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92-40

CLC conference speakers challenge  
Christians to make an impact on society

By Lonnie Wilkey

WASHINGTON (BP)--Until dysfunctional churches become functional again, government will continue to be dysfunctional, said syndicated newspaper columnist Cal Thomas.

Thomas was among a trio of speakers during the opening day of a Southern Baptist ethics conference in Washington who challenged Christians to stand up and be counted in order to make an impact on society.

About 300 people registered for the 25th annual seminar sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission March 2-4 in Washington. Theme of the conference was "Citizen Christians: Their Rights and Responsibilities."

Thomas said opinion polls show people's satisfaction with government is at one of the lowest points in history.

The reason for dissatisfaction and frustration, Thomas said, is "government no longer is fulfilling the function for which it was created."

The Washington-based journalist said the function of government as stated in the Declaration of Independence is to secure the rights God has endowed.

The founders of the United States understood men and women were flawed and were sinners and that if they would not be "constrained from within by the power of God they would have to be restrained from without by the power of the state acting as God's agent," Thomas said.

But in addition to a dysfunctional government, the church is not doing what it was intended to do, Thomas said. "The failure to believe God's Word as sufficient and complete is one of two major factors I believe is responsible for the lack of power in the modern church," Thomas said.

He cited biblical "illiteracy" as the second factor. A recent Gallup Poll shows only 11 percent of Americans read their Bibles daily, he said. "Biblical illiteracy has led to ignorance which has led to apostasy which has led to open rebellion against God and his Word," Thomas said.

Thomas said the church is dysfunctional because "it is fooling around doing a bunch of other things, denying what God has said." Add that to government which is not fulfilling its original purpose and the result is we are living in "an increasingly dysfunctional time."

There is hope, however, Thomas said. "If we can get the church back on track, we'll have the real power. Then, hopefully, and with the Lord's leadership, we can revive and reform government and get it back on its original track."

The president of Concerned Women for America, Beverly LaHaye, reminded conference participants despite what "secular humanists and atheists" say, religion and politics have mixed since the birth of America.

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"It's a good thing that early American Christians believed in having an influence on society. Had they not, there may not be an America today -- certainly not the same America you and I are privileged to live in," said LaHaye, who founded the Washington-based CWA organization dedicated to preserving, protecting and promoting traditional and Judeo-Christian values.

She recalled John Adams, second president of the United States, once said, "Our Constitution is designed for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for any other." Unfortunately, she observed, American has slipped away from being a "moral and religious" people.

"Over the past three decades we've seen our nation turn away from the principles on which our nation was founded. Now it is up to us, as Christians, to restore those principles.

"It is not that Christians can make an impact on government. It is that we must make an impact. Our nation's future is at stake," LaHaye said.

LaHaye cited five action steps for Christians to make an impact -- vote, communicate with elected officials, volunteer to work on campaigns, run for political office and pray. She emphasized prayer cannot stand alone, but must be a support for the other four steps.

"We must repent of our past involvement and start praying now, consistently, for our nation," she urged.

LaHaye observed that in all of the United States' battles from the Revolutionary War to Desert Storm, more than three million have given their lives for their country.

"And, like all these, we too find ourselves in a war today. It is not a war of guns and bombs, but a profound cultural war. And, its casualties are our children.

"If we are to win the cultural war, we must become the salt and light of our political system. We must be willing to make the required sacrifice.

"If three million young men could die to preserve this nation, certainly we can live to do the same," she concluded.

SBC President Morris Chapman of Wichita Falls, Texas, urged Southern Baptists to bathe their efforts in prayer in dealing with moral issues and concerns.

"We are to kneel down and be counted," Chapman said, noting "when we stand up, we must let people know we have been with God."

Chapman, who in February was elected to succeed Harold C. Bennett as president-treasurer of the SBC Executive Committee, reminded conference participants that government and politicians do not have the ultimate answers for morality, the economy and ethics.

"The answer comes by faith," Chapman said. "We need to pray for the leaders of our land that the Spirit of God would stir us and them for his glory."

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Southern Baptists must be  
'salt and light,' says Edgemon

By Lonnie Wilkey

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Christian citizens today must be willing to be the "salt and light" at every level of government and politics if society is to reflect positive values, according to Roy Edgemon.

Edgemon, director of the discipleship training department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, was one of three speakers who stressed the need for Christian involvement in society during the second day of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's 25th annual seminar in Washington.

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About 300 Southern Baptists gathered at the National Guard Memorial March 2-4 to address the theme "Citizen Christians: Their Rights and Responsibilities."

Everyone who responds to the call of Christ "is the salt of the earth. It is who and what we are," Edgemon said. "The mission of Christians is to save and change the world."

"If we cease to perform that mission or fail to live up to that mission, our purpose is gone, our direction is aimless, and our identity is blurred," he said.

Edgemon reminded conference participants the church "in a unique and appointed position to be the salt and light in the political and governmental arenas of this nation."

Unfortunately, Edgemon said, it appears at times "the salt has lost its savor and the light has been hidden."

Simply being an informed and involved citizen is not enough, Edgemon said.

"A church member who is an informed and involved citizen is dangerous to the cause of Christ unless that church member is disciplined to follow Jesus Christ and is, in turn, discipling others," he said.

Edgemon called for churches to prepare Christians for participation in government. "Churches can take on politics as a mission. They can form task forces and prayer ministries to orient church members to recognize places of service in government.

"They (churches) can assist Christians in discovering channels of being salt and light in society," he said.

Dallas evangelist Jay Strack reminded conference participants Southern Baptists "have a God-given mandate to make a difference in our world."

Strack, who has served on various drug task forces, said Christians must have the correct vision of Jesus Christ. "Our God is an awesome God. You must believe God can do it -- no matter what it is."

Strack said some Christians are willing to do things their way when they want to, but that's not the way it should be.

"God expects us to get the job done his way in his Spirit," Strack said.

The Dallas evangelist said it is important Christians have the correct vision of other people. Don't view people as objects or obstacles, but instead view them as opportunities, he said.

In order to be a good follower of Christ, a person must be willing to be a servant, Strack said. "We have a generation of peacocks who want to serve God. But peacocks one day are feather dusters the next."

Strack concluded good volunteers are people who are willing to do the best they can with what they have whenever they get an opportunity.

Strack cited the example of participants in a Special Olympics race. Three of the leaders in the race stopped before they got to the finish line and motioned for the others not to give up. When they caught up they joined hands and all crossed the finish line together.

"A Christian volunteer is someone who knows, that by the grace of God, he'll cross the finish line and take someone with him."

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CLC trustee Robert Showers told seminar participants "God wants impact players."

Showers, who works with a Washington law firm, gave conference participants his perspective after several years in Washington. Prior to his current position, Showers served in various positions with the United States Department of Justice. He also is active with the National Coalition Against Pornography.

He cited four things a person must have or do in order to make an impact for God:

-- Be humble. A person must be willing to take none of the credit, but rather give the credit to God, Showers said.

-- Obey God, not man. Christians must be willing to open their ears, hearts, minds, souls, and bodies to God, he said.

-- Please God, not man. Until a person is willing to please God and not man, he or she will go the way man takes you, Showers said. "Man pleasers do not make an impact; God pleasers do."

-- Have an eternal perspective. People need to look beyond today, Showers said. "God wants us to have eyesight for tomorrow."

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'Separation' misconstrued,  
Land says at Princeton

By Tom Strode

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PRINCETON, N.J. (BP)--The concept of the separation of church and state does not mean Christians are prohibited from taking part in the public debate over values and those who believe it does "would find much of American history incomprehensible," the executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission said to students recently at Princeton Theological Seminary.

It is a myth to say governments cannot legislate morality, Richard Land said.

Religious freedom and separation of church and state are Baptists' "peculiar gifts to the Reformation," Land said. Land, who received his undergraduate degree from Princeton University, spoke to about 35 people at an address sponsored by the seminary's Theological Student Fellowship.

The separation of church and state, however, does not prevent people with religious convictions from participating in the government's policy-making process, Land said. The examples of Roger Williams and John Leland, two Baptist champions of religious liberty, demonstrate this.

"The first indictment against (Williams) was not that he was preaching against the church of England, not that he was saying that there should not be an established church in Massachusetts Bay," Land said. "It was that he was going around saying that the land did not belong to the colonists because they got it from the king and they had no right to get it from the king because it belonged to the Indians and they hadn't paid the Indians for it and the Indians had not given it to them.

"In other words, Roger Williams, champion of separation of church and state, was up to his colonial eyebrows in the hottest political, social justice issue of his day."

Leland and other Baptist preachers agreed to support the Constitution only after they were given assurances by James Madison he would include a guarantee of religious liberty in amendments, which became the Bill of Rights, Land said. Despite the jailing of 500 Baptist preachers in a 10-year period after the Revolutionary War, Baptists had become the largest religious group in Virginia, Land said.

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"... you have a Baptist evangelist and Baptist leaders in Virginia cutting a political deal with James Madison at the time of ratification ... and Madison and his followers kept their promise," Land said.

"Every major social wrong that has been righted in this country throughout history - slavery, child labor, labor reform, the civil rights movement -- all of those had their backbone ... furnished by people of religious conviction and religious faith," he said.

Martin Luther King Jr. led the civil rights movement as a Baptist preacher. In his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, he described his desire for a country where people "would not be judged by the color of our skin but by the content of our character."

"He denounced racial prejudice because it was wrong, but he didn't argue for a morally neutral society," Land said. "He said that people should be judged by the content of their character. That is not in accord with the American Civil Liberties Union understanding of separation of church and state."

The myth that says governments cannot legislate morality needs to be confronted, Land said.

"All governments legislate morality," he said. "The only question is what is going to be the basis for the legislation of that morality."

The identity of the groups arguing morality cannot be legislated has changed, Land said.

"When I was a teenager, it was conservatives who were saying, 'Well, you can't legislate morality,' when what they really meant was they didn't want any civil rights laws," he said. "Now it is those who are saying, 'Well, you can't legislate morality,' when what they really mean is they don't want any legal restrictions on a woman's right to abort her unborn baby. They're both wrong."

"Laws against murder, laws against theft and laws against rape are all the legislation of morality. And when we pass laws making murder and theft and rape illegal, we are not so much seeking to impose our morality on murderers and thieves and rapists as we are seeking to prevent them from imposing their immorality on their victims ...," Land said in his Feb. 27 speech.

"We must also speak out against a rather wicked double standard that has arisen in this country, a double standard that at its best is simply ignorant and at its worst is ignominious and lethal. That is this double standard that applauds people of faith, clergy and otherwise, who bring their religious convictions into the public marketplace when it deals with civil rights, as they should; when it deals with apartheid, as they should; when it deals with doing away with nuclear weapons, when it deals with seeking a just and lasting peace but then, all of a sudden, wants to claim a violation of the First Amendment when other people of faith bring their religious convictions to bear in trying to protect the unborn from being killed before their time," Land said.

"Folks, what's sauce for the goose ought to be sauce for the gander. ... There's a double standard there, and we ought to call the media and others on it and say, 'Look, be honest enough to admit that it's not our involvement you don't like; it's our position you don't like and quit trying to hide behind the First Amendment.'"

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Young men respond to call  
to assist with food effort By Tim Yarbrough & Steve Barber

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GATLINBURG, Tenn. (BP)--High School Baptist Young Men responded generously to a call to assist Project Brotherhood, the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission's emergency food distribution effort set to begin March 28 in the former Soviet Union.

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Meeting in Gatlinburg for the fifth annual High School Baptist Young Men's Rally Feb. 28-March 1, nearly 500 young men from 14 states gave \$605 to a special offering to help support efforts in the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Project Brotherhood will focus initially on the delivery and distribution of 570 tons of USDA surplus food. An estimated 40,000 Russian families will benefit from the project.

The theme of the rally was "God's Man Today." James D. Williams, Brotherhood Commission president, quoted from Luke and urged the young men and adult advisers to have "deep water faith" in matters directed by God.

"Being God's man today means moving from the safety of the seen to the risks of the unseen," Williams said. "Nothing significant occurred in the shallows. He (Jesus) specifically led them (the disciples) out into the deep water and out where somebody could touch God. It was not until they were down and in the deep water that he commanded them to let down their nets.

The two-day rally featured home and foreign missions speakers and numerous conferences covering topics ranging from "My School is a Mission Field" to "Understanding Your Parents." The rally featured a special concert by multiple Grammy award nominee Eddie DeGarmo.

Home missionary Ron Climer of Fresno, Calif., said his ministry includes counseling, chaplaincy, Bible teaching and help for churches wanting to develop Christian social ministry programs.

"The reason I do the different kinds of things I do is this: If what we have to say about Jesus Christ is going to be heard by anybody, it's only because we take the time to become involved with people at the point of their need. I build relationships and in the process of that, share Christ," Climer said. "Relationships are the greatest evangelistic tools we have for sharing Jesus today."

Climer said he came to know Christ as savior through a friend named Larry whose life had been transformed. "He cared enough to tell me that God loved me, and he loved me just like I was. I knew that if God could love Larry like he was, then God could love me, too."

"Jesus changed my life," Climer said. "At nine years old I was arrested for burglary. Crime, gangs, and drugs were the pattern for me until I was 24 years old, when I came to know Christ. He cleaned me up and set me on a different path."

Don Sewell of the Foreign Mission Board explored numerous cultural differences between Americans and other world cultures in the conference, "It's a Different World."

Sewell said most Americans have no idea how the majority of the world's people live.

"Generally, we don't want to look at the real difficult, slimy, ugly, bad parts of life. We prefer to just turn our backs on that," Sewell said. "Some of the most unaware people in the whole world are Americans."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by the Brotherhood Commission.

New missionaries' prayer  
gets 'ringing' response

By Craig Bird

HARARE, Zimbabwe (BP)--Prayers aren't always answered by telephone. But Stan and Iva May believe theirs were.

As they completed their first year of language study, the Southern Baptist missionaries from Tennessee and Mississippi began praying for God to provide church leaders and to guide them in starting a church in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

The phone rang. It wasn't God speaking personally. Instead it was Ila-Mae Dueck, another Southern Baptist missionary and director of Zimbabwe's Bible Way Correspondence School. A young man named Clever Masuku had just left her office after asking the location of a Baptist church he could attend.

When Stan May contacted Masuku it didn't seem an obvious answer to their prayers. Masuku had just been released from prison after nine years as a political detainee. But during those years he had enrolled in Bible Way and completed all seven of the correspondence courses offered in his language by the Baptist Mission of Zimbabwe.

"He trusted Christ and began to bring friends and relatives to Stan's office to hear the 'good news,'" Dueck explained. May began preaching each Sunday at Masuku's apartment and on weekdays teaching the young man, by example, how to witness in his neighborhood.

As people responded the apartment soon became overcrowded. The group began to pray for somewhere else to meet -- "and the Lord provided someone else's building," according to Dueck. "The people are using their tithes and offerings to rent a Seventh-Day Adventist facility.

Just a year after the initial contact with Masuku, Tshabalala Baptist Church has 75 regular attenders. And Clever Masuku has a local Baptist church to attend.