



**Statement to the Board of Trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological
Seminary and to the Southern Baptist Convention
October 16, 2006**

I am honored and privileged to have been elected to serve the Southern Baptist Convention on the board of trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. For the past several years it has been my joy to support the mission and vision for theological education that Southwestern Seminary provides, and it has been my particular pleasure to fund the Wm. Dwight McKissic Student Scholarship, which my friend and our president, Dr. Paige Patterson, named in my honor in spite of my reluctance.

Having served as a trustee for only a few months, I have not had the opportunity to acquaint myself personally with the fine men and women who have answered the call of the convention to serve this fine institution as trustees. I consider it a tremendous blessing to serve alongside such gifted and godly Christian men and women, and I look forward to seeing the hand of God's blessing fall upon Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in the days ahead.

I never anticipated that my service on the Southwestern Board would have had the beginning that I have experienced. As a man who has taken very strong and public stands on issues of moral and social significance in our country, I am familiar with serving the Lord in an atmosphere of controversy. Never did I imagine that my service on the Southwestern Board would bring about the controversy of recent days. The president states his dismay that this controversy has been elevated to a level of public scrutiny. But I did not begin this controversy, and I was surprised to read that the president would characterize my position as "harmful to the churches." When he chose to make such a statement public, I was forced to respond in public. Today, seminary trustees have received a statement from the president, which if adopted, will limit the institution to a position of cessationism.

When Dr. Patterson invited me to preach the seminary chapel service on August 29, 2006, I prayed a great deal about what the Lord would have me to say that might edify the chapel audience and exalt our risen Savior. God put the message that I preached on my heart, and I preached it as God led me to preach. My ministry is one of the Word, and I am unaccustomed to disobedience when God has given me a clear direction for my preaching. I believe, therefore I speak.

I will not reiterate the content of my message. As our president has noted, it is readily available to any person who wishes to purchase it. I will not restate my observations about the way seminary officials responded to my sermon. This is not about Dwight

McKissic, or even about a sermon by Dwight McKissic. This is about the larger Southern Baptist family. More importantly, this about the limitations and freedoms we have as Southern Baptists as it relates to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The issue we now face as a family of Southern Baptists is whether or not we will follow a narrowing path of confessional latitude on theological matters not included in our statement of faith, the Baptist Faith & Message. Our president has gone to great lengths to provide this seminary board with his concerns about the private devotional lives of those of us whose experience differs from his own. He has acted commendably to inform this board of his disposition in these matters. I thank him for it.

The president's statement makes the claim that any private prayer language, if truly private, would never be discussed in Southern Baptist life. I fail to understand this logic. Many practices of a believer occur in private, but are discussed in public. Whether a man is praying in a known language, or in words or sounds that cannot be translated into another language, we all discuss what happens in times of private prayer. Jesus went deep into the Garden of Gethsemane alone. When he was there, he prayed. While he prayed, he groaned. And all of this is recorded in Scripture for us to discuss. The Apostle Paul spoke in private tongues more than anybody. He wrote about it. We discuss it. There is no shame in this, and I do not understand the agenda of those who wish to drive into the shadows those of us who are open to this area of the Spirit's work, as clearly attested in Scripture. To date, I have never explained the exact nature of my own gift or how frequent or in what manner it is manifest in my private devotion. But I must confess that a private prayer language is not always a tongue. Often it is a sigh, a groan, or a moan. Other times it is an expression of bliss, of joy, of gratification that God has met me in a time of need. And still at other times it can sound like pain, like anguish, like the wounded soul of a weary soldier battling against his own sin or the assaults of the enemy against him. The experiences just described have happened to many Baptists who would never classify it as a private prayer language. Sounds as just described are very common in most Black Baptist churches every Sunday, and they also occur in times of private worship.

Now that our president has spoken and asked for this seminary board to adopt a statement to express the seminary's refusal to "endorse in any way, advertise, or commend . . . 'private prayer language'" on the part of seminary personnel or publications, I believe we have a responsibility to act. If this board adopts a statement to exclude fellowship and employment along these lines, we will effectively create of this institution a place unwelcome to men like former professors Jack Gray, James Leo Garrett, and Jack MacGorman, an evangelist like Billy Graham, an author like Jack Taylor, a theologian like Timothy George or Wayne Grudem, a missiologist like Jerry Rankin, or even a pastor like Adrian Rogers, whose wife testified before the entire convention that her husband would never have supported such narrowing trends in Southern Baptist life. Furthermore, if this seminary had this position a short decade ago, it is unlikely that we would have had experienced the gifted leadership of Dr. Ken Hemphill, who is himself open, but cautious, about the continuation of all spiritual gifts. For years, Southwestern Seminary has been a place where students and faculty can study the Scriptures with an

open heart and mind before God's inerrant Word to the possibility that all spiritual gifts, including tongues, did not cease at the end of the apostolic age. If this board of trustees acts according to the counsel of the president, we will have effectively shifted the historic position of Southwestern Seminary from a place of open and diverse theological discussion within the parameters of the Baptist Faith & Message, to a *de facto* cessationist school.

If there is any redeeming virtue in adopting the president's recommendation, it is that finally – once and for all – potential faculty, administrators, students, donors, and the entire Southern Baptist family will know that Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary is not a place where a diversity of views about the work of the Holy Spirit within the history and theology of Baptists is tolerated. I do appreciate the desire of my fellow trustees to be honest and straightforward by adopting a statement clarifying the seminary position.

Had I known at the time of my election to the trustee board that such a shift from openness to narrowness was imminent, I never would have accepted the assignment. It is only because I have sufficient reason to believe that our convention is much more willing to accept different views on the matter of private prayer language than our president seems willing to accept that I will continue my service to all Southern Baptists in the role of a trustee. Over the past few weeks I have received numerous emails, letters, and phone calls from Southern Baptists who affirm my position. In fact, this is why I have publicly stated my desire to request the convention as a whole to address this matter. Until such time as the convention or this board of trustees, and not one party or person within the convention, acts to exclude from fellowship and service those who share my views, I will remain on this seminary board.

I wish to remind my fellow trustees that our convention president, Dr. Frank Page, has gone on record as stating his willingness to affirm the possibility of an interpretation of First Corinthians 14 that is consistent with mine. Yet the statement offered by our president would disqualify Frank Page from serving our seminary faculty. It is clear that Southern Baptists are not of one mind on the matter of private prayer, cessationist theology, or the manifestations of the Spirit. In spite of our differences we keep working together, but it remains to be seen if Southwestern Seminary will reflect this unity in diversity.

There are many other differences that threaten to divide us as a family. On the horizon are the concerns that the Calvinist issue will become another wedge. The faculty at Southwestern Seminary consists of fine men and women, all of whom have signed the Baptist Faith & Message, who represent a wide array of opinions on the issue of Calvinism. Differences about the end times have always been welcome in the Southern Baptist family. Dr. Herschel Hobbs was amillennial in his eschatology. Dr. W.A. Criswell was premillennial. Yet these two men were the best of friends and collaborators in Christ. Some Southern Baptists do not believe that a woman should teach a man in any context, yet members of our own board of trustees sat under the teaching of Mrs. Betty Criswell for years. Women like Beth Moore, who has spoken to men and women on

numerous occasions are welcome in Southern Baptist life to use their gifts within the parameters of scriptural authority. While our president was at Southeastern Seminary, he hosted several women in chapel to speak to men and women. These women, like Theresa Brown of Hickory Grove Baptist Church in Charlotte, NC, were welcome there. Anne Graham Lotz, the daughter of Billy Graham, is a Southern Baptist who continues to fill stadiums with her ministry of teaching. In fact, one of the most articulate professors of theology, and the only woman teaching in our School of Theology, Dr. Dorothy Patterson has spoken at Concord Missionary Baptist Church in Dallas, formerly pastored by my friend and mentor, the late Dr. E.K. Bailey, during the Sunday morning worship hour as the principal speaker. My belief and practice about women in public proclamation has been no different from that of Dr. Paige Patterson when he allowed his wife to speak in a local church at the Sunday morning worship hour with men present.

My practice and belief is consistent with all those who affirm the work of the Spirit and his gifts within men and women, whether five-point Calvinist or not, whether Premillennial or Amillennial, whether Cessationist or Continualist. I will not separate from them because I believe that doing so divides the Body of Christ unnecessarily.

Dr. Patterson has alleged in his paper that my position is “ill-timed, inappropriate, unhelpful, unnecessarily divisive, and contrary to the generally accepted understandings and practices of Southern Baptists.” There are in Southern Baptist life those who are willing to characterize pastors and theologians like me in such a way. My spirit is anything but divisive. My desire has never been to bring division into the Baptist family on issues of third-level concern. I have not promoted private prayer language as necessary or normative for Southern Baptist understanding and practices. I have never hidden my beliefs, and until this day I have not felt unaccepted even by those who disagree with me. Today, however, is different.

I now know what God-called Southern Baptist missionaries must feel when they are told that they are unqualified to serve because of a work of the Spirit in their private devotional life. I know what it must feel like to serve as a leader in our convention, like IMB President Jerry Rankin, when the institution you serve passes policies that would keep you from serving had they been in effect when you began serving. The source of division in Southern Baptist life is not from those of us who want more of God’s empowering presence in our lives, and are willing to seek his power earnestly. The source of division seems to come from those who wish to silence and deny us the freedom to serve in a convention that has never in its history spoken definitively on this matter.

It is time for Southern Baptists to recognize our diversity on these matters. We are, I fear, in danger of allowing the traditions of spiritual vitality – like the Sandy Creek tradition – to be totally lost in Southern Baptist life. A worship tradition, a spiritual life, a power of preaching, church-planting and witness that is born out of such an influence in our convention is the only hope we have for revival in our churches. We must not forsake the deep theological confession of the Charlestonian tradition, who has given us our commitment to doctrinal precision. Neither must we forsake the rich experience of

God's Spirit that was known by the Sandy Creek Baptists. These two groups formed the beginning of our convention, and these two groups must remain together for the sake of the gospel. One will not live without the other.

I am glad to affirm that I am, without apology, a Sandy Creek Baptist. I am open to the work of the Spirit. I affirm a more inclusive role of women in public worship. I believe that a vibrant worship experience, both corporately and privately, are the means by which God intends to bring a fresh touch of his Spirit on our churches and our people. At the same time, I will not move one finger to disfellowship the more Reformed and reserved brethren from the Charleston tradition.

I want to close my letter by stating my unqualified appreciation and deep admiration for Dr. Paige Patterson. He has held up the banner of inerrancy for Southern Baptists without compromise. If it were not for men like him, I would not be a Southern Baptist today. My only hope is that Dr. Patterson will see that it was his labors to preserve the authority of God's Word and his commitment to preach the whole counsel of God that has kept me in this convention. When I stood for inerrancy, I knew no greater friend than Paige Patterson. Today, as I stand for unity within the parameters of inerrancy on the subject of subject of spiritual gifts and private prayer language, I wish to reaffirm that friendship. We have settled that every word of the Bible is God-breathed. What we have to ask now is if that same breath of God will blow across our convention in reviving firms, reminiscent of earlier days in Southern Baptist life. As the late Dr. W.A. Criswell prayed, "Lord, do it again."

My conscience and biblical convictions necessitate that I vote against our president's recommendation, which I will do tomorrow. My heart demands that I express my love for him, which I will do forever.

Sincerely In Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Wm. Dwight McKissic". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Wm. Dwight McKissic, Sr.