

SBC set to withdraw from Baptist World Alliance_122203

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Committee urges SBC to cut ties, funding to Baptist World Alliance

A Southern Baptist Convention study committee is recommending that the SBC withdraw from the Baptist World Alliance and stop funding the worldwide fellowship.

Charging the BWA with a “leftward drift,” the committee proposes that Southern Baptists lead in creating a new, more conservative, worldwide Baptist organization.

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“Continuing to allow presentations that call into question the truthfulness of Holy Scripture, refusing to support openly the idea that all who are saved must come to salvation through conscious faith in Jesus Christ, and promoting women as preachers and pastors are among the issues that make it impossible to endorse the BWA as a genuinely representative organization of world Baptists,” said the committee report, released six days before Christmas.

**SBC leaders charge
BWA with a
"leftward drift" in
theology. BWA
leader calls
proposed SBC
withdrawal "a sin
against love."**

The SBC study committee is recommending that the SBC withdraw its membership and financial support from BWA effective Oct. 1, 2004. Withdrawn funds could then be used “to develop and execute a new and innovative strategy for continuing to build strong relationships with conservative evangelical Christians around the world as together we witness to the saving power of our Lord Jesus Christ,” the report says.

BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz labeled the proposal “a sin against love,” warning it would “bring a schism within the life of our worldwide Baptist family.”

The BWA has “rejected the theology of liberalism,” Lotz said. “Our BWA member bodies affirm the trinity, the divinity of Christ, the resurrection, the atonement, second coming and future rule of God.”

Lotz characterized the SBC committee's recommendations as the “triumph

of ideology over doctrine.”

“In the end, it became a question of power and control and the desire of forcing Baptists of the world to fit into one particular mode or mold or interpretation of thinking. This is contrary to all Baptist understanding of the competency of the individual and of soul liberty,” he said.

Southern Baptists were instrumental in founding the BWA in 1905, and the SBC has been its largest financial contributor, providing up to \$425,000 a year to the BWA.

Last June at its annual meeting, the SBC voted to cut its funding to \$300,000 and allocate the \$125,000 difference to a new Southern Baptist “Kingdom Relationships” global initiative.

SBC Committee rationale

The study committee's recommendations will be considered by the SBC Executive Committee in February and by messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention next June.

The committee includes four former SBC presidents: Morris Chapman, committee chairman, president of the SBC Executive Committee; Jimmy Draper, president of LifeWay Christian Resources; Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, who drafted the three-page report; and Oklahoma pastor Tom Elliff.

Other committee members are SBC Executive Committee Chairman Gary Smith, pastor of Fielder Road Baptist Church in Arlington; retired Houston judge Paul Pressler; Jerry Rankin, president of the International Mission Board; Joe Reynolds, a Houston attorney; and Bob Sorrell, president of The Associates, a ministry based in Cordova, Tenn.

The study committee cited concerns about the potential impact on

constituent bodies when the BWA “gives apparent approval ... (to) aberrant theologies.”

The committee also claimed: “A decided anti-American tone has emerged in recent years. Continued emphasis on women as pastors, frequent criticisms of the International Mission Board of Southern Baptists, refusal to allow open discussion on issues such as abortion, and the funding of questionable enterprises through Baptist World Aid provide just a surface sampling of what has transpired in recent years.”

The committee report stated, “We pray for the day when the BWA will return to the faith on which it was founded and which has been historically held by Baptists for centuries. We pray for the restoration of fellowship that such a return will bring.”

However, the committee also stated it “anticipates with enthusiasm the possible emergence of a new fellowship with an unqualified adherence to the absolute Lordship of Christ, the inerrancy of Holy Scripture, salvation based on the substitutionary atonement of Christ appropriated through repentance toward god and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The proposed fellowship would have a “commitment to the sanctity of all human life” and advocacy of absolute religious liberty. “How or when this new fellowship develops will be for others to determine,” the committee said, “but numerous Baptist friends from around the globe have indicated their hearty interest in such a fellowship,” the committee stated.

BWA reaction

BWA President Billy Kim expressed the “deep regret” of “Baptist friends around the world” regarding the proposed SBC withdrawal from the BWA.”

The SBC was “a pioneer in the establishment of the BWA, near-ly 100 years

ago. They have made a tremendous contribution to the Baptist work around the world. All of us are saddened that the SBC (is) now withdrawing from the BWA," said Kim.

Noting the challenges Baptists and other evangelicals face as a minority faith in many parts of the world, Kim said it is "essential that we remain united to fulfill the Great Commission before Christ returns."

Kim called for prayers during the transitional period. "Pray that we will not lose the focus of our call for fellowship, encouragement and the propagation of the gospel."

In an interview with Baptist Press, public relations arm of the SBC Executive Committee, Kim said he was not surprised by the report and recommendations. "Adding CBF was the straw that broke the camel's back, I think. But there was a majority vote."

The BWA General Council voted 75-28 last July to accept the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship into BWA membership. The SBC study committee report did not specifically address the vote regarding the CBF.

SBC leaders respond

The committee chairman told Baptist Press the report "well captured the sentiment of the committee and has attempted to show that the basis for the committee's decision was wide-ranging, much more than any one incident of misunderstanding or disagreement."

Chapman said the committee's discussions might be summarized by one question of whether the SBC would be best represented around the world by the BWA or by itself.

"We do not seek to separate ourselves from others but desire to work directly with fellow Baptists around the world rather than through the

BWA,” Chapman said. “The BWA was always intended to be a fellowship among Baptists rather than the denomination-like organization that it is becoming. It makes no sense for Southern Baptists to duplicate through the BWA what we are doing already in our international missions effort to reach the world for Christ.

“Given the wide range of theological views represented by the BWA, we are convinced that it is best that Southern Baptists work directly with like-minded unions and conventions around the world rather than through the BWA.”

Committee member Rankin told Baptist Press he regretted that the BWA has continued to embrace “a 'diversity' beyond what Southern Baptists can feel comfortable with. It is unfortunate that there has been a steady deterioration in relationships for several years as the BWA has moved beyond being a worldwide fellowship of Baptists to promoting programs and adopting positions with which the SBC cannot identify.”

“I would not see the SBC taking an initiative to create an alternate global organization of Baptists,” Rankin said, “but we are committed to facilitating the desire of overseas Baptist unions and conventions who represent conservative theology and a solid evangelistic approach to missions to work together for mutual encouragement. I am confident many will respond to efforts to provide training, fellowship and cooperative mission endeavors to advance the kingdom of God.”

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