

# **Southern Baptist seminary denies request for reparations**

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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (RNS)—Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which released a report last year about its connections to slavery, has denied a request from an interracial ministers coalition to provide financial support to a nearby black college as a form of reparations.

EmpowerWest, a coalition of black and white pastors in Louisville, Ky., where the seminary is located, recently contacted school officials with their request.

The group suggested Southern Seminary could donate millions to a local Christian college whose students are predominantly African American.

In a May 31 letter of response, the president and board chair of the Southern Baptist Convention's flagship seminary said they would not transfer funds to another institution.

"We agree with the policy of the Southern Baptist Convention in this regard, and we do not believe that financial reparations are the appropriate response," wrote President Al Mohler and board Chair Matthew Schmucker.

The seminary released a 71-page report in December that said its early trustees and faculty "defended the righteousness of slaveholding" and espoused white supremacy. Founders of the seminary, which opened in 1859, owned more than 50 slaves.

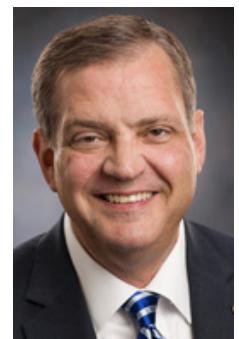
# **‘What are you going to do about it?’**

“Since the seminary has done a wonderful job of acknowledging what it did, it’s now time to ask ‘What are you going to do about it?’” said Joe Phelps, co-chair of EmpowerWest, which seeks to increase economic opportunities in predominantly black West Louisville.

Phelps, a 1978 graduate of the seminary and a white Louisville minister, and Kevin W. Cosby, a black Louisville pastor and president of Simmons College of Kentucky, were the lead signers of a petition to the seminary “to make an act of repentance and repair to descendants of American slavery for its leading role in crafting a moral and biblical defense of slavery.”

Among their recommendations was that the seminary give Simmons College a “biblical tithe,” or 10 percent, of its endowment, which they said is about \$100 million.

An Association of Theological Schools report about Southern Seminary showed the school had an endowment of \$90 million in 2017.



Al Mohler

We’re not going to respond to public demands for reparations made, quite interestingly, by the people who demand that the reparations be paid to them,” Mohler told Religion News Service. “And, furthermore whatever we do, this institution will do in keeping with its theological commitments.”

Simmons College has partnered with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group that split from the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1990s over differences about biblical interpretation and women's ordination, which the SBC does not support.

Mohler said his seminary began to address its past long before the report was issued.

"For decades the seminary has had rather ambitious efforts to serve African American churches and to educate African American students," he said.

The seminary had 228 blacks enrolled, comprising 4.26 percent of the total student body of 5,354, in its 2017-18 academic year.