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Patterson elected unanimously to lead Southwestern Seminary

By Toby Druin

Editor Emeritus

FORT WORTH-Pledging he would not “clean house” but would build a faculty committed to Southern Baptist Convention guidelines, including the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, Paige Patterson was elected eighth president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary June 24.

The co-architect with Paul Pressler of the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC was elected unanimously in a called meeting of seminary trustees. Thirty-three of the 40 members of the board—all who were present—answered “yes” as Chairman David Allen, pastor of MacArthur Boulevard Baptist Church in Irving and professor at Criswell College, asked for a roll-call vote.

Paige
Patterson
addresses
trustees after
his election
as president
of
Southwestern
Seminary
June 24. At
left is David
Allen,
chairman of
the board,
who is pastor
of MacArthur
Boulevard
Baptist
Church in
Irving and a
professor at
Criswell
College,
where
Patterson
once was
president.

Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., for almost 11 years, will assume the Southwestern presidency Aug. 1. His wife, Dorothy, also was elected a full professor at Southwestern, with full benefits but no salary.

Denny Autry, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lindale and chairman of the 10-member search committee that recommended Patterson, said the 60-year-old native Texan was the only candidate the panel interviewed.

"We received a number of recommendations from the Southern Baptist family," Autry said. "We could have taken two approaches, one interviewing each individual candidate or determining (at first) which candidate we felt most comfortable with and moving to the end result. We prayed over all the recommendations, and Dr. Patterson came to the top."

Both Patterson and Autry emphasized that no contact, formally or informally, was made by the search committee or any other trustee before the search committee spoke to him initially on May 15.

Even after that contact, Patterson said, "my position has been that I was president of Southeastern Seminary. In my wildest imaginations I never dreamed I would be standing here today."

Patterson added that he was so happy with his circumstances at Southeastern that he had no interest in moving to Fort Worth, where he was born while his late father, T. A. Patterson, former executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, was working on his doctoral dissertation at Southwestern.

"I don't want that misunderstood," Patterson said. "I have a great love and appreciation for (Southwestern's) history. It's just that when you are totally satisfied and happy and blessed of God beyond any possible way, and someone says, 'Are you interested in moving?' the answer is 'No, I am not interested in moving under any circumstances.'"

He held that position, he said, "until crossing the Atlantic a couple of weeks ago and I felt God decisively spoke to my heart. Until then no decision whatever (had been made) on my part."

In accepting his election, Patterson said it was a "signal honor" to be chosen and that he would come with "a keen sense of what is expected and a keen awareness of the fact that no one, least of all I, has the ability to do what must be done, except for the intervention of God. Our Lord said, 'Without me, you can do nothing,' and I am more convinced of that every day that I live."

He and his wife came to Fort Worth, he said, with their minds made up that he would accept the presidency if elected, and he will notify Southeastern Seminary of his resignation, effective July 31.

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Patterson will succeed Ken Hemphill, who resigned to lead a new SBC initiative called Empowering Kingdom Growth. Hemphill had been president since 1994 when he succeeded Russell Dilday, who was fired by trustees for opposing the new direction of the SBC.

Although Hemphill and trustee spokesmen deny it, numerous sources have told the Baptist Standard and other media that Hemphill was forced out of the presidency by seminary trustees and SBC leaders who were unhappy

with the seminary's declining enrollment and Hemphill's alleged failure to clear out faculty not fully sympathetic with SBC leadership.

Patterson said Hemphill assured him he felt God leading him to the new position in Nashville.

"He came at a time of considerable turmoil and came with sweetness and a gentle spirit," Patterson said of Hemphill. "And no better man could have been chosen to lead our empowering for kingdom growth. I am looking forward to reading his books."

Asked if he would "clean house" at Southwestern, as has been speculated, Patterson cited his experience at Southeastern Seminary when he assumed the presidency there.

"When we went to Southeastern, there were rumors we would dismiss faculty," he said. "I never found it be a satisfactory way to handle the situation. We knew there were faculty members who were not sympathetic with the turn in direction of the convention, but I found them to be reasonable, and we were able to work with them. Most did eventually leave, but it was never necessary to fire them."

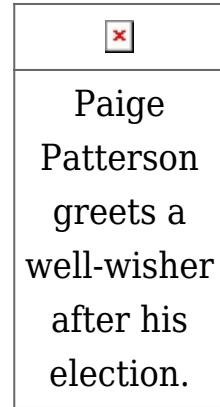
He said he could not imagine a circumstance when he would "come in and clean house. That does not fit my style of operation. I would prefer to motivate on a higher level."

There will be changes, however, he acknowledged. "There are always retirements; churches hire faculty because they can pay more; and sometimes the grass seems greener someplace else and people leave. I would anticipate that will happen here."

In hiring new faculty, Patterson said, he will seek men and women who have a genuine walk with God and who know what that means, who are good husbands and wives, good fathers and mothers and who are

consistent witnesses for Christ.

They also must be adequately credentialed with terminal degrees and proven abilities and must be people who can “contribute to theological literature through writing as well as a teaching ministry. They must be good classroom teachers. It is a sin to be boring.”



“And,” he added, “they must operate within the guidelines of the SBC which have been given to us and adopted by the six seminaries. They must be people who can sign their agreement with the Baptist Faith & Message 2000.”

Asked if he would permit a woman to teach in the seminary's School of Theology, Patterson said it would be his purpose as a leader not to do anything in the School of Theology other than what he would want churches to imitate.

“I believe there are ample numbers of men out there,” he said. “I will build the theology faculty around them.”

Asked if that was a “no” to women teaching theology, Patterson said, “Well, I didn't say it that way, but it tells you the direction I am headed.”

Pressed further, he said women could teach in areas of Christian education and church music, particularly if they were teaching women and children.

"My concern," he said, "is that the New Testament is crystal clear that pastors are to be men. That is not a question of the equality of essence but the assignment of roles that God gives. I believe in the equality of essence, but I believe there are specific roles given to men. As we build the School of Theology, where we primarily train future pastors, it is only appropriate, if we are going to stay with the biblical pattern, that we use only men in that capacity."

Asked if he would turn Southwestern into a "fundamentalist institution," Patterson said the issue is not, as some reporters have written, that he would require a literal interpretation of Scripture, but rather that he would uphold the "truthfulness of God's word."

"If it means to be a fundamentalist is to say Jesus is Lord, the Bible is absolutely true, and the mission of Jesus to us is to win people to faith in Christ around the world, I am guilty. If it means to be angry with it, I am not; I am quite happy with it. I am a fundamentalist with a little f, not a capital F."

Trustee Chairman Allen said he believes the main thing Patterson will bring to Southwestern is "the ability to wed scholarship and evangelistic zeal in a proper blend."

Among those welcoming Patterson to his new assignment was Jim Richards, executive director of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention.

As to the kind of relationship Patterson would seek for Southwestern with the BGCT, Patterson said the answer is easy. "I fully intend to have a wonderful relationship with anybody, regardless of affiliation, who maintains the absolute lordship of Christ, the inerrancy of God's word and the mission of winning men and women to Christ."

Relations between the BGCT and Southwestern have been strained since a BGCT seminary study committee recommended three years ago that

churches reduce funding to all six SBC seminaries, alleging they no longer operated in harmony with mainstream Texas Baptist beliefs.

In response to Patterson's election, BGCT Executive Director Charles Wade said: "The Baptist General Convention of Texas has had a long and fruitful relationship with Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. We have been saddened in recent years by the removal of presidents and professors for reasons that failed to convince many Texas Baptists of the wisdom or fairness of those decisions. We pray Dr. Patterson will exercise Christian wisdom and Baptist principles in his leadership of this institution, which has meant so much to all Texas Baptists.

"We are grateful for the good work that is being done in our universities and seminaries to prepare men and women for Christian ministry. Texas Baptists will continue to work with Southwestern in every way we are given opportunity to do so."

Patterson's election drew a strongly positive response from Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and current chairman of the council of SBC seminary presidents.

Southwestern presidents	
B.H. Carroll	1908-1914
L.R. Scarborough	1915-1942
E.D. Head	1942-1953
J. Howard Williams	1953-1958
Robert Naylor	1958-1978
Russell Dilday	1978-1994
Ken Hemphill	1994-2003
Paige Patterson	2003 -

"The election of Paige Patterson as president of Southwestern Seminary is

one of the great moments in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention,” Mohler said in a Baptist Press report. “Dr. Patterson is one of our greatest leaders and the Martin Luther in the reformation of our convention and the recovery of biblical inerrancy and authority.”

Mohler predicted Patterson “will take Texas by storm” and “win the hearts of Texas Baptists to the great cause of the gospel and truth as represented by their beloved Southwestern Seminary.”

Miles Seaborn, retired pastor of Birchman Baptist Church in Fort Worth and a highly influential person among Southwestern trustees, told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram: “A lot of people say Paige is mean-spirited, but I've been in a lot of meetings, and I've never heard him to be unkind. He's just very precise with what the Scripture says about an issue.”

Seminary trustee Ted Stone of North Carolina, who said he was among those who recommended Patterson to the search committee, likewise praised the new president as someone with “an established track record of success.”

He called Patterson the “one man” who can meet all Southwestern's current needs.

Texas Baptists disaffected by the fundamentalist power sweep within the SBC did not share the trustees' and Mohler's appreciation for Patterson's election.

“It's the final stroke in Patterson's plan to capture and radically alter the great school,” former Southwestern President Russell Dilday told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. “Already, Southwestern bears little resemblance to the institution that undergirded Baptist churches and ministries around the world for 90 years. Paige's election will complete that tragic metamorphosis, and the Southwestern we knew no longer exists.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.