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Southwestern trustees respond
to questions about Dilday firing By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
3/11/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--"Irreconcilable differences between trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and former President Russell H. Dilday led to his termination from leadership of the school, according to members of the board of trustees."

The statement headed a press release issued March 11 in behalf of trustees who fired Dilday March 9 at the end of a three-day meeting on the Fort Worth, Texas, campus.

The statement was a sharp contrast to a news conference trustees held two hours after firing Dilday. Ralph W. Pulley Jr. of Dallas, newly elected trustee chairman, gave the media no reasons for the action except "... the institution needed a new direction for the 21st century." He acknowledged there had been some discussion about the termination prior to the meeting by some trustees but refused to elaborate further.

Dilday was not quoted in the trustees' March 11 press release and was unavailable for comment to Baptist Press March 11.

The trustees' press release alleged Dilday's "reluctance to move in concert with policies established by the board brought constant concern to the trustees and often led to gridlock within the administration and to his stonewalling the board."

"Also, Dr. Dilday has continued to speak out on political issues fostered by others, in contradiction to his earlier agreement with the trustees not to do so," the trustee statement said.

Trustees said they had written letters to the faculty and members of the Southwestern Council expressing their desire to see the seminary continue "its great heritage and the vision of the school's founder and first president, B.H. Carroll."

Trustees said "with the increasing divergence of views between the board and Dr. Dilday on the direction of the seminary under his administration, the trustees came to the conclusion that Dr. Dilday was not the right person to maintain that heritage and vision."

Trustees said their action was in keeping with Southwestern's bylaws, which state, "The Southern Baptist Convention has committed to the trustees the responsibility to operate the seminary for the convention and full authority in all matters of its operation."

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An unidentified board spokesman was quoted in the press release as saying, "Everyone hurts when something like this happens. The trustees I know personally loved Dr. Dilday and wish things could have been worked out. However, for years we have tried to work under agreements and commitments that were made, and it just hasn't worked."

Trustees emphasized that while the difficulty in working with Dilday philosophically had reached a stalemate, he had earned high marks for his personal skills and relationships.

Trustees said Dilday "was offered an opportunity to accept early retirement, which he rejected. Board members further stated their action was 'simply dealing with a personnel matter that has no implications of moral wrongdoing on Dilday's part.'"

One unidentified trustee was quoted in the press release as saying trustees "hav the utmost concern for the institution and its commitment to doctrinal integrity for the future and that no other changes are expected."

Damon Shook, pastor of Champion Forest Baptist Church in Houston, and immediate past chairman of the board, was quoted in the press release as describing his tenure leading the board as frustrating. He said the relationship between the president and board members was "difficult to deal with. He (Dilday) was confrontational and critical and the conflict seemed to accelerate in recent years with frequent attacks on trustees for lack of cooperation."

The press release said T. Bob Davis, secretary of the board and a member of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas, told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram March 10 that Dilday's termination "represents years of frustration and gridlock with Dr. Dilday."

According to the press release, Robert E. Naylor, who served as president of the seminary from 1958 to 1978, told reporters Southwestern will continue to be strong.

"The substance for which the seminary stands will abide, that is more important than any one of us and (the seminary) will survive," Naylor was quoted as saying. "There must have been a difference of opinion as to direction. The seminary is a Bible-believing school recognized among theological institutions in America as a conservative people. The things that have been said in our denominational difficulty inevitably clash. It is unfortunate that either group should find group identity apart from the great thrust of our churches."

Dilday's firing was "like a snowball coming down the mountain, finally coming to rest," the product of years of "philosophical differences," Paul Balducci, a member of the trustee presidential search committee and pastor of West Mobile Baptist Church, told The Alabama Baptist newsjournal.

"There was nothing in the meeting itself that you could say was the straw that broke the camel's back," Balducci said. "It was something that was coming for a long time."

"Even when I first got on the board in 1990, I could see there was a lot of tension. At one of the conventions, he had made some very strong statements about the trustees not being competent and about the convention leadership. Some of the trustees wanted to relieve him then."

Balducci would not say whether he voted to fire Dilday, but he did take issue with reports that the vote was 27 to 8 in favor of firing. "I helped count the votes, and there were not eight people who voted against the firing. It was a clear, overwhelming majority of votes."

Balducci said there were many philosophical differences between Dilday and the board. As one example, he cited the seminary's relationship with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a moderate Baptist group which has its own missions offering.

"The issue of whether Southwestern would put up exhibits at CBF meetings had come up through the years," Balducci said. "Several board members tried to say that we didn't want Cooperative Program money sponsoring a group that collects funds in opposition to the Cooperative Program. Basically, Dr. Dilday tried to argue against taking such a strong stand, and it was left as an open issue. Also, we have told him that we have problems with th hiring of CBF-relat d people on the faculty. We see it as a potential for internal conflict and as a conflict of inter st.

"But in Tuesday morning's meeting, in his presidential address, in a room full of trustees and visitors, he concluded his address by saying that Keith Parks (missions coordinator for the CBF) would be our speaker for graduation. Now if you have sympathy for CBF, you would probably say that was no problem. But that announcement was difficult for those of us who see Parks as pulling money and missionaries away from the SBC. Immediately, the trustees voted unanimously to rescind the invitation to Parks. That's just one example of the ongoing conflict between the president and the board."

Balducci also corrected the impression left by news reports that the board officers took Dilday to his office for the express purpose of firing him.

"In his office, they presented him with a very generous package for early retirement, at essentially the same terms he agreed to later," Balducci said. "But he refused it and refused to even look at it. At that point, the chairman said we have no other choice but to ask him to leave."

Balducci did confirm that Dilday's administrative assistants were immediately placed on administrative leave. But he said they should be able to come back to a job at the seminary.

"It was a matter of control of the office," he said. "We felt like they would have little to do without the president there. As far as I know, they will come back. There was no talk of firing them."

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SBC leaders: Dilday dismissal
part of transition process

By Art Toalston

Baptist Press
3/11/94

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention leaders sought to put the dismissal of the president of the largest SBC seminary in perspective, as part of the process of setting in place new conservative leadership.

Meanwhile, Baptist leaders in Texas issued statements ranging from chagrin to anger over the March 9 firing by trustees of Russell H. Dilday, 63, as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.

And from both sides came the not-unexpected promises of prayer for the institution and the Dilday family.

SBC President H. Edwin Young, pastor of Houston's Second Baptist Church, said in an interview with Baptist Press he had mixed feelings about Dilday's dismissal and had sent a telegram assuring him of prayer.

"Russell and (his wife) Betty are good friends with Jo Beth (Young's wife) and I," Young said. "We have close ties. Russell has preached in my pulpit. I've held the seminary revival. Both my sons are graduates of Southwestern. We probably have had more students go to Southwestern in the past 10 years than any other church in the country. I don't know how many are there now, probably dozens. A lot of people in my church came up under his ministry at Tallowood (Baptist Church in Houston where Dilday once was pastor), came to know Christ there."

At the same time, Young said, "I know many of the trustees. I do not know all the issues involved. But I'm sure they were thinking about the direction the seminary would take in the next decade and felt this was the proper time, evidently, to look for a new president.

"I would hope this wouldn't explode into more political activity, because there's no Machiavellian plan that's involved in this," Young said. "I think they have given him a retirement package that seems to me very attractive and adequate. I think it's merely (a situation involving) trustees of an institution who are assigned a responsibility by our convention and a president who is assigned a responsibility by the trustees being in the retirement phase of life.

"And in the overall well-being of an institution, sometimes tough decisions are made," Young said. "They are 'trustees' -- we've entrusted them with the responsibility for these institutions fulfilling the purpose for which they are established.

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"This happens in churches, it happens all the time, and the kingdom will move forward," Young said. "I think Russell has given that counsel himself. In the statements I have read, he said the institution is bigger than the person, it's not what he desired, he wanted to stay on longer, but the trustees felt it was time for him to retire.

Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, issued a statement noting the SBC has trusted its system of trustee governance.

"The Southern Baptist Convention has chosen to make the executive head of each institution 'responsible (to the directors/trustees) for all the work of the agency ... (to) carry on the work as the directors may direct.' Whether in times of agreement or disagreement this policy, in the long run, has been helpful in guiding Southern Baptist institutions."

From a personal standpoint, Chapman added, "As an alumnus of Southwestern Seminary, I am grateful for the very significant contribution the school has made to my life and ministry and confident that it will serve the Lord mightily in the future as it has in the past." Chapman holds both the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from the seminary.

Mark Coppenger, SBC vice president for convention relations, issued a statement, noting:

"Across the convention, we've seen a change of leadership. Richard Land has come to the Christian Life Commission, Jerry Rankin to the Foreign Mission Board, Jimmy Draper to the Sunday School Board, Paige Patterson to Southeastern Seminary, Al Mohler to Southern Seminary, Morris Chapman to the Executive Committee, Larry Lewis to the Home Mission Board and so on. Recognizing the great good that has gone before, the trustees of these agencies chose to move on to the next stage of institutional ministry.

"We've already seen that, despite the wear and tear of transition, these new leaders have seen strong growth in their agencies.

"CLC literature sales are at a record high. Southeastern and Southern are on the ascent. The Home Mission Board is leading us to plant a record four missions a day. The Foreign Mission Board reports increases in such key categories as baptisms and new churches. The Sunday School Board has undergone institutional renewal, and is enjoying eager response to a variety of new products, including the LIFE support resources. The list goes on and on.

"Now Southwestern has chosen to move on, and there is every reason to believe that they too will experience encouraging developments.

"Change isn't easy, but it is inevitable, and God's grace is always sufficient, even abundant."

Coppenger added: "One strong point in all this is Southwestern's determination to stand by the Cooperative Program. As all our agencies sound a strong note of allegiance to the CP and our missions support offerings (Lottie Moon each Christmas, Annie Armstrong each Easter), we can expect even greater life for our Great Commission work."

David Hankins, Executive Committee chairman from 1991-93 who now heads its theological education study committee, said he was not privy to the Southwestern board's inner workings but noted "it is widely known that there have been serious conflicts between the board and Dr. Dilday for some time, running along the same lines as the larger conflict in our convention."

"The transition that was going to take place was inevitable," said Hankins, pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Lake Charles, La., who holds a master of divinity and Ph.D. from Southwestern. "When there is serious difference of opinion and vision in an institution, the transition may not be as smooth as everyone wishes, but it must be made in order for the institution to move out of the morass of conflict and mistrust and on to an unfettered achievement of its primary mission."

Several Texas Baptist leaders, however, sounded a different note of concern.

"It is a sad day for the SBC because those within the convention who kept hoping that reconciliation would in time come now have very reason to question their hope," said Jerold McBride, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas and pastor of First Baptist Church in San Angelo, Texas.

"All but seven of the trustees of SWBTS acted in a manner that has inflicted irreparable damage both to the seminary and the SBC," McBride said. "The seven who voted differently are to be commended for their courage."

"The decision to fire Russell Dilday is consistent with the nature of political fundamentalists to purge those who do not submit to their authoritarianism. The trail of their victims is both long and tragic," he said.

"The effect this will have on the BGCT could be positive," McBride noted. "It could cause Texas Baptists to cherish even more the openness and inclusiveness that characterize our convention. It could unite us even more. Texas Baptists are living proof that Baptists can work in harmony without agreeing on every detail. Texas Baptists are fiercely independent. There is not reason for what takes place in the SBC to determine what happens in Texas. The Baptist General Convention of Texas is not a farm team of the SBC."

William M. Pinson, BGCT executive director, said, "A host of Texas Baptists are deeply disturbed about the action of some of the trustees to dismiss R.H. Dilday as president of Southwestern Seminary and are equally concerned about the effect it might have on the Lord's work in Texas and beyond."

"We appreciate this native son," Pinson said, "and are grateful for the way the seminary thrived under Dilday's presidency -- record enrollments, huge increases in endowments, creative programs in evangelism and missions."

Herbert H. Reynolds, president of Baylor University in Waco, which will open a seminary this August, stated, "This is another very sad day in Baptist life ... I must say, however, that I am not at all surprised by this action on the part of the fundamentalists who have ravaged so many of our Southern Baptist institutions and agencies over the past 15 years. Certainly the future of Southwestern is very much in doubt as these forces have continued to be as determined as ever to control all facets of Baptist life. To see the seminary so drastically affected at this time by the rampant forces of change is something that creates great sadness for the theological programs within Southern Baptist life."

Reynolds described Dilday "as sound as a person can be theologically, and to see his great leadership pass is certainly disheartening."

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Southwestern students criticize
trustee action; affirm Dilday

By Herb Hollinger

Baptist Press
3/11/94

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Many, if not most, of the students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary are angry at the firing of President Russell H. Dilday by seminary trustees and some are considering leaving the school.

A Baptist Press random survey the day after the March 9 dismissal of Dilday didn't find one student who agreed with the trustees' action. Of the 48 students surveyed (the seminary has more than 4,000) on campus, all felt Dilday had been fair with students whether they agreed with his politics or not.

Many of them let the trustees know of their displeasure when trustee chairman Ralph Pulley attempted in the seminary auditorium to explain the action immediately following the trustee executive session.

"Anarchist!" "Puppets!" "Pharisees!"

Such were the ire of the more than 1,200 students who filled the Truett Auditorium floor and balcony to standing room only. Pulley was met with laughter and boos when he told the students the trustees were fulfilling their responsibility to keep the school's spirit alive.

"Dilday!" came the cry when Pulley said the trustees would accept recommendations from the students for Dilday's replacement. Not all the students were boisterous, some admitted embarrassment at the students' actions, but all seem upset about what happened and what that will do to their futures.

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In contrast, the next day following the morning chapel, more than 1,000 students gathered in front of Dilday's campus home to hear their fired president give an upbeat pep talk in which he affirmed them and urged them to stay with their studies and predicted the seminary will survive the present struggle as it has others in its 80-plus years of existence.

Students gave the president, dressed in a green sweater which he acknowledged for the former Baylor students in the crowd, and his wife, Betty, a long clapping ovation. Dilday finished the 15-minute address by leading the students in the hymn, "Open My Eyes."

But for some students, their future at Southwestern is cloudy.

For Doug Jones of Boise, Idaho, who is in the marriage and family counseling program, it will mean taking time to think about his future at SWBTS -- and maybe even as a Southern Baptist.

"I'm dismayed," he said. "I feel we have been shut out of the process."

Jones went further, comparing the action against Dilday to a time in the Bible when "they went behind closed doors ... and he was crucified."

Paul Orton, a master of divinity student from Marietta, Ga., said he was not leaving because he already has two years at SWBTS.

"But, I'm distraught." The professors will struggle in the classroom, he said, and some of the best have already left.

Rebecca Trammell, first-semester student from Dallas in marriage and family counseling/religious education, said the trustee action was handled incorrectly.

"Politics are for big boys, not little boys," Trammell said. "They (trustees) don't know what they're doing." Trammell said she was leaving SWBTS but not directly because of the Dilday firing.

Likewise, her friend Dawn Hamilton, a first-semester religious education student from Dallas, was unhappy with the action.

"The trustees are not good role models," Hamilton said. "There was no student input at all."

Although spring break week begins March 14, student organizers have scheduled a get-together March 21 "to discuss our options and try to organize ourselves along with other concerned Baptists in order to have a unified voice."

SWBTS does not have a student government and apparently members of the Theological Fellowship on campus are coordinating the meeting. One spokesman said the meeting does not have a place yet because the new administration may not allow the meeting on campus.

In a "Student Voice" mimeographed publication handed out to students gathered on the Dildays' front lawn, the editors accused SWBTS trustees, the SBC Executive Committee, SBC President H. Edwin Young and themselves as responsible for the dismissal.

"Under current convention polity, we elect the president of the SBC, who appoints the executive committee, who in turn appoints the trustees for the seminary," a paragraph read in "Who's Responsible" in the "Student Voice."

That brought a response from Ernest E. Mosley, executive vice president of the SBC Executive Committee:

"Errors in interpretation of SBC polity printed in the Student Voice paper circulated at SWBTS March 10 reflect the urgent need for education in denominational polity and practice.

"The report gets a failing grade of 33 and one-third percent. It is correct in stating that messengers from qualified churches elect the president of the convention. However, the president does not appoint the Executive Committee and the Executive Committee does not appoint the trustees of the seminary.

"The awareness of such misinformation supports the concerns of many that required courses in denominational polity and practice should be taught at each SBC seminary."

EDITORS' NOTE: The following story can be used in tandem with two stories in (BP), titled "27-year wait for 'Christy' to end on CBS in March" and "Film maker chooses rural Tenn. church," dated 2/9/94. CBS at the time was indicating "Christy" would be aired in March but changed the date to Easter Sunday night.

Letter-writing effort urged
to help 'Christy' succeed

By Art Toalston

LOS ANGELES (BP)--"I think we have the power to make this show work," veteran actor Tom Lester said of the boost Baptists and other evangelicals can give to the Easter night premier of "Christy" on CBS.

Christians should write letters to CBS voicing appreciation for the show and encouraging Hollywood to offer more family entertainment, said Lester, whose most memorable role was "Eb" on "Green Acres." Lester is a member of Shepherd of the Hills Church, a Southern Baptist congregation in Porter Ranch, Calif.

"Christy" is based on the best-selling novel with the same name penned by the late Christian author Catherine Marshall.

Its premier will be a two-hour movie following "60 Minutes" Sunday, April 3, pre-empting "Murder She Wrote." Six one-hour "Christy" episodes will be aired on subsequent Thursday evenings. Check local listings.

Letters should be addressed to:

Jeff Sagansky
President, CBS Entertainment
c/o CBS TV CITY
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Letters to the Federal Communications Commission, Lester said, also could play a key role in making sure "Christy" and other such programs get a chance.

The address is:

Federal Communications Commission
Mass Media Bureau
2025 M St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20554

The letters can include such information as:

- Your reaction to "Christy."
- The kind of family entertainment, values and/or role models you want to see more of on TV.

It's important the letters be written as soon after viewing the program as possible to have maximum effect on network decision-makers, Lester said.

Lester added he hopes pastors on Easter Sunday morning will include a moment of encouragement to families to watch the TV program that night. He also noted the importance of viewers sticking with the program during its six one-hour Thursday episodes.

"CBS has given us an incredibly good time slot" on Easter Sunday, said Ken Wales, veteran Hollywood producer whose 17-year dream to see "Christy" on film is finally being realized. But, he said, "It's a critical kind of test case" for whether network TV will decide to open up to other family oriented shows.

Wales, whose film credits include "The Prodigal" for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's film company, described "Christy" as "the story of a girl who based on her commitment and faith goes to the mountains to teach and to make a difference."

"We're encouraging response," Wales said. "We want to know what people think, how we can better tell the stories they enjoy."

Said Lester, "CBS indicated to Mr. Wales that they want to produce a show with family values. However, if it is not supported by those households seeking family entertainment, they will be forced to take it off the air.

"This is our chance to truly have an effect on television," Lester said. "We must not just do nothing. It is easy for us to complain and well we should, when appropriate.

"Now we have an opportunity to do something positive."

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The book, "Christy," now in its 84th printing, has sold more than 8 million copies worldwide since it was first published in 1967.

The TV version will feature Kellie Martin as "Christy," along with veterans Tyne Daly and Tess Harper. Martin is best known for her role as "Becca" on the former ABC family series "Life Goes On."

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(BP) photo available upon request from (BP) central office in Nashville.

Rankin urges MissionsFest crowd
to heed call to a lost world

By William Neal

Baptist Press
3/11/94

PERRY, Ga. (BP)--Not called to missions, you say?

Jerry A. Rankin, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, urged a "MissionsFest" audience in Georgia to heed the Great Commission of Christ, saying: "People often say to me: 'Dr. Rankin, I would go to be a missionary but I have not been called.'

"Pardon me? Who was he talking to? ... There's only one purpose to which we are called and that is to make Jesus known to a lost world."

More than 3,000 people turned out for the MissionsFest March 4-5 sponsored by the Georgia Baptist Convention and the FMB and held at the Georgia National Fairgrounds in Perry.

Referring to the large number of recently retired missionaries present, Rankin asked the Friday night audience, "Who will replace them?" He said he receives letters from all over the world asking for more missionaries to be sent. "When they ask, 'Will someone else come?' I cannot answer that question, but you can!"

The conference featured a number of foreign missionaries sharing their testimonies, information about mission needs and everything potential missionaries need to know about responding to God's "call."

In a separate dialogue session with Georgia Baptist leaders, Rankin expressed great optimism about the future of foreign missions. Last year more missionaries were appointed than had ever been appointed in one year, he said, and churches were started in World A countries where people previously had never been exposed to the Gospel.

In response to specific questions, Rankin indicated the board was still committed to comprehensive strategies for missions that include medical and agricultural missions and other ministry-related vocations.

He noted also the board is trying to break down the basic missionary budget into smaller packages that churches can pick up on so the people know specifically what they are giving to.

Missionary speaker Robert Winter, a Georgian who serves in Argentina with sports evangelism, said he once felt he could not be a missionary because he was not a preacher. He received a degree in recreation from Georgia Southern and later learned of the opportunity to apply his skills in a missionary setting.

"Sports in Argentina is very important. It is like a god, a religion to the people," Winter said. "My job is to help the churches use sports as an evangelistic tool."

Noting the growing interest in sports evangelism, Winter remarked, "God would approve ... after all, he did create the world in the shape of a ball!"

Program planners voiced confidence that seeds of interest have been planted in Georgia Baptists, young and old, whom God may be calling to either short-term or career missions.

This was the second MissionFest to be held in Georgia. (The first one was in 1990.) The FMB has sponsored these mission conferences at various locations around the country and Alan Compton, FMB communications vice president, noted "this may be the largest one we have had anywhere."

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(BP) photo available upon request from The Christian Index, Georgia Baptists' newsjournal.

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