



REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

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NewsMakers

◆ **Rosemarie Davidson-Gotobed**, racial justice coordinator for the London Baptist Association, said peoples' ethnic identity often "overlaps with their religious identity." Speaking about racial justice and religious liberty at a London conference titled "Beyond Mere Toleration," she told participants it's "difficult to address one without addressing the other."

◆ **Faith Bowers**, member of London's Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, said British Baptists have believed in church-state separation, but it has not been as dominant a concern as it has been for U.S. Baptists. While the British state church does not present a great threat to religious liberty, she said Baptists do add their voice to a "fresh movement" for disestablishment.

◆ **Robert Krueger**, former U.S. ambassador to Burundi, spoke openly to conferees about how faith impacted his work. Krueger, taking risks at home and abroad to document genocide in Burundi, said he felt "divine protection" when his motorcade once came under heavy gunfire, leaving two dead and eight wounded. "You haven't the faintest notion of what is going on in countries like Burundi and Rwanda," he told participants at the religious liberty conference. A

"Beyond Mere Toleration"

London conference news
pages 1, 2 & 4

Sects deserve same freedom as mainstream faiths, Barker says

Members of new religious movements, sects or cults deserve the same freedom to choose, practice and promote their faith as citizens of any other faith, sociologist Eileen Barker told participants at a Baptist-sponsored religious liberty conference in London.

"Beyond Mere Toleration: Religious Liberty as a Basic Human Right" was held July 8-10 at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church and sponsored by Bloomsbury, the Baptist Joint Committee and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

Barker acknowledged that many people feel "apprehension and repulsion" toward newer religious movements such as Hare Krishna, Scientology or the Unification Church.

Some activities are "absolutely beyond toleration," she said, citing Aum Shinri Kyo followers leaving lethal gas on the Tokyo subway, sexual child abuse by religious leaders and others. "But we must not tolerate intolerance" in principle and application, said Barker, a professor at the London School of Economics and a world-renowned expert on new religions.

Toleration can sometimes be a "wishy-washy relativism" of passive indifference to the beliefs of others, but going "beyond mere toleration" takes much more effort, she said. However strange the beliefs of some new religious movements, it is essential not to label them a danger to society, Barker added.

She said new movements do have certain characteristics in common, some of

which were shared by early Christians.

"It's possible the sets of beliefs most of us hold originated in a group that had sect-like characteristics," Barker said. It is a stark contrast to popular, but invalid, images of cults as "brainwashers," preying on the defenseless. She quipped that older religions are better "brainwashers," since they "work on children from birth."

"We have to remember that members of these groups are human beings."

— Eileen Barker
London School of Economics



People join new religious groups for many reasons, including positive ones, such as gaining an opportunity to sacrifice for their beliefs, she said. Newfound faith also gives followers a chance to

develop self-confidence, Barker added.

"We have to remember that members of these groups are human beings," she said, adding that new faiths often face mistreatment, loss of civil rights, physical attacks, and restrictive laws.

Moving past toleration means respecting "freedom for truth with a small 't,' rather than only for 'The Truth,'" she said.

"We subscribe to a culture that describes these people as 'other,'" she said. "We go along with constructing and maintaining an image that demonizes the small and strange." Media demonize by printing sensationalist stories and negative stereotypes of new sects, she said.

Barker said that Jesus would have interacted with groups considered to be different. But "would you or I have crossed the room to have a drink with Jesus and his friends? I'm not so sure." A

— Andrew Black
for Associated Baptist Press



Stanley Mogoba

Speaker touts debt relief for poor countries

Threats to religious freedom cannot be solved without also addressing the vast economic disparity between the world's rich and poor, said a South African anti-apartheid leader who spent nearly four years in Robben Island prison.

"How else do you approach the question of leveling the ground?" asked the Rev. Stanley Mogoba, president of the Pan Africanist Congress and member of South Africa's parliament.

Touting "Jubilee 2000," a global movement urging the world's richest countries to cancel debts owed by poor countries, Mogoba said that "the scales need to be adjusted."

At the London religious liberty conference, "Beyond Mere Toleration," he said, "This is a time when we need to move beyond mere toleration to a life of sharing, a life of actually ensuring that the resources of the world are available to all." ▴

Fundamentalism a problem for all faiths, panel argues

"If God were a person, he'd be turning in his grave," quipped a Jewish panelist discussing religious leaders who think they have the only interpretation of faith.

Sidney Brichto, senior vice president of the London-based Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, joined a Muslim and a Christian for a panel discussion at the religious liberty conference titled "Beyond Mere Toleration" (See cover story).

Brichto called it "arrogant" for any religious leader to tell others, "If you don't believe as I say, you aren't a good Christian, Muslim, Jew or whatever."

The panelists said fundamentalism in all three religions threatens individual choice and distorts tenets of their faiths.

Fundamentalists are viewed as the "real thing," Brichto said, "because they're fanatical; because they know exactly where they stand. The fact they're standing for the wrong thing doesn't worry anybody."

Liberals, meanwhile, who value individual religious freedom, are labeled "wishy washy," he said. But Brichto believes "liberals are closer to Jesus than fanatics who know it all."

People turn to fundamentalism, he said, because they want "easy options (and) to be told what to do and how to think."

Brichto said "human rights, liberty and autonomy of the individual" lie at the center of faith. He called it "anti-religious" if "anybody denies, for any reason, an individual's autonomy."

Asad Beg, an administrator for the European Parliament, said some "Muslim people have not been the greatest ambassadors of their own religion."

But Beg, a Muslim, also pointed to religious extremes in the Serbian-Orthodox Church and in Northern Ireland. Through those lenses only, he said, Christians "would be seen as people who have raped our women, burned our homes, desecrated our cemeteries (and) burned our people alive."

Beg said, "We need to learn about each other and try and build bridges for a common understanding."

Panelist Charles Wellborn, a Baptist and emeritus professor of religion at Florida State University, observed that some may try to force people to outwardly conform. "But there's a sanctuary of the individual soul that's inviolable," he declared. "In the final analysis, people will believe what they believe," he added.

Wellborn called for extending the New

Testament notion of "koinonia" (fellowship), "without diminishing its special meaning for the Christian community, to a larger community in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious world."

He acknowledged that "it's a dream, it's an idea. But when have we made any real progress without being prodded by dreamers and idealists?" ▴

Albanian woman calls for reconciliation in Balkans

An Albanian woman speaking at the London conference urged fellow Kosovars not to respond to "Serbian barbarism" with the "spirit of vendetta" and hatred.

Amid news reports of violence by ethnic Albanians seeking revenge for Serb atrocities during NATO's 78-day bombing of Yugoslavia, Kimete Basha called for reconciliation in the Balkans in her address to the Baptist-sponsored conference titled "Beyond Mere Toleration."

As wife of the Albanian ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg, Basha hopes to make a difference in the aftermath of ethnic-cleansing horrors in her native Kosovo.

But she admits she had to work through her own feelings to come to her present point of view. "Anger and hatred boiled in me," she said. "But I had to refuse to respond to it and look inside to see what makes us human."

When the rector of the University of Pristina called for help in reopening the damaged university in Kosovo's capital city, Basha responded quickly. She did so to help a school where Serbian and ethnic-Albanian students "once studied together peacefully and even fell in love and got married," she said.

Basha, who was librarian at the International School in Brussels for 18 years, took on the University of Pristina library as her project. She set out to replace all the books in the Albanian language that Serbs had burned.

Response to her calls for help included a \$10,000 gift from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, CBF representative Lonnie Turner told conference participants at London's Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church.

Basha said Serbs must seek forgiveness for ethnic cleansing but added that her people must muster the willingness to give it. "Unless every person is valuable there can be no peace," said the woman whose first name, Kimete, means "something of value." ▴

— Robert O'Brien
for Associated Baptist Press

Nothing eschatological, just a thank-you note



James M. Dunn
Executive Director

Carl Sandburg said, "It is all right to retire as long as it doesn't interfere with your work." I'm OK with that. Call it transition, not retirement.

It seems strange to refer to my retirement, to be feted and funeralized for finally

turning it over. This is my last letter to you, dear readers, as executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee. "Retiring," when one goes from one job to two?

This is a personal "thank-you," way too little to the faithful friends of the BJC, especially readers of this column. I am constantly amazed at how many of you accept this monthly missive as my personal mail to you. You respond by snail mail, e-damn-mail, phone calls, faxes, face-to-face comments and even checks.

Yes, checks. We now have \$870,609 in endowment and cash reserve funds for the BJC. One of the two new jobs I have is building a sound savings and earning base to guard the future of the BJC.

We set a \$600,000 goal for the endowment at the BJC's 60th birthday in 1996. Without a paid consultant, a fund-raiser, a campaign, or a single cent spent exclusively on endowment, we are now at \$871,000 of our \$600,000 target. You did it. *Report from the Capital* is our only life-line to like-minded liberty backers. It's remarkable. Thanks.

Giving to that "perpetual-care" fund is not as remarkable as the steady support, every month, from so many of you with contributions large and small. I haven't counted, but I guesstimate that most individual donors are retired pastors, professors and denominational workers who stand solidly behind us. Thanks.

Beyond giving, you are an incredible fellowship of freedom. You have:

- ◆ understood, questioned, learned and taught us things we needed to know. Thanks.

- ◆ sent us clippings, sermons, essays, ideas and named people we ought to know. Thanks.

- ◆ heard us when we criticized President Reagan for his despicable demagoguery saying "God had been banned from the schools." You caught on when we corrected President Bush for proposing that every church become an agent of the IRS by reporting tithers. You agreed when we lamented President Clinton allowing slaughter in the Branch Davidian crisis. You stick with us (so far) as we try to help Vice President Gore, who ripped his britches backing charitable choice tax funds for churches. Thanks.

- ◆ acted on our urgings to contact government, reaffirm basic Baptist beliefs and fight right-wing religio-political extremists. Thanks.

- ◆ trusted us, our motives, our calling, our integrity, our due diligence, being fellow laborers in God's kingdom. Thanks.

- ◆ forgiven us in situations when the judgment calls were difficult. Thanks.

- ◆ befriended us, best of all, not lumping us into the mess that is Washington. You have seen that with spiritual purpose we are here to bear public witness to our freedom in Christ. Thanks.

Now, I go to be visiting professor of Christianity and public policy at Wake Forest Divinity School and president of the Baptist Joint Committee Foundation. My goal is to reach a \$1 million endowment to insure a BJC future by the end of 1999. By my count, only nine more of you can pledge to give the last \$15,000. Thanks.

It has fallen my lot to do something that needed to be done. What good fortune! Now many of you are saying nice things. There is even a hagiographical book coming out. I'm embarrassed, but I love it. Whatever good has been done, whatever evil averted, is your doing. You should get credit.

Since it has been my lot to find

At every parting of the road
The helping hand of comrade kind
To help me with my heavy load
And since I have no gold to give
And love alone must make amends
My humble prayer is, while I live,
"God make me worthy of my friends."

For being who you are: Thanks.

Six senators seek federal inquiry of Americans United

Six Republicans senators have asked U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno to investigate whether Americans United for Separation of Church and State unlawfully attempted to interfere with Christian Coalition election initiatives.

The July 2 letter was signed by Sens. Jesse Helms, R-N.C.; Strom Thurmond, R-S.C.; Jeff Sessions, R-Ala.; Sam Brownback, R-Kan.; Paul Coverdell, R-Ga.; and Don Nickles, R-Okla. It pointed to AU's past efforts to warn churches about Christian Coalition voter guides and AU's potential interference with a July 4 coalition voter registration drive. The senators' said if AU is "intimidating people of faith into not participating in the political process ... then all Americans should be outraged."

AU Executive Director Barry Lynn responded by sending a letter to the senators and a copy to Reno. Calling for a public apology, he said that "I am appalled at this outrageous and wholly baseless action."

He dubbed the senators' actions "reckless and irresponsible," and said, "What you have chosen to describe as 'intimidation' is actually an educational effort designed to inform religious leaders about federal tax law." Δ

Baptist Joint Committee

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Book Reviews

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'Old thinking' threatens faith groups, Baptist leader says

"The survival of Bulgaria's evangelical churches is one of the biggest miracles of our day," said Bulgarian Baptist leader Theodor Angelov at a conference sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and London's Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church.

Before communism collapsed, communists imprisoned church leaders (including Angelov's father), destroyed church buildings and banned theological education, he said. "And yet the faith of the people survived," he told participants of the conference titled "Beyond Mere Toleration."

Evangelical Christianity has flourished since 1989, when communist control and spying ceased, he said. But the general secretary-elect of the European Baptist Federation said communist-colored, "old thinking" still causes problems for religious liberty in Eastern Europe.

He described efforts by the Orthodox Church to regain its status as Bulgaria's state church. A mind-set still exists that Orthodox leaders are loyal to the nation, he said, "while all evangelicals — including Baptists — are enemies of the state."

The "same thinking prevails today in many former communist countries," said Angelov. Orthodox leaders seek a preferred position, while government leaders — especially on the local level — hinder efforts by evangelicals to meet, build churches and in some cases allow violence against them.

He described a case in Romania, where police stood by while a mob led by Orthodox priests beat Baptists, and in Moldova, where a church building was destroyed in

a similar incident.

"The idea is for the state to control all religious activities, and this is what links us with the past," he said. The idea is so deeply rooted that even leaders of new democratic parties "believe this is the way it should be."

Angelov said the Bulgarian government enacted legislation assuring protection to minorities, but mentioned only ethnic, not religious minorities. The difference between "the rights of religious minorities and majority groups will continue to be the main source of concerns for religious freedom in many countries," he said.

Angelov also noted the importance to developing democracies of restrictive laws on new religions. Such laws have already passed in Russia, Uzbekistan and Macedonia, and others are expected to follow in countries like Bulgaria, he said.

If new laws "simply copy the spirit of the past," he warned, "religious freedom and equality will continue to be a big problem in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe."

Angelov said time and hard work are needed to overcome old thinking in new Eastern European democracies.

"Freedom of religion and conscience is the most basic and constructive of all freedoms," he declared. "Indeed, it may be called the cornerstone of all freedoms and human rights. Without freedom of religion, all freedoms are endangered."

Angelov praised U.S. Baptist churches and agencies for humanitarian and spiritual aid to Eastern Europe. "We appreciate and need help," he said. "But don't bring us your theological and diversity controversies," he added. "We have enough problems and divisions of our own." Δ

— Robert O'Brien
for Associated Baptist Press



Theodor Angelov



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