

Commentary: The tale of two presidents at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a Southern Baptist Convention seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, has relieved President Paige Patterson of his responsibilities.

Patterson's status has been [in question for weeks](#) after reports surfaced that years ago he advised an abused woman to remain with her husband and forgive him.

Although he initially [stood by his actions](#), Patterson later [issued an apology](#) and SWBTS's Board of Trustees scheduled a special meeting after a letter, signed by thousands of Southern Baptists, [was published](#) that condemned Patterson's actions, comments and ideology.

On Tuesday, while SWBTS trustees were meeting, The Washington Post [reported on allegations](#) that Patterson, then serving as president at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina, told a student who had informed SBTS administrators she had been raped not to report it to the police and to forgive the alleged assailant.

Early Wednesday morning, trustees officially removed Patterson from leadership and [released a statement](#) regarding his status.

Yet, [according to](#) The Washington Post, SWBTS has provided him with a lucrative compensation package that includes housing accommodation on campus and the titles "theologian-in-residence" and "president emeritus."

In the spring of 1994, I was on the campus of SWBTS as an aspiring student.

Growing up in very conservative churches in Oklahoma, I was astounded at the high level of education I was receiving from professors under the leadership of then president, Russell H. Dilday.

President Dilday was a well-respected leader and theologian that had a great rapport with students and admiration from the seminary faculty. Entering into my spring semester as a first-year seminary student, I was happy with my decision to attend Southwestern.

Then, everything changed when the trustees arrived on campus.

During their annual meeting, trustees gave Dilday a vote of confidence as seminary president. However, the next day those same trustees voted to fire Dilday for not offering enough support for a fundamentalist takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention.

As they voted to fire Dilday, they locked the doors of his office, escorted him to the president's house with armed guards, and prohibited him from walking anywhere on campus. They treated him as a criminal whose crime was not being conservative enough in their eyes.

For those still confused about what the Southern Baptist's wars were all about, you are now seeing first-hand the dark shadow moderate-conservatives, moderates and progressives saw rising from those who gained power in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Using the Bible as a tool to gain control over others, Patterson and other Southern Baptists leaders blatantly lied and misrepresented the truth about faithful Baptists in their quest for power and privilege. Nothing would stop their aspirations of reaching the highest levels of authority within the world's largest Protestant denomination.

Once the Southern Baptist Convention was taken over by right-wing conservatives, they quickly began to put their “theological” convictions into practice.

While numerous issues were touted — such as biblical inerrancy, marriage between a man and woman, pastoral authority, and breaking down the wall of separation between church and state — the one issue that seemed to be at the forefront of the SBC’s predominately-male leadership was the submission of females to male authority.

Time and time again, Southern Baptist men passed motions and implemented policies that demeaned women and categorized them as second-class citizens in the kingdom of God.

From wives submitting to their husbands to women not being allowed to teach men, Southern Baptist leaders have waged war on women over the last four decades. In Southern Baptist seminaries, women professors have been fired and [not granted tenure](#) based merely on their gender and skewed interpretations of a few biblical texts.

Therefore, when the news broke about Patterson’s departure at Southwestern, I could not help but think back to that spring semester when I witnessed the evils of right-wing conservative theology on display.

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

As an alumnus (MDivBL, ’97) of SWBTS, I am appalled and ashamed of the actions the trustees took towards Patterson this week. While his removal as president was appropriate, the message trustees sent with the exit package they provided was crystal clear.

As far as Southern Baptist leaders are concerned, the reputation and well-being of their male leaders far outweigh the rights and lives of abused women everywhere, [statements](#) about condemning “all forms of abuse” notwithstanding.

Southern Baptists must correct this evil course they find themselves on today.

With stories like these, evil ideas and practices are warping the message of the gospel — the message of Jesus that seeks to liberate, protect and give salvation to every victim of sinful abuse.

When I read the Gospels, I am quite confident Jesus would have been ministering to the abused women and condemning the male leaders for their sinful behaviors.

For the sake of abused women everywhere — especially those suffering at the hands and oversight of Baptist leaders — I pray a groundswell of Baptists follow the words and actions of Jesus.

Faithful Baptists of all types — conservatives, moderates and progressives — need to rise up, condemn these actions, and demand equality for all people.

Baptists can no longer let misogyny be an acceptable theological practice. We must demand more from our leaders and champion an egalitarian theology that empowers all Baptists.

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