



# Southwestern

JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY



Southern Baptists and  
American Evangelicals





# **Southwestern**

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American Evangelicals

Spring 2023 Issue  
Vol. 65 No. 2

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*The Southwestern Journal of Theology* is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, the *Southern Baptist Periodical Index*, and the *Christian Periodical Index*.

Books and software for review may be sent to the *SWJT Editorial Office*, The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 22608, Fort Worth, TX 76122. All other inquiries should be sent to this same address.

Please direct subscription correspondence and change of address notices to *SWJT Editorial Office*, The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, P.O. Box 22608, Fort Worth, TX 76122. Change of address notices should include both the new and old addresses. A one-year (two issues) subscription in the United States is \$30. An international subscription is \$50.

*Southwestern Journal of Theology* (ISSN 0038-4828) is published at The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX 76122. For the contents of back issues and ordering information, please see <https://swbts.edu/journal>.

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## EDITORIAL

This second volume of the 65th issue of the new series<sup>1</sup> of *Southwestern Journal of Theology* continues to show our appreciation for the Southwestern theological tradition by taking up the subject of one of the most significant contributions of James Leo Garrett Jr. to recent theological discourse. This year marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genesis of a formal debate over whether Southern Baptists may also be described as “evangelicals.” The executive editor and managing editor have both written on this subject, but we have set aside our own statements to return attention to the original question and to evaluate the answer we believe Garrett crafted and argued so well.

The 1983 publication of *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?* by Mercer University Press presented a lively discussion between Garrett of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and E. Glenn Hinson of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. James E. Tull of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary introduced the question of that volume. The scholarship and churchmanship of all three Southern Baptist seminaries were well represented in that book. Tull framed the question. Hinson argued that Southern Baptists must be distinguished from evangelicals and Garrett argued that Southern Baptists were a particular type of evangelical. Numerous books and articles have been written through the years to continue that conversation.

We begin with an interview of Timothy George by David Dockery regarding his own reflections on the interlocutors and the progress of the original debate. George and Garrett both earned doctorates at Harvard University, both engaged in ground-breaking ecumenical discourse as convictional evangelical Southern Baptists, and both contributed so very much to contemporary theology. We are thankful for George’s willingness to share his insights on the question of Southern Baptists and evangelicals and his appreciation for Garrett. After the interview, Malcolm Yarnell

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<sup>1</sup>The first series of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* began in 1917. The new series began under the editorship of James Leo Garrett Jr. in 1958.

presents the fruit of his research into the question of the spiritual and theological identity of Southwestern Seminary. His conclusion is that Southwestern was founded as a “soul-winning evangelical Baptist” institution. The details regarding that three-fold identity illuminate the character of this seminary specifically and the identity of Southern Baptists more generally as they entered their period of greatest sustained growth as a missionary denomination.

The next two essays offer a summary historical definition for each of the two communities considered in the ongoing conversation begun formally by Garrett, Hinson, and Tull. Blake McKinney, assistant professor of history and humanities at Texas Baptist College, addresses the first question, “Who Are Southern Baptists?” McKinney recognizes the difficulty in answering the question but, after careful evaluation of the evidence, concludes that Southern Baptists are “denominational evangelicals committed to cooperation for the sake of fulfilling the Great Commission.” Robert W. Caldwell III, professor of church history at Southwestern Seminary and a widely recognized authority in American evangelical history, answers the second question, “Who Are American Evangelicals?” Caldwell looks at the utility and definition of the term, “evangelical,” evaluates evangelical demographics, and offers three “takeaways” from the historical evidence, including that evangelicals should retain their denominations while also praying and working together for the advance of our common mission.

Gregg R. Allison, professor of Christian theology at Southern Seminary, contributes his own answer to the question, “Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals?” Following a method which Garrett would greatly appreciate, Allison approaches his answer by comparing the Southern Baptist confession, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, with a volume of essays from 1990 titled, *Evangelical Affirmations*. Allison’s careful evaluation of the evidence under his confessional microscope reaches the simple conclusion, “yes, Southern Baptists are evangelicals.” Allison, who comes into the Southern Baptist Convention from a different evangelical background, pictures the relationship as akin to a Venn diagram. Nathan Finn, provost and dean of the university faculty at North Greenville University, is an historian and historical theologian well known among Southern Baptists. Finn argues that “Southern Baptists (and other Baptists) are at our best when we understand ourselves to be simultaneously catholic, reformational, restorationist, and evangelical.” After examining the evidence, he concludes that Southern Baptists should move “toward a confessional

evangelical Baptist future.”

In the final article, Trevin Wax, vice president of research and resource development at the North American Mission Board, considers the question of “Denominations and the Hope of Evangelical Renewal.” Wax borrows from David Bebbington and Thomas Kidd to arrive at a two-fold definition of evangelicals as “aspirational” on the one hand and “cultural” on the other. Wax believes that evangelicalism would best be defined as a movement of “renewal.” He uses the illustration of a neighborhood to argue for maintaining denominational identity in a healthy way. He concludes with an excellent appeal for Southern Baptists not to see ourselves as opposed to other evangelicals, but as “among and for” them.

The Issue concludes with a dozen careful reviews of significant books that have been recently published. The reviewers, experts in their respective fields of study, come from both Southwestern Seminary and other evangelical institutions. They continue the legacy of the founder of Southwestern Seminary, Benajah Harvey Carroll, who read vigilantly and wrote helpful reviews of important theological texts on his long train rides so that he might help build the churches. May we who are evangelicals continue the positive kingdom-building work of evangelical Southern Baptist forefathers like Carroll and Garrett.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

David S. Dockery and Malcolm B. Yarnell





## REFLECTIONS ON: ARE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS EVANGELICALS?

An Interview with Timothy George by David S. Dockery

Timothy George serves as distinguished professor at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University and president of Evangelical Theological Society. He also serves as general editor of *Reformation Commentary on Scripture*. Editor David Dockery interviewed Timothy George regarding the relationship between Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals.

Q. You served with Glenn Hinson for a time on the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. You share an alma mater with James Leo Garrett Jr. Given your connections with both of them, might you be able to provide insight for readers of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* regarding the context in which the original conversation between Drs. Hinson and Garrett took place?

A. It was a hot summer day in August 1979 when I drove onto the beautiful campus of Southern Seminary in Louisville. I had spent the last seven years in postgraduate studies at Harvard University and was excited to begin what I hoped would be a lifetime of teaching, research, and service at this historic seminary, whose storied history went back to 1859. I have good memories of those early years at Southern. My faculty colleagues were cordial and welcoming, and my students were bright and eager to learn. I am still in touch with a number of them after all these years. However, those first halcyon days soon gave way to the thunder and smoke of the battlefield. What came to be called the Controversy soon engulfed the entire SBC, with Southern Seminary in the eye of the storm, so to speak.

Midway through my first semester at Southern, Duke K. McCall, the president who had hired me from Harvard, invited several leading critics who represented the SBC conservative resurgence to speak in chapel, including W. A. Criswell, Adrian Rogers, Jimmy Draper, and

Paige Patterson. McCall's "stunt," as someone called it, was met with consternation by many on the faculty, but, although I knew little about SBC politics at that time, I admired his effort at reconciliation—though in retrospect, it did little to heal the breach in the SBC.

Some ten years later, when I was invited to become the founding dean of Beeson Divinity School, I made the following remarks about the kind of school I hoped we would become: "In an age of secularism and relativism, we do not declare theological neutrality. Let it be said for all posterity to hear that we stand without reservation on the total truthfulness of Holy Scripture and the great principles of historic Christian orthodoxy. On these essential values, we cannot and we will not compromise. But we also know that godly teaching must be complemented by holy living, and so we commit ourselves to the disciplines of the Christian faith, to a life of prayer and worship, to witness and discipleship, and to show compassion with justice and peace for every person made in the image of God. In the lingo of contemporary labels, we *will* be neither a haven for disaffected liberalism nor a bastion of raucous fundamentalism. We will be evangelical but also ecumenical, conservative but not irresponsible, confessional yet interdenominational."

Apart from that last word, which is a Beeson distinctive, such was my vision for Southern Seminary during the 1980s, but alas, it was not to be. Still, I welcomed the publication of *Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals?* because it seemed to elevate the discourse beyond the name-calling and rumor-mongering prevalent on both sides at the time.

Q. Can you say a word about how you became acquainted with both scholars?

A. Yes, I had met both Glenn Hinson and James Leo Garrett before I moved to Louisville. I hosted Glenn when he came to New England to lead a Baptist student retreat. He was a senior faculty member at Southern and treated me kindly as I began teaching there. Although I did not share his perspective on Baptist history, I greatly admired his work as a scholar of the early church and his emphasis on spiritual formation. Glenn introduced me to the Quaker scholar, Elton Trueblood, and the Methodist theologian, Geoffrey Wainwright. When Glenn left Southern to teach at Wake Forest University, he asked me to edit the *Baptist Peacemaker*, a journal he had launched several years prior. I did so until my Anabaptist-inspired

pacifism faded as I delved more deeply into the writings of St. Augustine. After moving to Beeson, I had limited contact with Glenn, but I did write him a letter commending his 2012 autobiography, *A Miracle of Grace*, to which he responded kindly.

In our studies at Harvard, James Leo Garrett and I shared a mentor in George Huntston Williams, one of the great church historians of the twentieth century. He had been a Protestant observer at all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council and conveyed his strong ecumenical interests to all his students. Although Baptists had no official representation at Vatican II, through his friendship with Albert Outler, Leo was invited to attend the final session, which dealt with the theme of religious freedom. He was present in 1965 when Pope Paul VI promulgated the Decree on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*). I never studied directly with Leo, but I learned much from his many writings and enjoyed a lively correspondence with him over the years. He contributed a chapter to the first book I published, a *Festschrift* for Williams, and, in turn, I was honored to write a chapter for his *Festschrift*, a collection of essays on the believers' church edited by Paul Basden and David S. Dockery.

Q. To the question of "Are Southern Baptists 'Evangelicals?'" Dr. Hinson and Dr. Garrett provided different answers and perspectives. Could you briefly describe the emphases and perspectives of each?

A. Hinson and Garrett began with different questions, proceeded from different presuppositions, and, not surprisingly, ended up with different conclusions. Hinson's main concern is to show who the (true) Baptists are and how this movement has been hijacked by mean-spirited fundamentalists. Garrett, on the other hand, recognized Baptists as part of a wider evangelical reality which he described historically as encompassing the apostolic faith and the early church (including its creeds and councils), the medieval and Reformation developments, and the various renewal movements coming out of the era of awakenings. Hinson regards evangelicalism as an alien intrusion into Baptist life, a stalking horse or, perhaps better, a trojan horse with its weighty baggage of doctrinal orthodoxy, confessions of faith, theological strictures. For Garrett, Southern Baptists needed to reclaim their evangelical identity through their rediscovery of "the authority of the Bible, the Christocentrism of the gospel, and the coessentiality of witness by word and witness by life." The real question

is: “Will Southern Baptists be in reality conformed to the present age or be transformed as pilgrim people on their way to the City of God?” In other words, will we live for ourselves, in ease and comfort, or will we be “stewards for the billions of the earth for whom Jesus died and rose again?”

Q. The answer to this question seems to be an obvious “yes” to most of our readers in 2023. Why was this a significant disagreement forty years ago?

A. The major significance of the Garrett-Hinson exchange was to show how two mature, well-trained SBC scholars could engage seriously with the underlying issues that were at the very same time ripping apart their denomination. While this exchange did little to stop, or even slow down, the transformation of the SBC already underway, it did inaugurate a new era of fellowship, witness, and mutual exchange between Southern Baptists and the wider evangelical world. Foy Valentine’s oft-quoted quip, “We’re not evangelicals. That’s a Yankee word!” reflected the kind of self-imposed parochialism of the SBC from the 1930s through the 1970s. Whatever broadening influences there were, and there were some, the usual outcome for denominational elites was a one-way ecumenism to the left. Billy Graham, Carl F. H. Henry, and Chuck Colson—all three both evangelicals and Southern Baptists—helped to break through some of these barriers as did movements such as Evangelicals and Catholics Together, which always included Southern Baptists, publications such as *Christianity Today*, which over the past three decades has given wider coverage to Southern Baptists, and the Evangelical Theological Society, which was formed in 1949 of “Yankee evangelicals” almost exclusively, but now is replete with Southern Baptist scholars from a variety of institutions.

Q. Why do you think that Southern Baptists for the most part remained disconnected from major sectors of North American evangelicalism in the middle decades of the twentieth century?

A. Baylor historian Barry Hankins addressed this issue in an important article: “Southern Baptists and Northern Evangelicals: Cultural Factors and the Nature of Religious Alliances” (*Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 7:271-298). Southern Baptists and northern evangelicals, he claims, were prevented from forming a fruitful alliance

during the middle decades of the twentieth century because of two factors: (1) Northern evangelicals almost always found their enemies on the left, while Southern Baptists were preoccupied with pesky fundamentalists like J. Frank Norris on the right; (2) Southern Baptists dominated the culture of the South whereas northern evangelicals struggled for recognition and standing as a sequestered minority. This analysis holds true for much of the twentieth century, but everything began to come loose in the 60s. Prior to *Roe v. Wade*, the abortion mentality was embraced, albeit mildly, by SBC officials. But long before Ronald Reagan took up the pro-life cause at the national level, non-Baptist evangelicals such as Francis Schaeffer, D. James Kennedy, and others had put the horror of wholesale abortion on the evangelical agenda. Thus, by the time the Garrett-Hinson exchange took place, Southern Baptists and evangelicals were already forming an alliance that would be transformative for both groups.

Q. You have often affirmed the importance of Southern Baptists being both Baptist and evangelical. Might you help us understand what Dr. Garrett means by his approach to denominational evangelicalism?

A. Garrett and Hinson alike affirmed historic Baptist distinctives such as regenerate church membership, religious freedom, and the non-coercive character of faith. For Hinson, however, the essence of the Baptist tradition can be summarized in the word “voluntarism.” The key theological influence on doctrine-averse libertarian theology, an influence not limited to Baptists, was Friedrich Schleiermacher. He replaced the objectivity of divine revelation with Christian self-consciousness as the starting point for theological reflection. In the end, he decided that certain doctrines could be “entrusted to history for safe keeping,” which meant that much of the orthodox tradition, including the Trinitarian and Christological consensus of the early church along with the great soteriological axioms of the Reformation, could be rendered obsolete for modern/postmodern persons. Although not often mentioned in Baptist debates, another important figure in this development was Ralph Waldo Emerson, a true individualist who found even the strictures of his own unitarian denomination too stifling. Emerson is the forerunner of the nones, the constituency of spiritual but not religious which makes up about 30 percent of the U.S. population. E. Y. Mullins is often cited as belonging to this same trajectory, but a close reading of his works makes this a hard argument to press. Mullins

formulated the concept of soul competency and spent much of his presidency thwarting the fundamentalist advance in his day. Yet it was Mullins, not J. Frank Norris or John R. Rice, who declared before the Southern Baptist Convention in 1923:

We record again our unwavering adherence to the supernatural elements in the Christian religion. The Bible is God's revelation of himself through men moved by the Holy Spirit, and is our sufficient, certain and authoritative guide in religion. Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, through the power of the Holy Spirit. He was the divine and eternal Son of God. He wrought miracles, healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead. He died as the vicarious, atoning Saviour of the world, and was buried. He arose again from the dead. The tomb was emptied of its contents. In his risen body he appeared many times to his disciples. He ascended to the right hand of the Father. He will come again in person, the same Jesus who ascended from the Mount of Olives. We believe that adherence to the above truths and facts is a necessary condition of service for teachers in our Baptist schools (*Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention, 1923).

This does not mean that Baptist moderates and liberals have no claim on Mullins as a prophet of progressivism which in some respects he was. However, it does show how, in that era, even progressives like Mullins were committed to a view of Baptist identity with a solid doctrinal core.

Q. What can we learn from Dr. Hinson about understanding Southern Baptists in 2023? What can we learn from Dr. Garrett about understanding Southern Baptists in 2023?

A. My favorite definition of theology comes from the puritan William Ames whose book *The Marrow of Sacred Theology* was the first textbook adopted at Harvard College in 1636. "Theology," he said, "is the science of living in the presence of God." Though their methods, conclusions, and reconstructions of Baptist history differed in significant ways, this quotation embraces the life and witness of both of these distinguished

scholars. It is sometimes difficult to separate theology from polemics and at points the Garrett–Hinson exchange crosses over from the former to the latter. However, in the brief preface they jointly wrote to the book, they declared their intention: “These pages consist of a fraternal debate which has as its purpose the clarification of who Southern Baptists have been, are, and ought to be. It’s purpose is not to divide or disrupt but to enlighten and strengthen.”

What can we learn from E. Glenn Hinson about how to do this? Hinson’s most enduring contribution to Baptist life and thought, I believe, will be in three areas. First, his revitalization of early church history and patristics as a necessary field of study. At a time when Baptist patristics scholars were hard to find anywhere, Hinson forged a new field of study among Baptists. His 1981 book, *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire*, remains a classic study of the early church. Second, when Hinson began to teach at Southern, the field of spiritual formation was practically unknown among Protestant seminaries. Now, it is included among the accreditation standards for all seminaries. Hinson’s course on “Classics of Christian Devotion” and his many writings in this area have contributed richly to the study of spirituality as a theological discipline. Third, his commitment to Christian unity and his contributions especially to conciliar ecumenism were pioneering efforts, especially among Southern Baptists.

Two years after the publication of the Garrett–Hinson exchange, Hinson published another scholarly essay with a slightly different perspective: “One Baptist’s Dream: A Denomination Truly Evangelical, Truly Catholic, Truly Baptist.” In this paper, he sets forth a more elastic construal of evangelicalism, one capacious of Southern Baptists shorn of the more acerbic features of fundamentalism. He is not optimistic that the SBC will be able to accommodate such a vision, but he seems to entertain a measure of hope that it might be so. Southern Baptists can, and ought to be “truly” evangelical, just as they can and ought to be “truly” catholic, and “truly” Baptist. Such a vision might come closer to reality if it could be recognized that the real problem with fundamentalism is not so much what it affirms as what it leaves out—its reductionism. To be “truly” evangelical is to move beyond debates over several controverted points to affirm the Great Tradition of Christian believing and living that has marked the people of God at their best ever since Jesus declared that “upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt 16:18).

Now that James Leo Garrett has left this world for a better one, we can



begin to evaluate his many theological contributions, including his probing and affirming of the evangelical character of Southern Baptist witness. Garrett presented the lectures which would form his contribution to *Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals?* in November 1979, one year before Hinson presented the lectures that would constitute his rejoinder. Garrett seemed surprised, perhaps even shocked, that anyone would question whether Southern Baptists were evangelicals. He asserted that, prior to 1980, no responsible Baptist scholar had ever done so! Certainly E.Y. Mullins, whom Hinson cites in support of his perspective, referred to himself and the Baptists he served as evangelical. But for Garrett, this question was not merely about semantics. It had to do with the deeper roots of the Baptist heritage which certainly included religious freedom and liberty of conscience but which reached back much further to the Trinitarian and Christological faith of the early church, the Protestant doctrines of justification by faith alone and the *supremacy* (a word Garrett appropriated from the first article of the *New Hampshire Confession*) of Holy Scripture, as well as the vigorous missionary and revival movements which have extended the evangelical faith to the ends of the earth.

In some ways, the debate of 1983 seems antiquated and musty today as both Southern Baptists and American evangelicals face different and more urgent challenges. But it is good for us to stop, listen, and learn from two of our ablest scholars at a critical juncture both in their careers and in the life of the people of God called Baptists.

## SOUL-WINNING EVANGELICAL BAPTISTS: THE IDENTITY OF SOUTHWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Malcolm B. Yarnell III\*

The theological heritage of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary is evangelical in doctrine, and Baptist in spirit and structure, with a passion for soul-winning practical Christianity. We shall demonstrate this thesis regarding the Southern Baptist Convention entity in Fort Worth, Texas, through interaction with the seminary's founders, particularly its first two presidents, via the insights of James Leo Garrett Jr.

A keen interpreter of this denomination's heritage, Garrett's academic colleagues said he was "the most knowledgeable Baptist theologian," "the last of the great gentlemen theologians," and "the dean of Southern Baptist theologians." Southwestern Seminary's interim president, David S. Dockery, draws upon Garrett to discern and convey the theological tradition of our seminary, as in the recent issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* and in oral presentations to the faculty.<sup>1</sup>

Garrett's ability to speak to the theological heritage of Southwestern is certain. He came here in 1945, became the founding editor of the seminary's new journal series in 1958, and chaired the committee authorizing the seminary's official history.<sup>2</sup> Garrett delivered two Founders Day addresses, the latter titled, "Writings that Have Shaped the Southwestern Tradition." That address in 2002 concerned *The Legacy of Southwestern*, a collection reviewing the writings of 25 faculty members. In its first century, the faculty of our three oldest schools—theology, educational ministries, and church music—published at least 700 books, a huge contribution to

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<sup>1</sup>David S. Dockery, "James Leo Garrett Jr. and the Southwestern Theological Tradition," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 65 (2022): 9-27.

<sup>2</sup>Robert A. Baker, "Preface," in *Tell the Generations Following: A History of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary 1908-1983* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983).

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evangelical Baptist identity from the then “world’s largest freestanding theological school.”<sup>3</sup>

Garrett’s contribution to the Southwestern legacy was lifelong. In 2009, he described his spiritual and theological journey, granting primary place of service to Southwestern, where he began his studies after graduating from Baylor University in 1945. Impressing his professors, Garrett started teaching at Southwestern in 1949, well before completing his doctoral degree on “The Theology of Walter Thomas Conner” in 1955. Garrett retained an intimate relationship with Southwestern until his death in 2020, interrupted by short and intermediate stints at Baylor, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Hong Kong Baptist Seminary, alongside prized sabbaticals at Oxford University. Southwestern’s trustees granted him the highest possible honor upon his retirement, distinguished professor emeritus of theology.

Garrett came to Fort Worth with a passion for youth and revival. He called Southwestern’s first major systematic theologian, Conner, “my principal mentor.” Garrett lauded his ethics professor, T. B. Maston, for “shaping the conscience of his students and of Southern Baptists on the issue of race.” Although the seminary’s second president died shortly before his arrival, Garrett said Lee Rutland Scarborough abided with every Southwesterner through his emphases upon soul-winning “evangelism” and Baptist “cooperancy.” Garrett met another young minister, Myrta Ann, who accepted his marriage proposal.<sup>4</sup> Through 67 years of marriage and a shared half-century of service to Southwestern, they raised three wonderful sons and mentored students in their home, including my wife, Karen, and me. Leo memorialized Myrta as “my beloved wife, . . . life companion, great encourager, and co-participant in the quest for Baptist identity amidst the wider Christian world.”<sup>5</sup>

Garrett’s careful scholarship contributed massively to systematic theology, historical theology, Baptist theology, and Baptist ecumenism. He thanked Harvard University, where he earned a second PhD, both negatively, because Paul Tillich showed why his theology “was not for me or

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<sup>3</sup>James Leo Garrett Jr., “Preface,” in *The Legacy of Southwestern: Writings That Shaped a Tradition*, ed. James Leo Garrett Jr. (North Richland Hills, TX: Smithfield Press, 2002), ix-x.

<sup>4</sup>Garrett, “My Journey as a Baptist Christian” (2009), in *The Collected Writings of James Leo Garrett Jr. 1950-2015*, vol. 2: Baptists, Part I, ed. Wyman Lewis Richardson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 109-15. The lecture was given at the B.H. Carroll Theological Institute, established by Southwestern faculty in 2004.

<sup>5</sup>Garrett, “Memoriam,” in *The Collected Writings of James Leo Garrett Jr. 1950-2015*, vol. 1: Baptists, Part II, ed. Wyman Lewis Richardson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), v.

for Southern Baptists,” and positively, because George Huntston Williams enkindled a “love of Anabaptism,” prompting him to become “even more a convinced Baptist.”<sup>6</sup> He said a mission trip to India, a fellow professor, and the Civil Rights movement pushed him to “recover my priesthood.” This crisis made him an advocate of the biblical, historical, Baptist doctrine of universal priesthood.<sup>7</sup> I wrote both a master’s thesis at Duke University and a doctoral dissertation at Oxford University on that doctrine at his recommendation. Garrett also defended religious liberty and the separation of church and state during a stint at Baylor.

While he cautiously engaged in Baptist dialogue with Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox, Garrett heartily advocated two traditions with closer ties to Baptists, the Believers’ Church and evangelicalism. Always careful and generous yet intentional as a writer, the titles of Garrett’s two *magna opera* highlight the location of both his and Southwestern Seminary’s theology. The first was his magisterial two-volume *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical and Evangelical*; the second, the unparalleled *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study*.<sup>8</sup> These two major works identify Garrett as a keyholder to the theological heritage of both Southwestern Seminary and Southern Baptists.

Garrett also addressed our Baptist identity and our evangelical identity in other writings. Southern Seminary’s president Duke McCall was the first to call Garrett an “evangelical theologian,” indicating his divergence from the mainline worldview of the Louisville seminary. Garrett’s emphases upon being evangelical and Baptist were learned from and returned to Southwestern. These two aspects of Southwestern’s identity are necessarily joined by a third: Southwestern is also passionately evangelistic and practical. All three aspects of Southwestern’s identity stem from her founders.

## I. OUR EVANGELICAL FAITH

The official history of the seminary traces our historical roots to the southern manifestations of the Great Awakenings. While Baptists in the south predated the awakenings, they grew tremendously from them. Robert

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<sup>6</sup>Garrett, “My Journey as a Baptist Christian,” 112.

<sup>7</sup>Garrett, “Recovering My Priesthood,” *Home Missions* (1965), 14-15.

<sup>8</sup>While he restricts his article-length review to *Baptist Theology*, the provost of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary recognizes both works are significant. Duesing praises Garrett especially for his “methodical and careful scholarship.” Jason G. Duesing, “An Assessment of a Magnum Opus: James Leo Garrett Jr’s ‘Baptist Theology’ as a Gift to 21st Century Baptists,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 65 (2022): 94.

Baker said the first awakening gave the Baptists who built Southwestern a “warmhearted, evangelistic, biblical, effective” spirituality; the second awakening prompted “the development of structural patterns” in ministry.<sup>9</sup> Receiving that general narrative, Garrett also researched the denominational and movement designations of “evangelical,” tracing its usage to the Reformation and the awakenings.

Garrett found three “areas of doctrinal emphasis or agreement” which “differentiate” evangelicals from other Christians:

1. “The nature and necessity of justification or regeneration or salvation,”
2. “The nature and supreme authority of the Bible; and”
3. “The deity of Jesus Christ together with certain events of His ‘holy history,’ namely virginal conception, atoning death, bodily resurrection, and second coming.”<sup>10</sup>

Examining the writings of the founding presidents, trustees, and faculty of Southwestern Seminary demonstrates these three markers of evangelical identity were also theirs. In the same year that Southwestern moved to Fort Worth, our first president, Benajah Harvey Carroll, outlined the evangelistic, moral, and doctrinal requirements not only for trustees and faculty but also for graduates entering pastoral ministry. Both trustees and faculty were required to subscribe and not “seriously depart” from a slightly altered and thoroughly evangelical *New Hampshire Confession*. Evangelicalism’s markers are also found in Carroll’s description of what the student must demonstrate:

There should be a clear expression of his views concerning the Holy Scriptures—their integrity, their inspiration—concerning sin and the fall of man, concerning the person of our Lord as both God and man, his vicarious expiation, making the cross the central fact of the Gospel, the work of the Holy Spirit and the necessity for it in regeneration and sanctification in view of man’s depravity.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 27-28.

<sup>10</sup>Garrett, “What Evangelicals Believe and Practice” (1983), in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 107-8. See the helpful chart summarizing his research, “Emphasized Beliefs of Those Named or Described as ‘Evangelicals,’” in James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals?’* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), Jacket Inside Cover.

<sup>11</sup>B. H. Carroll, “Safeguards of the Seminary,” *The Baptist Standard* (January 13, 1910), 2.

Regarding Garrett's third evangelical emphasis, the person and work of Christ, Scarborough noted our seminary "was really born out of a spiritual experience its founder [Carroll] had with the risen, living Christ, and hence was based on the personality and deity of Jesus Christ." The first and second presidents taught the doctrines of classical Christianity of evangelicalism. Drawing language from the classical creeds, Scarborough said, "This institution rests in the confident conviction that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, very God of very God, born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, and showed forth a marvelous ministry among men, was crucified by Pontius Pilate upon the insistence of the Jews, buried in Joseph's tomb, rose the third day triumphant over death, hell, and the grave, and ascended the Father's throne and sits today regnant at his right hand, our Priest, Prophet, King of Kings, and Redeemer, forever interceding for us."<sup>12</sup>

In 1921, two days after Scarborough publicly confronted an "inquisitor" of conscience for his oblique and unjustified attacks on a Southwestern faculty member,<sup>13</sup> the full faculty crafted a seven-article doctrinal statement. "In View of Certain Criticisms" began with their "belief in the Bible as the Word of God," repudiated both "the rationalistic method of dealing with the Bible" and "evolutionary theory," and affirmed the Genesis account. Their version of "the fundamentals of Christianity" corroborates the "holy history" of Christ described by Garrett. The faculty also emphasized Baptist teachings about the church, morality, and mission.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding Garrett's second evangelical emphasis, on Scripture, Southwestern's founders repeatedly advocated its inspiration, truthfulness, and authority. Dockery notes, "The Bible was the focus of Carroll's career." "Carroll clearly and enthusiastically emphasized that the inspiration of Scripture ensures a perfect standard of instruction, conviction, and a profitable work for correction and training in righteousness."<sup>15</sup> The seminary's articles of faith significantly began with an affirmation of the

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<sup>12</sup>L. R. Scarborough, "The Primal Test of Theological Education: The Inaugural Address of President Scarborough, May, 1915," in Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets: A History of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary: A Project of Christ: A Product of Prayer and Faith: Its First Thirty Years—1907-1937* (Nashville: Broadman, 1939), 170.

<sup>13</sup>W. W. Barnes refused to answer certain questions presented by J. Frank Norris for two reasons: Norris is "not the inquisitor of my conscience" and would "misuse anything that I wrote him." Barnes, "L.R. Scarborough's Break with Norris," cited in Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 223.

<sup>14</sup>They also reaffirmed their subscription to the *New Hampshire Confession*. The Southwestern Faculty, "In View of Certain Criticisms" (November 23, 1921), in Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 224-25.

<sup>15</sup>Dockery, "The Southwestern Tradition," 12.

Holy Bible's inspiration, sufficiency, authority, and inerrancy.<sup>16</sup>

At his inauguration, Scarborough promised to keep the school "in a straight path." "We are not with nor for those who would have a 'scrapbook Bible.' We take Christ's endorsement of the Old Testament and receive the New Testament as Paul, the Holy Spirit, and the Fathers have handed it down to us. We believe it is God-breathed, and binding upon conscience and conduct, and is our only ultimate and infallible authority touching life and destiny."<sup>17</sup> George Washington Truett, the leading trustee during our seminary's first four decades, considered the inspiration of the Bible a settled matter. "What characterizes [Truett's] treatment of Scripture is his demand that we demonstrate our respect for God's Word by reading it, living it, and spreading it." But Truett, concerned for moral reception, warned against mere rhetorical affirmations of Scripture's truth. Scripture can be "lost" through "neglect," "substitution," "mutilation," or "disobeying it."<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the first evangelical emphasis, on salvation, Garrett distinguished two groups of evangelicals. "Evangelicals within the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican traditions tend to emphasize and articulate the Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith and not on the basis of works."<sup>19</sup> Advancing beyond this more intellectual form, "Present-day Evangelicals, however, who have been influenced by the Anabaptist, the Pietistic, and/or the Wesleyan traditions tend to express how sinful human beings may be rightly related to God by the concept of regeneration, or being born again by the Holy Spirit." This second group "stresses the indispensability of the new birth and the transformation which the new life brings to the reborn."<sup>20</sup>

Southwestern's founders identified the seminary thoroughly with the second soteriology. These revivalists emphasized the new birth and personal

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<sup>16</sup>The first article, which was later incorporated into the convention's Baptist Faith and Message, stated "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." Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 155; William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Revised edition (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1989), 361-62.

<sup>17</sup>Scarborough, "The Primal Test of Theological Education," 171.

<sup>18</sup>Yarnell, "A Theology for the Church: George W. Truett and the Southwestern Tradition," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 63 (2020): 17-18. Cf. Yarnell, "The Gospel, Religious Liberty, and Social Duty: The Holistic Theology of George Washington Truett," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 64 (2022): 69-84.

<sup>19</sup>Garrett, "What Evangelicals Believe and Practice," 108.

<sup>20</sup>Garrett, "What Evangelicals Believe and Practice," 109.

conversion as well as justification by faith. They proclaimed far and wide, “You must be born again.” They went on “a quest for souls,” “a search for souls.” They required a personal, living faith in a “living Lord.” They invited “recruits for world conquest,” in the spiritual sense of winning souls to true faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> Their primary systematic theologian, converted in a Methodist revival, wrote sermons about how Christians must depend upon the Holy Spirit to “win” souls to Christ.<sup>22</sup> Scarborough wanted a ministry marked by vibrant “spirituality.” Southwestern was “a warm incubator for the hatching out of live, burning, shining preachers of the gospel with souls hot with zeal and full of power.”<sup>23</sup>

And true faith requires moral change. Scarborough described five “marks” of the ministers who would come from Southwestern, including “spirituality,” “scholarship,” “doctrinal conviction,” and “denominational sympathy and co-operation.”<sup>24</sup> But he above all emphasized “the true stamp of character.” A won soul is a transformed soul, so the gospel minister must also demonstrate a changed life, a life of virtue. He lamented how “the cause of Christ” had been set back by “the betrayal of Judases and other ministerial defaults in character and conduct.” After blasting ministerial immorality at length, Scarborough laid down this principle: “Let us see to it that our diplomas are a guarantee of character as well as a stamp of scholarship.”<sup>25</sup>

Southwestern’s founders taught a transforming faith in a living Lord. True faith will foster both morality and Spirit-empowered evangelism and preaching. Soul-winning was the second feature of Southwestern’s identity.

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. B. H. Carroll, *Evangelism: An Address* (Atlanta, GA: Home Mission Board, 1906); L. R. Scarborough, *With Christ after the Lost: A Search for Souls* (1919; rev., Nashville: Broadman Press, 1952); Scarborough, *A Search for Souls: A Study in the Finest of the Arts, Winning the Lost to Christ* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1925); Scarborough, *Recruits for World Conquests* (New York: Revell, 1914); George W. Truett, *A Quest for Souls: Comprising All the Sermons Preached and Prayers Offered in a Series of Gospel Meetings Held in Fort Worth, Texas* (Nashville: Broadman, 1917).

<sup>22</sup>“We may persuade, we may argue, we may urge, but all our efforts are in vain unless the re-creative Spirit of God works in the sinner’s heart and leads him to lay hold of Christ to salvation.” Walter Thomas Conner, “The Holy Spirit in Soul Winning,” in *The Founding Faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*, ed. Jill Botticelli (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 2016), 117.

<sup>23</sup>Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 175.

<sup>24</sup>Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 175-84.

<sup>25</sup>Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 175-84.



## II. OUR SOUL-WINNING PASSION

Southwestern's founders typically spoke of "evangelism" or "winning souls" rather than "evangelicalism." In his vision for the seminary, "on a fast train rushing through the Panhandle," Carroll received the heartbeat for our seminary. He relayed this vision in his opening address to Baylor's theological department in 1905, "Our onlooking Lord is still moved with compassion for the multitudes because they are distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a Shepherd." Baptists have a moral responsibility to train pastors to preach the saving gospel of the living Lord. "It is our duty to pray for more laborers. It is our duty, and theirs, to train them for efficient service. It is our duty and high privilege to remember that our Lord is the living God, that he now reigns in heaven, that he now moves."<sup>26</sup>

Southwestern's emphasis upon Christian practice came in Carroll's closing paragraphs. His major premise stated, "Greater emphasis should be placed on the more important." His minor premise was Christ's commission. The conclusion concerned the spirit of Southern Baptist theological education: "we need great scholars—but a thousandfold greater need is a multitude of preachers, not professors. Preachers who know the English Bible, and who scorn not simple folk—who know how to get down off the theological and scholastic stilts, and preach with heart-power to plain people, a simple, old-time gospel." The students "should be drilled in the knowledge that the unction of the Holy Spirit and heart-power constitute the elements of ministerial force."<sup>27</sup> One of Carroll's final acts was to lead the faculty to discipline those who would lessen Southwestern's evangelistic and vernacular Bible preaching curricula. This resulted in the sorrowful yet necessary departure of two otherwise excellent scholars.<sup>28</sup>

Carroll watched Southern Seminary suffer under two scholars.<sup>29</sup> He researched how unorthodox theological education arose in schools originally founded by orthodox believers. Long before recent scholars detected

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<sup>26</sup>B. H. Carroll, "Opening Address before the Theological Department of Baylor University" (September 8, 1905), in Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 31. "More than any man among us B. H. Carroll was loved by the preachers and especially by the uneducated preachers. More than any man among us B. H. Carroll loved and yearned unspeakably to help the preachers and especially the uneducated preachers." Jeff D. Ray, "The Preachers' Friend" (Carroll Collection, November 11, 1914).

<sup>27</sup>Carroll, "Opening Address," 32.

<sup>28</sup>Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 165-67.

<sup>29</sup>The history with Crawford Toy's fascination for higher criticism was known to Carroll, and he approved of Toy's dismissal. Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 96. Carroll was a Southern trustee as the controversy over Whitsitt's anonymous articles unfolded. Alan J. Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight: The Life and Work of Benajah Harvey Carroll* (Austin, TX: Eakin, 1994), 84-94.

“the dying of the light” in the Christian academy, Carroll outlined a method for safeguarding an evangelical school.<sup>30</sup> He understood the problem was not merely intellectual but volitional. This requires renewed focus upon the heart. “‘The time needs heart—’tis tired of head.’ Before the religion of the heart, learning and intellect stand abashed; that is a holy of holies, open to the poorest and meanest, into which these enter not; they may become its sentinels, and outside ministers—it can never become theirs.” We need to love people, Carroll said, “love out of a pure heart, out of a good conscience, out of a faith unfeigned, often revealed to babes, and often hidden from the wise and learned.”<sup>31</sup>

Scholars and pastors need loving hearts—hearts compelled by the living God’s compassion for his world; hearts emboldened with the simple good news that his Son died and arose from the dead; hearts that know sinners must repent, believe, and be born again by the Holy Spirit; hearts which speak truth, but always with love. We need hearts passionate *for* people, not *against* people. The title of the most influential Southwestern text summarized the spirit: *With Christ After the Lost*. They were not with human politicians and petty demagogues. They were with the God who “gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). With this Christ, who left the fold so that he might find the lost sheep and bring her home to the heaven where divine love awaits her with open arms! With this Holy Spirit, who alone convicts and regenerates the sinner by faith. Our founders were not culture warriors against the world but militant evangelists going after the lost. They pursued the world to win it to a living faith in a living Lord. This was Southwestern Seminary’s passion.

*With Christ After the Lost*, dedicated to Southwestern’s first president by the second president, was revised three decades later by the third. E. D. Head said Scarborough “had a throbbing heart of love for the world.”<sup>32</sup> Scarborough’s faculty position “was an altogether new one in theological

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<sup>30</sup>Carroll, “Safeguards of the Seminary.” Following Carroll, Scarborough developed six “steps in the safeguarding of theological education.” Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 154-62. On the spiritual decline of many formerly Christian universities, see George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>31</sup>Carroll, “Opening Address,” 33.

<sup>32</sup>E. D. Head, “Foreword for the Revised Edition,” in Scarborough, *With Christ after the Lost*. Roy Fish says Scarborough “was the author of seventeen books, all of which were either indirectly or directly related to evangelism.” Roy J. Fish, “Lee Rutland Scarborough (1870-1945) Evangelism,” in Garrett, *The Legacy of Southwestern*, 21.

education. No other theological seminary had ever offered courses in evangelism and certainly not with a full-time professor.” Consumed with love for God’s world, Scarborough continued teaching even as he sacrificed his life to build the seminary and the convention. His efforts and those of his 8,000 students from over three decades transformed the Southern Baptist Convention. His successor, my professor of evangelism, Roy J. Fish, concluded, “No better choice of someone to fill this ‘Chair of Fire’ could have been made than that of Lee Scarborough.”<sup>33</sup>

Our founding president found his worthy successor after watching his former student guide his church into sustained evangelistic growth. Carroll trained Scarborough to lead, first by calling on him personally, then presiding in the faculty meeting which appointed him in 1908, then leading the trustees to charge Scarborough with securing this campus and its first buildings in 1910, then leading the trustees to create an assistant presidency for Scarborough in 1913. On his deathbed Carroll famously told his successor, “Lee, keep the Seminary lashed to the cross.”<sup>34</sup> Having been thoroughly vetted, inspired, and commissioned by Carroll, Scarborough wisely continued the evangelical theology, soul-winning passion, and Baptist structure of Carroll.

Lee Rutland Scarborough was born in Colfax, Louisiana. He was born again, like his predecessor, after enrolling at Baylor.<sup>35</sup> Scarborough was noted, above all, for his passionate love for the lost people in this world. He felt life deeply. With shocking emotional vulnerability, he asked his sister to pray for him unceasingly after their mother’s death.<sup>36</sup> He also requested prayer for his missionary travels in a treasured letter to his cousin Maude Searcy, my wife’s paternal grandmother. Lee’s seminary responsibilities took him often, long, and far from the family he loved so much, and he needed his family’s prayers.

Why would such a sensitive man, a man with a clear head in business matters and a good sense for dealing with people of all types, embrace such pain? Scarborough answers that question with reference to his own

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<sup>33</sup>Fish, “Scarborough,” 20. My colleague for the last dozen years and that chair’s current holder, Matthew Queen, agrees.

<sup>34</sup>From the notes of W. W. Barnes, in Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 182.

<sup>35</sup>Lefever, *Fighting the Good Fight*, 12, 17-19; H. E. Dana, *Lee Rutland Scarborough: A Life of Service* (Nashville: Broadman, 1942), 52-57.

<sup>36</sup>“Yesterday was a sad day—just two months mother has been gone. All my orphanage came over me. I wanted so much to be with you. You must take mother’s place in loving me and praying for me. You are dearer to me than ever.” L. R. Scarborough to His Sister (October 14, 1908); The L. R. Scarborough Collection, Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

salvation: “Out of what Christ put in me when he saved me came a hunger and a passionate longing for the salvation of others.”<sup>37</sup> Scarborough gave Southwestern its compassion for people. Fish concurs with H. E. Dana that Scarborough’s “greatest contribution” was “the spirit he imparted to the institution and the place he won for it in the hearts of Southern Baptists, and Baptists to the end of the earth.”<sup>38</sup> The Southwestern spirit is warm-hearted evangelism, calling everyone to personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Scarborough kept the seminary lashed to Christ’s cross by bearing Christ’s love for the lost.

“Keep the Seminary lashed to the cross.” Three truths flowing from that simple command define the heart of this school: First, “the cross” centers our evangelical faith in the gracious atoning work of Jesus Christ. Second, to “keep” it highlights the church’s duty to obey Christ’s commands. Third, being “lashed” points to the pain of passion. We must mentor sacrificial disciples, “lashed to the cross,” faithful followers of Jesus in heart, thought, and deed. Southwesterners go with the heart of Christ after lost people in the world. A passion for preaching to lost souls whom God loves; a passion to make Christ’s name known to every soul; a passion empowered by the Holy Spirit—Soul-winning is the spirit of Southwestern Seminary.

This is the spirit this terribly introverted man caught when I was a young student here. God called me to be a teacher and Leo Garrett called me to follow in his steps. But God told me in an Old Testament elective I had to become a preacher before I could become a scholar. And Roy Fish taught me to be filled with the Spirit and find the unparalleled joy of leading people to Christ, before I could enjoy the peace of the library to read and write. I also learned from my Bible, preaching, history, worship, and education professors about the pain of theological education. I learned to carry the teacher’s cross by watching my professors, and later my colleagues, suffer like our Lord. Why do we take it? Because we mentor soul-winners, preachers, and practitioners. We convey forward the compassion of Jesus for his lost sheep.

The identity of Southwestern’s theology is evangelical, but it is an evangelicalism of a particular type. Our evangelicalism is a God-given, Christ-centered, Spirit-filled, Bible-preaching, people-loving, heart-transforming, passion-embracing, thoroughly moral, revivalistic type of evangelicalism. In short, Southwesterners are “soul-winning evangelicals.”

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<sup>37</sup>Fish, “Scarborough,” 24.

<sup>38</sup>Fish, “Scarborough,” 27.

Southwesterners do not merely confess the gospel from the head; we passionately preach the gospel from the heart.

Carroll and Scarborough were convinced that if evangelism was emphasized, evangelical theology would be preserved. Addressing a convention on Carroll's behalf, Scarborough said of Southwestern Seminary, "We believe that the spiritual power of soul-winning lives in the souls of the preachers, and if they come out evangelistic in their thinking and life, they will not only preserve this hill, but preserve the churches, and all of our other institutions."<sup>39</sup>

### III. OUR BAPTIST FAMILY

Garrett traced the roots of Baptist doctrine to six historical movements: the ecumenical councils and early creeds, "medieval sectarian and reforming groups," "various magisterial Reformers," "Continental Anabaptist influence," "English Separatist influence," and "Independency."<sup>40</sup> Garrett concluded, "Concurrently the Baptist movement's distinctive differences from other Christian denominations were essentially ecclesiological and often, but not always, were comparable to the teachings of the sixteenth-century Continental Anabaptists—believer's baptism by immersion, the true church consisting only of those professedly and evidently regenerate, congregational polity, the priesthood of all believers (disciples), congregational discipline, and the separation of the churches and civil government, with religious freedom for all and with church members allowed to serve as civil officers."<sup>41</sup>

Garrett identified three "major emphases in Baptist theology" or "distinctives" vis-à-vis other Christians:

1. "Congregations Gathered around Believer's Baptism by Immersion"
2. "Religious Freedom and the Separation of Church and State"
3. "Evangelization and Missions as the Task of All Churches and of All Christians"

The first Baptist emphasis prioritizes "congregational polity;" the second,

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<sup>39</sup>Scarborough was delivering a convention report, speaking for Carroll, who was on his sickbed. He called Southwestern "the spiritual child of B.H. Carroll," and sought to reflect that spirit as he spoke in Carroll's stead. Scarborough, "The Southwestern Baptist Seminary" (Scarborough Collection, 1913), 6. Cf. Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 176.

<sup>40</sup>James Leo Garrett Jr., *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 21-22.

<sup>41</sup>Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 714.

“the human conscience in matters of faith;” and the third, “conscious awareness of and obedience to the Great Commission given to Christ’s *ekklesia*.”<sup>42</sup>

Carroll’s presentation of Baptist principles proceeds with ineluctable logic from Christ’s Lordship over the human conscience. Southwestern’s leading systematic theologian, a student of Carroll, likewise affirmed the Lordship of Jesus over each human person was “the fundamental Baptist principle.”<sup>43</sup> From Christ’s untrammelled Lordship over every soul flow Baptist congregationalism and cooperative missions. Jim Spivey says the theology of this “champion of Baptist unity and orthodoxy” was “intensely biblical, experiential, and corporate.”<sup>44</sup> It was also intensely Christological and personal. Sometimes mischaracterized as Landmarkist, Carroll’s astute biblical ecclesiology shaped the structural safeguards for the seminary’s life and doctrine.

Carroll’s 1903 sermon to the SBC Pastors’ Conference in Dallas grounded “Distinctive Baptist Principles” in the New Testament. The church understands the Old Testament’s “typical, educational, and transitory system was fulfilled in Christ.” The church must now submit to the New Testament as “the only law for Christian institutions.”<sup>45</sup> Second, derived from the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, “The sole responsibility of decision and action rests directly on the individual soul. Each one must give account of himself to God.”<sup>46</sup> The third major Baptist principle “follows” from this personal responsibility. Liberty of conscience means that “Neither parent, nor government, nor church, may usurp the prerogative of God as Lord of the conscience. God himself does not coerce the will. His people are volunteers, not conscripts.”<sup>47</sup>

Southwestern’s founding presidents, faculty, and trustees thoroughly respected “liberty of conscience.” In an article disclosing the seminary charter and his desire for the faculty, Carroll stated flatly, “Christian

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<sup>42</sup>James Leo Garrett Jr., “Major Emphases in Baptist Theology” (1995), in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 61-65.

<sup>43</sup>W. T. Conner also believed the Lordship of Christ is the fundamental principle of Christianity. Conner, “The Fundamental Baptist Principle,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, old series, 1 (1917): 26-29.

<sup>44</sup>James T. Spivey Jr., “Benajah Harvey Carroll (1843-1914) English Bible,” in Garrett, *The Legacy of Southwestern*, 3, 6.

<sup>45</sup>B. H. Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles* (1903; reprint, Fort Smith, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, [n.d.]), 2-3.

<sup>46</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 5.

<sup>47</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 6-7.

service must be *voluntary*, not legal, and must proceed from a motive of love.<sup>48</sup> Carroll and Scarborough repeatedly extolled the individual faculty members of Southwestern Seminary in their reports, encouraged them to serve the churches while teaching at the seminary,<sup>49</sup> and defended them from scurrilous attacks. Carroll's constitutional regard for the high dignity and excellent worth of faculty is a standing rebuke to hierarchy and unaccountability in academic structures. Equality of persons is non-negotiable: "With Baptists, the violation of a trained conscience, enlightened by the Word of God has been a high sin against heaven."<sup>50</sup>

Working with E. Y. Mullins, Scarborough ensured the new articles in *The Baptist Faith and Message* included "evangelism and missions," "education," "cooperation," and "religious liberty." The religious liberty article begins, "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and he has left it free from the doctrine and commandments of men which are contrary to his Word or not contained in it."<sup>51</sup> Southern Baptists' official confession bore the imprint of both Mullins and Scarborough, who respected each other.<sup>52</sup> Their 1925 committee bypassed Southern's *Abstract of Principles* for Southwestern's *New Hampshire Confession* as a starting point. The latter was popular with the churches and mitigated Calvinist controversy. The denomination's new confession doubled Southwestern's articles by adding articles on human freedom, evangelism, and missions. *The Baptist Faith and Message* thus reflects Southwestern's original ethos and beliefs.

From the Lordship of Christ over each person's free conscience unfold all other Baptist distinctives. These include, according to Carroll, regenerate church membership,<sup>53</sup> the church as "a spiritual body" separated from the

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<sup>48</sup>His italics. Carroll, "The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary," *The Baptist Standard* (Carroll Collection Manuscript, March 12, 1908), 3.

<sup>49</sup>Scarborough included a detailed affirmation for "the activity of the faculty in the denominational life which supports the Seminary" as the fourth of his safeguards for the seminary. Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 160. On the presidents' promotion of the faculty in his public statements, see Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 99-100, 168, 189-97. Conner founded the church now known as Gambrell Street Baptist Church. Garrett, "Conner," in *Baptist Theologians*, 423.

<sup>50</sup>Scarborough, *Southern Baptists and Evangelism* (Atlanta, GA: Home Mission Board, 1918), 8.

<sup>51</sup>Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 155.

<sup>52</sup>For example, "You are a constant blessing to me." Scarborough to E. Y. Mullins (Scarborough Collection, December 25, 1909). "May the Lord's richest blessings be upon you and the Southwestern Seminary and all connected with it, is my earnest prayer." Mullins to Scarborough (Scarborough Collection, December 29, 1909).

<sup>53</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 8.

world,<sup>54</sup> the “separation of church and state,”<sup>55</sup> the church as a “particular congregation” and not a denomination,<sup>56</sup> the church as “a pure democracy” with all members “equal” in governance,<sup>57</sup> the church as supreme in “all cases of discipline,” including over its officers, and believers’ baptism with the Lord’s Supper.<sup>58</sup>

Submitting to Baptist principles, a “convention, state or national,” must remain a “purely co-operative and advisory body” and must be “composed of individuals, not churches.” Carroll exulted in the non-negotiable truth that “there is no necessity for a hierarchy in order to promote harmony, secure unity of faith and discipline, and to obtain co-operation broad enough and strong enough to do anything God’s people ought to do.” He concluded with authority, “This is God’s order in the gospel of his Son, and the order is itself a distinctive Baptist principle.”<sup>59</sup> Departing from the priority of human dignity and freedom under Christ involves not only a departure from Baptist identity but from gospel order.

Working from his highly regarded, long-studied, and oft-tested consideration of Baptist distinctives and polity, which he believed came from the New Testament, the founding president of The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary hard-baked Baptist identity into the structure of his seminary. He saw the “drift away from the simplicity of the gospel” at the Kentucky seminary and wanted to ensure it did not happen in Texas.<sup>60</sup> His successor had the help of Carroll’s other friends and students, George Truett on the trustee board and J. B. Gambrell and W. W. Barnes in the faculty, to make sure the Baptist principles of liberty of conscience and pure congregational democracy shaped the governance of the seminary and Southern Baptist life.

James Bruton Gambrell presided over the Texas Baptist Education Commission, directed the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and later presided over the Southern Baptist Convention while serving on Southwestern’s faculty. Gambrell said cooperating Baptist agencies do not operate by “federation,” but by “affiliation.” Federation contradicts

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<sup>54</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 9.

<sup>55</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 10.

<sup>56</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 11-13.

<sup>57</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 13-14.

<sup>58</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 14.

<sup>59</sup>Carroll, *Distinctive Baptist Principles*, 16.

<sup>60</sup>B. H. Carroll, “A Word in Passing on the Seminary Issue” (Carroll Collection, September 9, 1897), 1.



Baptist polity by limiting human freedom and restricting trustee boards' authority. Gambrell could serve simultaneously as convention president and Southwestern faculty because Baptists have affiliate, not federal, entities.<sup>61</sup> Gambrell would have blasted any attempt to control his or any other Baptist's voice as a violation of Baptist principles.<sup>62</sup> Baptists have no papacy, no cardinals, no synods. Christ alone is Lord of conscience.

Carroll used the English Dissenters' method of mentoring ministerial students, inviting them into his home. Truett and Scarborough lived with Carroll for years, and William Wright Barnes was the last student invited into the Carroll home for intimate discipleship.<sup>63</sup> Barnes sat with Scarborough at Carroll's bedside, recording the patriarch's dying commission for the seminary. Afterwards Barnes worked closely with Scarborough, chairing the faculty, serving as acting president during his long absences, and functioning as registrar, librarian, and student disciplinarian. A careful church historian also active in denominational life, Barnes called Southern Baptists to preserve our Baptist principles. He coined the term "presbygationalism" to describe Baptists infatuated with elitism.

Barnes's voice formed a choir for Baptist principles with Carroll, Conner, and Gambrell, and Scarborough, Truett, and Mullins:

Let our people return to the emphasis upon the voluntary principle in religious experience and in religious work. Let the Southern Baptist Convention and all the other conventions be considered, not ecclesiastical organizations composed of churches, but voluntary organizations composed of individuals who are affiliated together for a common missionary task. Let us forsake the *presbygationalism* that infests us from the local church through organized life into the Southern Convention and return to the congregational government that is yet our theory.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>J. B. Gambrell, "History of the Education Commission," in *Report of the Education Commission and An Address to Texas Baptists* (1898), 6.

<sup>62</sup> Gambrell argued the Baptist principle of religious liberty "goes to the very foundations of the vast superstructure of proxy religion, and is rapidly working the destruction of the whole religious system." Every man has freedom: "Freedom to read God's Word, freedom to worship God as he feels he should, freedom to act for himself in religious matters." Gambrell, "Obligations of Baptists to Teach Their Principles," in *Baptist Principles Reset*, ed. Jeremiah B. Jeter (Richmond, VA: Religious Herald, 1902), 250-51.

<sup>63</sup> Spivey, "Carroll," 11; H. Leon McBeth, "William Wright Barnes (1883-1960) Church History," in Garrett, *The Legacy of Southwestern*, 49; Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 182.

<sup>64</sup>William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Study in the Development of*

When formulating the “safeguards of the seminary” in January 1910, Carroll explicitly solved the problem of encroaching theological heresy by maintaining, *not compromising*, Baptist principles. In the first place, Carroll addressed the trustees. He pointed out the major problems of self-perpetuating trustee boards,<sup>65</sup> non-subscription, and dependence upon one “great personality.” These problems stem from non-Baptist ecclesiologies. To mitigate these problems, Carroll crafted several “Permanent Laws” to ensure a healthy board of trustees. The trustees must be faithful members of regular Baptist churches, must sign the seminary’s articles of faith, and must attend regularly and carefully to the seminary. The President is an *ex officio* member, “but without the power to vote.”<sup>66</sup>

In the second place, Carroll empowered the faculty to defeat infidelity by requiring they adopt Baptist principles in spirit and in structure. Reacting to the errors at Southern, Carroll believed solutions would be found in “the concurrence of Faculty and Trustees after quiet and patient and fraternal conference.” He invited faculty and trustees to meet jointly and “reach practical unanimity” when their seminary faced major decisions.<sup>67</sup> Carroll disdained the legalistic, power-mongering approach in denominational life. Instead, Carroll wanted Baptist institutions to adopt a “family” approach. He envisioned organic unity without “envy or jealousy between the parts.” Unity in cooperative institutions can be gained through a loving spirit of “fostering care” and a respectful structure of “mediate control.”<sup>68</sup>

Carroll’s charter assigned “Permanent Laws” for the faculty of Southwestern Seminary, comprised of “full professors.” First, each shall “be a member of a regular Baptist church.” Second, each must “subscribe to the Articles of Faith.” Third, the president “shall nominate” and the trustees “shall elect all full professors of the Seminary, and fix their salaries.” The fourth law is particularly important: The faculty, “on the nomination of the President, may appoint tutors for special classes and may temporarily fill any vacancy in a professor’s chair.” The category of “tutor,” akin to “acting professor” or “adjunct,” did not carry with it full faculty status; the category of “professor’s chair” did. Southwestern began with faculty involvement in the hiring of future colleagues. In my own experience,

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*Ecclesiology* (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill, 1934), 74.

<sup>65</sup>Cf. Malcolm Yarnell, “Unauthorized Consent: Self-Perpetuating Boards Violate Historic Baptist Principles,” *The Pathway* (June 6, 2002, Convention Edition), 1.

<sup>66</sup>Carroll, “Safeguards of the Seminary,” 2.

<sup>67</sup>Carroll, “A Word in Passing on the Seminary Issue,” 5.

<sup>68</sup>Carroll, “Work of the Education Commission,” in *Report of the Education Commission*, 12.

nothing helps a “family” atmosphere better than when faculty invite, welcome, and treat one another as brothers and sisters.

Carroll’s fifth and sixth “Permanent Laws” for faculty concerned the registration of students and, through faculty leadership, preparing reports for the board to adopt. Seventh, the articles of faith must be *The New Hampshire Confession*.<sup>69</sup> The eighth law prohibited the conferral of honorary degrees. Ninth, faculty “shall have charge of the curriculum” and “all matters relating to order and discipline.” They also “may enact rules and regulations conducive thereto.” Finally, the faculty “shall confer all degrees” with trustee approval.<sup>70</sup> The faculty and the trustees, each under their permanent laws, were supposed to work intimately together with the president as a family, with Baptist democracy providing communal spirit and structure.<sup>71</sup>

Southwestern’s other founders put these Baptist principles, as expressed in Carroll’s permanent laws, into practice. With loving soul-winning hearts they formed a healthy Baptist family structure for promoting conservative evangelical theology. When Carroll established the Chair of Fire, that unique chair which most clearly exhibits Southwestern’s loving practical heartbeat, he wanted Scarborough to fill it. But he did not say, “I want it. Make it so.” Carroll taught Baptists to be militant for reaching the lost but rejected any hint of a militating structure. In the first place, Carroll consulted with the faculty before adding anyone to this family.

In 1908, Carroll was ready to appoint Scarborough immediately to the faculty, but they believed the wiser course was for this novice to take an acting professor role first. Their logic was that this young man with excellent practical experience yet limited intellectual work should develop his evangelism lectures prior to joining the faculty fully. They believed Jeff D. Ray was elected too hastily and hoped the role of acting professor

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<sup>69</sup> With the substitution of “particular” for “visible” in the article on the church. It has been argued that the fact faculty may not have “any serious departure therefrom in their teaching” allows for minor disagreement.

<sup>70</sup> Carroll, “Safeguards of the Seminary,” 2.

<sup>71</sup> Carroll, a constant reader and teacher of Scripture, also read some hundreds of pages per day in every possible field and retained what he read in his keen mind. He evangelized, preached, and pastored. He led Baptist churches, associations, conventions, and boards to pursue cooperative missions together. He forged unity for the sake of education in the face of challenges from the economy, from the lack of knowledge among Baptists, and from those who sought personal power. He had overcome atheistic infidelity, debated against unbiblical doctrines, and advocated Baptist principles. Drawing on this lifetime of spiritual wisdom, Carroll believed the best way to keep the seminary he envisioned and founded safe from “straying away” was to require the seminary to be Baptist not only in name but in spirit and structure.

for Scarborough would improve professional development. Scarborough's influential writings on evangelism, which came out of the course developed under Carroll's mentorship, ultimately originated in the faculty's wise requirement that he "mature and outline a course."<sup>72</sup> In the official election letter delivered to Scarborough, Carroll explicitly signed it "For Faculty."<sup>73</sup>

In 1910, Carroll followed a similar process with Southwestern's founding systematic theologian, Walter Thomas Conner. The idea to hire Conner did not come from the president but the faculty, A. H. Newman and Calvin Goodspeed. Again, Carroll and the faculty tapped Conner but required further development.<sup>74</sup> Conner was first appointed "acting professor," becoming a full professor after writing a thesis at Rochester Theological Seminary, studying at the University of Chicago, and teaching several years.<sup>75</sup> Holder of two earned doctorates, author of 15 volumes, and teacher of thousands, Conner became the "theologian of Southwestern" for its first half-century.<sup>76</sup> His profound teaching ministry benefited from the wisdom displayed in the faculty's oversight. Conner called Southwestern's next great theologian, Garrett, to his role, and many other prominent Southwestern faculty.<sup>77</sup> In 1913, Carroll followed the same proven process with W. W. Barnes. Barnes was elected by the faculty first, then later by the trustees.<sup>78</sup>

Historians have been surprised by the founding faculty's vigorous role in the seminary's governance.<sup>79</sup> But this was Carroll's plan. He believed a Baptist faculty should have a leading role in election, governance, and discipline. A seminary which reflects its churches' ecclesiological distinctives,

<sup>72</sup>Cover Letter, B. H. Carroll to L. R. Scarborough (Scarborough Collection, January 11, 1908), 1.

<sup>73</sup>The election notification begins, "At full meeting of Faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, held in my house, evening of January 10, 1908, you were heartily and unanimously elected Lecturer on Evangelism." B. H. Carroll to L. R. Scarborough (Scarborough Collection, January 11, 1908). A third document, this time a letter representing the trustee committee tasked with appointing a "field secretary" to assist the seminary in fund-raising, came from Carroll the same day.

<sup>74</sup>W. T. Conner, "My Religious Experiences," 14; cited in Garrett, "The Theology of Walter Thomas Conner" (ThD Thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1954), 9.

<sup>75</sup>Garrett, "The Theology of Conner," 12.

<sup>76</sup>Jesse J. Northcutt, "Walter Thomas Conner, Theologian of Southwestern," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 9 (1966): 81-89.

<sup>77</sup>Northcutt includes in this number himself, Ray Summers, Baker James Cauthen, Cal Guy, Robert Baker, W. Boyd Hunt, among others. Northcutt, "Conner," 85. "In his later years Conner's recommendation of young men for the Southwestern faculty was tantamount to election." Garrett, "Walter Thomas Conner," in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 424.

<sup>78</sup>McBeth, "Barnes," 49.

<sup>79</sup>Baker did not understand the two-step election process and assumed the faculty records were mistaken. Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 174.

as much as possible, is better able to teach its students to treasure those same distinctives. When delivering his famous charge to Scarborough about how to handle the rise of heresy in the faculty, Carroll defined a process which both preserves the individual professor's liberty of conscience and the community's spiritual democracy.

Carroll directed Scarborough to pursue an orderly process which assigns distinct oversight roles to the faculty, the trustees, the convention, and the churches. Missing from this ordering is any hint a president might take these significant decisions to himself. He has the agency of voice, but he should use it with a care for both the individual and the community. Carroll, aware of the problems with empowering one "great personality," said:

If heresy ever comes in the teaching, take it to the faculty. If they will not hear you and take prompt action, take it to the trustees of the seminary. If they will not hear you, take it to the Convention that appoints the board of trustees, and if they will not hear you, take it to the great common people of our churches. You will not fail to get a hearing then.<sup>80</sup>

The Baptist safeguard at Southwestern Seminary included the faculty's first-level responsibility for itself. This four-fold disciplinary structure established a strong sense of faculty ownership that worked well for generations, despite the centralizing efforts by subsequent administrations.

#### IV. PROTECTION FROM EXTINCTION

What of the generations who follow Carroll, Scarborough, and Gambrell, and Conner, Barnes, and Garrett? Specifically, what is our generation's responsibility? Garrett warned Baptists to "protect from extinction" their principles, identifying threats to each Baptist distinctive from within the culture, the churches, and the denomination.<sup>81</sup> Following Garrett's lead, please hear the heart of a fellow Southwesterner regarding the premiere need of our generation. The president, faculty, trustees, students, alumni, staff, and the churches who support the Southwestern Baptist Theological

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<sup>80</sup>This version comes from Barnes, who was in attendance. Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 182. Scarborough provided even more detail regarding the fourfold process. Scarborough, *A Modern School of the Prophets*, 160.

<sup>81</sup>Garrett, "Protect Baptist Distinctives from Extinction" (1991), in *Collected Writings*, vol. 1, 33-37.

Seminary would do well to pray for, advocate, and preserve, through oral and written instruction, through appropriate administrative action, and by personal passion and practical example, the following three aspects of our seminary's identity:

1. Our evangelical faith identity
2. Our passion for practical soul-winning Christianity
3. Our Baptist family identity

Three historic events demonstrate why we must protect our identity from extinction. First, the faculty suffered turmoil through the "modernizing" of administration by the third president, E. D. Head.<sup>82</sup> The faculty registered a sigh of relief for a return to the family approach by the fourth president, J. Howard Williams. Williams "often called the faculty as individuals and groups to his office for advice and counsel. A bridge of understanding and confidence was built with the faculty." Indicating a negative shift in the accepted demeanor of a president, Baker says, "Dr. Williams was more than a president: he was a trusted friend and co-worker for every cause of the kingdom."<sup>83</sup> Williams partially restored the Baptist spirit of Carroll and Scarborough when he implemented his belief that, "Organization is indispensable to the most effective service. It should never be permitted, however, to get in the way of fellowship."<sup>84</sup>

Carroll created a Baptist culture giving the faculty spiritual and structural responsibility for itself through communal self-governance, followed by trustee, convention, and church oversight. Scarborough nursed that Baptist spirit and structure. Williams nursed the Baptist spirit back to health, although the Baptist structure was increasingly diminished. Garrett concludes his *Baptist Theology* with a question which should haunt this current generation until we provide the appropriate answer. "Today's

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<sup>82</sup>On Head's efforts at "modernizing" the faculty and the departure of several, see Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 300-3. On the high faculty turnover, the return of Northcutt with a promotion in 1950, and of W. Boyd Hunt with Head's departure, see Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 304-6. Garrett noted the harm caused to theological education by both high faculty turnover and low faculty remuneration. "We cannot fulfill the theological education task of Southern Baptists with a high rate of turnover in our faculties. Theological professors do not want to live in luxury. They only want to be able to put their children through college without the necessity that every wife should be employed outside the home and every husband must take additional engagements so that he works eight days a week and fifty-six weeks a year!" See Garrett, "Crisis in Theological Education" (1967), in *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 21.

<sup>83</sup>Robert A. Baker, "The Seminary President," in *J. Howard Williams: Prophet of God and Friend of Man*, ed. H. C. Brown Jr. and Charles P. Johnson (San Antonio, TX: The Naylor Company, 1963), 89.

<sup>84</sup>J. Howard Williams, "Fellowship in the Churches" (ca. 1954), cited in Baker, "The Seminary President," 94.

question may be whether Baptists hold to and clearly affirm and practice their distinctives.”<sup>85</sup> Will we fully recover our Christian priesthood as a Baptist family?

Second, a positive example of how the three distinctives work for our self-preservation came during the Conservative Resurgence. The Peace Committee, elected by the Southern Baptist Convention and chaired by Charles Fuller, was empaneled to examine the apparent drift in the convention’s entities. That committee, composed of strong leaders from the various sides, concluded the Fort Worth seminary did not manifest the theological problems evident in the seminaries in Louisville, Wake Forest, and Kansas City.<sup>86</sup> Southwestern’s soul-winning passion on the one hand and its Baptist spirit on the other enabled her to remain largely evangelical in theology despite the theological headwinds evident elsewhere.

Third, a negative example encourages vigilance in preserving our passion for soul-winning practical Christianity. When Carroll began assembling the founding faculty of Southwestern Seminary, he chose a well-known Baptist church historian. Albert Henry Newman was a proponent of Baptist principles, including “absolute liberty of conscience,”<sup>87</sup> an advocate “for vital evangelical Christianity,”<sup>88</sup> and an accomplished academic. However, Newman admitted he lacked one essential quality for a Southwesterner: “He pointed out and emphasized the fact that he was only a quiet scholar and teacher and that he was lacking in the religious enthusiasm that many of the Texas brethren possessed and that seemed well nigh indispensable for a theological professor in a Texas institution.”<sup>89</sup> In 1911, when some Baptists attacked Newman for failing to teach Landmark successionism,

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<sup>85</sup>Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 725-26.

<sup>86</sup>The Peace Committee sent its “unanswered questions and unresolved issues back to the administrators and trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.” Southwestern was not included, according to its chairman, Charles Fuller, because it was found reliably conservative. “I. Sources of the Controversy,” in “Report of the Southern Baptist Peace Committee” (June 16, 1987; <http://www.baptist2baptist.net/b2barticle.asp?ID=65>); Interview with Charles Fuller (Personal Conference, Fort Worth, TX, June 2001). The Peace Committee also “found there was not a theological balance represented in the faculties at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary or Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.” “II. Findings,” in “Report of the Southern Baptist Peace Committee.”

<sup>87</sup>W. R. Estep, “A.H. Newman and Southwestern’s First Faculty,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 21 (1978): 97.

<sup>88</sup>A. H. Newman, “The Significance of the Anabaptist Movement in the History of the Christian Church,” Commencement Address, Goshen College, cited in Estep, “Newman,” 96.

<sup>89</sup>Autobiographical fragment, Newman File, Dargan Carver Library, Nashville, TN, cited in Estep, “Newman,” 86.

Carroll rightly declined Newman's offer to resign.<sup>90</sup> But in 1913, when the faculty under Newman's deanship lessened the practical orientation of the new seminary, Carroll decided it was time to let Newman finish out the year. Newman subsequently returned to Baylor, agreeing his departure was best.<sup>91</sup> He wished Southwestern well, even donating his portrait to the school.<sup>92</sup>

These examples—the diminishing of the faculty's Baptist spirit and structure after the founders, the relative exoneration of Southwestern's evangelical theology by the Peace Committee, and the necessary departure of A. H. Newman to preserve our practical orientation—should encourage us to be diligent to preserve each of Southwestern Seminary's three identity markers: our practical emphases upon soul-winning missions, preaching, teaching, and worship; our evangelical faith identity; and our Baptist family identity.

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<sup>90</sup>Estep, "Newman," 92.

<sup>91</sup>Estep, "Newman," 93; Baker, *Tell the Generations Following*, 166-67.

<sup>92</sup>Alex Sibley, "A.H. Newman," in *Profiles of Faithfulness: Legacy Servants of The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*, ed. Sibley, revised ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 2021), 43.





## WHO ARE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS?

Blake McKinney\*

### I. THE DIFFICULTY OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST IDENTITY

Definitions are tricky things. One ancient tale says that Plato defined man as a featherless biped, only to have Diogenes the Cynic respond by plucking a chicken and declaring, “Here is Plato’s man.”<sup>1</sup> The engagement with a voluminous, and often heated, historiography requisite to offering a definition of Southern Baptists is in many ways more daunting than a cynical philosopher flinging denuded poultry. Baptist theologians and historians have offered a steady stream of publications arguing and counter-arguing exactly what it means to be a Southern Baptist for over a century.<sup>2</sup> These have included attempts at clarifying Baptist identity within itself and in relation to other Christian traditions.

Forty years ago, James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull offered a new work to this field of study with their, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?*<sup>3</sup> This work was commendable for the collegial discourse amidst sharp disagreement. Tull provided an introductory framework to the debate at hand, Garrett argued that Southern Baptists are “denominational evangelicals,” and Hinson argued for a strong distinction between Southern Baptists and evangelicals rooted in Baptist voluntarism. *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?* emerged four years into what is now remembered as the Conservative Resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention, or the “Fundamentalist Takeover” by others, further demonstrating that debates about Southern Baptist identity are far from

<sup>1</sup>Visoni Gilmar, “Diogenes Popularizes Cynicism,” in *Salem Press Encyclopedia* (2022).

<sup>2</sup>If the reader desires a helpful introduction without opening oneself to the deluge of books whose voluminosity demonstrates the truthfulness of Ecclesiastes 12:12, see David S. Dockery, ed. *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

<sup>3</sup>James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983).

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academic.<sup>4</sup> Seven years earlier William Estep had declared that Southern Baptists were in “an identity crisis” in which the SBC was “confused about its reason for being, its relationship to its past (its tradition), and what others think and expect of it.”<sup>5</sup> These questions only intensified in the years following Estep’s perceptive essay.

In the 1970s and 1980s Southern Baptist identity was a live question. A cacophony of voices offered different opinions on the SBC’s reason for being and its relationship to its past. In 1973 the SBC’s Broadman Press published a book by a Southern Baptist missionary to Nebraska titled, *Baptists: The Passionate People*. The author decried inerrantists as “extremists” who insisted, “that the only valid biblical interpretation is their view.”<sup>6</sup> He grounded Southern Baptist identity in passion for “the authority of the Bible,” “personal redemption,” “the Church,” “doctrinal principles,” “God’s Spirit,” “Southern culture,” “Christian ethics,” and “evangelism.” Foy Valentine, head of the SBC Christian Life Commission, emphatically declared to *Newsweek* “We are *not* evangelicals. That’s a Yankee word. . . . We don’t share their politics or their fussy fundamentalism, and we don’t want to get involved in their theological witch-hunts.”<sup>7</sup> That same year, Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter emerged victorious in the United States presidential race. Southern Baptist Convention annual meetings exhibited growing controversy with every election for convention president. Theological denunciations and attacks on personal character became common in Southern Baptist circles.<sup>8</sup> Hinson found himself the target of such theological concerns and delivered an impassioned chapel address at Southern Seminary in 1986 defending himself against charges of heresy by testifying to his voluntarist Baptist faith.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>For a brief history of the controversy see, Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 285-92. For larger works see, David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996) and Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: B&H, 2000).

<sup>5</sup>W. R. Estep, “Southern Baptists in Search of an Identity,” in William R. Estep, ed. *The Lord’s Free People in a Free Land: Essays in Baptist History in Honor of Robert A. Baker* (Fort Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976), 164.

<sup>6</sup>C. Burrtt Potter, Jr. *Baptists: The Passionate People* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 17.

<sup>7</sup>Kenneth L. Woodward, John Barnes, and Laurie Lisle, “Born Again! The Year of the Evangelicals,” *Newsweek* 88 (25 October 1976), 76.

<sup>8</sup>The title of one publication about this era gives a sense of the tensions, see Randy Shepley and Walter Shurden, eds., *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup>E. Glenn Hinson, “Am I a Heretic?” Chapel address delivered at the Southern Baptist Theological

This introductory article titled “Who Are Southern Baptists?” is far too limited to offer a definitive answer that properly addresses past controversies. The questions entailed in the generic question posed are numerous: What does it mean to be Baptist? Did Baptists come from John the Baptist, Anabaptists, or British Separatists? Are Southern Baptists committed to southern culture? Are Southern Baptists Protestants? Are Southern Baptists evangelicals? Are Southern Baptists political separationists or accommodationists? Are Southern Baptists Arminians, Calvinists, or something else? Does Baptist identity adhere to a coherent theology, or does it all hinge on soul-competency? Are Baptists a confessional people or fundamentally anti-creedal? Why is it the “Southern Baptist Convention” and not the “Southern Baptist Denomination”? The list goes on.

This article will focus on two aspects of Southern Baptist identity as posed by Estep in the article quoted above: Southern Baptists’ history and their “reason for being.” First, it will explore who Southern Baptists were. This will include a history of the Southern Baptist Convention told in broad strokes. A retrospective look at Southern Baptist history reveals an “untidy Baptist past” which may “function as a hedge against excessive pride and triumphalism,” while celebrating what God has seen fit to accomplish through fallen and redeemed people.<sup>10</sup> Second, it will examine who Southern Baptists are. The goal is not to define all of the competing assertions for Southern Baptist identity and assign a winner. To do so would require multiple volumes. Rather than offer a simplistic approach to complex questions, this article will examine what it is that brings Southern Baptist messengers together from thousands of churches each summer to constitute the Southern Baptist Convention. This two-fold answer itself will show that Southern Baptists today are in many ways exactly who they have been since the beginning.

## II. WHO SOUTHERN BAPTISTS HAVE BEEN

As the gospel spread in the United States during the Second Great Awakening, and Baptist missionaries were going abroad, Baptists in the United States sought a way to best support cooperative missions efforts. This culminated in the General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions in 1814. Due to the

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Seminary Louisville, KY, February 26, 1986.

<sup>10</sup>James A. Patterson, “Reflections on 400 Years of the Baptist Movement: Who We Are, What We Believe,” in *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism*, ed. David S. Dockery, Ray Van Neste, and Jerry Tidwell (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 193.

agreement to convene every three years it eventually became known as the Triennial Convention.<sup>11</sup> This convention included Baptists from both the northern and southern states, with Richard Furman of Charleston, South Carolina, presiding over the first meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Triennial Convention focused on international missions whereas the American Baptist Home Mission Society was founded in 1832 to support domestic missions. Though many Baptists in America shared a commitment to missions, the Triennial Convention and American Baptist Home Missionary Society demonstrated the strong division of opinion among nineteenth century Baptists relating to the proper means of supporting missions and maintaining local church autonomy. Debates raged as to whether churches should cooperate via representatives in a convention, individuals should elect on their own to support missions societies, or if it was proper to have any missions agency beside a local church at all.<sup>12</sup> The convention model won the day for international missions support, and over the coming years many Baptist state conventions formed to facilitate statewide Baptist cooperation.

Baptist unity around missions would splinter along the same ideological and regional lines that fractured the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Although some eighteenth century American Baptists in the South had voiced unease regarding American chattel slavery, “over time most white Baptists in the South made peace with the institution, whether they owned slaves or not.”<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile many northern Baptists voiced support for the abolition of slavery. In late 1844 and early 1845 two leading Baptists engaged in public debate concerning scriptural teachings vis-à-vis slavery. Francis Wayland, president of Brown University, and Richard Fuller of South Carolina published a series of letters to one another in the *Christian Reflector*. Wayland argued against slavery as a moral evil, whereas Fuller saw slavery as sanctioned by Scripture and American law. They jointly published their work in a bound volume titled, *Domestic Slavery*

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<sup>11</sup>For more on the relation of missions to the foundation of the Southern Baptist Convention, see W. Madison Grace II, “Beginnings: Southern Baptists, the Foreign Mission Board, and James Barnett Taylor,” in *Make Disciples of All Nations: A History of Southern Baptist International Missions*, ed. John D. Massey, Mike Morris, and W. Madison Grace II (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021), 53-92.

<sup>12</sup>For more on the anti-mission movement, see James R. Mathis, *The Making of the Primitive Baptists: A Cultural and Intellectual History of the Anti-Mission Movement, 1800-1840* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>13</sup>Barry Hankins and Thomas Kidd, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 99.

*Considered as a Scriptural Institution* in 1846.<sup>14</sup> By the time this book was available for purchase, northern and southern Baptists had suffered an institutional fracture over “the peculiar institution.”<sup>15</sup>

American Baptists divided over slavery in 1845, which spawned the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>16</sup> Madison Grace has correctly observed, “Though tensions other than slavery have rightly been presented as reasons for the split from the General Convention, from beginning to end those reasons are all linked to the issue of slavery.”<sup>17</sup> In the early 1840s Baptists in Georgia and Alabama pushed the point of slavery upon the American Baptist Home Missionary Society (ABHMS) and the Triennial Convention respectively. Georgia Baptists offered a slaveholder named James Reeves as a nominee for domestic missions, but the ABHMS avoided the question by refusing to receive the application. The board of the Triennial Convention was less circumspect when Alabama Baptists demanded an answer to the possibility of a slave-owning missionary receiving approval from the Convention. The board responded that if “any one should offer himself as a Missionary, having slaves, and should insist on retaining them as his property, we could not appoint them. One thing is certain; we can never be a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation of slavery.”<sup>18</sup> Baptists from the South responded to this unequivocal repudiation by inaugurating their own missions organizations for both international and domestic missions.

Southern Baptists convened in Augusta, Georgia, on May 8, 1845, for the first Southern Baptist Convention. Southern Baptists elected the immediate past-president of the Triennial Convention, William Bullein Johnson, as their first president. He blamed the rupture as having “its entire origin” with the northern Baptists, but he averred “Northern and

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<sup>14</sup>Richard Fuller and Francis Wayland, *Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution*, ed. Nathan A. Finn and Keith Harper (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup>This term derives from the political rhetoric of John C. Calhoun in the 1830s. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1957).

<sup>16</sup>This article is far too short to address the Southern Baptist Convention’s history with race. For further reading see, Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2012); David Roach, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Civil Rights, 1954-1995: Conservative Theology, Segregation, and Change* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021); and Paul Morrison, *Integration: Race, T.B. Maston, and Hope for the Desegregated Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022).

<sup>17</sup>Grace, “Beginnings: Southern Baptists,” 59.

<sup>18</sup>“Reply of the Acting Board, American Baptist Home Mission Society, 1844,” in *Readings in Baptist History: Four Centuries of Selected Documents*, ed. Joseph Early, Jr. (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 103.

Southern Baptists are still brethren. They differ in no article of faith. They are guided by the same principles of gospel order.”<sup>19</sup> Though claiming to maintain the same faith and order, Johnson and Southern Baptists divided from their northern brethren to form their own cooperative effort at worldwide evangelization.<sup>20</sup> At the first Southern Baptist Convention two mission boards were formed: the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) and the Home Mission Board (HMB). For years the Foreign Mission Board dominated SBC attention, of which Leon McBeth remarked, “one might say at first the FMB in effect *was* the convention.”<sup>21</sup>

From the beginning Southern Baptists maintained a claim to unity in Baptist faith and order with other Baptists, while pressing forward with a distinctly regional identity. For good or for ill Southern Baptists would be distinctly “southern.” The Civil War was a time of immense turmoil replete with religious interpretations and motivations. For many the war became a holy war in which “each side saw itself as a chosen people whom the Lord would crown with victory.”<sup>22</sup> Southern Baptists were prone to such rhetoric and played significant roles, such as Basil Manly Sr., who served as a chaplain to the Congress of the Confederacy and prayed at Jefferson Davis’s inauguration.<sup>23</sup> The SBC Home Mission Board limited its “home field” of missions to the Confederate States of America in 1861 but returned its proclaimed national borders to the broader United States in the postwar period.<sup>24</sup> In the Reconstruction years and throughout the twentieth century Southern Baptist churches dominated the ecclesial landscape of the South. Southern Baptist churches became such a marked feature of Southern culture that historian Martin Marty could confidently assert in the 1970s that the Southern Baptist Convention had become “the Catholic church of the South.”<sup>25</sup> During the Inerrancy Controversy in the late twentieth century, some moderates even went so far as to ground

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<sup>19</sup>William B. Johnson, “Address Explaining Why the Southern Baptist Convention was Organized, 1845” in *Readings in Baptist History*, 112.

<sup>20</sup>For more on this see W. Madison Grace II, “Beginnings: Southern Baptists, the Foreign Mission Board, and James Barnett Taylor,” and McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 381-91.

<sup>21</sup>McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 413.

<sup>22</sup>George Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 68. See also, Mark Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup>For more on Southern Baptists and the Civil War, see Hankins and Kidd, *Baptists in America*, 117-48.

<sup>24</sup>Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987), 389.

<sup>25</sup>Martin E. Marty, “The Protestant Experience and Perspectives,” *American Religious Values and the Future of America*, ed. Rodger van Allen (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 40.

Southern Baptist identity in its affinity with southern culture rather than “theological uniformity.”<sup>26</sup> Simple identification of the Southern Baptist Convention with Southern culture came under significant reconsideration in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century due to the waning cultural isolation of the South, the continued extension of Southern Baptist influence throughout North America, and the Inerrancy Controversy.<sup>27</sup>

While Southern Baptists were unquestionably identified as “southern” until recent years, what it meant to be a Southern *Baptist* went through various controversies since the inception of the Southern Baptist Convention. One of the first major controversies to face the Southern Baptist Convention also contributed to its cultural isolation in the coming years—Landmarkism. Landmarkism is often remembered dismissively for its dubious claims of organic succession tracing an unbroken line of true Baptists all the way back to John the Baptist, but Landmarkism as an ecclesiological movement did much to shape Southern Baptist faith and practice. Landmarkists argued that Jesus instituted local churches (i.e., Baptist churches), not a universal church, and they strove for radical independence of local churches. Landmarkist leaders sought to stake boundaries of the true Baptist church against the threats of compromise including “alien immersion” (e.g., Pedobaptists and Campbellites), pulpit exchanges, and open Communion. Three men are most associated with mid-nineteenth century Landmarkism: James Robinson Graves, James Madison Pendleton, and Amos Cooper Dayton. Graves played the most visible role in the movement through his controversial editorship of *The Tennessee Baptist*, but Pendleton played the more lastingly influential role through his widely used *Church Manual*.<sup>28</sup> Graves’s acerbic writings and bellicose character undermined his influence within the SBC, but Landmarkist emphases on the autonomy of congregations and the importance of properly administered ordinances continued to impact Southern

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<sup>26</sup>Bill Leonard argued that SBC denominational unity was “based less on elaborate theological uniformity than on denominational and Southern identity.” Bill Leonard, “Southern Baptists and Southern Culture,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 4 (1985): 201. Potter identified “A Passionate Concern for Southern Culture” as one of 8 hallmarks of Southern Baptist identity. Potter, *Baptists: The Passionate People*.

<sup>27</sup>See several essays in David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville: B&H, 1993).

<sup>28</sup>For more on J. R. Graves and Landmarkism, see James A. Patterson, *James Robinson Graves: Staking the Boundaries of Baptist Identity* (Nashville: B&H, 2012). James Madison Pendleton, *Church Manual: Designed for the Use of Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1867).



Baptist faith and practice.

Landmarkism caused controversies regarding the nature and function of the church, but the most pressing Southern Baptist theological controversies of the next century concerned the nature of Scripture. In the 1870s at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary—Southern Baptists’ lone seminary until the founding of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1908—a popular professor spurred controversy that presaged theological controversies for decades to come. His name was Crawford H. Toy.<sup>29</sup> After the Civil War prevented his missionary aspirations, Toy pursued a career in academia. He adopted historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation while studying in Berlin. For a time he sought to balance commitments to historic biblical orthodoxy with an approach to Scripture that presupposed falsehoods in the biblical text, but in so doing “he held that the Bible was wholly true because it was true in its ‘real’ spiritual intent, even though its historical human assertions were in error.”<sup>30</sup> His faculty colleagues endeavored to win him back to biblical orthodoxy, but after anonymous denunciations in the denominational press, Toy offered an impassioned defense in a resignation letter that he was surprised to see accepted. Toy went on to teach at Harvard and eventually became a Unitarian. He was the first of many Southern Baptist seminary professors to draw ire for their approaches to Scripture.

American Christianity featured numerous conflicts across the Protestant landscape in the early twentieth century in what has come to be called the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy.<sup>31</sup> Due to a variety of factors Southern Baptists played only a small part in the broader turmoil. Southern Baptists were according to some “sixty years behind the evangelicals” when the inerrancy controversy exploded on Southern Baptist life in the second-half of the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup> The 1960s witnessed two major publishing scandals relating to historical-critical scholarship published by the SBC’s Broadman Press. In 1961 Broadman Press published Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Old Testament professor Ralph Elliott’s *The Message of Genesis* that denied the historical reliability of the creation and

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<sup>29</sup>For an analysis of the Toy Controversy, see Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 108-49.

<sup>30</sup>Wills, *Southern Seminary*, 116.

<sup>31</sup>See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture, Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>32</sup>See David S. Dockery and James Emery White, “Introduction,” in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals*, 25.

flood accounts and questioned the veracity of other supernatural occurrences in Genesis.<sup>33</sup> Within the next two years Elliott lost his position at Midwestern and the SBC approved an updated *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963) that retained the proclamation that the Bible “has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.” In 1969 the *Broadman Bible Commentary* featured analysis of the book of Genesis by a British Baptist named G. Henton Davies whose position was in many respects similar to Elliott’s earlier work. A firestorm of controversy spread within the SBC. W. A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, published a sermon titled “Why I Preach that the Bible is Literally True,” which was countered by the dean of the School of Theology at Southern Seminary William Hull’s “Shall We Call the Bible Infallible?”<sup>34</sup> Whereas the Toy Controversy of the 1870s flamed large and then sizzled, the debate about the Bible in the Southern Baptist Convention raged for three decades.

Beginning in 1979 and continuing into the 1990s theological conservatives committed to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy enacted a plan to take control of SBC bureaucracy in order to rid SBC seminaries and entities of those who denied inerrancy. This successful campaign that achieved consecutive SBC presidential elections for over a decade brought about an institutional transformation within the Southern Baptist Convention. This era was contentious. A strict dichotomy of “liberals” vs. “conservatives” was employed from opposite sides of the debate, but this dichotomy was overstated. David S. Dockery and James Emery White provide a helpful four-fold breakdown of the spectrum within the inerrancy debate listing, “(1) fundamentalists, (2) conservatives, (3) moderates, and (4) liberals.” Although all were present to varying degrees, they observed that the SBC by the early 1990s was “composed primarily of conservative and moderate evangelicals.”<sup>35</sup> In the end, many who identified as SBC moderates left the SBC to form the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and many non-inerrantist academics left SBC seminaries to work in other Baptist colleges or to found new academic institutions. In 2000 the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a revision of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, which declared, “all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy” and changed the BFM 1963 language of Scripture being “the record of God’s revelation”

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<sup>33</sup>See Ralph Elliott, *The Message of Genesis* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961).

<sup>34</sup>For more on controversies of the 1960s see Wills, “Progressive Theology and Southern Baptist Controversies of the 1950s and 1960s,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 7 (2003): 12-31.

<sup>35</sup>Dockery and White, “Introduction,” in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals*, 4, 9.

to a clear statement that Scripture “is God’s revelation.”<sup>36</sup>

The history of Southern Baptists has not been a single unbroken sequence of controversies. Southern Baptists came together for missions, and have always been at their best when cooperating to spread Christ’s Kingdom. In 1925 as other denominations were being torn asunder by the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy, Southern Baptists came together in Memphis, Tennessee, and paved the way for the future of the SBC. The SBC had its own voices sowing division, like J. Frank Norris, but the 1925 annual meeting saw Southern Baptists come together around a shared confession and a shared mission. The Southern Baptist Convention adopted its first official confessional statement—the *Baptist Faith and Message*. They also approved a plan that launched the Cooperative Program. The vision was for cooperative giving through the Cooperative Program that would then be allocated efficiently “to send and support missionaries, equip pastors and church leaders, enable educational institutions, and address benevolent, social, ethical, and moral concerns.”<sup>37</sup> The Cooperative Program greatly simplified the administrative costs compared to the old system of fundraising agents for each entity. For nearly a century the Cooperative Program has brought Southern Baptists together in their cooperative efforts to reach the world for Christ. McBeth observed, “*Cooperative* is the right word to describe this stewardship program, and it shows the near canonization of both the word and the concept among Southern Baptists.”<sup>38</sup> Southern Baptists in the twentieth century cooperated in funding missionaries through the Cooperative Program. Furthermore, Southern Baptists engaged in a shared experience of Southern Baptist programs.

For decades Southern Baptist churches engaged in shared Southern Baptist programming including enrolling their children in Royal Ambassadors and Girls in Action and then the Baptist Training Union, learning from uniform Sunday School lessons from the Sunday School Board, tithing through the six-point envelope system, and singing from

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<sup>36</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message*, 1963 and 2000. For more on the Inerrancy Controversy and the *Baptist Faith and Message*, see James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four-Century Study* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 491-513.

<sup>37</sup>David S. Dockery, “Hopefulness, Expansion, Disappointment, and Retrenchment: Paving the Way for the Next Generation of Southern Baptist Foreign Missions, 1915-1933,” in *Make Disciples of All Nations*, 161. For more on the Cooperative Program, see Chad Brand and David Hankins, *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: B&H, 2005) and Daniel Vestal and Robert A. Baker, *Pulling Together: A Practical Guide to the Cooperative Program* (Nashville: B&H, 1987).

<sup>38</sup>McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 622.

the ubiquitous Baptist Hymnal.<sup>39</sup> Southern Baptists celebrated Christmas together through contributing to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and they remembered domestic missions every Easter with the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering. Gregory A. Wills has argued “these programs produced a powerful Southern Baptist subculture that fostered tribal identity” in which Southern Baptists were “born into the group, nurtured in the rituals and practices of the group, and completed the certified rites of passage.”<sup>40</sup> McBeth wryly remarked that this programming contributed to Southern Baptist isolation in that “we have not associated much with others partly because we have not had time.”<sup>41</sup> These shared life experiences were common to conservative and moderate Southern Baptists alike. Thus, while the Inerrancy Controversy was undoubtedly about the inspiration of Scripture, it was also about what it truly meant to be Southern Baptist.

As the Inerrancy Controversy waned and conservatives began to exercise sole leadership in the SBC, Southern Baptists continued to consider what it meant to be Southern Baptist. Many feared that Southern Baptists had spent so much time fighting each other that they had lost the Great Commission vision that had brought them together in the first place. Nathan Finn remarked in 2009, “Perhaps the most pressing issue facing the SBC in the early twenty-first century is whether or not all the varieties of Convention conservatives can continue to cooperate together.”<sup>42</sup> Calls emerged for Southern Baptists to enact a Great Commission Resurgence. Messengers to the 2009 Southern Baptist Convention in Louisville, Kentucky, overwhelmingly approved a motion calling for the appointment of a Great Commission Task Force to bring a report and recommendations to the 2010 annual meeting in Orlando, Florida. The Great Commission Task Force called the SBC “to make an unconditional commitment to reach the nations for Christ, to plant and serve Gospel churches in North America and around the world, and to mobilize Southern Baptists as a Great Commission people.”<sup>43</sup> Two years later the Executive Committee brought a recommendation allowing “churches, entities and those organizations in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention”

<sup>39</sup>Leon McBeth remarked, “Perhaps more than any book except the Bible, this hymnal shaped the beliefs and worship of Southern Baptists.” McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 689-90.

<sup>40</sup>Wills, “Southern Baptist Identity: A Historical Perspective,” in *Southern Baptist Identity*, 78-9.

<sup>41</sup>McBeth, “Baptist or Evangelical: One Southern Baptist’s Perspective,” in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals*.

<sup>42</sup>Nathan A. Finn, “Priorities for a Post-Resurgence Convention,” in *Southern Baptist Identity*, 258.

<sup>43</sup>Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual of the 2010 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: SBC, 2010), 78.

who did not want to use the name “Southern Baptists” to be allowed “to indicate their relationship with each other and their involvement” with the SBC with the name “Great Commission Baptists.” This sparked debate and passed by only 314 votes.<sup>44</sup> Concurrently a controversy arose about the relationship of Calvinism to traditional Southern Baptist faith and practice, which itself gave rise to a Calvinism Advisory Committee that issued a report to the 2013 SBC annual meeting.<sup>45</sup> In 2021, the Southern Baptist Convention convened under the theme “We are Great Commission Baptists.” While Southern Baptists remain ambivalent about proposed name changes, it is clear through cooperative giving, evangelism, and church-planting that Southern Baptists are Great Commission Baptists.

### III. WHO SOUTHERN BAPTISTS ARE

“Southern Baptists are Great Commission Baptists” has a nice ring to it, but what does it mean? Most recent records show that 47,614 churches reporting 13,680,493 members comprise the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>46</sup> Now over one-fifth of Southern Baptist churches are in areas outside of the South.<sup>47</sup> Recent years have exhibited many tensions and controversies.

Theological, political, and ideological divisions have been evident in competing resolutions and motions proposed at annual meetings, and special interest groups clamoring for influence have arisen as well. How can one define such a large assortment of autonomous local churches that convene via messengers once a year for two days? Is it even possible?

In a sense there are as many different possible definitions of what constitutes a Southern Baptist as there are Southern Baptists. Yet, it is possible to identify a two-fold essential core of Southern Baptist identity. According to the Constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention, churches are considered to be “in friendly cooperation with the Convention” which have “a faith and practice which closely identifies with the Convention’s adopted statement of faith” (i.e., the *Baptist Faith and Message*), have formally approved their intentions “to cooperate” with the SBC, have “made

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<sup>44</sup>Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual of the 2012 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: SBC, 2012), 80.

<sup>45</sup>Michael Foust, “Calvinism committee issues report, urges SBC to ‘stand together’ for Great Commission,” Baptist Press, May 31, 2013.

<sup>46</sup>*Annual of the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Executive Committee, Southern Baptist Convention, 2022), 122.

<sup>47</sup>*SBC Annual 2022*, 124.

undesigned, financial contribution(s)” through the Cooperative Program, Executive Committee, and/or another Convention entity in the previous fiscal year, do not “act in a manner inconsistent with the Convention’s beliefs regarding sexual abuse,” and do “not act to affirm, approve, or endorse discriminatory behavior on the basis of ethnicity.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, Southern Baptist churches subscribe to the core of Southern Baptist convictions as found in the *Baptist Faith and Message* and cooperatively support shared Southern Baptist entities through the Cooperative Program. These two traits form the core of modern Southern Baptist identity.

1. *Southern Baptists’ Faith and Message*. Baptists have always been a confessional people.<sup>49</sup> From Thomas Helwys’s 1611 “A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining in Amsterdam in Holland” to the 1689 *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* to the 1742 *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* to the 1833 *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* to the three iterations of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (1925, 1963, 2000), Baptists have subscribed to confessions that spelled out Baptist faith and practice. Mullins, who advocated for soul-competency as the preeminent Baptist quality, helped craft the original *Baptist Faith and Message* approved by SBC messengers in 1925. In the twentieth century many Southern Baptist moderates appealed to soul-competency (or soul freedom) as the primary marker of Baptist identity, which conveniently rendered critiques of unorthodox theology un-Baptist.<sup>50</sup> It may have come as a surprise to many who appealed to soul-competency as antithetical to confessions and creeds that Baptist luminaries like J. P. Boyce, B. H. Carroll, and Mullins actually “used the word ‘creed’ in a positive sense and often spoke in an affirming way of ‘the Baptist creed.’”<sup>51</sup> After decades of debate about the role of confessions in Southern Baptist cooperation, Southern Baptists adopted an enlarged *Baptist Faith and Message* in 2000, which now serves as the official statement on Southern Baptist faith and practice.

The *Baptist Faith and Message* is not an exhaustive statement of theology, nor is it a barebones creedal statement of essential Christian doctrine. It encapsulates essential Christian doctrine as well as those doctrines that distinguish Baptists (e.g., the ordinances and ecclesiology). Furthermore,

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<sup>48</sup>“Constitution,” in *Annual of the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Executive Committee, Southern Baptist Convention, 2022), 6-7.

<sup>49</sup>See Timothy and Denise George, eds., *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville: B&H, 1996) and William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969).

<sup>50</sup>See Wills, “Southern Baptist Identity: A Historical Perspective.”

<sup>51</sup>George, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, 3.

the *Baptist Faith and Message* expresses shared Baptist views relating to the “Christian and the Social Order,” “Peace and War,” “Religious Liberty,” and “The Family.” It is around these shared beliefs that Southern Baptists cooperate in gospel ministry. The *Baptist Faith and Message* identifies the core of Baptist doctrine, but it allows for freedom of conscience in non-essential viewpoints. Divergent viewpoints on soteriology and eschatology are present (and welcome) in the Southern Baptist Convention. The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* provides a robust, Baptist, evangelical confession that lays the foundation for cooperative gospel ministry.

Garrett rightly identified Southern Baptists as “denominational evangelicals.”<sup>52</sup> Today Southern Baptists constitute the largest denomination in evangelicalism.<sup>53</sup> The past thirty years have witnessed increased Southern Baptist engagement with broader evangelicalism, including Southern Baptists playing leading roles within the Evangelical Theological Society.<sup>54</sup> Theological boundary staking is important, and the *Baptist Faith and Message* spells out what Southern Baptists believe. Yet, it is ultimately Christ’s call to make disciples of all nations that brings Southern Baptists together, and they do so through the Southern Baptist Cooperative Program.

2. *Southern Baptists’ Cooperative Program.* In many ways “cooperation” defines what it means to be Southern Baptist. Garrett wrote that defining Southern Baptists begins with, “saying that Southern Baptists are members of churches that contribute to the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention,” and McBeth referred to the “canonization” of cooperation among Southern Baptists.<sup>55</sup> The Southern Baptist Convention website defines the SBC as “a body of like-minded local churches cooperating together to reach the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ.”<sup>56</sup> The SBC exists to take the gospel message to the ends of the earth.

Southern Baptists cooperatively support a variety of entities meant to support the spread of the gospel. The International Mission Board (IMB)

<sup>52</sup>Garrett, Hinson, Tull, *Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals?’*, 126.

<sup>53</sup>For more on the SBC and evangelicalism, see David S. Dockery, “Southern Baptists, Evangelicalism, and the Christian Tradition,” in Matthew Emrson, Christopher Morgan, and Lucas Stamps, eds. *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Towards an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B&H, 2020): 267-92.

<sup>54</sup>See David Roach, “ETS meeting: ‘Southern Baptists everywhere.’” *Baptist Press*, November 21, 2014; and Ashley Allen, “Faculty, students represent Southwestern, TBC at annual ETS meeting,” November 18, 2022. <https://swbts.edu/news/faculty-students-represent-southwestern-tbc-at-annual-ets-meeting/>

<sup>55</sup>James Leo Garrett, Jr. “Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals’? A Further Reflection,” in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals*, 221, and McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 622.

<sup>56</sup>“Meet Southern Baptists.” <https://www.sbc.net/about/>.



and the North American Mission Board (NAMB) represent Southern Baptists' longest collaborative endeavors. Both were founded at the first Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 as the Foreign Mission Board and Home Mission Board respectively. Today Southern Baptists are able to collectively support over 6,000 full-time missionaries who never have to fundraise.<sup>57</sup> As of June 2022, 91 percent of IMB missionaries were engaging unreached people groups across the globe, and the IMB has set a goal of increasing "the number of frontline missionaries by 500 over the next five years." IMB personnel reported over 144,000 new believers professing Christ in 2021.<sup>58</sup> In cooperation with NAMB, Southern Baptist churches planted 600 new churches in 2021, provided disaster relief through Send Relief, and supported church revitalization efforts across the United States.<sup>59</sup>

The Southern Baptist Convention does not ordain pastors—Southern Baptist churches do. Yet, for over 160 years Southern Baptists have cooperatively supported theological education for the sake of better equipped ministers in Southern Baptist churches. Today the SBC oversees the work of six seminaries spread across the United States with over 25,000 students.<sup>60</sup> All six Southern Baptist seminaries boast faculty committed to the truthfulness of Scripture who affirm the *Baptist Faith and Message*. Not only do Southern Baptists cooperatively support the training of Southern Baptist ministers, they support all stages of church ministry through Lifeway Christian Resources' educational materials, Guidestone Financial Resources' investment and retirement resources, and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission's cultural interpretation and public policy engagement.

Southern Baptists are at their best when they come together for the sake of the gospel. Southern Baptists have had their fair share of controversies and divisions, but this does not define them. Southern Baptists are committed to the spread of Christ's Kingdom through the proclamation of the gospel. They unite around shared beliefs as found in the Baptist Faith and Message so that they may cooperate to see the Great Commission fulfilled. Southern Baptists are denominational evangelicals committed to cooperation for the sake of fulfilling the Great Commission.

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<sup>57</sup>*SBC Annual 2022*, 123.

<sup>58</sup>*SBC Annual 2022*, 169-70.

<sup>59</sup>*SBC Annual 2022*, 200-9.

<sup>60</sup>*SBC Annual 2022*, 262.





## WHO ARE AMERICAN EVANGELICALS?

Robert W. Caldwell III\*

It has been four decades since Southern Baptist scholars vigorously debated whether they should be categorized as evangelicals or not. Back in those days the debate surfaced amid the massive struggle within the Southern Baptist household over the theological direction of the Convention. While the SBC had been known as a conservative Baptist denomination that stood firmly on the inerrancy of the Scripture, there were signs that this commitment was beginning to erode. Throughout the 1950s to the 1970s Southern Baptist seminaries were hiring biblical scholars who advocated newer, more liberal theories of the Bible—its inspiration, authority, and interpretation. These progressive theories, furthermore, had a lengthy track record of turning every other mainline Protestant denomination liberal during the first third of the twentieth century. Those who welcomed these changes underscored the uniqueness of the SBC and thus tended to downplay the connections between the SBC and the broader evangelical world. Those alarmed by these changes countered that the SBC was indeed an *evangelical* denomination, one that emphasized a high view of Scripture like all historic evangelicals, and one that would forfeit its evangelical credentials if it continued down the path it was following. Clearly, the term evangelical—how it is defined and how it is employed in constructing the identity of a group—can generate significant discussion, tension, and controversy among committed Christians. After James Leo Garrett, the extraordinary historical theologian from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, penned his superb series of essays “Evangelicals’ and Baptists—Is There a Difference?” in 1983, it was hard to deny—no matter what side one was on—that Southern Baptists have always been members of that broad movement in American religious history known as evangelicalism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James Leo Garrett, Jr., “Evangelicals’ and Baptists—Is There a Difference?” in *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 31-128.

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Today, that controversy is largely in the rear-view mirror; most Southern Baptists, both laypersons and leaders, own the label evangelical if they are familiar with a basic definition of the word. Yet in the broader culture the term has become controversial for different reasons, mainly due to the fact that in an increasingly polarized political climate, the word is increasingly taking on the meaning indicating a “religious white Republican voter.” Note, this popular definition of the term—employed largely by pundits, journalists, and politicians—is largely a non-religious rendering on a word that has classically referred to a religious grouping of Christians that share overlapping theological commitments and deep historic roots. This shift in definition has generated considerable confusion and has led many sincere Christians, who otherwise might be identified as an evangelical according to a classic definition of the term, to reject the label as applying to themselves. Sober reflection on the history of evangelicals in American culture can clarify some of this confusion and hopefully resolve some of the tensions related to employing the term. With that in mind in this article I would like to address the question “who are American evangelicals?” I will argue history gives us a clear understanding of the term, more so than contemporary polemics. In the following pages we will define the term and explore current evangelical demographics in America, statistics which surprisingly reveal the continued strength of evangelicals in today’s American religious landscape. Before looking at those issues, I would first like to consider why it is appropriate and even advantageous to utilize the concept evangelical in the first place.

### I. WHY “EVANGELICAL?”

Every denomination has its purists who eye the concept of evangelicalism with a bit of suspicion. There is good reason for this: the concept often refers to a “mere” sort of vital Protestantism, a kind of basic born-again-ism that is devoid of the denominational identity markers which are necessary for an ecclesiastical tradition to operate in the real world. To emphasize the concept of evangelicalism, it is sometimes observed, almost necessarily commits one to deemphasize denominational specifics. This indeed can be a problem that accompanies the utilization of the concepts of evangelical and evangelicalism.

In response, it should be said at the outset that if it is wise to employ the concept, and I believe it is, then we must always do so *as a committed member of a denomination*. As C. S. Lewis noted long ago, the concept of

*Mere Christianity* might be good for the apologist who is helping unbelievers see the truth of the Christian faith, but it is not helpful for taking new converts and developing them into mature Christians.<sup>2</sup> No one matures in the “Church of the Mere Evangelical.” Christian sanctification, rather, is done in the context of a denominational congregation where there are biblically informed traditions on Christian growth, prayer, Bible study, evangelism, service, and a host of other means of grace which have stood the test of time.

If it is true that Christians are better off as committed members of a denomination, then is it not better to do away with the concept of evangelical altogether and simply speak in terms of one’s denominational affiliation? This is an honorable option that has been argued by respectable Christian intellectuals throughout the generations.<sup>3</sup> I do believe, however, that there is such an entity in the broader Christian world that we can call evangelicalism, and that defining it is helpful and serviceable to Christians for at least two reasons.

First, a definition of evangelical is useful for Christian churchgoers individually because it helps them to identify (1) who to share the gospel with and (2) who to help support financially in gospel endeavors. Take Sarah, for instance, a young Southern Baptist university graduate who has been teaching grade school for several years. Sarah recognizes there are other born-again believers beyond the walls of her church and denomination. How does she determine who to share the gospel with among her family, neighbors, and coworkers? At work, Sarah works closely with a nominal Presbyterian friend who rarely attends church services and lives with her partner. Sarah also works with a woman who is a Missouri Synod Lutheran who is open about her faith and is deeply active in a local Bible study. Sarah has begun to pray that God will open the door for her to speak to her nominal Presbyterian coworker about the Lord; she does not, however, pray the same for her Lutheran friend because she believes this woman is an authentic believer in Christ even though she may differ with Sarah over several areas of doctrine.

Sarah also desires to use her financial resources to support gospel ministries around the world. She tithes to her local Southern Baptist church which channels a portion of her money to the International Mission Board.

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<sup>2</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, rev. ed. (1952; repr., New York: Harper Collins, 2009), xiii-xiv.

<sup>3</sup>For an excellent example, see D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

In addition, she supports a couple working with a non-denominational collegiate ministry at the local state university where she attended, a group that was enormously influential in her own Christian life. A mission trip to Haiti in high school also gave her a heart for that nation, and consequently, she supports a child through a non-denominational ministry that ministers to children in areas of extreme poverty around the world. Lastly, Sarah also sometimes supports her local fire department since her father was in that profession, and she believes in the value of supporting that institution. Are all these charitable actions considered “kingdom work” even though they do not directly support her church and denomination? Sarah believes that in the case of the collegiate ministry and supporting the child in Haiti, they are, whereas her giving to the local fire department is not gospel work. The point to be made here is that with each of these decisions—determining who to evangelize and who to support financially—Sarah is operating with a nascent definition of evangelical; she has employed a set of criteria when determining how to pray, who to evangelize, and who to support financially with gospel causes. In short, having a clear definition of the term evangelical can help Christians like Sarah, and churches like the one she attends, make decisions related to how to live out the Christian life on the ground in the real world.

Second, having a clear definition of evangelical can help Christians from many denominations understand the religious landscape of our nation better and one’s place within it. Compared with the SBC, many evangelical denominations are small, representing only a fraction of a percentage of the overall population of the United States. For instance, the Evangelical Free Church of America has 357,000 adherents, and the Christian Reformed Church of North America has 224,000.<sup>4</sup> Both of these denominations comprise a fraction of a percentage of the American population, a small number indeed. This number becomes even smaller (psychologically) in light of the frequent news reports declaring that “traditional religion is dramatically declining in America.” Yet when considering that members from each of these denominations share quite of bit of overlapping beliefs—an affirmation that Scripture is God’s Word, that God is triune, and that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, that salvation is by faith alone—as well as practices—a desire to spread the gospel message and mobilize for

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<sup>4</sup>See “U.S. Membership Report (2010),” The Association of Religion Data Archives. <https://www.thearda.com/us-religion/census/congregational-membership?t=4&cy=2010>. These stats are for 2010 and will soon be updated once the 2020 US Religion Census is published later in 2022.

missionary efforts—then it becomes clear that, despite their many theological differences, there is a broad coalition of similarly-minded Christians out there in the United States which form the basis of *something* identifiable, something that is tangible and empirically measurable. That something has been termed evangelicalism, and as we will see below, it amounts to a sizable group in America's religious landscape. In sum, having a clear definition of evangelical can help many Christians in the United States come to see that, though they may be part of a denomination whose numbers may be small, they are actually part of something much larger than they realize.

## II. DEFINING EVANGELICAL

It is one thing to know why it is advantageous to define the term evangelical, it is quite another thing to define it. Part of the difficulty in defining the term stems from the fact that language changes; what evangelical meant in 1960 is not exactly what it means today. In the last forty years since the rise of the Religious Right, and especially in the wake of the 2016 election, the term evangelical has increasingly been associated with “white religious Republican voters,” a shift no doubt propelled by the dramatic political polarization which has enveloped the United States in recent years.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, this shift in definition inserts politics directly into the definition of the term. This needs to be resisted because the word has historically related exclusively to a religious identity. While political allegiances have always been very important to evangelicals, their particular political persuasions should not become a central feature in defining the term. A simple trip down memory lane reveals why this is the case. Consider for a moment the evangelicals of the First Great Awakening: images of the preaching of George Whitefield, the revival theology of Jonathan Edwards, and the conversion of thousands across the colonies probably comes to mind. What probably does not come to mind are the political leanings of any these individuals. This is for good reason, because when we reflect upon these early evangelicals we do not think of their politics, but their work as ministers, preachers, and evangelists. Politics thus forms no part of our conception of these First Great Awakening evangelicals. Similarly, it is well-known that during the period

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<sup>5</sup>For example, see Ryan Burge, “Why ‘Evangelical’ is Becoming Another Word for ‘Republican,’” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, October 27, 2021. <https://www.sltrib.com/opinion/commentary/2021/10/27/ryan-burge-why/>

of the American Revolution, die hard evangelicals were found on all sides of the political spectrum: there were evangelical Patriots who prayed for the success of the Revolution and sent off their sons to join in the effort; there were evangelical Loyalists whose biblical convictions (Rom 13:2–7; 1 Pet 2:13–17) prevented them from rebelling against George III; and there were other evangelicals who refused to take sides on the issue altogether.<sup>6</sup> In short, evangelicals across history have shared many common religious instincts, the specifics of which we will expound below, but these commonalities have not always led them to affirm the same political positions. It is thus ill-advised today to attach a specific political persuasion to the definition of the term evangelical.

The most widely-used definition of the term evangelical employed in the last thirty years has been the one crafted by British historian David Bebbington in his groundbreaking book *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: 1740–1980*, published in 1989.<sup>7</sup> There he defines evangelicals as Protestant Christians who exemplify four central characteristics: they are *conversionistic*, that is, they believe true Christians must be born again; *bibliocentric*, they have a high view of Scripture; *crucicentric*, they highly value Christ’s atoning death on the cross; and they are *activistic*, they practice evangelism, missions, and other mercy ministries.<sup>8</sup> This definition, which has come to be known as the “Bebbington quadrilateral,” offers several advantages when trying to distinguish between evangelical Protestants from Protestants in general. First, it provides a stable set of identifiable religious activities that can be applied to a diverse set of Protestants, a point which resists the definitional fluctuations that may occur with the passage of time. Second, it is also an academic definition that accords with the standards of modern historical inquiry. The Bebbington quadrilateral does not utilize theological criteria for determining who is “in or out” of the evangelical fold. Its goal is more modest: namely, to identify a set of empirically discernable characteristics that are shared by a diverse group of Protestant Christians throughout the centuries, and then apply that set to determining whether a group of Christians is evangelical or not. This point most likely accounts for the appeal of Bebbington’s definition to the

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<sup>6</sup>For the varieties of evangelical responses to the American Revolution, see Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 288–307.

<sup>7</sup>David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 1740–1980* (1989; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

<sup>8</sup>Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 1–19.

broader, secular community of journalists, sociologists, and pollsters who are merely concerned with mapping the religious landscape of the nation.

One problem with the Bebbington quadrilateral, however, is that it can mis-identify individuals as evangelical who are not evangelical according to the classic, historical sense of the term. Committed Roman Catholics, for instance, might have no problem affirming conversion, the Bible, the cross, and evangelistic activism and thus technically could be categorized as an evangelical by this definition even though they do not identify as such. Similarly, Mormons, Oneness Pentecostals, and other groups historically related to Christianity yet who embrace unorthodox notions of God and Christ, also could be placed on the evangelical spectrum based upon this four-fold criteria.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Bebbington quadrilateral struggles to identify what the term has classically referred to in American religious history.

To remedy this, I would argue that a definition of evangelical requires the inclusion of both theological and historical aspects. Theologically, evangelicals have always seen themselves as belonging to Protestantism which is firmly orthodox in its understanding of God and Christ. Historically, evangelical origins almost always are thought to be rooted in, or closely related to, the great revival movements which occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (i.e. the First and Second Great Awakenings in America, and the great evangelical revivals in Great Britain during the same period). Surely these issues, which factor prominently in the self-identity of many evangelicals, should form a part of our definition of evangelical. Several evangelical historians, like Timothy Larsen and Douglas Sweeney, have put forth excellent definitions with these considerations in mind.<sup>10</sup>

Building upon these insights, and at the risk of oversimplification, I submit the following definition for use in this essay: evangelicals are “orthodox Protestant New Lights and their descendants.”<sup>11</sup> At first glance this definition might seem somewhat cumbersome, but it really is not if we unpack its key components. First, evangelicals are “orthodox” in that they generally affirm doctrines which were identified to be faithful to Scripture

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<sup>9</sup>To illustrate these problems, see Mark A. Noll, “Introduction: One Word but Three Crises,” in *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 5-7.

<sup>10</sup>See Timothy Larsen, “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Trier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-14; Douglas A. Sweeney, “Evangelicals in American History,” in *The Columbia Guide to Religion in American History*, ed. Paul Harvey and Edward J. Blum (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 122-24.

<sup>11</sup>To put it another way, we might say, that evangelicals are “revivalized, orthodox Protestants.”



during the great theological controversies of the Patristic era: the doctrines of the trinity, the full deity and humanity of Christ, and the affirmation that salvation is the result of God's supernatural grace transforming fallen sinners. Second, evangelicals are "Protestants" who affirm that salvation is by faith alone, through grace alone, and wrought by Christ's sacrificial work alone (*sola fides, sola gratia, sola Christus*). They affirm *sola Scriptura*, and consequently reject many of the beliefs and practices that emerged in Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy which do not have a firm basis in Scripture (i.e. purgatory, transubstantiation, and patterns of devotion related to the saints, their relics, and Mary). On both points—the fact that they are orthodox and Protestant—evangelicals proudly stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before them, mainly because they believe that these earlier Christians were affirming the central teachings of Scripture.

Third, evangelicals are a specific kind of orthodox Protestant; they are "New Light" Protestants. The New Lights, we may recall, were those colonial-American Protestants during the First Great Awakening (early 1740s) who welcomed the revivals of the period, supported the evangelistic ministries of itinerants like George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent, and others, and were opposed by the Old Lights who believed that revivals were unnecessary emotionalistic intrusions into the ordered rhythms of normal congregational life. In addition to their affirmation of *right belief* (i.e. orthodoxy), New Lights also shared in what one theologian has called similar patterns of *right feeling* (orthopathy) and *right action* (orthopraxy).<sup>12</sup> With regard to right feeling, the New Lights shared some version of a convertive spirituality (i.e. conversionism) which asserted that authentic Christianity begins when one repents of sin, believes in Christ alone for salvation, and is born again by the Holy Spirit into new life with Christ. With regard to right action, the New Lights shared a common set of religious activities which is fairly consistent across proponents in many denominations: personally, they sought to live their lives as authentic Christians; ecclesially, they often became committed churchgoers; relationally, they desired to see others experience the blessing of the new birth and thus practiced personal evangelism, prayed for revivals similar to the ones they took part in, and supported evangelistic and missionary

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<sup>12</sup>John G. Stackhouse Jr., "Generic Evangelicalism," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. by Andrew David Naselli and Colin Hansen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 124-26. Stackhouse does a great job defining evangelicalism, yet I would take issue with the way he applies the term to various groups and individuals.

endeavors for the sake of extending God's kingdom. It is the union of these beliefs (orthodoxy), this spirituality (orthopathy), and these actions (orthopraxy) that set apart New Light evangelicals from other orthodox Protestants during the First Great Awakening.

The Great Awakening forged a transdenominational renewal movement that touched the lives of thousands of Christians and hundreds of churches throughout the mid-1700s. Historians generally associate the birth of evangelicalism with the emergence of these New Light Protestants in North America and their confreres in Great Britain who were also experiencing similar revivals under the leadership of itinerant evangelists like Whitefield and John Wesley. Today, those post-Great Awakening New Lights have long since died, yet there are Christians, traditions of Christians, and entire denominations who trace their spiritual lineage directly back to these New Lights. They look back with fondness on the great eighteenth-century revivals in general, and they share similar spiritual instincts (orthopathy) and actions (orthopraxy) that the original New Lights did in the eighteenth century. It is these descendants of orthodox Protestant New Lights which I am calling evangelicals today.

Defining evangelicals in this manner—as “orthodox Protestant New Lights and their descendants”—provides us with numerous advantages. It allows us to use Bebbington's quadrilateral with a more narrow lens, one that is more theologically definite (orthodox Protestantism) and historically rooted (they descend from the network of Christians related to the New Light renewal movement of the First Great Awakening). It also prevents us from confusing evangelicals with Roman Catholics (who are not Protestant) and Mormons (who are not orthodox).

Needless to say, the definition does have drawbacks. While we might use it to identify solidly evangelical denominations and groups, there will be organizations on the margins of the definition which may or may not fit neatly into the evangelical camp. Consequently, different individuals will draw the boundaries of evangelicalism differently. Nonetheless, our definition is useful in trying to answer the question of this essay, “who are evangelicals?”

### III. EVANGELICAL DEMOGRAPHICS IN AMERICA

Having given some thought to the definition of evangelical, we turn our attention to demographic questions related to evangelicals in American society today. Many evangelicals today find themselves alarmed by the

rapid changes that have taken place in American society: the growing rates of “nones” in the United States,<sup>13</sup> the increasing secularism of our nation’s major institutions, and the deepening marginalization of committed religious belief (usually committed Christian belief) from the public square.<sup>14</sup> This sense of alarm may lead to the conclusion that evangelicals are severely on the decline throughout the United States, a flickering wick whose light is just about ready to be snuffed out. In this situation, reliable statistics are required to help us distinguish fact from fiction. When we examine data on the religious landscape in the United States, we find a picture that is not as dire as alarmist news reports might suggest.

In 2018, when Gallup asked a group of Americans if they self-identified as “born again or evangelical” 41 percent answered in the affirmative. Furthermore, Gallup has asked this question since 1991, and they have found little change among these numbers over the decades. “The 42% of Americans who on average identified as born-again or evangelical in 1991-1995 is little different from the 41% over the past three years [2016–2018].”<sup>15</sup> Even more striking is that these numbers remain constant even as the rest of America’s religious landscapes reveal significant shifts. For instance, in 1991–1995, 7 percent of Americans professed to have “no religious identity” while that number grew by a factor of two-and-a-half times, or 18 percent, by 2016–201.<sup>16</sup> At the very minimum, these numbers tell us that those who profess to be “born again or evangelical” has remained constant for much of the last generation even though the rest of America’s religious landscape has shifted significantly.

Yet scholars have pointed out a problem with polls based upon self-identification: persons who say they have been born again or are an evangelical might not be recognized as such by authentic evangelicals themselves. The way around this has been to reconfigure the polling in one of two ways: (1) ask more detailed questions about actual religious beliefs and

<sup>13</sup>The “nones” are persons who see themselves as having no religious affiliation or identity.

<sup>14</sup>For a provocative article on the marginalization of evangelicals from the public square, see Aaron M. Renn, “The Three Worlds of Evangelicalism,” *First Things* (February 2022): 25-31.

<sup>15</sup>Frank Newport, “5 Things to Know about Evangelicals in America,” Gallup, May 31, 2018, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/235208/things-know-evangelicals-america.aspx>.

<sup>16</sup>Newport, “5 Things.” See also Candy Gunther Brown, “Introduction,” in *The Future of Evangelicalism in America*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown and Mark Silk (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 4-5, where she notes that while the total number of self-identifying Christians dropped significantly between 2007 and 2014 (78% to 71%), the number of evangelicals dropped much less (26.3% to 25.4%). She observes that during this period “the absolute numbers of evangelicals may have climbed from 60 million to 62 million adults” (5).

practices and (2) count the numbers of persons among the evangelical denominations.<sup>17</sup> When these factors are taken into consideration, we gain a better picture of the strength of evangelicalism in the United States. While there are numerous research groups out there which conduct polls and analyze data regarding the makeup of American religion, I will base my comments in this section largely upon the Pew Religious Landscape Study completed in 2014.<sup>18</sup> This study was based upon a large survey of over 35,000 individuals from all 50 states and it asked questions related to the basic religious beliefs and practices of Americans.<sup>19</sup>

Pew found that 70.6 percent of Americans identify as “Christian.” The four largest subgroups of this category were evangelical Protestant (25.4% of the U.S. population), Roman Catholics (20.8%), Mainline Protestants (14.7%), and historically black Protestants (6.5%).<sup>20</sup> The number of evangelical Protestants (-25%) is lower than the Gallup number (-40%), but it still reflects solid evangelical strength in the United States.

Furthermore, when we consider the fact that the historically black Protestant denominations share both similar historical origins and similar beliefs and practices with those identified as “evangelical Protestants,” then a solid case can be made to include them under the evangelical umbrella since they too are descendants of “orthodox Protestant New Lights.” Pollsters, sociologists, and historians have routinely counted the historically black Protestant churches as a separate category because these denominations emerged as separate entities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and have largely operated outside of what Pew identifies as the evangelical Protestant mainstream. In addition, many members of the historically black Protestant churches do not embrace the evangelical label, opting instead for the term “born again Christian.”<sup>21</sup> Yet the vast

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<sup>17</sup>For the various ways of counting evangelicals, see Mark A. Noll, “Evangelical Constituencies in North America and the World,” in *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 74-6.

<sup>18</sup>“Religious Landscape Study,” Pew Research Center, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/>. The data I discuss below is drawn from the online pages of this study.

<sup>19</sup>Furthermore, this was the second study Pew Research conducted like this in seven years; their earlier study was from 2007.

<sup>20</sup>Other smaller groups Pew identifies under the “Christian” umbrella are “Mormon” (1.6% of the United States population), “Orthodox Christian” (0.5%), “Jehovah’s Witnesses” (0.8%), and “Other” (0.4%).

<sup>21</sup>Candy Gunther Brown notes that there are numerous “historical and cultural reasons that black and white Christians who share much in common theologically have different experiences and priorities—which lead many theologically conservative African Americans to reject

majority of historically black Protestants are associated with the Baptist, Methodist, or Pentecostal traditions, each of which have deep roots in the New Light Protestantism of the eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

As we press deeper into the Pew data, we find more evidence of genuine evangelicalism than what we might find based merely on the criteria people use to self-identify. Pew asked respondents numerous questions related to their basic religious beliefs and practices. Their questions do not drill down thoroughly into specific theological affirmations that evangelicals would like to see asked—for instance, questions related to inerrancy of Scripture or the substitutionary atonement. But their questions were structured in such a way to determine basic convictions about Scripture, belief in God, Heaven and Hell, and practices related to prayer, church attendance, and the reading of Scripture, features which collectively align with evangelical attitudes, convictions, and behavior.

On the question related to the “importance of religion” in one’s life, both evangelical Protestants and historically black Protestants answered that it is “very important” (the highest category) in significantly higher numbers (79% and 85% respectively) than found among Roman Catholics (58%) and mainline Protestants (53%). Similar numbers can be seen with reference to the frequency of “attendance at religious services” as evangelical Protestants (58%) and black Protestants (53%) attend church “at least once a week” in higher numbers than Roman Catholic (39%) and mainline Protestants (33%).

With regard to the practice of prayer, both evangelical and black Protestants claim to pray “at least daily” and attend a “prayer group” (where those gathered pray together and study Scripture) at least “once a week” in roughly the same numbers (79-80% for praying daily, 44% attendance at a prayer group once a week) while the numbers are considerably less among Roman Catholics (59% pray daily; 17% attend prayer group once a week) and mainline Protestants (54% pray daily; 19% attend prayer group once a week).

Similar numbers are found regarding practices and attitudes related to Scripture. Evangelical and black Protestants read Scripture “at least once a week” in similar numbers (63% and 61% respectively), numbers which are higher than those found among Roman Catholics (25%) and

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the label ‘evangelical.’” See Brown, *The Future of Evangelicalism*, 3. Also see Noll, “Evangelical Constituencies,” 78, and Newport, “5 Ways,” for similar observations.

<sup>22</sup> The Pentecostal tradition, which appeared in the early twentieth century, came out of the Methodist tradition and shares many of the same evangelical instincts as its parent group.

mainline Protestants (30%). Pew also had a question related to “interpreting Scripture” which asks participants how they understand “holy Scripture” to be the “Word of God.” The strongest answer possible—Scripture is the “Word of God” and “should be taken literally”—was affirmed by 55% of the evangelical Protestants and 59% of historically black Protestants, numbers which again are higher than found among Roman Catholics (26%) and mainline Protestants (24%).

Stepping back for a moment, we can make two brief observations based upon this data. The first is basically a restatement of what was mentioned earlier: from the standpoint of our historical-theological definition of evangelical, we may safely include the historically black Protestant churches in with the evangelical Protestants when assessing the strength of evangelicals in American society today. Both groups have similar historical roots, possess broadly similar convictions, and live out their faith in similar ways. If this is the case, then second, we can observe that evangelicals form a sizable religious subgroup in American society. They are not a faintly smoldering wick on the verge of extinction but represent roughly 30 percent of the American population.<sup>23</sup> More recently, Ryan Burge, a political scientist and Baptist pastor has noted the same thing. Looking exclusively at evangelicals (not historically black Protestants) he notes that the “more honest reading of the data is that evangelicals constitute just slightly less than a quarter of Americans in an average year, and there is little reason to think that this will substantially shift in the next decade.”<sup>24</sup>

#### IV. TAKEAWAYS

What can we make from these observations? Three things. The first is that as we push deeper into the twenty-first century evangelicals can take encouragement that their numbers are still strong throughout the United States. The fall of “traditional religion” throughout much of the West is a well-known narrative. Only 10 percent of Canadians are evangelical (compared to ~30% in America).<sup>25</sup> Only 5 percent of citizens of the United Kingdom attend a church of any kind on a given Sunday (compared with

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<sup>23</sup>Pew’s numbers from their 2014 study have evangelical Protestants at 25.4 percent, and historically black Protestant churches at 6.5 percent. This amounts to 31.9 percent, just under a third of American population.

<sup>24</sup>Ryan P. Burge, *20 Myths about Religion and Politics in America* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022), 15.

<sup>25</sup>For the number in Canada, see Noll, “Evangelical Constituencies,” 79-80. The number for the United States is based upon the combined Pew number of evangelical Protestants and historically black Protestants (see note 24 above).

37% in the United States).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Christianity (often in one of its Pentecostal varieties) is exploding across the global South (South America, Africa, and Asia). One might be tempted to conclude from these facts that “God has given up on the West and has moved on.” Yet surprisingly, the United States appears to be resisting the trend to shed its Christian heritage altogether, at least at present. Evangelicals continue to endure as a sizable subgroup in American society. It is true that they are embattled and are increasingly marginalized. But it is often observed that this is the place—i.e. “embattled” and “on the margins”—where they have thrived the most throughout history. Historian Brian Stanley has observed that, based upon the way evangelicalism has survived massive changes in the past two centuries, that “the movement has the capacity to survive significant secessions from the margins and even realignments of the center without succumbing to the disintegration that its most pessimistic adherents or unsympathetic critics have predicted.”<sup>27</sup> The encouragement one can take from this observation should in no way give rise to an obnoxious evangelical triumphalism. But hopefully it lifts those who may, for whatever reason, have come to believe that the evangelical light has receded from North America, when the numbers appear to point to a different conclusion.

A second takeaway from the study is that we should recognize the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of American evangelicalism. The churches that make up evangelicalism in America today are reflecting the increasing complexity of the broader society. If we look specifically at the evangelical Protestant churches Pew identifies, we do not find them to be exclusively populated by white Americans of European descent. Rather, almost a quarter (24%) are comprised of “non-whites,” namely Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans and mixed races.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Pew notes that the number of non-whites grew significantly in evangelical Protestantism from 2007 (19%) to 2014 (24%), a fact which seems to indicate that non-whites are increasingly finding a religious home in the broad family of evangelical Protestant churches.<sup>29</sup> This is good news

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<sup>26</sup>For the UK (in 2015), see “Christianity in the UK,” Faith Survey, <https://faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html>. For the US (in 2013) see “What Surveys Say about Worship Attendance,” Pew Research Center, September 13, 2013, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/09/13/what-surveys-say-about-worship-attendance-and-why-some-stay-home/>.

<sup>27</sup>Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013).

<sup>28</sup>“Religious and Ethnic Composition,” Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/>.

<sup>29</sup>“America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/religious-landscape-study/>.



indeed: it demonstrates that God's Kingdom is indeed expanding through every nation, tribe, and tongue. It also helps counter the myth that modern evangelicalism is merely the religion of white middle-class Americans. It would be wise for pastors, churchgoers, and denominational leaders to take note of these trends and find ways to accommodate the new data in our local congregations.

A third and final takeaway is a challenge: as we press further into the twenty-first century, American evangelicals will increasingly need to rely upon each other and find ways to stand together in light of the increasing secularization of the United States. As noted earlier, a big surprise in the last generation has been the rise in the nones, or those who are religiously unaffiliated. Current trends suggest that this group may grow to 35–50% of the population in the next fifty years.<sup>30</sup> An increasingly religiously unaffiliated society means that many of the institutions of our nation—legal, commercial, educational, financial, entertainment, etc.—will increasingly be dominated by religiously unaffiliated individuals who possess little or no concern for organized religion. How does the church survive in the post-Christian America that appears to be coming? Christian writers have already begun exploring ways to prepare for this reality.<sup>31</sup> In the face of these trends, evangelicals would only benefit by finding ways to stand together and present themselves to the world as a “gospel people.” They may not agree on every matter related to soteriology, ecclesiology, or eschatology, but they share common attitudes related to life, the family, religious liberty, and righteousness—attitudes that make a difference in the world and should be contended for if we desire the semblance of a just and flourishing society. Furthermore, evangelicals are a significant segment of the American population as noted above, and they are not going anywhere soon. In such a situation, it would only behoove evangelicals in the years to come to find ways to pray for each other, and link arms and support each other on issues of common concern. This could only

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[pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/).

<sup>30</sup>“Modeling the Future of Religion in America,” Pew Research Center, September 13, 2022, [https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/?utm\\_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm\\_campaign=c8e24a8670-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2022\\_09\\_14\\_02\\_36&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_3e953b9b70-c8e24a8670-401278785](https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=c8e24a8670-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_09_14_02_36&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-c8e24a8670-401278785).

<sup>31</sup>The most popular of these in recent years has been Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017). For a historical study outlining another, more radical approach, see Crawford Gribben, *Survival and Resistance in Evangelical America: Christian Reconstruction in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).



help strengthen the church, its witness, and further its mission well into the twenty-first century.

# ARE SOUTHERN BAPTISTS EVANGELICALS?

Gregg R. Allison\*

In this essay I will answer the question by comparing the *Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM) 2000 to the 1990 edited volume *Evangelical Affirmations* (EA).<sup>1</sup> While that book is dated, it offers eight basic doctrines and nine broad evangelical affirmations that serve as a basis for comparison with the most recent BFM, which followed it by a decade. I will not include any interaction with the historical backgrounds of these two documents. Neither will I concern myself with the heated debate about whether the term “evangelical” has any meaning and advantage today.<sup>2</sup> Rather, these affirmations will serve as a standard-bearer/historical expression of evangelical theology for comparison purposes only.<sup>3</sup>

## I. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

EA includes a statement about evangelical identity.<sup>4</sup> If our question is to be answered, lining up this statement about evangelical identity with Southern Baptist identity is a good place to start.

As EA offers: “Evangelicals are to be identified by what is sometimes called the material or content principle of evangelicalism. They hold to all of the most basic doctrines of the Bible.” What immediately follows is a list of those eight doctrines (*italicized*), all of which correspond to

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>2</sup>For further discussion see “What Does ‘Evangelical’ Mean?” *Christianity Today*, January 2020, with links to earlier discussions; <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2020/january-web-only/evangelical-distinctives.html>.

<sup>3</sup>To orient readers to my theological and denominational identity, and moving from broader to narrower categories, I identify myself as a Christian, a Protestant (affirming the early ecumenical creeds and the principles of Protestantism), an evangelical, baptistic, and a Southern Baptist.

<sup>4</sup>EA articulates its nine affirmations then offers three areas of “evangelical identity”: belief in the gospel, or gospel centeredness; the material principle of evangelicalism, which consists of the basic doctrines that I discuss next; and the formal principle of evangelicalism, which is the truthfulness (inerrancy) and authority of Scripture.

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articles that appear in the BFM (which I cite for comparison purposes).<sup>5</sup>

1. *The triuneness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit*: “The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being” (BFM 2). Moreover, this article extends the treatment of trinitarian doctrine into three detailed sections titled “A. God the Father,” “B. God the Son,” and “C. God the Holy Spirit.”
2. *The pre-existence, incarnation, full deity and humanity of Christ united in one person*: “Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. . . . He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man” (BFM 2 B first part).
3. *His [Christ’s] sinless life, his authoritative teaching; his substitutionary atonement*: “Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin” (BFM 2 B second part).
4. *His [Christ’s] bodily resurrection from the dead, his second coming to judge the living and the dead*: “He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God. . . . He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to consummate His redemptive mission” (BFM 2 B third part).
5. *The necessity of holy living*: “Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God’s purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person’s life” (BFM 4 C).

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<sup>5</sup>In citations of these two documents, the numbers correspond to the respective BFM and EA numbering of the doctrinal *loci*. For the sake of clarity, the BFM’s Roman numerals have been changed to Arabic numerals (e.g., IV to 4). Also, the BFM’s “Saviour” has been rendered “Savior” for an American audience.

6. *The imperative of witnessing to others about the gospel:* “It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man’s spirit by God’s Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ” (BFM 11).
7. *The necessity of a life of service to God and humankind:* “All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth” (BFM 15).
8. *And the hope in a life to come:* “God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their

resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord” (BFM 10).

This EA statement about evangelical identity concludes with warrant for these eight basic beliefs: “These doctrines emerge from the Bible and are summarized in the Apostles’ Creed and the historic confessions of evangelical churches.” The BFM demonstrates its agreement with the biblical foundation for these beliefs by the fact that for each doctrinal *locus* articulated, it furnishes a lengthy list of biblical passages in support. As for the EA’s appeal to the Apostles’ Creed and historical evangelical confessions, the committee responsible for writing the BFM 2000 acknowledged its indebtedness to “the confession history” of the Southern Baptist Convention, with specific reliance on the two earlier versions of the BFM: the BFM 1925 and the BFM 1963.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, a quick glance at the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* (1853), upon which the BFM 1925 was based, reveals that the series of BFMs significantly mirrors the order and content of (most of) the doctrinal *loci* of that earlier confession.<sup>7</sup>

From these EA examples of basic evangelical doctrines, it becomes immediately apparent that the doctrinal commitment of Southern Baptists aligns extensively, if not completely, with “the material or content principle of evangelicalism.” Thus, an initial answer to our question is “yes, Southern Baptists are evangelicals.”

Still, a deeper look can be taken at the nine affirmations and the BFM 2000: Scripture, God, humankind and sin, salvation, the church, last things, the pursuit of justice, religious liberty, and the family. For each entry, I cite the BFM’s articulation, followed by the EA’s articulation (along with statements in the EA’s discussion of evangelical identity), concluding with a few brief observations about commonalities and differences between the two articulations.

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<sup>6</sup>Adrian Rogers, “Message from the Chairman of the Committee,” Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2000, <https://bfm.sbc.net/message-from-the-chairman-of-the-committee/>.

<sup>7</sup>In terms of historic baptistic confessions of faith, the *Second London Confession* of 1689 was modified slightly and renamed the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (1742). All of the founders of the Southern Baptist Confession (1845) adhered to the *Philadelphia Confession*. The *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* (1833; revised 1853) was the basis for the development of the BFM 1925, the first official confession of faith for the Southern Baptist Convention. The BFM 1925 was modified in 1963 and 2000.

## II. THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

### BFM 1. *The Scriptures*

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.

### EA 4. *Holy Scripture*

We affirm the complete truthfulness and the full and final authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures as the Word of God written. The appropriate response to it is humble assent and obedience. The Word of God becomes effective by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through it. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit creates faith and provides a sufficient doctrinal and moral guide for the church. Just as God's self-giving love to us in the gospel provides the supreme motive for the Christian life, so the teaching of Holy Scripture informs us of what are truly acts of love. Attempts to limit the truthfulness of inspired Scripture to "faith and practice," viewed as less than the whole of Scripture, or worse, to assert that it errs in such matters as history or the world of nature, depart not only from the Bible's representation of its own veracity, but also from the central tradition of the Christian churches. [hermeneutical principles follow but are not reproduced here]

### EA 3. *Evangelical Identity*

Evangelicals have a third distinguishing mark. In accordance with the teaching of their Lord they believe the Bible to be the final and authoritative source of all doctrine. This is often called the formative or forming principle of evangelicalism. Evangelicals hold the Bible to be God's Word and, therefore, completely true and trustworthy (and this is what we mean by the words infallible and inerrant). It is the authority by which they seek to guide their thoughts and their lives.

The commonalities of the BFM and EA articulation of the doctrine of Scripture are quite evident. Both documents affirm:

1. the inspiration of Scripture
2. the complete truthfulness and trustworthiness of Scripture
3. (put differently) the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture
4. the full and final authority of Scripture for doctrine, moral conduct, and ecclesial practice
5. the Holy Spirit's illumination of Scripture so that it becomes transformative.<sup>8</sup>

Differences between the BFM and EA include:

1. more details about inerrancy in the EA, which chastises contemporary perspectives that limit Scripture's truthfulness to salvific matters and/or affirm errors in matters of history and the natural sciences<sup>9</sup>
2. an EA articulation of how to interpret Scripture.<sup>10</sup>

Though the BFM does not address these two matters, Southern Baptists mirror the EA's reprimand of aberrant contemporary views of Scripture's

<sup>8</sup>Though not cited in this section, the BFM underscores the Spirit's illumination of Scripture: "The Holy Spirit inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand truth" (BFM 2 C. God the Holy Spirit).

<sup>9</sup>Paul Feinberg's classic evangelical essay on the inerrancy of Scripture treats in detail these disconcerting viewpoints. Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 267-304.

<sup>10</sup>EA 4 continues: "The meaning of Scripture must neither be divorced from its words nor dictated by reader response. The inspired author's intention is essential to our understanding of the text. No Scripture must be interpreted in isolation from other passages of Scripture. All Scripture is true and profitable, but Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture. The truth of any single passage must be understood in light of the truth of all passages of Scripture. Our Lord has been pleased to give us the whole corpus of Scripture to instruct and guide his church." The final statement in BFM 1—"All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation"—provides an interpretive principle regarding a Christocentric hermeneutic.

truthfulness/inerrancy and affirm its hermeneutical principles.<sup>11</sup>

If the inerrancy and full authority of Scripture is the formal principle of evangelicalism, then Southern Baptists are clearly evangelicals on this foundation matter.

### III. THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

As this doctrinal locus is oriented in completely different directions in the BFM (a classic definition of God; e.g., his being, works, infinite perfections, and revelation as triune) and EA (e.g., the truthfulness of God's revelation, the rejection of irrational theologies that deny objective truth), any comparison would not be fruitful.

### IV. THE DOCTRINES OF HUMANKIND AND SIN

#### BFM 3. *Man*

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

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<sup>11</sup>On the matter of Scripture's truthfulness from a Southern Baptist perspective, see R. Albert Mohler, "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classical Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Five Views of Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 29-58.



## EA 2. *Creation and Fall*

We affirm that the triune God created heaven and earth, and made human beings, both male and female, in his own image. In his providence God upholds all things and reveals himself through creation and history. Because of Adam's fall, all became sinners and stand under God's righteous judgment. Human rebellion against God shows itself today in many ways: such as in atheistic denials of God's existence; in functional atheism that concedes God's existence but denies his relevance to personal conduct; in oppression of the poor and helpless; in occult concepts of reality; in the abuse of earth's resources; and in theories of an accidental naturalistic evolutionary origin of the universe and human life; and in many other ways. As a result of the fall of the race into sin, human beings must be born again to new life in Christ. They can be pardoned and redeemed by faith in Christ alone.

The commonalities of the BFM and EA articulation of the doctrine of humanity and the fall into sin are again evident. Both documents affirm:

1. God's creation of human beings in his image and, more specifically, as male-gendered image bearers and female-gendered image bearers<sup>12</sup>
2. the originating sin that resulted in the fall
3. the fall's tragic consequence that all human beings become sinners and are liable to God's righteous judgment, that is, divine condemnation
4. the only hope of rescue from this condition of fallenness and liability to suffer punishment is for God by his grace to regenerate sinners, pardoning them, redeeming them, and giving them new life in Christ whom they embrace by faith alone.

Differences between the two documents include:

1. the BFM's emphasis on (a) the sacredness of God's special act of creating human beings in his image and (b) Christ's redemptive

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<sup>12</sup>The word "gender" here is used as a synonym for "sex" or, more specifically, "biological sex," a reference to the genetic, physiological, and anatomical aspects of maleness and femaleness. For further discussion see Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), ch. 2.

- work for all, both of which underscore that human beings of all races are full of dignity and worthy of respect and love
2. the details of the originating sin, with the BFM ascribing it to the generic “man” who transgressed through the temptation of Satan, and EA specifying it to be the sin of Adam without mention of Satanic enticement
  3. the particulars of the consequence of the fall for human posterity: (a) the BFM offers details about people’s inheritance of a sinful nature and “an environment inclined toward sin” and affirms that “as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation;” (b) EA describes several lines of evidence of human sinfulness, including atheism, oppression of other human beings, occultism, environmental waste, and evolutionary worldviews.

Southern Baptists are in significant agreement with the evangelical articulation of the doctrines of humankind and sin, with the differences being primarily modes of emphasis and expression.

## V. THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

### BFM 4. *Salvation*

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

[This opening statement is followed by four definitions of regeneration (along with the human responses of repentance and faith), justification, sanctification, and glorification.]

### BFM 5. *God’s Purposes of Grace* [a summary, not a citation]

This section treats two divine purposes of grace: election, which is defined as “the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies

sinner”; and perseverance of the saints, which affirms that “those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.”

EA 1. *Jesus Christ and the Gospel* [a summary, not a citation]

This affirmation focuses on the person and work of Christ, underscoring classical Christological truths about his deity, incarnation, humanity, substitutionary death, and resurrection. These truths “are essential to the gospel,” which EA compares with contemporary false gospels that cannot save. For fallen human beings to know the redemption offered in Christ, his followers must bear witness by sharing the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and so “accomplish Christ’s work in the world.”

EA 1. *Evangelical Identity*

Evangelicals believe, first of all, the gospel as it is set forth in the Bible. The word evangelical is derived from the biblical term *euangelion* meaning “good news.” It is the Good News that God became man in Jesus Christ to live and die and rise again from the dead in order to save us from our sin and all its consequences. The Savior’s benefits and his salvation are bestowed upon us freely and graciously and are received through personal faith in Christ. They are not conditioned on our merit or personal goodness but are based wholly on the mercy of God.

The commonalities of the BFM and EA articulation of this doctrine are again evident in terms of both the accomplishment of salvation, the application of salvation, and the announcement of salvation.

1. the accomplishment of salvation: the Son’s incarnation and earthly life, Christ’s substitutionary death involving the shedding of his blood, and his resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and eternal redemption
2. the application of salvation: (a) regarding the divine initiative,

God's mighty acts to save are free, unconditioned, gracious, and merciful; (b) regarding the human response to appropriate these divine benefits: repentance and personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, apart from any human merit or personal goodness

3. the announcement of salvation: believers are obligated to share the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit so fallen human beings may be saved.

The one major difference between the two documents is the BFM's detailing of the mighty acts of God to save: election, regeneration, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Though most of these divine benefits are points of discussion among both Southern Baptists and evangelicals—for example, the conditional or unconditional nature of election, the *ordo salutis*, the perseverance of the saints—these are intramural debates and not points of division between the two traditions.

As with earlier doctrines, Southern Baptists share much in common with the evangelical formulation of salvation.

## VI. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

### BFM 6. *The Church*

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

### BFM 7. *Baptism and the Lord's Supper*

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the

ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

#### BFM 14. *Cooperation*

Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament.

EA 5. *The Church*

We affirm that the church is a worshiping and witnessing community of Christians who profess faith in Christ and submit to his authority. Christ is building his church where his Word is preached and his name confessed. He sustains his church by the power of the Holy Spirit. We affirm that the church is to provide for corporate worship on the part of believers, the instruction of the faithful in the Word of God and its application, and the fellowship, comfort, exhortation, rebuke, and sharing in the needs of the entire body of Christ. In a day of lax doctrine and even more lax discipline, we specially affirm that Scripture requires the defense of sound doctrine, the practice of church discipline, and a call for renewal.

We affirm the mission of the church to be, primarily, that of evangelism of the lost through witness to the gospel by life and by word; and secondarily, to be salt and light to the whole world as we seek to alleviate the burdens and injustices of a suffering world. Though some are specially called to one ministry or another, no believer is exonerated from the duty of bearing witness to the gospel or of providing help to those in need. We distance ourselves from any movement that seeks to establish a world church on the premise of a religious pluralism that denies normative Christian doctrines. Rather we encourage efforts that help believers and faithful churches move toward fellowship and unity with one another in the name of Christ, the Lord of the church.

These two documents give evidence of what I refer to elsewhere as *mere ecclesiology* and *more ecclesiology*. As for the first category, “a *mere ecclesiology* is not an approach that trivializes this doctrine or is reductionistic or minimizes differences of perspective on ecclesiology. As I use it, *mere* indicates ‘common ground,’ in the sense of that which is central to the subject matter.” As for the second category, *more ecclesiology* engages “the task of addressing specific beliefs and practices of different churches and denominations. . . . The essential nature of the church, its core ministries,

its principal leadership framework, and the like that represent the common ground shared by all churches are expressed in different characteristics, functions, and structures in particular churches and denominations.”<sup>13</sup> Within this framework, then, EA represents *mere ecclesiology* and the BFM represents *more ecclesiology*.

In terms of *mere ecclesiology*, EA emphasizes the church as “a worshiping and witnessing community” composed of Christians under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. As a worshiping community, the church provides believers with corporate worship services, instruction in and application of Scripture, and opportunities for fellowship among its members. In terms of being a witnessing community, the missional church engages primarily in evangelism (a duty incumbent upon all its members) and secondarily in acts of good works.

In keeping with a *more ecclesiology* approach, the BFM goes into detail about church government (Southern Baptist churches are autonomous and congregational), covenant membership (baptized believers) and its duties (congregational Southern Baptist churches employ democratic processes in, for example, voting on budgets and officers), the ordinances/sacraments (Southern Baptist churches practice believer’s baptism by immersion and the Lord’s Supper as a memorial rite), and church officers (many Southern Baptist churches have both pastors and deacons) within a complementarian framework (the application of which is a growing point of debate among Southern Baptist churches). Interestingly, only EA mentions church discipline, which is gaining more and more attention in Southern Baptist churches.

Despite these two different approaches to ecclesiology, both documents express some commonalities:

1. the essential identity of the church as a worshiping, Worded (centered on both the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, and the inspired Word, Scripture),<sup>14</sup> and witnessing community
2. the crucial importance of evangelism
3. submission of the church and its members to the Lordship of Christ
4. the importance of fellowship and unity among Christians and their churches, expressed at the end of EA and featured in a

<sup>13</sup>Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 15-18.

<sup>14</sup>For further discussion see Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 110-17.

well-developed separate article (14) in the BFM.<sup>15</sup>

I posit that most Southern Baptists would fully approve of the mere ecclesiology of EA, and that a significant swath of baptistic evangelicals would fully approve of the more ecclesiology of the BFM.

## VII. THE DOCTRINE OF THE LAST THINGS

### BFM 10. *Last Things*

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

### EA 9. *Second Coming and Judgment*

We affirm that Christ will return in power and glory to bring full and eternal salvation to his people and to judge the world. This prospect of the Lord's return to vindicate his holiness and subjugate all evil should accelerate our witness and mission in the world. We affirm that only through the work of Christ can any person be saved and be resurrected to live with God forever. Unbelievers will be separated eternally from God. Concern for evangelism should not be compromised by any illusion that all will be finally saved (universalism). We affirm the preaching of ultimate hope in and through Christ. In an age of anxiety and despair, the

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<sup>15</sup>“Christ’s people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner. Members of New Testament churches should cooperate with one another in carrying forward the missionary, educational, and benevolent ministries for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom. Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ’s people. Cooperation is desirable between the various Christian denominations, when the end to be attained is itself justified, and when such cooperation involves no violation of conscience or compromise of loyalty to Christ and His Word as revealed in the New Testament” (BFM 14).



blessed hope of God's ultimate victory is not only a warning of divine judgment, but a wonderful hope that gives light and meaning to the human heart.

As noted above, one of the essential doctrines embraced by evangelicals is eschatology. EA underscores its basic contours, which share much in common with the BFM:

1. the powerful and glorious return of Jesus Christ who, according to the divine promise, will return personally and visibly to the earth
2. Christ's return will vindicate his holiness, subjugate all evil, and manifest God's ultimate victory by bringing the world to its proper consummation
3. the bestowal of full and eternal salvation upon the righteous who, having been saved only through the work of Christ and resurrected in their glorified bodies, will receive their eternal reward
4. the meeting out of God's righteous judgment upon the unrighteous, who will experience eternal separation from God.

Points of difference include:

1. the BFM gives locational details of the final state of the righteous—eternity in heaven with Christ—and that of the unrighteous—hell, the place of everlasting punishment
2. EA underscores that the blessed hope of Christ's return should accelerate Christian witness and mission to the world; such evangelistic fervor should not be mitigated by the false hope of universal salvation.

Southern Baptists share much overlap with evangelicals in eschatology. Indeed, the two articulations are virtually identical but for the inclusion of particular details.

## VIII. PURSUIT OF JUSTICE

### BFM 16. *Peace and War*

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness. In accordance with the spirit and teachings of Christ they should do all in their power to put an end to war.

The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord. The supreme need of the world is the acceptance of His teachings in all the affairs of men and nations, and the practical application of His law of love. Christian people throughout the world should pray for the reign of the Prince of Peace.

BFM 15 (cited above, repeated here in part)

In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.

EA 7. *Human Rights and Righteousness* (first paragraph)

We affirm that God commands us to seek justice in human affairs whether in the church or in society. In accord with the biblical call for righteousness, God's people should model justice in social relationships and should protest, confront, and strive to alleviate injustice. We must respond to the plight of the destitute, hungry, and homeless; of victims of political oppression and gender or race discrimination, including apartheid; and of all others deprived of rightful protection under the law. We confess our own persistent sin of racism, which ignores the divine image in humankind.

Whereas the issue of a "Christian" approach to justice in society has reached a boiling point in our contemporary setting, both the BFM and EA articulate a brief posture toward its pursuit. Their commonalities include:

1. a divine command, and thus a Christian duty, to seek peace/justice (alternatively, to strive for the alleviation of injustice) for all human beings both in the church and in society
2. such pursuit is in accordance with (a) the biblical call for, or principle of, righteousness, and (b) the spirit and teachings of Christ

3. an extensive list of many injustices that Christians should oppose: war (unique to BFM), all forms of self-centeredness and evil, all forms of sexual immorality, marginalization, political oppression, discrimination, violation of human rights, and (in particular) deeply entrenched racism (with EA giving special attention to apartheid, a key evil at the time of EA's publication)
4. specific steps to pursue peace include (a) modeling justice in social relationships; (b) protesting, confronting, and striving to alleviate injustice; (c) accepting Christ's teachings and his law of love as set forth in the gospel; and (d) praying for Christ's coming reign of peace.

The only difference between the two documents is BFM's details about positive steps to which Christians are called in their pursuit of justice/peace: (1) providing for the needs of the marginalized, abuse victims, the elderly, and the like; and (2) advocating for the unborn and contending for the sanctity of all human life. Certainly, EA's statement about the protection of individual rights, such as the right to life, reflects the same positive concerns (EA 8).

Southern Baptists and evangelicals sound a similar call to pursue justice/peace and to fight against injustice.

## IX. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

### BFM 17. *Religious Liberty*

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to

impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.

#### EA 8. *Religious Liberty*

We affirm the duty of state and society to provide religious liberty as a basic human right. We deplore any oppression to maintain or elicit religious commitments. We hold that civil government should not arbitrate spiritual differences, and that neither church nor mosque nor temple nor synagogue should use political power to enforce its own sectarian doctrines or practices. We do not consider laws to protect individual rights, such as the right to life or the freedom of anyone to confess his or her faith openly in society, to be a sectarian position.

The commonalities of the BFM and EA articulations of religious liberty are quite evident. Both documents affirm:

1. the separation of church and state is a basic principle
2. the state should provide and protect religious liberty; by this basic human right, churches, mosques, temples and synagogues are free to pursue their religious ends unencumbered by (a) state oppression (e.g., penalization of religious convictions, hinderances to full access to God), (b) preferential treatment of one religious expression over another, (c) imposition of taxes to support any form of religion, (d) arbitration of spiritual matters, and (e) interference in forming and proliferating religious convictions
3. because the state/civil government is ordained by God, the church should obey its laws insofar as they do not contradict the divine law; moreover, the church should avail itself only of spiritual means to carry on its work and never resort to the use of political power to enforce its own religious views
4. the only hope of rescue from this condition of fallenness and liability to suffer punishment is for God by his grace to regenerate sinners, pardoning them, redeeming them, and giving them new

life in Christ whom they embrace by faith alone.

Differences include:

1. the BFM's statement on the freedom of conscience, which cannot be constrained or coerced to accept anti-biblical or extra-biblical doctrines and rules
2. EA's denial that church advocacy of laws protective of individual rights (e.g., the right to life, religious freedom) should be considered a sectarian enterprise and thus forbidden by other principles of religious liberty.

Southern Baptists and evangelicals are a united voice on the issue of religious liberty.

## **X. THE FAMILY**

BFM 18. *The Family*

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 reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of 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.

EA 7. *Human Rights and Righteousness* (second paragraph)

We affirm the integrity of marriage, the permanence of the wife-husband relationship, the importance of the family for the care and nourishment of children, and the primary responsibility of parents for the instruction of their children.

This final doctrinal section may underscore two key points: (1) the rapid pace of the demise of the family from the time that EA articulated its position (1990) and when BFM expressed its view, and (2) the broad-tent nature of evangelicalism and the denominationally narrowed nature of the Southern Baptist Convention. In the first case, EA formulated a concise and context-appropriate statement that summarized the overall biblical picture of marriage and the family, while the BFM provided greater detail about key issues affecting those two institutions. In the second case, the BFM affirmed its denominational position of complementarianism, while EA did not take a stand because evangelicalism as a whole embraces both complementarianism and egalitarianism. It may be the case that a sizeable swath of evangelicals affirms the complementarianism of the BFM.

Again, there is widespread agreement between Southern Baptists and evangelicals when it comes to the institution of marriage and the family.

## XI. CONCLUSION

A comparison of *Evangelical Affirmations* and the *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000 leads me to answer our opening question with "yes, Southern Baptists are evangelicals." Visually, I see them as the two circles of a Venn diagram, with significant commonality. Having come from a solidly evangelical background (M.Div. and Ph.D. from Trinity Evangelical

Divinity School) and being a twenty-year veteran of the Southern Baptist Convention, I am cheered by this common ground between the two traditions that I dearly love.

# CONVICTIONALLY BAPTIST AND CONFESSIONALLY EVANGELICAL: A CALL FOR SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL FAITHFULNESS

Nathan A. Finn\*

## I. ON BAPTIST IDENTITY

Baptists have always pondered our identity. Longtime Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary church historian William Estep once argued that “the Southern Baptist historical experience can best be understood as a search for identity.”<sup>1</sup> This has always struck me as an insightful comment about Baptists in general and not just Southern Baptists in particular. Baptists not only tend to ponder our identity, but we have been writing about it for four centuries. Stan Norman suggests that Baptist writings about our identity represent a “confessional theology” within the tradition.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the study of Baptist history, which ought to be a primarily descriptive interpretation of the Baptist past, reflections on Baptist identity are by design intended to be prescriptive, making a case for present Baptist faithfulness and future Baptist flourishing.<sup>3</sup> Such is my purpose in this essay.

I believe that Southern Baptists (and other Baptists) are at our best when we understand ourselves to be simultaneously catholic, reformational, restorationist, and evangelical. By *catholic*, I mean that Baptists should be

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<sup>1</sup>William R. Estep, “Southern Baptists in Search of an Identity,” in *The Lord’s Free People in a Free Land: Essays in Baptist History in Honor of Robert A. Baker*, ed. William R. Estep (Fort Worth, TX: Evans Press, 1976), 145.

<sup>2</sup>R. Stanton Norman, *More Than Just a Name: Preserving Our Baptist Identity* (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 24.

<sup>3</sup>For more on this distinction, see Nathan A. Finn, “Debating Baptist Identities: Description and Prescription in the American South,” in *Mirrors and Microscopes: Historical Perceptions of Baptists*, ed. C. Douglas Weaver (Bletchley, Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2015), 173-87.

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rooted in what is often called the Great Tradition of ancient Christianity and understand ourselves to be in continuity with consensus Christian orthodoxy as it has been passed down through the ages. I appreciate the work of the Center for Baptist Renewal, of which I am a fellow, and resonate with the essays published in the 2020 anthology *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity*.<sup>4</sup> By *reformational*, I mean that Baptists are heirs of the Protestant Reformation, with historic roots in the Anglican and Reformed traditions. We affirm the Protestant recovery of doctrines like *sola Scriptura* and *sola fide*, while also seeking further reformation by applying these principles to matters of church membership, polity, and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>5</sup>

By *restorationist*, I mean that Baptists have always had an impulse, rooted in our commitment to biblical authority, to reflect faithfully and, when necessary, recover courageously the New Testament vision of the church. I am sympathetic to Doug Weaver's contention that this emphasis has been at the center of the Baptist experience throughout our tradition's history.<sup>6</sup> In this respect we have affinity with certain streams of Continental Anabaptism, with whom Baptists share some ecclesiological affinity and by whom at least some of the earliest Baptists in the seventeenth century were influenced.<sup>7</sup> By *evangelical*, I mean that Baptists are part of the wider evangelical movement that arose in the eighteenth century. Following James Leo Garrett, I argue that Southern Baptists in particular are denominational evangelicals who embrace basic evangelical doctrines, but who emphasize the local church to a greater degree than most other modern evangelicals.<sup>8</sup>

For the remainder of this essay, I want to make the case for an evangelical Baptist identity. While everything I write could be applied to other

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<sup>4</sup>For more on the Center for Baptist Renewal, see <https://www.centerforbaptistrenewal.com/> (accessed November 5, 2022). See also Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and R. Lucas Stamps, eds., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B&H, 2020).

<sup>5</sup>I have reflected on this theme more extensively elsewhere. See Nathan A. Finn, "Baptist Identity as Reformational Identity," *Southeastern Theological Review* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 29-49, and idem, "Reforming the Reformation," *Light* 3, no. 1 (Summer 2017): 27-30.

<sup>6</sup>C. Douglas Weaver, *In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008).

<sup>7</sup>For more on this topic, see Malcolm B. Yarnell III, ed., *The Anabaptists and Contemporary Baptists: Restoring New Testament Christianity* (Nashville: B&H, 2013).

<sup>8</sup>Garrett makes his case in James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists "Evangelicals"?* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983).

types of Baptists, I write as a convictional Southern Baptist for my fellow Southern Baptists. My aim is not simply to inform readers about Baptist identity, or even to provoke greater reflection on this topic, though I hope readers will do both. Rather, my purpose is to encourage greater theological fidelity in a time of significant confusion and even drift.<sup>9</sup> Southern Baptists should not only be convictionally Baptist, but we should also be confessionally evangelical, for the glory of God, the health of our churches, and the sake of Great Commission faithfulness.

## II. CONFSSIONAL EVANGELICALISM

Arguably, David Bebbington's oft-cited "quadrilateral" remains the gold standard for understanding evangelical identity historically. Bebbington argues that evangelicals since the early 1700s have emphasized the Bible, personal conversion, the saving work of Christ on the cross, and faith-motivated activism, with emphasis on evangelism. Though evangelicals debate the finer points of each of these emphases, and while many evangelicals embrace additional emphases, the quadrilateral constitutes something like a "mere evangelicalism" for the purpose of historical inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

While Bebbington's paradigm has great value for historians, sociologists, and journalists, for my purposes it is insufficient because it is not (nor is it intended to be) prescriptive. In a 2011 contribution to the volume *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, Albert Mohler advocates for what he calls confessional evangelicalism.<sup>11</sup> He does not argue for a particular confession of faith, but rather for an intentionally confessional posture. Evangelicalism is a gospel-centered movement in continuity with the consensus orthodoxy articulated in the Great Tradition and refined during the Reformation. Confessional evangelicals believe that evangelicalism should have a strong theological core rather than one characterized by ambiguous doctrine and vague boundaries. For Mohler, "evangelicalism is a movement of confessional believers who are determined by God's

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<sup>9</sup>Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research have partnered together in publishing biennial studies of American theology since 2016. For the most recent study, see "2022 State of American Theology," LifeWay Research, available online at <https://research.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Ligonier-State-of-Theology-2022-White-Paper.pdf> (accessed November 5, 2022).

<sup>10</sup>For more on Bebbington's quadrilateral, see David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1992), 1-19.

<sup>11</sup>R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Confessional Evangelicalism," in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 68-96.

grace to conserve this faith in the face of its reduction or corruption, even as they gladly take this gospel to the ends of the earth in order to see the nations exult in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

I appreciate Mohler’s call for a more confessional evangelical identity, and I believe it is entirely consistent with the theological renewal that has taken place among Southern Baptists since the Inerrancy Controversy of the late-twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> Southern Baptists are denominational evangelicals (descriptive), but we must also be confessional evangelicals (prescriptive) if we are to remain faithful in a time of confusion and compromise. To that end, I want to highlight three emphases that are central to confessional evangelicalism. These are by no means the only theological emphases, but they do represent areas where professing evangelicals are prone to theological compromise and doctrinal drift. For the sake of space, I will only introduce each of them with a brief sketch, leaving further elaboration for another day.

1. *Scripture*. Bebbington argues that evangelicals have always had a high regard for the Bible, believing it to be God’s inspired and authoritative written words to humanity.<sup>14</sup> This is surely correct. However, confessional evangelicals also argue that this is not saying enough. Based upon our reading of texts such as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:20-21 (among many others), confessional evangelicals believe the Bible is inspired, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient. These four concepts are closely related to one another, and there is a *theo-logic* to the way confessional evangelicals develop these aspects of bibliology.<sup>15</sup>

We affirm the plenary-verbal inspiration of Scripture. This means that God inspired every word of the original texts that were written by men,

<sup>12</sup>Mohler, “Confessional Evangelicalism,” 75.

<sup>13</sup>Space precludes a discussion of the Inerrancy Controversy. The standard conservative treatments include James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal, 1991) and Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: B&H, 2000). The best historical studies written from a moderate perspective include Bill J. Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) and David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, The New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969–1991* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996). For a sociological interpretation, see Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

<sup>14</sup>Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2-3.

<sup>15</sup>For more on the doctrine Scripture from a confessional evangelical perspective, see David S. Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Nashville: B&H, 1995); D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); Adam W. Greenway and David S. Dockery, eds., *The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture* (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 2022).

representing a miraculous concurrence of the Holy Spirit's divine authorship and the distinctiveness of each human author. It is not enough to say the ideas or concepts in Scripture are inspired; the very words themselves are inspired. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, three generations of theologians at Princeton Theological Seminary helped refine the doctrine of plenary-verbal inspiration over against a variety of challenges to historic Christian understandings of Scripture. Since that time, confessional evangelicals have echoed their insights.

Because the biblical text is not only human words, but also God's words, the words reflect his divine character. God is trustworthy, and thus his written words to us can be trusted. Inerrancy is the conviction that the Bible in its original autographs is without error, speaking truthfully in all matters it addresses. Further, because modern translations of the Bible are based upon ancient manuscripts with a high degree of accuracy, we can trust those translations to convey God's words faithfully and truthfully to us. Inerrancy has been the subject of considerable controversy among evangelicals, including Southern Baptists, but confessional evangelicals remain committed to the principle that God's words are true.<sup>16</sup> This includes his written words.

The Scriptures not only reflect God's perfect character, but they are also grounded in his divine authority. As such, they accurately convey that authority to all readers. To obey the Bible's teachings is to obey God. To disobey the Bible's teachings is to disobey God. The Bible reveals to us what God wants us to understand about himself and the world he created. While the Bible is not our only authority, it is the ultimate authority by which we evaluate all lesser authorities. Confessional evangelicals thus affirm the reformational principle of *sola Scriptura*, or the supreme authority of Scripture alone.

Finally, the Bible is sufficient, communicating everything one must understand to believe in Jesus as Savior and follow him faithfully as King. The sufficiency of Scripture does not mean the Bible is an exhaustive work that speaks to every topic. There are countless subjects the Scriptures do not address because that is not God's intention for his written words. Nevertheless, the Bible is a fully truthful work that is sufficient to help us rightly understand all topics from the perspective of a biblical worldview

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<sup>16</sup>See Nathan A. Finn, "Inerrancy and Evangelicals: The Challenge for a New Generation," The Gospel Coalition (August 21, 2020), available online at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/inerrancy-evangelicals/> (accessed November 5, 2022).

and for the sake of God's glory and our good. The sufficiency of Scripture is hotly contested among believers today, but confessional evangelicals remain committed to this important principle.

*The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* has a robust statement on the doctrine of Scripture that aligns closely with the confessional evangelical perspective summarized above.

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.<sup>17</sup>

2. *Humanity*. At different seasons throughout Christian history, various challenges have led to particular doctrines being elevated in their importance and thus subject to further refinement for the sake of doctrinal fidelity. I believe we live in a time where theological anthropology is the central point of contention. Confessional evangelicals must remain committed to a biblical understanding of what it means to be human while firmly but pastorally challenging the disordered anthropologies that continue to undermine historic Christian understandings.<sup>18</sup>

Human beings are creatures that God created for his glory. Alone among God's creatures, we reflect his divine image and represent the pinnacle of his creative actions. These truths are the most important basis for our belief in inherent human dignity and the sanctity of human life. Humans are comprised of both material and immaterial components, often referred

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<sup>17</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article I: The Scriptures, available online at <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/> (accessed November 12, 2022).

<sup>18</sup>For more on theological anthropology from a confessional evangelical perspective, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Charles Sherlock, *The Doctrine of Humanity*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996); John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); John S. Hammett and Katie McCoy, "The Doctrine of Humanity," in *Theology for the People of God* (Nashville: B&H, forthcoming).

to as the body and the soul or spirit. We are holistic creatures who relate to God, other humans, and in many cases to lesser creatures. God also created humans as gendered beings, either male or female. Our gender is fixed by divine intention, and males and females are designed to complement each other in the context of a one-flesh union that results in their flourishing and the procreation of the human race.

Though humans are the pinnacle of God's good creation, tragically, we are fallen. We are sinners by nature and by choice, rebels against God's just rule, with devastating consequences for both our race and the rest of the created order. Sin corrupts every part of our lives to varying degrees, resulting in a spiritual separation between us and God. Sin also distorts all our relationships with other people. Nevertheless, despite the tragedy of the fall, because of God's common or creational grace humans are not as sinful as we could possibly be, and we still have a divine mandate to exercise dominion over God's creation and be sub-creators of human culture. The family, community, politics, education, the arts, and every other human sphere endures, however their original design has been corrupted, and each will one day be redeemed.

Every word in the previous two paragraphs is under assault in our culture and at times within the visible church. God's creative activity is either rejected or redefined by appealing to evolutionary theories. Human dignity is devalued in myriad ways, both intentional and unintentional, all of which are ultimately rooted in relational animus between individuals and groups of people. The sanctity of human life is challenged by the bookended evils of elective abortion of preborn children and euthanasia (both elective and forced) among the aged. Biblical sexuality is scorned in a culture that increasingly normalizes and even celebrates disordered understandings of gender, sexuality, and marriage. Transhumanists desire to perfect humanity through the integration of biology and technology, which they see as the next step in human evolution.

Confessional evangelicals will likely continue to face enormous pressure to capitulate on biblical anthropology. In the eyes of the world, it is superstitious to claim humans were created by God and reflect his divine image, archaic to claim that males and females are complementary by design, unloving to claim that abortion and euthanasia are moral evils, bigoted to claim that homosexuality and transgenderism are rooted in sinful desires, and evidence of luddism to question transhumanism. Nevertheless, when it comes to theological anthropology confessional evangelicals must be

countercultural for the common good. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to biblical teachings about humanity and their implications for authentic human flourishing.

The *Baptist Faith and Message* 2000 has a helpful basic summary of theological anthropology, though there is an opportunity for future revisions to engage more directly with the challenges that technological innovations present to a biblical understanding of humanity.

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.<sup>19</sup>

3. *Atonement*. As mentioned above, Bebbington argues that “crucicentrism,” or cross-centeredness, is a core emphasis among modern evangelicals.<sup>20</sup> While this is surely correct from a historical standpoint, as with the doctrine of Scripture it does not say nearly enough for confessional evangelicals, whose principal concern is theological fidelity. Scripture not only teaches that the cross is central to God's redemptive purposes, but it also speaks to how the cross achieves redemption. Confessional evangelicals argue that the penal substitution of Jesus Christ is at the heart of

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<sup>19</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message* 2000, Article III: Man, available online at <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/> (accessed November 12, 2022).

<sup>20</sup>Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 2-3.

how sinful humans are reconciled with a holy God.<sup>21</sup>

Human beings are rebels against their Creator-King. We are relationally separated from God and deserving of his righteous wrath against every sinful rejection of his just reign over his creation. The end result of human sin is hell, which is the eternal, conscience punishment of unrepentant sinners. However, in his love for his fallen creatures, God has taken decisive steps to save us from the consequences of our sin. In accordance with the Triune God's eternal plan of salvation, at a particular point in history the eternal Son became a man, taking upon himself all that it means to be human without abdicating anything that it means to be divine. Jesus of Nazareth never sinned, but rather he was perfectly obedient to all of his heavenly Father's commands. In this way, he was the second Adam who was fully faithful to God. For three years he undertook a Spirit-empowered public ministry of preaching God's coming kingdom, healing the sick, and casting out demons.

In the end, Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples and abandoned by his other followers. The Jews rejected him as their King and the Romans crucified him for insurrection. On the cross, Jesus took our place when he willingly bore the consequences for sin, the sinless one thus enduring God's just wrath against sinful humanity. After being dead for parts of three days, God raised Jesus bodily to new life, conquering the power of death. His death and resurrection paid the penalty for the sins of the world, secured the salvation of all who believe, and guaranteed the final redemption of the created order. As the Nicene Creed reminds us, Jesus did all of this "for us and our salvation."

Confessional evangelicals understand that penal substitution does not say all there is to say about the atonement. The biblical picture of the atonement is a rich mosaic that includes a number of motifs, including recapitulation, penal substitution, victory, and moral influence.<sup>22</sup> But confessional evangelicals understand that there is no salvation without substitution, which is the hinge upon which our redemption turns. To switch metaphors, while the full biblical portrait of the atonement is a

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<sup>21</sup>For more on the atonement from a confessional evangelical perspective, see Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984); Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997); Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004); John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006).

<sup>22</sup>See Joshua M. McNall, *The Mosaic of Atonement: An Integrated Approach to Christ's Work* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019).



cut diamond, the facet that shines brightest is penal substitution. There is also debate among confessional evangelicals as to the intent or extent of the atonement. That debate has ancient roots, and it has been a perennial conversation among Baptists since the beginning of our movement in the seventeenth century. While that discussion is important, all confessional evangelicals agree that penal substitution is the heart of the atonement.

The *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* speaks to the atonement, offering a confessional evangelical account.

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the <sup>23</sup>virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man.<sup>24</sup>

More recently, in 2017 Southern Baptists adopted a resolution “On the Necessity of Penal Substitutionary Atonement” that addresses contemporary challenges to the doctrine and concludes that “the truthfulness, efficacy, and beauty of the biblical doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement as the burning core of the Gospel message and the only hope of a fallen race.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>See Andrew David Naselli and Mark A. Snoeberger, eds., *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: 3 Views* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), and Adam J. Johnson, ed., *Five Views on the Extent of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

<sup>24</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article II: God, available online at <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/> (accessed November 12, 2022).

<sup>25</sup>“On the Necessity of Penal Substitutionary Atonement,” (2017), available online at <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-the-necessity-of-penal-substitutionary-atonement/> (accessed November 12, 2022).

### III. CONCLUSION:

#### TOWARD A CONFSSIONAL EVANGELICAL BAPTIST FUTURE

It is possible to affirm historic Baptist distinctives while rejecting evangelical emphases on Scripture, humanity, and the atonement—as well as a host of other doctrines that confessional evangelicals hold dear. One of the reasons that the Southern Baptist Convention needed the Inerrancy Controversy was precisely for this reason: too many Southern Baptists were moving away from our historic evangelical beliefs, all the while appealing to Baptist distinctives as a pretense for theological drift.<sup>26</sup> However, we must remember that the “battle for the Bible” did not begin in 1979, but rather in the Garden of Eden when the diabolical serpent questioned the integrity of God’s words (Gen 3:1–4). Doctrinal deviation will remain an ever-present threat until the end of the age.

For this reason, I believe Southern Baptists must remain both convictionally Baptist and confessionally evangelical. We should not retreat one step from our commitment to a regenerate church membership, believer’s baptism, congregational church government, local church autonomy, and religious liberty for all people. However, we must continue to frame these Baptist distinctives from a perspective that is rooted in robustly evangelical understandings of God, Scripture, humanity, salvation, spirituality, and mission. What would it profit Southern Baptists to gain the largest membership of any Protestant denomination in American but forfeit our souls because of heterodox theology and ethics?

There has always been a tension in the Southern Baptist tradition between our commitment to cooperative mission and our fidelity to confessional faithfulness.<sup>27</sup> In some ways, this is unavoidable in a tradition that values liberty of conscience and local church autonomy. However, we must strive for the proper balance between confession and cooperation. We should joyfully agree with the preamble to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, which argues that confessions of faith are both a “witness

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<sup>26</sup>This impulse is evidenced in works such as Alan Neely, ed., *Being Baptist Means Freedom* (Charlotte, NC: Southern Baptist Alliance, 1988); Walter Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993); Grady C. Cothen and James M. Dunn, *Soul Freedom: Baptist Battle Cry* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2018).

<sup>27</sup>Arguably, this phenomenon has been even more pronounced since the turn of the twentieth century. See Melody Maxwell, “A Confessional People: The Priority of Doctrinal Orthodoxy over Cooperation in the SBC, 2000–2019,” in *Southern Baptists Re-Observed: Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Politics*, ed. Keith Harper (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2022), 18–51.

to the world” and “instruments of doctrinal accountability.”<sup>28</sup> However, we should also affirm what the same confession says about cooperation:

Christ’s people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure cooperation for the great objects of the Kingdom of God. Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner.<sup>29</sup>

As we build upon the theological renewal of the past generation, Southern Baptists should remain confessional evangelicals who affirm Baptist distinctives and who are deeply committed to the principle of cooperative mission. Confession should guide cooperation. This means we must continue to navigate issues where Southern Baptists are most divided, including (but not limited to) the following topics, in no particular order: (1) the most biblical understanding of the doctrine of election and the intent/extent of the atonement; (2) the most faithful applications of the biblical principle of gender complementarity; (3) how best to articulate religious liberty and the separation of church and state; (4) whether or not it is permissible biblically for churches to be comprised of multiple services and/or campuses; and (5) how best to advance the cause of the sanctity of human life in the public square. At the time of writing, the seeds of division are *potentially* present in each of these issues.

Albert Mohler has argued for “theological triage” as a paradigm for interdenominational or pan-confessional cooperation.<sup>30</sup> He makes a distinction between first-order doctrines that separate true Christians from heretics, second-order doctrines that define the theological convictions of different ecclesial or confessional traditions, and third-order doctrines that do not automatically preclude believers of differing opinions from being

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<sup>28</sup>“Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee to the Southern Baptist Convention,” available online at <https://bfm.sbc.net/preamble/> (accessed November 12, 2022).

<sup>29</sup>*Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Article XIV: Cooperation, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/> (accessed November 12, 2022).

<sup>30</sup>R. Albert Mohler Jr., “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity,” available online at <https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity> (accessed November 19, 2022). For a book-length reflection on Mohler’s paradigm, see Gavin Ortlund, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

members of the same church. Within the Southern Baptist Convention, we must do the work of “confessional triage” that will help us reach greater consensus on which doctrines and emphases are essential to a confessional evangelical Southern Baptist identity and which should be matters of confessional latitude for the sake of cooperative mission.

Southern Baptists will almost certainly need to revise the *Baptist Faith and Message* in the coming years if we are to refine and renew our doctrinal consensus. While it seems likely that such a revision would result in some degree of controversy, there is historical precedent for revising the confession about once a generation. Until that time comes, Southern Baptists should debate the aforementioned topics in a spirit that honors the Lord and evidences a love for brothers and sisters with whom we disagree—especially within the Convention. Our conversations should demonstrate unwavering commitment to the supreme authority of Scripture and critical sensitivity to the best insights of historical theology, including within the Baptist tradition. Finally, as a convention of autonomous churches, a significant motivation for these conversations should always be to cultivate more faithful cooperative mission for the sake of Great Commission faithfulness.



## DENOMINATIONS AND THE HOPE OF EVANGELICAL RENEWAL

Trevin Wax\*

“What hath Wheaton to do with Nashville?”

The sentiment behind Tertullian’s famous quotation regarding Athens and Jerusalem might well have been expressed by a number of Southern Baptists in the late 1970s and early 1980s—a time of controversy in the Convention when certain evangelical leaders (whose primary geographical center was in Chicagoland) participated in a strange dance with certain Baptist leaders (whose center was in Nashville), at times aligned in partnership, at other times keeping distance, often more than arm’s length.

The controversy between Baptist and evangelical identity came into its most clear and concise form in a debate between James Leo Garrett and E. Glenn Hinson in 1982 (later published in book form),<sup>1</sup> a time when the SBC was embroiled in bitter controversy over the nature of the Bible. Luminaries in the evangelical movement—men like Francis Schaeffer, Harold Lindsell, and Carl Henry—offered crucial support to conservatives in the SBC who insisted on the importance of believing in the Bible’s inerrancy. Concerned about doctrinal drift in the Convention, many Southern Baptists looked outside the SBC, particularly to leaders in the north, for energy and support in their “battle for the Bible.”

It may come as a surprise to younger Baptists to hear that it was Hinson, the moderate Baptist scholar, who argued against linking Southern Baptists with the evangelical movement. Hinson saw evangelicalism as a northern phenomenon with aspects that resembled fundamentalism. Garrett saw Southern Baptists as fitting comfortably within the history of evangelicalism as a renewal movement, although he believed the Southern Baptist denominational identity was crucial and not to be underestimated.

Forty years later, critics of the evangelical movement are more likely

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<sup>1</sup>James Leo Garrett Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, and James E. Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1982).

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to come from the right, not the left. Pastors and leaders concerned about the doctrinal and ethical drift of many evangelical leaders and institutions argue against linking Southern Baptist identity with the evangelical movement, sometimes for good reason. In certain cases, the church growth movement has led to a focus on pragmatism that often downplays the seriousness of Christian doctrine. In other cases, doctrinal drift has marked the once-burgeoning Emerging Church movement, or recent discussions around a post-evangelical identity or deconstruction of the faith. Some theological proposals today get labeled “progressive,” when there is little to distinguish the views from mainline Protestant liberalism.

As governmental and cultural pressures on traditional Christianity multiply, and as threats to religious liberty become more common in the future, theologically conservative evangelicals who belong to smaller denominations or are part of the rise of non-denominational churches may feel the need to hoist a flag with likeminded Christians in order to bolster the strength of their defense. New coalitions are forming. Church planting movements are multiplying. Well-established evangelical publishers and institutions are reconsidering their roles in the fast-changing landscape of evangelicalism.

The question forty years ago was this: would evangelicals be part of the renewal of the Southern Baptist Convention? The question today is: will Southern Baptists be part of the renewal of evangelicalism?

In considering this question, we must widen the lens and take a broader look at the definition of evangelicalism, how it relates to the Southern Baptist Convention, and then consider the current context of churchgoing, identification, and the future of denominations, which I liken to houses in a neighborhood.

## I. DEFINING EVANGELICAL

The question of defining evangelicalism—the core features that mark this movement, as well as its boundaries—is ever-present, and the different ways of asking and answering the question lead to wildly divergent viewpoints. From a global perspective, Mark Noll can claim evangelical Christianity as “the second largest grouping of Christian believers in the world,” behind Roman Catholics, and—aside from Muslims and Hindus—bigger than all other world religions.<sup>2</sup> John Wolffe believes

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<sup>2</sup>Mark Noll, “What is an Evangelical?,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 19.

evangelicals make up a tenth of the world's population, and although he acknowledges "the fluidity and individualism" of evangelicals can make it difficult to assess the strength and size of the movement today, he points back to a prehistory that extends to the early church and a more recent origin in the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

British scholar David Bebbington is known best for his description of four major traits of evangelicalism (biblicism, conversionism, cruci-centrism, and activism). This definition played a major role in a book released a decade ago, in which four scholars ("fundamentalist," "confessional," "generic," and "post-conservative") debated the meaning of the term and the spectrum of Christians encompassed by it.<sup>4</sup> A more recent proposal comes from historian Thomas Kidd: "Evangelicals are born-again Protestants who cherish the Bible as the Word of God and who emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. This definition hinges upon three aspects of what it means to be an evangelical: being born again, the primacy of the Bible, and the divine presence of God the Son and God the Holy Spirit."<sup>5</sup>

The situation is complicated in the United States, where it is often humorously said "An evangelical is someone who likes Billy Graham and likes to debate the definition of 'evangelical!'" The sociological definition, based either on self-identification or on denominations associated with the evangelical movement, is often contested by those who prefer a more theologically or historically informed definition.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, some researchers have attempted to define evangelicalism by doctrinal and ecclesial commitments, discovering that many who adhere to common evangelical beliefs do not claim the label for themselves, while many who do not adhere to common evangelical beliefs wear the badge proudly, usually while going into the voting booth.

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<sup>3</sup>John Wolffe, "Who Are Evangelicals? A History," in *Evangelicals Around the World: A Global Handbook for the 21st Century*, ed. Brian C. Stiller, Todd M. Johnson, Karen Stiller, and Mark Hutchinson (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 32.

<sup>4</sup>Kevin T. Bauder, R. Albert Mohler Jr., John G. Stackhouse Jr., and Roger Olson, *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

<sup>5</sup>Thomas S. Kidd, *Who Is An Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 4.

<sup>6</sup>For the former, see Ryan P. Burge, *20 Myths about Religion and Politics in America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022), 11-20. For the latter, see Ryan P. Burge and Andrew T. Walker, "Is 'Evangelical' a Historical, Theological, or Political Identity?" Good Faith Debates, Gospel Coalition video, 1:02:10, June 1, 2022, <https://thegospelcoalition.org/video/good-faith-debate-evangelical-identity/>.



It is the close association of evangelicals with the Religious Right that has caused confusion in recent years. The term has evolved from its American manifestation as a renewal project in the middle years of the twentieth century. At first, American evangelicals provided a counterpoint both to the isolationist tendencies of fundamentalists, on the one hand, and to the modernists who held unorthodox views of Scripture on the other. It was the movement's political mobilization in the 1980s that altered the landscape, leading to a present-day scenario in which a tiny percentage of Muslims and Hindus now claim the label "evangelical," most likely because they see it as a label meaning "religiously devout and politically conservative."<sup>7</sup>

Anyone addressing this question in the United States must consider whether to define evangelicals by those who identify as such, or the way political pundits do, or by core doctrinal commitments. I advocate for a variation of the doctrinal definition, but I do so with eyes wide open to the fact many more claim the label, while many who fit the doctrinal description do not want the label at all. I do not think we can dismiss self-identifying evangelicals who hold to theological or political positions we find problematic (whether on the political right or theological left). Neither can we dismiss brothers and sisters who hold tightly to evangelical distinctives and yet want nothing to do with the label.

All of this leads me to something like a two-track understanding of evangelicalism, a way of holding together an aspirational definition and a cultural one. There is evangelicalism as a renewal movement based on common beliefs and distinctives, and evangelicalism as a sociological and political phenomenon. The first is more aspirational and more closely aligned to the movement's roots (as well as its global connections), while the second is a sociological manifestation of varying traits of evangelical culture (even if the core beliefs and distinctives are no longer present).

Some wonder if we should give up the term "evangelical" because it has become hopelessly compromised in the American context. I would rather reclaim the historic meaning of the term. Just as there are Baptist churches far from where I believe true Baptists should be doctrinally (on one side Westboro Baptist Church and on the other First Baptist Church of America), it must be possible to hold both the historic definition and

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<sup>7</sup> Ryan P. Burge, "What's Up with Born-Again Muslims? And What Does That Tell Us About American Religion?", posted March 2, 2021, <https://religioninpublic.blog/2021/03/02/whats-up-with-born-again-muslims-and-what-does-that-tells-us-about-american-religion>.

acknowledge the contemporary de-formation at the same time. And, as we consider the situation globally, we must remember that evangelicalism is not solely an American reality. The word has different connotations in different contexts. It has a rich history that spans generations (even preceding the American neo-evangelical movement). It is a narrow and American-centered view of the world to allow American controversies to define the movement.

Debates over the definition of evangelicalism will likely persist into the next generation, but the good news is, we do not have to choose between preserving the best of our evangelical heritage and reforming whatever needs to change. At its core, evangelicalism is about renewal. That is the best thing evangelicals have to offer, and right now, it is something the church needs in many denominational settings.

## II. EVANGELICALS AND SOUTHERN BAPTISTS TOGETHER

The debate over evangelicalism as a renewal movement and its connection to the Southern Baptist Convention has taken twists and turns in recent decades. By the time Hinson and Garrett debated the relationship, the sticking point was the close identification of northern evangelicals with their fundamentalist roots, particularly on how best to articulate the nature of biblical inspiration and authority, as well as the fast-growing political mobilization of conservative evangelical churches for the Republican Party.

The framing of James Tull's introduction and Hinson's contribution warn that a restrictive reversion to fundamentalism now defines evangelicalism, which leads to the compromise of Baptist distinctives, most notably the doctrine of soul competency and anti-creedalism. Hinson shows the connection between these two beliefs, claiming the historical pedigree of E. Y. Mullins:

The lordship of Christ and the competency of the person signify that no priest, church, or earthly government has a right to interpose itself between God and the human soul. This twin affirmation involves the authority of the Scriptures, for no ecclesiastical institution has the right to interject a creed or a prescribed practice which infringes upon the right of private interpretation. It involves the belief in the "New Testament as our only rule of faith and practice."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Garrett, Hinson, and Tull, *Are Southern Baptists "Evangelicals"?*, 30.

Hinson goes further to explain why the tradition of Baptists is to reject all manmade traditions, that “the Baptist tradition” refers not to common beliefs but “the essence or spirit of a movement,” so that the tradition is to follow our ancestors in “kicking and screaming” against “efforts to impose uniformity either in worship or in faith and practice.”<sup>9</sup> Such a move would compromise the conviction that faith must be free and voluntary.

The implications of this view of Baptist identity quickly become clear, in stark form, beyond the question of biblical inerrancy. If one’s own status before God, apart from any mediator or outside authority, is a key component of Baptist identity, then who are we to claim that someone cannot be truly Baptist, even if he or she believes that Christ, “without the resuscitation of his dead body, now lives at the right hand of God, in the lives of his disciples, and works for the redemption of the world”?<sup>10</sup>

Hinson called for “a sharpening of the distinction between Baptists and other Christians,” so as to avoid the “grave danger of letting our association with evangelicals and evangelicalism of a particular type obscure and even obliterate voluntarist perceptions which stand most at the center of our life together as Baptists.” When it comes to biblical authority, Hinson warned, evangelicals assign priority to the Scriptures and to creeds as the objective Word of God, when Baptists prioritize the response of believers as a subjective Word.<sup>11</sup>

Ten years later, in 1993, Hinson clarified that he did not argue “Baptists are not evangelicals” but wanted to say that Baptists are *other than* evangelicals.<sup>12</sup> This aligned with his earlier contention, that it would be better for Baptists to preserve a sense of identity over against evangelicalism.

In his counterpoint, James Leo Garrett claimed it is accurate to situate the SBC within the evangelical movement, with the label “denominational evangelicals.” Garrett traced the development of neo-evangelicalism from the fundamentalist/modernist controversies of the early twentieth century. He defended his view by pointing to the obvious overlap between Southern Baptists and evangelicals (including a missionary impulse, a focus on forgiveness of sins through Christ’s redemptive work, and a high view of God’s revelation through Scripture).<sup>13</sup> Even if Southern Baptists must be

<sup>9</sup>Garrett, Hinson, and Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?*, 14.

<sup>10</sup>Garrett, Hinson, and Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?*, 28-29.

<sup>11</sup>Garrett, Hinson, and Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?*, 165, 169, 174.

<sup>12</sup>E. Glenn Hinson, “One Baptist’s Dream,” in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 202.

<sup>13</sup>Garrett, Hinson, and Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”?*, 118.

described as “unmistakably and intentionally denominationalists,” there’s no denying the areas of doctrinal agreement on justification by grace through faith or regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the supreme authority of the Scriptures, and the deity of Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Garrett believed Hinson “underemphasized the common roots which both evangelicals and Baptists have in Puritanism,” and had thus set up an antithesis unwarranted by Baptist history itself, the Baptist understanding of the authority of the Bible, the role of confessions of faith, and the Baptist commitment to religious freedom.<sup>15</sup>

Forty years later after this important debate, the context has changed. In the past few decades, we have seen an explosion of non-denominational churches across the country. Many of these are, in terms of doctrine and practice, Baptist, which has prompted the Christian comedian Tim Hawkins to joke about non-denominational Christians: “You’re not fooling anyone; you’re just a Baptist church with a cool website!” These churches are often marked by a connection to the Charismatic Movement as well. One of the biggest shifts in American church culture in the past forty years has been the rise of non-denominational churches along with new networks that act as quasi-denominations.<sup>16</sup>

These new networks have often led to pressures on older denominations and institutions, as it can be difficult for established groups to match the nimble nature of the newer forms and networked abilities. In addition to the rise of new networks, society’s embrace of expressive individualism has fueled the rise of something cultural observer Tara Isabella Burton calls *intuitional* religion, as opposed to its traditional, institutional forms. She describes it as follows:

a new, eclectic, chaotic, and thoroughly, quintessentially American religion. A religion of emotive intuition, of aestheticized and commodified experience, of self-creation and self-improvement, and yes, selfies. A religion for a new generation of Americans raised to think of themselves both as capitalist consumers and as content creators. A religion decoupled from institutions, from creeds, from metaphysical truth-claims about God or the universe of the Way Things Are, but that still seeks—in various and varying ways—to provide us with the

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<sup>14</sup>Garrett, Hinson, and Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”*?, 126.

<sup>15</sup>Garrett, Hinson, and Tull, *Are Southern Baptists “Evangelicals”*?, 122.

<sup>16</sup>Frank Newport, “More U. S. Protestants Have No Specific Denominational Identity,” Gallup, July 18, 2017, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/214208/protestants-no-specific-denominational-identity.aspx>.

pillars of what religion always has: meaning, purpose, community, and ritual.<sup>17</sup>

This is not only a description of the religiously unaffiliated, but also of many people in more established religious communities. We see a spiritual fluidity where many church-going Christians believe things that are fundamentally incompatible with orthodox Christian doctrine.

Several developments strain the evangelical consensus: the explosion of non-denominational churches and new networks, the benefits and drawbacks of the church when tightly connected to political parties, the rise of intuitional spirituality in place of institutional authority, and the cultural pressures evident in sexual revolution ideology and identity politics. Not surprisingly, some leaders, churches, and denominations historically associated with evangelicalism have drifted from biblical authority, leading others to wonder if an ever-enlarging evangelical tent is sustainable. Today, the Southern Baptists most likely to fret about the evangelical ethos making headway in the Convention are those on the right, who believe evangelicalism as a movement has strayed from sound doctrine. For reasons opposite of Hinson forty years ago, some Southern Baptists believe we need to reestablish our Baptist convictions over and against a wider evangelical movement that has gone astray.

### III. THE PLACE OF DENOMINATIONS IN EVANGELICAL RENEWAL

If the situation forty years ago was one where Southern Baptists needed help from evangelicals, today we wonder the reverse: are ailing evangelicals in need of help from Southern Baptists?

The only way this question makes sense is if Southern Baptists are doctrinally sound and spiritually healthy enough to provide support and ballast to a drifting evangelical movement, and if denominations will be part of evangelical renewal in the first place. Considering the rise of new networks and non-denominational churches, why would we consider a role for denominations in the future?

We could begin with the objection to denominations, or at least the concern that these visible divisions are in direct disobedience to Christ or contrary to His expressed will. “Christendom has often achieved success by ignoring the precepts of its founder,” wrote H. Richard Niebuhr nearly

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<sup>17</sup>Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020), 2-3.

a hundred years ago.<sup>18</sup> “Denominationalism in the Christian church is... an unacknowledged hypocrisy. It is a compromise, made far too lightly, between Christianity and the world,” he wrote. He continues, “The division of the churches closely follows the division of men into the castes of national, racial, and economic groups.”<sup>19</sup>

For Niebuhr, it is too simplistic to think that denominations can be explained merely by creedal differences. On the contrary, many churches and groups are divided by color and class. The creedal differences, while important, are often a respectable gloss on a more scandalous reason for contemporary divisions.<sup>20</sup>

Since the Reformation, church history offers many sad examples that buttress Niebuhr’s thesis. Perhaps the most notable example is in the birth of the Black Church tradition, when Richard Allen, a former slave who learned to preach under Methodist leader Francis Asbury, walked out of St. George’s Methodist Church in 1787 with his associate Absalom Jones and several other black people who were accosted after kneeling in new pews that had been reserved for whites. That walkout was the beginning of Bethel Church, known as “Mother Bethel,” and the seeds were planted that would blossom into the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>21</sup> This is a clear example of a denominational identity that began, not due to doctrinal differences, but to racial and class differences due to the assumptions of white supremacy at the time.

Niebuhr’s point is well taken: As denominations and groups develop over time, the doctrinal distinctives that may have had a supporting role in one era begin to take on a greater contrast in another. The same can happen in reverse, with doctrinal differences fading to the background and other aspects of culture and class coming to the forefront. Still, we must grapple with the distinctive groups as they are today, not as we might want them to be. What is the best way to look at different denominations within evangelicalism?

1. *The House and the Neighborhood*. A healthy way of looking at the presence of different denominations today would be to think of

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<sup>18</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1929), 3.

<sup>19</sup>Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, 6.

<sup>20</sup>Niebuhr, *Social Sources*, 12-14.

<sup>21</sup>Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

inhabiting a house in a friendly neighborhood.

First, consider the house itself. A house must have walls and structures. Some of those walls and structures are loadbearing. You remove them at your peril and may damage the integrity of the house or lead to its collapse. A beautiful home contains furniture. Some of the furniture may give the house a sense of character and personality.

Great houses are often big, with many rooms, and larger denominations often have subgroups that live comfortably in the home, in one wing of the house or another. More than a decade ago, David S. Dockery categorized Southern Baptists in this way: fundamentalists, revivalists, traditionalists, orthodox evangelicals, Calvinists, contemporary church practitioners, and culture warriors.<sup>22</sup> We might tweak the description of those groups a little today, based upon new debates and challenges, but even now, these disparate groups with various emphases can inhabit different rooms and live comfortably within the same structure.

A house with history also comes with stories and narratives. I recently had the opportunity to spend some time in the home of one of my literary heroes, G. K. Chesterton. Not only is the house interesting from an architectural standpoint, with its own integrity and protection as a notable house with government restrictions on the owners, but it also shines with stories—the notable people who passed through to visit, the plays that went on in the built-in studio theater, the study where Chesterton would write his great works and then steal out into the garden to cut heads off flowers, and the morbid yet comical picture of a group of men, shortly after Chesterton's death, trying to get his massive coffin down a tight spiral staircase.

Great houses come with stories of heroes and narratives of key moments, and the same is true of denominations. The story of past successes and failures, conviction and compromise, heroes and role models—all of these are vital for a house to feel like a home.

Consider also the presence of a neighborhood. Why is it important for those of us who live in the Baptist house to recognize the other homes nearby? Because we are not alone. And our roots go deeper than the current home in which we reside.

First, we share common ground. Creation is the stage upon which redemption plays out. In this shared realm—in which we all benefit from

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<sup>22</sup>David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 11.

the sky and sun, wind and rain—we recognize this solid earth beneath our feet connects us to the rest of the world, and to other churches, and it is here we exercise Luther’s four callings: family, church, workplace, and community.

Second, we share a common creed, in that we adhere to the Nicene Faith. We recognize the specific contributions of our own home, but as part of a larger tradition that goes back to the apostles. As the Center for Baptist Renewal has put it: “We affirm the distinctive contributions of the Baptist tradition as a renewal movement within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. These contributions include emphasis on the necessity of personal conversion, a regenerate church, believers’ baptism, congregational governance, and religious liberty.” At the same time, “We encourage a critical but charitable engagement with the whole church of the Lord Jesus Christ, both past and present. We believe Baptists have much to contribute as well as much to receive in the great collection of traditions that constitute the holy catholic church.”<sup>23</sup>

Third, we can make common cause with believers who reside in other homes. Because we believe the gospel is public truth, not a private revelation, we recognize that all believers offer the world some sort of public witness, whether they realize it or not. We can partner with and benefit from believers in other denominational homes who provide a faithful witness to Christ in areas of art, science, education, politics, sports and entertainment, business and entrepreneurship, etc. Making common cause reminds us of the importance of considering not only the reputation of our house, but the entire Christian neighborhood.

2. *The Necessity of Institutions.* Of course, some question the need for houses altogether. Are they not cumbersome? Do not old houses need constant work of renovation and repair? Wouldn’t we be better off to throw together mini-houses, or live in RVs, or find a place in one hotel or another? Perhaps some Christians might choose to live this way, eschewing denominations in favor of independent congregations, and yes, choosing to be “renters” rather than “owners” does allow for a level of mobility you might otherwise miss.

But there is something to be said for denominations, just as there’s something to be said for houses. Those who decide to stay unaffiliated—to

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<sup>23</sup>Matthew Y. Emerson, Christopher W. Morgan, and Lucas E. Stamps, eds., *Baptists and the Christian Tradition: Toward an Evangelical Baptist Catholicity* (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 353.



rent rather than put down roots—often find it necessary to draw from the benefits of stronger ecclesial connections. Even fiercely independent congregations naturally gravitate toward some kind of communion or network with other likeminded churches. It is true that denominations all have limitations—certain strengths and weaknesses—but there are many possibilities for collaboration and mutual strengthening.

We live in an age that is (often rightly) suspicious of institutions, and there is narrative drama in being “anti-institutional” in some way, the startup versus the established. But institutions are inevitable at some level. As Ray Ortlund has pointed out:

An institution is a social mechanism where life-giving human activities can be nurtured and protected and sustained. Some aspects of life should be unscheduled, spontaneous, random. But not all of life should be. What an institution does is structure a desirable experience, so that it becomes repeatable on a regular basis. Institutions are not a problem. But institutionalization is. An institution is meant to enrich life. But institutionalization takes that good thing and turns it into death. How? The institutional structure, the mechanism, takes on its own inherent purpose.<sup>24</sup>

A healthy denomination, much like a healthy house, does not exist for its own sake. It is open for the benefit of others, and it serves a purpose for those who live there, to be a place of refreshment and empowerment for the larger mission of God. It is when the people who live in a house become overly focused on the structure itself, rather than its purpose, that institutionalization squeezes the life out of the movement that led to its construction in the first place. As Ed Stetzer said a decade ago in reference to the SBC: “Being consumed with the machine of the denomination distracts us from the mission of the church. The goal is joining God on His mission, and denominations are merely a tool to that end. But we often turn tools into rules, and our focus becomes the machine instead of the mission. A denomination should exist to help us live sent rather than maintain a structure.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ray Ortlund, Jr. “Is Your Church an Institution?” Gospel Coalition, May 23, 2017, <https://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/ray-ortlund/is-your-church-institution/>.

<sup>25</sup>Ed Stetzer, “Denominationalism: Is There a Future?” in *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 40.

The problem we face today is an institutional crisis. We have hollowed out the ability for our institutions to deliver the weight of the expectations we put upon them, as Yuval Levin has pointed out.<sup>26</sup> In an individualistic world, we tend to think of freedom as the escape of institutional constraints, rather than the need to be formed and molded by those who have gone before us, or the community in which we are present. The renewal of evangelicalism will not take place apart from institutional forms, whatever those forms might take. Denominations will be a critical part of that future.

3. *The Importance of Cooperation.* If we look at denominations as houses, the question might arise: why not live alone? Why is the house necessary?

In the past, most denominations have answered this question by pointing to the mission and the essential nature of cooperation in fulfilling that mission. The point of being a homeowner is not merely to renew the house and take on various renovation projects, but to establish a home base from which to venture out into the world. And so, a good neighbor may agree to help better and beautify other homes in the neighborhood, just as leaders and pastors in one denomination may benefit from or contribute to the growth of leaders and pastors in another.

When J. B. Gambrell in 1901 answered the question of why Baptist churches unite in the form of a Convention, he said, the purpose was “to promote cooperation in matters of common concern.”<sup>27</sup> As Southern Baptists are fond of saying today, “We can do more together than we can apart.”

But the decision to live together—the agreement to take up rooms in the house and to come together for common mission—requires us to focus on the purpose, not the process. As Gambrell wrote:

Boards are channels, not fountains. They are means, not forces. The churches use them to convey their contributions as men turn a thousand streams into one channel to carry their united volume of water to arid plains that they may be watered and become fruitful fields. To elicit, combine and direct the energies of willing workers for the carrying out of the will of Christ is the function of a convention,

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<sup>26</sup>Yuval Levin, *A Time to Build: From Family and Community to Congress and the Campus, How Recommitting to Our Institutions Can Revive the American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

<sup>27</sup>J. B. Gambrell, “Why Conventions of Baptist Churches,” in *Baptist Why And Why Not*, ed. J. M. Frost (Nashville: The Baptist Sunday School Board, 1901), 286.

and this it does, not by authority, but by persuasion and the influence of intelligent piety.<sup>28</sup>

Cooperation matters when it comes to churches within the same denomination (just as people inhabiting different rooms in a mansion will come together for common cause), but cooperation also matters when it comes to churches from different denominations. The neighborhood is stronger when the various strengths on display in different homes are mutually available. We can trust that the Spirit is at work in other churches, and we believe He is active in nourishing, empowering, restraining, and enabling other believers. The Spirit is the common bond and unity for all believers, no matter which denomination, much like all the homes in a neighborhood are connected to a common water supply and electrical grid.

The *Baptist Faith and Message* (Article 14) encourages this kind of cross-denominational cooperation. A good homeowner extends the hand of fellowship to like-minded neighbors, which is why we should seek to strengthen the growing number of coalitions, encourage gospel-proclaiming denominations, and cheer on various church-planting movements. Conservative evangelicals need strength and support in their efforts to reclaim the center of evangelical identity.

Cooperation always comes with a risk. Cooperation can lead to the watering down of conviction or doctrinal distinctives. It is not wrong for some Southern Baptists to feel threatened by what this sort of evangelical networking might mean for the future of the Convention. There are some who feel that the purity of Southern Baptist identity will be polluted if we join coalitions or encourage other networks. This was the view of Hinson from the moderate side forty years ago, and it is often the view today from some on the right in Southern Baptist life.

But the cooperative spirit, when buttressed by security in what we believe and why, should cause us to bring others into the house who agree with our basic beliefs rather than causing us to pull up the drawbridge, hunker down on our hill, and refuse temporary shelter for the evangelical homeless. David S. Dockery is right:

Denominations that thrive will remain connected by conviction to Scripture, the gospel, and their tradition, while working and exploring ways to partner with affinity groups

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<sup>28</sup>Gambrell, "Why Conventions," 288.

and networks moving out of their insularity and seeking to understand better the changing global context around us. Learning to work afresh in cooperative ways will be important, with denominations no longer seeing themselves as rivals with either the networks or other denominations, looking instead for commonalities while working together with other special-interest groups.<sup>29</sup>

4. *The Need for Clear Boundaries, but Not Impenetrable Walls.* A healthy house has clear and visible structures. Imagine a neighborhood with distinct homes perhaps even with a fence, but the gate is unlocked, so as to provide easy access to people from other homes, and to allow people who live there to freely visit others. A vibrant neighborhood is a place where people feel a sense of camaraderie, where it is not a threat to spend time outdoors, to enjoy the occasional block party, to get together to watch fireworks, or to share a common pool.

In the same way, a well-established house and yard need not become a prison for the people inside, or a compound designed to keep people out. Paradoxically, one of the best ways to ensure that people in one home can visit another is by making clear the distinctions between homes. Vibrant denominations have clear lines of distinction.

In one of the first books published by the Baptist Sunday School Board, in 1900, J. M. Frost edited a series of contributions under the title *Baptist Why and Why Not*.<sup>30</sup> Many of the chapters explained why one would be Baptist *and not* Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, Campbellite, etc. Later chapters explained the “why” behind key doctrinal distinctives, such as why “close communion and not open communion,” and why the insistence on “a converted church membership.”

A strong foundation, walls, and rooftops are essential to a healthy house. But even here, with these clear lines of distinction, with a fence erected around the yard, there remains a sense of openness, a welcome to visitors who may occupy other houses in the neighborhood, as long as they share the same bedrock conviction of submitting to Scripture and living under its authority, while adhering to the essentials of the Christian faith as articulated in the great Christian creeds and as witnessed by the global

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<sup>29</sup>Dockery, “So Many Denominations: The Rise, Decline, and Future of Denominationalism,” in *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 25.

<sup>30</sup>J. M. Frost, ed., *Baptist Why and Why Not* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1901).

Christian church through the ages.

Denominations that compromise their convictions often try to enlarge the house so much that it eventually loses its integrity in trying to accommodate everyone and everything. We ought instead to be okay with blessing someone out of our fellowship and waving at them as they move to a different house, if their beliefs have shifted into better alignment elsewhere. This is best for denominational integrity.

I recall a small Baptist church a few years ago that wrestled with admitting a Presbyterian family into membership without undergoing baptism by immersion after a confession of faith. When I counseled the church, I told them that—should their church go in this direction—they would, in effect, cease to belong to the denomination of which they were part. They would be more akin to the Evangelical Free Church of America, which receives as valid infant baptism (though believer's baptism remains the norm). The church decided against this move, choosing to happily stay in the home they had started in. My point was not to decry or diminish the wonderful churches that belong to the EFCA. It was simply to say that *this is a question of identity, and if you make a decision in this way, you are effectively moving from one house to another.*

One cannot endlessly move the boundaries of the house without eventually harming the structure. A house with no walls is not a home. It is not unloving or uncharitable to insist on denominational integrity, just as it is not unloving or uncharitable to recognize the structure of its home and surrounding yard.

5. *Appreciation for Denominational Gifts.* Perhaps the opposite danger of broadening and extending the house is feeling threatened by the existence of neighbors. The denomination that becomes insecure in its convictions and biblical interpretation often compensates by throwing up additional walls and fences, turning the house into something more like a compound, as if everyone in the house needs to be protected from the neighbors. This is often the danger most associated with a neo-fundamentalist mindset—the need is for additional walls, not gates or bridges.

As mentioned above, it is right and proper to insist on denominational integrity. But this can be done in a way that is not hostile toward other homes in the neighborhood. One of the ways we remain good neighbors is by recognizing that we have gifts that others in the neighborhood might benefit from, and that other homes may have strengths that would

strengthen us.

Healthy homes can also give courage and protection to other homes in the neighborhood. Throughout history, we can trace among various denominational traditions a pattern of God using believers from one tradition to warn others about dangers from inside and outside the church. Perhaps this would be the “neighborhood watch” element of a healthy community. Yes, we look to ensure the wellbeing of our own home, but we also notify neighbors when dangers threaten another house.

Relating to people in the denominational neighborhood allows us to work together on certain projects, shave the rough edges off each other, and learn from one another’s strengths and weaknesses. It is myopic to assume that the Holy Spirit is exclusively or primarily at work in only one of the homes in a neighborhood. It would be better to extend the application of the Apostle Paul’s reference to the church as the body of Christ and to recognize distinctive gifts in different communities. Thus, Presbyterians may have something to learn from Baptists in the field of outreach and personal evangelism, and Baptists may have something to learn from Anglican stalwarts of theology, like John Stott and J. I. Packer. The charismatics may be strengthened by another home’s insistence on being tethered to the Word, while denominations that emphasize preaching and Bible study may learn something from the intercessory prayer of those in the Assemblies of God.

My point is not to relativize these homes, to claim they are all equally valid or scripturally the same. It is merely to recognize that each group has a specialty. God is at work in different groups in different ways, and if you visit other homes in the neighborhood, it is very likely that you will enrich your own home because of your experience and common commitment to Christ. As Nathan Finn has written: “Southern Baptists should humbly confess that we are only part of the visible body of Christ and that our own interpretations of numerous doctrines have been influenced by the catholic confessional consensus. We should acknowledge that we have much to learn from other Christian traditions, even as we earnestly and often times prophetically contend for our unique Baptist distinctives.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Nathan Finn, “Priorities for a Post-Resurgence Convention” in *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David Dockery (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 262.

#### IV. EVANGELICAL RENEWAL

If the neighborhood of evangelicalism is in disrepair, with some nearby homes showing cracks in the foundation, the best way Southern Baptists can serve our brothers and sisters is by ensuring that our home is as healthy and robust as it can be. This health will come from both a recognition of our convictions and spiritual gifts, and a willingness to glean from the Spirit's gifts on display in other fellowships.

By renewing our own home, we make the house a place for others to find refreshment and empowerment in engaging in God's mission. We also free ourselves up to strengthen the homes of others, to encourage the faithful to remain tied to sound doctrine, engaged in outreach and evangelism, and committed to the full authority of the Scriptures. I do not see an avenue of evangelical renewal that does not also include the renewal of particular denominational homes. The health of the neighborhood depends in large part on the health and charity of the individual homes. To that end, we ought to see ourselves not as Southern Baptists over against other evangelicals, but as Baptists *among and for* other evangelicals, rooting for our neighbors, conscious of God's work and hopeful in his promise to his church in the future.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Qur'an and the Christian: An In-depth Look into the Book of Islam for Followers of Jesus.* By Matthew Aaron Bennett. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022, 253pp., \$19.99.

Christian laymen and scholars alike may have significant caution when it comes to the topic of the Qur'an. As the holy book of the Islamic faith there is a tendency to view it as completely opposed to the Bible and the Christian faith. Consequently, it should be avoided and condemned. Bennett provides a useful resource to address these concerns and goes a long way towards making a very complex issue understandable for non-Muslims. He is clear that this is an outsider/etic perspective that is trying to hear and understand the insider/emic perspective. As such throughout the book he does well to let the Islamic scholars speak and so give insight into the insider view. A positive is that Bennett does not leave the reader wondering where he stands on the issue but from the beginning shows that his purpose is to understand the insider perspective while clearly holding to a belief that the basic claims and beliefs of Islam are not compatible with biblical teaching.

In the opening chapters he explains how revelation in Islam is not God revealing Himself but rather revealing His will. This is useful in understanding the Islamic emphasis on God's transcendence and the downplaying of God's imminence with the resultant rejection of the Son of God who is God incarnate. It also points to the Islamic focus on deeds as a way for man to achieve God's will contrasted with man's need for a savior in Christianity due to man's inability to achieve God's will. In chapter four Bennett does well to explain how even though one can read about familiar biblical characters and events in the Qur'an, this does not mean that the Qur'an endorses the Bible. He points out how the Qur'an uses these for its own narrative and to fulfil its own purposes. Building on this in chapter five Bennett shows how ultimately the Qur'an does not



portray Christians in a positive light but rather issues serious warnings and judgment.

Chapter six exposes the argument of how extra-Qur'anic material such as the Sunnah have impacted an objective interpretation of the Qur'an. This is a fascinating glimpse into the current state of Islamic scholarship where there are various approaches that are attempting to free the Qur'an from external influences on its interpretation. Chapter seven deals with a Christian's reluctance to read the Qur'an and provides useful arguments and suggestions for how this could be done. There is the danger that this can be done uncritically and so in chapter eight there is a word of caution as what can be called bridging methods are evaluated. Two critical principles are addressed: firstly, the problem of eisegesis where Christian readers impose meaning on verses in the Qur'an that Muslims would not accept. Secondly that the Qur'an can be used by Christians in a way that even unknowingly elevates it to the level of valid scripture. This strong caution against hermeneutical creativity that contradicts the Qur'an's own rules could have been strengthened by Bennett making direct reference to Islamic rules of interpretation such as those found in chapter three and verse seven of the Qur'an.

For those readers who are less familiar with Islam it would be useful to include more examples/application in certain areas such as the discussion of Islamic orthodoxy versus orthopraxy. That said, Bennett provides a helpful example of how to take a learner rather than debater posture in interactions with Muslims, so that instead of trying to win an argument the reader is equipped to open a gospel conversation. This book locates itself in Christian/Muslim dialogue and understanding as a valuable resource from an outsider perspective and would be complemented by those from an insider perspective. It is well researched and written and should be considered as a textbook in any course that takes a serious look at the Qur'an. It would be valuable to students at both a college and seminary level.

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*The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution.* By Carl R. Trueman. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020, 432pp., \$34.99.

Carl Trueman has written a sweeping intellectual history that chronicles the rise of the contemporary Western conception of what it is to be a human person. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* is clearly written. Non-academics or those not familiar with the thinkers in the book will benefit from a close read. In addition, Truman's ability to synthesize diverse intellectual traditions will provide professional philosophers, historians, and sociologists, among others, inspiration for further research in their fields. Finally, it is a necessary book. The church needs to engage current cultural debates with a nuanced understanding of the society it finds itself in. Not only so that we might love God with all our mind but so that we can love others.

In Part 1 the book begins with setting up theoretical scaffolding through an examination of Charles Taylor, Philip Rieff, and Alasdair MacIntyre. All three thinkers are referred to throughout the work as Trueman does an exceptional job of fulling the promissory notes he leaves in the text. He concludes Part 1 with the claim that "questions connected to notions of human identity...cannot be abstracted from broader questions of how the self is understood, how ethical discourse operates, how history and tradition are valued...and how cultural elites understand the content and purpose of art" (p. 102).

Part 2 is robust and perhaps the most ambitious and powerful of all the parts. Rousseau, Wordsworth, Shelly, Blake, Nietzsche, Marx, and Darwin are examined to demonstrate that the roots of our contemporary attitudes of the self go deep into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is an important point, as crisis has a way of making us myopic in our understanding. Trueman is charitable with his handling of the texts and often is generous with his quotations. It his contention that during these times the Western world, or at least its political and social elite, lost their metaphysical bearings and what replaced it was a worldview where goodness is primarily a subjective matter and what is valued is whatever is psychologically fulling or pleasurable. In addition, he details how Christianity became the villain, as upending the church's teaching on sexual ethics was seen as essential for psychological well-being.

Part 3 explains how the understanding of psychological well-being and

our sense of identity became sexualized and then how sex became politicized. Trueman suggests that perhaps “Freud is actually the key figure in this book” (p. 203). The basis for this claim is that it is in Freud’s theories where the West began to imagine that we are sexual beings primarily and in sexual pleasure that we find utmost fulfillment. In the second chapter of part 3, *The New Left and the Politization of Sex*, Trueman persuasively demonstrates that sexual identity is now an essential part of our political space. Through the combination of Marxist thinking on oppression and the sexualization of the self, the New Left has succeeded in making sexual freedom central to our understanding of freedom simpliciter.

Trueman deploys his cultural analysis to three areas in Part 4: art, public ethics, and transgenderism. In these chapters he touches on surrealism, pornography, the ethics of Peter Singer, contemporary Supreme Court cases, campus protests, and the formation of the LGBTQ+ political movement. He ends the book with words of wisdom for the church and thoughts on the future.

There are opportunities for further research to fill in parts of Trueman’s argument. There are times when he does a fine job correlating the ideas of a thinker with a trend in contemporary society but where he also acknowledges that the line from the original works to present thought is not direct. For example, he writes “Few of the campus protesters of recent years may have read Marchuse, but the basic ideas that he promulgated have penetrated the popular consciousness in such a way that challenges to classical liberal thinking are commonplace and often well received” (p. 252). Correlation is not causation and so there is an opportunity to tell the stories of *how* the ideas highlighted by Trueman influenced culture, laying out the causal process by which they entered the zeitgeist. This is important not just for completion of the story but to explain the ways in which Western societies have differed in their absorption of these ideas. While the West is often treated as a monolith in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, a look at abortion laws in Europe and America or attitudes to campus protests in France and the United States will reveal a great deal of particularness as well in the ways in which different societies in the West have created the modern person.

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*Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary.* By Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022, 349pp., \$39.99.

This title is an accurate reflection of this work. It is a commentary that embodies some critical work, but primarily is pastoral. At the end of each section there are questions that address spiritual, pastoral, and theological issues, reflecting more of a practical than a technical commentary, such as NAC or ICC.

The hermeneutic is centered in the “participatory” work of justification as outlined in the first chapter. As Gorman writes: “Romans demonstrates, no less than any other Pauline letter, that Paul’s theology always has a pastoral function: he has a formational, or transformational agenda” (p. 26).

This is the prime focus as to the pastoral application in the commentary. He argues that the atonement is not just about acquittal but rather participation. It is not that our sins are only forgiven or removed, but far more than that. It is the idea of our participating in the redemption, in the sense that Christ becomes our life and not just our Savior from sins. “Human beings need a solution that deals with both: forgiveness for sins and liberation (redemption) from Sin - both an act of atonement and a new exodus” (p. 11).

As a former pastor for 43 years this resonates with my heart. I have seen so many people misunderstand the depth of the atonement regarding its ramifications for their life. They love and live in the idea of acquittal without ever grasping the depth of the cross and his substitution for us. This premise drives the commentary and thus is very beneficial for pastors and anyone seeking to lead others into legitimate discipleship.

The only difficulty in his writing is the appearance of demeaning one who only addresses acquittal in the atonement. His definition of the Roman Road, so long used in Baptist life, is very accurate regarding the verses he quotes. This has been a staple for many in their witnessing, but he seems to view the verses and their juxtaposition with derision: “While each of these is arguably a component of Romans, the overall path of this road is, unfortunately, a dead end” (p. 35). This type of statement, without understanding his argument, could lead some to view this is a liberal take on Paul’s letter. However, that is not the purpose of his argument. I wish he had been a little softer in his response, but it does not negate his position regarding an improper understanding of the atonement. It is not just an acquittal but a complete and utter revolution in the life of the believer.

I would not recommend this work as a technical study of the book of Romans, but it is an excellent work for a pastor seeking to apply the text to his people. It is also an excellent tool for the laity to utilize. The technical commentaries are sometimes difficult for those without a language base to operate from, but this is an excellent addition to anyone's library. It is well worth the purchase.

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*Preaching: A Simple Approach to the Sacred Task.* By Daniel Overdorf. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022, 240pp., \$20.99.

The subtitle to this book is a “simple approach to the sacred task.” This accurately sums up this little book on homiletics. Overdorf discusses everything a homiletic professor would address for an intro class on preaching. He does it well without overstating his case, or as he said with a “simple approach.”

Overdorf's reliance on some of the New Homiletic teachers might cause consternation among some conservatives, but his adherence to the sacred text seems to be spot on. There is a need to address the flow of a sermon in the manner of the New Homiletic. This has been ignored because the end for the New Homiletic is the dilution of the Word's authority. He never argues to simply allow people to glean what they wish to glean, but to preach the text as it is written, thus negating that argument.

In chapter two he argues against the idea of beginning with a topic as this can lead us to “preaching our thoughts rather than God's” (p. 42). This is very beneficial, as so many do exactly that in their preaching calendars, thus the reason for our nomenclature at Southwestern Seminary of “text-driven preaching.” We desire for a text to be addressed in its whole and not just an idea we then impose on the Scripture, rooted in some topic.

He tackles the major facets of a sermon from introduction to conclusion. In addition, he has a section on how to tell a story which is helpful for those who struggle with that effort. This is needed as so many see deductive preaching as the only proper method for one who stands on the Scripture.

I particularly like his nomenclature for the delivery portion of the sermon. He uses the word “embody” which carries a better word picture than just how to speak a message. One needs to embody the text and the delivery be natural.

He addresses the idea of adding technology to the preaching experience by arguing there are several advantages to using technology in our sermons. It can bring emphasis to the sermon, engage multiple senses, is compatible with the way people learn in other venues and helps us to see different learning styles (pp. 172-73). Yet in chapter 8 he posits: “people see and hear the truth through us. We communicate the message with our voices and our bodies...They can see it in our eyes, hear it in our voices, and watch it in our body language....” These seem to be somewhat contradictory in their assessment. He wrestles with this problem when, in discussing some cons in using technology, he points out this can cause a break in communication which may be difficult to get back (p. 174). This is something to be very careful about and I fear he brought more confusion than light to this part of the book.

He argues for collaborating with other preachers on a consistent basis when writing a sermon. I certainly see wisdom in picking someone’s brain when the text is difficult in either content or application. However, I can see one being too dependent on the work of others and not his own work in the text. Since I am preaching for my people, from God, through his word, to the sheep He appointed me over, I would prefer to do the work primarily on my own. Every church community is different and the truths and their application in the text I see my people need, may differ drastically from another community of believers. I feel far more comfortable after having written the sermon, than before, meeting in a collaborative effort.

All in all, I found this to be a good resource for a quick and easy addressing of the preaching moment. I would not recommend it as a textbook for a class but as ancillary reading material, I feel it would very beneficial.

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*Courage is Calling: Fortune Favors the Brave.* By Ryan Holiday. New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2021, 304pp., \$25.00.

Say too much about courage today and you will probably be dismissed as corny or patriarchal. Suggest philosophy is useful, even important, for everyday life and you will probably be left standing alone at social gatherings. But Ryan Holiday is brave enough to take on both topics in this recent book, which is the inaugural volume in the Stoic Virtues series. Holiday has become known as a leading proponent of Stoicism via best-selling books and his podcast, *The Daily Stoic*. Judging by the book sales and eager reception ranging from the Silicon Valley to the NBA and NFL, he has hit a nerve and at least garnered a lot of attention.

Holiday is a wonderful storyteller and most of the book is him telling stories, from Greek myths, the Bible, and broader history, which illustrate various aspects of courage, its importance, and the results of the lack of it. Holiday primarily illustrates courage but early on he describes it this way:

“Courage is risk.

It is sacrifice...

...commitment

...perseverance

...truth

...determination.

When you do the thing others cannot or will not do. When you do the thing that people think you shouldn't or can't do” (p. xix).

His approach, illustrating with stories, is captured well early in the book when he urges, “Let us look to the courageous moments and learn from them rather than focus on another's flaws as a way of excusing our

own” (p. xxi).

This book is valuable simply as a collection of great stories, illustrations, and quotes about courage, but it is much more than that. Holiday mounts a full-scale argument for the importance, possibility, and necessity of courage and gives the reader specific examples to see courage at work. Holiday argues, as have others, that all the other virtues depend on courage. In many ways this book is the best of a coach’s pregame speech tailored to a broader audience calling for people to throw off passivity and apathy and to engage their world courageously. Courage is not the absence of fear but the willingness to learn from and harness fear in order to do what must be done. Holiday punctures the lure of bitterness and victimhood, calling us to rise above challenges and to find purpose amidst difficulty. We only need more of this sort of message.

Holiday is good with his words as well, and truth stated well is especially helpful. Here are a few examples.

“History is written with blood, sweat, and tears, and it is etched into eternity by the quiet endurance of courageous people” (p. xxii).

“Of cowards, though, nothing is written. Nothing is remembered. Nothing is admired. Name one good thing that did not require at least a few hard seconds of bravery” (p. 1).

“At the root of most fear is what other people will think of us” (p. 20).

“The brave don’t despair. They believe. They are not cynical, they care” (p. 47).

“Fear speaks the powerful logic of self-interest. It is also an inveterate liar” (p. 61).

“Fear votes for hesitation, it always has a reason for *not doing* and so it rarely does anything” (p. 65).

“It [real life] begins by choosing virtue. Not virtue signaling,



but virtuous *living*” (p. 263).

It does not take too long in the book, though, for an important truth to dawn on the reader. Courage is, by necessity a moral virtue. I am indebted to Holiday for bringing this truth home to me with more clarity than I had had before. Some of his examples of courage I would not affirm, because I did not think what was being supported or affirmed was true or moral. Also, as much as I appreciated the call to courage, I began to wonder how he would distinguish his calls to courage from the vapid Disney mantra to believe in yourself and to “know that you can do it.” All of this is related to the need of a moral basis for courage to make sense. Without a moral basis we cannot distinguish between courage and mere stubbornness (which can be related).

I was pleased to discover that in the last about third of the book, Holiday directly addressed the issue of a moral basis for courage. He argues well that true courage is not simply about ourselves, but it is about helping and defending others. It is not surprising, though, that a Christian reading such a book as this would not be completely satisfied with its moral argument. Holiday does not work (in the book) from any explicit authoritative norm so the moral basis remains less distinct than a Christian argument would be.

My primary critique, then, is that this Stoic book is not Christian; but then, it never claimed to be. Taking it for what it is, *Courage is Calling* is a fine book which I hope finds a wide readership. Christians should engage it as well since, as Holiday notes, the Bible calls for courage. Engage the book and think about how you would articulate the moral basis for courage more completely. We certainly need more courage in the Western church today, “for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim 1:7).

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*Amidst Us Our Beloved Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition.* By Michael A. G. Haykin. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022, 153pp., \$24.99.

Haykin demonstrates that Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used the term “sacrament” without any apparent worry, at times using that term and “ordinances” interchangeably (as quite a few nineteenth century Baptists did as well). Our Baptist forebears saw baptism and the Lord’s Supper as precious means of grace, not as mere externals, but divinely ordained venues by which the Holy Spirit ministers to the people of God. Our churches desperately need to recover this understanding.

On baptism, I was encouraged to see the clear affirmation by seventeenth century Baptists of baptism as *the* profession of faith. I think the New Testament is clear on this point, so I was delighted to see agreement from these forebears. I believe Haykin is correct in suggesting the “altar call” has lamentably replaced baptism as the profession of faith in the regular practice of most of our Baptist churches, thus diminishing the perceived value of baptism.

A good bit more space in the book is devoted to communion, so I will give it more space as well. The most important contribution of the book is demonstrating how prized communion was to these Baptists, how much they benefited from it, and how earnestly they approached it. Modern Baptists should read this and wonder what we have missed when so often indication of the Lord’s Supper being celebrated on a Sunday is met with a sigh and resignation to a slightly longer service. We would do well to meditate on the beautiful language they used. I love Benjamin Keach’s phrase for the Supper, “Soul-reviving Cordial” (p. 37). It is helpful also to note the care with which churches protected the table. I was encouraged to see they did not allow for private celebration of the Supper (seeing that as too much like Cathloic Mass). I have argued against this practice as well, but that argument has not always been well received.

The argument over who is qualified to preside over communion is instructive since this question often comes up today. It seems Baptists today usually agree that anyone designated by the church can preside. It was helpful to read the arguments of earlier Baptists that only pastors can preside. I think those arguments end up as man-made law fearing to trust the congregation, no matter how well intended (pp. 88-90). I am still unconvinced by the arguments for closed communion and was happy

to see William Carey (at least at one time) and John Rylands, Jr. on my side (pp. 88-90). As a side note, the aorist tense does not mean a single, once-for-all action (discussion of 1 Cor 12:13, p. 79).

Perhaps the most central point in the book is the real spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Haykin makes a strong argument that most Baptists in the eighteenth century affirmed this. Mostly it seems to me, they saw no conflict between the Supper being a memorial and the fact that Christ was present in a way such as the Puritans had affirmed.

Eventually Baptists moved away from real presence toward a memorial-only view. Without entering that debate, I am not sure Haykin demonstrates that the memorial view led to all the ills he suggests. This is often suggested but never proven. Causality is often hard to prove. I will simply say that I would heartily welcome memorialists such as Sutcliff whom Haykin quotes at length. Sutcliff saw the Table as "a place of re-consecration," and "an open avowal that one was subject to Christ as his Sovereign, according to Haykin (p. 49). Haykin notes that Sutcliff sought to guard against indifference about the Lord's Supper, but his perspective intime would "help to foster" indifference (p. 50). Perhaps, but not proven. There may be more historical data, but with what is given here, we need to be careful not to conflate bad results from bad examples with better examples of that idea.

Haykin seems critical of those describing Supper as a "commemoration" or "memorial" of Christ's death, but this is the language of Scripture (p. 52). It may be more, but these are good things to affirm and here he does not cite these people as saying "merely" or "only" this (similarly, p. 55).

I am not always convinced of every aspect of the argument about presence or at least that the more memorialists discussed in the book are doing poorly. My main take away is that both sides seem to be far more engaged with communion, appreciative of it, and benefiting from it than most Baptist churches today. I'd welcome at least a return to the hearty memorialist practices described here!

One of the great values of this book is its engagement with the hymnody of the era which focused on the ordinances. Not surprisingly, as our practice of the ordinances has faded so has our hymnody related to them. Haykin notes that the authors of hymns expressly intended to raise proper affections and "kindling devotion to Christ" (p. 94). This is an important way to help people not simply go through the motions. Our songs train our affections. Haykin quotes from these hymns at length,

and the doctrinal robustness paired with earnest affection is wonderful. Pastors today can use some of this language as they preside at the Table. I have marked several I am eager to use soon!

This is a wonderful book, accessible and valuable for all church leaders. Its great value is as an encouragement and exhortation to more meaningful engagement with the Lord's Supper and baptism, and as an aid to stirring up our affections thereto. Too bad so many important works on Baptist history and practice, like this book, have to look outside our denomination for publication. Like John Ryland, Jr. and Andrew Fuller, I am happy to disagree with Haykin on some points while celebrating his great work and the help it will be to pastors and churches.

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*Persuading Shipwrecked Men: The Rhetorical Strategies of 1 Timothy 1.*  
By Lyn M. Kidson. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020, 327pp., \$125.19.

Lyn Kidson earned her Ph.D. under the supervision of Alanna Nobbs, a professor at Macquarie University, and this monograph is the published version of her thesis. She contends that the command in 1:3-4 “is the key to understanding how the letter functions as a persuasive literary unit” (2, 274). She explains 1 Timothy 1:5-20 then is an “ethical digression” which is “tightly knit” and employs “a range of rhetorical devices and ideologically significant threads” (p. 274). She focuses on chapter 1 of 1 Timothy as the key to understanding the rest of the letter. En route to substantiating her argument she investigates the setting of the letter including the question of background and authorship, rhetorical devices, and a great deal of Greco-Roman background including ideas of sonship, education, hubris. This leads to her central thesis: The letter is primarily aimed at the “certain men” in 1:3, seeking to shame them for their departure from Pauline teaching by showing that this is hubris on their part and, by other means, creating “emotional tension” within these men calling them to the proper example of Timothy, a true son, as portrayed in the letter.

I appreciate the attention to the role of rhetoric and the argument that

this letter makes a positive contribution to the canon. Her argument that the letter has a coherent, cohesive argument is most welcome. I also like her argument (following Johnson and contra Mitchell) that 1 Timothy is an administrative letter of some type. Kidson also does a great deal of spade work on lexical issues and Greco-Roman background. It seems at times, though, that any potentially related data has been included such that the train of thought is obscured and that the data may not always be assessed well.

Kidson begins with an assumption that the “certain men” are the real addressees of the letter and later argues that the letter is pseudonymous. At the end of the book, she says that a specific stance on the authorship question does not affect her argument. However, it seems to me that her argument requires pseudonymity. If Paul is actually writing, then the audience is Timothy, first, with the church overhearing (suggested at least by the plural “you” which is the last word of the letter). The second person pronouns and verbs are overwhelming. And Timothy’s concern is for the rest of the church more than specifically for these certain men. I did not see enough argument for these “certain men” and their retrieval being the focus of the letter.

In various places there were inconsistencies. On page 5 she works from the idea of the Pauline Epistles as a collection, but then on pages 28-29 says the letters function independently, then on pages 42-43 she is back to deducing from the idea of the letters as a fictitious collection. She argues that pseudonymous letters were acceptable in the ancient world (pp. 42-43) but does not address the church’s contrary take. She spends a lot of time on education in the ancient world but does not interact at all with Claire Smith’s significant monograph, *Pauline Communities as “Scholastic Communities”* (2012) which is also in the Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament [WUNT] series. She asserts that the reference to the “other teaching” as “doctrines of demons” is hyperbole (p. 172) but does not substantiate that. It seems to be assumed that such a comment would be an exaggeration, but such a statement would not be out of place in the ancient world (even if does seem to be today). It seems that her argument that the letter is a gentle appeal has required the softening of this charge.

Central to Kidson’s argument is the idea that the letter is a call for these “certain men” to return to their filial obligation to Paul as their spiritual father. To this end she argues that the ἀγάπη which is the goal of Paul’s

command in 1:5 is the proper love due to Paul as spiritual father, rather than love for God or for fellow believers. I found this unpersuasive. She also argues at length that the “digression” of 1:5-20 is primarily concerned with *hybris*, insolence or arrogance, that typically characterized youth. She says the point is that the author seeks to persuade the “certain men” that they are guilty of this *hybris* by rejecting the teaching of Paul. While Paul does identify himself as a ὑβριστής in 1:13, the argument for this idea being behind this entire section seemed a stretch as did the argument that νόμος here refers to “the Greek law against hybris, which is reflected in the Septuagint” (p. 214).

In general, a thorough editing could have improved the work. In various places words are out of place and odd phrases occur. There are also gaps either in flow of thought or logic. The opening sentence of Chapter 2 says the principal objective of the study will be to identify the rhetorical strategy of the author. The next sentence says, “This means the writer of 1 Timothy must have received, at some point, some training in rhetoric” (p. 3). The goal of the study cannot “mean” that the ancient author had training in rhetoric. This is more than just a typo as it calls into question what is assumed and what will be proven.

In the end, I did not find Kidson’s argument persuasive. However, she has gathered a lot potentially helpful data on lexical and Greco-Roman background issues which can be helpful for others working in these letters.

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*Becoming C. S. Lewis: 3-Volume Set.* By Harry Lee Poe. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 1128pp., \$89.99.

Nearly 60 years after his death, C. S. Lewis is still one of Christianity’s most influential voices. Biographical accounts of his life are common, written by friends such as George Sayer, critics such as A.N. Wilson, and most recently, admirers such as Alister McGrath. However, none of these have produced a detailed and coherent account of Lewis’s life as Harry Lee Poe in his *Becoming C. S. Lewis* trilogy, the final volume of which

was released this past October. Sparked by a curiosity about what Lewis liked to eat (p. 11), Poe set out to give an account of Lewis's childhood, eventually leading him to study Lewis's life in its entirety to understand better the man who has influenced so much of Poe's writing.

Poe is a fitting author to produce such a work. As the Charles Colson Professor of Faith and Culture at Union University, he has taught a course on Lewis for decades. Before this trilogy, he authored two previous books related to Lewis, *The Inklings of Oxford* and *C. S. Lewis Remembered*, along with numerous articles and essays. He travels the country speaking at conferences and retreats related to Lewis and the Inklings. He is also the founder of the Inklings Fellowship, an academic society that seeks to model itself after the Inklings to transform the academic world through teaching and writing. It is clear that Lewis profoundly influenced Poe, and his respect and admiration are evident in this three-volume biography.

The trilogy begins with *Becoming C. S. Lewis: A Biography of Young Jack Lewis (1908-1918)*. It was initially the only book Poe intended to write, focusing on Lewis's childhood. As such, it provides the newest insight of the trilogy, giving the most detailed treatment of Lewis's childhood since Lewis discussed it in *Surprised by Joy*.

Both scholars and fans alike will be especially interested in Poe's detailing of Lewis's rocky relationship with his father, Albert. Poe illustrates how the relationship between Lewis and his father, particularly after the death of his mother, continually deteriorated as he matured. Nevertheless, while his relationship with his father was complicated and non-existent for long periods, his father also gave Lewis perhaps the most crucial teacher of his childhood, the tutor W. T. Kirkpatrick, known as "The Great Knock." Kirkpatrick would push, mold, and unlock the vast potential of young Lewis's mind. Poe seizes the opportunity to introduce the reader to many of the assigned books of young Lewis by Kirkpatrick that provide crucial context for how Lewis viewed the world in his days before becoming a Christian.

As the reader moves through the first book, sympathy will grow continually toward the young Lewis. Though Kirkpatrick may have given Lewis confidence in his worldview, Poe shows that Lewis's fall into atheism was no mere rebellion of youth but the result of a childhood wrought with pain and loss. First, he loses his mother at age nine, with whom he was very close. Shortly after, he is sent to England to attend a school Poe describes as a "concentration camp" led by an abusive headmaster (p. 27).

His troubled childhood concludes with Lewis leaving college to fight in the deadliest war the world had known up to that point. He spends two years on the Western Front, witnessing the unimaginable horrors of war, only to return injured in both body and spirit.

The second book, *The Making of C. S. Lewis: From Atheist to Apologist (1918-1945)*, shows that although Europe was done with war, Lewis was not. He returned from the Great War, the trauma of which solidified his atheistic worldview. However, upon his return, he enters another kind of war within his heart and mind. Lewis resumes his studies at Oxford with a very different mindset, and as he would write later in *Surprised by Joy*, “A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading.” Stealth attacks on his imagination from his favorite fantasy stories and long debates with friends such as J. R. R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson prove fatal to the fortress Lewis had built in his mind toward the God he did not want to exist. When Lewis finally surrenders a self-described “reluctant” defeat in this inner war, he discovers his purpose and role in the next war.

With his rediscovered faith firmly established, Lewis finds his purpose for the next war in his life and the life of Europe. He becomes a sort of special forces soldier, in the same vein as Tolkien and Dyson were for him. Tasked with the mission of clearly and winsomely presenting the Christian faith, he addresses the entire nation through his Wartime Broadcasts, which later became his well-known apologetic work *Mere Christianity*. Add to this his other works during the war, such as *The Screwtape Letters*, and Lewis quickly produced writings that would one day garner him the reputation as the most significant Christian apologist of the twentieth century.

The second volume concludes by showing how the conversion of C. S. Lewis impacted the world. The third and final volume, *The Completion of C. S. Lewis: From War to Joy (1945-1963)*, shows how his conversion changed the man. To use Paul’s analogy in 2 Timothy, the final book shows how Lewis finished his race.

Keeping with the theme of war, Lewis finally enters a time of peace emotionally, relationally, and spiritually, though this final season was not without grief. In fact, it contained the greatest sorrow of his life with the passing of his wife, Joy. However, Poe shows that even this event helped Lewis learn to finally experience peace by not only trusting Christ but making Christ his greatest treasure. Friends begin to pass away and his health declines, yet through it all, Lewis maintains what has become



most valuable to him - his faith. This peace left Lewis feeling that he had done what God had called him to, dying at the relatively young age of 64. Regarding the completion of his life, Poe closes with a beautiful observation, "Some will say that it was a tragedy for Lewis to have died so young. I think it remarkable that he became complete so young" (p. 352).

From the beginning, Poe's narrative and analytical abilities leap off the page. Moreover, he writes in a style that would make Lewis beam with approval. Lewis said his writing goal was to communicate Christianity's complex ideas in clear terms that anyone could understand, often by telling a story. In the same way, Poe beautifully narrates the life of Lewis while simultaneously communicating Lewis's thoughts clearly, which will appeal to both scholars and fans.

Poe blends biography with analysis seamlessly. The reader feels as if Poe has entered the very mind of Lewis, guiding them through his thoughts while providing the often-missed contextual details of Lewis's writing as the events of his life are displayed. The reader quickly realizes how much his experience, not just his education, influenced Lewis's writing. Poe does not stop at simply sharing a connected series of events; he analyzes the thoughts of Lewis as he goes, pointing out both philosophical and theological implications. In this way, the series has a slightly devotional element, providing a personal and experiential aspect to many of Lewis's ideas that have been so formative for generations. The Christian reader will be encouraged by the lessons from Poe's insights, and the non-Christian reader will be presented with much to consider.

As mentioned, Poe's most significant contribution in this trilogy is his detailed account of Lewis's childhood. He shows how Lewis, raised by Christian parents, had a childhood that produced the conditions that would eventually send him into atheism. However, it also imparted skills and ideas that would take him on his journey out of atheism and firmly into Christianity. Poe offering a complete work devoted to Jack's childhood is groundbreaking and will almost certainly open the door for further research in this gap of Lewis studies.

Nonetheless, the final two volumes of Poe's trilogy also contain stories and details that many fans of Lewis may be unfamiliar with and find interesting. Most often, these stories revolve around the creation of Lewis's works or the people in Lewis's life. For example, some readers may be familiar with the BBC radio talks that would become *Mere Christianity*, but perhaps not familiar with another set of talks that would become *The*

*Four Loves*. Regarding people in his life, Poe writes in great detail about Lewis's brother Warnie, a military officer, alcoholic, and best friend of Lewis.

In the second volume, the reader also finds Poe's most unique claim of the trilogy. Poe asserts that *The Allegory of Love* was the only book Lewis ever wrote. Poe writes, "All other books flow from it like a stream. In it can be found the synthesis of all the ideas that had been swirling in his head for years" (p. 151). He believes this book gives the foundation for the thoughts expressed throughout Lewis's more popular works. Where the first volume could spark new interest in a lesser period of Lewis's life, this observation from Poe could cause further investigation into a lesser-known work of Lewis and its connection to his later work.

Many authors have written biographies of Lewis before, and there will almost certainly be more to come. Numerous others have written about Lewis's philosophy, theology, apologetics, and historical context. However, no writer has combined all of these aspects so accessibly. This blend makes the trilogy a valuable asset to any Christian philosophy, apologetics, or church history student, as Lewis is an influential figure in all of these disciplines. Also, it serves as a great introduction to both primary and secondary sources on Lewis, as Poe shows extensive knowledge of both.

Simply put, Poe has given Lewis studies what could be considered its most important work to date. Anyone wishing to be a serious scholar of Lewis's life and writings ought to engage with Poe's comprehensive work, and any admirer of Lewis wanting to understand the man better should look no further than this trilogy.

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*The Practices of Christian Preaching: Essentials for Effective Proclamation.*  
By Jared E. Alcántara. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019, 224pp.,  
\$24.99.

"I'm supposed to be the franchise player, and we're in here talking about practice. I mean, listen, we're talking about practice. Not a game."

While preachers may not rant like a professional basketball star in a press conference, we are tempted to think we've learned all we need in our seminary training. Now we focus on the game, the preaching moment. But practice isn't only for professional athletes or student musicians. Hours of intentional hard work to improve will equip beginning preachers and strengthen experienced preachers. In *The Practices of Christian Preaching*, Alcántara calls preachers to "deliberate practice" rooted in four commitments: "well-defined and specific goals, focused attention, a consistent feedback loop, and a willingness to get out of one's comfort zone" (p. 5). Chapter one establishes the foundation of a gospel emphasis in every sermon: "The gospel scandalizes our sensibilities by exposing our idols, interrogating our priorities, and calling into question our alliances" (p. 19). Alcántara then provides five areas of practice in the five remaining chapters. Preachers should grow in their ability and willingness to preach convictionally, contextually, clearly, concretely, and creatively.

What sets *The Practices of Christian Preaching* apart from other introductory homiletics texts is Alcántara's "intentionally collaborative" and "strategically diverse" strategy (p. 191). The book is accompanied by online video discussions, questions for groups, sample sermon snippets, and personal reflection activities. Readers are invited to a robust conversation with an ethnically diverse group of preachers. Alcántara intentionally highlights, in the book and online, "courageous female preachers" which may limit the value of his book in some contexts (p. 48). Yet the overall strength of the book is his interaction with homileticians from non-majority cultures to help preachers overcome our "cultural blind spots" resulting from "our nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, and class" (p. 92). Alcántara's viewpoint expands preachers' intercultural competence. His own perspective, "I am half Honduran....my wife is half Puerto Rican," helps expose the importance of cultural contextualization (p. 83). His entire book is a master class in contextuality.

Alcántara expects preachers to work on the skills of exegesis and crafting a homiletical outline and main idea, but he moves the conversation deeper into his five areas of deliberate practice. Even experienced preachers will gain insight and encouragement in Alcántara's wisdom. He is a fantastic storyteller and master of analogies. Samples from his chapter on preaching convictionally highlight his clear writing style and deep understanding of key issues: "God's decision to preach through preachers seems about as counterintuitive as a parent deciding to give dynamite to toddlers" (p.

53), “Pastoral ministry is a lot like trying to clean a house with young children in it. The moment you think it’s clean, it’s messy again” (p. 60), and “A preacher without conviction is like a car without gasoline. It serves *a* purpose, but it does not serve the purpose for which it was created” (p. 71). Alcántara offers insights into the important theories of homiletics but remains practical throughout. He warns against “the specific struggles that preachers face” including workaholism, vanity, celebrity, arrogance, inauthenticity, and prayerlessness (p. 60).

Alcántara’s chapters on preaching clearly and concretely rest upon solid homiletical foundations but shine in their practical applications. He gathers useful quotes and offers his own pithy wisdom. To Sunukjian’s insight “We talk so that eleven-year-olds can understand us” (p. 117) he adds “*make every minute count no matter the sermon length*” (p. 124) and “Challenge yourself to write a main idea that is *twelve words or less*” (p. 127). He warns, “Too many sermons major on abstraction and minor on concreteness” (p. 153) as he aims at preaching that is applicable “on Monday mornings” (p. 133). Alcántara’s emphasis on the importance of illustrations will help preachers reach listeners. Illustrations move down the ladder of abstraction to concrete understanding.

The strength of Alcántara’s final chapter on preaching creatively is when he moves beyond his historical explanation of creativity to practical ideas for fostering creativity. While risking a reductionistic summary, since there are many valuable insights, the chapter, and perhaps the book as a whole, can be captured by Ken Robinson’s reminder, “Creativity thrives on diversity” (p. 177). Alcántara serves the church by gathering diverse voices to strengthen preachers. Intentional and deliberate practice, in the midst of a diverse community, will improve preaching. Alcántara’s *The Practices of Christian Preaching* should be added as a supplementary text to introductory homiletics programs and deserves to be in the hands of experienced preachers eager to grow in gospel proclamation.

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*40 Questions About Women in Ministry.* By Sue Edwards and Kelley Matthews. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022, 332pp., \$23.99.

“Where can women serve in ministry?” is not a new question, but in the last decade the question has been asked more loudly across the evangelical world. While most believers look to the Scriptures for God’s direction and guidance for the role of women in ministry, hermeneutical interpretation, including but not limited to translation of Hebrew and Greek words, modern-day appropriation of cultural settings in the epistles, and God’s plan and intent for men’s and women’s roles pre- and post-fall and following the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ have left many asking what is biblically permissible and what is not. Sue Edwards, professor of educational ministry and leadership at Dallas Theological Seminary, and Kelley Matthews, a former women’s ministry director and Doctor of Ministry student at Northern Seminary, seek to help address forty of the questions about women in ministry in their latest release.

Edwards and Matthews approach the questions from complementarian and egalitarian perspectives, though at the onset of the book the authors rename the terms hierarch and heterarch, respectively, to avoid an alliance with “any factions” and because they do not “believe either group has an absolute corner on biblical truth” related to the role of women in ministry (p. 27). Within the book’s introduction, the authors also note the “challenge” of “capturing the essence” of both perspectives, “especially on the ‘complementarian’ side” (p. 17). As the questions are presented in each chapter, the authors share the hierarch answer to the proposed query as well as the heterarch response. Edwards notes in chapter one that both complementarians and egalitarians can be charged with interpreting the Bible “*evangelistically*,” which she defines as “stretch[ing] the text to give credence to what they want it to say” (p. 26).

The questions are divided into four parts as they relate to introductory issues, the Old Testament, the New Testament and beyond, including women in church history, and current issues. The introductory issues include the aforementioned renaming of the two perspectives, a discussion of hierarchy and heterarchy views on feminism, principles of biblical interpretation, and a chapter focused on when issues are biblical cultural issues and when they are unchanging. Part two, questions related to the Old Testament, includes a lengthy discussion on God being imaged as male and female, what Genesis 1-2 shows about male and female relationships, an

understanding of God's command for men and women to have dominion over the earth, woman as being a corresponding helpmate for the man, male and female relationships as shown in Genesis 3, and an explanation Gen 3:16. Two chapters that focus on what can be learned from the women prophets of the Old Testament and the Proverbs 31 woman, as well as God's plan and design for women complete part two.

The longest is part three, which categorizes the questions under the headings of women in the Gospels and Acts, women in the epistles, and women in church history. Part three focuses on questions related to the New Testament and beyond. The first section, women in the Gospels and Acts, includes questions related to Jesus's interaction with the women who traveled and supported his ministry, his choosing only men as the Twelve Apostles, and the significance that Mary, a woman, first witnessed Jesus's resurrection. Lengthy discussion surrounding questions related to the women commended by Paul in Romans 16, whether women can teach or prophesy, what is meant by the metaphor "head," conclusions and views on 1 Tim 2:11-15, and what it means for wives to submit to their husbands are found in part three. This section also includes three chapters focused on women in church history.

Questions related to current issues are discussed in the final section of the book. These chapters include an examination of whether women can be deacons, priests, pastors, or elders; the titles women can be given for ministry roles; and how women can appropriately use leadership and teaching gifts, among other questions.

Edwards and Kelley should be commended for their willingness to tackle such weighty questions facing the church in the 2020s. The questions they address in their work are those both women and men are genuinely asking as women seek to advance the Kingdom of God and serve the Lord with excellence. The co-authors address many questions in a short amount of space as robustly as possible for the average reader who may or may not have a theological academic background.

Having observed the above, it should be noted the book appears to be lacking a complete argument from the hierarch perspective. Though the authors mention in the introduction "complementarians fall within a wide spectrum of perspectives differing from one another in many ways" (p. 17), the full spectrum of perspectives was not presented as the authors penned in the next paragraph they were going to focus more on the views of the heterarchs because "the hierarch's view is generally more

well-known, and often heterarchs are responding to hierarchs” (p. 18). The hierarch response for each question is then predominately presented from the standpoint of two complementarians who do not represent the full spectrum of views from the complementarian perspective. In contrast, the heterarch perspective is well-represented with a wide swath of scholars who range from the most extreme to more centered. The arguments then come across as unbalanced.

Another item of note includes the discussion of Greek words in relationship to Paul’s letters. It is difficult to distill what would normally constitute an entire academic semester into a few paragraphs focused on such an important topic. Though the book was written in “everyday language” (p. 17) these chapters could become cumbersome for those who have not had academic training in Greek. Chapters such as these would be best read with the assistance of one who has had academic study in biblical languages.

Edwards and Kelly’s work will encourage readers to look more deeply into what Scripture has to say about each of the questions that were posed. God’s Word is the final authority.

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*Truth, Theology, and Perspective: An Approach to Understanding Biblical Doctrine.* By Vern S. Poythress. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, 159pp., \$21.99.

Vern S. Poythress, distinguished professor of theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, makes it clear that the purpose of this book is not just to explore theological topics as typical theological texts do. Rather, rejecting postmodern relativism and skepticism, he aims to unfold each chapter of biblical doctrine with the presuppositional commitment to a Christian understanding of truth.

For Poythress, truth functions as a perspective through which all the biblical doctrines, as traditionally taught in systematic theology, are interpreted and appreciated. Four components frame the book: the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, redemption, and application of redemption,

which reflects a typical way of direction in the redemptive history of biblical interpretation.

The first section of the doctrine of God deals with the concept of truth in which all other attributes of God are displayed. Each attribute of God is described and confirmed in light of the idea of divine simplicity. Poythress notes that, "Truth is one attribute of God. So, in this attribute it ought to be possible to see the other attributes, all of which belong to truth" (p. 27). When it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity, the nature of truth is revealed in the Trinity by the interpersonal love within the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as well as by the coinherence that "each person of the Trinity indwells each other person" (p. 41). Through the rest of the sub-sections, i.e., creation, providence, and revelation, Poythress relates truth as perspective to God's unique nature and work to harmonize with those theological doctrines (pp. 53-69).

Next, Poythress unfolds the doctrine of man and redemption. God who is and possesses truth in himself, in the power of "the archetypal communicating truth in the Trinity," manifests truth by speaking creation into being, including mankind (pp.73-74). When the first covenantal communion with God in truth was broken in the fall, "Adam failed to believe the truth about God's truthfulness and his goodness" (p. 81). Then, the incarnate Christ, in harmony with the truth in the Godhead planned before the foundation of the world, comes in the second person of the Trinity, providing atonement by his penal substitutionary work (pp. 105-6, 113-19). Poythress, discussing penal substitution, sharply criticizes modern theology's "antipathy to penal substitution," which it considered "irrational." But, claims Poythress, "the real irrationalism is to try to be more rational than God!... Modernism has in its arrogance discarded whatever it cannot fit into its own impoverished framework" (p. 118).

The truth of God that has been initiated in fulfillment of salvation in the redemptive history affects in a comprehensive way the people of God: the gospel of truth demanding a response to the truth; justification indicating God's judgment in truth; sanctification expecting conformity to Christ the truth (John 14:6); and, finally the church sharing the truth, all of which together will draw "the consummation of the manifestation of truth" (pp. 129-45).

Poythress successfully demonstrates the truthfulness of biblical and theological doctrines in systematic theology, demonstrating their harmony in and from the perspective of truth. The existence of God who



condescended and accommodated himself for the sake of his creatures in the second person of the triune God, translates himself in theology on a human level, and manifests truth in Jesus Christ who himself is the way, the truth, and the life. I gladly recommend this short book, which will provide a prolonged impression on orthodox Christian truth for those who seek to trace the understanding of biblical doctrines in light of God's truthfulness.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

**The Qur'an and the Christian: An In-depth Look into the Book of Islam for Followers of Jesus.** By Matthew Aaron Bennett. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022, reviewed by Dean F. Sieberhagen

**The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution.** By Carl R. Trueman. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020, reviewed by Jeffrey H. Green

**Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary.** By Michael J. Gorman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022, reviewed by Chris S. Osborne

**Preaching: A Simple Approach to the Sacred Task.** By Daniel Overdorf. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022, reviewed by Chris S. Osborne

**Courage is Calling: Fortune Favors the Brave.** By Ryan Holiday. New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2021, reviewed by Ray Van Neste

**Amidst Us Our Beloved Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition.** By Michael A. G. Haykin. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022, reviewed by Ray Van Neste

**Persuading Shipwrecked Men: The Rhetorical Strategies of 1 Timothy 1.** By Lyn M. Kidson. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020, reviewed by Ray Van Neste

**Becoming C. S. Lewis: 3-Volume Set.** By Harry Lee Poe. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, reviewed by Clayton Carver

**The Practices of Christian Preaching: Essentials for Effective Proclamation.** By Jared E. Alcántara. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019, reviewed by Kevin Koslowsky

**40 Questions About Women in Ministry.** By Sue Edwards and Kelley Matthews. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022, reviewed by Ashley L. Allen

**Truth, Theology, and Perspective: An Approach to Understanding Biblical Doctrine.** By Vern S. Poythress. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022, reviewed by Wang Yong Lee



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