

Defending Adam and Eve Splits Trustees at Christian College

Taking an uncompromising stand for the biblical account of man's creation has roiled a small Christian college in eastern Tennessee and led to the resignation of four trustees who favored watering down the Word of God.

The trustees at Bryan College resigned because the school refused to back down from a literal interpretation of the biblical creation account, according to an account Tuesday on .

Controversy erupted at Bryan College in Dayton, Tennessee, earlier this year when the small evangelical school clarified its stance on the creation of man. The statement of belief clarification simply affirmed the traditional biblical position that Adam and Eve were divinely created by God and were not descendants of earlier life forms, the news service said.

"We believe that all humanity is descended from Adam and Eve," the statement said. "They are historical persons created by God in a special formative act, and not from previously existing life forms."

A solid majority of the 12-member board affirmed the statement of belief in February. Shortly thereafter, nearly 300 of the school's 800 students signed a petition a few days later asking the board to reconsider the statement, a Chattanooga newspaper reported.

The simple clarification quickly generated an uproar, as critics accused the school of unfairly disregarding any alternative interpretations of the Genesis account of creation. Several professors announced in May that they would be leaving the school as a result of the creation controversy,

while two other professors went so far as to file a lawsuit against the school, reported.

Now, according to Chattanooga's *Times Free Press*, four members of the college board of trustees have resigned from the school. Trustees Gary Phillips, Jeff Ryan, Mark Senter and James Wolf stepped down last week, citing their discontent with Bryan College President Dr. Stephen Livesay and Board Chairman Col. John Haynes.

Ironically, the controversy erupted at a school named for American statesman William Jennings Bryan, a three-time candidate for president, who argued in favor of the biblical account of creation in the so-called "Scopes monkey trial" in Tennessee in 1925. Bryan won the jury trial, but the result was overturned on a technicality.

As a Christian school, all faculty and staff members must subscribe to Bryan College's eight-point Statement of Belief, which lays out the college's theological stance and scriptural interpretation, Christian News reported. Included in the 80-year-old Statement of Belief is a reference to the creation of man:

"[We believe] that the origin of man was by fiat of God in the act of creation as related in the Book of Genesis; that he was created in the image of God; that he sinned and thereby incurred physical and spiritual death," the statement says.

On July 11, the four disgruntled trustees met behind closed doors with the other Bryan College board members to discuss the statement of belief clarification and the ensuing controversy. However, when the rest of the board defended the school's decisions, the four trustees decided to resign.

"The board majority has made it clear who the conductors are on this train, and it's time for me to step aside and allow them to carry out their vision with those who are unified behind them," Ryan wrote in his letter of resignation, as

quoted in the Chattanooga newspaper. "A line has been crossed in that I cannot continue to support Dr. Livesay or [board] Chairman Haynes."

In a *Times Free Press* reader poll, five of six of the nearly 1,300 respondents by Tuesday morning said that college President Dr. Stephen Livesay should resign. The newspaper reported Saturday that dwindling enrollment and staff layoffs have contributed to dissatisfaction with Livesay's leadership.

Despite the criticism, Chairman Haynes defended the school leadership's decisions, saying a majority of the board supported Bryan College's commitment to the literal creation account.

"There was a strong spirit of support by the majority of the board for the wonderful faculty, administration, and staff at Bryan College and continued support for our Statement of Faith and our historical stand on Creation," Haynes said in a statement, according to the *Times Free Press*. "We are grateful for the time, talents and treasures that have been contributed to Bryan College by each and every member of the board."

In the midst of the continuing controversy, many Christians have voiced support for Bryan College and the school's stand on the literal Creation account.

"Wishing all the best to the College to continue to remain true to God's Word and not be forced to give in to pressures of the media and any persons," one commenter wrote.