

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and Texas Baptists
A Response by Dr. Charles S. Kelley, Jr.
September 14, 2000

This week a study committee of the Baptist General Convention of Texas announced they will recommend that their convention end their historic ties to the Cooperative Program approach to the support of World Missions and Evangelism by dramatically reducing the funding of the six Southern Baptist seminaries and by eliminating all funding for any seminary students except those from Texas. The major reason given to us in conversations with the state executive and the study committee is because the six seminaries are firmly committed to employing faculty members who will voluntarily and joyfully teach in accordance with and not contrary to the Baptist Faith and Message. Gifts from Texas Baptist Churches total just under \$900,000 to date this year, comprising about thirteen percent of our operating budget. After a time of reflection and prayer, here is my response.

First, no decision has been made on what the Baptist General Convention of Texas will actually do. That cannot happen until their state convention in late October. We must remember that the money we receive from Texas does not belong to the Baptist General Convention of Texas, nor does it belong to the Southern Baptist Convention. It belongs to Texas Baptist churches and is to be used as they want it used. We need to be praying for Texas Baptist churches in the next few weeks as they decide what they want to do.

Second, the Texas study committee acknowledged to us that they know they do not represent all Texas Baptist churches, and that they know not all Texas Baptist churches will go along with their proposal. I am a native son of Texas, and the Texas I know always had the world on its heart. To defund the education of more than ten thousand mission and ministry volunteers solely because they are not Texans, in order to give millions of dollars to three Texas schools educating less than four

hundred students, knowing that at least one of those schools already has an endowment of nearly one billion dollars, is not something every Baptist church in Texas will want to do. I am confident there will be churches who will continue their support of the Cooperative Program and its Great Commission approach to missions, evangelism, and theological education.

Third, our security never has been and will never be in the hands of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Our security is in the hand of God, and we are confident He will provide what is necessary for our Seminary's future through the means He chooses to use.

Fourth, we will not compromise on doctrinal integrity. It is and will remain one of our core values. In a news release the Texas committee misquoted and completely misrepresented me in an alleged comment about the Baptist Faith and Message. What is true is that we always have and always will expect our faculty to voluntarily and joyfully teach in accordance with and not contrary to the Baptist Faith and Message. As I shared with you one week ago, in an address you can find on my page at our web site, it was during my days as a student in a Texas Baptist school that I first heard a Southern Baptist professor teach Genesis was myth and legend, and a man named Moses never received ten commandments from God. I personally witnessed the effect of that theology on ministry students, and over my years as a professional scholar in evangelism and church growth, I have seen its effect on churches. To quote Dr. Daniel Vestal, leader of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, in comments he made during a panel discussion on the campus of an American Baptist seminary, as reported by Associated Baptist Press, the moderate Baptist news agency:

“To be honest, as I look at ABC (American Baptist Convention), I guess I don't see ABC churches and folks being really aggressively evangelistic. They don't win a lot of folks to Jesus. However, having said that, I don't see most moderate Southern Baptist

churches being aggressively evangelistic. We're not really passionate about the gospel changing people's lives. We're . . . [Associated Baptist Press omission] more oriented to political correctness and relevancy." (Associated Baptist Press, September 7, 2000)

Thus said the leader of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. With every fibre of my being I tell you this school is not going there. Not on my watch. Not as long as I have breath. So that we might remain faithful to our mission, we will remain faithful in our doctrine.

Fifth, stay focused on why you are here. God led you here, and God will provide for you here. Your administrative team will have contingency plans in place for the future. Do not let yourself get distracted from the task God has given us. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Let's prepare to storm the gates of hell and let our Commander, the Lord Jesus, handle the logistics. I close with one illustration of the faithfulness of God. I walked out of the meeting with the Texas Baptist study committee knowing the decision to recommend defunding our school had already been made. Ten minutes later I was told the seminary was going to receive an estate gift of \$400,000 to complete the endowment of a chair in Christian Education. The source of the gift? A sweet precious lady who was a lifetime employee of the Baptist General Convention of Texas! That was a reminder to me that God will provide. So my friends, get out your Bibles and get ready to hear from Dr. Olford and learn about the key to spiritual power . There are churches waiting for leaders, and we will be doing our best to get you ready for the task of helping churches learn to grow again.