

# Associated Baptist Press

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## **Southwestern professor barred from classroom**

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A faculty member who accused Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary of academic censorship in a recent book has been permanently removed from classroom duties and faces firing, faculty sources say.

Jeff Pool, an assistant professor of systematic theology at the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, was not in classes when the fall semester opened Aug. 25. Pool was scheduled to teach four courses, which now are being taught by graduate students or other faculty.

According to faculty members, Pool was barred from teaching courses at the last minute by administrators angry over "Sacred Mandates of Conscience," a book released this summer examining the Southern Baptist Convention's "Baptist Faith and Message" doctrinal statement.

Both Pool and Tommy Lea, dean of the seminary's School of Theology, declined to talk about the particular aspects of the case. Both confirmed attorneys for Southwestern and for Pool were negotiating a resolution to the situation.

"All I really can say is that I'm not out [of the classroom] because I requested to be out," Pool said.

But several colleagues on the faculty confirmed that seminary administrators, in a letter to Pool earlier this summer, threatened to fire the professor, then sought instead to deny him tenure. Either way, Pool is not expected to return to the classroom, according to the faculty sources, who fearing reprisal spoke only on the condition of anonymity.

The book that apparently instigated Southwestern's action contained articles Pool originally edited for an issue of the seminary's Southwestern Journal of Theology last year. Claiming Pool's use of authors identified as "moderates" would alienate trustees and other conservative SBC leaders, seminary administrators suspended the journal.

Pool turned to Smyth and Helwys Publishing in Macon, Ga., which published the rejected articles in a book that made its official debut at the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's annual general assembly in June.

In a preface to the book, Pool decried the seminary's refusal to publish the journal as "academic censorship." Seminary officials denied the censorship charge, noting they waived rights to the rejected articles and returned them to the authors.

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"Although such abuses of academic freedom have occurred at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary previously, never have they occurred so blatantly," Pool wrote in the opening pages of the book. "Is academic censorship ever right or in the best interests of an educational institution, especially when those who contribute to the academic enterprise, either by publications or by teaching, do so responsibly?"

At the time the book was published, Lea responded, "The charge of censorship is totally untrue."

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-- By Marv Knox and Greg Warner

## **Some wives seek help adjusting to new zeal of their Promise Keepers**

By Sarah Zimmerman

(ABP) -- As Promise Keepers head for Washington, D.C., next month to "Stand in the Gap" for the nation, a growing women's movement is trying to keep wives from standing in the way of their husband's new-found enthusiasm.

The Oct. 4 Stand in the Gap rally will focus on repentance and confession, drawing its theme from Ezekiel 22:30 which says God looked for someone to "stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it."

Promise Keepers is better known, however, for challenging men to be the spiritual leaders in their families. Conflict can arise when a woman has assumed that role, and her husband returns from a Promise Keepers rally ready to take charge.

"The men are so pumped up after a rally," said Cheri Bright of Boulder, Colo. "But many women will say, 'I've seen this before.' They don't think it will last. They want men to be the spiritual leader, but it's hard for them to let go because they've done it so long."

Lori Beckler of Wichita, Kan., agreed that a newly zealous husband can create conflict at home. "Every husband-wife relationship is unique, but in a lot of cases, the man might not have been the spiritual leader. He comes home [from a Promise Keeper's rally], and she doesn't know if it's for real."

Bright and Beckler each lead women's organizations created in response to Promise Keepers. Bright's organization is Suitable Helpers based in Boulder, Colo. Beckler and her husband, Bob, lead Heritage Keepers in Wichita, Kan. Labeled Promise Keepettes by the New York Times magazine, the groups plan conferences and workshops to help women relate to their Promise Keeper.

The Heritage Keepers' mission statement is to help women grow spiritually and pass a godly heritage to the next generation. The one-day Heritage Keeper conferences begin and end with speakers from the Promise Keepers movement. Heritage Keepers will hold conferences in Indianapolis Sept. 20 and Portland Nov. 1.

Suitable Helpers was born when Bright's husband, then a new Christian, began attending Promise Keepers events. She was praying for her husband, but Bright said God changed the focus of her attention. "My prayer became, help women receive their men in love and not become a hindrance to what you're doing or put out the fire you're starting in their lives."

Suitable Helpers now hosts conferences across the country, including meetings in Virginia Beach Sept. 12-13 and Indianapolis Sept. 26-17. The group's prayer manuals are mailed to all 50 states and seven foreign countries.

The conferences feature keynote speakers and smaller workshops on subjects such as what to do when the apple of your eye has a worm. But the strategy is not finding ways for women to change their husbands. "We want to make sure the ladies' lives are right," Bright said.

Bright's message to women whose husbands are eager to become spiritual leaders is, "Trust the Lord. With the Lord, it will last. Nothing you can do will change your husband. Take your hands off and pray."

Prayer is virtually the entire focus of Promise Reapers, a Houston-based movement led by Mary Ann Bridgewater. She was a volunteer prayer consultant for Union Baptist Association there when "God birthed in my heart a love for the churches and a heart for the pastors' wives."

In 1994 Bridgewater prayed for a rally in Dallas and was convicted about the Promise Keepers movement needing a "nationwide prayer covering." Now Promise Keeper leaders send Bridgewater a list of conference topics, and Bridgewater makes a corresponding prayer guide for women.

Without prayer, "men come back [from Promise Keepers rallies] and the household is not prepared spiritually," Bridgewater said. "With prayer, the Holy Spirit begins to transform the wife's heart and the children's hearts."

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## **Dilday to be nominated as Texas Baptist president**

ABILENE, Texas (ABP) --Russell Dilday, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, will be nominated for president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas this fall, according to Hardin-Simmons University Chancellor Jesse Fletcher, who will nominate him.

Dilday was a political lightning rod among Texas Baptists in 1994, when Southwestern trustees fired him in one of the climactic chapters in the conservative domination of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Dilday, 66, now teaches at Baylor University's George W. Truett Seminary in Waco. He is expected to receive the endorsement of Texas Baptists Committed, a moderate political organization that supports BGCT leadership, when the convention holds its annual meeting in Austin, Nov. 10-11.

But Fletcher and Dilday said the nomination is not based on politics. They have been friends since the 1950s, when they were fellow students at Southwestern Seminary and fellow pastors in Bosque County.

"I came to know his heart and life and got to admire him," Fletcher recalled. That admiration grew through the decades, as Dilday was a pastor of churches in Texas and Georgia, a leader in denominational life and president of the world's largest seminary, Fletcher added.

Dilday explained he agreed to accept the nomination because he is a "debtor" to Texas and Texas Baptists. "The shaping of my life has been vitally linked up with Baptist Texans."

If elected, Dilday said he would emphasize two things: "the importance of being Baptist Christians" -- that is, preserving Baptist distinctives -- and "the need to be Christian Baptists" -- that is, showing "in our lives the Christlike qualities of kindness and goodness and love."

If elected, Dilday pledged, he would help Texas Baptists "get beyond our political struggles and differences and pull together in encouraging all Baptist Texans to put these peripheral and minor differences behind us and meet our goals of winning Texans to faith in Christ and building Texas churches."

David Currie, coordinator of Texas Baptists Committed, supported the nomination. "I fully expect Baptists Committed to endorse Dr. Dilday," Currie said. "... We would expect him to be fair and yet clearly in the tradition of our past presidents, who have been openly opposed to fundamentalism."

The identity of a possible candidate to oppose Dilday was unknown as of last week.

"Right at this moment, we're still working on that question," said Ronnie Yarber, administrator of Southern Baptists of Texas, a conservative group that has been trying to move the BGCT into closer synchronization with the rightward shift of the SBC.

"I can't say that it either will happen or who it will be," Yarber said.

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-- By Marv Knox

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following story updates one released yesterday under the same headline. The new material quotes Tom Landry.

## **Will Jesus ruin Deion's game? Don't count on it, athletes say**

By Marv Knox

DALLAS (ABP) -- Flamboyant sports star Deion Sanders' much-publicized decision to become a Christian has sparked a debate: Will his devotion to Jesus turn "Prime Time," as he is known, into Deion meek and mild?

Don't count on it, warn five Texas football legends who also happen to be Christians.

"There isn't any question that you can be a Christian and be a football player," said Tom Landry, an All-Pro defensive back for the New York Giants and longtime head coach of the Cowboys.

Any insinuation to the contrary is "absolutely ridiculous," added Bill Glass, a Baylor University standout who played defensive end in 12 seasons with the Cleveland Browns in their glory years.

"I was always irritated, from the time I was in college and especially in pro ball, by the inference that you're a weakling if you're a Christian," Glass recalled.

But since Sanders, a two-sport professional athlete who plays baseball for the Cincinnati Reds and football for the Dallas Cowboys, recently announced he had turned to Christ, Spirit-inspired softness has been a recurring theme of media reports.

One of his baseball teammates predicted Sanders' effectiveness as the Cowboys' cornerback would drop off, now that the All-Pro wears a diamond-encrusted gold cross instead of his signature gold necklace with his jersey number "21" on it.

"Deion won't intercept as many passes," the baseball buddy told reporters. "He doesn't want to hurt people's feelings."

Those words may have been said in jest, but they beg a question: Can an athlete be a good Christian and still excel in a violent sport?

"This question is as old as the game of football," responded Grant Teaff, former Baylor coach who now directs the American Football Coaches Association in Waco, Texas.

"And the answer is extremely simple," he added. "As Christians, we believe God gives us certain talents. We treasure them because they're a gift from God, and we use them to the best of our ability."

"I don't see any contradiction there at all," added Neal Jeffrey, who quarterbacked Baylor to a Southwest Conference championship under Teaff in 1974.

"A man that is possessed by the Spirit of the living God and wants to reflect Christ plays well," said Jeffrey, who played two years in the National Football League with the San Diego Chargers and now is associate pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Dallas. "He plays hard, aggressive and tough, yet he plays within the rules."

"He's a light in what can be a dark sport. A guy can do that, and there have been great examples through the years," Jeffrey said, citing a roster of committed Christian football stars, including Hall of Fame quarterbacks Bart Starr of the Green Bay Packers and Fran Tarkenton of the Minnesota Vikings.

The key difference is priorities, said Landry, an active Methodist layman in Dallas.

"When you're a Christian, your priorities are right," he said. "God is first, family second and football third. You can be on the right track and still play the game as tough as you want to play."

In fact, Christian ballplayers live under a biblical mandate to excel, noted Glass, who now lives in Cedar Hill, Texas, and heads an evangelistic ministry aimed at prison inmates. "The Scripture says that whatever you do, do it with all your might," he said. "If you don't play with all your heart, you better get out, or you'll get killed."

"You don't play dirty or illegally, but you play with all your heart," added Glass, who played in four Pro Bowls. "I prided myself on being very aggressive and very tough."

Like Jeffrey, Glass pointed to premier NFL stars who aren't shy about expressing their faith.

"Reggie White [defensive end for the Packers] is a committed Christian, a minister and a very effective leader," Glass said.

"Mike Singletary [former Baylor standout and retired linebacker for the Chicago Bears] is probably one of the toughest individuals I've ever met -- All-Pro for 12 years -- and he goes with us into prisons to minister. He gets a standing ovation every time he stands up and sits down when he speaks at Cook County Jail. And certainly he's one of the roughest, toughest people to play the game."

An infusion of faith actually can be good for a football player, stressed Gordon Wood, who won nine state championships in 43 years as a head coach of Texas high school football teams.

"I personally think Deion could be a better football player and be a Christian," said Wood, a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University and an active Presbyterian layman in Brownwood.

"A guy could be a better player" by turning his life over to Christ, Wood insisted. "If the Dallas Cowboys were all Christians, they would be an unbelievable force in football. They wouldn't have lost last year, and they wouldn't lose this year."

That's not to say God will favor believing ballplayers, Wood and Teaff said.

Wood recalled his teams -- led by the athletes themselves -- often prayed together on the field after games. "I would never stop them," he said. "I don't think the Lord has time to think about who wins a ballgame. But it solidifies them as a team and makes them better."

"People would ask me, 'If you're a Christian, why doesn't God let you win?'" Teaff remembered. "Well, the answer is that on the other side of the field are coaches and athletes that God loves too. God doesn't give a hoot and a holler about who wins. He cares about who plays the game."

And God cares about the witness of Christians who play the game, the players and coaches said.

"For a man to play a sport like football which is highly competitive and yet stay in control physically, emotionally and spiritually is a great testimony," Jeffrey said. "A true champion stands up humbly and says, 'I serve a great God, and he has blessed me, and I want to honor him.' And he does it in a way that brings honor to God."

"Excellence is an important testimony to the gifts God has given us," Teaff stressed.

As an outstanding high-profile player, Sanders can provide a witness in the locker room, Landry noted. "The other players respect Christians as long as they live what they believe. ... I would give [Sanders] a chance to prove he's a Christian, and I think the players will too."

In that light, "it's very important for Deion to be the best he can be" as a high-profile Christian athlete, said Glass, who offered Sanders advice from a big brother in Christ: "Don't get weird on us; Christianity is not for weirdos. You want to be wonderful, not weird. Be better because you're a Christian; you're representing Jesus Christ. and don't become a wuss on us now."