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Southern Seminary trustees set
closed-door meeting to elect Mohler

By Greg Warner

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- Trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have called a special closed-door meeting for March 25-26 in Atlanta for the purpose of electing Al Mohler president of the Louisville, Ky., school.

Mohler, a theologian and editor of the Christian Index of Atlanta, was announced as the unanimous choice of the trustees' search committee Feb. 22 in a news conference in Nashville, Tenn.

At the time, trustee chairman Wayne Allen of Memphis said trustees might call a special session, rather than waiting for their regularly scheduled April 18 meeting in Louisville, in order to allow trustees adequate time to consider Mohler's election.

Trustees were notified of the March 25-26 meeting in a Feb. 21 letter from Allen. The meeting, at a hotel near the Atlanta airport, will be closed to the news media and other outsiders, the letter said.

It will be the second called meeting of trustees in three months. On Dec. 15, trustees met privately -- again in Atlanta -- to consider a plan to buy out the contract of controversial ethics professor Paul Simmons. Trustees rejected the buy-out. Simmons took early retirement in early January.

Some in the seminary community have complained that trustees are conducting too much of their business off campus and behind closed doors.

In a letter to Allen Feb. 24, leaders of five student groups said trustees "compromised the presidential search process" by announcing Mohler's nomination at a Nashville meeting of denominational executives before informing faculty, staff and students. They asked that Mohler's election be conducted in open session.

Informed of the special Atlanta meeting, student government president

Ruth Davison said she was distressed that another costly trustee meeting would be held three weeks prior to a previously scheduled meeting.

"It seems to me trustees are spending money and not being accountable how they spend their money," Davison said. Such a practice "bewilders us as students, when we struggle to exist here," she said.

The Atlanta meeting will cost the seminary an estimated \$30,000 or more.

Allen, pastor of Briarwood Baptist Church near Memphis, could not be reached for comment March 4.

Davison said there is not a strong sentiment on campus against Mohler, but there is confusion that so much of the process has been conducted away from the campus. "It seems to us they don't want any interaction at all from the students," she said.

"Most students just want a chance to meet Dr. Mohler. They want an opportunity to hear what his vision is for the seminary."

Davison said students are contemplating some kind of protest demonstration simultaneous with the Atlanta meeting.

In Atlanta, trustees are scheduled to meet from noon March 25 till 3 p.m. March 26, during which they will interview the 33-year-old Mohler, pray about their decision and vote. A videotape of Mohler's life and career is being prepared.

A native of Lakeland, Fla., Mohler is a two-time graduate and one-time employee of Southern.

He holds the doctor of philosophy and master of divinity degrees from the seminary, in addition to a bachelor of arts degree in religion from Samford University in Birmingham, Ala. He served as special assistant to retiring president Roy Honeycutt and director of capital funding for Southern before taking the Georgia editorship in 1989.

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Message of Davidians sounds familiar to many Christians

By Scott Collins

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- The leader of a religious cult holding federal law enforcement officials in a standoff delivered a 58-minute rambling radio sermon March 2 that contained a message many Christians hear every Sunday.

"Without God, without Jesus, we have no hope," David Koresh said during a message broadcast live over a Dallas talk-radio station.

But religious experts say while Koresh's message sounds familiar, its meaning is different.

"He's apparently trying to use Scripture to justify what he is doing," said John Newport, retired vice president for academic affairs and provost at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Koresh, who legally changed his name from Vernon Howell, is the leader of the Branch Davidian sect which has been barricaded in a compound 10 miles outside Waco since Feb. 28, when members of the cult exchanged gunfire with officials of the federal Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agency.

The Branch Davidians grew out of a split with the Seventh-day Adventist Church more than 60 years ago. Seventh-day Adventists have

repeatedly disavowed any connections to the Branch Davidians.

And while members of the Waco cult may be outside mainstream religious beliefs, many theologians say the sect's emphasis on eschatology, or the "end times," is common in Christian history.

Some scholars are predicting that as the year 2000 approaches, many religious groups will focus on the Second Coming of Christ, which they believe will be the beginning of a 1,000-year reign of the Messiah before the Last Judgment.

"There was a lot of similar apprehension 1,000 years ago about the end of that millennium," according to James Leo Garrett, distinguished professor of theology at Southwestern Seminary.

Garrett said groups 1,000 years ago predicted the end of the world and the Second Coming, just as groups are doing today.

Garrett, who taught a class about cults at Baylor University from 1973-79, toured the Branch Davidian compound, known as Mount Carmel. Garrett said he often took students to the compound, where members of the cult would explain their beliefs.

"They were very peaceful then," Garrett said. "There has been a very definite development of the group into a more deviant group."

While teaching at Baylor, Garrett developed a relationship with cult member Perry Jones, a high-ranking official of the Branch Davidians. Jones often visited Garrett at his Baylor office. Jones' daughter, Rachel, later married Koresh.

After delivering his sermon March 2, Koresh broke his promise to release members of the cult and surrender to authorities. Koresh said "he will keep his promise to come out when he receives further instruction from God," according to FBI Agent Jeffrey Jamar.

Throughout the standoff with heavily armed federal, state and local law enforcement officials, Koresh has claimed he holds the keys to the "seven seals" of the book of Revelation. Many Christians believe those seven seals symbolize the calamities which will visit the earth before the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ.

Newport, author of the book "The Lion and the Lamb" which discusses various theories of Revelation, said Koresh apparently sees his Branch Davidian sect as a part of the "true church" that will be caught up in the air before the most severe end-times tribulation begins.

Newport described the seven seals mentioned in Revelation 6:1-17: "The first seal is a white horse, which many think symbolizes evil. The second seal is a red horse, which is war. The third is a black horse symbolizing famine.

"The fourth seal is the pale horse, meaning death. The fifth symbolizes suffering. The sixth seal has to do with earthquakes, stars falling and other catastrophes. And the seventh seal includes the battle of Armageddon and the return of Jesus Christ."

Cyril Miller, president of the five-state Southwest Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, described Koresh's message as "weird."

"He believes he is the Lamb who opens the seals and therefore is Jesus Christ," Miller said.

Although authorities initially believed Koresh was claiming to be Christ, he made no specific claims to be the Messiah during his radio message.

Instead, some scholars have connected Koresh's message and even his name to the Old Testament character Cyrus mentioned in the Book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 45:1, Cyrus is referred to as God's "anointed" who will "subdue

nations."

Bruce Corley, dean of the school of theology at Southwestern Seminary, said the name Cyrus is Koresh in Hebrew.

According to Scripture, Cyrus conquered Babylon. Corley said David Koresh apparently envisions himself as the "anointed one" appointed to subdue the modern-day Babylon before the return of Christ.

Corley points to Revelation 19:11, where the rider on the white horse "has a name no one knows." According to Scripture, the rider is a great warrior who overthrows the enemies of God.

"It must be that Koresh believes he is this great warrior," said Corley. Further evidence of the connection between the names "Koresh" and "Cyrus" is that Koresh named his son Cyrus, Corley said.

Corley said if Koresh does believe he is the great warrior of Revelation, authorities "had better negotiate seriously with him. This old boy (Koresh) will never yield," Corley said. "I believe he will fight to the end."

Eugene Boring, author of a recent book, "Revelation," and a professor at Texas Christian University's Brite Divinity School, told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram that Koresh's theology of the end times is a "kind of garden-variety fundamentalist dispensational interpretation of Revelation."

Garrett agreed, saying Koresh's beliefs appear similar to the dispensational beliefs held by many Christians. "It's a matter of how you see the book of Revelation," Garrett said. "Is it chronological or symbolic?"

Koresh is typical of other cult leaders -- self-styled prophets who proclaim theological truths, especially about eschatology, Garrett said. He said most cult leaders use either psychology or theology to gain control over their followers.

Garrett believes Koresh has used a combination of psychology and theology to gain the confidence of his followers.

That confidence led members of the sect to use firearms and other weapons to fight for their beliefs. However, Newport said, such tactics seem "foreign to basic Christian teaching."

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Baptist family's son
among 16 injured in Waco

By Toby Druin

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Joe Jordan, a Sunday school teacher and deacon at Big Creek Church in Winnfield, La., was showing his new interim pastor, Joe Bodine, through his library and Mrs. Jordan was preparing lunch when the call came from the Winn Parish Sheriff's Department that their son had been shot.

Glen Jordan, a 30-year-old agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms assigned to Little Rock, Ark., was one of the 16 people wounded when ATF agents served a warrant Feb. 28 at the compound of the Branch Davidian cult near Waco, Texas.

Glen Jordan was hit in the shoulder and upper arm and elbow and was hospitalized at Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center in Waco. His parents and Mrs. Jordan's sister were driven to Waco by a Winn Parish sheriff's deputy. Glen's wife also joined her husband at the hospital.

"I believe in prayer and I believe that God is the divine healer. My trust is in God," Jordan said the day following his son's injury and after receiving assurance that the son would not lose his arm as first had been feared.

"This could have been a lot worse," he added. "I attribute the fact that things are as well as they are that God was on somebody's side."

Jordan said he bears no ill will toward anyone.

"I think the law officers were right in doing what they did and (I'm) sorry it wasn't more successful," he said. "I don't like for people to be killed, but sometimes it happens like that. A man who professes himself to be Jesus and is a cult leader needs to be stopped."

"This line of work is dangerous, but people get killed offshore (in oil rigs), car wrecks and construction work," said Jordan, who is involved in the construction business as a brick mason. "This is just another job that has to be done."

The Jordans lost a son to an automobile wreck nine years ago, they said.

"We just asked the good Lord to give us strength to go through this ordeal, and he has," said Mrs. Jordan.

The elder Jordan praised the treatment they had received at Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center. It hadn't occurred to him, however, that he was in a Baptist hospital, he said.

"Our family has received good treatment in other hospitals," he said. "But it sure doesn't disappoint me any that we are in a Baptist hospital. It doesn't make me feel any worse."

Mrs. Jordan thanked Curtis Holland, director of pastoral care, for his assistance.

"We haven't asked for anything," said Jordan. "But a lot of people have said if there is anything we need to let them know."

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WMU videotape to missionaries
explains, defends changes

By Lacy Thompson

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (ABP) -- Woman's Missionary Union has prepared a videotape designed to assure Southern Baptist foreign missionaries that the organization intends to remain loyal in its missions support.

"We come to you today to say that we are still in the business of being your support system," WMU Executive Director Dellanna O'Brien tells missionaries in the 10-minute videotape prepared by the Southern Baptist auxiliary.

"We want to give you assurance of our loyalty. For almost 105 years, WMU has walked side by side with you. We will continue to do just that."

The videotape comes amid concerns about changes in the organization's policy. Woman's Missionary Union leaders recently voted to expand the scope of their work and provide missions education materials and prayer support to other Southern Baptist and evangelical groups.

Since that vote, WMU leaders have been called on to respond to concerns, especially fears that the changes open the door for Woman's Missionary Union to support the moderate-conservative Cooperative Baptist

Fellowship.

Last month, WMU leaders met with Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board trustees to discuss the matter. Videotape copies of that two-hour question-and-answer session also were mailed to overseas missionaries by FMB trustees.

Woman's Missionary Union began the process of mailing out its videotape to 3,900 missionaries in early March. "We were afraid after the missionaries viewed the Foreign Mission Board tape there would be some anxiety on their part," O'Brien said. "We wanted them to be comforted in knowing our ministry to them was not going to change. We wanted them to know we were not going to abandon them."

In the videotaped message, O'Brien reminds missionaries that WMU continues to join them in prayer for many things, including the selection of a new Foreign Mission Board president. "This is perhaps the most important decision that is before us today," she says.

She also expresses regret for "the stress that has been caused to you in your work because of our disunity here at home.

"We share with you the impatience that we've been unable to resolve the differences we face."

O'Brien encourages missionaries to view the Foreign Mission Board tape. "We share with them the desire that you know all of the factors with which we're dealing right now."

But she also encourages them to know that WMU remains committed to their support. O'Brien offers a litany of commitments WMU has made and kept during its 105-year history to provide prayer support for missionaries, to support Southern Baptist mission offerings and the Cooperative Program, to tell the missions story to Southern Baptists, and to rear up a generation of young people to serve as missionaries.

None of that has changed, O'Brien stresses again and again. "It has been said that we perhaps have become a part-time organization, a part-time support system for you. And we want to say clearly that is not true. We will be for you all we have ever been in the past. We want you to know that regardless of the situation here, you can trust us, you can count on us."

O'Brien asks missionaries to understand that WMU is seeking to respond to a new day in missions.

There is and always has been a great deal of diversity in the Southern Baptist Convention, she notes. But it is playing itself out in a different and unique way as various coalitions and fellowships join together, "meshed around some common concern or sense of alienation," she says.

"And if we listen to predictions for the future, we also have to recognize that there is a possibility and even probability of further splintering, not only in our own denomination but in others as well."

O'Brien claims Southern Baptists are seeing a return to the societal method of missions, in which churches and organizations compete for missions support.

There already are churches within the Southern Baptist Convention that send out their own missionaries, she says. In addition, the Fellowship has formed a missions-sending agency, and ethnic groups are suggesting that they may send their own missionaries.

"We're seeing that all of this fragmentation is pulling us apart as a denomination," O'Brien says. "WMU would like to be, for our denomination, an umbrella that would pull us all back together again in the missions cause and the missions effort, that we could be that force that brings us together for the sake of the sharing of the gospel around the world."

"This does not change our commitment to you. We will continue to be what we've always been, a support system for the Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board. In fact, we've really even recommitted ourselves to that task. We will continue to be that for you regardless of what happens to us. This is the kind of loyalty that money cannot buy."

As an umbrella group, however, WMU has to be willing to provide materials and prayer support for groups that decide they must do missions in a different way, O'Brien explains.

"In this day when two-thirds of the world does not know Jesus as Lord and Savior we cannot do anything except go and tell," she insists. "We must not wait on the resolution of the controversy within our convention to follow his mandate. We need every Southern Baptist to be faithful in going and giving and in doing missions for the cause of world evangelization."

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Richmond paper declines to assign
different reporter to cover FMB

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- The executive editor of the Richmond (Va.) Times-Dispatch has rejected a request from trustees of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to assign a new reporter to cover the board's meetings.

Instead, Alf Goodykoontz described as "accurate" and "fair" a story by Times-Dispatch religion editor Ed Briggs, whose account of the FMB's February meeting was disputed by trustees.

Last month, Briggs characterized a Feb. 8 dialogue between FMB trustees and leaders of Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union as "angry" and stated WMU had been "summoned" rather than invited to the meeting.

Trustees took issue with that account of the dialogue, which was convened to discuss WMU's recent decision to provide non-financial support for mission-sending groups other than the Southern Baptist Foreign and Home Mission boards.

Board members subsequently instructed their communications office to send a videotape of the dialogue to Times-Dispatch editors and asked the paper to send "a responsible reporter to accurately report" trustee meetings.

However, Goodykoontz wrote in a March 2 letter to Alan Compton, the FMB's vice president for communications, that after viewing the videotape, deputy managing editor Louise Seals "concluded that Ed Briggs' report of that meeting as published in the Times-Dispatch was accurate and fair."

"A viewer relying solely on the videotape -- rather than being on the scene as Ed Briggs was, to hear comments made off camera and outside the meeting hall and to interview trustees -- might question the use of the word 'angry.' But the WMU leaders faced clearly hostile questions and comments, no matter how politely they were sometimes phrased," Goodykoontz said in the letter obtained by Associated Baptist Press. "The WMU leaders were on the defensive from the beginning"

He concluded: "We don't often have the opportunity you provided to compare our coverage with a videotape of the whole event. Having done so, we see no reason to assign a different reporter to cover the Foreign

Mission Board."

Don Kammerdiener, FMB interim president, said some trustees remain displeased with reporting by Briggs, who has covered the FMB since 1971.

"There is an ongoing feeling among the trustees that the reporter from the Richmond Times-Dispatch does not capture what the trustees perceive to be the heart of what is going on here," Kammerdiener said.

"There is a feeling that he focuses on minutia and often on individual comments which do not reflect the thinking of the full board but which are reported in such a way as to give the impression that it is the thinking of the full board. The Richmond Times-Dispatch is free to send the reporter they want, of course. But that is what the trustees were trying to say. The Richmond Times-Dispatch obviously does not agree."

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-- By Robert Dilday

Abortion pill poses threat
to health, doctor tells CLC

By Ray Waddle

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The RU-486 abortion pill is a "human pesticide" that poses more danger to women than an actual abortion procedure and should not be introduced in the United States, an anti-abortion physician said yesterday.

As it is administered in Europe now, the abortion pill requires more visits to a physician than a regular abortion, is more expensive, and can cause massive bleeding, says J. C. Willke, a leading "pro-life" spokesman.

"RU-486 is used for the extermination of an entire class of living human beings, in this case the unborn," Willke, who heads the Life Issues Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, told about 500 people at a national bioethics conference March 2.

The conference was sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Developed by a French company, the pill is currently administered in clinics in only three nations -- France, Sweden, Britain. But RU-486 supporters in the United States, including President Clinton, believe it should be tested and marketed here.

Many supporters believe RU-486 has already proved its safety record among women in Europe. They see the pill as a less traumatic solution in the "abortion war" because it avoids the need for a surgical abortion.

But Willke, who has made visits to France and Germany to talk to RU-486 producers and observe its administration, outlined some of RU-486's reported procedures and bad side effects.

"It is important to emphasize that there is only one scientifically proven function for this pill. That is to kill a developing baby after his or her heart has begun to beat," Willke said.

RU-486 is usually taken during the second or third week after a woman misses her period, he said.

Used alone, the pill has a 60 percent-to-80 percent effectiveness rate, but that rate is boosted to 95 percent when it is followed by another drug, the hormone prostaglandin, which produces violent contractions of the

uterus, he said.

Those women who don't abort after taking the two drugs then have to have a surgical abortion.

In France, women who smoke or have problems with asthma, high blood pressure, poor circulation, glaucoma, anemia, ulcers or bowel inflammation are not allowed to take RU-486, Willke said.

The RU-486 procedure normally takes four visits to the clinic, more if there are complications.

Willke said side effects include sometimes prolonged bleeding, pain and nausea, or, on rare occasion, heart attacks.

French records say one woman in 80,000 has died of a heart attack after taking RU-486 and the prostaglandin.

Opponents of RU-486 also worry that it could cause defects in babies who survive the drug, though evidence is inconclusive.

Federal officials are working to open the door for possible marketing here, but even some "pro-choice" advocates oppose the abortion pill in America, Willke said.

He offered this scenario:

"They tell us that if the drug is licensed, many of the clinics that do surgical abortions will be closed. Then the pill will be used for a while, but soon it will become evident that the pill is very dangerous to women. ...

"In due time, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will take the drug off the market and forbid its use. At such time they (pro-choice advocates) fear that they would be able to prevent the reopening of the surgical abortion clinics and there would be no way for many women in the U.S. to get abortions."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: A wrap-up of the Christian Life Commission seminar will be sent to CompuServe users as soon as possible but at least by Friday, March 5.

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Women in Ministry
celebrate 10 years

By Relma Hargus

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist Women in Ministry began a three-site celebration of their 10th anniversary at the recent convocation of the Alliance of Baptists, highlighted by a sermon from an American Baptist woman.

Carolyn Hale, Women in Ministry president, said beginning the celebration with the Alliance meeting was significant since that organization was largely responsible for the survival of Women in Ministry.

"The financial undergirding, prayerful support, words of encouragement and deeds of action of Alliance people have been used by God in keeping the door open for Baptist women who are seeking to be faithful to God's call

upon their lives," Hale said.

Using texts from Habakkuk 2 and II Corinthians 3-4, Margaret Ann Cowden urged the Alliance congregation to use the occasion "to celebrate those women who have made plain the vision." Such a celebration, she said, will help women ministers "not lose heart" as they pursue full status for ordained women clergy among Baptists.

"Keepers of the vision frequently go unthanked for what is a most critical role among people of faith," said Cowden, associate executive director of the Missionaries and Ministers Benefit Board of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

She urged participants to acknowledge the women ministers who have been role models and mentors despite being denied ordination themselves, who have refused to fall "prey to an image of power and authority that places little value on bringing other women along."

"One of the myths of church structures is that there is a limited amount of power available within the system, and one must carefully guard the power and influence to which one has access."

Rather, she said, valuing sacrifice and service above privilege and power is the model Christians are called to follow.

She cautioned women to use power responsibly and avoid the temptation to betray their call by forgetting "what it means to be marginalized." That can happen, she said, when women compete "with people of color for resources or positions of influence" or remain "silent about injustice in order to retain a position of favor."

"We are not called to a ministry of maintenance, but rather a radical reordering of power and privilege," Cowden said. "And the integrity of our soul is at stake if we lose sight of that."

Women in Ministry will also celebrate their anniversary in May at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship meeting in Birmingham, Ala., and in June prior to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Houston.

The Birmingham meeting will include a May 12 party and a worship service and luncheon the next day to acknowledge the women who gave birth to the organization, Hale said.

The pre-SBC meeting will be a worship service in the chapel at the Methodist Hospital, she said, followed by a brunch.

"If there is anything that we know, it is that the God who has led us to this time and place is the God who is leading us still," Hale said. "We move through an open door that no one can shut. Our job is to work out of our little power, to be found faithful to the Word, never denying the name of Jesus."

-- Relma Hargus is religion writer for the Baton Rouge (La.) Advocate.

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