



--- BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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October 24, 1985

85-131

Southwestern Trustees
Fire Preaching Prof

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--For the first time in their history, trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary have voted to fire a tenured professor.

The action, the culmination of a bitter controversy, came Oct. 22 during a closed door session, when trustees voted 27-2 to immediately dismiss Farrar Patterson, associate professor of communications and preaching. Three trustees abstained from voting and four members were absent.

Patterson's firing came not as a result of a six-point charge brought against him by seminary President Russell H. Dilday Jr., March 20, but because of Patterson's alleged failure to respond to a "re-engagement" process devised by seminary administrators.

An attempt was made to fire Patterson in March, but failed when the secret ballot vote was 19-12, two votes short of the necessary two-thirds required for dismissal.

In March, Dilday brought a six-point charge against Patterson, alleging political implications and charging the professor was a "profane man," a poor teacher, insubordinate and a poor churchman and that he had made an "intentional distortion of the truth."

During that meeting, the political controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention was prominent in the discussions, with accusations the dismissal was politically motivated. Dilday was a leader of the moderates in the bitter controversy in the 14.3-million member denomination.

Following the March meeting, three members of the administration designed a "re-engagement" plan to return Patterson to the classroom. The professor was suspended from his teaching responsibilities prior to the March meeting. The re-engagement process was drafted by Dilday, Vice-President John Newport and Dean of Theology William Tolar.

Trustee Chairman Drew J. Gunnels of Mobile, Ala., said the 52-year-old Patterson, however, would not follow the plan, would not meet with the administration about it and attempted to set his own agenda. Gunnels said the trustees, specifically following the requirements of the faculty manual, took action only on Patterson's response to the re-engagement plan.

Dilday declined to comment on the matter, noting trustees "designated" Gunnels as the spokesman. "This was a matter handled by the board and they suggested that any discussion about it to the press come from (Gunnels)," Dilday said.

Gunnels, pastor of Springhill Baptist Church, Mobile, Ala., met with the news media following the two-hour closed door meeting. He said the re-engagement process "had to do with Christian deportment, church attendance, classroom technique, writing procedures-- basically with those things the faculty manual deals with for any faculty member."

Dilday, Gunnels said, gave a "detailed day-by-day report of the re-engagement process with Patterson to a meeting of the academic affairs committee on Oct. 21, the day before the trustees' dismissal action. The session lasted more than three hours, Gunnels said, and culminated in the recommendation for dismissal. Only one negative vote was registered, he said. A similar vote was registered in March when the committee first recommended Patterson be fired.

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Nashville, Tennessee

Under conditions of the dismissal recommendation, Patterson will receive full salary and benefits—about \$40,000—through June 1986, and full medical and life insurance coverage—at a cost to the seminary of about \$5,000—for himself and his family through July 1987. "I don't know how the seminary could have been any more fair with the man," said Gunnels.

Gunnels, who praised the spirit of the meeting and the "tolerance" shown opposing views by various trustees, attributed the change in the vote from 19-12 in March to 27-2 in October first to the fact the issue was response to the re-engagement policy, not the charges brought in March; and also to the fact that the "board members had thought this thing through prayerfully."

Gunnels said the closed door meeting was called because "we wanted to be able to handle the matter as best we could under God without any interference." The March meeting was opened to the public and was attended by several students, faculty members, the press and others and some made comments during the meeting.

Last week's meeting was closed, he explained, to limit the discussion to trustees only and to see that the March charges were not reopened. "We wanted to be certain we didn't get back into old things; that we weren't playing to the crowd," Gunnels said. He said the re-engagement process was tacitly approved by the academic affairs committee in May.

Gunnels said trustees, while responsible for setting policy, leave it to the administration to run the seminary. "And that is the way it should be," he said. "It was for that reason that the re-engagement procedure went through the administration." He added the academic affairs committee tacitly agreed to the re-engagement plan in May.

Patterson, Gunnels said, knew seminary procedures and knew better than to ignore the re-engagement process outlined by the administration. There was no vindictiveness on the part of Dilday or the board, he said. "We just upheld standards of conduct and activity established for faculty members." Failure to do so, he noted, would have been detrimental to faculty morale.

Gunnels said he views the action as vindication of Dilday's seminary leadership. The vote in March had been interpreted as being influenced by the president's involvement in Southern Baptist Convention politics. There was no discussion of that in last week's meeting, Gunnels noted, adding, "We did our best to separate this decision from any other convention activities."

He praised the trustees' willingness to deal with a "difficult situation" and said he would like to communicate to Southern Baptists "to have faith in our procedures."

"Though they are sometimes slow and cumbersome," he said, "I feel our procedures are valid here at the seminary. I feel we have done what is best for the seminary. There is no doubt in my mind about that. It's disheartening and burdening to have to do what we did, but I feel now we can look forward to the future with hope."

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(This BP report was prepared by Dan Martin, news editor of Baptist Press, from information provided by Toby Druin, associate editor, The Baptist Standard; Jim Jones, religion editor, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and Tim Tune and Mark Wingfield of the SWETS information office.)

Plea For Investigation
Ignored, Patterson Says

By Dan Martin

Baptist Press
10/24/85

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Farrar Patterson is "distressed" over his firing Oct. 22 by trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary because "my case has never been put to any kind of objective investigation."

Patterson, associate professor of preaching and communications, said trustees apparently ignored registered letters sent them, asking an investigation of "lies" told by seminary President Russell H. Dilday Jr.

Patterson, the first tenured professor to be fired in the 78-year history of the Fort Worth, Texas-based seminary, has been the focus of a bitter controversy which has involved Dilday, trustees, students, faculty and the Southern Baptist Convention at large.

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The controversy has included alleged death threats, reports of verbally violent confrontations, revelations of secret tape recordings of meetings, charges and countercharges of political dirty tricks, insinuations of political motivations, resolutions by faculty and students at the seminary--both in support of the administration's efforts to fire the professor--and the possibility of a lawsuit.

Following the firing, Patterson said trustees ignored his plea for an investigation into Dilday's "lies and falsehoods," but claimed the registered letter "shook" Dilday into an "attempt to bribe me with \$20,000 if I would resign prior to the trustee meeting."

Patterson told Baptist Press Dilday "showed up at my mother's house in Fort Worth uninvited and unannounced Friday (Oct. 18) and said he would pay me six months salary (about \$20,000) if I would just resign before the trustee meeting."

"He told me he had been out all over the country visiting the trustees and that I would be fired. I just didn't believe him; I didn't want to. But he was right. He did have the votes," Patterson said.

Patterson was dismissed during a closed door meeting Oct. 22 by a 27-2 vote with three abstentions for allegedly failing to cooperate with a "re-engagement" plan designed by Dilday, Vice-President John Newport and Dean of Theology William Tolar.

The action of trustees was only on the accusation of failure to cooperate with the plan and did not deal with more serious charges made against Patterson during a March meeting of trustees. At that time Dilday suspended the 17-year veteran from teaching duties and brought a six-point charge against him, alleging the teacher was a "profane man," a poor teacher, a poor churchman, insubordinate and guilty of "intentional distortion of the truth."

Dilday said in March the "culminating" incident occurred when Patterson is alleged to have given an "erroneous" report to an Arkansas pastor concerning actions taken at a faculty meeting in which Dilday's right to speak out in the SBC controversy was affirmed. Dilday was a spokesman for SBC moderates.

The March effort to dismiss Patterson failed. Trustees voted 19-12 to fire the professor, two votes short of the two-thirds majority required by school policies.

The re-engagement plan was developed after the March meeting.

"They hung me for refusing to do his re-entry program," Patterson said, adding he does not feel he has been given an opportunity to have his case examined by "somebody besides people who are blinded by the theological controversy."

Following the firing, Patterson told Baptist Press he had sent a registered letter to each of the 35 trustees replying to the charges against him and asking trustees for an "objective investigation" of the matter.

"I asked the trustees to investigate these lies he (Dilday) has been telling about me. I am sorry I have to call them lies, but that is what they are. I sent them a four-page registered letter which included a response to about 25 falsehoods he has told about me. I felt if the trustees would read my material, they would have to investigate," Patterson said.

Patterson said: "Apparently, as far as I can tell, they ignored my letter. All I wanted was for some kind of objective investigation. I do not see how they could have read it and failed to investigate these lies against me."

The professor, through his attorney, Walt Carpenter of Houston, had threatened this summer to sue Dilday, but delayed the filing of the lawsuit after appealing to Dilday to submit to arbitration by the Christian Conciliation Service and appealing to trustees to investigate. However, according to Patterson, Dilday "never made any effort at reconciliation. In fact it apparently was never an option with him. The only thing he wanted was that I either resign or be fired. He has refused to discuss with me in any way that he has wronged me."

Patterson said he attended several meetings "between the trustee meeting and May 30" in regard to returning to teaching duties. "But by the first of May I saw his (Dilday's) plan was to get me, no matter which way I went. He (Dilday) said he would put me back in the classroom the next day (March 21) but he never intended to do so. In fact, he has not let me back into the classroom at all."

The professor said the "re-entry program was wrong for three reasons. In the first place, neither the trustees nor the faculty manual call for it. In the second, to have submitted to it would have been an indirect admission of guilt to his false charges, and in the third, it was an abuse of his authority. He (Dilday) was discriminating against me; demanding things of me that were not required of anyone else."

Like Dilday, Patterson declined to discuss specifics of the re-entry plan, but cited one example: "He wanted me to do lesson plans for my courses. He never proved I was a bad teacher; he only accused me of being one. In fact, I was a good teacher. To have (submitted lesson plans) would have been an admission his charges were true and they weren't."

Patterson declined to say whether he will pursue a lawsuit against Dilday, but said the matter "has gone far beyond reinstatement...to libel and slander. I told the trustees I had been libeled and slandered and asked them to please investigate. They didn't deal with my request at all."

The professor added: "They haven't heard the last of this. I will press those charges against Dilday in my own way. Southern Baptists have a right to know about this whole thing. And they will."

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Experts Deny Claims
Of Voucher Proposal

By Kathy Palen

Baptist Press
10/24/85

WASHINGTON (BP)—An anticipated voucher proposal from the Reagan administration would not live up to its supporters' claims, declared several education experts in testimony before a Senate subcommittee.

The administration's Chapter I voucher proposal is expected soon, Chester Finn, assistant secretary for educational research and improvement with the U.S. Department of Education, told the Senate Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations. That voucher plan is expected to propose providing parents with approximately \$600 per eligible child. Parents then would be able to decide in which school—public or private—to spend those dollars.

Besides the anticipated voucher plan, President Reagan repeatedly has pledged to continue pressing Congress for tuition tax credits for parents who send their children to private schools.

Supporters of a voucher plan claim it would expand student and parental choice within the country's educational system. They contend this expanded choice would lead to improvement within the system.

"Educational vouchers could provide a consumer choice for parents and accountability of educational institutions to them," testified Robert L. Woodson, president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise. "Vouchers would empower low-income parents to choose any public or eligible non-public school for their child with the provision that tuition would be paid where the pupil attends."

Only if vouchers were to provide 100 percent of educational expenses could they provide real choice, countered Virginia state Sen. Wiley R. Mitchell Jr. Wiley, who served on a presidential panel studying federal assistance to education, testified that current educational assistance programs are working well. To take money out of those programs to move into an untested voucher program would only create "worthless pieces of paper," Wiley argued.

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During the Oct. 22 hearing, several witnesses described existing state and local innovations in so-called "educational choice." Among those programs described was the Minnesota Plan, a 10-year plan designed to overhaul that state's education system from kindergarten-12th grade.

The heart of that plan is a proposal to expand student choice in ways quite different from the various voucher schemes that have been debated in this country for more than two decades, explained Paul Berman, director of the study that proposed the Minnesota Plan. Instead, he argued, the Minnesota Plan calls for core academic education for all students through 10th grade, with choices provided for 11th and 12th graders.

"I believe a full-scale voucher system beginning in elementary or the earlier grades of secondary school would do more harm than good," testified Berman.

A Minnesota city school superintendent testified that, while he supports education choice within public schools, he does not support spending public dollars in private schools. "I would argue that strings follow money like the night follows the day; that public funds, no matter how indirectly delivered threaten the independence of private schools; and that public investment in private schools through vouchers is more likely, over the long term, to homogenize schooling and reduce the real choices available to parents and students than to increase them," stated David A. Bennett, superintendent of the St. Paul, Minn., public schools.

Much of the discussion of the matter of choice in American schools has "revolved around mechanisms to channel public funding to private schools," testified Roxanne Bradshaw, secretary-treasurer of the National Education Association.

Bradshaw said the voucher is being advanced as a school reform issue by those who believe a free marketplace will correct all education ills. Those proponents believe the voucher would enable parents to buy a better education for their children, she added.

"In fact, what vouchers offer is the illusion of choice with the reality of high stakes risks for the disadvantaged," Bradshaw testified. "The impact of a \$500 voucher would be negligible in the current educational market where the public school average per pupil expenditure along is \$3,429 a year."

Bradshaw also argued that, if extended to private schools, vouchers have the potential of subsidizing religious organizations, thus violating the First Amendment.

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EDITOR'S NOTE AND CLARIFICATION

In (BP) story "Seminary Prof Discusses Biblical Authority Models" mailed 10/16/85, please delete the ninth paragraph which reads: Furthermore, he said Model A is not based on the Bible we have but on original manuscripts no longer in existence. Hendricks admitted that "what we have is errant and fallible," though he said "I do not like to speak that way."

Please make the following clarifying substitution for the ninth paragraph:

Hendricks said the major drawback he sees in "Model A" of biblical authority is that it breaks down logically.

"If only the original autographs (of the Bible) are inerrant and infallible, and that of course is all that anyone with an awareness of biblical languages would propose, yet we do not have the original autographs, this means that what we have is errant and fallible. And I do not like to speak that way. I think it is at this point that the model breaks down," he said.

Hendricks later told Baptist Press "that those who hold to the infallibility and inerrancy of the original autographs are obliged to say that we do not have the original autographs and therefore what we have is fallible and inerrant. It is because of this logical problem that I do not espouse Model A and I do not like to talk that way about the Bible."

-end clarifying substitution-

The story as originally sent made it appear Hendricks was admitting the Bible is errant and fallible, which is not the case.

Thanks, BP

(BP)

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