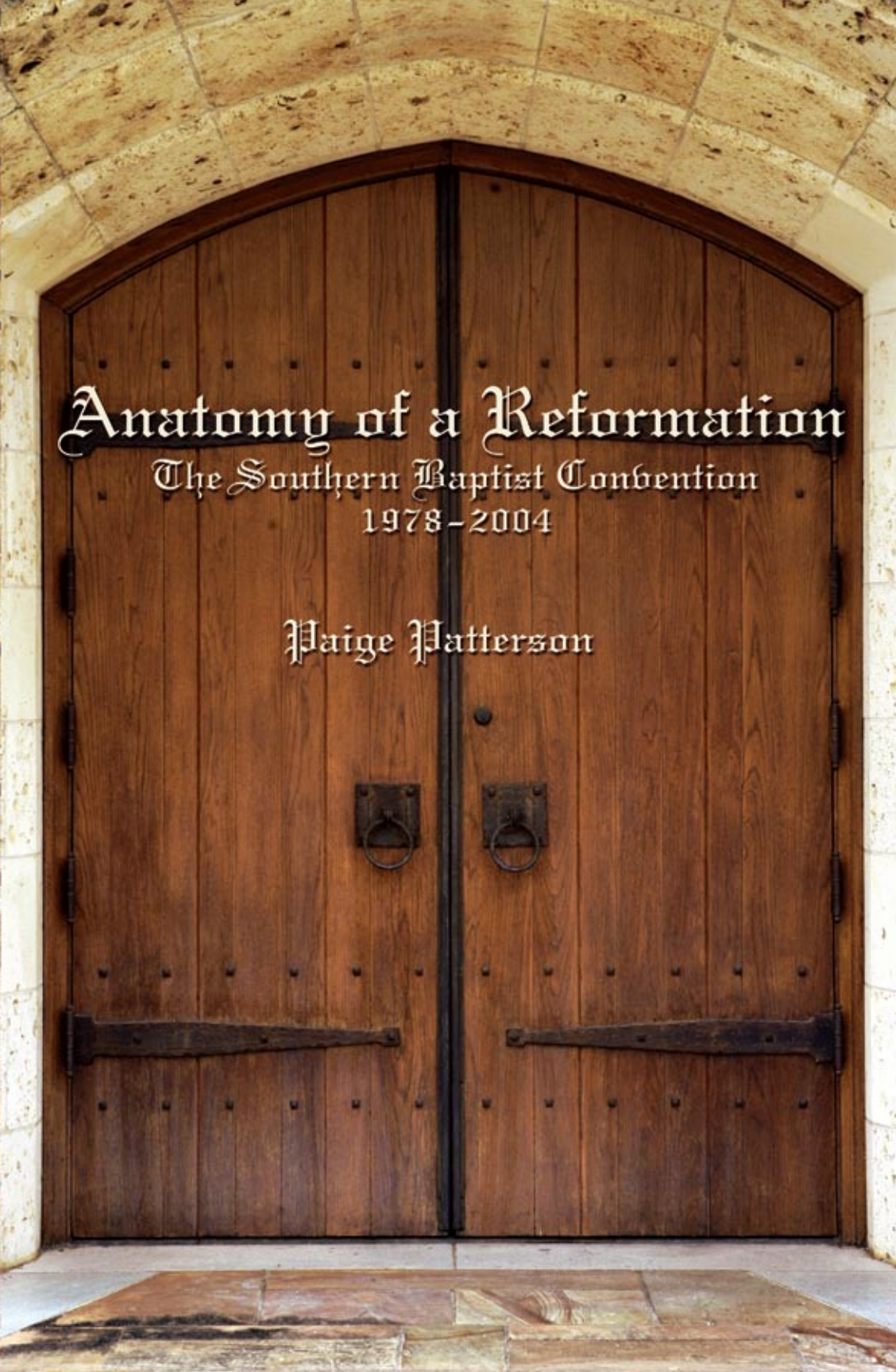
Anatomy of a Reformation
The Southern Baptist Convention
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THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION, 1978-2004

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Why would anyone want to live anywhere close to the San Andreas Fault? Millions choose to do precisely that, and they apparently lead reasonably normal lives. Perhaps the Baptist kingdom of our evangelical Zion is the San Andreas Fault of Christendom. Given the constant rumbles, frequent tremors, and occasional 10-point Richter scale seismic earth shifts, some observant evangelicals probably wonder why anyone would want to live among the rowdy Baptists. Others are curious as to why this phenomenon of confrontation in Baptist life seems to erupt with the regularity of Old Faithful.

One of the earliest tremors leading to the massive upheavals of the decade of the 1980s was the publication of an article entitled, "Death In the Pot," which appeared in various state Baptist papers in October 1961. K. Owen White, then pastor of the First Baptist Church of Houston, Texas, and president-elect of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963, used the incident from the life of Elisha recorded in 2 Kings 4:38-41 to suggest that a noxious herb had been introduced into the Southern Baptist stew. His immediate target was professor Ralph Elliott at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and his book, *The Message of Genesis*. Elliott's book, published in 1961 by Broadman Press, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, had employed historical-critical assumptions, conclusions, and methodologies, which led the professor to question the historicity of some of the narrative portions of Genesis.

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

This grassroots Baptist response was in stark contrast to the responses to White's concerns heard by a 19-year-old freshman Bible major at a state-operated Baptist university in West Texas. Instead, the reaction from those on the faculty who sallied forth to battle, as remembered by the writer of this booklet, was essentially as follows. First, educated and intelligent people virtually all had arrived at similar conclusions with Elliott. Second,

in any event, if there were minor shifts away from orthodoxy, "the convention" (which in actuality was "the bureaucracy") would make the necessary corrections. Third, having accepted the first two premises, the average Southern Baptist should trust the system, remain silent, and give his tithe—a hefty portion of which would be passed along through the Cooperative Program lifeline to continue funding the bureaucracy.

I. REFORMATION AND CAPTIVITY

J. B. Gambrell, known as the "great commoner," served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1917 to 1920. Sagely he had observed that, "Baptists never ride a horse without a bridle." This expression was Gambrell's folksy way of focusing on the fierce autonomy of every entity in Southern Baptist life. Believers are priests before God who voluntarily associate with a church comprised of similarly committed saints. Churches are autonomous, voluntarily associating with other churches in local associations, state fellowships (conventions), and a national fellowship (the Southern Baptist Convention). None of these fellowships has any organic connection to the other. In fact, Baptists fear "connectionalism" the way medieval society feared the plague. Gambrell's observation was intended to caution any entity spawned by the churches that it was not to see itself as a wild stallion roaming the Red Desert Basin of Wyoming but rather as a domestic quarter horse carefully bred to work for the churches. Agencies and institutions were bridled with a bit in their mouths and a saddle cinched tight. If they worked well and served the churches, they would eat well from the Cooperative Program trough. But Baptists would never mount up without the reins in their hands.

But the decades of the 1950s and 1960s were heady times for denominational bureaucrats. The successful campaign for "A Million More in '54" and other programmatic victories subtly shifted the focus of denominational life from substance to method. "Tiptoe through the tithers" became the silent refrain of denominational leaders. They developed skills at defusing potentially explosive situations through statesmanship where possible, but buy-outs, intimidations, and humiliations were not uncommon. Like practiced matadors, denominational executives and institutional presidents deftly eluded every bullish charge and slaughtered not a few of the angry convention bovines in the process. They were, so it seemed to them—and to everyone else—invincible.

In 1967, Houston attorney Paul Pressler visited the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Pressler, an advocate of the value of education, had joined other concerned Houston business leaders in establishing a scholarship fund to assist conservative students who needed support to continue in school. Interestingly, only New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, presided over by conservative Leo Eddleman, showed any

interest in receiving funds or assisting such students. Pressler came to the campus to interview prospective recipients. During his visit we met over coffee and beignets at the famous Café du Monde to discuss the current state of affairs in the convention and its seminaries.

As the evening wore on, several convictions that were repeatedly confirmed across the years began to take shape. First, a large number of Southern Baptists were skeptical about many of the leaders in the denomination. Second, Baptist ecclesiastical polity made possible a popular movement to correct errant trajectories. Third, many such efforts had been attempted but had uniformly failed because they were launched either by little-known leaders or else by isolated individuals who knew little of the value of organization or political process. As such, they were novices playing in a league with experienced professionals whose political prowess and, when necessary, determined ruthlessness rendered the efforts of rookies useless. Fourth, the convention constituency was comprised of at least four groups, which eventually began to be designated as: "movement" conservatives, "intuitive" conservatives, denominationalists, and liberals.

The last group included a few classical liberals, but mostly its ranks consisted of neo-orthodox professors and leaders who had imbibed deeply at the wells of historical-critical scholarship. The denominationalists, to the extent that theology and hermeneutics mattered at all, were mostly conservative, but above all were advocates of the status quo. The overwhelmingly successful denomination had been good to them. As they say in West Texas, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Movement conservatives were those who understood at least some of the theological underpinnings of the denomination, grasped the relationship between political process and leadership in a free-church denomination, and believed the whole matter to be sufficiently important to merit even suffering for a cause if necessary. Intuitive conservatives represented the largest numerical group. These were sweet believers who embraced the best about everything. They were conservative doctrinally but not always sure why, and they tended to believe the best about their leaders, though doubts were growing.

The key was to organize the two groups of conservatives and educate the intuitive conservatives in the methods available to effect change and of the necessity for doing so. The two groups of conservatives were estimated as comprising about 80 percent of Southern Baptists with the intuitive conservatives as the considerably larger group. Judge Pressler and I parted that evening, having covenanted together to study the convention, its bylaws, and the prospects of actually effecting theological renewal in the denomination. Ten years later in the fall of 1978, a group of pastors and laymen from many states convened in the Atlanta Airport Ramada Inn for a meeting that would launch "the controversy," as it is now called.

Several agreements developed out of the Atlanta meeting. Conservatives had a choice. Either they could stand by and watch a denomination, at that time numbering 14 million members and 38,000 churches, be held captive by a coterie of slick religio-political "denomicrats," or else conservatives could take their concerns to the people in the pews and see if the programs and structures of the denomination could be reclaimed for orthodoxy and evangelism. Most believed that if they did not act immediately, all hope to rescue the denomination from its slow and seemingly inevitable drift to the left would be lost. Already the denominational raft was swept along by the white water currents that propelled American Baptists, British Baptists, United Methodists, and a host of other denominations to a mooring far removed from the havens of their founders.

The participants in the Atlanta meeting were to begin efforts to inform Baptists in their states concerning the state of affairs in the denomination, particularly in its seminaries. They would also attempt to secure commitments to attend the 1979 convention in Houston with the intent of electing a conservative president. Because pastors in the churches were in sensitive positions, their identities would be protected as long as possible. Pressler, by then a judge, and I, as president of The Criswell College and associate pastor at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, would draw whatever public attack might come. Meanwhile, anyone with a prospect of becoming convention president had been deliberately excluded from the meeting and the inner circle of strategic planning for his protection. The plan had been conceived.

II. REALISM AND RENEWAL

Judge Pressler always believed the plan would work. I doubted it seriously. My father had been executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. I grew up in the midst of the denomination's bureaucracy and was thoroughly familiar with its self-protecting tendencies. There were several reasons many believed that this plan, like previous attempts, would fail. In the final analysis, we did not attempt a reformation movement because we thought it would succeed but because we sincerely believed that we were right about the inerrancy of the Bible and because we did not want to tell our children and grandchildren that we had no courage to stand for our convictions. Above all, the conviction that the continued drift of the Southern Baptist Convention could spell eternal doom for hundreds of thousands of people was the principal compelling motivation.

Why The Plan Would Not Work

An enormous bureaucracy consisting of hundreds of state and national denominational employees joined together with the faculties of 56 state Baptist colleges and universities and of six seminaries to provide most of the denominational leadership. To be sure, not all were drifting left, but almost all were willing to look the other way to protect a good system that had been kind to them. Many, no doubt, knew of problems but sincerely felt that things were not anything as corrupt as the conservatives imagined.

These denominationalists were buttressed by an army of journalists who through the official state papers were the major channels of communication to Baptists in each state. These, almost to the last journalist, were vigorous in their support of the status quo and often vitriolic in their opposition to the conservative renewal movement. Several hundred directors of missions were ostensibly the servants of the churches in local associations but had actually become, for the most part, the servants of the elite in state and national denominational leadership. Their assignment was twofold. First, they were on-site agents to report to denominational state houses concerning local participants in the resurgence. Further, they were the operatives most often used to intimidate local Baptist pastors who dared to buck the system. Add to all of this the apparent and real success of the world's largest Protestant denomination, and the evidence is clear why many believed that there was small chance of arresting the leftward drift of the denomination.

Other factors making a conservative triumph unlikely included a history of conservative failures. The "Genesis Controversy" and the "Broadman Commentary Controversy" had reached the resolution phase; but there were never the thorough, clean sort of resolutions that would have established new policy. Furthermore, conservatives generally suffered from a paucity of political acumen and sophistication that made it almost impossible for them to outflank the experienced operatives in the higher echelons of the denomination.

When the battle was finally joined, conservatives received epithets of opprobrium designed to prejudice the minds of the undecided against the conservatives. The pejorative use of "fundamentalist" was a favorite, with innuendoes that fundamentalism was the same whether Shiite or Southern Baptist. Charges of "Norrisism" were employed in an effort to link conservatives with the terrifying ghost of J. Frank Norris, the colorful and often despised former pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas. Conservatives were labeled as ignorant until debates went badly for moderates, at which time conservatives were alleged to be cold and calculating rationalists. With no official medium for reply, few conservatives could have nourished much hope of success.

Why The Plan Did Work

Astonishingly, the plan worked. How were the almost invincible odds overcome? For those who gave leadership to the conservative renewal, the only answer is the intervention of God. This impression grew across the years as the most carefully developed conservative plans were often defeated or radically altered only for conservatives to discover that their "plan" would have failed; whereas the actual development of events was the best possible scenario. Sincere opponents of the conservative renewal, or what they called the "take-over" movement, would understandably resist and resent such an assessment. So we leave to eternity the final word. Rather we will attempt to identify some of the factors that made it possible to overcome insurmountable odds and prevail in the controversy.

The first element in conservative success is the ecclesiastical polity of the convention. With no established hierarchy, no organic connectionalism, and the autonomy of each congregation, the entrenched "good ol' boy" system, in theory, could be overcome by a popular movement. In fact, the Southern Baptists who established the governance of convention affairs in 1845 and those who refined these processes through the years created a system that made possible, though not easy, the reversal of denominational direction through a grassroots movement.

The system works as follows. Autonomous congregations who give to "convention causes" elect up to 10 messengers to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. Those messengers elect a president of the Southern Baptist Convention, who appoints a Committee on Committees that consists of two people—usually a pastor and a layperson—from each state. In turn, the Committee on Committees nominates a Committee on Boards, which is subsequently elected by the Southern Baptist Convention in session. This committee also consists of two people from each state. The Committee on Boards then nominates a slate of nominees, which the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention in turn elect to the 12 agencies and boards of the Southern Baptist Convention.[1] The genius of the system is in leaving elected messengers in ultimate control while extending to the elected president considerable influence if he makes his appointments carefully. Since even two-term trustees on the various boards serve no more than 10 years, the election of presidents committed to a renewal agenda each year for 10 years, in theory, should redirect the entire system. This is exactly what happened, beginning with the 1979 election of Adrian Rogers. In the final analysis this ecclesiastical polity, allowing maximum freedom and autonomy to all, while not without its liabilities, is nevertheless what makes a populist revolution possible.[2]

The second reason for the conservative success was noted by Nancy Ammerman:

> These leaders were preachers of remarkable ability, able to stir crowds with their words, able to evoke response in their hearers. They had developed a following after years on the revival and Pastors' Conference circuit and were broadly admired as the leading pulpiteers of the day, even by people who later joined the moderate cause against them. Moderate leadership, on the other hand, had developed through the normal denominational channels of training and career, with the best among them moving into institutional roles. There, ironically, their very success under the old system proved a liability in their attempt to persuade Southern Baptists that the fundamentalists should be turned back. The pastors who took up the moderate fight were very good preachers, often with polished literary and rhetorical flair. But a Cecil Sherman was unlikely to move a crowd as an Adrian Rogers could. And Roy Honeycut's doctrinal expositions could not match the popular appeal of Jimmy Draper's. Many moderates were relatively remote from the majority of Baptists, having left behind the simple small town life. Both their positions as official denominational leaders and their remoteness from their roots diminished their ability to lead.[3]

The prowess of eloquent pulpiteers who thundered with almost prophetic authority was a profound impetus in the most pulpit-oriented denomination since the glory days of the Scotch Presbyterians. Criticisms of these pastors and evangelists were frequent, but the evident piety of their lives made the rhetoric of the critics shrill and their allegations hollow.

A third reason for conservative success was the decision to focus primarily on one issue: the reliability of the Bible. There were a host of other concerns, but the issue of the nature of Scripture was chosen for two essential reasons. First, if the epistemological issue were resolved, then the basis for resolving all other issues was in place. Second, most Baptists believed the Bible was every whit true. In some cases, the conviction was not a particularly thoughtful one, but Baptists in the pew almost always grimaced when someone found fault with the Bible. This issue could be explained and understood. Refusal to be sidetracked to other issues frustrated the efforts of opponents but assisted Baptists in the pew in understanding the controversy.

Another major factor in the conservative revival was the presence of a clear goal accompanied by fervent prayer. The goal was far different from

that imagined by the press, the opposition, and even some supporters. In a word, conservatives were concerned about the lost of this world—those who do not know Christ. Believing that heaven and hell are the only destinies and that everyone alive will spend eternity in one or the other, and further that Jesus and His atoning death provides the only way to avoid hell and inherit heaven, conservatives were determined to prevent the slide of Baptists into the labyrinth of formerly-effective denominations whose evangelistic zeal and missionary fervor had been stripped by rising doubts about the veracity of Scripture. The goal, then, was to keep the denomination close to a reliable Bible for the sake of evangelistic and missionary outreach.

Often other agendas would suggest themselves. For example, sometimes the desire to win the contest would intrude into discussions. Charles Stanley would inevitably remind everyone, "Gentlemen, let me remind you that we do not have to win. All that we must do is to please God." That would end such detours. Throughout the years of the resurgence, conservatives agonized for the lost and pleaded with God to grant their leaders purity of heart and motive. Frequent mistakes made by conservatives had to be forgiven. The conservative leadership, consisting of several hundred, generally practiced that forgiveness and hastened to the assistance of a wounded brother.

Another factor in the conservative success was an abandonment to the task. Most conservative leaders had committed themselves to what they understood to be the lordship of Christ on these issues, and they were fully prepared to sacrifice reputation, a promising future, and even relatively secure ministries, if necessary, to lift and maintain truth as they understood it. Although some leaders among the moderates obviously had those same sincere commitments but with very different doctrinal convictions, to create much sacrificial commitment among moderates proved difficult. As Roger Finke and Rodney Stark observed:

> There comes a point, however, when a religious body has become so worldly that its rewards are few and lacking in plausibility. When hell is gone, can heaven's departure be far behind? Here people begin to switch away. Some are recruited by very high-tension movements. Others move into the newest and least secularized mainline firms. Still others abandon all religion. These principles hardly constitute a wheel of karma, but they do seem to reveal the primary feature of our religious history: the mainline bodies are always headed for the sideline.[4]

The gradual emergence of a well-trained, impressively-credentialed intelligentsia provided respectability for the conservative resurgence. People like Richard Land, D.Phil., Oxford; Timothy George, Ph.D., Harvard; Al Mohler, Ph.D., Southern Seminary; Chuck Kelley, Ph.D., New Orleans Seminary; Ken Hemphill, Ph.D., Cambridge; Mark Coppenger, Ph.D., Vanderbilt; Phil Roberts, Ph.D., Amsterdam; Danny Akin, Ph.D., University of Texas; and not a few others, left the moderates unable to float their usual accusation that conservatives were untutored. The fact that moderates did not fare well in public debates and discussions exacerbated their problem.

Two major events of 1986 and 1987 contributed significantly to the ultimate moderate defeat. The first was the Glorieta Statement prepared and issued in 1986 by the presidents of the six seminaries. Presidents Roy Lee Honeycutt of Southern, Russell Dilday of Southwestern, Landrum Leavell of New Orleans, Randall Lolley of Southeastern, Bill Crews of Golden Gate, and Milton Ferguson of Midwestern, met at the Sunday School Board's National Assembly in Glorieta, New Mexico. They sensed that the only way to defuse the ticking bomb in Baptist life was to issue a reassuring statement. Among other things, the statement affirmed that the Bible contained no error "in any area of reality." The response was anything but what they anticipated. Moderate faculties in at least three seminaries descended upon their returning presidents with the charge that they had "given away the store." Conservatives, wary because of years of "double-speak," were not much more enthusiastic, wondering aloud what this kind of language implied. In the end, however, conservatives took the statement at face value and held the presidents' feet to the fire.

The next year, 1987, brought the final report of the Peace Committee, which had been meeting regularly for two years, to the convention in St. Louis. The committee had been mandated by the 1985 Dallas convention, which saw a record 45,000 elected messengers almost create terminal gridlock in that city. On the committee was a mixture of moderate leaders including Cecil Sherman, Winfred Moore, William Hull, William Poe, and Dan Vestal; conservative leaders including Adrian Rogers, Ed Young, Jerry Vines, and Charles Stanley; and a fair number of non-aligned individuals. The committee was chaired by the irenic, long-suffering, and fair-minded Charles Fuller, then the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Virginia.

The findings of the committee confirmed moderate charges of overt political activity within the convention, some on both sides that had been intemperate and uncharitable. On the other hand, the report also confirmed the presence of liberalism on some seminary campuses. Recommendations included equity in news reporting, cessation of overt political activities, and the following four observations about

the theological concerns of many Baptists:

1. Baptists generally wished to affirm the direct creation of mankind and the belief that Adam and Eve were real persons.
2. Baptists generally accepted the stated authorship of all the books of the Bible.
3. Baptists generally wished to affirm the reality of all the miracles mentioned in the Bible.
4. Baptists generally believed that all the historical narratives written by biblical authors are accurate and reliable.

At first, conservatives were not enthusiastic about the report. However, when it became apparent that moderate leadership was completely morose about the report, conservatives supported the Peace Committee. The report was adopted by about a 92 percent vote of messengers at the St. Louis convention. The four concerns listed above became in a sense the accepted interpretation of *The Baptist Faith and Message*, the confession officially adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention. In any event, the approval of the Peace Committee report was, in essence, the *coup de grâce* for convention liberals and moderates.

Some allege that the developing conservative mood in the country provided assistance to the conservative resurgence. I do not question this, although I believe that the mood swing in the American public arena was also greatly assisted by developments in the largest Protestant denomination in America. Further, I am convinced that it is possible to overstate the influence of the generally conservative mood in America as a factor in Baptist life. If external factors are measured, the work of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was at least an equal influence in Southern Baptist life.

Finally, the response of the moderates cannot be underestimated as a factor ultimately providing success for the conservatives. At first, many moderates and denominationalists were over-confident, feeling that this conservative assault differed little from others previously squelched. In 1982, the improbable election of James Draper, who defeated retired Southern Seminary president and perennial winner of political squabbles Duke McCall, established the undebatable evidence that this time conservatives had arrived at the joust with a sufficiently gifted and determined cast to redirect the Baptist kingdom. By the late 1980s, moderate rhetoric and accusation seemed in the minds of many to be much too vitriolic and uncharitable. Meanwhile, conservatives talked about Jesus and the Word of God, attempted to muzzle their more acid-tongued associates, and confined their attacks to an almost endless litany of quotations from the pens of Southern Baptist Convention moderates and liberals. But most

important were the publications of moderates in which they confirmed the concerns and fears of the conservatives.

The first of these was the 1985 publication *Called To Preach, Condemned To Survive* by Clayton Sullivan. This fascinating personal documentary chronicled the pilgrimage of Sullivan from zealous Southern Baptist evangelist to frustrated pastor to agnostic professor, a sojourn that he credited largely to Southern Seminary. As Sullivan himself put it:

> As a seminarian, still in my mid-twenties, I found myself baffled. I was more certain of what I didn't believe than I was of what I did believe. Southern Seminary had destroyed my biblical fundamentalism but it had not given me anything viable to take its place. That's the weakness of the historical-critical method: its power to destroy exceeds its power to construct. The historical-critical method can give you facts and hypotheses but it cannot give you a vision.[5]

> As a neophyte minister in Tylertown, I experienced reality shock. My seminary training, for which I am still appreciative, hadn't prepared me for life's rawness and pain. Indeed, I began to think that much of what I'd learned in Louisville was not relevant to the pastorate. I had moved back to Mississippi able—at the drop of a hat—to discuss "the Persian background of Deutero-Isaiah." I knew fourteen reasons why the last chapter of Romans was a misplaced letter of Paul to the church in Ephesus. But when you're talking to a woman whose husband has been killed in a head-on collision with a logging truck, issues like the authorship of Deutero-Isaiah are beside the point.[6]

In 1987, Robison James edited *The Unfettered Word*, an attempt to portray the moderate position as one that liberated the Bible from "fundamentalist" shackles. Unfortunately for James, positions advocated in the book merely demonstrated the truth of conservative allegations. This was followed in 1990 by a Rutger's University Press publication of Nancy Ammerman's *Baptist Battles*. Appendix A is a copy of my review of the book, which appeared in *Christianity Today*. Ammerman, a self-confessed moderate, is a thorough and fair-minded sociologist. In many ways her volume is still the best study of the conflict to date. She confirmed most conservative claims even though she assigned reasons and motives unacceptable to most conservatives.

Also in 1990, Bill Leonard published a short history of the "fragmentation" of the Southern Baptist Convention called *God's Last and Only Hope*. Critical of conservatives, the author nevertheless inadvertently

underscored their concerns. In 1992, *Beyond The Impasse?* appeared, edited by Robison James and David Dockery. It was the result of three debates, two public and one private, among four moderates and four conservatives. Moderates were Robison James, Molly Truman Marshall, Walter Harrelson, and John Newport. Conservatives joining me were David Dockery, Al Mohler, and Timothy George. In many ways this exchange is the best analysis of the real theological issues in the controversy. Initially, the title of the book was to appear without the question mark at the end. Three debates convinced everyone that the differences were substantive and created a chasm too vast for human engineers to bridge.

A devastating volume by Ralph Elliott entitled The "*Genesis Controversy*" also appeared in 1992. Elliott vented his fury not only toward conservatives but also toward moderates for what he called "doublespeak."

> 'Doublespeak' has become an insidious disease within Southern Baptist life. Through the years, the program at Southern Seminary has acquainted students with the best in current research in the given fields of study. Often, however, this was done with an eye and ear for the 'gallery' and how much the 'church trade' would bear. Professors and students learn to couch their beliefs in acceptable terminology and in holy jargon so that although thinking one thing, the speaker calculated so as to cause the hearer to affirm something else. When I taught at Southern Seminary years ago, we often said to one professor who was particularly gifted at this 'doublespeak' game, that if the Southern Baptist Convention should split, he would be the first speaker at both new conventions … It is my personal belief that this doublespeak across the years has contributed to a lack of nurture and growth and is a major factor in the present problems. The basic question is one of integrity rather than the gift of communication.[7]

To conservatives, Elliott's startling admission that "doublespeak" was common at Southern Baptist Convention seminaries was astonishing only because Elliott was so forthright. Furthermore, Elliot's last sentence was precisely the issue. To conservatives, the issue was integrity. Most conservatives actually expressed a degree of admiration for Elliott's candor.

Coupled with crucial conservative publications such as *Baptists and the Bible* by Russ Bush and Tom Nettles, conservatives had more than sufficient evidence to sustain their concerns. A myriad of other factors, such as frequent Bible conferences, the work and report of the Peace Committee in 1987, and the Glorieta Statement issued in 1986 by the six seminary presidents all had substantive impact in the success of the conservative renewal. Publication of *The Southern Baptist Advocate* was for several years the only

effective communication to conservative Southern Baptists. In retrospect, I cannot help but observe that it now seems to me that moderate efforts to resist conservative gains contributed as much to the success of the movement as the conservatives themselves.

III. REDIRECTION AND HOPE

What are the results? At the end of 25 years of conservative advance, new executives committed to the resurgence and to the inerrancy of Scripture have been installed in all of the agencies and institutions. Every board of trustees is decidedly conservative. Giving has reached all time highs in recent years. The six seminaries have ballooned from 10,000 to 15,000 students. Mission programs and offerings continue to grow with more than 5,000 career missionaries now under appointment and with personnel in more than 180 countries. Dozens of new evangelically-minded professors have taken their places on seminary faculties. *The New American Commentary* was authorized by the Sunday School Board (now LifeWay Christian Resources) to be written only by those who could sign the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.

Southern Baptists have always boasted that they were not a creedal people. However, the intent of such an avowal was neither the abdication of doctrine nor the enthronement of theological anarchy. Implicit within the denial of creedalism was an affirmation and a negation. Baptists needed no creed since the Bible is a "perfect treasure" of divine wisdom. No human creed can trump Scripture.

Nevertheless, confessional statements, summaries of those truths most widely invoked among Baptists have always been employed both to distinguish Baptists from other Christian denominations and to provide guidelines for the Baptist agencies and institutions that serve the churches. *The Baptist Faith and Message* was adopted in 1925 as a revision of the *New Hampshire Confession of 1833*. Once again, this confession was revised in 1963. The 1963 revision was influenced by the inroads of neo-orthodoxy in several of its articles, particularly Article I on the Scriptures.

In 1996, messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention authorized President Tom Elliff to appoint a committee to bring a proposal for an article on the family to be added to *The Baptist Faith and Message*. In 1998, the committee reported and added an article on the family that generated national and international discussion and criticism. The committee skillfully anticipated later socio-political discussions on the nature of marriage and also dealt with a number of other highly-charged issues, which set the Southern Baptist Convention at odds with the conventional wisdom of post-modernism.

This document, as adopted by 95 percent of the messengers, reads:

> God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.
>
> Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.
>
> The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family.
>
> A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.
>
> Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.
>
> Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-20; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 1:26-28; Psalms 51:5; 78:1-8; 127; 128; 139:13-16; Proverbs 1:8; 5:15-20; 6:20-22; 12:4; 13:24; 14:1; 17:6; 18:22; 22:6,15; 23:13-14; 24:3; 29:15,17; 31:10-31; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; 9:9; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 18:2-5; 19:3-9; Mark 10:6-12; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:8,14; 2 Timothy 1:3-5; Titus 2:3-5; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7.

The committee appointed by President Elliff was chaired by Anthony Jordon of Oklahoma. Serving with him were Richard Land, Bill Elliff, Damon Shook, John Sullivan, Mary Mohler, and Dorothy Patterson.

General T. C. Pinckney (Ret.) of Virginia also made a motion at the 1998 convention that I, as the newly-elected president of the convention, appoint a blue-ribbon panel to study and bring necessary revisions to the entirety of *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Subsequently, at the 2000 convention, the committee chaired by Adrian Rogers brought its recommendations to the convention. After a fascinating and vigorously contested one-hour debate, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted the panel's recommendations, once again by a 95 percent vote of the messengers.

The committee was carefully selected to include representatives from almost every aspect of Southern Baptist life. Although composed of only fifteen members, these included seven pastors, two women, one layman, one BSU director, one state WMU leader, one Latino, one Asian, one African-American, two seminary presidents, and one other SBC agency director. The committee included Adrian Rogers (TN) chair, Max Barnett (OK), Steve Gaines (AL), Susie Hawkins (TX), Rudy Hernandez (TX), Charles S. Kelley, Jr. (LA), Heather King (IN), Richard Land (TN), Fred Luter (LA), R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (KY), T.C. Pinckney (VA), Roger Spradlin (CA), Simon Tsoi (AZ), and Jerry Vines (FL). The hour-long debate constituted one of the most interesting and informative moments in the entire conservative renaissance.

In addition to reaffirming the article on the family, the convention action spoke a long overdue word against racism. Most important, the neo-orthodox language, which had previously been placed in the 1963 version of *The Baptist Faith and Message*, was deleted, and a more explicit declaration of the nature of Scripture was adopted.

Although the adoption of a confession of faith is hardly determinative, especially in a free-church denomination, there is a sense in which the adoption of the family article and the revision of the entire confession signaled closure to this reformation. Few denominations, unions, or conventions have retraced their steps and returned to the faith of their founding fathers. Here, however, is at least one instance of a grassroots referendum, which not only returned a convention to the doctrines and practices of its founders but also through its revised confession of faith sent a timely message to the watching ecclesiastical and secular worlds.

Note the comparison of the articles on Scripture from three confessions, beginning with the 1925 edition, the 1963 revision, and finally the 2000 statement. The pertinent sections have been highlighted:

1925

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

Luke 16:29-31; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Eph. 2:20; Heb. 1:1; 2 Peter 1:19-21; John 16:13-15; Matt. 22:29-31; Psalm 19:7-10; Psalm 119:1-8

1963

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

Ex. 24:4; Deut. 4:1-2; 17:19; Josh. 8:34; Psalm 19:7-10; 119:11, 89, 105, 140; Isa. 34:16; 40:8; Jer. 15:16; 36; Matt. 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16 ff.; 17:11; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21

2000

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

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21

Moderates have formed a fellowship within the convention called the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Wake Forest, Mercer, Stetson, Furman, Baylor, Richmond, and Samford universities have jumped the tracks and declared their independence from Baptist state conventions. State conventions in Texas and Virginia have divided. North Carolina, Kentucky, and Missouri are continuing trouble pockets. Whether or not the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship will secede from the convention and how a few state conventions settle some remaining issues remain to be seen. But no one seriously expects even a schism to deprive the Southern Baptist convention of more than a thousand of its 44,000 congregations.

A word needs to be said about two other developments. In the early days of the controversy, conservatives pointed to the unassailable fact that there was no parity in the six seminary faculties. Some seminaries had no professing inerrantists on board, and none had more than a few. Moderates later discovered that conservatives did not desire "parity," but rather, they believed that every professor in Southern Baptist Convention seminaries should be an inerrantist. Some moderates felt that they had been deceived. However, conservatives never asked for parity. They simply noted that moderates, who claimed to be inclusive, in fact had been exclusive and doctrinaire. They further expressed the conviction that the two confessions, which governed all six seminaries, are, in reality, inerrantist documents.

This observation leads to a second misapprehension. Moderates accused conservatives of wanting to diminish seminaries to be "indoctrination centers" and Bible institutes. Conservatives, however, stressed the distinction between what is "taught" on the one hand and what is "advocated" on the other. For any education to be adequate preparation for ministry, all conceivable options must be accurately and fairly presented. In addition, however, a supporting constituency has every right to expect that the professors in the seminaries advocate historic Baptist positions.

There are regrets. Although conservatives remained true to their word and pledged not to dismiss hundreds from employment (only four have been forced from denominational posts), many—both conservatives and moderates—have suffered hurt, sorrow, and job displacement. Friendships and sometimes family relationships have been marred. Churches have sometimes been damaged even though local church life has proceeded for the most part above the fray and often remains largely oblivious to it. No one seriously confessing the name of Jesus can rejoice in these sorrows. I confess that I often second guess my actions and agonize over those who have suffered on both sides, including my family. In addition, there is the realization that a new generation that knew not Criswell, Lee, Rogers, or Pressler, will now rise to leadership. It is entirely possible, although I think unlikely, that those who follow will squander

the gains made. Certainly it remains painfully true that denominations and institutions almost always drift left and seldom, if ever, return.

Would I do it again? Before you can say Mephibosheth! I have children and grandchildren. They deserve a chance to be exposed to orthodox theology, to read a Bible they can trust, and to know Jesus who can save them. Furthermore, I cannot relieve my mind of the vision of men and women filing hopelessly across the precipice of eternity and into the chasm of hell. I cannot support or ultimately leave unchallenged any doctrine or approach that engenders doubt rather than faith. The potential cost is simply too great!

Public images and portrayals notwithstanding, most conservatives do not enjoy controversy. Like everyone else, they wish to be loved and appreciated by everyone. But our understanding of the history of the impact of the uncritical use of critical methodologies upon the churches and their missions has led us to believe that faithfulness to Christ and to the revelation of God in Scripture is more important than human approval. Without belligerence and in painful awareness of our own inadequacies, we, nonetheless, plant our standard here.

APPENDIX A

Patterson, Paige. *A Review of Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* by Nancy Ammerman. *Christianity Today* 35 (Ja 14, 1991): 33-35.

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

A brilliant sociologist teaching in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Nancy Ammerman is a self-confessed Southern Baptist moderate and feminist. She was a prominent participant in the August meeting of moderates in Atlanta that sought ways of stifling the conservative resurgence in Southern Baptist life (CT, Sept. 24, p. 42).

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

Surprising Results

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

Consider the following admissions to which Ammerman is driven by her research: (1) The national bureaucracy in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) had become totally pervasive by 1978, with the staffs and trustees of the agencies and institutions overwhelmingly moderate in their sympathies. (2) Even today the vast majority of Southern Baptists are conservatives. (3) Moderates in the SBC tend to be more liberal than their conservative counterparts on ethical issues, with many moderates imbibing alcohol and even swearing. (4) Moderates attach less importance to evangelism and "soul winning" than do conservatives. (5) Moderates in Southern Baptist life are almost exclusively from a white-collar, professional, elitist class, while conservatives are broadly distributed among all kinds of peoples. (6) Influential moderates tend to be from large, historic churches, whereas conservative leadership emerges from a coalition of the smaller churches and the so-called superchurches. (7) During the fifties and sixties, conservative pastors were isolated and excluded from channels of leadership in the denomination.

Concerning the denomination's educational coterie, Ammerman says, "It is little wonder that the Convention's colleges and seminaries were the primary target of the discontented right wing. Colleges and seminaries had created both the ideology and the social networks, both the sources of meaning and belonging, out of which the old establishment was constructed. They were largely responsible for the changes in belief fundamentalists sought to oppose. Our statistical testing … confirmed what fundamentalists already knew—their foremost enemy was the denomination's educational system."

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

The Conservative Advantage

Ammerman also points to certain conservative advantages in the 12-year struggle, which have been largely unnoticed even by seasoned observers. First, the vast superiority of conservatives in the pulpit has given them more than just a leg up in the preaching-oriented denomination. Second, Ammerman notes the overwhelmingly adopted statement of the Peace Committee as effectively authenticating the claims of conservatives. Also, her research suggesting that 83 percent of all Southern Baptists are either self-identified fundamentalists, fundamentalists-conservatives, or conservatives, as compared with only 17 percent moderate-conservatives, is probably the most accurate assessment to date.

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

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

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

NOTES

[1]These entities are the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, the International Mission Board, the North American Mission Board, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Guidestone Financial Resources, and Lifeway Christian Resources.

[2]Presidents elected by the Southern Baptist Convention committed to the general conservative movement and to the inerrancy of Scripture were: Adrian Rogers, 1979-80; Bailey Smith, 1980-82; James Draper, 1982-84; Charles Stanley, 1984-86; Adrian Rogers, 1986-88; Jerry Vines, 1988-90; Morris Chapman, 1990-92; Edwin Young, 1992-94; Jim Henry, 1994-96; Tom Elliff, 1996-98; Paige Patterson, 1998-2000; James Merritt, 2000-02; Jack Graham, 2002-04; Bobby Welch, 2004.

[3]Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 178.

[4]Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 175.

[5]Clayton Sullivan, *Called To Preach, Condemned To Survive* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 79.

[6]Ibid., 117.

[7]Ralph H. Elliott, *The "Genesis Controversy"* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1992), 33-34.

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Former faculty at Southeastern who felt estranged by the new direction vent their frustrations. In the process some said more than they probably intended. See especially the chapters by Glenn Miller, Alan Neely, and Morris Ashcraft.

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Cothen, Grady C. *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention?* Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1993.

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