

June 16, 1958

### 13 Southern Professors Dismissed By Trustees

by C. R. Daley

LOUISVILLE--(BP)--In an unprecedented action in the 99-year history of Southern Baptist Seminary here, 13 theological professors were dismissed by the board of trustees (June 12).

Dismissals became effective immediately though salaries are to be continued through July 31, 1958 or a later date if deemed wise by a committee of the board.

The professors dismissed are those who have been involved in a controversy with Seminary President Duke K. McCall during the past several months. One section of the trustee statement provided for the possibility of reinstating one or more of the 13 professors in case genuine reconciliation is effected with their faculty colleagues and the administration.

Never a day dawned more gloriously and the Kentucky sun never shone more beautifully on the lovely campus of the seminary but darkness and despair were the prevailing order of the day as the trustees convened for a meeting destined for an outcome unparalleled in the annals of Southern Baptist theological education.

Hope and hopelessness mingled in many hearts through the day until the trustees emerged at 11:15 P.M. with the fateful decision.

Other than the trustees and the faculty members, only a handful including a few students and two reporters was on hand to hear the news that would rock the campus and stun thousands of alumni and a great number of the nine million Southern Baptists.

The full text of the report of the trustees is as follows:

"1. That Professors J. M. Ashcraft, T. O. Hall, J. E. Jones, J. M. Lewis, W. L. Lumpkin, W. H. Morton, J. J. Owens, H. F. Peacock, T. D. Price, G. H. Ranson, T. C. Smith, H. E. Turlington, and G. H. Wamble be dismissed from their respective positions as members of the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary effective June 12, 1958.

"2. That the salary of each of these men be continued through July 31, 1958, or until such time as the executive committee and/or the financial board of the trustees may deem wise.

"3. That in the hope that genuine reconciliation between one or more of these men and their colleagues of the faculty and administration may yet be effected and that they may be able to work harmoniously and effectively within the framework and intent of the actions of the board of trustees, including the charter and bylaws of the seminary, that an appropriate committee of the board of trustees be authorized to reinstate any one or more of these thirteen men as members of the faculty of the school of theology of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at a salary and rank not to exceed the salary and rank authorized for a given individual through the March, 1958, session of the board of trustees, and that such reinstatement be upon the basis of full confidence of the said committee that the reinstated member or members of the faculty can co-operate with the administration and serve in good conscience as a part of the faculty.

"4. That it be recorded that in the event trustee action is needed to provide for some situation relating to a sabbatical leave or hardship wrought upon the family of any one or more of these 13 faculty members the financial board and/or the executive committee of the board of trustees are specifically authorized and empowered to take such appropriate action."

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The thirteen professors, their official faculty status, home states, and the years they joined the faculty are:

J. J. Owens, professor of Old Testament, Oklahoma, 1948.  
William H. Morton, professor of Archaeology, Missouri, 1948.  
Theron D. Price, professor of church history, Arkansas, 1948.  
Henry E. Turlington, associate professor of New Testament, Florida, 1949.  
T. C. Smith, associate professor of New Testament, Louisiana, 1950.  
J. Estill Jones, associate professor of New Testament, Oklahoma, 1951.  
Guy H. Ranson, associate professor of Christian ethics, Texas, 1952.  
William L. Lumpkin, associate professor of church history, Virginia, 1954.  
J. Morris Ashcraft, associate professor of Archaeology, Arkansas, 1955.  
Heber F. Peacock Jr., associate professor of New Testament, Arizona, 1956.  
John M. Lewis, associate professor of theology, Florida, 1956.  
Thomas O. Hall Jr., associate professor of Old Testament, North Carolina, 1956.  
Hugh Wamble, associate professor of church history, Georgia, 1956.

Several of the professors served as instructors at the seminary before being officially added to the faculty. Others in the group taught in Southern Baptist colleges before joining the seminary faculty.

All of the professors are alumni of Southern Seminary except Hall, who is a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Fort Worth. A number of the group have had additional training in other graduate schools of America, Britain, and the Continent. Five of the professors received promotions last March.

The controversy between President McCall and the faculty members has been in the making for some time but took on critical aspects first in March of this year when the faculty report to the trustees referred to low morale prevailing among faculty members and pointed to the administration as a cause.

Subsequently it took an even more serious turn when an investigating committee of the trustees which visited the campus was presented a document signed by 13 professors with specific charges against President McCall.

When the investigating committee of the board indicated that a report favorable to the president would go to the full board in a Houston meeting, the professors addressed each trustee with a letter restating their position and emphasizing the seriousness of their convictions.

The trustees in the Houston meeting accepted the report of its investigating committee vindicating McCall and called for efforts for reconciliation by June 12. Several meetings took place between McCall and some of the professors without substantial progress. The last of these reconciliation efforts occurred between McCall and part of the group in a meeting on the evening of June 10.

This meeting lasted past midnight. It is reported that the teachers were willing to continue under McCall but would not retract their statement of charges against him.

In the trustee meeting of June 12 each of the professors was heard separately and the group was heard together. Again they seemed unwilling to retract charges against McCall and held out for some assurance from the board for relief in the future from wrong use of administrative authority.

They also insisted on all staying or all leaving. The trustees seemed disappointed in not being able to break the unity and save at least part of the group.

The feeling apparent on the part of many of the trustees was that the decision was inevitable. They considered that every proper effort had been made for reconciliation by the president and themselves. One trustee estimated he had spent 100 hours in all dealing with the crisis. Another seemed to express what most of the trustees felt when he said it was the most difficult experience of his entire ministry.

The trustee vote was not unanimous for the final decision but an overwhelming majority voted for the verdict. Less than a dozen of the 55 board members were absent from the June 12 meeting though several had to leave before the end.

A meeting of the executive committee of the trustees is scheduled for sometime in July when presumably an effort to rebuild the faculty and other matters relating to the crisis will be considered.

Counting two professors who resigned earlier to accept posts in other seminaries, 15 of the 30 members of the theology faculty are gone. They include the entire Old Testament department, the entire Archaeology department, the entire church history department, four-fifths of the New Testament department, half of the ethics department, and a third of the theology department.

Contacted by a reporter following the announcement of the decision, the dismissed professors held out little hope for reinstatement of any of the group. "We are 13 people hoping for pastoral or teaching jobs," one was quoted as saying. The professors persisted that their protest was on principle and that they were thinking of the future of the seminary.

They said they would pray for the future of the seminary and admitted a sense of relief that final action had been taken.

All of the 13 professors are married. They have a total of 37 children. Some admirers of the professors still hope for reconciliation. Three of the 13 were not on the scene, two being abroad and one in religious services in other states.

A funeral atmosphere pervaded the whole affair. Indeed, to me, it was sadder than any funeral of my ministry. Many times there is a bright side to death but no ray of light could be discerned here.

Doubtlessly the incident will have a profound effect upon the future direction of seminary education policies of Southern Baptists.

About all left at this time is the faith expressed by the Apostle Paul, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." God grant that we are among them that love him and are called according to his purpose.

I have no doubt that the seminary is much bigger than this whole generation and will be preserved by the Lord who has so much at stake in it that it cannot be destroyed by faculty, administration, trustees, or any of the rest of us. In this conviction we must proceed at this moment by faith, not by sight.