

Baptist moderate Honeycutt dies at 78: Opposed conservative takeover of Southern Baptist Convention

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Roy Honeycutt, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, from 1982 to 1993 during the height of the moderate-fundamentalist battle among Southern Baptists, died December 21, a day after suffering head injuries in an accident at his home. He was 78.

An Old Testament scholar, Honeycutt was dean of the school of theology and provost there before becoming president. Duke McCall, Honeycutt's predecessor, recalled that Honeycutt "functioned in a troubled time in which he was the irenic spirit trying to find middle ground and a solution to a situation where there was no middle ground."

Honeycutt was remembered, nonetheless, for one headline-making, nonirenic speech in 1984, when he declared "holy war" on the "hijackers"—a reference to the conservative effort to gain control of the Southern Baptist Convention. "Independent fundamentalists and many sincere but naïve individuals recruited to support their political party are seeking to hijack the Southern Baptist Convention," Honeycutt warned.

He said such efforts are "damaging local churches, risking the destruction of our denominational heritage and compromising our Christian witness to the world."

Honeycutt immediately became a target in the controversy. As the seminary's board shifted to conservative control, he came under increased pressure to resign. He retired in 1993 at age 67, three years earlier than he planned. His successor, Al Mohler, had served as one of Honeycutt's assistants from 1983 to 1989 before becoming editor of the *Georgia Baptist Christian Index*, but he took the seminary in a decidedly conservative direction.

Describing his predecessor as “a Christian gentleman,” Mohler said: “He gave so much of his life to the Southern Baptist Convention and to Southern Seminary in particular. He led during difficult times and was not afraid of controversy. On a personal level, he was as gracious a human being as you could ever expect or hope to meet.” *-Associated Baptist Press*