

Associated Baptist Press

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RTVC trustees voice concerns about plan to merge, move agency

By Greg Warner

IRVING, Texas (ABP) -- Trustees of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission said April 11 they have "some serious concerns" about a denominational plan to merge their agency into a new multipurpose mission board.

Those concerns need to be resolved before Southern Baptists vote on the plan this summer, the trustees said in a resolution passed overwhelmingly during their spring meeting near the Dallas-Fort Worth airport.

Administrators of the Fort Worth-based agency are preparing the list of concerns, which surfaced during an emotional meeting between trustees and two members of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee the night before the vote. None of the trustees who spoke in that meeting voiced support for the restructure plan, one trustee said.

The restructure plan calls for the Radio and Television Commission to move to Atlanta and be merged with the Home Mission Board, which recently built a new facility there, and the Tennessee-based Brotherhood Commission. The new agency would be called the North American Mission Board.

That recommendation is the result of a two-year study conducted by a special seven-member panel appointed by the SBC Executive Committee. The downsizing plan is intended to save money by reducing the number of SBC agencies from 19 to 12 and focus more attention on missions. All Southern Baptist agencies have been asked to endorse the plan.

In their resolution, RTVC trustees "affirm their responsibility to implement the actions of the Southern Baptist Convention." And they commend the "time and effort" invested by the Program and Structure Study Committee, which drafted the recommendations.

But the resolution adds: "... As trustees of the Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, we have some serious concerns which are attached to this resolution and which need to be resolved prior to the Southern Baptist Convention's consideration of the Executive Committee's recommendations."

Those concerns were not attached to the resolution but will be drafted and submitted with the resolution to the Executive Committee.

Among the issues which surfaced during discussion: the cost and necessity of the move, its effect on the stability of the agency and its work, changes in the RTVC's role, the new trustee alignment, the wisdom of selling the RTVC's Fort Worth property and equipment, the quality of the Atlanta facilities, the difficulty of displacing staff families, and the impact of the move on Fort Worth.

The RTVC moved from Atlanta to Fort Worth in 1955.

The resolution, which came from the trustee executive committee, replaced a proposed statement which called for the SBC Executive Committee to exempt the RTVC from the merger plan. That motion, offered by Jerry Holbert of Springfield, Mo., never came to a vote.

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Editor, trustee chairman argue about Mohler's hiring criteria

By Greg Warner

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The controversial firing of the social-work dean at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has sparked a wider dispute over whether the seminary's president has the right to require faculty to affirm that only men can be pastors.

Southern's trustee chairman is challenging a March 28 editorial in which Marv Knox, editor of the Baptist state newspaper in Kentucky, accuses seminary president Albert Mohler of violating the school's governing documents by insisting that new faculty members share his opposition to women pastors.

"By implementing his own litmus test for faculty election, Mohler violates the basic operational integrity of the seminary," Knox wrote in the editorial, titled "Could Jesus Teach Social Work at Southern Seminary?"

But trustee chairman Rick White says Mohler is well within his rights -- and indeed is obligated -- to require that faculty adhere to certain moral standards. White, in a rebuttal to be published in the Kentucky newspaper April 18, suggests most Southern Baptists support Mohler's faculty-election criteria, which include opposition to abortion, homosexuality, women pastors and salvation outside of Jesus Christ.

"Dr. Mohler has carried out his legitimate and proper role in a long-standing process of faculty selection involving trustees, faculty and president," White wrote. "It is right and proper for him to ask prospective faculty questions on their stands on significant issues within the life of the church, such as openness to homosexuals as church leaders or the possibility of women serving as senior pastors."

The Carver School of Church Social Work has been the focus of controversy since March 20, when Mohler fired Dean Diana Garland for telling students the president's new standards for faculty selection had placed the social-work school "in serious jeopardy." The seminary campus in Louisville, Ky., has been in turmoil ever since, with daily student protests outside Mohler's office and tense meetings between the president and students.

Garland went public with her criticism of Mohler March 20 after the president nixed the election of David Sherwood to the social-work faculty. Sherwood -- in response to Mohler's inquiry about homosexuality, abortion, women in ministry and the uniqueness of the gospel -- said the Holy Spirit might call some women "to any role in the ministry of the church."

The issues of homosexuality, abortion and women are not mentioned in either the seminary's doctrinal statement -- the Abstract of Principles, which all faculty members are required to sign -- or other governing documents.

Imposing an additional standard on faculty violates due process and therefore threatens the seminary's accreditation, Knox wrote in the Western Recorder editorial.

"Accrediting agencies aren't so concerned about specific criteria for election as they are the fair implementation of the election process," Knox wrote. Similar violations of due process led accreditors to place Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, another Southern Baptist seminary, on probation in 1992, Knox noted. "... The same fate -- or worse -- could befall Southern."

But, White countered, racism isn't mentioned in the Abstract either, "but I would hope Dr. Mohler would not present a racist to the trustees for election to the faculty." White, pastor of First Baptist Church of Franklin, Tenn., said the "vast majority" of Southern Baptists want a seminary president to apply their commonly held moral convictions to seminary decisions.

White said Mohler and the trustees are committed to preserving the accreditation of the social-work school, unless "the decision comes down to compromising the seminary's doctrinal integrity in order to receive the 'stamp of approval' of a secular agency."

Both the Association of Theological Schools, which accredits the seminary, and Council on Social Work Education, which accredits the Carver School of Church Social Work, are expected to investigate the dean's firing. But neither agency has indicated what action it might take.

Until now, Knox wrote, Southern's trustees have supported Mohler. "But if, or when, accreditation is threatened, enrollment falls and contributions dry up, trustees will forget their endorsements of his ideology," the editor wrote.

White, in his rebuttal, did not comment on that suggestion. Nor did he challenge Knox's charge that Jesus, who "generally offended the honchos of status quo religion," couldn't teach church social work at Southern Seminary. "He isn't orthodox enough," Knox concluded.

But White did accuse Knox of bias. White's rebuttal originally was planned as a paid advertisement in the Western Recorder to give readers "the whole picture," he wrote. "And the only way to do that without editing or censorship is in a letter such as this."

But the ad did not run as planned in the April 11 issue of the newspaper because the seminary missed several deadlines for submitting the copy. Once Knox found out the content, he offered to run White's letter free as a guest editorial April 18. The seminary accepted.

But the dispute was not over. Knox accused Baptist Press, which reported the controversy between White and Knox in a story April 7, of defamation.

In a memo to Baptist editors April 10, Knox objected to a section of the story that links his warnings about potential accreditation problems with a quote from White's letter, in which the trustee chairman wrote: "There are those within the secular culture and even a few within our own denomination who do not want Southern Seminary to stand for biblical moral values and conservative theological positions."

"The implication," Knox said, "is that I do not want the seminary 'to stand for biblical moral values and conservative theological positions' and, more specifically, that I do not agree with Dr. Mohler's four-part criteria." Knox noted he agrees with Mohler on all four issues except women pastors.

Baptist Press chief Herb Hollinger said the story was "far from defamatory." "The seminary trustee chairman has a right to respond to criticism in the editorial and we (Baptist Press) have a right and responsibility to report it," said Hollinger, vice president of the Southern Baptist Executive Committee, which operates Baptist Press.

Carver School crisis costs seminary "major" donation

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The Carver School crisis at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has set back fund-raising efforts for the next major building project on campus.

A donor last week withdrew a "major" pledge toward the North Complex, a proposed continuing education center, said Tom Mabe, seminary vice president for advancement. He would not specify the amount of the pledge.

However, Mabe pointed out that the seminary also received a "million-dollar gift" toward the same project last week.

Seminary trustees are to hear a proposal to proceed with the building project in their April 17-19 meeting.

The gift that was withdrawn and the million-dollar gift that was received were to be last major hurdles in fund-raising for the project, Mabe said. "The major gift we just got is the one that we thought would put us over the top, but then the other one was pulled out."

He added, "We were very close to being able to put a shovel in the ground, and now we're going to have to do some more fund-raising."

The latest seminary crisis became public March 20, when seminary President Albert Mohler fired Diana Garland as dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work. Garland was fired after she told social work students Mohler had instituted hiring policies that would make it impossible to recruit qualified faculty members.

This is not the first case of controversy distracting donors since Mohler became seminary president in 1993 and began moving the school in a more conservative direction.

Within the last year, the seminary forfeited a gift "in excess of a million dollars" due to an earlier controversy, Mabe said. This gift had not actually been pledged, but negotiations had been very close to being finalized, he said.

"We can't say we lost it because we never had it," he explained.

In the last fiscal year, which ended July 31, 1994, the seminary reported a record \$7.5 million in contributions. However, nearly half that amount was given in deferred gifts that may not be realized until the donors die.

Also, more than \$2 million of that amount was designated for the seminary's new Billy Graham School of Evangelism, Missions and Church Growth.

Both the total number of donors and the total number of alumni donors have decreased in the last two years, Mabe said. However, he would not specify the extent of that decrease.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Staff cuts reported likely at Southern

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The seminary pastor's position will be eliminated this summer at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, according to Bill Cubine, the person currently in the position.

Other administrative positions are reported to be on the chopping block for economic reasons, but no specifics have been announced.

In the wake of turmoil on campus after the firing of social-work dean Diana Garland March 20, rumors have circulated that other faculty members have been fired. They are not true, according to the subjects of those rumors.

The Western Recorder, newspaper of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, has received numerous calls inquiring about the status of Carey Newman, New Testament professor, and Gerald Keown, Old Testament professor and associate dean in the theology school. Both Newman and Keown told the Recorder they have not been terminated, despite rampant rumors to the contrary.

Keown said some confusion may have arisen because he will go on sabbatic leave this summer and does not expect to maintain his role as associate dean when he returns to full-time teaching in 1996.

While no other faculty members have been let go, numerous faculty and staff sources said they anticipate a downsizing of the seminary's administrative staff before the next fiscal year begins Aug. 1. The reductions reportedly would be caused by the seminary's declining enrollment and declining income.

Enrollment in the seminary's key degree programs has been declining for several years, and that decline appears to be more pronounced since the 1991-92 academic year. For example, enrollment in the master of divinity program, the seminary's most basic degree, has declined from 913 students in 1990-91 to 796 in 1993-94, the latest year for which complete figures are available.

Enrollment figures translate into financial figures, because the seminary gets a certain amount of funding from the Southern Baptist Convention for each student enrolled. Fewer students also means decreased revenue in auxiliary enterprises such as campus housing and student fees.

Cubine said President Albert Mohler notified him Feb. 9 that the seminary pastor's position would be eliminated in the next fiscal year due to budget cuts. However, Cubine said he is negotiating a three-year contract to teach in the theology school and expects to remain at Southern.

Cubine said the president told him other staff cuts would take place. That corresponds with reports from other seminary divisions that they have been asked to suggest budget reductions for the coming year that could include staff reductions.

In the aftermath of Garland's firing, Mohler cancelled a meeting scheduled for March 22 with seminary faculty and staff in which he presumably was to have laid the groundwork for announcing staff cuts, numerous seminary sources said.

However, Michael Duduit, a seminary spokesman, said the president has scheduled no meeting to announce staff cuts. "The executive cabinet has been discussing administrative restructuring," he said. "But to date there is no formal plan, no date, no dollar-amount goal."

A budget for the 1995-96 academic year will be considered by seminary trustees during their April 17-19 meeting in Louisville.

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Look to Jesus, not Calvin, Herschel Hobbs advises

OKLAHOMA CITY (ABP) -- Baptist Calvinists who cite the views of early Southern Baptists such as James Petigru Boyce ought to listen instead to the words of Jesus, according to Herschel Hobbs.

Hobbs, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City and chairman of the committee that drafted the "Baptist Faith and Message" statement, recently issued a written rebuttal of five-point Calvinism.

"I am more interested in what Jesus said and Paul wrote than what Boyce ... wrote," said Hobbs, considered one of Southern Baptists' most influential modern theologians.

Boyce was the first president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The seminary's current president, Albert Mohler, often has cited the views of Boyce and other 19th-century Baptists as support for his own endorsement of five-point Calvinism.

Five-point Calvinism is a shorthand term used to describe a theological system developed primarily by the 16th-century theologian John Calvin. Five-point Calvinists assert that God selected certain people for salvation -- and therefore others for damnation -- before the creation of the world.

In an interview with the Western Recorder last fall, Mohler defended his Calvinistic views, saying he believed the same views were held by the Apostle Paul.

In his recent statement, Hobbs asserted that anyone who believes the Apostle Paul was a Calvinist is "putting the cart before the horse about 1,500 years."

Calvinism's teaching that certain people have been predestined to salvation and others to damnation "is contrary to the very nature of God," Hobbs said. "Those who follow Calvin say that only the elect believe in Jesus as Savior. As I understand it, the opposite is true. Believers are the elect."

Hobbs said he agrees with a statement by Southern Baptist theologian Frank Stagg that election is not a "rigged television show."

God's salvation through Jesus Christ is available to "anyone, anywhere, any time," Hobbs said, citing Jesus' words in John 3:16 that "whosoever believeth" may be saved.

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Brownwood revival spreads to Wheaton College, elsewhere

By Ferrell Foster

WHEATON, Ill. (ABP) -- Word of a March revival at Wheaton College has spread throughout the country, and it now has spawned similar experiences on at least four other college campuses.

Wheaton College is a non-denominational, Christian liberal arts college in the suburbs of Chicago. At least one Southern Baptist, Tim Beougher, has been involved in recent events.

Beougher is assistant professor of evangelism at the Wheaton College Graduate School and associate director of the Billy Graham Institute of Evangelism.

Beougher and students who experienced the Wheaton revival have gone to other campuses and seen revival in those places, as well -- Northwestern College in Minneapolis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School near Chicago, and Gordon College and Eastern Nazarene College, both in Massachusetts.

The history of revivals has shown that "God often uses an individual who has been deeply impacted by revival to become a spark" to bring revival in another place, Beougher told the Illinois Baptist.

What happened at Wheaton?

On Sunday evening, March 19, two students from Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas, spoke during a regular weekly student-led worship service at Wheaton.

James Hahn and Brandi Maguire "shared what God had done in their lives" during recent times of revival at their campus and at other schools, Beougher said.

After they spoke, there was no exhortation or manipulation, the professor said. "There was no attempt to try and force a repeat experience of what had happened at Howard Payne."

But, "immediately students began to come up to the microphone and confess sin," Beougher said. "The confession was deep. It was painful. God really did a work of breaking people."

The service had begun at 7:30 p.m. Sunday. It did not end until 6 a.m. Monday.

Normally, about 400 students attend the service. That Sunday, about 700 came. It was difficult to know how many attended because many who were there "left and went back to get their roommates and friends," Beougher said.

The professor, who also is helping plant a new Southern Baptist church in the area, characterized the Sunday night gathering as "biblical," "sincere," "calm and orderly," and "God-focused and God-honoring." It involved emotion but not "emotionalism." It did not contain some of the excesses associated with awakenings of the past, he added.

When the students broke up at 6 a.m., they agreed to meet again Monday night, March 20. They started at 9:30 that night, and attendance climbed to more than a thousand. The seats of Pierce Chapel were filled, and students stood two and three deep along the walls, the professor said. The meeting lasted until 2 a.m.

The next night, a scheduling conflict at Pierce Chapel, forced the students to move to College Church. About 1,350 students gathered in the church's 1,500-seat sanctuary. And again, it lasted until about 2 a.m.

On Wednesday, it was sensed that there was a "need for instruction," Beougher said. Students had "emptied their lives," and that vacuum needed to be filled with the things of God.

Three school officials spoke that night. Wheaton President Duane Litfin gave his "full support and blessing and encouraged the group to keep their eyes on God," Beougher said.

Beougher then spoke on how to deal with temptation. Lyle Dorsett, professor of educational ministries and evangelism, then encouraged students to study the Bible, pray and be accountable to someone.

On Thursday, it was time to celebrate. The students, 1,500 of them, held a "praise and worship service that raised the roof," the professor said. "It was glorious. ... It was a foretaste of what heaven is going to be like.

That night, 200 to 300 students committed themselves to full-time Christian service, Beougher said.

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