



# Associated Baptist Press

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### Former SBC seminary president affirms new Baptist schools

**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES**  
Nashville, Tennessee

By Michael Clingenpeel

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Many of Southern Baptists' finest institutions have been turned into ruins by people who didn't support them in the first place, according to a former president of the Southern Baptist Convention's oldest seminary.

These institutions are gone forever, Roy Honeycutt, retired president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said Sept. 20 at a conference for laity at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond.

Those who grieve agencies lost during the last 25 years should not despair, Honeycutt said, because God is creating new ones to take their place.

The former seminary president drew an analogy with the palace of Sans Souci, built by Frederick the Great near Potsdam, Germany. Adjoining the grand palace, Frederick recreated the ruins of Pompeii.

Pondering why anyone would create a landscape of destruction alongside one of beauty, Honeycutt said something in human nature causes people to "exchange beauty and order for instability and chaos."

He applied the parable to the SBC's shift from moderate to fundamentalist-controlled institutions.

"For 25 years now we have witnessed the evisceration of one denominational agency after another," Honeycutt said. "Seminaries, mission boards, commissions, and others experienced the destructive, eroding effects of political power and its implementation."

Honeycutt said the issue in the SBC struggle "was never theological or biblical, but political power and the exercise thereof for the purpose of control."

Some who aided the shift "were seminary graduates who knew a better way than the one they followed," Honeycutt said. Others were disgruntled over theology or social issues. But most, he said, had no record of support for Southern Seminary other than their churches contributing through the SBC's unified budget.

"No buildings bear their names," he said. "There are more than 30 endowed chairs [at Southern Seminary], but no chair bears their name. Not one of those denominational dissidents has ever done anything toward Southern Seminary."

Honeycutt said he views Southern Seminary's present circumstances with "dismay," but consoled his audience that the human tendency to tear down is offset by God's urge to "redeem and transform."

He commended the move of moderate Baptists to build regional seminaries that replace the six national SBC seminaries. "I marvel at what I see here," admitted Honeycutt, referring to BTSR, an alternative seminary opened in 1991.

Honeycutt concluded his address by urging his audience, which included lay people and some faculty and staff of the Richmond seminary, to look forward to what is new and give up on trying to regain the SBC as it was prior to 1979. "Forget about the past," he said. "It's all over. Those days are long past and will never again be a reality. Those who continue to believe that God will turn those ruins into palaces, forget it."

But Honeycutt said God is an "ecologist," who never loses anything he creates and is continually creating new realities. For that reason, he said, "The direction of our faces should be forward, not backward to a past we can never again experience."

In a separate interview with the Religious Herald, Honeycutt described the emergence of regional Baptist seminaries like BTSR, the John Leland Center, McAfee School of Theology at Mercer University and Truett Seminary at Baylor University as "monumental, epoch-making."

Honeycutt, who retired in 1993 at age 66 when it became clear that a majority the school's board of trustees favored a more fundamentalist direction, said he initially struggled with the regional approach, as opposed to large, national seminaries.

"I don't know that I ever would have promoted regional seminaries," he said. "But maybe the emergence of new seminaries, particularly in light of the controversy, is a wholesome thing. We would never have broken up the empire of theological education otherwise."

Honeycutt said the center of theological education has shifted and predicted new schools will do well without being bound by old traditions. They are "consistent with the times," he said, in that they are a reaction against large bureaucracies. They also provide an alternative to the "femophobia," or fear of women in ministry, that Honeycutt said exists at the SBC's seminaries.

Pitfalls still exist for regional seminaries, however, he said. The new schools are not yet large enough to offer diverse course offerings and large libraries. The SBC seminaries also "denominationalized the ministry," according to Honeycutt, solidifying students' commitment to missions and creating a Southern Baptist "ethos." Finally, he cautioned that freestanding seminaries "can become a world of their own."

Honeycutt, an Old Testament scholar, confessed that he still cannot understand why God did nothing to save Southern Seminary from a fundamentalist takeover. He said he hopes that God is "doing something that if we knew it we would not understand it."

But he stopped short of saying anything positive about changes at Southern Seminary since 1993. "I can see no good in fundamentalism or the right-wing movement in the Southern Baptist Convention," he said.

Honeycutt first arrived on Southern's campus as a student 53 years ago. When he retired as president, he and his wife, June, moved seven-tenths of a mile from campus. Since then, he said, he has had few invitations from the seminary other than to the school's annual picnic. "I know little about it, frankly. I drive by it, but I rarely turn in."

Some Southern alumni expected Honeycutt to stay at the helm of the school until he reached age 70, but he said he stepped down at 66 because he saw the board of trustees changing "exponentially for the bad" and wanted to get the best search committee possible. He said he had hoped he could achieve "the best transition possible" to a conservative person as the next president and not "tear the seminary apart" in the process.

The Honeycutts are active members of Crescent Hill Baptist Church near the seminary campus, where he teaches a Sunday school class. He also works with Kentucky Baptist colleges, the Marshall Center at Georgetown College in Kentucky and is on the board of trustees at Campbellsville University. The couple travels frequently, and Honeycutt calls himself "a bargain hunter on the Internet" for discount prices in travel.

The former president said he has "a love that runs as deep as life itself" for Southern Seminary. Now, however, what he loves is ruins instead of the palace that once stood.

## **Oklahoma churches look to join BGCT**

By John Hall

DALLAS (ABP) -- Two Baptist churches from Oklahoma have recently affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and others are showing increased interest in doing the same.

Recently formed Chapel Creek Baptist Church in Tulsa became the first Oklahoma church to affiliate with the Texas convention last summer.

BGCT president Bob Campbell, a former pastor in Ardmore, Okla., said he has discussed affiliation with leaders from about 20 Oklahoma churches since May.

Some have approached the Texas convention, but the BGCT has also sought to reach out to churches that aren't involved in their state convention, in order to improve their missions efforts.

"Why not work with them?" Campbell asked. "They really don't have a state affiliation. They are looking to do missions with a group that is more similar to them theologically."

Campbell said some Oklahoma churches have been kicked out of their associations for various reasons, such as supporting women as deacons or pastors, and feel "disenfranchised" from the conservative-led Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

"I'm not a radical person," said Debbie McDaniel, a member at Chapel Creek Baptist Church. "I just didn't want my daughter to have to go to another denomination to see a woman passing out bulletins or leading prayer."

Along with the BGCT's more open theology, the Oklahoma churches also are attracted by ministries sponsored by Texas Baptists, such as Buckner Baptist Benevolences, as outlets for mission partnerships.

"We needed to partner with someone because we can do more with others than just as one church," McDaniel said. "We wanted to partner with a group with a more inclusive picture. We are just more in line theologically with the BGCT."

The BGCT voted to allow non-Texas churches into full fellowship in the convention in 2000. Convention affiliation allows the church to send messengers and vote at the annual state meeting, as well as channel church funds to BGCT entities. Two Louisiana churches and one in New Mexico are also aligned with the Texas convention.

Campbell said he looks forward to working with churches from other states for years to come.

"Any group of Christians who want to cooperate and do missions is an advantage," Campbell said.

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## **Texas conference examines 'cowboy church' movement**

By John Hall

WAXAHACHIE, Texas (ABP) -- "In barrel racing, the tighter your pattern, the better your time. The same goes with God. The tighter your walk with him, the better your time."

So said Jayme Richman, during a seminar at a Cowgirl/Cowboy Church Planters Conference, held Sept. 27-28 in Waxahachie, Texas.

The conference focused on "cowboy churches," specialized congregations targeting people of "western heritage," including cowboys, cowgirls and those interested in the ranching and rodeo lifestyle.

About 15 such churches have already sprung up across Texas, where an estimated 5 percent of the population -- about a million people -- belongs to the population segment that leaders say is largely untouched by the gospel.

Interest in western heritage is also strong elsewhere, as evidenced by a conference crowd of 180 people from Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico and Illinois.

Paula Edwards, who runs a trail-riding ministry in Arkansas, said people are interested in horses all across the nation and trail riding is becoming increasingly popular.

Corporate sponsors -- including alcohol companies -- have already harnessed the popularity of sports such as barrel racing and team roping, said Larry Murphy, director of missions for Ellis Baptist Association in north central Texas.

Churches are just beginning to catch on. A few have built arenas on church grounds for rodeos and other fellowship events.

Some view the cowboy culture -- with its image of fast living and hard drinking -- as unreachable. But those involved in the ministry say western music and culture also share many ideas and ethics that are consistent with Christianity. Many cowboys idolize John Wayne and the values his movies portray, even if they don't realize that some of the same morals are in the Bible.

"You don't have to work hard to get these people to believe in God," said Ron Nolen, a regional consultant for the Baptist General Convention's church-starting center. Nolan said he believes as many as 400 cowboy churches are needed in Texas alone.

Largely due to the values their culture already shares with Christianity, the cowboy churches are reaching people at an astounding rate. More than 300 people showed up to initial services at the Cowboy Church of Ellis County, Texas. After being in existence for only a year, the church led its association in baptisms.

Many in the cowboy lifestyle don't feel comfortable in traditional churches, and as a result have written off religion.

"They'll come check out the cowboy church, and suddenly their objections are taken away and they are left to make a decision about Christ," Murphy said.

Cowboy church members often wear blue jeans, boots and a Stetson to church. They aren't necessarily bound by other traditions, either. One cowboy church decided that instead of having a sunrise service on Easter, it would have one at sunset. Hundreds of people attended. Another observed Valentine's Day by holding a John Wayne dance for the community.

The methods may be unconventional, but the churches both reach out to new members and encourage fellowship within congregations.

"People thirst for that intimate time with God," said Richman, while leading a seminar on ministering to western-heritage women. "People may not know how to get there, but ultimately they want to be close to him."

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