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Hemphill inaugurated, pledges to keep Southwestern in tune with Bible, Baptists

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Kenneth Hemphill was officially installed as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary May 1 with a promise to keep the world's largest seminary tied to the Bible and in tune with its Southern Baptist constituency.

"I am humbled by the trust you have placed in me," Hemphill told the inauguration audience at Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. "I am challenged by the opportunity before me. I am confident because of the power of God that works through me. I am prepared to expend my life for the cause of this seminary and the Kingdom."

With trustees, faculty, friends and students looking on, trustee chairman Ralph Pulley placed the presidential medallion around Hemphill's neck. Hemphill and his wife, Paula, then knelt in prayer while close friend and Southern Baptist leader Jimmy Draper delivered the inaugural charge, urging the couple to "keep your eyes fixed on the Lord and your hearts tender."

Hemphill, 47, a successful pastor, author and church-growth specialist, was elected Southwestern's seventh president July 28, 1994, four months after conservative trustees fired former President Russell Dilday in a dispute over the direction of the 3,200-student school.

During the celebrative two-hour inauguration ceremony, there was no mention of Dilday or the campus turmoil that followed his firing March 9, 1994. Dilday's name was omitted as Draper, former trustee chairman and now president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, cited the seminary's former presidents and their "incredible legacy."

The only reminder of the firing, which rocked the Southern Baptist Convention and prompted probationary action from the seminary's accreditors, was a lone protester who marched quietly on the sidewalk in front of the auditorium throughout the ceremony. "Remember March 9, 1994," said the picket sign carried by Southwestern student Paul Mansfield. "They're still here and firmly in control," the sign warned.

Inside, Hemphill recalled the words of L.R. Scarborough, the seminary's second president (1915-1942), to set the course for his own presidency. In his address, Hemphill cited Scarborough's "three-fold foundation" for Southwestern:

-- An identity as a distinctively Baptist institution. "I reaffirm that denominational anchor," Hemphill said. "We are proudly a Southern Baptist institution. We are thankful for the support of our local churches. We desire to be accountable to Southern Baptists through our elected trustees."

-- A commitment to the Bible at the core of seminary training. "We make no apology for our commitment to base our scholarship and ministry training on the perfect word of God," Hemphill said. "The Bible must be the textbook of theological seminaries, the plumb line by which all our teaching is measured. We joyfully teach according to the 'Baptist Faith and Message,'" he said, referring to the SBC's 1963 doctrinal statement.

-- A three-fold focus on academic excellence, practical training and spiritual nurture. "I like that triune focus," Hemphill said. "... Our early presidents did not see the seminary as an academic ivory tower in which to retire from the world for study but as a front-line bunker where students participate in the contemporary spiritual battles."

In testimonials from a trustee, a professor and others, Hemphill was praised by inaugural participants as a leader who embodies those academic, practical and spiritual qualities.

After earning a doctoral degree from Cambridge University in England in 1976, the North Carolina native returned to the States to serve as a pastor in Virginia, leading First Baptist Church of Norfolk to become one of the state's largest. The author of seven books on church growth, spiritual gifts and other topics, Hemphill became director of the Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth in Atlanta in 1992.

"I am profoundly convinced that God has raised you up to be our leader," said New Testament professor Curtis Vaughan, who served on the presidential search committee. "I commend you for your openness, your fairness, your commitment to excellence, and your strong adherence to the inspired Word of God. I pledge to you our cooperation, our loyalty and our prayers."

Since taking the reins of the Fort Worth seminary last August, Hemphill has tried to calm fears among faculty and alumni that conservative trustees would steer a course too far to the right. Hemphill gets high marks from many faculty members for his efforts, but the new president still faces stiff challenges on several fronts, including accreditation.

The Association of Theological Schools has placed Southwestern on a two-year probation because of trustee violations of school policy in firing Dilday and threats to academic freedom.

Enrollment likewise has suffered since the firing, dropping from 4,157 in 1993-94 to 3,254 this year.

Funding from the SBC Cooperative Program, which is tied to enrollment, has dropped, making the seminary more dependent on fund-raising. Meanwhile, many of the seminary's strongest supporters, alienated by the firing of the popular Dilday, have cut their donations or pledges to the school. The development vice president, Jay Chance, resigned April 28 to take another position. The theology dean, Bruce Corley, left for a position at Baylor University's new seminary.

Despite those obstacles, Hemphill told the inauguration audience the seminary's future is bright. "I believe our greatest days are before us."

"We will work to provide for the continued financial stability of the institution by generating additional financial resources for the ongoing support of the empowering of men and women for Christian ministry," he said. He called for the funding of more endowed teaching chairs "to keep costs reasonable for our students."

"Our resources are abundant," he insisted. "Our primary source of help is the overwhelming sufficiency of the Lord." Other resources are a "fine faculty," committed alumni and friends, and Southern Baptists, he said.

"We are convinced our Southern Baptist constituency share our vision for the primacy of theological education and will continue to make it possible for students to receive the finest education available through their generous giving through the Cooperative Program."

"I know of no place that anyone can invest more wisely in the future of Baptist and evangelical work than through this seminary," he said. "It is no exaggeration to say that our work is foundational to the entire Southern Baptist mission."

In his inaugural address, Brazilian pastor and evangelist Nilson Fanini urged those present to work together with the new president. "Southwestern, my dear Southwestern, it was right here ... where God set fire in my heart," said Fanini, a 1958 graduate of Southwestern and a friend of Hemphill's.

"I challenge you to work with this great man of God."

About 1,200 attended the ceremony, which was the centerpiece of a two-day inaugural celebration that started with a prayer service Monday morning and ended with a campus picnic and concert by country music star Ricky Skaggs.

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Southern Baptist Historical Society to vote on charter, bylaw changes

By Brian Smith

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- The Southern Baptist Historical Society will consider making changes to its charter and bylaws at its annual meeting May 10 in Augusta, Ga. The proposed changes would allow the organization to operate as an autonomous agency, independent of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The society, which has 724 members, currently is an auxiliary of the Nashville, Tenn.,-based Historical Commission. The Historical Commission is one of seven SBC agencies proposed for dissolution under the "Covenant for a New Century" restructuring plan proposed by the Program and Structure Study Committee of the SBC Executive Committee.

Lynn May, president of the Historical Commission, emphasized that the move is not an effort to subvert the structure committee's recommendation but is necessary if the Historical Society is to continue should the commission be eliminated. To take effect, the restructure plan must be adopted by messengers at consecutive SBC annual meetings.

"There is language in the charter and the bylaws of the society that do identify the society as being related to the Historical Commission," May said. "If the Commission ceases to exist, then we will need to take steps to revise our charter and take out references to the Historical Commission, because there will be no Commission to relate to."

Former Historical Society president Adrian Lamkin, director of the Partee Center for Historical Studies at William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo., agreed changing the society's charter is not a "knee-jerk reaction" to the study committee report. But he said the change represents more than a simple formality.

"I'm afraid ... if (the Historical Commission) is dissolved, it is possible that the public viewing of Baptist history will be diminished," Lamkin said. "And that's where a renewed Southern Baptist Historical Society, through

revisions in its constitution, can be much more open to letting people participate in sharing Baptist history and preserving it."

May said the society differs little from the Historical Commission in its scope and interests.

"It is a means of enlisting far more people than the 30 trustees of this agency and our staff ... of 10 people. It involves an effort to try to enlist Southern Baptists across the nation in realizing that history is important and it needs to be preserved and it needs to be studied, interpreted, understood and communicated," he said.

"Our primary concern is that Southern Baptists don't push their history off in a corner and not give it adequate attention," May said.

Under the proposed restructuring of the SBC, the Historical Commission's archival duties would be assigned to a council of six seminary presidents. Its educational duties would fall to the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Lamkin noted that "some people are concerned that if the Historical Commission is dissolved, the door could be opened for not only a revisionist view of history, but perhaps even a closing of some of the books for open investigation, such as records of the Peace Committee."

He said the Southern Baptist Historical Society, as an autonomous entity, could "help to balance some of that and could at least keep before people's eyes an open view of our history so that it is available for use."

"There is some fear that indeed there is a possibility of having an in-house history, and that history will simply become a tool to express one view. It can be done that way, but I don't think that is how Baptists are well served," Lamkin said.

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School's attempt to display portrait of Jesus rejected

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court refused May 1 to hear a Michigan school district's plea to permit a portrait of Jesus Christ to be displayed in a high school hallway.

By refusing to hear the case, the high court left standing lower court rulings that the portrait's display violated the Constitution's requirement of church-state separation.

The 2-by-3-foot copy of Warner Sallman's portrait "Head of Christ" was donated to a Bloomingdale, Mich., high school, where it hung in a hallway for 30 years before a 1993 senior class member sued to have it removed.

Siding with Eric Pensinger, a federal appeals court ruled in September that the school district's practice violated all three elements of a legal test used to determine when government unconstitutionally establishes religion.

The school district did not show a secular purpose to hang the portrait, the court said. Additionally, display of the portrait advanced religion and entangled government and religion, the court said.

The appeals court noted that the case would have been different if the school had displayed representative symbols of many of the world's religions on a common wall.

But in this case, the court said, the display could be viewed as the school district favoring one religion while downplaying others.

"Christ is central only to Christianity and his portrait has a proselytizing, affirming effect that some non-believers find deeply offensive," the court said.

The appeals court also cited a 1980 Supreme Court ruling that struck down a school's posting of the Ten Commandments because they were undeniably religious and not part of a course of study, as well as a 1990 high court ruling that struck down a graduation prayer practice in part because it was supervised and controlled by the

school. The Bloomingdale school's hanging of the portrait of Jesus was not part of a course of study and was controlled by the school, the court noted.

In other action May 1, the Supreme Court announced it would decide whether the First Amendment's free speech protections prevent Rhode Island from prohibiting price advertising for alcoholic beverages. The case will be heard during the court's 1995-96 term, which begins in October.

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-- By Larry Chesser

Women sweep top awards in seminary preaching competition

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- A week after trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary decided to hire only professors who believe that women are not called to preach, women swept the top three awards in the Louisville, Ky., school's annual preaching competition.

This year's Clyde T. Francisco Preaching Awards went to Kimberly Baker of Lincolnton, N.C., Mary Beth McCloy of Philippi, W. Va., and Dixie Petrey of Knoxville, Tenn.

The winners, selected by an all-male committee, were announced April 27 -- one week after trustees affirmed President Albert Mohler's belief that prospective faculty members must interpret the Bible to prohibit women from serving as pastors. Trustees also adopted a more general statement outlining their own belief in the prohibition against female pastors.

Ironically, while women have won the Francisco Award in the past, this is the first year for women to earn all the top prizes.

Recipients of the preaching award were selected by a panel of six students and two faculty members, all male. The initial field of 28 entries was narrowed to three finalists based on a review of written manuscripts which did not identify the author's name or gender. Only after the three finalists were selected did the judges hear audio tapes of the sermons to determine first-, second- and third-place rankings.

The Francisco Preaching Awards were established in memory of Clyde Francisco, Old Testament professor at the seminary from 1947 to 1981. Each award carries a \$200 cash prize.

Recipients of the two top awards preached their sermons in a seminary chapel service. Baker, who won the first-place award, preached May 2, and McCloy, who won the second-place award, preached May 4.

Supporters of equal ministry opportunities for women and men said they were heartened by the outcome of this year's awards. "It affirms that God's Spirit blows where it will, and in a time where there is so much despair, there is a little hope in this," student David Casto told the Louisville Courier-Journal.

"I thought it was very ironic," said Lou Ellen Rich, a student from Jefferson City, Mo. She called the selections "a slap in the face" of those who oppose women pastors and "a pat on the back" for women who aspire to lead churches.

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-- By Mark Wingfield

Rankin, Lewis discuss amending restructure proposal to affirm WMU

By Toby Druin

DALLAS (ABP) -- Foreign Mission Board President Jerry Rankin says he and another Southern Baptist Convention agency head have discussed amending the report of the Program and Structure Study Committee to affirm Woman's Missionary Union.

Rankin stopped short, however, of saying he personally favors such an amendment and added he does not believe WMU "has been deprived of anything" in the report of the blue-ribbon committee proposing a massive restructuring of the 15 million-member denomination.

Rankin reportedly told a group of missionaries gathered in Dallas April 22 that he had been in conversation with Home Mission Board President Larry Lewis about "working out something as far as WMU's role" is concerned.

In the report of the Program and Structure Study Committee to be recommended to the SBC in June, responsibility for the promotion of the annual Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong mission offerings is given to the two mission boards. The WMU, the SBC's 107-year-old auxiliary, initiated the offerings and over the years has taken the lead in promoting them.

Study committee members said their report is not intended to change the traditional relationship between the mission boards and the WMU, but since WMU wants to remain a self-governing auxiliary, the committee was prohibited from assigning it a mission statement.

The omission, along with a proposed reassignment of missions education -- the WMU's other traditional emphasis -- to the Brotherhood Commission (which in turn will be absorbed into a new North American Mission Board), has drawn protests from WMU supporters and state Baptist newspaper editors.

Several letter writers have suggested amending the report to restore WMU's promotional and missions education role.

Rankin said he has discussed the possibility of such an amendment in the sense of restating the proposal in a way that "would be inclusive of what we recognize the WMU doing in an auxiliary way." "I think there is an openness to considering something like that," he said.

But when asked if he personally favored a change in the proposal, Rankin said he didn't know how to evaluate the matter personally. But with the committee's clarification that it didn't deal with WMU because of its auxiliary status, he added, "I don't believe any of the ministry assignments (in the report) have deprived WMU of anything."

"They are self-governing, free to determine their programs," Rankin said. "We hope they will do what they have always been doing, and we would assume they would because their focus is on missions"

Rankin said he sees nothing wrong with adding such a provision in the committee report, but he added WMU should also reaffirm the auxiliary's commitment to SBC missions.

"I think there is some responsibility on their part to affirm what they are committed to, rather than allowing misperceptions to be propagated," Rankin said.

Rankin said he has received letters from some individuals who mistakenly believe the committee recommendations imply the FMB does not want to work with WMU and others who question the motives of those who drafted the report.

Rankin wrote a letter to WMU leaders calling the report an "unprecedented opportunity for the WMU to assert a unique and specialized role in Baptist life."

Rankin said WMU's role is "not being threatened" in the study committee report and that WMU

members should not "act victimized and alienated" in their responses to it. WMU recently underwent a reorganization, and should respect the SBC's right to do the same thing, he added.

Rankin acknowledged the committee "could have been more sensitive to the potential perception that programs of the WMU were being reassigned and made a point of affirming WMU's auxiliary role, but I believe this was an oversight rather than intentional."

WMU should continue in its missions education role just as it has in the past, he urged, noting that although missions education is given to the Brotherhood Commission in the committee report, the commission already had the responsibility for missions education among boys and men.

Rankin said his greatest concern is the inference that WMU members will lose interest in promoting the missions offerings if it ceases to be their primary responsibility.

The Foreign Mission Board needs to assume "a primary role" in promotion of the Lottie Moon offering - the agency's largest income source -- but "could never presume to replace what is being done by WMU," Rankin said.

"Being given primary responsibility for the offering was never intended as a full responsibility that would exclude the WMU," he said.

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Former Southern Seminary professor critiques Southern Baptist Calvinism

By Beth McMahon

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- A return to Calvinism being promoted by Baptist seminary president Albert Mohler and other Southern Baptist Convention leaders is "irrelevant, obscurantist and distracting," says theologian Molly Marshall.

Marshall resigned last year from the faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary over theological differences with Mohler, president of the seminary in Louisville, Ky. She offered a critique of Calvinism -- the theology that greatly influenced the founders of the seminary and the SBC in the 19th century and is experiencing a resurgence in the denomination today -- in a series of lectures at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

"Why do we want to revive a 17th century ruckus that serves no real purpose for our broken world?" Marshall asked. The return to Calvinism instead "revives a controversy that derails us from the most pressing concerns of our day" she said.

Calvinism is the designation given to teachings of John Calvin, a Swiss Protestant theologian who died in 1564. Calvin emphasized God's sovereignty and predestination -- the idea that God calls only the "elect" to salvation, while all others are damned.

The "Reformed tradition" which spawned Calvinism produced "significant insights" -- including the primacy of grace, Christ and the Bible -- which Baptists "would want to cling to ... with the deepest fervor," Marshall acknowledged.

But a return to Calvinism, she added, "is not the way forward for such a time as this."

Marshall suggested the current return to Calvinism is an attempt to recreate a sense of stability in a time when theological consensus is elusive. "Proponents of reclaiming Calvinism as our theological framework want a cadre of covenants, confessions and catechisms to secure the fundamental truths of the gospel," she observed.

"Yet theirs is not the right solution, for it is too self-congratulatory in its triumphalism, it is too

deterministic in a world reeling from its perception of the absence of God, it is too partial a view to claim to be an encompassing theological framework," she added.

Instead, Marshall said, "A much better consensus would be a renewed theology of the cross."

Neo-Calvinist proponents value the five points of Calvinism more than Scripture, Marshall charged. "It is curious that in a denomination which has been fighting over who believes the Bible the most, a strangely dogmatic approach to Christian teaching is gaining ground," she said.

"Calvinism presumes to know the mind of God in ways the Bible never does. Indeed, it elevates the five points over Scripture, truncating its large witness to fit the dogma. The 'symphonic plurality of the Bible,' to use Rob James' lyrical phrase, is being silenced, and another gospel is being preached."

Marshall suggested the focus on an "irrelevant" controversy may be intentional. "It is much easier to debate theology in the abstract than to allow its insights to transform our actions."

Marshall said contemporary Southern Baptist Calvinism is elitist, promoting "an elite few persons who presume to be in the know," primarily "academicians who seek correct doctrine at the expense of a wider theological heritage."

Their reading of Baptist history through the lens of some of the 18th and 19th century Baptists who most reflected Calvinist influence is one-sided, Marshall said. It also makes "claims about the theological purity of this theological vision" but "fails to acknowledge the social praxis of those holding it," she said.

The early Baptist Calvinists "were privileged, slave-holding white men, disdainful of the enthusiasms of the common Baptists from the backwoods," Marshall said. "Our contemporary Calvinists have little room for diversity, as well," she added.

Calvin and his early followers "showed an intolerance toward non-conformists," Marshall said.

"Although Geneva became a haven for harassed Protestants, it also expelled many others who did not agree with Calvin's views. As we understand with deep intimacy, many in our day are being expelled."

The new Southern Baptist Calvinism often is used to rationalize political actions, Marshall said. "It claims personal political machinations to be God's sovereign and electing will. Thus, if it is God's will, persons are not responsible for the havoc wreaked. God's eternal purposes are simply being worked out. How dare anyone dissent from them?"

"This ignores the insights of more process-oriented theologies which call us to acknowledge the radical partnership that God beckons from humanity. It fails to acknowledge that there is a shared responsibility in the groaning project of creation not yet completed."

The Calvinist image of God contributes to a power-oriented attitude and "contributes to the contemporary misogyny of its perpetrators," Marshall said.

"An all-controlling and, in many respects, unrelated, deity serves to authorize similar exercise of power among humans. As is well-known, the language and images we use for God have powerful effect in ordering human relations," she said.

In addition, Calvinism is often associated with a theocratic view of government "which impairs liberty of conscience," Marshall said. "That is why, when new faculties are hired in current Southern Baptist seminaries, aspects of a political agenda become part of the litmus test for doctrinal fidelity."

Marshall was the inaugural speaker for the Virginia seminary's Lawrence Hoover Lectureship. She had taught theology at Southern Seminary 10 years before resigning last year under pressure from Mohler. She recently was appointed to the faculty of Central Baptist Theological Seminary, an American Baptist school in Kansas City, Kan.

The BTSR lecture series was founded by Charlotte Hoover in memory of her husband. The Hoovers, active members of First Baptist Church of Annandale, Va., have contributed to a variety of Baptist causes, including the Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and

Southern Seminary. The new annual lectures at Richmond will bring scholars and church leaders to campus to speak on issues related to the life of the church and Christian ministry.

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-- Bob Allen contributed to this story.

Baptist school lifts ban on use of alcohol

DELAND, Fla. (ABP) -- Stetson University, a school until recent years affiliated with the Florida Baptist Convention, has decided to drop its century-old ban on the use of alcoholic beverages.

The university's board of trustees voted April 21 to allow limited use of beer, wine and wine coolers at approved parties and in some student residence halls on the campus in DeLand, Fla.

The change, endorsed by students, faculty, parents and alumni after a two-year study "makes it possible for us to implement a more reasonable and enforceable alcohol policy, with strict guidelines, that we hope will help students to be more responsible," said Doug Lee, president of Stetson.

Studies showed that alcohol use at Stetson mirrored other schools, despite the ban.

David Bergen, associate dean for campus life, told the Daytona Beach News-Journal that 43 percent of the judicial cases handled internally at the school this year involved alcohol violations.

The new policy also calls for increased alcohol awareness education.

"We were unable to deal with alcohol abuse with integrity as long as we denied our students had a problem," said Lee. "This decision will allow us to face the problem squarely and strengthen our educational and counseling program to help our students deal responsibly with alcohol."

Drinking on campus will not be permitted for students under 21, Florida's legal drinking age. Forty-one percent of Stetson's students are 21. Some dorms will remain alcohol-free, and students will be able to request those rooms, said Jim Beasley, vice president for campus life.

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-- By ABP staff

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