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March 29, 1985

85-37

100 Southwestern Faculty
Support President Dilday

By Toby Druin

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Responding to the charge that recent action of the trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary impaired the leadership of President Russell H. Dilday Jr., 100 out of 101 members of the seminary faculty have signed "an open letter to fellow Southern Baptists" affirming the president.

Only Farrar Patterson, associate professor of communication and preaching, whose dismissal was recommended by Dilday but rejected by the trustees March 20 when it failed to get a two-thirds majority vote, failed to sign the letter.

There currently are 101 voting members of the faculty. Dilday and two vice-presidents, John Newport and Jeter Basden, who are faculty members were not asked to sign. Two other faculty members, Marvin Leach, visiting professor of missions and L. Jack Gray, who is retired but still teaches, also signed the letters.

Earl R. Martin, professor of missions and world religions, proposed the letter to a meeting of the faculty March 22, following the trustee action and news reports concerning it.

The open letter states:

"We, the undersigned members of the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, in the light of recent developments and press reports, wish to affirm our president, Russell Dilday. He stands tall in the line of illustrious presidents of this institution. His administration for the past six years has been distinguished by a theologically conservative stance. He has led this seminary to significant growth at every level. Under his presidency Southwestern has continued its rich heritage of advancing the Kingdom of God through evangelism and world missions. We affirm, contrary to the suggestion that the recent trustees' action has impaired his leadership, that, indeed, he enjoys our full confidence.

"This letter has come about spontaneously. It is completely independent of the administration. By this, we underscore our solidarity in support of our president."

Martin said 56 of the faculty members immediately signed the letter at the faculty meeting and the other 44 did so in the few days following. Some, on sabbatical, or out of town, were contacted by telephone and indicated by telegram or telephone conversations that they wanted their names affixed to the letter.

Martin, who joined the seminary faculty in 1982 after more than 25 years as a Southern Baptist missionary in east Africa, emphasized in an interview with the Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the letter was completely independent of Dilday and the seminary administration.

Neither Dilday nor any member of the seminary administration knew of the letter until it was read in the March 22 faculty meeting, Martin said.

Martin said he is no "campaigner or crusader," but following the trustee action on the Patterson matter and a news story in the Fort Worth Star Telegram about it, he said he felt some expression needed to be made to show support for Dilday.

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In the Star Telegram story, reporter Jim Jones quoted Houston Judge Paul Pressler as saying in regard to Dilday's recommendation of the dismissal of Patterson: "I don't know Dr. Patterson. But I think this (firing incident) is another example of the inept administration which has caused Russell Dilday to lose respect and confidence of many at the seminary and many on the board of trustees."

Martin said he discussed the trustee action and Pressler's comment informally with other faculty members and then asked two of them "who are good with words"—Scott Tatum and Harold Freeman, both professors of preaching—to help him draft the letter.

"We did our best to prepare a letter that we felt reflected the general tenor of the faculty," Martin said.

He said some had noted the letter approach was a "risk" which could backfire if only a small percentage signed. Martin said he told them it was time to take a risk.

The 100 out of 101 response is "overwhelming—beyond my wildest dream," he said.

He denied any pressure was exerted on any faculty member to sign the letter—that the 56 had done so spontaneously at the faculty meeting and many signed afterward, not knowing what their colleagues had done.

Pressler, apprised of the faculty action by the Standard, contended it was instigated by Dilday.

"I am aware of the fact that Dr. Dilday is trying to bolster his position by numerous ways," Pressler said in a telephone interview. "One, a petition among students, which I heard from the Fort Worth Star Telegram, had been able to garner less than 300 signatures among the over 5,000 students (sic) at Southwestern. I had not heard of the (faculty) letter but I am not surprised at all."

(According to seminary records, there actually are 3,516 students enrolled at the school for the 1985 spring semester.)

Told of the 100 signatures, Pressler said he believes it is "obvious to anybody with any intelligence at all," that such an action by the faculty would be instigated by Dilday.

"I think Russell Dilday will do everything he can to bolster his position and put pressure on those in the school to give him credence," Pressler said.

"I think everybody knows the political activity of Russell Dilday has caused a polarization among the students, among the faculty, among the board and that the seminary has suffered greatly under the administration of Russell Dilday," Pressler added.

Martin dismissed the thought of pressure by Dilday.

"I think this kind of talk is pernicious and counterproductive and persons who persist in such a thing as unequivocal as this show their true colors," he said. "This kind of pernicious innuendo and casting of suspicions has to stop. I am not saying we are going to stop it, but this is an effort to stop it."

800 Students Sign
Petition For Dilday

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—Convicted that the March 20 action of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees to retain a professor was "political" and that "you can be right in what you believe but wrong in what you practice," at least one student is circulating a petition in support of President Russell H. Dilday Jr. and the trustees of the academic affairs committee.

Jimmy Puckett, 27-year-old religious education student and a missions volunteer, told the Baptist Standard, newsjournal of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, he already has more than 800 signatures on the petition and hopes to have at least 1,000 before he presents it to Dilday next week.

He said he has heard other similar petitions are being circulated among the 3,615 students at the seminary this spring.

Puckett said he got the idea for the petition following the action of the trustees who voted 19-12 to fire Farrar Patterson, associate professor of communication and preaching. Dilday and the academic affairs committee, which voted 8-1 for dismissal, had recommended Patterson be fired.

The 19-12 vote was two votes short of the two-thirds majority required to dismiss a faculty member.

Puckett said he attended the trustee meeting and did not like what he saw. "I just felt like it (the trustee action) was political," he said. They were attacking Dr. Dilday and the methods they were using were just not right."

Puckett, a Baylor University graduate whose father, James Puckett, is pastor of First Baptist Church, McKinney, Texas, said, "I am conservative and I have had basically the same concerns that Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler have had and I have supported them basically in their goals up until the board meeting.

"But what I saw going on in the trustee board meeting greatly alarmed me. I just at that point felt you can be right in what you believe but wrong in what you practice."

The petition idea was completely his own, he said. The only influence was the board meeting.

"When I saw what was going on, I realized then that maybe some of our conservative brothers have gone too far. I knew then that I needed to do something to maybe counter this extreme action. I really believe that Dr. Dilday is a conservative and wanted to encourage him. So I just started on my own to begin this petition and have talked to so many students who felt the same way."

The petition states: "We the students of Southwestern...wish to express our support and appreciation of the leadership of President Russell H. Dilday Jr. and we wish to acknowledge and affirm our confidence in both President Dilday and the academic affairs committee."

Most students have been "really anxious" to sign and have told him they think it is a good idea, Puckett said. Several—"not many"—have told him they disagree with him.

"Quite a few told me they would like to sign the petition but were afraid—fearful for their future—that it might affect their jobs down the road or their seminary career," he said.

Asked whom they were afraid of, he answered, "This political faction led by Pressler and Patterson. Quite a few said they were afraid."

Puckett said the petition mainly just has been circulated between classes because the seminary allows no petitions to be placed on campus.

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Draper Warns Stanley
Defeat May Collapse CP

By Craig Bird

Baptist Press
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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—The Cooperative Program could collapse and thousands of churches might withdraw financial support if Charles Stanley is defeated for a second year as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, James T. Draper Jr. has warned.

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Draper, president of the SBC 1982-84, told the Baptist Public Relations Association annual meeting in Richmond, Va., heads of Southern Baptist institutions are leading a "massive attempt...financed with Cooperative Program funds" to deny Stanley a second year as SBC president.

Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, already has announced he will allow his name to be presented for a second one-year term as president of the 14.3-million member denomination. Under SBC by-laws, a president may serve two consecutive one-year terms.

Traditionally, a president who wishes to serve a second term has been unopposed. However, in the past five years, incumbent presidents have been challenged for the second term. Already, efforts are underway to mount a campaign challenging Stanley at the 1985 annual meeting, scheduled for June 11-13 in Dallas.

Draper said if Stanley is defeated, "how can we expect his church to continue to give \$500,000 to the Southern Baptist Convention...and thousands of churches would probably follow that lead in refusing to support the convention any longer."

In an interview following his presentation, Draper was asked what the church where he is pastor would do if Stanley is defeated. He replied the church, First Baptist Church of Euless, Texas, might escrow its denominational gifts (approximately \$400,000 this year) if Stanley is defeated, "to force people to sit down and adopt a strategy to resolve our problems."

Draper, also a trustee of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, said he would "be speaking in every church I can between now and June" to promote Stanley's reelection.

He told more than 150 BPRA members from Southern Baptist national and state institutions he had attended a recent meeting with leaders of the effort to turn the convention into a more conservative direction. "We said since we have already been accused (of being highly organized politically), tried and convicted, we might as well go ahead and commit the crime. We will be there in Dallas and we will be organized."

He said the "organization" earlier had been no more than "600 names on (Houston judge) Paul Pressler's personal computer, with a contact person in each state they (Pressler and Paige Patterson, associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas) send material to."

However, he charged an unnamed SBC institution with using its computers and a 46,000 name mailing list for political purposes. Draper declined to name the institution, but referred to Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and noted "both of them have about that number on their mailing lists."

"I am not accusing them of sending out clandestine letters, but they are using their mailing lists to make some accusations, to organize a partisan agenda and to create hysteria. All you have to do is look at the Baylor Line, other Baylor publications and to read Southwestern News for the last nine months to be able to see that," he said.

The Baylor Line and Southwestern News are alumni publications of the institutions.

"Where is the concern for (Russell) Dilday's partisan involvement in convention politics?" he asked. He also referred to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Roy C. Honeycutt and chastised him for "declaring Holy War against his Christian brothers."

Later he said Dilday, president of Southwestern seminary, is "reportedly using 50 percent of his time trying to defeat Stanley...and he is not going off salary for that time so he is using Cooperative Program funds."

"You may disagree with me," he told his audience. "But I am your Christian brother."

Draper said there are times he leans against the wall or puts his head on his desk and weeps over the anger and hostility being expressed in the SBC, but insisted that tiredness would not cause him to stop.

"It doesn't matter who 'wins' in Dallas if it is a hostile convention," he explained. "Because if it is hostile we all lose. I would hope Charles Stanley would be rejected without opposition."

Despite his charges of institutional leadership opposing Stanley, Draper said he believes, "in the integrity of each of those men (institutional heads), I don't want anybody fired. But I do wish we could hear in public what some of them say in private—that we do have problems."

While agreeing it is inaccurate to call any group in the SBC "liberal" and declaring his distaste for all terms currently being used (liberal, moderate, conservative, ultra-conservative and fundamentalist—terms he called "weasel words because they mean different things to different people"), Draper insisted it is an oversimplification to say two groups, one from the right side of the spectrum and one from the left side of the spectrum within the SBC, are causing all the problems.

"There is a third group—the institutional group—which is probably the most dangerous. I think it is changing, but often sincere inquiry is treated with suspicion and institutions feel they must protect themselves. That is why it has 'appeared' that institutions have come down on the 'moderate' side."

"We have had enough gripe sessions—what we need is to sit down and talk about solutions to our problems."

Draper said the convention could be better served if all SBC institutions opened their trustee meetings to reporters. "We all filter things through grid of our experiences. There will be less distortion—and I mean of our perceptions—if we see something ourselves instead of having someone tell us what happened."

He said SBC journalists are in a key position to deal with the SBC situation.

"Please help us," he said. "This convention could die...if hostilities continue to build there will be a great pulling away from the Cooperative Program. Then what are we going to do—mail postcards to all our missionaries around the world and ask them which side they are on, ask them who they want to pay their salaries?"

"We may be living in the days of the death of this denomination or in the day of the forerunner of the greatest revival in the history of the denomination. You shape public opinion...be Christians first and journalists second."

When asked if he were trying to influence "non-official" SBC news publications, Draper said he was trying, but not very successfully. "I have read things in some publications that are unbelievable," he said. "But Russ Kaemmerling (editor of the Southern Baptist Advocate) is the only one that will talk to me. I have written to the editor of The Call: 85 about an incorrect story, but have not heard from him, and the latest issue of SBC Today is full of misinformation. But I do spend a lot of time trying to get Russell Kaemmerling not to be what is his nature—sarcastic."