

A VISION REAFFIRMED

Progress at Southern Seminary, 1993-2013

By Aaron Cline Hanbury and James A. Smith Sr.

IN JUNE OF THIS YEAR, R. ALBERT MOHLER JR. WAS BACK IN HOUSTON, TEXAS.

He reported to the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention about the state of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Twenty years before, in the same city, Mohler addressed the convention for the first time as president-elect of the seminary.

On the morning of June 16, 1993, nearly 18,000 messengers heard from the newly elected 33-year-old president. The millions of Southern Baptists represented by the messengers present were anxious about the future of their flagship seminary. They knew where the seminary was and where it needed to go.

When the seminary began in 1859, founders James P. Boyce, John R. Broadus, Basil Manly Jr. and William Williams established the school with a confession of faith in order to define its theological commitments and to set “boundaries of acceptable belief for the faculty.”

Despite their precautions, as the school grew, many of Southern Seminary’s faculty members departed from the school’s confession. By the 1960s, Southern Seminary’s faculty was thoroughly and decidedly liberal theologically. And the progressive trajectory of the faculty continued into the 1980s.

When Mohler became the president of the seminary, the school’s board of trustees charged him with restoring the school to its founding commitments.

Mohler arrived with a plan to return Southern Seminary to the vision of James P. Boyce. As he implemented this plan, circumstances and professors who taught contrary to the school’s confession forced him to defend the integrity of the school’s mission.

Mohler persisted through faculty criticism and uproar among the students. And he remained committed to the vision of Boyce, and to the idea that a Southern Baptist seminary, ultimately, answers to Southern Baptists.

“God has blessed the seminary in the last twenty years in extraordinary ways,” said historian Gregory A. Wills, dean of the School of Theology at Southern Seminary and author of *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: 1859-2009*. “Dr. Mohler’s leadership has been a blessing. He has attracted a faculty who are here to serve the same vision that he serves, a vision of a fully inspired scriptures, an inerrant Bible, a sacrificial Christianity, a zealous and courageous proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth.”

After conflict and losses during Mohler’s early years, Southern Seminary has seen exponential growth on all fronts. The faculty is larger and its academic credibility stronger — and every member has signed the school’s confession, as Mohler says, “with gladness of heart.” The student body has increased significantly. And the finances of the school are secure, with the annual budget more than doubled and the endowment growing by more than \$30 million.

In 2013, Mohler was back in Houston to tell the Southern Baptist Convention about the past year at Southern Seminary. And as he did so, he also reported on the past 20 years.

“I came and made several commitments to you twenty years ago, and by God’s grace, I’m able to say — as I come back twenty years later — we’ve kept those commitments,” he said. And he emphasized that the work of Southern Seminary is far from finished.

“I want to stand before you now twenty years later and say that those commitments are not now fulfilled; they are here reaffirmed, as we move forward in an age unprecedented to do what the Lord Jesus Christ would have us to do.”



• **1983**

May 20 | R. Albert Mohler Jr. graduates with a master of divinity degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

• **1989**

May 26 | Mohler graduates with a doctor of philosophy degree

• **1989**

Mohler becomes the editor of the Georgia Baptist state paper, *The Christian Index*

• **1993**

March 26 | Mohler elected as the ninth president of Southern Seminary

• **1993**

August 31 | Mohler signs the Abstract of Principles and preaches his inaugural convocation address: "Don't Just Do Something: Stand There"

• **1993**

October 15 | Mohler inaugurated ninth president of Southern Seminary in ceremonies that included evangelist Billy Graham and theologian Carl F.H. Henry

A confessional seminary — begins with faculty

Perhaps the most significant accomplishment of Mohler's 20 years as president is Southern Seminary's faculty. When Mohler first arrived at the seminary, many of his critics predicted that the school would lose both its accreditation and its academic credibility. They maintained that top-tier scholars would not teach at the school under Mohler.

In the end, the opposite happened. He recruited men and women to teach at the seminary "in accordance with and not contrary to" the school's confession of faith. And the academic and intellectual life of the seminary grew in depth, as did its influence in the Southern Baptist Convention and in the broader evangelical world. Today, Southern Seminary's faculty is one of the most respected and well-published in the world — comprised of scholars who sign the Abstract of Principles without reservation.

• 1994

August | Southern Seminary opens the Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth

• 1995

March 22 | On "Black Wednesday," Mohler receives a vote of no confidence from the faculty who resisted his confessional commitment

• 1995

June 21 | Mohler preaches "What mean these stones?" as the convention sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Atlanta, Ga.





A FACULTY GROWING IN SIZE AND SCHOLARSHIP

Above: Jonathan T. Pennington, a New Testament scholar who studied at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, signed the Abstract of Principles, Aug. 23, 2011. Pennington is one of many high-caliber scholars to join the faculty during Mohler's tenure.

Left: Mohler leads the faculty, regarded by many as one of the finest faculties in the world, in a procession during annual commencement exercises.



• **1997**

Mohler breaks ground on Chiles Hall, which houses the seminary's cafeteria and Heritage Hall

• **1997**

Mary Mohler launches Seminary Wives Institute

• **1998**

Seminary faculty overwhelmingly affirm their support of Mohler

• **1998**

August | Boyce College expands into a four-year college

• **1999**

October 12 | Mohler dedicates Broadus Chapel

• **2001**

June | Mohler serves as chairman of the Louisville Billy Graham crusade

• **2001**

Mohler launches a local radio ministry, "Truth on the Line"

• **2002**

May | The seminary constructs The Legacy Hotel and Conference Center by remodeling and joining Rice and Judson halls



• **2003**

August | Mohler delivers his 10th anniversary convocation address, "Don't Just Stand There: Do Something"



Campus reset

Under Mohler's leadership, the seminary has invested more than \$31 million in campus improvements. Four new facilities have been built – Chiles Hall (dining/meeting facility), The Legacy Center (hotel/meeting space, including renovation of former Rice and Judson halls), Grinstead South Apartment Complex and Duke K. McCall Sesquicentennial Pavilion (opened in 2009 as part of the celebration of Southern's 150th anniversary). Additionally, Towerly Plaza on the north side of Norton Hall was built.

Additionally, major renovations of the campus include several improvements to Norton Hall – including Broadus Chapel, Carver Hall, Cooke Hall, Honeycutt Campus Center and Mullins Complex.

• 2004

Mohler expands his radio show nationally as the "Albert Mohler Program" on the Salem Network

• 2006

April | Mohler, along with four friends and colleagues, begins the biennial conference, Together for the Gospel

• 2009

June | The seminary celebrates its sesquicentennial anniversary in conjunction with the SBC annual meeting in Louisville

• 2009

June | The seminary dedicates the Duke K. McCall Sesquicentennial Pavilion in honor of its seventh president

• 2010

Mohler launches two new podcasts, "The Briefing" and "Thinking in Public"

• 2012

April | The seminary adopts a master plan to revive and reset the physical campus and thereby dissolve \$50 million in deferred maintenance

• 2012

October | The seminary establishes the Bevin Center for Missions Mobilization

• 2013

August | Mohler delivers his 20th anniversary convocation address, "Don't Just Stand There: Say Something"

The first phase of a 10-year Master Plan currently in progress is expected to invest an additional \$20 million in the campus, including moving Boyce College from Carver to Mullins, and to address nearly \$50 million in deferred maintenance on the campus whose oldest buildings date to the 1920s when the seminary relocated from downtown Louisville.

CAMPUS IMPROVEMENTS

- Towery Plaza, 2011
- Duke K. McCall Sesquicentennial Pavilion, 2009
- Carver Hall 2006, 2000
- Rankin Hall, 2004
- Norton Hall 2003, 2000
- Grinstead South Apartments, 2002
- Legacy Center, 2002
- Chiles Hall, 2000
- Mullins Complex, 1999
- Broadus Chapel, 1999



A GROWING AND THRIVING STUDENT BODY

Under Mohler's leadership, the student body at Southern Seminary has grown both in size and in its commitment to the gospel. The fall 2013 semester marks the largest class of incoming students in Southern Seminary's history, with 545 new seminary and 265 new college students. Today, Southern trains more master of divinity students than any other seminary, according to the Association of Theological Schools.



20 YEARS OF GROWTH

1993 2013

ENROLLMENT

(non-duplicating headcount)

2,858 **4,366**
1992-1993 2012-2013

BUDGET

\$16 **\$38**
million million
1993-1994 2013-2014

ENDOWMENT

\$50 **\$83**
million million
(estimate in the absence of de-tailed records) (as of July 31, 2012, latest audited data available)

FULL-TIME FACULTY

54 **75**
Including Boyce College

\$31
million

invested in four new facilities, building renovations and campus improvements

\$20
million

projected investment in first phase of Master Plan, 2012-2017