

Seminary sermon may signal thaw among Texas Baptists

At Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In a sign that once-frosty relations between the independent-minded Baptist General Convention of Texas and the large Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth may be thawing, the BGCT's new executive director spoke at the seminary last month.

"I have, as you would guess, gotten a little criticism about having Dr. Everett here, and he's gotten some criticism about coming," Paige Patterson, president of the Southern Baptist Convention-run school, said in introducing Randel Everett during an October 15 chapel service.

Everett became executive director of the 2.3-million-member, moderate-dominated BGCT in March.

"That always amazes me, because the theory is we disagree, and I shouldn't have anybody in who disagrees," Patterson said. "That's kind of interesting, isn't it?" he continued. "Because we haven't even talked enough to find out if we do disagree about anything."

Relations between the state convention and the seminary grew chilly when fundamentalist trustees fired the seminary's popular moderate president, Russell Dilday, in 1994. The distance grew even wider when Patterson, one of the acknowledged architects of the SBC's conservative resurgence, became Southwestern's president in 2003.

In 2004 the BGCT banned Southwestern Seminary and other SBC entities from having displays at the state convention's annual meeting, saying they were not supportive of BGCT's mission. Texas Baptist leaders lifted that prohibition in June, approving both Southwestern Seminary and the SBC's publisher, LifeWay Christian Resources, as exhibitors at the November convention meeting in Fort Worth.

Opening his chapel remarks by describing the seminary as “an important part of our heritage as Texas Baptists,” Everett said: “I’m sorry Dr. Patterson received some flak about this invitation. It was a gracious act for him.”

Added Everett: “One of the things I hope we can understand is that we all ‘see through glass dimly,’ and one of these days we’ll be able to see Jesus as fully and clearly, because we’ll be seeing him face to face. As we struggle with what God’s word is saying to us, in deep conversations with each other and often times in disagreements, we need to love each other as Christ loves us.”

Everett preached a sermon on forgiveness based on Matthew 18, closing with, “Wouldn’t it be something today if God brought healing to our Baptist family?”

In response, Patterson said: “You really only have two choices. You can either be bitter and when you get to be my age . . . then you are just a bitter old man. You can either do that, or you can practice the fine christological art of forgiveness. You only have two choices.” *-Associated Baptist Press*