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N-CO

Nominator: Committee
Violated Peace Process

By Marv Knox

NASHVILLE (BP)--The Southern Baptist Committee on Nominations violated the convention's peace process by politicizing the selection of denominational trustees, a member of the committee has charged.

But the committee's chairman has refuted the allegation, citing theology -- not politics -- as the standard for trustee nominations.

The committee met in Nashville March 17-18 to nominate people to fill trustee vacancies for Southern Baptist boards, seminaries, commissions and committees. Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting will vote on those nominations when they convene in San Antonio, Texas, June 14-16.

The nominating committee "violated the very spirit of the (SBC) Peace Committee report," said Raymond T. Boswell, an insurance executive from Shreveport, La.

The SBC has been plagued by charges of theological irregularity and political maneuvering since the late 1970s. The Peace Committee was created in 1985 to restore harmony to the convention. The Peace Committee's report, which was adopted by an almost-unanimous vote during the SBC annual meeting last summer, cited the background of the conflict and recommended changes to bring about peace.

Boswell said the Peace Committee report was violated because a conservative political litmus test was applied to several potential nominees. The question was asked about some of them, "Have they been in the struggle with us since 1979?" he said.

"So the decision was not whether you believe the whole Bible and whether you believe in the inspiration of Scripture," he said of the nomination process. "The issue rests on whether or not you have been in the struggle with them since 1979."

Such questioning of identity and involvement runs "against the very statement in the Peace Committee report in which they say, 'It is the unanimous conclusion of the Peace Committee that fairness in the appointive process would contribute to peace,'" Boswell said.

"Throughout the conclusions and recommendations of the Peace Committee, this kind of thing touches organized political activity and political strategies developed by a group with central control," he added. "Those were a part of the Peace Committee recommendations, and they (the Committee on Nominations) have violated the very spirit of the Peace Committee report."

Nominating committee Chairman Joseph T. Knott III, an attorney from Raleigh, N.C., said that charge is untrue, mainly because the issue in the SBC is theology and not politics.

"I did not think it was a political criterion that was being laid down," Knott said. "My reading of the committee was that people were very much concerned about church membership, baptisms, Cooperative Program, the stand on the Peace Committee report, the Bible and its total trustworthiness -- lots of interest in a person theologically. The only motivation I have as I read that committee was theological."

Convention politics was not part of the consideration, because politics is not part of the controversy, he added: "I don't believe there has been political involvement. I believe the whole controversy has been theological and not political. ... The idea of a political struggle -- I disagree with that whole concept."

"By politics, I mean people banding together for a political purpose so that one group of people will gain political advantage over another group for the furthering of the winning team's careers. That's not what I see going on. I don't see this as a career-enhancing sort of activity.

"I see it purely as an issue that's being debated, a theological issue that has nothing to do with the term 'politics' as it is generally used. I see it as purely service to Christ."

Boswell, however, cited two primary evidences of what he called political activity: the questioning of potential nominees' involvement in the conservative cause within the SBC and the involvement in the nomination process of conservative leaders who are not members of the nominating committee.

He cited his own experience as an example of the first type of activity. He and his Louisiana colleague on the committee, Monroe pastor Benny R. Thompson, presented alternate slates of nominees for most Louisiana trustee vacancies.

The duo had a "good meeting" prior to the Nashville session and agreed they "just come from different points of view with regard to people serving as trustees of our agencies and institutions," Boswell said. "We agreed that I would present my slate, and he would present his, and together we would present those we could agree on.

"When I had presented mine, and my counterpart had presented his, ... I was asked first, 'What do your people believe about the Bible?' ... Then my counterpart was asked, 'Have those you nominated been in the struggle with us since 1979?'"

Concerning his second element of politics -- involvement of people who are not on the committee -- Boswell said two nominating committee members mentioned contacting conservative SBC leaders, who are not on the committee, about their recommendations.

On another front, the nominating committee's work was politicized further by the operation of a Knott-appointed subcommittee, Boswell said. That group established operating procedures with disregard for previously established functions and policies, and it screened nominees to determine their theological and political orthodoxy, he added.

Knott declined to comment on specific actions taken by the committee, including any questions raised about potential nominees. He also declined to describe the "internal workings of the committee."

"We unanimously passed a motion that we weren't going to talk about the work of the committee, at least until the report is made public," he said. "I'm not going to comment on what Brother Boswell said. I'm not going to talk about what was done within the committee, because I feel bound by the strictures of our vote."

Boswell cited his Southern Baptist record as evidence that he did not speak flippantly about the nominating committee. He noted he had near-perfect attendance at his local Baptist association's annual meeting for four decades; served his church as a deacon for 31 years and Sunday school and/or church training director for 27 years; was Louisiana Baptist Convention president; and has previously served on the SBC Executive Committee, Canada Study Committee, Committee on Committees and Committee on Boards.

"I go back, not to '79 in the struggle, but to 1929, when I was three months old and in a Southern Baptist church," he said. "I did not want to betray the confidence of the committee, because it was supposed to be kept quiet until convention time. But others (committee members from Texas and Florida) have released it, and I just simply said if they can, ... then I can release this information."

Knott implied rumors circulating about possible nominations may have come from nominees themselves: "Every person that was nominated has heard from the Southern Baptist Executive Committee. As far as the (nominating) committee itself discussing these things publicly, it was my understanding that the committee would not talk."

Pressler: Southern Will Avoid
Southeastern-Type Controversy

By Pat Cole

N- CO
(SBTS)

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary will not experience the type of controversy that has raged at its sister school in North Carolina, Paul Pressler predicted.

Pressler, an appeals court judge from Houston and a leader of Southern Baptist conservatives, told students the Louisville, Ky., seminary would avoid a major administrative shake-up because of "realistic efforts" by seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt to hire conservative faculty members.

In October, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary President W. Randall Lolley and Dean Morris Ashcraft announced their resignations in response to actions taken by the Wake Forest, N.C., school's board of trustees to ensure that only people who profess biblical inerrancy will be hired for faculty positions. Several other administrators also submitted their resignations.

"I don't think you're going to have the situation at Southern that you had at Southeastern because of the leadership of Dr. Honeycutt," Pressler said at an April 13 meeting of the seminary's Student Evangelical Forum. Although Pressler's visit to the campus coincided with the annual meeting of the school's board of trustees, he did not directly address actions taken by the seminary's governing body.

At the meeting, trustees unanimously elected conservative New Testament scholar David Dockery to the faculty and, by a vote of 45 to seven, agreed to grant tenure to faculty member Molly Marshall-Green, the first female theology professor to receive tenure at a Southern Baptist seminary.

The guidelines set forth by trustees at Southeastern for hiring faculty there were a "corrective measure," Pressler said, noting the policies were a "way to balance" the faculty with people who held "traditional Southern Baptist beliefs."

The resignations at Southeastern were voluntary, and Pressler said, adding, he "would have hoped they would have stayed on."

The situation at Southeastern had been aggravated by some faculty members and students whom he described as "militant."

"There was a reaction without trying to understand what's going on," he said.

Some Southern Baptist agencies had not made "any accommodation to the conservative viewpoint" until conservatives gained a majority on the their boards, Pressler said, "The thing that bothered me most is that when the problems were raised in the '70s conservatives were viewed as barbarians who were invading Rome from the North."

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Southern Seminary Trustees
Show Signs Of Harmony

By David Wilkinson

N- CO
(SBTS)

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--In back-to-back votes, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees added a conservative New Testament professor to the seminary's faculty and awarded tenure to a theology professor who has been a target of conservatives in the denomination's theological controversy.

The actions were hailed by seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt as evidence of "a new spirit" reflecting the trustees' support of the seminary's efforts to be "an agent of reconciliation" in the troubled denomination.

In the final session of their April 11-13 annual meeting on the seminary campus in Louisville, Ky., trustees voted unanimously to add David S. Dockery, professor of theology and New Testament at Criswell College in Dallas, to a position as assistant professor of New Testament. Dockery was awarded a contract without tenure, effective with the completion of his doctoral studies.

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Asked to provide background on the search process, Honeycutt told trustees he had given the faculty search committee "an unprecedented directive." Any recommendation had to be consistent with his announced commitment to add to the School of Theology "someone who would represent the view of the more conservative" segment of the denomination, he said.

Dockery met that requirement, he said, adding, "He is a Southern Baptist scholar ... who will bring a different perspective to our faculty."

In contrast to Dockery's election, which required less than two minutes of discussion, the vote on tenure for theology Professor Molly Marshall-Green followed nearly two hours of discussion about her theological views.

The vote of support -- 45 for, seven against and three abstentions -- came after Honeycutt issued a personal appeal on her behalf, urging trustees to approve tenure as an indication of their willingness to "reach out in both directions." Marshall-Green, 38, is the first female professor of theology to be awarded tenure in any of the Southern Baptist Convention's six seminaries.

The vote also reflected a turnaround in support for the recommendation. Before the final session began, several conservative trustees had said at least 19 board members planned to vote against the recommendation. With two-thirds approval required, only 17 votes were needed to defeat it.

During debate, however, several trustees said they had changed their minds from the previous day, while others said just before the vote they were still uncertain about how to vote.

For several years some critics have charged Marshall-Green with espousing "universalism," a doctrine that all people come under God's grace and will receive salvation. The criticism stemmed from Marshall-Green's 1983 doctoral dissertation at Southern Seminary.

During the meeting, primary opposition was voiced by Arkansas pastor Mark Coppenger and Kentucky layman John Michael. Michael read an eight-point summary of statements in the dissertation that he said were "clearly in violation" of the Abstract of Principles, the seminary's governing theological statement. The dissertation "holds that one can be saved without knowing of, or believing in, Jesus Christ," he said.

Coppenger said Marshall-Green's views are in conflict with the abstract's section dealing with the "total depravity of mankind." He told trustees, "My position is that her understanding of the Bible does not square with this document (the abstract)." Trustees "must insist" that faculty members "affirm the clear meaning of the Abstract of Principles propositionally as true," he added.

James Monroe, retired Florida pastor and chairman of the trustees' academic personnel committee, read a written response from Marshall-Green to each of the eight criticisms voiced by Michael. He also read a brief statement of student support signed by the current and immediate past presidents of the student body. Throughout the discussion, about 120 students stood silently at the back of the room to demonstrate their support of Marshall-Green.

In presenting the recommendation, Monroe noted the committee had chosen unanimously to recommend tenure for Marshall-Green after meeting with her in a session "that to my knowledge in the 10 years I have served as a trustee was the most extensive and thorough interview ever held with a faculty member regarding any matter coming before this board of trustees."

The committee's conclusion was that Marshall-Green's "basic convictions and her teaching are in accordance with the Abstract of Principles and the Baptist Faith and Message," he said.

Monroe said Marshall-Green, in her dissertation, "dealt in a scholarly way with the troublesome question" about the fate of people who have never heard the Christian gospel. "It is our conviction that though Dr. Marshall-Green interprets some Scriptures in a way that might be different from many of us, that she has a very high view of inspiration of Scripture, that she has a very high view of the lordship of Jesus, and believes without question that salvation comes only through an expression of faith in him," he said.

Georgia pastor Jerry Mahan said Marshall-Green had "satisfied me on every question" during the committee's interview. Noting, "I am an inerrantist's inerrantist," he said it "would be a tragedy to deny her tenure based on what I fear is our misunderstanding of a thesis she wrote five years ago."

Echoing a concern voiced by several trustees, Tennessee pastor Wayne Allen said he felt uncertain about how to vote.

"I am in a dilemma," he said, noting Honeycutt "has given outstanding leadership toward trying to listen and respond and be fair ... and he's paid a great price for this. It's weighing on me that maybe some of us need to pay a price. This issue goes far beyond a professor and tenure."

Just prior to the vote, Honeycutt appealed to those trustees who were uncertain how to vote. Speaking in defense of Marshall-Green, Honeycutt underscored his commitment to lead the seminary to "reach out to all parties in our denomination."

"I am not asking you to vote against your conscience," he said. "I want to appeal to you, however, that if there is ambiguity in your mind and if you can find it in your heart under God, to vote a message to the world that this board of trustees has had open, fair discussion, and that we have reached out with one arm to bring in a professor from Criswell College ... and with the other arm to bring Dr. Molly Marshall-Green tenure."

"I believe it is still possible here -- as it is no longer possible at some of our seminaries -- for us to be a board that works through our differences, and for Southern Seminary to be a 'centrist' seminary where we can reach out in both directions."

He urged trustees not to "leave me amputated in this process of reconciliation, leaving me to say, 'As it turned out, I failed. I could reach out only toward Dr. Dockery; I could not reach out toward Dr. Marshall-Green.'"

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Southern Moves To Resolve
Trustee-Election Issue

N-CO
(S.B.T.S.)

Baptist Press
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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--Trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have moved to consummate the election of new seminary trustees more quickly, thereby averting future rumors that new members would not be accepted on the trustee board.

Meeting April 11-13 at the seminary campus in Louisville, Ky., they voted unanimously to hold an adjourned session of the board in San Antonio, Texas, following the 1988 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, in order to promptly elect new trustees nominated by the convention.

Because of provisions in the seminary's charter, the school's board elects new trustees at its annual meeting in April, following by 10 months the SBC annual meeting the previous June.

Reports had circulated before this year's meeting that some trustees planned to recommend the board reject trustees elected at the 1987 SBC meeting and perhaps even attempt to "pull out" of the convention.

Seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt said the rumors were "totally unjustified" and had been generated by a mass mailing of information taken from minutes of the board's executive committee.

"As I have said on numerous occasions, the seminary's name is not a geographical name but a denominational name," Honeycutt said. "It has never been our intention to be anything other than a cooperating Southern Baptist seminary." Although the San Antonio meeting will cost \$10,000 to \$15,000 in unbudgeted expense, he said, that meeting will be worth the cost "as an expression of good faith."

Trustees also voted to add a day to their fall retreat in October for a special meeting when the board's executive committee will bring recommendations to accelerate the election process in order to avoid the "ambiguity and uncertainty" created by current provisions.

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In other actions, trustees:

-- Adopted a 1988-89 operating budget of \$14.8 million, a 2.7 percent increase over the previous year. The budget includes no provisions for salary increases for faculty and staff.

-- Approved a phased construction plan for the seminary's \$12.6 million Campus Center Complex, with each phase contingent upon funds being in hand or committed to be received before completion of the project. The seminary hopes to break ground on the initial phase in the next few months.

-- Voted to present the seminary's E.Y. Mullins Denominational Service Award to Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of the Southern Baptist Woman's Missionary Union. The award is the seminary's highest honor.

-- Elected officers for 1988-89. Alton Butler, pastor of Myrtle Grove Baptist Church, Pensacola, Fla., was elected chairman, succeeding Perry Webb, recently retired pastor of First Baptist Church, Baton Rouge, La. William W. Causey, pastor of Parkway Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss., was elected second vice chairman, succeeding George W. Steincross, pastor of Second Baptist Church, Liberty, Mo. Re-elected to second one-year terms were Sam McMahon Jr., chairman of the board, Southeast Commercial Corp., Charlotte, N.C., first vice chairman; and Fred Pfannenschmidt of Gibson/Pfannenschmidt Realtors, Louisville, secretary.

-- Approved several increases in fees and charges for 1988-89, including a 5 percent increase in rental charges for campus housing and a \$25 increase in student matriculation fees to \$400 per semester for 1989-90.

-- Received a report from the administration outlining a five-year institutional plan for the seminary.

In other personnel decisions, trustees promoted David E. Garland from associate professor to professor of New Testament interpretation and granted tenure to six other faculty members. Two former faculty members were elected to professor emeritus positions -- Dale Moody in theology and Findley Edge in Christian education.

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MissionsUSA Receives Awards
For Content, Photo Usage

N-HMB

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ATLANTA (BP)--MissionsUSA, magazine of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, has been recognized in national competition for excellence in content and use of photographs.

The magazine received its first gold ADDY from the Atlanta Ad Club for its November-December issue, said Editor Phyllis Thompson. MissionsUSA was one of 81 recipients of the award from a field of 1,717 entries.

Thompson shared the award with magazine Design Editor Michael Largent, Typographer Joe Canzoneri, and editorial department Director Bill Junker. The magazine has a circulation of 110,000 copies.

The National Press Photographers Association also recognized the periodical for best use of photographs by a magazine. MissionsUSA shared the honor with LIFE and Sports Illustrated magazines, which also received awards of excellence for their choice of photography.

The photography award was based on photo content of the July-August, September-October and November-December editions of the magazine, said Mark Sandlin, director of the board's photojournalism department.

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