

Books probe God factor in U.S. politics

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Books probe God factor in U.S. politics

By Daniel Burke

Religion News Service

WASHINGTON (RNS)—According to the old saying, there are two things a person never should discuss at a dinner party—religion and politics. But nothing says people can't read about them. And as the presidential campaign season heats up, American publishers are releasing a flood of books on faith and public life.

Frank Lambert's [*Religion in American Politics*](#) traces the tense interplay between pulpits and the public square through nearly two centuries of U.S. history. Some things, Lambert writes, never change.

Baptist Briefs

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Baptist Briefs

Mohler faces surgery, bows out of SBC race. Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and spokesman for conservative social causes, will bow out of the race for Southern Baptist Convention president. Mohler, 48, will undergo surgery for a pre-cancerous tumor in his colon, according to a release posted on the seminary website. Doctors discovered the tumor during a routine colonoscopy, and a subsequent biopsy revealed it was pre-cancerous. Three other candidates for the SBC presidency already have been announced—Georgia pastor Frank Cox and Californians Wiley Drake and Bill Wagner.

Tornado causes minimal damage to rare books. The Ryan Center for Biblical Studies at Union University lost about 10 percent of its holdings when a tornado swept through the Jackson, Tenn., campus last month. The center is located on the top floor of Jennings Hall, which had half its roof ripped off in the tornado. Most of the damage was caused by water, mildew or mold. A nearly 400-year-old Geneva Bible, the oldest book in the library's possession, was untouched since it is kept in a glass case along with three other rare books—an English Hexapla, a Basal New Testament and a copy of the Wycliffe New Testament.

Cartoon

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Cash receipts and disbursements present challenges for churches

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Cash receipts and disbursements present challenges for churches

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

DALLAS—Handling cash presents some of the greatest challenges—and

potential problems—for churches in terms of finances, said Roger Hall, retired chief financial officer and treasurer for the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

“The biggest risk involves cash before it gets on the books,” said Hall, who works part-time as business administrator for First Baptist Church in Waxahachie and serves as a consultant with several nonprofit ministries.

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- [Follow the Money](#)
- Cash receipts and disbursements present challenges for churches

Follow the Money

February 29, 2008

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Follow the Money

Churches' budgets reveal something about priorities - but what?

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

Most observers of congregational life agree—a person can tell a lot about a church by looking at its budget. But exactly what conclusions can be drawn about a church's priorities remains an open question.

"It's a question I've raised with students in my classes for years," said Bill Tillman, who holds the T.B. Maston Chair of Christian Ethics at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon Seminary.

"The whole matter of economic and financial stewardship is such a vital part of the practice of the Christian life, whether for an individual, a family or a congregation."

A church's budget reflects its priorities, he noted. How much a church spends on ministries inside its walls and how much it devotes to ministries beyond itself offers one measure, but Tillman warns against rushing to judgment.

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"What happens always has to be held in tension and viewed in context," he urged. "For instance, we can't say a church never should build a new facility. A new building may be what is needed in a particular community."

2nd Opinion: Sermons, storytelling & novels

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2nd Opinion: Sermons, storytelling & novels

Bill Moyers, the ol' East Texas boy who did good, interviewed novelist John Grisham recently on his PBS program *Bill Moyers' Journal*. After Grisham talked about his storytelling ability, Moyers asked if he had heard a lot of sermons.

Grisham said he had heard them all, "from the long sermon on Sunday morning to the revivalist, tent crusades ... where the whole town turned up. It was kind of exciting at times and boring at times. But I've heard a lot of sermons."

Then Moyers asked the question seldom asked on national television, "Were you born again?"

"Sure," Grisham replied, "When I was 8 years old, I felt the call to become a Christian. I felt the need to. I talked to my parents. I talked to my pastor. And I accepted Christ when I was just a little small boy. That was very much a part of growing up."

Does God protect selected disaster victims but not others?

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Students gather for prayer and support at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., after a tornado tore through campus. (RNS photo/Morris Abernathy/Union University)

Does God protect selected disaster victims but not others?

By Brittani Hamm & Adelle Banks

Religion News Service

JACKSON, Tenn. (RNS)—As Kristen Fabrizio felt the vibrations preceding the [tornado](#) that ripped across the campus of Union University in Jackson,

Tenn., last month, she clung to her friends, who in turn clung to their faith.

“You can definitely see God’s hands if you look at our campus,” said Fabrizio, a history major at the Baptist-affiliated school. “No one’s supposed to be alive.”

DOWN HOME: Coming in 1st place in a dog contest

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DOWN HOME: Coming in 1st place in a dog contest

“You’re better company than the dog,” Joanna told me the other night, shortly after I returned home from a three-day trip.

My wife really knows how to dish out the compliments. Jo went on to compare my behavior favorably to the habits of our puppy, Topanga. She listed several canine proclivities I won’t mention in a family newspaper. Thankfully, I’ve never attempted any of them.

Since Jo laughed, then kissed me and hugged me and treated me to a terrific home-cooked dinner, I assume she really enjoys my company.

But contrasting my company with Topanga’s wasn’t exactly high praise. At

least not from my wife. She's had this duty before, when our daughters were toddlers and I traveled and she couldn't get a moment of privacy, much less peace and quiet, until way after bedtime.

EDITORIAL: Fresh beginning & the way forward

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EDITORIAL: Fresh beginning & the way forward

Humans naturally gravitate to beginnings. It's no coincidence New Year's Eve is the biggest party night of the year. Weddings and the birth of babies are the most significant events in almost every family's history. Grand openings and the first games of a new season always draw huge crowds. In churches, building dedications inevitably mark milestone moments.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas is no exception. And so the election of a new executive director stands out for its singularity. The BGCT Executive Board selected Randel Everett for that role Feb. 26. The eyes of Texas Baptists now look toward March 31, when Everett begins his tenure and the convention enters a new era.



Newness always highlights possibility. Every team is a potential champion on Opening Day. Every child is a potential president, Oscar winner, star athlete, life-changing leader and life-giving healer on the day of its birth.

The BGCT executive director is no exception. As Everett prepares to take up the mantle of leadership, Texas Baptists look ahead with longing. We're ready for hope. In the past decade, many BGCT churches left to affiliate with a competing convention. The fallout of 9/11 wreaked financial havoc. An overall decline in denominationalism sapped energy and enthusiasm. A church-starting scandal siphoned trust. Tight budgets and staff layoffs eroded confidence and optimism.

Church of England short on Bibles

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Church of England short on Bibles

By Al Webb

Religion News Service

LONDON (RNS)—The Church of England has discovered a shortage of a basic piece of equipment it really cannot afford to do without—an adequate supply of Bibles for its churches.

The church's General Synod recently voted to ensure that everyone visiting a church should have "easy and unfettered access" to a Bible, after delegates complained many churches were failing to make them available.

BGCT board allocates funds, approves missions partnership, hears reports

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BGCT board allocates funds, approves missions partnership, hears reports

By Marv Knox

Editor

The Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board handled a broad range of business during a day dominated by the election of a new executive director.

After the board chose Randel Everett to succeed Charles Wade as the convention's staff leader Feb. 26, members turned their attention to an agenda that ranged from money to missions and institutions to internal audits.

Faith Digest

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Faith Digest

Amazing Grace takes top honors. *Amazing Grace*, the big-budget film that traced the life of abolitionist William Wilberforce, won Most Inspiring Movie of 2007 and Best Movie for Mature Audiences at the 16th annual Movieguide Faith and Values Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif. The film stars Ioan Gruffudd as Wilberforce, a member of Parliament who fought to end the slave trade in the 18th century British Empire. The historical drama was awarded the \$50,000 Epiphany Prize, sponsored by the John Templeton Foundation, which provides \$100,000 annually to films and television shows that reflect a “dramatic increase in either man’s love of God or man’s understanding of God,” according to the Epiphany Prizes’ website.



Jehovah’s Witnesses fastest-growing faith in America. Jehovah’s Witnesses are the fastest-growing church body in the United States and Canada, with more than 1 million members, according to new figures that track church membership. The 2008 Yearbook of Canadian and American Churches, produced by the National Council of Churches, recorded growth trends in 224 national church bodies with a combined membership of 147 million Americans, based on self-reported membership figures for 2006, the

most recent year available. Although Jehovah's Witnesses ranked 24th on the list of 25 largest churches, they reported the largest growth rate—2.25 percent—of all churches. The badly divided Episcopal Church, meanwhile, reported the largest drop, at 4.15 percent.