

## Reflections on the SBC in 2007

Having returned home from the annual meeting of the SBC in San Antonio, I again was reminded why I love and appreciate the people called Southern Baptists. We are not perfect to be sure. Sometimes we can be somewhat funny and even a bit strange in how we do business. Still, our love for the Lord Jesus, devotion to the Bible, and passion for the lost makes me glad to be a part of this family. It honors me to serve you and our Convention at Southeastern Seminary.

As I have done in previous years, let me share some reflections on this year's meeting, where I think we are, and where, by God's grace, we can go in the days ahead. Know that what follows will chart the future for Southeastern Seminary.

First, I rejoice in the re-election of Frank Page as our Convention president, and the election of Jim Richards and Eric Redmond as 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> vice presidents. All three are friends of mine, and they are men for whom I have great respect. I will support each of them this coming year, especially with my prayers.

Second, we saw a renewed commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the sufficiency of Scripture, our doctrinal commitments, and the priority of the Great Commission both at home and abroad. All Southern Baptist should be able to unite around these great affirmations. Along with my fellow seminary presidents, I believe the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* is a solid theological confession to guide us. It is not an exhaustive statement, but it is a sufficient statement. It, along with the *Abstract of Principles*, will continue to give theological direction to Southeastern. This is what our convention reaffirmed on Tuesday evening. Barry McCarty, our chief parliamentarian said to me at the airport following the Convention, there was no understanding that this motion was asking our agencies to do anything different than what we had been doing. It was a reaffirmation, not a re-direction. In that context let me say this. Your seminaries are not interested in theological witch hunts. At the same time, we will not be ostriches with our heads in the sand. If we spot a teaching that possesses a danger to our churches or will compromise our ability to fulfill the Great Commission, you can rest assured that we will withstand it with all our might.

Third, Southern Baptists are overwhelmingly a body of cessationist and continualist when it comes to spiritual gifts and their activity today. We are not "charismatics" in any historic sense of that word. This is what the recent LifeWay survey clearly revealed, and I am surprised at a number of shrill responses I have heard. I am personally grateful for the research done in this area by LifeWay under the superb leadership of its president Thom Rainer, and I am disappointed that some have questioned Dr. Rainer's motives and intentions. I have known Thom for more than ten years, and I know him to be a man of the highest degree of integrity. Now, let me put my theological cards on the table as I did at this convention. I am a continualist, "open but cautious," when it comes to the activity of spiritual gifts in our day. This has been my position since I began teaching at Criswell College almost twenty years ago. It is also the case that I do not have a private prayer language nor do I believe that one can make a good case for a private prayer language from the biblical text. Still, I must be honest and note that good non-charismatic scholars like D.A. Carson and Darrell Bock believe 1 Corinthians 14 allows for the possibility of such a gift. Therefore, for me and for Southeastern Seminary, the issue will be one of priority and agenda. If someone makes

private prayer languages an agenda item, then I will oppose them in the strongest measure. In fact, as I said above, I will withstand any agenda or movement that gets in the way of fulfilling the Great Commission of Christ. Perhaps you wonder how many of our faculty at Southeastern has a private prayer language. The answer is I do not know. I have never asked. It is not an issue with this faculty, and it will not become one.

Fourth, I believe it is clear that Southern Baptists have got to grow in the discipline of thinking theologically and living biblically. Hopefully the new Broadman and Holman work, *A Theology for the Church*, will help us in this area. I had the honor to edit this book, and it includes contributions from some of the brightest and best in Southern Baptist life. Our own David Nelson, Pete Schemm, John Hammett and Ken Keathley participate in this project. You will also discover that Mark Dever, David Dockery, Timothy George, Al Mohler, Russ Moore, Paige Patterson, Malcolm Yarnell, and Greg Thornberry penned significant chapters as well. Southern Baptists cannot afford sit on the sidelines when it comes to good and careful theological reflection. At Southeastern we are committed to loving God with our heart and head. We believe in pursuing the model left to us by the apostle Paul, the great theologian and the great missionary. We believe the best context for doing theology is the Great Commission. The best missionaries are capable theologians, and the best theologians are also passionate missionaries. The two must never be separated. This is absolutely essential for the future health of our denomination.

Theological discussion and debate, carried out in the atmosphere of mutual love and respect, is a good and healthy thing. Indeed, it is vitally necessary for the health and well-being of the church. Southeastern is delighted to partner with LifeWay and the Founder's Ministry in sponsoring a conference on Calvinism at Ridgecrest on November 26-28. No subject needs more light and less heat than this one. Extreme positions and dispositions need to be exposed, confronted and rejected. Areas of agreement that will show how we can work together for the gospel need to be embraced and affirmed. We are thrilled to host on our campus, October 26-27, what is certainly to be the premier C.S. Lewis conference in America in several decades. We also are glad to sponsor a conference on the Emerging/Emergent Church with participants like Mark Driscoll and Ed Stetzer on September 21-22. I applaud neither Pastor Driscoll's view on alcohol nor his less than wholesome language. The former is unwise and runs the risk of compromising his witness. The latter is blatantly sinful. However, we need to hear and learn from persons like Mark Driscoll in how to effectively engage an increasingly secular culture with the life changing gospel of Jesus Christ. We can learn from those with whom we do not see eye-to-eye theologically, or practically, (e.g. in everyday decisions of Christian living). I want a well informed and educated student body. I believe it is appropriate to invite to a college or seminary campus those you would not invite to speak or lead in worship when your local church gathers for worship. It seems to me that a clear difference exists between the two.

Fifth, I was delighted we approved a resolution on integrity in ministry but disappointed we did do the same for one on regenerate church membership. Some feared the latter was telling the local church what to do, but a resolution can never do that. Some may think there was some political agenda in the works. However, this is a clear biblical and theological issue all Baptist should be able to affirm. Perhaps the resolution presented needs to be reworded or adjusted, but an emphasis on regenerate church

membership needs to be recaptured by our churches. I have personally been saying this for several years now. I will continue to speak to this in the days ahead.

Sixth, it was a joy to welcome Geoff Hammond as the new president of North American Mission Board and to receive their fine report. Southeastern hopes to work side by side with the North American Mission Board in the years to come as we seek to reach North America with the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Finally, this year's attendance is a cause for grave concern. In spite of "pre-convention activity," this was one of the smallest conventions in years. Our annual meeting is also aging, and I include myself having turned 50. A younger generation committed to the goals and convictions of the Conservative Resurgence must be sought out. We must get them involved with what we are doing. They need our wisdom and we need their passion and energy. I pledge to do my part to see this happen. I believe what is happening on our seminary campuses is a very hopeful sign.

God has blessed our Convention beyond what we deserved. He has indeed been gracious and faithful. Now is the time for us to come together as a mighty army equipped and ready to take the gospel to the nations. Time is short. The hour is urgent. Heaven and hell are real and Jesus is the only difference. If you come to Southeastern, if you send your children to Southeastern, know that our challenge will not be, "Should you go to the nations?" Rather, it will be, "why would you not go? You have already received the command to go to the nations by the Lord Jesus Himself." Southeastern is committed to being a Great Commission Seminary, and a Great Commission seminary is what we will be. I love you and consider it a joy words cannot capture to serve you.

Danny Akin  
President