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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE:
SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #75
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Alvin C. Shackelford, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Marv Knox, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 720-0550
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hasty, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

November 4, 1987

87-166

Southeastern Trustees
To Convene Nov. 17

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(N.C.)

WAKE FOREST, N.C. (BP)--The full board of trustees of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary will meet Nov. 17 to discuss the future of the 37-year-old school in Wake Forest, N.C., following the Oct. 22 announcement of W. Randall Lolley that he was setting in motion the termination of his presidency.

Lolley and Dean Morris Ashcraft met with four trustees Nov. 3 to discuss the details of the transition to a new president and dean.

Participating were Lolley, Ashcraft, trustee Chairman Robert D. Crowley of Rockville, Md.; Vice Chairman James DeLoach of Houston; immediate past Chairman Jesse Chapman of Asheville, N.C., and Lee Beaver of Chesterfield, Mo., chairman before Chapman.

The meeting was closed to the press, including R.G. Puckett, editor of the Biblical Recorder, North Carolina's Baptist newsjournal, who requested the privilege of sitting in the meeting for background information without reporting.

Puckett's request was denied by Crowley after he conferred with others. Crowley told the North Carolina state Baptist paper editor he thought "it would be better if no one else (other than the four trustees, the president and the dean) attended the meeting."

School officials refused comment on the meeting that was delayed in its start because Chapman was grounded in Asheville because of fog.

"It was mostly just a matter of housekeeping," Crowley told Todd Ackerman of the Raleigh (N.C.) News and Observer.

"Nothing was done to advance the situation past what it was two weeks ago, and we all agreed that there was really no point in commenting on anything," added Crowley, who had to leave before the meeting was over.

The chairman said he did not know when Lolley's resignation would become effective. Crowley indicated names of potential successors are being compiled and the subject of the next president will be discussed at the Nov. 17 meeting.

Crowley told the Florida Baptist Witness, newsjournal of the Florida Baptist Convention, the search committee will begin its work "very much in earnest" immediately after that meeting.

Early speculation about Lolley's successor centered on Paige Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas and a leader in the nine-year effort to turn the Southern Baptist Convention to a more conservative direction.

Patterson was a speaker in an Oct. 22-23 Bible conference in Montrose Baptist Church, where Crowley is pastor, immediately following Lolley's surprise announcement. The conference also featured Gray Allison, president of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tenn., which is not affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, and Fred Wolfe, pastor of Cottage Hill Baptist Church in Mobile, Ala., and a member of the SBC Executive Committee.

Crowley -- who said the Bible conference "just coincided" with Lolley's announcement -- and Patterson both said the presidency of Southeastern Seminary had been discussed, Patterson added the discussion was "in broad, general terms. It was not about me."

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Patterson told the Witness he is reasonably sure he will be among the top candidates for Lolley's job, but also said his election would be "fairly controversial" and not very likely.

He said participants in the meeting -- which he said included Crowley and "several other men" -- generally were agreed on the type of president they would like to see at Southeastern: an experienced administrator with an earned doctoral degree who could "communicate with the churches of the Eastern Seaboard" and bring "strong conservative doctrine to the community, but in a respectable way."

Patterson acknowledged he meets those qualifications but said they fit many others as well. He said he expected the search committee to narrow the candidates to about 25 and "from what I've heard from the trustees, I'm reasonably sure my name is going to be among them." That list will be narrowed to five, from which one person will be picked to recommend to the full board, he said.

Concerning his chances, Patterson said, "it is very likely they will go a different direction," and pointed to his prominence in the "conservative resurgence" as a factor which makes him "fairly controversial."

He also said he is unlikely to leave his job at Criswell College, where he says he is in "a very happy situation where I have maximum freedom to operate."

Two trustees, Frank Jordan of Chula Vista, Calif., and Mark Caldwell of Hyattsville, Md., said rumors were circulating that conservative trustees were grooming one of their own for the presidency even before Lolley announced his retirement.

Crowley denied the reports, as did trustee William Delahoyde, whose name was mentioned most often in the rumors.

Delahoyde, an assistant U.S. attorney from Raleigh, N.C., told the Witness the reports were "the product of someone's fertile imagination." Although he holds both a law degree and a theological degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Delahoyde said he is too young and not qualified for the position.

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(Contributing to this report were R.G. Puckett, editor of the Biblical Recorder, and Greg Warner, associate editor of the Florida Baptist Witness.)

Southern Seminary Responds
To Southeastern Resignations

N- (O) (SPTS)
By Pat Cole

Baptist Press
11/4/87

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--In the wake of resignation announcements by the president and dean of a sister school, students, faculty and staff at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary demonstrated concern for friends and colleagues at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary with a week-long series of actions ranging from letters of support to a student rally.

Southern Seminary President Roy L. Honeycutt noted the Louisville, Ky., campus had been engulfed by "a profound sense of sadness" after learning Southeastern Seminary President Randall Lolley and Dean Morris Ashcraft had announced plans to resign their posts in response to recent trustee actions at the Wake Forest, N.C., school.

Southeastern trustees had approved changes in the school's hiring procedures to ensure that only persons who adhere to biblical inerrancy -- the view that the Bible is literally true -- would fill future faculty positions.

"We share a common concern for Dr. Lolley, Dr. Ashcraft and the many other friends we have among the faculty, staff and students at Southeastern Seminary," Honeycutt told a Southern Seminary chapel audience. "President Lolley's resignation and the circumstances which constrained him to conclude that abdication was his only appropriate response to the trustee's agenda for the seminary's future was more than an isolated event affecting a single person, family or seminary. Its accomplishment was one of the desired consequences of a 10-year-political campaign which has raged throughout the Southern Baptist Convention."

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Honeycutt, who said the controversy is "taking its toll in human terms," praised Lolley as "a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ, an effective seminary administrator and a loyalist of impeccable commitment to Jesus Christ, to the Bible and to his Baptist heritage. He is a courageous Christian who willingly prioritized conscience above unacceptable alternatives."

In addition to a period of prayer during the chapel service, Honeycutt invited students to join a prayer vigil each night at a designated room on the seminary campus.

The chapel service was sandwiched by several other gestures of support for the Southeastern community. On the day after the resignation announcements, many students, faculty and staff wore yellow arm bands as a symbol of concern.

The same day, a letter of concern and encouragement, signed by 50 of Southern's 74 faculty members, was sent to the Southeastern faculty. Faculty members at Southern also gave \$350 in personal contributions to help defray expenses of Southeastern's chapter of the American Association of University Professors.

A few days later, another letter of support signed by 500 students also was mailed to Southeastern.

Concern over the Southeastern resignations and the future of academic freedom in all Southern Baptist Convention seminaries was verbalized at a student-initiated rally attended by more than 300 students and faculty members.

"We grieve with our sisters and brothers at Southeastern Seminary who feel the impending threat of radical change to their beloved school," said Dale McAbee, a theology student from Spartanburg, S.C. "We mourn the loss of trust and the overt hatred which has resulted from the activity of a right-wing religious/political coalition within the Southern Baptist Convention.

DeAnna Banister, Student Government Association president and a theology student from LaGrange, Ky., said she hoped Southeastern students would continue to "feel our support" and "know there are people out there who care."

"I can imagine how devastated the students at Southeastern must feel, having felt the call of God to attend that seminary, only to have that call challenged by an outside force," she said.

Church history Professor Bill Leonard said he was tired of the theological/political struggle which has gripped Southern Baptists. "I'm a poorer teacher, preacher, scholar, pastor, father and husband because of the controversy," he noted.

Leonard also said he was "angry" that Southern Baptists "had distracted themselves from the fruits of the Spirit and the work of ministry." He urged students "not to be intimidated by the majority religion" and to diligently prepare themselves for ministry "because when all the churches, associations and seminaries have been purged, when all the missionaries are up to specification and when all the right theology is in place -- people still need Jesus."

To people associated with Southeastern Seminary, Leonard said: "You may be the first seminary to confront with this trauma, but you are not the last. We are praying for you, and we affirm your courage, your spirituality and your scholarship."

Larry McSwain, professor of church and community, asked rally participants to respond to the situation at Southeastern by being faithful to their ministries: "I'm going to stay right here and stand up for the gospel of Jesus Christ the best I know how. And that's what I hope you will do too."

McSwain also called for a "new commitment to honesty in all relationships" and warned against rejecting persons with differing viewpoints.

"I do not help the cause of truth when I color it with my ideology and reject those who disagree with me," he said. "If you want to support the tactics of takeover at Southeastern Seminary, join the ranks of those who put down fundamentalists or moderates."

Reaction to the Southeastern Seminary news was more restrained on the four other Southern Baptist seminary campuses. Baptist Press polled officials from those seminaries -- Midwestern in Kansas City, Mo.; New Orleans; Southwestern in Fort Worth, Texas; and Golden Gate in Mill Valley, Calif. -- and discovered no public actions.

"We're grieving privately and individually," an official said.

Response from one group of moderate Southern Baptists was stronger. Leaders of the Southern Baptist Alliance, a new organization of moderates from across the convention, expressed "dismay and alarm" at actions taken by Southeastern trustees that led to the resignations of Lolley and Ashcraft.

A statement released by the Alliance said: "The executive committee of the Southern Baptist Alliance deplores the spirit, methods and actions of a group who are contemptuous of Southeastern Seminary's history and tradition. These trustees are seemingly bent on the destruction of this Southern Baptist institution. Their treatment of moderate trustees, of the president and dean of the seminary, as well as of the faculty, staff and students of the seminary is cause for grief and dismay for all Southern Baptists who treasure religious freedom and academic integrity."

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(Also contributing to this story was Marv Knox of the Baptist Press central office.)

N-HMB

Roberts Loses Suits
Totaling \$233,427

By Jim Newton

Baptist Press
11/4/87

ATLANTA (BP)--Mercer University critic Lee Roberts has lost 23 lawsuits that have been filed against him and his company for failure to pay debts, according to the Atlanta Constitution.

Court judgments against Roberts in the 23 cases have totaled \$233,427, the Constitution said. Four other suits are pending.

The Constitution reported the lawsuits on its front page Nov. 4, less than one week before the Georgia Baptist Convention is expected to deal with charges by Roberts against Mercer University President R. Kirby Godsey and the Mercer trustees.

In October, Roberts mailed to all Georgia Baptist pastors a 16-page booklet charging Mercer with allowing immorality and debauchery on the campus, and that Godsey is a universalist who "does not believe Jesus Christ died for our sins."

Godsey and the Mercer trustees denied the charges, and in a called board meeting adopted 10 resolutions reaffirming Godsey's integrity and Mercer's policies against drinking, pornography and immorality on campus.

Roberts said the Constitution's latest news reports about lawsuits and court judgments against him are part of a smear campaign initiated by Mercer "to do everything they can to destroy me."

He pointed out the former editor of the Constitution, Reg Murphy, is a member of Mercer's board of trustees, and Mercer trustee Chairman Bob Steed is an editorial columnist at the Constitution.

During a meeting of Baptist pastors and laymen in Rome, Ga., Roberts accused Mercer of plotting a smear campaign against him and predicted it would begin "with a rip-roaring, down-in-the-gutter" article in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

The newspaper's managing editor, Glenn McCutchen, responded the Journal-Constitution "doesn't deal in smear stories or conspiracies." McCutchen added the newspaper constantly gets tips from the public about stories and follows up those that have merit. "We received information about possible problems in his business and we are researching them," he said.

Four days later, the paper carried the story detailing Roberts' financial plight, reporting he has been accused of unethical behavior in some of the 23 lawsuits.

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The newspaper carried detailed accounts from court records on the amounts Roberts owes to such creditors as Dunn and Bradstreet, Georgia International Life Insurance Company, Delta Airlines, Phenix Federal Savings and Loan Association, National Bank of Georgia, Citibank, First Atlanta Bank, Federal Express and the Marietta Country Club.

Roberts attributed the lawsuits against him to efforts of former clients to recoup losses or avoid foreclosures and said the court judgments resulted from cash-flow problems in his business.

In a statement to Baptist Press, Roberts said he and his mortgage banking company lost \$1.1 million on short-term real estate loans when five of his real estate developer clients went into bankruptcy within the past two years. He said he was owed \$300,000 by clients who were "born again Christians" having financial difficulty. Since he believes the Scripture teaches Christians should not sue Christians, Roberts voided their notes, he said.

Because of the cash-flow problems, he said, he has not been able to pay all of his debts on time, but he will continue to pay them back when he is able to do so.

Roberts was chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention's Committee on Boards in 1986.

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Billy Graham Eulogizes
Friend Grady Wilson

N-(O)
(N.C.)
By R.G. Puckett

Baptist Press
11/4/87

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)--"Grady had many friends. I have only a few, and Grady was one of mine. I could talk to him about anything and never question his loyalty," said Southern Baptist Evangelist Billy Graham Nov. 3 during his eulogy of fellow evangelist and friend, Grady Wilson.

Wilson, 68, the first associate evangelist Graham enlisted for his crusade team, died Oct. 30 at Charlotte (N.C.) Memorial Hospital following a long illness. He was a member of First Baptist Church of Charlotte, N.C.

Wilson served since 1950 as a member of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association as he traveled across the nation and around the world conducting evangelistic crusades. At the time of his death, Wilson was vice president of the Minneapolis-based BGEA.

During his tribute to Wilson at First Baptist Church, Graham's voice filled with emotion as he spoke of his friend's love for people:

"Grady felt at home with the rich and the poor. People felt he loved them. It was something in the way he smiled, something in the way he talked that was like no one else I've ever known. He could win their hearts. His life was unique. There are hundreds of people who would love to be here today from all the world, including New Zealand, England and France. Grady touched people wherever he went."

Wilson was born Aug. 28, 1919, in Charlotte. He had been friends with Graham since high school days. Wilson met Graham when both were choir members in the 1934 Mordecai Ham revival in Charlotte where Graham made a profession of faith and Wilson renewed the commitment he had made to God three years earlier.

He became serious about religion after the Ham meeting. He began preaching and was baptized a Baptist and ordained as a minister in 1938 at the age of 18. His first pastorate was Bethel Baptist Church in Hell Hole Swamp, S.C.

Wilson was a graduate of Charlotte High School and Wheaton College. One of his brothers, T.W. Wilson of Montreat, N.C., also has been a BGEA associate.

In Baptist life, Grady Wilson has been a member of the board of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board and of Gardner-Webb College, affiliated with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Wilson is survived by his wife, Wilma Hardie Wilson; two daughters; three brothers; one sister; four grandchildren and six nephews.

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