

October 29, 1962

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Made A Concession

By Donald J. Sorensen

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Elliott is the author of "The Message of Genesis" and his firm position resulted in the trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here dismissing him from the faculty as professor of Old Testament and Hebrew.

The critical issue, as far as trustees were concerned, hinged on efforts to have Elliott agree to withhold from republication his book, which has not been reprinted since the first publication of about 4000 copies was sold out.

It was put out by Broadman Press of the Sunday School Board, another agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. The board declined this summer to order a second printing, despite back orders for them, and offered the second rights to Elliott so he could seek another publisher.

"I felt," Elliott said, "that if I voluntarily withdrew it, it would have the overtones of repudiating my work and suggesting that I did not now share the same perspective."

Elliott, however, also felt he was willing to make a concession of his own. He spoke especially of the suggestion by one of the trustees that Elliott consider voluntarily agreeing not to seek to republish the book if the full board requested him to do so.

Such an action, coming from the full board, would be tantamount to an administrative decision that Elliott would have to obey.

However, nothing more was said about this and Elliott pointed out that he had to remind the trustees of "my voluntary willingness to lay aside and not seek to republish the book if the full board so instructed me."

Even this reminder apparently had little effect. The general idea among some persons close to the issue is that the trustees dropped the idea because if they instructed Elliott not to have the book republished, it would put the trustees in the questionable position of banning books.

Then there is the question of responsibility? Who bears the responsibility for a situation like this?

"I am responsible for the book," Elliott admitted, "and I accept my responsibility for it."

Such groups as the Sunday School Board, the trustees of the seminary, and the Southern Baptist Convention itself also figured in the controversy.

Elliott told of the request made to him by the special committee to agree voluntarily not to have the book republished. When he refused, the committee diluted its request by saying "for the present."

The author said, "When I asked them how long the present meant, they said, 'Two years, six years, maybe forever.' Well, what can you say to that?" He shrugged, referring to the fact that he felt the terms "for the present" had no real meaning.

The ironic part about the republishing of the book is that few other publishers apparently would be willing to republish it. The book stands in the unique position of being too liberal for Southern Baptists and too conservative

# NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

127 NINTH AVE. N. NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37203

W. C. Fields, Director

Theo. Sommerkamp, Assistant Director

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The ironic aspect of the republishing of the book is that few other publishers appeared to be willing to republish it. The book stands in the unique position of being available for Southern Baptists and too conservative

for other groups, according to some observers.

"I think the possibility of republishing the book," said Elliott, "is most remote because it is slanted toward Southern Baptists and is not stiff enough for other groups. In the event such an opportunity for republication did arise, I would desire to make some amplifications and elaborations dealing with certain issues raised by the book."

Elliott recalled he was the first faculty member hired by the seminary, the newest of the six seminaries operated by the SBC. "This was just a wide space," he said as he pointed out his window at the seminary grounds. "I really came to spend my life here. I've made the best decision I can to go with my own conscience. I'm not bitter. I have no ill will for anyone."

"I intend to remain a Southern Baptist and hope someone will give me the opportunity to serve." He is currently interim pastor of Calvary Baptist Church here, the site of the temporary classrooms when the institution was first opened.

But the trustees' action leaves a cloud on the future of this position, too.

Elliott, who is 37 years old, spoke of leaving the Kansas City area because it has been the focal point of the controversy. "I don't know what I will do," he added. "At this time, I would enjoy the pastorate again because I like that kind of work."

This reporter had a final glimpse of Elliott walking alone across the deserted campus. It was early in the evening. He was on the way home to his wife and two young daughters, 8 and 10 years of age, who have had to help shoulder the burden of the past months.

He smiled, waved his hand in farewell, and strolled off into an uncertain future alone.

(The Nashville Tennessean quoted Elliott as saying, "I think this is going to create a great disturbance among all our professors in our colleges and seminaries. It will create a sense of fear in their teaching.

("As a result, we are not going to be able to deal with the relevancy of the gospel in this highly technical age. I think we are going to lose many in our denomination, and to injure the cause of theological education in general.")

Born to a grocer's family . . . Elliott grew up in Danville, Va. Known as a good preacher, Elliott was conducting a revival in Danville when he returned to Kansas City for the trustee meeting at which he was fired. Later in the day, he took another 'plane for Danville to pick up his revival again.

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