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THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE:
RELIGIOUS CONVICTION, POLITICAL CHOICE, AND
FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST
CONVENTION

A Dissertation Presented

by

Mary Elizabeth Jones

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2002

Political Science

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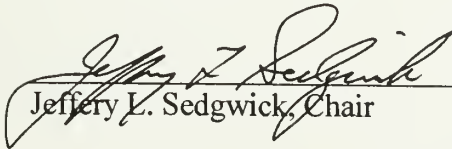
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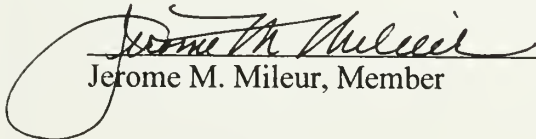
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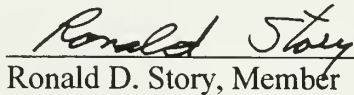
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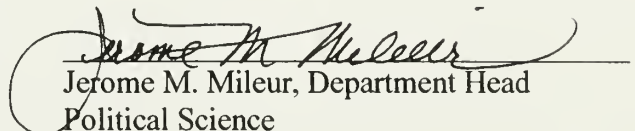
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DEDICATION

To my loving, supportive, and infinitely patient partner.
Thank you Maggie. You make it all worth it.

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I would like to express my gratitude to my dissertation director, Jeffrey Sedgwick. Throughout my graduate career he has been a patient, supportive teacher and friend. Many thanks are also due to Jerome Mileur. Generous with his time and energy, he has been invaluable in my professional development. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Ronald Story. He has contributed significantly to the completion of this dissertation and his excitement over the project has often served to lift my spirits when they were flagging.

Finally, I wish to thank all those friends and family members who have provided support and encouragement throughout my graduate studies. The completion of this project is due in part to their love and friendship.

ABSTRACT

THE PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE: RELIGIOUS CONVICTION, POLITICAL CHOICE, AND FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

MAY 2002

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The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States with 15.8 million members. It has, in the span of two decades, transformed itself into a fundamentalist denomination and become far more politically active. The traditional Baptist principles of priesthood of the believer, congregational autonomy, and commitment to separation of church and state have been significantly compromised as the denomination has embraced religious fundamentalism. I situate the SBC historically in the realms of both Protestant faiths and politics, while including within that analysis the politics internal to the Convention itself. This raises important questions about relationships between church and state, religion and politics. Of these questions, I treat as most consequential those concerning the accommodation of fundamentalist religion within a framework of religious and civil liberties in a pluralist democracy.

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CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY AND POLITICS OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST FUNDAMENTALISM

Introduction

The SBC controversy, as it is usually called, was one of the major ecclesiastical battles of twentieth-century American Protestantism.¹

Throughout its history, the Southern Baptist denomination has been one of the politically more aware and dynamic of American religions. Whether one traces the denomination's roots to Roger Williams in colonial America or all the way back to the church of the first century, the history of the Baptist faith is remarkable for its tradition of dissent.² What has been exceptional about *Southern* Baptists, however, is that prior to the last decades of the twentieth century, dissent *within* the Convention has been either absent or quite subdued. The denomination's polity was designed to produce consensus and unity of purpose and the values of its members reflected their social and cultural surroundings.³ After the split between northern and southern Baptists in 1845 over the issue of slavery, Baptists in the south embarked on a journey of denomination building that, until 1979, is notable for its institutional coherence, bureaucratic efficiency, and cultural hegemony. There was little tension within the denomination, or between it and

¹Hankins, Barry, "Principle, perception, and position: why Southern Baptists differ from moderates on church-state issues. *Journal of Church and State*. Spring 1998 v.40 n.2 p.343.

² As noted by Jack Hoad in *The Baptist* (London: Grace Publications Trust, 1986) "Many American Baptists claim John, the forerunner of Jesus Christ, as the first 'Baptist' and trace their beginnings from him." This is part of the tradition that places the origins of the Baptist faith in the apostles. The "landmark Movement" or "Landmarkism" are the names given to the movement in the Southern Baptist Convention that attempted to establish this "unbroken tradition" from John the Baptist. This movement is further discussed by Harold Bloom in *The American Religion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992) p. 196.

³ Farnsley, Arthur Emery II. *Southern Baptist Politics: Authority and Power in the Restructuring of An American Denomination*. (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) p. 11.

its cultural and political milieu. The dominant ethos was conservative and Protestant. As George Marsden notes in his study of fundamentalism in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, “almost all American Protestants thought of America as a Christian nation.”⁴ This was particularly true in the South and among Southern Baptists, and it remained so there for a much longer period of time.

As the cultural ascendancy of Protestant Christianity waned in the north, generating controversies between fundamentalists and modernists during the 1920’s, the south was largely unscathed by this transformation until the latter half of the twentieth century. Prior to the 1970’s, fundamentalism among Southern Baptists would have been redundant.⁵ “There were simply not enough modernists around in the Convention to generate a good fight.”⁶ That is not to say that fundamentalism did not leave an imprint on the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) of the early twentieth century. Indeed, the fundamentalists in control of the Convention today are the descendants of a movement that began in the closing years of the nineteenth century.⁷

Today, after a pitched battle spanning two decades, fundamentalists control the SBC. The term “fundamentalist” (admittedly a label subject to contention) refers to the now dominant wing of the Convention, which in 1979 began to organize around the common goals of wresting control of the Convention from the more moderate hierarchy, restoring the denomination to principles of Biblical inerrancy, and embarking on an

⁴ Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelism: 1870-1925*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 11.

⁵ Farnelsy, Arthur E. II. in *Southern Baptist Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination*. Nancy Tatom Ammerman, ed., (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993) p. 53.

⁶ Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) p. 48.

⁷ Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*. p. 62.

agenda of social and political conservatism. This conservative agenda is expressed in the attempt to restore prayer and Bible reading to public school classrooms; the teaching of creationism alongside or in place of evolution; a return to traditional families with husbands and fathers at their head; a commitment to Biblical inerrancy; support of conservative Republican political candidates for various levels of public office; and increasing support of the ecumenical anti-abortion movement. Many members of the SBC, while not identifying themselves as fundamentalists, support part or all of this agenda.

The array of theological and political positions within the SBC is complex. There are fundamentalists, conservatives, and moderates. An analysis of the term “fundamentalist,” along with a history of its development within the Southern Baptist denomination, comprise part of this project and will be developed in what follows. Conservatives in the SBC generally believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and support most, if not all, of the fundamentalist agenda. They are just less militant about the realization of their theological and/or political goals. Moderates are the disaffected minority within the contemporary SBC. They are more liberal in their theological and political views, considering the Bible to be inspired but not necessarily inerrant. Moderates are also more supportive of an increased role for women in the Convention, eschewing traditional gender roles and family values for more progressive notions. Many moderates have left the Convention, forming alternative associations in the wake of the fundamentalist takeover.

Primarily, I will explore the fundamentalist capture of the SBC as a political, rather than religious, phenomenon. A *political* analysis of the SBC is quite appropriate,

for this denomination has replaced its historical polity of democratic consensus with one “based on a model of competing interests.”⁸ The denomination has always addressed a broad range of political questions in an attempt to engage the secular world in a Christian dialogue of evangelism, but its methods have changed.

Situating the SBC historically in the realms of both Protestant faiths and politics, while including within that analysis the politics internal to the Convention itself, raises important questions about relationships between church and state, religion and politics. Of these questions, I will treat as most consequential those concerning the accommodation of fundamentalist religion within a framework of religious and civil liberties in a pluralist democracy. How, and to what degree, should we tolerate religious fundamentalism in public debates about public goods? Are there qualities intrinsic to fundamentalist religion that render it a threat to religious liberty? Is there a “secular problematic” in America through which we more readily accommodate disbelief rather than belief?⁹ Should we reconstruct secularism to include faith-based groups within the pluralist, identity-based politics of America? A primary undertaking of the more theoretical section of this dissertation will be to ascertain, through an examination of the SBC, whether this accommodation can be made when the religious beliefs concerned are of the fundamentalist variety.

Pluralism is a thread throughout the fabric of the SBC story. How has the Convention responded to a plurality of beliefs, cultures, classes, and races within the denomination and in the culture surrounding it as it faces the twenty-first century?

⁸ Ibid., p. 93.

⁹ See William E. Connally in *Why I Am Not A Secularist*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) for a discussion of the “secular problematic.”

Arthur E. Farnsley II argues that pluralism is “the crux of the issue” in the recent controversies within the SBC.¹⁰ In its recent transformation and contemporary political agenda, the SBC provides an excellent case study for the exploration of these issues.

That religion is important to politics and political science is attested to by the fact that the “politics of religious people” has been studied “from the age of John Calvin to the era of Pat Robertson.”¹¹ While the question of how religion relates to politics is not new, the increase in politically active religious fundamentalism in the United States, indeed in the world, lends a fresh urgency to the question. The fundamentalist rise to power within the SBC is a subject of contemporary scholarship across a variety of disciplines, from religious studies and theology to social science and cultural studies. This interdisciplinary breadth is reflected in what follows.

This study is in many respects a history. It is also a work of political thought, but one that is dependent upon, and indebted to, an historical approach. The aspect of this subject that makes it most interesting also makes it most challenging. The questions raised and complicated by the SBC traverse an expanse of disciplines from political science and philosophy to religious studies and American history, rendering the topic resistant to a systematic methodological approach. The initial analytical objective herein is to examine the dramatic shifts in the SBC within the wider political and cultural context of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This analysis will in turn serve as the foundation from which I will explore how Christian fundamentalism corresponds with the separation of church and state and the preservation of religious liberty in the negotiation of key public policy issues. The continuing resolution of conflict over

¹⁰ Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*. p. 140.

¹¹ Smith, Oran P. *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*. (New York: New York University Press, 1997) p. 3.

church/state separation and related issues within our nation must be informed by a thoughtful analysis of the degree to which religion, politics, and citizenship are, and should be, intertwined.

The Indelible Baptist Connection to Democracy

The SBC is especially well-suited for an analysis of fundamentalist religion and its relation to religious and civil liberties for two primary reasons, each in tension with the other. First, Baptists were some of the earliest and most committed agitators for religious liberty and tolerance in Europe and America. Second, the contemporary SBC is in the firm grip of a politically active, fundamentalist leadership known for its “ecclesiastical imperialism” and “theological totalitarianism.”¹² Whether contemporary fundamentalist Baptists differ that significantly from their liberty loving, oft-times persecuted, ancestors is a disputed question. Disaffected moderates in the Convention argue that the fundamentalist leadership has betrayed precious Baptist principles and traditions, while the leaders counter that they are simply trying to return the denomination to a doctrinal purity from which it has strayed.

When Oran Smith speaks of the “indelible Baptist connection to democracy,” he is referring to a Baptist tradition wholly compatible with some of our most cherished founding political principles.¹³ Baptist theology and polity have been centered on three tenets that have clear parallels in American political thought and history: “priesthood of the believer” or liberty of conscience; local congregational autonomy; and separation of church and state. Edgar Y. Mullins, past president of the SBC, referred to these

¹² Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 114.

¹³ Smith, Oran P. *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*. p. 6.

principles as the “spiritual analogues of our entire political system.”¹⁴ The Social Service Commission of the SBC took the occasion of a report to the Convention in 1929 to restate these principles.

Baptists have always unfalteringly stood and always will stand for the entire separation of church and state, for absolute liberty of conscience in religion and for complete freedom in politics. With all modesty and yet with just pride, Baptists can point to the fact that they have pioneered in this field, preaching, suffering and giving their lives for liberty of conscience; liberty not only for themselves, but equally for all others.¹⁵

These doctrines have been so central to the Baptist faith that a real or perceived threat to them has been the justification for most congregational splits in the evolution of the denomination. But the paradigmatic shift in Convention theology and polity in the latter decades of the twentieth century represents a significant compromise of these principles from within the church itself. To what can we attribute this institutional self-contradiction? Here we have a denomination fundamentally and paradoxically transformed through remarkable changes in its politics and preaching. The contradictory but stable equilibrium between Biblical authority and interpretive freedom, maintained for centuries of Baptist history and tradition, seems to have been resolved in favor of the former. Also lost in the slide has been the unique Baptist commitment to religious liberty, tolerance, and separation of church and state.

During the colonial and founding era, Baptists were among the most fervent advocates of religious freedom. In fact, Baptists were judged to be radicals due to their

¹⁴ Mullins, Edgar Y. *Axioms of Religion, A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith*. (Philadelphia, 1908) Quoted in John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972) p. 76.

¹⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1929*, p. 273.

insistence on soul competency and absolute separation of church and state.¹⁶ As “natural allies of Jefferson and Madison” they “strongly supported constitutional protections of religious freedom.”¹⁷ Ellen Rosenberg clearly draws this connection between the Bill of Rights and early Baptists.

It was in this period that Baptists left their lasting mark on the design of the American polity. Young James Madison saw an imprisoned Baptist minister preaching the Gospel through a jail window, and his horror of such persecution became part of the background of the First Amendment. Baptist John Leland, a Massachusetts man who spent fifteen years in Virginia during and after the Revolution, was a vigorous preacher of freedom of religion and reinforced Madison’s views.¹⁸

Echoing that argument, Nancy Ammerman contends that Baptists were “the most prominent champions of the principle of religious liberty” in the founding era.¹⁹

If the Southern Baptist tradition of dissent and resistance to imposed doctrine, creedalism, and hierarchical leadership makes the polity and politics of today’s SBC perplexing, perhaps we can better understand the denomination’s seeming abandonment of its founding principles by examining the development of those tenets over time. There is, perhaps, an important qualification to the concept of religious liberty as it developed in Baptist theology and ecclesiology. In reaffirming their historic position on religious liberty and restating their commitment to the right of every individual to believe “according to the dictates of his own conscience,” Southern Baptists connect this

¹⁶ Eighmy, John Lee. *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972) p. 8.

¹⁷ Fowler, Robert Booth, Allen D. Hertzke, And Laura R. Olson, eds. *Religion and Politics in America: Faith, Culture, & Strategic Choices*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 9-10.

¹⁸ Rosenberg, Ellen. *The Southern Baptist: A Subculture in Transition*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989) pp. 23 and 143.

¹⁹ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 21.

prerogative to “the right to evangelize and teach.”²⁰ The Convention’s definition of religious liberty is as follows:

By this we mean, and must mean, not only freedom of individual worship and fellowship without interference by the state; but we mean also *specifically and insistently* the right of propaganda through evangelism, education, and the development of Christian institutions.²¹

It is true that Southern Baptists cherished the voluntary principle, that unique American version of religious and political affiliation as it was remarked on by Tocqueville. But one must, when discussing the Southern Baptist concept of religious liberty, remember that while decrying the autocracy of hierarchical organizations, denominational leaders believed that through right reasoning, all would come to agree. It is only when that consensus began to deteriorate that a group of leaders within the Convention moved the organization toward a more hierarchical form. But perhaps we should go back further still, to the organization of the SBC.

Conceived in Sin

A split occasioned the birth of the SBC from northern Baptists over the issue of slavery and a marginally related question of ecclesiology. The Georgia Baptist Executive Committee submitted the name of a slaveholder, James E. Reeve, for appointment as a missionary for the Home Missionary Society. The Executive Board of the Society refused his appointment. Alabama Baptists responded by demanding from the General Convention’s Executive Board a statement that slaveholders were eligible for appointments as missionaries and agents. The Board’s response was that no slaveholder

²⁰ *Annual of the SBC, 1944*, pp. 137 and 150.

²¹ *Annual of the SBC, 1946*, p. 38. (emphasis added)

would be permitted to serve as long as they continued to hold slaves as property.²²

Southern Baptists responded by claiming that the missionary society did not “have the right to judge the moral character and Christian integrity of the slaveholders, when, as a matter of fact...these prerogatives belong only to a local church.”²³

As the abolitionist movement was intensifying in the north, Baptist religion in the south was still very much that of a “frontier church [that] operated in such a way as to establish and maintain white male hierarchy.”²⁴ In addition to defending the institution of slavery, Baptists in the south were growing increasingly resentful of the intrusion of outsiders in matters of church polity and discipline. The decision of the General Convention’s Executive Board was seen as just such an intrusion. But, Southern Baptist mythology notwithstanding, the issues of ecclesiology and states’ rights should not obscure from view the real cause of the split between northern and southern Baptists. “Slavery was the main issue that led to the 1845 schism; that is a blunt historical fact.”²⁵

Two meetings speak volumes about the connection between Southern Baptists and the slavery issue. The first, convened in Augusta, Georgia, in the spring of 1845, “incorporated and made a body politic” the Southern Baptist Convention. This body was “for the purpose of eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the Baptist Denomination of Christians, for the propagation of the gospel.”²⁶ This act of

²² Baker, Robert A. *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People 1607-1972*. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974) pp. 158-159. Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 15.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 171

²⁴ Flint, Wayne. *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998) p. 35.

²⁵ McBeth, H. Leon. *The Baptist Heritage*. (Nashville: Broadman, 1987) p. 382.

²⁶ *The Annual of the SBC, 1976*. p. 5.

incorporation was a direct response to the northern Baptist repudiation of slavery. The second, the “initial meeting of the South Carolina Secession Convention,” took place in the First Baptist Church of Columbia.”²⁷ Only after meeting in the Baptist church did the delegates then travel to Charleston to secede formally from the union.

During the Civil War, Southern Baptist congregations provided the bulk of soldiers to the Confederate army. This may be one of the reasons that “the defeat of the Confederacy left a deeper and more indelible scar upon the Southern Baptist psyche than upon that of the other denominations involved.”²⁸ Southern Baptist historian Bill Leonard argues that one cannot understand the real identity of Southern Baptists “apart from the surrender at Appomattox.”²⁹ Despite the defeat however, the Southern Baptist Convention scored a spiritual victory by remaining steadfastly committed to the principles of the Confederacy and emerged as the established church of the south. It is, and has been for some time, the “southern American religion.”³⁰

From its birth in 1845, the SBC embarked on a journey of evangelism and institution building that resulted in the cultural hegemony it has enjoyed for the better part of a century in the south. With astounding success, Southern Baptists applied the “Great Commission” found in Matthew 28:19, “Go ye therefore to all nations and make them my disciples; baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” When the SBC was formed it was “superimposed upon [existing] state and local

²⁷ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 21.

²⁸ Copeland, E. Luther. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgment of History: The Taint of an Original Sin*. (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1995) pp. 13-14.

²⁹ Leonard, Bill. *God's Last and Only Hope*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) p. 13.

³⁰ Bloom, Harold. *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992). p. 192.

bodies.” Local churches were already affiliated through district and state organizations. Several of these supported schools and colleges. Many published periodicals with significant circulation. And “[a]lthough no formal ecclesiastical ties united the three organizational levels, they recognized an interdependence from the first, resulting in much practical cooperation and a strong sense of solidarity.”³¹

As the denomination grew, it underwent a centralization of power and leadership. As Robert Baker characterizes the nature of the SBC, it is “centripetal,” tending to “pull all denominational activities into its structure.”³² In addition to the emerging development of church polity, the Convention steadily expanded its membership. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, in the period from 1877 to 1917 the Convention grew at a rate of 5.22% while the population of the southern states grew at a rate of 3.27%.³³ This is not surprising when one considers that the SBC has historically placed as much emphasis on domestic evangelism as on foreign missions. When considering the SBC during its first eighty years of existence, the more remarkable characteristics of the denomination are its growth, cultural ascendancy in the South, and its internal harmony. It is only in the 1920s that we begin to see the potential for, if not the actual existence of, disharmony within the Convention or between it and its political and cultural environment.

Darwinism in the SBC

The decade of the 1920s is important in the evolution of the SBC. Only then did modernism, and all that it implied—Darwinism, higher criticism of the Bible, urbanism,

³¹ Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 17.

³² Baker. *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People*. p. 345.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 338

and immigration—finally threaten the old-world establishment of the denomination. Among the reasons for the late arrival of Darwinism, higher criticism, and the fundamentalism they inspired is that the SBC was a relatively new denomination. After spending the years prior to the Civil War in building their Convention, they spent the years of Reconstruction rebuilding their society. In addition, “in the late 1800s Southern Baptists presented an almost unrelieved front of orthodoxy.”³⁴ But just because modernism finally threatened the SBC early in the twentieth century does not mean that the Convention was weakened. In fact, the denomination’s knees neither buckled nor bent. As Samuel S. Hill puts it, the SBC engaged in a little “muscle-flexing” in the context of a changing south. The Convention saw itself as a city on the hill, a new “Puritan New England.”

The sense of a unique mission arose. Vigorous denominational loyalty emerged. A kind of religious-cultural ethnocentrism emanated from the 1920s in which success, centralization, and confidence were evident traits.³⁵

Within the denomination there was little disagreement over issues that were beginning to challenge orthodoxy outside the Convention. Southern Baptists were politically conservative, anti-Darwinist, Biblically literal, and to a large extent premillennialist—believing that Christ would return to earth before the thousand year reign of good over evil. There was little left to debate and dissent was met with a high degree of intolerance. The conservatism of the SBC at this time was related to the southernness of its members. “[R]eligious conservatism was directly tied to cultural conservatism....The preservation of evangelical religion went hand-in-hand with the preservation of the Southern way of

³⁴ Thompson, James J. Jr. *Tried as by Fire: Southern Baptists and the Religious Controversies of the 1920's*. (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1982). pp. 64-65.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Forward by Samuel S. Hill, p. xv.

life.”³⁶ Southern Baptists of this era were politically, socially, and theologically conservative.

Southern Baptists of the 1920s confronted the specter of modernism with a unified front. They saw themselves as missionaries endeavoring to build “a superstructure for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity.”³⁷ In these efforts they addressed home life, government and politics, education, temperance, and law and order. The seriousness with which they approached these subjects is telling. In the 1920 Home Mission Board’s report on “Christian Education,” Southern Baptists argued that “[o]ur very civilization is on trial.”³⁸

The home was considered by Southern Baptists to be the most important institution in society. Because of the effect evolutionary theories would have on the Genesis account of creation, Darwinism was seen as a threat to Christian morality and the institutions of marriage and the family.³⁹ The Biblical account of Adam and Eve was incommensurable with evolutionary theory. This, coupled with the progressive loosening of traditional moral strictures, caused great concern in the SBC of the early twentieth century. Changing gender roles and rising divorce rates were issues the Convention felt compelled to address. In 1920, the Committee on Temperance and Social Service bemoaned the increase in divorces and argued that it was a matter “of gravest concern [to] all who give serious thought to the problems of our civilization and social order.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. pp. 103 and 179.

³⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1920*. p. 366.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

³⁹ Thompson. *Tried as by Fire*. pp. 108-109.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4.

In 1921 the Convention recommended the strengthening of divorce laws to bring them in line with the teachings of the Bible.⁴¹ Of course, as is perhaps true of some Convention leaders at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there was surely in the hearts of some leaders a desire to return the Convention and the South to the simpler and more hierarchical Antebellum patterns of behavior and relationships, particularly concerning gender roles.

Southern Baptists have spent over a century concerning themselves with the proper role of women, in the church, in the home, and in society. There is great complexity and not a little irony in the relationship between women and religion in the SBC in the early twentieth century. The second Great Awakening, the rise of women's missionary organizations, and the role of women in the temperance movement created opportunities for the expansion of women's roles.⁴² But the religion that would liberate them would also bind, and that is the direction in which the SBC moved in attempting to police the public and private morality of women in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the sphere of education, the SBC in these decades was predominantly concerned with Darwinism. Whether or not they were part of the turn-of-the-century fundamentalist movement, "virtually all Southern Baptists rejected...Darwinism."⁴³ In 1922 the Committee on the Report of the Education Board addressed the problem of science and faith in the classroom.

It is our profound conviction that no man [can] believe both the Bible and the accepted theory of evolution as set out in the textbooks. One can

⁴¹ *Annual of the SBC, 1921*, p. 82.

⁴² Flint, *Alabama Baptists*, p. 39.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

understand both the Bible and evolution and believe one of them, but he cannot understand both and believe both.⁴⁴

Education was, and still is, a vital concern to Southern Baptists. Before the birth of the SBC, district and state associations sponsored schools, colleges, and seminaries. As the Convention grew, so did this part of its mission. Further, Southern Baptists historically have been staunch defenders of the public school system, believing that the education of young people would eventually lead to the spread of the Baptist faith around the world through evangelism and right reasoning.⁴⁵

This denomination, historically committed to separation of church and state, found little difficulty in forswearing its tradition of removal from politics and public policy when the subject was schools. In his 1923 presidential address to the Convention, E. Y. Mullins protested the “imposition” of the theory of evolution on children in “denominational or *public* schools.” Although Mullins defended the role of science in the investigation of the origins of life, he took issue with the teaching of “mere hypotheses as facts.”⁴⁶

The Education Board of the SBC reported in 1923 that science faculties in Baptist schools were “loyal to the Baptist interpretation of the truth” and, in the following year, recommended a legislative committee to monitor bills and issues that might affect church schools.⁴⁷ While Baptists primarily concerned themselves with whether evolutionary theory had infected their denominational schools, they also vigorously protested the growing presence of Darwinism in the public institutions that schooled their children.

⁴⁴ *Annual of the SBC*, 1922. p. 35.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

⁴⁶ *Annual of the SBC*, 1923. pp. 19-20. (emphasis added)

⁴⁷ *Annual of the SBC*, 1923. p. 31 and *Annual of the SBC*, 1924. p. 30.

With the growing influence of Darwinism and higher scholarly criticism in Biblical studies, Southern Baptists involved themselves in the politics of education as never before. In fact, the emergence of fundamentalism in the SBC of the early twentieth century was a reaction to these issues. But it was, in many respects, an unnecessary and misplaced reaction. Most Southern Baptists shared orthodox beliefs when it came to the Bible and its account of creation, so much so, that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the fundamentalist elements of the SBC during this period and their conservative counterparts. As previously stated, fundamentalism in the Convention of this era was, for all intents and purposes, superfluous. Southern Baptists were in general agreement on a broad range of issues. Even though some members of the denomination applied scholarly criticism to their Biblical studies and perhaps even embraced the theory of evolution, most of them “staunchly opposed modernism” and saw themselves as conservative believers in evangelical Protestantism.⁴⁸

Southern Baptists, cast in the role of southern fundamentalists, were largely discredited following the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee. H. L. Mencken played no small part in their demise.⁴⁹ Mencken portrayed the forces of fundamentalism, as indeed some of them surely were, as rural, less-educated, and fervently religious folk who saw themselves besieged by the evil influences of modernism and urbanism. But Mencken painted them in caricature and this, perhaps, they did not deserve. Baptist antievolutionists based their opposition to the scientific theory on three principles. First, Darwinism undermined orthodox Christianity. Second, Baptists were troubled by the

⁴⁸ Thompson. *Tried as by Fire*. p. 82.

⁴⁹ Marsden has an excellent discussion of Mencken's role in the shaping of public opinion during and after the Scopes trial in Fundamentalism and American Culture, pp. 184-189. See also H. L. Mencken, *Prejudices: Fifth Series*. (New York, 1926).

relationship between evolution and their moral standards, which were linked to the Biblical account of creation and man's fall from the Edenic state of innocence. Finally, they "objected to Darwinism on scientific grounds."⁵⁰ It is particularly in this latter objection that the Baptists entered the public conversation ill prepared for debate. Southern Baptist antievolutionists discredited their stance against the theory by wading in over their heads concerning the scientific plausibility of the theory.⁵¹ It is not that there were no Baptists capable of informing themselves and arguing the merits of the case intelligently. It is simply that the spokesmen representing the denomination had not done their homework, leading Walter Lippmann to conclude that "the movement is recruited largely from the isolated, the inexperienced, and the uneducated."⁵² This location of the Baptist leadership in the rural and intellectual "wilderness" contributed to the depiction of the fundamentalist controversy as a battle between urban progressives and country rubes. Further, it was almost as if southern fundamentalists became the very caricatures that Mencken portrayed, developing a deep mistrust of reason and the intellect. Even today, the self-conscious anti-intellectualism of the fundamentalist leadership has resulted in what Harold Bloom refers to as a takeover by "know-nothings masking as fundamentalists."⁵³

Darwinism was not the only tempest to roil the seas of Southern Baptist tranquility in the 1920s and 1930s. Southern Baptists confronted a changing world in which many were dislocated by economic forces beyond their control. The temperance

⁵⁰ Thompson. *Tried as by Fire*. p. 103.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 110.

⁵² Lippmann, Walter. *A Preface to Morals* (New York, 1929) p. 32.

⁵³ Bloom. *The American Religion*. p. 46.

movement, immigration, and the fall-out from World War I were all issues that the Convention addressed through preaching and practice. The 1920 Convention opened with a letter to the delegates from President Woodrow Wilson, in which he affirmed the importance of the Convention's "utterances" and the scope of its influence.⁵⁴ The SBC took this influence quite seriously and, in earnest, attempted to address the social and spiritual ills of the day.

The Social Gospel

The attempts to deal with social issues raised inevitable questions about the scriptural basis of the social gospel within the conservative denomination. Southern Baptists formed a Commission on Social Service in 1913 and the body immediately began to address a host of social justice issues from hunger and economic displacement to temperance and divorce. In 1923 the SBC's Commission on Social Service argued that the "social" and "civic" gospel came directly from the New Testament and that "social and moral reform contribute largely to soul-winning." The Commission members saw no distinction between the work of evangelism and the assistance rendered to those who would receive the gospel. In fact, they pointed to an "obligation of service" as the accompaniment to real evangelism. One could not, they reported, be "a good well-rounded Christian...or Baptist, without believing in and practicing social service."⁵⁵ Just the year before, in 1922, Southern Baptists opened a free clinic in El Paso to serve an indigent population suffering with tuberculosis. And in 1921, the Report of the Foreign Mission Board recounted the significant amount of relief work engaged in throughout the

⁵⁴ *Annual of the SBC, 1920*, p. 41.

⁵⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1923*, p. 101.

year, noting that “[t]he cause of Christ will...receive large spiritual dividends upon these investments in human, physical relief.”⁵⁶ This is not to say that the engagement of social issues was uniformly accepted throughout the Convention. There were those who strenuously argued that the denomination should be concerning itself with the winning of souls and nothing else. The considerable support for this belief within the Convention is one reason why the Commission on Social Service often went to great lengths to explain the importance of the issues it addressed and to affirm that they were in no way attempting to replace the work of evangelism. As late as 1944, thirty-one years after its formation, the Commission on Social Service still felt compelled to justify its existence and mission, arguing that the remedies for social problems “must not be left to secular or political interests.”⁵⁷

For the early years of its existence the Commission on Social Service concentrated much of its efforts on temperance. Although the Commission disavowed involvement in partisan politics, its 1924 report states that “Southern Baptists will not support for president any candidate who is wet, or about whose Americanism there can be any question.”⁵⁸ The issues of temperance and “Americanism” are not grouped accidentally there. In the post-war world, the threat of a militaristic Germany had been neutralized and concern was redirected toward immigration, particularly the immigration of Catholics from Europe. Their bigotry is not veiled in the least by their statement of support for an immigration bill which “will greatly reduce the number of aliens admitted

⁵⁶ *Annual of the SBC, 1921*. p. 202.

⁵⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1944*. p. 130.

⁵⁸ *Annual of the SBC, 1924*. p. 116.

to our shores and will admit a larger percentage of the better class from the more enlightened and advanced nations of Northern Europe.”⁵⁹

The SBC ventured beyond the issue of immigration policy into global politics and affirmed the responsibility of America in the stewardship of post-war Europe. In the same year the Commission voiced the Convention’s fear about immigration, the denomination adopted the following resolution against war and for the League of Nations.

We have experienced deep disappointment over our nation not taking definite steps to enter into the world’s greatest cooperative effort to safeguard peace, the League of Nations...Surely some internationally approved police force could safeguard peace by keeping in check war-inclined nations.⁶⁰

Bringing the focus back to domestic politics in 1926, the Commission on Social Service denounced corruption in public office and offered support for child labor legislation. It is interesting to note that, with all the rhetorical engagement of politics and governmental affairs, the Convention and its various committees and commissions were always careful to renounce involvement in partisan politics—while often, in the same breath, tacitly endorsing candidates for public office. The following is from a Report of the Commission on Service titled “At the Polls.” It is quoted at length because it so thoroughly demonstrates the Southern Baptist view of the Christian’s responsibility to participate in the selection of public officials.

With partisan politics a great Christian body like ours cannot properly concern itself but with the great moral issues of law and order and of the protection of the weak against the avarice and greed of the strong we may well be deeply concerned. We may well lay it upon the hearts and

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 117.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

consciences of all our citizens to meet squarely their obligation and to support for nomination and for election to office only such men as are unalterably committed to the enforcement of law and to the enactment of any and all laws that may be found necessary for the protection of the peace, health, and morals of the people and for the highest and best interests of the state and nation. This we ought to do. This we will do for every office from constable to president.⁶¹

It is accurate, to an extent, to believe that the Commission is genuinely speaking for the Convention when renouncing “partisan” politics. The denomination was at this time governing itself on a consensus-model of democracy and there was no partisanship to speak of within the Convention. But a rejection of partisanship is not a removal from politics, at least not in the minds of Southern Baptists early in the twentieth century.

One of the abiding concerns of the Commission on Social Service, and the Convention at large, was citizenship. Denomination members were encouraged to consider candidates for public office based on their “intelligence and character.”⁶² Reports and resolutions during this period were carefully worded to avoid identification with particular parties or candidates, urging instead the prayerful exercise of citizenship and support of government, which in their view was ordained by God.⁶³ This concern with citizenship reflects the Southern Baptist belief that a Christian must be the same person in the religious and political spheres. In fact, those two spheres are coterminous. As individuals and as a collective body, Southern Baptists saw themselves as being endowed with the right to express their judgment “concerning matters involving the public morals and the public good.”⁶⁴ Further, denomination leaders preached the

⁶¹ *Annual of the SBC*, 1926. p. 113.

⁶² *Annual of the SBC*, 1927. p. 117.

⁶³ *Annual of the SBC*, 1929. p. 273.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

Christian obligation to exercise this right.

When one considers the Southern Baptist premium on evangelism in the exercise of religious liberty, along with their version of the social gospel, it is not so difficult to understand the evolution of the denomination into one that today participates in politics at a level that is disconcerting to those who would have politics purged of religion.

The whole spirit of Christ calls us to accept the responsibility of being in the world and not to leave the social problems of our day to the wisdom of men who know not the redemptive purpose and moral ideals of Jesus Christ...it is the task of every Baptist and every Baptist church to invoke the moral standards of Christ and to introduce into social relations those attitudes and principles that will move our society in his direction.⁶⁵

In 1954 the Commission on Social Service, perhaps the victim of its endorsement of the social gospel in a conservative denomination, was renamed the Christian Life Commission and its focus shifted somewhat to issues of the family and individual behavior. Finally, in 1997, the Commission was renamed yet again, this time as the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. In its contemporary incarnation the Commission reflects the fundamentalist ethos of the denomination's leadership.

The Great Commission

It is telling that, in the early days of the SBC's existence, the first two major boards organized were the Foreign and Home Mission Boards. Evangelism was, and still is, a foundational part of the Southern Baptist identity and calling. It is, as Southern Baptists were reminded in the 1944 annual meeting, "soul-winning;" that is the "primary obligation of all Believers, both individual and collective."⁶⁶ In a twist of the historical facts, the Foreign Mission Board reported in 1945 that the "primary motive for the

⁶⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1945*. p. 93.

⁶⁶ *Annual of the SBC, 1944*. p. 78.

organization of the Southern Convention was the yearning to give the gospel to all the lost peoples of earth.”⁶⁷ The success of SBC missions is evident in the size of the denomination today. What began in colonial America as a small band of dissenters is now the largest Protestant denomination in the country with 15.8 million members. Early in this century the Home Mission Board celebrated the reach of its missions into “well nigh every phase of the cultural life of the South.”⁶⁸ This extension into the every day lives of Southern residents is responsible for the cultural ascendancy of the denomination in the South. Combined with the delayed arrival of modernism in the South, the cultural hegemony of the Southern Baptist way of life explains why fundamentalism was simply unnecessary in the SBC until the latter third of the twentieth century.

The self-appointed task of the Convention was, and is, the “evangelization of the homeland and the mobilization of the evangelized for world conquest for Christ.”⁶⁹ The SBC has, in recent years, been much criticized for its attempts to evangelize Jews, both in the United States and in Israel. This is not a new phenomenon, for Southern Baptists were working “among the Jews” as early as 1921 and at the annual Conventions received from their Home Mission Board reports on the success of this work. There is perhaps cause to be concerned about the evangelism of the SBC, for it is not just Jews who are to be evangelized, but everyone, until we have a Christian nation.

Every province of our thinking, every area of our lives, every region of our relation to others and of others’ relations to us must be taken for Christ. The whole life of the nation through its entire civilization must be brought under the sovereignty of Christ.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *Annual of the SBC*, 1945. p. 140.

⁶⁸ *Annual of the SBC*, 1927. p. 48.

⁶⁹ *Annual of the SBC*, 1944. p. 279.

⁷⁰ *Annual of the SBC*, 1946. p. 308.

This call to Christianize America was issued, not in the 1990s, but in 1946, lending some credence to the claim by contemporary fundamentalists in the SBC that they are simply attempting to restore the denomination to its historic principles.

Church and State

While historically committed to separation of church and state, Southern Baptists have viewed the relationship between the two in much the way the Federalists envisioned the relationship between the separate branches of government. Separation did not mean that church and state existed in isolated, unrelated spheres. Instead, they existed “side by side” and each influenced the other.⁷¹ Ideally for Southern Baptists, however, the influence moved in a more unilateral direction, with the church having impact on the state rather than the other way around.⁷² Southern Baptists saw the “criticism of government and public social practices” as their “Christian duty in a democratic order.”⁷³

It was not the state that needed protection from religion, but the other way around for denominational members. There was much in the history of the Baptist faith to give Southern Baptists reason to fear the involvement of the state in matters of faith. There are, sprinkled throughout Convention Annuals and literature, reminders that early Baptists suffered state persecution to the point of giving their lives to practice their religion.

As a fledgling denomination, Southern Baptists committed themselves to the historic principle of separation of church and state. In the 1929 Convention Annual,

⁷¹ *Annual of the SBC*, 1929, p. 275.

⁷² Flint, *Alabama Baptists*, pp. 420-421.

⁷³ *Annual of the SBC*, 1944, p. 130.

separation is described as a “priceless heritage...purchased largely by the preaching and suffering of the Baptists.”⁷⁴ But as the denomination grew, so grew its involvement in matters of politics and government. By the 1940s, the Convention was fully immersed in the politics of federal aid to religious institutions. Its involvement here can not, nor should it be, disassociated from the extreme anti-Catholicism within the denomination at the time. So committed to absolute separation were Southern Baptists (and so fearful of the spread of Catholicism through parochial schools) that they actually “rejected federal aid, even to the financial detriment of their own institutions. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that in their attempts to keep government funds out of private schools, Southern Baptists were attempting to maintain a rigidly secular public school system. Denomination members, particularly in the old South, could count on their public schools to teach the Ten Commandments and to encourage prayer—Christian prayer—in their classrooms. The world of the Southern Baptist was not a secularized world.”⁷⁵ Far from it.

The wall between church and state had many gates, and Southern Baptists supported only those that swung in the direction of their choosing. As society around them became more secularized, they were more willing to step further and further into the domain of public policy and government. But secularization was quite late in coming to the South and, until it did, Southern Baptists enjoyed a cultural hegemony that allowed them to oppose the mixture of church and state vehemently, resting assured that their politics and governmental institutions were infused with the spirituality of the region. Additionally, it would seem that Southern Baptists employed a selective memory when it

⁷⁴ *Annual of the SBC, 1929*. p. 274.

⁷⁵ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 50.

came to the history of separation of church and state in their denomination. At the turn of the twentieth century, finding old methods of church discipline no longer effective in controlling the behavior of society, Alabama Baptists “increasingly sought to impose their moral values on Alabama society by law.”⁷⁶ John Lee Eighmy tells us that this was not limited to Baptists in that state, but that across the south, Baptists attempted to impose moral order on the community at large.⁷⁷

Nowhere is the change in Southern Baptist views on church/state separation more evident than in the field of education policy. When immigration and the resulting increase of American Catholics was prominent in the denomination’s agenda, strict separation was the rule. From the 1920s and 30s through the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the SBC took strong stands against federal aid to parochial schools. The 1961 Convention adopted as its first resolution a message urging the Federal Government to refrain from providing “tax support for church operated schools” and identified the source of this support as an “aggressive” Roman Catholic leadership.⁷⁸ Although successive resolutions may not have explicitly designated Catholicism as the intended target of the action, the message was implicit. We find the Convention resolving over and over again to protest any tax proposals that would provide public funds for religious schools and groups. Of course, Southern Baptists in the south could count on *their* public schools to assist in the inculcation of Southern Baptist values in their children. When that began to change, so too did the historic stance on church/state separation. Once, in 1982, the same

⁷⁶ Flint. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 228.

⁷⁷ Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 48.

⁷⁸ *Annual of the SBC, 1961*. p. 80.

year that they resolved to oppose tuition tax credits for religious schools, Southern Baptists were also resolving to support prayer and the teaching of “scientific creationism” in public school classrooms.⁷⁹ Finally, the transformation is complete, when in 1991, the SBC completely reversed its earlier position and adopted a resolution in support of tuition tax credits for education.⁸⁰

One other area of church/state concern to Southern Baptists was the appointment of an Ambassador to the Vatican. For many denomination members, though certainly not all, opposition to such a post was not the result of anti-Catholic bias. Baptist roots are firmly planted in the soil of the Reformation. Prior to the tightening of denominational reins that has occurred in the last two decades, it would have been difficult to find a faith less “Catholic” in its polity. The Baptist principles of priesthood of the believer, congregational autonomy, and separation of church and state find their antitheses in Catholic ecclesiology.

In addition to opposition to envoys to the Vatican, there was one other issue over which the Baptist antipathy to Catholicism surface: the campaign and eventual election of John F. Kennedy to the presidency. In a resolution on Christian citizenship, Southern Baptists in 1960 addressed the election.

We reaffirm our conviction that a man must be free to choose his own church and that his personal religious faith shall not be a test of his qualification for public office. Yet, when a public official is inescapably bound by the dogma and demands of his church he cannot consistently separate himself from these. This is especially true when the church maintains a position in open conflict with our established and constituted American pattern of life as specifically related to religious liberty, separation of church and state, the freedom of conscience in matters

⁷⁹ *Annual of the SBC, 1982*. pp. 58-59 and 63.

⁸⁰ *Annual of the SBC, 1991*. pp. 81-82.

related to marriage and the family, the perpetuation of public schools, and the prohibition against the use of public monies for sectarian purposes.⁸¹

There can be no more clear statement of Southern Baptist anti-Catholicism than is found here. After further stating concern for the ability of a candidate to exercise independent thought in office, the resolution concludes with a reminder to pray for candidates and to exercise the rights of citizenship.

It was out of the concern for church/state separation that Southern Baptists formed the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA) in 1956. This committee, one that combined representatives from several Baptist denominations, was to represent the Baptist view before governing bodies whenever an issue of concern to the Convention presented itself. The Committee was to negotiate or communicate with government “whenever Baptist principles [were] involved in, or...jeopardized through governmental action.”⁸² It is a bit ironic that this committee, created primarily to defend historic principles of church/state separation, was essentially a lobbying firm. Perhaps it is simply an affirmation of the inseparability of religion and politics, as well as an acknowledgment of the uneasy relationship between church and state.

The fortune of the BJCPA, like the annual resolutions on education issues, is a useful barometer of the changing pressures the SBC brought to bear on church/state issues. For years the BJCPA gave voice to Southern Baptist collective opinion. For years there was broad agreement about just what that opinion was on a broad range of issues. But as the Convention was taken over by the fundamentalist leadership, and the historic Baptist adherence to strict separation of church and state was threatened from

⁸¹ *Annual of the SBC, 1960*. Resolution No. 4.

⁸² *Annual of the SBC, 1956*. p. 64.

within the SBC, the BJCPA refused to toe the line. The Committee would not support a school prayer amendment, nor would it oppose the Civil Rights Restoration Act.⁸³ The BJCPA was eventually penalized for maintaining its historic commitment to separation of church and state, as the Convention was moving in a different direction. The Committee was viewed as too liberal by the fundamentalist leadership. Southern Baptists cut the funding to the BJCPA in 1989 and, finally, in 1991 eliminated funding from the Convention's cooperative fund. It is interesting to note that this move actually benefited the BJCPA in an unexpected way. It gave disaffected moderates the opportunity to channel funds to an agency at odds with the fundamentalist leadership. The year following their first funding reduction, the Committee had one of its best fiscal years ever.⁸⁴

Faith and Message

A Statement of Faith and Message for Southern Baptists was originally an expression of the extant "consensus of opinion" regarding the fundamentals of their faith. It is the closest thing to a creed that this non-creedal denomination has. The first such statement, a response to a changing world in which the supernaturalism of Christianity was being challenged by the naturalism of science, was adopted at the Convention in 1925 with the following explanation:

We do not regard them as complete statements of our faith having any quality of finality or infallibility...As in the past so in the future Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time...Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience.⁸⁵

⁸³ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. pp. 240-241.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 242-243 and Farnsley. *Southern Baptist Politics*. p. 34.

⁸⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1925*. p. 71.

The first Faith and Message Statement was, in some ways, a concession to the early fundamentalist movement within the Convention. It was an attempt to bring calm to a denomination agitated, if only slightly, by early fundamentalists who threatened the consensus of the SBC.

The Convention has adopted a Statement of Faith and Message only two other times in its 155-year existence, the second time in 1963 and the last, in the year 2000. There are changes in the Statement over time and these are instructive for one who wishes to understand something about the drift of the Convention from conservatism into fundamentalism. A letter from Adrian Rodgers, chairman of the committee that drafted the new Statement, prefaces the most recent Statement, adopted by the Convention meeting in Orlando, Florida in June 2000. In it he explains why it is necessary at this time to restate the denomination's faith and doctrine

Our generation faces the reality of a postmodern culture, complete with rampant relativism and the denial of absolute truth. A pervasive secularism has infected our society and its corrosive effects are evident throughout the life of our nation. Moral decay and assaults upon cherished truths dominate the arena in which we must now minister, and to which we must now proclaim the Gospel.⁸⁶

That justification leaves little doubt that a committee largely staffed by fundamentalists has drafted the latest Statement. So while the first Statement was adopted in order to mollify fundamentalists, the latest one is the crowning moment in their two decade long attempt to control the Convention. This point cannot be overemphasized. The place of fundamentalist theology and church polity in the SBC is codified by the new Faith & Message statement.

⁸⁶ Baptist Faith & Message. From the Chairman of the Committee on the Baptist Faith and Message. http://www.sbc.net/2000_report.html, p. 1.

The first section of the Statements deals with the Scriptures. The most readily apparent change from the previous two documents is the statement, "Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy." This reflects the current fundamentalist leaderships' belief in the absolute infallibility of the Bible. It is interesting that the previous two statements characterized the Scriptures as truth "without any mixture of error"⁸⁷ and that this, apparently, did not communicate infallibility clearly enough. The 1963 Statement was adopted in response to a controversy over a Bible commentary authored by a seminary professor at Midwestern Seminary. Ralph Elliot's Genesis commentary sparked a revolution of sorts, one that smoldered for the better part of two decades in the form of a burgeoning fundamentalist movement, because it challenged the literal interpretation of the Genesis story.

Tellingly, the next most significant change in the texts of the three Statements is under the heading "Man" and the latest version addresses gender. It states that "[t]he gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation."⁸⁸ As will be argued in what follows, gender is one of the primary battlegrounds on which the fundamentalist/moderate battle has been waged in the contemporary SBC. In fact, the struggles over family norms and gender roles have been some of the most intense throughout the controversy. The fundamentalist leadership has mobilized to oppose the ordination of women, to advocate the submission of wives to their husbands, and to promote a return to traditional gender roles.

A second battleground in the fundamentalist controversy of the SBC has been the intellectual leadership of the denomination's colleges and seminaries. The

⁸⁷ Baptist Faith & Message. http://www.Sbc.net/2000_report.html. p. 5.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

fundamentalist leadership began, through the control of trustee boards, to remove those about whom there could be any doubt regarding loyalty to the fundamentalist cause. The justification for such action is given denominational approval in the adoption of the new Faith and Message Statement. About Southern Baptist education it says:

In Christian education there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility. Freedom in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute. The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college or seminary is limited by the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.⁸⁹

Interestingly, this section of the Statement is unchanged from the 1963 version. It is simply that it has taken on new meaning under the fundamentalist leadership and their strategies of control.

The next section with significant changes is one with an intriguing history. In the 1925 Statement, we find a section on “Social Service.” Addressing those issues most often covered by the denomination’s Commission on Social Service, the section reads like a brief statement of the social gospel. Christians are exhorted to minister to those less fortunate, providing for their needs and to bring all elements of social life “under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love.” The 1963 version has a new title, “The Christian and the Social Order” and a new ethos. The same problems are to be addressed, but the emphasis is on personal salvation—a step away from the social gospel. Finally, in the 2000 version, we find the 1963 emphasis on individual regeneration with another change. Before attending to the “orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick” in the new version, the drafters of the Statement urge Southern Baptists to oppose “all forms of sexual immorality, including

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

adultery, homosexuality, and pornography.” And there is one more change. The anti-abortion activism of the fundamentalist leadership is evident in the addition of a statement on “behalf of the unborn.”⁹⁰

Thus, the 1963 and 2000 Statements address an institution that, in the minds of Southern Baptists in 1925, needed no such attention or support—the family. There is very little significant change in the 2000 Statement when compared to the previous one. As is the case with the section on Christian education, the difference seems to be in the attempts to enforce the Statement as a denominational test of faith rather than a statement of belief. According to Ellen Rosenberg, the “battle for control of the norms of family structure is almost obsessive in its intensity.”⁹¹

The three Faith and Message Statements serve as useful measures in charting the course of fundamentalism in the SBC. In 1925 a very conservative denomination faced and withstood a fundamentalist challenge from within its own ranks. The Statement of that year can be taken as an indicator of genuine consensus. In 1963 the Convention once again faced controversy in the form of the Elliot Genesis Commentary and the result was a more conservative restatement of the Faith and Message. Finally, with the 2000 Faith and Message Statement we find additional changes, both in the text of some sections and in the interpretation and application of that text which remained unchanged. The story told from the first Statement through the last is a broad outline of the fundamentalist movement within the Southern Baptist Convention. Now to fill in the details.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

⁹¹ Ellen M. Rosenberg. “The Southern Baptist Response to the Newest South.” in Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 161.

Fundamentalism: Then and Now

Fundamentalism in the early part of the twentieth century was, in the simplest terms, a reaction to modernism and much that it implied: Darwinism, Social Christianity, higher criticism of the Bible, urbanism, and the Catholicism that came with immigration. The movement took its name from a Northern Baptist journal, *The Fundamentals*. Curtis Lee Laws, who argued that fundamentalists were those willing “to do battle royal for the Fundamentals”, coined the term itself.⁹² Those “fundamentals” were Biblical literalism and a return to traditional Christian morality and virtue. It was both a theological and social movement, addressing issues within the church as well as in culture and politics. There are those who argue that the southern region of the country was so conservative that it could not properly be called fundamentalist. David Norsworthy argues that very few southerners had experienced the “relativizing and pluralizing effects” that accompanied modernism.⁹³ But although the Southern Baptist Convention of the time could be viewed as ultraconservative when compared to the rest of the nation, there were still those within the denomination who were champions and casualties of the movement.

Fundamentalism may have come late to the SBC, but come it did, particularly in the person of a Texas firebrand by the name of J. Frank Norris. Norris was largely responsible for both the rise and the ultimate rejection of the fundamentalist movement in the SBC in the early part of the twentieth century. His style personified the movement within the Convention as one of “frantic acrimony,” controversy, bitterness, and narrow-

⁹² Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, p. 119 and 159.

⁹³ David Ray Norsworthy, “Rationalization and Reaction Among Southern Baptists,” in Ammerman, *Southern Baptists Observed*, p. 72.

mindedness.⁹⁴ He was eventually drummed out of his local and state associations for his vitriolic and extremist rhetoric. Oran Smith argues that he was a precursor to the “militant, individualistic Texas brand of fundamentalism” we see in the SBC today.⁹⁵ Norris was particularly concerned with the bureaucratic leadership of the Convention and used every opportunity to characterize them as the ecclesiastical equivalents of the Papal hierarchy. He was so opposed to denominational polity above the local church level and so committed to Biblical inerrancy that he banned all “man-made [denominational] literature” in his church in order to focus solely on the Word of God.⁹⁶ Despite his extremism, however, Norris left his mark on the Convention. If his movement was rejected, many of his beliefs were widely shared. Fundamentalism, in the form of theological orientation, was already in the Convention.

There were others who joined Norris in his crusade. A. C. Dixon was a crusader against evolution and Victor Masters was a long-time opponent of the social gospel in the Convention. And the fundamentalist stand on inerrancy was successful enough in the denomination at large to force the adoption of the first Baptist Faith and Message statement in 1925. In that statement, members affirmed the divinity of scripture and acknowledged the necessity of a “reaffirmation of Christian fundamentals” in the presence “of naturalism in the modern teaching and preaching of religion.”⁹⁷ There were also those within the Convention who were successfully targeted by the fundamentalists. Two professors at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky

⁹⁴ Thompson. *Tried as by Fire*. p. 81.

⁹⁵ Smith. *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*. p. 22.

⁹⁶ Thompson. *Tried as by Fire*. p. 85.

⁹⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1925*. p. 71.

were forced to resign. Crawford H. Toy was accused of denying the inerrancy of the Bible and William Whitsitt challenged the long-held belief that Baptist ancestors had always practiced adult immersion.”⁹⁸ As a militant movement, however, early fundamentalism in the SBC failed, partly because it was redundant, and partly because it offered no middle ground for those who sympathized with some of the tenants, but not all. Norris and his followers depicted those who disagreed with them, even on the smallest point, as the forces of Satan. As we find in the contemporary SBC, the terms were absolute and the battle lines implacably drawn.⁹⁹

Fundamentalists associated with Norris and his followers were marginalized in the SBC after the 1920s. But again, it was not so much the message as the messenger Southern Baptists rejected. Instead of preaching to the choir, early Southern Baptists fundamentalists were screaming at it. The movement was not completely unsuccessful, for it did form the seedbed of future fundamentalist sentiment. The issues that animated the early fundamentalists remain the same for their theological and political descendants: a bureaucratic structure out of touch with the common people in the church pews; Biblical inerrancy; a return to conservative Christian values and traditions; and rejection of Darwinism and the social gospel. In the case of the SBC--and contrary to some analyses of the contemporary phenomenon—the smoldering embers of fundamentalism have been in the Convention all along, simply intensifying in response to changes within and outside the denomination.

Moderates controlled the Convention that spawned the current fundamentalist

⁹⁸ Eighmy, Churches in Cultural Captivity, p. 74.

⁹⁹ Thompson, Tried as by Fire, pp. 81-82.

movement. But there is evidence that the moderate leadership may have been out-of-step with a more conservative membership. Oran Smith suggests that a “political push” from those moderates in 1968 “touched a match to conservative dynamite.”¹⁰⁰ This political push is best understood within the context of the changing South and has parallels to the souring of the relationship between conservative Southerners and the Democratic party. As the moderate leadership of the SBC embraced key elements of a liberal theological and political agenda, the conservative body of the Convention—fundamentalists among them—became disaffected with their denomination. In this view the contemporary fundamentalist movement in the Convention is characterized as a “counteroffensive” of sorts. There is some merit to that argument. A moderate denominational leadership marginalized the fundamentalists. According to one study of the takeover, “Discrimination against fundamentalists surely did exist in the educational institutions and denominational agencies of the SBC during the generation before the take-over movement began.”¹⁰¹ In echoes of Frank Norris and his vehement critique of the centralization of power in the SBC of the 1920s, the bureaucracy was a primary target of fundamentalists some fifty to sixty years later. But is this battle really about bureaucracy and denominational structure?

Harold Bloom argues that fundamentalism is a manifestation of “religious anxiety.”¹⁰² Indeed, theological and political conservatives did have some cause to be anxious. The old consensus model of democracy was no longer working in

¹⁰⁰ Smith. *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*. p. 48.

¹⁰¹ Norsworthy. Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 78.

¹⁰² Bloom. *American Religion*. p. 39.

an increasingly pluralistic denomination and world. Pluralism itself was a great source of anxiety among those who would eventually assume the mantle of fundamentalist leadership in the SBC. The contemporary agenda of the current SBC hierarchy has been depicted as “an attempt to purge the ‘isms’ of feminism, pluralism, or any form of liberalism” from the Convention.¹⁰³ Those “isms” arrived late to the SBC and the south. So late, in fact, there may have been no real need for a fundamentalist movement in the SBC prior to the latter half of the twentieth century. One can think of the fundamentalist leadership of the Convention as one that insists on being *right* in a response to the proliferation of *rights*. In the face of the one of the most important political transformations of the twentieth century, the “rights revolution,” fundamentalists search for ways to resist change. The rights revolution “refers to the tendency to define nearly every public issue in terms of legally protected rights,” or what R. Shep Melnick terms “programmatic rights.”¹⁰⁴ This crucial transformation in the way individuals relate to the laws and institutions of government has had impact far beyond the public sphere. Programmatic rights reach into the private sphere of home and business, altering the relationships between genders, races, workers, classes, and minorities. In a time of profound change, the form of contemporary liberalism that extends programmatic rights offers security for some. But for fundamentalists, this expansion of governmental protection is itself part of the

¹⁰³ Carl L. Kell and L. Raymond Camp. *In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999). p. 120.

¹⁰⁴ Melnick, R. Shep. “The Courts, Congress, and Programmatic Rights.” Richard A. Harris and Sidney M. Milkis. eds. *Remaking American Politics*. (Boulder, San Francisco, and London: Westview Press, 1989). p. 188.

change to be resisted.

The fundamentalist response to a changing world has been a mixed one: a theological retrenchment combined with a political offensive.

The changes in the South over the last forty years required a new ideology to make sense of this changing world. The SBC's fundamentalists provided such an ideology in the form of the nineteenth-century doctrine of biblical inerrancy. This ideology won in the SBC because it was merged with modern methods of political reform learned in the right wing of the Republican Party under Ronald Reagan.¹⁰⁵

Wayne Flint agrees that we are witnessing a resurgence of nineteenth century attitudes in the new fundamentalist leadership of the SBC.¹⁰⁶ The contemporary movement is, in some ways, an attempt to return to a uniquely southern, and Southern Baptist, way of life. We can understand something of the difficulty in such an attempt by identifying the parties to the struggle.

The label issue in the contemporary SBC is a contentious one. Some individuals identify themselves as fundamentalists while others view the label as derisive. Many in disagreement with the fundamentalists refer to themselves variously as conservatives, moderates, and even some as progressives. One thing is certain; the various sides disagree, passionately and strenuously. I will use the term fundamentalists to refer to those who in 1979 engineered the takeover of the SBC, embarking on a mission to restore the denomination to principles of biblical inerrancy, traditional Christian morality, and conservative politics, and who since then have established full control over the Convention's agencies and boards. They are, in some studies, referred to as

¹⁰⁵ Larry L. McSwain. "Swinging Pendulums: Reform, Resistance, and Institutional Change." Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 261.

¹⁰⁶ Flint. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 583.

conservatives or loyalists. Prior to their successful takeover they were dissidents, marginalized by the denomination's moderate bureaucracy. One of the difficulties in defining fundamentalists is that in many significant ways, they differ little from their non-fundamentalist brethren. The "moderates" in the Convention are predominantly biblical conservatives, if not literalists. Most are politically conservative, though not militantly so. In fact, in her aptly titled Baptist Battles, Nancy Ammerman argues that on "basic Christian beliefs...there remained very little differentiation among Southern Baptists."¹⁰⁷ Fundamentalists are those biblical literalists who militantly confront a sinful culture and a wayward denomination. They are seeking to restore the homogeneity and orthodoxy of a faith that just a few decades ago needed no such restoration. But they are also betrayers of that faith's traditions in important ways that will be discussed shortly. One of the principle ways in which today's fundamentalists differ from their historical predecessors is in their level of political activism. The SBC is nothing now, if not thoroughly politicized, both in its denominational polity and in its relationship to the outside world.

The dissidents in today's Convention, those who disagree with the fundamentalists, will be referred to as "moderates." I believe this label to be an appropriate one, even when many I am placing into the group are conservative Christians. This is because, unlike their fundamentalist counterparts, many of these individuals are willing to compromise and have demonstrated a greater tolerance for pluralism and diversity within and outside the Convention. They are primarily a group that, if not Biblical literalists, do hold the Scriptures to be the divinely inspired Word of God. While most are politically conservative, few are involved in the politics of the religious right.

¹⁰⁷ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 72.

Moderates are, by and in the large, much aggrieved by what has happened to their denomination and to their place within it.

Since the formation of the Convention in 1845, the denomination has conducted its church business on multiple levels. Churches are associated through district, often county, organizations. They are also members of state associations. The third, and largest level is the SBC. Churches participate in the SBC organization in many ways. They contribute monies to denominational programs through the Cooperative Fund. These funds support Foreign and Home Missions, seminaries and colleges, and other boards and agencies. Local churches also purchase denominational literature from the Sunday School Board or other Convention presses. They also participate in the annual meetings by sending “messengers” who vote on Resolutions and elect officers to serve for the following year. Before the fundamentalist takeover, the office of the SBC President had been little more than an honorific title. It was the genius of the contemporary fundamentalist movement to recognize the potential of that office, in its powers of appointment, to change the direction of the Convention. The presidency of the SBC became the vehicle of the fundamentalist takeover.

Prior to the fundamentalist takeover in 1979, the SBC still governed itself on the traditional model of consensus democracy. Through almost the first 130 years of its existence, the SBC focused on denominational growth, institutional development, and evangelism. This shared sense of mission tended to discourage or overshadow potential sources of disunity. But by the late 1970s, the SBC and the south had changed. As Samuel Hill argues, the Convention moved toward “concern over doctrine and

theological positions.”¹⁰⁸ It also moved toward a model of competing interests in its church polity.

The tale of the fundamentalist takeover has overtones of political intrigue, with secret meetings and strategy planning sessions. The main characters in the story are Paul Pressler, a Texas politician, W. A. Criswell, a minister from Dallas, and Rev. Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta. Others would join these three, among them Adrian Rogers and Paige Patterson. All but Pressler would eventually serve their terms as presidents of the SBC and all would move the denomination further to the right, theologically and politically. The fundamentalist movement in the SBC also suggests a form of status politics. Leaders of the movement railed against the bureaucratic “elite” of the established denominational hierarchy. Contemporary fundamentalist style is southern, rural and blue-collar. Most leaders of the movement had (and have) lower education levels and fewer “established credentials” than did (and do) the men they replaced.¹⁰⁹ There is one further characteristic of the fundamentalist movement that is suggestive of politics, namely its populism. In a denomination and world of growing complexity and pluralism, the leadership offers a simple, singular truth as *the* answer to all problems. It is a message of ideological and theological purity, one that judging by Convention support of the fundamentalist leadership, appeals to the majority of Southern Baptists, beset as they are by cultural changes they are powerless to prevent. But even among those who agree with the fundamentalist leadership in the Convention, many will voice concern about how “political” their denomination has become. Others, the

¹⁰⁸ Samuel S. Hill. “The Story Before the Story: Southern Baptists Since World War II.” Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 34.

¹⁰⁹ McSwain. Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 259.

disaffected minority of moderates, go beyond accusations of politics and argue that the new hierarchy has betrayed precious Baptist principles and traditions.

One of the most upsetting of all fundamentalist victories for moderates was the 1988 adoption of Resolution No. 5 on the Priesthood of the Believer. In this Resolution the primacy of individual conscience and interpretation is undermined, replaced with a bolstering of pastoral authority. It reads, in part,

WHEREAS, The priesthood of the believer is a term which is subject to both misunderstanding and abuse; and

WHEREAS, The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer has been used to justify wrongly the attitude that a Christian may believe whatever he so chooses and still be considered a loyal Southern Baptist; and

WHEREAS, The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer can be used to justify the undermining of pastoral authority in the local church.

Be it further RESOLVED, That we affirm that this doctrine in no way gives license to misinterpret, explain away, demythologize, or extrapolate out elements of the supernatural from the Bible; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer in no way contradicts the biblical understanding of the role, responsibility, and authority of the pastor which is seen in the command to the local church in Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account;" and

Be it finally RESOLVED, That we affirm the truth that elders, or pastors, are called of God to lead the local church (Acts 20:28).¹¹⁰

Moderate Convention attendees were so upset over the adoption of this resolution that they marched from the meeting site to the Alamo, singing "We Shall Overcome." Upon reaching the Alamo they ripped up their copies of the Resolution in a symbolic act of defiance.¹¹¹ For the dissidents, this resolution established an infallible clergy class, something unthinkable for any Southern Baptist who cherishes a belief in the right of personal interpretation. Harold Bloom, in his work on American religion, depicts a

¹¹⁰ *Annual of the SBC, 1988*. pp. 68-69.

¹¹¹ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. pp. 88-89.

beautifully evocative picture of the Baptist “alone in the garden” with Jesus. To require that a pastor accompany the two was simply unthinkable for some Baptists. For many, it still is.

What is most troublesome to some Southern Baptists is not simply that fundamentalists have established a rigid hierarchy and redefined long-standing Baptists traditions and principles. They also feel that they no longer have a voice, that debate and dissent is no longer tolerated, much less encouraged. Some churches have been “disfellowshipped” from their local associations for their rejection of SBC Resolutions. For instance, Prescott Memorial Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee was removed from membership in the Shelby County Association for calling as pastor Rev. Nancy Hastings Sehested.¹¹² By calling Rev. Sehested, Prescott Memorial acted in opposition to the 1984 “Resolution No. 3 On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry.”¹¹³ Two other congregations confronted the intolerant atmosphere of a fundamentalist Convention by refusing to abide by the SBC’s Resolutions on homosexuality. Pullen Memorial Baptist Church of Raleigh, North Carolina allowed the same-sex marriage of two gay men and Binkley Memorial Church of Chapel Hill licensed a gay divinity student as minister. Both churches were ejected from their local and state Southern Baptist Associations.¹¹⁴ President Bill Clinton’s home church, Immanuel Baptist Church of Little Rock, Arkansas was targeted in the 1993 Convention. Each messenger was required to sit before a Committee on Credentials and “swear his or her opposition to

¹¹² Kell and Camp. *In the Name of the Father*. pp. 69-70.

¹¹³ *Annual of the SBC, 1984*. p. 65.

¹¹⁴ Kell and Camp. *In the Name of the Father*. pp. 102-103.

homosexuality before being seated,” an action that Oran Smith likens to an inquisition.¹¹⁵

Other congregations have chosen to “disfellowship” themselves from the SBC, a method of formally withdrawing from institutional membership in the Convention. In 1992, the Riverside Baptist Church, a Southern Baptist church in Washington, D. C., cut their ties with the Convention. Said the pastor; “We had to get out of the SBC so we could remain Baptist.”¹¹⁶ And on April 9, 2000, a founding member church of the SBC, the Athens (Georgia) First Baptist Church voted to disassociate with the SBC. Citing the movement toward greater pastoral authority, “restrictions of academic freedom at Southern Baptist-supported seminaries,” and “the role assigned to women” by the Convention, the Congregation took the historic step of severing a 155-year-old relationship.¹¹⁷

That historic relationship, the tie between autonomous local churches peopled with individual believers and a dynamic, national organization is part of what is lost under the current fundamentalist leadership. The Southern Baptist faith is what Bloom calls a “profoundly indigenous religion” in America and it has transformed itself in significant ways. There are reasons, religious and political, for the extensive changes in the SBC. There are also consequences, religious and political, both for the denomination and the culture around it. In what follows, I will analyze the changes within the SBC and the consequences of those changes for our religious and political communities in three issue areas: gender and the family; church and state; and race relations. These issue areas are significant because they represent arenas of transformation within the last half of the

¹¹⁵ Smith, The Rise of Baptist Republicanism, p. 58.

¹¹⁶ Baptists Today, 24 September 1992, 18.

¹¹⁷ Report by Susanna Capelouto of National Public Radio, Morning Edition, May 19, 2000.

twentieth century. Those changes have had profound impact on the SBC and the fundamentalist leadership has responded to those changes in important ways. Finally we will examine in greater detail the philosophical and political elements of religious fundamentalism and whether (and how) we are to accommodate such beliefs in a pluralistic, public arena.

CHAPTER 2

OUT OF THE PULPIT AND INTO THE HOME: THE CONTESTATION OF GENDER ROLES IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

Their role is to learn, listening quietly and with due submission. I do not permit women to teach or dictate to the men; they should keep quiet.

- Timothy 2:11-12

There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female; for you are all one person in Christ Jesus.

- Galatians 3:28

Of all the issues that have torn at the fabric of Southern Baptist unity over the last two decades, none has been so fiercely contested as that of gender roles. Indeed, I will argue that gender roles and human sexuality are not merely some issues among others within Southern Baptist struggles, but are instead among those issues of central importance in the political and theological battles of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), as the fundamentalist leadership has embarked on an attempt to reestablish patriarchal authority in the church and home. Moreover, the course embarked upon by fundamentalists within the Convention is a predictable one, because, as will be shown at the close of this chapter, a typical fundamentalist reaction to cultural anxiety is the attempt to reinforce the demarcations of rigid gender roles. Gender role conformity is a way of holding at bay the cultural pluralism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, a task to which the SBC's fundamentalist leadership is fervently committed. In a sense, the SBC serves here as a contemporary American case study. Through an analysis of the construction and enforcement of gender roles within the Convention, one can

arrive at a fuller understanding of how and why gender is so central to the tenets of fundamentalist religions.

As a point of departure, some elaboration on the term “gender” is in order. I will be working with two different perspectives on gender, using one to critique the other. The first is gender as it is encountered in the rhetoric of the SBC. For fundamentalists within the Convention, gender is a rigid category of identification determined by one’s sex. It is biologically deterministic, an ahistorical and essentialist concept of men and women. The Convention’s leadership supports its stance on gender with resolutions, the denomination’s Faith & Message Statement, and the accompanying scriptural “proof texts” (such as Genesis 1:27, which states that God created both male and female or Ephesians 5:21-24, which states that wives are to be subject to their husbands). Within the SBC, the concept of gender extends beyond proper relations between the sexes at home and in church to the appropriate behavior of individuals in public and private, thus encompassing issues as far-ranging as female ordination, abortion, homosexuality, and male leadership in the church and home.

The second way in which gender is present in this work is as an analytical tool of feminist critique. Here I take gender to be a process, a discursive construction and, following the methodology of historian Joan Wallach Scott, I will look for the ways in which “woman” is discursively produced through the theological and political rhetoric of Southern Baptist leaders.¹ Scott argues that gender is a “primary way of signifying relationships of power.”² I will look for and analyze the ways in which this is evident in the rhetoric of the SBC. Woman is not, I contend, naturally or inherently “submissive,”

¹ Scott, Joan Wallach. *Feminism & History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). pp. 8-10.

² Ibid. p. 167 and 169.

but must be admonished to *be* so, through recourse to scriptural and theological bases. In fact, it is here, in the attempt to attribute “natural” characteristics to woman that make her unfit for the leadership and teaching of men, that we find the beneficial marriage of biblical inerrancy and anti-feminism in the SBC. For woman’s place is firmly anchored in the story of Eve’s fall from grace, her submission eternally justified by an infallible text. I will analyze the deployment of gender, both in relevant scriptural passages and in contemporary fundamentalist use of them, to demonstrate how woman is constructed or produced as the inherently unequal partner of man in the Southern Baptist lexicon of church polity and familial life.

I will expose and analyze the strong reaction within the Convention to feminism as the fundamentalist leadership’s attempt to reestablish patriarchal authority and power within and outside the church. Because these issues involve not simply the roles of women as they exist in a vacuum, but women and men as they exist in relation to one another, this chapter would be incomplete without an analysis and interpretation of the roles of Southern Baptist men in the church and home.

In addition to the Convention’s stances on heterosexual gender roles, one also finds a sharp escalation in the SBC’s rhetoric concerning homosexuality. This issue, too, is related in complex ways to the construction or production of “appropriate” gender roles in the Southern Baptist lexicon and must be included in what follows.

The fundamentalist SBC has found a home in mainstream American politics as the country has turned toward conservatism. With strident anti-government principles and a pro-family, traditional values agenda, the Republican party has attracted the fundamentalists and conservatives in the Convention, a legion of individuals

marginalized by the racial and gender politics of the Democratic party of the 1960s and 1970s. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, Southern Baptists and Republicans have “used conservative creeds, hardball politics, and powerful personalities to expand membership and win elections in the South.”³ Newly at home in the Republican party, Southern Baptist fundamentalists are no longer cast as foes of modernity—they see themselves as the heart and soul of America’s future.

Conservative evangelicals “now make up almost half of the Republican primary vote.”⁴ Under a newly politicized fundamentalist leadership, conservative evangelicals in the SBC have moved away from their heritage of religious liberty and social consciousness, “toward a more solely moralistic bent,” becoming more partisan in the process.⁵ The battle over gender roles is a central part of this partisan struggle over values in contemporary American politics. The story of that battle within the SBC is the subject of this chapter.

Women in the Church

When he had risen from the dead, early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary of Magdala, from whom he had driven out seven demons. She went and carried the news to his mourning and sorrowful followers, but when they were told that he was alive and that she had seen him they did not believe it.

- Mark 16:9-11

The role of women in Southern Baptist churches changed in response to the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. More women sought ordination as deacons and pastors and a greater number of women enrolled in ministerial training programs at Baptist colleges and seminaries. The traditional role of women as Sunday school

³ Smith. *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*. p. 1.

⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

⁵ Ibid., p. 177.

teachers for children's classes was being greatly expanded to reflect the changing role of women in the larger culture. It was against the backdrop of these changes that the fundamentalist leadership moved to constrict the roles of women in the church and home. In fact, fights over women and theology have dominated the denominational landscape of Southern Baptist life in the closing decades of the twentieth century.⁶

The fundamentalists were and are, in a sense, repeating history. This is not the first time the male leadership of the Convention has moved to exclude women from positions of power within the denomination. While they did not serve as denominational leaders or ministers, women did serve in the Southern Baptist Convention as annual messengers every year from the Convention's founding in 1845 until 1885, and then, suddenly, were excluded. On the defensive against women's suffrage, men moved to include "brethren" only for the purposes of conducting the Convention's business.⁷ The women's response was an interesting and creative one, one that will be explored further in what follows. But the relevant point for now is that in response to the threat of an expanded role for women, in the church and in society at large, the men in the Convention responded by excluding women from positions of responsibility within the denomination. The prospect that was "most troubling of all" to Southern Baptist men was women preaching in the enlarged public sphere that would result from the expanded franchise.⁸

Catherine Allen argues that Southern men, angered over their defeat in the war

⁶ Knight, Walter L. "Race Relations: Changing Patterns and Practices" Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 179.

⁷ Rosenberg. *Southern Baptists*. pp. 87-88.

⁸ Flint. *Alabama Baptist*. p. 178.

and further humiliated by the strictures of Reconstruction, took their frustration out on Southern women who dared to overstep the traditional roles assigned them.⁹ The confluence of suffragist anxiety and southern resentment is evident in the tendency of some Southern Baptist men who tried to make it a regional issue, linking feminist agitation to “unprincipled women” of the North.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, it would take the settlement of the suffrage issue for women to once again be accepted on the floor of the Southern Baptist Convention meetings as messengers. But they were not, it should be noted, extended the privilege of preaching in SBC churches or meetings.

Exclusion from voting on the floor of the Convention was not enough to temper the evangelical fervor of Southern Baptist women, however, and their response to the “brethren only” rule was the formation of the Woman’s Missionary Union (WMU). This organization, auxiliary to the Convention, was formed around the women’s concern for missions at home and abroad. The WMU built its own autonomous bureaucratic structure and an enormously successful fundraising capacity.¹¹ According to Wayne Flint, the dedication of Southern Baptist women to their denomination, even in the face of exclusion and second-class membership, was “largely responsible for the growth and success of the denomination.”¹² In responding to financial necessity rather than social or theological imperative, the SBC was forced into depending upon the assistance of the very persons they had marginalized. It was through this supportive role that women

⁹ Allen, Catherine. *A Century to Celebrate: History of Women's Missionary Union*. (Birmingham, Ala: WMU, 1987) p. 30.

¹⁰ Spain, Rufus B. *At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptist 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967). p 167.

¹¹ Rosenberg. *Southern Baptists*. pp. 87-89. See also Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 41.

¹² Flint. *Alabama Baptist*. p. 11.

began to play a larger and larger part in the day-to-day life of the Southern Baptist Convention.

There was much that was paradoxical about the relationship of women to the Southern Baptist faith at the close of the nineteenth century. Their virtual exclusion from the decision-making bodies of the Convention was met with the formation of the organization that became largely responsible for the collection and dissemination of mission funds that would sustain and grow the denomination. Hence, once they were allowed back on the Convention floor, they were due some measure of appreciation, for the organization they had built in their “exile,” the WMU, was keeping the denomination afloat. Then again, even as the Convention was dependent on the WMU for its annual funds, a male proxy had to deliver its annual report for a female member because it was considered inappropriate for a woman to address the assembly. For four decades women were not allowed to report on their own work in mixed assemblies; “men had to give the women’s reports for them.”¹³ The relationship of women to the SBC has been a complex one with no small measure of irony. Although the rise of women’s consciousness was met with much trepidation and resistance by men within the SBC, women within the denomination responded through their involvement in the second Great Awakening, in female mission societies, and the temperance movement.¹⁴ In short, women flourished within the SBC, even as they were marginalized for the short period of time by the “brethren only” rule.

In addition to their incredible success in foreign and home missions, Southern

¹³ Copeland, E. Luther. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History: The Taint of an Original Sin*. (New York: The University Press of America, 1995).

¹⁴ Flint. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 39.

Baptist women thrived within the domestic sphere of home and family. As Randall Balmer points out in his study of evangelicalism, by the dawn of the nineteenth century, virtue had come to be equated with femininity and women with the religious instruction of their families.¹⁵ This female role was easily transplanted to Southern Baptist churches too, in which women were (and still are) most often the teachers of children in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School classes. It should be noted here, however, that as young males mature, it was (and is) considered inappropriate in most Southern Baptist congregations for women to teach them in Sunday School or Training Union classes. In addition to teaching children, today's Southern Baptist women work in the day care centers, prepare the church suppers, sing in the choirs, play the organs, clean the sanctuaries, provide the floral arrangements, and feed the pastors' families after Sunday services, in addition to raising generation after generation of Southern Baptist children. In short, Baptist women are "useful," very much so, just not in positions of leadership or authority.¹⁶ The role of helpmate is the historical and contemporary role for women in Southern Baptist congregations. When Southern Baptist women venture beyond the bounds of their traditional "usefulness" into the territory of leadership, Southern Baptist fundamentalists react with exclusionary policies. Further, this model of female virtue was a highly essentialized and gendered one. It could be as limiting as it could be facilitative.

As previously discussed, Southern Baptist men initially reacted to the agitation of the women's suffrage movement by asserting male privilege and authority. This tactic

¹⁵ Balmer, Randall. *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Kell and Camp. *In the Name of the Father*. p. 33.

was not completely discarded with the re-admittance of women to the floor as messengers. It was simply put away for the rainy day of late twentieth century feminism and all the changes it wrought. As women began to seek ordination, to overstep their “usefulness,” within the Convention and as female gender roles in the family were transformed, fundamentalist leaders in the SBC sought to reassert patriarchal authority within the Convention and home. The Convention took “significant actions” to subordinate the roles of women in denominational life in the 1970s, the years during which the greatest numbers of female ordinations occurred.¹⁷ The level of opposition to women’s ordination rose as a direct result of the increasing number of those ordinations in these years.¹⁸ Indeed, Nancy Tatom Ammerman argues that the ordination of women may serve as the overall flashpoint for the fundamentalist takeover of the Convention.¹⁹ I will argue that she is only partially correct. There were three matches touched to the kindling of the fundamentalist takeover of the Convention. The first was certainly the issue of female ordination. Indeed, for many fundamentalists within the SBC, female pastors are the very “embodiment of liberalism.”²⁰ The second, and related issue, is that of changing gender roles in the home and workplace. This issue of changing gender roles contains within it the issue of abortion. The third issue is that of homosexuality—an issue that represents and encapsulates for Southern Baptists fundamentalists all that is wrong about cultural pluralism and gender at the turn of the twenty-first century.

¹⁷ Anders and Wittaker. Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 212.

¹⁸ Chaves, Mark and James Cavendish. “Recent Changes in Women’s Ordination Conflicts: The Effect of a Social Movement on Intraorganizational Controversy.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. p. 581.

¹⁹ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. pp. 90-94.

²⁰ Anders and Wittaker. Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 214.

In its scope and impact, no “issue has caused evangelicals more consternation in the second half of the twentieth century than feminism.”²¹ This is particularly true in the SBC. Each of three issues that sparked the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC—female ordination; gender role changes in the home and workplace; and the normalization of homosexuality—have their roots in the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The first to reverberate through the SBC was the issue of female ordination.

Female Ordination

As in all congregations of God’s people, women should keep silent at the meeting. They have no permission to talk, but should keep their place as the law directs. If there is something they want to know, they can ask their husbands at home. It is a shocking thing for a woman to talk at the meeting.

- 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

It really is not such a “shocking thing” for a Baptist woman to desire a measure of equality in worship and denominational service. Striving for equality in the spiritual realm has its roots in the Baptist tradition of individual soul competency or the priesthood of the believer.²² What is shocking is the manner in which a Baptist woman’s claim to have been called to the ministry is dismissed out of hand by her Convention’s current leadership. Women who believe they are called to preach are, according to SBC president James Merritt, “misled.”²³ Currently, there are 1,600 or so ordained women in the SBC with approximately 100 serving as pastors. But of that number, only 35 serve as senior pastors. This is the case, Adrian Rogers, chairman of the drafting committee of the newly revised Southern Baptist Faith and Message Statement, argues because “Southern

²¹ Balmer, Randall. *Blessed Assurance*. p. 71.

²² Barnhart, Joe Edward. *The Southern Baptist Holy War*. (Austin, Texas: Texas Monthly Press, 1986) p. 158.

²³ “SBC reinforces fundamentalist agenda.” *The Christian Century* June 21, 2000 v 117 i19 p. 674.

Baptists, by practice as well as conviction, believe leadership is male.”²⁴ The following section of this chapter will cover the question: whether leadership in the SBC is, “by practice as well as conviction,” male and why.

The Southern Baptist Convention meeting of June 2000 was perhaps the most publicized of any SBC meeting on record. Much of the media attention was due to important votes on the adoption of a new Baptist Faith and Message Statement. Only two other times in its history, once in 1925 and again in 1963, has the SBC, a denomination that has prided itself on its creedlessness, deemed it necessary to declare formally a statement of its faith. It is no small matter to change the Message to address social themes. Of a Resolution to amend the Statement adopted in 1998, Marie Griffith and Paul Harvey observed that the “Depression, a World War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Vietnam War [all] spurred no such action. The family values debate has.”²⁵ The family values debate thus seems clearly to have been much more compelling than all the aforementioned periods, leading as it did to a new Faith and Message Statement. The Statement proposed by the Convention leadership in June 2000 seemed out of step with mainstream American culture, especially on issues of gender and gendered relations. It affirms that the “office of pastor is limited to men as qualified as Scripture” and that a “wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband.”²⁶ The Statement was adopted by an overwhelming majority of the messengers present at the Convention. The limitation on the office of pastor is particularly interesting since the

²⁴ “Southern Baptist Convention Passes Resolution Opposing Women as Pastors” (AP) *The New York Times* June 15, 2000. See also “Culture Class” *Christianity Today* July 10, 2000 v. 44 i8 p.19.

²⁵ Griffith, Marie and Paul Harvey. “Wifely Submission: The SBC Resolution” *The Christian Century* July 1, 1998 v. 115 n 19 p 636 (3).

²⁶ Faith & Message Statement—http://www.sbc.net/2000_report.html.

choice and ordination of pastors throughout the history of the denomination has been subject only to the approval of the local congregation. Hence, this tightening of the gender hierarchy is also a significant alteration in denominational polity.

The new Faith and Message Statement was controversial enough to generate considerable media coverage and to prompt the withdrawal of some Southern Baptist churches from the denomination. The First Baptist Church of Athens, Georgia, voted to disassociate with the SBC, in part because of the role assigned to women by the Convention,²⁷ while the South Main Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, discussed the possibility of severing its ties to the SBC for the same reasons.²⁸ The First Baptist Church of Greenville, South Carolina, also withdrew from the SBC. This congregation, among the denomination's founding churches, severed its ties to the SBC in large part due to the Convention's stance on women in the church and home.²⁹ These congregations are not alone. In their 1999 meeting, Texas Baptists voted overwhelmingly to reject the SBC's 1998 amendment to the Faith and Message statement calling for wives to submit to their husbands.³⁰ And in their annual 2000 meeting, the Baptist General Convention of Texas voted to withdraw more than \$5 million in funding from the SBC, largely due to the SBC's sharp turn to the fundamentalist right in the last

²⁷ Susanna Capaloute reporting for NPR's Morning Edition May 19, 2000 "Number of Southern Baptist Churches Break Ranks with the Southern Baptist Convention Because of its Conservative Principles."

²⁸ Vara, Richard. "South Main Baptist may decide to sever ties." *Houston Chronicle* July 1, 2000.

²⁹ Riddle, Lyn. "Used to growth, Southern Baptists face attrition." *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* May 23, 1999.

³⁰ Vara, Richard. "Texas Baptists vote to reject call for wives to submit" *The Houston Chronicle* Nov. 10, 1999.

two decades.³¹ Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics, said frankly that, “if the leadership keeps making such backwards statements about women, there will be an exodus of churches from the” SBC.³²

The Convention has not, however, recoiled from the withdrawal of some congregations or funds. To the contrary, and particularly over the issue of women in the ministry, the Convention has remained steadfast, with outgoing President Paige Patterson saying, “Despite the media blitz over this issue, there has been little controversy in Southern Baptist circles. In one sense the vote is merely the confirmation of the status quo.”³³ In fact, Rev. Patterson has acknowledged that the denomination may lose up to, possibly over, 1500 congregations, but quickly notes that the SBC “started 1,479 new churches in 1999.”³⁴ To underscore this point, the St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, severed its ties with the Convention in June 2001, but it is the only Southern Baptist church in the state to do so and, offsetting that loss, ten new churches have been founded in the metropolitan area in recent years.³⁵ The fundamentalist leadership is unapologetic, understanding their position as one defined against a sinful culture. They are, according to Rev. Patterson, “returning to the faith of [their] fathers.”³⁶ Fundamentalists believe that, with the adoption of the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message Statement, the SBC can avoid the cultural drift that has plagued so

³¹ *The Christian Science Monitor*. Thursday November 16, 2000. Ideas Section, p. 15.

³² Decker, Twila. “When God calls, should women answer?” *St. Petersburg Times*. June 11, 2000.

³³ “Do Good Fences Make Good Baptists?” *Christianity Today*. August 7, 2000 v 44 I 9 p. 36.

³⁴ Niebuhr, Gustav. “Rift Among Baptists Leaves Two Denominations in One” *The New York Times*. June 6, 2000.

³⁵ *The Times-Picayune*. National Section, p. 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

many mainline denominations. That cultural drift wears the face of feminism for the fundamentalist leadership.

Prior to the fundamentalist takeover of the Convention, there were stirrings of discomfort within the SBC concerning the proper role of women in the church and the impact of the feminist movement on those roles. In Resolution Number 12 of the Southern Baptist Annual from 1973, the Convention addresses the cultural pressures of the feminist movement. The Resolution affirms the traditional roles of women and men in the church as distinct and scripturally based. The “women’s liberation movement” is criticized for attacking woman’s proper place in society and “God’s order of authority for his church and the Christian home.”³⁷ But in the following year the Convention grappled further with the questions posed by the feminist movement and, in a resolution on abortion, actually addressed the injustices “toward women....in every institution in society; government, business, education, and the church.” It goes on to say “[e]ven in our churches, women often have been kept from assuming places of leadership for which their abilities and their Christian commitment qualify them.”³⁸ While expressing a commitment to the “distinctive roles of males and females,” this resolution urges that the Convention work to combat discrimination against women. Notably, this is the only place within Convention Resolutions where one finds a statement supporting women in positions of leadership within the denomination.

Women are not mentioned in the Convention Annuals in terms of the ministry or positions of leadership again until 1984 in Resolution Number 3, “On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry,” which asserts that “the Scriptures teach that women are not

³⁷ *SBC Annual*, 1973. p. 87.

³⁸ *SBC Annual*, 1974. pp. 208-209.

in public worship to assume a role of authority over men lest confusion reign in the local church” and also that women are to remain in submission to men due to woman’s role in the Edenic fall.³⁹ The contrast between 1974 and 1984 could not be starker. Much has occurred in the decade between the two Conventions. More women had sought and gained ordination, and the fundamentalists had taken control of the SBC.

Fundamentalists sought the adoption of Resolution Number 3 in 1984 with the full intent of seeing it enforced in the congregations of the SBC. The effects were felt throughout the Convention in county and state associations, as well as in local churches. Nancy Hastings Sehested, for example, accepted the call to pastor the Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee in 1988. The church was disfellowshipped from the Shelby County Baptist Association as a result.⁴⁰

One method adopted by fundamentalists in their takeover of the Convention was the placement of like-minded members on Boards of Trustees for mission boards, seminaries, and colleges. Here, too, the effects of the SBC’s fundamentalist stance on gendered leadership are clearly evident. The first Convention agency to have a fundamentalist majority on its board was the Home Mission Board and, in one of its first actions, it voted “not to fund any additional churches that called a woman as pastor.”⁴¹

In 1998, Molly Marshall, a tenured Bible scholar at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was ousted by the newly appointed president, R. Albert Mohler, Jr. Mohler attributed her termination to her “feminist theology” which represented a break with

³⁹ *SBC Annual, 1984*. p. 65.

⁴⁰ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 94.

⁴¹ Rosenberg. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 199.

“basic Christian doctrine” and Biblical text.⁴² Although Marshall argued that her theology was sound and not the issue, she was in many ways a marked woman, for she openly supported women’s ordination. That was the issue. Likewise it was the issue when the California Southern Baptist Association barred the 19th Avenue Baptist Church from the annual state convention. The congregation was pastored by a woman.⁴³ Similarly, the WMU was chastised in 1993 for its association with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) which endorses the ordination of women by local congregations. The WMU had accepted fellowship with the CBF, providing its mission programs with materials. The conservative leadership of the SBC responded with a call to the WMU to “*submit* to conservative leadership or lose their role in the Southern Baptist Convention.” (emphasis added) Adrian Rogers called for a “complete takeover of the women’s auxiliary and an end to what he termed the ‘feminization’ of missions.”⁴⁴ By the academic year 2000-2001 the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary would offer a Women’s Ministry Program specifically and explicitly designed to equip “women to reach women,” nothing more.

The 1984 Resolution Number 3 on the Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry was the beginning of the end for women who aspired to pastor churches in the SBC. It was followed in 1986 by the Home Mission Board’s decision to adopt a “policy

⁴² “Tenured SBC woman forced to resign.” *The Christian Century*. Sep 21, 1999 v 111 n26 p847 (2) and “Wifely Submission: The SBC Resolution.” *The Christian Century*. July 1, 1998 v115 n19 p636 (3).

⁴³ Lattin, Don. “Baptist Convention Bars Woman-Pastored Church.” *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Nov 19, 1993.

⁴⁴ “Rein in women’s group, says SBC conservatives.” *The Christian Century*. April 21, 1993 v110 n13 p423.

of financial non-support to any church that chose a woman as its pulpit minister.”⁴⁵ The fundamentalist takeover of the SBC was a fait accompli and the place of women within the denomination would thereafter be determined by the Biblical role of Eve in the Genesis story and Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. Of course that place extended well beyond the church. The role of woman, as described in Resolution Number 3, clearly delegates authority over the woman to man. Woman is to remain in submission to man due to her role in the Edenic fall.⁴⁶ This submission extends from the authority exercised by the leadership in the church to the authority of the husband over the wife. The issue of wifely submission is equally important as that of female ordination in the SBC, though in many ways it is even more controversial. It speaks to the issue of gender roles in the home and, by extension, the workplace, in many instances even determining whether the woman will work out of the home at all. James Davison Hunter has argued that “the family may prove to be a final battleground in conservative Protestantism’s century-long battle with modernity.”⁴⁷ Nowhere is this more evident than in the SBC.

Women in the Home

Wives, be subject to your husbands as though to the Lord; for the man is the head of the woman, just as Christ is the head of the church. Christ is, indeed, the savior of that body; but just as the church is subject to Christ, so must women be subject to their husbands in everything.

- Ephesians 5:22-24

Nor have the Americans ever supposed that one consequence of democratic principles is the subversion of marital power or the confusion of the natural authorities in families. They hold that every association must have a head in order to accomplish its object, and that the natural head of the conjugal association is man.

- Alexis De Tocqueville

⁴⁵Libby Bellinger “More Hidden than Revealed: The History of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry,” in *The struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement*. Walter B. Shurden, ed. (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1993) p. 138.

⁴⁶ *SBC Annual*, 1984. p. 65.

⁴⁷ Hunter, James Davison. *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1983) p. 70.

The family as a “battleground” in the SBC is not a new site of struggle. It is, in fact, a very familiar site of gender contestation for Southern Baptists. The difference now is that the battle is “almost obsessive in its intensity.”⁴⁸ In 1998, the SBC adopted an amendment on the family to its Faith & Message Statement. That amendment contained a controversial section on wifely submission. The amendment was, said Paige Patterson, the newly elected president of the SBC, a response to “a time of growing crisis in the family.”⁴⁹ This is a common theme for Southern Baptists. At the turn of the century Baptists attributed the increase in crime and social disorder to the “loosening of family ties and the decline in paternal discipline.”⁵⁰ Again in 1972, in a Resolution on Christian Citizenship, “family breakdown” was listed as a “Grave moral issue of our time.”⁵¹ For Southern Baptists, the traditional, nuclear family is the essential building block for church and civil society. The restoration of paternal authority within that family is behind much of the Fundamentalist agenda of the last two decades. According to Rev. Paige Patterson, and women attending the Convention in 1998, the declaration on wifely submission was not a step away from Baptist principles but instead was “consistent with longtime Baptist teachings.”⁵² In other words, it was not the Convention, but the culture, that had changed. The statement was adopted as an “Article on the Family” Amendment to the 1963 Faith & Message Statement. It read, in part:

⁴⁸ Rosenberg, Ellen M. “The Southern Baptist Response to the Newest South.” Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 161.

⁴⁹ Niebuhr, Gustav. “Southern Baptists Declare Wife Should ‘Submit’ to Her Husband” *New York Times* June 10, 1998.

⁵⁰ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 158.

⁵¹ *Annual of the SBC, 1972*. p. 86.

⁵² *Ibid.*

A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.⁵³

Note the admixture of equality and inequality in the language. Although equivalent in the image of God, she is to be submissive and respectful. In the language to follow, wives are “created to be helpers to their husbands (Genesis 2:18).” We are told that her submission “does not decrease her worth but rather enhances her value to her husband and to the Lord (1 Peter 3:4).”⁵⁴ The woman’s submission is then tied to evangelism and spiritual growth, and is said to describe “function, rather than worth.” But submission here actually does quite a bit more than describe function. It *functions* to define, to fix and identify. It *makes* one a woman.

But what of the husband? According to the Amendment to the 1963 Faith & Message Statement, and the 2000 Faith & Message Statement, he has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family.⁵⁵ To understand the nature of the relationship between husband and wife, one must take note of words such as “headship” and “leadership”, both roles the husband is called to play as he “cares responsibly for his wife’s...needs.” These are powerful words. They construct and reinforce traditional gender roles. They produce relationships of power, within which the husband and wife are located and fixed. As submission produces the traditional gender “woman,” leadership produces the traditional gender “man.” Contemporary challenges

⁵³ *Annual of the SBC, 1998*, p. 78.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78 and http://www.sbc.net/2000_report.html

to those roles are interpreted as subversive or rebellious⁵⁶ as fundamentalists seek a return to the patriarchal power structure of nineteenth-century church and home.

It is not difficult to understand why many Southern Baptist men are attracted to the Promise Keepers.⁵⁷ In one piece of the organization's literature by Dr. Tony Evans, husbands are counseled to take back the leadership of their families. Should the wives resist, husbands are urged to be sensitive, to listen, but without fail, to lead!⁵⁸ Further, there is an element of religious machismo in Southern Baptist fundamentalism that is nicely compatible with the athleticism of former football Coach Bill McCartney and the militarism of his organization, led by many high-level military retirees. As far back as 1963 Southern Baptist men were naming their evangelization effort "Operation Penetration," to be followed in 1981 with "Bold Mission Thrust." The language is both militarized and gendered.

The relationships between males and females, husbands and wives, is only part of the picture in the battle over the family in Southern Baptist life. Children fill out that picture, both born and "unborn." Of course, whether "unborn" children are actually "children" is part of the fight.

Abortion

The Southern Baptist Convention went from being a denomination that actually endorsed *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 to one that included a section on the sanctity of human life

⁵⁶ In Resolution No. 21—On the Family, the SBC resolved that family values were under attack in part from "rebellion against authority." *Annual of the SBC*, 1988, p. 79.

⁵⁷ The ecumenical men's group founded in 1991 by former University of Colorado football coach Bill McCartney.

⁵⁸ Cited in Bloch, Jon P. "The New and Improved Clint Eastwood: Change and Persistence in Promise Keepers Self-Help Literature." *Sociology of Religion*. Spring 2000 v61 i1 p11.

in its new Faith & Message Statement for 2000.⁵⁹ The intervening years tell an interesting story. Part of that story parallels that of conservative, evangelical Christianity. Abortion became a “touchstone for a list of moral ills, including homosexuality, pornography, and extramarital sex—all of which evangelicals traced to the spread of what they termed ‘secular humanism.’”⁶⁰ This was nowhere more true than in the SBC.

For those who support abortion rights, one of the claims often made is that the attempt to ban abortions is actually an attempt to control women. Likewise for critics of the Southern Baptist Convention. Joe Edward Barnhart sees abortion as a conflict “symptomatic of something more far-reaching than the abortion problem” and points to the role of some Southern Baptists in using the abortion issue to keep women in “their place—under male domination.”⁶¹

The history of the Convention’s positions on abortion reveals the increasing power of the fundamentalists as resolutions on abortion take on greater stridency and call for more political involvement. In 1974, in a Resolution on “Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life,” the Convention struck a “middle ground between the extreme of abortion on demand and the opposite extreme of all abortion as murder.”⁶² In the following year, the Convention adopted a Resolution on abortion that reflects a slight change in tone to begin with. “The practice of abortion for selfish non-therapeutic reasons only destroys fetal life, dulls our society’s moral sensitivity, and leads to a cheapening of all human

⁵⁹ Balmer. *Blessed Assurance*. p 82.

⁶⁰ Bendroth, Margaret Lamberts. “Fundamentalism and the Family: Gender, Culture, and the American Pro-family Movement” *Journal of Women’s History*. Wntr 1999 v10 i4 p35 (1).

⁶¹ Barnhart, Joe Edward. *The Southern Baptist Holy War*. (Austin, Texas: Texas Monthly Press, 1986) pp. 160-161.

⁶² *Annual of the SBC, 1974*. p. 76.

life.” But then, in traditional Southern Baptist fashion, the messengers “affirm [their] conviction about the limited role of government in dealing with matters relating to abortion and support the right of expectant mothers to the full range of medical services and personal counseling for the preservation of life and health.”⁶³

In 1977 The Convention once again affirmed its “strong opposition to abortion on demand” adding a statement opposing government policies and procedures that facilitate abortion on demand.⁶⁴ The rhetoric is warming up. By 1980, in Resolution No. 13, Southern Baptists “favored appropriate legislation and/or a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother.”⁶⁵ This position was reiterated in Resolution No. 8 of 1984, which again called for government to step in through legislation and/or constitutional amendment to protect the unborn.⁶⁶

In 1991 there is a significant change in tone, as well as name. No longer a resolution on abortion, Resolution No. 2, “On the Sanctity of Human Life,” called for all Southern Baptists to work actively in their home states for the adoption of pro-life legislation. The Resolution cites statistics of “1.6 million unborn babies...killed each year in America as a result of the” *Roe v. Wade* decision.⁶⁷ This resolution is lengthier and the language reflects that of the ecumenical pro-life movement to a much greater degree than in the past. In 1996, the SBC adopted Resolutions in support of the partial

⁶³ *Annual of the SBC*, 1975, pp. 57-58.

⁶⁴ *Annual of the SBC*, 1977, p. 53.

⁶⁵ *Annual of the SBC*, 1980, pp. 48-49.

⁶⁶ *Annual of the SBC*, 1984, p. 66.

⁶⁷ *Annual of the SBC*, 1991, p. 74.

birth abortion ban,⁶⁸ requesting “All Political Parties to Include a Pro-Life Platform.”⁶⁹

The final word on abortion from the Convention and its fundamentalist leadership came in the form of the Faith & Message Statement adopted in June 2000. In Article XV, it states that “We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.” Article XVIII, on The Family, says that “Children, *from the moment of conception*, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord.”⁷⁰ (emphasis added) The SBC, by adopting its new Faith & Message statement, has moved a long way from its initial acceptance of the Roe v. Wade decision, as well as from its moderate position adopted in St. Louis in 1973 and reaffirmed in 1974, a position that “reflected the middle ground between the extreme of abortion on demand and the opposite extreme of all abortion as murder.”⁷¹ The Convention has moved to embrace one of the extremes it so carefully avoided almost three decades ago. In so doing, the SBC and its fundamentalist leadership has joined forces with a highly partisan and larger political movement that extends beyond conservative Christianity. Further, by becoming an active participant in this movement, the SBC has become more ecumenical than ever in its history, joining forces with the Catholic church in the fight against abortion. It is by combining the Convention’s resolutions on abortion with its other positions on women in the church and home that we can find ourselves in agreement with Barnhart—they function to keep women in “their place.” The anti-abortion movement within the SBC is read here as the Convention’s response to changing gender roles in the

⁶⁸ *Annual of the SBC*, 1996. pp. 86-87.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 91.

⁷⁰ http://www.sbc.net/2000_report.html.

⁷¹ *Annual of the SBC*, 1974. p. 76.

home and workplace. A companion to that response is the denomination's escalating rhetoric concerning homosexuality. The issues are related because they involve the Convention's consensus on appropriate gender roles.

Homosexuality

As early as 1975 Southern Baptists were grappling with the issue of homosexuality, equating homosexuality with sin and urging "churches and agencies not to afford the practice of homosexuality any degree of approval through ordination, employment, or other designations of normal lifestyle."⁷² In 1977 the Convention condemned the "devastating consequences for family" of homosexuality and the "radical scheme to subvert the sacred pattern of marriage."⁷³ In 1980 "liberal humanistic politicians" were taken to task for policies that had "the effect of giving public approval to the homosexual lifestyle,"⁷⁴ and in 1985 the Convention took a formal stand against homosexuals being designated a minority with "attendant benefits."⁷⁵ By 1988 the Convention's 1988 Resolution "On Homosexuality" was notably mean-spirited, faulting homosexual activity with the "introduction and spread of AIDS in the United States" and then noting that it had also infected many "*innocent* victims."⁷⁶ (emphasis added)

Reflecting the principles of fundamentalist biblical inerrancy, the 1991 Resolution "On Human Sexuality" censures homosexuality, as well as "premarital sex, adultery, rape, incest, pornography, promiscuity, [and] prostitution" according to scripture. It calls

⁷² *Annual of the SBC, 1975*. p. 18.

⁷³ *Annual of the SBC, 1977*. p. 50.

⁷⁴ *Annual of the SBC, 1980*. p. 55.

⁷⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1985*. p. 85.

⁷⁶ *Annual of the SBC, 1988*. p. 71.

on “all Christians to uphold the biblical standard of human sexuality.”⁷⁷ In that same year, the Convention adopted a Resolution “On the Use of Government Funds to Encourage Immoral Sexual Behavior.” This resolution specifically mentions the Center for Disease Control’s grant to the 13th Annual National Lesbian and Gay Health Conference and lists some of the workshops at the conference as examples of the immorality promoted.⁷⁸

In 1992 Southern Baptists entered the public dialogue on the Boy Scouts of America, resolving to support the organization in its refusal to allow homosexuals as Scout Leaders.⁷⁹ The denomination would revisit this issue in 2000 with “Resolution No.8—On the Judicial Oppression of the Boy Scouts of America,” a critique of the expansion of non-discrimination laws to “immoral sexual behavior and a continuation of support for the BSA’s traditional moral standards.”⁸⁰

In 1993 the Convention resolutely affirmed its commitment to the ban on homosexuals in the military. In Resolution No. 2 of that year, the denomination criticized President Clinton for his attempt to repeal the ban on homosexuals in the military and called on him to “affirm biblical morality in exercising his public office.”⁸¹ Resolution No. 3 “On Homosexuality, Military Service and Civil Rights,” adopted in the same year reads in part that “homosexual politics is masquerading today as ‘civil rights’ in order to exploit the moral high ground of the civil rights movement even though

⁷⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1991*. p. 73.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁷⁹ *Annual of the SBC, 1992*. p. 91.

⁸⁰ *Annual of the SBC, 2000*. pp. 88-89.

⁸¹ *Annual of the SBC, 1993*. pp. 95-96.

homosexual conduct and other learned sexual deviance have nothing in common with the moral movement to stop discrimination against race and gender.” The resolution goes further, stating opposition to “all...government endorsement, sanction, recognition, acceptance, or civil rights advantage on the basis of homosexuality.” And finally, in a cruel twist on the phenomenon of gay bashing, the Resolution states that “we deplore acts of hatred or violence committed *by homosexuals* against those who take a stand for traditional morality as well as acts of hatred or violence committed against homosexuals.”⁸² (emphasis added)

The Disney Company became a target of Southern Baptist ire in 1996 for its extension of benefits to partners of homosexual employees and for the publication of a book entitled “Growing Up Gay.” The Convention resolved that year to boycott Disney parks and products since the company had seen fit to promote homosexuality rather than “traditional family values.”⁸³ The Disney Company’s policy remained unchanged. In the same year, in one of the most voluminous resolutions contained in SBC Annuals, the denomination took on the issue of homosexual marriage. This resolution was partly in response to the Hawaiian Supreme Court’s ruling that the state’s exclusion of same-sex couples from the benefits of marriage may violate that state’s constitution. The Convention recognized the implications of the “full faith and credit” clause of the U.S. Constitution, which compels states to recognize marriages from other states, should homosexual marriage be legalized in any one of the states. The Convention then pursued a strategy known in legal argument as the “parade of horrors.” The resolution expresses the concern that homosexuals from all fifty states are pursuing marriage certificates from

⁸² Ibid., p. 99.

⁸³ *Annual of the SBC, 1996*. pp. 84-85.

Hawaii with the intention of forcing recognition of their married status back home. The government, by extending legal status to homosexual marriage, jeopardizes “the favor of Almighty God on whom the security, welfare, and stability of every nation, even Gentile nations ultimately depend.”⁸⁴ Further, those who refuse to recognize homosexual marriage may face a “potential use of force.”⁸⁵ Laws, educational institutions, and business practices will all be adversely affected. Finally, in a bold statement of resistance to law before it exists, Southern Baptists “most solemnly pledge [their] decision never to recognize the moral legitimacy of any such law, policy or regulation.” They “affirm that, whatever the stakes, [they] will never conform to or obey anything required by any governing body to implement, impose, or act upon any such law.”⁸⁶ This resolution is a fine example of the escalating rhetoric concerning homosexuality in the Southern Baptist agenda. According to some, it is the “most important subtext” in the SBC’s “moral agenda.”⁸⁷

The homosexual issue within the SBC can be interpreted within the overall context of the family as a “battleground” in the SBC. The adoption of the 1988 amendment, “On the Family,” which was added to the 1963 Faith & Message Statement, affirms support of heterosexual marriage. The statement defines “family” as “composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.”⁸⁸ It is an implicit condemnation of homosexuality and alternative families. The adoption of a new Faith &

⁸⁴ *Annual of the SBC*, 1996. pp. 91-92.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁸⁷ Gushee, David P. “The speck in Mickey’s eye: we live in a wildly pluralistic society” *Christianity Today*, Aug 11, 1997 v. 41 n.9 p. 13 (1).

⁸⁸ *The Christian Century*. June 17, 1998 v. 115 n.18 p. 602 (2)

Message Statement in 2000 was equally adamant about the unacceptability of sex outside heterosexual marriage. In Article XVIII of that document, marriage is defined as the union of “one man and one woman” for the purposes of “sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means of procreation of the human race.”⁸⁹ Then, in Article XV, homosexuality is once again grouped with a variety of social ills: “Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography.”⁹⁰

Discussions of homosexuality are integrally related to issues of marriage and the family within the SBC’s broader agenda on gender. Homosexuality challenges gender norms in fundamental ways. Thus this issue sparked the greatest amount of controversy and opposition from within the denomination, because it is this issue that, in the cultural plurality of our time, generated the greatest amount of anxiety within the SBC.

Fundamentalism and Gender

It is telling that the 2000 Faith & Message Statement explicitly prohibits homosexual relations, abortions, and female pastors, while calling for wives to submit to their husbands—issues all related in one way or another to gender or gender roles. As argued previously in this chapter, the three central issues that ignited the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC were (1) female ordination, (2) changing gender roles in the home and workplace (part of which includes reproductive freedom), and (3) homosexuality. In short, fundamentalism in the Convention is the bulwark against feminism and modernity. Speaking of fundamentalism in general, Mark Chaves argues that “resisting full gender

⁸⁹ http://www.sbc.net/2000_report.html.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

equality...became a key feature of [its] broader antimodern identity.”⁹¹ Antifeminism is most certainly a “key feature” in the fundamentalism of the SBC.

Another facet of fundamentalism is that it is an essentially reactive movement. In her study of American fundamentalism, Karen McCarthy Brown argues “that societies under considerable stress almost inevitably seek to allay their anxiety by firming up boundaries having to do with women and children.”⁹² For Brown, this retreat to fixed and knowable boundaries represents a “failure of nerve in the face of the complexity of life” that can come at a particularly high cost.⁹³ An example of these fixed and knowable boundaries for Southern Baptists is found in the 1998 Amendment on the Family, to be appended to the 1963 Faith & Message Statement:

Thus, distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order (Gen. 1:27). Their differing roles in relating to one another provide a picture of the nature of God and the way He related to his people. As the realities of *headship* and *submission* are enacted within loving, equal, and complementary male-female roles, the image of God is *properly* reflected.⁹⁴ (emphasis added)

Finally, in the new Faith & Message Statement for 2000, “gender” itself becomes an issue for the Convention, as Article III of the Statement reads in part, “The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God’s creation.”⁹⁵ Here the attempt is to make gender, and its discursively produced differences, part of God’s natural and permanent creation. The hope of Southern Baptist fundamentalists is to make gender incontestable. That hope will ultimately be frustrated because the reality is that gender at the beginning of the twenty-

⁹¹ Chaves, Mark. *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) pp. 104-105.

⁹² Karen McCarthy Brown, “Fundamentalism and the Control of Women” *Fundamentalism & Gender*, John Stratton Hawley, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 10.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁹⁴ *Annual of the SBC, 1998*. p. 80.

⁹⁵ http://www.sbc.net/2000_report.html.

first century is highly contestable.

There are Southern Baptist women who feel called to preach and seek out congregations that will ordain them. Theirs is not an easy journey and they are often forced to leave the denomination they love in order to pastor congregations. Sometimes their congregations leave the Convention, sometimes they are disfellowshipped from associations for calling a female pastor. But the reality still exists—there are Southern Baptist female pastors. There are Southern Baptist women challenging gender stereotypes every day in the workplace and at home, being anything but submissive wives, women who disagree with the direction of their fundamentalist Convention but who love their denomination enough to stay with it yet a little longer. And, there are homosexuals in the Southern Baptist Convention, uninvited, unappreciated, and uncounted, but they are there. And that is just from among the 15.8 million Southern Baptists! The SBC must contend with the culture at large as well, and this is the battle in which the fundamentalists are most vigilantly engaged, the one between the Convention and a culture within which gender is being contested in every imaginable way. While the SBC may win its battle within, staking out a fundamentalist refuge from modernity and change, it is sure to lose its battle with the culture around it, for that fight is with a nation of growing diversity and cultural plurality.

CHAPTER 3

CRACKS IN THE WALL: THE ATTENUATION OF CHURCH STATE SEPARATION IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

A distinguishing feature of the Southern Baptist Convention throughout its history has been the denomination's commitment to separation of church and state. Ellen M. Rosenberg refers to this commitment as "one of the true Baptist distinctives."¹ In many key areas, Southern Baptists have remained stalwart defenders of church-state separation. There has, however, been an intriguing change over the last two decades. Over this time, on several issues, the SBC has straddled the wall between church and state, willing to abridge separation in favor of accommodation.² This chapter identifies and examines those areas within which the SBC has altered its position on separation of church and state, situating and analyzing these alterations within the changing judicial and political climate of church-state relations. Among the issues considered in this chapter are school prayer, tax support for religious schools, the teaching of evolution versus creationism, military chaplainry, tax exemptions for religious organizations, government funds or loans for religious colleges and universities, federal and state grants to religious hospitals, and U.S. presidential appointments of ambassadors to the Vatican. Before these issues can be explored, the history and tradition of church-state separation in the Southern Baptist denomination must be established.

¹ Rosenberg. *The Southern Baptists*. p. 146.

² Separation refers to the principle of complete separation between church and state and emphasizes the establishment clause of the First Amendment. Accommodation refers to an arrangement wherein all religions are equally accommodated by the government and emphasizes the free exercise clause of the First Amendment.

Early Baptist History on Church-State Separation

Southern Baptists can trace their American theological (and political) lineage to Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, colonial advocate for separation of church and state, and early Baptist. The agency charged with defending the Baptist tradition of religious liberty, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA), routinely credited Williams with being the founder of religious liberty and Baptist freedom in America.³ The Convention's view of Roger Williams is a useful benchmark to measure how far the SBC has altered its positions on some church-state issues. For he is not as heartily embraced as a theological forebear today as he once was.

Roger Williams emigrated to the American colonies as a Puritan dissenter, arriving in Boston on February 5, 1631. Primarily because of his belief that church and state should be separate, as well as his criticism of Boston authorities for "cheating the Indians out of their land" and the presbytery-like nature of ministerial meetings, Williams was expelled from the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1636. He subsequently founded the colony of Rhode Island and, in 1639, established the first American Baptist Church in Providence, having been baptized by Ezekiel Holliman in March of that same year.⁴ After a brief experience as a Baptist, Williams became a Seeker, rejecting a formal relationship with any congregation.

Williams' most controversial work was his published dispute with John Cotton on the separation of civil and ecclesiastical matters. In his "The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience," Williams argues that "*all men in all Nations and Countries*" must be free to practice even the "*most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish or*

³ *Report From The Capital*. October 1950 and March 1964.

⁴ *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*. Volume II, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), p. 1502.

Antichristian consciences and worships.”⁵ This freedom was not to be abridged by any sword other than the “*Sword of Gods Spirit, the Word of God.*” With those words, one can easily draw the connections between Williams’ thought and the traditional Baptist commitment both to religious liberty and evangelical missions. Williams and the early Baptists were regarded as radical because they “demanded the complete separation of church and state” and were relentless advocates for religious liberty.⁶

Beginning with Williams and John Clarke, and continuing for a century and a half with Isaac Backus and John Leland, Baptists “fought for the disestablishment of colonial churches and for church-state separation in state and national constitutions.”⁷ Isaac Backus was a leader of Baptists in Massachusetts. Backus was particularly well-known for his thought on church-state relations. His work, while predominantly theological, focused on the right ordering of government in relation to religious freedom. He vigorously opposed the establishment of religion in Massachusetts and protested to “the governor and council in 1774 that eighteen Baptists from the town of Warwick had been jailed forty miles from home, in Northampton, during the extremity of winter, for the crime of refusing to pay taxes in support of the town’s Congregational minister.”⁸

John Leland spent a great deal of time in the state of Virginia and was instrumental, along with other Baptists of that state, in impressing upon James Madison the importance of the First Amendment and its guarantees of separation and religious

⁵ Williams, Roger. *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience*. (London: 1644).

⁶ Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸ Hovey, Alvah. *A Memoir of the Life and Times of Reverend Isaac Backus*. (Boston, 1858). pp. 197-198.

liberty.⁹ These radical Baptists, committed to liberty of conscience and absolute separation of church and state, were early allies of and influences upon both Thomas Jefferson and Madison.¹⁰ It was Madison's horror at the imprisonment of a Baptist preacher that framed in part the drafting of the First Amendment.¹¹

Though not a Baptist himself, Madison had views that were quite consonant with those held by Baptists of his day. Separation of religion and government was one of his "favorite principle[s]" and he was dismayed when a "deviation from it took place in Congress when they appointed Chaplains, to be paid from the National Treasury."¹² The separation of church and state "was the principal theme of Madison's Remonstrance and a theme of the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom."¹³ This chapter considers the judicial opinions that assign meaning to Madison and the First Amendment's original intent, but Madison himself seems to have made it quite clear from the beginning.

Madison had such refined constitutional scruples on this matter that he also regarded as unconstitutional such governmental, legal, or financial support to religion as presidential proclamations of Thanksgiving, tax exemptions for religious institutions, chaplains for Congress and the armed services, incorporation of churches by the federal government in the District of Columbia, and the grant of lands to a church of the land on which it was built.¹⁴

Early Baptists and their descendants, at least until the most recent incarnation of the SBC, were in agreement with Madison on these matters.

⁹ *Madison Papers*. XII, p. 453. Quoted in Levy, Leonard W. *The Establishment Clause: Religion and the First Amendment*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986) p. 88.

¹⁰ Fowler, et al. *Religion and Politics in America*. pp. 9-10.

¹¹ Rosenberg. *The Southern Baptist*. pp. 23 and 143.

¹² Letter to Livingston, July 10, 1822 in Hunt, Gaillard, ed. *The Writings of James Madison* (New York, 1900-1910) 9 Volumes, IX, p. 100.

¹³ *Madison Papers*. VIII, pp. 300, 304. Quoted in Levy. *The Establishment Clause*. p. 168.

¹⁴ Levy. *The Establishment Clause*. p. 106.

But just what did the Framers intend by the wording of the First Amendment's religion clauses? And is original intent even a question we should concern ourselves with today? These are the central questions that animate disputes over the role of American jurisprudence in matters of church-state separation and religious liberty. The "great object" of the Bill of Rights was, according to Madison, to "limit and qualify the powers of government."¹⁵ If, as Leonard Levy argues, the First Amendment was intended to deny Congress the power to act in prohibited fields, it is the separationists, not the accommodationists, who prevail in arguments about the meaning of the Establishment Clause.

There is much discussion in contemporary jurisprudence and scholarship about the viability of the "wall" metaphor in church-state separation cases. In the decisive modern establishment clause cases before the U. S. Supreme Court, Justice Hugo Black employed Jefferson's wall metaphor, arguing that the "First Amendment has erected a wall between church and state" and that this "wall must be kept high and impregnable."¹⁶ A mere thirty-eight years later, Justice William Rehnquist argues that, "We have done much straining since 1947, but still we admit that we can only 'dimly perceive' the *Everson* wall. Our perception has been clouded not by the Constitution but by the mists of an unnecessary metaphor."¹⁷ For the early Baptists, however, the wall was much more than a shadowy figure of speech. It guaranteed the freedom of conscience that lay at the heart of the Baptist faith. And, it should be noted, the metaphor itself did not originate

¹⁵ Quoted in Levy, *The Establishment Clause*, p. 84.

¹⁶ *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).

¹⁷ *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985).

with Jefferson—although he did employ it in his letter to the Danbury Baptists¹⁸—but was first mentioned by that early Baptist, Roger Williams. Williams’ wall of separation was a protective structure that would shield the church from the intrusions of state and politics.¹⁹ Jefferson’s wall was more concerned with protecting the state from the strife of religious sectarianism. This is not to say that Jefferson envisioned a wall that would divide religion and public life. He opted instead for a wall between ecclesiastical institutions and the government. Further, “Jefferson’s ‘wall’ was a metaphoric construction of the First Amendment, which governed relations between religion and the *national* government.”²⁰ Importantly, Jefferson’s wall did not separate church and state at the level of *state* governments. That would come with the incorporation of the Bill of Rights through the Fourteenth Amendment and would first be applied in the Supreme Court case, *Everson v. Board of Education*. In this seminal establishment clause case, justices on both sides of the ruling identified Madison and Jefferson as the “appropriate interpreters of the meaning of the Religion Clauses of the First Amendment.”²¹ But over the course of half a century of Supreme Court rulings, interpretations of Madison and Jefferson have shifted within the court and among Southern Baptists.

Historically, the Baptists have been more concerned with church-state separation

¹⁸ In his response to the Danbury Baptist, Jefferson employed the “wall” metaphor to depict the constitutionally correct church-state relationship. Letter from Thomas Jefferson to a committee of the Danbury Baptist association in Connecticut, 1 January 1802, Presidential Papers Microfilm, Thomas Jefferson Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress), Series 1, Reel 25, November 15, 1801-March 31, 1802.

¹⁹ Howe, Mark DeWolfe. *The Garden and the Wilderness: Religion and Government in American Constitutional History*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

²⁰ Dreisbach, Daniel. “Thomas Jefferson, A Mammoth Cheese, and the ‘Wall of Separation.’” *Religion and the New Republic: Faith in the Founding of America*. Edited by James H. Hutson. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000) p. 81.

²¹ Editorial note by Robert S. Alley in *The Constitution & Religion: Leading Supreme Court Cases on Church and State*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 1999) p. 47.

from Williams' point of view rather than Jefferson's, an interpretation that focused on the protection of religious liberty from government. This focus on protection for church has obscured the fact that, at times, government and the citizens it protects might need their side of the wall too. Until the latter half of the twentieth century, a general and mainline protestant ethic predominated in government and religion. This afforded Protestants the opportunity to be enthusiastic supporters of church-state separation but, in fact, offered little solace or protection to religious minorities. This dominate protestant ethic was a sort of "shadow" establishment that helps to explain several seeming paradoxes in Baptist positions on church-state separation. For instance, while they continued to oppose the military chaplainry throughout the Civil War, Southern Baptists accepted public funds for the establishment of an Indian school in their mission work with Native Americans. Southern Baptists were champions of prohibition and advocated the use of government regulation based on moral arguments about alcohol consumption. They also lobbied the state to enact Sabbath observance laws. As Nancy Ammerman argues, Southern Baptists simultaneously held to the Baptist tradition of church-state separation in national government while being "only too eager to have the assistance of government in upholding the morals they saw essential to the life of a Christian community."²² In each of these cases the Convention seems unaware of the tensions between these positions and its historic commitment to church-state separation, viewing the state as "a valuable ally in the enforcement of moral principles."²³ The unawareness of these tensions is located in a willingness to view Protestant morality as deserving of establishment. That is why James

²² Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 36.

²³ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 37.

Wood may argue correctly that First Amendment case law “has been largely forged by minority religious groups seeking elbowroom for their religious life-style in a dominantly Protestant society.”²⁴

Rufus Spain argues that Southern Baptists at the close of the nineteenth century were not “strict separationists” but that instead they held distinctive “Baptist theories of government.”²⁵ This draws on the Baptist belief in the divine origin of civil government. Included with this belief is a commitment to democracy, an emphasis on individual rights, and a strong attachment to religious liberty. But the relationship between the Southern Baptist and his government is not unilateral. Throughout Southern Baptist Convention resolutions, one finds exhortations to fulfill the duties and obligations of good citizenship. Whether that role of Southern Baptist citizen has become more politicized and has taken on different objectives forms part of this chapter’s inquiry. A good place to start is with a review of Supreme Court jurisprudence and Southern Baptist positions on the cases considered.

First Amendment Jurisprudence and Southern Baptist Positions

The case that initially applied the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause to the states was *Everson v. Board of Education*. In this instance a New Jersey statute authorized reimbursement of transportation costs to parents of children using the public transportation system. The statute allowed these reimbursements to go to parents of children both in public and Catholic parochial schools. The court upheld the statute, devising a “child benefit” theory as the reason for its decision. More important perhaps is

²⁴ Wood, James E. “Religion, the State and Education.” *Church and State in America: A Bibliographical Guide The Civil War to the Present Day*. John F. Wilson, ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987) p. 344.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

that Justice Hugo Black's decision in the case argues that the Establishment clause "means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government...can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another."²⁶ Justice Black goes on to invoke Jefferson's wall metaphor, stating that the Establishment Clause was "intended to erect a wall of separation between church and state."²⁷

The newly formed Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA), formed in 1946 as the SBC's church-state and public policy advocate in the nation's capital, filed a brief in this case, contending that reimbursement of transportation costs to parents of children attending parochial schools violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments. The Committee disputed the "child benefit" theory, arguing instead that the parochial schools themselves would receive the aid through parents and children. The Committee's brief in the *Everson* case, though it was on the losing side of the issue, staked out the Baptist position on separation of church and state. When the ruling was handed down, the BJCPA decried the decision, arguing that it gave "the Catholic church a privileged position" and "could wreck the whole cherished public school system."²⁸ The report goes further, characterizing the decision as the "most serious thing that has happened within forty years of our active life. It is the opening wedge whereby larger public funds will be asked for the support of Catholic institutions."²⁹

The Southern Baptist fear of Catholicism, exacerbated by the *Everson* decision,

²⁶ *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Report from the Capital*. March, 1947. p. 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

was partially ameliorated by the *McCollum* decision that was to follow a year later.³⁰ This decision dealt with the public schools in Illinois and with a statute that allowed religious groups to provide religious instruction in school classrooms during school hours. The Court overturned the law, with only one justice dissenting, arguing that this was, “beyond all question,” a utilization of the public school system to assist religious groups in their mission. Importantly, the Court also used this case to reaffirm the application of the First Amendment to the states via the Fourteenth Amendment. This decision carved out a protectorate around public schools, insulating them from sectarian instruction and influence. Southern Baptists applauded this decision, characterizing it as “the greatest single safeguard to separation of church and state outside the First Amendment itself,”³¹ adding that, “We were...quite gratified when the Court’s decision was announced.”³²

The 1950s were a rather quiet time for constitutional jurisprudence concerning the First Amendment religious clauses,³³ but it was simply the lull before the storm of school prayer decisions in the early sixties. The first of the two major school prayer cases to appear on the Supreme Court’s docket was *Engel v. Vitale*.³⁴ The decision, announced in 1962, was hailed by Southern Baptist leaders as deserving of the Convention’s support.³⁵ The case addressed a procedure in the Union Free School District No. 9 in New Hyde

³⁰ *McCollum v. Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948).

³¹ *Report from the Capital*. March, 1948. p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ With the exception of *Zorach v. Clausen*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952) which upheld a New York statute that allowed for released time from school for religious instruction off school premises.

³⁴ *Engle v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

³⁵ *Annual of the SBC*, 1963. p. 259.

Park, New York. The school district had directed the principle to start each school day with a prayer, composed by state officials, to be said aloud by students in the presence of a teacher. The Supreme Court agreed with the petitioners that the constitutional prohibition against establishment of religion extended to the composition of official prayers for people to recite as part of a religious program executed by government.³⁶ The practice in Union Free School District No. 9 was unconstitutional. The BJCPA was in complete agreement.

In addition to prohibiting the practice of organized, school-sponsored or directed prayer in public school classrooms, the ruling in *Engel* makes an important distinction between the establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment. The Court said the former “does not depend upon any showing of direct governmental compulsion.”³⁷ In other words, it did not matter whether students were excused from the exercise, because the “power, prestige and financial support of government” was placed behind a particular religious belief.³⁸

Following the *Engel* decision came the second public school prayer case, and this one seemed to ignite a greater firestorm of criticism than did the first, although it was, in many respects, simply a reaffirmation of what the Court had decreed in the first case. This may be because the second case, *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, provided a more visible antagonist to mainstream Protestant, or at least Christian, views. This antagonist was Madalyn Murray, a professed atheist, who opposed Bible reading

³⁶ *Engle v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

and the use of the Lord's prayer in her son's public school classroom in Baltimore, Maryland. Murray argued that the practice subjected "their freedom of conscience to the rule of the majority" and that it established "belief in God as the source of all moral and spiritual values."³⁹ This decision merged two cases, the Murray case and one from Pennsylvania. In the latter, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania required ten verses from the Bible to be read at the opening of each public school day, sometimes accompanied by the recitation of the Lord's prayer. The entire school participated in this activity over an intercom system or through each teacher in his/her individual classroom. Any child could be excused by written request of a parent.

The Court lays a little groundwork prior to getting on with the substance of its decision. First, we are reminded that the First Amendment is "wholly applicable" to the states via the Fourteenth Amendment. Then, importantly, the Court rejects "unequivocally the contention that the Establishment Clause forbids only governmental preference of one religion over another."⁴⁰ It does more than that, the Court's majority asserts, in what is more than irrelevant dicta on the part of the Court. It stakes out a separationist doctrine that prevailed for the better part of three decades. Within the last decade, the Court notes, we have begun to witness the abrogation of the wall in favor of a more accommodationist approach. In espousing its separationist doctrine at the time of this decision, the Court established the first two prongs of what would come to be known as the "Lemon test" in constitutional doctrine. To be constitutional, a statute must (1) have a secular purpose and (2) have as its primary effect must neither the advancement

³⁹ *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

nor retardation of religion. Based on these principles, the laws and practices in *Abington v. Schempp* were ruled to be unconstitutional.⁴¹

The leadership of the SBC expressed support for the Supreme Court's handling of school prayer cases. Indeed, when an amendment to permit prayer and Bible reading in public school classrooms, known as the Becker Amendment, was introduced in the U. S. House of Representatives, the BJCPA publicized its unambiguous opposition to the proposal. It charged that the proposal addresses the erroneous assumption that "recent" Supreme Court decisions prohibited student-initiated prayer and Bible reading rather than government-led activities.⁴² What Baptists should oppose, according to the BJCPA, is the offering of religion on a "government platter."⁴³ The BJCPA returned to the subject of school prayer a couple of years later, detailing the *Engel* and *Abington* rulings and drawing a clear distinction between what the Court did (and did not) prohibit.⁴⁴

It is important to bear in mind as one traverses the landscape of First Amendment jurisprudence that one may not assume that the voiced opinion of the SBC or the BJCPA reflected the sentiments of individual Southern Baptists in the pews. In one edition of *Report from the Capital*, scholar Martin Marty takes to task those, Southern Baptist among them, who would restore prayer to public school classrooms.⁴⁵ That piece is followed two months later by James Dunn, who criticizes the movement to make public

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Report from the Capital*. March, 1964. p. 2 and 4.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ *Report from the Capital*. August, 1966.

⁴⁵ *Report from the Capital*. Vol. 37, No. 2 Feb, 1982. p. 14.

schools the instruments of prayer and devotion.⁴⁶ The presence of these public arguments exposes the rifts within the Convention on this subject, as some moved toward a more fundamentalist (accommodationist) stance and moderates (supporting a separationist position) attempted to maintain their hold on the Convention and its principles. To be sure, the SBC leadership had not voiced an opinion on every landmark Supreme Court case involving church-state relations. Nonetheless, this jurisprudence is relevant to the project at hand, for it establishes the governmental context for Southern Baptist history and change.

The seminal test for constitutionality in Establishment Clause cases was established in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*.⁴⁷ This case involved aid to parochial schools in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. The irony of the ruling is that the very measures the states had taken to insure constitutionality were viewed by the Court as “excessive entanglement” between government and religion.⁴⁸ The potential for entanglement formed the third prong of the three-part “Lemon” test.⁴⁹ The Court found the aid to parochial schools in this case unconstitutional. While the SBC did not issue an official endorsement of the decision, the denomination did in the following Convention year adopt a resolution opposing both the “channeling [of] tax funds to parochial schools” and “voucher plans.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Report from the Capital*. Vol. 37, No. 4 April, 1982. p. 15.

⁴⁷ *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹ The first two prongs are listed above in the discussion of *Abington v. Schempp*. They are (1) that the statute must have a secular purpose and (2) that its primary effect must neither advance nor hinder religion.

⁵⁰ *Annual of the SBC, 1972*. pp. 75-76.

Subsequently, the Court and the SBC have moved on this issue. The important Supreme Court cases that address the relationship between government and parochial schools are *Grand Rapids v. Ball*, *Aguilar v. Felton*, and *Agostini v. Felton*.⁵¹ In the first two cases the Court reaffirms its separationist position, holding that aid in the form of either shared time or the provision of public school teachers to parochial schools is unconstitutional.⁵² In the last, it overturns that position, articulating instead a more accommodationist stance. The majority's decision in *Agostini v. Felton* abandoned the notion that public employees in parochial school settings would "fail to discharge their duties faithfully."⁵³ Prior to this decision, constitutional jurisprudence held that pervasive monitoring would be necessary to ensure adequate separation and that such arrangements would signal excessive entanglement. *Agostini v. Felton* represents, in the words of Justice O'Connor, the Court's recognition that its "Establishment Clause law has 'significantly changed' since we decided *Aguilar*."⁵⁴ Further change is to be found in the silence of the SBC on the *Agostini* decision. The ruling goes unaddressed in the following year's Convention.

The denomination does continue to oppose public aid to parochial schools in its resolution of 1981, on "Affirming Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State." In this resolution, the Convention protests against "tax proposals which would finance

⁵¹ *Grand Rapids v. Ball*, 473 U.S. 373 (1985), *Aguilar v. Felton*, 105 U.S. 3232 (1985), and *Agostini v. Felton*, 114 U.S. 2481 (1997).

⁵² *Grand Rapids v. Ball* and *Aguilar v. Felton*.

⁵³ *Agostini v. Felton*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

education and other activities of churches or religious groups.”⁵⁵ Then the following year the Convention voices its opposition to tuition tax credits for parents of parochial school children, citing the denomination’s concern with threats to the First Amendment.⁵⁶ A mere nine years later, however, we find the SBC reversing its long-held position on public dollars going to parochial education. In a resolution, “Parental Choice in Education,” the Convention states:

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have always affirmed the right of parents to educate their children in accordance with their religious convictions, without governmental obstruction or interference; and

WHEREAS, More and more Southern Baptist parents are concerned that their public school systems are increasingly hostile to Christian convictions; and

WHEREAS, Many of these parents have felt the need to choose other avenues of instruction for their children, including private schools, Christian schools, and home instruction; and...

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we encourage choice in education initiatives which include proper tax incentives for families; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That these initiatives be fully in keeping with First Amendment protections of religious liberty and prohibitions against any governmental establishment of religion.⁵⁷

The significance of this reversal can not be overemphasized. The SBC had, since its beginnings in the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth, invoked the First Amendment against the use of public funds for parochial education. Its new position, supporting “parental choice” in education through the disbursement of tax dollars to the parents of privately-educated children, was then reaffirmed in a 1996 resolution and remains in place today.⁵⁸

The issue of *public* schools and religion, whether addressed by the Supreme Court or the SBC, has revolved around two primary issues: prayer and the teaching of scientific

⁵⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1981*. p. 56.

⁵⁶ *Annual of the SBC, 1982*. p. 62.

⁵⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1991*. pp. 81-82.

⁵⁸ *Annual of the SBC, 1996*. p. 96.

creationism. The *McCullom* decision (prohibiting the teaching of religion on public school premises during school hours) and the *Engel* and *Abington* decisions (prohibiting state sanctioned or guided prayer in public school classrooms) address these questions directly. It is in this area of constitutional jurisprudence, however, that one can see over the course of two decades the SBC diverge from the Supreme Court. In denominational publications, *amicus curiae* briefs, and annual resolutions, the Convention had been supportive of these early Court decisions. But while the Court has remained fairly steadfast regarding the place of religion in public schools, the SBC has not. After the fundamentalist takeover of the Convention, the denomination changed its position on prayer and the teaching of scientific creationism.

In the early 1980s the SBC began to emphasize the Religious Liberty clause over the Establishment Clause in the relationship between public schools and religion. In a resolution passed in 1982, the Convention declared its support for President Ronald Reagan's proposed constitutional amendment on school prayer. That proposal read, "Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed to prohibit individual or group prayer in public schools or other public institutions. No person shall be required by the United States or by any state to participate in prayer."⁵⁹ In a difference that would portend a future split, James Dunn and the BJCPA publicly opposed Reagan's proposal, citing the eight "previous SBC resolutions supporting the Supreme Court's 1963 ruling."⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court reaffirmed its earlier position on state sponsored or directed prayer in the classroom, going so far as to inquire about the legislative intent in a voluntary prayer statute in Alabama. In *Wallace v. Jaffree* the Court considered a

⁵⁹ *Annual of the SBC, 1982*. p. 58.

⁶⁰ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 100.

statute authorizing a moment of silence in public school classrooms for “meditation or voluntary prayer.”⁶¹ The prime sponsor of the bill, Alabama state senator Donald Holmes, explained that the purpose of the bill was to return prayer to schools. Employing the first prong of the “Lemon” test, the Court found that the statute had no secular purpose and was therefore unconstitutional.⁶² In his dissent, Justice Rehnquist argued from the accommodationist position, suggesting that the Establishment Clause was simply intended by the Framers to prevent the establishment of a national religion and to prevent preference among religious sects or denominations. It did not, he asserted, require “government neutrality between religion and irreligion, nor did it prohibit... government...aid to religion.”⁶³ Justice Rehnquist did not stop there. He went on to criticize the “Lemon” test, arguing that it is not grounded in the First Amendment but on “historically faulty doctrine.” It is difficult to apply, he says, yielding unprincipled results.⁶⁴

In 1986, the SBC decried the misinterpretation of Supreme Court rulings that, when applied, would prohibit voluntary prayer and Bible reading in public schools.⁶⁵ There is an important distinction to be made here. The Convention is absolutely correct; Supreme Court rulings have never prohibited voluntary prayer or Bible reading in public schools. By 1992 the SBC, through a resolution on religious freedom in public schools, expresses a concern that Supreme Court decisions on prayer and Bible reading in public

⁶¹ *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985).

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Annual of the SBC*, 1986. p. 75.

schools have resulted in hostility toward religion. The denomination resolved to urge “all Southern Baptist students vigorously and aggressively to seek all means by which they may share the love of God with their fellow students.”⁶⁶ The constitutional implications have not changed, but the relationship between a religious life and a student life is cast here as an adversarial one. The student is urged to proselytize aggressively in the public school setting. This has the potential to introduce just the sort of sectarian pressures that should be absent from that environment.

The terrain shifts between 1992 and 1993. The Supreme Court hands down a ruling that offended the SBC, not just in its potential for misinterpretation or misapplication, but in its substantive content. The Court’s decision in *Lee v. Weisman* was denounced by Southern Baptists as a “lopsided emphasis on ‘strict separation.’”⁶⁷ This case concerned a practice by a school board in Providence, Rhode Island. The schools in the district had a tradition of inviting community clergy members to deliver a nonsectarian prayer at commencement exercises. The school principal in question selected a Rabbi to offer the prayer at graduation and provided the clergy member with a pamphlet on prayer for civil occasions. But the attempt to avoid sectarian divisiveness was not enough to void the constitutional problems for the Court’s majority. The real problem was that the school was involved in producing a prayer “to be used in a formal religious exercise which students, for all practical purposes, are obliged to attend.”⁶⁸ For Southern Baptists, this ruling required “extreme strict separation of church and state” and

⁶⁶ *Annual of the SBC, 1992*. p. 88.

⁶⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1993*. p. 101.

⁶⁸ *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992).

accommodates only “arid secularism” in public schools.⁶⁹ The relationship between the fundamentalist SBC and the nation’s highest Court could not have been more strained than at this point.

Through its “Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission” and its “North American Mission Board,” the SBC issued a call to “Southern Baptist leaders, pastors and students to join together in taking prayer back” to public schools.⁷⁰ This initiative represents more than simply an attempt to reintroduce prayer on school campuses. It is an evangelizing effort that encourages students to view their schools as a “mission field.” While programs developed by these agencies, such as “Campus Prayer Journey” and “See You At The Pole,” seek to clarify Supreme Court rulings on prayer in public schools and to foster student exercise of their religious freedoms, evangelistic strategies such as “FiSH!” and “Campus Missionary” suggest a more invasive and aggressive approach. These tactics, though well within the parameters of constitutional rights, have the potential to antagonize and marginalize students of minority faiths. While not having the imprimatur of governmental authority, peer pressure is a very real and very powerful presence among high school students. Due to their strong evangelistic ethos, these programs threaten the religious diversity present in public schools and could transform the atmosphere of secondary education into one of religious competition rather than of pursuit of learning.

The politicization of religion in public school settings intensified over the issue of prayer at high school football games in 1999-2000. From right in the heart of fundamentalist Baptist territory in Texas came a Supreme Court case, *Santa Fe*

⁶⁹ *Annual of the SBC, 1993*, p. 101.

⁷⁰ <http://www.namb.net/root/schoolprayer/default.asp>.

Independent School District v. Jane Doe.⁷¹ Students in this high school elected to have an invocation broadcast over the public address system at football games, delivered by an elected representative from the student body. This case placed minority students “at the mercy of the majority.”⁷² Set in the context of a high school football game, delivered over the public address system, this prayer was given the “actual or perceived endorsement” of the school administration.⁷³ The Court clearly recognizes the implications of that endorsement.

School sponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are nonadherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community.⁷⁴

This problem, the marginalization of religious minorities, is the same difficulty that results from the aggressive evangelization of high school students on their public school campuses. Barry W. Lynn captures the tenor of the movement in discussing the “No pray, no play” movement that sprang up in response to the *Santa Fe* decision. “It strikes me,” he writes, “that praying as part of a protest of a Supreme Court ruling is using prayer as a kind of weapon or an act of spiritual intimidation against those who” are different. “For these folks,” he continues, “prayer isn’t an expression of piety but more a statement of power: we are the biggest, most powerful religious group and we want everybody to know it. People who pray with this attitude are bullies.”⁷⁵ Richard Land, director of the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, responded to the *Santa*

⁷¹ *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Jane Doe*, (99-62) 168 F.3d 806.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Benen, Steve. “Righteous Revolution or Constitutional Quagmire?” *Church and State*. Oct. 2000 v. 53 i9 p. 8.

Fe decision with outrage. “I don’t care if a prayer is offensive to someone. There’s no constitutional right against being offended.”⁷⁶ Mr. Land, however, fails to look beyond the basic structure of rights to the more complex and subtle issues of environment, perception, and sentiment. The Court, in *Santa Fe*, recognized and attempted to diminish the potential for “entangling divisiveness along religious lines in a public school setting.”⁷⁷

Other Issues in Dispute

School prayer is not the only issue in public school education that has provoked the attention and objections of Southern Baptists in the last two decades. With the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC came a renewed interest in the teaching of creation science instead of evolution as an account of the world’s origins. The first denominational declaration of support for the teaching of creation science came in 1982. In a resolution at that year’s Convention, the SBC questioned the scientific validity of the theory of evolution and argued that scientific creationism could be taught “solely in terms of scientific evidence without any religious doctrines or concepts.”⁷⁸ The Convention resolved to support the teaching of Scientific Creationism in public schools.

The Supreme Court took on this topic with its decision in *Edwards v. Aguillard* in 1987.⁷⁹ This case involved Louisiana’s “Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science in Public Instruction Act, which forbade the teaching of evolution in

⁷⁶ Grossman, Cathy Lynn. “Private prayers remain protected in schools” *USA Today* June 21, 2000. Life Section. p. 10D.

⁷⁷ Zirkel, Perry A. “Courtside – The Games, They Are A-Changin’” *Phi Delta Kappan* Oct. 2000 v. 82 i2 p175.

⁷⁸ *Annual of the SBC, 1982*. p. 59.

⁷⁹ *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578 (1987).

public schools unless it was accompanied by the teaching of creation science.”⁸⁰ The stated purpose of the act was to “protect academic freedom.” The Court’s majority disagreed, arguing that both the legislative history and the historic antagonism between religion and the teaching of evolution combined to indicate that the purpose of the Louisiana legislature was “clearly to advance the religious viewpoint” that God created humankind.⁸¹ In this instance the court is once again employing the first prong of the “Lemon” test, finding that the purpose of the statute in question is not secular but religious.

In a dissenting opinion in this case, Justice Anthony Scalia questions whether legislation can be invalidated under the Establishment Clause based on its motivation or intent. The purpose prong of the “Lemon” test, he argues, exacerbates the tension between the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses. Leaving that test would be a good place to start in church-state cases. The SBC’s Christian Life Commission agreed, calling on the Supreme Court to abandon the “Lemon” test and replace it with something called “benevolent neutrality” on the part of government toward religion.⁸² Scalia raises the point that exceptions to the impermissibility of a religious purpose to a law might be to eliminate discrimination against a particular religion, to “facilitate its free exercise, or to accommodate it.”⁸³ Southern Baptists supporting the teaching of creation science agree with this dissent. The Convention’s expressions of support for creation science are based in part on the perception that there exists a general climate of hostility to religious

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *The Christian Century*, March 2, 1994 v111 n7 p. 219. Note: The SBC’s position was contained in an amicus curiae brief in the case *Board of Education of Kiryas Joel v. Grumet*, 114 S. Ct. 2481 (1994).

⁸³ Ibid.

faith in the public realm, and especially in the public schools.

Another issue on which the SBC has been relatively quiet during the twentieth century is that of military and legislative chaplainries. The Convention was opposed to military chaplains during the Civil War, preferring denominational and church funded personnel to minister to the troops.⁸⁴ Since then, the SBC has cooperated with and contributed to government programs to provide chaplains to the military, even organizing a Chaplains Committee (renamed the Chaplains Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1944) to meet the demands of World War II.⁸⁵ The latest Supreme Court word on chaplains involves the appointment of a legislative chaplain in the Nebraska legislature. In this case, the court upheld the practice and custom of legislative prayer.⁸⁶ This ruling recalls the echo of Justice Potter Stewart's dissent in the *Engel* decision, in which he argues that the Court's majority in that case deprived school children of the very thing that the Court and members of Congress begin their days with...prayer.⁸⁷ As has been shown, the SBC began thereafter to sound more like Justice Stewart and less like the majority opinion in the *Engel* and *Abington* decisions.

Another area of constitutional law on which the SBC differed from the Supreme Court concerned religious liberty as defined in the *Oregon v. Smith* case.⁸⁸ The relevant question in this case was whether the Free Exercise Clause permitted the State of Oregon "to include religiously inspired peyote use within the reach of its general criminal

⁸⁴ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. pp. 34-35.

⁸⁵ *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*. Vol. 1. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1958) pp. 245-246.

⁸⁶ *Marsh v. Chambers*, 463 U.S. 783 (1983).

⁸⁷ *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

⁸⁸ *Oregon v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

prohibition on use of that drug, and thus permit the State to deny unemployment benefits to persons dismissed from their jobs because of such religiously inspired use.”⁸⁹ The Court determined that, indeed, Oregon could prohibit religiously inspired peyote use and that the denial of unemployment benefits was constitutional. The SBC reacted in its next Convention by passing a resolution on the “Endangerment of Our Religious Liberties.” This resolution expresses the denomination’s “outrage” over the ruling and calls for “federal legislation to restore the religious liberty protections endangered by this ruling.”⁹⁰ What is particularly interesting in the SBC’s reaction is the Convention’s identification of itself as a religious minority. The majority decision in *Oregon v. Smith* leaves accommodation to the political process, acknowledging that while this may disadvantage minority religious practices, it may be an “unavoidable consequence of democratic government.”⁹¹ This is precisely the problem with the position of the SBC on Supreme Court rulings in *Lee v. Weismann* and *Santa Fe Independent School District v. Jane Doe*. Identification with minority religious groups in these cases would result in support of the Court’s decisions, just as sympathy with the religious minority in *Oregon v. Smith* lead to SBC opposition to the Court’s decision. The explanation for the Convention’s inconsistency in these instances may be related to the denomination’s perception of threats to religious liberty from an overreaching government. Southern Baptist commitment to the principle of church-state separation has always been predicated on the necessity of this separation for the preservation of religious liberty.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Annual of the SBC, 1991*, p. 75. Note that the federal legislation called for here was to follow in the form of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) which was overturned by the Supreme Court in *City of Boerne v. Flores* 521, U.S. 507 (1997).

⁹¹ *Oregon v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

Entangling Alliances

A Baptist institution ought to spurn and turn away from every offer of financial help from governmental sources, however indirectly and subtly made, as they would turn away from deadly poison.⁹²

For many years the SBC resisted even the slightest entanglement with the government. In 1940 the Convention resolved to reject any and all governmental grants and funds, whether to denominational schools or hospitals, on the grounds that “freedom of religion and...separation of church and state excludes all financial grants from governmental funds.”⁹³ The denomination’s Social Service Commission urged the Convention in 1941 to oppose federal legislation that would extend the Social Security program to employees of religious organizations. Participation in the program was viewed by the Commission as a tax on religion.⁹⁴ The Convention itself resolved to petition the U. S. Senate to exclude religious denominations from the Social Security Act in 1950 and the language of the resolution reveals the spiritual reasoning beneath the principle of church-state separation.

It is our conviction that the church’s highest spiritual function becomes impossible when its organizations and methods, to any degree whatsoever, are controlled by the State or when it becomes economically dependent upon any other group. The church must remain entirely free from entangling alliances if it is to continue to function as the voice of God in human society.⁹⁵

Until their stunning reversal on tuition tax credits or vouchers in 1991, Southern Baptists had vigilantly guarded against such “entangling alliances.” This reversal should be understood in the context of the political conservatism of the denomination that has facilitated a greater spirit of ecumenism between Southern Baptists and Catholics. For all

⁹² *Annual of the SBC*, 1938, p. 103.

⁹³ *Annual of the SBC*, 1940, p. 97.

⁹⁴ *Annual of the SBC*, 1941, p. 134.

⁹⁵ *Annual of the SBC*, 1950, p. 49.

their early anti-Catholic rhetoric, contemporary Southern Baptists have formed important and politically potent alliances with Catholics on issues such as abortion and school voucher plans. But the road to this cooperation is a winding and bumpy one.

Anti-Catholicism among Southern Baptists appears and reappears throughout the denomination's history. In 1914 the annual Convention resolved to protest "the efforts of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to gain control of our government, and thereby be in a position to fasten either its faith or fallacies upon the consciences of a free and sovereign people."⁹⁶ In the following year the Convention once again resolved to warn representatives in "both houses of Congress" about "Romish schemes and legislation."⁹⁷ The SBC's Social Service Commission recommended in 1938 a constitutional amendment prohibiting the "appropriation of public funds to sectarian institutions by any unit of government."⁹⁸

Even symbolic actions of the U. S. government were subject to Southern Baptist scrutiny for violation of church-state separation. In 1939 the Convention expressed its disapproval of the adjournment of Congress in response to the death of Pope Pius XI and the dispatch of Joseph P. Kennedy to witness the crowning of Pope Pius XII.⁹⁹

This Baptist preoccupation with Catholicism was also evident in the BJCPA's *Report from the Capital*. In discussing the pending *Everson* case, the monthly newsletter states that "knowing the official pronouncement of the Catholics in respect to church and state, this suggests what many suspect, that it is the aim of the Catholics, to be achieved

⁹⁶ *Annual of the SBC, 1914*. pp. 93-94.

⁹⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1915*. p. 72.

⁹⁸ *Annual of the SBC, 1938*. p. 114.

⁹⁹ *Annual of the SBC, 1939*. p. 109.

whenever they reach a majority in the population in this country to amend the American Constitution in a manner to give them the special privileges which they seek.”¹⁰⁰ Within that expression is a key to Baptist anti-Catholicism and that key is the American Constitution. Baptists, and particularly Southern Baptists, viewed the religious liberty guaranteed by the Constitution as a right purchased with the blood of their Baptist forbears. Southern Baptist denominational strength, perhaps more so then than now, was predicated upon democracy at the individual and church levels. The Convention inherited a strong “apprehension about central authority” and a “traditional fear of dogmatism.”¹⁰¹ That inheritance—democracy and liberty, both political and religious—pitted Southern Baptists against Catholicism and its hierarchical church polity.

In October 1948, Stanley Stuber of the BJCPA, argued that religious freedom in the United States could be lost either to “the Roman Catholics or to the Communists” and urged that Baptists must be prepared to “battle for [their] fundamental principles.”¹⁰² Southern Baptists vigilantly tracked the status of federal aid to education, the appointments of American representatives to the Vatican, and the appropriation of federal funds to denominational hospitals. Within the Convention, each of these was seen as a threat to church-state separation and violations of the First Amendment. Whether this apprehension was based on fundamental principles or anti-Catholic bigotry is, for the most part, undetectable. Much of that would be determined by the individual hearts and minds of the Southern Baptists taking those positions. What can be said with certainty is that the SBC, until very recently, was explicitly opposed to the spread of Catholicism in

¹⁰⁰ *Report from the Capital*. December, 1946. p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Rosenberg. *The Southern Baptists*. p. 146.

¹⁰² *Report from the Capital*. October, 1948. p. 5.

America and vigorously opposed any form of governmental aid to the Catholic church.

A related issue on which the Convention has consistently voiced strong opposition is the U. S. appointment of ambassadors to the Vatican. For the SBC, church and state had historically combined to produce religious persecution. In the words of a Convention resolution in 1914, such entanglements had “crimsoned the pages of the past with the blood of the saints.”¹⁰³ Baptists, according to the SBC, had “borne the blunt of the battle” which had secured American religious liberty.¹⁰⁴ Baptists are, in this view, the “pioneer champions” of the principle of separation of church and state and freedom of religion.¹⁰⁵ Opposition to Papal legates in the nation’s capital and to U. S. representatives to the Vatican was based on this view of Baptist heritage and history. The Convention used strong language to characterize attempts to establish diplomatic ties between the American government and the Vatican.

If diplomatic recognition by our Government is sought and secured by the Vatican it will be only that the Pope, as head of the Roman Catholic Church, through political methods, may promote Roman Catholicism both as a religion and as a political power. Deep down in the soul of every true American the suggestion that our government establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican stirs violent revolt.¹⁰⁶

The denomination first expresses its opposition to diplomatic relations with the Vatican in a report of the Social Service Commission to the Convention in 1934.¹⁰⁷ In 1940, the SBC begins a somewhat repetitious conversation with President Truman, resolving time and again to petition the President to terminate Myron C. Taylor’s

¹⁰³ *Annual of the SBC, 1914*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1934*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1934*, p. 112.

appointment to the Vatican.¹⁰⁸ This is a point on which the SBC has remained consistent. Southern Baptists were still opposing the appointment of ambassadors to the Holy See with resolutions at their 1984, 1986, and 1993 Conventions.

It would be a mistake to assume that Southern Baptist anti-Catholicism forced the Convention into adopting positions that the denomination was hesitant to apply with equal measure to itself. In 1935, through its Social Service Commission, the Convention voiced its opposition to Federal Housing Administration loans being extended to churches for repair to facilities. The danger in such a program is that churches receiving funds from the government become “to some degree subject to governmental authority and control.”¹⁰⁹ The Commission report continues by suggesting that Catholic institutions would “bid for and receive a goodly share of the public fund.”¹¹⁰ In what appears to be a reply to anticipated charges of anti-Catholicism, the Commission states:

We would not for a moment suggest that our opposition to governmental patronage for churches and other religious institutions is incited by a vision of what the Catholics would receive. We are just as much opposed to financial patronage of Protestant or evangelical Christian bodies by the government as we are opposed to the patronage of Catholic institutions.¹¹¹

One may question whether any sincerity expressed in this statement is accompanied by full self-awareness. Was the purity of Southern Baptist separationism ever adulterated by anti-Catholic bias? The answer to that question may differ from Southern Baptist to Southern Baptist, but there is little doubt that the SBC remained steadfast in its commitment to strict separation until the latter decades of the twentieth century.

The 1960 SBC brought its distrust of Catholicism to electoral politics with the

¹⁰⁸ *Annual of the SBC*, 1940. p. 97, *Annual of the SBC*, 1945. p. 58, *Annual of the SBC*, 1947. p. 41.

¹⁰⁹ *Annual of the SBC*, 1935. p. 65.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

candidacy of John F. Kennedy, expressing its concern that, as President, Kennedy might be “inescapably bound by the dogma and demands of his church.” The problem was not so much Kennedy as the church, which maintained “a position in open conflict with our established and constitutional American pattern of life as specifically related to religious liberty” and church-state separation.¹¹² The fear expressed in this resolution is that, as a Catholic, Kennedy would not be at liberty to make independent decisions “consistent with the rights and privileges of all citizens.”¹¹³

Beginning in the 1980’s, as the SBC turned increasingly toward theological fundamentalism and political conservatism, members of the Convention found much in common with conservative Catholics. Pro-life Southern Baptists and those supporting school voucher programs found natural allies in Catholics who were enlisted in the same causes. While the SBC’s strong evangelical ethos has not diminished, its political activism has created some space for ecumenical cooperation on issues of shared concern.

Throughout the first three quarters of the twentieth century, the SBC continued to be a voice for an impregnable wall between church and state. This is not to say that the denomination saw no relation between the two. A sentiment expressed in the early part of the twentieth century remained true for the Convention fifty years later: the state is related to the church in that it is responsible for guaranteeing freedom of religion and the “equality of religious denominations,” and the church is related to the state by insisting that a government be “humane and democratic under the Christian law of fraternity and

¹¹² *Annual of the SBC, 1960*, p. 63.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

justice.”¹¹⁴ Other than that, a strict wall of separation is to govern relations between church and state. That wall was important enough to Southern Baptists to warrant the call for a constitutional amendment to support and strengthen it.¹¹⁵ In the 1960s and 1970s, the Convention routinely expressed its continuing support for church-state separation and protection of religious liberties. Throughout these two decades the denomination remained committed to absolute separation, to support of the Supreme Court’s decisions on school prayer, and opposition to public funds for parochial education. That was to change in varying degrees as the fundamentalist leadership solidified its control of the Convention in the 1980s and 1990s. It is worthy to note, however, that the fundamentalist leadership is democratically elected and annual resolutions are adopted in the same manner. Therefore, the alterations in the Convention’s position on church-state separation reflect changes among rank and file Southern Baptists, not simply the leadership. One interesting focal point for charting the changes in the SBC is the BJCPA.

The Baptist Joint Committee On Public Affairs

The BJCPA was formed in 1946 by the SBC and charged with the “preservation of religious liberty” and the protestation to “proper authorities whenever Baptist principles [were] being violated by either municipal, state, or national governments.”¹¹⁶ The BJCPA was a vigilant monitor of church-state issues, expressing opposition to public aid to parochial, an American representative to the Vatican, and federal funds to denominational hospitals. The Committee was particularly outspoken on the Supreme

¹¹⁴ *Annual of the SBC*, 1914, p. 37.

¹¹⁵ *Annual of the SBC*, 1947, p. 50.

¹¹⁶ *Report from the Capital*, November, 1946.

Court's rulings in *Engel* and *Schempp*, supporting both rulings and devoting much time to clarifying the meaning of the decisions. There is some evidence, however, that the BJCPA was out of step with the average Baptist on this and other issues.

Viewing the BJCPA's history, when compared with the trajectory of the SBC, it seems likely that the Committee did not always reflect the views of rank and file Southern Baptists. In fact, conservative Southern Baptists had long dissented from the more liberal positions of the BJCPA and its long-time head, James Dunn. As examples: In a 1967, an editorial by Robert G. Torbet, for example, makes the case for accommodation of religious pluralism is made, accompanied by an expression of support for academic freedom and an expansive concept of religious liberty.¹¹⁷ Then in 1973, the BJCPA voted to oppose a proposed constitutional amendment to ban abortions, citing the principles of "civil liberties and religious freedom."¹¹⁸ Finally, in 1981, Paul D. Simmons wrote an article in Report from the Capital that raised serious objections to fundamentalism and the New Christian Right. He closed by arguing that fundamentalists would "destroy the soul of this country."¹¹⁹ This came just as the Convention was beginning to turn toward the theological and political right with its burgeoning fundamentalist leadership.

As the SBC fell under the control of fundamentalists, the BJCPA became the voice of opposition to changes within the Convention. As early as 1982, in an article titled "Identity Crisis," Bill J. Leonard laments the movement of some Baptists toward a

¹¹⁷ *Report from the Capital*. July, 1967. pp. 4-5.

¹¹⁸ *Report from the Capital*. Oct/Nov, 1973. p. 6.

¹¹⁹ *Report from the Capital*. Vol. 36 No. 6. June, 1981. pp. 5-6.

creed and the restoration of prayer in public schools.¹²⁰ In a related piece, Grady C. Cothen criticizes the threat to “soul competency” in the SBC and the increasing politicization of the denomination.¹²¹ The BJCPA also took on the fundamentalist view of women’s roles and, in 1983, Lowell Weicker, Jr. wrote an article critiquing the combination of Christian fundamentalism with political conservatism. Specifically, he protested “fundamentalism’s attempts to coerce uniformity of belief.”¹²² Throughout the 1980s, “motions to censure either Dunn or the BJCPA would surface at annual meetings.”¹²³ Although these motions were repeatedly refused by the messengers in attendance, the day of reckoning was hastening for a BJCPA that continued to diverge from an increasingly conservative SBC.

One tactic of the SBC was to increase the number of Southern Baptist representatives on the BJCPA from fifteen to eighteen. There was also a great deal of institutional wrangling over the disbursement of funds. In 1987 the Southern Baptist representatives on the BJCPA, acting independently, voted to support the nomination of Robert Bork to the U. S. Supreme Court. This was not an endorsement shared by the BJCPA. They voted as well to recommended that the Convention “dissolve its institutional and financial ties with the BJCPA.”¹²⁴ The parting was coming and it would not be amicable. Finally, in 1991, the Convention completely defunded the BJCPA. The responsibilities previously assigned to this committee were reassigned to the Christian

¹²⁰ *Report from the Capital*. Vol. 37, No. 8. September, 1982.

¹²¹ *Report from the Capital*. Vol. 38, No. 3. March, 1983. pp. 4-5.

¹²² *Report from the Capital*. Vol. 40, No. 1. January, 1985. p. 10.

¹²³ Farnsley. *Southern Baptist Politics*. p. 31.

¹²⁴ *Report from the Capital*. Vol. 42, No. 10. Nov/Dec 1987. p. 4.

Life Commission. Since then that commission has been replaced by the SBC's new voice on political and public affairs, the "Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC)."

The ERLC, led by Richard Land, made its first endorsement of a cabinet nominee in 2001 with its support of John Ashcroft to be President George W. Bush's Attorney General. Among the Commission's reasons for the endorsement were Ashcroft's strong pro-life position and his rejection of "a separationist view of church-state relations for a more accommodationist approach."¹²⁵ Richard Land argues that Southern Baptists can not be strict separationists, since to do so favors secularism.¹²⁶ Nothing could point more clearly to the stark contrast between the BJCPA's traditional positions on church-state relations and that of the SBC's new agency for public policy. These changes occurred in a context of growing conservatism in the SBC.

Social and Political Conservatism in the Southern Baptist Convention

White Southern Baptists, for the lion's share of the denomination's history, were "yellow dog" Democrats. One reason for this is simply regional. The Convention was the dominant religion in a one-party Democratic south. In the late nineteenth century the Democratic party of the south was responsible for reestablishing white political dominance. Then popular New Deal programs in the 1930s further solidified the party's control in the region. This dominance continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s.¹²⁷ But as the Democratic party became increasingly liberal on issues of race and social welfare,

¹²⁵ <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=10142>.

¹²⁶ Hankins, Barry. "Principle, perception and position: why Southern Baptist conservatives differ from moderates on church-state issues." Journal of Church and State, Spring 1998 v40 n2. p. 348.

¹²⁷ Wald, Kenneth D. Religion and Politics in the United States. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1997) p. 221.

the Republican party moved to the right, attracting disillusioned white southerners along the way.¹²⁸ This is particularly true of Southern Baptists. Kenneth Wald borrows a phrase from Great Britain to characterize today's SBC as "the Republican party at prayer."¹²⁹

In presidential elections, the Southern Baptists present an interesting picture. From 1968 to 1972, they became much more Republican.¹³⁰ But that was followed by the 1976 election, in which Southern Baptists were the "least Republican," owing, in part at least, to the affinity many in the denomination felt for Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist and avowed born-again Christian. Carter's first election was a high-water mark for Southern Baptist Democratic votes during this period. But when President Carter stood for reelection against Ronald Reagan in 1980, the support of the denomination's regular attendees dropped twenty points.¹³¹ This was followed by the 1980s, during which regularly attending Southern Baptists became "more Republican than other Americans."¹³²

President Reagan, in a 1983 speech to the National Religious Broadcasters, offered his support of tuition tax credits, prayer in public schools, and opposition to *Roe v. Wade*.¹³³ The SBC, which previously had adopted resolutions that contradicted each of these positions, now voiced its agreement with Reagan on each item. Of those

¹²⁸ Ibid. pp. 222 and 239.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 255.

¹³⁰ Smith. *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*. pp. 157-158.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 159.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Corbett, Michael and Mitchell, Julia. *Politics and Religion in the United States*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999) p. 135.

identifying themselves as Biblical literalists, among whom one may count Southern Baptist fundamentalists, 74 percent voted for George Bush in 1988. In 1992 51 percent of the same group voted for Bush again, with only 35 percent voting for fellow Southern Baptist, Bill Clinton.¹³⁴ Of those identifying as either evangelical or Biblical literalists, 81 percent opposed the Supreme Court's rulings on prayer in public schools. With Southern Baptists comprising the largest denomination among evangelicals, it is little wonder that its stance on prayer in public schools reflects the significant changes in perception on the part of its members.

The Southern Baptists who now identify with the Republican party are in agreement with the president of the ERLC: the public square is secularized and government is hostile to religion. This is the salient church-state issue for today's conservative or fundamentalist Southern Baptist.¹³⁵ Where the moderates of the old SBC emphasized the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, vigilantly guarding against violations of church-state separation, the conservatives and fundamentalists of the new SBC emphasize the Religious Liberty Clause of the First Amendment, defending their right to religious freedom in public and private. More than ever, Southern Baptists are prepared to address their perception of the contemporary cultural situation in America through state reinforcement of traditional values. This, they believe, can best be accomplished through support for the Republican party.¹³⁶

To locate the SBC on a continuum of church-state relations is a complex, but not

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 278.

¹³⁵ Hankins. "Principle, perception, and position." p. 351.

¹³⁶ Guth, James L. "Southern Baptists and the New Right" in *Religion in American Politics*. Charles W. Dunn, ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1989). pp. 177-190.

impossible task. First, it is necessary to understand that the moderate leadership of the Convention during the 1960s and 1970s was somewhat out of step with the church members in the pews each Sunday. Southern Baptists have always been conservative. The Democratic party to which they were attached for more than a century was a conservative, southern party. That party, the moderate SBC leadership, and the BJCPA changed. This is not to suggest that the Convention stood still. It has been transformed at the hands of a fundamentalist leadership that was to some degree always present, but marginalized by the moderate leadership. Second, any analysis of the SBC has to account for the fact that the Convention is governed by a democratic church polity. The Convention is not ruled by theocratic fiat. If there were sufficient resistance to the fundamentalist leadership and its positions on church-state relations, that resistance would manifest itself in a triumph of opposing principles. It has not.

With that said, the SBC has undergone a significant transformation with a radical impact on its historical stance on church-state separation. Much of that change can be accounted for by the shift in emphasis from Establishment Clause concerns to Religious Liberty Clause concerns. The interesting point in this is that most of the existing jurisprudence on Religious Liberty issues involves the exercise of religious freedom by minority religious groups. The SBC is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States and surely does not view itself as a religious minority. But a perception that seems commonplace within the denomination today is that, in the public square, all religions occupy a minority status in relation to secularism. Southern Baptist positions on church-state separation are influenced significantly by this perception. Perhaps they are correct. Two questions flow from the notion that the public square has been stripped of religious

influence. First, is the public square the appropriate place for the full exercise of religious liberty, or is religious freedom always to be tempered by the Establishment Clause in matters of public policy and government? Second, if the public square must accommodate religious liberty to a greater extent, how are we to deliberate on the degree to which it must make that accommodation? These questions will continue to be debated and addressed by the SBC, as a politically active and engaged denomination. They will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER 4

A TROUBLED PAST: THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION AND RACE

When Reverend Fred Luter preached the convention sermon to the messengers assembled at the Southern Baptist Convention in June, 2001, it was an historic occasion. Reverend Luter was the first African-American minister to deliver the central convention sermon in the denomination's history.¹ Some would argue, and rightfully so, that the Convention took too long in coming to terms with its racist history, that it was well past time that an African-American took the pulpit at the annual meeting. But it would be difficult to overestimate the changes in the SBC on issues of race and inequality. This denomination was formed around the defense of slavery and slave-owning Baptists. It originated out of the worst manifestation of racial discrimination and did not begin to eradicate the vestiges of racism until it was well over a century old. Early Southern Baptists, although regarding slaves as persons having souls and in need of evangelizing, depended on their Bible and faith for their justification of slavery.

The contemporary SBC has taken many bold steps in the direction of racial reconciliation. By the closing decades of the twentieth century, the denomination witnessed the founding of African-American Southern Baptist churches at the rate of 150 per year.² At the same time, however, there are few African-Americans in positions of

¹ Sanders, Matt. "Superdome rocks as Fred Luter urges 'Go!' in historic sermon." <http://sbcannualmeeting.org/sbc01/newspage.asp?ID=159>.

² Maxwell, Joe. "Black Southern Baptists: The SBC's valiant efforts to overcome its racist past." *Christianity Today*, May 15, 1995 v39 n6 (6).

Convention leadership. Additionally, several of the Convention's contemporary fundamentalist leaders were "outspoken advocates of racial segregation in the 1950s and 1960s."³ The story of racism in the SBC is, therefore, one of many inconsistencies and sometimes glaring contradictions. In the long run, it is both tragic and triumphant. The final verdict on the SBC and its relationship to race is undecided and, as yet, indeterminable. Some have suggested that with the fundamentalist takeover of the convention and the accompanying political conservatism of denominational leaders, the SBC may be retreating from progress it has made in the area of race relations and the social and spiritual problems of inequality.⁴ To judge the Convention's success and current state in race relations, it is best to start at the beginning—the founding of the SBC.

Slavery, white supremacy, and the SBC

Among some historians in the contemporary SBC, the role of the slavery controversy is minimized, often to the point of being a non-factor in the formation of the denomination. History does not substantiate this view. The slavery question was *the* issue in the Southern Baptist split from Northern Baptists. To minimize the this issue, holding that the schism was only tangentially due to slavery, is to perpetuate a Southern Baptist myth. Further, it is "an evasion of the truth."⁵ Without the slavery controversy,

³ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, p. 10.

⁴ Copeland, E. Luther. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgment of History: The Taint of an Original Sin* (New York: The University Press of America Inc., 1995) p. 45. The author is discussing the role of foreign missions in the contemporary SBC and a return to "high-handed paternalism—or narrow authoritarianism." I argue that this approach can also characterize the SBC's relation to issues of social inequality at home, as well as abroad.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

the split between Southern and Northern Baptists would not have occurred.⁶

The Southern Baptists position on the slavery issue was not monolithic in the early nineteenth century, but as the abolitionist movement intensified, Southerners reacted by defending slavery. Further, the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 was accompanied by an increased need for the unskilled labor of slaves.⁷ Southern Baptists were situated within this cultural context. They were, according to John Lee Eighmy, captives of that culture.⁸

In 1844 the Georgia Baptist Convention nominated a slaveholder, James E. Reeve, for appointment as a missionary to the Cherokee Indians. At that time, Baptists missionaries were appointed and supported through the Home Mission Society of the Baptist General Convention. This nomination was an attempt on the part of Southerners to force the issue, to obtain once and for all an explicit decision on the issue of slavery in the denomination. The executive committee voted seven to five against Mr. Reeve's appointment.⁹ With that vote the place of southerners in the Baptist General Convention was becoming increasingly uncomfortable. Still, Baptists in the slaveholding South did not have the explicit statement on slavery they sought. In November 1844, the Alabama Baptist State Convention requested the Foreign Mission Board to provide a ruling as to whether a slaveholder could serve as a missionary. The response was both explicit and emphatic. "If any one should offer himself as a missionary, having slaves, and should

⁶ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸ See Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity* for an excellent explication of this thesis.

⁹ Hill, Samuel S. *The South and the North in American Religion* (Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 1980) p. 63 and Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. pp. 31-32.

insist on retaining them as property, we could not appoint him.”¹⁰ The board removed all doubt as to the northern Baptist position: “One thing is certain, we can never be a party to any arrangement which would imply approbation of slavery.”¹¹ Southern Baptists had their answer and given the support of slavery, among Baptists as well as their Southern neighbors, a split was then inevitable. The Baptist was not the only denomination to split in middle of the nineteenth century. Methodists and Presbyterians were riven by the controversy too. The notable Baptist exception, however, is that while the other two denominations reunited after the Civil War, Southern Baptists remained a faith apart from their Northern brethren.

The defense of slavery among Southern Baptists was four-pronged. There were legal, Biblical, evangelical, and practical reasons for slavery according to the newly formed Southern Baptist Convention. The legal defense of slavery was based on the United States Constitution, specifically the fugitive slave clause in Article IV, Section 3. Closely related to the constitutional argument was the issue of states’ rights as it related to slavery. Southern Baptists were strongly committed to a constitutional, democratic republic in which the rule of tyrannical majorities over minorities was unacceptable. They did not see the incongruity of coupling those sentiments with the defense of slavery.

The Biblical (or theological) defense of slavery was based primarily on “Pauline admonitions for slaves to accept their lot in life” and the account of Noah and his sons in the ninth chapter of Genesis.¹² The latter account was used to a greater extent than the

¹⁰Ibid. pp. 31-32.

¹¹ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 15

¹² Ibid., pp. 43-44.

former and it bears a closer examination here. Noah planted a vineyard and, drinking much wine, became intoxicated and fell asleep naked inside his tent. His son, Ham, father of Canaan, went into the tent and, seeing his father naked, went out to tell his brothers, Shem and Japheth. Shem and Japheth walked backward into the tent, avoiding the sight of their naked father, and covered him with a cloak. When Noah awakened and learned what Ham had done to him, he said “Cursed be Canaan! Most servile of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”¹³ What is important to notice here, something that was sorely overlooked by those who used this passage to justify the institution of slavery, is that *Noah*, not God, cursed the descendants of Ham.

Southern Baptists who used Genesis 9 to justify slavery believed that the black race was descended from Ham. “As a sign of the curse, God placed on Ham and his descendants a ‘mark,’ which Southern Baptists interpreted as black skin.”¹⁴ The descendants of Ham were the dark races of the world and the descendants of Shem were the Asiatic races. The blessed descendants of Japheth were the Anglo-Saxons, a superior race to all others according to the Biblically based race theory.¹⁵ These beliefs were stubborn relics of a racist past that remained a part of Southern Baptist life well into the twentieth century.

An early Southern Baptist theologian, John L. Dagg, argued that the Bible was the infallible word of God and that Genesis 9 was “to show how God after the flood wanted the peoples of the world distributed and ranked.” Dagg was unflagging in his attempt to

¹³ Genesis 9: 20-25.

¹⁴ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 117.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

justify slavery and the slave trade.¹⁶ Jimmy Draper, president of the Convention from 1982-1984 and one of the early architects of the fundamentalist movement that has taken over the SBC, praises Dagg as one of the “first truly Southern Baptist theologian[s].”¹⁷ The praise of Dagg as a theologian obscures the role he played in the Southern Baptist justification of slavery. Perhaps he should be assigned a lesser place in the history of the SBC, particularly by contemporary leaders.

The evangelical defense of slavery was based on a paternalistic view of mission work among the enslaved African-Americans. In 1851, the Convention offered one its many justifications of slavery this way: Ministers who worked among the slaves were convinced “that God sent them [slaves] here to receive the word of life, and that they seem, in some measure, impressed with this as a special feature in the providence of God, which has assigned them their present position.”¹⁸ Here we have two different statements of justification. First, slaves have been transported to a part of the world wherein they will be exposed to the gospel of Christ. Second, their being there in the first place is God’s will. Southern Baptists also believed that slavery was “God’s method of training missionaries for Africa” and that the continent would be evangelized only through the conversion of enslaved Africans in the South who might one day return to their homeland.¹⁹

The practical defense of slavery grew out of the need of masters to control their “property.” A converted slave was less prone to “violence, drunkenness, and disorder

¹⁶ Barnhart. *The Southern Baptist Holy War*. p. 130.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Southern Baptist Convention, *Proceedings*, 1860, p. 23. (Prior to 1900, the Annual Meeting Minutes are referred to as “Proceedings.” From 1900 on, the minutes are referred to as “Annual.”)

¹⁹ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 59.

and thereby added to the value of a master's property."²⁰ Moreover, evangelized slaves were, according to conventional wisdom, more likely to accept their lots in life. Class was operative in relations between the races and the justification of slavery too. Poor whites in the South defended slavery, finding that it was satisfying in some sense "to have a class of people beneath them on the social ladder."²¹ And "vast numbers of Southern Baptists [were] economic marginals."²²

Leading up to the Civil War, Southern Baptists renounced neither slavery nor secession. As the South, not quite a political state, moved toward secession, the defense of slavery became vociferous and vital to the coherency of the Confederacy. Southern Baptists provided the rhetoric of justification and, later, the men who would fight the war against the North.

After the War, the SBC defended the "traditional relationship of the races," meaning that aside from their personal freedom, the place of the African-American in Southern Baptist churches would not change in response to emancipation.²³ In fact, in many ways the SBC was less interested in the evangelization of freedmen than it had been in the converting of slaves. Rufus Spain, chronicler of Southern Baptist social history, gauges the level of commitment to the evangelization of African-Americans by examining the assignment of home missionaries.

In 1861 the Domestic and Indian Board was employing sixty-nine missionaries in the continental United States. Sixty of these were ministering to native white people. Of the remaining nine, who were working with other than native whites, six were employed outside the South (two working with the Negroes in Maryland and Washington, D.C.,

²⁰ Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 101.

²¹ Copeland. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History*. P. 19.

²² Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 147.

²³ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 44.

three with the Germans in Maryland and Missouri, and one with the Chinese in California.) Of the three missionaries engaged in work with non-white or non-native peoples in the South, one was working with the Indians in Georgia and two with the Germans in Kentucky and Louisiana. The home mission agency of Southern Baptists was not employing a single missionary in the work of evangelizing the nearly four million Negroes in the South.²⁴

The SBC ushered in the postwar era with declarations about its obligations to African-Americans, but those statements emerged as nothing more than platitudes.²⁵ The Convention was still steeped in theories of white supremacy and they continued to rely on the Bible in justifying segregation. To this they added history, reason, science, and instinct to support the social, political and economic inequality between the races. Jeremiah B. Jeter, senior editor of the Virginia Baptist paper, *The Religious Herald*, argued that to admit African-Americans into white churches on an equal basis would be to pave the way for “the mongrelization of our noble Anglo-Saxon race.”²⁶

Segregation split Southern religion in two by 1870, and it was to remain so for almost a century, at least as far as the SBC was concerned. Throughout this period Southern Baptists “continued to express their concern” for African-Americans, but no deeds followed the words.²⁷ And at times, the Convention’s words were not the type to elicit favorable deeds. Racism and the paternalism it bred were pervasive in the SBC at the end of the nineteenth century. To the extent that Southern Baptists recognized a race problem at all, the solution was segregation, not integration and social equality. State papers, as well as Convention *Proceedings* were repositories of racist sentiment, with calls for the maintenance of white privilege and black subordination. The editor of the

²⁴ Ibid., p. 47 (Drawn from Southern Baptist Convention, *Proceedings*, 1861, pp. 32-34.)

²⁵ Hill. *The South and the North in American Religion*. p. 102.

²⁶ *Religious Herald* (Richmond), August 19, 1869, p. 1.

²⁷ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 67.

Religious Herald, in 1866, argued that the whites of the South must never permit “social or political equality between the races.” “Let no man,” he says, “try to bring together what God has sent so far asunder.”²⁸

The justifications of segregation and racial inequality did not sit well with the Christian principles of Southern Baptists. According to Spain, however, it was the Christian ethics rather than the racial views that were compromised.²⁹ The justifications were sometimes tortured expressions of racial prejudice, as is evident in this quote from the Convention Proceedings in 1891:

Nothing is plainer to anyone who knows this race than its perfect willingness to accept a subordinate place, provided there be confidence that in that position of subordination it will receive justice and kindness. That is the condition it prefers above all others, and this is the condition in which it attains the highest development of every attribute of manhood. Whenever it shall understandingly and cheerfully accept this condition, the race problem is settled forever.³⁰

It is interesting to note, as Rufus Spain does, that the belief in white supremacy became the central element in a Southern Baptist racial creed. According to Spain, “[t]heories of race were as much a part of Southern Baptist thinking as the Virgin Birth or the Second Coming.”³¹ This racial creed existed within a denomination that proudly eschewed theological creeds and was comprised of four basic beliefs:

1. That God created mankind as a single entity, of “one blood.”
2. That God divided mankind into different races.
3. That among the differing biological characteristics of the races was the primary one of color.
4. That the superior race was the white race and that among these, Anglo-Saxons

²⁸ *Religious Herald* (Richmond), September 20, 1866, p. 1.

²⁹ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 104.

³⁰ Southern Baptist Convention, *Proceedings*, 1891, p. XXXVI.

³¹ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. pp. 119-120.

were superior.³²

Southern Baptists were no different in these beliefs than those non-Baptists in their region. The SBC simply reflected the culture that surrounded it, rather than acting prophetically to change it.³³

Part of that culture was manifested in strong and persistent strains of a white, Southern patriarchy concerned with racial miscegenation and control of women's purity. One particularly poignant example of this is captured in a letter to the *Religious Herald* from a Virginia Baptist in 1874.

Before he [the Southern white man] would consent to the marriage of his daughter with the most intelligent, virtuous and respectable Negro on the earth, he would gladly follow her to her grave.³⁴

Twenty-six years later, in 1900, this commitment to white patriarchal supremacy is still prevalent, as evidenced in the words of an Alabama Baptists who calls on his brethren to “*manfully*, religiously, and patriotically maintain [their] dignity, supremacy and social status in [their] own sphere.”³⁵ White male society in the South, Southern Baptists among them, “projected upon the black male its pathological guilt, fantasizing him into a sexual animal with insatiable libido and oversized sex organs, ever ready to prey upon idealized Southern womanhood.”³⁶ This attitude, prevalent throughout the South's history of lynching, differed little from Antebellum racial beliefs, even when the incidence of rape during that period was more likely to occur between white men and slave women, than the other way around.

³² Ibid., p. 113.

³³ Copeland. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History*. P. 14.

³⁴ *Religious Herald* (Richmond), November 26, 1874, p. 2.

³⁵ *Alabama Baptist* (Montgomery), April 26, 1900. p. 4 (emphasis mine).

³⁶ Copeland. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History*. P. 17.

After the war, Southern Baptists did not participate in the ecumenical efforts to evangelize the freedmen in the South. Not only was the denomination nonecumenical in its approach, Samuel Hill, historian of southern religion, argues that it was “antiecumenical” and even “uncooperative” with other denominations.³⁷ Southern Baptists were greatly opposed to the Northern teachers and ministers who were dispatched to the South to minister during Reconstruction. White members of the SBC were suspicious of programs to assist African-Americans, associating them with “carpetbaggers and radical Republicanism.”³⁸ Baptist clergy, thoroughly politicized by secession and the prosecution of the Civil War, played key roles in explaining why the South had suffered defeat. They were also instrumental in resisting and eventually freeing the South from Reconstruction and Republican rule.³⁹ Resentment against “outside” interference existed after Reconstruction as well. In 1891, the *Alabama Baptist* asserted that, with respect to race relations in the South: “Southern whites and Southern blacks are getting along admirably, and always will, if blatant politicians keep hands off.”⁴⁰

The denomination did not recognize an obligation to evangelize or educate former slaves. In fact, Southern Baptists supported only such education as would enable African-Americans to read their Bibles and to work “as unskilled or semi-skilled

³⁷ Hill. *The North and the South in American Religion*. p. 104.

³⁸ Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 30.

³⁹ Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 155.

⁴⁰ Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 40.

laborers.”⁴¹ The “race problem” in the South, according to members of the SBC, was located in the African-Americans themselves. Freed slaves did not know how to live in freedom and needed training as citizens and workers. Southerners were especially concerned with a perceived “lack of positive work habits and cleanliness,” as well as “their [African-American’s] proclivity for crime and desire for interracial sexual relations.”⁴²

Southern Baptist churches had many African-American members before the Civil War. Slaves attended worship with their masters, although segregated in balconies or at the back of the church. They took no part in church governance nor did they hold positions of leadership in the church, but they were members. Southern Baptist churches thus had many African-American members at the time of emancipation. But this was temporary, as blacks were encouraged to withdraw and form their own churches as soon as it became apparent to whites that blacks “could be retained only at the price of accepting them as equals.”⁴³ Further, the formation of their own churches was simply another manifestation of their social and political liberation.⁴⁴ When the Civil War ended in 1865, for example, “nearly half of all Alabama Baptists were African-Americans.” By 1874, the end of Reconstruction, few Southern Baptist churches had black members.⁴⁵ By 1890, “of more than one million SBC members in the South, there were no African-

⁴¹ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 92.

⁴² Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith*. p. 40.

⁴³ Copeland. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History*. p. 21.

⁴⁴ Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 136.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

Americans.”⁴⁶ This is not to say that African-Americans did not remain Baptists. They simply formed their own congregations and affiliated with other Baptist agencies, eventually forming the National Baptist Convention in 1886. The democratic church life of the Baptist faith was familiar and no doubt attractive to the newly freed African-Americans. Still, freed slaves in the South did not experience real freedom in their social, political, or economic lives. Church turned out to be one of the few places in which they could “exercise complete freedom and control.”⁴⁷ It must be noted that the spread of the Baptist denomination among African-Americans in the South after the Civil War was almost entirely due to the evangelizing efforts of African-Americans themselves, with little or no help from the Southern Baptist Convention.⁴⁸ White Southern Baptists were “much less enthusiastic” about assisting African-Americans in establishing their own congregations and organizations “than they had been about evangelizing the Negro slave.”⁴⁹ Only through separate congregations could Southern Baptists “reconcile the Negro’s freedom with white supremacy.”⁵⁰

There is little wonder that newly freed African-Americans found Southern Baptist congregations inhospitable after the Civil War and formed their own separate churches. Many Southern Baptist congregations did not formally exclude the freed slaves from their churches after the War. They simply expected African-Americans to comply with the

⁴⁶ Sanders. “Superdome rocks as Fred Luter urges ‘Go!’ in historic sermon.”

⁴⁷ Spain. *At East in Zion*. p. 45.

⁴⁸ Copeland. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History*. p. 23.

⁴⁹ Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

same structure of white supremacy that existed before the War.⁵¹ The racial creed of white supremacy was always beneath the surface, and at times manifested itself in the most visible and tangible of ways.

In the summer of 1870 a different kind of congregation met at the Baptist church in the Goshen community of Cherokee County. Ku Klux Klansmen selected a twelve-man execution squad to murder William Luke, a white northern minister who had begun a school for blacks in Calhoun County. Among the death squad was a Baptist preacher as well as farmers and former Confederate soldiers. The night of Luke's murder, they met at another Baptist church and proceeded to Cross Plains, where they carried out the killing.⁵²

Theories of white supremacy are rife throughout SBC statements and papers in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Segregation was sacred; miscegenation was evil; and equality of the races was to be avoided at all costs, even when that cost came in the form of glaring inconsistency with the gospel. In this, however, Southern Baptists were no different from the culture in which they were immersed. Truly they were, culturally, the “captives” of a racist region.⁵³ Southern Baptists approached the end of the nineteenth century expressing the same sentiments about race relations they offered at the time of the Civil War. If anything, denomination members became more vociferous in their defense of segregation.⁵⁴ Little changed, other than the admission on the part of Southern Baptists that race relations were a problem. While the previously referenced report of the Home Mission Board in 1891 painted a hopeful (if paternalistic) picture of the races in the South, the Annual of 1900 contains a report of the “Committee on Work Among the Negroes” that states, “With all possible emphasis, your committee

⁵¹ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 34.

⁵² Cited in Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 140. From Howard, Gene L. *Death at Cross Plains: An Alabama Reconstruction Tragedy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984) pp. 62, 84.

⁵³ Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. pp. 39-40.

⁵⁴ Spain. *At Ease in Zion*. p. 103.

declares its conviction that the Negro problem in the South is the gravest that confronts us as a people.”⁵⁵ To acknowledge the problem is not, however, to address and solve it. Southern Baptists did not, even as they approached the twentieth century.

The First Half of the Twentieth Century

One way that Southern Baptists might have found the denominational and theological means to address the problem of race relations would have been through an embrace of the Social Gospel as it appeared at the turn of the century. A movement that applied Christian principles and ethics to the social and economic problems of industrialized society, the Social Gospel was gaining popularity among Protestants in the North and was effectively producing reforms for society’s ills. Southern Baptists, however, found it difficult to accept the Social Gospel because of their tradition of “religious individualism, theological conservatism, decentralized authority, and denominational isolationism.”⁵⁶ Further, Southern evangelicals entered the twentieth century engaged in a cultural war with “liberalism, labor unionism, feminism, racial equality, and demon rum.”⁵⁷ The SBC’s rejection of the more progressive elements of the movement retarded the influence of the Social Gospel in the denomination.

There was, however, one reform movement associated with the Social Gospel that Southern Baptists heartily embraced: prohibition. The denomination campaigned tirelessly for the adoption and enforcement of prohibition and one Convention leader, W. B. Crumpton, even found a way to link temperance with the racial politics of the South.

⁵⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1900*. p. 36.

⁵⁶ Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 71.

⁵⁷ Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 191

He rallied support for the cause by describing whiskey bottles sold to African-Americans “that contained pictures of nude white women.”⁵⁸ The SBC established a permanent committee on temperance in 1908.⁵⁹ Following the adoption of prohibition, the Convention turned its attention to other pressing social and economic problems. Many state conventions also established social service committees to address the burgeoning crises associated with modernization and industrialization.

Throughout this period, however, the SBC made no real progress on race relations. In fact, in some states, the inequality of race relations was codified with the adoption of Jim Crow statutes. In 1901 Alabama adopted a new constitution which instituted poll taxes, literacy tests, and other requirements to disenfranchise black voters.⁶⁰ Denominational leaders in the SBC also acted to solidify white supremacy. Victor Masters, a leading Southern Baptist figure in the early part of the twentieth century, argued that his denomination had a unique destiny in America. He based his argument on two things: “the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race as represented by Southern whites and the perpetuation of ...the Anglo-Saxon evangelical faith”⁶¹ When Southern Baptists did turn their attention to the inequality of the races, they expressed their support for improvement, but often within a paradigm of white supremacy. Most denominational efforts to address the problems of African-Americans were tinged with paternalism and not a little racism. Arthur J. Barton, for instance, the long-time chairman

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 272.

⁵⁹ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. pp. 79-81.

⁶⁰ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*. p. 302.

⁶¹ Masters, Victor I. *The Call of the South* (Atlanta, 1918) pp. 208-209. Quoted in Eighmy, *Churches In Cultural Captivity*. p. 77.

of the SBC's Social Service Commission, perpetuated the typical stereotype of the African-American as a "childlike creature under the benevolent care of tolerant white superiors" in a 1913 address to the Southern Sociological Congress.⁶² And even in the SBC's anti-lynching resolution in 1906, the Convention found it necessary to condemn the crimes that "caused" the lynching. I quote the resolution at some length here because it demonstrates the Convention's conflicted position so clearly.

God speed the day that, when by suggestions like those we here submit, or by better ones, if any can make them, men and women and girl children and all the innocent and the good, may be safe as they come and go, and in their homes, whether such homes be in castle or cabin! The law is very weak and imperfect. We speak this to our shame! But lynching is not the remedy. Lynching blunts the public conscience, undermines the foundations on which society stands, and if unchecked will bring on anarchy. Our condemnation is due with equal emphasis, *and in many cases with much greater emphasis*, against the horrible crimes which cause the lynchings...The law as now contrived...is but a poor protection for the innocent and the good.⁶³

While finding the lynching abominable, the Southern Baptist men who adopted this resolution are not far removed from their predecessors, those who were intent on protecting the mythologized purity of Southern womanhood against the contrived evil of black male sexuality.

In 1909 the SBC declared that "relations between white and Negro Baptists in the South are of the most friendly and fraternal nature."⁶⁴ The following year Southern Baptists adopted a report entitled "Work Among the Negroes." In this report the "close and cordial" relationship between the races is once again affirmed and then inaccurately projected into the SBC's past, by stating that since the origins of the Convention, Southern Baptists had accepted their responsibility for the African-Americans in their

⁶² Barton, Arthur J. "The White Man's Task in the Uplift of the Negro." *The South Mobilizing for Social Service*. Pp. 460-476. Quoted in Eighmy. *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 101.

⁶³ *Annual of the SBC, 1906*. pp. 33-34. (emphasis mine).

⁶⁴ *Annual of the SBC, 1909*. p. 33.

midst. Speaking of the Convention's evangelizing work among the slaves, the report states that "the longest distance ever traveled by a race in 300 years is the distance between the Negro in the jungles of Africa and the Negro on the highways of Southern civilization." Proudly, the report attributes this success in part to Southern Baptists, who "have been a mighty factor" in it.⁶⁵ They are at least partially correct. It is most certainly the case that Southern Baptists played a role in the vicissitudes of African-American life in the South. It is the nature of that role that is contestable. The role, however slowly, began to change early in the twentieth century.

After the adoption of prohibition, the Social Gospel made further advances into Southern Baptist approaches to the world outside the church. Social service committees, at the national and state levels, began to pay more attention to economic, social, and political issues, including those concerning race relations.⁶⁶ It is important to note that the Convention did not necessarily speak with one voice on these issues. As a more progressive leadership addressed issues in the spirit of the Social Gospel, the Convention did not become a bastion of liberal social thought. It simply ceased to exist as a mirror, uncritically reflecting the Southern cultural milieu.⁶⁷ In short, it began, however falteringly, to bring its Christian principles to bear on the issues of racial inequality. In 1917, for instance, the Social Service Committee report submitted at the annual Convention expressed concern for the ills of segregation and the "pernicious doctrine of a double standard of morals" that accompanies it.⁶⁸ Six years later the Convention once

⁶⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1910*, pp. 31-32.

⁶⁶ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, p. 91.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Annual of the SBC, 1917*, p. 61.

again addressed the issue of lynching. Through the report of its Social Service Commission the SBC turned its attention to the continuing problem of mob violence, by perpetrators both masked and unmasked, in the South. Unfortunately, the report does not express its condemnation of the lynching until it first establishes that lynching was a response to “attacks upon the sanctity of womanhood [by] ...individuals of the Negro race.”⁶⁹ Finally, in 1930, Southern Baptists condemn lynching without qualification. The Social Service Commission reports that they “shall not be satisfied until this foul blot is entirely removed from the garment of our civilization.”⁷⁰

Although one finds, interspersed throughout Convention Annuals, reports of the Social Service Commission that address racial inequality, the Commission most often placed greater emphasis on individual issues, such as temperance, gambling, and Sabbath-keeping. Issues with social, economic, or political implications were usually addressed only superficially and with little “appeal for direct action.”⁷¹ A perfect example is found in the Social Service Commission’s report of 1932.

More and more must we cultivate and maintain a proper spirit of kindness and justice between the races...That the Negro race has to suffer injustice many times in the courts of the land and in other ways, we all know...We must cultivate inter-social good will, we must demand equal and impartial justice.⁷²

The SBC’s Social Service Commission, the natural and only source of Social Gospel initiatives in the denomination, “lacked vision and insight as a social critic; it lacked resources and leadership as a social-action agency.” It was, in Eighmy’s words,

⁶⁹ *Annual of the SBC, 1923*, p. 103.

⁷⁰ *Annual of the SBC, 1930*, p. 69.

⁷¹ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, p. 94.

⁷² *Annual of the SBC, 1932*, p. 91.

“[c]aught between two ideological currents—personal evangelism and social Christianity.”⁷³ Its words of moral and ethical admonition were not translated into remedy or action. The Commission did, however, have to function within a denomination that, as a whole, was not quite ready to embrace a progressive vision of race relations in the South. Thus the annual declarations served as nudges in the right direction, as guideposts for interpersonal behavior, but not for eradication of the racism that permeated the Convention.

In 1940 the Social Service Commission returns again to race relations and issues a statement that urges equality in all areas of public life. The report calls for “equal and impartial justice before the courts” and “better and more equitable opportunities in industrial, business, and professional engagements; and a more equitable share in public funds and more adequate opportunities in the field of education.”⁷⁴ In 1943 the Social Service Commission’s report on race would reflect the country’s awareness of Nazism. The report urged that Americans “can not adopt the ‘Germanic principle’ on race.” Races are not, the Commission argued, “natural enemies destined to rule or be ruled by one another as masters and servants. Races are but families of the common race.”⁷⁵ The SBC had traversed a great expanse in the area of race relations with the adoption of that report—from apologists for slavery to a defense of the family of man.

Another area in which the Southern Baptist approach to race relations was sometimes contradictory was foreign and home missions. While the Convention did not

⁷³ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*. p. 107.

⁷⁴ *Annual of the SBC, 1940*. p. 95.

⁷⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1943*. p. 107.

expend a great deal of effort or funds on evangelizing African-Americans immediately following the Civil War, that changed in the twentieth century. Early Southern Baptist mission work, which like the Convention itself had its origins in the slavery controversy, was permeated by racism. This carried over into the new century as the SBC expanded on the foreign and home mission fronts. Black missionaries were sent into the tropical areas of Africa where Americans, black and white, were susceptible to disease. It was believed that African-Americans had “a stronger resistance to the adverse climate and the diseases of Africa than white Americans.”⁷⁶ Luther Copeland argues that racism, a “blind spot” in Southern Baptist missionary vision, is still a problem in the denomination’s present mission work.⁷⁷ In addition to the problem of racism, there was an underlying paternalism in SBC mission work, manifest in the myth that “America was uniquely qualified to save the world” and that Southern Baptists were especially chosen to fulfill this mission.⁷⁸

On the home front, the Convention began to appropriate funds for African-American churches and religious education. The SBC and the National Baptists Convention jointly supported the American Baptist Theological Seminary, an institution for African-American ministers. In addition, Southern Baptist seminaries in Louisville, Fort Worth, and New Orleans provided low-cost training to Black ministers in their areas.⁷⁹ At the same time, the SBC’s Home Mission Board provided Bible and religion

⁷⁶ Copeland. *The Southern Baptists Convention and the Judgement of History*. p. 34.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁷⁹ *Annual of the SBC, 1940*. p. 84.

teachers in nineteen Black colleges of the South.⁸⁰ Despite the vestiges of racism and paternalism, the SBC envisioned an obligation to African-Americans that finally translated into action. For the first time in the Convention's history, and in the field of missions, the SBC was doing more in the area of race relations than simply adopting resolutions and expressing sentiments. The denomination was acting, and by those actions it would eventually be changed.

There were, even in the first half of the twentieth century, bright spots in the SBC concerning race relations. There were those who took rather nonconformist positions on race in the denomination. One such person was Robert B. Eleazer, who in an article in the *Biblical Recorder* in 1926, "affirmed the equality of the races on the basis of Christian principles."⁸¹ Eleazer himself was not a Baptist, but his views—controversial as they were—were published in a Baptist paper. Then there was Noble Y. Beall, a pastor in Montgomery, Ozark, and Gadsden, Alabama, before taking the job of Director of Negro Missions in the SBC's Home Mission Board.⁸² Beall reminded Baptists of their obligation to racial justice and that this obligation had gone largely unheeded in the denomination. He published discussions of African-American history which emphasized Black contributions to civilization. Perhaps most importantly, Beall disagreed with the traditional Baptist interpretation of Black inequality as resulting from Noah's curse on the descendants of Ham.⁸³ Southern Baptist women were active in founding the Association

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Eleazer, Robert B. "Popular Fallacies about Race Relations," *Biblical Recorder* 91, no. 50 (1926).

⁸² Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 354.

⁸³ Ibid.

for the Prevention of Lynching in 1930.⁸⁴ These women were rejecting the pretense of protection so often used in the justification of lynching. Women in the SBC were also involved in other areas of interracial cooperation. The denomination's Women's Missionary Union (WMU) established a relationship with African-American women's Baptist organizations.⁸⁵ And Edwin McNeill Poteat, Jr., addressed a Southern Baptist audience at the denomination's retreat at Ridgecrest, North Carolina, about the need to end racial segregation in religious worship.⁸⁶ As the denomination entered the second half of the twentieth century, race relations within the Convention were—albeit slowly and belatedly—changing in response to political and cultural pressures, as well as the leadership of several courageous Southern Baptists who worked toward the eradication of the conflict between the denomination's race relations and its Christian principles.

The Second Half of the Twentieth Century

The Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* reverberated through the South as though an earthquake. The SBC's Christian Life Commission (formerly the Social Service Commission) attempted to steer the denomination through the turbulent waters of change and reaction. The Commission called on the Convention to recognize and acknowledge that the *Brown* decision was in "harmony with constitutional guarantees of equal freedom to all citizens, and with the Christian principles of equal justice and love for all men."⁸⁷ The Convention approved the

⁸⁴ Copeland, *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History*, p. 27.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1954*, pp. 56 and 403-404.

Commission's report.⁸⁸ In the same report, however, the Commission commended the court for deferring application until the nation underwent a period of adjustment. The report continued by calling on all Southern Baptists to act in the "spirit of Christ" during this period of adjustment.⁸⁹

What is most notable about the Christian Life Commission's report on the *Brown* decision is that it was published in the midst of strong "constituent" feeling against race integration. That the Commission's report was approved by the Convention is not an accurate gauge of Southern Baptist response to integration. "Some pastors openly criticized the Court's ruling...A few churches forced resignations from ministers supporting integration, and some in the Deep South denounced the commission and threatened to withdraw financial support from the Convention."⁹⁰ It is with this report and on this issue that we begin to observe a split between SBC leadership and Southern Baptists in the pews on Sunday mornings. Southern Baptist unanimity was breaking down as the Convention was faced with a changing cultural and political environment. In the 1950s and 1960s, it would not be the denomination's pastors who would chart the path of the SBC, but rather lay people, those Baptists in the pews who disagreed with the denomination's leadership and slowed the process of integration.⁹¹ White Alabama Baptists, for instance, were dissatisfied with the fact that their denomination "was acting more like main-line denominations on race."⁹² Alabama Baptists directed as much anger

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, pp. 189-191.

⁹¹ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, p. 465.

⁹² Ibid., p. 459.

toward the SBC as they did toward the government or the leaders of the civil rights movement.⁹³ All the while, the Christian Life Commission continued to express concern for African-Americans in the South and support for racial equality. This progressive leadership represented the “avant-garde within Southern Baptist life” but they did not exercise a great deal of control over the denominational life of individual churches or their members.⁹⁴

Most Southern Baptists opted for the segregationist perspective, although the most reactionary attitudes are, surprisingly, somewhat difficult to document from the Baptist newspapers and convention minutes. The explanation for this is that the papers and Convention machinery were in the hands of more moderate or progressive denominationalists who above all worked to hold the Convention together.⁹⁵

The progressive leadership steered a middle course, between the forces of desegregation on one side and the disintegration of their Convention on the other.

Andrew Michael Manis argues that integration was the “crucial common denominator” in a conflict between civil religions after 1954.⁹⁶ The civil religion of the white South was identified with the “Southern way of life” and was “less optimistic, less liberal, less democratic, less tolerant, and more homogeneously Protestant.”⁹⁷ African-American civil religion, particularly that among black Baptists, was more optimistic, liberating, and pluralistic. Hence, desegregation played different roles in the civil religions of white and black Southerners. For black Baptists, it was the “fulfillment...of

⁹³ Ibid., p. 460.

⁹⁴ Manis, Andres Michael. *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Black and White Baptists and Civil Rights, 1947-1957* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987) pp. 26-27.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 27

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁷ Wilson, Charles Reagan. *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980) pp. 12-13. Quoted in Manis. *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict*. P. 15.

hope” and for white Southern Baptists, “disappointed hope.”⁹⁸

As the 1960s approached, many members of the SBC felt even more disaffected as the denomination’s leadership embraced “liberal” attitudes toward minority groups and women. The Baptist Joint Committee for Public Affairs’ endorsement of Supreme Court rulings on school prayer did nothing to alleviate this disaffection, but rather exacerbated it. Helen Turner Lee argues that because of this disconnection between Convention leadership and the rank and file, fundamentalists could claim, in their bid for power, that the “SBC is not what it used to be.”⁹⁹ The leadership of the SBC in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s was more progressive or moderate than the conservative membership of the denomination, making the fundamentalist bid for power more attractive than it might have been. Sometimes, however, even the leadership of the Convention could not break free of their regional sentiments on race. The Executive Committee of the SBC, meeting in Nashville a week after the 1963 bombing of a black Baptist church, “refused to adopt a statement addressed to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church” mourning the dead and “lamenting the tragedy.”¹⁰⁰

Despite contradictory feelings within the Convention concerning race relations, the SBC continued throughout the Civil Rights Movement era to address the issue of racial inequality and reconciliation. In 1961, the Convention resolved that the race problem be treated as “a moral and spiritual as well as a social problem.”¹⁰¹ Following

⁹⁸ Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict*. P. 60.

⁹⁹ Turner, Helen Lee. “Myths: Stories Of This World And The World To Come.” Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 100.

¹⁰⁰ *Baptist Peacemaker* 13, no. 3 (1993) Quoted in Copeland. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History*. p. 31.

¹⁰¹ *Annual of the SBC, 1961*. p. 84.

the passage of the Civil Rights Act by Congress in 1964, the SBC in 1965 adopted a statement by the Christian Life Commission on “the Racial Crisis.” In this statement, the Convention acknowledged that “Southern Baptists have unusually heavy responsibilities and unique opportunities in the area of race relations.”¹⁰² Convention messengers committed themselves to “the Christian ministry of reconciliation between Negroes and whites and between segregationists and integrationists.”¹⁰³ Southern Baptists were attempting to answer the call of President Lyndon Johnson, who, in a Rose Garden address to the denomination’s Christian Life Commission, told them that “[n]o group of Christians [had] greater responsibility in civil rights than Southern Baptists.”¹⁰⁴

Following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and on the day that Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, the SBC adopted “A Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation” in which it acknowledged the failure to live up to the Christian obligations of brotherhood and accepted responsibility for many of the social ills that plagued the nation.¹⁰⁵ The following year, in a “Resolution...On Christian Social Concern,” the denomination affirmed a “Christian posture toward people of all races” and expressed “appreciation for those persons and agencies which have made courageous efforts to work for racial justice and human betterment in difficult areas.”

The Convention tackled prejudice in its 1971 meeting, resolving to put into practice that attitude encapsulated in Acts 10:34-35—“that God is no respecter of

¹⁰² *Annual of the SBC, 1965*. p. 247.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Sanders, Matt. “Superdome rocks as Fred Luter urges ‘Go!’ in historic sermon.”

¹⁰⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1968*. pp. 67-69.

persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” But some of those who put this teaching into practice were persecuted. Paul Turner, a Baptist pastor in Clinton, Tennessee was attacked and beaten by a mob after he escorted black children to a school from which they had previously been excluded.¹⁰⁶

There were times when the rank and file successfully resisted progressive action on the part of Convention leadership. In 1964, messengers to the SBC from the Deep South were successful in altering the wording of an antisegregation resolution proposed by the Christian Life Commission. The Convention divided along conservative and moderate lines, which was a precursor to the battle for control of the Convention in the closing decades of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷ Progressive, young pastors in the SBC found it increasingly difficult to lead their congregations in the direction of racial equality and reconciliation. Baptist pastors are dependent upon their churches, serving at the will of their congregants and without hierarchical structures on which they can depend for support. At some times and in some congregations, Southern Baptist preachers were supportive of the old South and segregation. At other times and in other congregations, ministers were embattled visionaries of a better and more equitable South. Nancy Ammerman speaks of a “lost generation” of idealistic leaders, bruised from they denominational fights over integration and civil rights, who left their churches and denomination for other, more tolerant and progressive institutions.¹⁰⁸ One example of this “lost generation” is Morris Decs. A Baptist ministerial student at the University of

¹⁰⁶ Dehoney, Wayne. *Baptists See Black* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1969) pp. 9-10. Quoted in Copeland. *The Southern Baptist Convention and the Judgement of History*. p. 28.

¹⁰⁷ Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 461.

¹⁰⁸ Ammerman. *Baptist Battles*. p. 66.

Alabama, Dees, like many others, became “disillusioned with the denomination. He chose a secular path that led him to create the Southern Poverty Law Center.¹⁰⁹ His friend, Millard Fuller, left the church, but in time returned as the founder of Habitat for Humanity.¹¹⁰

If anything may be said about the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1960s and 1970s, it is that the Convention was not immune to the changing social and political culture of the South. Even if no longer pro-segregationist, the SBC was not exactly pro-integrationist either. It was caught in the middle, trying to “maintain order and stability,”¹¹¹ one attempt that often resulted in resistance to inevitable change.

The SBC found itself in the midst of a culture war with public schools, a lightning rod in the storm of integration as it swept the South. Long an advocate of the public school system, Southern Baptist support for this institution began to wane with forced integration. In 1970, the SBC emphasized and condemned a practice of which some of its own constituent churches were guilty: the establishment of church-related schools “as a strategy to avoid racial integration.” In a “Resolution...[on] Public and Private Education” the Convention affirmed its historic support of the country’s public schools and offered its vigorous opposition to the use of tax funds for private, church-related schools.¹¹² That resolution did not, however, end the practice of establishing and maintaining church-related schools in order to circumvent forced integration. Eventually

¹⁰⁹ Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 480.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Hill, Samuel S. “The Story Before the Story: Southern Baptists Since World War II” in Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 40.

¹¹² *Annual of the SBC, 1970*. p. 79.

Southern Baptist support for public education was further eroded through school prayer decisions, the teaching of evolutionary science, and the intrusion of alternate lifestyles.¹¹³ This waning support for the public school system contributed to what would be the Convention's complete reversal of its position on school vouchers and tax support for private schools at the close of the twentieth century.

In many ways, the decade of the 1970s laid the ground for fundamentalist reaction within the SBC. The denomination's leadership continued to take stands on issues that were incongruent with opinions of the rank and file of the Convention. The progressive vision of the moderate hierarchy was not widely shared by either the messengers who attended the annual Convention, or by the average Southern Baptists in church on Sunday mornings. But there was one area of progressive transformation within the SBC that, although late in coming, represented substantial and real change in the denomination: race relations. In 1971 the Convention resolved to combat prejudice within the denomination.¹¹⁴ In 1975 a report from the denomination's Christian Life Commission recommended that Southern Baptists seek God's guidance in race relations, "recognizing [themselves] as standing under God's judgment concerning the sin of racism."¹¹⁵ The Commission argued for a renewed commitment to Biblical principles of "justice for all human beings regardless of race." This vision of racial justice, as articulated in the remainder of the resolution, extends to "public education, employment, health care, housing, consumer concerns, and citizen participation in the political process."¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Flynt. *Alabama Baptists*. p. 578.

¹¹⁴ *Annual of the SBC, 1971*. p. 79.

¹¹⁵ *Annual of the SBC, 1975*. p. 117.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The first SBC resolution on the Ku Klux Klan came, not in the era of lynch mobs in the early part of the century or the era of civil rights struggles in the 1960s, but in 1982, when the denomination resolved to “go on record as strongly [opposed to] the activities of the Ku Klux Klan.”¹¹⁷ The resolution notes that the KKK promotes hatred and that, according to the Bible, there is no racial distinction between peoples.¹¹⁸ The following year the Convention resolved to encourage the denomination’s agencies, boards, and committees to encourage and strive for black and ethnic leadership. This would enable to SBC to “reflect more completely the oneness in Christ.”¹¹⁹

Ten years later, in 1993, another resolution on racial reconciliation called on Southern Baptists to “reaffirm [their] intention to love [their] neighbors” and strongly denounced racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination. This resolution concludes with a call from the Convention to all Southern Baptists to “redouble their efforts in their own communities to reach across racial and ethnic boundaries to establish both wholesome friendships and mutually beneficial ministry relationships.”¹²⁰ There are, however, two problems with this resolution. First, in 1993, the SBC could not demonstrate significant harmony between the reality of its leadership structure and the sentiments of the resolution adopted ten years earlier. In other words, the commitment to greater representation of black and ethnic leadership in the Convention’s agencies, boards, and committees was not realized. Second, the 1993 resolution depends, in the final analysis,

¹¹⁷ *Annual of the SBC, 1982*, p. 64.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Annual of the SBC, 1983*, p. 70.

¹²⁰ *Annual of the SBC, 1993*, pp. 100-101.

on *individual* relationships between white Southern Baptists and people of other races and ethnic groups. It does not address the systemic and institutional problem of racism, both within and around the Convention.

These problems, however, should not obscure the fact that the SBC was approaching the end of the twentieth century with an assault on its racist past. The denomination offered a minimum of \$18,000 into each local black church start-up, and extended its vast array of denominational benefits and materials to congregations which affiliated with the Convention.¹²¹ The SBC also demonstrated a new found commitment to the establishment of African-American Southern Baptist congregations, founding them at the rate of approximately 150 per year since 1989.¹²² By 1993 it was estimated that more than one thousand African-American congregations were affiliated with the SBC. At the same time, these churches existed primarily outside the deep South, most being located in California, Michigan, Texas, and the Northeast.¹²³ By 1987 black Southern Baptist churches in the United States numbered 1,817.¹²⁴ Despite the proliferation of black churches, however, there were only eight African-Americans out of more than nine hundred national SBC trustees, officials, and committee members in 1991—and that number has been *decreasing* since that time.¹²⁵

The Convention adopted a more expansive resolution in 1995, condemning

¹²¹ Sanders, Matt. "Superdome rocks as Fred Luter urges 'Go!' in historic sermon." (<http://sbcannualmeeting.org/sbc01/newspage.asp?ID=159>)

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Knight, Walker L. "Race Relations: Changing Patterns and Practices." In Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 173.

¹²⁴ Joe Maxwell. "Black Southern Baptists: The SBC's valiant efforts to overcome its racist past." *Christianity Today*, May 15, 1995 v39 n6 p26.

¹²⁵ Knight. "Race Relations." In Ammerman *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 176.

racism “in all its forms” and apologizing to “all African-Americans for condoning and or perpetuating individual systematic racism in our lifetime.” The resolution ends with a pledge to “eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry.”¹²⁶ The realization of this resolution’s sentiments would of course take time. The apology was accepted on behalf of black Southern Baptists by Gary L. Frost, the sole African-American in the denomination’s upper echelon of national leadership at the time.¹²⁷

There is concern that with the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC, the hard-earned progress on race relations within the denomination will be rolled back. There is some evidence to justify this concern. Walker L. Knight argues that with the fundamentalist control of the Convention, “progress toward better race relations within the denomination began to slow and almost ground to a halt.”¹²⁸ But equally important to note is that the Convention’s most far-reaching resolutions on race, and the historic sermon by Fred Luter mentioned earlier in this chapter, have all occurred during the era of fundamentalist control of the SBC. Thus it remains unclear as to the evidence that can be marshaled in rendering a verdict on race relations in today’s SBC.

First, it is necessary to note that none of the fundamentalists in charge of the Convention since 1980 has demonstrated leadership on the issue of race relations within the denomination. In fact, one of the principle architects of the fundamentalist takeover, W. A. Criswell, was a staunch advocate for segregation in the 1950’s, and had this to say about integrationists in 1956: they are “a bunch of infidels, dying from the neck up.”

¹²⁶ “Southern Baptists apologize to blacks for racism.” *Jet*, July 10, 1995 v88 n9 (2)

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Knight. “Race Relations.” in Ammerman. *Southern Baptists Observed*. p. 173.

They are “good-for-nothing fellows who are trying to upset all the things we love as good Southern Baptists.”¹²⁹ Criswell has since repudiated his former stance on race, but as Joe Barnhart points out, Criswell and all fundamentalist Southern Baptists who remain committed to the inerrancy of the scriptures are “stuck with Genesis 9,” the account of Ham and his cursed descendants.¹³⁰ A favorite text of fundamentalists is the *Scofield Reference Bible* which, expounding on Genesis 9, refers to the curse on Ham as a “prophetic declaration” of an “inferior and servile posterity.”¹³¹ *The Criswell Study Bible* still adheres to a “racist interpretation of Genesis 9,” the same interpretation that Antebellum Southern Baptists used to justify slavery.¹³²

There is more than a literalist approach to the Bible at work against fundamentalist Southern Baptists in the healing of race relations within the Convention. There is, extant in southern white evangelical culture, a rationale for racial inequality. This rationale functions as a “defense of identity, culture, and worldview.”¹³³ In this defensive posture, individuals bring to bear what Ann Swidler has termed a cultural “tool kit” comprised of “ideas, habits, skills, and styles,” that while not necessarily over-determinative, is nonetheless limiting.¹³⁴ Emerson, et. al., have identified the “tool kits” of white, conservative Protestants as including accountable freewill individualism, anti-

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 177.

¹³⁰ Barnhart. *The Southern Baptist Holy War*. p. 131.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 135.

¹³² Ibid., p. 131.

¹³³ Emerson, Michael O., Christian Smith, and David Sikkink. “Equal in Christ, But Not In The World: White Conservative Protestants and Explanations of Black-White Inequality.” *Social Problems*, August 1999 v46 i3 p398 and Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 89.

¹³⁴ Swidler, Ann. “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies.” *American Sociological Review* 1986 51:273.

structuralism, and relationalism.¹³⁵ The first, “accountable freewill individualism,” refers to the belief that there are right and wrong choices laid before each individual by his/her Creator and that these choices have consequences in this life and the next. Hence, many problems, including social ones, may be explained through reference to individual choices. “Anti-structuralism” as a world view makes it difficult for one to attribute the cause of racial inequality to social, economic, and political structures. In fact, it makes it difficult to accept that racism, as a structural component of racial inequality, can play a role in the life situations of individual African-Americans. Finally, “relationalism” renders the problems of racial inequality subject only to relationships between individuals and not to structural transformation. Hence, based on the cultural “tool kit” available to Southern Baptists, the denomination would logically address the issue of racial reconciliation through resolutions that call on individuals to “reach across racial and ethnic boundaries” and establish “friendships and mutually beneficial ministry relationships.”¹³⁶

Southern Baptists approach the problem of racism in this way because white evangelicals see the race problem as stemming from one of three possibilities. It may be the result of prejudiced individuals (leading to bad relationships), of other groups (usually African Americans) making it a group problem, or a “fabrication of the self-interested—again often African Americans, but also the media, the government, or liberals.”¹³⁷ In other words, it is not a systemic, group problem for Baptists and their organization. This

¹³⁵ Emerson, et. al. “Equal in Christ.” *Social Problems*. P. 398.

¹³⁶ *Annual of the SBC, 1993*. p. 101.

¹³⁷ Emerson, Michael O. and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith*. p. 74.

frame for the race problem draws heavily on the evangelical emphasis on individualism. A notable consequence of this emphasis is the “tendency to be ahistorical,” resulting in an inability to view contemporary problems in their historical, structural context.¹³⁸

Emerson and Smith found that when people were asked to identify the primary issues with which Christians should be concerned, “only 4 percent of white Protestants named racism as an issue.”¹³⁹ One third of the African-American Protestants asked, however, named racism as a problem, with one quarter citing it as the “single most important issue for Christians to address.”¹⁴⁰ In another survey, 62 percent of conservative Protestants assigned responsibility for the black-white socioeconomic gap to problems of “individual motivation, while only 27 percent identified discrimination as the reason for the gap.”¹⁴¹ The white evangelical world view—their cultural “tool kit” and emphasis on individualism—significantly influences their approach to the problem of racial inequality. Rather than seeing racism and the resultant socioeconomic gap as a systemic problem, 72 percent of white evangelicals surveyed identified black culture and/or motivation as the source of racial inequality.¹⁴² Given the cultural “tools” available to conservative, white evangelicals, this finding suggests a more complex problem than a simple assignation of racism. This complexity is present in the SBC’s approach to race problems in the late twentieth century. Southern Baptist blindness to problems of racial inequality is not simply a defense of socio-economic privilege; it is

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 81.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 86-97.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Emerson, et. al. “Equal in Christ.” *Social Problems*, August 1999 v46 i3 p. 398.

¹⁴² Ibid.

also a defense of “identity, culture, and worldview.”¹⁴³

There is an additional phenomenon at work in the SBC response to racism within and around the denomination. It was identified by Reinhold Niebuhr in discussing nations in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, but is applicable to the behavior of denominations and churches. When direct contact with members of a different group is limited, as is the case with black and white Southern Baptist churches, people “know the members of their own group and their needs more deeply, fully, and personally than the members and needs of the other group.”¹⁴⁴ It stands to reason, then, that one attends to the needs of his/her own group first. Moreover, Niebuhr argues, this attention to one’s own group is “precisely because they are moral and loving.”¹⁴⁵ For the first hundred years after the Civil War, black and white Southern Baptists were doing just that—paying attention to their own groups. Even as the SBC has attempted to correct its racist past, the solution—the intentional formation of black churches—does nothing to contravene the problem of intergroup loyalty. Establishing and funding of black congregations does not address the problem of Sunday morning segregation. There is, however, some common ground—if not common church pews—occupied by contemporary black and white Southern Baptists in the fundamentalist SBC.

Racial reconciliation may be within the reach of today’s SBC. African-American evangelicals tend toward fundamentalist theology, making the contemporary Southern

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Niebuhr, Reinhold. *Moral Man and Immoral Society; A Study in Ethics and Politics*. (New York & London: C. Scribner’s, 1932) p. 75.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

Baptist denomination a natural and comfortable home for them.¹⁴⁶ As white Southern Baptists have embraced the Republican party in their move toward greater political conservatism, they have found natural allies in Oklahoma Congressman J. C. Watts, a Southern Baptist and former SBC youth pastor. Watts personifies contemporary Southern Baptist fundamentalism in his faith and politics. But while Southern Baptist African-Americans may share similar theological orientations with their white counterparts, they are more liberal in their political, social, and economic views. The simpatico between Watts and the contemporary denomination does not typify the relationship between African-American members and the SBC. Black Southern Baptist leaders argue that “conservatives in the SBC have dropped the ball in championing black progress,” that racism is an illusive but nonetheless institutionalized part of the SBC.¹⁴⁷ Richard Land, Director of the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, offers a different view of racial progress in the SBC, arguing that racism is “in great disfavor” in the Convention. He does concede however that while, African-American participation in association, state, and national levels is encouraged, the SBC does not have “significantly integrated congregations.”¹⁴⁸

The racist past of the SBC continues to surface in isolated congregations from time to time. The Central Baptist Church in Selma, Alabama, turned away a black ministerial student who came to worship services in 1989.¹⁴⁹ And Sanford University’s student-preacher program has encountered many churches that refused to allow African-

¹⁴⁶ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, p. 593.

¹⁴⁷ Maxwell, “Black Southern Baptists,” *Christianity Today*, May 15, v39 n6 p26.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Flynt, *Alabama Baptists*, p. 594.

American students to preach for them. But an example of how denominational sin is often followed by redemption in matters of race, the minister of education at Maranatha Baptist Church in Rainsville, Alabama, responded to the problems encountered by black student preachers by praising a student speaker, John Mokiwa of East Africa, and urging “all churches to accept black Samford ministerial students.”¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

The Southern Baptist Convention’s history in the area of race relations has been a difficult and complex one. The denomination’s origins are in the defense of slave-owning. This grew into the established religion of the South during and after the Civil War. Racial reconciliation presents still a Herculean challenge for the SBC. Part of the Convention’s identity was, for the better part of its history, based on the exclusion of African-Americans. Yet, Southern Baptists remained committed to the “Great Commission.” It is through that commitment to evangelize that white Southern Baptists began to reach out to their black neighbors. By sharing common ground in fundamentalist theology and evangelicalism, black and white Southern Baptists may direct the SBC toward racial reconciliation and redemption for the Convention’s “original sin.” To do so, however, the Convention’s leadership must demonstrate a greater commitment to racial equality within the denomination. And Southern Baptists of all races and ethnic backgrounds must learn to accommodate the political differences that exist between them. Since the 1960s, the denomination has sponsored a race relations Sunday, during which members of separate churches integrate and worship together. Other than that day, however, Southern Baptists worship in their separate congregations. Perhaps on the far horizon one can see the day when Sunday morning at 11:00 is no

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 596.

longer the “most segregated hour” in America. The attainment of that goal depends in large part on how the SBC—a denomination of 15.8 million members—addresses the problem of racial inequality.

CHAPTER 5

RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS AND POLITICAL CHOICES: THE FATE OF FUNDAMENTALISM IN A LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

What a conspiracy this, between Church and State!
Thomas Jefferson

I esteem that Toleration to be the chief Characteristical Mark of the True Church.
John Locke

The American experiment concerning religious liberty and toleration is, in many ways, the victim of its own success. Before the American founding, no nation had attempted to secure a relationship of “mutual independence” for religion and government.¹ That extraordinary arrangement established an environment within which religious pluralism could grow and thrive. And, indeed, it has done just that. But the proliferation of religious sects, coupled with the irreligion of secular liberals and the growth of the welfare state, has paradoxically given birth to a movement to curb both freedom of religion and freedom from religion. That movement is contemporary religious fundamentalism and it threatens the delicate balance between the Establishment and Religious Liberty clauses of the First Amendment. The reemergence of fundamentalism in the late twentieth century provides us with a special opportunity to explore the limits of liberal democracy. The Rawlsian question of whether it is possible for a just and stable society of free and equal citizens to exist over time, despite profound differences in religious, philosophical, social, and moral doctrines, has never been more

¹ Pfeffer, Leo. *Church, State, and Freedom* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1953) p. 26.

timely, nor more difficult to answer.² This chapter examines that question by asking, specifically, whether the principles of democratic engagement are compatible with the “absolutist standpoint of the fundamentalist.”³ Vincent Crapanzano argues that there is no single answer to that question. I believe, and will argue, that there is. Religious fundamentalism is not compatible with the principles of engagement in a liberal democracy. To defend that argument I have undertaken a two-pronged approach, one that is both particular and general. Particularly, the previous four chapters have sketched a vision of the contemporary Southern Baptist Convention and the political ramifications of the fundamentalist takeover of that body. Generally, there is substantial philosophical inquiry extant proving the incompatibility of fundamentalism with religious and civil liberties. Some of that material will be surveyed and applied in this concluding chapter. Sketching the relationship of fundamentalism to the political order first requires an understanding of the fundamentalist phenomenon.

Religious Fundamentalism in America

The only true Fundamentalist is a fighting Fundamentalist. Tossing away his scabbard, the Fundamentalist must cling to the sword of the Spirit until it becomes a part of his very being, like the man from King David’s mighty three. He must place that sword into the enemies’ bosoms, and he must fight on and on until Christ returns.⁴

American fundamentalism was born in the early twentieth century. It was an evangelical Christian response to “modernism in theology and the cultural changes that

² Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) p. 4.

³ Crapanzano, Vincent. *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York: The New Press, 2000) p. 334.

⁴ Beale, David O. *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850* (Greenville, South Carolina: Unusual Publications, 1986) p. 357.

modernism endorsed.”⁵ Fundamentalism was, from the start, a militant movement, best understood as reactionary evangelicalism. It was stridently anti-modernist.⁶ Those defending the “fundamentals” of evangelical Christianity were responding to a perceived catastrophe—the deterioration of America’s Biblical foundations. Conservative American evangelicals in the early part of the twentieth century witnessed significant cultural transformation. George Marsden applies the term “in-migrants” to those who “found themselves living in a society where [the dominant beliefs of the preceding century] were widely considered out-dated, or even bizarre.”⁷ These Americans found themselves strangers in their own land and viewed themselves as “the faithful remnant, the true American patriots.”⁸

Much of the popular stereotype of early fundamentalists resulted from the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee. One consequence of the trial and the media publicity surrounding it was that fundamentalism became associated with all that was “southern, rural, anti-intellectual, and anti-scientific.”⁹ In the aftermath of the sensational trial, Bible-believing Protestants were “othered” by the label “fundamentalist,” and rendered “cultural outsiders.”¹⁰ But this image is a false one. Fundamentalism first developed in

⁵ Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁸ Carpenter, Joel A. *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 6.

⁹ Harris, Harriet A. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 33.

¹⁰ Harding, Susan Friend Harding. *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 74.

the north, reacting against a liberalism that had not yet reached the Southern states. Fundamentalism, although popularly associated with the South, rural living, poverty, and ignorance, “had been predominantly urban with its strength in the northern and eastern sections of the country.”¹¹ The fundamentalist-modernism controversies at the beginning of the twentieth century predominated in Northern Presbyterian and Northern Baptist congregations.¹²

Early fundamentalism was not simply a reactionary response to a culture out of step with conservative evangelicals. It originated out of a “doctrinal controversy with Liberalism.”¹³ George Marsden, the preeminent historian of American fundamentalism, argues that the movement was not “primarily a response to social and political conditions,” but was a “response to the spread of what was perceived as false doctrine.”¹⁴ Fundamentalists were evangelical Christians, militantly opposed to modernism in theology and the cultural changes modernism endorsed.¹⁵ These defenders of the faith were “deeply suspicious of the subjective,” rejecting higher criticism of the Bible (the practice of subjecting accounts of the Bible to scientific standards) and adhering to scriptural inerrancy.¹⁶

Fundamentalists in the early twentieth century were responding to the spread of religious liberalism, influenced by the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher

¹¹ Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. p. 188.

¹² Harris. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. pp. 29-30.

¹³ Dobson, Ed. and Ed Hinson. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity*. Edited by Jerry Falwell (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, inc., 1981) p. 6.

¹⁴ Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. p. 159.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶ Harris. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. p. 180.

(1768-1834), “who considered the ultimate authority in religion to be founded in the experience of the soul rather than in the content of Scripture.”¹⁷ This approach to religion was too relativist for those conservative evangelicals who would eventually embrace the fundamentalist stance. Indeed, the militancy of these early fundamentalists was a direct response to the “more aggressive and radical forms of theological liberalism.”¹⁸

Fundamentalism was proposed and defended initially as “an intellectual and scientific position.”¹⁹ Princeton theology, which was based on the Bible-believing conservative evangelicalism of Presbyterians at Princeton Theological Seminary, formed the backdrop to the emerging fundamentalist movement. Princetonians believed that Biblical truth could be known by “common sense,” the “common sense knowledge of the objective truth of Scripture.”²⁰ There was, however, a troubling legacy left by the Princeton theologians of the nineteenth century. This legacy was a clash “between two traditional loyalties, to scientific scholarship as a neutral objective inquiry, and to the Bible as the factually accurate Word of God.”²¹ Fundamentalist appropriators of Princeton theology, those who were part of the “larger phenomenon of militantly anti-modernist evangelicalism of the 1920s,” resolved that trouble or tension by embracing Biblical inerrancy and rejecting any scientific approach that contradicted scripture.²² Early fundamentalists were staunch supporters of education and learning, but proper

¹⁷ Dobson and Hindson. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. p. 23.

¹⁸ Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. p. 141.

¹⁹ Harris. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. p. 33.

²⁰ Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. p. 108.

²¹ Noll, Mark. *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and America*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1986). P. 25.

²² Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. p. 5.

inquiry was to be protected from the subjectivism of modernity. The Biblically correct use of the intellect would inevitably lead to Biblically supported conclusions.²³

Early fundamentalism sprang from Princeton theology and was “shaped by a dual commitment to a fully inspired Bible and an evidentialist apologetic.”²⁴ What this means is that conservative evangelicals of the early twentieth century wrestled with the tension between an inerrant Bible and scientific inquiry. In the event of irreconcilable accounts, empirical interpretations were discredited. Fundamentalists were committed to reading “historical and miracle narratives” as fact and accused those who “attempted to rationalize supernatural elements of failing to work in the spirit of scientific and Christian scholarship.”²⁵ In an era of profound change and upheaval, fundamentalists clung to the printed word.

If fundamentalism was initially an intellectually and scientifically grounded endeavor, it was also a reaction against intellect and science. Early fundamentalism was aggressive and combative, never shy about identifying the enemies of the faithful.²⁶ The call to adherents was a call to wage war. In coining the new label, Curtis Lee Laws declared, “We here and now move that a new word be adopted to describe the men among us who insist that the landmarks shall not be removed” and those “who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals shall be called Fundamentalists.”²⁷ These “fundamentals” were contained in the scripture, and inerrancy became a test of faith

²³ Ibid., p. 180.

²⁴ Harris. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. p. 142.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

²⁶ Carpenter. *Revive Us Again*. p. 66.

²⁷ Laws, Curtis Lee. “Convention Side Lights.” *Watchman-Examiner*, 1 July 1920, p. 33.

among early fundamentalists. But inerrancy was not a simple acceptance of Biblically revealed truth. The Bible was engaged as a text that, when approached empirically and scientifically, could reveal truth.²⁸ Early fundamentalists were comfortable with the science of Bacon and Newton, with the science of fixed things, but not with the scientific revolution touched off by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution that was transforming their world.²⁹

Fundamentalists, then and now, view evolution as an "unverified working hypothesis."³⁰ Evolution and German culture became inextricably combined in the minds of American fundamentalists. Fundamentalism was fervently committed to saving America from the "dangers of evolution" and all that was associated with it.³¹ In addition to a rejection of Darwinism in the account of worldly origins, fundamentalists were also opposed to the philosophy of social Darwinism. They explained "German barbarism...as a result of an evolutionary 'might is right' superman philosophy,"³² and the experience of America during and after both World Wars affirmed in the hearts and minds of fundamentalists the righteousness of their cause. As an indication of the centrality of Darwinism to the fundamentalist movement, *The Fundamentals*, a set of twelve volumes published from Chicago and distributed to "every pastor, evangelist, missionary, theological professor, theological student" in the English speaking world," devoted fully

²⁸ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. pp. 56-57.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 149.

one third of its content to attacks on Darwinism and higher criticism.³³

Fundamentalism reacted against other modern phenomena: vice, liquor, dancing, card playing, theatre attendance. This version of evangelical conservatism “helped to tie fundamentalism to the popular idea of the Puritan tradition as morally repressive.”³⁴ Further, fundamentalists strongly reacted to “anything that even looked like the Social Gospel.”³⁵ In the minds of fundamentalists, the Social Gospel was connected to philosophical pragmatism, and it relegated to a secondary status questions of Christ’s regenerating grace. Social Christianity was “becoming thoroughly identified with liberalism and was viewed with great suspicion by many conservative evangelicals.”³⁶ This is partially because Social Gospel initiatives were associated with liberals, but primarily because fundamentalists emphasized saving souls through Christ. Fundamentalists vigorously opposed “progressives, Social Gospellers, and New Dealers for seeking to redeem America through social engineering.”³⁷

Fundamentalism in the United States can be divided into two separate eras and types. The first, appearing in the early part of the twentieth century was conceived in and dispatched from the northeastern part of the country. It was primarily concerned with higher criticism of the Bible, evolution, and the Social Gospel. It was, for the most part, a separationist movement—calling for fundamentalist Christians to set themselves apart from the world. In the 1920s and 1930s, fundamentalists were convinced that America

³³ Harris. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. pp. 26-27.

³⁴ Marsden. *Fundamentalism and American Culture*. p. 162.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

³⁷ Carpenter. *Revive Us Again*. p. 118.

was turning its back on God and that they were “called out” to live exemplary lives apart from the spiritual morass that surrounded them.³⁸ The movement thrived for two to three decades and then receded from view on the cultural radar. But the significance of the early fundamentalist movement should not be underestimated. It was, “by far the most influential evangelical movement in the United States during the second quarter of the twentieth century.”³⁹ Although it did not have a significant impact in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), it did transform the Northern Presbyterian and Northern Baptist denominations while elevating preachers like Dwight L. Moody to national prominence.

As early fundamentalism faded from the canvas of American religious life, it fell victim to the stereotypes that abounded after the Scopes trial. In fact, Richard Hofstadter argues that fundamentalism actually became anti-intellectual, reactionary, and authoritarian. Fundamentalists, he argued, “will tolerate no ambiguities, no equivocations, no reservations, and no criticism.”⁴⁰ What was launched as an intellectual and moral defense of fundamental beliefs collapsed ignominiously in the increasingly secular world of post World War II America.

The return of fundamentalism to America came in the late 1970s-early 1980s. This time around, it emerged in the southern part of the country and spread to the Midwest and West. Moreover, in its second formulation it has proved far more politically engaged than the previous movement, and it has successfully contended for the leadership of the nation’s largest Protestant denomination, the SBC. If fundamentalism

³⁸ Carpenter. *Revive Us Again*. p. 58.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁴⁰ Hofstadter, Richard. *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962) p. 119.

was an important influence on American culture in its first manifestation, it may be even more significant the second time around because of its engagement with culture and politics. No longer content to live apart from a degenerate culture, today's fundamentalists view themselves as guardians responsible for the spiritual restoration and regeneration of American culture.

Fundamentalism in the Twenty-First Century

We need to call America back to God, back to the Bible, and back to moral sanity.⁴¹

Harriet Harris has called fundamentalists in the late twentieth century “neo-fundamentalists.” The fight is once again against liberalism, but something new has been added to the enemy list—“secular humanism.”⁴² Secular humanism is something of a shibboleth for the Christian right. It first found its way into the legal and political lexicon as little more than dicta in a decision of the United States Supreme Court.⁴³ The case involved whether an individual may be required to declare a belief in God in order to hold public office in a state and was decided in favor of the individual who refused to swear such an oath. The relevant part of the decision for purposes of this discussion is Justice Hugo Black’s opinion, written for the majority of the court, asserting that neither a state nor the federal government can force a person “to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion.”⁴⁴ That statement is followed by the argument that advantage cannot be assigned to a religion based on the belief in God against religions “founded on different beliefs.” As an example of the latter religions, Black listed in a footnote: “Buddhism,

⁴¹ Dobson and Hindson. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. p. 186.

⁴² Harris. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. p. 44.

⁴³ *Torcaso v. Watkins* 367 U.S. 488 (1961)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism, and others.”⁴⁵ That footnote was a seminal moment among conservative, evangelical Christians. Now secular humanism had been defined as a “religion” and it quickly became, in the rhetoric of fundamentalists, a religion favored by the liberal “establishment.” It became the repository of all the religious right opposed—the teaching of evolution, the ban on prayer in public schools, abortion, as well as feminism and gay rights. With its new status as a religion, “cultural humanism,” which embraced these policies and practices, could now be framed as a religion favored by government policy and practice. Arguments for constitutional and governmental neutrality among competing religions thus took on a new hue for the fundamentalists.

In addition to engaging the battle against secular humanism, contemporary fundamentalism is, in many respects, like its predecessor. The basics of the movement remain unchanged: the infallibility of the Bible; the virgin birth of Christ; substitutionary atonement through the death of Christ; the literal resurrection of Christ; and Christ’s return in the Second Coming. Today’s fundamentalist is as much a moral absolutist as his early twentieth century counterpart and functions within “a closed system of meaning and value that explains everything.” This system hinges on an “[u]ncritical and unreflective attachment to a single set of values.”⁴⁶

Because of the fundamentalists’ commitment to the truth, there is a tendency among them to overabsolutism, that is, to approaching every conceivable issue with a totally black-or-white mentality. Our tendency is to view something as either totally right or totally wrong.⁴⁷

Another characteristic of contemporary fundamentalism is that it is

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Dobson and Hindson. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. pp. 174-175.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 183.

“quintessentially *modern*.”⁴⁸ It is not simply a revival of early twentieth century fundamentalism. It is a “response to events and conditions in the *present*...a symptom of perceived threat or crisis.” Kathleen Boone reminds us that as such, “it is frequently deeply involved in contemporary political processes, and so cannot be divorced from the operation and implications of power.”⁴⁹

Contemporary fundamentalism is in fact inextricably linked to politics, infused as fundamentalism is with the belief that God is “active in the world” and that “His actions have a normative aspect.”⁵⁰ This means that fundamentalist Christians have a religious mandate to act in the realm of the public no less than the private. The absolute authority of pastors, teachers, fathers, and the Bible, and the attempt to establish that authority in the broader culture, translates into a practice of trying to impose a way of life and values on others.⁵¹ Fundamentalists offer “a reassertion of traditional values that have lost the force of ideals they may once have had,” and these values have now assumed the mantle of imperatives, “biblical and legal, that demand discipline rather than aspiration, repetition rather than creation.”⁵² The imposition of absolutes and imperatives is an apolitical move; it stifles the process of deliberation and truncates the possibility of compromise. It is difficult, if not impossible to argue with the authority of God and that is what Protestant fundamentalists bring to the table of democratic politics. The “Bible

⁴⁸ Boone. *The Bible Tells Them So*. P. 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Garvey, John H. “Introduction: Fundamentalism and Politics” in *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies and Militance*. Martin E. Marty and Ro. Scott Appleby, Eds. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) p. 18.

⁵¹ Crapanzano. *Serving the Word*. p. 325.

⁵² Ibid., p. 339.

stands alone as the final word on all matters, sacred and secular.”⁵³

In some respects, the entrance of Protestant fundamentalists into the realm of secular politics could be viewed as a positive development. Many of those who are now politically active previously viewed themselves as practically disenfranchised due to the stark contrast between their religious views and American culture. Susan Friend Harding argues that in the 1980s we witnessed a “major realignment of public religiosity in America.”⁵⁴ This was not a full-scale political realignment in which one party replaced another, and fundamentalists certainly did not establish themselves as dominant in electoral politics. But they did return from “exile.”

Marginalized groups were mainstreamed, but mainstream groups were not marginalized. In the new regime of public religiosity, power and authority are less centered. More dramatically, one of the stories that gave shape to modern America, the story of the progressive secularization of national life, lost its essential protagonist, the excluded Fundamentalist other.⁵⁵

In this sense, the politicization of religion expanded the political realm and contributed to the diversity of America’s religious landscape. It signaled the return of a substantial bloc of citizens to the public square—a homecoming of sorts that was welcomed by Richard Neuhaus who had previously bemoaned the purely secular nature of our civic deliberations.⁵⁶ But whether this development enriches the nation’s democratic processes depends on the substantive nature of the practices and policies sought by the newly mainstreamed fundamentalists.

Exactly what is it that fundamentalists want? Sarah Diamond argues that the

⁵³ Boone. *The Bible Tells Them So*. p. 13.

⁵⁴ Harding. *The Book of Jerry Falwell*. pp. 79-80.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Neuhaus, Richard John. “What the Fundamentalists Want” in *Piety & Politics: Evangelicals and Fundamentalists Confront the World*. Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Cromartie Eds. (Washington, D.C.” Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987) p. 3.

Christian Right has gradually developed as “a social, political and religious movement intent on taking over secular institutions step by step.”⁵⁷ She contends that, while the “Religious Right is by no means monolithic,” divergent groups have found common cause in the effort to take “control over the political and social institutions in the United States.”⁵⁸ While Diamond’s warnings are dire and may be read by some as sensational, there is justification for her concern. Today’s fundamentalists are activists. Theirs is a plan to transform the world around them by eradicating the separation between the secular and religious realms. Importantly, Protestant fundamentalism in America combines activism with absolutism.⁵⁹ That combination has significant implications for politics. All religion, but particularly fundamentalist religion, is “about the imposition of order.”⁶⁰ In the seeming chaos of twenty first century America, there is something appealing and comforting about a return to traditional order. But lurking beneath that attractiveness is the all-too-real potential for loss of freedom.

For the fundamentalists, like their Puritan predecessors, freedom is a highly qualified concept. Freedom means submission to God’s will no less for today’s fundamentalist than it did for John Winthrop. “Fundamentalists argue that laws which drive us toward God’s will are not inconsistent with freedom; indeed they set us free.”⁶¹ The consequences of this belief extend beyond the fundamentalist community due to the

⁵⁷ Diamond, Sara. *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End Press, 1989) p. v.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁹ Antoun, Richard T. *Understanding Fundamentalism: Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Movements* (New York: Altamira Press, 2001) p. 85.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁶¹ Garvey, John H. “Fundamentalism and American Law” in *Fundamentalism and the State*. pp. 35-36.

fundamentalist belief that it is an appropriate utilization of the law to induce people to accept the version of freedom that accords with God's will.

What the fundamentalists want has far-reaching implications for their fellow citizens. The list extends into many facets of American life: "[p]rayer and Bible reading in public schools; a pro-life amendment; legal restrictions on pornography; cessation of state harassment of Christian schools; resistance to feminist and gay-rights legislation; increased defense spending; and terminating social programs that...increase the dependency of the poor."⁶² As is the case with Jerry Falwell's congregation at Thomas Road Baptist Church, the mission of contemporary fundamentalism is to fight "worldly battles" and to seek "worldly power and influence in the name of Christian values."⁶³ It is more than a defense of the "fundamentals" of their faith; it is an ideology whose adherents, according to Harvey Cox, become "culture critics and political theologians despite themselves."⁶⁴ In fact, while the fundamentalist phenomenon of the early twentieth century first emerged as a doctrinal controversy that was primarily theological, fundamentalist theological assumptions this time around are "political."⁶⁵

Jerry Falwell argues that ministers can properly do the following from the pulpit: "You can register people to vote. You can explain the issues to them. And you can endorse candidates right there in church on Sunday morning."⁶⁶ One could legitimately

⁶² Neuhaus, "What the Fundamentalists Want," p. 17.

⁶³ Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ Cox, Harvey, "Fundamentalism as an Ideology" in *Piety & Politics*, pp. 289-290.

⁶⁵ Marty, Martin E. "Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon" in *Piety & Politics*, p. 312.

⁶⁶ Liebman, Robert and Robert Wuthnow. *The New Christian Right: Mobilization and Legitimation*. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1983) p. 37.

argue that there is little, if anything, with which to take issue in Falwell's position. Indeed, Richard Neuhaus is at least partially correct to argue that the return of the formerly marginalized to the interplay of civic life can be viewed as a positive development. But, to be fully correct requires that those returning do not advocate positions and practices that undermine the very civic life they have rejoined. Should a democratic polity of social and religious pluralism welcome, or tolerate, an anti-democratic ethos like that present in the ideology and theology of politicized religious fundamentalism?

Throughout this dissertation I have charted the Southern Baptist response to fundamentalism and the path of the Convention under the leadership of fundamentalist preachers. There was no fundamentalist controversy in the SBC during the early twentieth century because conservatives in the Convention "were so overwhelmingly dominant."⁶⁷ This is not to say that the movement did not impact the SBC. The Convention, openly embracing and defending the fundamentals of the faith, "gained almost one and a half million members during the...fifteen years" following the fundamentalist controversies of the 1920s and 1930s.⁶⁸ This may be an instance of a Southern Baptist leadership at the time knowing its congregation, something that can not be said for the more progressive leadership of the post World War II generations, the leadership that lost its dominant position to a new brand of fundamentalism. For in the closing decades of the twentieth century, just as was the case in the movement's early years, fundamentalism found a comfortable home in the SBC.

What do fundamentalist Southern Baptists think and want? In many respects they

⁶⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, p. 165.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

differ little from their fundamentalist counterparts in conservative evangelical circles. Much of this dissertation has been devoted to an identification and analysis of those positions. But there are, within the SBC, more extreme elements. Judge Paul Pressler, one of the primary architects of the fundamentalist takeover of the Convention, has been linked to “Reconstructionist” Christian thought, according to which America should be ruled by a theocracy based on Old Testament law. “For example, there would be a death penalty for adultery, homosexuality, murder (including abortion), and incorrigible children.”⁶⁹ While these positions represent the far extreme of conservative Christianity, they have the potential, in a time of crisis, to unify a large portion of the fundamentalist following. The current leadership of the SBC has manifested a desire to utilize “agencies and institutions built up by generations of Southern Baptists as a lever to bring about one set of political solutions for this country.”⁷⁰

When faced with the implications of a radically politicized fundamentalist movement, we find ourselves caught in one of contemporary liberalism’s more puzzling dilemmas. It is difficult not to defend the right of any group, religious or otherwise, to participate in political deliberation about public goods. But, when the agenda of these groups is based on an absolutist vision of public and private goods intended to extend to all members of the political community, the democratic rights of other groups are threatened. Hence we confront a paradox: the inclusion of some groups leads to the exclusion of others. Is contemporary democratic liberalism up to the task of effectively coping with this problem?

⁶⁹ James, Rob. ed. *The Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention: A Brief History* (Decatur, Georgia: SBC Today, 1989) p. 38.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

The Liberal Democratic Republic and Religion

Liberalism originated out of the need to disentangle religion and politics. In the process however, many today discover within liberalism a “characteristic liberal incapacity to understand religion.”⁷¹ It is, at the very least, a problematic relationship: that between church and state, religion and society. According to Stephen Carter, the problem is that “the state and the religions are in competition to explain the meaning of the world.”⁷² But is the modern liberal state really in the business of explaining the meaning of the world? Certainly it was never intended to be. The legacy of religious toleration that has accompanied liberalism throughout history suggests that the teleological ends of life were left to the individual living it. The question thus becomes one of change or expansion in the reach of the state. Has the liberal state and the process of secularization that has accompanied its development trespassed on the grounds of religious belief? Stephen Carter’s answer is unequivocal.

The liberal state is uncomfortable with deep religious devotion—and, for the most part, so is its product, liberal law. Religious belief is reduced to precise parity with all other forms of belief, an act of leveling that is already threatening to religion itself. In practice, liberalism often reduces religion to an even smaller role than other belief systems, seeking to limit or shut off its access to the public square and often deriding the efforts of the religious to live the lives they think the Lord requires when those efforts seem to conflict with other liberal goals.⁷³

Carter’s argument here is not persuasive. To “reduce to precise parity” is not, in and of itself, a threatening act. It merely codifies the neutrality the modern liberal state is supposed to demonstrate with regard to religious belief. Yes, the liberal state may be

⁷¹ Galston, William A. *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 13.

⁷² Carter, Stephen L. “Liberalism’s Religion Problem.” *First Things*. March 2002, Number 121. p. 23.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

“uncomfortable with deep religious devotion,” but that discomfort is merely the price to be paid in the attempt to hold in equilibrium competing claims about life’s ends.

Carter makes the same leap as do those who view secular humanism as a religion, namely that belief in the liberal state becomes antithetical and incommensurable with belief in God. As Carter views it, “a theory that developed in order to explain the organization of the state...becomes a theory about the organization of everything.” This, according to Carter, is the crux of liberalism’s problem with religion.⁷⁴ To determine whether liberalism has supplanted religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine in the spheres previously reserved for those ideas and ideals, one must consider the role of privately held beliefs in public decision making.

For John Rawls, the very existence of religious diversity in the modern state is testament to the proper functioning of pluralism. “[T]he diversity of reasonable comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines found in modern democratic societies is not a mere historical condition that may soon pass away; it is a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy.”⁷⁵ But notice that Rawls qualifies his support of diverse doctrines by arguing that they must be “reasonable.” There is, however, no mechanism—constitutional or otherwise—to ensure the reasonableness of privately held beliefs in the pursuit of public policy. Further, how is reasonableness to be determined? What is reasonable for some may be unreasonable for others, particularly in regard to religious truths and philosophical doctrines.

John Keane argues that, by its very nature, the secular state “requires citizens to

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁷⁵ Rawls, John, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) p. 36.

agree to disagree about religion, which ultimately means...that there must be at least some civil spaces in which religion plays little or no role at all.”⁷⁶ Is this possible when one is speaking of profound religious belief? Certainly Rawls would require that citizens in a modern liberal democracy bracket their most profound religious, philosophical or moral doctrines when debating fundamental public policies and goods. One’s religious or philosophical doctrines are, he argues, “not, in general, to be introduced into political discussion of constitutional essentials and basic questions of justice.”⁷⁷ This is a divestiture that profound believers, in this case fundamentalist Christians, are not prepared to make. For them, such a qualification on public debate strays into the realm of the unreasonable, for they make no distinction in their religious beliefs between their private and public selves.

By their very nature, fundamentalist religious beliefs are incontestable. How, then, is the political realm—a space of contestation—to accommodate those beliefs? Rawls may be asking that we render the public square “naked,” to use Richard Neuhaus’ terminology. “[W]ho has the right to vote, or what religions are to be tolerated, or who is to be assured fair equality of opportunity, or to hold property? These and similar questions are the special subject of public reason.”⁷⁸ To participate in the deliberation that decides these questions requires that one adopt a public persona divested of those characteristics that would differentiate us from our fellow deliberators. The Rawlsian concept of political legitimacy requires that the exercise of political power is “in

⁷⁶ Keane, John. “Secularism?” in *Religion and Democracy*. David Marquand and Roanld L. Nettler eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) pp. 9-10.

⁷⁷ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*. pp. 15-16.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to them as reasonable and rational.”⁷⁹ In other words, the terms of political debates must be equally acceptable to all parties to the discussion, at least insofar as elementary principles of justice and fairness are concerned. This means that religious fundamentalists must draw a distinction between that “portion of their creed that can play a legitimate role in the public sphere and...that [which] must remain within the confines of group practice or individual conscience.”⁸⁰ Yet this appears to be a requirement of the modern liberal state which it legitimately places on all citizens in the liberal polity to assure fairness, equality, and stability. In what follows I will attempt to justify that position.

Vincent Crapanzano argues correctly that a prerequisite for democracy is “an openness to the position of the other.”⁸¹ Despite a conviction that we accurately apprehend moral truth, we must remain open to the possibility that other truths held by fellow citizens may in truth be “truth.” This is a tall order. In fact, it asks of devout believers precisely what Stephen Carter says we must not. The problem with liberal political theory, he argues, is that “for all its virtues, [it] is woefully incomplete because of its persistent refusal to accept the force of religion as a genuine and vital expression of human personality.”⁸² But the force of fundamentalist religion, due to its incontestable and absolute nature, has the power to foreclose political debate and compromise. It is of course impossible to prohibit the influence of fundamentalist religious belief in the

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 217.

⁸⁰ Galston. *Liberal Purposes*. P. 257.

⁸¹ Crapanzano. *Serving the Word*. p. 336.

⁸² Carter. “Liberalism’s Religion Problem.” p. 31.

formation of political opinions and choices. We can not force an abstract identity on persons of faith before allowing them to participate in public debates on public goods. Thus, the challenge is to find a way to attenuate the absolutist force of fundamentalist belief in modern liberal democracies. To what degree should we encourage or discourage the presence of fundamentalist discourse in contemporary politics?

Ideally, public reason would be “independent of...opposing and conflicting philosophical and religious doctrines.”⁸³ But that vision of the public square may be too antiseptic and bare. Perhaps the politically feasible alternative is located somewhere between John Rawls and Stephen Carter, but this would require a compromise that fundamentalists may be unwilling or incapable of making. Can modern liberal democracies accommodate irreconcilable visions of truth and the good life? That question has perhaps never been more urgent than today, and the proliferation of religious fundamentalism is a significant reason for that urgency.

The path out of the apparent conundrum is that designed by America’s framers—separation of church and state. This solution does not require that citizens divest themselves of their religious, philosophical or moral beliefs in order to participate in political deliberation about the principles of justice and equality. It does, however, prevent them from establishing religious beliefs to which others would be required to adhere. The agenda of the contemporary fundamentalist movement seeks to abridge that wall of separation by prescribing religious reasons for public policy on issues ranging from prayer in public schools to equal rights for women and gays. On these issues the liberal state should remain neutral with regard to religious and irreligious reasons. Simply stated, policies or practices that compromise or undermine democratic practice

⁸³ Rawls. *Political Liberalism*. p. 9.

should be resisted by the liberal state, and many of the goals of the contemporary fundamentalist movement fall into that category. There are those among the fundamentalist leadership, for example, who argue that America was initially a Christian nation, and that their agenda merely seeks to return the country to its Biblical foundations. This, however, is an incorrect reading of the American founding.

One of the unique elements of the American experiment is its contribution to religious liberty and its commitment to separation of church and state.⁸⁴ The Constitution, as first adopted, was “implicit in principle” that government was to remain separate from religion.⁸⁵ That arrangement “was made explicit with the adoption of the First Amendment.”⁸⁶ A line of argument, from Roger Williams’ *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for cause of Conscience*, to Thomas Jefferson’s *Act for Establishing Religious Freedom*, to James Madison’s *Memorial and Remonstrance*, attests to the American founding being a secular one. Further, and contrary to many claims today, only a “small minority of Americans were affiliated with any church during the period of time between the Revolution and the adoption of the First Amendment.”⁸⁷ While there was a diversity of religious faiths, there was a scarcity of adherents. Hence the fundamentalist contention that America was a Christian nation in its origins is not supported by the evidence.

While most of the founding fathers were affiliated with churches, there was a pointed absence of reference to God in the Constitution they would construct. In fact,

⁸⁴ Pfeffer. *Church, State, and Freedom*. p. 604.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

taken in total with the Bill of Rights, the Constitution begins and ends with an affirmation of separation of church and state: the First Amendment's Anti-Establishment Clause and the Article VI prohibition on the use of religious tests as qualification for office-holding. To frame a relationship of course is not to supply the means to address the complexities of that relationship. In his concluding theses on church-state relations, Leo Pfeffer draws the following picture:

Probably ever since the institutions of religion and of secular power were recognized as separate and distinct in human history, the two forces have competed for and struggled over human destiny. In this struggle the church has sought to dominate the state and use it as an engine for its purposes, and the state has sought to dominate the church and use it as an engine for its purposes.⁸⁸

This ongoing struggle for power requires that we guard with vigilance both church-state separation and religious liberty. Put differently, religion, no less than government and politics, requires the most mindful protection we can provide.

Religious people, to include clergy, rightly draw on their faith in participating in the civic life of the nation. But there is a difference between individual and corporate rights.⁸⁹ The right of religious liberty attaches to individuals, not churches. That is to say, as denominations and churches enter into the political fray, with clergy members advocating political stances and candidates, we encounter real church-state conflicts.

It makes sense within the context of the First Ten Amendments to frame religious liberty as an individual right. Indeed, much of the church-state jurisprudence surveyed in Chapter 3 reveals just this orientation, and is an example of the state carving out and protecting a space for individual attachments and expressions. But this is precisely one

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 604.

⁸⁹ Hallencreutz, Carl F. "Anti-Secularist Policies of Religion" in *Questioning the Secular State: The Worldwide Resurgence of Religion in Politics*, David Westerlund, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996) p. 2.

of Stephen Carter's complaints, that "in twentieth-century American experience...the power of religion [is reduced] by confining its freedom within a state-granted, state-defined, and state-controlled structure of constitutional rights."⁹⁰ By what other rights-granting and protective institutions would we receive and maintain our rights, including religious liberty? The state does not forfeit, nor should it, its position as final arbiter when the religious beliefs of some infringe on those of others, to include disbelief. But it is incorrect to hold that the rights of religious freedom are any more sacrosanct than those of free speech and free press. There are circumstances under which these rights may be permissibly abridged in the interest of justice, fairness, or stability. The same is true of religious liberty. To argue that the right to religious liberty is an individual right is not to contend that it is a right confined to the private sphere. But there are some interesting complexities regarding public/private distinctions and their relation to church-state issues.

Fundamentalists, and most evangelical Christians, do not accept a public/private split when it comes to their religious beliefs. Religious fundamentalists "reject this method of political organization. They see the public/private distinction as artificial and in particular they believe that religion is inseparable from law and politics."⁹¹ The problem with this rejection is that liberalism's strategy for controlling the tension between religion and the state is predicated on the division of life into public and private spheres.⁹²

Much of the fundamentalist reaction against liberalism has to do precisely with

⁹⁰ Carter, "Liberalism's Religion Problem," p. 23.

⁹¹ Garvey, "Introduction: Fundamentalism and Politics" in *Fundamentalisms and the State*, p. 13.

⁹² Garvey, "Fundamentalism and American Law" in *Fundamentalisms and the State*, p. 38.

the greater reach of the state into the private sphere. Hence, while not recognizing a public/private distinction in religious matters, they do recognize and seek to protect that division in other areas of life. One can understand contemporary Protestant fundamentalism as a reaction against the enlargement of the public sphere, as has happened with the expansion of the welfare state.⁹³ This is particularly problematic for those fundamentalists who view human life as sacred and the family as a divine institution. They view the political order as having washed “over its banks to reform [life and the family], redefining them at its convenience.”⁹⁴

Politics, in short, loses all its old limitations, and, subject only to the taboo on religion, becomes the arena within which all human destiny is worked out. The state becomes a *de facto* God.⁹⁵

The solution, according to Richard Rorty, is for modern liberal democracy to “privatise religion without trivializing it.”⁹⁶ There remains, however, the religious protest that privately held beliefs have an important role to play in public matters. There are those, fundamentalists among them, who believe that “religious faith is the appropriate source of values to guide both private and public actions.”⁹⁷ The problem here is that religious fundamentalists want it both ways. They want a public sphere in which religious beliefs guide public policy, *and* they want a protected, inviolate private sphere that is off limits to the state. In other words, one element of the private sphere—religion—may become public while everything from the family to property rights is to

⁹³ Garvey. “Introduction: Fundamentalism and Politics” in *Fundamentalisms and the State*, p. 21.

⁹⁴ Sobran, Joseph. “Secular Humanism and the American Way” in *Piety & Politics*, p. 405.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁹⁶ Rorty, Richard. Privately circulated manuscript. Quoted in Keane. “Secularism?” in *Religion and Democracy*, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Carter. “Liberalism’s Religion Problem.” p. 30.

remain protected. But is it? For in going public with religion there comes a kind of conservative social engineering that has vast consequences for the private life choices of everyone. Protestant fundamentalists are seeking to revive an agenda that is unconstitutional in letter and spirit, and do so with the aid of the state.

The SBC provides us with evidence of this agenda and its potential for conservative social engineering. In terms of gender relations, the Convention's early fundamentalism was built on opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, women's ordination and leadership, and homosexuality. The growing absolutism of the denomination on questions of gender has an impact in the public/political sphere, as Southern Baptists seek to limit the role of women to the home, oppose abortion, and fight same-sex domestic partner benefits. The fundamentalist vision of proper gender roles and relations is reflected in the policy preferences of this increasingly conservative denomination.

Separation of church and state is likewise threatened by the fundamentalism of the contemporary SBC. The denomination supports a return of prayer and Bible reading in public school classrooms—a goal with clear constitutional implications. For the first time in the SBC's history, one of its agencies endorsed a presidential nominee in the appointment of John Ashcroft to be the Attorney General. Further, the most conservative of the SBC's fundamentalist leadership envision the application of Biblical principles to American political and governmental institutions and practices.

The absolutism of this fundamentalist vision threatens the founding principles of the American polity. It entails the belief that adherents are the sole possessors of truth, that a closed system of meaning and values explains everything, and it facilitates an

“uncritical and unreflective attachment to a single set of values.”⁹⁸

Here is the crux of the matter. Liberalism is about providing the “availability of choice without a theory about the virtue of good choices,”⁹⁹ while fundamentalism is, in part at least, about a direct relationship with God and adherence to a sacred and unquestionable text that gives its proponents justification for imposing God’s will on others.¹⁰⁰ Because of this, fundamentalism is at odds with modern liberal democracy. It is, as Harold Perkin writes, the “tyranny of the virtual majority.” Contemporary fundamentalists seek power in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of American government. In so doing, fundamentalist leaders have brought into question basic principles governing the relationship between church and state.¹⁰¹ The very doctrine of religious toleration is imperiled.

[I]mportant elements of a newly politicized religious fundamentalist movement wish to go well beyond a restoration of the status quo ante, to a commingling of religion and the civil order that threatens the centuries-old doctrine of religious toleration itself.¹⁰²

How can fundamentalists so significantly impact such long-standing and broadly accepted principles? How can a sectarian movement impose its will on the majority? By packing local school boards and mobilizing unprecedented numbers in Republican primary elections.¹⁰³ In so doing, fundamentalists seek to make their views and practices

⁹⁸ Dobson and Hindson. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon*. pp. 174-175.

⁹⁹ Carter. “Liberalism’s Religion Problem.” p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ Perkin, Harold. “American Fundamentalism and the Selling of God” in *Religion and Democracy*. p. 79.

¹⁰¹ Martin, William. *With God On Our Side: The Rise Of The Religious Right In America*. (New York: Broadway Books, 1996) p. 371.

¹⁰² Galston. *Liberal Purposes*. p. 258.

¹⁰³ Hirst, Paul. “J. N. Figgis, Churches and the State” in *Religion and Democracy*. p. 104.

applicable to areas of life that can not be classified as religious.¹⁰⁴

There is a problem for liberals who would oppose the fundamentalist incursion into electoral politics and local governance. It is the fundamentalists' paradoxical use of liberal freedoms to pursue illiberal beliefs and practices that liberals find difficult to oppose. Their problem is that "they cannot prevent the advocacy of illiberal beliefs and policies that stops short of a direct threat of violence and of public disorder."¹⁰⁵ It is a similar problem as that faced by moderate Southern Baptists today, who stand impotently by while fundamentalist leaders use the agencies and procedures put in place by the moderates to pursue a very immoderate agenda. Contemporary fundamentalist activists have copied the politics of the left in their attempts to abridge separation of church and state and impose their sectarian will on the rest of American society. The issue of primary salience, however, is that unlike their activist predecessors from the left, fundamentalists maintain a belief in the incontestability of their beliefs, denying "others the validity of their own beliefs."¹⁰⁶ In a profound irony, fundamentalists exist and flourish within a context of American pluralism while pursuing principles opposed to the American tradition of tolerance and diversity.¹⁰⁷

The American Experiment and Fundamentalist Response

There is perhaps a deep-seated and irreconcilable conflict between liberalism and Christianity. Liberalism exalts the individual and cherishes choice. Christianity exalts

¹⁰⁴ Coleman, Simon. "Conservative Protestantism, Politics and Civil Religion in the United States" in *Questioning the Secular State*. p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶ Boone. *The Bible Tells Them So*. p. 21.

¹⁰⁷ Coleman, Simon. "Conservative Protestantism, Politics and Civil Religion in the United States" in *Questioning the Secular State*. p. 29.

the connection to God and cherishes duty.¹⁰⁸ The American solution to that conflict is church-state separation and the distinction between private and public spheres. The erosion of either will upset the tense equilibrium—a standoff of sorts—between liberalism and Christianity. William Galston makes one other observation concerning this balance. He argues that the American juridical apparatus has, in recent years, moved to reinterpret the Constitution to “require impartiality not just among religious faiths but also between religion and irreligion.”¹⁰⁹ But the U.S. Constitution has always secured freedom *from* religion as well as freedom *of* religion. Evidence of this, Leo Pfeffer reminds us, is that “[t]he constitutional fathers...deliberately chose to make nonbelievers eligible to hold even the high office of President.”¹¹⁰

When the constitutional fathers and the generation that adopted the Constitution formalized the concept in the First Amendment, they thereby imposed—and intended to impose—on future generations of Americans in church and state a great moral obligation to preserve their experiment and adhere strictly to the principle they expressed. They were fully familiar with the religious wars, the persecutions, and all the other evils that had inevitably accompanied unions of church and state, and sought forever to keep those evils from our shores.¹¹¹

Today’s fundamentalists confront a world vastly different from that of the founding fathers. Conservative Christians perceive a decline in American religiosity as they encounter the “relativization of public values and the pluralization of private beliefs.”¹¹² This state of affairs sets the stage for the “sectarian reassertion of the ideal of the virtuous

¹⁰⁸ Carter. “Liberalism’s Religion Problem.” P. 29.

¹⁰⁹ Galston. *Liberal Purposes*. p. 258.

¹¹⁰ Pfeffer. *Church, State, and Freedom*. p. 498.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 604-605.

¹¹² Antoun. *Understanding Fundamentalism*. p. 188.

republic.”¹¹³ Fundamentalists may be partially correct. At the time of the nation’s founding, there may have been a level of “general support for religion or Christianity” that may have been suitable given the religiosity of the populace. But with the contemporary level of diversity and nonbelief, such support is no longer appropriate.¹¹⁴

Karen Armstrong argues that religious fundamentalism has emerged in response to all developed, westernized secular states.¹¹⁵ Hence it is perhaps inevitable that such a movement would materialize and thrive in America. It is important, however, that the political institutions of the nation engage fundamentalism rather than ignoring or trying to suppress it. Because fundamentalism is accompanied by a fear of annihilation—because fundamentalists believe that the secular state in the U.S. is intent on eradicating religion—the scripturalism that attends it supports “militant nationalism and justifies...the use of violence and self-sacrifice.”¹¹⁶ The American state can not, then, adopt policies or procedures that may be interpreted as denigrating religion. That would compromise the liberal premises of the social contract¹¹⁷ and would exacerbate the tension between fundamentalists and their government. This does not mean, however, that principles of tolerance should be truncated in an attempt to placate fundamentalist paranoia. Just as the Constitution strikes a balance between the Establishment and Religious Liberty Clauses of the First Amendment, so the nation’s politics and

¹¹³ Robbins, Thomas and Dick Anthony, eds. *In Gods We Trust: New Patterns of Religious Pluralism in America*. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1982) p. 19.

¹¹⁴ Greenawalt, Kent. *Religious Convictions and Political Choice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 19.

¹¹⁵ Armstrong, Karen. “Cries of rage and frustration.” *New Statesman*. Sept. 24, 2001 v130 i4556. p. 17.

¹¹⁶ Antoun. *Understanding Fundamentalism*. p. 155.

¹¹⁷ Grennawalt. *Religious Convictions and Political Choice*. p. 197.

institutions must search for and strike the appropriate balance between the religious liberty of fundamentalists and the liberties of other groups—religious or secular. The appropriate balance is to be found by vigilantly preserving the separation of church and state, in other words, by governing according to the Establishment Clause in order to secure the Religious Liberty Clause.

Just as American governments should not dictate “matters of religious belief and worship to its citizens,”¹¹⁸ religious groups should not do so through government and it is the responsibility of the state to prevent this. Even something as seemingly benign as publicly administered prayers, when situated within the deep religious pluralism of contemporary America, reflects a prohibitive sectarian favoritism.¹¹⁹ And even if early Constitutional interpretation viewed the First Amendment as an instrument of neutrality between religions and not between religion and irreligion, the latter is more appropriate and applicable to a society deeply divided between religions, and between religious belief and nonbelief.

If there are fears on the part of Fundamentalists, so too are there fears of fundamentalists. Today approximately eight percent of the American population may be described as fundamentalist.¹²⁰ This segment of evangelical Christianity is activist and “resolved to drag God and religion from the sidelines in secular society and bring them back to center stage.”¹²¹ Martin E. Marty paints the following dismal portrait of a victorious fundamentalist movement:

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

¹¹⁹ Galston. *Liberal Purposes*. p. 282.

¹²⁰ Karen Armstrong. “Cries of rage and frustration.” *New Statesman*. P. 17.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Only if the 'formal system' should break down and the economic order collapse would it be likely that Fundamentalists could break out of their current cohort in the competitive market. If there has to be a whole new social contract some day, it is likely that there must be in it a state religion, compulsory in character, authoritarian in tone, and 'traditional' in outlook. America would be 'socialized,' not in the name of Marx, but of Jesus, not in the name of Communism, but of Christian republicanism.¹²²

The secular and fundamentalist forces active in contemporary American politics meet at a point of implacability. But it is the responsibility of government officials and citizens alike to mediate the conflict, protecting the constitutional rights of all parties to the disagreement. If Pfeffer is correct, we can not avoid conflicts between church and state, nor should we. William Galston goes even further, suggesting that liberal politics and religion need each other.¹²³ "Religion," he says, "can undergird key liberal values and practices; liberal politics can protect—and substantially accommodate—the free exercise of religion."¹²⁴ The answer seems inevitably to return to a question of balance, avoiding the extreme limits of both liberalism and religion. That, however, is key to a liberal approach to fundamentalist religion. Fundamentalism, by its very nature, represents the extreme limit of religious belief. It is absolutist and incontestable. It does not peacefully coexist with competitors in the marketplace of religions and ideas. Thus, in modern liberal democracies, fundamentalist religion must give way to the interests of the liberal state and its constitutional principles in any contest between the two.

This does not mean that liberalism must remain committed to a "narrow containment of religious pluralism."¹²⁵ It does, however, indicate that there are political

¹²² Marty, Martin E. "Fundamentalist As A Social Phenomenon." in *Piety & Politics*. p. 318.

¹²³ Galston. *Liberal Purposes*. p. 279.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ As argued by Timothy Samuel Shah in "Making the Christian World Safe for Liberalism: From Grotius to Rawls" in *Religion and Democracy*. p. 132.

limits to religious pluralism within liberal democracies. Those limits ensure the containment of the radical conflict that religious pluralism threatens. The search for and establishment of reasonable limits on sectarian pressures is the answer to the liberal problem—"that of specifying terms of peaceful coexistence among exponents of rival, and perhaps rationally incommensurable, world-views."¹²⁶

Does this mean the promotion and establishment of a "public life empty of moral meaning, a kind of collective nihilism that serves as the breeding ground for despotism?"¹²⁷ In no uncertain terms, the answer is, "no." Individual religious liberty is to be preserved, indeed one of the primary reasons to place limits on corporate religious liberty of some is to protect the individual religious liberty of all. I am not suggesting the imposition of Neuhaus' "naked public square." Religious terms and reasons may be invoked by politically active citizens. They simply may not be employed "directly to support controversial political positions"¹²⁸ or to impact the fundamental terms of equality and justice in society. On what grounds can liberalism establish such limits?

In religious freedom cases, the U.S. Supreme Court has employed the "clear and present danger" approach to determine whether circumstances constitutionally justify restrictions on religious freedom. In these cases, the court has deemed restrictions justifiable only when "immediately necessary to protect an interest more important to democratic society than the unrestricted exercise of religion."¹²⁹ The same logic can be applied in a broader governmental context. When basic principles of equality and justice

¹²⁶ Gray, John. *Liberalism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) p. 85.

¹²⁷ Galston. *Liberal Purposes*. p. 276.

¹²⁸ Greenawalt. *Religious Convictions and Political Choice*. P. 219.

¹²⁹ Pfeffer. *Church, State, and Freedom*. p. 502.

are in the balance, when the constitutional rights of some are threatened by the exercise of religious liberty by others, limits to the religious liberty of the latter would be appropriate. Should we feel comfortable with such a statement? Decidedly not. For any time we undertake to restrict the constitutional rights and freedoms of any group, it is a matter of utmost gravity. Should we then shy away from the duty to do so? Again, no. There are times when liberal democracies can not refrain from deciding between the rights of some against those of others. The emergence and gathering strength of politicized religious fundamentalism is one of these times.

Conclusion

Leo Pfeffer argues that religion has achieved its “high estate” in America because of the separation of church and state. The “great experiment” has been justified by history.¹³⁰ That justification extends into the future, pointing us in the direction of the only reasonable way to secure the maximum freedom for both church and state, religion and society. Just as the constitution strikes a balance between the Establishment and Religious Liberty Clauses, so too the nation’s politics and institutions must search for and strike the appropriate balance between the religious liberty of fundamentalists and the rights of those who do not subscribe to their beliefs.

Religion can be, indeed has been, dangerous to the “basic human liberties of believers and unbelievers alike.”¹³¹ A survey of history reveals a lineage of persecution from “Moses’ command to slay the three thousand men who worshipped the golden calf to the Spanish Inquisition and the exiling of Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson by the

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 605.

¹³¹ Carter. “Liberalism’s Religion Problem.” P. 31.

Puritan fathers.”¹³² It is in part because of that history that liberal democracy rightfully has “something to say about acceptable bases for the political positions of citizens as well as about acceptable political outcomes.”¹³³ In other words, reasonable, appropriate limits are not incompatible with liberal democratic principles. American government “knows no religious truth”¹³⁴ and the fundamental principles of our political order do not (nor should they) require religious belief to inform or sustain them. That said, the political participation of religious persons and groups is a vital and healthy part of our democracy. But, as Kent Greenawalt argues, a “degree of self-restraint is appropriate to prevent dangerously close connections between religion and politics.”¹³⁵ Self-restraint, however, militates against the basic premises of religious fundamentalism. In the absence of self-restraint, we must rely on and fortify the only form of restraint we have, in the American case, constitutional separation of church and state. That mechanism has never been more necessary than now, as we strive to protect freedom *of* religion and freedom *from* religion.

¹³² Pfeffer. *Church, State, and Freedom*. p. 6.

¹³³ Grennawalt. *Religious Convictions and Political Choice*. p. 11.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

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