



**-- BAPTIST PRESS**  
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE  
SBC Executive Committee  
901 Commerce #75  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203  
(615) 244-2355  
Herb Hollinger, Vice President  
Fax (615) 742-8911  
CompuServe ID# 70420.1

**BUREAUS**

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522  
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5232  
NASHVILLE Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300  
RICHMOND Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151  
WASHINGTON Tom Strode, Chief, 400 North Capitol St., #594, Washington, D.C. 20001, Telephone (202) 638-3223

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Baptist bookstores suspend sale  
of Mike Warnke's 'Satan Seller'

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press  
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NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's bookstore chain has suspended sales of "The Satan Seller" by popular youth speaker and comedian Mike Warnke.

The action by Baptist Book Stores was announced after questions erupted this summer concerning the truthfulness of Warnke's testimony and the financial ethics of his Burgin, Ky.,-based ministry.

A Chicago-based evangelical magazine, Cornerstone, carried a 12-page investigative report in its July-August issue uncovering, it said, "serious doubts" about Warnke's account of converting from satanism to Christ, first published in 1973 in "The Satan Seller." Warnke, 47, responded with a 12-page reaffirmation of his testimony.

The Lexington, Ky., Herald-Leader then reported the IRS last fall revoked the tax-exempt status of Warnke Ministries, which the organization is appealing. The newspaper also raised questions about the ministry's finances, including luxury perks and high salaries, listing Warnke's at \$303,000 last year.

Word, Inc., soon announced it was suspending sales of Warnke's 13 recordings and two videos.

Charles Wilson, Sunday School Board vice president for trade and retail markets, told Baptist Press Sept. 1, "In light of the suspension of Mike Warnke's products by mutual agreement with Word, Inc., Baptist Book Stores will discontinue sale of those products pending the resolution of questions surrounding his ministry."

The BSSB action includes Warnke's widely known book, "The Satan Seller," currently published by Bridge Publishing, Inc., in South Plainfield, N.J. The book is listed in the current Baptist Book Stores catalog and has been among items available at all 63 Baptist Book Stores across the country.

Additionally, "three or four" Southern Baptist churches have canceled, for now, Warnke's speaking engagements, according to a source close to the ministry who asked not to be identified. Warnke has spoken in numerous Southern Baptist churches over the years. Last fall, for example, he was featured in a city-wide youth rally at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala.

Cornerstone writers Jon Trott and Mike Hertenstein said their article was based on interviews with an estimated 100 people including "Mike's closest friends, relatives, and daily associates -- people who ... knew the real Mike Warnke, who was not a drug fiend or a recruiter for Satanism. But he was a storyteller."

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Trott and Hertenstein stated, "We have uncovered significant evidence contradicting his alleged satanic activity. His testimony contains major conflicts from book to book and tape to book ... and it doesn't square with known external times and events. Further, we have documentation and eyewitness testimony that contradict the claims he has made about himself."

The magazine further claimed that even after Warnke became a noted Christian speaker and author, he continued to be involved with drinking and sexual immorality.

"Mike has sinned against the public for years," Trott and Hertenstein wrote, "and the public is entitled to know the truth about his claims and actions."

Warnke subsequently issued his 12-page rebuttal, along with supportive letters from his "Satan Seller" co-author and several Christian publishing, recording and film executives.

Warnke stated, "I stand by my testimony of being delivered and set free by the power of Jesus Christ after being a satanic high priest exactly as published in my book, 'The Satan Seller.'

"While I am the first to acknowledge my failures and shortcomings, I can also say with absolute conviction that I have never willfully lied to or deceived anybody ... and that my ministry is operated totally open and honest before God." In his statement, however, Warnke did not mention last fall's IRS revocation of his ministry's tax-exempt status.

"For the mistakes of the past, I have repented," Warnke wrote. "For the mistakes of the future, I look to the grace of God and the lessons I have learned ... I intend to go on serving God with all my heart and strength and soul."

Warnke acknowledged some of the information in "The Satan Seller" "was purposefully changed to protect the privacy of certain individuals and to prevent readers from using the book as a guide for occultic and satanic purposes."

He said Cornerstone did not interview "the one person -- my ex-wife Sue Warnke -- who could have confirmed my life story. Sue lived and experienced about 60 percent of the account included in ... 'The Satan Seller ... .'"

Warnke, now married for a fourth time, said his ex-wife Sue was contacted by Cornerstone a year and a half ago and said the book was true but otherwise had no comment. "Since Sue apparently did not provide the answers they wanted to hear, the magazine looked elsewhere for its 'facts.'" Warnke wrote.

David Balsinger, Warnke's "Satan Seller" co-author, wrote in a letter of support that "I met probably a half dozen people who had knowledge of Warnke's satanic activities."

Warnke, in his rebuttal, added Cornerstone "did not contact me until a few days before the publication deadline" for a response. He said he was in the midst of a tightly scheduled concert tour, and he and the magazine could not agree on how, when or where an interview could be conducted.

"They wanted no one but their representatives present at the interview," Warnke said, and the magazine insisted on an immediate interview rather than a date he was suggesting three weeks later.

"Apparently this was not acceptable to Cornerstone, since the magazine went to press with its 'expose' without further attempts to interview me or verify any portion of its story with the ministry."

New Southern dean hopes  
school can help unify SBC

By Pat Cole

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The new dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's school of theology wants the seminary to be a catalyst for denominational unity.

"We need to begin to move out of an era of frustration into a time of positive transition ... so as to be agents of unity for future generations in the Southern Baptist Convention," said David S. Dockery, who was installed Sept. 1 as dean during convocation services opening the fall semester at the Louisville, Ky., seminary.

The Alabama native was chosen following a national search for a conservative evangelical scholar to fill the position vacated by Larry McSwain who was promoted to provost in 1991.

Dockery's installation marks a major milestone in Southern's more conservative course charted last year in the school's "Covenant Renewal," a document approved in an effort to help relieve mounting tensions between faculty and conservative trustees. Trustees and faculty agreed in the covenant to steer the school in a more conservative direction by filling future faculty vacancies with theological conservatives.

"We must develop a framework for faculty, administration and trustees to live out our mutual commitments to the covenant," Dockery said in an interview. "We need to build alumni support and broaden our appeal in both our denominational and broader evangelical contexts."

For the past two years, Dockery, who holds the faculty rank of associate professor of New Testament, has been general editor of the New American Commentary for Broadman Press, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board. Previously, he taught two years at Southern Seminary and six years at Criswell College in Dallas.

He earned the Ph.D. degree from the University of Texas at Arlington and holds other degrees from Texas Christian University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, both in Fort Worth; Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Ind.; and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Dockery said he would like to build an evangelically oriented school that embodies academic respectability and cultural relevancy.

"My goals include providing the best Baptist/evangelical scholarship possible, maintaining the highest academic standards for the school of theology and educating ministers who can bridge the gap between our changing American and global context," he said. "We also need to engage the public square with the truth claims of Christianity."

Search processes for new professors in the school of theology should focus on individuals who have a "deep spiritual commitment" as well as academic qualifications, he said. "We want faculty members who have outstanding academic credentials, who are publishing, who are able teachers and capable communicators."

New faculty members must affirm "the complete inspiration and truthfulness of Scripture," the seminary's confessional statement and the covenant, Dockery said. "We want people who understand Southern's rich heritage, who are dedicated to the church and world evangelization through their respective disciplines."

Dockery believes Southern "has been and continues to be one of the finest institutions in the United States for theological education."

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Ministerial students can profit by studying in the midst of the heritage of Southern Baptists' oldest institutions, he said. "The seminary has one of the finest faculties and we will continue to build that faculty. We want to offer students theological education that is academically sound, ministry-focused and student-centered. Similarly, we want to emphasize spiritual nurture, ministry formation and community building."

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(BP) photo available upon request from Southern Seminary.

Theological educators must share  
blame for unchurched young adults

By Pat Cole

Baptist Press  
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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Theological educators must bear some of the blame for the church's failure to appeal to a generation of young adults, the head of the nation's primary accrediting agency for theological schools told a Southern Baptist seminary chapel audience.

In a Sept. 1 convocation address opening the fall semester at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., James L. Waits, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, said a recent Presbyterian study has shown that "an entire generation between the ages of 33 to 42 'left the church in the 1970s and are not coming back.'"

The study, he said, is probably the first of several that will "paint a bleak picture" of this age group's commitment to church life.

"We have not made the case with this generation for participation in organized religion, and we in the seminaries must bear some of the responsibility for the ill-focused quality and unconvincing appeal of much of the church's pastoral leadership," said Waits, a United Methodist minister and former dean at Emory University's Candler School of Theology in Atlanta.

Graduates of theological schools have complained their training did not prepare them for the practical aspects of ministry, Waits noted. "We have tended to dismiss their remarks on the grounds that such comments lacked academic respectability. Perhaps what our graduates have been (saying) is for us to better equip them for making the case to a generation that seems yet to want to believe, but sees organized religion as an unimaginative conveyance of the deeper truth and meaning for which they yearn."

In response, some schools have begun to reassess their mission, he said.

"But I doubt if any faculty or institution has yet probed deeply enough the shape of the new culture, the values and habits of this current generation and the requirements of leadership to relevantly address the changes that now confront us.

"For the most part, theological education and the church have been timid in their engagement of the culture and slow to envision new strategies for coping with its needs," Waits said.

In an era when political leaders are proclaiming a "new world order," the church and theological schools should help shape "a culture which embodies the instinct for humaneness, compassion and love that is the heart of the gospel," he said.

The new era demands that theological institutions broaden their global perspectives, give attention to gender inclusivity, renew their connections with church life and provide relevant theological voices for the religious community, Waits said.

"We need theologies that reach into the most profound contemporary human concerns," he said, "and are founded in the ultimacy of God's character as well as witnessed to in Scripture."

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During the convocation, the seminary installed David S. Dockery as the eighth dean of its school of theology.

Dockery, who has been a New Testament professor at Southern Seminary and at Criswell College in Dallas, came to the deanship from the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, where he was general editor at Broadman Press, the board's book publishing arm.

Dockery and two new professors, James Chancellor, W.O. Carver associate professor of missions and world religions, and Jack R. Cunningham, J.M. Frost associate professor of Christian education, signed the original copy of the Abstract of Principles, the seminary's statement of faith. The document has been signed by every tenured professor at the seminary since the school's founding in 1859.

The seminary also presented its highest honor, the E.Y. Mullins Denominational Service Award, to former Southern Baptist missionary Ralph Bethea and posthumously to his wife, Linda Sharp Bethea.

Linda Bethea was killed in 1991 during an attack on the couple by robbers on a Kenyan highway while the Betheas were serving as Southern Baptist missionaries to the African nation. Ralph Bethea earned the master of divinity and Ph.D. degrees from Southern in 1973 and 1979, respectively.

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Trennis Henderson elected  
editor of Arkansas paper

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LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (BP)--Trustees of the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine selected 11-year Baptist journalist Trennis Henderson as the newspaper's editor in a unanimous vote Sept. 1.

Henderson, 33, managing editor of Missouri Baptists' Word & Way newsjournal, will succeed the late J. Everett Sneed who died June 26 after 20 years as the Arkansas paper's editor.

Greg Kirksey, trustee chairman and pastor of First Baptist Church of Benton, Ark., said the first factor in the selection process of a new editor called for a Southern Baptist journalist who would be fair.

Henderson, who will assume his new post Oct. 20, said, "I am committed to providing objective, balanced news coverage which contributes to the growth, encouragement and unity of Arkansas Baptists as we seek to faithfully serve the Lord together."

Henderson voiced gratitude for the trustees' unanimous vote, saying it "culminated a positive process which reflects the Lord's timing and leadership."

"I look forward to the enriching ministry and challenges which lie ahead," he said.

Henderson has been Word & Way managing editor since 1985. He joined the paper's staff as associate managing editor in 1982.

He has won various awards in journalism, newspaper design and photography from the Baptist Public Relations Association, Associated Church Press and Evangelical Press Association.

A native of Portageville, Mo., Henderson graduated cum laude with a bachelor of arts degree from the School of the Ozarks, Point Lookout, Mo., in 1979, majoring in mass media and minoring in graphic arts and, as a student, sensing a call to full-time Christian work. He then enrolled at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., where he earned a master of religious education degree in 1983 with an emphasis in Christian journalism.

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Henderson worked as co-editor, then editor of Southern Seminary's campus newspaper, "The Towers," 1981-82; staff writer for Kentucky Baptists' Western Recorder, 1981, and as an advertising representative for the newsjournal, 1980; and sports and general feature editor of The Covington (Tenn.) Leader, 1979-80, and a writer at the weekly paper, 1978.

Henderson and his wife, Pamela, have two daughters, Emily, 6, and Audrey, 3.

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(BP) photo available upon request from Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine.

Registration opens for second  
Baptist senior adult convention

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NASHVILLE (BP)--Senior adults from across the nation began registering Sept. 1 for the second senior adult convention scheduled in Atlanta April 26-28, 1993.

All sessions will be held in the new Georgia Dome, located adjacent to the Georgia World Congress Center in downtown Atlanta. The Dome opened Aug. 23 with an Atlanta Falcons NFL exhibition football game.

Khalil Johnson, manager of the Georgia Dome, said the senior adult convention, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's family ministry department, was the first convention booked in the dome.

"When the Dome was still a hole in the ground, your meeting planners had the faith and belief that our project would be completed on time and in a satisfactory manner," he said. "We are excited and honored to be hosting the senior adult convention."

In addition to internationally known television personality Art Linkletter and Myrtle Hall, a long-time soloist at Billy Graham crusades, Southern Baptists will be well represented in a senior adult choir expected to number about 5,000.

The program opens on Monday, April 26, with the theme "Senior adults making a difference through Christ." Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta, will preach. Vocalist Steve Green will present music, while congregational singing will be led by Lyndel Vaught, minister of music at First Baptist Church of San Angelo, Texas.

Tuesday's morning theme is "Senior adults making a difference in families" featuring Linkletter. That evening, the theme is "Senior adults making a difference in church." Frank Pollard, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jackson, Miss. will preach. The conference choir will premiere a musical titled "Don't Hang Up."

Theme for the closing session Wednesday morning will be "Senior adults making a difference in communities," featuring Pollard and Mildred McWhorter, home missionary from Houston. McWhorter will tell of her often life-threatening work in the inner city.

Convention preacher will be Brian Harbour, pastor of First Baptist Church of Richardson, Texas. Additional features will be senior adult choirs, senior adult testimonies and a dramatic theme interpretation.

Between sessions, registrants will browse an exhibit area which will feature hands-on ministry showcase exhibits and a Baptist Book Store. Special optional tours are planned for each day of the convention.

Registration packets have been sent to churches, but individuals and churches may request additional packets from the family ministry department, 127 9th Avenue North, Nashville, TN 37234. Deadline for hotel reservations through the housing bureau is March 26, 1993.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by BSSB bureau of Baptist Press.