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Albert Mohler on 'Time' list of 50 up-and-coming leaders

NEW YORK (ABP) – Southern Baptist seminary president Albert Mohler is included in a "Time" magazine listing of 50 of "America's most promising leaders" age 40 and under.

Mohler, 35, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., joins the likes of 39-year-old Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft Corp., and 34-year-old John F. Kennedy Jr., in the roll-call of 50 young men and women "who we think will make a difference," wrote David Van Biema in a special report for the Dec. 5 issue of "Time."

"If clarity of purpose is a requisite for leadership, then Al Mohler has what it takes," the excerpt on Mohler begins. It describes how Mohler, "barely into his second year as president of the prestigious (seminary) ... forced the resignation of the seminary's first-ever female theology professor on the ground that her perceived liberal teachings were outside the boundaries of the institution's 136-year-old Abstract of Principles."

"In doing so, Mohler forcefully asserted his traditional values on the school and by inference on the entire 15 million-member Southern Baptist Convention," it continues.

The article also notes Mohler's launching of the seminary's Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth and raising \$7 million.

"Mohler's conservatism is manifest, from his insistence on the authority of the Bible to the dark blue suits that dominate his wardrobe," the magazine says. It quotes Mohler as saying: "My first mission is to call the church back to the truth of the gospel. Only then will the church be a powerful force for the transformation of society."

The listing, screened from "hundreds of candidates," ranked young leaders based on a standard of "civic and social impact," allowing inclusion of not only political comers, but also academics and business visionaries, Van Biema wrote. Athletes and entertainers were not included, he added, unless "their genius extended to activism, evangelism or entrepreneurship."

Others making the list include Ralph Reed, 33, executive director of the Christian Coalition; Evan Bayh, 38, governor of Indiana; Stephen Carter, 40, Yale University law professor and author of an acclaimed recent book, "The

Culture of Disbelief," and talk-show host Oprah Winfrey, 40.

The listing is the magazine's third. The first pack of "young leaders," in 1974, included now-senators Ted Kennedy, then 42, and Sam Nunn, 35; broadcast journalists Barbara Walters, 43, and Dan Rather, 42; and 1992 presidential candidate Ross Perot, who at age 44 was featured as founder of Electronic Data Systems.

A second listing, in 1979, included a 32-year-old Bill Clinton, then the governor of Arkansas, about whom "Time" wrote, "Limited by law to two terms, Clinton is expected to run for Congress."

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-- By Bob Allen

Distrust, fear hinder cause of moderates, Graves says

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) – Distrust and fear are hindering the creativity of moderate Baptists, says one of their key leaders.

"We are so fearful of creating old structures that we are refusing to create any structures," said Tom Graves, president of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond (Va.). "We are so fearful of doing it the old way that we are refusing to do it at all."

After losing control of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979, moderate Baptists struggled unsuccessfully for a dozen years to recapture the denomination and its institutions. More recently, however, they have focused on creating new institutions and alternative ministries apart from or alongside the 15 million-member SBC.

One example is the three-year-old seminary Graves serves as president, which was founded by the progressive Alliance of Baptists and now is funded in part by the moderate Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

However, through distrust of bureaucracy and of each other, Baptists have sabotaged other opportunities to respond creatively to shifts in the denomination, Graves told the Virginia chapter of the Alliance of Baptists Nov. 14.

"So the CBF is skeptical of the radical Alliance. The Alliance ridicules the 'old boy' network of the CBF. We are cynical of the work of bureaucrats at the state level. And we all question what Texas Baptists are up to."

What is needed, Graves said, is a good "forgettory."

"We must look to the future without focusing on our fears from the past," he said.

Baptists must rebuild trust, rethink denominations and focus on the centrality of Christ in order to act creatively in a changing denominational environment, Graves told the Alliance gathering.

That environment will be one less influenced by denominational structures, he said.

"The day of the predominance of central planning and national bureaucracy is over," he said. "There are still tasks that transcend the work of local congregations, such as theological education, missions and publications. But we do not need denominations for the sake of denominations."

"You do not go to the hardware store to buy a drill because you need a drill; you buy a drill because you need a hole," he explained.

Graves said denominational leaders are fearful of doing things in new ways because altering the central plan might open "Pandora's Box." Instead, he said, "an image for the denomination of tomorrow is not Pandora's Box but a simple tool box. We need a denomination that makes available to congregations a variety of tools for a variety of tasks."

New structures are also needed to address a new era of spirituality, he continued. Americans are becoming more spiritual and embracing faith despite a decline in involvement in mainline denominations.

Key to these tasks is a focus on our center, said Graves. "As Baptists who have been caught up in denominational battles and who are standing for certain causes in defense of our faith tradition, let us not confuse peripheral issues for the central issue."

Graves told of a friend's teenage son who, after making a confession of faith, said to his father, "It was a very

hard decision to make, because I grew up knowing a great deal about the proper causes of our day, but no one ever talked to me about Jesus."

"We stand so thoroughly for our causes, and they are just," Graves said. "But we can be so busy affirming this or that cause that we lose sight of what we are all about. Before all else, let us commit ourselves to the central focus of faith, Jesus Christ."

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-- By Beth McMahon

Pastor, church, facing contempt charge for failing to turn over giving records

By Bob Allen

SANFORD, Fla. (ABP) -- A hearing is scheduled Dec. 7 to determine if a Florida minister and Southern Baptist Convention leader is in contempt of court for resisting an order to allow inspection of his church's giving records.

If found in contempt of court, pastor Bob Parker of Lake Mary could be jailed and he and the church, First Baptist Church of Markham Woods, could be assessed daily fines until they turn over records ordered opened to a former church clerk who accuses Parker of abusing his ministerial position for personal gain.

Parker, a member of the powerful SBC Executive Committee, has been pastor of the congregation since 1983.

The former clerk and charter member of the church, Ann Haynes, alleges Parker used the congregation's non-profit status to avoid paying taxes on his \$285,000 home and kept jewelry or other personal items, left to the church as part of a \$416,000 bequest, for his own use.

Haynes won the right to inspect church records in a lawsuit filed last year in the Circuit Court in Seminole County. After a Jan. 18 ruling, Haynes was permitted to inspect some, but not all, church records.

Haynes went back to court, asking for specific information including access to all donor records of contributions to the church. Circuit Judge O.H. Eaton Jr. granted her request in an order dated Nov. 2, giving the defendants until Nov. 18 to turn over giving records, checks and invoices related to the building and purchase of Parker's house and any records of jewelry or other personal items received from estates of deceased donors to the church. Haynes also won access to any correspondence that would determine if Parker improperly usurped control of the 14-year-old congregation.

Eaton's order said giving records must be opened only to Haynes' agent, accountant John King of DeBary, who must maintain their confidentiality.

The church's attorney, Thomas Ranew of Ocala, says most of the requested information either has already been turned over or doesn't exist. But he protested the order to open records of individual contributions, arguing they are constitutionally protected.

Ranew filed for a rehearing on the order to open the records Nov. 14 but did not schedule a hearing date with the judge. After the Nov. 18 deadline, Haynes' attorney, Tim Askew of Sanford, filed a motion alleging "an improper use of delaying tactics" in response to court orders by the defendants, which he said "constitutes willful contempt" of court.

A hearing on Askew's contempt motion is scheduled Dec. 7.

Ranew did not return a reporter's phone call.

In litigation now spanning 15 months, Parker and the church twice have been threatened with contempt. In May, they dropped an appeal rather than face a contempt hearing.

Haynes originally sued to see church records after she was denied access to them and told she had been voted out of the church by its deacons last August. After a trial last December, Judge Newman Brock ruled the dismissal

violated the church's constitution. He ordered Haynes reinstated, giving her the right to view church records, and ordered the defendants to pay court costs.

Since the trial, legal costs have continued to mount through an abortive appeal and the recent request for a rehearing. To date the church has paid about \$22,000 for Haynes' legal expenses and was assessed another \$4,000 in court costs in an order by Judge Eaton dated Oct. 21.

At the recent annual meeting of the Florida Baptist Convention, Parker was denied a second three-year term as a trustee of the Florida Baptist Witness, the state Baptist newspaper. The committee that removed his name from a list of trustee nominees said Parker was bumped because his church is not affiliated with a local association and its level of denominational support is below minimum standards set for convention leadership.

Parker, a fundamental-conservative leader in the SBC, was a leading critic of Jack Brymer, who resigned after 10 years as editor of the Witness in August citing "continued harassment" by members of the Witness' governing board.

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Bible paraphrase for golfers gets sub-par reviews

By Mark Wingfield

FRANKFORT, Ky. (ABP) – Alan Medders wrote a paraphrase of the Book of Matthew for people who like to play golf, but he never dreamed anyone would get teed off over it.

But that's just what he encountered upon arrival at the Kentucky Baptist Convention bookstore Nov. 16, where he was supposed to sign copies of his new book, "The Golfer's Good News."

By the time Medders arrived Wednesday afternoon, his book had been pulled from the Baptist Book Store due to complaints from messengers who found it in poor taste, if not blasphemous.

One messenger made a motion on the floor of the convention that the bookstore be instructed to stop selling the book. President Bob Browning eventually ruled the motion out of order since the convention had no jurisdiction over the bookstore, set up by the Louisville Baptist Book Store.

But that same day, the bookstore manager voluntarily removed the remaining copies of Medders' book.

Medders, a former Kentucky pastor who holds a master of divinity degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said he was inspired by Clarence Jordan's popular "Cotton Patch" paraphrases of the Bible.

An avid golfer, Medders wanted to set the gospel message in a context non-Christian golfers would read as a first step toward deeper inquiries about the faith, he said. The paperback's color cover features a drawing of Jesus holding a golf club and walking over a golf course water trap dressed in red-and-white golf shoes.

In the book, Jesus is called The Great Golfer, the Holy Spirit is called The Special Golf Instructor, the Pharisees are called the Rules Committee, the Sadducees are called the Jewish Golfers Association and the angels are called caddies.

Medders paraphrases Matthew 1:18 this way: "Now the birth of The Great Golfer was as follows: After his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, before they were married or played a single round of golf together, she became pregnant by the Special Golf Instructor of God."

And the Lord's Prayer recorded in Matthew 6 is paraphrased this way: "Our Father in the clubhouse on the golf course in heaven, holy is your name. Your golf course will come. Your swing will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily pars and forgive us our bogeys as we forgive those who distract us and cause us to bogey. And do not lead us to hit a slice, but deliver us from the hook. For yours is the golf course and the power swing and glory forever. Amen."

Duane Holland of Gilbertsville, Ky., made the motion that KBC messengers remove the book from the convention bookstore. Although Browning ruled the motion out of order, he allowed Holland a point of personal privilege to explain his concern.

Holland read messengers a few excerpts from the book and said, "I'm all for fun and humor and satire, but when you satirize the Scripture, you've gone too far."

His comments received a round of applause from many messengers.

Later that afternoon, during the time he was supposed to have been signing books, Medders fielded questions from reporters.

He said he was surprised by all the controversy he had caused but had no hard feelings. The bookstore manager, he said, was very gracious.

This was his third scheduled appearance at a state Baptist convention this fall, he said. Book signings in Missouri and North Carolina went well, he noted.

Medders said his book was intended to be a "serious, funny book" that would appeal to Christian and non-Christian golfers and prompt them to read more in the real Bible. "I'm not making fun of the Bible or of Jesus," he said.

Medders, who said he came to golf late in life and carries a handicap of 12 to 20, now lives in Birmingham, Ala., where he sells convention exhibits. During the 1993-94 school year, he was director of admissions at Southern Seminary. Previously, he was pastor of First Baptist Church of Mount Sterling, Ky., and Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Mount Eden, Ky.

Medders said last January's big snowstorm in Kentucky gave him his break on the book, which he had thought of a month earlier. Stranded inside his Louisville home for a week, he began writing the volume, which he completed before the spring thaw.

Medders said he plans to paraphrase Genesis, John and Revelation for golfers and sees potential for developing an entire line of biblical books in the language of various sports.

Although sold in Baptist Book Stores, the book was not published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. The publisher is a Louisville company, Butler Book Publishers.

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Humility, tolerance play a part in governing, Danforth says

By Tim Palmer

WASHINGTON (ABP) — John Danforth is more than a U.S. senator. He is a Christian — in fact, an Episcopal priest. He is a husband, a father and most recently an author. What John Danforth is not, in his mind, is a pipeline for carrying out God's purposes in the federal government.

Danforth, who retires in December, points to Isaiah 55:8 — "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" — as evidence that what goes on in Washington may not be the pressing business to God.

"I don't purport to be a conduit for God's will," the senator said as he relaxed in his photo-lined office on the second floor of the Russell Senate Office Building. "I would recognize that whatever I do is sort of groping around."

Danforth, known as "Jack" to his friends, retires at the end of the year after serving three six-year terms as senator. He represents 5 million Missourians, including people who do not believe in anything, he pointed out. His job is to represent them all. "If I didn't, I wouldn't get elected. And I shouldn't get elected."

"You cannot be a sectarian officeholder, there to do the bidding of particular denominations or groups," he said. "It's very important for people who are in government and in faith groups to wear their tolerance on their sleeve."

"In a country as diverse as ours, it would be pretty dangerous if people in public life believed they were the instrument of God — his voice in public-policy matters," Danforth said.

Danforth's religious convictions and personal integrity are well known in Washington. A strong supporter of religious-liberty principles and civil-rights legislation, he is regarded by his peers as a politician who acts out of conscience rather than political ambition.

Danforth became known as a vocal supporter of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas during Thomas' confirmation hearings. He prayed with Thomas during the hearings and recently published a book about the episode, "Resurrection: The Confirmation of Clarence Thomas."

As he leaves office, Danforth said he is concerned about the cynicism and distrust he sees in America today. He described the public's mood as "total outrage and anger" toward government, which many define as the enemy.

Many people believe, "If it weren't for these evil people in high places, everything would be fine," he said. This attitude – that most public officials are corrupt and interested only in feathering their nests – allows people to "slough off responsibility" for working on the nation's problems.

He called the rampant cynicism "the great gift of talk radio to America."

That medium's message about government – "There may be a few good people, but they're mostly bad people trying to do us in." – helped give rise to former presidential candidate Ross Perot, Danforth observed. "I think it's a bad thing."

He would like to see a difference in the way people communicate with one another. "I think that we have to try to restore civility to American life," he said. Television commercials and sound bites have cheapened public discourse.

Christians have a role to play in the political process, Danforth said, even if it's a role of dissent.

"I think it's something that's very much in the tradition of Judaism and Christianity for religious people to be involved in political matters, going all the way back to Joseph and Pharaoh," he said, "certainly extending through the prophets of Israel, who commented relentlessly on the political matters of their day."

Though there are people who absent themselves from the world, Danforth noted, most people feel a religious obligation to participate in all of life.

The senator said the difficulty comes in trying to translate how one's faith applies to one's views on different government policies. Some people feel a position on an issue is clearly required by their religion or by God. "Myself, I'm more aware of the gulf between where God is and where I am."

Even those who dissent need to recognize, as Martin Luther King Jr. argued, that society is built on laws, Danforth said. Government and religion share a commitment to hold things together. "Keeping things glued together, in fact, is the root meaning of religion," Danforth said. "And it certainly is the role of government to do that."

The senator is a firm believer in the American system's checks and balances. "The genius of this country is we have done a good job of keeping people together."

He remarked that religious groups are discharging their responsibility to the world around them when they involve themselves in issues. "Then the question is: How certain are you that your political views are God's views?"

The Old Testament prophets were quite certain, he noted, but most people today are not. "I'm not convinced we've got that prophetic voice."

Although a man of prayer, Danforth has not made it a practice to pray before he votes in the Senate. "I don't confuse in my mind any specific vote in the Senate with God's will," Danforth said. "I'm sure that there is a wideness to God's mercy."

Danforth said he has been influenced since his college days by American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, whose theme was humility, especially with respect to political involvement.

Despite his concerns about the epidemic of cynicism, Danforth said he is optimistic about America's future.

"I'm optimistic because I'm by nature an optimist," he said. "We have a great country, a wonderful Constitution."

Jeffrey Dahmer found religion behind bars

PORTAGE, Wis. (ABP) – Jeffrey Dahmer found religion behind bars before his murder Nov. 29, according

to the minister who baptized him in May, Associated Press reported.

Dahmer, 34, was killed by a fellow prisoner while cleaning a bathroom at the Columbia Correctional Institution in Portage, Wis. He was serving 15 life terms for killing, dismembering and sometimes cannibalizing boys and men in Wisconsin.

Dahmer was convicted of 15 murders. A 16th murder charge was dropped. He pleaded guilty to a 17th killing in Ohio.

Minister Roy Ratcliff, who baptized Dahmer in a prison infirmary whirlpool and visited him weekly since, said Dahmer did not talk much about what prompted him to commit his grisly crimes. "Mostly he talked about how deeply guilty and remorseful he was," Ratcliff said.

Ratcliff said he felt as though he has lost a friend but that he had helped accomplish what Dahmer wanted -- preparing to meet his maker.

"I really feel that he's now in the hands of the most loving and compassionate and kind person he'll ever know," Ratcliff said. "There's a certain solace in that."

END