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92-42

WRAP-UP

CLC speakers encourage
Baptist focus on government

By Louis Moore

WASHINGTON (BP)--Speakers ranging from Democratic and Republican senators to a nationally syndicated columnist, the U.S. surgeon general and a noted theologian urged Southern Baptists to impact American as well as world society through the U.S. political system and culture.

The wide-ranging group of speakers called on Christians to put their own houses in order while simultaneously working to impact governments and society with biblical ethics and morality.

The speakers made the comments March 2-4 during the 25th annual Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission seminar in Washington. More than 310 people from at least 27 states registered for the event. The meeting's theme was "Citizen Christians: Their Rights and Responsibilities."

CLC Executive Director Richard Land said in his theme orientation the seminar was purposely named "Citizen Christians" instead of "Christian Citizens" to emphasize the fact Christians are first believers, with their secular citizenship being a modifier.

"We have responsibilities and we have rights, and those responsibilities and those rights are in both realms," he said. "As citizens of Heaven, which is what we are called in Philipians 3:20, we as believers are commanded to be obedient unto the Lord Jesus.

"The Apostle Paul instructs us that as Christians we have the responsibility to be good citizens for conscience sake, because God has ordained government to punish and restrict evildoers and to reward and protect moral behavior," he said. "We are to support the civil government unless the authorities require us to support or to do that which is in direct contradiction to our ultimate allegiance to our Heavenly Father.

"But we are also commanded by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who gives us our ultimate marching orders, that we are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world," he said.

"So our responsibilities as citizen Christians include not just obedience to the state but involvement in society.

"When we bring our religious and moral convictions and our faith affirmations into the public marketplace of ideas and involve ourselves in the social and political arena, we are standing solidly within the best of our traditions as Americans and as Baptists," Land said.

"It never has been and never will be accurate to debate for Christians their responsibility to either be a witness or to be salt and light," he said. "It always has been and always will be both/and. We are disloyal to our Savior if we neglect evangelization, and we deny the incarnation of our Savior, the Word made flesh, if we see the flesh, the real world of human beings, as secondary or irrelevant."

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Land said, "It is blasphemous to seek to feed the hungry and not tell them about the Bread of Life. It is blasphemous to seek to clothe the naked and not tell them about the whole armor of God. It is blasphemous to seek to house the homeless and not tell them in our Father's house are many mansions. It denies the incarnation to preach the gospel of light without being also the salt that preserves and the light that penetrates the darkness."

Southern Baptist law professor Lynn Buzzard told seminary participants the reverence with which some religious leaders today treat "the premiere slogan, 'the wall of separation,'" tends to leave the erroneous impression that nothing, including morality and religious values, should pass from the churches to society or culture or government.

Buzzard, professor of law and director of church-state studies at Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C., said such an attitude distorts the Constitution and the meaning the founding fathers intended for the First Amendment.

He pointed out the First Amendment does not use the phrase "separation of church and state." The First Amendment says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

"It (the phrase 'separation of church and state') is almost an invocation that is given at any conference on church and state today, a sort of constitutional chant, or if you will, a sound byte, which for many people is supposed to silence all further discussions," he said. "Many Baptists are fond of this phrase and use it in a kind of invocational way, particularly those who at times chide conservatives for slogans about inerrancy, and yet they themselves genuflect before the wall, wailing lest the wall be breached in some way."

Syndicated newspaper columnist Cal Thomas said dysfunctional churches must become functional again, so that government can stop being dysfunctional.

Thomas told participants opinion polls show people's satisfaction with government is at one of the lowest points in history. The reason for this 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 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.

Southern Baptist theologian Carl F.H. Henry called upon all evangelical Christians to champion religious freedom for the entirety of humankind.

The end to communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union does not eliminate all the restraints imposed on religious freedom worldwide, he said.

"In view of the lifting of restrictions on Christianity by Soviet sphere nations, the repressive treatment of Christian minorities by Islamic nations and by communist mainline China becomes glaringly conspicuous," Henry said.

Henry singled out Saudi Arabia as a prime example of religious intolerance, but also fired verbal shots at Turkey, Egypt, Israel, China and the American secular culture.

During the seminar in Washington, Land presented Henry with the agency's Distinguished Service Award for his work over several decades on behalf of Christian ethics. Henry was founding editor of Christianity Today, the fortnightly evangelical magazine, and is a prolific author and noted theologian.

Roy Edgemon, director of the discipleship training department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, told seminar participants citizen Christians today must be willing to be the "salt and light" at every level of government and politics if society is to reflect positive values.

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.

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.

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

"It's a good thing early American Christians believed in having an influence on society," she said. "Had they not, there may not be an America today -- certainly not the same America you and I are privileged to live in."

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."

Southern Baptist Convention President Morris Chapman called on the 15.2 million Southern Baptists in this country to bathe their efforts in dealing with moral issues and concerns in prayer.

He said government and politicians do not have the ultimate answers for morality, the economy and ethics.

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

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

If Christians view people as opportunities then they can "demonstrate the love and person of our Lord Jesus Christ," 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," he reminded.

Washington attorney Robert Showers told seminar participants "God wants impact players."

Showers drew on his years in Washington to describe how Christians can make an impact on government and society for Christ. Prior to his current position, Showers worked 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 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," he said.

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

Former Secretary of Education William Bennett told seminar participants only the right values, not larger governmental programs, will turn American society in the correct direction.

"It is much more important what ideas, what values are out and abroad in the mainstream than anything any government can do," Bennett said. "Government, for all the good that they may do, they cannot undo" wrong ideas.

Bennett served during the last decade not only as secretary of the Department of Education but as the drug czar and chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Now in the private sector, Bennett continues to write and speak on cultural matters.

He discussed three societal problem areas: drugs, education and the family. With each, he identified a wrong idea he believes led to the problem.

On drugs, Bennett pointed to an idea of the late 1960s: "Do your own thing. If it feels good do it.

"There is no more perfect 'Do your own thing' thing than drugs," he said, "because when you start to do them, soon that is the only thing you will be doing."

On education, he cited a concept of the late '60s and early '70s: "There is no right curriculum." Moral relativism is the "most disastrous teaching" in recent decades, Bennett said.

"We can spend money, dollar after dollar, program after program, but unless we get that idea back that says there are things that are right and wrong and there are things children should learn, we will not fix American education," he said.

United States Senators Albert Gore, D.-Tenn., and Trent Lott, R.-Miss., and Senate Chaplain Richard C. Halverson all urged Southern Baptists attending a Congressional Breakfast to continue to make their voices heard in the nation's capitol.

Gore urged Southern Baptists to continue to be active in the areas of health labels on alcohol beverage advertising and the environment.

Lott emphasized the need for Christians to express themselves through the ballot box in the election of Bible-believing Christians to public posts. He also called for more Southern Baptists to step forward and run for public office.

Lott also seemed to endorse a constitutional amendment for prayer in public schools. "Wouldn't it be nice if we could open our schools with prayer as we open the Senate with prayer?" he said.

Halverson said Christians need to become interested in a wider array of public issues beyond just the traditional concerns of pro-life and prayer in public school.

Both Lott and Halverson said Christians need to learn to write their Congressional representatives when they are pleased with how they have voted as well as when they are angry about certain votes.

During a White House briefing, Housing and Urban Development secretary Jack Kemp told seminar participants a government's concern for its citizens should not be measured by how many it is supporting financially.

"Our liberal friends in Congress measure the welfare and compassion of America by how many people need assistance," he said. "The ultimate measure of the compassion of a society is how few people need to be dependent upon the government."

Surgeon General Antonia Novello told participants in the briefing the Bush administration is seeking to reduce illegal underage drinking.

Though this is a problem affecting half of the country's 20 million junior high and high school students, Novello said, "You won't believe the people who think I have the problem."

Of the 10 million secondary school students who drink, Novello said, eight million drink weekly; five million binge (consume five drinks in a row); three million have binged in the last month, and 500,000 binge weekly, according to reports compiled by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Parents, friends and the media help determine a teenager's perspective on drinking, Novello said.

There is a need to "cultivate a culture of character," HHS Assistant Secretary for Health James Mason said in the second briefing.

"A lot of diseases we have today are related to choices we make," said Mason, who oversees the Public Health Service. The department uses the "C word (condom)," Mason said, but I "guess we need to talk more about faithfulness in marriage."

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(Tom Strode and Lonnie Wilkey also contributed to this story.)

SSB cites national economy
in convocation cancellation

By Frank Wm. White

Baptist Press
3/6/92

NASHVILLE (BP)--The nation's economy was cited by officials of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board as a primary factor in a decision to cancel the National Convocation on the Bible planned for April 21-23 in Nashville.

"It has become clear to us that many Southern Baptists who had hoped to attend cannot participate because of the impact of the economic downturn affecting our nation," Harry Piland, director of the Sunday school division, said in a prepared statement announcing the decision.

Registration totals by early March remained well below the 8,000 goal planners had for the three-day event which was to include a riverfront gospel singing, Bible preaching and teaching, more than 125 seminars and teacher recognition.

Some elements of the April meeting will continue, Piland said.

A commissioning service for Southern Baptist home missions appointees will continue as planned on Wednesday, April 22. That service will be conducted cooperatively by the Sunday School Board, Home Mission Board and Woman's Missionary Union.

A Bible that is being read in each state convention which was to be presented during the convocation will continue to be read as scheduled in remaining states and will be used in the commissioning service, Piland said.

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A musical, "Break the Glory Free," which was to premiere at the convocation instead will be presented during each of the Sunday school leadership conferences, church music leadership conferences and Jericho missions festivals at Glorieta (N.M.) and Ridgecrest (N.C.) conference centers this summer.

Sunday school teachers who have been nominated for the teacher's wall of fame to be displayed during the convocation will receive a certificate as previously planned. Other plans to display the wall of fame are being explored, Piland said.

About 1,850 teachers were nominated for the recognition. "Unfortunately very few of those were able to register to attend," Piland said.

Fees from those who have registered for the convocation will be refunded, officials said.

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Texas Baptist conservatives
to launch new publication

By Ken Camp

Baptist Press
3/6/92

DALLAS (BP)--Citing their desire to provide a "balanced and objective" news source for Southern Baptists in Texas, leaders of the Texas Baptist Conservative Fellowship plan to launch the first issue of a statewide newsletter within the next week.

The Texas Baptist Conservative Newsletter will be published "monthly officially, but unofficially we aspire to publish twice a month," said Perry Ellis, executive editor of the newsletter and executive director of the conservative fellowship.

Sample copies of the newsletter are being reviewed by the executive committee of the Texas Baptist Conservative Fellowship, and the first issue is expected to be mailed to all Southern Baptist pastors in Texas during the week of March 8.

Ellis, a former Southern Baptist missionary to Brazil and now a member of First Baptist Church of Dallas, emphasized the publication is needed to give Texas Baptists "balanced and objective" information. However, he stopped short of saying the newsletter is in direct competition with the Baptist Standard, weekly news journal of Texas Baptists.

"I don't know that it's intended to be an alternative to anybody's magazine. It's just that nobody can take all the magazines, and we want to let folks know what is happening in the Southern Baptist Convention and the Texas convention in a balanced way," he said.

Topics covered in the first statewide issue include a progress report on the formation of the conservative network in Texas, as well as coverage of recent events at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and the continuing formation of Truett Seminary at Baylor University in Waco, articles on the need for spiritual awakening and promotion of a conservative statewide "ladies' auxiliary" meeting, April 23-24 at the Embassy Suites in Dallas.

Future issues of the publication will encourage conservative Texas Baptists to "be good stewards of their messenger representation to the Baptist General Convention of Texas," Nov. 9-10 in Corpus Christi, Ellis said.

While the newsletter will be mailed free to all Texas Baptist pastors, paid subscriptions will be solicited, with bulk quantities of the publication being made available to the subscribers, Ellis noted.

Tim McKeown of Weatherford, who was contributing correspondent to the new publication, said a newsletter already had been sent to the more than 200 Texas Baptists who met in Fort Worth on Jan. 7 to form the conservative fellowship. However, the upcoming magazine is the first publication sent to a larger statewide audience.

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The fellowship was formed in January by an ad hoc committee of 14 Texas pastors, a number of whom were active in the Baylor Restoration Committee, a group formed prior to the 1991 BGCT meeting in Waco in an effort to return Baylor University to "Texas Baptist ownership and control." At the time, Ellis expressed the desire to form a larger executive committee of 200-300 pastors and laymen from all of the state's 112 associations.

Members of the ad hoc group were: Jack Graham, Dallas; John Bisagno, Houston; Edwin Young, Houston; Joel Gregory, Dallas; Damon Shook, Houston; John Morgan, Houston; Stan Coffee, Amarillo; Bill Sutton, McAllen; Rick Scarborough, Pearland; John Hatch, Lake Jackson; Forrest Lowry, Spring; Miles Seaborn, Fort Worth; Terry Fox, Corpus Christi; and Bill Tisdale, Henderson.

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Carl Henry calls for end
to Muslim's anti-Christianity

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
3/6/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--Southern Baptist theologian Carl F.H. Henry has called upon all evangelical Christians to champion religious freedom for the entirety of humankind.

The end to communism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union does not eliminate all the restraints imposed on religious freedom worldwide, he said.

"In view of the lifting of restrictions on Christianity by Soviet sphere nations, the repressive treatment of Christian minorities by Islamic nations and by communist mainline China becomes glaringly conspicuous," Henry told participants at the 25th annual Christian Life Commission seminar in Washington March 3.

The seminar drew more than 310 registrants.

"Despite the pride of the West in the technological achievements of modernity, religious intolerance and persecution remains a besetting evil of much of the contemporary world," he said.

Henry singled out Saudi Arabia as a prime example of religious intolerance, but also fired verbal shots at Turkey, Egypt, Israel, China and the American secular culture.

During the Washington seminar, CLC Executive Director Richard Land presented Henry with the agency's Distinguished Service Award for his work over several decades on behalf of Christian ethics. Henry was founding editor of Christianity Today, the fortnightly evangelical magazine, and is a prolific writer and noted theologian.

He said Saudi Arabia "not only refuses to approve of basic religious liberties, but it also withholds from Christians even the dhimma, or protection, of the ongoing practice of Christianity.

"Something is terribly amiss when 500,000 men and women fight a war for liberty and freedom while at the same time they themselves are denied the very thing they are fighting for -- the basic principle of freedom, including religious liberty even for American workers living within Saudi Arabian borders."

"Religious intolerance lies at the very heart of the conflict between Israeli and Arab and Islamic neighbors, between Shiite and Sunni Iraq, between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland, between Muslims and Jews and Muslims and Christians in Lebanon, between various sects in the old Soviet empire, between Allied Forces and Saudis."

He said Saudi Arabia is a good place for evangelical Christians and all Americans to drive home the point to the world that other nations must develop authentic concepts of religious liberty.

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"Saudi Arabia is a good place to begin since Muslims at least enjoy religious tolerance in New York, London, and in many other countries of the world," he said. "Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia, both civilian and military, must be free to worship God in good conscience. They must be allowed to possess Bibles, to display religious symbols, and to meet at congregations for worship.

"It is time that the United States link military and/or economic aid -- exempting only emergency humanitarian assistance -- with insistence on the right of all foreign workers residing in Saudi Arabia to openly practice their religious faith without harassment, persecution and punishment."

On Egypt, Henry said, "More Christians live in Egypt -- an estimated 10 million -- than in any other country in the Middle East. Yet Christian converts from Islam who publicly profess their new-found faith have been arrested, tortured and imprisoned in an effort to persuade them to recant. Human rights agencies estimate more than 200 persons remain imprisoned because of their Christian faith."

On Israel, he said, "It is time to raise the question of intolerance by Israel's official hard line toward Jews who consider themselves as Reform or Conservative as Christian or Messianic Jews. Jews (in Israel) are told that one cannot be a Jew and receive the same rights as other Jews if one believes in Jesus Christ. In principle, this has remarkable implications of Saul of Tarsus and almost every other person we read about in the New Testament, not to speak of Jesus of Nazareth."

On China, Henry said, "Both because of the present communist regime's continuing pressures on house churches and because of anxiety and fear arising from the scheduled reversion of Hong Kong to China in 1997" evangelical Christians need to focus their attention on that country too.

"In the United States itself the constitutional assurance of free religious expression is increasingly subordinated to an exaggerated and distorted emphasis on religious nonestablishment," he said.

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Two senators address
CLC seminar session

By Louis Moore

Baptist Press
3/6/92

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Gore, Lott and Halverson all spoke at a Congressional Prayer Breakfast held during the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission's 25th annual seminar in Washington. The meeting drew more than 310 registrants.

"The greatest single reason for the failure of our social order has been the prayerlessness of the people of God," said Halverson. "In most churches today, I just don't hear prayers for the president, the vice president, the senators, the representatives, the judges or any other political leaders."

"Most of the phone calls and mail the congressmen receive from Christians is angry," he said. "The only issues we ever hear from them on is prayer in public schools and abortion. These leaders just don't hear from Christians on other issues and they certainly don't hear enough the words, 'We're praying for you.'"

Gore said American youth are bombarded with advertising of alcoholic beverages without the other side being told. He said young people and pregnant women deserve to hear that serious health hazards can result from consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Halverson also defended his decision to allow a Black Muslim recently to open the Senate in prayer. He said several unnamed senators suggested the idea to him and after serious consultation with them felt he had to issue the invitation.

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Compassion measured
by opportunity, Kemp says

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press
3/6/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--A government's concern for its citizens should not be measured by how many it is supporting financially, Jack Kemp said at a White House briefing during a Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission seminar.

"Our liberal friends in Congress measure the welfare and compassion of America by how many people need assistance," the secretary of Housing and Urban Development said. "The ultimate measure of the compassion of a society is how few people need to be dependent upon the government."

Kemp spoke during the first of two briefings attended by participants at the CLC's 25th annual seminar, "Citizen Christians: Their Rights and Responsibilities."

"We need equality of opportunity for all people," said Kemp, a former United States representative often mentioned as a Republican presidential candidate in 1996. "... the family is being destroyed by a welfare system that perpetuates dependency.... (the welfare system) is turned upside down because if a family breaks up they get subsidized, and if they stick together they get punished."

As HUD secretary, Kemp said, he has tried to remedy welfare dependency by such acts as freezing rent "so when families get married they aren't punished" and by giving persons the opportunity to own their own homes.

How the United States handles such domestic problems will affect the world as well as this country, Kemp said.

"I don't need to remind this convention.... that what we are as a country is determined by what we are as individuals," said Kemp, who identified himself as an evangelical Presbyterian. "Edmund Burke said, 'There's never been poor leadership of a virtuous people,' that in a democracy we get what we deserve.

"... I am convinced that we can change the world and change our country by changing hearts and by good example."

The president, who is battling Republican challenger Pat Buchanan in the primaries, was defended in the second briefing.

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"I think people should resist the temptation to send a message" through Buchanan, said William Kristol, chief of staff for vice president Dan Quayle.

There are "fundamental issues at stake" in this year's election representing a gulf "between two parties and really between two world views," he said. A liberal president will act opposite George Bush on the Freedom of Choice Act, which would legislate abortion on demand in all states, on nominees to the Supreme Court and federal courts, and on foreign policy, Kristol said.

In response to a question about concerns over whether the pro-life plank in the Republican platform will be softened, Kristol said the administration welcomes all party members but will not change its position. "We are willing to have a big tent, but the foundation of the big tent is pro-life," he said.

The administration is seeking to reduce illegal underage drinking, Surgeon General Antonia Novello told participants in the second briefing at the Old Executive Office Building.

Though this is a problem affecting half of the country's 20 million junior high and high school students, Novello said, "You won't believe the people who think I have the problem."

Of the 10 million secondary school students who drink, Novello said, eight million drink weekly; five million binge (consume five drinks in a row); three million have binged in the last month, and 500,000 binge weekly, according to reports compiled by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Parents, friends and the media help determine a teenager's perspective on drinking, Novello said.

There is a need to "cultivate a culture of character," HHS Assistant Secretary for Health James Mason said in the second briefing.

"A lot of diseases we have today are related to choices we make," said Mason, who oversees the Public Health Service. The department uses the "C word (condom)," Mason said, "but I guess we need to talk more about faithfulness in marriage."

Some of the priorities for the Public Health Service, Mason said, are increasing biomedical research capabilities; reducing infant mortality, where the United States, he said, ranks only 22nd among industrialized countries; targeting drug abuse, and improving the quality of health care.

William Gribbin, the vice president's assistant for legislative affairs, also spoke in the first briefing. Two sessions were held because the number of registrants, about 300, surpassed the size of the briefing room, which normally seats about 180.