

Southern Baptist Convention Top Exec Boosts Anti-Public School Agenda

By: Robert Parham

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The Southern Baptist Convention's chief executive officer advocates the launch of a Christian alternative to public education, a move that joins at the hip the largest Protestant denomination with a five-year campaign for Southern Baptists to abandon the public schools.

"In far too many public schools throughout the country our children are being bombarded with secular reasoning, situational ethics and moral erosion," wrote Morris Chapman, president and chief executive officer of the SBC's Executive Committee.

Chapman wrote in late April that Christian schools should be part of a church's "intentional ministry."

He urged Baptist associations—geographically clustered churches—to aid congregations in such a ministry.

"Why shouldn't we have at least one Christian school in every association that merges dynamic biblical principles with academic excellence? At minimum, a number of Southern Baptist churches in the same association could band together to create an outstanding Christian school for the area," wrote Chapman.

Anticipating the moral critique of goodwill Baptists and Baptist public school employees, who support public education, Chapman offered a beguiling false choice: "The focus should not be to abandon public schools, but to be certain not to abandon our biblical responsibility to come alongside parents in training up a child in the way he should go."

Chapman concluded: "In recent days, two questions have weighed heavily on my soul. If Southern Baptists don't do it, who will? If we don't do it now, do we risk forever losing the opportunity to build schools for God's glory and the future of our children, grandchildren and the land we love?"

Of course, abandoning public schools will in fact abandon the biblically mandated responsibility to care for all God's children—the poor, the immigrant, the special-needs children.

Abandoning public schools is really about retreating from the larger culture, from the public square, in order to "protect our own" from racial, religious, cultural and economic diversity. It's also about shielding children from science.

Nonetheless, Chapman's surprising move drew cheers from the extreme right, which has been calling for the exodus from public schools since 2004.

One of their leaders, Houston attorney Bruce Shortt, called Chapman's statement "the first step in the 'exit strategy.'"

"All Christians should note this sea-change in sentiment within the SBC," said Shortt. "The spiritual, moral and intellectual pathologies of the government school system are now obvious even to casual observers. Christian parents and pastors need to ask themselves just how much longer they intend to render our children to Caesar's spiritually dark, morally decaying and physically dangerous government schools."

Shortt's anti-public school colleague, E. Ray Moore, said Chapman's statement "could not have come at a more opportune moment when families are crying out for assistance with their children, and churches are losing the next generation of youth to worldliness, humanism and post modernism due to public schooling."

In a resolution submitted to the SBC for consideration at its upcoming meeting in Louisville, Shortt used anti-government rhetoric. He called public schools "government schools" and accused them of being "seething cauldrons of spiritual, moral and intellectual pathologies."

Shortt said public schools have rejected Christ. He asserted that the "aggressively anti-Christian government school system" has resulted in a "proliferation of nominal Christianity."

EthicsDaily.com editorials have been and continue to be pro-public education. We believe public schools advance the common good and deserve the intense support of people of faith. We think the demonizing of public school employees is morally wrong. We contend that hate speech against public education bears false witness.

EthicsDaily.com has given extensive news coverage to the exodus movement. A search for the word "exodus" on our Web site pulls up more than 100 articles related to public education.

We have produced pro-public education resources for churches and provided video clips of Baptist pastors speaking up for public schools at an education and faith summit sponsored by the National Education Association.

Rather than retreat from public education, goodwill Baptists must be known as the ones who speak up for public schools and refuse to give up on one of our nation's most important institutions.

Robert Parham is executive editor of EthicsDaily.com and executive director of its parent organization, the Baptist Center for Ethics.