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INDIANAPOLIS (ABP)-Paige Patterson's assessment of the American Baptist Churches USA's stand on homosexuality is "completely outrageous," declared ABC General Secretary Roy Medley.

Patterson, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention's Baptist World Alliance study committee, cited BWA's affiliation with American Baptists as an example of the alliance's "continual leftward drift."

Patterson pointed in particular to Evergreen Baptist Association, an ABC regional group established last year in the Pacific Northwest that includes some churches that accept homosexuals as members.

The SBC "can no longer afford to be aligned in any way" with groups that are considered gay-friendly, insisted Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

“Nowhere in any of the conversations with the BWA has such an excuse ever been given,” Medley responded.

The SBC's decision to pull out of BWA “was clearly and solely a response to the BWA's vote to welcome the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship into the Baptist World Alliance,” he said.

“That is when the issue arose and is the substance of their action, though they have consistently sought to cover it with patently untrue excuses, such as that the BWA is anti-American.

“To characterize American Baptist Churches USA as being in favor of gay marriage goes beyond the pale. Our policy statement on family life, adopted in 1984, maintains, 'We affirm that God intends marriage to be a monogamous, life-long, one-flesh union of a woman and a man.'”

Richard Schramm, ABC deputy general secretary for communication, said American Baptist leaders “regret that our Southern Baptist brothers and sisters have been given a misleading picture—one that distorts the very traditional Christian understanding of marriage and sexual expression held by the great majority of American Baptists.”

He said ABC's statement on marriage “maintains 'that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching.'”

In addition to voting to withdraw from BWA, SBC messengers gave initial approval to SBC bylaw revisions that reflect the change. BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz noted, however, that the SBC's action “seemed very inconsistent” at that point.

While Patterson cited affiliation with American Baptists as a reason to withdraw from BWA, revised SBC bylaw 17 leaves intact a provision for the SBC to “send a fraternal messenger to the annual sessions of the American Baptist Churches.”

With SBC leaders insisting “they do not want to be tainted by anyone they're aligned with,” Lotz said, “we find it strange not to belong to BWA because the American Baptists are there, and then on the other hand to send a representative to the American Baptist Churches.”

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