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**Proposed Texas funding cuts expand
to SBC Executive Committee, ERLC**

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- A week ago, Southern Baptist Convention seminaries learned they stand to lose about \$4.3 million in funding next year in a proposed budget being developed by Texas Baptist leaders.

As a key committee completed its work at a called meeting Sept. 13 in Dallas, the news only got worse for two other SBC entities that also now stand to lose money.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas administrative committee is recommending no money for the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, a moral-concerns agency with offices in Nashville, Tenn., and Washington, and only token funding for the SBC Executive Committee, also in Nashville.

The administrative committee gave unanimous approval of proposed budget changes for calendar year 2001. To become effective, the budget proposal must be ratified by the convention's executive board Sept. 26 and then by the full convention Oct. 30-31.

Even before the Sept. 13 meeting, Morris Chapman, a former Texas pastor who is president of the SBC Executive Committee, was urging Texas conservatives to turn out in force at the BGCT annual session in Corpus Christi to defeat the proposed budget. That call comes too late, however, for a number of the state's most conservative churches, which have already left the BGCT to form their own state convention.

Supporters of the budget changes likewise are urging Texas Baptists to attend the convention session, virtually guaranteeing a larger-than-normal turnout. Convention planners estimate more than 6,000 messengers could register for the historic meeting, which presents SBC conservatives with their most serious funding challenge in the 10 years since they gained control of the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Conservatives now control the SBC and have purged moderates from any form of leadership. The BGCT, however, the SBC's largest state affiliate, has steadfastly resisted the conservative tide and has remained under the direction of moderates and centrists.

Tension between the state and national conventions reached a peak this summer, when the SBC revised its doctrinal statement, the "Baptist Faith and Message." Texas Baptist leaders particularly objected to the removal of one reference to Jesus Christ as the standard by which Scripture should be interpreted and the addition of another declaring the document an instrument of doctrinal accountability that denominational employees cannot question.

In response to the growing rift between the two groups, the Texas administrative committee is recommending a radical reallocation of funds that are currently in the "worldwide missions" portion of the state's Cooperative Program unified budget. Those changes include:

-- Reducing the amount of funding for the SBC Executive Committee to \$10,000 from \$706,000. The Executive Committee is the SBC's main administrative office and is responsible for setting policies, distributing Cooperative Program money and running a national news service, Baptist Press.

-- Eliminating \$345,000 in funding for the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, which is headed by former Texan Richard Land. Many Texas Baptists have criticized the ERLC for its departure from a strict advocacy of church-state separation and a perception that it is partisan.

-- Reducing funding for the SBC's six seminaries from \$5.3 million this year to a maximum of \$1 million next year. That \$1 million would be distributed based on the number of Texas students enrolled at each school.

The net effect of this change, which was recommended by a special theological-education study committee, would be a virtual defunding of five of the six SBC schools, which currently receive anywhere from \$443,000 to \$1.5 million annually from the BGCT. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, based in Fort Worth, would get the largest share of the \$1 million pool because it currently enrolls about 1,400 of the estimated 1,600 Texas students attending SBC seminaries.

Even so, Southwestern's funding could be reduced from \$1.5 million to an estimated \$875,000 in 2001.

Texas churches still would be able to designate funds through the BGCT to all SBC causes, including the seminaries, should they desire. However, designated funding from Texas churches to the seminaries would be counted toward the cap of \$1 million given to the SBC schools collectively.

The budget proposal does not alter distributions to the SBC's International Mission Board or North American Mission Board, which stand to continue to receive about \$12 million and \$5.6 million respectively from the BGCT next year.

The more than \$5 million in funds that would be diverted from the SBC next year would be redirected to fund what both committees called "Texas missions priorities."

The \$4.3 million balance of the seminary money would go to three BGCT schools -- Truett Seminary at Baylor University, Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University and Hispanic Baptist Theological School.

The administrative committee proposal calls for dividing the \$1.1 million diverted from the SBC Executive Committee and ERLC three ways. Half would strengthen Hispanic ministries and church starting in Texas. A fourth would go toward Texas human-welfare ministries such as adoption and childcare. The final fourth would go to the Texas Christian Life Commission to produce church-resource materials and address ethical issues such as poverty and pornography.

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Theological-education study group cites concerns behind recommendations

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- A study committee recommending dramatic changes to the way Texas Baptists fund theological education -- which gave a sneak preview of its report Sept. 8 -- filled in details a week later at a called meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas administrative committee.

Proposals to reduce Texas funding of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries by more than 80

percent and reallocate more than \$4 million to Texas schools, were brought by a theological-education study committee chaired by Robert Campbell, pastor of Westbury Baptist Church in Houston.

The 16-member committee spent six months conducting research, including on-site visits to the six SBC seminaries and extensive dialogues with the president, administrators and some trustees of each school. The committee initially asked the SBC seminary presidents to meet with them in Dallas, but the presidents spoke as a group to decline that invitation.

"We did not appoint the committee nor ask for it, and we are not directly accountable to state convention committees anyway," Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina told the committee in a July 27 letter.

So, over a period of about two weeks, the Texas committee undertook a whirlwind tour of the SBC seminaries, which are scattered from the West Coast to the East Coast.

Completing its study, the committee cited a number of concerns behind its recommendation:

-- Creedalism. The committee specifically cited changes in the "Baptist Faith and Message" and the way those changes are being enforced at the SBC schools. "During interviews with the administration and trustees of the six SBC seminaries, it was clearly stated that no faculty member could call into question any portion of the 2000 'Baptist Faith and Message' for any reason at any time. Thus the 2000 'Baptist Faith and Message' is elevated to inerrant status."

The report also cites comments New Orleans Seminary President Chuck Kelley made at a faculty meeting this July when asked by a faculty member how to respond if a student were to ask an individual professor what he or she believes.

"That is irrelevant," Kelley told the faculty, according to documentation in the committee's report. "It doesn't matter what I believe; this is the SBC statement of faith."

Further, Campbell said, Kelley told at least some members of his faculty that no faculty member would be allowed to question the "Baptist Faith and Message" anywhere at any time, not even in private conversation at an off-campus party.

Further, the report notes, four of the SBC seminary presidents told the Texas committee they believe the 1963 version of the "Baptist Faith and Message" is a "neo-orthodox document."

"We had never heard that before," Campbell said. "This is an alarming description."

Campbell said the committee responded by asking: "Do you know who you're calling neo-orthodox? All the presidents of the state conventions."

The 1963 "Baptist Faith and Message" committee was comprised of the presidents of the state Baptist conventions, with Southern Baptist statesman Herschel Hobbs of Oklahoma as chairman.

The seminary presidents responded that Hobbs was "duped" by neo-orthodox individuals who heavily influenced the 1963 document, Campbell said.

-- Financial irregularities. "BGCT-related churches are spending a disproportionate amount of money on seminary education in the six SBC seminaries as compared with the amount spent on seminary education within BGCT-supported seminaries."

Specifically, the report notes, 93.3 percent of all BGCT funding for theological education has been going to the SBC seminaries, while 6.3 percent has gone to the BGCT-related seminaries. "Put another way, this is \$14.90 to be split among six SBC seminaries and \$1 to be split between the two BGCT seminaries."

Further, "funds received by the six SBC seminaries are not always used for graduate theological education," the committee found. "Cooperative Program funds are being used for some baccalaureate degrees (university and college-level classes) and to provide 'free' education to non-Southern Baptist students from other denominational or religious groups."

-- Faculty purges and replacements. "Most Southern Baptists are well aware of the purging of faculty or administrators who refuse to go along with the ideas and philosophies of the new SBC president and

trustees," the committee noted. "While the committee knows that faculty members can be terminated, the process by which some were dismissed or contracts were not renewed violates both due process and common decency."

Further, at least three of the six seminaries have experienced "significant faculty turnover," the committee reported. For example, at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., two thirds of the theology faculty has been hired since 1993, the year Albert Mohler became president. That does not account for other faculty members who were hired since 1993 and subsequently have left. At Southeastern Seminary, 88 percent of the theology faculty is new since 1992. And at Southwestern Seminary, 37.5 percent of the theology faculty is new since 1995, the year after Russell Dilday was fired as president.

"One has to wonder why there is such a large turnover," the committee noted. "According to the presidents of Southeastern and Southern, it was because of retirements and normal attrition. The seminaries used to have many long-term faculty members. This is no longer the case. Why are faculty members leaving? Many times, faculty members are voluntarily leaving or retiring because they do not agree with the new philosophies or theologies of the current presidents and trustees."

On a related issue, "a large number of new faculty members are being employed in the six SBC seminaries who lack background or experience in Baptist life," the report charges.

"Some SBC seminaries have an inordinately large number of teachers who have no degree from any Southern Baptist or state Baptist convention-owned college or university," the report says. "Schools like Bob Jones University, Criswell College, Liberty University and Mid-America Seminary may have some Baptist connections, but those connections represent very narrow viewpoints. They do not represent widespread Southern Baptist or statewide Baptist thought.

"For instance, Southern Seminary had 15 out of 51 teachers in its 1999 faculty that did not have degrees from traditional Baptist schools. This is 29 percent of the faculty. Twelve of the 15 have been hired since Albert Mohler Jr. became president. In an Aug. 11, 2000, Baptist Press release, Mohler hired four new faculty members -- three in the seminary and one in the undergraduate school. Only one out of the four had any educational degree from a Southern Baptist seminary or state Baptist-owned college or university."

-- Trustee interference. "The style of seminary governance has significantly changed in the last decade," the committee said, citing examples of trustees becoming involved in directing classroom content and teaching.

Further, the selection of seminary trustees "has been narrowed to no longer represent the broad spectrum of Southern Baptist thought and belief. Consequently, current SBC seminary trustee boards almost exclusively reflect the narrow attitude of doctrinaire Fundamentalism."

Texasans appointed to serve on SBC seminary boards often are those who are "openly hostile" to the BGCT, the committee added.

-- Enrollment. "Enrollment in graduate-level theological education has plummeted in most of the SBC seminaries in the last decade," the report says. "At the same time, some SBC seminaries have inflated their enrollment figures by including undergraduate college and university-level degree programs. Cooperative Program dollars that were originally intended by most Southern Baptist churches for graduate theological education are now being used to fund these competitive and redundant undergraduate programs."

Further, the reporting of some enrollment figures at SBC seminaries is "confusing and misleading," the report adds.

The committee says that enrollment at Midwestern Seminary in Kansas City, Mo., was misrepresented during the recent presidency of Mark Coppenger, resulting in an overpayment of Cooperative Program funds totaling \$300,000. "The funds were not returned," the report adds.

Also, Southwestern Seminary officials "misreported their enrollment in 1997 and 1998," the report says. "The correction of those figures appeared to give a serious decline of students in 1999."

After doing its work, the committee struggled with a desire to treat some of the SBC seminaries differently than others -- Southwestern, for example, because of its location and Texas heritage -- but finally realized it could not do so, Campbell said.

And besides, the six SBC seminary presidents specifically asked the committee to treat all the schools the same, he added. "The six seminaries chose to stand as one. That was their choice."

Leaders from more than one seminary begged the committee not to give their school more favorable treatment than other SBC schools, he said, explaining that the result would be to hurt those schools rather than help them.

The process was painful for committee members, particularly those who are graduates of Southwestern or have known of its historic ties to the BGCT, Campbell said.

In the end, however, "Southwestern should be treated equally because the things we found are equally true," he said.

Southwestern is "a changed school," Campbell said. "The Southwestern I was trained in does not exist anymore.

"Are there still some good professors there? Absolutely. Are they as free as they used to be? No."

The hard truth, Campbell said, is that Southwestern's faculty members "can't criticize the 'Baptist Faith and Message.' If I can't criticize this man-made document, I've made this document inerrant. That's credal. And that's a big thing for us."

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Former SBC seminary profs feel vindicated by report

By Mark Wingfield

DALLAS (ABP) -- Former faculty members at Southern Baptist Convention seminaries who lost jobs over differences with conservative presidents say they feel vindicated by a six-month study by Texas Baptists recommending reduced funding for the SBC schools.

The Texas theological-education study committee found "a great deal of mistreatment of people" by administrators and trustees at the SBC seminaries, said Mike Chancellor, vice chairman of the study committee and pastor of Crescent Heights Baptist Church in Abilene.

"People in the church I serve hold certain expectations about Christian conduct," Chancellor said, adding that SBC seminaries have not always upheld those standards. "It's not about beliefs," he said. "It's about the way as Christians we treat other people."

Such statements brought gratitude from Jeff Pool, who was forced out of teaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, over a dispute about academic freedom. Pool now teaches at Brite Divinity School of Texas Christian University and remains active in a Texas Baptist church.

"As one of those who refused both political and theological allegiance to the fundamentalists who seized control of the SBC and its seminaries -- and also as one who suffered the consequences for my decision to resist both power as domination and religion as credalism -- I sincerely thank the committee for exposing the intentional mistreatment of persons who disagreed with the fundamentalist leadership of the seminaries, as well as the un-Christian ways by which the fundamentalists seized control of the SBC's seminaries," Pool said.

"I admire the leaders of our Baptist General Convention of Texas for the courage and wisdom of their Christian faith, as they have pursued and fulfilled this difficult and painful task," he said. "Their wise and courageous faithful service makes me proud again to be Baptist, especially a Texas Baptist."

The report of the Texas committee "squares with my own experience" as a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., added Carey Newman.

Newman, who holds the master-of-divinity degree from Southwestern Seminary and doctor-of-philosophy degree from Baylor University, was hired as a conservative New Testament professor at Southern Seminary in 1993, the year Albert Mohler became president. He said he left the seminary just three years later, however, because he refused to affirm additional theological dictates imposed by Mohler and seminary trustees.

"I am pleased the committee did such objective, painstaking and even soul-searching research in the question of funding theological education," Newman said. "As a once-proud Southwestern and still-proud Baylor graduate and a former Southern Seminary professor under the Mohler regime, I heartily concur with the findings and recommendations."

Newman, who now works as an editor for Westminster-John Knox Press, said the SBC seminaries "are on a perilous, head-long drive toward a new orthodoxy of five-point Calvinism." They "are bent on hiring professors who have little or no heritage in Southern Baptist circles," he added, "and certain seminary administrators have resorted to the sub-Christian practices of intimidation and hostility to silence those who disagree."

Also affirming the Texas committee was Molly Marshall, who was forced out of teaching theology at Southern Seminary after being accused of heresy. Marshall's case is one of several examples of alleged mistreatment of professors cited in the report.

"While my leaving Southern Seminary could hardly be considered voluntary, I certainly knew that the patriarchal retrenching of the Mohler administration would attempt to silence the voices of dissent, especially those of women," Marshall said. "The coercion of conscience was intolerable, an utter repudiation of a Baptist's freedom."

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