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# The Southern Baptist Convention “Crisis” in Context: Southern Baptist Conservatism and the Rise of the Religious Right

Austin R. Biggs

Western Kentucky University, [austin.biggs213@topper.wku.edu](mailto:austin.biggs213@topper.wku.edu)

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THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION “CRISIS” IN CONTEXT:  
SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONSERVATISM AND THE RISE OF THE  
RELIGIOUS RIGHT

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

By  
Austin R. Biggs

May 2017

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION "CRISIS" IN CONTEXT:  
SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONSERVATISM AND THE RISE OF THE  
RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Date Recommended 04/07/2017

Tamara J Van Dyken  
Dr. Tamara Van Dyken, Director of Thesis

Carol Crowe Carraco  
Dr. Carol Crowe-Carraco

Patricia Minter  
Dr. Patricia Minter

[Signature] 4/24/17  
Dean, Graduate School Date

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....vi

Chapter One- Introduction.....1

Chapter Two- Converging Narratives: The Southern Baptist Convention and  
Modern American Conservatism.....18

Chapter Three- A Collision of Worldviews: The Southern Baptist Convention “In  
Crisis”.....58

Chapter Four- Conserving the Family: How “Family Values” Reshaped the  
Southern Baptist Convention.....85

Chapter Five- The Southern Baptist Convention as the Religious Right:  
Uncertainty Ahead?.....113

Bibliography.....126

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION “CRISIS” IN CONTEXT: SOUTHERN  
BAPTIST CONSERVATIVES AND THE RISE OF THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Austin Biggs

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Directed by: Tamara Van Dyken, Patricia Minter, and Carol Crowe-Carraco

Department of History

Western Kentucky University

From the late 1970s through the early 1990s, a minority conservative faction took over the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). This project seeks to answer the questions of how a fringe minority within the nation’s largest Protestant denomination could undertake such a feat and why they chose to do so. The framework through which this work analyzes these questions is one of competing worldviews that emerged within the SBC in response to decades of societal shifts and denominational transformations in the post-World War II era. To place the events of the Southern Baptist “crisis” within this framework, this study seeks to refute the prevailing notion put forth in earlier works that the takeover was an in-house event, driven purely by doctrinal disputes between conservative Southern Baptists and SBC leadership. Illustrating the differences between rhetoric and action on both sides of this intra-denominational conflict, this work seeks to provide perspective to the narrative of the Southern Baptist “crisis” by asserting that the worldviews guiding the opposing factions diverged not only on doctrine, but culture and politics as well. Placing the events of the “crisis” within the context of broader worldviews, this project highlights and examines the intertwined nature of religion, culture, and politics in modern American society.

CHAPTER ONE  
Introduction

In the world from which they came, the distinction [between religion and politics] in fact was a false one: as custodians of their culture, evangelicals were expected to govern with a Christian conscience and vote in accordance with core Christian values. Now, in a society like California's, derailed, in their minds, by progressive thinking, the need for an engaged Christian Citizenry seemed all the more urgent.  
– Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt* (2011)

The story of the Southern Baptist 'Crisis', alternately referred to as a controversy, takeover, or resurgence depending on the allegiances of the person that you are talking to, is one that is little known in today's Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The struggle that consumed the Southern Baptist Convention through the entire decade of the 1980s no longer pervades the collective memory of its members. Over three decades have now passed and with it new generations of Southern Baptists have come of age without having the slightest clue as to what went on in those days. Being in my early twenties as I write this, I belong to these younger generations. Although I have family members who work at Lifeway (the denomination's book store and publishing arm) and attended a rural Southern Baptist church regularly into my college years, it was not until graduate school that I stumbled across the event in my reading. That such a major event in the history of the denomination could occur within the lifetime of people that I knew and yet never be discussed perplexed me. I began to ask questions such as: Why had no one ever mentioned this controversy even in passing? What was the denomination like before this 'conservative take over'? How has their victory changed the denomination? Why did these 'conservatives' feel the need to take over?

To answer these questions, I did what any graduate student would do: I wrote a research paper on it for my class. Through that project I was able to answer many of my questions, but some still evaded me. Although the event seemed to have fallen out the

collective memory of Southern Baptists, those few that wrote about the controversy, despite differing in opinion on many things depending on their “side,” had two common conclusions: that the Conservatives had successfully taken over the denomination and that the struggle was one that was entirely contained within the denomination. What bothered me the most was that of the motivation behind the “conservative” movement. The answer that came up during my research was that the divide had been over doctrine. Knowing that Baptists were traditionally congregational, meaning that each individual church is seen as its own autonomous body, this explanation did not make sense. If what one church believed did not come to bear on what another one did, then why would these “conservatives” go through the trouble of organizing themselves and undertaking a ten-year plan of denominational conquest? The question of how this group of “conservatives” was able to pull off their denominational *coup d'état* evaded me in a similar way. It is well documented that the group utilized Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson’s plan to seize control via the political machinery of the denomination, but how they were able to carry out their plan was not adequately explained. The historiography points to the “conservatives” packing of the conventions and utilizing parliamentary procedure (sometimes unfairly) to carry out their plan, but they do not discuss how they were able to accomplish even those things. How were they able to mobilize enough people to flood the annual conventions and where did their use of political tactics come from in a traditionally non-political denomination? My attempts to answer these questions led me to this project.

This work contends that the struggle within the Southern Baptist Convention was driven by both internal and external factors, challenging the notion typically put forth that it was an in-house controversy. Thus, this work seeks to shed new light on these Southern

Baptist tumults by placing them in a broader historical context than is represented in extant works on the subject. Accordingly, this project seeks to answer questions at two levels: the narrower level concerning itself with the denomination and the broader level concerning itself with the interaction between evangelicalism and conservative culture and politics. On a narrower scope this project seeks to answer the questions of how and why the “conservatives” took over the Southern Baptist Convention. At the broader level this project seeks to better understand the interplay between religion, culture, and politics in American society by examining the effects of the interaction between Southern Baptists and the New Right. That these two levels interweaved themselves in reality will be reflected in the narrative this work puts forth and is, in fact, an important contention of this work. I believe that in answering these questions will not only provide a better insight into forces at work in the Southern Baptist Controversy of the 1980s and 1990s, but also insight into the forces that are at work in American society today. For just as religion, politics, and culture tend to affect one another in a cyclical nature in the narrative of the Southern Baptist “crisis,” the same is true today.

In the case of the SBC changes in cultural and political worldviews would lead to changes in religious emphases. A denomination with two-part identity, Southern and Baptist, how the heritages of each facet would be emphasized and interpreted would depend on which of the competing worldviews one took up. This work will demonstrate that the Conservatives tended to emphasize Southern cultural traditions, while Moderates tended to emphasize Baptist traditions. In the SBC, the battle over women’s ordination would be the clearest example of this cyclical nature and how the development of opposing worldviews are a part of the process. Whereas a traditional patriarchy within Southern

culture would make most Conservatives and Moderates at best ambivalent toward the idea of women in the pulpit, the adoption of a Religious Right inspired worldview by Conservatives would lead them to take a hardline stance of opposition to the practice that went beyond what their doctrinal assertions required. Thus, we can see how the cultural and political alignment of conservative Southern Baptists with the Religious Right to (at least in part) preserve their religion, reflected back upon, and transmuted aspects of their religious thought.

The socio-politically conservative culture that the modern-day SBC indoctrinates into its members through its programming and publications is yet another reason why answering the questions that this project sets forth is important. As the nation's largest Protestant denomination, with a membership totaling over 16 million, the Southern Baptist Convention is quite a boon to the "Religious Right" with which it almost entirely aligns in official positions on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and even the death penalty. While not all Southern Baptists are social or political conservatives, it is significant that in many Southern Baptist congregations a pervasive culture of sociopolitical conservatism exists without recognition. Belonging myself to the generations that have been reared in the denomination without any alternative perception of Southern Baptist life, I can attest to this. The perception that society has become morally bankrupt and hostile towards Christianity are common themes in Southern Baptist discourse. One example of how these messages are encoded by the denomination is found in Lifeway's "Fourth of July" church bulletin for this year. The back of the bulletin features a piece entitled "Religious Liberty Is Not Freedom from Ridicule," which begins by stating: "Recent years have seen an unprecedented and nasty turn in American culture

against basic religious freedoms – freedoms that were once the bedrock of American consensus. Moving forward, we will have to advocate for religious liberty and soul freedom for everyone, against a government and a media culture hostile to the idea.”<sup>1</sup> How such a world view has come to permeate the denomination is what this work seeks to explain.

## THESIS

This work sets out to understand what drove the conflict that occurred in the Southern Baptist Convention during the 1980s and 1990s and why the “conservatives” came out on top. In doing so this project has sought to contextualize the event by placing it within the broader context of American societal change in the twentieth century. The result of doing so has produced in this work an understanding of the Southern Baptist “crisis” that runs counter to that projected by participants and chroniclers of the event alike. While the traditional narrative tends to focus on the doctrinal divisions between the “moderate” and “conservative” blocs, the narrative put forth in this work focuses on broader differences in worldview between the two groups. I maintain that the Southern Baptist “crisis” was primarily a result of societal shifts and upheaval in American society that wrought significant changes on the SBC and its people in the decades following World War II. By placing the “controversy” in this broader context, the problem of motivation inherent in the accepted narrative of events is solved.

That a fringe group of conservative Southern Baptists would want to take control of their denomination over doctrinal differences with SBC leadership makes little sense considering Baptist congregationalism and doctrines such as Soul Competency that reject

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Moore, “Religious Liberty Is Not Freedom from Ridicule,” *Lifeway Worship*, July 3, 2016.

the notion that even denominational leaders can tell individuals what to believe.<sup>2</sup> If conservative Southern Baptists were unhappy with the doctrines advanced by the denominational establishment, then they could have simply turned to their already existing alternative organizations and institutions. The more plausible motivation that this work asserts is that conservative Southern Baptists were driven by a worldview shaped by their encounters with and participation in the “Religious Right” bloc of the New Right political movement. This absolute values based worldview that stresses traditionalism and “family values” can be clearly seen in the social and doctrinal issues that “conservatives” in the SBC rallied around. The need to save American society, and the Southern Baptist Convention, from forces of secularism and moral decay that are inherent in this worldview explain why conservative Southern Baptist were driven to the activism that caused the “crisis.”

An important caveat to be made about this work is that it is by no means meant to be a complete narrative of the SBC “crisis.” While I challenge the arguments made in works such as Nancy Ammerman’s *Baptist Battles* and the myriad of histories produced by both sides such as James Hefley’s *The Conservative Resurgence* on the Conservative side or Walter Shurden’s *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC* on the Moderate side, they provide a more complete narrative of the events that took place.<sup>3</sup> Instead of focusing on *what* happened, this project is more concerned with *why* it happened.

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<sup>2</sup> Conservative in this discussion on Southern Baptists refers to those that held to the doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy and stressed “traditional” social values. Southern Baptist leadership, denominational executives and agency heads, were latitudinarian toward doctrine and more progressive on social issues prior to the “crisis.”

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990). James Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (LaVergne: Lightning Source, 1991). Walter B. Shurden,

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

To understand why the events of this Southern Baptist controversy occurred and properly contextualize them, this project has consisted of a study of primary and secondary sources. Although my primary sources provide some insight into the broader level of questioning in this study, their content mainly concerns the narrower denominational level of inquiry. The major primary sources for this project are gleaned from archival research conducted at the Southern Baptist Library and Archives, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library and Archives and the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary Library and Archives. The major collections that I have drawn from are the SBC Controversy collection at the Southern Baptist Library and Archives in Nashville, the Roy Honeycutt Presidential Papers housed at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library and Archives in Louisville, and the Paul Pressler Papers housed at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest. The SBC Controversy collection provides a wealth of information on the “crisis.” It includes newspaper clippings, personal letters, promotional materials, and convention sermons that relate to the controversy. The Roy Honeycutt Papers have been vital in characterizing the moderate faction. As president of the denomination’s most prominent (and best endowed) seminary, Honeycutt was a major player on the moderate side until his retirement in 1992. The collection of his presidential papers includes newspaper articles, speeches, sermons, and letters. Additionally, an archive of the seminary’s magazine, The Tie, provides an insightful “Presidential Journal” section in which Honeycutt editorialized his thoughts on the takeover to the Southern [Seminary] community. The Paul Pressler Papers, on the other hand, have been vital in

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*The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement*, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993).

characterizing the conservative faction. Pressler, the Texan Appeals Court Judge and Princeton graduate, was a leader of the conservative faction and the mastermind behind their political strategy to take over the denominational structure. A smaller, but helpful collection in placing denominational events in a broader context is the Albert Lee Smith Papers. Smith was congressman that was highly active in the denominational politics within his home state of Alabama. As a politician, Smith was a conservative Republican who read materials from organizations such as the Heritage Foundation demonstrate the link between identifying as “conservative” in the SBC and aligning with the Religious Right. In addition to archival research, miscellaneous Southern Baptist materials that I have come across, such as the bulletin quoted from above, provide insights into the nature of the SBC today. Also, examination of SBC convention resolutions provides good insights into change over time in the denomination.

Secondary works that are drawn from are split between the two levels of inquiry. Works such as Nancy Ammerman’s *Baptist Battles*, Elizabeth Flowers’ *Into the Pulpit*, and Barry Hankins’ *Uneasy in Babylon* deal with the narrower level of inquiry.<sup>4</sup> Their works deal specifically with the narrative of denominational struggle, although approaching it in different ways. Works with a broader level of inquiry provide different treatments to the narrative of the rise of the New Right and modern American conservatism. Darren Dochuk’s *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, William Martin’s *With God on Our Side*, and Kevin Kruse’s *One Nation Under God* all fit within this category.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power Since World War II*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012). William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1996). Kevin Kruse,

## METHODOLOGY

In terms of major historical writings that are pertinent to this project there are two sets of works: histories of the SBC crisis and histories of the modern conservative movement in America. These works reflect the two levels of questioning mentioned above that this project will attempt to provide answers for. To demonstrate the intertwined nature of politics, culture, and religion in this project, works from these two levels will be woven throughout to provide a narrative that contextualizes the actions of SBC conservatives in bring their denomination into the broader fold of the New Right. Key to this is drawing the connection between the cultural and political dimensions of the conservative movement in the SBC and their use of doctrine as a justification to align their denomination along those dimensions.

One particularly influential work upon this project is Barry Hankins' *Uneasy In Babylon* in which he makes similar connections between SBC conservatives and the evangelical mainstream in his effort to understand who they were and what energized their takeover of the denomination. Despite not being a Southern Baptist, Hankins is history professor at Baylor University (a Baptist university) that sympathizes with the opposing moderate faction. Taking a topical approach and drawing heavily from interviews with important people within the movement, he argues that it is was the encounters of conservative leaders with the non-Southern evangelicals that led to them to action. In Hankins account the writings of Francis Schaeffer and Carl F. Henry, prominent evangelical theologians, convinced SBC conservatives to push their denomination in the evangelical mainstream and become culture warriors. This

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*One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

assessment is very similar to my own, except that Hankins tends to point to doctrinal and cultural changes that lead to political changes while mine will point to cultural and political changes that lead to changes in doctrine.

No work that this project draws on makes the connection between the political, cultural, and religious dimensions of the SBC “crisis” as clearly as Hankins’. William Martin’s *With God on Our Side* and Darren Dochuk’s *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt* make similar connections to Hankins in their narratives of the broader conservative movement. However, their works focus mainly on the role of religion in shaping political and cultural change and rarely touch on the effect back on religion that this work will try to assert. While, Martin only dedicates a single page to the SBC “crisis” and Dochuk fails to mention it at all. These works are still indispensable to this project in the understanding they provide of the broader conservative movement over the span of the twentieth century. Without them the context of American societal change and upheaval in the decades following World War II would be lost to this project. Kevin Kruse’s *One Nation under God* also provides insight into the broader conservative movement, but his work asserts the role of civic religion more so than evangelicalism.

Two other works that focus on the SBC “crisis” are highly influential on this project: Nancy Ammerman’s *Baptist Battles* and Elizabeth Flowers’ *Into the Pulpit*. Ammerman, a sociologist at Mercer University and self-identified Moderate, provides a history of the “crisis” in which she attempts to use field data collected from denominational conventions in the mid-Eighties to support her argument that the conservative takeover was driven by cultural, not doctrinal factors. Ammerman’s 1990 work is still considered one of the standard works on the “crisis” despite its tendency to

oversimplify the struggle as being between a higher educated, white collar Moderate faction and a less educated, blue collar Conservative one. Flowers, a historian at Texas Christian University that also sympathizes with the moderate side per her experiences growing up as a Southern Baptist during the “crisis,” provides a narrative in which the issue of women’s ordination is central to the controversy. Her argument is useful in that she points to doctrinal stance of SBC conservatives against women in the pulpit as signaling alignment with the broader “family values” ideology of the Religious Right. My work will also assert that the ‘conservatives’ in the denomination sought to mold the SBC in the image of the Religious Right, but I assert that their crusade against women’s ordination was a symptom and not a cause of the “crisis” as Flowers puts forth.

Thus, my work is an attempt to amend the historical narratives of both the Southern Baptist Convention and the New Right. By illustrating how these two narratives that are conceived of as being only tangentially related at best in their historiographies, are in fact interconnected, this work hopes to shed greater light on the entangled nature of religion, culture, and politics in American life. Through a greater understanding of the interconnectedness of these often-deemed separate aspects of American life, a greater understanding of the forces at work in the tumults of American society today can be gleaned. Opposition to gay rights is a good example of this interrelatedness. Often anti-gay sentiment is chocked up to “Bible thumping” Christians in popular discourse, but opposition to gay rights is not the exclusive reserve of Christians or other religionists. There is also a sizeable minority of non-religionists in America that also oppose, or are quite ambivalent toward, same-sex marriage because it

does not conform to the normative cultural moors of sexuality.<sup>6</sup> Gay rights are often opposed as an affront to the “traditional” nuclear family defined by two heterosexual spouses and their children, born, preferably, in wedlock. This idea of the “traditional” family transcends the Christian community, but the views it promulgates are steeped in Christian morality and culture. Thus, while there are those that oppose gay marriage and lifestyles with a claim to religion, the cultural norms that they fall back on are rooted in religion. In more recent years, this process has worked in reverse for those that support gay rights. Influenced by greater acceptance in popular culture, many Christians have come to either support gay rights or at least soften their opposition to them. A growing minority of Christian churches have embraced doctrines that do not view homosexuality as a sin and many no longer prevent gays from seeking ordination. As the Pew Research Center data shows, over the period from 2001-2006 white evangelical Protestant acceptance of same-sex marriage increased from 13 percent to 27 percent.<sup>7</sup> Thus, like the issue of women’s ordination in the SBC as American cultural norms based on religion that opposed gay rights and marriage began to change, religious attitudes trended in the same direction.

## TERMINOLOGY

Being a work that encompasses essentially two sets of historical narratives, there is quite a bit of jargon that will surface as I refer to different groups and ideas. Perhaps the terms in most dire need of definition for this project to be intelligible to the reader are my near constant references to Conservatives and Moderates in the SBC. One may

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<sup>6</sup> “Attitudes on same-sex marriage by religious affiliation,” Pew Research Center: Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage, May 12, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/05/12/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>. 20 percent of non-religionists opposed same-sex marriage in 2016.

<sup>7</sup> “Attitudes on same-sex marriage by religious affiliation,” Pew Research Center (2016).

typically think of a conservative as someone that seeks to maintain the status quo and a moderate as someone that seeks some sort of middle path. In the case of these Southern Baptist factions, however, these are more proper names than descriptors. Each side chose to refer to itself in these terms to avoid more pejorative labels of “fundamentalists” and “liberals” that were utilized by their opponents. The Conservatives were anti-establishment Southern Baptists; they possessed a “Religious Right” worldview that encompassed absolute moral values and an unwavering belief in the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. Energized by the successes of New Right politics in the latter half of the 1970s, this group would seek to “save” their denomination from the threats of secularism and moral decay in the same way that they sought to “save” American society as a whole. Led by an cadre a well-educated, and well-politically connected elites, Conservatives saw seizing control of their denomination as the only way to save it. Existing on the fringes of the denominational structure, with their own institutions and organizations, this group of conservative Southern Baptists came to power by harnessing the frustration that many rank and file Southern Baptist had felt in the decades leading up to the “crisis” as SBC leaders had become increasingly socially and doctrinally progressive.

Moderates in the SBC were establishment Southern Baptists. Unlike Conservatives that had a clear ideology driven by their worldview, Moderates largely sought to maintain the status quo in the denomination. Many Moderates were Southern Baptist “lifers” that had attended SBC schools and worked within the denomination. Unlike their Conservative counterparts, they were comfortable within the denomination. Although largely socially conservative and given to the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy, they did not feel that the SBC had strayed far enough from their beliefs to need any kind

of “saving.” In addition to the majority that simply sought to maintain the status quo, Moderates also encompassed the denominations progressives and the growing women’s ordination movement. The third group under the Moderate umbrella was the women that sought ordination within the SBC. Called by God to the pulpit and inspired by the evangelicals among the second wave feminists, these women argued for a break from the traditional idea within the denomination that ordained positions were meant for men only. Although supported in real terms by progressive Southern Baptists, their alliance with mainstream Moderates was an uneasy one. Moderates were often willing to speak in support of these women, but too often unwilling to act.

Moving outside of the SBC, an explanation of how I use terms referring to the modern conservative movement in America. In this work, I refer to the modern conservative movement and the New Right interchangeably. While the modern political right encompasses a range of worldviews and philosophies, for my purposes I refer to the mainstream of the movement that identified with libertarian principles of free markets and limited government. The “Religious Right” is a subset of the modern political right that combined those conservative principles with a Christian patriotism that asserted conservative evangelical social values and opposed secularism, communism, and moral degeneracy. This segment of the conservative movement was most concerned with social issues, opposing abortion, feminism and gay marriage, while asserting their idea of “traditional family values.” This work is unconcerned with how well the New Right and the Religious Right held to these ideals, but the power that those ideals had in driving a political activism that I argue spilt over into the SBC for its Conservative faction.

## CHAPTER LAYOUT

The body of this work will consist of three chapters divided in roughly chronological order: Pre-Crisis, Crisis, and Post-Crisis. The Pre-Crisis chapter follows the historical narratives of the Southern Baptist Convention and the rise of the New Right up through the end of the 1970s. This chapter not only provides an overview of the two narratives, but also illustrates how their increasing entanglement through the 1960s and 1970s led to the formation of the Conservative movement that would eventually undertake a plan to seize control of the denomination. Key to each of these narratives are the massive population shifts of the mid-twentieth century that saw Southerners leave the South for better employment opportunities in other regions of the country. This effect of these population shifts was three-fold: it led to the formation of the New Right, it created the massive expansion of the SBC, and it broke white cultural hegemony in the South. As this chapter will show, each of these moved the Southern Baptist Convention towards its “crisis” as future Moderates and Conservatives developed the worldviews that would guide them through the coming struggle during this period.

The Crisis chapter covers the years in which Conservatives and Moderates “battled” for control of the denomination. The bookends for this period are the 1979 election of Adrian Rogers as SBC president in Houston in which the Conservative plan was launched and the 1991 election of Morris Chapman as SBC president in which he was elected unopposed, marking the end of Moderate attempts to regain the denomination.<sup>8</sup> While this chapter will discuss how the “crisis” came about and how it

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<sup>8</sup> "Southern Baptists Re-Elect a Fundamentalist," 1991, *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 05, 1, <http://libsrv.wku.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/108743508?accountid=15150>.

played out, the main focus of the chapter is examining the issues over which the two sides fought and illustrating their motivations. In this chapter, the notion that the struggle was mainly over Biblical inerrancy is refuted and the role of the Religious Right worldview in driving Conservative action is asserted. This argument is then traced through the battles over politicization and women's ordination.

The Post-Crisis chapter covers the events that took place within the denomination during the decade of the 1990s. It is during this decade that Conservatives, having gained complete control of the Southern Baptist Convention at the national level, set out to mold it in their image. This chapter will continue to demonstrate how the Religious Right worldview shaped the Conservative agenda as they moved the denomination into lock-step with this sociopolitical ideology. Through convention resolutions, seminary faculty purges and curriculum overhauls, and eventually two new Statements of Faith in 1998 and 2000, Conservatives would transform their denomination during this decade. This chapter will also discuss Moderate resistance during this period and why most chose to stay in the SBC despite becoming disenfranchised within the denomination.

My concluding chapter will discuss the state of the denomination today and its possible future. This chapter will examine the cumulative effects of twenty-five years of Conservative rule on the denomination. Additionally, this chapter will consider how the current cultural and political climate in America might affect the SBC going forward. As tied as the denomination has become to the Religious Right, a bloc that loses influence within the Republican party and American culture at large with each passing year, this chapter will question the possibility of a pendulum swing back toward Moderate ideology.

CHAPTER TWO  
Converging Narratives:  
The Southern Baptist Convention and Modern American Conservatism

The Southern Baptist “crisis” was one that involved millions of people and stretched out over the entirety of a decade. Although in hindsight Conservative victory was almost inevitable after their opponents failed to mobilize themselves within the takeover’s first few years, the struggle was a long and protracted one. For those that lived through the event the battle for the denomination became a pivotal event in the narrative of their lives in much the same way that Great Depression came to define the lives of those that lived through it. Perhaps because of its almost epic proportions, those that write and speak about the “crisis” tend to lose its context in the greater narrative of twentieth century American history. Often these writers and speakers knew their subjects and thus tend to focus on the individuals instead of their actions. This leads to shortsightedness in explaining the event itself as those relating the story find it difficult to detach themselves from their emotions. Thus, their narratives tend to emphasize individuals, not movements. Personal disagreements, not ideologies. In a case of “not seeing the forest for the trees,” they tend to assume that the struggle was entirely in-house.

The Conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, however, was not an isolated incident. Instead it was the convergence of two streams within the American historical narrative: the history of the Southern Baptist Convention and the history of modern American conservatism. Although each of these narratives developed in different times and disparate places, it would be the myriad changes rendered on American society through the twentieth century that would set them on a collision course. While each had been largely regional prior to World War II, the expansion of wartime industries had led to massive population shifts throughout the country. With Southerners

moving outside of the region throughout the country and non-Southerners moving in, both the South and the nation were transformed. In the South, these demographic changes led to a more pluralistic society where the cultural hegemony that white Southerners took for granted began to be challenged. Accompanying the outmigration of mostly white Southerners would be an influx of whites and non-whites from outside the South. Ironically, this in-migration would be driven by the same growth in defense industries that would lead many Southerners to leave the region. This growth of industry and changing of demographics would slowly chip away at the cultural milieu of the South as the region became increasingly urban and increasingly less white. Amidst these population shifts, the Civil Rights Movement would gain steam resulting in legal victories such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 whose effects would eventually break the back of white hegemony in the region despite the efforts of many Southern whites to oppose them. Just as those who remained in the South were forced to come to terms with a society around them that was more culturally pluralistic and socially “liberal” than they had been willing to recognize in years prior, so too did those that left the South during this time. In regions new to them throughout America, the Southerners that moved during and after the Second World War encountered a world entirely different from the one they had left. Facing a religious and cultural landscape in which they were in the minority for the first time in their lives, they reacted with fear that American society would be wholly lost to them. Attempting to regain their moorings, many of these Southerners would begin to identify with a burgeoning new political conservatism that appealed to both their senses of populism and distrust of New Deal progressivism.

As many Southerners began to leave the South for other regions of the country, they brought their religion with them. For the Southern Baptist Convention, this led to explosive denominational growth both in terms of territory and membership. As a result of this expansion from the 1930s through the 1960s, Southern Baptists began to encounter the emerging New Right as it began to draw conservative evangelicals into its circle. While the relatively homogenous white Southern culture of the SBC in the inter-war period had largely spared it from the controversies over modernism that splintered many of the mainline denominations, the effect of Southern Baptist contact with the modern conservative movement in the decades following World War II would be different. Feeling threatened for the first time by the pluralism around them, conservative Southern Baptists' encounter with the New Right would spur them to begin to close ranks. Running counter to a leadership that embraced latitudinarian inclusiveness for the sake of continued growth, a number of Southern Baptist congregants began to push against what they perceived as "liberal" threats to their denomination. Controversies in the 1960s regarding publications questioning the creation account in Genesis required a new statement of faith that assured a commitment to Biblical inerrancy to quell the fires of discontent at the annual conventions. By the 1970s, organizations dedicated to assuring adherence to the statement of faith and seminaries outside of the denominational system dedicated to "conservative" education for Southern Baptists began to be formed. Growing out of increased contact with political conservatives, these events foreshadowed the denominational "crisis" of the 1980s and beyond.

This chapter will discuss the histories of the SBC and the modern conservative movement against the background of American societal change during the twentieth

century. By examining these histories, the seeds of the Moderate and Conservative movements within the Southern Baptist denomination become visible. The seeds of the Moderate movement date back to Baptist notions of freedom of conscience and the Post-World War II business-like structure of the denomination. The seeds of the Conservative movement are found in the conservatism of the Southern culture that the denomination had long been intertwined with and the blossoming of modern conservative politics in the decades preceding the “crisis.” As this chapter will show, these seeds began to sprout as the SBC and the modern conservative movement came into greater contact with one another. The germination of those sprouts through the denominational controversies of the Sixties and Seventies, along with the various social upheavals of those decades, brought about the denominational turmoil that is the focus of this work as its fruit.

#### EARLY SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORY

During the controversy, Moderates and Conservatives would both make use of Southern Baptist history in their rhetoric, each claiming to be the rightful heirs of the tradition. As the denomination’s history shows, both sides could make legitimate claims. Moderate arguments for the doctrines of soul competency and congregational autonomy can be traced to early Baptist history, while Conservative arguments can be traced to the conservatism of the Southern culture that the denomination had always existed within and the traditional Southern Baptist assumption of an inerrant Bible. Neither side in the Southern Baptist controversy fully realized the impact that denomination’s early history had on creating the SBC over which they would do battle. In these early chapters of its history the denomination moved from a radical fringe group to the unofficially established religion of an entire region. In the process a distinctive worldview was

created that blended Baptist individualism with the conservative culture of the South. This worldview would pervade the denomination throughout its history and come to form the basis of the Moderate and Conservative worldviews. Each side would understand itself as being both Baptist and Southern, however, they interpreted those terms in often vastly different ways.

To understand early Southern Baptist history, it is first necessary to have a grasp on Baptist history before the formation of the denomination in 1845. The earliest known Baptists were dissenters during the English Reformation. Rejecting the ordinances of the Church of England, they stood for liberty of conscience and their autonomous congregations found them in London's arrest records as early as 1567. Drawing their influence from earlier reformations on the Continent, two types of Baptists emerged by the early seventeenth century: General and Particular. General Baptists hailed from the Anabaptist tradition, meaning they believed in the doctrine of general atonement and formed a centralized body of churches. Particular Baptists hailed from the Calvinist tradition, they believed in the doctrine of particular atonement and fixated upon the autonomy of the local church.<sup>9</sup> Despite their differences, however, all Baptists shared an ethos that was both individualist and egalitarian. Their doctrine of soul competency placed accountability before God in the hands of each individual and through the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers the pulpit was open to all of the faithful as all were equally saved through Christ.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People 1607-1972*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 17-19.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth H. Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 35.

As Baptists moved to America in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the General and Particular sects jockeyed for legitimacy amidst persecution from the established Puritan and Anglican churches in the colonies. By the early eighteenth century, General Baptist bodies began to splinter as the doctrinal and social diversity of their churches became too great to maintain a highly centralized body. Consequently, by the mid-eighteenth century, Particular Baptists dominated their rivals to the extent that they became synonymous with the term in America.<sup>11</sup> Although Particular Baptists predominated their rival Baptists, they were still considered a radical fringe group. Despite a strong anti-establishment streak, Baptists heavily supported the American Revolution as a means of obtaining religious freedom for themselves. Following the Revolution, Baptists would be among the loudest of groups calling for the separation of church and state in the early years of the American Republic. In fact, Jefferson's famous metaphor of "building a wall of separation" between church and state stems from his 1802 correspondence with the Baptist Association of Dansbury Connecticut.<sup>12</sup> Following state laws and Constitutional amendments aimed at protecting religious liberty, the outright persecution of Baptists died down, but Baptists still existed on the fringes of society until the Second Great Awakening. Although persecution would cease to be an issue for Baptists by the mid nineteenth century, they would continue to be weary of threats against their religious liberty. By the time of the 'crisis', however, two differing views on maintaining religious liberty would emerge. Moderates would argue that clearly defined separation of church and state was necessary for religious liberty, citing

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<sup>11</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "A letter to Nehemiah Dodge, Ephriam Robbins, and Stephen S. Nelson. A Committee of the Dansbury Baptist Association" 16 Writings of Thomas Jefferson 281, (ed. A. Andrew, 1903) in "Prayer and Religious Activity in American Public Schools," by Charles J. Russo, 33.

the historic persecution of Baptists by state church bodies. On the other side, Conservatives argued for a greater influence of religion upon the state to protect against a growing secularism that they perceived as hostile to religious liberty.

Coinciding with their first significant movement into the South, Baptists spearheaded great frontier revivals in Tennessee and Kentucky during the first years of the nineteenth century. These revivals were both emotionally charged and egalitarian, as anyone “filled with the spirit” including women and adolescents led groups that numbered in the thousands.<sup>13</sup> The massive success of these revivals led to a swelling of Baptist ranks and its establishment as a mainstream American religion. With newfound numbers and resources, Baptists continued their missional thrust beyond frontier revivals. This evangelical thrust led Baptists throughout the country to organize themselves into groups larger local associations for the first time in their history and by the 1820s national societies dedicated to missions and Bible publishing were being formed.<sup>14</sup> Repudiating creeds and centralized governance, these associations became the *de-facto* denominational organization of American Baptists prior to the Civil War. These national organizations would only hold Baptists in America together for a couple of decades as the issue of slavery became more and more divisive. In 1845, after several disputes over the appointment of slave-holders to foreign missionary positions, a body of southern Baptists met and adopted a constitution for a new Baptist organization: the Southern Baptist Convention.

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 27-28.

<sup>14</sup> Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People 1607-1972*, 95-105.

Upon its creation, the Southern Baptist Convention was a more centralized body than the Baptist General Convention from which it broke. While the national body had a loose structure in which various Baptist mission and benevolence societies funded and governed themselves, Southern Baptists placed all such societies as boards under the auspices of a single denominational structure. Despite this, power still rested largely in the hands of local churches as each board collected its money separately and the denomination's decisions were made at annual democratically conducted meetings. As Baker remarks on the early denomination: "This was not a convention of churches, but a gathering of money-giving Baptists organized to do their benevolence work through a centralized structure."<sup>15</sup> In its early years the denomination struggled for two major reasons. The first reason was that the Civil War and Reconstruction era that promptly followed the denomination's founding impoverished the region depriving its boards of funds with which to carry out their work. The second reason was the Landmarkist movement.

Landmarkists insisted that mission work could only take place at the local level and that one could only be properly baptized by another that had been properly baptized. Proper baptism only took place in "true" Christian churches that could trace their lineage back to the early church. Baptists, of course, were truly Christian in their eyes and thus they insisted that baptism and communion take place amongst only local Baptist congregations. To justify their radical stance on local church autonomy, landmarkists pointed to the New Testament church as being void of entities such as conventions and

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<sup>15</sup> Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People 1607-1972*, 174.

boards.<sup>16</sup> Landmarkism became popular in throughout the western south for a time, but the movement died out by the end of the century.

Landmarkist thought, however, would live on within the denomination with its legacy being a staunch anti-ecumenism among Southern Baptists to this day. Eschewing participation in ecumenical groups such as the National Council of Churches or the National Association of Evangelicals, Southern Baptists prefer to work toward their missional and charitable goals via intra-denominational efforts. This anti-ecumenical sentiment remained so strong within the denomination that prior to the takeover Southern Baptists did not even consider themselves to be evangelicals. In an interview with *Newsweek* magazine amidst the media fascination with evangelicalism that surround Jimmy Carter's 1976 presidential campaign, Foy Valentine, head of the SBC Christian Life Commission (CLC), grumbled:

Southern Baptists are not evangelicals. That's a Yankee word. They want to claim us because we are big and successful and growing every year. But we have our own traditions, our own hymns, and more students in our seminaries than they have in all theirs put together. We don't share their politics or their fussy fundamentalism, and we don't want to get involved in their theological witch-hunts.<sup>17</sup>

Following the end of the Reconstruction era, the denomination began to flourish as the region's economy recovered. With more money in their coffers, Southern Baptist missionary boards began to send greater and greater numbers into the field. Through territorial agreements with northern Baptists in 1894, Southern Baptists made the South their exclusive domain.<sup>18</sup> This lack of competition fueled the denomination's growth in

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<sup>16</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 33.

<sup>17</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 38.

the latter years of the nineteenth century. A major development for the denomination came during this era as the Sunday School Board was formed in 1891.<sup>19</sup> Producing materials ranging from Sunday school materials, to hymnals and even sermons, the Sunday School Board brought a sense of uniformity heretofore unknown among Southern Baptists. This standardization of materials increased the denominational consciousness of Southern Baptists leading to investment in new denomination wide programs such as the Baptist Training Union, Vacation Bible School, and the Women's Missionary Union. In doing so, the SBC would follow a broader trend toward programmatic uniformity in American Protestantism during this time, but unlike many of their counterparts they chose to create their own organizations as opposed to joining larger ecumenical bodies. The latter of these, the WMU, became a means to empower women within the denomination as they were barred from the SBC convention floor until 1921. Founded as an "auxiliary" to the Southern Baptist Convention the WMU had its own decision making and financial responsibility, but only with the understanding that it would work exclusively to support Southern Baptist missions. Despite being held out of its "official" power structure, the WMU became a financial bulwark of the denomination. Through the first half of the twentieth century, its Lottie Moon Christmas offerings and Annie Armstrong Easter offerings provided half of the budget for both the Home and Foreign Mission boards.<sup>20</sup>

A turning point for the SBC came in 1925 with the development of the Cooperative Program. Prior to the Cooperative Program fund, the denomination had

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<sup>19</sup> Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People 1607-1972*, 296.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth H. Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 46.

been structured as a mixture of earlier society and association models. Each board was essentially its own society that collected its own funds and the denomination acted as an association to which these “societies” belonged, determining spending decisions through annual democratic meetings attended by the members of the boards. The Cooperative Program fund brought a greater amount of centralization to the denomination by doing away with this system. Instead of giving directly to the boards, Southern Baptist churches were now to direct their offerings to the Cooperative Program fund, which would then distribute those offerings to the denomination’s boards. Additionally, convention meetings were moved from a democratic style in which all board members were invited to participate in decision making to a representative style in which delegates from individual churches that met a minimum amount for required giving to the Cooperative Program fund made decisions for the denomination. Driven by the push toward professionalism in American society during this time, the SBC also established its first executive committee to oversee its boards.<sup>21</sup> The effect of the centralization and bureaucratization of this era would be two-fold. Not only would it make denominational business more efficient, but it would also cement within the minds of Southern Baptists that they existed within a denomination. Whereas generations of Southern Baptists before them had seen themselves as a collection of individual congregations associating with one another in pursuit of missions, from this time on they would take on a new identity of belonging to the Southern Baptist Convention. With a set liturgy and a growing litany of programs and organizations produced by the increasingly productive

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 44-45.

denomination, Southern Baptist churches became more uniform than ever. Although they still held congregational autonomy in high regard, as their congregations became more alike, Southern Baptists began to increasingly identify with one another beyond the local context. The development of this identity became ever important in the denomination's expansion as Southern Baptists began to move to disparate regions of the country in the next chapter of their history.

### THE NEW DEAL AND THE NEW RIGHT

While the 1920s had been an era of professionalism and prosperity, the stock market crash of 1929 sent the country into the worst economic depression of its history during the 1930s. The Great Depression affected millions worldwide and proved to be the catalyst for transformation in American society. During this era, Southerners, especially those in the western South that were affected by the "Dust Bowl," began an exodus from the region in search of work that intensified in succeeding decades. Far more reaching though, was the political revolution that Franklin Roosevelt's landslide election in 1932 brought. During Roosevelt's unmatched twelve-year tenure as President, his New Deal policies would greatly expand the power of the federal government and see a jurisprudential shift toward legal liberalism. Through a plethora of work programs and the 1935 Social Security Act, the Roosevelt administration sought to alleviate the plight of jobless Americans and lift the nation out of its economic depression via increased spending. Once the nation went to war in 1941, massively increased defense spending and created new wartime industries throughout the nation, Roosevelt's economic recovery plan emerged victorious as the economy rebounded. These policies

were widely popular and allowed his Democratic Party to effectively crush its Republican adversaries during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>22</sup>

Despite its successes, the New Deal also proved politically polarizing. Prior to the New Deal, the Democratic Party had been a bastion of populism. Through the New Deal, however, the party began to become increasingly statist. Seeking to remedy the disastrous effects of Great Depression in the lives of millions of Americans, the Roosevelt administration greatly expanded federal power and for Republicans, the Depression and New Deal left their party only able to futilely protest the Roosevelt administration and its policies. Receiving much of the blame for the reckless debt accumulation that created the Depression, the Republican leaders of the 1920s fell from power leaving their party adrift. In addition, massive population shifts within the country further complicated the political picture. As mentioned above, America's entrance into World War II led to massive defense spending to facilitate the national war machine. During the early 1940s, fifteen million Americans left their homes to take well-paying jobs in government-funded wartime industries. For Southerners, this great migration in search of work led them to Southern California where by 1945 forty percent of Los Angeles' residents received their pay from the federal government.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, this in-migration of Southerners from their agrarian homes to the relatively cosmopolitan Southern California via the policies of the Roosevelt administration led to the birth of a "New Right."

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<sup>22</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 86.

<sup>23</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 5.

While the South had been a bastion for the Democratic Party for nearly a century, Southern Democrats were different from New Deal Democrats that embraced ideas of secular statism and legal liberalism. Southern Democrats were Jeffersonian Democrats given to both populism and rugged individualism; their political heroes were men such as William Jennings Bryan and Huey Long. They believed strongly in local governance and free markets, while generally distrusting the notion of a strong federal government. In large part evangelical Christians, with their doctrinal bent toward piety and proselytization, often blurred the lines of church and state as their belief in a society attuned to Christian values led them to push for strict legal codes for issues that they deemed immoral. Often independent at the local level, Democrats in the South voted solidly for their party in state and national elections hating the excesses of Wall Street and seeing the Republican Party as opposed to their agrarian lifestyle.<sup>24</sup>

As these evangelicals left their Southern homes to work in urban and suburban industrial complexes in Southern California in the 1940s and 1950s, their political convictions were put to the test. Leaving a region in which they saw themselves as the arbiters of their culture, these evangelical Southerners found themselves in a society that appeared godless and wholly uncomfortable with a political climate that seemed to run counter to everything they believed in. While evangelical Christianity, at least on a cultural level, had pervaded the South, it did not have the same hold on Southern California. Associated with the excesses and scandals of Hollywood and home to a plurality of religious and non-religious ideologies, Southern California was a far cry from the pietistic society that evangelicals sought to create. Whereas the project of creating

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<sup>24</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 9-10.

God's kingdom on earth seemed in the Southern mind to be a communal undertaking, in Southern California evangelical ideals competed with those of secularists, socialists, and others that worked toward their own ideal societies. As Dochuk writes, Southerners heard a quite different message in their new union-controlled workplaces from the ones coming from their pulpits on Sundays:

While in their factories they encountered advocates of the CIO's Political Action Committee (PAC) that banked hope for societal reform on powerful unions and an active, secular state, from the pulpits of the region's influential middle-class evangelical churches they heard sermons celebrating free market capitalism and Christian patriotism with little heed to economic injustice.<sup>25</sup>

Through the 1940s, these Southern evangelicals in California would find themselves in political limbo, caught between quasi-socialist New Dealers to their left and big business Republicans to their right.

The "labor wars" of the decade would prove to be the watershed moment in which conservative evangelicals began to move out of the Democratic Party. In locales across the nation, management and unions faced off over closed shops. In California, the push for a quasi-socialist retirement scheme for the state's seniors, known as Ham and Eggs, led conservative evangelicals to get caught in the crossfire between the political right and left. With the popular Pentecostal evangelist Jonathan Perkins and the anti-Communist firebrand Gerald L.K. Smith as its public faces, for a time the movement was able to garner broad support from California's conservative evangelicals despite its inherent quasi-socialism. Behind the scenes, however, the political leaders of the movement, the Allen brothers, were determined to use Ham and Eggs as their means to power in the

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<sup>25</sup> Darren Dochuk, "Christ and the CIO: Blue Collar Evangelicalism's Crisis of Conscience and Political Turn in Early Cold-War California," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 74 (Fall, 2008), 84.

Democratic Party.<sup>26</sup> While the progressive-labor oriented left within the state had been Ham and Eggs most strident opposition, resorting at multiple points to violence, the Allen's decided to align the movement with the Congress of Industrial Organizations in California. Disaffected by this shift toward the political far-left, conservative evangelicals abandoned the movement. As Dochuk asserts, conservative evangelicals were given a choice between "Christ and the CIO" and they chose to first disavow Ham and Eggs and, within a decade, the Democratic Party.<sup>27</sup>

As conservatives in California began to repudiate the left-wing Democrats in their state for their willingness to turn to mob violence and fabrication of Ku Klux Klan activities to paint their opponents as racists, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act allowing for right-to-work and other measures that limited union power.<sup>28</sup> While throughout the nation, socially conservative evangelicals in particular, began to push back against the left-wing of the Democratic Party, the Republican Party began to recover from its fall during the Depression.

Although the political right was all but dead through the Depression and New Deal, academics whose ideas would provide ideological underpinnings for its resurrection were hard at work during that era. Thinkers such as Ludwig von Mises, Ayn Rand, and Friedrich von Hayek began producing works that effectively criticized the New Deal through a reassertion of classic liberalism. A seemingly unlikely well for conservative evangelicals to draw from, due to the areligious and sometimes amoral

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<sup>26</sup> Darren Dochuk, "Christ and the CIO: Blue Collar Evangelicalism's Crisis of Conscience and Political Turn in Early Cold-War California," 79-83.

<sup>27</sup> Darren Dochuk, "Christ and the CIO: Blue Collar Evangelicalism's Crisis of Conscience and Political Turn in Early Cold-War California," 92-94.

<sup>28</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 115.

character of some libertarian writers, the libertarian message of individual freedom and responsibility resonated with the intensely individualistic nature of evangelicalism. By emphasizing individualism, along with voluntarism and free markets, they created a much more conservative evangelical friendly message than that of their elitist predecessors. With this new message, conservative business elites set out on a campaign to popularize this new message outside intellectual circles, where it had been a sensation. Evangelical entrepreneurs turned spokesmen, such as George Benson and John Brown would provide a crucial link between the political right and conservative evangelicals that had been disaffected by the left.

In previous generations, conservative evangelicals, a largely working class group, had distrusted the financial elites that dominated the political right. However, as they grew in wealth and became business owners themselves, conservative evangelicals began to find common ground with the pro-business political right. By bringing a new appreciation for free markets into the fold of ideas like individualism and limited government, the libertarian message brought them even closer to the elites they once distrusted. For their part, the financial elite of the political right realized the political expediency of the libertarian critiques of the New Deal and used their resources to make sure that they spread. Bankrolled by likes of Eastman, Kodak, DuPont, General Motors, and Sun Oil, men like George Benson toured the country spreading a message that mixed the new libertarian message of free markets and limited government with a folksy evangelicalism.<sup>29</sup> Driving home notions of Christian patriotism, financial responsibility, and anti-communism that were co-opted for mass appeal, these spokesmen for the right

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<sup>29</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 64.

converted formally lifelong Southern Democrats both in and outside the South who found themselves voting for the Republican Eisenhower in the 1952 presidential election.<sup>30</sup>

Still politically adrift, but sure that American society was in grave danger from the forces of communism, secular humanism, and moral degeneracy, conservative evangelicals in places like Southern California began to organize at the grassroots level to assert their values of Christian morality, individualism, and patriotism. With Southern evangelicals growing in both wealth and number thanks to continued increases in defense spending, they began for the first time to have real influence in California politics. The first place in which the fight against “liberalism” took place was in local school boards. Convinced by both their pastors and the media that their children were at risk from the “social experiments of liberal educators” seeking to destroy their individualism and reduce their ability to ward off the sinister forces of communism, these conservative evangelicals began to fight for control of their children’s education. In these battles, housewives, who because of their ascent into the middle class could afford to stay at home, led the charge networking through churches and suburban neighborhoods.<sup>31</sup>

These conservative evangelical suburbanites’ first battle would come against the inclusion of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization materials into the public-school curriculum. Given to dispensationalism, the belief in a historical progression toward the Biblical “end times,” many evangelicals opposed the United Nations, seeing it as a step toward the nefarious one world government in the book of Revelation. Thus, they saw their success in excluding the UNESCO materials in 1951 as

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<sup>30</sup> Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God*, 62.

<sup>31</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 201-202.

a victory on two fronts. Not only did they protect their children from what they saw as “liberal” educational materials, but they also struck a blow for Christians worldwide. In 1952, they successfully pushed through ballot initiatives to force schools and churches to take anti-communism pledges to remain tax-exempt and provide tax-exemptions for religious private schools. By 1958, however, Southern California progressives began to fight back. The local ACLU began to investigate ways in which to undo Proposition 5, which had produced the anti-communism pledges, and proposition 16 was placed on the ballot in an attempt to remove tax exemptions from religious private schools. Through an uneasy alliance with Southern California’s Catholic population, evangelical conservatives would successfully defeat the proposition.<sup>32</sup> Despite successes in local battles such as these in the 1950s, evangelical conservatives would lose the war on a national scale by the early 1960s. In the early 1960s the Supreme Court would begin to produce a series of rulings that would build a substantial “wall” between church and state in public education. In 1962, the Court ruled directed prayer in public schools unconstitutional in *Engel v. Vitale* and in the following year they struck down Bible reading in public schools in *Abington School District v. Schempp*. With these rulings, many conservative evangelicals would move their children into private education, but for those that continued to battle over education the battles would continue. Through the 1960s and into the 1970s opposition to “liberal” textbooks that included subject matters many conservative parents deemed too “grown up” for their children and sex education in public schools would drive local politics throughout the nation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 200-204.

<sup>33</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 140.

While battles over their children's education would drive them into local grassroots politics, conservative evangelicals would not shift their attention to national party politics until the presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater. Portrayed by William Martin as "a man on horseback," Goldwater was the embodiment of the conservative evangelical worldview. He opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on states' rights grounds, supported the proposed Becker Amendment to restore and protect religious observances in public schools, championed capitalism and freed trade, and had been an active supporter of Joseph McCarthy.<sup>34</sup> Each of these stances signaled to conservative evangelicals that Goldwaterite Republicanism was committed to the same ends of Christian moralism, limited government, free markets and patriotism that Jeffersonian Democracy had been in their old Southern homes. Combining his stances with a tough exterior and a brash personality, Goldwater would become the hero of conservative evangelicals across the country leading them to form a new "right-wing" in the Republican Party.

Utilizing the grassroots networks that they had developed in their battles over local public schools, conservative evangelicals produced enough support for Goldwater to make him the Republican Party's candidate over the establishment's choice of the more liberally bent Nelson Rockefeller.<sup>35</sup> Despite winning the party nomination, Goldwater went on to lose to Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 election as the Johnson campaign successfully painted him as an unpredictable extremist. But while the Republican party lost, evangelical conservatism won as the twenty-seven million votes

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<sup>34</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 227-229.

<sup>35</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 80-84.

that Goldwater received demonstrated the coalescence of the “New Right” on a national scale. Four years later, Richard Nixon would recognize this “silent majority” of evangelical voters and win the presidency by associating with the likes of Billy Graham and portraying himself as a more sensible version of Goldwater. Evidence of the reflection of Southern Evangelicals outside the South back upon their homeland through “New Right” politics, the 1968 election would see the breakup of the Democratic party’s “Solid South” as Nixon captured several Southern states en route to the presidency.<sup>36</sup>

### THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE SBC

During the same era that the “New Right” was born, the Southern Baptist Convention began to grow exponentially both in terms of membership and territory. As Southerners left their region en masse over that thirty-year period for greener economic pastures, they took their cultural and religious views with them. A legacy of their landmarkist streak discussed above, Southern Baptists were the epitome of individualistic Southerners. While their Methodist and Pentecostal brethren tended to settle into the local churches of their new communities, Southern Baptists instead chose to found their own. This led to a massive expansion of the denomination’s territory that saw a Southern Baptist church in every state by the mid-Sixties and a growth in membership by ten-million between 1931 and 1981.<sup>37</sup> Accompanying this growth were several changes that transformed the denomination and the lives of its members. An increasingly efficient central bureaucracy allowed Southern Baptist churches to offer more programs and

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<sup>36</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 98-99.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 52.

services than ever before, but an emerging class of elites within the denominational structure began to create a divide between the SBC and its members.

To keep pace of its growth in membership, the denomination began a process of extensive institutional growth. At the beginning of this era, the denomination was still a relatively small operation. Its full-time employees consisted of an executive committee and a handful of professional staff on each of the boards. As donations to the Cooperative Fund Program expanded rapidly alongside its territory and membership, the Southern Baptist Convention would transform into a structural behemoth. The 1950s proved to be the decade in which the denomination would commit itself to structure and bureaucratization. The catalyst for this was not only the growth of the denomination, but also a changing of hands to a new a generation of denominational leaders who committed themselves to business-like management. In 1954 James Sullivan, head of the Sunday School Board, brought in the management consulting firm Booz, Allen & Hamilton to suggest methods of increasing efficiency and continued growth within the Sunday School Board. Per Sullivan's request, the firm would conduct studies of the Sunday School Board's organizational practices, assess possible personnel, survey salary structures and provide guidance for structural growth for the denominational agency.<sup>38</sup>

Pleased with Booz, Allen & Hamilton's work with the Sunday School Board, the SBC Executive Committee brought the firm in to conduct studies on all the denomination's institutions, agencies, and programs.<sup>39</sup> The report produced in May of

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<sup>38</sup> James Sullivan, "letter to Dr. Arnold F. Emch of Booz, Allen, & Hamilton," Sept. 22, 1954, *Inventory to the Southern Baptist Collection. Sunday School Board. Executive Office. James Lenox Sullivan Papers*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas M. Branch, "letter to Judge Brooks Hayes," July 27, 1956, *Inventory to the Southern Baptist Collection. Sunday School Board. Executive Office. James Lenox Sullivan Papers*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

1957 by Booz, Allen, & Hamilton sought to maintain the decentralized nature of the denomination while streamlining it for greater efficiency:

The general plan provides for continuation of the present highly decentralized structure of organization for the Convention and its agencies. The plan calls for the Convention to delegate the maximum feasible responsibility and authority for the conduct of programs to individual Convention agencies, retaining to itself only those broad responsibilities and authorities which cannot be delegated. The broad direction for which the Convention continues responsible includes: establishment of broad objectives and policies, assignment of responsibility for programs to Convention agencies, evaluation of program effectiveness, and allocation of undesignated financial resources.<sup>40</sup>

In response to the changes suggested in the management firm's report, denominational agencies and committees were restructured and given more clearly defined goals and responsibilities, an added layer of bureaucratic structure was added with the formalization of the Inter-Agency Council, and SBC seminaries received greater funding. These changes proved highly effective on the business end with membership and territory continuing to expand, three new seminaries being founded, and programmatic expansion that provided ever-increasing interaction between Southern Baptist churches and their members. Another legacy of the Booz, Allen & Hamilton report was that the Executive Committee began to "seek the center of its constituency" on doctrinal matters to avoid controversy. Following the management firm's recommendations, it became increasingly latitudinarian, allowing denominational boards and agencies to interpret Southern Baptist doctrine as they saw fit. While this would allow for greater denominational efficiency, as

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<sup>40</sup> Booz, Allen, & Hamilton, "Preliminary Report: Survey of Functions and Relationships, Southern Baptist Convention," June 15, 1957, *Inventory to the Southern Baptist Collection. Sunday School Board. Executive Office. James Lenox Sullivan Papers*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

will be seen below, it also led created several controversies involving what was and wasn't Southern Baptist orthodoxy.

While the expansive growth and institutional changes of the SBC during this period had many positive effects, they also had unintended consequences. The new generation of leaders that came to power in the 1950s, while focused on modern business tactics and efficiency, were still held to a more relaxed "Old South" mentality. Upon coming into power, this mentality contributed to their development of what Elizabeth Flowers refers to as a "good ole boy system." Through this system, men like Duke McCall, Porter Routh, and Herschel Hobbs became the power brokers in the denomination. They rewarded their seminary friends and those that they viewed as sufficiently loyal to the denomination through their churches' giving to the Cooperate fund with positions of power within the bureaucratic structure that they built. Though these men tried to avoid controversy for the sake of continued growth by maintaining wide and inclusive stances on doctrine, they miscalculated their constituency in the newly nationalized Southern Baptist Convention. The same forces that acted upon other Southern evangelicals as they encountered the other regions of the country affected Southern Baptists. Encountering a changing cultural landscape that seemed hostile to their conservative values, they began to act to preserve their values and traditions. Taking an interest in politics at the local level first and eventually the national level following the candidacy of Barry Goldwater, many Southern Baptists sensed that American society was in danger from "secular forces" and that only a reassertion of their conservative values could save it. Turning from the political world around them to their own denomination, these Southern Baptists interpreted the doctrinal laxity of their leaders

as a sign that they had acquiesced to those forces and that their denomination was in danger as well.

#### THE BIRTH OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT WITHIN THE SBC

Possessing a battle-hardened conservatism after a decade or more of participation in state and local politics, many Southern Baptists began to fear that their own denomination might succumb to “liberalism.” While other denominations had experienced major controversies over modernism during the inter-war period, the Southern Baptists had not. Prior to its expansion outside of the South, the denomination had been so defined by the cultural conservatism of its membership that it could, outside of the questionable accusations of “modernism” by the fiery fundamentalist Frank Norris, avoid the debate almost entirely. This was accomplished by pushing Norris out of the denomination and adopting its first Statement of Faith in 1925 that essentially reaffirmed the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of the Particular Baptists.<sup>41</sup> Thus while the other conservative evangelicals received their impetus for political activism from their pulpits, Southern Baptists generally did not. However, as many Southern Baptists began to become active in conservative politics in the 1950s and 1960s, the process happened in reverse leading politics to begin to influence religion in the SBC. This was the convergence of the two streams of Southern Baptist and modern conservative history and the result would be the birth of a conservative movement within the denomination. As conservative Southern Baptists began to turn their cultural scrutiny toward their own denomination, an organized movement did not form right away. Instead it would take

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<sup>41</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 31.

two controversies concerning denominational publications on the Biblical book of Genesis.

The first of these controversies came in 1961 over the book *The Message of Genesis* by Midwestern Theological Seminary professor Ralph Elliott. In the book, Elliot focusses on the first eleven chapters of Genesis and applies modern historical-critical methods to them in questioning whether its account of creation is factually reliable. This book caused a fire-storm at the 1962 SBC convention in which a large contingent of the floor demanded that the book be pulled from circulation and Elliot be reprimanded for his “assault on Biblical integrity.” With executive secretary-treasurer of the SBC Porter Routh demanding that the issue be settled “lest it cost us millions of dollars in the Lottie Moon offering,” denominational officials tried to placate the delegates with a resolution stating that the Bible was “authentic, authoritative, and infallible” in addition to a pledge to draft a new Statement of Faith.<sup>42</sup>

The Baptist Faith and Message statement adopted in 1963 was essentially the same as the 1925 formulation with two differences. The first difference was that whereas the 1925 statement read: “We believe the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and it is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction”, the 1963 statement reads: “The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God’s revelation of Himself to man.” The second was that the 1963 statement added the clause, “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ,” to the end of the paragraph.<sup>43</sup> While the 1925 statement had been enough to stifle denominational

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<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth H. Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 35-36.

<sup>43</sup> “Comparison of the 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” *Southern Baptist Convention*, accessed November 30, 2015, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

controversy in its own era, the 1963 statement was not as effective. The 1925 statement had been adopted in an era when the Southern Baptist Convention was still very much a provincially Southern institution and its national structure had yet to grow into a leviathan. Thus, even if there were doctrinal differences between Southern Baptist leaders and the membership, the leadership's lack of power and a shared worldview created enough common ground to avoid outright conflict. By the 1960s, the situation was different as the denomination had become a national institution with a massive bureaucratic structure headed by leaders that resembled business executives in power and mindset. With multiple worldviews competing for ascendancy in the denomination, the compromises made in the 1963 statement were no longer enough to avoid conflict.

In 1969, the Sunday School Board released a commentary on the book of Genesis written by the British Baptist, G. Henton Davies, that once again fanned the flames of controversy by incorporating historical-critical methods to question the Genesis account. Employing these methods, Davies questioned a literal interpretation of the Genesis creation account and the miracle accounts of the later chapters of the book. At the 1969 convention angry messengers demanded that the commentary be pulled and attempted to pass a resolution that would force all denominational employees to sign an annual statement affirming their belief in the Bible as the "authoritative, authentic, inspired, infallible, Word of God."<sup>44</sup> This time, however, the SBC elite were not as accommodating. Over the decade of the 1960s, a new generation of denominational leaders had risen from the SBC seminaries to join the older elites. These younger men had come of age in a more pluralistic Southern society which reflected itself in their

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<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth H. Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 35-36.

doctrinal views that aligned more with Elliott and Davies than rank and file Southern Baptists. They possessed what would later become the Moderate worldview that did not necessitate moral absolutism and identified with traditions that were more Baptist than Southern. This worldview would lead them to pursue relatively progressive social ends and relatively liberal doctrines that brought them into conflict with a growing number of more conservative members. Following the 1970 convention, Sunday School Board executives refused to pull the commentary and in 1971 they would reassign the commentary after considerable pressure from the convention floor, assigning in to an author that found Davies' commentary acceptable.<sup>45</sup>

Through the 1960s and 1970s, the gap between the denominational elite and rank and file Southern Baptists grew ever wider as SBC agencies and seminaries became increasingly progressive. The most progressive of the denominational agencies was the Christian Life Commission (CLC) and the Baptist Joint Committee (BJC). The heads of these two agencies, Foy Valentine and James Dunn respectively, worked to move the overwhelmingly socially conservative denomination in a more progressive direction. On issues involving social justice such as supporting peace, providing hunger relief, and fighting racism these men positively impacted the denomination by rallying support for more progressive causes through producing materials and holding conferences.<sup>46</sup>

Their greatest success story was Valentine's push to improve racial relations. While the denomination had unanimously passed a resolution in support of *Brown v. Board of Education*, this was offset by the fact that many of those that opposed

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<sup>45</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 67-68.

<sup>46</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 99.

desegregation in the South were Southern Baptists. Valentine and a small cadre of progressives within the denomination risked their careers and at points bodily harm to work toward racial reconciliation within the denomination.<sup>47</sup> The fact that denominational leaders such as Valentine were willing to work toward such ends with racism still rampant among the rank and file membership demonstrates the widening gap between the institution and the laity during this period. By the 1980s, it became clear that Valentine's push for racial reconciliation was a prophetic one. As Conservative leaders gained control of the denomination in the 1990s, they repudiated the racial attitudes that many of them held during this era and committed themselves to continuing Valentine's work to great success.

On other issues, however, they pushed the denomination to take official stances that served to disaffect many within the denomination. One such stance was the moderately pro-choice position on abortion that Valentine argued for through CLC publications. Valentine argued that while Southern Baptists sought to uphold the sanctity of life, including the unborn, they should also allow people to pursue their conscience. This stance was reflected in the 1971 convention resolution on the issue that stated they sought a middle road between abortion on demand and outlawing the practice: "Be it further resolved, that we call Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion under such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother."<sup>48</sup> That this resolution passed

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<sup>47</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 243.

<sup>48</sup> SBC, "Resolution on Abortion," (1971), *Resolution Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Dec. 7, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/13/resolution-on-abortion>.

without controversy stems from a lack of concern for the issue of abortion, an issue that was associated with the Catholics whom Southern Baptists largely mistrusted during this era. By mid-decade, however, this would change as the influential evangelical thinker Francis Schaeffer's book and film entitled *Whatever Happened to the Human Race* depicting the horrors of abortion became widely popular within evangelical circles.<sup>49</sup> As conservative evangelicals throughout the nation began to view abortion as a legalized slaughter on a mass scale, its opposition would become a defining feature of the burgeoning Religious Right. This translated to a growing pro-life sentiment within the denomination that would eventually lead to calls for abortion to be outlawed without exception by many conservative Southern Baptists. As evidence of the growing division between the denomination and laity, subsequent convention resolutions during the 1970s would increasingly narrow the parameters of permissible causes for abortion while the pro-choice message from Valentine and the CLC would remain the same.

Another stance that disaffected conservative Southern Baptists was executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs James Dunn's opposition to prayer in public schools. On this issue, Southern Baptist history was on Dunn's side. As mentioned earlier, Baptists have always been strongly in favor of the separation of church and state. Most Southern Baptists in this era seemed to hold to this as ten resolutions intended to support separation of church and state would be made during the 1960s and 1970s. These resolutions would suggest wide opposition among Southern Baptists toward prayer in public schools. In the takeover era, as Conservatives tried to enforce compliance with the 1982 resolution that they pushed through supporting public school

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<sup>49</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 194.

prayer, Dunn would make such an argument.<sup>50</sup> Upon closer inspection of those resolutions, however, none of them actually mention prayer in public schools. Instead they are concerned with making sure that the state does not provide aid to religious schools, especially Catholic parochial schools which, as stated earlier, were generally distrusted by Southern Baptists during this era. Like most other evangelicals of this era, Southern Baptists were suspicious of Catholics because of their allegiance to the Pope. For them the Pope was a foreign power and the Catholic Church, much like the United Nations, resembled the globalist government that they feared. Thus, while an argument can be made that Southern Baptists would have extended the principle of separation of church and state to prayer in public schools, a lack of even a single resolution specifically regarding the issue points to a different conclusion.

As discussed earlier, keeping prayer in public schools was an important issue for conservative evangelicals across the nation and it seems likely that, despite Baptist tradition, many Southern Baptists would have come to support the institution as they became politically active. Additionally, it became an early focus of the Conservative faction in its bid for power demonstrating that a sizeable number of conservative Southern Baptists supported school prayer.

During the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, progressive views were imposed on the denomination from the top-down. As James Hefley recalls,

Conservatives could only look back over the past decade in frustration. They had won almost every vote on the Bible issue [inerrancy] at the [annual] Southern Baptist Convention, but it seemed little had been accomplished with the agencies, particularly the Sunday School Board and Midwestern Seminary.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “Director ‘Welcomes’ Fact-Finding Effort,” *Baptist Press*, Nov. 25, 1986.

<sup>51</sup> James C. Hefley, *The Truth In Crisis: The Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention*, (Garland: Hannibal Books, 1986), 58.

Driven by this frustration, conservative Southern Baptists started to form organizations and institutions on the denomination's fringes. Despairing over the "liberal" doctrines that were being taught more and more frequently in the denomination's six seminaries, conservative Southern Baptists began to create their own. The first would be Luther Rice Seminary founded in 1962, followed by Criswell Theological Seminary in 1971, and Mid-America Baptist Seminary in 1973.<sup>52</sup> Employing future Conservative leaders such as W.A. Criswell, Paige Patterson, and Richard Land, these institutions both provided an alternative to the official SBC seminaries and helped bring together those that found the denomination becoming too "liberal" for their tastes.

Alongside the foundation of institutions, conservative Southern Baptists also began to form organizations. Largely grassroots in nature, springing up at the local and state level, these organizations would be centered around a shared social and doctrinal conservatism. The largest and most active of these organizations was the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, formed in 1973. The purpose of the organization was to be a "strong advocate of the doctrinal and theological positions stated in the "Baptist Faith and Message" adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City in 1963, especially Articles One and Eleven, dealing with the Scriptures and the Evangelism."<sup>53</sup> Through the publication of pamphlets and its official magazine, *The Southern Baptist Journal*, the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship spoke out against the threat of "liberalism" within the denomination. Just as the seminaries mentioned above, this organization and others

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<sup>52</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 70.

<sup>53</sup> "Baptist Faith Fellowship Formed," *Baptist Faith and Message: Special 1973 Convention Issue*, *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

like it were vital components in the coalescence of the Conservative movement with the SBC. Thus, when Conservative leaders began to make their bid for denominational power in 1979, they were building on more than a decade of grassroots conservative Southern Baptist organization. In response to the increasingly top-down leadership of the Southern Baptist elite, the Conservative takeover would begin a denominational revolution from the bottom up.

#### THE NEW RIGHT ASCENDENT AS THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

As discussed above, the New Right coalesced over the 1960s from disparate grassroots pockets of political organization to a national bloc of voters that Richard Nixon capitalized on in his successful bid for the White House in 1968. Bringing a level of “civil religion” to the White House unseen since the Eisenhower administration, Nixon painted himself as the consummate evangelical through appeals to the divine in his speeches, national prayer breakfasts, and his initiation of White House church services. With the Watergate scandal of 1972, however, this façade came crashing down. Beyond the inherent political scandal, the revelation of Nixon’s vulgar language served to shock his evangelical supporters. Most disillusioning, though, was the revelation through White House insiders that the Nixon administration had made calculated moves to bring in prominent evangelicals such as Billy Graham to achieve political objectives.<sup>54</sup> Nixon’s fall from grace proved to be a serious setback to the Republican party, but conservative evangelicals continued their fight against “liberalism” at the state and local levels.

Through the 1970s, conservative evangelicals would begin to realize that they were a powerful voting bloc in national politics. Groups such as the Heritage

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<sup>54</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 97-98.

Foundation, founded in 1973, were instrumental in this process. Founded during the Nixon campaign, this Washington think tank was comprised of some of the brightest young conservative minds of the era including Paul Weyrich, Ed Fuelner, and James McKenna. Through efforts such as bringing national attention to the battle over sexual education and textbooks in the public schools of Kanawha County, West Virginia, the Heritage Foundation helped to further rally conservatives around an ever-growing set of concerns.<sup>55</sup> Watergate, the Vietnam War, and an economic crisis caused by an OPEC oil embargo left people throughout the nation feeling as though America had lost its way. America needed healing and in the eyes of conservatives a return to “traditional” Judeo-Christian values. In 1976, Jimmy Carter, a devout Southern Baptist, would seem to be what they were looking for.

Unlike Nixon, Jimmy Carter did not have to make calculated moves to prove that he was an evangelical Christian. A family man and Sunday School leader, Carter was a committed Christian and made no attempt to hide it. Casually mentioning to reporters that he was a “born again” Christian, Carter set off a media frenzy to discover what the term meant. Since the fundamentalism debates of the 1920s, the mainstream news media had associated religion with superstitious yahoo-ism and failed to give it serious attention. With the revelation that Carter, the Democratic party candidate for President was devoutly religious, however, 1976 became the “Year of the Evangelical” as the news media scrambled to inform their audiences of what it meant to be a born-again evangelical Christian.<sup>56</sup> Thanks to Carter’s earnest Southern Baptist faith and his focus

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<sup>55</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 135.

<sup>56</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 365.

on family values, promising a White House conference on the American family, he gained wide evangelical support on the campaign trail.

Signs that Carter was not the kind of evangelical that conservatives were looking for began to emerge on the campaign trail. As it became apparent through interviews that he was not an inerrantist, drank socially, opposed school prayer, and held a pro-choice view on abortion, Carter's evangelical support began to erode even before he took office.<sup>57</sup> For example, at the annual denominational convention, future Conservative SBC president Bailey Smith had stumped for Carter in his keynote address saying, "This country is in need of a born-again man in the White House." Just a few months later, following these interviews, Smith publicly doubted whether he would even vote for Carter in the election.<sup>58</sup> Despite this, evangelicals throughout the nation took some pride when Jimmy Carter won the presidency, seeing him as one of their own. Shortly after taking office, however, Carter would quickly prove them wrong. Being a member of the Democratic party, after all, Carter's policies in no way fit the conservative evangelical ideal of limited government. Instead Carter further expanded the government creating the departments of health, education, and welfare. Even worse to conservative evangelicals, he actively supported gay rights and the Equal Rights Amendment, and did nothing to even limit abortions.<sup>59</sup> Combined with an abysmal economy that he and his administration seemed unable to fix, Carter quickly lost what evangelical support that he had left. For conservative Southern Baptists, Carter's failures further galvanized their

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<sup>57</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 157.

<sup>58</sup> Myra MacPherson, "Evangelicals Seen Cooling on Carter," *The Washington Post*, Sept. 27, 1976, *The Washington Post (1974-Current File)*, ProQuest Historical Newspapers, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/146561896/FD452414AAAC4C67PQ/8?accountid=15150>.

<sup>59</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 374.

conviction that both their denomination and their country needed to be turned around before it was too late.

Disillusioned by Carter, conservatives began to set their sights on the next election. They understood now that what they needed was not simply a mobilization of evangelicals to accomplish their goals, but the bringing together of specifically evangelicals from the right. To form this “Religious Right” new organizations were formed specifically to mobilize conservative evangelicals in politics on the national scale. Hailing from the Christian Freedom Foundation, a Washington think tank similar to the Heritage Foundation, the Southern Baptist Ed McAteer used his broad connections to found the Religious Roundtable in 1979 which enlisted some of the most powerful pastors in the country to its cause. In that same year, Jerry Falwell would meet with several prominent pastors and conservative leaders, including future Southern Baptist conservative leaders Adrian Rogers and James Draper, at the Holiday Inn in Lynchburg, Virginia. At this meeting, the Moral Majority would be formed. Falwell characterized this new organization as “pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, and pro-American” and the three categories of its work it set out to do were: registration, information, mobilization.<sup>60</sup>

As the structures of the Religious Right began to fall into place, the candidate that New Right had been waiting for since the days of Barry Goldwater emerged onto the scene. Ronald Reagan, the former actor and Democrat that had proven a mixed bag as governor of California, did not seem to be their perfect candidate at first. He had been divorced and remarried, donated very little to charity, rarely attended church and upon being asked if he was “born again” in his failed bid at the Republican nomination in 1976

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<sup>60</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 201.

election, he had not even known what the term meant.<sup>61</sup> By 1979, however, Reagan had figured out a winning formula in appealing to that conflation of Jefferson and Jesus that had guided conservative evangelicals from the beginning. Focusing on his platform on Jimmy Carter's failures, supply-side economics, and opposition to abortion Reagan captured the GOP nomination.<sup>62</sup> Despite his earlier difficulties with evangelicals in 1976, Reagan would know the right things to say this time around. In his courting of evangelicals Reagan interacted with Moral Majority and Religious Roundtable, appearing at their national meetings. In the months leading up to the election as his campaign intensified, Reagan continued to reach out to conservative evangelicals. At a Religious Roundtable meeting in August of that year, with prominent conservative Southern Baptists in attendance, he uttered what would perhaps be the most famous line of his campaign before a crowd full of evangelical pastors stating, "You can't endorse me, but I endorse you," sending the crowd into a thunderous applause.<sup>63</sup>

In the end, Reagan's campaign strategy was the same as Nixon's before him, but this time the conservative evangelical constituency that he aimed for had grown much larger. Realizing this, Carter tried to rally non-conservatives against Reagan by painting him as a Goldwater-style extremist and racist. However, unlike Lyndon Johnson's attacks on Goldwater, Carter's accusations were easily brushed off by Reagan. Much too savvy to allow himself to become worked up over Carter's accusations, Reagan countered asking the American people, "Are you better off than you were four years

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<sup>61</sup>William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 208.

<sup>62</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 388.

<sup>63</sup> William Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 217.

ago?”<sup>64</sup> At the polls the American people gave a resounding answer in the negative as Reagan won the election in a landslide. Pulling votes from both parties and capturing an overwhelming majority of evangelicals, Southern Baptists included, the former Hollywood Democrat’s appeals to plain-folk evangelical values and American exceptionalism led him to the nation’s highest office. As Reagan took office, the Religious Right looked toward the 1980s with a sense of accomplishment in what they accomplished and hope that their president would save America from its slide into secularism and moral decay.

As the Reagan administration took over, it would largely abandon the conservative evangelicals of the Religious Right that had worked to put him in office. This left the Religious Right torn as at once it felt it had more political influence than ever before, but at the same time a disappointingly low number of conservative evangelicals received appointments in the new regime. Understanding that the economic failures of the past four years had been the downfall of the Carter administration, Reagan’s advisors pushed him to table social reform until the economy could be stabilized. This proved immensely frustrating for the Religious Right, but despite a lack of change in real terms, Reagan would keep conservative evangelicals behind him by continuing to cater to them in his speeches as he had done on the campaign trail.

## CONCLUSION

The same political energy that coalesced the Religious Right and brought Reagan a landslide victory over Jimmy Carter in 1980 would drive conservative Southern Baptists to take over their denomination in the succeeding decade. Just as they

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<sup>64</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 395.

envisioned an American society in need of salvation from secularism and moral decay, conservative Southern Baptists saw those same corrosive forces at work within their own denomination. As the Religious Right came together to fight a budding culture war, an absolute-values based worldview began to take form in the minds of conservative evangelicals. After decades of identifying themselves in terms of what they were against, conservative evangelicals began to identify themselves by the things that they were for. As with Falwell's statement above on Moral Majority, the Religious Right centered itself around "traditional" family values and Christian patriotism. In the 1980s, conservative Southern Baptists would channel this worldview as they waged war against the denominational establishment.

CHAPTER THREE  
A Collision of Worldviews:  
The Southern Baptist Convention “In Crisis”

In 1979, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was the nation's largest Protestant denomination. The decades surrounding World War II were a period in which Southern Baptists joined a great migration of Southerners from their home region in search of great economic opportunity. For the denomination, this Southern exodus led to a shedding of traditional provincialism as it amassed territories and membership throughout the nation. What had been dubbed the "Catholic Church of the South" decades before had grown into a denominational machine second only to the actual Catholic Church in America. An article in *Christianity Today* speaks to the scale of the Southern Baptist enterprise:

The word "largest" seems hardly apt to describe the Southern Baptist Convention. It has 14 million members, half again as many as the next largest church the United Methodist. It has 36,000 congregations, 6,630 career home and foreign missionaries, and it baptized nearly a half-million people last year. It has six seminaries, 52 colleges and universities, and an agency with the modest little title of Sunday School Board. The board is the publishing arm of the convention. It owns the Broadman Press (118 titles published last year), the Holman Bible publishing company, and a chain of 65 Baptist bookstores. Its headquarters is housed in five buildings covering two-and-a-half blocks in downtown Nashville, and has 1,500 employees. The board publishes 150 periodicals (1982 postages budget: \$2.6 million), and has its own zip codes.<sup>65</sup>

Despite this prosperity and the optimism that came with them for Southern Baptists, the changes that had brought exponential growth to the denomination had unintended consequences.

The "Crisis" in the Southern Baptist Convention that began in 1979 and continued through the 1980s was an event that the denomination and the American society around it had been building toward for decades. These forces, driven by population shifts and

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<sup>65</sup> James Hefley, "The Historic Shift in America's Largest Protestant Denomination," *Christianity Today*, Aug. 5, 1983.

exacerbated by the tumult of the Cold War, the counter-cultural movement, Watergate, and Vietnam, both transformed and divided the nation. In the South, they produced a nationalization of the region, including the SBC, which destroyed the cultural hegemony of the Old South and played a vital role in the emergence of the New Right as Southern migrants carried their cultural and political worldviews with them to other regions of the country. For the denomination, these societal upheavals and population shifts created a drastic expansion of its territory and brought about a massive centralization project by the generation of leaders that came to power in the 1950s. Forward looking, but still products of the Old South, these leaders failed to recognize the threat that many Southern Baptists felt as they encountered new levels of secularism and pluralism within their society. Accordingly, their attempts to appeal to the “center” of their constituency caused them to misjudge the sway of the morally absolutist worldview of the New Right upon Southern Baptists throughout the nation.

As they attempted to downplay and overlook doctrine for the sake of continued growth, many rank and file members became frustrated as doctrines that they felt were not traditionally Southern Baptist began to be advanced in the denomination’s press and seminaries. This frustration led to events such as the Ralph Elliott Controversy in which a new Baptist Faith and Message Statement emphasizing the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy had to be adopted to appease widespread discontent over the printing of Elliott’s book questioning a literal interpretation of the Genesis account. As growing number of rank and file members became disaffected with the laissez-faire attitude of SBC leaders toward the doctrinal and cultural milieu of the denomination, they began to form groups and institutions such as The Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship and the

Criswell Theological Seminary dedicated to defending the conservatism that they saw as vital to Southern Baptist life. The formation of such groups and institutions in the early 1970s would be a harbinger of things to come by the end of the decade as a full-blown conservative movement would square off against the denominational elite.

The events of the Southern Baptist “Controversy” should not be seen simply as a corporate-style takeover of the denomination by a small cadre of power hungry fundamentalist conservatives or as a “conservative resurgence” in which the denomination was steered back on a rightward course from a dangerous drift toward theological liberalism. While each of these narratives put forth in the extant histories of the event speak some truth to what the “crisis” was, they fail to recognize the complexity and the scope of what took place within the SBC. Instead of being a largely in-house affair, as those who lived through the event and produced its histories assert, the “controversy” was driven by forces that transcended the SBC. In adjusting to the new paradigms of post-World War II American society and a newly nationalized denominational machine, the worldviews that guided the Moderate and Conservative movements that would wrestle for control of the denomination emerged. An adoption of the Religious Right’s values-based worldview drove Conservatives to activism to save their denomination and their nation from liberalism, while Moderates were in large part driven by a worldview shaped by defense of their comfortably provincial Southern Baptist lives. For the minority of more progressive minded Moderates an outright opposition of both to the doctrinal and social positions of the Conservative group drove them to action.

In this view, the timing of the “crisis” demonstrated a linkage between the actions of Conservatives within the denomination and their politicization outside of it as part of the Religious Right. The late 1970s were a time in which evangelicals became an acknowledged force in American political and cultural life. The year 1976 was dubbed by the mainstream media “The Year of the Evangelical” as Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter, himself a Southern Baptist, would utilize the newfound cohesion of this voting bloc to reach the White House. Despite their success at the polls, evangelicals would soon become disaffected by their support of Carter as the President proved to be an evangelical of a more progressive sort. Out of this frustration with Carter, Jerry Falwell created Moral Majority with the goal of turning evangelical political energy toward a candidate that would bring the “family values” platform to the White House and turn the nation back toward God. In 1978 Ronald Reagan announced his candidacy for president and conservative evangelical political energy built toward its apex upon Reagan’s election in 1980. Therefore, to see the SBC ‘Crisis’ as simply an in-house issue for Southern Baptists is to miss the broader context. After decades of grassroots growth, conservatives became empowered by their political activism. Drawing from a worldview that posited absolute values that needed defending to maintain a righteous society, the same energy that mobilized conservative Southern Baptists to vote for Reagan in the 1980 presidential election drove them to elect Adrian Rogers as president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979.

The “crisis” in the Southern Baptist Convention was the era in which Conservative leaders executed their plan to seize control of the denominational machinery and provide a “course correction” away from what they perceived as a

leftward drift. The bookends for this period were the 1979 election of Adrian Rogers as SBC president in Houston in which the Conservative plan was launched and the 1991 election of Morris Chapman as SBC president in which he assumed the denominational presidency unopposed, marking the end of Moderate attempts to regain the denomination.<sup>66</sup> At first glance, doctrinal issues loomed large in this struggle as Conservatives built an attack on the “liberals” in the denomination centered around upholding the doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy, while Moderates countered by asserting the traditional Baptist doctrines of Soul Competency the Priesthood of all Believers. Southern Baptist doctrine, however, was more of a surface level issue. When considering the extent to which Conservative action molded itself largely around the “family values” platform of the Religious Right, it becomes evident that it was their sociopolitical views, not doctrine, that they wished to impose upon the denomination. The struggle between Moderate and Conservative Southern Baptists extended beyond their religious lives to encompass diverging worldviews that drew broader cultural and political issues into the conflict.

#### HOW THE “CRISIS” BEGAN

Adrian Rogers’ election as president of the SBC at the 1979 denominational convention in Houston was somewhat of an aberration to those who became Moderates in this Southern Baptist controversy. In the decades leading up to Rogers’ election, the presidency of the denomination had been somewhat of an honorary title accessible only to those who were well connected within the SBC power structure. As Elizabeth Flowers relates in *Into the Pulpit*, there existed a “good ole boy system” in which the power in the

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<sup>66</sup> "Southern Baptists Re-Elect a Fundamentalist," *New York Times (1923-Current File)*, Jun 05, 1991, 1.

denomination was in the hands of relatively few men such as Duke McCall, Herschel Hobbs, and Porter Routh.<sup>67</sup> Loyalty to the denomination was highly prized and rewarded annually at the SBC convention in which committees and presidencies were awarded to those whose churches had given the most to the Cooperative Program fund and the well-connected who had often been classmates of the denominational elite in seminary. Because politicking ran counter to this system it was frowned upon. Those who were “too open and candid” about their desire for a position of power within the SBC often found their efforts thwarted, as was the case with Rev. Dr. Kenneth Chafin who had both of his efforts to become president of the denomination soundly defeated due to his “excessive campaigning.”<sup>68</sup> When Rogers, whose massive Memphis, Tennessee church gave only the bare minimum required for convention representation, was elected, it signaled to the denominational elite that something was amiss. Going as far as to claim election fraud, denominational loyalists found the outsider Rogers’ election as president hard to comprehend, but in no way did they suspect that his election was the first step in a calculated plan to take over the denomination.

Adrian Rogers’ election as SBC president was, of course, no fluke. Instead it was the point at which the plan of Texans Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson, the leaders of the Conservative bloc, to take control of the denomination was set into motion. As Barry Hankins discussed in *Uneasy in Babylon*, Pressler and Patterson had more in common with mainstream evangelicals such as Francis Schaeffer than they did with their own denominational leaders. Whereas the Southern Baptist elite did not even perceive the

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<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth H. Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 31,87.

<sup>68</sup> Louis Moore, “Rogers’ decision not to seek another term as Baptist leader is jolt to fundamentalists,” *Houston Chronicle*, May 8, 1980.

SBC to be an evangelical denomination, Conservatives did. This led Conservatives to draw their doctrinal and sociopolitical stances from a wider pool of mainstream evangelical scholars, while the SBC establishment looked almost exclusively to the work of Southern Baptist thinkers. Looking to sources outside of the denomination created more hardline stances on doctrines relating to Biblical inerrancy among Southern Baptist conservatives than their denominational leaders, who tended to pursue open and inclusive doctrines for the sake of maintaining growth.

The backgrounds of Conservative leaders illustrate the movement's connections to institutions outside of the denomination. Paul Pressler was a Texas Appeals Court judge who spent his formative years at Exeter Academy, a prestigious boarding school in New England, before attending Princeton University en route to a law degree.<sup>69</sup> Paige Patterson trained as a Biblical scholar at an SBC seminary, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, but after clashing with professors that he deemed too "liberal" chose to work outside of the denominational structure at Criswell Theological Seminary. According to a well-known story among Southern Baptists, the two met in 1967 while Patterson was still a seminary student in New Orleans. This fated meeting at Café du Monde in the French Quarter was said to be the origin of the duo's eventual coup against the SBC establishment as they discussed late into the night their fears for the denomination and their ideas of how to stop its "leftward drift." According to Pressler, the meeting with between the two that night in the French Quarter was a turning point for

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<sup>69</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 37.

the movement, but it was not until 1977 when he was approached by Baylor students upset over what they referred to as “liberal textbooks” that he decided to take action.<sup>70</sup>

Having decided that they needed to save their denomination from a culture of doctrinal and social “liberalism,” Pressler and Patterson began to formulate a plan to accomplish that goal. Pressler, an erudite legal scholar, studied the inner working of the SBC and found that the historically democratic denomination was structured in a top-down hierarchical fashion in which the president, ironically, held a vast amount of power. At annual conventions messengers [delegates] from Southern Baptist churches elected a new president. The president had the power to select the Committee on Committees which in turn appointed the Committee on Nominations which nominated trustees for the various boards and institutions of the SBC. Messengers at the convention had the opportunity to vote on these nominations from the floor, but this was done quickly in blocks leaving little time for opposition to individual nominees.<sup>71</sup> Under the “good ole boy” system that had ruled the SBC for decades, this structure had worked because the conventions were small affairs that were as much about fellowship as denominational business.

Presslers’ plan to take advantage of this system, however, quickly made the annual conventions important events in denominational life. His plan, that bore the election of Adrian Rogers as its first fruit, was to elect Conservative pastors to the SBC presidency who would then appoint Conservative committee members that were chosen

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<sup>70</sup> R. Gustav Niebuhr, “House Divided: Southern Baptists Lose and Impetus In an Internal Struggle,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 1989.

<sup>71</sup> Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention, “Struggle for the Baptist Soul,” 5, *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

at meetings prior to the conventions. Pressler estimated, correctly, that this strategy would take ten consecutive denominational presidencies for the cumulative effects of these appointments to place all SBC boards and institutions within Conservative hands. Key to this plan was the grassroots organization of like-minded conservative Southern Baptists who would attend the annual conventions en masse and vote for a single candidate.

### CONSERVATIVE POLITICIZATION

That Conservative Southern Baptists would turn to politicization to effect change within their denomination should not have been a surprise. Several prominent SBC Conservatives were active in national conservative politics as well. Although many Moderates viewed Adrian Rogers as simply a pawn of Conservative leadership, especially after he chose to forego a customary second term as SBC president in 1980, Rogers was, in fact, highly active in national conservative politics. In 1979, Rogers not only became president of the SBC, but also a founding member of Moral Majority. SBC Conservative leaders Paige Patterson, Charles Stanley, and Jimmy Draper also joined the organization at its inception.<sup>72</sup> An additional link between Rogers and national conservative politics was Ed McAteer. The founder of the Religious Roundtable, an organization created to mobilize evangelical voters, McAteer also happened to be a member of Rogers' congregation at Bellevue Baptist in Memphis, Tennessee. With extensive ties in both the political and evangelical circles, McAteer would be a key agent in focusing evangelical political energy on the "family values" political platform.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> William Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 206-207.

<sup>73</sup> William Martin, *With God On Our Side*, 199.

In addition to its leadership being linked to national conservative politics, rank and file SBC Conservatives also identified themselves as politically conservative. As sociologist Nancy Ammerman's 1985 survey of Southern Baptists found, of those who identified with the Conservative movement in the denomination 95 percent agreed with the statement: "it is good that groups like [the] Moral Majority are taking a stand for Christian principles." Among self-identified Moderates the results were almost the opposite with only 15 percent agreeing with that statement. With over 90 percent of Southern Baptists surveyed by Ammerman upholding the traditional Baptist tenet of separation of church and state, these findings suggest that differences in political views were driven by factors external to the denomination.<sup>74</sup>

In analyzing the data on the political beliefs of the Southern Baptists in her survey, Ammerman pointed to such an external factor: "On that [the SBC's] right wing, a strong conservative consensus had evolved, especially around family-related issues."<sup>75</sup> Historian Seth Dowland refers to these "family values" as a triumvirate of political positions that includes opposition to abortion, feminism, and gay marriage.<sup>76</sup> This "family values" platform that stressed "traditional" nuclear families, opposed the ERA, and opposed abortion soured mainstream evangelical support for Jimmy Carter and rallied millions behind Ronald Reagan in the lead up to the 1980 presidential election also shaped Conservative action in the SBC.

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<sup>74</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 105.

<sup>75</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 100.

<sup>76</sup> Seth Dowland, "'Family Values' and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda," *Church History* 78, 3 (Sept. 2009), 607.

An important caveat that must be made, however, is that Southern Baptists were by in large socially conservative. They were so conservative in fact that “liberal” was used as a pejorative term within the denomination, prompting Moderates to take on their name to assert that term did not fit them. Typical of the conservative culture that held sway in the South, especially among the religious, alcohol and tobacco use, profanity, and sexual promiscuity were included among a long list of the taboos within the SBC. Therefore, while Moderate action was not as shaped by the “family values” platform as Conservative action, Moderates were still not “liberal” in many senses. In fact, Ammerman noted that Moderate Southern Baptist political and social positions were like those found in a 1989 survey of the general population in twelve Southern states.<sup>77</sup>

A certain overlap in opinion existed between SBC Conservatives and Moderates on many social issues, with divisions taking place over how those opinions should affect Southern Baptist life. While Conservatives sought to bring the political activism of the broader conservative movement into the denomination, Moderates largely felt that the religious and the sociopolitical should be kept separate. The way in which the two groups dealt with homosexuality, a practice that Southern Baptists almost universally saw as sinful, is a good example of this. Whereas Moderates were in large part still supportive of gay rights and in 1977 had passed a resolution condemning Anita Bryant’s anti-homosexuality campaign following her speech at the convention that year, Conservatives were vehemently against gay rights. Once in power, they made institutional efforts once in power to purge the denominational structure of anyone who

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<sup>77</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 102.

even affirmed gay rights and even changed the Baptist Faith and Message to make clear that no homosexual could be ordained in the SBC.<sup>78</sup>

Abortion was another issue that Conservatives drew a hardline stance on due to their Religious Right worldview. That is was largely a social, and not religious issue, for Conservatives is evident when considering that the majority of protestant Christians did not see abortion as a major issue until the rise of the Religious Right. Demonstrative of this was Conservative patriarch W.A. Criswell's 1973 statement that he believed life began after birth in reaction to *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>79</sup> As convention resolutions passed during the 1970's show, the Moderate-led SBC was concerned with sanctity of life, but did not want to take a coercive stance. This created resolutions that opposed abortion on demand, but supported various kinds of "therapeutic" abortions. Even though the Southern Baptist definition of what constituted "therapeutic" would narrow as consciousness of the issue was raised by mainstream evangelicals such as Francis Schaeffer, it would not be until after Conservatives had launched their takeover that opposition to abortion in all forms would make its way into the convention resolutions.<sup>80</sup>

As Conservatives seized control of the denominations boards and agencies during the 1980s, they crusaded to bring America's largest denomination into the Religious Right's fight against abortion. By 1980 they pushed through a resolution that opposed all forms of abortion after which conservative laymen Ed McAteer announced, "I'm planning personally to send a letter to every congressman and senator to tell them that we [Southern Baptists] are against abortion." In 1984, Southern Baptists for Life was

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<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth H. Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 56.

<sup>79</sup> "Abortion Decision: Death Blow?" *Christianity Today*, Feb. 16, 1973, 48.

<sup>80</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 181-184.

created as a denomination-wide organization. It distributed pamphlets at the annual conventions, created sermon materials for pastors, promoted anti-abortion films, and created a set of resources for the institution of an SBC Sanctity of Life Sunday.<sup>81</sup> The Conservative fight against abortion within the SBC did not, however, stop at promoting pro-life materials. By the late 1980s an avowed anti-abortion stance was necessary to gain any significant position within the denomination and holding views that allowed for abortion under any circumstances risked job loss. The most notable casualty of this would be Larry Baker, who was forced out as head of the Christian Life Commission.<sup>82</sup> These policies also extend outward as the Conservative controlled denomination checked the views of a ten-year medical missionary to Uganda before granting him an ethics award in 1989<sup>83</sup> and speakers who supported abortion in any way were banned from SBC conferences and events in 1990.<sup>84</sup>

Farther reaching than Conservatives' opposition of abortion was their opposition of feminism, which translated into an opposition of women's ordination within the denomination. As the ranks of Southern Baptist women seeking ordination and pastorates swelled during the 1970s and 1980s due to the spread of second wave feminism, the role of women in the church became a significant issue in the denomination. SBC leaders attempted to address the issue of women's ordination in the denomination through the 1978 Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations. While the Moderate leadership of that era attempted to be inclusive of women who felt a

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<sup>81</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 186-187.

<sup>82</sup> Ray Waddle, "Besieged Baptist Director Sought as Pastor," *The Tennessean*, May 12, 1988.

<sup>83</sup> Ray Waddle, "Abortion View Checked Before Honor Awarded," *The Tennessean*, Sept. 15, 1989.

<sup>84</sup> Ray Waddle, "S. Baptists Ban Speakers Holding 'Pro-Choice' Views," *The Tennessean*, Mar. 9, 1990.

call to ministry, although support for it was quite weak within the denomination, Conservatives saw the issue as an affront to “traditional womanhood” in which a woman’s highest calling was motherhood and thus opposed it. By 1984, the Conservative bloc would push through a resolution that encouraged the, “service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastor functions and leadership roles entailing ordination.”<sup>85</sup> As Conservative began to exercise control over SBC apparatus, this resolution would be employed to not only keep women out of Southern Baptist pulpits, but would also be used to keep those who supported women’s ordination off of the denomination’s seminary faculties and out of leadership positions in its bureaucratic structure.

The conservative charge against women’s ordination within the SBC would be led by two women: Dorothy Patterson and Joyce Rogers. Both Patterson and Rogers were married to Conservative SBC leaders (Paige Patterson and Adrian Rogers) and were active members of the nation’s largest group committed to “traditional womanhood,” Concerned Women of America.<sup>86</sup> Not only would the pair hold conferences and produce materials to advance the ideals of “traditional womanhood” within the SBC, but they would also develop a complementary Biblical interpretation that sought to refute the interpretations of evangelical feminists as well as draw out values such as modesty and submission that fit within their Religious Right, “family values” oriented worldview. In the 1990s, their complementarian hermeneutic would eventually come to shape women’s ministry within SBC churches and even redefine curriculums for women attendees of

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<sup>85</sup> SBC, “Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry,” (1984), *Resolution Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Oct. 30, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1088/resolution-on-ordination-and-the-role-of-women-in-ministry>.

<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth H. Flower, *Into the Pulpit*, 77.

Southern Baptist seminaries. As these events illustrate, Conservative preoccupation with keeping women out of ordained roles of authority within their churches proved to be one of their strongest links to the broader Religious Right movement.

### BATTLES OVER BIBLICAL INERRANCY

According to those involved on both sides of the 'crisis' the main issue dividing Conservatives and Moderates in the SBC was the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. As the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy defines it, the Bible is wholly infallible in both its message and its accounts. Inerrancy was a preface to Southern Baptist doctrinal division. It hindered compromise as hermeneutics that strayed from a literalist reading of Scripture tended to create in some Moderates ideas about the Bible that often proved incommensurate with those of Conservatives.

Abandoning Biblical inerrancy, especially in the denominations seminaries, was a slippery slope toward Southern Baptists losing faith in their core Christian beliefs such as the Resurrection or the Virgin Birth in Conservative mind. Moderates, on the other hand, did not feel inerrancy to be a necessary doctrine for Southern Baptists. Their qualm was less with the doctrine itself, as many of them believed it themselves, but with the dogmatism of Conservatives who insisted that only those who believed in inerrancy should teach in SBC seminaries or hold other positions of power within the denomination. They argued that such hardline doctrinal stances not only hampered academic freedom within SBC seminaries, but also violated the traditional Baptist doctrine of Priesthood of the Believer. Priesthood of the Believer (sometimes referred to as Soul Competency or Freedom) is a tenet that allows for no human intercession

between the believer and God, meaning that no one can be told how to personally interpret Scripture.<sup>87</sup>

In a very real sense, though, there was a divide between the two factions over the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. Its apparent abandonment by some SBC leaders truly did cause concern among conservative Southern Baptists that their denomination was heading down a dangerously liberal path as evidenced by a 1979 editorial in the *Tennessee Baptist Reflector* in response to the Houston convention at which concerns were raised that there were Southern Baptist leaders and professors that did not believe in Biblical inerrancy:

Granted: We have heard charges made against only a small percentage of our leaders and teachers, and these charges have been made by relatively few Southern Baptists. But, these need to be dealt with in an orderly fashion... Something needs to be done quickly and completely to instill the confidence of “grass roots” Southern Baptists in the faithfulness of our seminaries... IF (and we emphasize IF) there are Southern Baptist leaders and professors whose beliefs and teachings are contrary to our basic Baptist beliefs, Southern Baptists ought to know about it.<sup>88</sup>

Despite being the focus of rhetoric on both sides, inerrancy proved to be problematic when considered as a driving force of division between Conservatives and Moderates. The first problem with inerrancy being the central issue in the ‘Crisis’ is that most Southern Baptists, on both sides, believed in it. In Ammerman’s 1985 survey 85 percent of respondents agreed that “the Scriptures are the inerrant Word of God, accurate in every detail. Upon further analysis of her results, however, Ammerman points to a second problem with inerrancy being the central dividing issue: inerrancy meant different things to different people. She found that although the vast majority of Southern Baptists

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<sup>87</sup> Mitchell Brooks, “Here is a glossary of the terms that bind,” *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>88</sup> Alvin Shackleford, “Inerrancy Question Needs Answers,” *The Tennessee Baptist Reflector*, July 18, 1979.

in her survey agreed to the statement above on Biblical inerrancy, only 44 percent claimed to hold to a completely literal interpretation of the Genesis creation account.<sup>89</sup> Further complicating the term, an article written in *SBC Today* by David Dockery, a conservative Southern Baptist, called “Variations on Inerrancy” listed seven different versions of Biblical inerrancy that are represented within the SBC. These variations ranged from “mechanical diction” in which it was assumed God dictated the Bible to its human writers assuring its perfection, to “functional inerrancy” which asserted that the Bible accomplishes its purpose in an inerrant fashion without being necessarily factually correct throughout.<sup>90</sup>

Instead of being the central dividing issue, Biblical inerrancy was an ideological signpost. Conservative insistence that the Bible was absolutely trustworthy, was a product of the same worldview that drove them to war against abortion and women’s ordination. The Religious Right worldview that they bought into was a value based one in which there were God-ordained absolutes that Christians must fight to protect. In turning this worldview that had influenced their political lives toward their denomination, Conservative leaders recognized Southern Baptist universities and seminaries as the place in which those values were most challenged. Concerns over education had been one of the earliest driving forces of grassroots conservative politics. In their undertakings within the SBC, Conservatives would follow the same pattern as they had in their political activism by making the “liberal” teachings of professors within the denomination the first issue that they set out to tackle.

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<sup>89</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 74-75.

<sup>90</sup> David Dockery, “Variations on Inerrancy,” *SBC Today*, May 1986, *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

In early 1980, Paige Patterson published a highly publicized list of the names of seven professors that he claimed taught “liberal” doctrines to their Southern Baptist students.<sup>91</sup> In a subsequent letter, Patterson provided examples from these professor’s works in order to illustrate the kind of “liberal” teachings that he saw as representative of many of the denomination’s professors. Quotations from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Church History Professor Dr. E. Glenn Hinson’s 1977 work entitled *Jesus Christ* provides a good example of the teachings that Patterson viewed as dangerous, which stated:

The Fact that none of these [The Gospels] is absolutely factual, however, does not take away all of their value. What it takes away is the dogmatic certainty with which historians in the past sometimes operated.... A number of modern scholars have discounted the healing narratives and miracle stories, ascribing them to primitive mythology and early Christian embellishment.<sup>92</sup>

As the controversy continued Conservatives would repeatedly point to examples such as this in which things were being taught in the denomination’s schools that honestly would have made most Southern Baptists at the time uncomfortable. To put a stop to such teachings and to ensure that seminary students were receiving an education that was representative of Southern Baptist beliefs, Conservatives insisted that the seminaries be staffed only with professors who believed in Biblical inerrancy.

Accordingly, the seminaries became a significant battleground between the two sides as the Conservatives set out to take over the boards of the denomination’s seminaries to bring them in line with their social and doctrinal beliefs. Southern Seminary in Louisville and Southeastern Seminary in Raleigh would become the most

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<sup>91</sup> Helen Parmley, “Baptist Hits 7 Professors for Teachings,” *The Dallas Morning News*, May 7, 1980.

<sup>92</sup> Paige Patterson, “A Reply of Concern,” May 10, 1980, *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

hotly contested as they were the least conservative of the six SBC seminaries. The two seminaries led by their fiercely Moderate presidents, Roy Honeycutt and Randall Lolley, vocally opposed the Conservative takeover of the denomination at every turn. Their resistance was not enough, however, and by the mid 1980s a considerable number of Conservatives had made it onto their boards. In 1986, in an attempt to stave off complete takeover, the presidents of the six seminaries drafted and signed the Glorietta Statement. The document affirmed a belief in Biblical inerrancy on the part of the seminary presidents and pledged that their schools would make greater efforts to bring in more doctrinally conservative professors.<sup>93</sup>

The attempt failed, however, and by 1988 Randall Lolley had been forced to resign by his Conservative controlled board and the bulk of the faculty were purged.<sup>94</sup> When Billy Graham spoke at the inauguration of Southeastern's new Conservative president,<sup>95</sup> Lewis Drummond, students at Southern wore yellow armbands around campus and held rallies to show their support of the ousted regime.<sup>96</sup> In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Conservatives continued their stranglehold on the denomination's boards and eventually gain Southern as well. Upon seizing control of the seminaries, the faction would attempt to reorient their culture toward conservative doctrines and cultural values by hiring only mainstream evangelical professors that agreed with Biblical

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<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth H. Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 109-110.

<sup>94</sup> Mary Knox, "Accrediting Decision Delayed," *Baptist Press*, Feb. 1, 1989.

<sup>95</sup> Sharon Grove, "Embattled Seminary Accepts Outside Help," *Charlotte News and Observer*, n.d., *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>96</sup> "Students, Faculty Demonstrate Support for Southeastern," *The Tie*, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library and Archives, Louisville, KY.

inerrancy. Ironically, however, even these professors had a hard time toeing the Conservative line as many of them affirmed women's ordination.

Moderates, as opposed to their conservative opponents, were driven by forces other than a desire to stomp out liberalism within the SBC. For some Moderates, especially the intellectuals and more progressive among them, a worldview informed by Rawlsian philosophy and attuned to relativism led to outright rejection of Biblical inerrancy along with conservative ideas of absolute values.<sup>97</sup> The professors that found themselves purged by their Conservative trustees at Southeastern fit well in to this category. Most Moderates, however, worked from a provincially Southern Baptist worldview. They had come of age in a denomination and a South in which they were comfortable and proud to be Southern Baptists. Thus, their actions were driven less by theological or philosophical conviction and more by their desire to defend their denominational culture. Doctrinally they were not very different from their Conservative counterparts, but they had been happy in the pre-Crisis SBC and resented the changes that the takeover brought. Whether or not Moderates supported conservative social and doctrinal agendas did not find its way into their rhetoric, instead they focused on how the Conservative bloc had departed from traditional Baptist tenets through their politicization and doctrinal dogmatism. The only time that inerrancy found its way into their rhetoric was in demonstrating how Conservative leaders had strayed away from "Traditional Baptist Distinctions" in their almost credal assertion the doctrine.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 166-167.

<sup>98</sup> Baptists Committed to the Southern Baptist Convention, "Quote References," 1, *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

## BATTLES OVER THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

The issue of women's role in the church is one that highlights the way in which the broader worldview of each side shaped their doctrinal stances. Women's ordination was something that Moderates seemed to support and Conservatives flatly rejected. Unlike inerrancy, though, the issue of women's ordination was not one that Moderates hammered away at the Conservatives on. This was because Moderates were much more ambivalent about the issue. With dogmatic stance on inerrancy they could point to Baptist notions of freedom to support their attacks, but women's ordination was not a part of the Southern Baptist heritage that they sought to protect. As Ammerman's survey showed only 26 percent of respondents supported the idea of hiring women as pastors. Even among self-identified Moderates, the most progressive in the denomination, there was only nominal support for the issue. While over 90 percent claimed that they believed in women's ordination, only 6 percent of their churches had ordained even a single woman.<sup>99</sup> Thus, even though Moderates were quick to speak in support of women seeking ordination, those women were largely left on their own. Having long been married to a patriarchal Southern culture, most Southern Baptists had long assumed that the Bible only allowed for the ordination of men to the pastorate. Accordingly, the Women's Missionary Union had been the traditional ministerial outlet for women since its founding in the late nineteenth century. For the generation of Southern Baptist women that began to push for ordination and pastorates in the 1970s and 1980s the WMU and second wave evangelicalism had empowered them to respond to

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<sup>99</sup> Nancy T. Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 96-97.

what they felt was God's call in their lives regardless of that tradition.<sup>100</sup> The method by which those women sought to legitimize this quest for ordination was Biblical hermeneutics.

Following the lead of respected evangelical feminists Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty's seminal 1974 work *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation*, Southern Baptist women seeking ordination argued for a move from women's submission to mutual submission of the sexes.<sup>101</sup> By pointing to both Old and New Testament Scriptures, they produced an interpretation that rejected traditional notions of women's subordination. They highlighted women such as Miriam and Deborah in the Old Testament and Priscilla, Aquila, and Phoebe in the New to demonstrate that God called, too, called women to places of leadership.<sup>102</sup> Possessing the Moderate worldview that did not necessitate absolute values, they argued that passages that appeared to place women in subordination were a product of the misogynistic culture of the authors and not God's timeless word. They also turned to modern techniques of textual criticism in their arguments. Exemplify this was an argument that in Paul's letter to the Corinthians when he wrote that "the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak," it was actually an admonition of the Corinthians. Quoting the rest of the passage, "Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached," it was argued that Paul was, in fact, using a diatribe stylistic device in which he was stating their position and then refuting it.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Elizabeth H. Flower, *Into the Pulpit*, 45-49.

<sup>101</sup> Elizabeth H. Flower, *Into the Pulpit*, 45-49.

<sup>102</sup> Nell Magee, "One Woman Speaks," *The Baptist Program*, Aug. 1974, 8.

<sup>103</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 206.

Conservative Southern Baptist women developed their own theology of Biblical womanhood that ran counter to that of evangelical feminists. Possessing a worldview in which absolute values were eminent and the Bible was fully inerrant, these women accepted a much plainer reading of Scripture that viewed its historical context as irrelevant because for them the word of God was timeless. Realizing the inherent problems that passages in Paul's writings that called for women to cover their heads and to remain silent in church that a strict literalist interpretation posed, Conservatives instead focused on the values of modesty and submission which they claimed those passages were trying to instill. In other places, however, they did pursue a literalist interpretation. One such argument that was used in the 1984 resolution that called for women to seek non-pastoral functions was that women were subordinate to men due to their being second in the order of creation and the first to sin in the Genesis account.<sup>104</sup> In the Conservative view, women were to submit themselves to their husbands just as Christ had submitted himself to death on the Cross. Both were in accordance with God's will and for them, authority over men was not something that God willed for women. This interpretation was part of a view of "traditional womanhood" in which women were ordained by God to be mothers and help-mates to their husbands, not ordained pastors.

A Biblical text that demonstrates the divergence of the Moderate and Conservative viewpoints on womanhood and Scripture is Galatians 3:28, which states that in Christ, "there is neither male, nor female."<sup>105</sup> For Moderates and women seeking ordination, this verse stated clearly that there is no distinction between men and women

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<sup>104</sup> SBC, "Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry," (1984).

<sup>105</sup> Galatians 3:28.

in the eyes of God. Therefore, they posited that women had the same authority as men to be leaders and teachers within the church. Conservatives, on the other hand, saw this verse as an assurance of equal salvation for men and women through Christ. They argued that although men and women were equal in terms of their humanity, but God had given them different functions and pastoral work was not among those given to women.<sup>106</sup>

The opposing views of this Scripture would be argued by Jane Aldredge Clanton and Dorothy Patterson in a 1988 debate held by the SBC's Historical Commission. Clanton, an ordained minister, represented the Moderate side and Dorothy Patterson (the wife of Paige Patterson) represented the Conservative side. The debate between Clanton and Patterson, both of whom held advanced theology degrees from Southern Baptist seminaries, was a contest in which both arguments were grounded firmly in Scriptural interpretations. Both women held their ground, although the mostly Moderate crowd heckled Patterson for her hat asking if she was conforming to the commandment in Scripture that women keep their heads covered.<sup>107</sup> An exchange between Clanton and Patterson during the debate demonstrated the difference in worldview between the two highly educated women. At one point during the debate Clanton remarked that it was sad to see a women of Patterson's gifts using her talents to deny other women the right to use theirs. Patterson responded that she chose to be a conservative spokeswoman because that is what Scripture required of her and then stated: "I can truthfully say that the most

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<sup>106</sup> Joyce Rogers, "God's Chief Assignment to Women," January, 1974, *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>107</sup> Ray Waddle, "Debaters Cross Swords Over Ordination of Baptist Women," *The Tennessean*, n.d., *Southern Baptist Controversy Collection, 1980-1995*. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

exciting thing I've done as a woman is be the wife of Paige Patterson and the mother of Carmen and Armour.”<sup>108</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The driving force behind the conflict were cultural differences that emerged between the Conservative and Moderate factions because of myriad changes that took place both in and outside the Southern Baptist denomination in the decades leading up to the “crisis.” While the doctrinal divisions took primacy in their rhetoric, when put in context each sides’ religious ideologues were part of broader worldviews. These competing worldviews led Moderates and Conservatives to clash as they each claimed to be the true heirs of the dual heritage of the Southern Baptist Convention. Seeking to maintain the status quo, Moderate Southern Baptists asserted traditional Baptist doctrines and tenets. Taking on the social conservatism of their Southern heritage, Conservative Southern Baptists asserted the “traditional family values,” that they felt that their denomination, and the nation, were in desperate need of recapturing.

Politicization was the key to the success of the Conservative plan. Their ability to mobilize rank and file conservative minded Southern Baptists was an important asset in their bid to elect ten denomination presidents in a row, but equally important was the inability of Moderates to organize effectively. At first this stemmed from an underestimation of the Conservative bloc, but as the need to embrace political tactics became evident the Moderate faction ran into difficulties. Whereas the Conservatives were a very homogenous group that was both doctrinally and politically conservative, Moderates spanned a much broader spectrum. Additionally, Moderates lacked the

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<sup>108</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 212.

political energy and experience that their Conservative counterparts had gained through their participation in the formative years of the modern conservative movement prior the rise of the Religious Right. This meant that by the time that Moderates formed groups dedicated to denominational politics such as Baptists Committed to the SBC, it was too little too late.

By 1991, Conservatives would gain control of every national agency and institution in the Southern Baptist Convention. With the power of the denominational machine in their hands, Conservative leaders set out to remake the denomination in their image. In the process, they would move the denomination into the evangelical mainstream and seek to align it entirely with the socio-political views of the Religious Right. Whereas Biblical Inerrancy was the rallying cry of Conservatives throughout the takeover era, in the 1990s the “traditional family” became their fixation.

CHAPTER FOUR  
CONSERVING THE FAMILY:  
HOW “FAMILY VALUES” RESHAPED THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

By the early 1990s, Conservatives in the SBC attained something that their Religious Right counterparts in national politics never could: real tangible power. Up until this point in the narrative of the Southern Baptist history, Conservatives had first a disaffected minority, and then an opposition party. Having elected eleven denominational presidents in a row and seized control of the boards of every denominational institution, Conservatives would begin their project to mold the SBC in their image inspired by a Religious Right worldview. Per this worldview, Conservative leaders pursued to bring the denomination in line with a family values platform that emphasized the “traditional family” by opposing feminism, homosexuality, and abortion. Along with pursuing the goals of the family values platform, the SBC would also come into alignment with the Religious Right on almost every social and political issue from school prayer to the death penalty.<sup>109</sup> To bring the denomination in line with their vision, Conservatives would pursue change via three avenues: an overhaul of seminary faculties and curricula to emphasize conservative doctrines, a reimagining of women’s ministry geared toward “traditional womanhood,” and an entrenching of their sociopolitical views into two new Statements of Faith.

#### REORIENTING TOWARD THE EVANGELICAL MAINSTREAM

During this era, the effects of Conservative leadership on the denomination were somewhat of a mixed bag. After years of being marginalized by denominational elites, Conservatives were certainly not conciliatory once the power of the SBC machine was theirs. They purged seminary faculties, drove Moderates out of posts on denominational boards, and aggressively excluded women and gays from Southern Baptist pulpits.

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<sup>109</sup> SBC, “On Capital Punishment,” (2000), *Resolution Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 7, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/299/on-capital-punishment>.

Despite a tendency toward vindictiveness and dogmatism, at times, Conservative leaders also had several positive impacts on the denomination. Having attained their power through a largely grassroots effort, Conservative leadership, for better or worse, did align more closely with rank and file Southern Baptists. Perhaps because of their political activism in the Religious Right, Conservative leaders were geared more toward ecumenism than their Moderate predecessors. Prior to the takeover, Southern Baptists had historically eschewed ecumenical efforts, choosing instead to create their own institutions and organizations as opposed to working with other denominations. However, once Conservatives gained control, they worked to move the denomination toward the evangelical mainstream. The professors that Conservatives brought in to replace the “liberals” that they pushed out of the denomination’s seminaries came largely from outside of Southern Baptist ranks and the Sunday School Board would be rebranded as Lifeway Christian Resources to cater to the mainstream evangelical market.

Alongside identifying more closely with mainstream evangelicalism, Conservative leaders were more evangelical than their Moderate counterparts. While SBC leaders prior to the rise of the Conservatives had certainly been concerned with maintaining the denomination’s growth, marked especially by the pivoting of denominational executives toward a business oriented mentality in the 1950s, their concern was more with providing for existing members than seeking new ones. This lack of zeal for proselytization by Southern Baptist leadership was one of the most often cited reasons Conservatives gave for seeking control of the denomination. In the Conservative worldview, the world was increasingly at risk of secularization and the only just response for Christians was to redouble their evangelistic efforts. Conservative dogmatism on

doctrinal issues such as Biblical Inerrancy was caused by this, in part, as they saw doctrinal consistency as being the key in messaging toward potential converts.

#### CONSERVATIVE LEADERS AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION

A surprising effect of this evangelistic fervor was greater outreach toward minority communities. Over the course of the first decade of Conservative control, non-white congregations grew from 5 percent in 1990 to 13.4 percent in 1998.<sup>110</sup> Most notably, Conservative leaders made real efforts to reach out to the black community. During the Civil Rights era, many conservative Southern Baptists had refused or failed to aid Foy Valentine and the CLC in their attempts to work toward racial reconciliation within the denomination and the South. By the 1990s, most Southern Baptists regretted their earlier racial attitudes, but the denomination was still largely viewed as racist to the extent that it hurt missionary efforts in urban neighborhoods. Wanting to move the denomination beyond the race issue, SBC leaders picked up the mantle of men like Valentine and began to make racial reconciliation a priority. They achieved successes as the North American Mission Board began to make inroads into the black community by offering its vast resources to black churches that chose to cooperate with the SBC in addition to their alignments with National Baptists and the American Baptists.<sup>111</sup>

Conservative leaders soon found their efforts complicated by both the denomination's past and their own political leanings. In 1995, a committee of eight black and eight white members assembled in Nashville to draft a resolution on racial reconciliation that would be presented before the denomination's sesquicentennial

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<sup>110</sup> Tobin Perry, "SBC ethnic congregations up 66 percent since 1998," *North American Missions Board*, Jan. 22, 2013, <https://www.namb.net/news/sbc-ethnic-congregations-up-66-percent-since-1998>.

<sup>111</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 255.

celebration at that year's convention. The product was a lengthy resolution that sought to deal earnestly with the denomination's racist past, apologize for it, and seek forgiveness. The most poignant of its clauses read: "Be it further RESOLVED, That we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systematic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty whether consciously (Psalm 19:13) or unconsciously (Leviticus 4:27)."<sup>112</sup> Although received with great fanfare on the convention floor, the resolution's reception by the black community outside of the SBC and the national media was decidedly cold. Many derided Southern Baptists for waiting until the mid-90's to take the time to acknowledge the role of slavery and racism in their denomination's past. In a column entitled "Late Regrets about Slavery," Les Payne of *New York Newsday* questioned why it had taken Southern Baptists 132 years after the Emancipation Proclamation to repent for their support of slavery.<sup>113</sup> Some charged the SBC with hypocrisy for calling for racial reconciliation while also opposing affirmative action legislation, as a black journalist from Florida wrote: "If Southern Baptists are serious about atoning for their historical sins, how can they also join Republicans in destroying affirmative action – the one federal program that modestly attempts to redress some of the wrongs of the denomination?"<sup>114</sup> Despite the bad press, SBC leaders continued to pursue reconciliation with and greater inclusion of the black community and by 1999 the number of black

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<sup>112</sup> SBC, "Resolution On Racial Reconciliation on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention," (1995), *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 10, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention>.

<sup>113</sup> Les Payne, "Late Regrets about Slavery," *New York Newsday*, June 25, 1995.

<sup>114</sup> Bill Maxwell, "Baptists' Apologies Are Right," *St. Petersburg Times*, June 25, 1995.

congregations had grown from 1,200 at the time of the resolution to 2,800.<sup>115</sup>

Additionally, by 2000 each SBC seminary had at least one black faculty member, whereas there were none when the Conservatives took control of the denomination.<sup>116</sup>

#### MODERATE EXCLUSION

During the same time that the SBC's Conservative leadership waged a campaign of inclusion toward the black community, it launched a campaign of exclusion toward its Moderate opponents. During the years that they were seeking control of the denomination, Conservatives worked to expose what they viewed as social and doctrinal liberalism within the denomination. Their rhetoric centered on the dangers of the "liberalism" exhibited by the SBC leadership and seminary professors and called for the inclusion of conservative voices. They argued, correctly, that conservative viewpoints on doctrinal and social issues were underrepresented among the denominational leadership compared to their prevalence among the membership at large. Upon gaining control of the SBC, however, Conservatives shifted focus. Their goal changed from inclusion of their viewpoints, to the exclusion of all others. In part, this stemmed from personal vendettas. Conservatives had been marginalized for decades under the old SBC elite as they failed to gain denominational posts and had their doctrinal views ridiculed by seminary professors. Although this was a struggle between church men, Conservatives had received no grace as outsiders nor did they intend to use their newfound power to grant any. The drive to exclude those who opposed them also drew heavily from their worldview. Conservatives, along with their Religious Right counterparts outside of the

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<sup>115</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 254.

<sup>116</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 269.

denomination, envisioned themselves as underdogs in a great struggle against secularism and “liberalism” with the salvation of American society (and the world) depending on them to not give any more ground. Thus, in the SBC that they set out to create, Conservatives would allow no room for compromise with Moderates.

According to rhetoric historian Carl Kell, the Conservative movement undergirded its actions with three stages of argumentation. The first two, fundamentalism and inerrancy, were clearly visible in Conservative rhetoric from the beginning of their takeover as they repeatedly asserted the need for Southern Baptists to uphold the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. The third rhetoric, exclusion, was employed upon gaining control of the denomination. As Kell wrote: “The third body of argument, the rhetoric of exclusion, has as its goal the disenfranchisement of any member or church that denies the inerrancy of the Bible. The groups targeted for exclusion are women as ordained leaders, liberals of any persuasion, homosexual church members, and churches that accept homosexuals in their membership.”<sup>117</sup> For Moderates this exclusion proved devastating as most had spent their entire lives within the Southern Baptist world. They grew up in Southern Baptist churches, attended Southern Baptist schools, and many had spent their careers working for the denomination. When Conservative leaders began to put their exclusionary rhetoric into action, Moderates found themselves marginalized within the SBC for the first time in their lives. Much as conservative Southern Baptists of the 1960s and 1970s that lacked access to power within the denomination, Moderates faced a choice of either leaving the denomination or doing as the Conservatives had done and forming their own organizations and institutions within the SBC.

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<sup>117</sup> Carl Kell, *Exiled: Voices of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006), xxxv.

Making the Southern Baptist controversy perhaps unique among denominational struggles, neither side would choose to leave the denomination. A possible explanation for this was strong notion of congregational autonomy that had existed within Southern Baptist Convention from its founding. Despite being branded “fundamentalists” by their Moderate opponents and the mainstream news media, Conservatives had not broken off from the denomination when they felt it was becoming too doctrinally and socially “liberal” as the actual fundamentalist evangelicals had done. Having lost their cultural hegemony in the SBC and facing exclusion from the denominational power structure, Moderates would also choose not to leave. Instead, they formed organizations that allowed them to restore a semblance of control over their lives within the denomination. In 1987, the Alliance of Baptists was formed by a progressive faction within the Moderate camp.<sup>118</sup> They were completely opposed to the Conservative movement, but also had not been comfortable under the old SBC elite either. Unlike most Moderates, they substantively supported women’s ordination and were gay affirming. Frustrated by the Alliance’s social and doctrinal positions that went beyond what they were comfortable with, a group representing the Moderate mainstream formed the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship in 1990. By diverting their giving from the Conservative-controlled Cooperate Program Fund toward these organizations, Moderates began to independently undertake their own missional, educational, and charitable efforts as they were excluded from these functions within the official SBC structure.

Unlike conservative Southern Baptists that, outside of a small cohort of leaders, were made up largely of rank and file members that had little power prior to their ascent

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<sup>118</sup> Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 272.

to the takeover, Moderates existed throughout the bureaucratic structure of the SBC. This meant that although they lost complete control of the national apparatus, Moderates still held considerable power in state conventions. In eastern states like Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Kentucky the Moderates never lost power at the state level. These were “blue blood” states in the SBC with widespread establishment sentiment during the takeover era, thus the grassroots organization of conservative Southern Baptist proved ineffective in their state conventions. That Moderates could hold on to these states, in addition to their creation of new organizations outside of denominational control, may also have contributed to their decision not to leave the SBC. So, while the struggle over the denomination ended in decisive defeat for Moderates by the early 1990s, the struggle over some state conventions continues into the present day.

#### SEMINARIES

From the beginning of their takeover of the denomination, Conservatives focused much of their attention on the seminaries. In their mind, the inculcation of young Southern Baptists with “liberal” views on doctrine and theology was arguably the most worrisome facet of the denomination under the control of Moderate elites. Many early Conservative attacks centered around exposing how professors at SBC seminaries were straying from what they viewed as Southern Baptist orthodoxy. As the Crisis decade wore on, they, too, would find the increase in women seeking theological degrees and their support in the seminaries, Southern and Southeastern especially, as vexing. Either intuitively or from their experience in grassroots conservative politics, SBC Conservatives understood the seminaries to be the arbiters of denominational culture. Future Southern Baptist leaders, from pastors to directors of boards, were shaped by these

institutions. This made the seminaries significant battlegrounds in the struggle for denominational control, with seminary presidents, faculty, and students vocally opposing the Conservative movement. Despite their opposition, Conservatives steadily gained positions on the seminaries' boards. In 1992, the Conservatives completed their conquest of SBC seminaries when Southern Seminary president, the fiery Roy Honeycutt, announced an early retirement after more than a decade of resisting the takeover.<sup>119</sup>

Upon seizing control of the boards of the seminaries, Conservatives began the process of remaking them in their image. This process was not equally painful in all six seminaries. Southwestern, New Orleans, Midwestern, and Golden Gate were traditionally more conservative, making their adjustment to Conservative rule an easier transition. For Southern and Southeastern the changes would be more difficult. When Conservatives gained control of Southeastern Seminary in 1987, they promptly pushed the Moderate president, Randall Lolley, out and purged most of the faculty. When Conservatives finally accomplished their goal of taking Southern Seminary in 1992, they were forced to move more slowly. Southern Seminary was the oldest and most well-endowed of the denomination's seminaries. Unlike the other five seminaries, Southern received most of its funding from sources other than the SBC. So, even as Conservative's gained control of the school's board, they lacked the ability to make the same sort of drastic changes that they had at Southeastern Seminary. Instead, Conservatives would bring in a new president, Albert Mohler Jr., and work piecemeal toward the faculty the sought.

Albert Mohler was a life-long Southern Baptist elite insider, even a former aide to Roy Honeycutt as a student at Southern Seminary, but his theological and ideological

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<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 124.

influences lay outside of the denomination. Growing up in Central Florida, Mohler was influenced by the conservative Presbyterian pastor D. James Kennedy, who would become a prominent voice in the Religious Right. Later as a seminary student, he discovered the works of eminent evangelical theologians Francis Schaeffer and Carl F. Henry.<sup>120</sup> As president of Southern Seminary, though, Mohler's hiring practices would aim beyond the conservatism of the evangelical mainstream. Acting on an agreement made under Honeycutt in 1991 that Southern would bring in more doctrinally conservative faculty to achieve an ideological balance, Mohler and the Conservative-controlled board acted quickly to bring in more conservative voices.

Since the SBC seminaries up to this point had been largely Moderate or even progressive in their makeup, Mohler would have to look outside of the denomination for suitable candidates. To find professors that would embrace the doctrinal and social conservatism that SBC leaders now wanted, the hiring committee at Southern brought in five new professors from the larger evangelical world. After an exhaustive interviewing process that included multiple rounds of questioning on the doctrinal and social views of the candidates, a potential problem emerged with all the candidates: none of them expressly repudiated women's ordination. Although the professors were narrowly approved by the board, it made clear that it was not in any way affirming women's ordination.<sup>121</sup>

Perhaps ironically, the mainstream evangelicals that were sought out for their doctrinal conservatism failed to be conservative enough on the issue of women's

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<sup>120</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 25.

<sup>121</sup> Bill Wolfe, "Baptist Trustees Approve 5 Teachers for Seminary, Disapprove of Views," *Louisville Courier Journal*, Apr. 30, 1992.

ordination. Whereas mainstream evangelicals viewed women's ordination with ambivalence, agreeing to disagree with one another, Southern Baptist leaders demonstrated an adherence to their sociopolitical views over and above their doctrinal beliefs by opposing women's ordination with puritanical zeal. Within just a few years, the issue of women's ordination would begin to have bearing on hiring and firing at Southern Seminary. In 1994, Molly Marshall Green was forced to resign her post as a professor of theology at Southern Seminary. The administration claimed that it was due to her teaching of universalist doctrines, but it was more likely that it was due to her affirmation of women's ordination. As a doctoral student at Southern, Green was at the forefront of the movement to co-opt the hermeneutics of evangelical feminism into a Southern Baptist theology that allowed for women's ordination.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, Green's position at Southern Seminary had been an issue for the administration. As a professor of theology, Green largely men who were studying to become future pastors. Thus, Green's position was viewed as one of ministerial authority that per the Conservative worldview should not be vested in a woman. Mohler's stated view that a teaching position in the School of Theology at Southern Seminary was equivalent to a pastor position supports this interpretation.<sup>123</sup>

The clearest, and most egregious, example of the issue of women's ordination affecting employment practices at Southern was the Carver incident in 1995. The controversy began when Diana Garland, dean of the seminary's Carver School of Social Work, recommended David Sherwood for a vacant faculty position. Sherwood, a

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<sup>122</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 95.

<sup>123</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 126.

mainstream evangelical, fit all the official requirements for the position. However, by this time Mohler had developed his own unofficial requirements that were known to only the board and the deans that necessitated, among other views, an opposition to women's ordination. So even after his unanimous approval by the hiring committee, Mohler informed Garland that he would not hire Sherwood because of his views on women's ordination. Having been instructed to not share Mohler's unofficial criteria with the hiring committee or prospective employees, Garland found herself having to deny Sherwood employment without revealing the cause. Realizing that it would be impossible for her to fill the position with a more doctrinally conservative professor than Sherwood, Garland decided to go public with Mohler's criteria in an effort to save Sherwood's candidacy.<sup>124</sup>

In response, Mohler asked for Garland's resignation and continued to refuse to hire Sherwood. Two days later, in a meeting between Mohler and the faculty that is remembered as "Black Wednesday," several of the mainstream evangelical faculty confronted Mohler over his unofficial criteria. When two of the mainstream evangelical professors that had been brought in under Mohler pointedly asked if their affirmation of women's ordination was no longer acceptable to the administration, Mohler responded, "That's right."<sup>125</sup> The fallout from this episode would lead all five of the mainstream evangelical professors mentioned above to leave within a year and the closure of the Carver School of Social Work, which had existed at Southern since 1904. That simply affirming women's ordination was enough to prompt Conservative leadership to run off

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<sup>124</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 82-85.

<sup>125</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 127.

seminary professors, who were otherwise completely aligned with them doctrinally, was the proverbial “smoking gun” that proved Southern Baptist allegiance to the broader Religious Right worldview. While the evangelical professors who found their way in and then out of the denomination demonstrated, it was possible to believe in Biblical inerrancy and not oppose women’s ordination. For the Religious Right, with its fixation on preserving the “traditional family,” the same could not be said.

### DEFINING THE FAMILY

Perhaps the defining feature of Conservative discourse and action during the 1990s was concern for the institution of the family and defense of family values as conceived in the context of the Religious Right worldview. Conservative redefining of women’s ministry within the denomination, boycotting Disney, and barring of churches that affirmed homosexuality, while drawing on other impetuses, were underlined by a common concern with defending “traditional family values.” The conception of the family in the Conservative worldview also illustrated clear demarcations from the Moderate worldview. In a dispute that was reminiscent of the debate over the definition of family during Jimmy Carter’s White House Conference on Families in 1980, Moderates and Conservatives disagreed on the inclusivity of the term “family.” In 1992, the Associated Baptist Press, a Moderate-run news outlet, ran an article in which prominent Moderates challenged the idea of the nuclear family. Doug Cole, a leader in the state convention of Moderate-controlled North Carolina offered an alternative definition of the family as: “Any place nurture can be experienced and which creates wholeness.” Kay Shurden, a professor at Mercer University and wife of Moderate leader Walter Shurden, added: “I think imposing a model on a Christian woman or a Christian

man or a Christian family is absolutely trying to play God to them.” In response, Richard Land, head of the Christian Life Commission, stated:

Whether purposeful or not, that kind of definition opens the door for calling all kinds of perverted relationship ‘family relationships.’ Gay and lesbian couples regularly claim that they have positive, affirming family relationships. A menage a trois might claim the same thing. But, from a biblical perspective, their relationship is not familial. It is sinful. To claim anything else is morally repugnant to evangelical Christians.<sup>126</sup>

In the Moderate worldview that emphasized Baptist traditions, exclusive definitions of the family were dangerous for their violation of individual freedoms and the doctrine of Soul Competency. Per their Religious Right worldview, Conservatives saw inclusive definitions of the family as dangerous because of their potential to allow for the “timeless values” they saw in the Bible to be violated. At the 1997 SBC Convention, a resolution was passed that called for a definition of the family to be added to the Baptist Faith and Message statement for the exact purpose of defending those values. In an interview given at the convention, Daniel Helmbach, a professor at Southeastern Seminary and convention delegate, commented on the passing of the resolution: “We don’t believe moral values change. They were fixed from the beginning by God and He holds each one of us accountable.”<sup>127</sup> In terms of instilling this moral absolutism within the SBC, the 1998 amendment to the Baptist Faith and Message statement was the culmination of the Conservatives’ decade-long project.

The 1998 amendment to the Baptist Faith and Message statement, entitled “The Family,” embedded the Religious Right’s family values platform into the closest thing to

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<sup>126</sup> Louis Moore, “CLC responds to ABP story redefining ‘family,’” *Baptist Press*, Jun. 26, 1992.

<sup>127</sup> Yonat Shimron, “Baptists aim to define family,” *The News and Observer*, Jun. 20, 1997.

a creed that exists in the Southern Baptist Convention. It began with a definition of 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.” The amendment then moved on to defining marriage as, “the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime.” After providing a definition of marriage and family that assured the exclusion of gays, the relationship between husband and wife was explained in complementarian terms. The husband, it explained, “has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family.” The wife was to, “submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She... has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve him as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.” The final paragraph of the amendment, regarding children, was intentionally worded to exclude all forms of abortion, as well as the viability of any “non-traditional” families: “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.”<sup>128</sup>

Although a committee of several Conservative SBC leaders, with Adrian Rogers at the helm, oversaw the drafting process, the bulk of the amendment was written by Dorothy Patterson. Along with the amendment came a lengthier commentary that explained the argumentation and theological underpinnings of the amendment. As Elizabeth Flowers pointed out, both the amendment and the commentary borrow heavily from the “Danvers Statement” that was adopted at the inaugural meeting of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in 1987, which Patterson and other Conservative

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<sup>128</sup> SBC, “The Family,” “Comparison of the 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” *Southern Baptist Convention*, accessed Feb. 10, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

leaders attended.<sup>129</sup> The conclusion of the commentary returned to the concomitant moral absolutism underlying the arguments that it had set forth: “Doctrine and practice, whether in the home or in the church, are not to be determined according to modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends or according to personal emotional whims; rather, Scripture is to be the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct.” While this passage states that Scripture was to be the ultimate guide for the denomination, the fact that Conservative leaders amended the Baptist Faith and Message to assert their view of the “traditional family” as Southern Baptist orthodoxy two years before Biblical inerrancy suggests otherwise. Driven to impose the socio-political aspects of their Religious Right worldview on the denomination, the drafters of the 1998 amendment on “The Family” inserted Conservative views on orthopraxy into a document that was created to outline Southern Baptist orthodoxy.

#### TRANSFORMING WOMEN’S MINISTRY

While Conservative leaders worked to exclude women from the pulpits and drive professors out of the seminaries that affirmed their ordination, they also began a campaign that defined women’s ministry in the SBC. Prior to the 1960s, the traditional ministerial outlet for Southern Baptist women was the Women’s Ministry Union. It would be through their missionary work with the WMU that Southern Baptist women would be empowered to seek ordination, but outside of a handful of foreign missionaries in the field, the WMU had not been an avenue to the pastoral ministry. The pulpit had been understood to be male during this era and the power that WMU leaders possessed was accepted because it was exercised expressly over women. With the concurrent rise

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<sup>129</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 145.

of evangelical feminism and the Conservative movement in the SBC; however, these dynamics changed.

By the end of the takeover era, the WMU would cease to define women's ministry in the denomination because of three main factors. First, women who accepted evangelical feminism began to leave the WMU for Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, a group dedicated to the doctrine of sexual equality and the support of women seeking ordination. Second, being an auxiliary of the denomination, Conservatives were unable to appoint the leaders of the WMU. Accordingly, the WMU became a Moderate stronghold over the course of the struggle for control of the denomination. By 1993, the WMU was supplying literature to Moderates that acted separately of the SBC, prompting Conservative leaders to demand an end to the organization's independence. Adrian Rogers, Conservative leader and former SBC president, called for an end of the "feminization of missions," saying: "We need to put male leadership back where it belongs in supporting, promoting, and leading out in missions."<sup>130</sup> Rogers' tying of the WMU to feminism, which had become anathema within the conservative culture of the denomination, alienated the organization from denominational life from that point on. Third, as Conservatives gained control, they began to formulate a new conception of women's ministry centered around "traditional womanhood," that came to shape denominational programming from the early 1990s on.

In the late 1980s Dorothy Patterson and Joyce Rogers led the Conservative push for "traditional womanhood." They created and popularized scriptural interpretations that stressed female submission against the equality-based interpretations of those that

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<sup>130</sup> Herb Hollinger, "Adrian Rogers is critical of those speaking for him," *Baptist Press*, Mar. 11, 1993.

supported women's ordination. Upon seizing control of the denomination, Conservative leaders would rebuild women's ministry atop this understanding of scripture. In 1992, a new denomination-wide women's ministry program, Women's Enrichment Ministry, was created with Joyce Rogers among its leadership. Utilizing Lifeway's (formally known as the Sunday School Board) publishing capabilities, Women's Enrichment Ministry quickly grew a multimillion industry geared toward conservative evangelical women.<sup>131</sup> Providing programming such as Bible studies, videos and other materials for local churches, as well as hosting denomination-wide forums, conferences, and regional retreats, the Women's Enrichment ministry quickly ascended to the place that the WMU once held in the lives of Southern Baptist women. The highly popular Beth Moore, who today "teaches" before stadiums full of evangelical women, is a lifelong Southern Baptist whose career was launched by the Women's Enrichment Ministry. Her emphasis on complementarian gender roles and anti-gay activism are an embodiment of the program's values.

Accompanying the creation of the Women's Enrichment Ministry was a systematic redefining of seminary education for Southern Baptist women. Under Moderate leadership, the seminaries had not always been accepting of women divinity students, but no restrictions were put upon them. With Conservative leaders at the helm, this would change. Upon assuming the presidency of Midwestern Seminary in 1995, Mark Coppenger made immediate changes to bring the school in line with Conservative views on women in ministry. For women seminarians, the divinity curriculum was changed. Instead of taking the courses Preaching Lab and Pastoral Leadership, women

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<sup>131</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 130.

were to take alternative courses entitled Biblical Teaching Lab and Principles of Leadership. Going one step further in instituting the Conservative ideal of “traditional womanhood,” Midwestern created a new program for women seminarians entitled “Women in Seminary Developing Our Ministries.” This program was created for the wives of pastors to receive a “Diploma of Ministering Wife.” Combined with an official hiring policy that included questions about women’s ordination, there was no doubting where the seminary would stand on the issue.<sup>132</sup>

During the takeover era, Southern and Southeastern were the loudest supporters of the women’s ordination movement in the SBC. The women who brought evangelical feminism into the denomination largely hailed from these two schools, and organizations such as Southern Baptist Women in Ministry used their campuses as home bases.<sup>133</sup> Following the takeover, however, they became the focus of the Conservative counterattack against evangelical feminism in the denomination. In 1992, Conservative Leader Paige Patterson became the president of Southeastern Seminary, bringing with him his wife Dorothy. In short order, Dorothy Patterson was placed over a new women’s studies program at the seminary. In this program, women seminarians took many of the same courses as the men, but akin to the changes in the curriculum at Midwestern it made clear that women were not being trained to be pastors. Pastoral classes were banned to women and replaced with courses that prepared women to speak to and teach other women such as they would in Women’s Enrichment Ministry programs. However, unlike Midwestern’s curriculum, Patterson’s program did not simply aim to create good

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<sup>132</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 233.

<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 130.

pastor's wives. Being an erudite theologian in her own right, Patterson also hoped to breed a new generation of female theologians that would continue her work of advancing a complementarian hermeneutic to counter the egalitarian hermeneutic of the evangelical feminists.<sup>134</sup>

Like the 1998 amendment on the "The Family," the Conservative overhaul of women's ministry in the SBC had more to do with culture and politics than religious conviction. From the development of a systematic complementarian interpretation of Scripture, to reorienting the curriculum for female seminarians toward teaching and domestic roles, Conservatives sought to bring Southern Baptist women in line with their ideal of "traditional womanhood." Holding to a worldview in which feminism was a grave threat to American society, endangering the institution of the family and contributing to moral degeneracy, Conservative leaders did everything in their power to squash its influence within their denomination. In doing so, they assured that the SBC would retain at least some of the vestiges of the patriarchal Southern society from which it hailed.

#### EXCLUSION OF GAYS AND LESBIANS

In their campaign to reshape the SBC, the centrality of the "traditional family" in the Conservative Religious Right worldview and their seeming compulsion to defend it became increasingly clear. The efforts of Conservative leaders to exclude gays and make clear that the denomination did not support what they viewed as the gay lifestyle is case in point. Traditionally a denomination that existed within a conservative Southern Culture that scandalized perceived sexual misconduct, it was not as though

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<sup>134</sup> Barry Hankins, *Uneasy In Babylon*, 234.

homosexuality was a particularly controversial topic for most Southern Baptists. As early as 1976, the denomination began passing resolutions against it and outside of a small minority of progressives, most Southern Baptists viewed the gay lifestyle as sinful.<sup>135</sup> According to Nancy Ammerman's survey data, only two percent of Southern Baptists viewed homosexuality as a "viable Christian alternative."<sup>136</sup> Considering that the SBC was in no need of a crusade against homosexuality, the actions of Conservative leaders appear to have been purely a function of their worldview. Throughout the 1990s, homosexuality would be a hot button issue within American society at large. In several states, homosexuality was still technically illegal via "sodomy" laws. Homosexuality along with abortion were the two main issues that divided the "conservative" and "liberal" sides of the culture war that dominated political culture during that decade.

Over the course of the 1990s, the SBC would pass eleven convention resolutions condemning gays or those that supported them in some way. Managing to approach the issue from almost every conceivable angle, Southern Baptists passed resolutions spanning from condemnations of homosexuality as a practice, to opposing gay marriage and legal protections, to expressing "outrage" at the allocation of federal funding to gay advocacy groups.<sup>137</sup> Perhaps the most notable resolution in opposition of gays was the "Resolution on Disney Company Policy," passed at the 1996 Southern Baptist Convention. The resolution cited Disney's policies of allowing gay couples insurance

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<sup>135</sup> SBC, "Resolution on Homosexuality," (1976) *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 10, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/606/resolution-on-homosexuality>.

<sup>136</sup> Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 109.

<sup>137</sup> SBC, "Resolution on Human Sexuality," (1991), "Resolution on Homosexuality, Military Service and Civil Rights," (1993), "Resolution on Homosexual Marriage," (1996), and "Resolution on Use of Government Funds to Encourage Immoral Sexual Behavior," (1991), *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 13, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/search/>.

benefits, gay nights at its theme parks, and the publishing of a book entitled “Growing up Gay: From Left Out to Coming Out,” by one of the company’s subsidiaries among the denomination’s grievances and called for all Southern Baptists to boycott Disney until the company changed its ways.<sup>138</sup> The resolution also called for the Christian Life Commission to monitor Disney’s response to the boycott, leading to a 1997 convention resolution that called for its strengthening and continuation after Disney proved to be unrepentant.<sup>139</sup> The SBC was, of course, not alone in their boycott of Disney. In fact, the denomination joined a number of other Religious Right groups including the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, Focus on the Family, and the American Family Association in a boycott that began in 1995.<sup>140</sup> The boycott drew the ire of the mainstream news media and achieved decidedly mixed results, but it would stay in place well into the 2000s.

In addition to their more general condemnations of gays, Conservative leaders also took steps to ensure their exclusion from Southern Baptist life. In 1992, they pushed through an amendment to the SBC constitution that stated that: “churches which act to affirm, approve, or endorse homosexual behavior would be deemed not to be in cooperation with the Convention.”<sup>141</sup> In contrast, Moderate groups did not bar churches that were gay affirming from cooperation. The Baptist Peace Fellowship, a progressive

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<sup>138</sup> SBC, “Resolution on Disney Company Policy,” (1996), *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 13, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/435/resolution-on-disney-company-policy>.

<sup>139</sup> SBC, “Resolution on Moral Stewardship and the Disney Company,” (1997), *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 13, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/436/resolution-on-moral-stewardship-and-the-disney-company>.

<sup>140</sup> Dwayne Hastings, “AFA ends Disney boycott it launched in the mid-1990s,” *Baptist Press*, May 24, 2005.

<sup>141</sup> SBC, “Constitution,” (2006), accessed Feb. 13, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/pdf/sbc-charterconstitutionbylaws.pdf>.

Southern Baptist group, issued a statement in 1995 affirming “gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons in church life.” The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the mainstream Moderate group, called for individual conscience and local church autonomy, but also barred hiring gays or providing funding to groups that affirm homosexuality. By 2000, however, the CBF dropped their ban on funding gays, but were still ambivalent about the issue. CBF Coordinator, Daniel Vestal, described the group’s new position as, “welcoming, but not affirming of homosexuals.”<sup>142</sup> Demonstrating the lack of cultural distance between Conservatives and Moderates, outside of the most progressive pockets of the denomination, gays were marginalized from full participation in Southern Baptist life.

As with the issue of women’s ordination, the separation between Conservative and Moderate Southern Baptists on homosexuality was found in the cultural and political aspects of their worldviews. Outside of the most progressive Southern Baptists, homosexuality was viewed across the board as a sin. Doctrine notwithstanding, Southern Baptists also hailed from a region in the South in which the terms “gay” and “sodomite” were synonymous. The differences in how they approached the issue, though, reflected the differences in their worldview. Reflecting the libertarian streak in Baptist tradition, Moderates were willing to at least attempt to welcome gays into their congregations. Concerned with maintaining the “traditional family,” seemingly above all else, Conservatives zealously exiled any and all gays from official Southern Baptist life.

#### 2000 BAPTIST FAITH AND MESSAGE

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<sup>142</sup> Art Toalston, “CBF stance on homosexuality follows SBC action by 8 years,” *Baptist Press*, Oct. 16, 2000, accessed Feb. 13, 2017, <http://www.bpnews.net/6674/cbf-stance-on-homosexuality-follows-sbc-action-by-8-years>.

Two years after the 1998 amendment, the SBC adopted a new Baptist Faith and Message Statement. While the 1998 amendment set out to sacralize the sociopolitical positions of Conservative leaders, the 2000 statement brought Southern Baptist doctrine in line with the moral absolutism of the Religious Right worldview. The language used in the report presented by the committee charged with producing the new statement illustrated how the Conservatives viewed their actions in rewriting the Baptist Faith and Message:

New challenges to faith appear in every age. A pervasive anti-supernaturalism in the culture was answered by Southern Baptists in 1925, when the *Baptist Faith and Message* was first adopted by this Convention. In 1963, Southern Baptists responded to assaults upon the authority and truthfulness of the Bible by adopting revisions to the *Baptist Faith and Message*. The Convention added an article on "The Family" in 1998, thus answering cultural confusion with the clear teachings of Scripture. Now, faced with a culture hostile to the very notion of truth, this generation of Baptists must claim anew the eternal truths of the Christian faith.<sup>143</sup>

Setting their work in the context of a society that strayed ever further from Biblical truth, the committee positioned their new statement of faith as a necessity for the preservation of not on the Southern Baptist faith, but the whole of American culture.

The differences between the 1963 and 2000 versions of the Baptist Faith and Message Statement were not very numerous, but still significant. The first change made addressed the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. The 1963 section on "Scripture" had attempted to placate both Conservatives and Moderates by asserting that scripture was, "without any mixture of error, for its matter." This vague wording was meant as a compromise and appealed to the traditional Baptist doctrine of Soul Competency in

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<sup>143</sup> SBC, "Preamble to the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message," "Comparison of the 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message," *Southern Baptist Convention*, accessed Feb. 13, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

which each scripture interpretation is solely between each believer and God. The 2000 section on “Scripture” took a clear stance on the side the Conservative understanding of Biblical inerrancy, keeping largely the same wording, but adding: “Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.” The section on “Man” was changed to include statements on gender intended to preclude transgender or non-binary understandings of gender: “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.” The 1963 statement had not mentioned gender at all.

In the section on “The Church” the 2000 statement officially barred women from the pastorate. Whereas the 1963 statement once again failed to even mention gender in its description of church officers, “Its [an SBC church] Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons,” the 2000 statement included it to deny women the pulpit, “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.” Continuing in the vein of instituting Conservative sociopolitical views, the 2000 statement added, “and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography,” to the actions prohibited to Christians in the section on “The Christian and the Social Order.” “We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death,” was also added to the list of works Christians should undertake in the section, further strengthening the pro-life stance that the 1998 amendment took.<sup>144</sup>

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>144</sup> SBC, “2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” “Comparison of the 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” *Southern Baptist Convention*, accessed Feb. 13, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

It was in the 1990s that the Conservative Religious Right worldview truly came to the fore. During the takeover era, moral absolutism and concern for “traditional family values” certainly drove Conservative action, but the doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy predominated their rhetoric. Upon realizing their goal of control of the denomination, however, Conservative leaders fixated upon family values with Biblical inerrancy becoming an afterthought. It is notable that a section on family values was added to the Baptist Faith and Message statement before an assertion of Biblical inerrancy was added. It is also notable that the hiring criteria at SBC seminaries moved to the right of the evangelical mainstream regarding women’s ordination. Tellingly, all the professors that ran afoul of the Conservative leadership for their support of women’s ordination were originally sought out for their inerrantist beliefs. Outside of racial reconciliation, every major issue that Conservative leaders pursued involved preserving the “traditional family” in some way.

It cannot be forgotten, however, that the 1990s was the decade of the “Culture Wars.” Family values were contested more during this decade than they ever had before in American political discourse. Abortion and homosexuality were not hot-button issues for only Southern Baptists, they were two of the most divisive issues in American society at the time. The Religious Right also reached the apex of its influence during this era. Both the Republican Revolution of 1994 and the presidential campaign on George W. Bush at the end of the decade would not have been successful if not for massive support from conservative evangelicals. Therefore, in context, it seems natural that the Conservative reshaping of the SBC would produce a denomination focused on the upholding the institution of the family.

Moving into the new millennium the issues that animated political discourse and Conservative action would not go away. Despite winning battles throughout the 1990s, the pendulum would swing against the Religious Right by the end of the 2000s. During this time, Southern Baptists would move to the center of the evangelical mainstream and find themselves among the loudest voices composing the Religious Right.

CHAPTER FIVE  
The Southern Baptist Convention as the Religious Right:  
Uncertainty Ahead?

## CONTINUING THE FIGHT FOR FAMILY VALUES

Having moved into the evangelical mainstream and embraced the Religious Right worldview over the course of the 1990s, the SBC came to embody them in the 2000s. Conservative leaders were effective in winning the battles within the denomination on issues such as women's ordination and Biblical inerrancy by the end of their first decade in power, but their broader crusade for "traditional family values" carried over into the new millennium. Despite being hot topics in political discourse that drove conservative evangelicals to the polls, Americans entered the 2000s without anything close to a consensus on the issues of abortion and homosexuality. As the Religious Right began to lose the "culture wars" over these issues, Southern Baptists became the loudest voices in opposition. The idea that American society, and the world, was in grave danger from an ever-increasing secularism and moral degeneracy became a call to action for Southern Baptists. It was up to them to shine a light into the darkness of the society around them through increased evangelistic efforts and a refusal to compromise the "timeless" truths of the Bible. Continuing to boycott Disney, condemn gays, and call for an end to abortion, Southern Baptists would obstinately defy the current of American culture away from the "traditional values" of the Religious Right.

The continuation of the denomination's boycott of Disney was an embodiment of Southern Baptist action in the 2000s. In 1997, the SBC officially joined the ongoing boycott against the entertainment company alongside groups such as Focus on the Family and the American Family Association over its support of homosexuality. Four years into the boycott, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) (formerly the

Christian Life Commission) released a report stating that Disney had to do at least the following for Southern Baptists to end their boycott: cease “gay days” at the park, cease publishing pro-homosexual books, cease promoting a “radical” homosexual agenda through its television programs such as *Ellen*, and establish an advisory committee made up of evangelicals to advise the company against inflammatory content.<sup>145</sup>

While not all Southern Baptists participated in the Disney boycott, at least for its entirety, the denomination’s Conservative leadership viewed it as both necessary and effective means of defending family values. In 2002, Baptist Press ran a review of the Disney movie *The Rookie* entitled “The Best Baseball Film Ever.” This action prompted Richard Land, President of the ERLC, to chastise Will Hall, the Vice President of Convention News, over the breaching the boycott in endorsing a Disney film. As the words in Land’s note to Hall revealed, SBC leadership saw their boycott as a zero-sum game: “We said the boycott meant we were not going to take money from our pockets and put it in Disney’s pocket by supporting the “good” entertainment, which would enable Disney to keep producing money-losing fare, which mocked and ridiculed our values. In other words, profits from the good stuff subsidizes Disney’s undermining of our core family values.”<sup>146</sup>

Shortly after the American Family Association (AFA) ended its boycott of Disney in 2005, the Southern Baptists followed suit. In the article that the AFA released explaining why it was ending its boycott, it cited some gains made through the boycott such as Disney becoming more aware of its offenses against Christians and the

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<sup>145</sup> SBC, “ERLC Commission Report on Disney Boycott,” *2001 SBC Annals, Richard Land Papers*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee, 250-251.

<sup>146</sup> Richard Land, “Note to Morris Chapman,” Apr. 16, 2002, *Richard Land Papers*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

company's production of a film version of the Christian classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. However, the biggest factor in the decision to end the boycott was that too many other "threats" to the family had appeared to maintain focus on Disney: "However, since 2001, Wildmon (then President of the AFA) said Disney almost became "lost among the other battles being fought on a crowded cultural battlefield."<sup>147</sup> In other words, the AFA had won some battles, but they proved pyrrhic as it was losing the war.

The resolution passed at that year's SBC convention lends itself to a similar interpretation, of the SBC pointing to some measure of success, while being far from able to declare victory. The resolution began by attempting to justify the eight-year endeavor, "The boycott has communicated effectively our displeasure concerning products and policies that violate moral righteousness and traditional family values." However, the clauses that followed the call to end the boycott seemed to admit that the denomination-wide boycott was an overall failure. They urged Disney to produce only products that "affirm traditional family values," pledged that Southern Baptists would, "continue to monitor the products and policies of the Disney company," and called for Southern Baptists to, "practice continued discernment regarding all entertainment from all sources."<sup>148</sup> Like the AFA, the SBC seemed strained to show how the boycott accomplished tangible goals, while acknowledging the "culture wars" was still on.

The most obvious sign that Southern Baptists, along with the rest of the Religious Right, were losing the "culture wars" was the growing acceptance of the gay community. As the gay community made significant gains in both cultural and legal contexts, the

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<sup>147</sup> "AFA ends Disney boycott," *AFA Journal*, Jun. 2005, *Richard Land Papers*, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

<sup>148</sup> SBC, "On The Disney Boycott," (2005), *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 17, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1146/on-the-disney-boycott>.

SBC opposed them at every step. Between 2003 and 2013, thirteen SBC convention resolutions passed either condemning homosexuality or opposing gay rights legislation, six of which specifically opposed gay marriage.

Per their Religious Right worldview, SBC leaders viewed gay marriage as a threat to the whole of civilization itself. In 2003, Southern Baptist leaders met in Kansas City and produced the “Kansas City Declaration on Marriage,” which sought to define the Biblical idea of marriage and reject gay marriage as acceptable. The declaration began: “Marriage is the union for one man and one woman for life. This has been the definition of marriage in Western culture for millennia.” Later in the declaration, marriage was characterized as the foundation of the family and, thus, the foundation of the family: “As the foundation of the family, marriage is the foundational cultural institution. The family is a critically important institution in society because it supplies essential components to the bedrock upon which all other human relationships depend.” The declaration also warned that consequences of straying from the traditional conception of marriage would be dire: “Any weakening of the traditional, Judeo-Christian definition will undermine the foundation of Western culture and result in deep, permanent fractures that will fundamentally alter American culture, indeed all of Western civilization.”<sup>149</sup>

In addition to opposing gay marriage, the SBC passed resolutions opposing gay rights in broader terms. In 2007, the SBC convention passed a resolution entitled “On Hate Crimes Legislation,” opposing the classification of gay and transgendered persons as protected classes under the Local Law and Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2007. The resolution asserted that America was a Christian nation in which homosexuality should

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<sup>149</sup> “Declaration: Kansas City Declaration on Marriage,” *Baptist Press*, Nov. 12, 2003, <http://www.bpnews.net/17077/declaration-kansas-city-declaration-on-marriage>.

not be accepted: “The Bible is clear in its denunciation of homosexual behavior (Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:21-28, 1 Corinthians 6:9), and upon that basis, our Founding Fathers, and early laws its practice in American society.” It denied that gay and transgender were classes that had a right to protection: “Proponents argue that the establishment of such protected classes is a civil rights issue, yet neither homosexuals nor transgendered persons constitute a class like race, ethnicity, or gender because their identity is based upon a lifestyle choice.” It also argued that the legislation was unconstitutional, claiming: “Such hate crimes legislation violates the U.S. Constitution’s Fourteenth Amendment guarantee of equal protection under the law by extending special protected status to certain groups of people that is not available for others.” The resolution’s final issue with the hate crimes legislation was that it could be used to punish Christians that voiced their opposition to homosexuality: “In many jurisdictions where such thought crimes laws have been passed, they have been used actively to punish Christians who peacefully voice their moral opposition to homosexual conduct.”<sup>150</sup>

Alongside their losing battle against gay rights, the SBC also continued to join the rest of the Religious Right in their war against abortion. Like the fight against gay rights, Southern Baptists did not gain any ground, but made a lot of noise. Since 2000, the denomination has passed fifteen convention resolutions that touch on the issue, but as of today almost no ground has been gained.

From their language, the moral absolutism of the Religious Right worldview was clearly visible. In 2003, the convention passed a resolution entitled “On Thirty Years of *Roe v. Wade*.” Prompted by pro-choice opponents that attempted to paint Southern

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<sup>150</sup> SBC, “On Hate Crimes Legislation,” (2007), *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 17, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1170/on-hate-crimes-legislation>.

Baptists as hypocrites for SBC convention resolutions from the 1970s that were moderately pro-choice, the resolution sought to set the record straight and ask forgiveness for the denomination's past actions.<sup>151</sup> It lamented the actions of SBC leaders prior to the Conservative takeover, stating, "Resolutions passed by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1971 and 1974 accepted unbiblical premises of the abortion rights movement, forfeiting the opportunity to advocate the protection of defenseless women and children." Later in the resolution, abortion was also characterized as a cultural issue that resulted from the abandonment of traditional family values:

That we reaffirm our belief that the *Roe v. Wade* decision was an act of injustice against innocent unborn children as well as against vulnerable women in crisis pregnancy situations, both of which have been victimized by a "sexual revolution" that empowers predatory and irresponsible men and by a lucrative abortion industry that has fought against even the most minimal restrictions on abortion.<sup>152</sup>

The most recent resolution, from 2015, told much of the same story. The resolution opined government support of abortion: "Recent federal directives seek to compel religious organizations to provide coverage for abortifacient technologies and services." Abortion was then referred to as genocide, characterizing the action as an absolute evil: "That we reaffirm our repudiation of the genocide of legalized abortion in the United States and call on all civil authorities to enact laws that defend the lives of the unborn." Finally, the resolution returned to the idea, put forth in the resolution above, that abortion was a cultural problem that victimized women who strayed from traditional family values: "That we call on Southern Baptist churches and entities to show the love

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<sup>151</sup> Dwayne Hastings, "SBC sets the record straight on convention's abortion stance," *Baptist Press*, Jun. 19, 2003, <http://www.bpnews.net/16151/analysis-sbc-sets-the-record-straight-on-conventions-abortion-stance>.

<sup>152</sup> SBC, "On Thirty Years of *Roe v. Wade*," (2003), *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 17, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1130/on-thirty-years-of-roe-v-wade>.

of Christ through appropriate means to those women most vulnerable to the victimization of the abortion industry, and show grace and mercy to those individuals who grieve with repentance over past abortions.”<sup>153</sup>

### THE SBC TODAY

The Southern Baptist Convention today is fundamentally the same as it was at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Conservatives still control every institution within the denominations’ national structure. Despite the decline of the Religious Right in recent years, the SBC continues to align with its precepts. Women are still barred from ordination, gays are still not accepted, and abortion is still opposed in all its forms. The SBC is still the nation’s largest Protestant denomination with over 15 million members and nearly 50,000 churches. Lifeway Christian Resources, formerly the SBC Sunday School Board, is one of the largest Christian bookstore chains in America with over 170 stores nationwide.<sup>154</sup> In addition to the denomination’s six seminaries, fifty-one colleges and universities affiliate with the SBC.<sup>155</sup>

Aligning itself the Religious Right, a movement now in decline, however, may have impeded the denomination’s growth. A 2016 *Associated Press* article reported that the denomination was in its ninth straight year of decline in overall membership, seeing an almost 300,000 drop in membership from 2014. New baptisms were also down, prompting SBC Executive Committee President Frank Page to exclaim in a news release, “God help us all! In a world that is desperate for the message of Christ, we continue to

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<sup>153</sup> SBC, “On the Sanctity of Human Life,” (2015), *Resolutions Search*, Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 17, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2256/on-the-sanctity-of-human-life>.

<sup>154</sup> “About Lifeway,” Lifeway Website, accessed Feb. 20, 2017, <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/About-Us>.

<sup>155</sup> SBC, “Colleges and Universities,” Southern Baptist Convention Website, accessed Feb. 20, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/colleges/>.

be less diligent in sharing the good news.”<sup>156</sup> The true cause for declining membership, however, may be broader than the character of the SBC itself. According to Pew Research Center’s “Religious Landscape Study,” respondents under twenty-nine years old were less likely to be church members, believe in God, attend church services regularly, or undertake spiritual disciplines like prayer than their older counterparts. In the case of church membership, only 17 percent of respondents 18-29 years old claimed to be Evangelical Protestants, while 33 percent of respondents age 33-49 claimed to be so.<sup>157</sup> So while the denomination’s social and political leanings may be leading some members to leave the denomination, the greater threat seems to be a declining religiosity among younger generations.

That being said, the direction of the denomination going forward is questionable. The Religious Right worldview that Conservative leaders molded the current SBC around seems to have lost the “culture wars.” With waning influence in national politics, the future of conservative evangelical activism seems uncertain. Will Southern Baptists, and others ascribing to their worldview, continue to loudly call for American society to conform to their values or will they do like the evangelicals of the earlier twentieth century and withdraw to their own insular communities? With membership and new baptisms on decline, will Southern Baptists continue down the same path that they have been on for the past three decades or is a change of direction in the near future? While these questions are important to the future of the SBC, their answers seem unclear.

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<sup>156</sup> Travis Loller, “Southern Baptists see 9<sup>th</sup> year of membership decline,” *Associated Press*, Jun. 7, 2016, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/e1afa2371ff44136ae3683ff0eb8c6e7/southern-baptists-see-9th-year-membership-decline>.

<sup>157</sup> “Religious landscape Study,” Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life, (2014), <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/age-distribution/>.

For Southern Baptist Moderates, the future seems to exist outside of the denomination. Today, most Moderates attend churches that either do not cooperate with the SBC or cooperate with the denomination in addition to others like the American Baptists or National Baptists. It has been a peculiarity of the SBC “crisis” that an official schism never occurred, but the future is ripe for such an event. For Moderates, old enough to remember the pre-takeover era, the SBC had been the center of their life and worldview. When combined with traditional Baptist congregationalism, most Moderates could never find it in themselves to leave. For younger generations in Moderate Southern Baptist churches that never experienced the pre-takeover era, there are fewer reasons to stay. They have no personal memory of Southern Baptist life before the “crisis” to shape their worldview and no denominational structure to spend their careers in as their parents and grandparents had. Holding firmly to a doctrine of local church autonomy, this new generation of Moderates may not choose to leave the denomination wholesale, but eventually the memory of the pre-1979 Southern Baptist Convention will fade from the collective memory of their congregations. Once this happens, Moderates may no longer see themselves as Southern Baptists and decide to officially break from the denomination.

## CONCLUSIONS

This work is not a complete narrative of the last Southern Baptist History in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, nor is it even a complete narrative of the Southern Baptist “crisis.” A myriad of details were left out in order to ensure that this work accomplishes its tasks without straying down countless rabbit trails. The SBC controversy was an event that encompassed a decade and effected the lives of generations

of Southern Baptists. There are many impactful, important, and engaging stories that can be told about the individual experiences and actions of both Conservative and Moderate Southern Baptists during this era, but telling them is not the task that I have set out to accomplish in this work. Instead, I set out to answer the questions of why and how the Conservative takeover of the denomination occurred. This work has also set out to refute assertions made in earlier works on the Southern Baptist “crisis” that Conservatives and Moderates were driven apart solely by doctrinal disputes.

This work has sought to accomplish its tasks by employing a framework of competing worldviews to the events. By placing Conservative and Moderate actions within a framework of broader worldviews, the SBC controversy is not only placed in the broader context of the narrative of post-World War II America, but a more plausible motive for the Conservative takeover is also discerned. In a congregationalist denomination in which individual churches see themselves as autonomous entities that choose to cooperate with one another, it does not make sense for doctrinal disputes to lead one bloc to seek control over all others. If doctrine were the only issue, Conservatives could have simply ceased cooperating with the churches or institutions that they disagreed with. When considering Conservative action is placed within a framework of the Religious Right worldview, characterized by moral absolutism and concern for “traditional family values,” however, the impetus for takeover becomes clearer. Conservative Southern Baptists, like other conservative evangelicals, viewed American society, and the world, as being under attack from the forces of secularism, liberalism, and moral degeneracy. Seeing these same forces at work within their

denomination, through the progressive social stances and “liberal” doctrines of the SBC elite, Conservatives were driven to take over the denomination to save it.

One of the more surprising results of this project has been the strong connection between Conservative action and “traditional family values.” The family, and issues such as feminism, abortion, and homosexuality that Conservatives viewed as a threat to the family, seemed to undergird almost every action by Conservative leaders during the takeover and post-takeover era. Often, family values overshadowed doctrine, such as in the case of the inerrantist seminary professors who were driven from their posts for affirming women’s ordination. While such instances fit well within the Religious Right worldview framework, the overwhelming predominance of family values in shaping Conservative action is somewhat surprising. In part, it seems that the Conservative fixation on the family is a product of the American cultural climate in which issues related to family values were being contested, but the drive could come from elsewhere. It may be fruitful to reexamine the rhetoric and actions of conservative Southern Baptists prior to the “crisis” to see how important family issues were to them at that time.

Three main conclusions can be drawn from this work. The first conclusion is that the Southern Baptist “crisis” was not an in-house event, but one that transcended the denomination itself. The current narrative, advanced by those that lived through the event, that asserts so, lacks perspective. It fails to consider the effects of the population shifts and societal changes in mid-twentieth century America that transformed the world in which Southern Baptists lived.

The second conclusion is that the divisions between Moderates and Conservatives stemmed from competing worldviews. Formed in the decades preceding the “crisis,” in

response to the transformation of both American society and the SBC, these worldviews guided the actions of both sides. Conservatives took on the worldview of the Religious Right in which absolute values were stressed and American society viewed as under assault from the “nefarious” forces of secularism, liberalism, and moral degeneracy. The Moderate worldview, on the other hand, was shaped by “pre-crisis” Southern Baptist life. Moderates filled many of the posts within the denominational structure and had been comfortable under the leadership of the old Southern Baptist elites. The worldviews were comprehensive, including religion, but also cultural and politics as well.

This moves into the third conclusion: that the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy was not the main dividing issue between Moderates and Conservatives. Given the congregational nature of the SBC it simply does not make sense that Conservatives would feel the need to control the entire denominational apparatus for the sake of the doctrine. Additionally, a lack of consensus within the denomination over the definition of the term “inerrancy” casts doubt on it as the main reason for the Conservative takeover. Instead, the takeover was driven by the broader Religious Right worldview of the Conservative faction. Biblical inerrancy was only a function of the same worldview that motivated their crusade to mold the denomination around the “family values” platform.

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