



# Associated Baptist Press

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May 9, 2000

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
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(00-40)

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MAY 18 2000

### **Truett seminary dean returning to classroom**

By Mark Wingfield

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Students and faculty were stunned by a May 5 announcement that Bradley Creed will step down as dean of George W. Truett Theological Seminary June 1 and return to the classroom full time.

The change was instigated by Baylor University President Robert Sloan, who praised Creed for his contributions during Truett's founding years but said a dean with a different set of skills is needed for the next phase of the 6-year-old seminary's life.

Truett operates within the Baylor University structure, and Baylor's deans serve on three-year contracts renewable at the pleasure of the president. Sloan said he and Creed began conversations about the change more than a year ago, before the end of Creed's contract.

Baylor University Provost Don Schmeltekopf met with Truett faculty to break the news Friday afternoon, May 5. Faculty members reportedly wept upon hearing the news.

Word spread to students later that night and over the weekend, as they prepared for final exams scheduled the week of May 8.

A group of about 10 third-year students called Sloan at his home on Saturday, May 6, to request a meeting. Sloan met with them that afternoon for about an hour.

Students and faculty alike said they do not fully understand the reasons behind the change in deans, even though both groups have asked repeated questions of university administration.

In an interview with the Baptist Standard, Sloan did not directly answer the question of why the change was made. He did, however, offer some insight.

"Truett is changing a lot," he said. "For the next period of the life of Truett, it's very good for us to have a change of leadership which involves a slightly different set of skills. ... We've got to be increasingly involved with student recruiting. We've got to be increasingly involved in fundraising and in encouraging Baptists to support theological education in Texas."

Truett's growth from 92 students to 194 under Creed's leadership is only the beginning of further anticipated growth, Sloan said. "Truett is going to grow and grow rapidly. This brings larger and larger administrative demands."

"Brad was the outstanding leader for the initial years of Truett's life," Sloan added. "Now is a good and healthy time for there to be a transition."

Creed confirmed he and Sloan had been in conversation about the change for more than a year. Although he does not share the president's perspective that this is a good time for a change, he said, he determined to be cooperative in the transition.

The focus of conversations between Sloan and Creed "has not been on elaboration of reasons," Creed said. "The best way I've described it is that a new profile of leadership is needed for the next phase of development. We have talked about how to cooperate in letting this unfold."

Sloan was "emphatic about wanting me to stay on faculty," Creed said. "Those are my intentions right now."

Creed will take a brief sabbatical this summer and fall, in which he will prepare for a return to full-time teaching and work on Spanish-language study in Mexico. "With the sort of mission needs we have in Texas, I want to be proficient in Spanish," he said.

Sloan, who was Truett's founding dean and who hired Creed as one of the seminary's first faculty members in 1994, emphasized he and Creed remain friends.

The change in leadership should not be interpreted as a signal of any change in theological or political perspective at Truett or at Baylor, Sloan said.

"This is not about theological views. This change is not about political alignments in Baptist life," Sloan said. "Brad and I are in firm agreement about theological issues and Baptist principles. This is not about those kinds of things."

Nevertheless, as news of the leadership change spread across campus and across the state, speculation began about what possible unspoken motives might lie behind Sloan's decision. Some of Sloan's long-time critics among the university faculty saw the change as evidence of a "fundamentalist" agenda on the president's part. Others speculated that university donors demanded the change. Still others focused on what they called a lack of due process, a charge that has been raised in other intense battles between Sloan and some university faculty members in recent years.

Sloan said he understands that such speculations are natural when such a leadership change is announced. But he lamented that Baptist life over the last 20 years has created an environment in which suspicion rules the day.

"The fact is that nowadays, unfortunately, any time there's a transition in Baptist leadership, people have this very traumatic frame of reference against which to interpret events," he said. "They immediately ask questions about theology or Baptist politics."

"I appeal to Baptist people to realize you can have transitions whereby people as Christian friends, brothers and sisters, come together and for the good of the Lord's work decide upon change," Sloan added. "We've simply got to get beyond this sad past whereby everything is interpreted with conspiratorial terms and with theological agendas."

Truett's younger students who were raised in Southern Baptist churches have known nothing but denominational conflict their entire lives. Several said in interviews it is difficult to put this heritage of political and theological feuding behind them when faced with an unexpected turn of events like has happened at Truett.

Several said their minds immediately raced to draw connections to the 1994 firing of Russell Dilday as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Dilday later became a professor at Truett.

"I've grown up in this Baptist atmosphere of fear and suspicion," admitted Anne Burton, a third-year student from Amarillo, Texas. "I don't want to be like that, but my initial fear was that this is what happened to Dr. Dilday. I now know it's not that at all."

Burton and other Truett students quickly rallied around Creed to show support, holding a prayer vigil and other events designed to affirm Creed's leadership. Truett faculty also planned a celebration worship service and reception for Creed and his family.

Third-year students who met with Sloan expressed appreciation that he met with them so quickly and cordially. But they continued to express dismay at their lack of understanding about why the change was necessary. They uniformly affirmed Creed, while questioning the process that led to his removal as dean.

"It wasn't like we got a whole lot of answers, but we got to express our concerns to him," said Rebekah Falk, from Winter Haven, Fla., of the meeting with Sloan.

"We all just love and respect Brad," added Chris Bryan, a third-year student from Houston.

Before enrolling at Truett, Bryan worked as a corporate vice president. That gives him a somewhat different perspective on the turn of events at Truett, he admitted.

"From my perspective having been in the corporate world and seeing people lose their jobs, I thought Dr. Sloan was very open with us, very sincere. I did not sense that there was anything arbitrary or capricious about this."

"That doesn't mean I think he was right," Bryan added. "But I have no basis for judging Robert Sloan."

Other students concurred with Bryan's mixed assessment. Though they think Sloan made the wrong decision, they believe Truett will go on, they said.

That's due in part to the way Creed has handled himself, Falk said. "Just because of the integrity of Dean Creed, I don't think he's going to do anything that would protest it. Even if the students do anything to protest, he's not going to try to get his job back. He's settled in his decision and taken his place. He's full of integrity, and he wouldn't want to do anything to cause problems."

Brent Beasley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Eagle Lake, Texas, and president of the Truett Seminary Alumni Association, also affirmed Creed while expressing dismay with Sloan's decision.

"From my perspective, the seminary is in better shape than it has ever been," Beasley said. "Instead of having the projected 136 students, they have 240 and are expecting 70 to 90 more in the fall. The building is totally funded. The faculty, which was not terribly strong in the beginning, has been seriously upgraded with the additions of Roger Olson and David Garland.

"In my opinion, Creed has led the seminary with integrity, courage, intelligence and spiritual depth," he said.

Sloan said Schmeltekopf will appoint a dean search committee out of the Truett faculty. It is not likely a new dean will be named by the start of the fall semester, but it might be possible to have someone in place before the end of the year, he said.

In the meantime, Randall O'Brien, professor of religion and executive assistant to Sloan, has been named acting dean at Truett.

## **Jacksonville pastor withdraws offer to resign, claims disability**

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Claiming a "mental disability," the pastor of a prominent Florida church has changed his mind about resigning his pulpit.

Altus Newell, pastor of Deermeadows Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., earlier offered to resign amid questions about unauthorized contributions made in the church's name to a Swiss bank account and allegedly falsified documentation of the transactions.

However, according to a statement read at the close of the morning worship service May 7, Newell has informed church leaders that he "has a mental disability" and is withdrawing his offer to resign.

A church business meeting called May 10 to consider Newell's resignation and severance will be held but will be "informational only," according to the statement read to the congregation by interim administrator Doran McCarty.

"The resignation was withdrawn, and the action that was set to occur is no longer valid," the statement said.

Leaders of the 2,100-member church earlier said Newell offered to resign April 26, contingent on church approval of severance, when confronted about checks totaling approximately \$184,000 purportedly for evangelism in Eastern Europe sponsored through the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic.

Newell, a former Southern Baptist missionary who served as president of the school in the mid-1980s when it was located in Ruschlikon, Switzerland, said he and another donor made the series of contributions to help churches in areas where Baptists are persecuted.

Current leaders at IBTS, however, said there is no such program related to the seminary and that documents acknowledging receipt of funds by school officials are bogus.

Newell said in an interview that questions about the checks were being resolved and that the main issue is his health. He said he has been sick for several months with a "depressive illness."

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-- By Bob Allen

## **Ballenger named dean at Richmond seminary**

By Robert O'Brien

RICHMOND, Va. (ABP) -- A veteran missions educator and administrator will become acting faculty dean at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond on June 1.

Isam Ballenger fills a post vacated by Thomas Halbrooks. Halbrooks resigned to become president of Colgate Rochester Divinity School/Crozer Theological Seminary in Rochester, N.Y. on July 1. Halbrooks, 59, joined the Virginia seminary in 1991 and has been its only dean and professor of church history.

Ballenger, 64, will act as dean for an indefinite period while the seminary seeks administrative and faculty replacements, said President Thomas Graves. Ballenger will also continue as Duke K. McCall professor of missions and world Christianity.

At various points during a 28-year career in foreign missions, Ballenger was president, professor and trustee of International Baptist Theological Seminary, then in Ruschlikon, Switzerland.

"Dr. Ballenger is eminently qualified to serve as dean, given his past experience as a seminary president and his heavy involvement in preparing our initial accreditation report to the Association of Theological Schools," Graves said.

Ballenger joined BTSR in 1992 after he retired early to end his career as a missionary and administrator with the Southern Baptist Foreign (now International) Mission Board.

He was area director and then vice president for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, 1982-92, when he retired from the Southern Baptist Convention agency.

Besides his seminary experience in Switzerland, he has also been the associate to the board's area director for Europe, pastor of English and German-language churches in Germany, teacher at a school in Nigeria, and pastor of Carey Baptist Church in Henderson, N.C.

A Florida native, Ballenger grew up in South Carolina, where he graduated from Clemson University. He earned bachelor-of-divinity and master-of-theology degrees from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., studied at Heidelberg University in Germany, and earned a doctorate from Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tenn.

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## **Seminary administrator resigns post, trustees told**

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- A top administrator at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has stepped down, trustees of the Southern Baptist school in Kansas City, Mo., learned at an April meeting.

Jim Cogdill has resigned as vice president for academic affairs to pursue evangelistic and church-growth opportunities, interim President Michael Whitehead told trustees.

Cogdill, who joined the seminary's faculty in July 1997, was a central figure in a trustee investigation last summer that eventually led to the firing of seminary President Mark Coppenger over issues related to "misappropriation of anger."

Old Testament professor Gary Smith will replace Cogdill as interim dean of the faculty.

Two other Southern Baptist Convention seminaries, meanwhile, elected new high-level leaders.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., added a new position of vice president of institution effectiveness and assessment. In the new role, former presidential assistant and pastoral-ministry professor Waylon Owens will help the school prepare for an upcoming review of its accreditation.

Trustees at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., elected Thomas Jones as vice president for institutional advancement. He currently works in a similar position at Williams Baptist College in Walnut Ridge, Ark.

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-- By ABP staff

## **Baptist agency gets grant for environmental project**

DALLAS (ABP) -- The Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission will soon receive a \$100,000 grant for a project on religion and the environment.

The New York-based Beldon Fund approved the grant in April. The moral-concerns and public-policy arm of the Baptist General Convention of Texas was among several hundred applicants for the grant, said Terri Morgan, special projects coordinator for the Dallas-based commission.

The Texas Baptist "creation stewardship" project involves issues related to competition for water supplies, the loss of farmland to desert, and rural-community development in West Texas and New Mexico.

The project specifically addresses the faith community's response to competition for water rights between powerful metropolitan municipalities and poor rural communities.

"The CLC has a strong interest in an intervention in West Texas and New Mexico to prevent further environmental degradation in a population area that exceeds 2 million people," the grant proposal reads. "With a network of churches and a voice for the larger faith community, the CLC can build a substantial consensus for personal, economic and public-policy changes necessary to achieve environmental health and justice."

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-- By Ken Camp

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