF's chief financial officer. That's short of a basic budget of \$18.2 million. The Coordinating Council enacted spending cuts earlier in the year for both CBF's own ministries and its funding for partner organizations.

Despite the organization's budget shortfalls, one CBF initiative will be fully funded this year. Offerings at the general assembly went to support CBF's Partners in Hope program, a ministry designed to alleviate poverty in the nation's 20 poorest counties over the next 20 years. The project aims to improve economic conditions through what CBF leaders call "assets-based community transformation."

Although the goal for the offering had been \$100,000, the assembly's 4,357 attendees ended up giving \$175,210 to the project in offerings collected over two days.

In other business, Clayton, Mo., attorney Cynthia Holmes became CBF's moderator after being elected at last year's general assembly. She is a member of Overland Baptist Church in suburban St. Louis.

Participants also elected Bob Setzer as moderator-elect. Pastor of First Baptist Church of Macon, Ga., Setzer will take over CBF's leadership from Holmes at next year's assembly. Susan Crumpler was also elected as recorder. An engineer with Procter & Gamble Co. in Cincinnati, Crumpler is a member of Montgomery Community Baptist Church in suburban Cincinnati.

— Mark Wingfield and Marv Knox also contributed to this report

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Pluralism and orthodox Christianity not exclusive, Leonard tells group**By Marv Knox****Associated Baptist Press - www.abpnews.com****June 30, 2003****Volume: 03-61-3684**

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) – Many Baptists bog down in theological "quicksand" as they try to relate to people of other religions, church historian Bill Leonard reported.

They've got "one foot set in Jesus-ism and the other in pluralism," Leonard said in a breakout session held during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's general assembly, June 27 in Charlotte, N.C.

But by taking clues from their heritage, Baptists can find firm footing to remain respectful while advocating for their cause, said Leonard, dean of Wake Forest University's Divinity School.

"Since the beginning of our movement, Baptists generally have affirmed the belief in a regenerate church membership, or 'believer's church,'" he said. "Conversion to Christ is non-negotiable" for salvation and membership in the church.

"But since almost the beginning, Baptists have not agreed on the nature or process of that conversion," he noted.

As early as 1608-09, Baptists affirmed the thinking of religious reformer Jacob Arminius, who believed all people have free will and can decide if they will accept God's grace in Christ and be saved.

Less than 30 years later, Baptists influenced by reformer John Calvin believed Christ died only for the "elect," or those God already had chosen to be saved, he said.

So, almost from the beginning of their history, Baptists affirmed two unique plans for salvation, he said.

Moreover, Baptists developed the concept of religious pluralism in America, he added. They took their cues from English Baptists, who first said God, not government, is the Lord of conscience, and neither the church nor the state can dictate religious faith.

Led by Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island, Baptists in America advocated for pluralism, the notion that "every individual is free to believe the right stuff, the wrong stuff or nothing at all," Leonard said.

But even as they championed the rights of others, Baptists advocated for their own beliefs, he noted.

"Baptists were not silent about the need for regeneration," he observed. "Baptists said, 'You're free to believe, but we're free to tell you you're wrong.'"

This principle of religious pluralism is in serious danger today, Leonard warned. "It is half a step from saying all other religions are wrong to saying we have to protect 'the innocent' with sanctions" against other religions, he explained. "The Baptists [who were persecuted for their faith by other Christians in Colonial America] knew that before everybody else."

Throughout the generations, most Baptists have struggled to live in two worlds – unashamed commitment to Christian faith and an understanding of religious liberty that nurtured pluralism, he said.

These potentially competing values create the "quicksand" that provides uncertain footing for evangelistic Christians who also affirm others' rights, he noted.

When Baptists began to engage in world missionary efforts after 1792, they had to consider God's purposes and their interaction with other religions, he noted.

"If you have a responsibility to say Jesus is the only Savior of the world, you have to deal with other religions."

Often, some critics attack Christianity on this point, claiming Christians try to exert "salvific hegemony" over others, Leonard observed. However, other religions – particularly Islam – often are more extreme in denying Christians the opportunity to express their faith.

In fact, the way out of the "quicksand," he said, is recognizing Christians can live responsibly and effectively in a pluralistic society without forfeiting their beliefs or abandoning the right to express them to people who believe differently.

Christians should think carefully about how they witness in the pluralistic world in light of the results they hope to achieve, Leonard stressed.

"Some are compelled by conscience that all other religions other than Christianity are lost," he said, noting they should act upon their convictions.

"But they need to know...in church [their belief] will be perceived as a statement of conviction but on CNN it will be interpreted as bigotry," he added.

For example, he cited the 1980 statement by former Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith, "God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew." Many Jews and others offended by the comment still quote Smith, and the sentence has been an impediment to evangelism for almost a quarter of a century, he said.

Still, the notion that Christ is only one among several possible roads to faith is "syncretistic pabulum," Leonard declared.

Moreover, the idea that Christians must choose between harshly-expressed Christian orthodoxy and religious "libertarianism" is a false dichotomy, he said. Christians can express their convictions while remaining respectful listeners to others and gain ground in the dialogue, he said.

As evidence, he pointed to the rapid growth of Christianity "outside the West," where faithful Christians diligently but thoughtfully confront pluralistic societies.

Leonard said he has learned to "be with them, but not one of them" as he talks to people of other faiths.

"To respond to other world religions, I do it as a person of faith," he said. "It does me no good to tell Muslims, 'If you don't believe in Jesus, you're going to hell.' You take them seriously, communicate with them.... You can say, 'We're together here and here, but not here.'"

And in discussing where the faiths diverge, the Christian gains an opportunity to share the gospel, he said.

For example, he told about talking to a person from another religion who said to him, "We could never believe God, the transcendent, would become human." Leonard responded, "I can't imagine God wouldn't."



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