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Patterson nominated to  
Southeastern presidency

By Greg Warner

DALLAS (ABP) -- Paige Patterson, who planned and guided the rise to power of fundamental-conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention, will become president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, according to the school's trustees.

Patterson, president of Criswell College in Dallas, told reporters April 21 he will accept the job if elected by the seminary's trustees, who will meet May 14 at the Wake Forest, N.C., campus to hear the unanimous recommendation of their search committee. He said he probably would assume the post July 1.

Trustee chairman Roger Ellsworth, who directed the search process, said Patterson's election is virtually assured. "I would anticipate no difficulty," he told Associated Baptist Press April 21.

If elected, Patterson will become the most prominent player in the 13-year SBC controversy to take the helm of one of the 21 Southern Baptist agencies.

The 49-year-old Patterson, who holds a doctorate from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was widely reported as the front-runner for the Southeastern post after embattled president Lewis Drummond announced in January he will step down in July.

"We didn't surprise anyone, did we?" chairman Ellsworth said of the trustees' selection.

The nomination of Patterson marks a new chapter in Southeastern's history, which has been fraught with bitter controversy for five years. The seminary, which had become a bastion for moderate-conservative theology, became a target for SBC fundamental-conservatives, who gained a majority on the Southeastern trustee board in 1987.

Trustees changed seminary policy to ensure that only biblical inerrantists were elected to the faculty, prompting then-president Randall Lolley and most top administrators to resign.

Lolley, now a pastor in Greensboro, N.C., said the nomination of Patterson indicates "that those who are on the board of trustees have accomplished the goals they set for themselves: making Southeastern a fundamentalist school."

"One of the values of electing Paige Patterson is that nobody has any question about who he is and what he stands for," Lolley told the Winston-Salem Journal April 20. "He has been unwavering in his commitments to hard-core fundamentalism."

As recently as last June, Patterson said his role in what he calls the "conservative resurgence" in the SBC would make him unelectable as head of any SBC agency.

But Southeastern trustees, anxious to solidify the seminary's conservative image, concluded Patterson's qualifications to fill Southeastern's specific needs "outweighed" those considerations, Ellsworth said.

"I hope the (Southern Baptist) Convention has moved beyond that point of controversy to where this won't really be a factor anymore," said Ellsworth, who chairs the 12-member trustee executive committee that conducted the search.

In an interview with Associated Baptist Press, Ellsworth said Patterson's political involvement "was an issue" that "received some discussion" in the committee. "It caused some men to think very seriously about their vote on the matter," he said.

Ellsworth confirmed that Patterson was a finalist for Southeastern's presidency in 1988, when Drummond was chosen. The chairman said he didn't know why Drummond was picked instead of Patterson. Trustees described Drummond, an inerrantist who was not aligned in the SBC controversy, as a "transition president."

While the election of Patterson will "give a definite cast to the seminary," Ellsworth said, Southeastern already was well on its way toward establishing its conservative identity "no matter who we picked as president."

"I really don't construe this as some kind of a signal," he said of Patterson's nomination. "The conservative direction was already set through various means."

"It is correct we haven't reached the point where we are one entity," he said, citing as an example disagreements between the faculty and trustees over the direction of the school.

Ellsworth said Patterson was chosen for his ability to deal with Southeastern's problems, particularly student recruitment, faculty recruitment, financial development and accreditation.

Since the departure of Lolley, the school's enrollment has fallen from more than 1,000 to about 500 and fund-raising has suffered. Trustee-initiated policy changes brought scrutiny from the seminary's two accrediting agencies, one of which placed Southeastern on probation in December.

Meanwhile, most of the 35 faculty members have left or announced plans to leave. Only seven of the professors who were at the school in 1987 will remain by the end of the year, creating a need to recruit inerrantist faculty members.

Patterson told reporters in Dallas he expects some of Criswell's 23 professors will follow him to Southeastern. "They probably would welcome the opportunity to work in a Southern Baptist institution," he said.

He added, however, he has avoided recruiting Criswell College's 375 students to Southeastern. Criswell is an undergraduate school affiliated with First Baptist Church of Dallas.

He said his first priorities as Southeastern president would be "to rebuild the student body and faculty and satisfy the accreditation associations."

Patterson has had his own troubles at Criswell College, where he has been president since 1975. Trustees reportedly fired him in October, then reinstated him at the urging of Southeastern trustee Adrian Rogers of Memphis, Tenn., and other fundamental-conservative leaders. Patterson denied

April 20 that he was ever fired.

Despite Patterson's differences with Criswell trustees over administration -- which Patterson called "philosophical differences" -- Ellsworth said Southeastern's trustees were convinced Patterson could effectively lead Southeastern, one of six SBC seminaries.

"We obviously have confidence he can handle these (administrative) concerns or we wouldn't have looked in his direction," Ellsworth said.

Early reaction to Patterson's nomination from Southeastern's faculty was not favorable. Librarian Eugene McLeod said most long-time faculty members will greet the news with "great disappointment."

Faculty spokesman Robert Culpepper said the nomination of Patterson, perhaps the most prominent political figure in Southern Baptist life, demonstrates that positions in the SBC are being filled according to a political "spoils system."

"To the victor go the spoils, and Southeastern is one of those spoils," Culpepper, professor of theology, told the Winston-Salem Journal.

Culpepper said the election of Patterson will help the school attract more fundamentalist students. The fact Jerry Falwell offered Patterson a dean's position at Falwell's Liberty University last year indicates how strong a fundamentalist Patterson is, Culpepper said.

Ellsworth told ABP such a reaction from the current faculty was expected, but he noted, "The more (new) faculty members come in, the more that will change."

"I hope faculty members who are there will give him a chance," he continued. "He's not as bad as his public image. I think they would be surprised at how good he is to work with."

Russ Bush, Southeastern dean and vice president for academic affairs, called Patterson's nomination both providential and fortunate.

"My prayer is that God will give him the wisdom and grace to see Southeastern's strengths and enhance them, as we at the same time continue to work to overcome remaining weaknesses," Bush said. "Our biggest challenges, of course, are our need for new faculty members and our accreditation."

Bush, who was hired under Drummond's administration and was at one time considered a possible successor to Drummond, pledged to do "all in my power" to help Patterson succeed. "God will honor the faithful teaching of his infallible Word," Bush said. "Dr. Patterson and I agree on that foundational principle."

Ellsworth said he hopes Patterson's election also will aid the school's effort to retain its accreditation, noting Patterson has guided Criswell College through its own accreditation problems.

"I don't think the accreditation concerns will be lifted just by having a new president," Ellsworth said. "We have to take the right steps. But we are confident he can (help)."

Ellsworth said Patterson plans to meet with Southeastern faculty and students during the last week of April in preparation for the election in May.

Patterson was chosen from three finalists who were interviewed for the job. The others, as reported by ABP April 14, were Albert Mohler, editor of the Christian Index, newsjournal of Georgia Baptists, and Richard Melick, a professor at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis, Tenn.

-- This story includes information from Orville Scott of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Toby Druin of the Baptist Standard of Texas and Christopher Quinn of the Winston-Salem Journal.

Baptists Committed closes its doors  
as Fellowship's role increases

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- Baptists Committed, one of several opposition groups that sprang up as fundamental-conservatives rose to power in the Southern Baptist Convention, is closing its doors.

In a letter to the organization's members, James Slatton, chairman of the executive committee for Baptists Committed, said the four-year-old group will close its national office at the end of May and throw its support behind the new Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

"The time has come for the functions of our national office to be assumed by the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," wrote Slatton, pastor of River Road Baptist Church in Richmond, Va.

The Fellowship was formed last year as an umbrella group for moderate-conservatives, who have been unsuccessful in their attempt to wrest control of the 15 million-member denomination from fundamental-conservatives.

While the efforts of the Texas-based Baptists Committed have focused primarily on political strategies to oppose the current trend in SBC leadership, the Fellowship has eschewed denominational politics in favor of starting alternative ministries and missions.

In his letter to Baptist Committed members, Slatton noted that since 1990 the group had "no longer mounted an effort to change the fundamentalist direction of the SBC."

Instead the group has lent its support to formation of the Fellowship, providing more than \$150,000 for start-up costs. Several Baptist Committed leaders serve on the coordinating council of the Fellowship.

Last October, Baptists Committed leaders said the organization would continue to function in order to promote the growth of the Fellowship and to organize opposition to "fundamentalism" within the state Baptist conventions.

While the organization's national role will be superseded by the Fellowship, Slatton said, the state-level organizations begun by Baptists Committed will now serve in many cases as state chapters of the Fellowship. "We are anticipating the same people being involved and the same agendas for states and regions," Slatton wrote.

Oeita Bottorff, who will retire May 31 as program coordinator for Baptists Committed, will be in charge of "networking" for the Fellowship and the state-level organizations as a volunteer, Slatton said.

"We can all be proud and excited about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, this new organization which provides missions and ministry in keeping with historic principles differing from current fundamentalist leadership in the SBC," Slatton wrote.

"The Fellowship holds in its seeds the renewal of spiritual energy, recovery of integrity in Baptist life, rededication to freedom as paramount in experiential religion, a primary focus on mission, and repositioning the local congregation as the center of decision-making under the leadership of the Spirit of God," he added.

Baptists Committed, formed in 1988, was originally called Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention. The reference to the SBC was eliminated from the name after formation of the Fellowship and as moderate-conservatives became less committed to the denominational structure. Originally based in Houston, the organization's office was later moved to Austin, Texas.

Houston layman John Baugh, who was involved with Baptists Committed from the beginning, said the dissolution of the organization is not a sign of failure but "a sign of fulfillment."

"I believe the Baptists Committed enterprise had as its intention to find a way for Baptists who are Baptists to have some fellowship and engage

in some cooperative endeavors," Baugh said. "That has been accomplished through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship."

Baugh conceded Baptists Committed's objective of winning back the SBC "hasn't happened," but he predicted the end of the organization will not mean an end to all political efforts.

Instead, he said, the focus will shift to local churches, which control how much money is sent to Southern Baptist Convention coffers.

Baugh said he soon will launch a clearinghouse of information for churches that will help them learn "how their heritage can be reclaimed." He would not discuss the details, which he said will be made public at a news conference May 1 in Fort Worth, Texas.

The dissolution of Baptists Committed leaves the Alliance of Baptists as the only major opposition group, other than the Fellowship, still in existence. Formerly the Southern Baptist Alliance, the Washington-based organization currently is discussing a merger or other official relationship with the Fellowship.

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-- By Greg Warner

Baptist editor copes  
with life after firing

By Daniel Cattau

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- When asked to describe himself, Al Shackelford invokes the image of Superman.

"He was a man of great power who, in order to do his job, disguised himself as a mild-mannered reporter," said Shackelford. "I am a mild-mannered reporter who, in order to do my job, had to act like Superman."

Unlike the comic book hero, however, Shackelford didn't prevail.

On July 17, 1990, Shackelford was fired as director of Baptist Press and as chief public relations officer for the Southern Baptist Convention. Also fired was Dan Martin, the Baptist Press news editor. They are the highest-ranking SBC officials to be dismissed during 13 years of denominational strife.

The convention's ruling Executive Committee, which is dominated by SBC fundamental-conservatives and which operates Baptist Press, accused the men of being biased in favor of Southern Baptist moderate-conservatives.

The two editors denied they were biased and said they were operating a truthful and balanced news service. They were asked to resign but refused.

"In our situation, to have resigned would have been a compromise," said Shackelford, 59.

Instead, the Executive Committee fired the pair without stating a reason and granted both editors six months' severance pay.

Of the two editors, Shackelford has fared worse after the firings. Martin is the pastor of a small church in North Carolina and a free-lance writer. But Shackelford has been without a steady job for nearly two years.

Asked whether he would have stood up to denominational officials if he had known how difficult finding work would be, Shackelford replied: "I hope I would have."

News of the firings of Shackelford and Martin was picked up by the secular press. Their defenders included national political commentator Bill Moyers.

Even among critics of Baptist Press, specific criticisms of Shackelford are hard to come by.

"Al simply saw things in our convention from a different perspective

'than the way we do," said Eldridge Miller, a pastor in Sallisaw, Okla., and secretary of the Executive Committee.

The firing of the two editors set off a tempest of protest among Baptist editors, but there were some who believed that the dismissals "were not unreasonable," said Gary Ledbetter, editor of the Indiana Baptist in Indianapolis.

Ledbetter noted the tensions journalists face between public relations and news and said it became increasingly apparent that Shackelford "was angry toward his bosses, and it showed."

Founded in 1947, Baptist Press primarily serves the nearly 40 state and regional Baptist newspapers. But it also traditionally has had a strong following among those covering religion for secular newspapers.

Since his firing, Shackelford has sought about 50 editing or public relations positions -- about half of which were with Southern Baptist-related institutions.

He now is working temporarily as a \$6.60-an-hour clerk for the United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville. Until mid-February, he spent about 10 months working as a \$4.60-an-hour clerk in the nutrition department at a Kroger grocery store in suburban Brentwood.

In addition, the Georgia native -- who received a journalism degree from the University of Georgia before going to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas -- has edited a book called *The Tacky Manager*, set type in another publishing house and worked at a temporary service, doing such things as arranging paint displays in a discount store.

From March 1987 until July 1990, his Baptist Press job paid approximately \$60,000 a year.

Describing the Kroger job as "good therapy," Shackelford talked about how he mixed peanut butter, made fresh orange juice, arranged vitamins on shelves and stocked other nutrition supplies.

"It killed a lot of time," he said. "Plus, I didn't know how my jobs in the past had protected me from the general public."

The job also kept Shackelford in touch with an informal but extensive support group. The grocery store is close to Brentwood Baptist Church, where he teaches a kindergarten Sunday school class and plays trumpet in a musical ensemble. The store is also near the Tennessee Baptist Convention offices, where he once edited the state Baptist newspaper.

Since college, he said, he had never really considered working at anything besides religious communications. Then, all of a sudden, "I'm no longer acceptable to any Baptist organization. Any time I hear of a Baptist job in this field, I send in my resume and ask some friend to contact them. In most situations, I don't even get a response."

Shackelford said he still is a "loyal Southern Baptist" and his faith in God has actually increased through his trials. He still hopes to get a job in church-related journalism or public relations.

Unlike his former boss, Martin, 53, pastor of a small Baptist church in Bakersville, N.C., never sought another Southern Baptist Convention job in news or public relations.

"I didn't expect any Southern Baptist organization to hire me," he said. "Al and I were hot potatoes."

Martin said Southern Baptist politics, not theology, "cost Al his career. He's a victim of the controversy."

Shackelford is conservative and an inerrantist, who believes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God that is both historically and factually true.

"I'm a living testimony to the fact that it was not a theological issue" that caused the dismissal, Shackelford said. "It was an issue of control."

At times during a recent lengthy interview, Shackelford showed flashes of anger, mostly at the Executive Committee.

"I made a mistake," Shackleford said. But the mistake was not in originally accepting the director's job, he said, "because I felt the Lord's leadership there."

"The mistake was believing them when they said they wanted a fair, objective news service, which they really didn't."

His wife, Tommye, is a counselor for a temporary job service. In addition, support has come from unexpected sources, such as a friend at church who handed Tommye Shackleford \$100, and a stipend of \$1,000 a month for 14 months from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The Fellowship is a newly formed group of Southern Baptist moderate-conservatives who are dissatisfied with the new direction of the denomination.

Shackleford estimates that these gifts have totaled \$20,000 in the past year and a half. He tracks these contributions in a specially created computer file titled "God's gifts through others."

But for the Shacklefords, who live in a leased condominium in Franklin, about 20 miles from Nashville, survival hasn't been easy. They recently had to sell what Shackleford called "their dream house" in Franklin -- a home in wooded acreage that borders on a creek -- to which they had hoped to retire.

But at least he hasn't lost his faith -- or sense of humor.

"I had the highest communications job in the Southern Baptist Convention. Where do you go from there? To Kroger's, where else?" he said.

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-- Daniel Cattau is religion editor of the Dallas Morning News. This story is reprinted with permission.

Religion not a factor  
in party choice, poll shows

By Mark Wingfield

PRINCETON, N.J. (ABP) -- As Americans weigh their political choices in this election year, religious preference will have little impact on whether they call themselves Democrats or Republicans, the Gallup Poll reports.

Nine out of 10 Americans say they have a religious preference, and for the first time in 16 years a majority of the population believes religion is losing its influence on American life.

But those beliefs are divided consistently across party lines, according to polling data released in the Emerging Trends newsletter of the Princeton Religion Research Center.

"The most striking comparison between Republicans and Democrats is the lack of meaningful differences," the newsletter reports in its April issue.

Republicans are slightly more likely than Democrats to be Protestants, and Democrats are slightly more likely than Republicans to be Roman Catholics.

Among Republicans, 88 percent identify themselves as Christian, 1 percent as Jewish, and 7 percent claim no religious preference. Also, 62 percent call themselves Protestants, while 24 percent call themselves Roman Catholic.

Among Democrats, 85 percent call themselves Christian, 3 percent Jewish, and 8 percent express no preference. Also, 56 percent say they are Protestant and 27 percent say they are Roman Catholic.

On other religious criteria measured by the Gallup Poll, Democrats and Republicans express similar views. The largest difference -- 5 percentage points -- is that Democrats are slightly more likely than Republicans to say religion is "very important" to them.

About 45 percent of both Republicans and Democrats say they attend church regularly. About 63 percent from both parties believe religion has answers for modern problems, and about 62 percent express a "great deal" or "quite a bit" of confidence in the church.

Little difference is found among Republicans and Democrats on the Bible as well. About 36 percent prefer a strict literal interpretation, about 49 percent classify the Bible as the "inspired word of God," and about 12 percent believe the Bible is "only the work of man."

Also Republicans and Democrats agree that religion is losing influence on American life. Among Republicans, 54 percent express this belief, compared to 55 percent of Democrats.

Catholics (60 percent) are slightly more likely than Protestants (54 percent) to hold this view.

When the Gallup organization first polled Americans on the influence of religion in society in 1957, 69 percent said religion was gaining influence. Belief in the positive influence of religion hit an all-time low of 14 percent in the early 1970s but began an upward climb after 1975.

However, polls taken in 1991 found for the first time since 1975 that more than half of Americans (55 percent) believe religion is losing influence on society.

Christianity remains the predominant faith of Americans, the Gallup organization said, based on surveys throughout 1991. Eighty-two percent of Americans call themselves Christians, while 2 percent say they are Jewish, 0.2 percent Muslim, and 0.1 percent Hindu.

Only 11 percent of the population claims no religious preference. However, not all of those people would be considered atheists since polls consistently show only 5 percent of the population claims to be atheist or agnostic.

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#### High court declines to review adult-entertainment decision

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court has declined to review lower court rulings that struck down a Washington city's adult-entertainment zoning ordinance but upheld its regulation of peep shows.

Tukwila, Wash., officials enacted the ordinances in 1988, the year after World Wide Video Inc. began operating an adult-entertainment business in a commercial zone that borders a residential area.

In addition to selling and renting sexually explicit magazines, novelties and videotapes, World Wide Video operates eight peep-show booths.

The 1988 Tukwila ordinances permit adult-entertainment businesses only in the city's heavy industrial zones and regulate peep-show operations through various licensing requirements.

In affirming a lower court decision striking the adult zoning law, the Washington Supreme Court noted that the ordinance's definition of an adult business would "even include 'mainstream' video stores that have restricted adult sections."

The top Washington court stated that Tukwila officials failed to show that "adult businesses with predominantly 'take-home' merchandise...have the same harmful secondary effects traditionally associated with adult movie theaters and peep shows," or that the city has a substantial governmental interest in "regulating the numerous types of business covered" by the ordinance.

Both Washington courts rejected World Wide Video's challenges to the

city's peep-show regulations.

In a dissenting opinion, Washington Supreme Court Chief Justice Fred Dore said he would uphold the zoning regulation.

"Tukwila or any other municipality should be free to manage commercial development by zoning procedures," he said.

He said a city should be able to determine where adult bookstores are located as long as zoning requirements have only a slight or neutral effect on protected speech and further a city's interest in fostering neighborhood quality.

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-- By Larry Chesser

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