

INTRODUCTION

Three successive Baptist battles exceeded a century, each brawling over biblical inspiration. The period's most famous preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon, exhausted his last years in the Baptist Union (Union) "Downgrade Controversy" 1887-88. The American Northern Baptist Convention (NBC) fought a similar battle in the 1920s "Fundamentalist Controversy." Sixty years later, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest American Protestant denomination, endured the "Inerrancy Controversy." In each, the Right fiercely defended biblical infallibility, later called inerrancy. On the Left the warriors defended Baptist principles of soul competency, priesthood of every believer, and anti-creedalism. The controversies theologically embraced biblical studies, theology, church history, and ecclesiology. In practical theology, they altered ministerial education, publishing, missiology, and applied ethics. In the first two, the Left prevailed. In the third, the Right triumphed. The strategies, combatants, and outcomes have produced encyclopaedic interpretations from the Left, Right, and those who profess no affiliation. This dissertation is a counterfactual study using a certain lens of practical theology.

Megill considers counterfactual history may either be "restrained" or "exuberant." The latter he disrespects as "virtual history" which leans into fiction. "'Restrained' counterfactual history involves an explicit canvassing of alternative possibilities that existed in a real past."¹ Such history "moves from observed effect to hypothesized causes."² Of primary importance for this essay is "[i]n imagining how things might have been different, the restrained

¹ Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 151.

² *Ibid.*, 153.

counterfactualist tries to understand better what actually did happen.”³ That creates a double burden for this study. That is, one must imagine what plausibly might have happened in a real situation. Then, that plausible counterfactual outcome must relate not just to history but also to the resultant practical theological consequences that counterfactual history would imply. If something theoretical might have happened, given what did happen, what impact would that have on practical theology then and now? Megill prudently warns that “we tend to promote to the status of a cause,” what we think could have happened.⁴

The research question for this dissertation asks of each controversy, “What were the missed opportunities for peace?” This will demarcate boundaries for otherwise engulfing sources. Cahalan provides a heuristic lens for defining this problem.⁵ Her overview of practical theology uses Lakeland’s three philosophical responses to modernity in the categories *late modern*, *countermodern*, and *radical postmodern* to assess recent practical theology models by nominating practical theology representatives for these three categories.⁶ The late modern response continues the Enlightenment modern project seeking timeless norms represented by Browning.⁷ The countermodern model dismisses the modern project, seeking to return to the wisdom of persons in community before modernism. Dykstra and Bass defend this lens

³ Megill, 153.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵ Kathleen A. Cahalan, “Three Approaches to Practical Theology, Theological Education, and the Church’s Ministry,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9, no. 1 (2005): 64-94.

⁶ Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* in *Guides to Theological Inquiry*, eds. Kathryn Turner and Paul Lakeland (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 12, 13, 30, 32, 42-43.

⁷ Don Browning, ed., *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).

demonstrating in a wobbly world how past practices give stability.⁸ It should be noted, however, that Lakeland explicitly excludes Fundamentalism as errant countermodern distortion.⁹

The radical-postmodern paradigm dismisses both previous models as meaningless in a world with no metanarrative. Various liberation theologians embody this paradigm. Cahalan critiques all three models glossing their strengths and weaknesses. She then examines their common concerns: the relationship between sacred texts and traditions and current experience, the contributions practical theology makes to theological anthropology, and how Christians “ought to live within the peculiar vagaries of time and place.” She concludes, “The minister must be trained to be an interpreter of many texts, which include sacred scriptures, the tradition of teaching and witness, and the contemporary context. The minister must practice a hermeneutic that embraces the local and particular as well as the universal and global, the contemporary as well as the past.”¹⁰

This study will use her reflexive heuristic lens to consider three controversies, examining the combatants sponsoring two views of scripture and ecclesial tradition in three similar battles. In each the Right voices the countermodern view while the Left increasingly sponsors the nascent postmodern view. The biblical Fundamentalism of the Right confronts the emerging use of Higher Criticism defended by the Baptist principles freedom of conscience and soul competency. These two principles struggled in the womb of Baptist life like Jacob and Esau with no final resolution. The study must present sufficient biblical, theological, and historical background to understand what unsettled the peace. The loss of energy, distraction from mission, consumption of resources, and human pain cried out for some pathway to peace. Practical

⁸ Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, “Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 1-12.

⁹ Lakeland, 59.

¹⁰ Cahalan, 93.

theology may demonstrate the *habitus* or practices that might lead to peace in a community of believers that has eluded Baptists in repeated contests. The practical theological outcome of this research suggests irenic practices derived from these controversies. Cahalan insists biblical, historical, and theological studies must issue in practical theology situated in specific contexts and, at the same time, those contexts must reflex back into the classical disciplines. In the following three battles, the leaders, theology, and events that disrupted the peace will suggest the missed opportunities for peace.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DOWNGRADE CONTROVERSY

The instigator of the Downgrade was Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892). Son of a Congregationalist pastor, a Christian at 16, became a Baptist, and pastored shortly after. Called to the historic New Park Street church at 19, he became a metropolitan phenomenon. He built and filled the 5,600-seat Metropolitan Tabernacle from 1861 until his death. His charitable institutions, Pastor's college, weekly published sermons, newsmagazine, and itinerant ministry had lasting global impact. He was the most famous preacher of the Victorian era. The Downgrade Storm at the end of his ministry affords a counterfactual history of missed opportunities for peace, as Migell suggests, first looking at what did happen from the perspective of what did not.

The Context of Baptist History and Confessions

Seventeenth-century England produced novel Protestant groups.¹¹ Among these were two species of Baptists. Represented by John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, General Baptists emerged around 1609 as part of the Separatist movement. Particular Baptists emerged in the 1630s.¹² Particular Baptists formed the Union in 1813 with forty-six ministers and a theological statement.¹³ Reorganising in 1832 and 1873, it rejected strict Calvinism, accepting closed and open communion, local church autonomy, and baptism by immersion.¹⁴ The Union removed the

¹¹ Bill Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 4.

¹² H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 21; A.C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1947), 33-54, 73-74, 119-27.

¹³ Underwood, 292.

¹⁴ Underwood, 293-94.

word “evangelical” from its 1873 Declaration of Principle.¹⁵ Spurgeon objected to this omission, wishing instead for a doctrinal declaration similar to the 1846 statement of the Evangelical Alliance.¹⁶ The two Baptist groups merged in 1891. “While Particular Baptists structure prevailed, the General Baptist theology continued in the merged group.”¹⁷ The most visible public antagonists in the Downgrade, Spurgeon and John Clifford, respectively reflected aspects of Particular and General Baptist theology.

A common feature of the three Baptist battles pitted those wanting a denotative confession against those wanting individual latitude. The Downgrade pitted Spurgeon and his desire for a clear confession against Union members who suspected creeds. Carlile insists Spurgeon only wanted a “straightforward statement that would let the world know the things for which Baptists stood.”¹⁸ From the time of the English Separatist-Baptists, multiple confessions of faith emerged.¹⁹ Smyth and Helwys produced competing creeds.²⁰ Early Baptists in Holland had a one-hundred item confession.²¹ The 1644 London Confession, with fifty-two articles,

¹⁵ Ernest Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London: The Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1982), 4.

¹⁶ Phillip Schaff, “The Doctrinal Basis of the Evangelical Alliance, 1846,” in *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Church*, Bible Hub, accessed May 8, 2022, https://biblehub.com/library/schaff/the_creeds_of_the_evangelical_protestant_churches/the_doctrinal_basis_of_the_.htm.

¹⁷ McBeth, *Heritage*, 307.

¹⁸ J.C. Carlile, *C.H. Spurgeon: An Interpretive Biography* (London: The Religious Tract Society and The Kingsgate Press, 1933), 246.

¹⁹ William Lumpkin and Bill Leonard, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2011), 77.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 115-29.

defines virtually every belief held by Baptists since. It was refined into the “Second London Confession”

(1677 and 1688), which was definitive for most Baptists.²² Spurgeon reproduced the Second London in 1855 as “an assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness.”²³ By the mid-twentieth century, General Superintendent of Metropolitan Baptists Henry Cook exclaimed creeds cannot bind the conscience of Christians even though they act as “landmarks.”²⁴ Trending towards abbreviated and less denotative Baptist confessions of faith, however, collided with the profound changes of nineteenth-century biblical criticism emerging after 1860.

The Higher Criticism Movement

The Downgrade confronted the nineteenth-century Protestant acceptance of Higher Criticism. Will Van Mildert voiced the infallibilist dogma almost universally held in England in 1814.²⁵ Cameron concludes, “The British Critics ... were the inheritors of some two millennia of Jewish and Christian tradition which might be styled *ex hypothesi* infallibilism.”²⁶ Although

²² Lumpkin and Leonard, 140, 218, 222-97.

²³ William Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought: With Special Reference to Baptists in Britain and North American* (Macon: Mercer University Press), 33.

²⁴ Henry Cook, *What Baptists Stand For* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1947), 67.

²⁵ Nigel M. de. S. Cameron, *Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defense of Infallibility in Nineteenth Century Britain*, vol. cc, Texts and Studies in Religion (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

Glover contends, “Higher criticism did not gain a foothold in England until after 1880,” there were premonitory events signalling its cryptic arrival.²⁷ Three representative events symbolised the critical insurgency.

S.T. Coleridge, influenced by Schleiermacher, authored a posthumous work retaining traditional piety, rejecting infallibilism, and accusing its advocates of making scriptural authors “ventriloquists.”²⁸ Coleridge maintained the overriding personal experience of the Bible set it apart from all other books and that subjective experience revealed its superiority, not a dogma of infallibility.²⁹ “In the Bible there is more that finds me ... whatever finds me brings with it irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit.”³⁰ His work also shaped progressive American theology.³¹ Spurgeon was six when the book appeared.

The public debate occurred in 1860, *Essays and Reviews*, published a year after Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. Essays by Anglican clergy and a layman, it challenged infallibilism and created a protesting firestorm. A sentence from Benjamin Jowett’s essay defined the debate: “Interpret the Scripture like any other book.”³² The Bible should not be privileged from literary criticism. Dean John William Burgon immediately preached before Oxford University a defence

²⁷ Willis B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954), 36.

²⁸ Glover, 31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰ S.T. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit: Letters on the Inspiration of Scriptures* (London: 1840 [repr. 1950]), in Cameron, 31.

³¹ David Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody, A History of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 163-164.

³² B. Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture” in *Essays and Reviews*, 337, quoted in Cameron, 128.

of tradition insisting on the infallible accuracy of every word.³³ Legal action was taken in the Privy Council against some essayists, and an avalanche of pamphlets resulted.³⁴ Spurgeon was sixteen.

William Smith represents the critical conflict at its most dramatic. In 1875, Smith contributed several articles to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; critical reviews followed and then an ecclesial investigation.³⁵ The denomination accused Smith of libel against the Westminster Confession leading to hearings and Smith's respondent pamphlet, *Additional Answer to the Libel*, where he defended his orthodoxy.³⁶ Smith insisted that honest scholarship must adopt critical views but his own experience of the Bible as God's word to him was unabated.³⁷ Smith defended his critical view and evangelical faith, arguing Christianity does not hinge on the minds of the intelligent, "but to the personal hold of a personal God which is still given to the believers by a truly supernatural work of the Spirit of Christ."³⁸ Smith, however, was dismissed. After these representative conflicts in 1901, George Adam Smith wrote, "Modern criticism has won its war against the traditional theories. It only remains to fix the amount of the indemnity."³⁹ Spurgeon would fix that indemnity at very high price.

³³ Glover, 88. See Edward Meyrick Goulburn, *John William Burgon: Late Dean of Chichester: A Biography, With Extracts from His Letters and Early Journals* (London: J. Murray, 1982), 175, 259-60.

³⁴ Josef L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a Controversy: The Debate Over Essays and Reviews 1860-1864* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, VT, USA: Scolar Press, 1994).

³⁵ Cameron, 217; Glover, 117-28.

³⁶ W. Robertson Smith, *Answer to the Form of Libel: Now Before the Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen* (Edinburgh: D. Douglas, 1878).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 229.

³⁸ Footnote 2821, Item H-15 of the Cambridge Collection, as quoted in W.M. Bailey, *Theology and Criticism in William Robertson Smith* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1970), 349-66.

³⁹ George Adam Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament* (New York: Armstrong & Son, 1901), 72, quoted in Cameron, 75.

Historiography of the Downgrade

Interpretations of the Downgrade usually reflect the theology of the historian.

Fundamentalists and/or Calvinists identify Spurgeon as the defender of the faith exonerated by time. Progressives see him as a remnant of Puritan, pre-critical biblical exegesis. Between these poles are inquisitive historians seeking insight into a regrettable, complex drama. Among fundamentalist defenders are Tom Nettles, Arnold Dallimore, and Iain Murray.⁴⁰ Jerry Faught voices current bitter antagonism towards Spurgeon from the US Left as the historic instigator of the twentieth-century SBC Controversy.⁴¹ Godfrey Holden Pike wrote a friendly, detailed biography with access to private letters.⁴² Spurgeon mentee William Young Fullerton (1857-1932), a president of the Union, produced a biography expressing warm admiration while noting Spurgeon's deficiencies.⁴³ Carlile's biography gives mature reflection forty-six years after the controversy from Spurgeon's friend. Ernest A. Payne (1902-1980), president and general secretary of the Union and president of the World Council of Churches, wrote both a private paper on the Downgrade and a sage chapter in his Baptist Union history.⁴⁴ Patricia Stallings

⁴⁰ Tom Nettles, *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2013); Arnold Dallimore, *C.H. Spurgeon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); and Iain Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Trust, 1973).

⁴¹ Jerry Faught, "Baptists and the Bible: The Downgrade Controversy," in *Turning Points in Baptist History: A Festschrift in Honor of Harry Leon McBeth*, eds. Michael B. Williams, Sr. and Walter B. Shurden (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2021), 249-60.

⁴² Godfrey Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 6 vol. (London: Cassell and Company, 1892).

⁴³ W.Y. Fullerton, *C.H. Spurgeon: A Biography* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1920).

⁴⁴ Payne, 127-43.

Kruppa, using primary sources at Spurgeon's College, revealed a sympathetic understanding while offering a blunt criticism of his impact.⁴⁵

Among the most balanced works is Mark Hopkins's, offering a carefully researched study of the Downgrade amidst its cultural, sociological, and historical context.⁴⁶ Informing many of these is Spurgeon's *Autobiography*, finished by his widow Susannah Spurgeon and private secretary Joseph Harrald, an anecdotal hagiographical work.⁴⁷ Michael Watts examines the Downgrade in his history of John Clifford, who before defending the Union had revered Spurgeon. Watts exceeds in depth and detail the standard works by Marchant and Bateman. All three studies of Clifford reflect on his participation in the Downgrade.⁴⁸ Hopkins conjectures that the principals in the Downgrade and their later investigators misunderstood Spurgeon. Hopkins insists, "Never before, during, or after the controversy, did he believe it possible to win a fight against the liberal trend."⁴⁹ Spurgeon was terminally ill, in pain, and universally admired with an unsullied reputation. He did not need the Downgrade but felt the Christian faith was at risk.⁵⁰

Leading Up to the Downgrade: Spurgeon and the Union

⁴⁵ Patricia Stallings Kruppa, *Charles Haddon Spurgeon: A Preacher's Progress*, Modern British History (New York: Garland Pub, 1982).

⁴⁶ Mark Hopkins, *Nonconformity's Romantic Generation: Evangelical and Liberal Theologies in Victorian England*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2004).

⁴⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, Susannah Spurgeon, and W.J. Harrald, *An Autobiography*, 2 vol., rev. ed. (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973).

⁴⁸ Michael R. Watts, *John Clifford and Radical Nonconformity, 1836-1923* (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 1966); Dr. John Clifford, *C.H.: Life, Letters, and Reminiscences* (London: Cassell and Co., 1924), 155-67; C.T. Bateman, *John Clifford: Free Church Leader and Preacher* (London: National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, 1904), 145-52.

⁴⁹ Hopkins, 198.

⁵⁰ Carlile, *Spurgeon*, 243.

Spurgeon did not naturally embrace controversy. After a decade of non-participation, Spurgeon first attended the Union in 1865. Payne notes Spurgeon's repeated affectionate autumn Union sermons at one of its provincial centres.⁵¹ This harmony would last until critical observations began to appear in Spurgeon's magazine, *The Sword and Trowel (ST)*.⁵² In light of his later concerns, Spurgeon's cautious response was intriguing: "There are not above a dozen loose men among us to my knowledge, but an attack upon one might make a martyr of a party and cause a world of trouble to the many faithful ones among us."⁵³ Years later Spurgeon would do just that.⁵⁴

Spurgeon's last personal Union appearance was 1882 Liverpool, where he preached a compelling sermon followed by a generous offering for his orphanage.⁵⁵ The next year's Union meeting at Leicester involved a mayoral reception featuring an address by Unitarian minister Page Hopps, Clifford's college friend. Hopps made flippant remarks about once having been a Baptist.⁵⁶ Union president-elect Richard Glover responded with what Spurgeon understood to be a blessing on Hopps, affirming his unity in Christ. Spurgeon wrote Glover requesting an explanation and Glover sidestepped the issue with ambiguities.⁵⁷ Spurgeon afterwards refused future participation in Union meetings although invited by Secretary Booth.⁵⁸ Archibald Brown

⁵¹ Payne, 128.

⁵² Hopkins, 159.

⁵³ Murray, 185, ft 28.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵⁵ Kruppa, 365.

⁵⁶ Watts, 79.

⁵⁷ Kruppa, 365-66.

⁵⁸ Payne, 128.

wrote his mentor Spurgeon reporting presumed heterodox message a Leicester. Spurgeon nevertheless urged his apprentice to refrain from comments. Yet Kruppa found many letters from clergy and laity reporting to Spurgeon instances of alleged apostasy.⁵⁹

Spurgeon wrote Booth asking for an explanation of Sheffield, penned a critical *ST* article, and Booth requested a meeting with Spurgeon and Brown. Spurgeon was assured by trusted friends that the Left made more noise than they had numbers, but Spurgeon ominously stated, “There is a point beyond which association cannot be carried.”⁶⁰ Meanwhile, two of the supposed heterodox, J.G. Greenhough and James Thew, called Spurgeon out in a letter to *The Christian World*. They called Spurgeon’s *ST* article “cruel” and wrote that as great as Spurgeon was, such comments lost their “regard.”⁶¹ They twice telegraphed requesting a meeting with Spurgeon which he ignored.⁶² By 1884, Spurgeon considered withdrawing from the Union.⁶³ Hopkins insists that “paradoxically Spurgeon wanted to fight and run at the same time” and considers this the key to understanding the controversy.⁶⁴ Spurgeon’s anxiety increased when his friend Samuel Cox openly avowed universalism.⁶⁵ Additionally, in 1885, Leicester’s James Thew unambiguously reframed world missions in light of universalism; Christian missions should fit persons for a better life in this world rather than anxiety about the next.⁶⁶ A few weeks

⁵⁹ Kruppa, 368.

⁶⁰ *ST*, November 1883, 607, quoted in Watts, 80.

⁶¹ *Christian World*, November 8, 1883, 778, quoted in Watts, 188.

⁶² Kruppa, 370.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁶⁴ Hopkins, 197.

⁶⁵ Watts, 82.

⁶⁶ *Freeman*, October 9, 1885, 671, quoted in Watts, 83.

later, Union President Samuel Green affirmed Thew's views even though Spurgeon still thought such positions were in the minority.⁶⁷

The Sword Comes out of the Scabbard

Spurgeon's magazine inaugurated and narrated the Downgrade in five monthly articles from March to November 1887. The first two articles were written by Spurgeon's friend and fellow pastor, Robert Shindler, with affirming notes from Spurgeon appended. After he became the object of opprobrium, Spurgeon wrote the increasingly agitated three *ST* editorials.

The March *ST* article by Shindler fired the first shot. Watts considers "it is almost certain" that Charles Williams's 1886 appeal to merge General and Particular Baptists motivated Shindler's article.⁶⁸ Shindler's article ended with an admonition, "Oh that it might act as a warning to the unsettled and unsettling spirits of our own day!" Spurgeon inserted an editorial note: "Earnest attention is requested for this paper. There is need of such a warning as this history affords. We are going downhill at breakneck speed." The March readers were yet to discover who "we" were.⁶⁹

In the April *ST* article, Shindler moves from other denominations to General Baptists. Shindler names pastors and churches extant at that time. This specificity must have alarmed some Baptists readers because it moved from principles to personalities. Again, Spurgeon inserted an editorial note: "Again we call special attention to this most important theme. The growing evil demands the attention of all who desire the prosperity of the church of God."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ *Freeman*, November 20, 1885, 786, quoted in Watts, 84.

⁶⁸ Watts, 117; see Underwood, 216 for merger details in 1891.

⁶⁹ Robert Shindler, "The Down Grade," *ST*, March 1887, https://archive.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg01.php.

⁷⁰ Robert Shindler, "The Down Grade, Second Article," *ST*, April 1887, https://archive.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg02.php.

In the same issue, elsewhere Spurgeon notes that Shindler's March article had excited notice. Anticipating criticism of his Calvinism, he insists that his opposition is to those who opposed Christ's atoning sacrifice, deny biblical inspiration, and belittle justification by faith. His praise of Wesleyan Methodists in 1877 typified his stance towards others who held central Christian orthodoxy rather than his Calvinism.⁷¹ Spurgeon regularly had non-Calvinists teach and preach at the Tabernacle.⁷²

Using a striking metaphor in the August *ST*, Spurgeon wrote the first the article that alarmed the Union:

A new religion has been initiated, which is no more Christianity than chalk is cheese.... The Atonement is scouted, the inspiration of Scripture is derided, the Holy Spirit is degraded into an influence, the punishment of sin is turned into fiction, and the resurrection into a myth, and yet these enemies of our faith expect us to call them brethren and maintain a confederacy with them!⁷³

This plainly targets the Union, clearly indicated by plural "us" referring to Spurgeon and his sympathisers. Spurgeon roars, "These gentlemen desire to be let alone. They want no noise raised. Of course, thieves hate watch-dogs, and love darkness. It is time that somebody should spring his rattle, and call attention to the way in which God is being robbed of his glory, and man of his hope."⁷⁴ Carlile lists three principal objections: denial of biblical plenary inspiration, the vicarious death of Christ, and future eschatological punishment.⁷⁵

⁷¹ *ST*, March 1877, 138; similar sentiments are found in *ST*, November 1869, 52, in Nettles, 543.

⁷² *Annual Paper descriptive of the Lord's Work connected with the Pastors' College, 1873-1874* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 9, in Bebbington, 41.

⁷³ C.H. Spurgeon, "Another Word Concerning the Downgrade," *ST*, August 1887, https://archive.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg03.php.

⁷⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, "Our Reply to Sundry Critics and Enquirers," *ST*, September 1887, https://archive.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg04.php; H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 198-200.

⁷⁵ Carlile, *Spurgeon*, 244.

Spurgeon turns to two other criticisms. Spurgeon bellowed that his opponents thought he had to be out of his mind to be orthodox. Spurgeon then turns to accusations that he refused to name the heterodox and the later “censure” was based on his refusal to name his opponents.⁷⁶ After his death, his widow Susannah would solemnly affirm that he could have named his heterodox and she had the revealing letters but decided “to conceal under a generous silence” the evidence she held.⁷⁷ Spurgeon’s greatest disappointment was with orthodox who refused to join his campaign: “The house is being robbed, its very walls are being digged down, but the good people who are in bed are too fond of the warmth, and too much afraid of getting broken heads, to go downstairs and meet the burglars; they are even half vexed that a certain noisy fellow will spring his rattle, or cry, ‘Thieves!’”⁷⁸

Spurgeon closed with a note that signalled his intent to leave the Union: “Neither when we have chosen our way can we keep company with those who go the other way.... What communion hath Christ with Balial?”⁷⁹ The latter stung his friends who remained. One can only wonder how these words disturbed his friend Alexander Maclaren or admirer John Clifford.

The Silence at Sheffield

Evidently, Spurgeon expected the earlier *ST* articles to foment a reaction at the 1887 Sheffield autumn Union meeting. Payne surmises Spurgeon expected Booth would broach the subject, even expecting the expulsion of the perceived heterodox Greenhough.⁸⁰ Booth’s non-

⁷⁶ McBeth, *Sourcebook*, 202-03.

⁷⁷ Spurgeon, Spurgeon, and Harrald, *Autobiography*, 2:469.

⁷⁸ Spurgeon, “Reply.”

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Payne, 133.

action was exacerbated by a speech from E.G. Gange of Bristol, Spurgeon's own graduate, criticising Spurgeon and by an article in the *Freeman* asserting that Spurgeon's concerns were "a joke" among ministers on the Sheffield-bound train.⁸¹ Silence at Sheffield was achieved by Booth's intention to keep the Downgrade off the agenda.⁸² Perhaps it was to Gange's speech Council Member and Spurgeon supporter David Morgan Davies referred in a subsequent letter to Secretary Booth:

When ... a Baptist minister ... asserts that a greater gulf separates his teaching from Mr. Spurgeon's than that which separates his teaching from that of "Mahomed or Buddha" you cannot feel surprised that Mr. Spurgeon should feel it his duty to retire from a Christian Union which, as an illustration of the proud boast that it has no creed, embraces such opposites in its membership.

If things continued unchanged, the Union "will neither have a body worth feeding nor a soul worth saving."⁸³

The Sheffield meeting presented two missed opportunities for peace. First, Spurgeon could have attended. The presence of *the* Baptist pulpit icon would have been an arresting moment. The *Freeman* October 21, 1887 responded to the Downgrade articles, acknowledging the charges suggesting they had been blown out of proportion by secular and religious papers. The paper insisted that Spurgeon would have been better informed had he associated with other pastors and that his negative sources were not reliable.⁸⁴

It is difficult to imagine that the presence of Spurgeon attending and addressing could not have defused the controversy. The majority of Union ministers were somewhere in the middle.

⁸¹ Joel Gregory, "Spurgeon's Resignation from the British Baptist Union: A Microhistory of First Responders," *Baptist History and Heritage* 53, no. 3, 2018, 43.

⁸² Stevenson to Booth, November 18, 1887, Downgrade Controversy, Box 7, Folder 1, Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford; Hopkins 203, n. 34.

⁸³ David Morgan Davies to Booth, November 3, 1887, Downgrade Controversy, Box 7, Folder 1, Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford University, Oxford, UK.

⁸⁴ Pike, 286.

Spurgeon's opponents lacked his gravitas or otherwise wished not to offend him personally, even Clifford. If the Sheffield assembly would have considered a confession similar to that belatedly adopted by the Union in April 1888, Spurgeon's next article might not have materialised.

Additionally, Booth could have placed Spurgeon's concern on the agenda. It seems disingenuous that *the* issue was not addressed. Such an address would not have implied capitulation to Spurgeon's desire for a new confession. It would have dignified his concerns and likely forestalled his resignation while asking the Union to negotiate a confession acceptable to Spurgeon and his opponents. J.G. Greenhough of Leicester claimed to know Spurgeon's targets and also to know that they were not heterodox.⁸⁵ Another of Spurgeon's suspects, James Thew, stated that for him and other suspects "the outer darkness would be a relief if they are brought to see that they had been unfaithful to their dear Lord."⁸⁶

By October 1887 *ST*, Spurgeon acknowledged the firestorm he created. He professes to understand his friends' loyalty to the Union, but complains they had spoken and written to him about the heterodoxy they now denied even existing. Spurgeon found an unlikely ally in *The Christian World*, a magazine that he believed his "perennial nemesis."⁸⁷ The periodical agreed with Spurgeon's accusations about heterodoxy, called his view of the atonement immoral, denied biblical infallibility, and caricatured his view of the Trinity as polytheism. Spurgeon used the magazine of the Left in the same way a good prosecutor uses an honest defence witness to bolster her case.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ "Editorial," *The Freeman*, January 1888, 37.

⁸⁶ Thew to Booth, November 3, 1887, Downgrade Controversy, Box 7, Folder 1, Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford University, Oxford, UK.

⁸⁷ Nettles, 545.

⁸⁸ Cited in Carlile, *Spurgeon*, 252; Nettles, 553.

His final words left no doubt about his intentions: “[T]here are many things upon which compromise is possible, but there are others in which it would be an act of treason to pretend to fellowship.... [W]e abstain from assembling with those whom we dearly love and heartily

respect, since it would involve us in a confederacy with those with whom we can have no communion in the Lord.” On October 28, 1887, Spurgeon wrote his resignation to Booth.⁸⁹

In his November 1887 editorial, Spurgeon used the most controverted phrases that stung many of his friends: “To pursue union at the expense of truth is treason to the Lord Jesus.... *Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin.*” He penned the most unfortunate phrase in his polemics: “To be very plain, we are unable to call these things Christian Unions, they begin to look like Confederacies in Evil.” This explicit characterisation of his friends who remained in the Union created acrimony and wounded good persons.⁹⁰

The Downgrade Devolves in Controversy

October 28, 1887 Spurgeon wrote Booth resigning the Union, begging not to be visited for reconsideration, and expressing no personal hostility to Booth.⁹¹ Booth responded that Spurgeon’s actions were painful to both himself and many others.⁹² Pike provides a co-authored letter defending the evangelical character of the Union and noting that it had recently excluded a Universalist, lamenting Spurgeon’s resignation but claiming unity with him in Christ and as

⁸⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, “The Case Proved,” *ST*, October 1887, https://archive.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg05.php.

⁹⁰ C.H. Spurgeon, “A Fragment Upon the Downgrade Controversy,” *ST*, November 1887, https://archive.spurgeon.org/s_and_t/dg06.php; McBeth, *Sourcebook*, 200-02. Italics in original.

⁹¹ Pike, 287.

⁹² Pike, 297; Gregory, 35.

Baptists.⁹³ November witnessed Spurgeon's reading his Union resignation letter to the Metropolitan Tabernacle. His College alumni expressed their support but did not collectively resign from the Union. Spurgeon affirmed their individual freedom.⁹⁴

The Union Council's called meeting December 13 deciding Spurgeon's charges were based on incorrect information, observed the Council had already excluded members who lapsed into Unitarianism, and tabled a proposed confession of faith by Regent's Park Principal Angus as well as a proposal by Spurgeon's brother James to adopt the creed of the Evangelical Alliance. They complained the Scriptural rule of a personal interview should have been observed by Spurgeon with the alleged offenders.⁹⁵ Then the officers made a much-contested statement in the controversy when they denied that Spurgeon "had, in any communication he made to them, brought any charge as to laxity of faith and practice such as would have justified them in laying it before the Council of the assembly." James Spurgeon left the room in protest of their questioning his brother's veracity.⁹⁶

Payne contends Booth and Spurgeon "had been on terms of intimacy with one another and more than once discussed the general denominational situation." In fact, Booth had opposed his own pastor, W.E. Blomfield, over suspected heterodoxy.⁹⁷ In 1933, Carlile wrote he had personally seen "many letters" from Booth to Spurgeon detailing names and extracts from heterodox sermons and speeches. This passed from Spurgeon to his wife and then his son

⁹³ Pike, 289.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 290-91.

⁹⁵ Hopkins, 215.

⁹⁶ Pike, 292; Payne, 135.

⁹⁷ Payne, 130.

Charles. Spurgeon was “very angry” and wrote Booth, “I will give the information you have given me.” Booth retorted, “My letters to you were not official but in confidence. As a matter of honour you cannot use them.”⁹⁸ Fullerton affirms the same.⁹⁹ Feeling betrayed, Spurgeon defensively wrote *The Baptist*, itemising his multiple personal conversations with president Culross, Secretary Booth, Williams, Maclaren, and “more than enough” members of the Council on multiple occasions to verify his expressed concerns.

Five days later Spurgeon’s resignation was accepted and what he considered a “censure” was passed, that his charges “in the judgment of the Council, ought not to have been made.”¹⁰⁰ Long-time Spurgeon friend, William Landels, made the motion. “When it [the censure] became known, it caused great and long-continuing resentment on the part of Spurgeon and his friends.”¹⁰¹ Hopkins contends Spurgeon, stung by the censure, re-entered the fray to compel the Union to adopt a creed.¹⁰² Spurgeon accused the Union delegation of misrepresentation: “Their real errand was not what they openly avowed.... They censure the man with whom they openly professed to deliberate.”¹⁰³

At a continuation of the censure meeting, James Spurgeon and Angus proposed a revised confession, stoutly contested by Richard Glover, J.G. Greenhough, and others. It passed 35-5 after Clifford added a preamble rejecting it as a theological test for membership in the Union.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Carlile, *Spurgeon*, 246-47.

⁹⁹ Fullerton, 314-15.

¹⁰⁰ Pike, 296.

¹⁰¹ Payne, 136.

¹⁰² Hopkins, 219.

¹⁰³ C.H. Spurgeon, Preface “The Baptist Union Censure,” *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 34 (1888) (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1974).

¹⁰⁴ Payne, 137-38.

Spurgeon had proposed a more robust confession similar to that of the Evangelical Alliance.¹⁰⁵ In another blow, the London Association, re-founded by Spurgeon, rejected a motion that that the Union prepare a stronger confession of faith and Spurgeon resigned.¹⁰⁶ Spurgeon's Pastor's Conference met and dissolved, to be reborn with a stricter confession of faith, excluding many leading Spurgeon's College graduates.¹⁰⁷ Yet a further sadness was Clifford's editorial in secular *The Pall Mall Gazette*.¹⁰⁸ He condemned the vacillation of the Union over attempting to provide Spurgeon with an acceptable creed. Payne argues the Downgrade was not primarily a disagreement between Spurgeon and Clifford. He provides evidence from contemporaries that Spurgeon explicitly exonerated Clifford from heterodoxy.¹⁰⁹

Controversy inside Spurgeon's Pastor's Conference continued. Over 100 alumni issued a "mild protest" against Spurgeon's procedure to dissolve the Conference over a creed. Out of 496 votes, 432 voted in favour of Spurgeon's proposal for a new Conference. Resigning his own Conference, Spurgeon invited those who wanted a new creedal Conference to join in founding one.¹¹⁰ The "vast majority" of Spurgeon's students and churches did not resign the Union.¹¹¹

In the days preceding the April 23, 1888 Union meeting, there was internal jousting up to the last minute about a new Confession to be presented. Charles Williams made the resolution and James Spurgeon seconded it. The negotiated statement was adopted by a vote of 2000-7

¹⁰⁵ Pike, 296.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Pike, 297.

¹⁰⁸ Watts, 107.

¹⁰⁹ Payne, 129.

¹¹⁰ Pike, 297-99.

¹¹¹ Peter Morden, *C.H. Spurgeon: The People's Preacher* (Farnham, UK: CWR, 2009), 160.

after Clifford's preparatory message.¹¹² Many saw this as a possibility for Spurgeon to return to the

Union, but too much had been said for that.¹¹³ Richard Ellsworth Day observed, "Every protest Spurgeon uttered should have been uttered; yet we have a feeling that something went wrong with our Valiant Galahad in the way he went about it ... it is tragic to find that one has been fighting an ally, Mr. Divergent-opinion, mistaking him for the enemy, Mr. Different-heart."¹¹⁴ It is a grace that 135 years later the global millions who read Spurgeon have no clue of the bitterness that clouded his last five years.

The Missed Opportunities for Peace

First, Spurgeon should have attended Union meetings, especially Sheffield. Staying isolated from the annual Union meetings left him prey to naysayers who convinced him he alone could save orthodoxy. This left him with an Elijah Syndrome that he alone was left in Israel. Had he gathered with those who revered him, he would have found that the Union fellowship was congenial to him and aware of his concerns. There is evidence Spurgeon lived in an echo chamber where select few had his ear, insulating him from concourse with typical pastors. Further, he could have stated his case directly rather than in print, removed from those he suspected. Clifford revered him. Thew and Greenhough wanted to visit with him. Virtually all who disagreed with him loved him. There is evidence from the NBC Columbia Conference in the

¹¹² Payne, 138-39.

¹¹³ Ibid., 142.

¹¹⁴ Richard Ellsworth Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim: The Life Story of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Heir of the Puritans* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1934), 150.

1920s that meeting one's adversaries helps diminish conflict.¹¹⁵

With Nonconformist England ablaze with controversy over criticism, it should have been obvious that a confession only requiring baptism by immersion needed amplification. Shrewd leaders could have found language specific enough to please Spurgeon but elastic enough to embrace much of the Left. Booth provided insufficient leadership. All indications suggest he had confidentially complained to Spurgeon about heterodoxy. Booth should have allowed the matter to be discussed at Sheffield, if not before. An able denominational executive could have ameliorated the situation with finesse. Prearrangements could have organised respondents in a debate fairly treated, and Spurgeon would at least have felt that he was heard. If the outcome at Sheffield could have pre-empted, the “censure” might have been avoided. Spurgeon may have been appeased. Fullerton and Bebbington contend the controversy would have been defused if later Secretary John Shakespeare had been Secretary.¹¹⁶ Bebbington avers, “Shakespeare ... would have managed the affair energetically, avoiding the pitfalls and ensuring a better outcome.”¹¹⁷

Further, no action should have been taken until Maclaren visited with Spurgeon. Maclaren was ill, but not permanently. Maclaren was the only living Baptist with a global reputation similar to Spurgeon. Hugh Price Hughes, editor of the *Methodist Times*, called Maclaren “supreme as the highest modern proponent from the pulpit of the spoken word.”¹¹⁸ No Baptist could have approached Spurgeon as a peer like Maclaren. It is tragic that he was side-

¹¹⁵ See pg. 44-45 below.

¹¹⁶ Fullerton, 314.

¹¹⁷ David Bebbington, email message to author, June 2, 2022; Peter Shepherd, *The Making of a Modern Denomination: John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists 1898-1924*, vol. 4, Studies in Baptist History and Thought (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2001). See 61-91 for Shakespeare's ability to negotiate difficult Union situations.

¹¹⁸ J.C. Carlile, *Alexander Maclaren, D.D.: The Man and His Message* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1902), 8.

lined from the January 18, 1888 meeting. The outcome might have been different if his moderating view had been expressed. In that critical meeting, Clifford and James Culross (Principal of Bristol Baptist College) wanted to win for the Left.¹¹⁹ Maclaren could have handled the day differently as the only person in the room approaching an equal to Spurgeon.

Spurgeon did not understand that the Union was not the Tabernacle where his will reigned supreme. There is no evidence that his lay leadership ever challenged anything Spurgeon wished to do. He was not a good controversialist. There was no one to hold him accountable for his extreme statements that injured good Union persons. Lack of accountability produces inevitable difficulties for gifted leaders.

Spurgeon should have visited with his opponents. He should have answered the two telegrams from Greenhough and Thew. He wrote President Culross, "Surely, no sane person thinks that I should have made a tour to deal with individual terrorists."¹²⁰ That is precisely what sane people did think. A censure from the world's most famous preacher hurled at relatively unknown British Baptist pastors should have been forestalled with an invitation to visit him at his expense, which he could easily have borne. The supreme biblicist was not above Matt 18:15-20. The refusal to conduct Christian controversy according to explicit Scripture while defending the Bible is a disappointing display from all three controversies herein.

From this counterfactual review, Cahalan's practical theology suggests both Downgrade sides moved from their own view of Scripture/tradition to address concerns in a specific situation. In a reflexive turn, both sides read their contemporary views back into scripture/tradition, in a closed system of reinforcement. Practical theological principles from the Downgrade suggest issues must be settled early before they are personal, they are unlikely to be

¹¹⁹ Hopkins, 205-06.

¹²⁰ Spurgeon to Culross, November 26, 1887, quoted in Spurgeon, Spurgeon, and Harrald, *Autobiography*, 2:478.

solved without shrewd transparent executive leadership, and they can be anticipated. These permanent lessons can be learned from the Downgrade. Before the first *ST* article, prudent Union leadership could have taken pre-emptive action working on an expanded confession while denying an enforceable creed. Bilaterally, both sides must declare what non-negotiable and then strive for a negotiated settlement. In this and following controversies, the Left was largely willing to co-exist with the Right while the Right was mostly unwilling to remain in partnership with the Left. This argues that extremes at both poles could leave to keep the majority together, certainly a counterfactual outcome.

CHAPTER TWO

THE US NORTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION FUNDAMENTALIST CONTROVERSY, 1920-23

Among missed irenic opportunities in the three controversies, the 1922 Columbia Conference was most promising. The 1922 Columbia Conference witnessed a pacific possibility that could have forestalled schism in the NBC and pacified the NBC/SBC Civil War split. This 1922 meeting included both internal NBC antagonists and SBC representatives. To comprehend the impediments to peace requires a larger frame addressing American Baptist history, polity, and conflicts. As Megill insists, in counterfactual history one must first understand what *did* happen.¹²¹ The battle necessitating a concordat exhibited opposing personalities, institutions, and publications. Specific representatives and events typifying a throng of actants are presented below to epitomise the tangled impediments to peace. The value of the peace process is in proportion to the tortuous trail impeding it.

US Baptist Roots

The drama of American Baptist divisions informs the missed opportunity for peace in 1922. Around 1638-1639, Roger Williams founded America's first Baptist church in Providence, RI.¹²² Later five Baptist churches formed the Philadelphia Association (1707), the NBC taproot.¹²³ In 1814, Baptists united in the Triennial Convention, meeting every three years between 1814-1844.¹²⁴ In 1840 northern abolitionists told southern Baptists they could no longer consider them

¹²¹ Megill, 153.

¹²² Robert Baker, *Relations Between Northern and Southern Baptists* (Ft. Worth: N.p., 1948), 7.

¹²³ Edward B. Cole, *The Baptist Heritage* (Elgin, IL: David C. Cooke, 1976), 41.

¹²⁴ William H. Brackney, *Origins of the American Baptist Churches, USA* (Brentwood, TN: Baptist History & Heritage Society, 2006), 1-2.

“brethren in Christ” or take communion with them, outraging southern Baptists.¹²⁵ May 8, 1845 at

Augusta, GA, twelve southern states withdrew from the Triennial Convention and established the

SBC.¹²⁶ Civil War bitterness was compounded by distinctively more conservative theology in the

South.¹²⁷ The 1922 Columbia Conference presented an historic opportunity for healing both the Baptist theological breach and Civil War resentment.

The NBC did not exist until 1907. Northern Baptists were a gaggle of competing societies.¹²⁸ A meeting of independent Baptist societies gathered in Washington, D.C., 1907 voted to charter a centralising NBC in Oklahoma City 1908.¹²⁹ The NBC, and subsequent name changes, has been plagued by Fundamentalist and anti-ecumenical divisions.¹³⁰ A splinter reactionary missionary society, “The Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, Inc.,” withdrew from the NBC hegemony and found support from 400 NBC churches, which became the 1932 General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARB).¹³¹ This was followed by another fracture from the Right, the “Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society” with its own Fundamentalist board and missionaries. The NBC in 1945 refused to recognise the new

¹²⁵ Ibid., 54-59.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 89.

¹²⁷ Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3d ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1963), 297.

¹²⁸ Bill Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2003), 390-91.

¹²⁹ McBeth, *Heritage*, 464-65; Torbet, 437-38.

¹³⁰ McBeth, *Heritage*, 496, 563.

¹³¹ Torbet, 395.

association and recommended it drop the name “Conservative” while supporting favoured NBC missionaries.¹³²

Two new denominations in the North abandoned the NBC: the GARB and the Conservative Baptist Association of America (1947).¹³³ A peaceful outcome from the 1922 Columbia Conference might have delayed or avoided such divisions. The larger problem, however, was a distinctly American religious phenomenon, Fundamentalism.

The Fundamentalist Insurgents

The 1920 name “Fundamentalist” is traced to *The Watchman-Examiner* editor Curtis Laws. Weighing names, Laws considered “Conservatives” were considered reactionary. “Premillennialists” identified a limited subset of the Right. Laws then made his historic nomination: “We suggest that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals shall be called ‘Fundamentalists’.”¹³⁴ Sociologist Nancy Ammerman more recently agrees with his “battle” metaphor: “*Fundamentalism, then, differs from traditionalism or orthodoxy or even a revivalist movement. It differs in that it is a movement in conscious, organized opposition to the disruption of those traditions and orthodoxies.*”¹³⁵ The cast of characters, institutions, and periodicals in the 1920s NBC drama presents a complex web of personalities, seminaries, and magazines.

¹³² Torbet, 400-01.

¹³³ Roland Nelson, “Fundamentalism and the Northern Baptist Convention” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1964), 11.

¹³⁴ Curtis Lee Laws, “Convention Side Lights,” *The Watchman-Examiner*, July 1, 1920, 834.

¹³⁵ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, “North American Protestant Fundamentalism,” in *Fundamentalism Observed*, eds. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 14. Italics in original.

On both sides, subtle shades of opinion could easily make classifications a caricature. There were both radical and moderate Fundamentalists and Liberals.¹³⁶ The five, nineteenth-century NBC seminaries were targets of Fundamentalism and three founded later deemed less objectionable. On the Right, Fundamentalist patriarch W.B. Riley listed fifty schools in 1930 that passed his Fundamentalist litmus tests.¹³⁷ Furthering the conflict were duelling reciprocally critical publications, the major public influencers. William Laws edited *The Watchman-Examiner*. Among others, he called for a conference on the fundamentals of faith in Buffalo before the 1920 NBC convention.

Unlike more divisive fundamentalists such as W.B. Riley, T.T. Shields, and John Straton, Laws did not assert inerrancy or dispensationalism. For him, Fundamentalism was “an attempt to reaffirm theological orthodoxy and promote biblical Christianity.” Laws opposed NBC Left’s new establishment periodical, *The Baptist*. The first issue of *The Baptist* featured an editorial clearly aligned with the NBC Left, the doomed ecumenical Inter-Church World Movement, and pledging to “differentiate between our convictions and our prejudices.”¹³⁸ Fundamentalists had numerous regional periodicals.

This thumbnail only suggests the interactive drama among the actants. Periodicals indicted and defended persons and seminaries. Persons attacked periodicals, seminaries, and one another. Constant feuds erupted among Fundamentalists about who was the most fundamental.

¹³⁶ See Matthew Burton Bowman, *The Urban Pulpit: New York City and the Fate of Liberal Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); see also “Baptists,” *TIME Magazine* 1, no.14 (June 4, 1923).

¹³⁷ W.B. Riley, “Schools and Theological Seminaries, typescript sermon comparing the growth of Moody Bible Institute and his Northwestern with NBC seminaries,” <https://cdm16120.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/riley/id/2320/rec/16>.

¹³⁸ “Editorial,” *The Baptist* 1, no. 1, January 31, 1920, 8-9.

For that reason, I have chosen consensus representative persons who evoke the controversial themes, on the Left the original American Baptist Liberals William Newton Clarke and Shailer Mathews, who represents the uber-Left Chicago school. Mathews alone among these attended the 1922 Columbia Conference. The Fundamentalist patriarch W.B. Riley represents the Right.

Typical Partisan Representatives

William Newton Clarke (1841-1912) The First USA Baptist Liberal

A Colgate graduate, Clarke was author of the first USA Protestant Left systematic theology. His views agitating his first pastorate, he moved to a more progressive Canadian church. He taught at multiple colleges. He found no textbook for his “Progressive Theology” so he wrote his own. “He contended Christianity differed from other religions not as true against false but as complete compared with less complete. His *Outline of Christian Theology* through twenty editions was an epoch-making book ... the first broad survey of Christian theology which frankly accepted the modern view of the world.”¹³⁹

Clarke recalls his relationship with the Bible beginning in the 1840s.¹⁴⁰ As a child, “No one believed the Bible more thoroughly than I did.”¹⁴¹ As a teenager he “began the selection of my personal Bible.”¹⁴² His initial intellectual struggle was attempting to harmonise geology and Genesis.¹⁴³ Through classroom lectures, he formed his own conviction rejecting verbal

¹³⁹ “William Newton Clarke,” in *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), *Gale In Context: Biography*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/BT2310015982/BIC?u=txshracd2488&sid=bookmark-BIC&xid=33e3d4cf>.

¹⁴⁰ William Newton Clarke, *Sixty Years with the Bible; a Record of Experience* (Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 11.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 21-24.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 32.

inspiration. His encounter with the controversial British *Essays and Reviews* led him to confront the inequality of religious value in biblical books.¹⁴⁴

Confronting two NT eschatologies, he complained “It cannot be that I am required to believe all the Bible says because the Bible says it.”¹⁴⁵ Concerning the Bible, “Its own contents bore witness to its errancy.”¹⁴⁶ Clarke states with finality, “The doctrine of an inspiration that imparts infallibility and direct divine authority to the entire body of scriptures is no more.”¹⁴⁷ Although these views would be rudimentary to the Left today, they outraged the Right then.

Marsden observes that “the NT expectation of an early physical return of Christ destroyed Clarke’s belief in the infallibility of the Bible. Clarke represented the measure of revelation by contemporary culture.”¹⁴⁸ There is a sense in which his life was Clarke *contra mundum*. His influence through Fosdick alone shaped Liberalism. Fosdick decried that Clarke’s theology “brought down upon him the invectives of the orthodox.”¹⁴⁹

Shailer Mathews (1863-1941)

In Cauthen’s taxonomy of liberalism, the University of Chicago’s Shailer Mathews belongs to Cauthen’s category “Modernistic Liberalism.”¹⁵⁰ Jesus was not the unique Saviour to these thinkers. He was not the source of Christianity but an example of the truths that could be

¹⁴⁴ Clarke, *Sixty*, 42-45.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁴⁷ William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1919), 26.

¹⁴⁸ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2d ed. (Oxford: University Press, 2006), 50-51.

¹⁴⁹ James E. Tull, *Shapers of Baptist Thought* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972), 159.

¹⁵⁰ Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 27.

found without him, presenting Christianity in terms acceptable to twentieth-century science.¹⁵¹

Both Mathews and Rudolf Bultmann insisted twentieth-century moderns could not ground faith in the historicity of the Scripture.¹⁵²

Mathews attended Colby College and Newton, taught at Colby, spent two years in Berlin, and joined the University of Chicago in 1894 as Dean of the Divinity School until 1933.

Mathews conceived Christianity not a body of dogmatic propositions but rather a social movement. Christianity was a lifestyle, not a belief. Theology's task is to find contemporary conceptualisations for outdated norms such as atonement.¹⁵³ He articulated these views in twenty- eight books and on the platforms afforded him as president of the NBC (1915) and the Federal Council of Churches of Christ (1912-1916).¹⁵⁴

Mathews contended he was as loyal to Jesus as any Fundamentalist. What troubled many Baptists was his complete redefinition of traditional terms.¹⁵⁵ Brackney observed: "His language was baptistic, but his meaning moved well beyond their long-held orthodox positions."¹⁵⁶ Bush and Nettles voice the opinion of the scholarly Right: "Mathews denies the very concept of biblical authority except in the matter of experience. Religious experience was recorded in

¹⁵¹ Cauthen, 29-30.

¹⁵² Konrad Hammann, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Biography*, trans. Philip E. Devenish (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2013), 446.

¹⁵³ Cauthen, 147-52.

¹⁵⁴ Garrett, 550.

¹⁵⁵ Brackney, *Genetic*, 351-52.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

Scripture and is produced by Scripture, but the words are not binding in their authority beyond that.”¹⁵⁷

In his later thought, God is not an ontological category but “a name for the personality-evolving reality of the cosmos.”¹⁵⁸ The horrors of World War I followed by the Great Depression caused Mathews “to sound quaint than the realistic biblical language of sin, redemption, and transcendence.”¹⁵⁹ The brilliant epitome of the Chicago school’s sociological approach lived to see his categories replaced by others, just as he had taught.

William Bell Riley (1861-1947) – Representative Fundamentalist

No one better epitomised the tenacity of Baptist Fundamentalists than W.B. Riley. He professed faith in 1875 and was baptised into a Baptist church. Riley was educated at Hanover College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. After his first wife died in 1931, he married Marie Acomb, who wrote a hagiographic biography of Riley.¹⁶⁰ He served early pastorates in Kentucky, Indiana, and Chicago. He was pastor of First Baptist, Minneapolis, MN (1897-1947), turning it into a fundamentalist fortress and adding 7,000 persons to the church. He originated the World Christian Fundamentals Association, the Northwestern Schools, adding a seminary in 1935 and a college in 1944, as well as a charitable foundation rivalling John D. Rockefeller’s. In his last year he finally resigned the NBC after fighting for fundamentalists as an insider. He left

¹⁵⁷ L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 299.

¹⁵⁸ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, & Modernity 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 211.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁶⁰ Marie Riley, *The Dynamic of a Dream: The Life Story of Dr. William B. Riley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938).

sixty books, four religious magazines, and three schools. In regards to prodigious work, he rivalled Spurgeon.¹⁶¹

He was a biblical inerrantist, anti-evolutionist, and passionate premillennialist.⁴² As early as 1908, he avowed liberals should leave the NBC and demanded the NBC seminaries be examined. His astonishing energy and persistence marked him as the most impactful of all NBC fundamentalists.⁴³ These representative characters and thousands behind them led to dramatic annual NBC confrontations underscoring the need for a peaceful solution. The feared Fundamentalist movement lost the NBC in three annual meetings but fought on for decades. The need for a peaceful resolution between the warring factions emerged at three national NBC conventions.

The Three Decisive Conventions

The NBC controversy lived in the Baptist periodicals that preceded and followed its annual conventions where its autonomous churches sent delegates. The abiding public record of these meetings remains in these periodicals as primary sources.

Buffalo, New York 1920

The opening NBC battles salvos sounded in 1920 with a massive pre-convention meeting of 6,000 Fundamentalists and a demand to investigate heterodoxy in NBC seminaries. The tensions between Left and Right readily appear in their respective newspapers. *The Watchman-Examiner* gave it prominent display while *The Baptist* buried in the back of its issue.⁴⁴ The 1920

¹⁶¹ William H. Brackney, *Historical Dictionary of the Baptists*, no. 25, Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements, ed. Jon Woronoff (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999), 352; B.L. Shelley, "Riley, William B.," *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, ed. Bill J. Leonard (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 237;

C. Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 79-83.

⁴² Russell, 84-85.

⁴³ Ibid., 93-104; William Vance Trollinger, *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 84.

⁴⁴ "General Conference on Fundamentals," *The Watchman-Examiner* 8, no. 21, May 20, 1920, 652; "Pre- Convention Conference on Fundamentals," *The Baptist* 1, no. 18, May 29, 1920, 642.

Buffalo pre-convention new periodical, *The Baptist*, sought to pre-empt Fundamentalist demands for a creedal confession: "It is not our business to formulate a creed or to settle vexed questions of theology. To undertake this would be to commit denominational suicide.... Only those who have forsaken the ancient Baptist faith will think of using the Northern Baptist Convention for the purpose of determining a theological standard to which all shall be compelled to conform."¹⁶² Dissimilarly, *The Watchman-Examiner* exulted that the Conference was "an overwhelming success" with "illuminating and inspiring messages" that would be published as a book.¹⁶³

Next issue *The Baptist* editorial noted, "There is to be a study made of our institutions of learning. Nothing could be more desirable.... The ugly rumors of years will dissipate if the committee shows the wisdom [sic] and the Christian spirit which we expect of it."¹⁶⁴ The next week the editorial exclaimed, "Our Baptist privilege of freedom of expression was put to a severe test at Buffalo. And it was amply vindicated.... The question is whether we will now soft pedal doctrinal differences and magnify the magnificent campaign of service to which we have together given ourselves."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² "The Buffalo Convention," *The Baptist* 1, no. 19, June 5, 1920, 655.

¹⁶³ *The Watchman-Examiner*, July 1, 1920, 934.

¹⁶⁴ "Editorial," *The Baptist* 1, no. 23, July 3, 1920, 797.

¹⁶⁵ "Denominational Unity," *The Baptist* 1, no. 24, July 10, 1920, 835.

Laws seemed to attend a different convention. When the motion was made to investigate the schools, “A sober, reverential, thoughtful body of men and women was transformed into a shouting, hissing, applauding bedlam. The behavior was shameful, but it is easily accounted for.”¹⁶⁶ Given the disparity in reporting the 1920 NBC, it is not a surprise that Fundamentalist J.C. Masee moved the immediate defunding and sale of *The Baptist*. The need for a creed and the investigation of seminaries framed the 1920 meeting.

Des Moines, Iowa 1921

The 1921 NBC continued the newspaper debate, a Fundamentalist rally, as well as floor debates. Preliminary to the NBC meeting, *The Baptist* carried a debate between fundamentalist Frank Goodchild and moderate Frederick Anderson continuing the war over creeping credalism. Goodchild argued that the general public thought Baptists had no convictions, Baptists had historically made detailed confessions, and the convention should adopt a covenantal creed. Anderson responded Baptists had always mistrusted creeds and the adoption of creeds “smell of Rome rather than of Rhode Island,” a reference to Roger Williams’s non-conformist Rhode Island.¹⁶⁷

The second pre-convention Fundamentals Conference met in the city auditorium. Conference President J.C. Masee indicted some of his Baptist peers: “It makes no difference at all whether Christ was the Son of God of the son of Joseph, whether he died as a moral example or as sinner’s substitute. Whether he rose from the dead bodily or only in idea.” He further

¹⁶⁶ *The Watchman-Examiner*, July 1, 1920, 834.

¹⁶⁷ “Should the Northern Baptist Convention Adopt a Doctrinal Standard?” *The Baptist* 2, no. 20, June 18, 1921, 629.

emphasised the literal bodily resurrection and return of Christ.¹⁶⁸ Dr. Heinrichs, of the conservative Northern Seminary, compared Liberal vs. Fundamentalist as the difference between a sea captain who navigated by his own masthead vs. one who navigated by the stars.¹⁶⁹ Massee led the Conference to adopt a mild, seven-article confession of faith.¹⁷⁰ *The Baptist* editorialised that the confession was so mild “that it could only be regarded as the expression to find common ground in theological moderation.”¹⁷¹ *The Baptist* led with a critical review of the Fundamentalist Conference, criticising Canadian pastor T.T. Shields as showing “neither fairness nor mercy.” The meeting left the NBC unmoved by Fundamentalists.

Indianapolis, Indiana 1922

In 1922 a dramatic moment epitomises the Fundamentalist’s losing battle against the NBC Left. On June 16, 1922, Riley made a motion before the convention “in view of the fact that the eyes of all the Baptists of the world, the eyes of millions of our fellow Christians of other denominations, are upon us today...” that the NBC adopt the historic 1883 New Hampshire Confession as its own, reading all eighteen articles as part of his motion.¹⁷² Liberal Cornelius Woelfkin proposed a substitute motion: “The Northern Baptist Convention affirms that the New

¹⁶⁸ Curtis Lee Laws, “Pre-Convention Days at Des Moines” *The Watchman-Examiner*, June 30, 1921, 811.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 812.

¹⁷⁰ Laws, “Pre-Convention,” 805.

¹⁷¹ “No, We Did Not Divide,” *The Baptist* 2, no. 22, July 2, 1921, 685.

¹⁷² *Annual of the Northern Baptist Convention 1922*, ed. Maurice Ambrose Levy (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.), 129-33.

Testament is the all-sufficient ground of our faith and practice, and we need no other statement.”

Woelfkin’s substitute passed 1264-637.¹⁷³ It was a brilliant ruse because even conservatives thought they would be voting against the NT if they disapproved the substitute. Riley would continue to fight from within until the last year of his life. The Woelfkin motion defeated the most aggressive Fundamentalist proposal and the Right never recovered in subsequent meetings.

Amidst these battles an opportunity for peace transpired at an unlikely place with an unusual convener.

The Columbia Conference

As the newspaper and floor debates continued, an all-but-forgotten peace effort unfolded in a remote women’s college. The January 24-26, 1922 Conference, held at Stephens College in Columbia, MO, at the invitation of its president James Wood (1875-1958), presented a possibility for peace within the NBC and between the NBC and SBC. Among the three controversies, the most probable counterfactual peace effort happened at a small Missouri college.

The Leaders

James Wood – A Visionary Leader in a Small Space

This was a big idea at a small school. Wood served as Stephens College president between 1912-1947. Reared in rural farm poverty, Wood did not graduate from high school until twenty-one but earned degrees from University of Missouri and Columbia. He found Stephens moribund with only fifty-two students, deeply in debt, and not expected to survive. He left it

¹⁷³ Ibid., 133-34.

with 2,200 students in a nationally recognised transformative presidency.¹⁷⁴ In November 1921, Wood invited the NBC president, Helen Montgomery, and the SBC and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president, E.Y. Mullins, to visit him at the college. This meeting produced an invitation to NBC and SBC pastors, educators, editors, and lay persons to meet at the college at Wood's expense. A student wrote in the school paper, "We Stephens girls will never forget this conference and we will tell our grandchildren about meeting thirty or forty of the greatest men and women in the United States at one time."¹⁷⁵

Helen Barrett Montgomery (1861-1934) – A Woman of Firsts

A Rochester, NY native, Montgomery was a woman of firsts: first female member of the Rochester school board, the first woman to be president of an American denomination, and the first woman to publish a popular NT translation from Greek.¹⁷⁶ A graduate of Wellesley and Brown, she received three honorary doctorates. She was a licensed Baptist minister, president of Woman's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, National Federated Woman's Boards of Foreign Missions, and president of New York Federation of Women's Clubs.¹⁷⁷

She began her career as a schoolteacher and principal¹⁷⁸ but soon moved into Christian work with several NBC agencies. She married William A. Montgomery and became friends with

¹⁷⁴ "James Wood Dies; Headed Stephens," *New York Times*, September 29, 1958, 27; Louise Dudley, "Forty-Five Years in Retrospect," *Stephens College Bulletin*, vol. 38, 2-9.

¹⁷⁵ "The Columbia Conference," *The Stephens Standard*, February 1922, 87. Thanks to Dan Kammer of Stephens archives for these rare sources.

¹⁷⁶ Helen Barrett Montgomery, *Centenary Translation of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1924).

¹⁷⁷ "Montgomery, Helen Barrett," *Who Was Who in America*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The A.N. Marquis Co., 1942, 856; "Montgomery, Helen Barrett" in James, Edward T., Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds. *Notable American Women, 1607-1950; a Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 566-68.

¹⁷⁸ Helen Barrett Montgomery, *Helen Barrett Montgomery, From Campus to World Citizenship* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1940), 33, 70.

suffragettes Susan B. Anthony and Frances Willard. Her passion was global missions. As NBC president during the Fundamentalist controversy, she reminded the denomination of its missional purpose believing missions were the basis of rekindling moribund churches and often upbraided pastors for their lack of mission awareness.¹⁷⁹ One historian observed that whether she lived in a flat or in wealth she was ever the same, as respectful to her maid and chauffeur as to a grand dame of society.¹⁸⁰ Although her husband became wealthy through General Motors, the couple refused a car until too old to give to mission causes.¹⁸¹

In ways similar to Mullins “she never lost the wisdom of seeing herself as others, even her critics, might be seeing her and she herself was among the critics.”¹⁸² Known by millions, she kept a common touch while leadership positions sought her. “A natural leader who ‘radiated influence,’ [she] had a quick and efficient mind, a balanced judgment, and a winning and persuasive personality. She combined self-confidence with sympathetic interest in others and a keen sense of humour.”¹⁸³

The Montgomery Correspondence

A review of forty-eight letters dated 1921-22 reveal Montgomery behind the scenes pushing back against both NBC extremes and trying to hold the centre together. Writing Shailer Mathews, she thanks him for his acceptance to preach at the Columbia Conference but appeals to him: “I am very anxious to have you give at Columbia a thoroughly evangelical address such

¹⁷⁹ W.H. Brackney, “Helen Barrett Montgomery,” in *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, ed. Bill Leonard (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 192.

¹⁸⁰ Montgomery, *Helen*, 94.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹⁸³ *Notable American Women*, 567.

as I know you are capable of giving. There are a lot of people who have a false idea of you, and they need to get their eyes opened.” In the same letter she pleaded him to rid the academy of the heterodox. She points to one unnamed professor at Denison who denied personal immortality, a personal God, and the atonement. With a feisty attitude she never showed in public, she wrote Mathews: “I have a good reactionary longing to get my hands on every one of the gentry that are making things hot for us in our various educational institutions.” She wants to put them out the door and close the door on them.¹⁸⁴

Worried about Mathews’s sermon at the Columbia Conference on the Deity of Christ, she warns him of the need to walk carefully or “risk the disintegration of this great denomination of ours.”¹⁸⁵ In the same season she warns this icon of the Left, she writes an apologist for the Right opposing the pre-convention Fundamentalist rallies. Comparing the NBC to the divisions of Corinth, she pleads “can we not, my brother, abandon this fighting spirit and the use of these party shibboleths?”¹⁸⁶ She writes Laws, deploring the Fundamentalists attacks on NBC school and pleading for a fair hearing.¹⁸⁷ Even before the meeting, she wrote an influential New York pastor proposing the need of a new statement of faith by the NBC and SBC, revealing her desire before the meeting for such a proposal.¹⁸⁸ Her letters reveal a publicly gracious but privately pointed matron confronting both NBC extremes.

¹⁸⁴ Montgomery, RG-1481, to Shailer Mathews, December 13, 1921, Helen Barrett Montgomery Collection, RG-1481, [Box 1, Folder 75], American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁸⁵ Montgomery to Mathews, January 6, 1922, Helen Barrett Montgomery Collection, RG-1481, [Box 1, Folder 75], American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁸⁶ Montgomery to H. Lee Mclendon, September 8, 1921, Helen Barrett Montgomery Collection, RG-1481, [Box 1, Folder 75], American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁸⁷ Montgomery to Laws, December 5, 1921, Helen Barrett Montgomery Collection, RG-1481, [Box 1, Folder 75], American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁸⁸ Montgomery to J.Y. Aithchison, December 5, 1921, Helen Barrett Montgomery Collection, RG-1481, [Box 1, Folder 75], American Baptist Historical Society, Atlanta, GA.

Edgar Young Mullins (1860-1928) – Baptist Theologian of the Century

Mullins by temperament and position was an ideal catalyst to mediate peace. He was the premier USA Baptist theologian of the 20th century. During the Columbia Conference he was simultaneously president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1899-1928) and the SBC (1921-1924). A graduate of Texas A&M, he was stellar student at the SBC Southern Seminary. Three pastorates enabled study at Johns Hopkins, and Newton Center, MA, which connected him with Northern Baptist Newton Theological Institution as well as Harvard, Wellesley, and Brown. In 1905 he also studied at Berlin.¹⁸⁹ In a posthumous memorial by his colleagues it was noted that

“he preferred to look for the good rather than the evil in men... he seemed in an unusual degree to put himself in another’s place, and to inquire as to cause of wrong attitudes, wrong motives, and wrong conduct.”¹⁹⁰

Located at the oldest SBC seminary between North and South, he embodied “the moderate as border-state conciliator.... He tried to create a moderate synthesis combining evangelicalism with the newer trends of thought.”¹⁹¹ On one hand, his contribution to *The Fundamentals*, “The Testimony of Christian Experience,” was the most moderate voice in the historic series.¹⁹² On the other hand, his views on ecumenism and evolution created tension with Fundamentalists. His widely used books emphasised a moderate position in the Fundamentalist

¹⁸⁹ Gaines Dobbins, “Edgar Young Mullins,” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 2 Ker-Yu, ed. Norman Wade Cox (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 930.

¹⁹⁰ Faculty, *Edgar Young Mullins: A Study in Christian Character* (Louisville: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1928), 11.

¹⁹¹ William H. Ellis, *A Man of Books and a Man of the People: E.Y. Mullins and the Crisis of Moderate Southern Baptist Leadership* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 220.

¹⁹² Edgar Young Mullins, “The Testimony of Christian Experience,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, vol. 3, ed. R.A. Torrey (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Co., 1910-1915), 76-85.

debates.¹⁹³ While befriending Fundamentalists, his leadership sometimes concerned them.¹⁹⁴ He foiled the fundamentalist attempt to insert the evolution issue into the SBC 1925 confession.¹⁹⁵ His balanced approach fit the peace effort.

The Promising Meeting

Those attending came from twelve states related to the NBC, fourteen states representing the SBC, and four from Missouri. The far-Left NBC Shailer Mathews spoke on the same program with conservative SBC George W. Truett. The conservative editor of *The Watchman-Examiner*, Curtis Laws, found himself beside his new competitor, Edgar L. Killam of the NBC's progressive *The Baptist*. The conferees discussed shared challenges and avowed they represented only themselves. The editor of *The Baptist* headlined the conference as "epoch making."¹⁹⁶

The Baptist gave a separate article to the most intriguing outcome of the conference, a proposed NBC/SBC joint confession of faith. Unusually "those present were in approximate and substantial agreement on the doctrine and polity as set out in the Fraternal Address of Southern Baptists." NBC conferee W.F. Freeman offered the resolution:

That a statement of Baptist doctrine and polity, setting forth briefly the fundamentals of faith and peculiar beliefs and observances which characterize and distinguish us, is both timely and desirable and will make for clarity of understanding among the different groups of Baptists everywhere, and especially as between the constituency of the Northern and Southern Baptist Conventions, and also service to place ourselves properly before other Christian bodies as to the doctrines and polity we hold.

¹⁹³ W.R. Estep, "Edgar Young Mullins," in *Dictionary of Baptists in America*, ed. Bill Leonard (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 195.

¹⁹⁴ David Edwin Moore, "Ecclesiological Implications of Religious Experience in the Theologies of Edgar Young Mullins and Henry Wheeler Robinson" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999); Ellis, 137, n. 62 for correspondence.

¹⁹⁵ Ellis, 151, 166-67, 189.

¹⁹⁶ "The Columbia Conference," *The Baptist* 3, no. 1, February 4, 1922, 16; see also "The Columbia Conference," *The Christian Index* 102, no. 5, February 2, 1922, 6-7 for a report from GA attendees.

Both conventions would appoint nine representatives plus the two presidents charged to prepare the statement. The editor of *The Baptist* opined that NBC Liberals might find this statement essentially the same as the controverted Fundamentalist NBC “Des Moines Confession” but might accept it due to its cooperative NBC/SBC origin. “It will be easier to secure hearty unanimity in the Northern Baptist Convention for a statement which is nation-wide and which does not start with a handicap.”¹⁹⁷

Montgomery exulted that the meeting was “one of the most fruitful and delightful conferences ever held.”¹⁹⁸ With reference to the proposed confession, she wanted the anticipated committee to be representative with liberals, conservatives, “the middle of the road man and the man of passionate convictions.”¹⁹⁹ She imagined a global impact of the joint confession, to be adopted by Canadian, British, and Continental Baptists: “The imagination kindles at the thought of a great statement recommended to the churches for adoption by both conventions.”²⁰⁰ Even allowing for Baptist triumphalism, it was a hopeful statement. E.C. Routh, editor of the *Texas Baptist Standard*, commented:

We have never heard stronger reasons advanced for such a statement of beliefs than were given by President Mullins and Mrs. Montgomery. Creedal statements are not binding on any church or individual, but we need clear and concise expressions of what Baptists believe the Bible to teach, so that any seeker after truth may secure in small compass and in a form easily understood, the beliefs of Baptists on certain fundamental doctrines.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ *The Baptist* 3, no. 1, 5.

¹⁹⁸ Helen Barrett Montgomery, “The Columbia Conference,” *The Baptist* 3, no. 3 (February 18, 1922), 79.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ E.C. Routh, “A Very Significant and Interesting Conference,” *Baptist Standard* 34, no. 5, 1921, 5.

Missouri editor T.W. Young gushed, “In all the discussions there was nothing said extreme, sensational, divisive, nor foolish. The Spirit of God seemed to fill all minds and hearts.... It was truly apostolic.”²⁰² Florida’s J.W. Mitchell saw the meeting “virtually dissolving the [doctrinal] differences.”²⁰³ Not everyone shared this exuberance. Edward B. Pollard criticised the proposal. Pollard affirms Baptists have been in “remarkable doctrinal union” due to their reverence for the Bible and missionary thrust. He pleads against a new confession. This would only sow distrust in mission work and education.²⁰⁴

All of the optimistic expectations ended suddenly at June 1922 national meeting of the SBC. Eighteen members of its Executive Committee unanimously rejected the proposal of a joint confession: “We do not regard this as an opportune occasion for the [SBC] to take the initiative in the matter of formulating a general doctrinal statement for American Baptists; inasmuch as there exists at this time on the part of Southern Baptists, neither demand nor necessity for any new statements of Baptist faith and polity.”²⁰⁵

This rejection likely embarrassed Mullins. His explanation published in *The Baptist* reveals the strain. He would have defended the joint confession had it come to the SBC floor and he judged it would have easily passed. The proposal was killed in committee because “there were a number of delicate and difficult matters which threatened the Southern Baptist Convention.” These internal issues may have been SBC Fundamentalist agitation and the

²⁰² T.M. Young, “A Great Baptist Conference in Columbia, MO,” *The Baptist Record*, February 2, 1922, 4.

²⁰³ J.W. Mitchell, “The Columbia Conference,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, March 9, 1922, 2.

²⁰⁴ Edward B. Pollard, “Baptists and Creedal Confessions,” *The Christian Index* 102, no. 10 (March 9, 1922), 6-10.

²⁰⁵ John E. White, “Report of Committee on Columbia Conference Memorial,” in *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1922, Sixty-Seventh Session, Seventy-Seventh Year* (Nashville: Marshall and Brown Co., 1922), 66.

evolution debate. He stressed the SBC never had the chance to vote on the proposal and would have approved it.²⁰⁶

Mullins wrote his explanation considering published statements by the chair of the committee that rejected the proposal, John B. White. White had responded to criticism from the editor of the North Carolina *Biblical Recorder* that turning down the joint confession was the equivalent of the US rejecting the post-war League of Nations. Offended, White complained the joint confession would have been discourteous as an SBC effort to settle the NBC doctrinal quarrel without having been asked to do so. The SBC had not adopted a creed at its organisation and should not do so in 1922.²⁰⁷ The reason for the rejection is shrouded in history. My careful review for this of Mullins and Montgomery archived correspondence reveals no reason for the SBC rejection.

Analysis

Of the three controversies covered in this essay, this unfortunate SBC unilateral rejection of a joint confession blocked the best opportunity for peace. The combatants in the Downgrade never gathered for a meeting like the Columbia Conference. The Columbia Conference afforded an opportunity of historic potential for three reasons.

First, the NBC Left would likely have adopted a joint confession if it did not originate with NBC Fundamentalists. With the backing of NBC representatives to the conference and the graciousness of Montgomery, the convention would have adopted a non-binding confession that would have at least appeased Fundamentalists for the foreseeable future. If nothing else, this might have postponed the acrimony of the 1920s.

²⁰⁶ E.Y. Mullins, "Dr. White and the Columbia Conference," *The Baptist*, October 7, 1922, 11-12.

²⁰⁷ John B. White, "Another View," *Biblical Recorder*, August 9, 1922, 2.

Second, this would have augmented the healing of the NBC/SBC sectional cleavage following the Civil War. The SBC suspicion of NBC liberalism was universal in the South, added to sectionalism exacerbated by the Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction. As the largest USA Protestant denomination, the SBC could have handed an olive branch to the NBC.

Third, the adoption of a joint confession might have prevented the NBC schism resulting in two new Baptist denominations, the GARB and the Conservative Baptists. At the same time, the sheer universality of confession might have muted Fundamentalists who would later divide the SBC. It could have provided a wholesome model for future conflict in the NBC and SBC rather than the toxic divisions that occurred. If Mullins had insisted the motion for the joint confession reached the floor, he knew it would pass. No one in the SBC had Mullins's gravitas. It is regretful he was not more forceful towards the Executive Committee where his respect might have carried the day. Had Mullins used his gravitas to persuade the Committee what was counterfactual might have been actual.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST INERRANCY CONTROVERSY

A war over biblical inspiration divided the largest USA Protestant denomination in a public battle that adherents called the Controversy. In its public observation and by its sheer numbers of participants, no American internal Protestant fight has exceeded its drama. The battle split families, churches, schools, and the massive SBC. The denomination born in the pre-Civil War South had its own civil war that, to this day, pains its veterans. Missed possibilities of peace weigh heavily on the consciences of its participants. This study will use the predominant historic terms for the two sides, Conservatives for the Right and Moderates for the Left.

Four decades after its inception, the Controversy developed a Conservative and Moderate debated historiography. Nolen examined this diversity.²⁰⁸ To consider missed opportunities for peace, one must first review issues, definitions, leaders, strategies, key incidents, and the work of an elected Peace Committee. Megill insists that all counterfactual history works back from what transpired to what might have.²⁰⁹ Missed counterfactual possibilities for peace presume prior developments historically.

The Background of the Controversy

The Controversy origins are older than the SBC. Shurden identifies two Baptist traditions in the South. The “Charleston Tradition” emphasised *order*, ecclesiological, liturgical, and ministerial. The “Sandy Creek Tradition” featured *ardor*, a revivalist enthusiasm with autodidact

²⁰⁸ Michael Wayne Nolen, “A Critical Evaluation of the Historiography Surrounding the Southern Baptist Convention Controversy” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1997), accessed December 6, 2021. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/221f46c2f304b626996c905cd77e61b9/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>.

²⁰⁹ Megill, 153.

clergy emphasising individualism, biblicism, and egalitarianism.²¹⁰ From its origin, these strains coexisted in tension, united by the Civil War Lost Cause, Reconstruction, and devotion to global mission. SBC commitment to missional activities trumped inherent theological differences.

Duke McCall (1914-2013), president of two SBC seminaries, SBC executive director, and president of the Baptist World Alliance, was an SBC leader with unparalleled experience. A self-proclaimed Conservative, he staunchly served Moderates. McCall insisted the Controversy stemmed from the 1940s post-war southern migration from farm to city, SBC expansion to more conservative western states, increasing education of Southern Baptists, and evolution of the six SBC seminaries into respectable graduate schools rather than Bible schools.²¹¹ The implication of that diagnosis flags Conservatives as rural and less educated with inferior schools. Conservatives chafed under this Moderate characterisation. In the most sophisticated study of the controversy lauded by both sides, Ammerman empirically affirms McCall's analysis of larger southern cultural shifts shaping the battle.²¹²

The Genesis of the Inerrancy Controversy in Genesis

The preliminary skirmish in the Controversy was a Genesis commentary by Ralph Elliott, OT professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, MO.²¹³ Critics claimed his interpretation of Genesis 1-11 was symbolic rather than literal. Elliott said as much: "Error in literary vehicle does not necessarily mean error in message or in the essential purpose

²¹⁰ Walter Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?" *Baptist History and Heritage* 16, no. 2 (1981): 2-11.

²¹¹ A. Ronald Tonks, *Duke McCall: An Oral History* (Nashville: Baptist History and Heritage Society and Fields Publishing, 2001), 394-97.

²¹² Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 18-71.

²¹³ Ralph Elliott, *The Message of Genesis* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961).

of God ... the symbolic stories aren't to be taken as literally true."²¹⁴ By most academic standards his book was a mild application of higher criticism. K. Owen White, pastor of First Baptist Church Houston, TX countered, "This sort of rationalistic criticism can lead only to further confusion, unbelief, deterioration, and ultimate disintegration as a great New Testament denomination...."

Modernism is insidious, dangerous, and destructive."²¹⁵

Elliott was fired in 1962 when he refused to cancel the republication of his book by a non-SBC publisher. Years later, Elliott accused former Southern Seminary colleagues of "doublespeak," teaching higher criticism in the classroom and being disingenuous in churches.²¹⁶

The 1962 SBC passed a motion by White "to remedy at once those situations where such views now threaten our historic position."²¹⁷ A motion to recall the book was defeated but Conservative incitement could not be extinguished.²¹⁸ Another bombshell from Genesis exploded in Denver, CO eight years later.

With Fundamentalists already vigilantly agitated by Elliot's book, 5,394 SBC members meeting in Denver 1970 staged the most vitriolic annual SBC to date. Known as "The Broadman Commentary Controversy," the convention rejected the first volume of the first commentary the SBC ever published. The Genesis commentator, G. Henton Davies, at the time Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford, denied that God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Interpreting

²¹⁴ Elliott, *Message*, 1, 7, 11.

²¹⁵ K. Owen White, "Death in the Pot," *Baptist Standard*, January 10, 1962, 6.

²¹⁶ Ralph Elliott, *The Genesis Controversy* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992), 33-34.

²¹⁷ *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1962, 65, 68.

²¹⁸ James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Garland TX: Hannibal Books, 2005), 30.

Genesis 22, Davies averred that God would never command such a deed: “Indeed what Christian or humane conscience could regard such command as coming from God?”²¹⁹ Indeed, 3,224 Baptists did believe God told Abraham to do so and recalled the commentary. The battle continued in subsequent conventions and enlarged the constituency for Conservatives.²²⁰ These two contested publications excited unabating Conservative vigilance.

The Issue – Theological or Political

The opponents labelled their opposites as Liberals and Fundamentalists. Cecil Sherman, leader of the Left, contended virtually all SBC members were conservative by any definition.²²¹ Leaders of the Right rejected the term Fundamentalist because it evoked anti-intellectual, antagonistic, parochial images.²²² Many understood the Conservative faction included Fundamentalists and millions of non-aligned Baptists. Moderates included leaders that would be considered Fundamentalists but who abhorred politicisation of the SBC and exclusion of non-inerrantists.

Complicating labelling was a binary debate about the issue. Conservatives insisted the issue was biblical inerrancy. Moderates argued the issue was a grab for religious/political power in a denomination with \$11.52 billion receipts in 2020.²²³ Moderate historian Bill Leonard wrote,

²¹⁹ G. Henton Davies, “Genesis,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 General Articles Genesis-Exodus, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), 198.

²²⁰ Jerry L. Faight, “The Genesis Controversies: Denominational Compromise and the Resurgence and Expansion of Fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist Convention” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 1995), 249-306.

²²¹ Cecil Sherman, *By My Own Reckoning* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2008), 136.

²²² Grady C. Cothen, *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention?: A Memoir of the Controversy* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1993), 20.

²²³ “Net Worth of the Southern Baptist Convention,” Google search, data from May 23, 2021, <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-l-d&q=net+worth+of+the+southern+baptist+convention>.

“The new [Fundamentalist] SBC is a poignant symbol of a broader effort to attain a new American religious establishment based on a Christian interpretation of the American experience.”²²⁴

Additionally, divergent views of Baptist priorities emerged. Conservatives insisted on adherence to biblical inerrancy by every employee of SBC agencies. Memphis megachurch pastor, three-time SBC president, and Conservative icon Adrian Rogers told Baptist leaders that seminary professors “must teach whatever they are told to teach. And if we tell them to teach that pickles have souls then they must teach that pickles have souls.”²²⁵ Moderates contended the defining Baptist characteristic historically was soul competency and priesthood of the believer; every believer is competent to stand before God with no intermediary and thus is a believer priest. Moderate leader Cecil Sherman avers, “Baptists come from the womb shouting *freedom*.”²²⁶ Conservatives insisted that competency/priesthood was never intended to be a cover for perceived heterodoxy.

Conservative SBC historians insist inerrancy, although not by that name, was always the predominant Baptist view.²²⁷ In contrast, Moderate SBC theologian and pastor William E. Hull argued in that the Bible itself did not use the word “inerrant,” authors were sinful persons, original autographs are not available, and translations are not infallible.²²⁸

²²⁴ Bill Leonard, “A Southern Baptist Religious Establishment?” *Christian Century*, September 10-17, 1986, 775.

²²⁵ Bob Allen, “Adrian Rogers Retiring as Pastor,” Good Faith Media, September 14, 2004, <https://goodfaithmedia.org/adrian-rogers-retiring-as-pastor-cms-4712/>.

²²⁶ Sherman, *Reckoning*, 143. “Soul competency” in Baptist theology refers to the individual right and necessity of making religious decisions by oneself with no external coercion from church or state.

²²⁷ L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptist and the Bible*, rev. ed., (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 359-84.

²²⁸ William Hull, “Shall We Call the Bible Infallible?” *Baptist Program*, December 1970, 5-6, 17-18, 21.

In contrast with Conservatives, Moderates insisted on freedom from binding creeds as the defining characteristic of Baptists. Historian Douglas Weaver writes, “In the early twentieth century Southern Baptists continued to emphasise their commitment to freedom of the individual conscience and the sole authority of the Bible in matters of faith.”²²⁹ The most prominent twentieth century Baptist theologian, E.Y. Mullins, asserted voluntary confessions can identify what Baptists believe, but imposing a creed on the human conscience was a tyranny and a “shadow between the soul and God.”²³⁰²³¹ Few Baptists argued against competency/priesthood for individuals and autonomous churches. The SBC was focused control of SBC institutions that collected funds from 50,423 churches with 13,680,493 members, educated their ministers, and published their literature.²⁴ Conservatives insisted that professors/publishers must teach what the majority of those attending the annual SBC told them to teach and write. Moderates contended employees had the same liberty as any Baptist in the pew.

Leaders – Conservative and Moderate

A triumvirate of Conservative leaders conceived and promoted the Controversy. Herman Paul Pressler (1930-) was a graduate of Princeton University and the University of Texas Law School. He was a Texas appellate court judge. Leighton Paige Patterson (1942-) was a graduate of Hardin-Simmons University, held a ThD from New Orleans Baptist Seminary, and after a

²²⁹ C. Douglas Weaver, “Baptists and Denominational Identity and the Turn Toward Creedalism: 2000,” in *Turning Points in Baptist History: A Festschrift in Honor of Harry Leon McBeth*, eds. Michael E. Williams, Sr., and Walter B. Shurden (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2021), 288.

²³⁰ E.Y. Mullins, “The Baptist Conception of Religious Liberty,” in *The Life of Baptists in the Life of the World*, ed. Walter B. Shurden (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 59.

²³¹ Adelle Banks, “Southern Baptists Report Significant Attendance Drop,” *Baptist Standard*, May 16, 2022, <https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/baptists/southern-baptists-report-significant-attendance-drop/>.

five-year pastorate became president of Criswell College, Dallas (1975-1992), Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (1992-2003), and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (2003-2018).²³² Adrian Pierce Rogers (1931-2005) was educated at Stetson University (BA) and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (ThM). He became pastor of the historic Memphis, TN megachurch, Bellevue Baptist, three-time SBC president, and was a national radio and television preacher.²³³ Pressler was the political organizer, Patterson the theologian/tactician, and Rogers the superstar preacher without whom it is conceded by both groups Conservatives could not have won. Moderates had no counterpart to the debonair, quick-witted preacher who was an ardent Fundamentalist.

The consistent leader of Moderates was Cecil Sherman (1928-2010), a graduate of Baylor (BA), Southwestern Seminary (ThD) and Princeton (ThM). He served pastorates at First Baptist Asheville, NC and Broadway Baptist, Fort Worth. He was the first coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a network established by Moderates unwelcomed by Conservatives. Although other Moderates played a role, no one articulated their cause as did Sherman. His memoir is the clearest account of the Moderate movement, candid about its failures and its necessity.²³⁴

The Conservative Strategy

The Left aggravated Pressler since his Princeton days and Patterson was a student undergraduate agitator for Fundamentalism at Hardin-Simmons. The two met in 1967. Pressler

²³² Garrett, 494; "Patterson, Paige (1942-)," *The Religious Right: A Reference Handbook*, 3d ed., Glenn Utter and John Storrey, ed. (Amenia, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2007), 115-20.

²³³ "Adrian Rogers," *Gale in Context: Newsmakers*, 2006, accessed August 25, 2022, <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=BIC&u=wikipedia&id=GALE|K161800013&v=202.1&it=r&sid=BIC&asid=01143374>.

²³⁴ Sherman, *Reckoning*, 131-211.

claimed he had no further operative engagement 1967-1977, although Morgan insists he was active in the 1970s with other SBC malcontents.²³⁵ Certainly Pressler/Patterson in 1977 began active organisation to get Conservatives to the 1979 Houston SBC to elect Rogers. Pressler claimed his activity was based on reports of liberalism from Baylor University students and the prodding of Bill Powell, a constant SBC agitator in the 1960s. Pressler/Patterson met with twenty or more pastors in 1978 to lay the groundwork for an SBC takeover. Ammerman notes many Conservative operatives wanted anonymity, fearing denominational reprisal and ostracism. Yet there were apparently no defections from the organisation for ten years.²³⁶

By Spring 1979 Patterson/Pressler had spoken in twenty-five states. Each state had an appointed leader who organised sending messengers to Houston. Patterson warned pastors they would be attacked by the establishment, comparing their vulnerability to signers of the Declaration of Independence.²³⁷ Pressler denied the Moderate contention that persons had been bused in for the 1979 election or voting irregularities. There were, however, 200 churches within 150 miles of Houston that carried messengers to the presidential election session. The official registrar estimated 83 percent of those bused in voted and then left the convention.²³⁸

The Moderate Strategy

After Rogers's victory in 1979, Moderates reacted September 25, 1980 answering a call by Cecil Sherman, pastor of FBC Ashville, NC to meet at Gatlinburg, TN to resist the nascent

²³⁵ David T. Morgan, *New Crusades, New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1971* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1996), 15-17.

²³⁶ Ammerman, *Battles*, 173.

²³⁷ James C. Hefley, *Conservative Resurgence of Political Takeover*, vol. 3 *The Truth in Crisis* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1988), 15.

²³⁸ Cothen, 73-74.

Conservative movement. Seventeen pastors from various states found Sherman warning them of the real threat presented by the Patterson/Pressler coalition. The group was dubbed “The Gatlinburg Gang” and organised to get 6,000 “mainstream Baptists” to the 1981 SBC in Los Angeles. Sherman acknowledged he was the Moderate leader 1980-1985 and recalled a deliberate strategy to organise SBC members in each state, finding more cooperation in the East than the West.²³⁹ Some Moderates disdained any political organisation by their own partisans. The Los Angeles effort failed.²⁴⁰

Moderate Grady Cothen explained, “Moderates never found a charismatic leader for their cause until it was too late to overcome the incoming tide of fundamentalism.”²⁴¹ By their very nature Moderates could not compete with the authoritarian organisation of Conservatives. Sherman identified causes for Moderate failure as an “ambivalence about doing politics,” changes in leadership, and the reality Moderates were to the Left in the SBC. Sherman, with a hint of elitism, noted: “The pity of this was that it was argued out before an unsophisticated people. If you believed in inerrancy, you believed the Bible. If you did not believe in inerrancy, you did not believe the Bible.”²⁴² Kenneth Chafin, another Moderate leader, characterised the more militant Moderate language by calling Conservative leadership “sick people with different sets of sick egos with different ego needs.”²⁴³ At first, institutional heads were sympathetic with but uneasy about organised Moderates. They feared a binary war would hurt their schools.

The Critical Conventions 1979-1985

²³⁹ Cecil E. Sherman, “An Overview of the Moderate Movement,” in *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC*, ed. Walter B. Shurden (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993), 19-29.

²⁴⁰ Cothen, 102-07.

²⁴¹ Ibid, 107.

²⁴² Sherman, *Reckoning*, 38.

²⁴³ October 4, 1980, *Dallas Morning News*, quoted in Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: B&H Pub Group, 2000), 119.

The Conservative hegemony required capturing the SBC presidency to control appointments to governing boards of its agencies. The primary target was the six seminaries which trained more ministers than any other American academies. In the president's first year, he (there has never been a female SBC president) nominates a Committee on Committees. In his second year, that Committee nominates a Committee on Nominations approved by SBC vote. The third year that Committee recommends agency boards also approved by SBC vote. This trickle-down plan assured Conservative control of the seminaries within a decade.²⁴⁴

The SBC is the largest Protestant denomination in America with 16.2 million members. Comparatively United Methodists have 7.8 million and Episcopalians 2 million.²⁴⁵ In Houston 1979 SBC with 15,760 voters, Rogers won the presidency on the first ballot with 51.36 percent of the votes over five other candidates.²⁴⁶ He disavowed any relationship to the Patterson/Pressler political movement.²⁴⁷ Moderates objected Pressler had directed operatives from a skybox above the fray.²⁴⁸ There were accusations of voting irregularities by both sides.²⁴⁹ "All this was new to Southern Baptists. Previous elections were little more than popularity contests. This was different."²⁵⁰ Conservative historian Sutton affirms the Conservative pre-

²⁴⁴ Ammerman, *Battles*, 170.

²⁴⁵ Thom S. Rainer, "15 Largest Protestant Denominations in the United States." *Church Answers* (blog), March 26, 2013, <https://churchanswers.com/blog/the-15-largest-protestant-denominations-in-the-united-states/>.

²⁴⁶ Shurden, *Struggle*, ix.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, x; Morgan, 50.

²⁴⁸ Sherman, *Reckoning*, 135.

²⁴⁹ Morgan, 41-43.

²⁵⁰ Sherman, *Reckoning*, 135

convention political activity. Along with a barrage of directive letters to state organizers, there were meetings in at least fifteen states.²⁵¹

At the 1980 SBC in St. Louis, Rogers refused a typical automatic second term. Another Conservative, Bailey Smith of Del City, OK was elected president against five other candidates by 51.67 percent (13,844 voters). Additionally, a resolution “On Doctrinal Integrity” was adopted demanding SBC agencies “employ, and continue the employment of, faculty members and professional staff who believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible, infallibility in the original manuscripts, and that the Bible is truth without any error.”²⁵² Moderates were further alarmed September 12-13, 1980 when Pressler announced Conservatives would “need to go for the jugular—we need to go for the trustees.” This resulted in the first meeting of the “Gatlinburg Gang” September 25-26 to organise politically against Conservatives.²⁵³ Sherman objected that Smith’s church only contributed 1.1 percent to SBC causes, far beneath support from Moderate churches.²⁵⁴ Conservatives continued their hegemony at the 1981 Los Angeles SBC. Smith was re-elected with 60.24 percent vote (13,529 voters). Moderates decided to break tradition and oppose Smith for a second term. In a Fort Worth meeting they voted unanimously to oppose Smith.²⁵⁵ His opponent was Abner McCall, revered president of Baylor University, whose defeat astonished Moderates.

The 1982 SBC saw 20,456 voters elect Conservative Jimmy Draper with 56.97 percent of the vote over Moderate Duke McCall, a revered president of its oldest seminary and former SBC

²⁵¹ Sutton, 95.

²⁵² Shurden, *Struggle*, xi ; Morgan, 50-51.

²⁵³ Shurden, *Struggle*, x-xi

²⁵⁴ Sherman, *Reckoning*, 135.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

Executive Director. In the 1983 Pittsburgh SBC, Draper was elected without opposition while the convention turned back a Moderate challenge to nominations for boards.²⁵⁶ The meeting was low key, the controversy muted, and was called “The Peace of Pittsburgh.”²⁵⁷

In the 1984 Kansas City, MO, SBC Conservative Charles Stanley, pastor of FBC Atlanta, GA and global television preacher, was elected with 52.18 percent of the vote over Moderate Grady Cothen and independent John Sullivan. Moderates bitterly complained it was only Stanley’s second time to attend the SBC, to which they had given their lives.²⁵⁸ Alarmed seminary presidents launched a fiery attack on Conservatives. Southwestern’s Russell Dilday blamed Conservatives for “an incipient Orwellian mentality,” which earned him the vitriolic disdain of the Conservative press.²⁵⁹ Southern Seminary president Roy Honeycutt called for a “Holy War,” all intended to unseat Stanley in Dallas at the 1985 SBC.²⁶⁰ Both sides recognised the 1985 Dallas meeting was decisive.

Dallas 1985

The zenith of the controversy was the 1985 Dallas SBC meeting. Exceeding the wildest expectations, 45,129 voters overflowed all facilities creating logistical problems, more than twice the attendance of previous conventions. As noted above, the trickle-down nature of presidential appointments takes three years to complete. The Conservative appointment process of 1985 would lead to Conservative majorities controlling every agency in 1988. Honeycutt

²⁵⁶ Shurden, *Struggle*, xiii

²⁵⁷ Morgan, 63.

²⁵⁸ Sherman, *Reckoning*, 167.

²⁵⁹ Morgan, 66.

²⁶⁰ Shurden, *Struggle*, xiii, Morgan, 66.

joined with other agency heads attacking Patterson/Pressler for “unscrupulous use of power and manipulation.”²⁶¹ Stanley won re-election with 55.3 percent over Moderate Winfred Moore with 44.7 percent. Moore was theologically a Conservative and pastor of FBC Amarillo, TX but objected to the Patterson/Pressler machine. It was widely recognised there was no theological difference between the two. Moore tolerated SBC inclusion of non-inerrantists and magnified unity around missional programs.²⁶²

This was the first of several theologically Conservative Moderate candidates who opposed the Patterson/Pressler machine and exclusion of non-inerrantists from SBC positions. Moore and subsequent politically Moderate but theologically conservative candidates demonstrate the desperation to find a candidate that could stop the machine. Patterson/Pressler continued their insistence they neither led a political movement nor named a candidate. They claimed they awaited after prayer for someone to emerge.²⁶³ What emerged were two new accusations. There was credible evidence of voter irregularities, perhaps in the thousands.²⁶⁴ In another development following the 1985 SBC, Robert Crowder and Henry Cooper filed a lawsuit challenging Stanley’s rulings that left Conservative appointees in office. They lost the suit when a federal judge ruled the government had no jurisdiction in church matters.²⁶⁵ Sherman later lamented, “It was in Dallas that I allowed myself to think of losing the SBC to political Fundamentalism.”²⁶⁶ The Dallas SBC authorised a committee to seek peace.

²⁶¹ Morgan, 70.

²⁶² Ammerman, *Battles*, 4.

²⁶³ Sutton, 95-97.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁶⁵ Morgan, 72-74.

²⁶⁶ Sherman, *Reckoning*, 174.

The Peace Committee

Of the three controversies treated, only the SBC featured an official “Peace Committee” to discover reasons for and solutions to conflict. Former SBC president Franklin Paschall proposed the idea to the Tennessee Baptist Pastor’s Conference in November 1984, a committee composed of “representatives of our agencies and leaders of the conservative group” to seek peace.²⁶⁷ At the 1985 Dallas SBC, Paschall and Florida’s Bill Hickeman moved the creation of a “special committee” with a ten-point charge aimed at finding sources of SBC conflict and suggesting ways to solve it.²⁶⁸ The unnamed Committee voted in its first meeting August 5-6, 1986 to name itself the “Peace Committee.”²⁶⁹

The Peace Committee featured “feverish phone calls” negotiating its membership.²⁷⁰ Historians categorised the twenty-two members into various groups. Ammerman divided the committee into aggressive Conservatives (Rogers and Jerry Vines), aggressive Moderates (Sherman and Hull), and the remainder somewhere in the middle.²⁷¹ After the initial twenty men were named, two women were added, Conservative Jodi Chapman and Moderate Caroline Gregory.²⁷² Morgan, an outspoken Moderate historian, discerned five groups: five staunch Conservatives, three outspoken Moderates, three leaning towards Conservatives, three leaning

²⁶⁷ “Paschall Offers Proposal to Resolve Crisis in SBC,” *Baptist and Reflector* 150, no. 47 (November 21, 1984), 1.

²⁶⁸ “Proceedings #57,” in *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, June 11-13, 1985, 4; Document 33, “SBC Motion to Establish a Peace Committee” in *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War*, eds. Walter B. Shurden and Randy Shepley (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 175-76.

²⁶⁹ Sutton, 152.

²⁷⁰ Ammerman, *Battles*, 9.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 94.

towards Moderates, and the remainder non-aligned.²⁷³ Committee member Houston megachurch pastor Ed Young named members Conservatives, Moderates, and “denominationalists” who wanted peace at the price of doctrine. Young numbered himself with Conservatives, along with Rogers and Vines. He identified Hull, Sherman, and Moore as Moderates.²⁷⁴ Cothen divided the Committee into seven members with “traditional Baptist values” (a phrase left undefined), eight on the “rightist,” five in the middle, and two who wavered.²⁷⁵ Patterson divided the committee into five groups: “rock solid conservatives, “conservatives and usually dependable,” “unaffiliated,” “moderate liberals,” and “liberals.”²⁷⁶ Theological handicapping the Committee both anticipated and explained its outcomes. The Committee was charged to bring reports to the 1986 and 1987 SBC.

In its initial 1986 report, the Committee identified both doctrinal and political issues as divisive. These included the nature of biblical inspiration, political partisanship, religious press involvement, appointive powers of the presidency, registration irregularities at the SBC, and SBC publications. The Committee named “theological concerns” and “political activities” as primary problems.²⁷⁷ For future work the Committee intended to meet with agency heads, seminary presidents, urged a moratorium on political activities, pleaded for temperate language, and called for fairness in trustee appointments.²⁷⁸

²⁷³ Morgan, 76.

²⁷⁴ Charles Martin Jacumin, “A Theological and Historical Analysis of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee 1985-87” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 61.

²⁷⁵ Cothen, 207-08.

²⁷⁶ Jacumin, 83.

²⁷⁷ Charles G. Fuller, “Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee,” *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, June 10, 1986, 253.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 257.

The most consequential 1986 event was a meeting of seminary presidents prior to the agency heads' retreat with the Peace Committee. In a joint meeting with the Committee, the presidents issued "The Glorieta Statement" October 22, 1986. Moderates would execrate this statement while Conservatives were more comfortable with it. The statement called seminaries to reflect Conservative views adequately on their faculties. The critical statement from The Glorieta Statement was, "The sixty-six books of the Bible are not errant in any area of reality. We hold to their infallible power and binding authority." They further pledged to have theological balance in classrooms, faculty selection, chapels, and stop alleged ridicule/intimidation of Conservative students.²⁷⁹ An immediate result was Sherman's resignation from the Committee when the meeting concluded. He refused to join the 19-0 vote affirming The Glorieta Statement: "What fundamentalists wanted, the Peace Committee has helped them get." After resigning, Sherman bitterly objected to the Committee's use of the 1963 *Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM): "This is not the Baptist way. It has never been the Baptist way. It is a deviation from the Baptist way to such measure until it is just the opposite of 'being Baptist.'" The reason Baptists broke from Rome and Canterbury was objection to just such forced creeds.²⁸⁰

Sherman expressed the chagrin of Moderates as they encountered the Committee's authorised report. Southeastern's Randall Lolley soon rejected The Glorieta Statement interpretation as requiring belief in inerrancy. He further indicated Baptists had no business signing creedal statements. When Southern's Roy Honeycutt met with alumni he backed away

²⁷⁹ Document 37, "The Glorieta Statement of the Seminary Presidents," in *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War*, eds. Walter B. Shurden and Randy Shepley (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 195.

²⁸⁰ Cecil Sherman, "Freedom of Individual Interpretation," in *Being Baptist Means Freedom*, ed. Alan Neely (Charlotte: The Southern Baptist Alliance, 1988), 11-12.

from the statement.²⁸¹ By the December 1986 Peace Committee meeting, Rogers was dismayed at

Honeycutt's backtracking and led the Committee to adopt a forceful statement requiring seminaries to comply with the Conservative view.²⁸²

The Critical 1987 Peace Committee Report

The substantial Committee report occurred at the June 1987 St. Louis, MO SBC with 25,607 voting. The report was promised one month before the SBC, but it appeared two hours before its discussion at 9:00 a.m. President Rogers only allowed thirty minutes for discussion in the face of protests to delay the report until 1988. The report passed with 96 percent approval.²⁸³

Meeting fourteen times, the Committee reported the “extent and nature” of biblical authority was the primary cause of conflict.²⁸⁴ The controversy centred on the interpretation of Article I of the 1963 BFM, the adopted SBC confession. The controverted phrase described the Bible as “truth without any mixture of error.”²⁸⁵ The Committee acknowledged this phrase meant different things to each group.²⁸⁶ For Conservatives, “it means all areas—historical, scientific, theological, and philosophical. The others hold the ‘truth’ relates only to matters of faith and practice.” As an example of SBC diversity, the Committee reported some believe in a

²⁸¹ Sutton, 172-73.

²⁸² Ibid., 175-76.

²⁸³ Ibid., 178.

²⁸⁴ Charles G. Fuller, “Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee,” *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, June 16, 1987, 233.

²⁸⁵ Herschel Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message: A Statement Adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention* [May 9, 1963] (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1963).

²⁸⁶ *Annual*, 1987, 234.

literal individually created Adam and Eve while others see them as representatives of humanity, some believe that all biblical history and miracles happened exactly as written and others do not, and some hold to the stated authorship of every biblical book and others do not. Simply put, the battle was between fundamentalistic literalists and others who accepted some or all findings of higher critical studies. None of this astonished anyone familiar with the battle, but it gave the items an official recognition.²⁸⁷ The Committee reported the Conservative view was “inadequately” represented in some seminaries.²⁸⁸ This was the first official statement acknowledging what Conservatives saw as the primary issue and Moderates viewed as a Conservative camouflage to gain power.

Reaction to the report varied within both camps. Non-aligned Hobbs and Moderate Hull were “optimistic.” Pressler was “elated.” Rogers hoped malcontent Moderates would “step aside.” Dilday objected that the problem was political, not theological. Carolyn Weatherford, Director of the Women’s Missionary Union, had a “negative reaction.” Rather than lower tensions, the report increased them. Moderates recognised they were condemned to a prolonged rear-guard action in a lost cause.²⁸⁹ Reception of the Glorieta Statement left the impression that four seminaries agreed with its definitions. It was shortly seen that Southern and Southeastern presidents rejected the statement. Lolley resigned the presidency of Southeastern in 1987²⁹⁰ and Honeycutt retired in 1992 after pressure from Conservative trustees.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ “Report of the Southern Baptist Convention Peace Committee,” Baptist2Baptist (blog), June 16, 1987, <http://www.baptist2baptist.net/b2barticle.asp?ID=65>.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Morgan, 87.

²⁹⁰ Randall P. Lolley Papers, Special Collections and Archives, ZSR Library, Wake Forest University, Wake Forest, NC, <https://wakespace.lib.wfu.edu/handle/10339/84644>.

²⁹¹ Roy Honeycutt, “Retirement Announcement,” October 12, 1992, <http://www.worldcat.org/title/28855650>.

Fuller hoped sharing meals and prayer would ameliorate the tension. It did not.

Additionally, the Committee had no enforcement power.²⁹² Ammerman notes, “The Peace Committee report was, then, something of a treaty written by the victors.”²⁹³ Cothen criticised the report for inconsistency.²⁹⁴ McCall confessed Conservatives had won and Moderates needed to accept it and learn to live with it.²⁹⁵

Interviews with Surviving Participants

Most Controversy principals are deceased. Patterson (1942-) is eighty and Moderate Walter Shurden is eighty-five. Patterson was president of Southeastern Seminary (1992-2003) and Southwestern Seminary (2003-2018) as well as SBC president (1998-2000). He was fired by Southwestern in 2018 for misrepresenting student rape cases.²⁹⁶ Shurden (1937-) served as Dean of the theological faculty at Southern Seminary and for twenty-five years as Calloway Professor of Christianity at Mercer University and founding director of the Center for Baptist Studies. I interviewed both concerning the research question: what would they propose as missed opportunities for peace? Patterson recalled Jimmy Draper, SBC president 1982-84, invited fifteen Moderates and fifteen Conservatives for a ten-day pilgrimage to Israel.²⁹⁷ The combatants did not know each other. Friendships forged on the trip lasted throughout the controversy and after. That missed opportunity proved ineffective. Patterson cites as a later, substantial missed

²⁹² Ammerman, *Battles*, 220-221.

²⁹³ *Ibid*, 323.

²⁹⁴ Cothen, 224.

²⁹⁵ McCall, 419.

²⁹⁶ “SWBTS: Paige Patterson Terminated ‘Effective Immediately,’” Baptist Press, May 30, 2018, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/swbts-paige-patterson-terminated-effective-immediately/>.

²⁹⁷ Paige Patterson, interview by author, Dallas, August 29, 2022.

opportunity a meeting of victorious Conservatives at FBC Jacksonville, FL where he informed them “you cannot maintain a war more than twenty years.” He based this statement on the fifth century BCE military treatise *The Art of War*.²⁹⁸ At one level this reference demonstrates Patterson’s conception of the Controversy as war. At another level the response of Rogers to Patterson’s proposal revealed a missed opportunity unnoted outside this interview.

Patterson claims Rogers proposed dividing the seminaries between both camps. Conservatives could take Southwestern, New Orleans, and Golden Gate while Moderates retained Southern, Midwestern, and Southeastern. Rogers’s proposal was met with immediate rejection by host pastor Homer Lindsay, Jr., who gathered his notes and complained, “I thought I was in a meeting of prophets.” Two former SBC presidents present, Draper (1982-84) and Vines (1988-90) said nothing, so Rogers’s speculation died for lack of interest. I have found no record of this meeting in any literature. If Patterson’s recollection is accurate, this possible remediation would have been a historic concession by Conservatives. This proposal is amazingly similar to one made by Sherman, who proposed to the Peace Committee the division of the seminaries, three each to the two factions. No seminary professor would be fired. Churches could support whichever variety they wished. The same approach would be used for the production of literature, with two lines serving Conservatives and Moderates. Sherman called his plan “Creating a Broad Denomination.”²⁹⁹ Ironically, similar to Rogers’s recommendation meeting with silence so did Sherman’s on the Peace Committee.

Shurden considers the Controversy’s first four years presented an opportunity for peace if Moderates had taken the initiative.³⁰⁰ He indicates “Fundamentalists” did not initially believe

²⁹⁸ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, ed. James Clavell (New York: Delacorte Press, 1983).

²⁹⁹ Sherman, *Reckoning*, 197.

³⁰⁰ Walter Shurden, interview by author, Waco, TX, August 25, 2022.

they could continue winning. Moderates controlled the denominational machinery. “We wanted to win just like the Fundamentalists.” He now considers it would have been possible 1979-1983 for Moderates to have reached some agreement while Conservatives were unsure of continued winning. Both sides “wanted the whole ball of wax.” He also laments the lack of Moderate leadership on the Peace Committee. “Except for Cecil [Sherman] there was not a good Moderate debater. Only Cecil would take Adrian [Rogers] on.” When Sherman resigned the Peace Committee after the Glorieta statement there was no aggressive Moderate remaining. Also, Shurden recalls Moderate academic Larry McSwain asserting that Peace Committee member Daniel Vestal would have made a more effective chair than Charles Fuller: “Charles did not lead the Committee; the Committee led him.” Vestal was an inerrantist but despised the Conservative strategy. He could have led the Committee as a theological inerrantist who rejected the Conservative political agenda of forced conformity. Shurden agrees that division of seminaries between factions would have abated the split but opines it would only have worked for a season followed by a final amicable divorce.

Analysis of Missed Opportunities

The Moderate establishment before 1979 was aware of Conservative discontent since the 1960s. Scant evidence exists Moderates took malcontent Conservatives seriously. Discerning Moderates might have included emerging younger Conservative leaders in the denominational structure rather than marginalising them before 1979. There is copious evidence Conservatives felt unheard and unheeded. If astute denominational patriarchs McCall and Cothen had embraced Rogers and given Conservatives a chair at the table, the outcome might have been different. Denominationalists might have understood that any battle over the Bible in the SBC would be won by those who claimed to believe more of the Bible, however spurious their motives might

have been. This is reminiscent of the adroit motion by Woelfkin at the NBC when he substituted the adequacy of the NT for the New Hampshire Confession.³⁰¹

Shurden's opinion that the Conflict could have been solved earlier has merit.

Conservatives were uncertain in the early 1980s they would win enough elections to install their agenda. There is historical irony that Sherman and Rogers, nemeses on the Peace Committee, agreed on the wisdom of dividing seminaries equally between both sides. The battle's focus was on the seminaries more than other agencies. This could have created a "broad tent" denomination where individual churches could send their members and money to trusted academies. A similar outcome could have been achieved with two types of literature from the SBC owned publishers. Such a plan would not have worked easily, but it might have delayed the battle or sloughed off extremists on both sides early when Conservatives were unsure of success.

An early settlement would have avoided the bitter, personal acrimony that characterised the Conflict's latter years. Although the Conservative outcome was assured by the appointments following 1985, the growing dominance of Conservatives on the boards, the dismissal of presidents, and the outcries of faculty dominated the SBC for another decade. Families, friendships, churches, and state Baptist entities suffered divisions that have still not healed. The pain was so acute because the stakes were so high. Public embarrassment in secular media was so adverse that many Baptist churches renamed themselves as "Community Church" or some other ambiguous name, "Cornerstone" or the like. Uncounted Moderates joined mainline Protestant churches while Conservatives joined non-denominational "Bible Churches" to escape the ignominy of the battle.

Since the Conservative takeover, the SBC has steadily declined. The SBC historically defined itself by the number of annual baptisms. That was the celebrated benchmark of

³⁰¹ See pg. 38 above.

Conservative churches. In 1972 under the leadership of Moderate SBC president Jimmy Allen the SBC baptised 445,725 persons.³⁰² For fourteen years the SBC has declined under the Conservative hegemony to a diminished 154,701 baptisms in 2021.³⁰³ This decline does reflect similar declines by other Protestant denominations and could be caused by increased USA secularisation. By the Conservatives' own yardstick, however, orthodoxy did not lead to orthopraxy.

³⁰² Will Hall, "Analysis: What Do the Numbers Mean—Is the SBC in Decline? Part 1 Memberships and Baptism," Baptist Press, June 10, 2009, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/analysis-what-do-the-numbers-mean-is-the-sbc-in-declinepart-1-membership-baptisms/>.

³⁰³ Carol Pipes, "Southern Baptists See Baptism and Giving Rebound in 2021." Lifeway Newsroom, May 12, 2022, <https://news.lifeway.com/2022/05/12/southern-baptists-see-baptisms-and-giving-rebound-in-2021/>.

CONCLUSION

This work assesses counterfactual outcomes in three Baptist controversies. Most of these are possibilities with a few probabilities. None of the outcomes are inevitable. These counterfactuals are examined with Cahalan's practical theology lens that focuses on past biblical texts and traditions on one hand and on the "living text" of particular communities on the other. Each text informs the other in a reciprocal relationship.

To solve the controversy early is the most probable positive counterfactual outcome. In the Downgrade Spurgeon had communicated to Union secretary Booth his displeasure for months. Spurgeon's own magazine trumpeted warnings for seven months before he resigned. While Booth privately agreed with Spurgeon, he refused to address the obvious crisis at Sheffield where Spurgeon was lampooned. In the larger context most Protestant denominations engaged in the battle over higher criticism. Booth and Union leaders could have anticipated Spurgeon's resignation and sought some earlier palliative confession that might have assuaged Spurgeon. Booth's refusal to acknowledge his own private complaints to Spurgeon virtually assured Spurgeon's resignation.

The NBC and SBC present a contrast. It is improbable the NBC controversy would have been solved by any earlier action other than NBC seminaries refusing critical views and dismissing most faculty. The denominational establishment, press, and seminaries adopted higher critical views by the 1890s. NBC academics, presidents, and loyalists provided a front too formidable for Riley and Fundamentalists to overcome. By the 1920s pre-convention Fundamentalist rallies the dye was long before cast. The Fundamentalists lost every significant 1920s vote.

Contrastively, a solution for the SBC controversy was probable if it had been addressed early. Denominationalists observed the two Genesis controversies with a misplaced assurance

their plebiscite would hold. The opposite happened. The Conservatives became hyper-vigilant, held rallies, published newspapers, and organised politically. As Sherman complained, the Moderate persons he was trying to save considered him an unneeded, irritating activist. The Conservatives were excluded from trusteeships and major platforms, and they knew it. If SBC loyalists had listened, not capitulated, to Adrian Rogers in the 1970s, the Patterson/Pressler coalition would likely have failed, and some liveable compromise succeeded. The abiding practical lesson is demonstrable. Early action is necessary, particularly before personalities are in conflict.

Baptist theology insists on the priesthood of every believer and soul competency; not only is every Baptist free to define her faith, so is every human of any persuasion. This is a reaction to earlier persecution of Baptists by established religion. The competency of each soul to approach God as an individual without any intermediary is Baptist DNA. Each Baptist church is also thus free. No hierarchy, synod, or magisterium can force any belief on a Baptist church. Larger Baptist bodies can exclude a church considered heterodox but cannot dissolve the church. In all three controversies, the Left magnified the Baptist freedom trait and the Right contested its pre-eminence. The Right did not deny individual and congregational independence but balked at granting it to collective missional and educational efforts. Institutionalists insisted their missionary and professorial employees had the same freedom as individual Baptists. Conservatives insisted on doctrinal unity as the basis of missional educational service. This inherent Baptist conflict has never been solved. A possible counterfactual outcome would be an agreement on shared humanitarian cooperation that did not engage controverted theological issues. The ironic proposal by both Conservative Rogers and Moderate Sherman to divide the six seminaries between the two factions and cooperate where they could suggests such a possible counterfactual. Another model would have been the adoption of the failed Columbia Conference

joint NBC/SBC confession that would have set a minimal doctrinal threshold while finding commonality.

The Right's inability to compromise at any point defined the SBC controversy. The NBC Right might have been more pliable. Spurgeon may have spent his last years in an echo chamber listening to malcontents while holding himself away from Baptists who insisted they were as orthodox as he. His refusal to receive Thew and Greenhough, who begged to visit with him to demonstrate their orthodoxy, does not present him at his best. As palm trees bend without breaking in a hurricane, Baptists bodies must bend at some point to cohere. The Baptist Left will usually tolerate the Right as a younger sibling but the Right wishes to exclude the Left. To insist on biblical inerrancy excludes many Baptists that otherwise are orthodox by any common definition. At the same time, there must be some boundary on the Left that remains in historical Christianity. The NBC Left that defended the Chicago School defended some who no longer believed in an ontological God. The pleading letters from Montgomery to Mathews about his colleagues demonstrate that problem. For Baptists to unify, both Left and Right must have a boundary.

An ancillary problem in all three controversies was whether to identify suspected heterodox individuals. The Union censured Spurgeon for generalised charges. In the NBC and SBC controversies, those who named the heterodox were considered "witch hunters." Those who did not name the heterodox were blasted for vague generalities. A possible solution would be for the accuser to do what Spurgeon refused, go to the offending person (Matt 18:15-20). This is explicit dominical teaching related to Christian controversy. In some instances, this would have mitigated problems. The Columbia Conference where suspicious NBC and SBC leaders met in what was considered bilaterally a virtual Pentecost by most attendees demonstrates the extenuating nature of such meetings.

Also significant is the journalistic role in controversies. The typical Baptist layperson depended on a pastor and the press for information. Except for the rare verbatim report, in each controversy the issues were filtered through journalists with a viewpoint. Spurgeon had his magazine while Baptists had two others. The NBC controversy pitted *The Watchman-Examiner* against the new *Baptist* founded to defend the Left and promote its causes. The SBC controversy produced a library of periodicals, pamphlets, and histories representing the combatants. Most analysis today is based on filtered material. This suggests that then and now Baptists need to read carefully multiple representative works. This work has attempted to do so. One can imagine how much these controversies would have been augmented by today's social media, which will agitate future controversies.³⁰⁴

In the Baptist way, these counterfactual suggestions may be models, but just that. As a free church tradition with inevitable conflict, one hopes that counterfactual possibilities become future realities, for God's sake.

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³⁰⁴ Kyongseok Kim, Jooyoung Kim, and Leonard N. Reid, “Experiencing Motivational Conflict on Social Media in a Crisis Situation: The Case of Chick-fil-A Same-Sex Marriage Controversy,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 71 (June 2017): 32-41, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.035>.

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