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By Robert Marus

Associated Baptist Press

WASHINGTON (ABP)-A Southern Baptist Convention leader reacted to charges that he slandered the Baptist World Alliance in a speech by affirming his complaints against the worldwide Baptist body-and issuing more.

Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth and a member of a study committee that recommended the SBC break ties with the BWA, issued a statement on the controversy surrounding a speech he gave at the SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis urging messengers to vote in favor of leaving the alliance.

In it, Patterson cited "a continual leftward drift" in BWA as justification for the SBC's breaking ties. As an example of the alleged drift, Patterson noted

that BWA continues to be affiliated with the American Baptist Churches USA, which has accepted a new regional association in the Pacific Northwest that contains some gay-friendly churches.

Although American Baptists' general board is officially on record as opposing homosexuality, Patterson accused the ABC of being too open to gay-friendly churches. The ABC defers to local churches' decisions on sexual-orientation issues. The SBC expels churches it views as "affirming" or "promoting" homosexuality.

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz—who is a Southern Baptist—released a statement saying Patterson's charges "slandered" the alliance. BWA spokesperson Wendy Ryan said Southern Baptist leaders never had raised the homosexuality issue as a criticism of BWA prior to Patterson's speech.

But Patterson said it was one of many important issues leading to the recommendation to break ties.

"Southern Baptists have not said that the BWA promotes gay marriage or homosexuality," Patterson said. "We have said, based on a press release from one of (BWA's denominational member) unions, that some unions now tolerate churches which welcome practitioners of homosexual behavior.

"We have also said that if the BWA tolerates a convention or union which is accepting of churches with this anti-biblical agenda, then we can no longer lend our name or resources to that alliance," Patterson said.

Lotz also dismissed as "ridiculous" SBC leaders' charges that the BWA has given a platform to "anti-American" sentiments expressed by international Baptists without allowing Americans to respond.

"We are citizens of the kingdom of God and loyal citizens of our own nations. As Baptists who believe in the authority of the word of God, we believe that all of us must be open to the prophetic voice from God as it

applies to our nations and to the world,” Lotz said.

“We believe that Baptists should be good and patriotic citizens of their countries, but patriotism must always be limited to and judged by the Bible's call for ultimate loyalty to Christ who is above all!”

Patterson said his criticism was that BWA leaders provided insufficient opportunity for Americans to respond to what he perceived as anti-American sentiments at BWA meetings.

“No charge has been made that the BWA is anti-American or anti-Southern Baptist,” he said. “Those sentiments are not infrequently stated, but we are all big boys here and can handle criticism. That to which we have objected is that when these charges come, no effort has been made in those same forums for participants to hear the other side or receive an answer that might put matters in a different light.”

Patterson also raised the issue of BWA tolerating member bodies that support women as pastors. He said that refuted Lotz's claim that BWA was a “conservative, evangelical” fellowship.

“The BWA says that it does not advocate the role of female pastors,” he said. “But neither does it call for a biblical position on the matter. In ways sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, some leadership in the BWA has, in fact, sanctioned such practices. Again, that is their right and privilege—just as it is our right and mandate to hold to a biblical position and not lend name and resources to the promotion of views that we honestly view as antithetical to biblical truth.”

Patterson also said BWA had repeatedly provided a platform at its events for “liberal and neo-orthodox presenters” such as former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, and American Baptist sociologist Tony Campolo.

“Southern Baptists have no intention of engaging in any further tit for tat with BWA leadership,” Patterson concluded. “There is a world to reach for Christ. Southern Baptists shall now turn our attention to that. We would risk the suggestion that the BWA do the same.”

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