

# Baylor professor fighting dismissal charge

December 1, 2011

WACO, Texas (ABP) - A Baylor University professor is fighting dismissal charges that supporters say are aimed at silencing a dissident voice in America's Jewish community.

According to published reports, Marc Ellis, university professor of Jewish studies and director of Baylor's Center for Jewish Studies, said during a Nov. 21 speech to the American Academy of Religion he has become a victim of "selectively enforced" policies regarding practices that are routinely overlooked.

Ellis, an expert in Holocaust studies and liberation theology, said former Baylor presidents defended his outspoken opposition to U.S. and Israeli policy toward Palestinians. He claimed current Baylor president and former Bill Clinton prosecutor Kenneth Starr was personally involved in efforts to fire him, a charge denied by Baylor spokesperson Lori Fogleman.

Neither side is discussing details of the charges. Ellis has hired a lawyer to fight dismissal of a tenured professor. Several high-profile individuals have come to his aid. Princeton scholar Cornel West, feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether and Archbishop Desmond Tutu co-sponsored an online [petition](#) on his behalf to "stop persecution" of a dissident voice.

Fogleman told the Waco Tribune-Herald that the charges against Ellis have nothing to do with his exercise of academic freedom, but due to privacy rules she could not go into details without the professor's permission.

Ellis' attorney, Roger Sanders, questioned whether timing of formal charges filed Nov. 18, just three days before Ellis was to be honored by the

10,000-member American Academy of Religion, the world's largest association of scholars in the field of religious studies, was intended to embarrass the professor. Fogleman said the dates were coincidental and that the charges came after a period of due process.

Ellis told the academy that his duties were curtailed after the investigation began. He said all of his classes for the fall semester were canceled unilaterally and he was stymied in efforts to bring West, an acknowledged scholar and frequent commentator on political talk shows, to campus.

Ruether, visiting professor at the Pacific School of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, told the Waco newspaper that Baylor wants to get rid of Ellis because his views on Israel are too controversial. She said she believes Ellis is willing to accept severance, because the environment is unfriendly and he is near retirement age, and she wondered why Baylor didn't negotiate instead of risk notoriety by firing him.

*-Bob Allen is managing editor of Associated Baptist Press.*