

Baucham and Ascol to be nominated as SBC leaders

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Two preachers known for their claims that the nation’s largest Protestant denomination is becoming too liberal will be nominated for top roles in the Southern Baptist Convention.

In a statement that blasted SBC leaders for abandoning biblical truth and embracing “radical feminism” and “Race Marxism,” a group of Baptist pastors and professors announced plans to nominate Tom Ascol, president of Founders Ministries and pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Cape Coral, Fla., for SBC president.

The same group also plans to nominate best-selling author Voddie Baucham, a former pastor and dean at African Christian University in Zambia, to lead the SBC Pastors’ Conference.

The statement, posted on the conservative website Capstone Report, said Ascol and Baucham will help turn the SBC away from “wokeness” and back to the Bible and criticized Baptist leaders who worry that the “world is watching” how Baptists behave.

“But we believe that God is watching, that he alone defines our terms and sets our agenda,” the statement read. “And God is not woke.”

A number of signatures on the statement belong to leaders of the Conservative Baptist Network, which has been critical of current SBC leadership. Among the CBN leaders signing the statement are Lee Brand, the current first vice president of the SBC and a seminary professor; Mark Coppenger, a retired SBC theology professor; Brad Jurkovich, pastor of First Baptist Church in Bossier City, La.; Mike Stone, a Georgia pastor and

defeated SBC presidential candidate; and Ronnie Rogers, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Norman, Okla.

Carol Swain, a retired professor and conservative commentator, and East Texas pastor Tom Buck of Lindale, a conservative social media agitator, also signed the statement.

Ascol joins Florida Baptist pastor Willy Rice as potential candidates for SBC president. Candidates for SBC president are nominated during the denomination's annual meeting.

Current SBC President Ed Litton, an Alabama pastor, announced earlier this month he will not seek a second one-year term in office—the first time an SBC president has not served a second term in 40 years.

Baucham a critic of social justice

The nominations of Baucham, author of *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe*, and Ascol, who has produced videos critical of the SBC, are the latest salvo in the “woke wars” being waged in the SBC and other evangelical groups.



A group of vocal critics in the SBC sees attempts to address racial injustice or other social ills as antithetical to the Christian gospel—in messaging that parallels that of Republican leaders and former President Donald Trump.

Ascol told The Daily Wire, a conservative media company co-founded by Ben Shapiro, his concerns and the concerns of his church about the SBC

long have been ignored.

“We’re told, you know, there’s nothing to see here. You’re meddling in business that doesn’t pertain to you,” he said.

Ascol has gained a higher profile in the SBC for his opposition to a resolution on critical race theory that passed during the SBC’s 2019 annual meeting. Ascol’s 2021 campaign to rescind that resolution failed.

‘Liberal drift’ in conservative SBC?

Stone, who narrowly lost the 2021 election for SBC president to Litton, posted a note on social media endorsing Ascol.

Since losing the election, Stone has missed a number of high-profile meetings of the SBC’s Executive Committee, where he is a trustee and former chairman. He also blamed Russell Moore, former head of the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, for his loss and sued Moore for libel. That lawsuit later was withdrawn.

Like Ascol, Stone has long been critical of what he sees as a liberal drift in the SBC.

“Tom is a pastor, a preacher, a writer and a staunch advocate for conservative Bible principles,” Stone wrote on Twitter.

Ascol told Religion News Service in an interview last year he believes SBC churches have been shaped more by pragmatism than by the Bible in recent decades. As a result, he said, SBC churches are filled with people who think they are Christians but really aren’t.

“We still have churches filled with unregenerate people,” said Ascol, whose ministry produced a documentary that criticized former SBC Bible teacher Beth Moore and former SBC President James Merritt of bringing the

“Trojan horse of social justice” into the denomination.

Baucham not member of SBC church

In recent weeks, rumors that Baucham would be nominated for SBC president circulated on social media. Baucham has confirmed those rumors but said he was not likely eligible to be SBC president because he is not technically a member of an SBC church.

Though he is the former pastor of an SBC church and was sent as a missionary by that church, Baucham is a member of a church in Zambia.

According to the SBC’s constitution, “Officers of the convention, all officers and members of all boards, trustees of institutions, directors, all committee members, and all missionaries of the convention appointed by its boards shall be members of Baptist churches cooperating with this convention.”

“I have indeed been asked to accept a nomination for SBC president. While I am honored to have been asked, I am not sure I am eligible,” Baucham said in March, according to Christianleaders.com.

Elections for the SBC Pastors’ Conference, which features a series on sermons held the two days before the convention’s annual meeting begins, are not subject to the same rules as the president of the denomination. The vote usually is held during the conference and in the past has been done by voice vote.

Baucham said if nominated as president of the Pastors’ Conference, he would focus the conference on “biblical preaching” and support Ascol.

“I would love to see a revival of great biblical preaching in the SBC,” Baucham said. “The Pastors’ Conference has the potential to play a significant part in that, especially if it is part of a larger movement that brings a man like Tom Ascol into the SBC presidency.”

Despite the success of the self-described Conservative Resurgence, which ousted more-moderate Baptists from the convention in the 1980s and 1990s and promised a golden age of evangelism and growth, the SBC has seen significant decline in recent years. The denomination lost more than 2 million members since 2006, with no turnaround in sight.