

# Associated Baptist Press

Editor: Greg Warner  
Associate Editor: Bob Allen  
Phone: (904) 262-6626  
Fax: (904) 262-7745

February 2, 1995

## In this issue:

- Trustee actions at Southwestern bring probation from accreditor
- Enrollment down by 197 at Southwestern Seminary
- Richmond Seminary attains 'candidate' status from ATS
- Molly Marshall takes job at Kansas City seminary

## **Trustee actions at Southwestern bring probation from accreditor**

By Greg Warner

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has been placed on probation for two years by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada because of actions by the seminary's trustees.

ATS, the school's primary accrediting agency, said the trustees acted within their authority last March when they fired President Russell Dilday, but they violated school procedures in their treatment of Dilday and other faculty members and allowed interference in the school's academic freedom.

Dilday was fired by conservative trustees who said he was too sympathetic to moderate Southern Baptists and was blocking conservative reforms at the 3,117-student school, the largest of the Southern Baptist Convention's six seminaries.

Dilday's firing ignited a firestorm of protest from students, alumni and donors and prompted a rare rebuke from ATS, which called the action "a clear violation of accepted governance practices (which) places in jeopardy the vitality and basic integrity of the institution."

An ATS team that later visited the seminary recommended probation, which was adopted by the agency's Commission on Accrediting Jan. 6.

Ken Hemphill, the seminary's new president, told faculty, staff and students of the verdict Feb. 2 after receiving written notification from ATS. He said he is "disappointed" in the decision but noted Southwestern remains fully accredited during the two-year probation.

Probation, according to ATS, is intended to allow an institution time to correct "major inadequacies." While not as serious as withdrawal of accreditation, probation can hinder a school's ability to attract students and financial support.

Southwestern can appeal the probation decision and might, Hemphill said.

"If we believe it is in the best interest of confessional and denominational theological education, we can take

FEB 07 1995  
SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

full advantage of the appeals process," he said in a prepared statement. "Nevertheless, I would hasten to add that we are going to work as fully and cooperatively as possible with ATS to resolve quickly the issues so that we can further strengthen the work and ministry of one of the finest theological institutions in the world."

Daniel Aleshire, ATS associate director, issued a strong statement in support of the school.

"The commission is of the opinion that students can receive an accreditable theological education at Southwestern during this period of probation," Aleshire said. "Both 1994 visiting committee reports have assured the commission that the seminary has a talented faculty skilled in their disciplines and loyal to the seminary, that students are appropriately qualified and motivated to pursue graduate theological education, and that an able and experienced administrative staff supports the work of the newly elected president."

Most of the criticisms from ATS were directed at trustees, who had been in conflict with Dilday for several years over the direction of the school.

Southwestern was placed on probation, ATS said, because "the seminary's board of trustees has failed to exert consistent and disciplined efforts: (1) to provide for the regular and ongoing evaluation of the president; (2) to ensure that faculty appointment, promotion and tenure decisions carefully correspond to published policies and criteria; and (3) to attend sensitively to the several constituencies and publics of the seminary, and to discharge its responsibility for the establishment, maintenance and exercise of the institution's integrity and freedom from inappropriate external and internal pressures and destructive interferences or restraints."

Trustees fired Dilday despite giving him consistently positive annual evaluations. They also were accused of violating seminary policies by blocking election and promotion of faculty members who had ties to Southern Baptist moderates. And, according to seminary sources, several trustees harassed faculty members in letters challenging their teachings.

Seminary officials said trustee leaders would not comment on the ATS decision. Trustee chairman Ralph Pulley, a Dallas attorney, could not be reached for comment by Associated Baptist Press.

ATS said probation will be lifted when: "(1) The board of trustees demonstrates that it has consistently made decisions about personnel -- both administrative and faculty -- according to its formally adopted criteria and procedures; (2) the board demonstrates that it has paid careful attention to its own continuing education and development; [and] (3) faculty and students are able to attest, through some fair and appropriate means, that their freedom of inquiry, within the seminary's confessional boundaries, is assured; and that the board has made reasonable efforts to assure a stable institutional environment that supports the ministry of teaching, research and service."

In a recent faculty survey, used by ATS in making its evaluation, two thirds of faculty members said the academic freedom of some professors has been violated (67.2 percent). Three fourths (74.7 percent) said they fear academic freedom will be violated in the future, while 59.6 percent said statements in the faculty manual intended to protect academic freedom won't be enough to guarantee freedom at Southwestern. And 88.1 percent said trustees are not acting responsibly in guiding the seminary

In his Feb. 2 statement, Hemphill defended academic freedom at Southwestern, noting "there has not been one documented incident where academic freedom has been violated."

"ATS appears to be responding to fears that academic freedom may be curtailed rather than to any actual cases where academic freedom has been violated," he said. "We feel it is inappropriate to base a decision on suspected or possible problems rather than actual ones."

"We believe academic freedom must ensure that every faculty person has the right to investigate fully all matters pertinent to theological education and to expose students to alternative interpretations," Hemphill's statement continued. "But a faculty member may not advocate a position contrary to our confessional statement. This understanding is at the heart of every confessional school. Academic freedom is given appropriate boundaries by our confession of faith. We consistently have assured the faculty that they have no reason to worry about any loss

of academic freedom as long as they teach in harmony with the 'Baptist Faith and Message.'"

The "Baptist Faith and Message" statement, adopted by the SBC in 1963, is the governing doctrinal document for Southwestern.

Likewise, Hemphill denied ATS charges that trustees violated policies in faculty elections and promotions. "Here again, there are no cases where tenure or promotion has been withheld for reasons other than those stated in our own policy manual," he said.

Concerning other charges, Hemphill said: "ATS did not question the right and authority of the trustees to terminate the president, but they have questioned the matters of the evaluation of the president and the board's accountability to all constituencies. In response to ATS concerns, a stronger evaluation process is being implemented with a longer retention of the records of evaluations."

As for trustee responsiveness to constituents, he added, Southwestern is working "to open clearer and more productive lines of communication between trustees, faculty and students."

Hemphill said ATS's "greatest concern" had to do with an issue of Baptist polity.

"The bylaws of the trustees indicate that they are primarily accountable to the local church through the decisions made by the duly elected messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention," Hemphill said. "This accountability to the local church sets Southern Baptists apart from many other schools represented by ATS but is a critical element of Southern Baptist polity which we believe cannot be compromised.

"If we do appeal, it will be in an effort to strengthen the case of other denominational schools that have a confessional basis and accountability to a denominational constituency," he said.

Southwestern has one month to file an appeal. Once all appeals are handled, ATS publishes its findings for all schools -- usually in late March -- said Nancy Merrill, ATS public relations director.

ATS is the professional accrediting agency that evaluates most accredited seminaries in the United States, including the six operated by the Southern Baptist Convention. All six likewise are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, a more general agency that evaluates virtually all public and private schools in the South.

SACS likewise is investigating Dilday's firing at Southwestern, as well as the seminary's off-campus centers. The agency, which participated in the initial visit to Southwestern with ATS in May, has scheduled another visit to the Fort Worth campus in the spring. When ATS places a school on probation, SACS often follows suit.

Southwestern is the third of the six SBC seminaries to draw sanctions from accrediting agencies in recent years, as trustees elected by the convention's "conservative resurgence" instituted plans to move the schools to the right.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., received probation from both ATS and SACS because of continuing disputes between trustees and faculty after the 1987 resignation of President Randall Lolley. Lolley quit, along with several other top administrators, after trustees instituted changes to ensure that only biblical inerrantists were added to the faculty.

SACS removed Southeastern's probation in December 1993. ATS followed suit in June 1994.

Actions by trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., drew a "focused visit" from the accrediting agency in 1991.

In 1990, Southern trustees adopted the SBC's 1987 Peace Committee Report as a guideline for employment, promotion and tenure of all faculty and a policy disallowing professors to ban tape recording of their lectures. ATS questioned whether the board had moved beyond normal policy-making function and if the actions potentially damaged the school's academic environment.

Later, trustees essentially reversed both actions -- replacing the Peace Committee Report with a "Covenant" document drafted by a committee and endorsed by the faculty and dropping the requirement that taping of classes be allowed -- causing the accrediting agencies to drop any further sanctions.

## **Enrollment down by 197 at Southwestern Seminary**

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, still reeling from the firing of its president last year and now facing a threat to its accreditation, enrolled 6 percent fewer students this spring.

Southwestern, the largest theological seminary in the world, registered 3,117 students for the spring term -- 197 fewer than last spring. The school suffered a similar drop of 204 students last fall, at a time when enrollment at the other five Southern Baptist seminaries grew 7 percent.

Students apparently remain wary of Southwestern's future, which was clouded by the firing of former president Russell Dilday by conservative trustees last March. The seminary's primary accrediting agency, the Association of Theological Schools, which at the time called the firing "a clear violation of accepted governance practices," just placed the school on probation.

Southwestern officials, meanwhile, are trying to put the controversy behind them and convince prospective students that the seminary is on the mend. "They can be assured that the finest theological faculty in the country is still in place and that we still have one of the finest curriculums in theological education," said Scotty Gray, Southwestern's executive vice president.

Gray and Ken Hemphill, the seminary's new president, blamed "public perception" about the seminary and demographic factors for the declining enrollment. "Our target age group is between the ages of 22 and 35, and that portion of the population is not as large as in times past," Hemphill said.

The enrollment drop will hurt the seminary's finances. Southwestern receives about \$2,600 a year from the Southern Baptist Convention for each student, and students pay an average of \$1,800 a year for tuition. Last fall administrators projected a drop in income of about \$600,000 this school year, due mostly to falling enrollment.

The spring enrollment figures, released by the seminary Jan. 30, showed Southwestern enrolled 263 new students, fewer than in recent years. The 3,117 total enrollment includes 2,745 students on the seminary's main Fort Worth, Texas, campus and 372 in off-campus centers in eight cities in the Southwest.

Enrollment was down in all three of the seminary disciplines. The theology school dropped from 1,889 students in the spring of 1994 to 1,783. The religious education school dropped from 1,198 to 1,154. And the music school dropped from 227 to 180.

-- By Greg Warner

## **Richmond Seminary attains 'candidate' status from ATS**

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond has been granted "candidate" status by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, the last step before full accreditation.

The decision was announced by the ATS Commission on Accrediting, which met in January.

"This is a major step, giving us recognition of what we have accomplished in such short order," said Tom Graves, BTSR president. "It will be a great aid in recruiting students as well as placing students, particularly those going into graduate school. This sends a very clear signal to donors that this is a well-established institution."

Now in its fourth academic year, BTSR was established by Southern Baptist moderates after conservatives made inroads at Southern Baptist seminaries, primarily Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C.

BTSR has 139 students and offers one degree, the master of divinity. There are nine full-time faculty members, including several former Southern Baptist seminary professors. The seminary leases classroom and office space from the Presbyterian School of Christian Education and shares a library with Union Theological Seminary, both in Richmond, Va.

The ATS action came after an agency official visited the Richmond campus and submitted a favorable recommendation to the commission.

"With a profound commitment to its founding vision and mission, the seminary has built a strong faculty, enrolled a capable and sufficient student body, established structures and procedures for governance and administration, developed reliable sources of income and entered stable agreements for the provision of an excellent library and physical facilities," concluded Michael Gilligan of ATS.

The ATS decision makes BTSR a candidate for full accreditation. "It is accepted by almost every agency looking at schools that a school is treated as accredited when it reaches candidate status," Graves said. He noted BTSR was granted candidacy about six months earlier than the school expected.

The seminary now will begin the process of self-study, in which "the school determines how it is operating within the guidelines and standards of the accrediting agency," Graves explained.

The ATS commission is the same body that recently placed Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, on probation.

-30-

-- By Greg Warner

## **Molly Marshall takes job at Kansas City seminary**

By Bob Allen

KANSAS CITY, Kan. (ABP) -- Molly Marshall, the professor who left Southern Baptist Theological Seminary after being accused by the school's president of aberrant theology, has accepted a position with Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Kan.

Marshall will be visiting professor of theology, worship and spiritual formation for the 1995-96 school year at Central Seminary, beginning Aug. 1. "My intent will be to make a long-term commitment as a tenured professor," she told Associated Baptist Press.

The seminary is affiliated with the 1.5 million-member American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. For more than 50 years, the seminary served both Northern and Southern Baptists, before the Southern Baptist Convention pulled out of a joint-governance arrangement in 1958 to begin its own school -- Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in nearby Kansas City, Mo..

Recently, however, Central has sought to re-establish itself as a theological education alternative for

progressive Southern Baptists who are losing confidence in SBC seminaries now being run by conservatives in control of the 15 million-member convention.

Last May, Central Seminary trustees voiced "full support" for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, an Atlanta-based operation offering alternatives to SBC programs, and adopted a policy offering discounted tuition to students from Fellowship-friendly churches.

The Fellowship currently provides funds to two seminaries -- Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond and Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary -- and Baptist studies programs at Emory University's Candler School of Theology and Duke University.

"It is possible we will be helping Central Seminary financially," said Fellowship Coordinator Cecil Sherman. Noting that the other schools which receive Fellowship support are located "a long ways from Kansas City," Sherman added, "There is a geography where this could be a great aid to our kind of Baptists."

Marshall said she is "very grateful to be able to continue to teach in a Baptist context, fulfilling my vocation as an equipper of ministers."

Marshall, who earned both the master of divinity and doctor of philosophy degrees from Southern Seminary, taught at the Louisville, Ky., school 10 years. In 1988, she became the first woman in history to be tenured in the seminary's school of theology.

Often under fire for her views of salvation and the roles of women in ministry, Marshall received support of seminary administrators, helping her over the years to survive attacks from some trustees and others who wanted to see her fired.

That support shifted, however, with the 1993 election of Albert Mohler to succeed Roy Honeycutt as president of the seminary.

Last summer, Marshall agreed to resign her teaching position, effective Dec. 31, after Mohler informed her he otherwise would initiate charges seeking her dismissal.

Mohler refused to say publicly what charges he intended to bring against Marshall, but an internal memo charged her with "failure to relate constructively" to the SBC and with teaching outside the "Abstract of Principles," the seminary's confessional statement since the school's founding in 1859.

Marshall, an ordained minister and a former pastor, has functioned as a role model for women who aspire to serve in the pulpit and other non-traditional ministerial roles. Some observers speculate that popularity had more to do with her being asked to leave Southern than her teaching. Mohler denied that gender was a factor.

Marshall said encouraging women will continue to be an emphasis of her teaching ministry. "Historically American Baptists have been more receptive (than Southern Baptists) to women in all areas of ministry," she said. "Currently the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship senses the priority of that position. I look forward to continuing to be an advocate for women in ministry and assuring Baptist students there are hospitable places."

Other Southern Baptists working at Central include David May, assistant professor of New Testament and former faculty member at Midwestern Seminary, and Gayla Sherman, vice president for development and public relations, who once worked on the development staff at Southern Seminary.

Central Seminary President Thomas Clifton said Marshall "will bring to the faculty energy, scholarship and a genuine commitment to preparing women and men for leadership in Baptist churches and organizations throughout our country." He predicted her coming will bring "increased enrollment" and "opportunities to develop new relationships" with Fellowship churches.

Greg Hunt, former moderator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Missouri and a member of Central Seminary's board of trustees, said Fellowship members in the Midwest "take courage knowing that there is a place like Central Seminary doing theological education with integrity."

Marshall brings "the best of Baptist scholarship and Christian leadership" to the school, "model(ing) scholastic emphasis while exhibiting the personal touch of a great minister. She is a bright star," said Hunt, pastor

of Holmeswood Baptist Church in Kansas City, Mo.

Marshall said she "will miss Louisville immensely," along with her "faithful colleagues" and "church community." She added she leaves Southern Seminary "with deep grief over the decimation of her theological heritage."

Marshall is not the first Southern Baptist scholar to find Central Seminary to be "a city of refuge," she noted. Ralph Elliott taught there after he was fired at Midwestern Seminary for his 1961 book, "The Message of Genesis." The book, published by the Baptist Sunday School Board, created a controversy over alleged "liberalism." Most historians regard the Elliott controversy a precursor to a takeover movement initiated in 1979 under a banner of biblical inerrancy and purging SBC seminaries and agencies of alleged "liberals."

-30-

-- Gayla Sherman contributed to this story.

---

END