

SBC ends 99-year relationship with Baptist World Alliance_62804

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Messengers
to the
Southern
Baptist
Convention
annual
meeting
vote for the
SBC to
withdraw
from
membership
in the
Baptist
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Alliance.
(Van Payne
Photo)

SBC ends 99-year relationship with Baptist World Alliance

By Trennis Henderson

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INDIANAPOLIS—Southern Baptist Convention messengers voted overwhelmingly to end the denomination's 99-year relationship with the Baptist World Alliance.

The action during the SBC annual meeting in Indianapolis follows several years of tension between the two organizations. SBC leaders repeatedly have accused BWA of affiliating with Baptist groups that espouse “aberrant theological views,” a charge denied by BWA officials.

Paige Patterson, speaking on behalf of the SBC's BWA study committee, told the 8,000 registered messengers that committee members “have noted with sorrow in our hearts a continual leftward drift in the Baptist World Alliance.”

Citing the example of BWA's affiliation with American Baptist Churches, Patterson said a group in that denomination is “committed to being a gay-friendly place for churches and people of that disposition.”



He apparently was referring to the Evergreen Baptist Association, a new ABC regional group in the Pacific Northwest that includes some churches that accept homosexuals as members. The issue of the Evergreen Association had not surfaced publicly before in the debate over BWA.

“What you give your name and your money to, you give your tacit approval to,” he added, insisting the SBC “can no longer afford to be aligned in any way” with gay-friendly groups.

In addition to Patterson, prominent SBC leaders on the study committee included Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee and a BWA vice president; Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources; Oklahoma pastor Tom Elliff, a former SBC president; Paul Pressler, a key architect of the SBC's “conservative resurgence”; and Jerry Rankin, president of the SBC International Mission Board.

Detailing other reasons for the split, the study committee report adopted in February by the SBC Executive Committee noted: “Much has been made about the inclusion of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship into the BWA as having been the cause of our present recommendation to withdraw from the organization.”

Declaring “one soaked by a rain need not blame the last raindrop,” the report added, “The decision of the BWA to include the CBF merely served as a confirmation that we must, as a convention, allow the world to see us without having to look through a BWA lens—a lens which, for us, has become too cloudy.”

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz, who was not invited by SBC leaders to address the BWA recommendation, said in an interview after the vote: “We were shocked by Dr. Patterson bringing in the gay issue which was never on the table before. ... To combine this with the whole question of gay marriage is really an insult to the rest of the Baptists of the world and particularly to the American Baptist Churches, which has taken a strong stand that homosexuality is incompatible with the Christian lifestyle.”

Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a former SBC president, also expressed concern that some denominations

affiliated with BWA “do not believe in the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture and regularly call it into question.”

Explaining that BWA is not a denomination, Lotz said in an interview, “There are 211 confessions or statements of faith” among BWA's 211 member bodies. “We certainly are not liberal,” he added. “We're all conservative evangelicals.”

During brief discussion on the floor of the convention, Larry Walker, a messenger from First Baptist Church of Dallas, urged messengers to support BWA as “a united, worldwide community of Baptists.”

Walker said he views BWA “not as a theological incubator but as a nursery” where the SBC and other groups can help small, struggling Baptist bodies around the world.

“We may not need them, but they desperately need us,” Walker said. “Is there something we can do to resolve and reconcile this relationship?”

Immediately after Walker's comments, messenger Wiley Drake of California called for the question, effectively cutting off further debate. Messengers then overwhelmingly voted by a show of hands for the SBC to withdraw its membership from BWA effective Oct. 1.

The action also will end the SBC's \$300,000 annual contribution to BWA. That amount was reduced last year by \$125,000 in anticipation of BWA accepting the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as a member body.

The SBC action specifies that the funds be earmarked for the convention “to develop and execute a new and innovative strategy for continuing to build strong relationships with conservative Christians around the world.”

Responding to the SBC vote, Lotz said: “Money is not the issue. Churches all across the Southern Baptist Convention are going to make up the

difference. It really is a theological question of schism and unity: What does it mean to be the body of Christ?

“It's very sad for Baptists of the world,” he said. “We're going to love the Southern Baptists. We want them to come back in.”

Lotz told reporters that, despite SBC complaints about BWA's theology, “we have not left Southern Baptists; Southern Baptists have left us. ... But we want them to come back”

He said world Baptists view the SBC dispute as “an inner conflict” among U.S. Baptist bodies.

“It was acceptance of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship into (BWA) membership that triggered this whole movement” to withdraw, he said.

In a public statement released after the SBC, Lotz said: “Baptists of the world, and the Baptist World Alliance in particular, were slandered by statements made to messengers at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. ...

“The blast from Indianapolis was like a bombshell in a crowded building. Millions of Baptists have been spiritually hurt, their witness maimed and our good name besmirched.”

Lotz cited a 1994 BWA General Council resolution opposing same-sex marriage. “The BWA does not support homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle, believing it to be incompatible with the teachings of Scripture,” he said. “(The BWA) affirms without reservation that marriage is a holy state and only between a man and a woman forever.”

Morris Chapman, president of the Executive Committee, said regarding Lotz: “His scathing denunciation of the Southern Baptist Convention ... revealed his long-term attitude toward our convention's leadership. He

erupted with accusations ... that could hardly have been created on the spur of the moment. What he said and the way he said it came from deep within."

Rob Marus of Associated Baptist Press contributed.

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