

Southern Baptists deal with fallout over Paige Patterson

May 25, 2018

EDITOR'S NOTE: On May 30, the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees' executive committee cut ties with Paige Patterson, stripping him of the titles and benefits previously granted. See that article [here](#).

Southern Baptists continue to deal with the fallout of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees' decision to remove Paige Patterson as president but allow him to continue to live on campus and hold an honorary position with compensation.

Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., condemned "an unorganized conspiracy of silence" surrounding sexual abuse.

"The SBC is in the midst of its own horrifying #MeToo moment," Mohler wrote in an [online article](#).

In light of Patterson's comments about spousal abuse and women, the Southwestern Seminary board "determined to move in the direction of new leadership for the benefit of the future mission of the seminary," according to a [statement](#) trustees released soon after they took action about 3 a.m. May 23.

'Golden parachute'

However, the board announced Patterson and his wife, Dorothy, would be invited to live on campus in the Baptist Heritage Center, where they will be

“theologians-in-residence” and he will be “president emeritus.”



Mitch
Randall

Mitch Randall, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics, wrote an [article](#) contrasting the treatment received by Russell Dilday, who was fired as president of Southwestern Seminary in 1994, and the benefits afforded to Patterson.

“While one of the kindest and thoughtful Christian men to ever walk the campus of Southwestern was treated as a criminal for not being ‘conservative’ enough, Patterson was ushered out the door with a golden parachute,” Randall wrote. “Apparently, for Southern Baptist leaders, it pays well to keep the party line and keep women in their place.”

The same day the Southwestern Seminary board of trustees convened, the [Washington Post reported](#) Patterson allegedly instructed a woman who told him she had been raped not to report the assault to police. The woman said she was sexually assaulted while a student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina when Patterson was president there.

‘The judgment of God has come’

In his online column, Mohler noted the statements by Patterson from 2010 urging a woman in an abusive marriage to pray for her husband and be submissive, as well as a 2014 sermon in which he said a teenage boy who described an attractive 16-year-old girl as “built” was “just being biblical.”



Al Mohler

“The issues only grew more urgent with the sense that the dated statements represented ongoing advice and counsel,” Mohler wrote.

He confessed he initially saw sexual misconduct and tolerance of abuse as “a Roman Catholic problem” brought on by the requirements of priestly celibacy and “a conspiracy of silence within the hierarchy.”

“When people said that evangelicals had a similar crisis coming, it didn’t seem plausible—even to me. ... I was wrong. The judgment of God has come,” Mohler wrote.

“Judgment has now come to the house of the Southern Baptist Convention. The terrible swift sword of public humiliation has come with a vengeance. There can be no doubt that this story is not over.”

‘Morally compromised’

Patterson was an architect of what supporters called the “conservative resurgence” in the SBC and what critics considered its “fundamentalist takeover,” along with Paul Pressler, who is facing a [lawsuit alleging sexual abuse](#).

“This is exactly what those who opposed the conservative resurgence warned would happen. They claimed that the effort to recover the

denomination theologically was just a disguised move to capture the denomination for a new set of power-hungry leaders,” Mohler wrote.

He insisted the characterization was untrue, but he acknowledged “their prophecies had some merit after all.”

“As I recently said with lament to a long-time leader among the more liberal faction that left the Southern Baptist Convention, each side has become the fulfillment of what the other side warned,” Mohler wrote. “The liberals who left have kept marching to the left, in theology and moral teaching. The SBC, solidly conservative theologically, has been revealed to be morally compromised.”

Mohler asserted the Southern Baptist position about the submissive role of women, as expressed in the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message, is not to blame. However, he admitted “that argument would seem plausible to many looking to conservative evangelicals and wondering if we have gone mad.”

He insisted churches should be ready to protect any person threatened by abuse and follow the law in reporting any incidents.

“A church, denomination or Christian ministry must look outside of itself when confronted with a pattern of mishandling such responsibilities, or merely of being charged with such a pattern. We cannot vindicate ourselves. ... I believe that any public accusation concerning such a pattern requires an independent, third-party investigation,” Mohler wrote.

Russell Moore, president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, [tweeted](#) in response: “I totally agree with this by @albertmohler. A humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention indeed. God have mercy.” (<https://twitter.com/drmoore?lang=en>)

'We know the world is watching'



Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth (Photo: Michael-David Bradford / Wikimedia Commons)

Kevin Ueckert, chair of the Southwestern Seminary board and pastor of First Baptist Church in Georgetown, sent a May 24 email to seminary alumni explaining the trustees' actions.

"Each member of the board of trustees takes seriously the responsibility bestowed upon him or her when elected by the SBC to serve SWBTS and ensure its wellbeing for the future," Ueckert wrote.

"For this reason, the board's decision to move forward with a leadership change was made only after much prayer and thorough discussion related to the current challenges of and future opportunities for our seminary. While we are grateful for Dr. and Mrs. Patterson's longstanding contributions to both SWBTS and the SBC, on the whole, the board feels confident that now is the time for renewed leadership."

Ueckert confirmed Jeffrey Bingham, dean of the seminary's School of Theology, agreed to accept the position of interim president. He expressed his belief Bingham's "leadership and insight will serve us well during this transition" and that he "will bring a fresh perspective" to the role.

“We know the world is watching our response from the SWBTS family and reaction to all that has happened,” Ueckert continued. “Those outside our community have much to say about SWBTS and all it represents, but we remain committed to our core values as unto the Lord, specifically seeking to honor him in everything we do.”

‘Women in the SBC are finding their voices’

On May 6, an [open letter](#) to the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees from Southern Baptist women had appeared online and soon gained about 3,000 signatures expressing concern about Patterson’s comments and actions.



Kyndall Rae
Rothaus

In a May 24 [opinion article](#) written for Baptist News Global, Kendall Rae Rothaus, senior pastor of Lake Shore Baptist Church in Waco, took some consolation in the newfound willingness of Southern Baptist women to speak their minds.

“Southern Baptist women spoke up and something changed. Not enough changed, but something did, and that is a start,” Rothaus wrote. “If nothing else, women in the SBC are finding their voices. Once you start using your

voice, I find the voice has a hard time quieting down. I can't wait to see what the women say next."

In a May 24 email to Southwestern Seminary students, Patterson remained defiant.

"We are of course hurt, but we did not compromise," he wrote. "What matters in all this is not the lives of a couple of old soldiers, but your bright futures for Christ."

Patterson is scheduled to deliver the convention sermon at the SBC annual meeting at Dallas in June. If he withdraws or if messengers to the convention challenge the agenda and ask for a substitute, the alternate preacher is Kie Bowman, pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin and a trustee of Southwestern Seminary.