

Seminary pulls plug on trustee's online sermon

September 1, 2006

Posted: 9/01/06

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Associated Baptist Press

FORT WORTH (ABP)—A trustee at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary endorsed the concept of a private prayer language in an Aug. 29 chapel sermon at the school, setting off a wave of discussion in the Southern Baptist blogosphere and triggering the seminary's leaders to ban free distribution of the sermon through the school's website.

Dwight McKissic, a new Southwestern trustee and pastor of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Arlington, delivered the sermon in which he recounted how, while a Southwestern student in 1981, he had an experience of speaking in a “private prayer language” and that the experience has repeated itself.

McKissic also offered criticism of a policy, recently established by the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, that would ban the appointment of missionaries who practice the private version of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues.

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**—Dwight McKissic,
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Arlington**

"I couldn't figure out how a policy that contradicts the teaching of many of our believing theologians could be enacted like that. That was amazing to me," McKissic said in an interview after his chapel address. "I was so disappointed by the policy that I gave serious consideration to leading my church out of the Southern Baptist Convention."

He said he believed the policy—which disqualifies candidates for appointment as international missionaries if they practice private glossolalia—"is an intrusion of privacy, an invasion of privacy, totally unnecessary, and would exclude a great number of Baptists who would make excellent missionaries."

McKissic called the IMB policy "extra-biblical."

Word of the sermon spread quickly among the numerous Southern Baptist bloggers who have been critical of Southwestern Seminary President Paige Patterson and others in the denomination's elite cadre of top leaders. Many have noted that Patterson, on recent occasions, has opposed the practice of speaking in tongues.

Pastor Art Rogers of Tulsa, Okla, writing on his "12 Witnesses" website,

said “McKissic set off the political equivalent of a nuclear device” with his statements.

The seminary recently has begun live streaming-video telecasts of its chapel sermons, which enabled several bloggers to hear the comments. An Aug. 24 news release announcing the feature noted, “Audio and video recordings of each chapel service will be archived immediately after each service is over.”

But bloggers began asking why McKissic’s morning sermon was not yet posted by the late afternoon of Aug. 29. Neither Patterson’s assistant nor officials from the school’s communications office responded to phone messages requesting an explanation until the early evening hours.

Jon Zellers, the seminary’s associate vice president for news and information, directed a reporter to a statement posted on the school’s website that said, while the seminary “is honored to have Rev. W. Dwight McKissic as a trustee” and “honored to have him in chapel this morning,” the seminary would not disseminate copies of the chapel sermon free of charge.

“While Southwestern does not instruct its chapel speakers about what they can or cannot say, neither do we feel that there is wisdom in posting materials online which could place us in a position of appearing to be critical of actions of the board of trustees of a sister agency,” the statement said.

“Any trustee or faculty member is free to communicate his concerns to the boards of sister agencies, but it is difficult to imagine a circumstance that would merit public criticism of the actions of a sister board.”

It continued: “Furthermore, though most of Rev. McKissic’s message represented a position with which most people at Southwestern would be comfortable, Rev. McKissic’s interpretation of tongues as ‘ecstatic

utterance' is not a position that we suspect would be advocated by most faculty or trustees. In keeping with Baptist convictions regarding religious liberty, we affirm Rev. McKissic's right to believe and advocate his position. Equally in keeping with our emphasis of religious liberty we reserve the right not to disseminate openly views which we fear may be harmful to the churches."

The statement said Patterson had made the decision to limit distribution of the sermon, "lest uninformed people believe that Pastor McKissic's view on the gift of tongues as 'ecstatic utterance' is the view of the majority of our people at Southwestern."

Prior to the statement's posting, McKissic said he didn't believe Patterson had a problem with him or his view of tongues. "He has not in any way indicated that he has issues with what I have to say," he said.

He noted that he had lunch with Patterson and his wife, Dorothy, following the chapel service. "I love Dr. Patterson; Dr. Patterson loves me. We had rich fellowship today," he said. "If they had a problem with it (the sermon), they didn't utter it to me at all."

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