

AlbertMohler.com

Will the Last Baptist at Baylor Please Turn Out the Lights?

Wednesday, March 2, 2011

Baylor University has been the news lately, because of the vote by the university's regents to allow up to 25 percent of the board to be non-Baptists. The Executive Board of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, meeting February 21-22, grilled Baylor leaders on this decision — taken without consultation with the convention.

In an odd but revealing twist, the regents basically told the BGCT that they did not consult with leaders there because they knew what the answer would be. After all, the BGCT voted overwhelmingly to reject a similar proposal from Houston Baptist University just last fall. "If we offended you, we apologize," said regent Gary Elliston. Trust me on this — many were offended.

Now that Baylor has taken the action, it appears that Houston Baptist University intends to reconsider the issue as well. It has been years since the BGCT has been so interesting to watch — and the case can be made that the BGCT sowed the seeds for all of this when it allowed Baylor to escape its oversight through the election of the school's governing board.

Nevertheless, none of these issues match the one hardly noted as a matter of concern. Now, given the political dissonance between the BGCT and Baylor on the one side, and SBC conservative leaders on the other, the natural expectation is probably that an argument is about to be made in order to score political points. That is not the case with this article. Those issues can await some future consideration. The most urgent issue in this case could be of equal concern in the most conservative of contexts.

The real issue of concern should be a matter that is really not political at all. In speaking to the BGCT Executive Board, Baylor regent chairman Dary Stone explained the central rationale for the regents' decision. As reported by *The Baptist Standard*:

"Only 31 percent of our freshman class claim the Baptist label," he added, noting the percentage of Baptist students has been declining about 2 percent a year and likely will drop to 20 percent within this decade.

We might offer many suggestions to explain why the percentage of Baptist students has been dropping at Baylor, and some of these would have to deal with theological and ideological controversies. But there are no doubt other reasons as well, having little to do with theology or worldview. These would include the rising cost of private education, the increasing diversity of the population, and the shift to an evangelical identity that is perceptibly less specifically Baptist. In one sense, the very success of a school in terms of academic reputation and expanding institutional reach can dilute the percentage of Baptist students at any school.

Mr. Ellison pledged that Baylor would forever remain "a Texas Baptist institution." Well, I have no reason to doubt his sincerity, but I can cast ample doubt on the fulfillment of that pledge. If the percentage of Baptists in the student body reaches such perilously low levels — and is candidly expected to fall even more — the school will cease in any meaningful way to be a Baptist institution where it matters most.



Baylor has made its choice, but it will not be alone in facing this challenge. If Baptists are determined to retain their colleges and universities, they will have to show far greater resolve than in the past. They will have to make certain that their schools are the kind of schools that will attract Baptist students, earn the confidence of Baptist parents, and retain a clear accountability to Baptist churches. Otherwise, the Baptist label will mean little or nothing — merely a tip of the hat to ancient history.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

Ken Camp, "[Institutional Relations Dominate BGCT Executive Board Meeting](#)," *The Baptist Standard*, Wednesday, February 23, 2011.

Content Copyright © 2002-2011, R. Albert Mohler, Jr.