

Josh Arnold,

As I read your posts, I see the lack of substance in the nature of this dialogue. Whether or not I have the moral authority or right, I would like to rehash some of the events that have shaped this debacle.

- 1) I believe that the GBC, the board of trustees, and the Dowless administration (of which you are a proud part) are trying to have their cake and eat it too. You are hijacking a conservative Christian college and turning it into a fundamentalist Georgia Baptist institution. This is all being done under the banner of being “Christ-centered” when it is in actuality, Georgia Baptist-centered. As Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:21, no man can serve two masters. While this teaching was specifically referring to God and money, I think that it can just as easily apply to loyalty to God or denomination. According to the GBC/Dowless/Price definition, a Christian is a church-going, teetotaling, drug-free and sexually abstinent or married heterosexual with sworn loyalty to the GBC. If the purpose of this statement is to define ourselves as an institution dedicated to the propagation of Georgia Baptist dogma, then the definition works nicely. If, however, the purpose of this statement is to define ourselves as a Christ-centered institution, it almost utterly misses the mark. Jesus' teachings are remarkably devoid of references to church, drugs, alcohol, and sex.
- 2) Don Dowless' talking points continually reiterate how that the purpose of these statements is so that “we” can define ourselves as an institution that is Christ-centered. Faculty, staff, alums, and students are concerned about this for a number of reasons. To whom does “we” refer? “We” the faculty and staff were never consulted. In fact, in an unofficial survey conducted of all full time Rome faculty, 89% found this not to be an accurate reflection of our Christian identity. “We” the alumni were not consulted. The alumni that I know are categorically outraged at their exclusion from dialogues concerning the future of their treasured Alma Mater. “We” the students were to my knowledge equally left out of the equation. During the presidential search, faculty, staff, alumni, and students were kept completely in the dark. Search committee members were instructed to maintain absolute silence. No candidate campus visits and interviews. No token involvement whatsoever. Who then is “we”? The papal “we”? “We” Don Dowless? “We” the board of trustees? “We” the GBC? Other Christian institutions undergoing such processes of self-reflection and self-definition have spent months or years conducting focus groups of students, faculty, staff, alums, and community. With the president's leadership and guidance, WE could have done the same. WE could have asked ourselves, “What does it mean to be a Christ-centered institution with a Baptist affiliation?” “How can WE come together and articulate our conservative beliefs in a humble manner that reflects the teachings of Jesus?” “How can WE uphold standards that honor God and set us apart from the world?” At the end of such a process, WE would have had a document that united us in the essential elements of conservative Christian brotherhood.
- 3) Instead, I and many of my colleagues of both conservative and moderate theological bent are leaving. Why?
 1. As a protestant evangelical, I am married to the idea that Jesus is our high priest and that we come to the Father through him alone. I am unwilling to publicly submit a statement of faith that was written for me by someone else. As a condition of my employment, I submitted a personal faith-statement that reflected my conservative beliefs. I was delighted to be employed by a Christian institution that had missions similar to Oklahoma Baptist University and Baylor University where I had received my degrees.
 2. As one who leans towards the right, politically, I value a form of governance that is local, transparent, and representative.
 - The local element at Shorter has been disappearing for years. No longer do we have a faculty senate. No longer do we have faculty elected representation on the board of

trustees. Our president has no history with Shorter and he shows no interest in familiarizing himself with or honoring our history. The board of trustees is made up mostly of individuals lacking any significant Shorter connection. In fact the current chairman of the board admitted that he had little knowledge of the institution when he was asked by Nelson Price to serve.

- When Nelson Price became chairman of the Board he exhorted the board that “what we do as a board of trustees will not be sub rosa and will be reflected in the public arena.” As I mentioned above, the presidential search was completely lacking in transparency. My understanding is that applications were vetted by Nelson Price before being passed along to the rest of the search committee. It would seem that he basically picked his man single-handedly. Further, faculty and staff were informed of the possibility of faith and lifestyle statements one day before the board passed them. Three days later the president called faculty and staff together to inform us about them. The only part that he revealed was that drug use and distribution would not be tolerated. He then refused to field any further questions, instructing us instead to come visit him individually if we had questions or concerns. This is only one “small” example of the lack of transparency on the board. My contacts on the board say that there is a great deal strong-arming that goes on. As far as I know, there are no meeting minutes available to the public. We do however see the board awarding honorary doctorates to its own members (Bob White and Nelson Price) and voting Nelson Price chairman emeritus and presidential adviser. My understanding of term limits is that they are there to keep a governing organization from becoming self-perpetuating and unaccountable. This seems to be what has happened to our board of trustees, though.

3. As an adult American, I am accustomed to the idea that I am innocent until proven otherwise. Don Dowless has chosen a style of “leadership” that trusts no one. He has to examine and scrutinize every detail of your program. He weighs in and makes judgment calls without knowledge of that which he is controlling. He bullies middle-level administrators into making decisions for fear of their jobs. At the end of the day, Don Dowless is unwilling to take responsibility for any of his mandates, however. It is always the board's decision or the deans decision or the only “Biblical” choice. Life as a faculty member at Shorter was beginning to feel like an elementary school field trip with supervisors constantly looking over your shoulder and evaluating your every step. Since my teenage years I have been used to being expected to make mature and honorable decisions. I have also been used to the idea that I will be responsible when I make bad decisions. As a 34-year old professional, I would like to be afforded that same trust now.

4. A recent letter to the editor appropriately discussed I Corinthians 13. Whether the theology is sound or not can be debated until the cows come home. But without a spirit of love, all of the best theology in the world is nothing more than resounding gongs and clanging cymbals. While we all like to hear that we are loved, actions do indeed speak much louder. The current administration led by Nelson Price and Don Dowless has been devoid of any sort of love excepting the rhetorical sort. The cries of the constituents fall on deaf ears. More than one professional mediator has offered their services. The administration's response was that there is nothing to mediate. The tears of the deans have been ignored and now four of them have resigned. The pleading of the faculty for a voice and an opportunity for dialogue has been met with presidential responses such as, “Nothing that you say will change anything” and “I really don't care what you think.” The clambering of concerned alumni has been met with a deaf ear by Don Dowless and prayers, platitudes and unsolicited hugs by Bert Epting. The attempts of students to speak out have been stalled and diffused by the administration. During all of this, the board of trustees has been kept as insulated as

possible.

Why do I weep and rage over this situation? I weep for my dear colleagues who is battling cancer and must for the sake of health insurance go against his conscience and sign the documents if he can not find a job within the 6-8 months that he has before his contract runs out. I weep for my colleague who has served Shorter for 40 years and is not being allowed a voice in the future of the institution which he helped build. I weep for my colleague who's ailing mother in Rome fears that he will lose his job or move away and leave her without care. I weep for my first year colleagues who moved here to teach in an academically vigorous Christian environment, only to find that they were being told how to teach their discipline before school had even commenced. I weep for the students who came for one Shorter only to find that that Shorter no longer exists. I weep for the alumni who are seeing brutally violated that institution that they attended, supported, and fell in love with. I weep for the university family that I gave my heart to and must now leave.

God patiently took forty years to bring the children of Israel from Egypt to the promised land. He allowed them nearly two thousand year to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Even Brewton-Parker College allowed an extra year for its employees to look for other jobs if they were not comfortable signing their documents. When a wise pastor takes over the leadership of a congregation, he recognizes that change either takes time or rips the church apart. Is it too much to have asked of our leadership that if this transition were inevitable, we could at least have some time to make this major transition?

I believe that there is much religiosity at play in the Shorter leadership and little true religion. If our leadership lead us in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly before God, I would not be leaving. I would not be feeling survivor's guilt over those that I am leaving behind, and I would not be pitying those who have fallen for wolves in sheep's clothing.