

# THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONSERVATIVE RESURGENCE

*The History. The Plan. The Assessment*



PAIGE PATTERSON



PREACH THE WORD.



SOUTHWESTERN  
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

[SWBTS.EDU/PREACHING](http://SWBTS.EDU/PREACHING)

# The Southern Baptist Conservative Resurgence

*The History. The Plan. The Assessment*

## Table of Contents

Theological Drift—World War II–1979 .....	5
Roping the Whirlwind—A Renaissance Plan.....	19
To Rejoice or Not—An Assessment.....	35





# *Theological Drift—World War II–1979*

*Paige Patterson*

*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

*Fort Worth, Texas*

*presidentsoffice@swbts.edu*

Gonna lay down my sword and shield  
Down by the riverside  
Down by the riverside  
Down by the riverside  
Gonna lay down my sword and shield  
Down by the riverside  
Ain't gonna study war no more.

Gonna stick my sword in the golden sand  
Down by the riverside  
Down by the riverside  
Down by the riverside  
Gonna stick my sword in the golden sand  
Down by the riverside  
Gonna study war no more.<sup>1</sup>

Sweet sentiments—but when I stepped off the plane in 1990 in New Orleans, Louisiana, and was handed an invitation from Texas lawyer, Cactus Cagle, to a celebration of victory on Tuesday following the evening session of the Southern Baptist Convention, I was quite certain that the celebration was premature and that the event itself would cause the golden sand to yield its grip on swords, which would once again be wielded in denominational combat.

On the night appointed, exuberant conservatives descended on the famous French coffee shop, Café du Monde.<sup>2</sup> The aroma of café au lait and powdered sugar-covered beignets was discernible several hundred feet from the famous coffee house. That night as the convention parliamentarian led the rejoicing conservatives in singing “Victory in Jesus,” that coffee aroma was to conservatives the aroma of life unto life, but to scores of moderates who had tasted several years of defeat, it became the aroma of death unto death. So monumental was the conflict manifesting itself that

---

1 “Down by the Riverside,” traditional spiritual.

2 Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 196–97. Judge Pressler describes vividly the events of the evening.

Cagle actually petitioned Café du Monde for permission to place a commemorative bronze plaque on the wall—a petition quietly denied. Somehow, the confrontation in the New Orleans French Quarter that night was characteristic of the previous eleven years of life in the Southern Baptist Convention and would chart the course for the next ten years. What lay behind this less than civil war in a convention that had been born out of currents leading to America's Civil War shortly after its birth?

Early American Baptists were even more agrarian than most of their neighbors in the New World. Commoners, “butchers, bakers and candlestick makers,” they by nature adapted marvelously to the spread of both civilization and the gospel to the frontier. In Texas, Baptist preachers carried along with their Bibles, swords of steel, Bowie knives, revolvers, and later repeating rifles. B.H. Carroll, the founder and first president of Southwestern Seminary, was a Texas Ranger who at fifty yards could shoot the ticks off his dog without scratching the dog. Southwestern's second president, Lee Rutland Scarborough, was a cowboy and a great personal evangelist. In 1904, two rival state paper editors, S.A. Hayden and J.B. Cranfill, staged a shoot-out in a railway car on the way to a convention. Zane Mason in *Frontiersmen of the Faith* chronicles a day in the life of Texas Baptist wilderness revivals:

That the frontier Baptists took Indian dangers as a matter of course, seems evident by an incident that took place at Weatherford, Parker County. A revival meeting was in progress at the Grind Stone Baptist Church, being held by Rev. Lee Newton. A party of fifteen mounted Indians passed in a few hundred yards of the place of worship, driving a number of horses. Some ten or more men gave chase, with at least eight men going on to the Indian camp, where “they captured four horses, two saddles, a few blankets, one hat, some quilts, etc.” The Indians fled and the men missed a fight, but felt lifted in spirit by the taking of spoils. This feeling of elation was added to the revival fires and great results were seen; namely, “Twenty-two joined by letter, five by experience and baptism, and a score or more gave unmistakable evidence of their determination to forsake the paths of sin and seek the Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

The first Baptist preacher in Texas, Joseph Bays, apparently arrived in the summer of 1820. Robert Baker describes him:

This tall, powerfully built man looked more like an Indian fighter than the first Baptist preacher of record in Texas. Born in North Carolina into a non-conformist English family, he had been taken as a boy to Kentucky where he was reared in the shadow of Daniel Boone. After the death of his father, his mother taught him to read and write using the Bible as a textbook. In later years, it was noted that he would quote long passages from the Scriptures rarely looking at his open Bible, having memorized the text as a lad. The religious character of his family may be glimpsed in the names given to his brothers. His biblical name (Joseph) was matched by those of his brothers, who were called John, Peter, Isaac, Shadrack, Meshach, and Abednego.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Zane Allen Mason, *Frontiersmen of the Faith: A History of Baptist Pioneer Work in Texas 1865–1885* (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1970), 47–48.

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Baker, *The Blossoming Desert: A Concise History of Texas Baptists* (Waco, TX: Word, 1970), 14.

Two recent novels highlight this pioneer period. In the novella *A Strange Star*, B.H. Cormac is a character patterned after the life of B.H. Carroll and demonstrates vividly the life of Baptists on the frontier. The other novel, *Where the Ground Is Even: A Christmas in the Arizona High Country* by the same author, is a book that not only paints a picture of the push of the gospel to the West but also offers appropriate reading for lost men who wish for adventure but seldom look to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

There is much to criticize in observations characterized by rambunctious behavior, but within this limited picture is the portrait of a freedom-loving, independent, passionate people, who possessed for the most part a compelling, experiential faith given to vivid, emotional expressions. Revival fires swept across the American wilderness. Viewing their better educated, wealthier, and more sophisticated counterparts, who sometimes exhibited elitist airs, these Baptists often were suspicious of the possibly deleterious impact of formal study. Was it not enough to know how to read carefully the Scriptures?

As Bernard Weisberger put it in his critical but classic 1958 volume,

The marriage of human reason and divine guidance was something for the urban few. The country gentlemen of the old landholding upper classes remained Episcopalian, largely by habit. A few social leaders of the rising cities were willing to compromise on Unitarianism, yet even this was true only in Boston to any large extent. But a religion hugged close by patrician Boston was not an answer to the needs of the New England countryside. Lyman Beecher, when he was a Presbyterian minister in the “hub of the universe,” never missed a chance to point out that the Unitarians were aristocrats who ground the faces of the poor. He said that their control of Harvard was “silently putting sentinels in the churches, legislators in the hall and judges on the bench, and scattering everywhere physicians, lawyers and merchants.” Hard-working farmers and self-taught small-town leaders were apt to share Beecher’s resentment over the fact that in the contest for church members, “Unitarianism . . . had a better chance, on the score of *talents, learning, wealth* and popular favor,” than the faithful.<sup>6</sup>

Or again,

For among the props on which revivalism rested, two were fundamental. One was the importance of emotion in religion. The other was the significance of the individual. It was his salvation that would always be the first and foremost goal.

In 1800 two of these props were being hewed out of native timber. A wild, free, singing flavor was introduced itself into religion on the frontier, flinging the gates of redemption brazenly and invitingly ajar. In the flickering light of Kentucky campfires, amid hallelujahs and handclaps, the Great Revival of 1800 was beginning to make a tradition.<sup>7</sup>

But there were other Baptists in the South who recognized the need for ministerial education and were convinced that this would not compromise the faith but rather accentuate and spread the

---

<sup>5</sup> Armour Patterson, *A Strange Star* (Fort Worth: Seminary Hill, 2008) and *Where the Ground Is Even: A Christmas in the Arizona High Country* (Collierville, TN: Innovo, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

faith. In the end, both groups were right. But the second group proposed that a seminary be established in Greenville, South Carolina. The seminary opened in the fall of 1859 with Professors James P. Boyce, John A. Broadus, Basil Manly, Jr., and William Williams instructing twenty-six students.<sup>8</sup>

However, trouble was never far away. The fifth professor was added in 1869. Crawford Howell Toy was named as professor of Old Testament. The Proverbs volume in *The International Critical Commentary* series was published in 1899 and reveals both the incalculable brilliance and the theological drift that characterized Toy. In his first semester at Southern Seminary, he revealed that he had embraced Darwinian thought as well as the Graf-Wellhausen theory on the composition of the Hexateuch.<sup>9</sup> Typical of Toy's position is this observation about Old Testament books:

The name "Moses" stands for legislators of all periods; no psalm or other production ascribed by the tradition to David can be assigned him without examination of its contents; large parts of the books of Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah were certainly not written by the prophets whose names they bear, and Jonah and Daniel had nothing to do with the composition of the books called after them.<sup>10</sup>

By 1879, Toy had been dismissed by trustees, and his romance with the soon-to-be-famous missionary Lottie Moon had withered on the theological vine. Could Toy have misread Boyce and Broadus about the commitments of Southern Seminary? Were Boyce and others so enamored with the genius of Toy that they were careless in their interrogation? Neither seems likely. Whatever the case, the Toy incident presaged the future in Baptist life.

However, Baptists sequestered in the South remained virtually immune to the controversies that racked other denominations prior to World War II. Baptists in the old Confederate states may have suffered from a fortress complex; but if they did thus suffer, it only meant that their evangelistic, revivalistic, church-planting energies took a careful bead on everything inside the fort and proceeded with unparalleled success and growth. There was no paucity of controversy, but these conflicts were about what the Bible says, not about what the Bible is.

The world expanded rapidly with the fall of Germany and the surrender of Japan. Southern Baptists invaded the world with the gospel and were in turn infiltrated by the same world. This infiltration first became evident in changes in perspective within the colleges and universities operated by state Baptist conventions. Mercer University in Georgia, Stetson University in Florida, Wake Forest University in North Carolina, The University of Richmond in Virginia, Samford University in Alabama, and the big tuna, Baylor University in Texas—to name a few—began a steady drift to the left, often under the oversight of an orthodox president and board. In this departure from the faith of their founders, they followed the pattern already well established in America at Yale, Harvard, Brown, etc.

By comity agreement, Baptist colleges and universities were operated by state Baptist conventions, while the national body, the Southern Baptist Convention, was responsible for distinctively theological education through the work of six seminaries regionally located in Louisville, Kentucky; Fort Worth, Texas; New Orleans, Louisiana; Wake Forest, North Carolina; Kansas City, Missouri;

---

8 Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People 1607–1972* (Nashville: Broadman, 1974), 201.

9 *Ibid.*, 302.

10 Crawford H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1977), xix.



and San Francisco, California. Professors in the seminaries began, after World War II, to travel abroad for study, and the seminaries began hiring teachers from beyond the usual fishing ponds, SBC churches.

The reasons for abandonment of the vision of the founding fathers in four of these seminaries is more complex than what I have stated here, but it was abandonment with the two exceptions of Southeastern and Midwestern, which from their inception were to the left of most of their Southern Baptist constituency. Moderates (a strange concoction of classical liberals, neo-orthodox, and self-styled denominational loyalists) sought the high ground in the media by calling the conservative renaissance in the Southern Baptist Convention a “takeover” movement.<sup>11</sup> While this accusation is generally suspect, the moderates had a point in the latter two institutions, which today employ only those who are advocates of biblical inerrancy.

The inevitable followed. First Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia, the founding location of the Southern Baptist Convention, together with First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, perhaps the single most influential church in the developmental days of the Southern Baptist Convention, both shifted away from their conservative base. Meyers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, with its colorful and well known pastor, Carlyle Marney, joined with Texas churches, such as First Baptist Church and University Baptist Church in Austin, Texas, and Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, in adopting postures similar to those visible in the United Methodist Church. The flagship churches of the denomination gradually became First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas; Bellevue Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee; First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Florida; and others.

Evangelicals outside of Southern Baptist life were cognizant of the drift. They knew the drill—loose the denominational boat from the moorings of its founders, and, stripped of rudder and locomotion, the gradual journey of riding the contemporary currents would take the boat to a new home somewhere downstream. John R. Rice turned the torch of *The Sword of the Lord* on Southern Baptists. Sometimes he was not fair, but cleverly cobbled together with sermons on “soul-winning” and reports of revival, the reports of Southern Baptist apostasy had a general ring of truth. And while Southern Baptist leadership either excoriated their former associate or else desperately attempted to ignore this now Independent Baptist hornet, in the days of my youth I went into few offices of Southern Baptist pastors who did not have the latest issue of *The Sword*. Rice graduated to heaven never knowing, I suspect, the extent of his impact on the denomination he had left.

The Evangelical Theological Society was beginning to expand, but Southern Baptist participation was limited to ten or fewer. Hallway discussions of Covenant Theologians and Dispensationists alike decried the apparently helpless condition of Southern Baptists, and no one seriously anticipated a day when these country cousins would crash the ETS party. Dallas Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary became increasingly the home of Southern Baptist students who held to *sola scriptura*.

As the “seamless robe” of Southern Baptist life began to exhibit signs of fraying of the fabric, reform efforts were launched. In the sixties, William “Bill” Powell with associates Gerald Primm, Calvin Capps, M.O. Owens, and Robert Tenery marshaled an effort to rectify the waning

---

11 See for example, Robison James and Gary Leazer, eds. *The Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention: A Brief History* (Decatur, GA: Baptists Today, 1994).

orthodoxy of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>12</sup> Some would adjudicate this venture a failure, but a more prudent conclusion would be that these were all tremors contributing to the seismological shift that would reshape the Southern Baptist Convention landscape beginning in 1979.

Other seismic rumbles included two major controversies regarding publications of the Sunday School Board (now LifeWay) of the SBC. Both, perhaps predictably, focused on the historicity of the early portions of the Genesis narrative. On January 10, 1962, K. Owen White, highly esteemed pastor of the First Baptist Church in Houston, published an article in the *Baptist Standard*, the state Baptist oracle for Texas, provocatively entitled “Death in the Pot.”<sup>13</sup> This essay, based on the incident from the life of Elisha (2 Kings 4:38–41), fingered a recent publication by a Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Old Testament professor, Ralph Elliott, entitled *The Message of Genesis*, which, White alleged, contained serious theological error. One observer put the matter as follows.

If White’s immediate target was the work of Elliot [sic], his article was received enthusiastically by many Baptists in Waxahachie, Texas; Yazoo City, Mississippi; Soddy Daisy, Tennessee; Lizard Lick, North Carolina; and hundreds of other towns. Its ramifications extended to feature the entire superstructure of Southern Baptist Convention denominational institutions and agencies as a seething, noxious pot for which no healing pinch of flour from a prophet’s hand had been forthcoming. This perception included two general features: a general distrust for the pot itself (the bureaucracy), and the suspicion that someone had visited Deutschland and returned with a “Tubingen gourd” and poisoned the life-giving gospel stew that the pot was supposed to be warming.<sup>14</sup>

The second major controversy involved the first volume of the *Broadman Bible Commentary*, edited by noted neo-orthodox scholar Clifton J. Allen and published by the denomination’s publishing house. Other volumes of the commentary would also come under fire, such as Roy Honeycutt’s work on Exodus. But G. Henton Davies’ assessment of Genesis created a Vesuvian eruption on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in June of 1970 in Denver. The debate resulted in a decision by Broadman to reissue the volume on Genesis to be written by well-known scholar Clyde T. Francisco, perceived by many to be one of the more conservative professors at Southern Seminary and in the Southern Baptist Convention. However, most conservatives did not trust him and were not pacified. When Ralph Elliott published his memoirs in 1992, he was unable to conceal his antipathy for Francisco. He considered the latter to be nothing more than a shrewd politician, an accomplished practitioner of rhetorical “doublespeak.”

“Doublespeak” has become an insidious disease within Southern Baptist life. Through the years, the program at Southern Seminary has acquainted students with the best in current research in

---

12 Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die*, 77–78. See also Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 62–77.

13 Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation*, 8. Less known but equally important is Sutton’s dissertation at Southwestern entitled “A Comparison Between the Down Grade Controversy and Tensions over Biblical Inerrancy in the Southern Baptist Convention,” 1982. The dissertation, while perceptive, was almost denied because faculty and administration recognized that the comparison with the Down Grade Controversy would likely further undermine the “moderate” hegemony of Southwestern in the Southern Baptist Convention. They were correct.

14 Paige Patterson, *Anatomy of a Reformation: The Southern Baptist Convention 1978–2004* (Fort Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004), 1.

the given fields of study. Often, however, this was done with an eye and ear for the “gallery” and how much the “church trade” would bear. Professors and students learn to couch their beliefs in acceptable terminology and in holy jargon so that although thinking one thing, the speaker calculated so as to cause the hearer to affirm something else. When I taught at Southern Seminary years ago, we often said to one professor who was particularly gifted at this “doublespeak” game, that if the Southern Baptist Convention should split, he would be the first speaker at both new conventions. . . . It is my personal belief that this doublespeak across the years has contributed to a lack of nurture and growth and is a major factor in the present problems. The basic question is one of integrity rather than the gift of communication.<sup>15</sup>

These public controversies were blazing infernos stoked by a plethora of smaller but nonetheless convincing campfires in the Southern Baptist forest. To mention just one as an example, the faculty of Southern Seminary on August 26, 1976, approved a revealing master’s thesis by Noel Wesley Hollyfield Jr., entitled “A Sociological Analysis of the Degrees of ‘Christian Orthodoxy’ Among Selected Students in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.” Readers who approved this thesis were G. Willis Bennett, Henlee Barnett, and E. Glenn Hinson, the latter of whom became one of the major figures in the controversy. Bill Powell of the conservative *Southern Baptist Journal* discovered the thesis, appended an explanatory sheet to the front of the document, and distributed the treatise widely in the Southern Baptist Convention.

While such statistical evaluations suffer from acknowledged limitation, there was more than sufficient grist for conservative mills in Hollyfield’s work. In a word, not a few denominational fence-straddlers, with one foot firmly dangling on the “denominational loyalty” side of the fence and the other on the side of the integrity of Scripture, were zapped right off the fence and into the burgeoning conservative renaissance because of the distribution of this thesis. Among a host of other startling revelations, Hollyfield, who himself was no conservative, demonstrated that the longer a student remained at Southern Seminary, the less likely he was to embrace the position of Christian orthodoxy. Just as a sampling, asked if they believed that there is life beyond death, 89% of first-year students acquiesced; but, for those in their final year, only 42% could affirm this belief. Among first-year students, 87% had no doubts about the deity of Jesus, but only 63% of third-year students held this view.<sup>16</sup> The deterioration of orthodoxy continued and escalated among doctoral students.

However much Southern Seminary professors of that era were isolated in their carrels on Lexington Road, could they have been blissfully unaware of these developments among the students? There is no evidence that Hollyfield’s findings elicited any chagrin among the seminary’s trustees, administration, or faculty. Had Powell not made the matter public, the thesis would doubtless have suffered the fate of most such Herculean efforts—months of diligence issuing in a product read by three academes and then confined to a crypt in a vertical cemetery to await a resurrection that would likely never come. As it developed, many a common laborer from Georgia to California read

---

15 Ralph H. Elliott, *The “Genesis Controversy” and Continuity in Southern Baptist Chaos: A Eulogy for a Great Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1992), 33–34. This memoir by the embattled professor was intended as a rebuke for conservative Southern Baptists, but the consequence of the volume was to confirm that the conservatives were in a target-rich environment when searching for liberalism in the SBC. As such, it remains one of the eight or ten most important assessments of the era.

16 William A. Powell, Seminary Approved “Orthodoxy” Thesis; pamphlet published by Southern Baptist Journal, n.p.

the only master's thesis he had ever seen. Smoke signals wafted from the Georgia mountains to alert members of the Baptist tribe all over America to the fact that whatever was rotten in Denmark was also failing the theological sniff test at Southern Seminary.

Among conservatives, one could hear hallway chatter like, "Southern Seminary is the mother of all harlots [spiritually and theologically speaking] in the earth, and Midwestern and Southeastern are her daughters, who have exceeded their mother in harlotry." The non-mention of New Orleans, Southwestern, and Golden Gate was no "get out of jail free" pass, but only a general acknowledgment of the relative seriousness of the problem.

About this time, Clayton Sullivan, then professor of philosophy at University of Southern Mississippi, delivered what he undoubtedly hoped would be a devastating kick to the conservative solar plexus. This monograph took the form of an autobiographical interpretation of his journey from Mississippi College to Southern Seminary to an abortive attempt to serve as a pastor bereft of the benefit of much more than a social gospel message denuded of any certainty about the voice of God in sacred literature. Conservatives can perhaps be forgiven for believing that God had "confused the counsel of Ahithophel" (2 Sam 15:31).

This rollicking, sad, and gripping account of 1985 confirmed in a single life all that Hollyfield had alleged in his statistical study. In Sullivan, numbers became incarnate as the audience listened to the colorful philosopher.

As a seminarian I was fortunate because in the 1950s a remarkable cluster of teachers composed Southern Seminary's faculty, persons of intelligence and ability. Duke McCall was the seminary's president. T.C. Smith, Henry Turlington, and Heber Peacock were professors of New Testament. Estill ("Pistol Pete") Jones taught Greek and T.D. Price and Hugh Wamble lectured in church history. Wayne Ward, Dale Moody, and Eric Rust were professors of theology. Henlee Barnette and Guy Ranson taught ethics. Bill Morton and Morris Ashcraft were in archaeology, while Clyde Francisco and J.J. Owens were professors of Old Testament. Wayne Oates excelled in psychology of religion. There were others.<sup>17</sup>

The results were as follows.

As a seminarian, still in my mid-twenties, I found myself baffled. I was more certain of what I didn't believe, Southern Seminary had destroyed my biblical fundamentalism but it had not given me anything viable to take its place. That's the weakness of historical-critical method: its power to destroy exceeds its power to construct. The historical-critical method can give you facts and hypotheses but it cannot give you a vision.<sup>18</sup>

And the finished product of the brewer's art can now be stated.

This anticlericalism was due, in part, to my professors' ignorance of what it means to be a preacher. Most professors under whom I studied at Southern had no prolonged experience in the pastorate. That was unfortunate because they had no appreciation of the role the church plays

---

17 Clayton Sullivan, *Called to Preach Condemned to Survive: The Education of Clayton Sullivan* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 72.

18 *Ibid.*, 79.

in the lives of common people. They had no real understanding of what ministers do in relating to folk in the crises of life when sickness, divorce, tragedy, and death come. Maybe if all my seminary teachers had each conducted a hundred funerals the administration-faculty conflict I am relating would never have taken place. But in any case, because of their anticlericalism and denominational hostility some members of the faculty were not primarily interested in Southern Seminary as a service to the Southern Baptist Convention, as a preparatory school for working pastors. They wanted it to be a divinity school—the Harvard of the evangelical world, with a hyperintellectual approach to the Christian faith. They placed it in a world somehow “above” the Southern Baptist Convention and its fried-chicken-eating churches, a Laputa for Protestants alienated from their roots.<sup>19</sup>

And again.

I think I would have been a better preacher in Tylertown if I had been aware of Eastern faiths and of alternative religious experiences. Maybe I would not have gotten so upset over the “fallen sparrow” problem. For the Christian faith provides no rationale for the savage injustices we see around us and for the differences in talents, opportunities, and circumstances that exist among people. But if religions like Buddhism are right in contending we live not one life but many lives, experiencing human existence from different angles, then life’s injustices and vagaries might be endowed with meaning or purpose that otherwise is impossible.<sup>20</sup>

Another volume that circulated influentially was *The Long Way Home*, John Jewell’s story of loss and recovery of faith.<sup>21</sup> Though not set in a distinctively Southern Baptist setting, Jewell began his wilderness sojourn at William Jewell College, a Missouri Baptist school related to the Southern Baptist Convention. He continued at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School and ended his journey in personal and family disaster. This was just another chapter of a sad book Baptists kept reading.

Moderates attempted several parries, one of which was to feature themselves as supporters of the Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists while intimating that the conservatives lacked commitment. Although this was sometimes an accurate analysis, it rankled the conservative fur, and the backlash came in an infinite variety of forms. My wife found a wolf in sheep’s clothing figurine while shopping on the square in Santa Fe and bought it for me. To my shame I confess that I had a green Southern Seminary pin on it and preeminently exhibited it. With the dawning of the Mohler era at Southern and the better judgment of antiquity, I removed the Southern pin and keep it now as a cogent admonition to myself never to be a wolf in sheep’s clothing but to put first the flock of God to whom I owe so much.

To summarize, the golden years of rapid Southern Baptist expansionism are chronicled well in a little known volume by Charles S. Kelley Jr., the current president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary—an account recording how the denomination of backwoods revivalists called Southern Baptists was catapulted into a position of increasing prominence in America. Isolationism gave way to mission efforts in all fifty states and Canada. Kelley notes in *How Did They Do It? The Story of Southern Baptist Evangelism*:

---

19 Ibid., 86.

20 Ibid., 180.

21 John P. Jewell, *The Long Way Home* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

The genius of Southern Baptist evangelism is not in a particular methodology. It is in the development of an integrated process that finds unchurched people, exposes them to the gospel, bonds them with people in the church, and offers them a logical opportunity to commit their lives to Jesus Christ. Born in the rural South, Southern Baptists were able to glean from the farm a paradigm for evangelism. The paradigm was not the work of a taskforce and it has never been officially adopted and promoted as the way that Southern Baptists do evangelism. This is a paradigm for evangelism that gradually emerged as an expression of Southern Baptist life and theology. You will find it expressed, often unconsciously, in most Southern Baptist churches. The whole, not the individual parts, helped Southern Baptists become the largest Protestant denomination in America.<sup>22</sup>

T.A. Patterson, my father, noted in 1971 prior to the outbreak of the 1979 revolution, the following:

America is still the stronghold of evangelical Christianity. The work of the Lord is being done by men and women with convictions and not by those who are blown about by every wind of doctrine. Those who compromise, tone down, or deny the fundamental truths of God's Word are in no position to help anybody. The Christians of the first century were victorious because they had convictions worth living for and worth dying for. The greatest contribution to world peace is being made by the messengers of the cross of Christ.

Lest the position of Baptists be misunderstood, this additional word is in order: Baptists have always recognized and fought for the right of others to be free in their worship of God. They are glad for anything that others may achieve in bringing glory to God's name. They will make common cause with all other groups on a moral issue so long as no compromise of their convictions is involved, but they will not turn away, if they know it, from teachings of the Holy Scriptures.<sup>23</sup>

The sunny optimism reflected in the judgments of my kinsmen was beginning to erode. The slippage chronicled above, as well as the new prominence of Southern Baptists snatching them as it were from the relative safety of their southern briar patch, all contributed to both internal tensions and external exposures, which would lead to the confrontation of 1979. My denominationally loyal but theologically conservative and pacifistic father had observed the first indications of blackening Southern Baptist skies signaling the advent of the storm. Counseling his then young preacher son, he warned,

Son, like the mainline denominations, Southern Baptists are drifting from the vital faith of the New Testament. In your lifetime, you will face difficult days and excruciating choices. When that hour comes, you must find out where Jesus and the Bible stand, and it is there that you must rivet your feet—whatever the cost. But you must “keep your heart diligently,” because even if you stand where you should, if you do so in lovelessness and bitterness toward even your most implacable enemy, God will withhold His blessings from your life and ministry.

---

22 Charles S. Kelley Jr., *How Did They Do It? The Story of Southern Baptist Evangelism* (Covington, LA: Insight, 1993), 117.

23 Thomas Armour Patterson, *Dear Dr. Pat* (Dallas: Crescendo, 1971), 146.

Though my father's words were the prophetic and perceptive observations of a real man of God and a seasoned pastor and denominational statesman, I do not think that he envisioned the extent of the problem, the range and intensity of the battle, the agony of injury sustained on all sides, or the long-term implications of the outcome. Not until he was already in declining years and, in reality, on his final couch did he know the degree to which his own son would be involved in his prophecy. Thankfully, death shielded him from a merely earthly perspective of all that was to come.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> My father did live long enough to enter the struggle as Sutton points out in his assessment of the 1970 Denver convention. Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation*, 14–15. His assessment of the Denver convention is attached as an appendix.

## Appendix

### T.A. Patterson, “Did SBC Over-React?” *Baptist Standard*, June 17, 1970.

In the recent meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention a great deal of time was given to the discussion of Volume I, *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, published by the Sunday School Board. Criticism focused on the first part of the volume, a commentary on Genesis prepared by G. Hinton Davies, a British writer and teacher. The vote requesting recall and revision of the volume was 5,394 to 2,170—a decisive margin.

Did the convention over-react?

No doubt a small minority would answer affirmatively. Still others would regard the whole episode as “a tempest in a teapot.” The opinion of the majority was indicated by the ballot.

The messengers with whom I talked did not believe they had over-reacted. Among the reasons they gave for their point of view were the following:

For several years, they said, efforts have been made by individuals and small groups within the convention to minimize, if not erase, the distinctive beliefs cherished by most Baptists. Statements appearing in books and assorted periodicals clearly were designed to erode the distinctive doctrines for which Baptists have stood.

Comments, particularly by a few professors, were further confirmation of a disturbing trend. The embattled messengers saw in all this a dangerous drift away from the Word of God. The real point at issue, in their minds, was the integrity of the Holy Scriptures. Feeling that parts of *The Broadman Commentary* were in conflict with the affirmation of Baptists on the inspiration of the Bible, they thought it time for the convention messengers to assert themselves in unmistakable terms.

The aroused messengers had also observed the high esteem in which many modern theologians have been held in some academic circles despite the fact that their one point of agreement is that the Bible is a human production filled with errors. Davies, the author of the commentary on Genesis, appeared to mirror this trend of thought.

The messengers, sated with this fare, saw a chance to express their feelings about theological liberalism.

Convinced that a major factor in the decline of other denominations has been the persistent gnawing away of confidence in biblical infallibility, the messengers did not feel that they should stand idly by while it happened to Baptists. The contrast in Baptist churches that have been characterized by a dynamic and effective ministry when they exalted the Scriptures as God’s inerrant Word was far from lost on the observers.

Messengers were irked by those who insisted that the Davies’ commentary reflected mature scholarship. By implication those who disagree are shallow, superficial exponents of the Scriptures.

To many, such an evaluation denotes intellectual arrogance and pride. This was even more objectionable in light of the fact that among those who protested the commentary were able, well-trained preachers and teachers.

The messengers knew they could speak for no one except themselves, but they wanted to say to their fellow Baptists and to the world, “This is where we stand.” *The Broadman Commentary* afforded the opportunity to express what had built up in their hearts over a period of years. Finally



the silent majority became vocal. They believed their action was justified and that it was not overdone.

Noteworthy in the eye of the observer was the cosmopolitan nature of the no longer silent majority. When the standing vote was taken, evidence was unmistakable that the majority was constituted of a cross section of pastors, teachers, laymen, women—in short, those who make up the membership of the Baptist churches of many states.



# *Roping the Whirlwind—A Renaissance Plan*

*Paige Patterson*

*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

*Fort Worth, Texas*

*presidentsoffice@swbts.edu*

“This Cowboy’s Hat” is classic country-western narrative music. Chris LeDoux popularized the Jake Brooks’ song about two cowboys in a coffee shop. They were approached by a biker gang who were overconfident because of their numerical superiority but inferior in wit. They offered to rip the hat off the cowboy’s head. Cowboy LeDoux responds in song:

You’ll ride a black tornado—Across the western skies  
You’ll rope an ol’ blue norther—And milk it ‘til it’s dry  
Bulldog the Mississippi—and pin its ears down flat  
Long before you take this cowboy’s hat.

The images of riding tornadoes and roping “blue northers” remind me of the halcyon days of college and of the attempt to return the Southern Baptist Convention to the faith of its founding fathers. “Cowboy Chicken” is a game played in rodeos during bull-riding events. The four most courageous cowpokes sit in the middle of the arena at a table playing cards while the angered male of the bovine species crashes around the arena looking for someone to gore or trample. In college on the plains of West Texas, we developed our own version of this adventuresome challenge. Keeping a card table ready, when the tornado sirens sounded, signaling the approach of a black funnel, we ran to a previously specified open field on the northwest side of Abilene, set up the table, and began to play dominoes. The rules for winning had nothing to do with the score. The last to run for the ditch was the winner. Had the annual Darwin Awards been available, we would all have been candidates, but adrenaline junkies can never get enough.

Having attended a western university, I did learn that roping and riding the whirlwind is not just formidable—it is clearly impossible! Yet, this is precisely what conservative Southern Baptists were attempting in June, 1979, when the convention convened in Houston, Texas. Every denominational executive was either liberal or too frightened to buck the ride. All six seminaries were adrift from the Southern Baptist theology that had been the basis of the denomination’s radical growth. Only 20 or so out of more than 200 professors were conservative, and few would sally forth to battle for conservative theology. Every state paper, except the small publication in Indiana, was unsympathetic to conservative concerns. Denominational leaders were adept at doublespeak, just as Ralph Elliott alleged. They knew well the vocabulary expected by the average Southern Baptist and conveniently failed to inform these followers that the definitions had been altered. These leaders

had also become adroit at isolating and humiliating anyone who dared raise questions about the denomination. Only about 5 out of 56 colleges and universities—and these were the smaller, less influential ones—were operating with a biblical worldview.

Against all odds, Bible-honoring Southern Baptists held that the majority of Southern Baptist people and churches believed every syllable of the Bible. The obvious problem was: How do you rope the “norther”? Is there a way to ride the black tornado? About the same time that Southern Baptists were twirling their ropes and testing their spurs, the Missouri Synod Lutherans under the leadership of Robert Preus and others made an apparently successful ride of their tornadic denominational structure. This encouraged conservative Baptist hearts, even if some of the gains secured have not seemed to hold.

Often I am asked, “What was your strategy?” We did have one, of sorts. But honesty compels me to admit that it was more like “The Charge of the Light Brigade” than Normandy. As Alfred, Lord Tennyson, described it:

‘Forward, the Light Brigade!’  
Was there a man dismay’d?  
Not tho’ the soldier knew  
Some one had blunder’d:  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do & die,  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
Volley’d & thunder’d;  
Storm’d at with shot and shell,  
Boldly they rode and well,  
Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the mouth of Hell  
Rode the six hundred.<sup>25</sup>

Just as Balaclava in October, 1854, so was Houston in 1979. Actually, there were some differences. Conservatives did have the majority following, but they held neither the high ground nor the denominational leadership. In March 1967, a young lawyer named Paul Pressler, a layman from Second Baptist Church in Houston, with a hankering to assist conservative students and causes, visited New Orleans Seminary where my wife and I were students. Informed by a mutual friend that he should meet me because we shared similar commitments and concerns, Paul and Nancy

---

25 Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” stanzas 2–3, transcribed from Tennyson’s handwritten composition of 1854, available online at <http://www.nationalcenter.org/ChargeoftheLightBrigade.html>. First published in *The Examiner*, 9 December 1854; later in Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Poems*, annotated by Alfred, Lord Tennyson; ed. Hallam, Lord Tennyson (London: Macmillan, 1908), 2:225–27.

Pressler appeared at our door in Willingham Manor about 10 o'clock one evening. Weary of study, I suggested a trip to Café du Monde for coffee and beignets.

Ah, the stuff of legend! But the truth is that no big plan was hatched that evening. We doubtless became weightier in thought, friendship, and unfortunately, body, but little more. But as the friendship developed, so also the meager plan evolved from a paltry Galapagos finch to a full-blown homo sapien! Here are the basic conclusions that we deduced:

1. All previous attempts at reform had failed. We had to determine why.
2. We had to do our homework. We had to know the bylaws of the convention and use them effectively.
3. We knew that our people were suspicious that the emperor had no clothes, notwithstanding his protests to the contrary. We had to find some courageous souls who would point this out.
4. Education about the actual state of the SBC, as well as on how it functioned, had to be begun and vigorously pressed.
5. Once education progressed, churches had to be convinced to elect and send to the convention each year every allowable messenger.<sup>26</sup>
6. Potential presidents, who enjoyed appointive powers, had to be protected, and kept as long as possible at arm's length from the organizers of the effort.<sup>27</sup>
7. Patience was essential. The whole process would need ten years.<sup>28</sup>

Southern Baptists enjoyed one distinctive advantage that many sister denominations could not boast. Few places on earth provide a structure as thoroughly democratic as that developed by Southern Baptists. Churches are autonomous and more often than not operate with congregational church government.<sup>29</sup> In turn, congregations elect to participate in local associations of churches (usually geographical), in state Baptist associations, and in the nationwide assembly called the Southern Baptist Convention. A single congregation may choose to have fellowship with any or all of these entities. But two concepts are sacred. First, there is no "connectionalism"; and second, while local, state, and national associations are themselves autonomous, under no circumstance does any one of these entities exercise authority over the local congregation. This fierce, robust

---

26 No church is allowed more than ten voting delegates (called "messengers"). Most, however, were eligible for that many, but often no one but the pastor and his wife attended. That practice had to change.

27 This effort fooled no one. Every attentive Baptist knew that Adrian Rogers, Bailey Smith, Jimmy Draper, Edwin Young, Charles Stanley, Jerry Vines, etc. were one with the conservative renaissance. But because denominational press was unable to trace any of these men to organizational meetings, they received a measure of protection from the scathing rebukes aimed at the organizers.

28 This was figured based on the fact that it would take ten years to change the trustee boards of the institutions and agencies of the convention. Also, sustaining any conflict for more than ten years is virtually impossible, as America learned painfully in Vietnam. But the idea of ten years turned out to be laughable. Mistakes and setbacks were not accurately calculated. The renaissance took twenty years. Therein is the most astonishing fact of the conservative movement. The people and churches remained constant and dedicated to the task for twenty years.

29 The advent of "elder rule," either of a single prominent pastor or an oligarchy of elders following something of a Presbyterian model, has emerged in recent years. There are even a few cases now of churches ruled by a board of directors, some of whom may not even be members. In defense of such moves, many of these arose due to the absurdities and embarrassments generated by an abusive, selfish, and godless form of congregationalism developed in many congregations and characterized by the "monthly business meeting" and the hegemony of "bylaws." Advocates of the new departures seem ignorant or unconcerned that, if widely successful, the "cure" will be worse for Baptist futures than the disease.

doctrine of autonomy, while often dangerous if not pinned tightly to biblical mandates, is ultimately what made possible a grassroots referendum in the SBC. In the end, the bigwigs in the SBC—in any generation—bear little resemblance to the bishops of lesser or greater hierarchical churches. They are nothing more than servants with cuff links, luxurious ties, and somewhat overstated titles like the President of Southwestern Seminary.

This loose confederation of churches bound together by common doctrine, passionate purpose, and a unified means of voluntary support has been, even as at this moment, proven fragile.<sup>30</sup> But as fragile as it may be, the results are frequently an astonishment for other fellowships. This is most often noticed on the missions level where the national entity supports more than 5,000 missionaries, who are entirely funded by the SBC, rather than their being burdened to raise their own support. The other venue noted by many is the support of students in the six Southern Baptist seminaries, who receive essentially half the cost of their training.

Governing boards for all SBC entities are selected as follows. Messengers to the annual meeting of the SBC elect a president. The president appoints a Committee on Committees, a layperson and a pastor from each SBC state. This Committee on Committees has only one critical function, the appointment of a Committee on Nominations consisting also of a layperson and a pastor from each state. The Committee on Nominations nominates all trustees for the various SBC entities and the following year recommends these to the SBC for election. The convention in session elects these trustees.<sup>31</sup>

Judge Paul Pressler, brilliant, optimistic, and a student of grassroots politics, led a coterie of pastors and laymen, who canvassed to find in each state a pastor and layman who had both sufficient courage and profound conviction and a willingness to promote the necessary educational efforts and strategic attendance at the annual conventions. A major objective each year was to elect a president who endorsed the concept of biblical inerrancy and who understood the issue and the plan.<sup>32</sup> Assuming that each president made wise appointments, it would take only six years to gain ascendancy on the boards and ten years to have boards consisting only of those committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and other conservative causes.

Conservatives had multiple concerns. In addition to the issue of the reliability of the biblical text, there were uncertainties about where some denominational leaders and professors stood on the nature of the atonement, creation, the resurrection of Christ, abortion, the sanctity of marriage, and a host of other issues. However, early in the contest the decision was made to focus on only one issue. That decision was the most strategic one made by conservatives. Other issues would not be avoided and would be addressed whenever they arose naturally, but only one issue, i.e., the inerrancy of the Bible, would take center stage. There were three essential reasons for this. First,

---

30 The doctrinal agreement is *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. The purpose is somehow to get the saving gospel of Christ to all nations. The means (in its cooperative expression) is known as the Cooperative Program.

31 The genius of this system is that it provides the president of the convention with significant but strictly limited impact on the direction of the convention. In addition to the six seminaries, the entities include the Executive Committee, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the International Mission Board, the North American Mission Board, LifeWay (the publishing arm), and GuideStone (the retirement and insurance arm).

32 These presidents, beginning in 1979, were Adrian Rogers (1979), Bailey Smith (1980–1981), James T. Draper (1982–1983), Charles Stanley (1984–1985), Adrian Rogers (1986–1987), Jerry Vines (1988–1989), Morris Chapman (1990–1991), H. Edwin Young (1992–1993), Jim Henry (1994–1995), Tom Elliff (1996–1997), Paige Patterson (1998–1999), James Merritt (2000–2001), Jack Graham (2002–2003), Bobby Welch (2004–2005), Frank S. Page (2006–2007), and Johnny Hunt (2008–2009). These calculations are based on the election years of each. Rogers, for example, was elected in 1979 but presided over the 1980 convention.

conservatives believed that all issues resolved ultimately into epistemological issues. How does one know for certain the truth of that which he chooses to espouse? The confidence that God had spoken in special revelation—in Christ and in the Bible—provided abundant hope that orthodox doctrine could be ferreted out from the study of Scripture.

Second, the issue of the nature of the Bible was understood by most Southern Baptists. Stop the average Baptist on the streets of Liberal, Kansas, and ask him, “Is the Bible true?” His answer would likely be, “Of course. Is there anyone who does not know that?” Third, by focusing primarily on one issue, moderates would have less wiggle room and would encounter greater difficulty in fogging denominational air. This proved to be the most strategic decision made. As Adrian Rogers classically opined, “Make them argue with the Bible.”<sup>33</sup>

## Educational Advance

The educational advance was a multi-pronged effort. First came various kinds of publications and circulated white papers. *The Southern Baptist Advocate* became the principal mouthpiece of the movement, though there were also other regionally popular journals. Russell Kaemmerling, whose ministry would later suffer tragedy, was the editor for most of the paper’s life. Moderates soon greatly feared him as a keen investigative reporter.

In 1980, Russ Bush and Tom Nettles published *Baptists and the Bible*.<sup>34</sup> The SBC denominational press refused to publish the book, but Moody Press agreed to make it available. The volume was devastating to the moderate cause because it demonstrated that while there were some liberal Baptists, the vast majority of Baptist leaders always endorsed the full reliability of the Bible. Try as they might, the moderates could not counter both the logic and the historiography of Bush and Nettles. Both professors at Southwestern Seminary at the time, these men encountered no small hostility from faculty and administration.

Other books, too numerous to mention, were published. Just one other, relatively unknown now, merits special mention. Robison James, liberal professor at the University of Richmond, proposed three debates, two public and one private, after which a book would be issued entitled *Beyond the Impasse*, which would establish an ideological compromise exhibited by four theologians on each side of the theological divide.<sup>35</sup> Ostensibly, this would set the stage for a convention compromise. The two public debates were held at the University of Richmond and at Southern Seminary. The private discussion held at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, was recorded by LifeWay. Edited by David Dockery and Robison James, who were opposing participants, moderates were also represented by John P. Newport of Southwestern Seminary; Walter Harrelson of Vanderbilt; and Molly Marshall, then a professor at Southern Seminary and now president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kansas. Conservatives included R. Albert Mohler, then

---

33 Roughly commensurate with this effort in the SBC was the organization of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, which did its work from 1977 to 1989. This organization contributed substantively, especially through its publications to the conservative renaissance in the SBC.

34 L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, rev. and expan. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999).

35 Robison B. James and David S. Dockery, eds., *Beyond the Impasse? Scripture, Interpretation, and Theology in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992).

the editor of *The Georgia Baptist Index*; Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School; and Paige Patterson, then the president of Criswell College in Dallas, Texas.

The value of the volume was that for the first time interested parties could view the perspectives in the format of more recent volumes written from a contrasting position. Further, John Newport was comfortable with neither group and consequently was of little assistance to the moderates. When it became apparent that the positions intensely endorsed in the book were irreconcilable, Robison James suggested that publication be abandoned. Knowing that the debate had not gone well for moderates, conservatives pointed to the publishing contract. However, the title was admittedly misleading since the impasse had not been bridged, but had expanded. Therefore, they suggested that the problem be resolved with the addition of an interrogative to the title. The title became a question, answered helpfully by the book.

Another approach was an attempt to survey relatively current literary contributions from professors related to the institutions of Southern Baptists. In the midst of the controversy,

Paige Patterson released a white paper entitled "Evidences." These citations were from neo-orthodox and liberal professors teaching in state and national Baptist institutions. The effort might have had little effect if it had not been for Presnall Wood of the *Baptist Standard* of Texas who saw the paper and responded, citing some of the evidences and alleging that the authors in question had been taken out of context. Wood alleged,

The April 23 editorial of the *Standard* called on Paige Patterson, president of Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, Dallas to name the names of a "a very large contingency in significant denominational posts" who do not in fact any longer believe that the Bible is totally true and do not hold to the faith of Baptist founding fathers.

President Patterson has responded, and a rather extensive news article appears on pages 5, 8, 9 of this issue of the *Standard*. Since some of these charges against some of those named had been made in some of the meetings of the nationally organized group, it is well that the names are made public in order that any Southern Baptist can know and evaluate the charges. It is helpful for the agenda of the charges to move from the general to the specific.<sup>36</sup>

The effect was to create an appetite to view both "Evidences" and the books from which the citations had been plucked. Conservatives sold quite a number of heterodox books that probably would have had little audience otherwise. Just to provide a few examples, note the following from the pen of Glenn Hinson:

Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Jesus expected the return of the Son of Man and the consummation to occur within his own lifetime (Mark 13:30). His "error" was due to prophetic foreshortening. So urgent was his sense of mission, it seemed as if God had to consummate his kingdom immediately.<sup>37</sup>

In a separate volume, Hinson came to this conclusion:

---

36 Presnall Wood, "Serious Charges," in *The Baptist Standard*, 14 May 1980, 6.

37 E. Glenn Hinson, *Jesus Christ* (Wilmington, NC: McGrath, 1977), 76. Hinson was a professor of church history.



The conclusion leaves me with mixed feelings about the applicability of my findings to the church today. Negative sentiments arise out of the way in which early Christianity narrowly defined the boundaries for God's people. Its expansion was related to an exclusivism and intolerance to which I could not subscribe. Early Christianity grew for the same basic reasons that conservative American churches are now growing. If my thesis is correct, the major ecclesiastical and theological forms had much to do with inculcating and conserving this spirit, helping continually to motivate the Empire-wide effort. Indeed, they figured prominently in inciting the effort to enlist not only non-Christians but others who claimed to be Christians—schismatics, heretics, and others. Did the covenant have to be so narrowly defined and applied through Christianity's institutional life?

Today, it would appear, the covenant and thus the mission of the church could be defined with a greater measure of tolerance. This would not necessitate an abandonment of monotheism nor the conviction that some sort of special revelation occurred through Israel and Christ and the church. It might necessitate, however, the acknowledgement that the one God has disclosed himself in particular ways through other cultures and religions besides these.<sup>38</sup>

Temp Sparkman at Midwestern Seminary concluded that children reared in faith needed no repentance:

Our children, truly reared in the faith, do not need to throw off the old life of sin and take on the new life of faith. They have, all along, been choosing faith over sin and choosing sin over faith, and will continue to do so throughout their lives.<sup>39</sup>

Fisher Humphreys of New Orleans Seminary just could not believe that vicarious punishment was either moral or meaningful:

Men today do not ordinarily hold this view of God as simply willing right and wrong, and so they cannot believe that vicarious punishment is either meaningful or moral. No illustration can be given, so far as I can tell, which makes vicarious punishment morally credible to men today. The stories of one soldier punished for another, a child punished for his brother, a man punished for his friend, may be morally praiseworthy from the point of view of the substitute, but they never are acceptable from the point of view of the punisher. It always seems morally outrageous that any judge would require a substitute. However noble the substitute's act might be, the judge's act seems despicable.<sup>40</sup>

Frank Eakin of the University of Richmond broke up the Egyptian army in a shallow bog:

When the J source and the Miriam couplet (Ex. 15:21) are juxtaposed, a probable event unfolds. The Hebrews fleeing Egypt were pursued by the Egyptians using chariots. When the Hebrews confronted a shallow body of water, a strong east wind blew back the water in a ready, shallow area, permitting the Hebrews to cross. When the Egyptians sought to follow, their chariots were too heavy and bogged down. As the horses attempted to pull free, some of

---

38 E. Glenn Hinson, *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981), 287.

39 G. Temp Sparkman, *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God: The Story of Emma* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1983), 25. Sparkman was a professor of Christian education.

40 Fisher Humphreys, *The Death of Christ* (Nashville: Broadman, 1978), 61. Humphreys was a professor of theology.

the Egyptians were thrown into the shallow water and mud. In the confusion some Egyptians died.<sup>41</sup>

C.W. Christian of Baylor opted for Darwin and against being bound in any way by the Bible:

The disparity between Genesis and Darwin, if it comes down to it, has really been decided for all of us in Darwin's favor. If the Scriptures are not then reliable in matters scientific, how can they be trusted in other matters? Furthermore, scientific ("critical") study of the Scriptures has made clear the very human quality of the Bible itself, and has shown the rather surprising variety of outlook, witness, opinion and theology to be found in the Bible. What does this say about its authority? If indeed this book is shot-through with humanity, how can it be relied on as a testimony to faith and a source of doctrine?

And one cannot begin to understand the clearly provable inadequacies of Scripture scientifically and historically, or its peculiar richness and power to move men to worship and to repentance unless he takes this purpose seriously.

But to the question, "Are we bound by the Bible?" we must also answer "No," for within the dialogue of faith are other sources of insight which we must hear. Our theology is not exclusively biblical theology, even if we formally hold to an exclusive biblical authority, because we continually measure, test, and select from biblical insights in the light of the belief of the church and in the light of our experience.<sup>42</sup>

Another method of creating awareness was the *Heart of America Bible Conferences*. Staged in Saint Louis, Louisville, and elsewhere, these conferences brought together some of the best known Southern Baptist pastors to address why they endorsed the inerrancy of the Bible and why they were convinced that Southern Baptists as a whole needed to do the same. The Criswell College, in cooperation with evangelist James Robison, sponsored these events. Later Robison left the movement and became a Charismatic television preacher. But these conferences, plus the annual Pastors' Conference immediately prior to the meeting of the SBC and the School of the Prophets at First Baptist, Dallas, became rallies for Ma and Pa Baptist to hear their favorite preachers expound these verities.

A feminist sociologist unsympathetic to the conservative cause actually wrote one of the most important accounts of the conservative renaissance. In her work *Baptist Battles*, Nancy Ammerman is one of the few to note the significant role of the pulpit. "The most natural form of communication among Southern Baptists is, of course, the pulpit. And in the medium, as we have noted, fundamentalists excelled."<sup>43</sup>

---

41 Frank Eakin, Jr., "The Plague and Crossing of the Sea," *Review and Expositor* 74 (Fall 1977), 478. Eakin was a professor of religion.

42 C.W. Christian, *Shaping Your Faith: A Guide to a Personal Theology* (Waco, TX: Word, 1973), 67, 70, 81. Christian was a professor of religion.

43 Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 181–82. Ammerman is notable for her evenhandedness and scholarly distancing. She is not always fair, but conservatives generally rejoiced in her research more than moderates. Patterson reviewed it for *Christianity Today* (see Appendix A). When protests fell on *Christianity Today* like West Texas hail, Ammerman herself replied with a letter to the editor affirming the accuracy of the review. Another similar monograph, *Uneasy in Babylon* by Baylor professor Barry Hankins, made a concerted effort to be evenhanded, but like Ammerman discovered much greater sociological impetus than is warranted. The "battle" was theological in nature. Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture*, Religion and American Culture Series (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002).

Another publication, *In the Name of the Father* composed by Carl Kell and L. Raymond Camp, focuses on the rhetoric of conservative Southern Baptist preachers, concluding that the conservative cause triumphed primarily because of the persuasiveness of their pulpits. The authors even appended the full text of Jerry Vines' famous sermon, "A Baptist and His Bible," as a prime example of conservative preaching.<sup>44</sup>

As the thermometer in the Baptist kitchen climbed to unprecedented levels, the ensconced moderate leadership of the SBC felt increasing discomfort. Initial efforts simply to quash the belligerent and bellicose country cousins, who were supposed to have remained in their churches and to have funneled money upline, were unsuccessful. A series of efforts to placate the implacable were launched. For example, in the winter of 1982, *Review and Expositor*, then the journal of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, featured "Fundamentalism and the Southern Baptist Convention." Charles Allen, a graduate of Southern who was at that time a Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago, submitted an article entitled "Paige Patterson: Contender for Baptist Sectarianism."

Allen was a high school student in Fayetteville, Arkansas, when I first knew him. Unquestionably one of the most brilliant youths I had ever encountered, he nonetheless had some profoundly troubling personal issues, which he brought to me as his pastor. The *Review and Expositor* article contained considerable critique and analysis with which the subject of the article was less than ecstatic. Nonetheless, Allen's analysis was much more hospitable than the treatment that I had come to expect. Allen also wrote an appendix to the article, which the seminary refused to publish. In it, Allen attributed to his former pastor the fact that he was married and the father of children. He further indicated that while his own beliefs were now considerably different than Patterson's, he knew that this was a matter of personal grief to Patterson—and sometimes even to Allen.<sup>45</sup>

Eleven years later, the same publication actually asked Patterson to provide an article entitled "My Vision for the Twenty-First Century SBC."<sup>46</sup> President Roy Lee Honeycutt was kind enough to publish the article but only with an addendum attempting to set the record straight on an issue with a member of the faculty. Nevertheless, the article was published, and once again the contrast of two positions vying for the hearts of Southern Baptists became ever clearer.

## Two Events

Toward the conclusion of the open conflict, two events occurred with devastating effects on the moderate counterinsurgency, even though one was orchestrated by moderate leadership. The first was the report of the Peace Committee and, the second, the issuance of the Glorieta Statement by the six SBC seminary presidents. June 11–13, 1985, unveiled the granddaddy of all SBC gatherings in Dallas, Texas. An incredible 45,519 messengers clogged highways leading to the convention center, prompting a helicopter traffic reporter to opine, "What the Democratic and Republican National Conventions failed to do, Southern Baptists have done—we have terminal gridlock on Dallas freeways." W. A. Criswell delivered to the Pastors' Conference his now famous message,

---

44 Carl L. Kell and L. Raymond Camp, *In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 131–45.

45 Charles W. Allen, "Paige Patterson: Contender for Baptist Sectarianism," *Review and Expositor* 79 (Winter, 1982): 105–20. Appendix B includes the banned conclusion to Allen's article, which he sent to me.

46 *Review and Expositor* 88 (Winter 1991): 46.

“Whether We Live or Die.”<sup>47</sup> Charles Stanley was reelected to a second term in the largest vote ever taken by Southern Baptists. Tensions were high, arguments frequent, and, reverting to their early twentieth-century style, there were at least two scuffles among the saints. Somehow, the proposal of former convention president Franklin Paschal for a Peace Committee seemed appropriate, even if the committee had about the same possibilities for a peaceful conclusion as a chance meeting between a Cape Buffalo and a male lion.

Such a committee was the last possible hope for moderates and, therefore, not enthusiastically welcomed by conservatives, who understood political compromise only too well. To make matters worse, conservatives were able to place some of their strongest voices on the tribunal, but so the moderates did as well, and the majority on the panel was made up of what one conservative liked to call “the great unwashed.” Conservatives were not greatly encouraged when the final report came two years later in June, 1987, in St. Louis. When the full report arrived, discouraged conservatives met on Monday night to discuss it. There was talk of opposing the report. One conservative, remembering Gideon with Purah, his servant, and their reconnaissance mission to the camp of Midian, suggested that it was a good idea to sample opposition reaction and insisted that conservatives go to the moderates’ coffee gatherings and listen (Jdg 7:10). “They hate the report” was one conservative’s report, and that clearly became the consensus. The next day, the convention overwhelmingly adopted the report. The moderate collapse was almost a *fait accompli*. Pressler reports the key results of the report:

It is the conclusion of the majority of the Peace Committee that the cause of peace within the Southern Baptist Convention will be greatly enhanced by the affirmation of the whole Bible as being not errant in any area of reality.

Therefore we exhort the trustees and administrators of our seminaries and other agencies affiliated with or supported by the Southern Baptist Convention to faithfully discharge their responsibility to carefully preserve the doctrinal integrity of our institutions receiving our support, and only employ professional staff who believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible and that the Bible is truth without any mixture of error.

They then found as follows:

We, as a Peace Committee, have found that most Southern Baptists see truth without any mixture of error for its matter, as meaning, for example, that

1. They believe in direct creation of mankind and therefore they believe Adam and Eve were real persons.
2. They believe the named authors did indeed write the biblical books attributed to them by those books.
3. They believe the miracles described in Scripture did indeed occur as supernatural events in history.
4. They believe that the historical narratives given by biblical authors are indeed accurate and reliable as given by those authors.

---

<sup>47</sup> Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000). Sutton says that Criswell told him that the sermon was the most important message he ever preached (147).

They then issued this charge:

We call upon Southern Baptist institutions to recognize the number of Southern Baptists who believe this interpretation of our confessional statement and, in the future, to build their professional staffs and faculties from those who clearly reflect such dominant convictions and beliefs held by Southern Baptists at large.<sup>48</sup>

Pressler reports that “Paige supported its formation [that of the Peace Committee] much more than I did,” and intimated that I had greater faith than he.<sup>49</sup> The truth is that Pressler almost always surpassed me in faith, confidence, and optimism. In fact, when anyone asked Richard Land how things were going in the convention, he would respond, “Ask Patterson and Pressler. The truth will be halfway between the dark foreboding of Patterson and the unrealistically sunny optimism of Pressler.” There is a sense in which Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, Charles Stanley, W. A. Criswell, Jimmy Draper, Bailey Smith, and others were essential to the return of the convention to the faith of the founding fathers, but any rendition of the story that did not grant primary focus to the layman, Judge Paul Pressler, would be hopelessly misleading.

The addition of an outside parliamentarian is also noteworthy. Attempting to have a town hall meeting with anywhere from 8,000 to 45,000 participants requires patience, some special rules, and courage. Few attempt this with groups of any size. In the 1986 convention, President Charles Stanley, challenged by a lawsuit from Robert S. Crowder, called an organization of professional parliamentarians and asked for the best. That person turned out to be a Christian Church minister, Barry McCarty. McCarty recognized the challenge and took to it like a polar bear to an ice float. First in the convention of 1986, and until today, McCarty has skillfully guided presidents through the convoluted maneuverings of such town meetings. Any assessment of the conservative strategy and triumph would be incomplete without recognizing the genius of Charles Stanley’s decision and the sure and sane leadership of a Christian Church preacher and professor.

One final event, perhaps the most bizarre of all, must be chronicled. When the Peace Committee convened a meeting on October 20–22, 1986, at the Baptist Conference Center in Glorieta, New Mexico, part of the purpose was to meet for prayer with the agency heads, including the six seminary presidents, four of whom were moderate to liberal with William Crews of Golden Gate and Landrum Leavell of New Orleans relatively quiet conservatives. By this time it had become obvious to almost everyone in Southern Baptist life that the six seminaries were the chief bone lodged in the Southern Baptist trachea. Consequently, sensitive to growing pressure, the six presidents decided to issue a statement, which, in part, declared,

We believe that the Bible is fully inspired; it is “God breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16), utterly unique. No other book or collection of books can justify that claim. The sixty-six books of the Bible are not errant in any area of reality. We hold to their infallible power and binding authority.<sup>50</sup>

---

48 Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die: One Southern Baptist's Journey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 138–39.

49 *Ibid.*, 272.

50 “The Glorieta Statement of the Seminary Presidents,” in Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation*, 166.

To assess the reaction of both conservative and moderates to this declaration is not so difficult. But to say which coterie was the more stunned lies beyond my ability. I will not soon forget the look on the face of Milton Ferguson (president at Midwestern Seminary) when I shared with him that I could not have signed the statement since grammar is part of “reality.” I did not think grammar had to be perfect to be a carriage for inerrant truth. The faculties at Midwestern, Southern, Southeastern, and, to some degree, Southwestern were furious with their presidents, certain that the presidents had bequeathed the family farm to the fundamentalist country cousins. Conservatives, on the other hand, found the statement totally inconsistent with practices at most of the seminaries.

Whatever the reactions, the tide now turned decisively in favor of conservatives. Within a short time, five of the six seminary presidents had resigned, retired, or been released. Only an inerrantist, William Crews at Golden Gate Seminary, remained. All six seminaries now had boards with a majority of conservatives, presidents who endorsed the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, and within their faculties growing contingencies who had the same commitments. Soon every agency of the convention had named conservative leaders, and gradually even the editors of state paper news distribution began to change. A long, complicated, difficult—and often painful—safari was in sight of the home from which it had wandered far.

## Appendix A

*Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention.* By Nancy Tatom Ammerman. Rutgers University Press, 1990. 388 pages. Softcover, \$23.95.

The most unfortunate aspect of *Baptist Battles* is that it will not make its author a millionaire. If only this sociological evaluation of Southern Baptist life could sell 5 million copies—Rutgers would be astonished, Ammerman would be basking at Club Med in Phuket, and I would be ecstatic!

A brilliant sociologist teaching in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Nancy Ammerman is a self-confessed Southern Baptist moderate and feminist. She was a prominent participant in the August meeting of moderates in Atlanta that sought ways of stifling the conservative resurgence in Southern Baptist life.

The author's purpose is to demonstrate that the divisions within Southern Baptist life reflect “deep cultural divisions separating people who have responded differently to that cultural change.” So, why would I, an ardent advocate of this conservative resurgence, volunteer my services as manager of sales and promotion to Rutgers University Press? My spirit of volunteerism is even more curious in light of the inaccuracies and misrepresentations of conservatives and their views that crop up occasionally in the book.

Neither Sherlock Holmes nor Jessica Fletcher will be required to resolve this curiosity. Astonishingly, Ammerman's research reveals that just about every concern that conservative Southern Baptists have voiced over the last 30 years is justified!

Consider the following admissions to which Ammerman is driven by her research: 1) The national bureaucracy in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) had become totally pervasive by 1978, with the staffs and trustees of the agencies and institutions overwhelmingly moderate in their sympathies. 2) Even today the vast majority of Southern Baptists are conservatives. 3) Moderates in the SBC tend to be more liberal than their conservative counterparts on ethical issues, with many

moderates imbibing alcohol and even swearing. 4) Moderates attach less importance to evangelism and “soul winning” than do conservatives. 5) Moderates in Southern Baptist life are almost exclusively from a white-collar, professional, elitist class, while conservatives are broadly distributed among all kinds of peoples. 6) Influential moderates tend to be from large, historic churches, whereas conservative leadership emerges from a coalition of the smaller churches and the so-called superchurches. 7) During the fifties and sixties, conservative pastors were isolated and excluded from channels of leadership in the denomination.

Concerning the denomination’s educational coterie, Ammerman says, “It is little wonder that the Convention’s colleges and seminaries had created both the ideology and the social networks, both the sources of meaning and belonging, out of which the old establishment was constructed. They were largely responsible for the changes in belief fundamentalists sought to oppose. Our statistical testing . . . confirmed what fundamentalists already knew—their foremost enemy was the denomination’s education system” (163).

The mystery is solved. What conservatives have known and alleged is now documented and rehearsed, not from a conservative pen, but from an honest, forthright moderate. With all of its warts and foibles, the conservative resurgence seems more than justified in its efforts given these admissions.

Ammerman also points to certain conservative advantages in the 12-year struggle, which have been largely unnoticed even by seasoned observers. First, the vast superiority of conservatives in the pulpit has given them more than just a leg up in a preaching-oriented denomination. Second, Ammerman notes the overwhelmingly adopted statement of the Peace Committee as effectively authenticating the claims of conservatives. Also, her research suggesting that 88 percent of all Southern Baptists are either self-identified fundamentalists, fundamentalist-conservatives, or conservatives, as compared with only 17 percent moderate-conservatives or self-identified moderates, is probably the most accurate assessment to date.

The book has its mistakes, but most of these are unrelated to the author’s research. The errors usually occur when she shifts to her own opinions or chronicles the usual rhetoric concerning such demonstrably false accusations as conservative mass busing of voters of the allegations that conservatives attempt to undermine individual freedom.

Ammerman stooped to the reporting of moderate paranoia about classroom lectures being clandestinely taped and then shipped off to Dallas. But this is the worst of it: Ammerman does not succeed in her purpose of demonstrating that the current controversy arises out of cultural differences. But the book is still invaluable.

Every “movement conservative” in the Southern Baptist fellowship should purchase two copies of this book. Read one and mark it carefully. It will prove extraordinarily helpful. Give the other copy to a confused Baptist whose theology tends to be orthodox but for whatever reasons has aligned himself with the moderates. If he can still waltz with the moderates after reading this book, then let the orchestra play!

Paige Patterson

Originally published in *Christianity Today*, 35 (Jan 14, 1991): 33–35.

## Appendix B

The following is the appendix in Charles W. Allen's paper, "Paige Patterson: Contender for Baptist Sectarianism, *Fides Quaerens Superare*."

### Paige Patterson: An Appreciation

Every once in a while, especially when writing applications that require a biographical sketch, I will stumble on a few memories that shock me with the realization that I did actually do some thinking before Paige Patterson. I have little problem recalling what I was like in the seventh or eighth grade, but the closer I get to my junior year in high school—the year Paige came to be our pastor—the harder it is to recall favorite ideas, hobbies, feelings, and so on. I think it is because I was on the way to a set of values when suddenly I switched directions and started toward another set. So much of my character then is hard to recall because it got rearranged before it could take. After Paige came, I woke up. Either I became a young adult soon afterward, or I haven't yet, but I found a vocation that so far hasn't let me down, and for that Paige is largely responsible.

We wanted a pastor who would get all our college students back, but we never got them back. What we got was Paige Patterson, and who can say what I or close to thirty other people near my age would be doing now? It probably wouldn't be ministry. I know it wouldn't be in my case.

It's hard to say, because high school students, like theologians, are always a little unrealistic, but I at least thought I was just about through with Southern Baptists, and maybe Christianity too. Then we got this evangelistic pastor, and I knew I would be leaving soon—and decided to tell him why. So I dropped by one Sunday afternoon and stayed for five years—talking with and learning from my friend and mentor.

Through Paige I came to recognize what the grace of God was, who Jesus Christ is, and what both were making out of me. Not that my conversion hadn't been genuine enough for an eight-year-old and a re-dedicated ten-year-old, but my real awakening took place at sixteen. Paige was the one who pointed out that my hermeneutic—accept the Bible when you like what it says, reject it when you don't—left something to be desired. He made me realize that wanting to know the truth was more important than trying to prove you already know it—especially when you pray. And he showed me that evangelism was only sharing Good News, and that I could do it too, if I would. Some of the best experiences of my life have come out of sharing Christ with someone else, and why for the life of me I don't do it more often now, I can't explain except by foolishness. Paige still does, and often—and I envy him.

Despite our theological differences now—and they are many and serious—I still feel an unpayable debt to him. He made me grow up, and sometimes I grieve over not turning out exactly as he had hoped. I suppose I still nourish the hope that some day we will both have grown to the point where he will like what I will have become. In the meantime I can only alternate between criticism and praise, following the lessons he taught me then as I can best apply them to today. But we still call each other friends.

Paige made himself available to young people through many varied means. When he first came he taught our training union for one quarter, teaching us about personal evangelism through role-playing and finally through sending us out in pairs one night. He vigorously supported starting a coffee-house ministry in Fayetteville, in an area where most of the bars were located,



and encouraged us to become involved with people who really weren't our kind. When several of us dedicated our lives to Christian ministry, he instituted a Saturday morning session for us, appropriately called "Table Talk." There I first learned such terms as "existentialism," "demythologizing," "eschatology," "logical positivism," "linguistic analysis," "neo-orthodoxy," "evangelical," "process philosophy," "JEDP," "Q," and so on. For high school and college students, that made us sound pretty sophisticated. Paige also started a Thursday night Bible study for college students in his home, where we often stayed until quite late. He and Dorothy also accompanied us on each of our four mission tours. (By the way, Dorothy could always hold her own in a theological discussion, and sometimes she had to correct Paige.) All of this is to say that his interest in us was obvious, and bonds of love and friendship quickly developed.

So now when I criticize him, it hurts us both. It hurts me because what I am actually criticizing is a period in my life which I can never disown. It hurts Paige because he had high hopes for me to become a major theologian who would help defend conservative evangelicalism. I still confess to having high hopes myself, but I got them because Paige first believed in me. Of course, part of me is compelled to criticize, too—again, I think, because we were so close.

What I would like people to come away with after reading this, is a perception of the man that differs from one they might get just from reading *The Shophar* or various news releases. Probably no one can be reduced to labels, and I am most acutely aware of this when I think of Paige. Somehow, despite all the legitimate objections to his theology and behavior, I still wish everyone could *like* him.



## *To Rejoice or Not—An Assessment*

Paige Patterson

*Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

*Fort Worth, Texas*

*presidentsoffice@swbts.edu*

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,  
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;  
Lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him,  
And He turn away His wrath from him  
(Prov 24:17-18, NKJV).

There are nobler reasons for this prohibition than that stated in the last words. But as it stands, the author reveals his knowledge of the character of the God he serves. Of course, there is a fine line between rejoicing in victory, especially if God-given, and stepping across that razor thin line to celebrating another's loss. Every moderate arraying himself against the conservatives in what Glenna Whitley, writing in *D Magazine*, styled the "Baptist Holy War," is the object of God's love and compassionate longsuffering no less than conservatives.<sup>51</sup> Who could construe rejoicing over the sorrow of one who is the object of God's love as healthy action?

While I do believe that the reality of human sin demands acceptance of the concept of a just war, I, nevertheless, cannot imagine a genuine follower of Christ as a warmonger. There was never a war without agonizing pain, incalculable loss, wrenching sorrow, and devastating heartbreak. Religious conflicts may not maim the physical body, though that has also happened, but spiritual and emotional injury can be even more traumatic. I did and do rejoice over the return of Southern Baptists to a biblical theology and Christian worldview. But that rejoicing always has to be tempered sternly with an understanding of the suffering on both sides of the aisle.

When I consider moderate foes, the ever forthright Cecil Sherman, the creative Kenneth Chafin, the gifted Duke McCall, and the amiable Milton Ferguson, I do not feel sorry for them. They and hundreds like them would not wish such condescension.<sup>52</sup> But I do regret profoundly

---

51 Glenna Whitley, "Baptist Holy War," *D Magazine* (January 1991), [http://www.dmagazine.com/Home/1991/01/01/BAPTIST\\_HOLY\\_WAR.aspx..](http://www.dmagazine.com/Home/1991/01/01/BAPTIST_HOLY_WAR.aspx..) (Accessed 8 April 2010).

52 Carl L. Kell, ed., *Exiled: Voices of Southern Baptist Convention Holy War* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006). This volume contains a number of testimonies from known and obscure moderates who felt keenly their exodus from Southern Baptist life. Another such volume, which appeared in 1994, contained essays written by disaffected former professors at Southeastern Seminary: Thomas A. Bland Jr., ed. *Servant Songs: Reflections on the History and Mission of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950-1988* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994).

that they, as well as their wives and children, suffered. Luther, Calvin, and the Reformers were right in what they had to do, but the casualties on both Catholic and Protestant sides surely do not represent what God intended. One, of course, cannot fail to recognize that there are consequences associated with beliefs and behavior. But in the end, we are all reduced to the plea of the malefactor on the cross, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Please permit then the salute of a dying soldier to other noble warriors who fought well though in a different uniform.

Religious wars often divide families. Wayne Ward, cousin to my wife and professor of theology for a lifetime at Southern Seminary, taught a summer class in contemporary theology at New Orleans Seminary. This class remains my favorite above any I ever took. Love has remained in our family, though Ward walked on a different side than the rest of our family. Perhaps while such division is tragic on either side of the divide, I tend to find it more distasteful among those claiming to be people of the book, especially when it involves me.

## Thanksgiving

That said, many were the blessings of God for Southern Baptists. First, six seminaries are now all headed in the same direction just as a plethora of other institutions founded by Bible-loving believers had been virtually lost to the faith and now have been pulled back from the edge of fatal compromise by a free people determined to set the course of the schools they generously supported. Today, I am not aware of a faculty member who questions the inerrancy of the Bible at any of the six seminaries. Wide ranges of interpretation are discernible and debate is sometimes vigorous. But all appear to be orthodox, evangelical, Baptist followers of Christ.

There were two bonuses. In the heat of the controversy, there was little hope of salvaging more than five of the state Baptist colleges and universities. Astonishingly, fifteen or more of these institutions have remained Baptist to the core or have returned to the faith after straying for a brief time. But there was more.

Beginning in September 1962, Luther Rice Seminary opened in Florida. Ahead of its time in various forms of distance education and intensely unpopular among its accredited, more avant-garde sister Baptist seminaries, thousands enrolled across the years. Because LRS was led altogether by men committed to the Bible, she exercised an influence on the conservative revitalization far beyond what her resources would have dictated.

In 1969, W. A. Criswell, far-famed pastor at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, established The Criswell Bible Institute, modeled much after Moody Bible Institute. Eventually, the school became The Criswell College. An astonishingly large number of the leaders of the conservative movement in the SBC came from the faculty and graduates of this fledgling college.

In 1971, B. Gray Allison, a widely known professor of evangelism at New Orleans Seminary, led in the establishment of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, located first in Little Rock and then associated with Adrian Rogers and the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, with an extension campus in Schenectady, New York. Well-known for their emphasis on witness and personal evangelism, Mid-America joined with the Criswell College and Luther Rice Seminary to provide for the denomination pastors who did not compromise on the Word of God. Any fair estimate of the conservative renaissance in the SBC would have acknowledged the profound impact of these schools.

In the midst of this controversy, Southern Baptists found themselves suddenly in the bright lights of the national media. With more than 30,000 churches and twelve million confessing members, Southern Baptists had usually operated beneath the radar of the general public. None were prepared to find themselves center stage, and few handled the press well. All of our controversies had taken place beneath the domes of our own teapots. Fiery rhetoric and vigorous pulpit-shattering gestures were followed by coffee with the opponents and boisterous laughter about the goldfish with which some teen had seeded the baptistery waters. On the big stage of history, we stumbled often. For example, in 1984 Roy L. Honeycutt preached a sermon at Southern's convocation on "holy war."<sup>53</sup> Within minutes of his conclusion the secular press contacted the president of the Criswell College, then a young man in his mid-thirties, for comment. Instead of simply saying, "I cannot comment. I was not there," the combatant replied that this was simply "another case of denominational fascism." While my reply was neither godly nor in any sense helpful, it meant paychecks for paparazzi and was promptly exhibited in both secular and ecclesiastical media throughout the United States. The letter of apology to Honeycutt, who was less than innocent in this incident, was, of course, carried by only one paper, though copied to many. Hundreds of other examples could be cited, but the point is made with my own faux pas.

This new notoriety was not without significance. As time progressed, so hopefully did wisdom come in handling representatives of the press. Southern Baptists became widely known, and often that was a curse when conservatives were painted with the brush of scrappy pugilists out to return society to the Ordovician era. But there were also remarkable blessings.

Sometime in the mid-eighties, Michael Bryan called the president of The Criswell College in Dallas, explaining that he had a contract with Random House to write a book on evangelicals for the general public. Bryan confessed that, though he had some good ideas, he did not know these people from the inside. Having noted an article about the president at Criswell College in the Houston paper and charmed by the unassailable fact that the president was a cowboy and of all things that he wore boots every day, Bryan had concluded that this picture was certainly typical of backwoods evangelicals. He could "feel" this book coming together as he asked to come to the college for six months and literally live among the students and professors. Shocked to be immediately granted his request, Bryan informed the college president that he was an atheist and a graduate of Cornell.

Criswell College president Paige Patterson opened the doors of the school, no strings attached. I could attend classes, trustee meetings, prayer meetings, go out with students and professors on their evangelizing assignments, take a mission trip overseas. But there was a catch of sorts. Patterson confided that I would inevitably become a project at the school, "prime meat for the headhunters . . . . We have some Green Berets around here," he announced gleefully. "How will you handle it when you walk into a prayer meeting and twenty people are on their knees praying for your everlasting soul?"<sup>54</sup>

The inside cover of the book prepares the reader for the literary journey to follow.

---

53 Roy L. Honeycutt Jr., "To Your Tents O Israel!" 28 August 1984, "Document 29: Roy Honeycutt's 'Holy War' Convocation Address at Southern Seminary," in *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War*, ed. Walter B. Shurden and Randy Shepley (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 124-34.

54 Mike Bryan, *Chapter and Verse: A Skeptic Revisits Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1991), back cover.

Fifty million Americans call themselves evangelical Christians—people who believe the Bible is the inspired word of God. Politically, they are known as the religious right. In *Chapter and Verse: A Skeptic Revisits Christianity*, author Mike Bryan, a lapsed Protestant on the religious left, enrolls as a student at Criswell College, a leading evangelical Bible school in Dallas.

What Bryan found there surprised him and will fascinate true believers, agnostics, and even atheists: Criswell was anything but a haven for fundamentalist hypocrites, shysters, or their pathetic dupes. In fact, its students and faculty concur with their less-devoted brethren that the shenanigans of televangelists like Jimmy Swaggart or Jim and Tammy Bakker are an embarrassment to any informed Christian. Instead, what Mike Bryan discovered at Criswell were steadfast, unwavering followers of serious, intelligent religious tenets determined to hold the line against accommodation, be it in the form of “liberal” Christian doctrines, New Age journeys, or burgeoning deism—wherein God is a “warm fuzzy” who makes no demands, leaves us alone, and in the final analysis, doesn’t matter. These religious purists see Jesus Christ as the only true way and light. And pity us for not seeing this light, too.<sup>55</sup>

When Bryan’s volume appeared in 1991, it contained some criticism. But on the whole, the monograph was an endorsement that the Criswell College could not have purchased with millions spent in advertising. Toward the end of the book, Bryan notes,

Then he [Patterson] caught me off-guard and introduced me from the dais. “Mike’s an atheist”—momentarily ashamed, I called out “Agnostic!” by way of correction, and he accepted that—“and I know he won’t mind when we pray for him. He’s a dear person, and many of us have come to love him.”

I was annoyed—with myself. Patterson had caught me off-guard with his “atheist” designation and induced me into the semantic emendation, but he was right. We’re functional atheists, no matter what the polls show. And his sally convinced me of one thing. I’d never attempt to put one over on Paige Patterson. I had always assumed that his unfailing kindness to me during my term at his college was to some extent political. I was writing a book about Criswell College, after all, for a partially secular audience, presumably. Why would he want to antagonize me? But I had never taken his generous and undoctinaire attitude, shared by almost everyone else at the school, as mainly calculated. It was a Christian attitude, and it was real. I give myself credit for knowing the difference. I took his introduction of me as the pet atheist at Criswell to be another mark of his irrepressible mischievousness and genuine interest in all folks and their diverse ways—a mark of his personality, not his faith. The same holds true for Danny Akin, Jim Parker, Keith Eitel, and just about everyone else I’ve mentioned in this narrative. One thing I had learned at Criswell: theological dogmatism can be passionately espoused by personalities who are not in the least doctrinaire.

This had puzzled me. I had asked several people at the school why, if they believed I was so wrong in my beliefs I am going to hell, I didn’t feel this condemnation on anything but an intellectual level. Why wouldn’t it interrupt a friendship and, for that matter, the whole flow of living in the wide world in which most of the people encountered would also be going to hell.

---

55 Ibid., inside book jacket.

Patterson answered me this way: “While there is a clear divide, as far as we are concerned, between those who are saved and those who are lost, the clear divide is purely the grace of God. It is no matter of character within us that makes us superior to anybody. We just don’t see any big difference, we really don’t. We are both sinners who have rebelled against God, and just by His precious grace I happen to be forgiven. I have accepted His forgiveness.

‘Also, and however falteringly we follow the faith we claim to believe, we do believe that every individual, lost or saved, is the handiwork of God—to get technical, he is the imago dei—the image of God. And as such this person is the object of God’s most intense love, and that being the case, for me to be anything other than totally accepting, not to reach out to him with every fiber of my own being, would be to deny the faith. It would be failure to extend to others the same kindness and love that God has extended to me.

‘One of the things that happens to you in conversion is that there’s a fundamental change in your attitude toward people when the Lord moves into your life. You don’t any longer see them as the girl who sells you the hamburger or the guy who changes your tires. You see each of them as very precious people, each of who has a fascinating personal story. You get to where it’s fun to be with them, see what makes them tick.’<sup>56</sup>

Grateful for the assessment and for both hardback and paper editions of the book, I have to say that the opportunity to attempt in a faltering fashion to show the love of Christ and to speak the gospel of Christ to this man and to many other secularists was to me the most important consequence of the confrontation. In 2003, Bryan published a fascinating novel with Pantheon Books, a division of Random House. The intriguing title of the book is *The Afterword*.<sup>57</sup> The copy he sent to me is inscribed as follows. “To Paige, from a guy who’s still trying to get it right! Mike Bryan.” As I read the novel, I thought I discerned a man who had become a follower of Jesus. One night over supper in New York City, I asked if I read it right. Mike smiled broadly and changed the subject.

During the convention presidency of Tom Elliff (1996 to 1998), the opportunity arose to accomplish a critical task that conservatives had reserved almost to the end of the contest. The confessional document reflecting Southern Baptists is called the Baptist Faith and Message. As such, the confession was first adopted in 1925 as a revision of the New Hampshire Confession of Faith of 1833.<sup>58</sup> Emended again in 1963, under the direction of denominational leaders and theologians, some of whom leaned toward neo-orthodox perspectives, the document was vague to conservatives at several points.

Tom and Jeannie Elliff have a large family and strong convictions about the nature of the family. Elliff had noted the absence of an article on the family in the Baptist Faith and Message. In 1997, Elliff appointed a committee who were charged with bringing an amendment on the family for the convention to approve in 1998.<sup>59</sup> The following amendment was hotly debated at the 1998 convention in Salt Lake City but overwhelmingly passed by the messengers, adding Article XVIII to the confession.

---

56 Ibid., 312-14.

57 Mike Bryan, *The Afterword* (New York: Pantheon, 2003).

58 William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1969), 390-92.

59 The committee chaired by Anthony Jordan of Oklahoma included Bill Elliff, Richard Land, Mary Mohler, Dorothy Patterson, O.D. “Damon” Shook, and John Sullivan.

## Article XVIII. The Family (1998 Amendment)

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel for sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love

his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.

Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-20; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 1:26-28; Psalms 51:5; 78:1-8; 127; 128; 139:13-16; Proverbs 1:8; 5:15-20; 6:20-22; 12:4; 13:24; 14:1; 17:6; 18:22; 22:6,15; 23:13-14; 24:3; 29:15,17; 31:10-31; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 9:9; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 18:2-5; 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:8,14; 2 Timothy 1:3-5; Titus 2:3-5; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7.<sup>60</sup>

Just when the secular press found other stories more interesting, the phrase, "A wife is to submit graciously to the servant leadership of her husband," unleashed the press in a manner resembling the eruption of Krakatoa. Dorothy Patterson, who, with committee input and approval, largely penned the commentary provided to the convention participants at the time of the vote, anticipated this, remarking in the commentary:

Doctrine and practice, whether in the home or the church, are not to be determined according to modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends or according to personal emotional whims; rather, Scripture is to be the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).<sup>61</sup>

Southern Baptists were back in the news, and seemingly every feminist in the world was on the warpath. Like it or hate it, Southern Baptists were now on record with an article of faith strongly

---

60 Baptist Faith and Message 2000, Article XVIII (1998 Amendment).

61 "Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee," in *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Executive Committee, 1998), 81; "Report of Committee on Baptist Faith and Message," (June 1998), [on-line]; accessed 9 April 2010; available from <http://www.utm.edu/staff/caldwell/bfm/1963-1998/report1998.html>; Internet.



supporting the home. This feat could not have transpired under the old regime and is, therefore, to be understood as a direct product of the conservative renaissance.

The next year in Atlanta, T.C. Pinckney, an Air Force Brigadier General and war hero from Virginia, proposed a motion that the president of the SBC appoint a blue-ribbon committee to revise and update the entire Baptist Faith and Message since this had not been done since 1963.<sup>62</sup> In turn, the recommendations of this committee, brought to the SBC in annual session in Orlando, Florida, were adopted on June 14, 2000.<sup>63</sup> Several factors necessitated revisiting the confession. Most Baptists would agree that truth never changes but the issues confronting society, and even the church, present new challenges to be addressed.

The fact that Southern Baptists began on the wrong side of the slavery issue, accompanied by a tragic history of harboring and perpetuating racism, necessitated a clear statement about the teachings of the Bible regarding race. Statements on both race and gender were added to Article III, “Man.” The “openness of God” had become an issue, so Article II, “God,” addresses the extent and fullness of God’s knowledge. Article VI, “The Church,” specifies that pastors will be men. Article XV, “The Christian and the Social Order,” addresses the abortion debate by adding a strong affirmation for the sanctity of human life.

Article I, “The Scriptures,” represented a major alteration and predictably attracted the most vigorous and prolonged debate. The committee developing the 1963 revision was influenced by growing neo-orthodox perspectives on Scripture.<sup>64</sup> They had added two phrases, which, because of ambiguity and with the two phrases added by moderates as cover for introducing questions about the reliability and authority of the text, were the issues that leaders of the conservative renaissance most wanted clarified. These can best be appreciated by the following comparison:

## 1925

*We believe that the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds and religious opinions should be tried.*

---

62 President Patterson appointed the following committee: Adrian Rogers (chair), Max Barnett, Steve Gaines, Susie Hawkins, Rudy Hernández, Charles S. Kelley Jr., Heather King, Richard D. Land, Fred Luter, R. Albert Mohler Jr., T.C. Pinckney, Nelson Price, Roger Spradlin, Simon Tsoi, and Jerry Vines.

63 Two excellent volumes provide analysis of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Charles S. Kelley Jr., Richard D. Land, and R. Albert Mohler Jr., eds., *The Baptist Faith & Message* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2007); and Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell, eds., *Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America's Largest Protestant Denomination* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007). In the foreword of the latter volume, Susie Hawkins notes, “Given this charge, the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* study committee was formed. It was my privilege to be a part of this committee and to be present for all of its meetings. Dr. Patterson appointed a committee representative of Southern Baptist life. It was diverse not only in gender but also in ethnicity, representing the African-American, Hispanic, and Asian communities. It included theologians, pastors, a Baptist Student Union director, a state convention’s Woman’s Missionary Union and Women’s Ministry director, seminary presidents, an agency head, and laypersons. Only persons committed to the inerrancy of Scripture were appointed to the committee,” vii.

64 See Paige Patterson, *Anatomy of a Reformation: The Southern Baptist Convention 1978-2004* (Fort Worth: Seminary Press, 2004), 16.

## 1963

*The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.*

## 2000

*The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.*

The Committee affirmed that the Bible is a record of God's revelation, but they also realized that such language lent itself to a bifurcation of the Bible—a division between what is accepted as divine revelation and what is suspect. They also believed that the criteria by which the Bible should be interpreted is Christ, but they knew that what is known of Christ is from Scripture. Further, they had seen this phrase employed to negate certain passages that had made moderates socially uncomfortable as they tried to allege that Jesus would somehow have taught differently from what is recorded in the Bible on these points. Moreover, these 1963 insertions were not found in the New Hampshire Confession or the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message.

The most memorable moments in my ministerial life are easily identifiable. The opportunity to be spiritual midwife and assist, either through individual personal witness or through public proclamation, as people experience the New Birth—this joy is one my soul craves and to me is more fulfilling and astonishing than anything else. Only two other incidents come close, and they both occurred at meetings of the SBC. The first is the one-hour debate on the night of June 15, 2000, in Orlando, Florida. Scheduled for thirty minutes, the time was twice extended. Although apparently the mind of the messengers was to approve, unamended, the report of the Baptist Faith and Message committee, every opportunity was provided for messengers to debate the issue. As presiding officer and president of the convention, I did my best to exercise fairness and justice. The chairman of the committee, Adrian P. Rogers, assisted by committee members Charles S. Kelley Jr., Richard D. Land, and R. Albert Mohler Jr. spoke with brilliance and perception that was as close to inspiration as I have ever heard. Clearly, opponents would never agree. I leave the resolution of that debate to all who will listen to the discussion.<sup>65</sup>

The other most memorable night unfolded on June 17, 1997, in the meeting of the SBC in Dallas, Texas. In every annual meeting of the SBC, each of the six seminaries must give a public report. On that night, a document composed by Al Mohler, with the encouragement and full

---

<sup>65</sup> Audio and video cassettes of the debate are available for purchase—see <http://www.sbcannualmeeting.net/sbc00/home2000.html>.

consent of the other five presidents, entitled “One Faith, One Task, One Sacred Trust,” was distributed to the messengers.<sup>66</sup> Ken Hemphill, the president of Southwestern Seminary, had added his own touch by arranging for the desk and chair used by B. H. Carroll, the first president of Southwestern Seminary, to be placed on the platform as the setting for this historic moment. After the presentation of the document, each of the presidents—William Crews of Golden Gate Seminary, Charles Kelley of New Orleans Seminary, Mark Coppenger of Midwestern Seminary, Ken Hemphill of Southwestern Seminary, and Paige Patterson of Southeastern Seminary—each sat in Carroll’s chair to sign the document. Unfortunate illness and hospitalization prevented Al Mohler of Southern Seminary from being present, but Danny Akin, dean of Southern’s School of Theology, signed in Mohler’s behalf.

What transpired next was never anticipated. When the first president sat and began to sign, the thousands of messengers stood spontaneously and began sustained applause, which continued until all six presidents had signed and for a total of almost fifteen minutes. The presidents understood clearly that the applause was not for them. This was an expression of profound gratitude to God for what was viewed by the messengers as the culmination of all that for which conservatives had sought. This event, coupled with the adoption of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 three years later, can be considered the climax of the conservative renaissance in Southern Baptist life.

## The Devil Never Sleeps—What Is the Future?

The dawning of the twenty-first century appeared to be a hopeful era for Southern Baptists. Moderates left the train, some to the newly formed Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and some to more liberal denominations. A confident peace seemed prevalent, and the day had come to pursue the stated goal of the conservative renaissance—the evangelization of North America and the world. The spurs to the flanks of the SBC mare had never been orthodoxy for orthodoxy’s sake but orthodoxy as a launch pad for the gospel. Baptists and Anabaptists have been nothing if not aggressively evangelistic and missionary.

But the new orthodox consensus was scarcely in place before flood waters of change threatened. The massive resources of the SBC were now the object of much interest from many individuals and groups. Multiple interests began pulling at the structure of the convention and at its churches as though they were a piece of taffy candy. To mention a few, Baptist churches by virtue of their autonomy are easy targets for some strands of the emergent movement. A new form of ecumenism threatens the distinctives of Baptist doctrine, especially in ecclesiological matters. As Harvey Cox points out in his monograph on charismatics, their infiltration of other denominations, if only partly successful theologically, has been overwhelmingly adopted in much contemporary music.<sup>67</sup> The remarkable history of Calvinists and non-Calvinists working together in SBC life has become strained with the advance of Reformed ideas and even ecclesiology in the convention. How divisive

---

66 See Appendix. Also included in Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 478-80; available on-line in the “Baptist Confessions and Doctrinal Statements” of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, a research institute of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary at <http://www.baptistcenter.com/onefaithonetaskonesacredtrust.html>.

67 Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo, 1995), 139-57.

this becomes remains to be seen. As moderates predicted, the conservative victors have had a difficult time working with one another once the moderates departed. Concerns, sometimes petty and sometimes serious, have divided leaders.

Other concerns, which to my mind are much more serious and threatening, begin with a failure adequately to seek the face of God. Associated with this failure is a loss of the sense of what is holy. I am less than certain that their remains in most of our churches the discernment to distinguish between the holy and the profane. Some of this arises in reaction to legalism, real and perceived, but much of it seems to confuse the Jesus of faith and the popular culture, which somehow can both be tolerated within the body of Christ. Roger Scruton, as a critic of contemporary culture, has written one of the most unpopular but incisive assessments, which all would do well to read. Scruton, in a chapter entitled “Yoofanasia,” observes:

It must by now be apparent that high culture in our time cannot be understood if we ignore the popular culture which roars all around it. This popular culture is pre-eminently a culture of youth. There is an important reason for this, and my purpose in this chapter is to bring this reason to light—to show why it is that youth and the culture of youth have become so visible, in the world after faith.

Among youth, as we know it from our modern cities, a new human type is emerging. It has its own language, its own customs, its own territory and its own self-contained economy. It also has its own culture—a culture which is largely indifferent to traditional boundaries, traditional loyalties, and traditional forms of learning. Youth culture is a global force, propagated through media which acknowledge neither locality nor sovereignty in their easy-going capture of the air-waves; “one world, one music,” in the slogan adopted by MTV, a channel which assembles the words, images and sounds which are the *lingua franca* of modern adolescents.<sup>68</sup>

Later, Scruton becomes more specific.

From this there follows the iconisation of the totem. Singers, groups or lead performers are not constrained by musical standards. But they are constrained by their totemic role. They must be young, sexually attractive, and with the plaintive voice of youthful desire—like the girly group called All Saints. Of course, popular musicians have always been idolized, as were Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, and Cliff Richard. But those old-style icons grew up in time, passed over from adolescence to adulthood, became mellow, avuncular and religious. The modern pop star does not grow up. He grows sideways, like Mick Jagger or Michael Jackson, becoming waxy and encrusted as though covered by a much-repainted mask. Such spectral creatures haunt for a while the halls of fame, trailing behind them the ghosts of their vanished fans. And then, overnight, they disappear.

Modern pop stars and groups often refuse to answer to a normal human name, since to do so would compromise their totemic status. The name must be an icon of membership. Sting, R.E.M., Nirvana, Hanson, Madonna, U2 are like the species names assumed by tribal groups, in order to clarify their social identity, with the difference that is not biological species that are invoked by the titles, but glamorized human types.<sup>69</sup>

---

68 Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2000), 105.

69 *Ibid.*, 111.

Having less of an authentic historical perspective is another serious problem. There is little memory about the sacrifices of four centuries of Baptist leaders; and, in fact, most seem not to even know the names of their progenitors. The Baptist triumph of religious liberty for all has been so prevalent in America that the present generation cannot recall the day when persecution came from every direction. Fewer pastors seem to be calling out the called. The age of the internet free-way to quick access to knowledge inspires fewer to seek the steadying influence of years of study and guidance in Bible college or seminary, and the general tendency toward shorter degree programs and the overall dumbing down of pastoral preparation, as well as the shallowness of sermonettes all raise serious questions about what the churches will look like in twenty years. “Networks” become quasi-denominations and seek the loyalty and financial support of affiliated churches, sometimes even providing pastors with sermons ready to preach like prefab buildings. I could go on.

So what of the future for Southern Baptists? Am I concerned? Always. Am I profoundly concerned? Never. Here is why. I am a West Texas country preacher and not a historian. But I have lived nearly forever and have read a few books along the way. Here is how I see it.

First, Baptists need God, but God will do just fine without Baptists. He will coach whichever team desires to know His mind and to do His will. But He has promised never to leave Himself without a witness, and should Baptists wish to be a part of that plan He will welcome them.

Second, fads rise and fall with increasing frequency. Much of what churches face as new and innovative will soon move out to sea, replaced without doubt by other new fads on steroids. Wood, hay, and stubble are always consumed by the fire of Christ's gaze; but gold, silver, and precious stone are only purified thereby. So it has been and ever it will be.

A Southern Baptist—even if he lives in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan; Horseheads, New York; Gun Barrel City, Texas; or Front Sight, Nevada—cherishes his freedom; but many have some difficulty making accurate distinctions between their personal desires and God's will and purpose. Commoner roots and a rambunctious and torrid history make them awfully puckish—exactly the right word, I think, since many Baptist gatherings resemble nothing if not a hockey contest. Excessive activity racing to and fro in following an object of relatively little significance, frequent confrontations, occasional penalties, and rare scores characterize both endeavors. But both tend to bring out the crowds.

Third, there is a generational cycle to the history of the church. Revival fires are lit by one generation, stoked and admired by another, and, as often as not, neglected and even ignored by a warm third generation. Then arises a cold generation, who, in the search to be warm, discovers the barely simmering coals of former generations. They began to pray that the billows of the Holy Spirit will blow on those embers, and soon the fire rages again.

Finally, Southern Baptists do have a generation gap in leadership due to the era of wandering from the faith in our seminaries. That admitted, the younger generation is amazing. I am not speaking of those who seem ubiquitous based on the turmoil they generate and who spend inordinate time meditating on their personal whims on the blogs. Rather I speak of a generation of young adults with a will to take Christ to the nations regardless of sacrifice. They love the Word of God, desire to teach its message, and desire holiness before God. They will grow in grace, prayer, sanctification, and knowledge. The future is in good hands.

## Conclusion

Numerous assessments of the conservative renaissance in the Southern Baptist Convention, written from widely disparate perspectives, already line the shelves of the library of the Baptist Historical Archives in Nashville, Tennessee. This brief overview suffers along with all such efforts by way of its proximity to the events. All sources will doubtless be consulted by future historians, who can attempt, having been removed from the emotions and passions of the present, to assess the motives, actions, and results of all the players on the SBC stage.

Every generation has its own battles, and not infrequently, resurrects conflicts from the past. The next few generations of Baptists, being a free people, will debate fiercely. But the reliability and authority of God's Word that guided Baptist life for the first 100 years of the Southern Baptist Convention will likely now guide the next 100 years if Jesus delays His return. Those who led the movement are retiring or transferring residence to a happy clime where God's Word is never contested. None to my knowledge regrets what was done, though hindsight might dictate some changes of method and action. Pastors, evangelists, and missionaries determined to get the saving gospel of Christ to all people will never consistently emerge from the framework of those who question the truthfulness of the Bible, whatever their virtues. We have given our children, grandchildren, and sons in the ministry a chance to live under and to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ by preserving the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. May the grace of God attend them and keep them faithful. We gladly pass the torch to the next generation!

## Appendix

### **One Faith, One Task, One Sacred Trust: A Covenant Between Our Seminaries and Our Churches**

For over 135 years, the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention have looked to their seminaries for the training and education of their ministers. These six schools were established and undergirded by Southern Baptists in order that our churches may be served by a more faithful ministry.

This is a critical moment in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention and for our seminaries. The six seminaries serving this denomination bear a precious and perishable responsibility on behalf of our churches; for we are entrusted with those who will be their ministers, pastors, preachers and servants.

Looking to the dawn of the twenty-first century, we hereby restate and reaffirm our commitment to the churches we serve, to the convictions those churches hold and honor and to the charge we have received on their behalf.

#### **One Faith**

The church of Jesus Christ is charged to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Our seminaries, charged with the theological formation of ministers, must take this charge as central and essential to our mission. In an age of rampant theological compromise, our seminaries must send no uncertain sound.

Let the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention know that our seminaries are committed to theological integrity and biblical fidelity. Our pledge is to maintain the confessional character of our seminaries by upholding those doctrines so clearly articulated in our confessions of faith; by teaching the authority, inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible; by maintaining the purity of the Gospel and affirming the identity of Jesus Christ, by whose blood we have been redeemed and in whose name

alone salvation is to be found; and by proclaiming with boldness the precious and eternal truths of God's Word.

In this we stand together, and we stand with our churches. We understand that those who teach take on an awesome responsibility and will receive from our Lord a stricter judgment. We stand before this convention and our churches to declare that we stand together in one faith, serving our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **One Task**

Our mission is to prepare ministers for service. We cannot call ministers nor appoint them to service. Ministers, called by God and commissioned by our churches come to us in order that they may through our seminaries receive learning, training and inspiration for service. Preachers, evangelists, missionaries and those who minister throughout the life of the churches come to our seminaries with the hope that they will leave their programs of study better equipped, armed and matured for the faithful exercise of their calling.

Our mission is to remain ever true to this task. We declare our unflinching resolve to provide the very finest programs of theological education for ministry. We will match theological fidelity to practical ministry, passion to practice, vision to calling and honor to service. This is our task.

## **One Sacred Trust**

Our schools are not generic institutions for religious studies. We are the six theological seminaries serving the Southern Baptist Convention. We belong to you; we belong to the churches of this Convention. We are proud to carry your charge, and we declare our fidelity to you as a sacred trust. In this trust we stand before the Southern Baptist Convention, and we stand together.

Through the trustees elected by this Convention, our churches must hold our seminaries accountable to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, to the essential task of training and educating ministers and to the sacred trust which unites our seminaries and our churches.

As the presidents of your seminaries, we declare our unbending and fervent resolve to uphold all of these commitments. We will lead our institutions so that no harm shall come to your students and ministers; so that they will be rooted and grounded in the truth; so that they will be trained as faithful and effective preachers and teachers; so that they will bring honor to the church and not dishonor; and so that we shall be able to give a good answer and receive a good report when we shall face that stricter judgment which is to come.

This is our pledge, our resolve, our declaration.

*Signed in the presence of the messengers to the 140<sup>th</sup> session of the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Dallas, Texas, June 17, 1997.*





REACH THE WORLD.



**SOUTHWESTERN**  
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

[SWBTS.EDU](http://SWBTS.EDU)



SOUTHWESTERN  
BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PREACH THE WORD. REACH THE WORLD. | [SWBTS.EDU](http://SWBTS.EDU)