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Hemphill resigns at Southwestern for new denominational post
By Mark Wingfield
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FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Ken Hemphill announced his resignation as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary April 8.

Hemphill, 54, told a packed chapel audience of students, faculty, staff and trustees that he will take "early retirement" from the seminary to become national strategist for the Southern Baptist Convention's Empowering Kingdom Growth initiative.

He becomes the first president in the seminary's 95-year history to voluntarily leave the post for another position. His six predecessors either died in office, retired or were fired.

Hemphill will complete the current academic term before moving to Nashville, Tenn., where he will be jointly employed by the SBC Executive Committee and LifeWay Christian Resources. Empowering Kingdom Growth is a new national initiative to promote church health and growth and mission. It has no specific goals but has been touted as an inspiration ideal.

Hemphill came to Southwestern in 1994 from a position similar to the one he soon will assume. From 1992 to 1994, he directed the Southern Baptist Center for Church Growth, a strategy role funded jointly by the SBC's Home Mission Board and what is now LifeWay.

Prior to that, Hemphill built a reputation as an effective pastor at First Baptist Church of Norfolk, Va., where membership grew from 800 to 6,000 in 11 years.

Southwestern trustees turned to Hemphill for leadership after firing President Russell Dilday. Conservative trustees criticized Dilday for not getting on board with the political and theological changes occurring within the SBC at the time.

Hemphill has enjoyed more favorable relations with SBC leaders during his tenure, but some trustees privately have expressed frustration that he has not moved fast enough to make sweeping changes at the Fort Worth seminary, the SBC's largest.

At the April 8 meeting, trustees gave no outward appearance of dissatisfaction with Hemphill. Those who spoke about his departure declared the change to be "God's will" and a positive transition.

Asked if Hemphill felt any pressure to leave, trustee chairman Michael Dean responded by quoting Hemphill's own words: "Circumstances inform our decisions, but only the word of God and will of God determine our decisions." Dean is pastor of Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, where Hemphill is a member.

In the chapel service where Hemphill announced his plans, Dean urged students, faculty and staff not to despair over Hemphill's departure but to understand it as God's will. "Nothing important has changed," Dean said, emphasizing the certainty of God's reign.

Although this may be a "time of disappointment, discouragement, grief," Dean said, such "can be times when we see the Lord." The bottom line, he declared, is that "God is still on his throne."

Hemphill tearfully read from a prepared text, emphasizing his love for the seminary and its people. "I will always be grateful for the opportunity the Lord has given me to serve the greatest seminary on the face of the earth," he said.

He recalled the first time he heard former President Robert Naylor's first-of-year ritual of pronouncing new students "Southwesterners." And he recalled Naylor's admonition never to do anything to "defame the name."

In an apparent appeal to students not to protest his departure, Hemphill said: "Remember that your actions on this day reflect on [God] and his kingdom."

Hemphill reported that he and his wife, Paula, feel a strong call from God to move to the new role, even though the decision is painful. Making this change, he added, is "in the best interest of the seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention."

"Southwestern's future is bright," he declared, as are the possibilities of his work with Empowering Kingdom Growth.

The chapel audience gave the Hemphills three standing ovations, including one for Paula Hemphill when her name first was mentioned. The final ovation at the conclusion of Hemphill's statement lasted several minutes.

Both Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, and Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay, spoke to the chapel audience via video.

Chapman noted that Hemphill's move is not unprecedented. In 1920, Southwestern President L.R. Scarborough was loaned to the SBC to lead a national campaign to raise \$75 million.

After Hemphill's announcement, Dean appointed a presidential search committee to be chaired by Denny Autrey, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lindale, Texas. The vice chairman will be Dean Gage, associate dean for academic programs in the College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University.

Other members of the search committee are David Allen, professor of expository preaching at Criswell College and pastor of MacArthur Boulevard Baptist Church in Irving, Texas, who also was elected chairman of the board; David Galvan, pastor of Primera Iglesia Bautista Nueva Vida in Garland, Texas, who was elected vice chairman of the board; Royal Smith, a retired psychologist and layman from First Baptist Church of Dallas, who was elected secretary of the board; David Jett, associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Gardendale, Ala.; Mike Marshall, a layman from First Baptist Church of Upper Marlboro, Md.; Matthew McKellar, pastor of Sylvania Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas, who has served several terms as board secretary but was defeated by Smith in a re-election bid, the only contested officer race; and Dan Schrider, a banking executive from Olney, Md. One other member is to be named by Allen, incoming board chairman.

As currently configured, the nine-member committee includes representatives from three states. Its members include one Hispanic, eight Anglos and no African-Americans or Asians. The committee members are all male. It includes five clergy and four laymen.

Dean said the search committee will be given no time frame to complete its work. "We're setting the beginning point, not the end point," he said, urging the committee to take "however long it takes to find God's man."

In other business, Southwestern trustees:

- Voted to give the L.R. Scarborough Award next October to Mr. and Mrs. Bobby Eklund and Dr. and Mrs. Malcolm McDowell. McDowell will become the first faculty member to receive the award, which is given to individuals who either contribute or lead others to contribute large amounts to the seminary. Eklund is former stewardship director for the Baptist General Convention of Texas who now works with the conservative Southern Baptists of Texas Convention. The seminary also plans to name an academic chair for the Eklunds.

- Adopted a new student fee structure that moves from a matriculation fee to a tuition-based system. Provost Craig Blaising said the tuition rate will be comparable to other SBC seminaries, but he refused to reveal the approved amount until he holds a meeting with students. The trustees' work on budget and many other matters was done in closed-door committees and then approved in the plenary sessions through common consent.

- Heard an update on renovations at the seminary's Houston campus, which has been relocated to property donated by Park Place Baptist Church.

– Elected four new faculty members. Elias Moitinho, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church in Ennis, Texas, was elected assistant professor of psychology and counseling. John Moldovan, chairman of the missions and evangelism department at Criswell College, was elected associate professor of evangelism and intercultural studies. Greg Welty, a doctoral candidate at the University of Oxford, was elected assistant professor of philosophy. Malcolm Yarnell, dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was elected associate professor of systematic theology.

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Weaker faith-based legislation passes, but controversies remain

By Robert Marus

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WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Despite several legislative setbacks, supporters of President Bush's faith-based initiatives are trying new ways to get the agenda through Congress.

After many struggles, the Senate on April 9 passed a much-watered-down version of the faith-based initiatives, Bush's plan to provide government funding for some religiously based social services. The CARE Act of 2003 passed on a vote of 95-5.

The CARE Act – for Charity, Aid, Recovery and Empowerment – started its legislative life two years ago as the Senate version of the faith-based program. Since then most of its controversial sections for government grants to churches and other religious groups have been removed. The bill now mostly consists of tax incentives designed to encourage individuals and corporations to donate to charities.

On March 28, Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.), one of the Senate co-sponsors of Bush's faith-based legislation, announced that he had agreed to remove the bill's most controversial section in order to prime it for passage. That section would have required the government to give what Santorum called "equal treatment" to religious providers in distributing grants to social-service programs. The section said government could not discriminate against awarding welfare contracts to agencies simply because they had religious names, had religious art or icons on the walls of their facilities, or had religious requirements for membership on their boards of directors.

The provision was already a compromise with groups that oppose explicit expansion of the government's ability to fund pervasively religious charities. However, some senators believed the compromise language still left the door too open to interpretation by an administration that has repeatedly attempted to expand government funding for religious groups. Objectors to those provisions – led by Sens. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) and Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) – ended up killing last year's version of the bill in the Senate.

The latest compromise on the bill appears to have answered Reed and Durbin's objections. However, in floor debate April 3, Reed expressed continued concerns with certain portions of the bill that remain. He mentioned worry about the so-called "Compassion Capital Fund," which would provide more than \$150 million a year to offer "technical assistance" to faith-based and other small community charities to aid them in building capacity.

Opponents of government funding for religious groups also have been concerned that any version of the CARE Act the House passes may attempt to re-include the controversial provisions.

In an April 3 briefing with reporters, Santorum said he had reached an agreement with House Majority Whip Rep. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) that any version of the CARE Act passed in the House would not contain the controversial language.

Reed spokesman Greg McCarthy said his boss had confidence in Blunt's assurance.

But Santorum – a strong supporter of Bush's faith-based plan – did indicate that he would attempt to use other legislative vehicles later in this session of Congress to expand the government's ability to support religious groups. "I expect to bring equal-treatment language back when we deal with the issue of welfare" later in this session, Santorum said. He reiterated that intention in a press conference following the April 9 passage of the CARE Act.

Last year, the House passed a version of the faith-based initiative with virtually all of Bush's requirements intact – including the ability of government to fund pervasively religious groups and a provision that would explicitly allow such groups to receive government funds while retaining their exemption from federal civil-rights laws that allows them to discriminate on the basis of religion or ideology in hiring. But the legislation fell victim to intense opposition in the Senate.

Catapulting over the Senate controversy on the issue, Bush enacted many of the goals of his faith-based plan

administratively, through a December 2002 executive order and through administrative rule changes. However, congressional supporters of the initiative want to codify these orders into permanent law so that future presidents cannot overturn them without congressional approval.

In recent weeks, House committees considering welfare-reauthorization bills have dealt with the employment-discrimination issue explicitly. On March 28, the House Education and Workforce Committee voted along strict party lines to include a provision allowing religious organizations receiving funds under a welfare bill to practice employment discrimination. The amendment provoked acrimonious partisan debate in the committee.

And a House committee dealing with reauthorization of the National Service Act discussed whether religious providers funded under the program should be exempted from civil-rights protections required of other federal contractors. The Bush administration argued in the last Congress for this change to the law, which covers AmeriCorps and other federal community-service programs.

In addition, the administration has recently proposed rule changes for federal grantees under programs administered by the departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs that would similarly exempt religious contractors from federal civil-rights laws.

Although he said he approved of the CARE Act, Durbin took the opportunity of debate on it to address problems he has with other parts of Bush's faith-based plan. On April 8, from the Senate Floor, he launched into a lengthy recounting of the origins of the religious-liberty protections of the First Amendment in America.

"Over the past two years, President Bush and his faith-based initiative have repeatedly eroded 200 years of carefully protected separation between church and state," Durbin said, contending that providing government funding to religious groups not only subsidizes employment discrimination with federal dollars, but creates great potential for religious strife. "It appears that what the president wants to achieve with this initiative is to fundamentally change the historic balance in the relationship between government and religion that our founding fathers struck over 200 years ago."

But Santorum responded that government provision of funds to religious organizations to perform social services is necessary because such groups solve problems secular organizations cannot. "One of the things I believe is essential to a lot of faith organizations – one of the reasons that faith organizations should be and need to be included in providing social services – is that a lot of these faith-based organizations don't just treat the symptom," Santorum said. "What they do, because of their mission, they treat the mind. They treat the spirit and they treat the emotional well being of this person. They treat the whole person. That is one of the keys to success in trying to truly turn people's lives around in a way that brings them back into productive life in America."

The CARE Act is S. 476.

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Differing opinions on war can create dialogue or damage

By John Hall

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DALLAS (ABP) – Conversation among Christians about the war in Iraq should begin with respect for differing views, according to Christian theologians from a variety of traditions. But, they added, assertions about the righteousness of the war that lack respect for other Christian views can cause damage to the cause of Christ.

Stanley Hauerwas, a Methodist theologian at Duke University Divinity School, said Scripture serves as a dividing point in many instances for Protestants.

The Catholic Church, with its hierarchical structure, has an organized way of being unified, Hauerwas argued, but Protestantism allows room for multiple interpretations of the same verse or passage. The lack of a final authoritative figure or structure to encourage a consensus allows Protestants to explore the Bible, Hauerwas said – but it leads to difficulty finding common ground for discussion.

Though much of the discussion of Christian viewpoints on the war has centered on the ancient Christian system of "just-war" philosophy, Protestants disagree whether that is the model that should be used. For example, Hauerwas is a pacifist who disagrees with just-war theory.

This confusion about how to formulate an argument – and unwise presentations of opinions by some Protestant leaders – negatively impacts the image of Protestants, Hauerwas believes. He said Protestants mirror the "moral disarray of society" in their dialogue without an agreed-upon structure for discussion.

Baptist theologian Ronald Smith said dialogue among Christians regarding should begin with the Bible. "The question for Christians should not be, 'Is it conservative or liberal?'" he said. "It should be, 'Does this reflect the life and teachings of Jesus Christ?'"

Smith, a professor of theology at the Logsdon School of Theology at Hardin-Simmons University, said the Bible provides the basis for all conversations about the morality of the Middle East conflict. Reflection on Scripture and researching the issue can lead to fruitful discussion that brings people together even if they disagree, he said.

Smith said that, if it is truly open, conversation among Christians on the war can help people grasp a global understanding of God's saving purpose and equip people with ways to deal with the war issue without demanding one conclusion. "I think there are very devout people on both sides of this issue," he said. "We need to affirm these people to make a judgment."

Smith encouraged Christians with differing opinions on the war's morality to gather and discuss the topic. He said he believes the dialogue will help each person involved. "I often learn from people who do not agree with me," he noted. "I may not change my mind, but I will have a better-formulated conclusion."

But according to Hauerwas, religious leaders are directing the comments in the wrong direction. They are not going to influence politicians, he said, so they should speak with their congregations or constituencies.

Many Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant leaders around the world have condemned the war. Baptist leaders who have spoken out against the war effort include Denton Lotz of the Baptist World Alliance, Lindsay Penn-Matheson of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America and Stan Hasteley of the Alliance of Baptists.

Meanwhile, Southern Baptist Convention leaders are among the few Christian leaders around the world who have spoken out strongly in favor of the war. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and outspoken Virginia pastor Jerry Falwell are among Southern Baptist leaders who have publicly shown support for the effort.

Christian theologians agreed faith leaders should speak to the war issue to provide a needed Christian voice in the

discussion of important moral issues. William Cavanaugh, a Catholic theologian at the University of Saint Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., believes it would be "disastrous" for Christian leaders to remain quiet about the conflict.

Many Christians spend one hour a week at church, but watch several hours of television coverage a night, Cavanaugh pointed out. Church leaders need to be outspoken in what they see as biblical stances to help people better understand issues from a Christian standpoint.

"The greatest danger is people will form their opinion based on what they see on Fox News and not what they hear in church," Cavanaugh said. "Silence is not really an option. If you do that, you're abandoning people in secular society."

Smith, meanwhile, said a pastor should not encourage one stance over another from the pulpit, but should instead discuss it in a teaching forum outside a regular worship service.

Above all, theologians emphasized that leaders must clearly present their opinions as their own and not representative of a body, if that is the case. Opinions must be logical and founded in fact.

"If Christian leaders don't speak on these issues, who will we listen to?" Smith asked.



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