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EDITORS' NOTE: This replaces the ABP story filed March 9: "Russell Dilday fired by Southwestern trustees."

Southwestern trustees fire Dilday;  
students left to wonder 'Why?'

By Toby Druin and Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Russell Dilday was fired as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary by trustees March 9, evoking bitter reactions from students.

Trustees gave no reason for the firing, which was approved in executive session on a vote reported as either 27-8 or 26-7. The firing is effective immediately. After the decision, Dilday was locked out of his office.

Ralph Pulley, newly elected trustee chairman and a longtime Dilday foe, brought the motion to dismiss Dilday. He later reported the action to a gathering of more than 1,000 students, who booed and jeered in response.

Pulley read students a letter from trustees which offered no explanation for the action. "Why?! Why?!" students yelled. He asked students to make suggestions for Dilday's successor, to which they chanted, "Dilday! Dilday! Dilday!"

Later Pulley told reporters: "We just felt like the institution needed new leadership to move into the 21st century." He said the negative reaction was expected and will subside in time.

The firing "represents some years of frustration and gridlock with the existing administrator," said T. Bob Davis, a Dallas dentist and trustee secretary who has been critical of the formal approach of the seminary's music school. "They (trustees) felt like a breath of fresh air was needed."

But William Hightower of Charleston, S.C., a trustee who voted against firing, called the event "a black day in the life of the school and the life of Southern Baptists."

Hightower said the firing came as a surprise even to some trustees. He attributed the move to "politics in the convention."

Dilday is the first Southern Baptist Convention seminary president to be fired since fundamental-conservatives gained control of the SBC, in part by charging the seminaries with liberalism.

His frequent criticism of the tactics used by fundamental-conservatives has brought him into conflict with his trustees in recent years. Two earlier attempts to force him out failed.

Dilday's firing capped a contentious three-day trustee meeting March 7-9 on the seminary campus in Fort Worth, Texas. Southwestern, with about 4,000 students, is the nation's largest seminary. Dilday had been president for more than 15 years.

During the meeting, trustees blocked all but routine recommendations offered by Dilday, including faculty elections. They delayed a proposed reorganization of his administrative team and rescinded his 1991 invitation to missions leader Keith Parks, then president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, to deliver a commencement address in May.

Rumors that trustees would move against Dilday himself circulated for more a week before the meeting, most suggesting the 63-year-old president would be forced to retire earlier than planned. But, Dilday said, the issue did not surface in a job-performance review Tuesday night, March 8, in which trustees gave him a favorable evaluation.

Dilday said he had asked the trustee executive committee members -- including Pulley, Davis and chairman Damon Shook of Houston -- about the rumors that he would be dismissed. They said they knew nothing about such a plan, Dilday reported.

The following morning, as trustees gathered for their 11 a.m. session, Shook and trustee secretary Lee Weaver of Fort Worth asked to meet with Dilday privately in the president's office, Dilday said. Waiting for them were Pulley, Davis and Gerald Dacus, a trustee from Walnut, Calif.

Pulley said they wanted to offer him an early retirement plan, Dilday recalled. "I said I had no plans to retire and didn't need to see the plan because I wasn't ready for retirement. I said if they wanted me to announce my retirement plans, I would be glad to do that, but that they were for when I am 67 or 68. ...

"It was not my intention to retire immediately. God led me here and I had no leadership from the Lord that this was the time to retire."

Dilday said that Pulley replied that the alternative then was that he be fired.

"I asked under what charges, what rationale, would they dismiss me," said Dilday. "His response was 'We don't need a reason. We can do it. We have the votes and we will, and it will be with no provision for anything if you don't accept the early retirement plan.'"

Dacus, a supporter of Dilday, told the president the trustees had been polled and there were not enough votes to block the move to dismiss him.

Dilday said he told them, "You have to do your business as a board. My business is to determine my calling in life, and I am not planning retirement. So let's go. You do what you have to do."

The group then joined the other trustees, who immediately called for an executive session and excused press, faculty and students. Only Dilday remained with the trustees during the 75-minute closed-door session.

When they emerged, Dilday told the 500-plus students gathered outside the meeting room that the seminary no longer had a president.

Several events suggested trustees had laid plans for the dismissal well in advance:

-- Within minutes of the firing, trustees changed the locks on the president's office and denied him access. Dilday retreated to the president's home, where he met on the lawn with students and faculty.

-- Letters from trustees to students and faculty were distributed immediately. Two versions had been prepared -- one if Dilday accepted forced retirement and the other if he were fired. Some faculty said they actually received the wrong letter, which said Dilday retired.

-- Trustees voted on printed ballots prepared ahead of time.

-- John Earl Seelig, a longtime seminary vice president dismissed by Dilday in 1990, was appointed by trustees to take charge of public relations. Seminary spokespersons were restricted in their contact with the press. Seelig, who was on the seminary campus March 9, said trustees asked him to take the position before the firing.

"They had done their work," Dilday said afterward. "I am very confident they had it all worked out before they came to the meeting."

Trustees came to the brink of firing Dilday in 1989 but backed away. The officers held a closed-door meeting with the president to discuss his alleged political involvement with SBC moderates, after which chairman Ken Lilly of Fort Smith, Ark., issued an 85-page memo detailing Dilday's alleged political offenses. A five-hour private session between trustees and Dilday followed, which resulted in an agreement that both the president and trustees would avoid denominational politics.

Seelig, then vice president for public affairs, was forced to retire for passing information to Lilly that was used in the failed attempt to fire Dilday, according to former seminary employees. Seelig, however, denied he was fired or that he fed Lilly information. "That's false," he said.

Seelig's dismissal angered trustees but they were unable to block it. Instead, they gave Seelig use of his seminary-owned home and named a banquet room in the student center in his honor.

The controversy erupted again a year later, however, after Dilday accused SBC fundamental-conservatives of "crass, secular political methodology" in their rise to power. Calls for trustees to fire or censure him at their next meeting were smoothed over by then-chairman Jimmy Draper.

Dilday appeared to have worked out his conflicts with trustees. However, Pulley -- a trustee from 1975 to 1987 -- was re-elected to the board in 1992, raising fears that the president again might be targeted.

Pulley, former deacon chairman at First Baptist Church of Dallas, a conservative bastion, has opposed Dilday since the president's election in 1978.

When the recommendation to elect Dilday was brought by a trustee search committee, Pulley presented an alternative candidate -- his brother-in-law, theology dean Huber Drumwright. Trustees defeated Pulley's motion, which was viewed by some trustees as the first attempt by fundamental-conservatives to exert influence on the school.

During the trustees' March 9 deliberations, one trustee accused Pulley of carrying out a personal vendetta against the president, a charge later denied by the Dallas attorney in a meeting with reporters.

Other trustees objected to the manner of the firing. Larry Brown of Convent Station, N.J., said he had served on boards of major secular corporations and had never seen such a "mean spirit" as that demonstrated by the seminary trustees.

Brown's comments were overheard on a hallway speaker outside the closed meeting room. Trustees later had the speaker turned off.

Afterward many trustees declined to comment on the appropriateness of the firing. Dilday was philosophical.

"They took the position that it was their right," Dilday said. "And to be perfectly fair, it is true that the board can vote to change presidents at any time. The president serves at the pleasure of the board. I respect their authority to do that. But I think they should have good reasons."

Fundamental-conservatives now dominate the trustee boards at all six seminaries and have hired sympathetic presidents at three. Recent statements by Southwestern trustees suggested they were growing impatient with the pace of change at the school.

In March 1993, trustees asked Dilday to lead the seminary to be on "the cutting edge" of the conservative swing in the SBC. And trustee chairman Shook said Southwestern should hire more professors who are committed not only to conservative theology but to the conservative political cause.

Unlike other Baptist seminaries, Southwestern was not accused by conservatives of harboring liberalism. The SBC Peace Committee, which conducted a study of orthodoxy at all six schools, found Southwestern to be essentially blameless.

"The fact is we have handled the theological issues here at Southwestern very well, and the school has not had any substantive criticism for liberalism in all these 15 years, nor has my own theology," Dilday said.

Indeed Dilday's theology was conservative enough to mute most criticism. However, trustees repeatedly accused him of being in sympathy with SBC moderates, charges which date back at least a decade.

In 1984 Dilday preached the annual sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City in which he said an "Orwellian mentality" in the denomination threatened to put Southern Baptists in the company of the "demonic family of forced uniformity."

Trustees named a search committee to find Dilday's successor, chaired by Miles Seaborn of Fort Worth. They also appointed seminary Provost William Tolar to head a committee of administrators to direct the school in the interim.

Although the original motion to fire Dilday included no severance benefits, trustees amended the recommendation to pay him his base salary -- about \$85,000 -- until he turns 65 in September 1995. He also will receive a housing allowance, medical and annuity benefits, and a \$3,000-a-month allowance for an off-campus office. He and his wife, Betty, must vacate the seminary-owned president's home by June 7.

Dilday's administrative assistant and secretary were put on leave of absence with Dilday's dismissal but were reportedly reinstated a day later.

The provisions of Dilday's severance package require him to take no other employment for 60 days, not join a competitive venture, and do "only those things that are supportive of the seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention."

Dilday said he can abide by the restrictions, noting nothing in the provisions would prevent him from speaking out or speaking his convictions.

A group of some 30 faculty members came to the president's residence following the dismissal. Bruce Corley, theology dean, told Dilday they had "broken hearts" and that they wanted to express their gratitude for the kind of president he had been.

Dilday urged students and faculty not to overreact.

"I don't want anybody leaving or the faculty reacting," he told reporters. "They need to stay with their work and the task to which the Lord has called them. I will be praying for them and supportive of them. I want this school to go forward."

In a session with students the next day, he urged them to move forward and not abandon God's call to attend the seminary.

Dilday firing bewilders observers,  
raises concerns about fallout

(ABP) -- The March 9 firing of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary president Russell Dilday left observers bewildered about specific reasons for the action, but expecting a big fallout.

"I'm in shock," said Bill Leonard, professor of religion at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala. Leonard predicted the firing would harm fund-raising for the seminary and the denomination as a whole, and might even prove "the catalyst for a possible schism" between conservatives and moderates.

SBC President Ed Young of Houston called Dilday "a long-time friend" and expressed surprise at the firing. "I know they've had difficulty through the years -- the trustees and Russell -- but I had really thought there were fresh breezes blowing."

Since he is not a trustee, Young said, "I really don't know why he was dismissed."

Southwestern Seminary church historian Leon McBeth said he and colleagues "are devastated" and "feel it's a very damaging thing to happen to Southwestern."

"Of all the tragic circumstances affecting Southern Baptists in the last decade, I think this is by far the worst," McBeth said. On the Richter Scale, this earthquake is a big one. I think it is a killer."

Seminary switchboards were jammed with callers seeking information as reports of the firing spread, McBeth said. "It's amazing -- the outpouring of support."

McBeth rated support for Dilday among faculty and students at "almost 100 percent."

The secrecy under which the firing occurred "puzzles us," said McBeth, a noted Baptist historian. Minutes after the firing, locks were changed in the president's office and secretaries were temporarily placed on administrative leave. No explanation for such precautions was offered.

Hardy Clemons, moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, lamented that "a man of integrity was treated like an embezzler. "I am horrified."

"This makes it very clear that the problems that we have had in Southern Baptist life are political and not theological," said Clemons, pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C. "This violates everything it means to be a Baptist Christian."

Clemons acknowledged Dilday's firing may drive more people to the Fellowship, but he said that doesn't diminish his sorrow for Southwestern. "I hope at some point Baptist people will wake up and say 'We do not want to be controlled by a group of people who are politically motivated.'"

Ken Chafin, a graduate, former professor and one-time trustee chairman at Southwestern, said the impact of the action will not be cataclysmic, but merely "another blip on the screen." The primary effect, he said, will be to boost alternative seminaries that have sprung up in recent years.

"All firing of Russell Dilday does is make it clear for people who are slow learners what kind of people are in charge of theological education for Southern Baptists," said Chafin, now retired in Louisville, Ky. "If they don't get the message, they deserve the kind of leaders that are going to be coming out of our seminaries."

"No one can ever accuse Russell Dilday of not trying to work with those people," he added. "They exploited his goodwill and exploited his efforts."

"This is a tragedy and loss to all Southern Baptists," said Roy Honeycutt, retired president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in

Louisville, Ky. Honeycutt called Dilday "a premier leader among Southern Baptists who demonstrated the finest academic and administrative leadership anyone could expect."

Honeycutt questioned the method in which Dilday was dismissed.

"His abrupt firing and the action of locking him out of the office and the treatment he is receiving is unprecedented among Southern Baptists," Honeycutt said. "We've entered a new phase of the so-called resurgence among Southern Baptists, and no one knows when it will end."

Southern Seminary board's handling of transition to a more conservative direction was "stellar," Honeycutt said, "which is in stark contrast to what's going on" at Southwestern. "The matter of changing the locks on his office and forbidding him from coming back on campus is unconscionable," he said.

"It was an abuse of power and will continue to damage the Southern Baptist family," said Lloyd Elder, retired president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, who served as Dilday's executive vice president for five years. "This will not substantially improve theological education but will bring damage to the school."

Elder said trustees acted as if they own Southwestern, while "Southern Baptists probably still think they own that institution."

"The fat is in the fire," said James Hefley, a conservative scholar who has chronicled the 14-year-old battle in the 15.4-million-member convention.

Hefley acknowledged that Dilday is widely regarded in the convention as a biblical conservative, but "he has not been one to roll over and play dead" in his criticism of methods to gain control of the SBC.

Dilday has maintained the conservative resurgence is primarily political, Hefley observed. Still, he said he expected the Southwestern president to "serve out until retirement."

Moderates, Hefley predicted, will use Dilday's dismissal to fuel their allegations that the conservatives are not concerned about the Bible or doctrine as much as political control.

William Pinson, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, said "a host of Texas Baptists are deeply disturbed" about Dilday's dismissal "and are equally concerned about the effect it might have on the Lord's work in Texas and beyond."

Texas convention president Jerold McBride of San Angelo, said "it is a sad day" for both Texas Baptists and the SBC. Trustees voting for Dilday's dismissal "inflicted irreparable damage both to the seminary and the SBC," he said.

McBride said the action "is consistent with the nature of political fundamentalists to purge those who do not submit to their authoritarianism." He said the action could have a positive effect in Texas by causing Baptists in the state "to cherish even more the openness and inclusiveness that characterize our convention."

"Personally for me, it will end any financial involvement with the seminary," said Ophelia Humphrey, a long-time seminary supporter from Amarillo.

Former trustee chairman Jimmy Draper, now president of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., said "it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the actions of a sister institution."

He is, however, "praying for the seminary, for Dr. Dilday and for the trustees," he said, and urged "all Southern Baptists to do the same."

"We take no joy in Southwestern's pain," said Robert Sloan, dean of Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary in Waco, Texas.

While Sloan said he stands by an agreement that the new seminary at Baylor will not compete with existing seminaries, he acknowledged that

changing conditions at Southwestern, less than 100 miles away, would have an impact on student enrollment at Truett.

Phones have been busy with inquiries from students since Dilday's firing was announced, Sloan said, but he has not received any calls from members of Southwestern's faculty seeking teaching positions.

Professors at the Fort Worth school have a strong loyalty to their institution, he said. "I have not had a single Southwestern professor call me to inquire about a job," Sloan said. "It didn't happen yesterday or this morning. It hasn't happened anytime in the last three years."

"The faculty is not going to react or overreact," said Doug Dickens, a tenured professor of pastoral care. "I think people are going to be very prayerful and intentional. We love Russell, but we feel a sense of calling here, too."

Daniel Vestal, pastor of Houston's Tallowood Baptist Church, said Dilday's firing was "another tragic example of the pain caused by the fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention."

Vestal, one of the organizers of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, called Dilday "a man of impeccable integrity and Christian commitment." Dilday was founding pastor of Tallowood.

"The issue of the leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention is political power and if you get in the way of that power, you will be crushed," Vestal said.

Dilday's firing "will likely impact and diminish the quality of theological education in the southwest," said Cecil Sherman, Fellowship coordinator.

"I believe when the dust settles," McBeth said, "in years to come, an honest historian will assess Dr. Dilday's administration as being of the highest quality. In the short run he will probably be severely criticized."

McBeth said faculty members he had talked with were committed to staying with the seminary.

"We think Southwestern is severely damaged, but we are going to do all we can to keep the school strong for the future," he said.

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-- Bob Allen, Ken Camp, Greg Warner and Mark Wingfield contributed to this story. Information was also obtained from the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, the Washington Post, and the Houston Chronicle.

Dilday presidency marked  
by disputes with trustees

By Bob Allen and Mark Wingfield

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A sometimes stormy 16-year relationship between President Russell Dilday and trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary had recently, by all accounts, been relatively quiet.

The March 9 firing of Dilday by trustees at the Fort Worth, Texas, school caught most observers by surprise. Recent trustee meetings, however, offered some indications that a truce achieved in 1990 between the president and his critics was starting to crack.

In their 1993 spring meeting, trustees praised Dilday for 15 years of "able leadership and administration," but also, in their annual performance review, challenged him to lead the seminary to be on "the cutting edge" of change in the SBC.

Trustee chairman Damon Shook said while faculty hired recently at Southwestern were conservative theologically, the school should follow the lead of its sister institution, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in employing teachers who are conservative both biblically and in denominational politics.

For his part, last fall, Dilday urged trustees to moderate their response to an SBC motion urging seminaries not to be represented at meetings of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. And at the March 1994 meeting at which he was later dismissed, he announced to trustees that Keith Parks would deliver the address at the seminary's spring commencement.

Some trustees expressed shock that Dilday would honor the invitation to Parks, who at the time he was invited was president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board but since retired to lead missions efforts of the rival Fellowship. The board overruled him by a voice vote with no apparent opposition.

His latest troubles were reminiscent of 1989-90, when Dilday spent much of his time on the defense against charges by trustees of too much involvement on the wrong side of SBC politics.

In 1989, trustee officers held a called, private meeting to discuss with Dilday alleged political activities. Dilday had spoken to a symposium sponsored by Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention, a moderate group. His remarks were reported in the Southern Baptist Advocate, an independent fundamental-conservative advocacy journal. Dilday defended the address, on denominational unity, saying he should turn down no invitation to address the topic.

After the private meeting, the then-trustee chairman, Arkansas physician Ken Lilly, sent an 85-page memo detailing what he called "political activity" by Dilday and asking for an executive session to discuss his concerns with the full board.

In response, an Atlanta attorney threatened to sue trustees if they fired Dilday.

At their October meeting, trustees and the president emerged from a five-hour executive session with a joint statement agreeing to "cease and desist from making any statements, or writings, or engaging in any activities that could be reasonably be interpreted as being intentionally political in nature . . . ."

Dilday interrupted business at that meeting to hail the compromise as "a very positive and strong step that will ensure a strong future for this seminary."

The respite was brief, however. In March 1990, trustees received a letter from a member of the SBC Executive Committee, describing a discussion overheard between Dilday and then-SBC President Jerry Vines. Dilday was said to have told Vines the "conservative" movement had done more damage to the SBC than had been done in the heyday of fundamentalist J. Frank Norris and to have alleged that trustees elected during the previous 10 years were incompetent.

Dilday said the report of his remarks were "not altogether accurate" and were similar to comments made by conservative leaders. Trustees called it a "satisfactory response."

The dispute re-emerged at the 1990 SBC annual meeting, when Dilday told a reporter that "crass, secular political methodology used in the takeover of the convention these last 12 years has satanic and evil policies to which I am desperately opposed."

Rumors preceding the board's fall meeting were that Dilday would be fired, censured or embarrassed. However, a calm mood attributed to a retreat-style setting away from the campus and the leadership of the new trustee

chairman, Jimmy Draper, prevailed with a commitment on the part of trustees to forget the past, build trust and transcend a climate of conflict.

Dilday first came into the spotlight of the denominational controversy when he delivered the convention sermon at the 1984 SBC annual meeting in Kansas City.

The message, titled "On Higher Ground," called on Southern Baptists to avoid the political and theological controversy that then had been brewing for five years.

"Incredible as it sounds, there is emerging in this denomination, built on the principle of rugged individualism, an incipient Orwellian mentality," he said. "It threatens to drag us down from the high ground to the low lands of suspicion, rumor, criticism, innuendoes, guilt by association and the rest of that demonic family of forced uniformity."

That comment stirred the ire of conservative forces who, at the time, had not publicly admitted they were operating with an overarching plan to capture control of the denomination.

Then one month later, Dilday wrote in the seminary's alumni newsletter about a "fundamentalist political machine" working to take over the SBC.

Concerns about liberalism within the SBC's agencies and schools are "a mask for other interest," he wrote in the July 1984 issue of Southwestern News.

He said the SBC controversy was a division between "the spirit of Southern Baptist cooperation" on one hand and "the spirit of independent fundamentalism" on the other.

In the early years of the controversy, Dilday remained an outspoken opponent of those attempting to turn the SBC in a different direction. He labeled himself a "denominational loyalist" rather than a "moderate."

In 1986, he and the presidents of the other five SBC seminaries joined in releasing the "Glorieta Statement," which was seen as an attempt to build bridges between the seminaries and their detractors.

That statement acknowledged the seminaries were "not perfect institutions" and the presence of "legitimate concerns regarding them which we are addressing."

Out of that statement, the six seminaries sponsored two national conferences, the first on biblical inerrancy and the second on biblical interpretation. Dilday was a leading force behind those events, billed as attempts to get Southern Baptists talking about the theological issues dividing them.

Despite Dilday's solidarity with more embattled seminary presidents such as Randall Lolley of Southeastern Seminary and Roy Honeycutt of Southern Seminary, no serious charges of heretical teaching ever were leveled against a Southwestern Seminary professor.

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Southwestern Seminary joins list  
of agencies changed since '79

By Bob Allen

(ABP) -- In 1979, the first of a string of fundamental-conservative presidents was elected to lead the Southern Baptist Convention. Through presidential appointments, the presidents sought to change the character of denominational institutions and agencies to reflect a more conservative posture.

The following leadership changes have occurred since then:

-- Golden Gate Seminary (1986): Frank Pollard, who described himself at one point as a fundamentalist "if you don't capitalize the word and put the accent on the second syllable," resigned as president Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary to return to the pastorate. William Crews was elected his successor, regarded at the time as a win for conservatives.

-- The Home Mission Board (1987): Missouri college president Larry Lewis was elected president by a vote of 52-15. Lewis, the first SBC agency head to have been vocal in support of a fundamental-conservative movement, succeeded William Tanner, who left to become executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma.

-- Southeastern Seminary (1987): Randall Lolley resigned as president of the Wake Forest, N.C., seminary, after trustees unilaterally altered the method of selecting faculty. He was succeeded immediately by longtime Southern Seminary evangelism professor Lewis Drummond and eventually (1992) by Paige Patterson, former president of Criswell College and architect of the fundamental-conservative movement in the SBC.

-- The Christian Life Commission (1988): The SBC's moral-concerns agency elected Richard Land as president in 1988. Land, academic vice president at Criswell College in Dallas, Texas, succeeded Larry Baker, who narrowly survived a firing attempt in 1987 and months later accepted the pastorate of First Baptist Church, Pineville, La.

-- Annuity Board (1989): Long-time president Darold Morgan retired and was replaced by Texas pastor Paul Powell, a theological conservative and denominational loyalist. The Annuity Board, because of its non-political assignment, has not been targeted for theological correction. However, Powell's support of Baylor University recently has alienated some conservatives. Annuity Board leaders recently had to defend themselves against charges they are lax on abortion and sympathetic to SBC moderates.

-- Woman's Missionary Union (1989): WMU President Carolyn Weatherford retired to marry Ohio pastor Joe Crumpler. She was succeeded by former missionary Dellanna O'Brien, wife of Keith Parks' longtime associate at the Foreign Mission Board. The WMU, an auxiliary not controlled by the SBC, has adopted a non-political stance but came under fire last year for agreeing to provide some mission education resources to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

-- Baptist Press (1990): Vice president Al Shackelford and editor Dan Martin were fired behind closed doors by the SBC Executive Committee at a called meeting July 17, 1990. No stated reason was given for the firings. Supporters of the move interpreted it as a problem of bias against conservatives; detractors called it censorship. Succeeding Shackelford was California Baptist editor Herb Hollinger. A public relations vice presidency was created apart from Baptist Press, and Mark Coppenger, an Indiana Baptist executive director and conservative spokesman, was named to fill the slot.

-- Radio-TV Commission (1990): Jimmy Allen, the last moderate SBC president, left the presidency of the Radio-TV Commission, an agency affected early in the controversy by conservative influence. Arizona state convention executive Jack Johnson, a non-aligned conservative, succeeded Allen.

-- Sunday School Board (1991): President Lloyd Elder, who had been elected as a compromise candidate after moderate president Grady Cothen's 1984 retirement, accepted a generous severance package for a negotiated retirement at a special meeting Jan. 17, 1991. A year earlier Elder survived a firing attempt. Conservative Texas pastor Jimmy Draper, an SBC president during the 1980s, was elected to lead the board July 19.

-- The Baptist Joint Committee (1991): The SBC voted in 1991 to disassociate itself from the Baptist Joint Committee, a coalition of Baptist

groups that had represented the SBC on church-state issues for a half-century, and transfer the denomination's religious-liberty assignment to the Christian Life Commission. BJC head James Dunn had been under fire for opposing school prayer and other political offenses, including criticism of President Ronald Reagan.

-- Executive Committee (1991): Harold Bennett retired after 10 years as president of the SBC Executive Committee. He was succeeded by Texas pastor Morris Chapman, one of the inerrantist presidents in the 1980s.

-- Brotherhood Commission (1991): Sunday School Board administrator Jim Williams was elected to replace a retiring president Jim Smith. Neither man is identified with either theological-political faction in the SBC struggle.

-- Foreign Mission Board (1992): Keith Parks, after years of trying to compromise with an increasingly adversarial board of trustees, retired as president of the Foreign Mission Board in October, three years earlier than planned, protesting a trustee decision to defund a European seminary for perceived liberalism. Subsequently, Parks accepted a position with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an alternative missions agency for moderates. He was replaced at the FMB by missionary Jerry Rankin, who said he supports the SBC's conservative movement.

-- Southern Seminary (1993): President Roy Honeycutt opted for retirement at age 66, backing off a stated desire to stay on a few years. Trustees elected 33-year-old Georgia state paper editor Albert Mohler, a darling of the SBC right, to succeed Honeycutt.

-- Education Commission (1993): California educator Stephen Carleton was elected in 1993 to succeed Arthur Walker as executive director-treasurer. Carleton, though not politically active, was considered to be more conservative than his predecessor.

-- Southwestern Seminary (1994): Trustees fired president Russell Dilday March 9.

Unaffected by a change in leadership since the early 1980s are:

- the Southern Baptist Foundation, Hollis Johnson, president;
- the Historical Commission, Lynn May, executive director;
- the Stewardship Commission, Rudy Fagan, president;
- Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Milton Ferguson, president;

and

- New Orleans Seminary, Landrum Leavell, president.

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Texas church withdraws  
from relationship with SBC

By Ken Camp

AUSTIN, Texas (ABP) -- An Austin, Texas, church has withdrawn from affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention, saying the nation's largest non-Catholic religious group no longer represents "the kind of Baptists we want to be."

Church of the Savior, a former mission of Austin's Highland Park Baptist Church, announced March 8 its decision to sever its relationship with the SBC.

"In recent years, church members have found a widening gap between their beliefs and the political agendas of the SBC," said pastor Joe Phelps in a prepared statement.

A vote by the church on Feb. 12 to cut ties with the SBC was announced

March 8, the day before the sudden firing of Russell Dilday as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. Contacted by ABP, Phelps said the firing was "a good example" of the mindset with which the Church of the Savior no longer wanted to be associated.

"Russell Dilday is a solid, conservative, mainstream Baptist. If someone like Dilday cannot satisfy those who are leading the inquisition that has plagued Southern Baptists for more than a decade, then it is clear the issue is not theology. The issue is control and power," Phelps said.

The action by the Church of the Savior came in response to a number of actions taken by the SBC in recent years, he said, including resolutions on homosexuality and the role of women in ministry and defunding of the Baptist Joint Committee.

"We no longer had the same understanding of what it means to be Baptist," Phelps said.

Church of the Savior was begun in 1985 as a mission of Highland Park Church, and has been a self-supporting congregation for three years. In 1989, the congregation became dually aligned with the SBC and the American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.

The church will maintain its affiliation with American Baptists and the Alliance of Baptists, an organization that grew out of moderates' dissatisfaction with the SBC.

The congregation is not a member of the local Austin Baptist Association, having been rejected for practicing "alien immersion"--accepting as members persons baptized in other denominations.

Although the church has been "very proud of the continued conservative but open stand" of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, it will not maintain relations with the state convention.

"We just felt the time had come for us to no longer be considered Southern Baptist at any of the three levels -- associational, state or national," Phelps said.

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Smyth & Helwys breaks ground  
for new headquarters building

MACON, Ga. (ABP) -- Smyth & Helwys Publishing broke ground March 8 for a 20,000-square-foot building in Macon, Ga.

The one-story glass and brick building will be built on four acres of land on Peake Road. Total cost for the project, including furnishings, is \$1 million, according to Publisher Cecil Staton.

The building is expected to be completed by September and will serve the company's needs for three to five years, Staton said. Smyth & Helwys now has 23 full-time employees.

In the new structure, 12,000 square feet will be devoted to office space and 8,000 square feet will be used for warehousing and distribution. A small bookstore is included.

Smyth & Helwys is an independent book and curriculum publisher founded in 1990 as an outgrowth of the moderate movement in the Southern Baptist Convention. Since 1991 it has been housed at Mercer University in Macon.

The publisher has 38 books in print and sells its curriculum resources to about 1,300 churches.

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-- By Greg Warner

-- A photo is available from Smyth & Helwys.

Religious persecution in China  
escalates, threatens U.S. relations

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- China's aggressive campaign of religious persecution must not go unchecked by the United States, two U.S. congressmen said during a March 9 subcommittee hearing.

Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., reported about religious persecution in China to a House foreign affairs subcommittee holding its second in a series of hearings on religious freedom worldwide.

In January, Smith led a delegation to China where he met with Chinese officials and religious leaders. Smith pointed to President Clinton's executive order that extended most-favored-nation trade status to China on the condition that it make "significant progress" in human rights. Instead, China has "made substantial regression," Smith said.

As a member state of the United Nations, China "pays lip service to (human rights) -- but its actions show the complete disregard the government has not only toward its people but toward the entire international community as well," Smith said.

In meeting after meeting, Smith said, he was assured that China held no religious prisoners -- an assertion that is an "insult to the truth," he added.

"As I was meeting with individuals who were assuring me that there was religious freedom, I was also receiving reports of Christians who were being detained. I was hearing from members of the underground Protestant and Catholic churches about the repression and discrimination which they experience."

Smith cited as an example the arrest of Bishop Su Zhi Ming's for performing Mass for Smith's delegation. The arrest occurred on the day Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen was in Beijing meeting with Chinese officials, Smith said.

China renewed its crackdown on religious freedom through two new executive orders on Jan. 31, Smith said. The orders prohibit foreigners from proselytizing and regulates management of places of worship.

A representative of The Puebla Institute, a human-rights group, reported that more than 100 Chinese Christians have been persecuted for religious reasons.

Chairman Tom Lantos, D-Calif., said that "it is imperative that we send a clear signal to the Chinese leadership that religious persecution is not acceptable under any circumstances."

Lantos said that the Chinese government would clean up its act if it believed the United States would not renew China's top trade status.

Smith said that he sensed Chinese officials have misread President Clinton. The Chinese officials "have a sense, I think a wrong sense, that Clinton is somehow in solidarity with them" and that he is probably bluffing about not renewing MFN, Smith said. Democrats and Republicans are united on this issue, he added.

President Clinton has until June 3 to decide whether to renew China's MFN trading status.

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-- By Pam Parry

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