

Dismissed professor files lawsuit against Southwestern seminary

March 30, 2007

Updated 3/30/07

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Associated Baptist Press

FORT WORTH (ABP)—Former professor Sheri Klouda has sued Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, charging fraud, breach of contract and defamation for forcing her out.

Klouda, who was hired in 2002 to teach Hebrew in a tenure-track position at the Fort Worth school, [lost her job last year](#)—allegedly because of her gender. She filed the lawsuit in federal court.

Sheri Klouda
pictured at
Southwestern
Seminary's
convocation
August 29,
2002,
affirming her
adherence to
the 2000
Baptist Faith
and Message.
(The photo
appeared on
[Wade
Burleson's
blog](#)).

Her termination set off a firestorm in the Southern Baptist blogosphere. Klouda's supporters have filed complaints with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Association of Theological Schools asking them to investigate Southwestern for "a serious breach" of accreditation guidelines in connection with the firing.

Public outcry at the dismissal—which has been reported not only in the blogs and Baptist news outlets but also the Dallas and Fort Worth daily newspapers, the Associated Press and Religion News Service—has given the issue unexpected national prominence.

Benjamin Cole, the pastor in Arlington who filed the academic complaints, called Klouda's dismissal a "terrible injustice."

President Paige Patterson's "negligence has taken the seminary to a new

low,” Cole said, adding if school trustees do not hold Patterson accountable to the policies governing faculty tenure, then the federal courts should condemn the trustees and the president.

“To quote the Apostle Paul, the civil authorities are no terror to those who do right,” he said. “But to those who do wrong, they are instituted of God to punish evildoers. If I was a trustee or administrator at Southwestern Seminary today, I think I would be terrified.”

Klouda’s story first broke Jan. 17 in a post by Wade Burleson, an Oklahoma pastor who runs a popular blog about Southern Baptist Convention Life (kerussocharis.blogspot.com). Burleson said Klouda, who had received several grants and awards during her collegiate and seminary years, was dismissed by Patterson because of her gender.

The school didn’t want women teaching men in the theology department, Burleson said.

Van McClain, chair of the school’s board of trustees, has refuted the claims of removal, explaining in a letter posted on another Southern Baptist blog that Klouda “did not have tenure and, like hundreds of professors around the U.S. every year, was told that she would not be awarded tenure.” The letter was posted on sbcoutpost.blogspot.com, whose proprietor is Georgia pastor Marty Duren.

After Patterson became Southwestern’s president in 2003, he personally assured Klouda the change in administrations would not jeopardize her position, she said.

However, school officials told her in 2004 she would not get tenure, she added. Her contract was terminated in December 2006, and she now teaches at Taylor University in Upland, Ind.

The Association of Theological Schools board of commissioners has not

taken any action in the matter.

The suit is Klouda v. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, No. 4-07CV-161-A. It was filed in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas, Fort Worth Division. Klouda has retained an attorney from Tulsa, Okla.

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