

October 28, 1962

Midwestern Trustees
Dismiss Ralph Elliott

KANSAS CITY, MO (BP)--Trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here voted 24 to 5 to dismiss Professor Ralph H. Elliott effective immediately.

The dismissal was "reluctantly and regretfully" recommended after Professor Elliott refused a request that he not offer for republication his controversial book, "The Message of Genesis."

The seminary will continue his salary and fringe benefits for 12 months.

A special committee of trustees, appointed a few weeks ago to go into the matter further, made the dismissal recommendation. This committee, President Millard J. Berquist, and Elliott were reported in agreement on nine out of 10 desired points of accord.

The nine dealt with historical studies of scripture and seminary teaching. The tenth, on which Elliott declined to agree, was that Elliott withhold his book from further publication at this time.

Originally published by Broadman Press at Nashville, the Baptist Sunday School Board--which operates Broadman--declined this summer to order a second printing of the Genesis book despite a sell out of the first printing and back orders for the next.

It offered the republication rights to Elliott, Midwestern's professor of Old Testament and Hebrew.

At the trustee meeting, which ended at 1:30 A.M. after six and one-half hours, the board created the post of academic dean at the seminary. The academic dean, not yet appointed, would supervise the instructional program of the seminary and be responsible directly to the president.

All trustees were present for the meeting. The vote of the chairman, who was present, was not required because of the vote count.

Berquist, Elliott, some others from the seminary administration, and a representative of the student body at Midwestern appeared before the trustees during the evening.

The student brought in a document allegedly signed by 159 students, or about 70 per cent of the enrolment. It declared the seminary students had been ignored in considering the issue in question. The document said the students stood by Baptists' position of freedom to interpret the Bible but did not specifically ask the trustees to retain Elliott.

Elliott, engaged in a revival in Virginia, was called back to Kansas City for the special meeting of trustees.

The nine points at which the committee and the dismissed professor were said to be in agreement were:

1. The literary, critical and historical approach is valid in Old Testament studies.
2. There are differences of opinion on interpreting Bible passages.
3. The seminary teacher is to approach his work from the viewpoint of an firm belief in the Bible as God's word.
4. We believe the Bible and all parts thereof to be inspired.

5. The task of the teacher is not to proclaim what he doesn't know about the Bible nor to seek by shock methods to startle the students with a negative approach to the Bible. His task is to strengthen the faith of students and help them prepare to present its message.

6. The Bible contains accounts of the miraculous and the supernatural. The fact that miracles do not depend upon the human ability to understand or explain them does not make them untrue. They are acts of God in accordance with his power. This also includes God's use of natural forces.

7. In presenting interpretations of passages and events in the Bible, various views should be given.

8. We reject any theory that the Bible is a book of folk lore and mythology.

9. The Bible is to be taught and it is the task of the teacher to lead students in their teaching and preaching to go out and make known their faith and belief, not to preach something that is in doubt.

President Berquist said, "This (request on republication) was not intended to be a repudiation of the book but to be a precautionary measure to avoid a recurrence of the recent disturbance."

He called attention to the fact the committee recommendation to dismiss Elliott came only after it reached the opinion it was "impossible to come to a mutual working relationship in arriving at a solution of the problem."

Elliott did not offer an immediate statement on his dismissal, nor on his future plans.