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IN THIS ISSUE:

- * Disclosures make Dead Sea Scrolls less of a mystery
- * Alliance directors affirm talks with Baptist groups
- * Six members added to board of ABP
- * TV campaign will try to improve SBC's image
- * Church-bond market falls on hard times
- * Graham rally draws 250,000 to New York's Central Park
- * Seminar speakers urge environmental stewardship
- * African American Baptists react to Thomas nomination

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC
Nashville, Tennessee

Disclosures make Dead Sea Scrolls
less of a mystery to scholars

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Two Southern Baptist scholars are encouraged by breakthroughs related to the Dead Sea Scrolls but say they won't know the full impact of the documents until they actually see the texts.

In recent weeks, the chances have increased that Baptist scholars might have access to previously unpublished portions of the ancient scrolls.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of animal-skin and papyrus scrolls discovered between 1947-1956 near the Dead Sea in what is now the Israeli-occupied West Bank. The find included manuscripts of every book of the Bible except Esther, in addition to documents describing life in the era of early Christianity.

The scrolls are considered important because they can provide information about the development of Scripture and the early church.

After 44 years, at least one-fifth of the material has yet to be published by an elite group of scholars entrusted with the documents.

This monopoly on the Dead Sea Scrolls has agitated other scholars worldwide, including Tom Smothers and Gerald Borchert of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

"It's irritating that a small clique of scholars has held on to this material," said Borchert, a New Testament professor. "They've had control they should not have had."

The monopoly was broken for the first time in September, when two Cincinnati scholars released a reconstructed version of some of the documents with help from a computerized concordance.

Using a concordance published in 1988, two scholars from Hebrew Union College reconstructed 23 texts. Each word in the concordance was listed by its location and context in the original documents. By entering this data into a computer and grouping words together by location, the scholars were able to reconstruct the texts.

Then last week, the Huntington Library in California made available a

photographic record of the scrolls. The Los Angeles Times reported the library would open its microfilm collection without restriction to scholars.

The library's collection was donated by a philanthropist who obtained permission to photograph the scrolls in 1980. Because the photographs were donated without stipulation, the Times reported, the library's administrators claim they have the right to show the photographs to anyone they choose.

Smothers, who teaches Old Testament at Southern Seminary, explained that the unpublished portions of the scrolls consist mainly of fragments. The most complete scrolls were the first to be published.

"It is unlikely anything startling of a theological nature is going to turn up," he said. "I know the charges have been around for a long time that religious groups have sat on this material because it would embarrass the Christian faith or the Jewish faith. I doubt that is the case."

Just what the unpublished portion of the scrolls will reveal is uncertain, Smothers and Borchert said.

"We're waiting to see how much we're going to get that might give us clues (related to) the New Testament," Borchert said. "It probably will fill in some information about the times. Until you see the documents, you don't really know."

One thing likely to come out is material from a book or books of Samuel, Smothers said. Graduate students of the few scholars originally entrusted with the scrolls have "made their reputations writing about these materials no one else has ever seen," he said.

-30-

Alliance directors affirm
talks with Baptist groups

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Alliance board of directors affirmed the organization's ongoing dialogues with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. and the Progressive National Baptist Convention during a Sept. 19-21 meeting in Washington, D.C.

The directors also approved a 1992 budget of \$302,983 and voted to recommend that the organization's name be changed to The Alliance of Baptists.

Directors focused considerable attention on talks begun this summer with the Fellowship which could result in the merger of the two moderate-conservative Baptist organizations. In July, representatives of the two organizations approved a statement that expressed the "possibility that we can accomplish our goals and mission more effectively together than separately" and pledged to work toward that goal with the expectation of making a decision about a future relationship by the spring of 1993.

While some Alliance directors voiced concerns about the possible merger of the two groups, the board approved without objection a motion by Alan Neely, a former Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary professor now on the faculty at Princeton Theological Seminary, endorsing the ongoing dialogues.

"There is a commitment of the board to continue the dialogue (with the Fellowship), but we have to be honest to say there are different levels of hope and interest," said SBA president Richard Groves, pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church, Winston-Salem, N.C. "There are some who seem to have the impression that a merger is a done deal. That is simply not the case."

Far from talking marriage, we've had one date."

Alliance Executive Director Stan Hastey said the Alliance is open to the possibility of a merger but will approach the issue with caution.

"While there is consensus in our group that we continue in dialogue with the Fellowship, there is no consensus for merger," Hastey said.

"Until the Fellowship indicates its openness to the kind of expanded view of doing missions that we have developed over the past five years, albeit on a modest scale, our people are not ready to merge," he said. "At the same time we are determined to remain in an open dialogue in the hope that our visions of the future will match well enough that we will feel good about a merger."

Hastey said differences within the SBA about the attractiveness of a merger "have to do with different levels of hope that Alliance people have invested in the Fellowship."

"This difference is not over whether the courtship is a good thing," he continued. "It's just too early to talk about marriage. I'm optimistic we will have a good outcome. But we remain in a state of ambivalence. A lot is yet to be decided."

In their initial discussions with Fellowship representatives, Alliance officials expressed concern that any new organization affirm the principles set forth in the SBA covenant, support the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, continue SBA dialogues with other Baptist bodies, receive a new name and structure, and give consideration to SBA personnel as employees of a new organization.

Hastey said any cautiousness toward possible merger does not indicate Alliance members want the SBA to remain small or appear elitist. "They want to be sure that the larger group reflects what to us are basic values before we give up our identity to become part of the other group," he explained.

The SBA's relationship with American Baptist Churches began in 1988 when the ABC Task Force on the Southern Baptist Convention asked the Alliance to be its official partner in dialogue. The discussions have included joint curriculum and missions endeavors. The next scheduled meeting between the two will deal with the endorsement of chaplains and ways to collaborate to identify congregations interested in dual affiliation.

The SBA's relationship with the Progressive National Baptist Convention began this summer and at this point has no specific agenda, Groves said. "We simply have an agreement to meet and begin talking," he said.

In other business, directors agreed to recommend that the SBA change its name to The Alliance of Baptists. The matter will be considered at the Alliance's annual convocation scheduled March 5-7 in Charlotte, N.C.

The 1992 budget approved by the directors includes \$33,300 in administrative expenses, \$51,600 in mission projects, \$127,583 in personnel costs and \$90,500 for program expenses. The 1991 budget totaled \$299,639.

In addition to the \$51,600 in mission expenditures contained in the operating budget, SBA directors approved an additional \$56,880 in Global Mission Offering projects and \$16,900 in its challenge budget. Projects in the two latter categories will be funded based on receipts of the annual Global Mission Offering, expected to exceed \$50,000 in 1991.

New items in the SBA operating budget include \$5,000 for Associated Baptist Press and \$2,000 for the Baptist Center for Ethics, a new moderate-conservative organization headed by former Christian Life Commission staffer Robert Parham of Nashville, Tenn. The challenge budget also includes an additional \$3,000 for the ethics center.

Other items in the operating budget include \$12,000 for the Baptist Joint Committee, \$6,000 for the Baptist Peace Fellowship, \$6,000 for the

Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, \$6,000 for student scholarships and \$5,000 for Southern Baptist Women in Ministry.

The Richmond seminary, an Alliance-initiated school now funded by the Alliance and the Fellowship, is also targeted to receive an additional \$12,000 in Global Mission Offering receipts. The school began classes this fall with 31 students, seminary President Tom Graves said in a report to Alliance directors.

In other business, SBA directors:

-- Approved a resolution supporting passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act pending in Congress. The measure would restore the "compelling interest" test government must meet before restricting the free exercise of religion. A 1990 Supreme Court decision virtually abandoned that test, holding that government need demonstrate only a reasonable interest in acting to limit free exercise.

-- Agreed to apply for a sponsoring membership in Interfaith IMPACT, a coalition of mainline religious groups active on a variety of social and public-policy fronts.

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Six members added
to board of ABP

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Six people were added to the board of directors of Associated Baptist Press during the board's annual meeting Sept. 21 in Jacksonville, Fla.

The six were elected by the current directors and bring the number of board members to 18. Two others were elected pending their acceptance.

New members are Hugh Greene, senior vice president of Baptist Medical Center and a member of Hendricks Avenue Baptist Church in Jacksonville; Dan Hobbs, director of the board of regents for higher education in Oklahoma, a former member of the SBC Executive Committee and a member of First Baptist Church of Norman, Okla.; Marv Knox of Louisville, Ky., editor of the Western Recorder, newsjournal of the Kentucky Baptist Convention; Jeff Mobley, an attorney and member of Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, Tenn.; Joe Turner, president of First Sun Management and a member of First Baptist Church of Clemson, S.C.; and Ralph Walls, a car dealer and member of Oak Grove Baptist Church in Bel Air, Md.

Associated Baptist Press was chartered by a group of Baptist state newspapers in September 1990 after the editors of Baptist Press were fired by the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, which controls the denomination's official news service. Associated Baptist Press was set up with a self-perpetuating board free from the control of any denominational agency or faction.

Directors of ABP met in Jacksonville for the first time since ABP opened its headquarters there in July.

Greg Warner, ABP executive editor, reported the one-year-old news service has published 120 articles by 39 writers since Jan. 1. Weekly issues of ABP are distributed by computer, facsimile and mail to 111 outlets, including 36 daily newspapers and 33 Baptist newspapers. At least 19 state Baptist newspapers have published ABP stories in the past two months, directors were told.

Directors heard ABP is operating within its \$120,000 budget for 1991, with income coming from service fees and contributions. Baptist state conventions provided 50 percent of ABP's income during the first eight months of the year, followed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (18 percent), service fees from users (15.7 percent), church contributions (14 percent) and individual donations (2 percent).

A new three-tiered fee structure was adopted. Publications that reprint ABP articles will be asked to pay \$1,200 a year for the service. Churches, Baptist agencies and other organizations that receive ABP without publishing it will be charged \$600. Individual recipients will be charged \$250.

The board also re-elected its officers: Charles Overby of Arlington, Va., chairman; James Pleitz of Dallas, vice chairman; Judy Strother, Mountain Home, Ark., secretary; and Don McGregor, Jackson, Ms., treasurer. McGregor also serves as volunteer executive director.

-30-

TV campaign will try
to improve SBC's image

By Mark Wyatt

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Convention will try to improve on its negative public image when it launches a nationwide TV ad campaign next year.

The television spots could be ready within a few months and may be on the air before next summer's SBC meeting in Indianapolis, Ind., according to convention officials. But limited funds will force the convention to ask TV stations to broadcast the spots free of charge.

The TV ads are part of a public relations campaign to cast Southern Baptists in a more positive light and to counter more than a decade of often negative publicity that has resulted from the controversy in the 15-million-member denomination.

A motion offered at the annual SBC meeting in June cited "a large amount of negative publicity" toward Southern Baptists and urged development of a national multimedia campaign, including television, newspapers, and billboards, "to depict the truth about what Southern Baptists really represent."

Mark Coppenger, vice president for public relations for the SBC Executive Committee, reported on progress of the campaign during the Executive Committee meeting Sept. 16-18. Coppenger said public service announcements being produced for television will portray Southern Baptist concerns for traditional values and family life.

Public service announcements are broadcast by television stations and networks without charge.

In a recent letter to a group of public relations advisors, Coppenger addressed concerns that the spots will mimic Mormon promotional efforts, which some consider effective but misleading. He said the SBC effort "could come off as 'Mormon Lite'" if Baptists "simply tried to ape them with a lower budget."

"Let's take our cues from Scripture and the Holy Spirit instead of Salt Lake City," Coppenger said. "Our fruit may bear certain similarities, but it will have come from different sources."

Coppenger told Executive Committee members a PR campaign should not be viewed as a distraction from the SBC's primary purpose of evangelism and missions. Instead, he said, such a campaign would "climatize the culture for the reception of the gospel."

The budget for the SBC public relations office was increased nearly sevenfold last year. But Coppenger noted the \$100,000 included in the new budget year beginning Oct. 1 won't go as far as some might imagine. Similar image campaigns have cost 10-to-20 times as much.

Coppenger said the SBC Radio and Television Commission is helping

produce the first spots. He estimated two will be completed in a few months at a cost of \$15,000 to \$30,000 each. The spots will then be offered to television stations and networks. Since no fee is paid for airing such spots, however, there is no guarantee they will be used.

-30-

Church-bond market
falls on hard times

By Toby Druin

DALLAS, Texas (ABP) -- For almost half a century, he had been a pastor and church builder. What better use could be made of the retirement nest egg he and his wife had nurtured than to invest it in church bonds?

"It seemed like the normal thing to do," the pastor said. "We had invested our lives for the Lord. Why not our retirement funds? Even in retirement, we would still be working for the Lord."

A decade later and more than \$100,000 poorer, the couple -- who asked not to be identified -- said they still believe church bonds can be a good investment. But they said every church-bond prospectus should carry the warning: "Caveat emptor," or "Let the buyer beware."

It's a warning echoed by many other investors, who have seen the church-bond market suffer from some recent highly publicized defaults. Some industry estimates put current church-bond defaults at \$140 million or more.

For decades Baptists and others have sold bonds to finance new buildings and other improvements. They offer churches below-average interest rates and offer buyers above-average profits. But the bonds also are subject to little government oversight and a benevolent lack of scrutiny by buyers.

Most church-bond prospectuses do carry some sort of warning. Two from A. B. Culbertson and Co. of Fort Worth, Texas, include the statement in boldface type: "It should not necessarily be assumed that the membership and revenues of the church referenced above will remain stable or increase as they have during the aforementioned period."

What that means is that a church bond, and the earnings it promises, are only as good as this week's offering plate.

A June article in Forbes magazine reported 125 or more churches across the country are now in default for up to \$140 million in bonds. The true figure may be even higher, the article added, "since the \$3 billion or so of marketable church bonds outstanding generally escape detailed regulatory review, and no one keeps track of defaults."

If the Forbes figures are accurate, the bonds in default represent as much as 5 percent of all church bonds. But the number of churches in default is probably less than 1 percent of those issuing bonds.

The problem is that some of the biggest bond issues by very prominent churches have gone belly up, especially in the South and Southwest, where many churches were expanding while the oil-based economy was headed up in the mid-1980s.

The Texas-based Culbertson Co. -- the largest marketer of church bonds with \$50 million last year -- has some 12 percent of its bond money in default. Still Culbertson President Charles Martin noted the defaults represent less than half of 1 percent of the 2,500 churches with which his firm has served since 1954.

Among those churches gaining bond notoriety:

-- First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., is not meeting payments on a \$14 million bond issue that financed a move to a new worship

center in 1986.

-- Great Hills Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, which at one time owed more than the Del City church, has had to postpone bond payments. So has RiverBend Church in Austin. The two churches have bonds totaling \$5 million.

-- First Assembly of God in New Orleans has defaulted on \$17 million.

-- North Richland Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth reportedly hasn't made a payment in two years on a \$13 million bond issue and a \$3.3 million loan.

Church bonds were born during a time when it was difficult for churches to borrow money from banks, which were reluctant to foreclose on bad church loans. Churches today also are having difficulty getting bank loans, and the interest in bond programs has begun to increase.

The development of church bonds can be traced to the work of J. S. Bracewell, an attorney and member of Broadway Baptist Church in Houston. In 1936 Bracewell developed a plan for churches to issue bonds bearing 5 percent interest and maturing over 13-and-a-half years. The bonds would be sold to members and friends of the church.

Bracewell's idea, known as the Broadway Plan, soon became popular. By 1956, 1,200 churches in 18 major denominations had issued \$55 million in bonds, and every payment reportedly had been made on time.

At first, most of the bonds were bought by church members. But over the years, the process has evolved. Rex Davenport, president of Share Inc., an Oklahoma securities brokerage, said there are now three basic kinds of companies handling bond programs.

-- Davenport's company does "directed bond programs," he said, whereby all of the bonds are bought by members of the church "and sometimes (by) their friends or associates or (members) in sister congregations."

-- "Best effort" companies, a second kind, offer bonds to church members and then, for an additional fee, the rest are brokered to outside purchasers.

-- The third kind, which includes Culbertson, are firm underwriters, which in effect loan money to a church for the amount of the bond issue and then sell the bonds to customers. The church pays a fee which usually runs from 6 percent to 7.5 percent of the bond issue.

Are church bonds good investments? Yes and no.

First, the buyer must consider that there is little regulation of the church-bond business. Church bonds are not rated or insured. Once the bonds are sold, the church makes payments to a trustee, usually a bank or trust company, which pays bondholders. If the church can't make the payments, the holder will get little help from the trustee.

If a church gets into trouble with its payments, often the trust company will organize a bondholders' committee, which will make decisions for all the bondholders. They might suspend payments, cut the interest rate or extend the payment time period.

Trust Management Inc. of Fort Worth is the trustee for First Southern Church, Del City, and has organized a bondholders' committee. Trust Management would not disclose the names of committee members.

One of the church's bondholder said instead of money he has been offered prayers and promises that the church is going to pay, but nothing has been forthcoming since July 1990.

Buyers of bonds also will get little or no help from the brokerage houses that sell them. One of the criticisms of the business is that bond brokerage firms take their money off the top and then wash their hands of the deal.

Culbertson's Martin said that is simply the industry practice. "We buy bonds (from the church) at a price, put them in our inventory, at which point we are totally at risk with them, and then resell them," he said.

"When we resell them, our job is over. We have done what we were asked to do.

"If the church subsequently has problems, that is not our debt. We are no different from the profit the contractor made or the architect or anyone else. We are just a part of the process of placing the buyer and seller together.

Some critics of brokerage houses like Culbertson, however, say that once the buyers are established, the brokerage firms often are too prone to take marginal bond issues, especially in hard times such as those the bond business has recently gone through. That explains why so many have gone bad recently, the critics say; they were bad deals from the start.

There are good-sense guidelines for churches considering issuing bonds. The usual rule of thumb is that a church should not obligate itself for more than 30 percent of its budget income, said Bruce Bowles, president of the Texas Baptist Church Loan Corporation.

Davenport, past president and director of the National Association of Church and Institutional Financing Organizations, said a church's total debt should not exceed four times its income when interest rates are 7.5 percent. "At 9.5 percent, three times the church's income is more appropriate," he said. "And at 11 percent it would be two times the church's income."

Davenport, a Methodist, said that NACIFO is "very concerned" about factors affecting bond issues from Southern Baptist churches. He said NACIFO is considering recommending that any prospectus from a Southern Baptist church carry a "risk factor" that would warn that the controversy among Southern Baptists could result in some leaving the denomination or that factional breaches within a church's membership could affect its ability to pay off its bond issue.

Davenport and Bowles both underscore that church bonds can be good investments, however, if proper precautions are taken.

Bowles' advice is to use a reliable company and good guidelines that include a look at the bond company and its track record in the business.

Also look carefully at the church and its financial data, which should be based on history and not just projections, Bowles said. "Too many (bonds) are sold on projected income."

Other factors to consider: membership, attendance, budget, income, indebtedness vs. appraised value, and longevity of the pastor, Bowles said. "I look at an investment and ask if the worst possible thing happened, would I be able to get my money back," he concluded.

Davenport said he "wouldn't give a plug nickel" for appraised values of church property and not much more for audited financial reports, which he said can be made to show almost anything.

Property appraisals are of limited value, he said, because of the difficulty of foreclosing and reselling church buildings. "Unless it is some downtown property in downtown Houston, for instance, where you can scrape the church off and sell it for a high-rise parking garage, you have nothing," he said.

To the list of factors to consider, Davenport added: year-round contributions, outstanding debt vs. cash flow, and fixed expenses vs. discretionary funds ("They can't fire the preacher and quit paying the utility bills to build and pay for the church.").

Some denominations will come to a church's aid if it gets into trouble, Davenport noted, but those are rare instances. Most churches either pay off bond issues by themselves or go it alone in default.

The retired pastor cited earlier has his own advice for prospective church-bond purchasers: "Church bonds are only as good as the integrity of the people and leaders at any given time in the process. Unless you have unlimited resources, which can be placed at high risk or lost, carefully

investigate each church, and then spread your investment over many churches with only a small amount in each."

Caveat emptor. Let the buyer beware.

-30-

Graham rally draws 250,000
to New York's Central Park

NEW YORK (ABP) -- In what one person described as a "day of miracles," Southern Baptist evangelist Billy Graham preached to 250,000 people on the Great Lawn of Central Park Sept. 22.

It was Graham's largest North American audience ever and his second-largest worldwide, surpassed only by the 1 million people who heard him in Seoul, Korea, in 1984.

"This was a day of miracles," said Simpson Turner, pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church and rally chairman. "In a city known for racial division and tension, there was total unity. In a city known for crime out of control, the police blotter was empty."

New York City police confirmed that although this was one of the largest crowds ever gathered in Central Park, they made no arrests and no incidents were reported. Despite heavy traffic and gridlock around the park after the meeting, the city's trademark symphony of blaring horns was absent for blocks.

George Russ, a Southern Baptist home missionary in New York, served on the executive committee for the afternoon rally and for the northern New Jersey crusade that preceded it.

Gathering 250,000 people to hear the gospel in Central Park made "quite a statement," he said.

"I don't know if religion is in, but I know people are looking for answers to questions," Russ said. "Billy Graham helped bring a lot of these questions out in the open."

"It's made it a lot easier to introduce conversations about the Lord."

Russ, a native New Yorker, marveled that the city's media gave Graham extensive and favorable coverage. "He got great press coverage. I read all the local papers, and they were really fair."

An article in the New York Times, Russ explained, "said he's not here to rip anybody off, but his real purpose is to strengthen the churches."

In addition, Graham's message was carried live on radio stations in six languages.

Russ said a number of Southern Baptists were involved in the rally, which was supported by 900 churches representing 40 denominations.

Roman Catholic involvement was the largest for any domestic Graham crusade. Archbishop John O'Connor of the New York diocese wrote a letter urging priests and laity to attend the rally.

More than half the churches sponsoring the rally represented ethnic congregations.

Graham said he wanted the rally to promote racial unity and to demonstrate how many people are concerned about the need for moral and spiritual foundations in America.

"Our social problems are basically moral and spiritual problems, and moral problems require a religious solution," Graham told the crowd. "Some ask, 'Why has God abandoned us?' God has not abandoned us. We have abandoned him."

"Many people want to turn their backs on New York and see its problems as incurable," he said. "I do not see New York that way. I think we should stay in New York and do something to change New York."

"I love New York, and God loves New York. He has not given up on this city, because he does not give up on people."

Other highlights of the day included:

-- Musical guests Johnny and June Carter Cash, Kathie Lee Gifford, Take Six, Sandi Patti and the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir.

-- A welcome by Mayor David Dinkins, who called the rally "the largest multicultural revival meeting the world has ever seen."

-- A blitz of the city by volunteers who distributed 2 million brochures door-to-door and at subway and bus stations.

-- Preaching by 50 teams of street evangelists during the week prior to the rally.

The Central Park rally was the culmination of a three-year outreach known as Mission New York State, which included crusades in Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany and Long Island, N.Y., as well as Hamilton, Ontario, and the Meadowlands, N.J.

-30-

-- By Mark Wingfield

Seminar speakers urge
environmental stewardship

By Ben McDade

COLUMBIA, S.C. (ABP) -- The Christian view of the environment is "an ideal one" according to Fisher Humphries. "It tells us neither to deify the planet nor to defile it, but to care for it responsibly."

Humphries, a professor at Beeson School of Divinity at Samford University, was one of four keynote speakers at a recent seminar on "Christian Responsibility for the Environment." The seminar, sponsored by the South Carolina Baptist Convention, was held in Columbia, S.C., and attracted 62 participants.

Humphries, professor of divinity at the Birmingham, Ala., school, cited 10 themes from the Bible: the earth is God's good creation; the earth was created for God, not just for human beings; human beings are the greatest of God's creations; human beings were created from the earth to live upon the earth; God gave the earth as a blessing to human beings; sensitivity to creation can lead human beings to know and praise God; God has entrusted human beings with the responsibility of caring for the earth; human beings and the earth are in serious trouble; God has acted to rescue human beings and the earth; and in the end human beings and the entire creation will be redeemed by God.

Robert Parham, executive director of Baptist Center for Ethics, described things Christians can do to be responsible stewards of creation.

Parham, of Nashville, Tenn., said that too often Christians analyze social issues but fall short where concrete action ought to begin.

He encouraged Christians to begin by taking small steps. "We must recall the parable of the mustard seed," he said. "From something small may come something great. Our little efforts may culminate in a healthier environment in the decades ahead for future generations."

Parham said the power of the local church is immeasurable in facilitating social change. "The church has more opportunities and diverse methods to communicate to a larger number of American citizens on a regular basis than almost every other social institution," he said. "Regrettably, the Christian community has been largely silent on environmental issues."

Parham provided practical environmental tips: don't use foam or plastic cups; use paper sacks instead of plastic; buy glass instead of

plastic containers; and order in bulk to cut down on wrapping.

"Earth-hostile behavior will not change significantly until our values change," Parham concluded. "Unless the faith community takes up the banner of earth-keeping, the earth will continue to spin into deeper ecological problems."

In other messages:

Michael Jarrett, commissioner of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, said protecting the environment requires trust and occasional compromise. "Our increasing sensitivity to protecting the environment and preserving South Carolina's natural beauty must be coupled with sensitivity to meeting basic human needs," he said.

Walter Sanders, project coordinator for Chambers Development Corp., said responsible businesses should strive to integrate environmentally sound and economically efficient practices. But he added, "the problem is that the demand for recycled goods is not as strong as the supply."

-30-

African American Baptists
react to Thomas' nomination

By Pam Parry

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- African American Baptists gave the Senate Judiciary Committee opposing views of U.S. Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas during the second week of Thomas' confirmation hearings, which ended Sept. 20.

The committee appears headed for a vote this week that most observers predict will endorse Thomas as the second African American to serve on the high court, replacing the retiring Thurgood Marshall. If approved by the committee, Thomas' nomination will then go to the full Senate for approval.

In the final days of the hearings, two representatives of African American Baptist denominations testified against Thomas, while another Baptist who has worked in civil rights for about 30 years testified on behalf of Thomas, her former employer.

Amos Brown, pastor of Third Baptist Church in San Francisco, told senators the National Baptist Convention in the U.S.A. voted to oppose Thomas for two primary reasons.

Brown, chairman of the denomination's Civil Rights Commission, said Justice Marshall's successor should "bring to the bar of justice the experiences and aspirations of African Americans who have been locked-out, looked-over and denied respect and equal opportunity in our society."

Marshall, the first African American to sit on the high court, was a champion of civil rights. Brown said National Baptists believe Thomas' approach to constitutional adjudication would undermine progress made on civil rights.

Second, Brown said, Supreme Court nominees during the past five years have established a majority whose positions are "antithetical" to African Americans' interests.

"Judge Thomas would seem to fit well within extreme factions of the court that have been particularly unsympathetic," Brown said. "We say enough is enough."

"We would like to see an African American on the court. However, in our view, Judge Thomas' legal philosophy and his views of the civil rights statutes reflect hostility toward the African American community. Thus, his color offers us no solace."

Brown added National Baptists did not "choose to oppose" Thomas but "we are morally called upon to be soldiers of the cross, and Judge Thomas'

record compels us to oppose him."

Archie Le Mone, executive director of the Progressive National Baptist Convention's Home Mission Board, told the Judiciary Committee that the denomination adopted its official position in August. The resolution stated the PNBC opposed Thomas "until or unless in his Senate hearings he expresses support of the constitutional rights won in our hard-fought struggles for civil rights."

Le Mone said after Thomas' testimony: "We are not convinced. There are too many unanswered questions for us to support the confirmation of Judge Clarence Thomas at this time."

"There are too many critical questions that remain unanswered...", Le Mone continued. "That is all we are faced with in these hearings: questions, questions, questions, questions."

Le Mone told senators that the nomination of another minority to the nation's high court is not the primary concern of the PNBC. "Our concern and the reality that has to be met is that justice must serve the poor, the unhappy, the children and the aging," he said.

Both the National Baptist Convention in the U.S.A. and the Progressive National Baptist Convention are affiliated with the Baptist Joint Committee, a Washington-based religious-liberty coalition. A third African American denomination affiliated with the BJC, the National Baptist Convention of America, also has opposed Thomas. The BJC traditionally does not take positions on court nominees, however, and has not taken one on Thomas.

Willie King, a deacon of Montgomery Hills Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Md., testified in support of Thomas. While not speaking officially for a denomination, she formerly worked with Thomas when he was chairman of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

King, a member of the District of Columbia Baptist Convention executive board, categorically denied that Thomas' views are antithetical to civil rights or values of African Americans.

"Judge Thomas saw the agency and its mission as a direct result of the civil-rights struggle," said King, director of financial management at the EEOC.

"Judge Thomas is a very compassionate man," continued King. "He took an interest in the less fortunate and the 'little' people. He shows concern for the plight of the working women and minorities."

"During his tenure as chairman of the EEOC, many women and minorities were recruited for and promoted to high-level positions."

"This is the Clarence Thomas I know...", she added.

In addition to religious leaders, the committee heard from more than 75 groups, including lawyers, women's and civil-rights groups, politicians and personal acquaintances of Thomas.

The American Bar Association gave Thomas a "qualified" rating based on its investigation of Thomas' integrity, judicial temperament and professional competence, said Ronald Olson, chairman of the ABA standing committee on the federal judiciary. The "qualified" rating was not unanimous, however, Olson noted.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People opposes Thomas because of his public record, said its executive director, Benjamin Hooks.

"Despite Judge Thomas' compelling personal story, the interests of African Americans would not be well served if, after his confirmation to the court, he dismantled the consensus elements of our nation's civil-rights policy," Hooks said. "The prospect of this occurrence is heightened by evidence drawn from the record Judge Thomas has amassed over the past decade."

Hooks concluded that "in the strong interests of all Americans, we

have put...conscience above color" by opposing the nomination.

Another African American group, the National Black Nurses' Association, voiced support for Thomas. Sadako Holmes, executive director of the 7,000-member association, said Thomas' presence on the high court "will be an assurance that someone with a special, hard-earned sensitivity is there, providing a special dimension to America's highest tribunal."

A panel of law enforcement officials endorsed Thomas as one who would bring balance in the area of criminal justice. They said Thomas would be concerned about protecting the rights of criminal defendants as well as victims.

Women's rights groups told the committee Thomas' confirmation could be the last nail in the coffin signaling the death of Roe v. Wade, the controversial 1973 Supreme Court decision that affirmed a woman's right to privacy in making abortion decisions.

Personal acquaintances testifying on behalf of Thomas included his eighth-grade teacher, Sister Mary Virgilius Reidy, former principal at St. Benedict's School in Savannah, Ga.

"The road from the unpaved streets of our part of Savannah to these 'hallowed halls' cannot have been an easy one to travel," Reidy said, "but Clarence Thomas has demonstrated that he has overcome obstacles that might have defeated a lesser man."

-30-

EDITOR'S NOTE: An update on the Thomas nomination will be issued as soon as the Senate Judiciary Committee votes, perhaps as soon as Friday, Sept. 27.
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EDITOR'S NOTE: ABP is developing a story on Southeastern Seminary's accreditation. It should be available by Friday afternoon, Sept. 27.
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EDITOR'S NOTE: A photo is available to accompany the story "Estonian Professor Sees Freedom...", issued Sept. 19. Contact Southern Seminary.

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