



Southern Baptists at the Crossroads

Returning to the Old Paths

Special SBC Sesquicentennial Issue, 1845-1995

Issue 19/20

Winter/Spring 1995

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The Founders Journal

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The Founders Journal is a quarterly publication which takes as its theological framework the first recognized confession of faith that Southern Baptists produced, [*The Abstract of Principles*](#).

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Southern Baptists at the Crossroads

Returning to the Old Paths

Thomas Ascol

Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls."

Jeremiah 6:16

On May 8, 1845, two hundred ninety-three "delegates" (as they were then called) from Baptist churches in the South assembled in Augusta, Georgia, to form a new denomination. From that first meeting to the present, the Southern Baptist Convention has been marvelously blessed by our Lord. Missions, education, benevolence, social concerns--these are among the many avenues of service which Southern Baptists have cooperatively traveled during the last 150 years.

During our century-and-a-half pilgrimage Southern Baptists have made great strides in many of these areas. We have seen our foreign missionary force swell to over 4,000 men and women serving under the Foreign Mission Board in more than 175 countries. Through the Home Mission Board we have an almost equal number of appointees serving in our own nation. Approximately 10,000 students are currently being trained in our six seminaries. The 1995 goal for gifts to support our various mission efforts through the Cooperative Program is \$150 million.

Indeed, Southern Baptists have much for which to be thankful as we approach the sesquicentennial anniversary of our convention. However, and with due appreciation for the many outward signs of growth and prosperity, all is not well in Southern Baptist Zion. Spiritual life and vitality cannot be measured simply by large numbers and growing organizations. Otherwise, we would be compelled to give a clean bill of health to the Mormons, Moonies and Jehovah's Witnesses, all of whom have experienced phenomenal growth over the last two decades.

It does not take much analysis to discover that all across the convention churches are infected with some serious maladies. One of the most obvious is meaningless church membership. Every serious-minded pastor is aware of this.

Meaningless Membership

Southern Baptists have in recent years topped the 15 million mark on our membership rolls. Our fastest growing type of member, however, is of the "non-resident" variety. Add to this the fact that 20% of our members are "inactive" (they are resident--they have not moved away--but they neither attend nor contribute to their church). What this means is that only half of our 15 million members can in any sense be counted as active (that is, they contributed financially or attended at least one service last year).

Even the secular media recognizes the deception of our inflated membership statistics. *The Wall Street Journal* exposed the facade in an article entitled, "Official Number of Southern Baptists Is Overstated, Even Their Leaders Agree."[\[1\]](#)

Baptists have historically championed the twin convictions of *believers'* baptism and a *believers'* church. The Baptist Faith and Message's article 7 reflects a long and consistent heritage when it affirms:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers who are associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel, observing the two ordinances of Christ, committed to His teachings, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth.

A church is comprised of members who are in covenant with each other, who *observe...are committed...exercise...and seek*. In other words, they are active. The Bible knows nothing of "inactive" or "non-resident" church members. Why then do such people comprise the majority of our membership?

We will never get to the bottom of this question without first examining the current method of adding new members. Specifically, we need to reexamine modern evangelistic practices. When Roy Edgemon, the Director of Discipleship Training for the Sunday School Board, studied this issue, he concluded that too much of our evangelism is "manipulative," "shallow," "abortive," and "without integrity."^[2] It is more interested in decisions than disciples.

Too often modern evangelistic technique is geared toward getting a sinner to agree with some facts and recite a prayer. Once this occurs, it is assumed he is saved. Those who go through these steps are commonly judged ready for baptism and church membership. The consequence of such practice, Edgemon observes, is that "we lose thousands of people who are going to die and go to hell, thinking they're saved. And they've never been saved." This is a sobering thought.

The Bible recognizes the reality of false faith. Demons have faith (James 2:19). Simon Magus had faith (Acts 8:13; cf. vv. 21-23). Many Jews who were impressed with Jesus' miraculous power put their faith in him (John 2:23-25). But the Bible teaches that none of these were truly converted. They did not possess saving--that is, life-changing--faith in Christ.

Likewise, the first century church was not immune to church members who ceased coming to church--dropouts, if you will. They did not, however, keep on regarding them as members who should be classified as either "non-resident" or "inactive." Rather, these dropouts were categorized on the basis of what they demonstrated themselves to be--false converts. The Apostle John explains, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 John 2:19).

The late evangelist, Vance Havner, used to say, "We Southern Baptists are many, but we ain't much." Because of deadly evangelistic practices, we are not as many as we may think, either.

Moral Relativism

Another serious problem which plagues our churches today is moral relativism. This actually grows out of the shallow evangelism that has filled our church rolls with unconverted members. When unregenerate people find refuge in church membership they inevitably dilute the body's corporate commitment to holiness. If a little leaven leavens the whole lump, how much more devastating is a lot of leaven? No matter how congenial and affable he may be, an unconverted church member inevitably retains unregenerate appetites and perspectives. Allegiance to biblical principles which govern Christian and church life will necessarily wane where there is not a whole-hearted

submission to Christ as King.

The spiritual disciplines for daily life (prayer, Bible study, worship, evangelism, fasting, etc.) are not only not practiced by the majority of our members anymore, they are rarely even recognized as essential ingredients of vital Christianity. Today the Christian life is typically depicted in emotional terms. Feelings predominate. If _____ (you may fill in the blank here with any number of possibilities: the sermon, the pastor, the choir special, the Sunday School class, the service, the church, etc.) does not make you feel just right, then, by all means, make a change! Many have done just that and so have dropped out, moved on or simply drifted off into spiritual wastelands.

Further, the corporate discipline of the church has gone the way of the Mastodon in the thinking of most Southern Baptists. There was a time when church discipline was recognized by Protestants in general and Baptists in particular as one of the distinguishing marks of a true church. The teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 was not only regarded as inerrant, the steps which he outlined there were actually practiced by the churches. Today it is tragically common to have church members living in open immorality with absolutely no response from the congregation of which they are a part.

Thus it hardly even shocks us to read Hollywood badgirl and former *Playboy* pinup Shannon Doherty describe herself in *TV Guide* as "just a nice, Southern Baptist, Republican girl." Of course she is! Why should shameless immorality stand in the way of being a church member? Somewhere along the line, Southern Baptists have lost their moral nerve. The world's relativism ("nothing is always right or wrong") and sentimentalism ("because I love you I will let you") have displaced the Bible's moral absolutism and genuine love that cares enough to correct.

John Dagg, the first Southern Baptist theologian to produce a systematic theology textbook (see Mark Dever's article), argued that "when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it." If Dagg is correct, what does that say for the state of our churches today?

The Root of the Problem

As disconcerting as our membership mirage and diluted spirituality may be, they are symptoms of deeper difficulties. Like cracked walls in a house, they betray the existence of far more serious, foundational problems.

Why do we have so many people on our church rolls who give little or no evidence of being converted? Why do shamelessly low levels of morality seem to be so widespread and readily accepted in our churches? To find the answers we must reexamine the very foundation of our church life and practice.

It is precisely at this point that our Southern Baptist heritage has so much to offer in the way of help and guidance. The serious issues reviewed above were not problematic for Southern Baptists of the last century. Why is that? What has changed? What did they have that we are missing?

Simply put, the answer is doctrine. The men and women who founded and shaped the Southern Baptist Convention in its formative years placed a high premium on sound doctrine. They took for granted that which we have all but forgotten, namely, that the foundation of vibrant Christian living and healthy Christian churches is solid, biblical teaching.

This was not a novel idea with them. It is taught everywhere in the Bible. When Jesus prayed that His followers would progress in holiness He did so by asking the Father to "sanctify them by the truth" (John 17:17). If we want to

grow spiritually, then we must progress in our understanding and application of God's truth revealed in His Word.

The very structure of Paul's letters demonstrates the absolute necessity of a sound doctrinal foundation to an effective Christian life. The first 11 chapters of Romans set forth strong, weighty doctrine (including teachings on sin, justification, union with Christ, sanctification, and election). The last 5 chapters are filled with practical exhortations for daily life. These latter principles of conduct are rooted in the previous doctrinal exposition, as Paul indicates when he makes the transition from doctrine to practice: "I beseech you *therefore* [emphasis mine], brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service" (12:1). Paul bases his appeal to live righteously on the glorious doctrines which he just expounded. This pattern is repeated throughout his writings.

Our Southern Baptist forefathers saw this and followed suit. They knew that there could never be right living without right belief. So they emphasized doctrinal teaching and preaching. In the pulpits, in the Sunday Schools, on the mission fields-and most certainly in the college and seminary classrooms!-priority was given to setting forth doctrinal truth as the foundation of spiritual life.

So important was this emphasis that in 1891 the Sunday School Board commissioned John Broadus to produce a catechism that could be used to teach sound doctrine to children. That same board published *The New Convention Normal Manual* in 1913 as an instruction manual for Sunday School teachers. According to the publishers, this book, with its clear affirmation of doctrinal distinctives, helped "standardize the thinking of our people."

In 1874 the Southern Baptist Publication Society even published a *Church Members' Handbook of Theology* to help "secure [the] `one faith'" among Southern Baptists by helping them to "give more attention to the study of the plan of salvation." This the book does by including lengthy chapters on the doctrines of total depravity, the human will, regeneration, justification, atonement, perseverance of the saints, and predestination and election.

One thing is quite certain: our Southern Baptist forefathers were absolutely convinced of the necessity of understanding and believing sound doctrine. They expected it and insisted on it for all of the members of their churches.

Not Just Any Doctrine

Early Southern Baptists were not content to believe just any ol' doctrine. They were concerned with *sound* doctrine. There was from the beginning widespread doctrinal agreement among them. The consensus was built around the great salvation doctrines which were commonly referred to as the "doctrines of grace." James Boyce, founder and first president of Southern Seminary, described these doctrines in 1874 as being part of the "prevailing principles" which had guided the denomination to that point (see Al Mohler's article). Forty-four years later in 1918 the second edition of *The New Convention Normal Manual* made the same claim by declaring, "nearly all Baptists believe what are usually termed the `doctrines of grace.'"

What are these "doctrines of grace?" Specifically, they are those truths of God's Word which reveal His sovereign majesty in salvation. Historically, these doctrines have also been nicknamed "Calvinism," not because John Calvin invented them, but because he very proficiently explained them in a systematic fashion. "Calvinism" has been badly abused as a descriptive theological term. Many people use it pejoratively to refer to fatalism and falsely say that it is opposed to evangelism. Nothing could be further from the truth (see Ernest Reisinger's article).

The biblical understanding of Calvinism may be summarized as follows: All men are totally depraved because of sin.

Everyone is born into the world, therefore, without spiritual ability to save himself and is deserving of God's wrath (Rom. 8:7-8; Eph. 2:1-3). Secondly, God is not willing to let the whole human race go to hell and has, from before the foundation of the world, chosen individual sinners to be saved. This choice is not based on any merit or justification found in the individual but is sovereignly exercised by God solely out of His grace and love (John 17:6; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13). Thirdly, those who are elected by God were given to Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world so that He should redeem them from sin (Matt. 1:21; John 6:37-40; 10:11, 14, 15, cf. 26-28). This He did in His earthly ministry by offering Himself as a substitute in His people's place. His death on the cross actually accomplished their redemption. Though His death has some benefit for everyone, it does not actually redeem everyone. Fourthly, God effectively applies to all of His elect that redemption which His Son secured on the cross. He does this by drawing and effectually calling these by the gospel so that they freely come to repent of sin and believe in Christ (Rom 8:30; 2 Tim 1:9). Fifthly, those who have been so chosen, redeemed and reborn will persevere in the faith and thus are eternally secure (Philip. 1:6; John 10:28-29).

As Tom Nettles and Timothy George convincingly demonstrate elsewhere in this journal, these doctrines comprised the common understanding of the gospel among Southern Baptists during their first seventy-five years of existence. They are clearly stated and defended in the writings of former convention leaders such as Boyce, Dagg, Broadus, W.B. Johnson, R.B.C. Howell, Basil Manly, Sr., Basil Manly, Jr., Patrick H. Mell, Richard Fuller, and Richard Furman, to name just a few.

Call it what you will--Calvinism, reformed theology, the doctrines of grace--these truths are nothing less than historic Southern Baptist orthodoxy. This is the theology which gave rise to the formation and early development of the great missionary and evangelistic enterprise which we know as the Southern Baptist Convention. This is what our forefathers believed to be the true teaching of Scripture. These are the doctrines on which they built their churches and which undergirded their ministries. And if these doctrines were true then, they are still true today, because the Bible has not changed, God has not changed, and truth does not change.

If we hope to see a renewal in our churches (how we live), then we must be willing to seek a renewal in our theology (what we believe). Our doctrinal heritage can be very helpful as it challenges our thinking and points us forward into a renewed understanding of God's Holy Word.

It is a wonderful providence that the sesquicentennial anniversary of our convention comes at a time when there is a growing recognition of our deep need for revival and reformation. We should take this opportunity to remember the rock from whence we are hewn and listen to those who have gone before us, on whose shoulders we stand--those former faithful servants who, though being dead, yet speak.

Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.





The Rise & Demise of Calvinism Among Southern Baptists

Tom Nettles

In Search of Restoration of the Land

A woman of Shunem had house and land. Her recognition of God's goodness to her was demonstrated in the care she gave to God's prophet, Elisha. God had also twice blessed her with one son. His conception was God's gift, and, when he died as a child accompanying his father to the field, God's prophet restored him to life. Her life was overflowing with the grace of God.

When a famine of seven years came to the land, Elisha forewarned her to leave. She did. At the end of seven years, she returned and immediately made her way to see the king, intending to appeal for the restoration of house and land. Providentially, at the moment she came before the king, the story of the resuscitation of her son had just been told him. When she verified its truth, the king immediately saw to it that all that was hers, including the produce of the intervening years, was restored (cf. 2 Kings 8:1-6).

The first two generations of Southern Baptists received nurture and kingdom zeal from a theological system they called "the doctrine of grace." Bequeathed to them by their Baptist forefathers, this understanding of God's infinite majesty and the pure gratuity of his saving activity defined Baptist faith and practice. Subsequent generations succumbed to the theological famine which plagued twentieth-century American Christianity. Perhaps by God's good providence a reminder of the grace that formed us will inspire a restoration-of, what?-let's say, of ourselves, to the fountain of God's life-giving grace and to the understanding of that grace which gave godly vision to our founders.

Early New England

The story of the commitment of early Baptists to the doctrines of grace is a picture of unity and fortitude. The earliest Baptist in America, Roger Williams, was a decided Calvinist and built his theory of religious liberty on his commitment to total depravity, unconditional election, effectual calling, perseverance of the saints, and definite atonement. Those who persecuted men over matters of conscience were guilty of an Arminian, popish error of free will, as if it lay in the power of a man's will to believe evangelically simply because the magistrate threatens him with punishment if he doesn't.

Isaac Backus, the historian of Baptists in New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had clear intentions to show that these Baptists were "sound in the faith and much acquainted with experimental and practical religion."^[1] He was careful to publish, therefore, not only their experiences of suffering for the sake of Baptist ecclesiology and freedom of conscience, but their confessions of faith on theological issues as well. The story of John Clarke, according to the method of Backus, would not be complete without establishing his theological convictions. Clarke, the founder of the second Baptist church in Rhode Island and America, begins his personal confession of faith by showing his unity with the Puritans and Pilgrims of Massachusetts in affirming that the "decree of God is that whereby God hath from eternity set down with himself whatsoever shall come to pass in time." A part of this decree consists of the unconditional election of certain individuals to salvation.

Election is the decree of God, of his free love, grace, and mercy, choosing some men to faith, holiness and eternal life, for the praise of his glorious mercy; I Thes. i. 4, II Thes. ii. 13, Rom. viii. 29, 30. The cause which moved the Lord to elect them who are chosen, was none other but his mere good will and pleasure, Luke xii, 32.[\[2\]](#)

Obadiah Holmes, Clarke's friend, shared not only his Baptist convictions and willingness to suffer for truth, but joined him in his confidence in God's wise and certain purpose in salvation. A distillation of total depravity, particular and unconditional election, effectuality calling, and final perseverance constitute his affirmation that "no man can come to the Son but they that are drawn by the Father to the Son, and they that come, he in no wise will cast away." This doctrine is wrapped in the historical certainty of the irrevocable nature of Christ's reconciling death: "I believe God hath laid the iniquity of all his elect and called ones, upon him," Holmes affirmed. For this reason we can be assured that "the Father is fully satisfied, and the debt is truly paid to the utmost farthing, and the poor sinner is quit, and set free from all sin past, present and to come."[\[3\]](#)

The Move South

First Baptist Church of Boston, established by Thomas Gould with the help of Particular Baptists from England, played a major role in the establishing of Baptist life in the South. William Screven, a Baptist from England and signer of the Somerset Confession of Faith, was ordained by the church in January 1682 so that he might establish a church in Kittery, Maine. Later the church in Boston set aside the group in Kittery as a separate congregation. A part of the examination included their determining that the Kittery group conscientiously acknowledged the Second London Confession of Faith. This church eventually moved, in 1696, to Charleston, South Carolina, becoming the first Baptist Church in the South. When Screven retired as pastor, he warned the congregation to obtain a man to lead them as soon as possible and be careful that he is "orthodox in faith, and of blameless life, and does own the confession of faith put forth by our brethren in London in 1689."

The power and influence of this confession continued for many years. Three of the most notable pastors of the church were Oliver Hart, Richard Furman, and Basil Manly.

Oliver Hart

Oliver Hart was born July 5, 1723, in Warminster, Bucks County, PA. His parents taught him Christian truth from his earliest years. He was converted in 1741 and baptized in April of that year, not quite 18 years old. Richard Furman remarks that this was "at an early period." Hart often heard the Tennents and George Whitefield. Hart himself testified that he received great benefit from the preaching of George Whitefield.

December 20, 1746, he was licensed to preach by the Baptist Church at Southampton, PA. Almost three years later he was ordained to the gospel ministry. Hart immediately came to the South in response to a call for ministers. In 1749, he is listed as one of the ministers of the Philadelphia Association. In that year the association presented an essay on the "Powers of an Association" which Oliver Hart signed. He was called to pastoral charge of the First Baptist Church, Charleston, S.C., in February, 1750, and continued there for 30 years.

In his funeral oration for Hart, Richard Furman characterized Hart as a "Calvinist, and a consistent, liberal [generous] Baptist." He continued,

The doctrines of free, efficacious grace, were precious to him; Christ Jesus, and him crucified, in the

perfection of his righteousness, the merit of his death, the prevalence of his intercession, and efficacy of his grace, was the foundation of his hope, the source of his joy, and the delightful theme of his preaching.[4]

Furman, a keen observer of preachers and preaching, described Hart's sermons as "peculiarly serious, containing a happy assemblage of doctrinal and practical truths." Doctrinal preaching, as a matter of fact especially suited him for he was prepared "by an intimate acquaintance with the sacred scriptures, and an extensive reading of the most valuable, both ancient and modern, authors." [5]

On at least three occasions Hart preached ordination sermons built on 1 Timothy 4:16. Edmund Botsford, Joseph Cook, and Samuel Stillman all heard Hart admonish them to take heed to themselves and the doctrine. They would constantly remember their own interest in Christ and the work of grace in their souls. He reminded them:

You cannot be qualified to deal with wounded spirits, unless you have been sensible of your own wounds. It is not possible you should, in a suitable Manner, direct Sinners to Christ, without an actual Closure with him yourselves.[6]

In speaking to the candidates for ministry about their doctrine, Hart said, "In general you will insist upon the two following Topics, namely our apostacy from God, and our Redemption by Jesus Christ, which will very naturally lead you to take notice of the Transactions of God in eternity, with reference to your salvation." They were to bear in mind that the persons for whom God's salvation has been given "are a certain, select number, out of the Race of Mankind, who are redeemed by his blood, justified by his righteousness, called by the inscrutable operations of his Spirit, sanctified by his grace, and finally glorified."

In 1780, Hart was forced by the British invasion of Charleston to leave his beloved people. He found his way to Hopewell, New Jersey, and became pastor of the Baptist church. Again he was a part of the Philadelphia Association. In fact,

in 1780, at the Associational meeting the minutes recorded "Rev. Oliver Hart of Charleston, South Carolina" was present, and, along with three others, was admitted "to the full privilege of members." He was "unanimously requested to preach" on the evening of Wednesday October 18. In 1782, he was chosen moderator and also presented the associational letter on the eighth chapter of the Confession, which treats Christ as mediator.[7] In this letter, he presented a strong statement on the necessity of the orthodox understanding of Christ's person, "God and man in one person." The human nature was taken "in union with and subsisted in the person of the Son of God." He spoke also of the eternal counsel of the Triune Jehovah and voluntary submission of the Son to undertake for the people he had chosen: "Jehovah, the Father, in his manifold wisdom, having predestinated a select number of the fallen race to the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, now proposed the business or work of saving the elect, to Jehovah the Son." Hart says that in Christ's position as mediator, "All the sins of an elect world were imputed to him." As mediator He sustained several characters or offices which qualify Him for His work. He is covenant head to the elect; He is surety of His people in which office He took His people's whole debt to the law upon Himself "in consequence of which, the elect...were set free;" He is an advocate "for all the chosen people of God" whose advocacy proved "efficacious to the pardoning, justifying, and glorifying an elect world;" He is a prophet in which office he teaches "powerfully and efficaciously by his Word and Spirit;" He is a priest in which capacity he "was offered up a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice[8] for the sins of an elect world;" He is a king as which he gives the saints "the most glorious charter of privileges contained in the covenant of grace."

I have entered into some degree of detail concerning Oliver Hart because, like William Screven, he represents the continuity of doctrine from New England through the South. He also personifies the unanimity of doctrine and fellowship between the Philadelphia Association and the Charleston Association. It was due largely to Hart's vision and energy that associational life developed among Southern Baptist churches. Furman says, "He was the prime mover in that plan for the association of churches, by which so many of our churches are very happily united at the present day." The Charleston Association was established in 1751 one year after Oliver Hart came to Charleston and while the spiritual streams of the First Great Awakening were flowing into southern baptistries. Following the lead of the Philadelphia Association, the Charleston Association, in 1767, adopted the Second London Confession as an expression of its doctrinal stance and used the *Baptist Catechism* regularly also. The Association's "Summary of Discipline" leaned heavily on John Gill's *Body of Divinity*.

Hart also led in the movement toward assisting young men to receive an education for the ministry. Both of these Baptist principles so strong in our own day (inter-church cooperation and education for the ministry) had their beginning in the South from Oliver Hart, a strong Calvinist who had been influenced toward this in the context of the Philadelphia Association.

Richard Furman

Richard Furman, who succeeded Hart as pastor of FBC Charleston, was born on October 9, 1755, at Esopus, New York, and was reared in a pious Anglican family. In 1771, Furman experienced a dramatic conversion under the preaching of Joseph Reese, a zealous Separate Baptist, who questioned Furman thoroughly in front of the entire church just before his baptism. Furman went through a period of deep study of Scripture and doctrine and long hours of prayer and meditation. He even stood as an exhorter in worship services in spite of ridicule and opposition from his teen-age peers.

In 1773, at eighteen, Furman was licensed by the High Hills Church. This action put him in contact with a company of men who would greatly influence him. In that year he met Oliver Hart, who was greatly impressed with the young preacher and from the beginning treated Furman as an equal. He also met John Gano, a messenger that year from the Philadelphia Association to the Charleston Association. Furman enjoyed the "rigorous intellect, the ready eloquence, scriptural knowledge, evangelical simplicity, and fervid devotion" of Gano. Gano wrote the circular letter for the Philadelphia Association in 1784 on "Effectual Calling" defining it as "an act of sovereign grace, which flows from the everlasting love of God, and is such an irresistible impression made by the Holy Spirit upon the human soul as to effect a blessed change." Gano defined the "called" as "such as God hath chosen and predestinated both to grace and glory, elected and set apart in Christ, as redeemed by his blood, although by nature children of wrath even as others." That Gano's impact on Furman was substantial is seen by the tribute Furman paid to him at his death in 1806.

As a minister of Christ, he shone like a star of the first magnitude in the American churches and moved in a widely extended field of action....He was not deficient in doctrinal discussion, or what rhetoricians call the demonstrative character of a discourse; but he excelled in the pathetic,--in pungent, forcible addresses to the heart and conscience. The careless and irreverent were suddenly arrested, and stood awed before him; and the insensible were made to feel, while he asserted and maintained the honour of his God, explained the meaning of the Divine law, showing its purity and justice, exposed the sinner's guilt proved him to be miserable, ruined and inexcusable, and called him to unfeigned, immediate repentance...The doctrines he embraced were those which are contained in the Baptist Confession of Faith, and are commonly styled Calvinistic. But he was of a liberal mind, and esteemed pious men of every denomination. While he maintained, with consistent firmness, the doctrines which he believed to be the truths of God, he was modest in the judgment which he formed of this own opinion, and careful to avoid giving offence.... He was cordially

esteemed and honoured by the wise and good of all denominations.[\[9\]](#)

That description could very well be applied to Furman himself. Furman's sermons were filled with doctrine, though he was not doctrinaire. He was a strong Calvinist of the historic experiential kind. His love for gospel truth shone bright and pure; its beauty, however, did not consist of its abstract conformity to ideal categories or its internal consistency, though he would defend both. Its beauty consisted of its enlightening and transforming impact on the heart, under the Spirit's power, so as to renew the image of God in fallen creatures, recreating them in true righteousness and holiness.

His sermon entitled "Conversion Essential to Salvation" demonstrates the beauty of applied Calvinism.[\[10\]](#) Though Furman understood the technical difference between conversion and regeneration as some theologians defined the terms, his aim was not to present a "refined metaphysical discussion." He simply defined conversion as "a renovation of the soul, by the spirit of God." This definition was predicated on the doctrines of man's depravity and God's holiness. It does not involve an extinction of any of the natural faculties of the soul, but these faculties all undergo a "great and evident change, in a moral or spiritual sense."

Something in the nature of regeneration is "mysterious and wonderful" and as inscrutable as the "operations and effects of the wind in the natural world." Its effects, however, will be "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; a hatred to sin, and a love to holiness; supreme love to God, and unfeigned benevolence to men," including sincerity, humility, meekness, patience, and all the accompanying graces, which distinguish and adorn the "new man." We see in this construction that Furman expounds the normal Calvinistic *ordo salutis*. Regeneration, or the new birth, precedes by virtue of moral necessity the graces of repentance and faith. He goes on to say later, "We have already seen, that the renovation of a sinner is the work of God. A man cannot change his own heart: How then can he effect this necessary, important change in the soul of another?"[\[11\]](#)

Basil Manly

This same commitment to experiential Calvinism is seen in the ministry of Basil Manly, who was pastor of this same church from March of 1826 through November 2 of 1837, part of which time James P. Boyce, founder and first president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was a lad in the church. His sermon entitled "Divine Efficiency Consistent with Human Activity," preached in 1849 in Alabama captures the spirit which was dominant in the churches in those days. Manly contends that men reject the doctrine of divine efficiency because "the doctrine of dependence on the divine being throws us constantly into the hands, and on the mercy of God. Proud man does not like it." In concluding a section in which he had spoken boldly and deeply concerning the nature of God's foreknowledge, Manly exclaimed, "My brethren, however mysterious and incomprehensible it may be, that God chose a poor sinner like me--freely chose me, loved me, redeemed me, called me, justified me, and will glorify me--I will rejoice in the truth, and thank him for his free grace! O, where is boasting then? Not at the feet of Jesus, not at the cross. It belongs not to that position."[\[12\]](#)

The Georgia Connection: All I know Is What I Read in the Papers

Georgia Baptists, just as clearly as those of South Carolina, embraced the devotional, experiential Calvinism expressed in the Baptist Confession of Faith. In 1839, a Brother C. Collins was upset because of the bad influence a recent Methodist protracted meeting had among the Baptists. Some of his own brethren complained about his preaching saying, "there was too much election in it, the doctrine was too strong." He called for the *Christian Index*,

a Baptist newspaper in Georgia, to "put something into the *Index* on doctrinal points" because there appeared to be "a great falling off among the Baptists from the doctrines they once held." Jesse Mercer, the senior editor of the paper, was delighted to report that in the very issue the junior editor, William H. Stokes, had begun "extracting articles from the Baptist Confession of Faith with remarks." Stokes's introductory article argued that, though the Bible without doubt is the final, and indeed only, authority in matters of faith and practice, "compends of faith" also are useful. They state explicitly the faith of a group so that a general statement of adherence to the Bible will not be used as a "shield for heterodox opinions." He called for an adoption of the Confession by all Baptist associations to achieve a "oneness in doctrine and practice" since "this venerable little book, does contain the doctrines systematically arranged, which are held by the old-fashioned, Calvinistic Baptists the world over."

In the weeks that followed, the *Index* printed the first nine chapters of the confession. At times extensive remarks on one or two points were added and at other times only a brief comment followed. After the section on the decrees of God, the writer lamented that many brethren had opposed that article but in their opposition had "railed and not reasoned." The doctrines had been "attacked from the pulpit" and "miserably misrepresented" in a way that was neither fair, right, manly, or honest. The writer, however, contended that "when the scriptures referred to" in the confession of faith "are carefully and prayerfully studied," the "much abused 'five points' will be found in perfect accordance with gospel truth, and that they more than any other scheme, reflect honor upon the Divine character."

In his notes concerning the chapter on "Christ the Mediator" the junior editor argues strongly for the particularity and efficacy of the death of Christ.

Is it to be supposed that he intended him to go unrewarded for his deep abasement, his labor and travail--for his obedience even unto death; for his glorious victory over the grave and all the powers of darkness? Can it be thought for a moment, that the Father would prepare a body for his Son--make him Prophet, Priest, and King--the great head of the Church, and still leave it in perfect uncertainty whether he should be rewarded for his mediatorial work or not?...He was not to be disappointed, nor was the object of his blood-shedding to be lost.

Jesse Mercer also printed in 1843 a series of messages written by C. D. Mallary, who just two years after these appeared was elected president of the new Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The messages gave an exposition of Ephesians 1:3, 4 and unpacked the doctrine of election in several of its connections. He discussed the doctrine in light of the nature of God, in its connection with other biblical doctrines, as a necessary expository conclusion from several key passages of scripture, as opposed to a variety of objections, and in its practical effects. Mallary defined election as "God's free, sovereign, eternal and unchangeable purpose to glorify the perfections of His character in the salvation of a definite number of the human family by Jesus Christ, without regard to any foreseen merit or good works on their part, as the ground or condition of this choice."[\[13\]](#) His development of this teaching is well-balanced but reflects the typically, for that time, southern [lower case on purpose because it's still 1843] Baptist love for the experiential elements of God's grace. In a passage reminiscent of the images and thoughts of Furman, Mallary discussed effectual calling in light of Jonathan Edwards's distinction between natural ability and moral ability. "It is very easy," Mallary claims, "for that person to do right, who is willing to do right." A call which results in salvation must operate, therefore, in such a way as to create a desire for holiness; in other words, it must be effectual to be salvific. Mallary surmises:

What additional power or favor may or may not have been bestowed upon men as sinners, I would not now undertake to explain; but this much I will say, that whatever power may be granted, or whatever influence may be exerted upon the hearts of men, if it does not rise higher than the rebellion of the human bosom, and so operate on the perverse will as to determine it to that which is good, this influence never will be rightly improved nor result in the salvation of one single

soul....Jehovah must put forth the energies of his Spirit, and by giving pungency to truth and force to the notions of the Gospel, bring down the rebellious will into sweet and cheerful submission, and plant in the bosom those pure and gracious affections which it is the duty of all to possess and exercise, but from which all alike, if left to themselves, will remain totally and forever estranged.

Given this reality combined with God's intention to save and the eternal nature of his purposes, Mallery concludes, "Hence, then, we are driven by the doctrine of human depravity into the doctrine of sovereign, particular, unconditional and eternal election."

The Churches Agree

This theology was not the ivory tower expression of the few theological *literati* among Baptists in the South. Those truths quickened devotion and worship of the churches. In December, 1839, the Indian Creek Baptist Church outside of Atlanta, Georgia, was organized. Their confession's form and content showed the theological ubiquity of Calvinism through the confessional impact of the 1689 [Philadelphia, Charleston] Confession among the general populace of Baptists. They state their belief in the "fall of Adam and the imputation of sin to his posterity" and in the "corruption of human nature and the impotency of man to recover himself by his own free will ability." In another article they state, "We believe in the everlasting love of God to His people, and the eternal election of a definite number of the human race to grace and glory." In addition they were convicted that "all of those who are chosen in Christ will be effectually called, regenerated, converted, sanctified, and supported, by the Spirit and the power of God, so that they will persevere in grace and not one of them be finally lost."

Leading Lights

John L. Dagg, the first writing Baptist theologian in America, served in Virginia (the state of his birth), as pastor of the prestigious Fifth Baptist Church in Philadelphia from 1825 to 1833, as trustee of Columbian College, as an officer of the Triennial Convention, and as an active member of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, the American and Foreign Bible Society, and the Baptist General Tract Society. From 1844 to 1854 he was president of Mercer University as well as professor of theology. For two years beyond his tenure as president he continued to teach theology. His *Manual of Theology* published in 1857 clearly aligns with the order and content of the Philadelphia Confession of faith. Its artistic and compelling presentation of the power and spiritual warmth of experiential Calvinism embodied the ideal of Southern Baptist thinking about the Christian faith in the nineteenth century. He was bold to say that objections to unconditional election will be found to contain "some lurking idea that it is safer to trust in something else than in God's absolute mercy." Such distrust is dangerous to the soul and the doctrine of election delivers one from this danger. "It tends to produce precisely that trust in God, that complete surrender of ourselves to him, to which alone the promise of eternal life is made." Should we persist in our resistance to the doctrine "we ought to consider whether we do not at the same time, reject our only hope of life everlasting."[\[14\]](#)

P. H. Mell, the friend and contemporary of Dagg, joined him in his passion for the distinguishing truths of Calvinism, consistently presenting them as normative Baptist theology. In his 1884 centennial summary of Baptists in Georgia entitled "The Fathers of the Association," Mell reported that "The prominent themes of the ministry of our fathers were the great doctrines of grace--man's guilt and impotency, and God's electing love." Their preaching, according to Mell, "gave impressive proof that the great doctrines of grace are preeminently qualified to bring men to repentance and salvation."[\[15\]](#) In that year, the year of Dagg's death in Alabama, Mell was confident that those themes still prevailed in the Georgia Zion.

The Intention of Theological Training

Another example of Calvinistic theology and confessionalism among Southern Baptists is seen in J. P. Boyce's address to the trustees at Furman University in the year 1856. Calling for the enforcement of a doctrinal standard on teachers in Baptist theological institutions, Boyce also was bold enough to recommend what precise standard should be adopted.

For all the purposes aimed at, no other test can be equally effective with that Confession of faith acknowledged in the Charleston Baptist Association -- the doctrines of which had almost universal prevalence in this state at the time of the foundation of the institution. Let that then be adopted, and let subscription to it on the part of each theological professor be required as an assurance of his entire agreement with its views of doctrine and of his determination to teach fully the truth which it expresses and nothing contrary to its declarations.[\[16\]](#)

When Southern Seminary was established, Boyce reports that the Philadelphia Confession was seriously considered as the official confessional statement of the seminary. For several compelling reasons, however, a separate confession was constructed by a committee with Basil Manly, Jr., at its head. One guiding concern prominent in its composition was that it must include "a complete exhibition of the fundamental doctrines of grace, so that in no essential particular should they speak dubiously."

Boyce himself exhibited no tendency to "speak dubiously" on the doctrines of grace. His *Abstract of Systematic Theology* placed God's sovereign purposes in salvation at the heart of his discussion from the attributes of God to the final judgment. God's righteous sovereignty permeated his system because, in his view, it permeated all of Scripture. After spending several pages expounding what Boyce called "the Calvinistic theory of personal, unconditional, and eternal Election," he argued that resistance to the doctrine "arises from an unwillingness on the part of man to recognize the sovereignty of God, and to ascribe salvation entirely to grace." He had given attention only to some concise biblical passages which allowed more full exposition but certainly had not exhausted the biblical presentation of this truth. More lavish treatment would by no means exaggerate the biblical emphasis.

Let the Scriptures be read with reference to this doctrine and every passage marked which indicates God's dealing with men as an absolute sovereign, and also every declaration which ascribes Election or the fruits of it to his choice and not to the will or acts of men, and every illustration afforded that this is God's usual method, and it will appear that scarcely any book of Scripture will fail to furnish testimony to the fact that in the acts of grace, no less than those of providence, God "doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth." Dan. 4:3-5.[\[17\]](#)

To Points Beyond

Baptists first moved to and settled in the Mississippi-Louisiana frontier around 1780. These people moved from the Charleston, South Carolina, area because the British had occupied the city in that year. Their theology clearly arose from the Charleston Confession of Faith. When they first formally organized a meeting for Baptist worship, they adopted a set of "Church Rules," "Rules of Discipline," and a "Church Covenant." The church covenant contained a confession of faith which merely highlighted the doctrines they believed. Article one on the Holy Scripture reflects not only the order of the 1689, or Charleston, confession but the language is reminiscent of it. The second and third articles, which concern the "Living and True God" and the doctrine of the Trinity, again reflect the order and concept of the old confession. Article four concerns the person of Christ and his role as mediator. Article five states:

We believe in the doctrine of Particular Redemption, personal Election, Effectual calling, Justification by the imputed Righteousness of Jesus Christ, Pardon for sins, by his atoning blood, Believer's baptism by immersion, the Final perseverance of the Saints, the Resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

When the Mississippi Baptist Association was formed in 1807, it adopted 9 articles of faith. These also reflect the order and language of the Charleston Confession. Articles 3-7 follow.

3. We believe in the fall of Adam; in the imputation of his sins to all his posterity; in the total depravity of human nature; and in man's inability to restore himself to the favor of God.
4. We believe in the everlasting love of God to his people; in the eternal unconditional election of a definite number of the human family to grace and glory.
5. We believe that sinners are only justified in the sight of God, by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is unto all and upon all them that believe.
6. We believe all those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world are, in time, effectually called, regenerated, converted, and sanctified; and are kept, by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.
7. We believe there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who, by the satisfaction which he made to law and justice, "in becoming an offering for sin," hath, by his most precious blood, redeemed the elect from under the curse of the law, that they might be holy and without blame before him in love.

Mullins's Mild Modifications

In a study of Southern Baptist theology entitled *Winds of Doctrine*, W. Wiley Richards locates the origin of Calvinism's decline in the middle half of the nineteenth century. His thesis is interesting but his evidence is ambivalent.^[18] Only slight, isolated, and idiosyncratic declines from Calvinism entered Southern Baptist theology prior to the 20th century. No one of trend-setting influence seriously challenged the Calvinistic hegemony before the arrival of E. Y. Mullins as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1899. He had entered as a student in 1881, receiving his degree in 1885. His return as president came after serving pastorates in Baltimore, Maryland, and Newton Center, Massachusetts.

During his 29 years as president, Mullins became a dominant force in Southern Baptist denominational life (convention president 1921-24) as well as a world-wide Baptist leader (president of the Baptist World Alliance 1923-28).

As a theologian, Mullins worked energetically to create a new theological paradigm for the defense of evangelical Christianity and in the process redefined both theological method and content for Southern Baptists. He gradually steered the Southern Baptist theological ship in a different direction by imposing the New England Baptist reticence toward confessions and creeds characteristic of Francis Wayland and the philosophical personalism of Borden Parker Bowne, a professor of philosophy at Boston University.

The Bible

His experientialism softened the belly of apologetics for biblical revelation as he created a superficial identity between argument for biblical authority and an unwarranted imposition of religion on the conscience. Defenses of

biblical authority, or inerrancy, which relied on *a priori* reasoning, or syllogisms, were counterproductive to real spiritual life, in Mullins's view. Truth must be assimilated experientially, he reasoned, not "imposed by authority of any kind, whether pope or church or Bible."[\[19\]](#)

Confessional Unity

Mullins's dislike for the *a priori* method made him just as hesitant to advocate inferential theology as he was to construct a theory of inerrancy. Mullins could still admit that creeds "help rather than hinder," especially as a tool to educate us "to unity of faith and practice" and "as means of propagating the faith" and as an instrument to judge whether an individual or group may have departed from the "common view sufficiently to warrant separation."[\[20\]](#)

On the other hand, his language to describe the dangers of creeds can be picturesque and compelling. "As soon as [creeds] become binding they become divisive," Mullins said; and they "inevitably lead to mischief in the church."[\[21\]](#) He speaks of creeds as becoming "stereotyped and formal" and used as "death masks for defunct religion" or "lashes to chastise others." A creed without life "becomes a chain to bind, not wings on which the soul may fly." Nothing is more distasteful than the idea of a barren intellectualism, void of life, where creeds may become "whips to coerce men into uniformity of belief by carnally-minded champions of the faith."[\[22\]](#)

Mullins encouraged a tentative and mediating approach toward confessions by creating a false dichotomy. Baptists are not creed-makers he said, because "the Scriptures are a sufficient revelation of his will."[\[23\]](#) The sufficiency of Scripture is not the only spiritual reality to which creeds may be antagonistic. "They become barriers to the free development of personality in religion" when the propagation of them takes the place of the personal dimension of the God/man relationship.[\[24\]](#)

In spite of tipping his hat to their usefulness, Mullins's warnings about the possible killing effects of creeds overwhelmed his weak attempts at advocacy. His heightened emphasis on the superiority of experience to creed, his clear warnings about the dangers of creeds, and the vivid images he evoked in speaking of their oppressive use tended to neutralize their advantages as instruments of education, definition, and discipline. Some of his warnings, though warranted if a genuine danger were present, were overstated and treated the worst possible scenario as the most possible scenario. His implication that the use of a creed and the experiential commitment to biblical truth are mutually exclusive will simply not bear the weight of the historical facts.

Calvinism

Though Mullins's doctrinal positions reflected some characteristically Calvinistic emphases, he hesitated to identify himself with either Calvinism or Arminianism as a system, preferring to "adhere more closely than either to the Scriptures, while retaining the truth in both systems."[\[25\]](#)

Mullins's chosen approach made him more anthropocentric than theocentric and eventually eroded any meaningful emphasis on God's sovereignty. Though election is, for Mullins, both personal and unconditional it operates within "limitations imposed upon his [good] action by the nature of human freedom and sin."[\[26\]](#) He dismisses the discussion of the extent of the atonement in less than one page, affirming a universal atonement.[\[27\]](#) He does not discuss bondage of the will, but does say that "without God's prevenient grace the will inevitably chooses evil"[\[28\]](#) and that men if left to themselves "would inevitably refuse salvation." In order to protect human freedom, however, God reduces "his own action to the minimum lest he compel the will."[\[29\]](#)

Fraying Loose Ends

The clear and precise commitment of Southern Baptists to Calvinism diminished rapidly after the time of Mullins. Preachers and teachers began to dismiss even the remnants of Calvinism remaining in Mullins. Dale Moody's *The Word of Truth* gloried in the fact that it was the first theology by a Southern Baptist completely to dismiss all "five points" of Calvinism, including Perseverance of the Saints.^[30] Nothing more antithetical to the position of Dagg and Boyce, indeed to their entire understanding of the spirit and fabric of the Christian faith, could be produced. Herschel Hobbs, in his reworking of Mullins's *Axioms of Religion*, focuses on man's freedom over God's sovereignty when he pictures God's activity as limited simply to offering "every incentive." "The final choice," however, "lay with man. God in his sovereignty set the condition. Man in his free will determines the result."^[31]

Another striking example of this is seen by comparing Mullins's treatment of the potter and the clay with that of Wayne Dehoney. Mullins describes the potter as working toward beauty if the clay is "yielding and plastic." Should the clay be refractory, the goal is not accomplished -- "all of which means that God will not do violence to the will of man. His sovereignty is holy and loving; it respects human freedom."^[32]

Wayne Dehoney employs the same biblical picture with similar conclusions but with a kerygmatic flair. After describing the potter's patient work resulting only in a destroyed vessel, he says: "Herein is an awesome truth! You and I, finite beings, can thwart the purpose of the Almighty God! We can resist and rebel and cause God himself to fail in our lives!"^[33]

Later Dehoney applied this same idea by pressing his hearers to yield to a God who "is subject to your will, your response, your decision! By yielding to him in confession, repentance and faith, he will make you over and you can begin again, today!"^[34]

None of Mullins's concern for the efficacy of God's holy and loving sovereignty is retained; only the dominant anthropocentric concern for freedom remains.

Conclusion

Southern Baptist beginnings were self-consciously and vigorously Calvinistic. This is reflected in the confessions, the associations, the preachers, and the theologians. The changes that have come could with clear justification be called "theological apostasy." Some feel the force of this historical reality and with both conscience and conviction desire to restore the spiritual dynamic of the living truth of the documents. Others would rather ignore the implications of this theological matrix. As the outworkings of this apostasy have established themselves, we should see that the changes have not contributed to our health but have spawned a climate of theological disunity, rampant absenteeism, a circus mentality in much evangelism, and a justified distress concerning the spirituality of professing Christians.

The two generations of Mullins and his successors succeeded not in perpetuating but in altering historic theological commitments of Baptists.^[35] The microcosm of diversity embodied in Mullins was not reflective of an existing condition in Southern Baptist life. Rather, he was the seminal power in the procreation of a diversity innately centrifugal. The ideas which supported his treatment of biblical authority, the use of confessions, and divine sovereignty had no cohesive power. Though often scintillating, they were so individualistic that they had no hope of serving as an effective unitive force for a denomination intent on eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of

its people in one sacred effort for the propagation of the gospel.

"So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now."



Southern Baptist Theology

Whence and Whither?

[Timothy George](#)

Several years ago Will D. Campbell published a fascinating novel entitled *The Glad River*. The chief character is a man named Doops Momber. Actually his real name was Claudy Momber but everybody called him Doops because Claudy sounded too much like a girl's name. He grew up among the Baptists of Mississippi, attended the revivals, the hayrides, and the Sunday School wiener roasts, but somehow he never got baptized. Later when he was inducted into the army his sergeant asked, "You a Protestant or a Catholic?" Doops did not answer for a moment. Then he said, "I guess I'm neither. I'm neither Catholic or Protestant. I never joined. But all my people are Baptist." "But there's a P on your dog tag. Why not a C?" "They asked me what I was and I told them the same thing I told you. And the guy stamped a P on it." "Why do you suppose they did that?" the sergeant asked. "Well," said Doops, "I guess in America you have to be something."[\[1\]](#)

The confusion Doops encountered about his own religious identity is symptomatic of many other Baptist Christians who, unlike Doops, have indeed taken the plunge but who, no more than he, have any solid understanding about what that means in a post-denominational age of generic religion and dog-tags Christianity. Several years ago I published an essay entitled "The Renewal of Baptist Theology" which began with the following lamentation:

There is a crisis in Baptist life today which cannot be resolved by bigger budgets, better programs, or more sophisticated systems of data processing and mass communication. It is a crisis of identity rooted in a fundamental theological failure of nerve. The two major diseases of contemporary church are spiritual amnesia (we have forgotten who we are) and ecclesiastical myopia (whoever we are, we are glad we are not like "them"). While these maladies are not unique to the people of God called Baptists, they are perhaps most glaringly present among us.[\[2\]](#)

This article is a sequel to that earlier essay. First of all, I want to point out some of the difficulties in speaking about the theological identity of Baptists. Then, in the heart of the article, I will present a mosaic for the renewal of Baptist theology by identifying five major components for such an agenda.

Diversity and Adversity

The first problem in sorting out the theological identity of Baptists is the sheer diversity of the movement. From the beginning of the Baptist experiment in seventeenth-century England, General (Arminian) and Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists developed diverse, even mutually incompatible, paradigms for what it meant to be a Baptist. The Particulars, who were better educated, better organized and more successful than the Generals, forged alliances with other mainstream Dissenting bodies denying that they were in any way guilty of "those heterodoxies and fundamental errors" which had been unfairly attributed to them.[\[3\]](#) The Generals, on the other hand, were drawn into the orbit of that "swarm of sectaries and schismatics," as John Taylor put it, which included Levelers, Ranters, Seekers, Quakers, and, at the fag end of the Puritan movement, the mysterious Family of Love. It was, as Christopher Hill has called it, a world turned upside down. An anonymous rhymester may well have had the General Baptists in mind when he penned these lines in 1641: "When women preach and cobblers pray, the fiends in hell make holiday."[\[4\]](#)

The diversification of the Baptist tradition which began in England was accelerated in America where the great fact of national life was the frontier—a seemingly endless expanse of space which offered limitless opportunities for escaping the past. "If you and yours don't agree with me and mine, you can pack your Scofield Bibles in your hip pocket and start your own church!" And so they did. And the line stretches from Roger Williams who left Massachusetts to practice soul-liberty in Rhode Island to Brigham Young who carried the Mormons to Utah to Jim Jones in California and David Koresh in Waco. The frontier was always there.

As for the Baptists, one only has to skim through Mead's *Handbook of Denominations* to appreciate the bewildering variety. Among many others, there are American Baptists, Southern Baptists, National Baptists, United Baptists, Conservative Baptists, General Association of Reformation Baptists (GARB), Free Will Baptists, Landmark Baptists, Duck River and Kindred Associations of Baptists, Six Principle Baptists, Primitive Baptists, Seventh Day Baptists, Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists and the National Baptist Evangelical Life and Soul-Saving Assembly of the USA, Inc.! That's a lot of Baptists! How do you talk about theological identity amidst that kind of variety?

There's a second factor we also need to consider—not only *diversity* within the tradition but *adversity* from the environing culture. While Baptists in America, especially in the South, have long been accustomed to the accoutrements of an established religion, we began as a small, persecuted sect. Long after the 1689 Act of Toleration granted statutory freedom of worship, Baptists, along with other Nonconformists in England, suffered harassment, discrimination, and ridicule. One critic labeled them as "miscreants begat in rebellion, born in sedition, and nursed in faction."^[5] The struggles for religious liberty continued for Baptists in America where Obadiah Holmes was publicly beaten on the streets of Danvers, Massachusetts and John Leland was clapped up in a Virginia jail.

An example of the low esteem in which Baptist folk were held in the early nineteenth century was recorded by David Benedict who traveled by horseback through all the seventeen states of the new nation collecting historical information and impressions about the Baptists. One person, "a very honest and candid old lady," gave Benedict the following impression she had formed of the Baptists:

There was a company of them in the back part of our town, and an outlandish set of people they certainly were... You could hardly find one among them but what was deformed in some way or other. Some of them were hair-lipped, others were bleary-eyed, or hump-backed, or bow-legged, or clump-footed; hardly any of them looked like other people. But they were all strong for plunging, and let their poor ignorant children run wild, and never had the seal of the covenant put on them.^[6]

Despite diversity within and adversity without, by mid-nineteenth century Baptists in America had developed a remarkable unity of purpose and vision, a theological consensus which even cut across the seismic fault line produced by slavery and the Civil War. Thus Francis Wayland, a Northern Baptist, could write:

I do not believe that any denomination of Christians exists, which, for so long a period as the Baptist, have maintained so invariably the truth of their early confessions... The theological tenets of the Baptists, both in England and America, may be briefly stated as follows: they are emphatically the doctrines of the Reformation, and they have been held with singular unanimity and consistency.^[7]

Thus despite countless splits and some doctrinal defections (e.g. the lapse of certain Baptists into Universalism), there emerged among Baptists in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century America what might be called an orthodox Baptist consensus, represented in the North by Augustus H. Strong, in the South by E. Y. Mullins.

One knew instinctively when the bounds of this consensus had been transgressed. Thus in the controversy surrounding the forced departure of Crawford Howell Toy from Southern Seminary in 1879, both Toy himself and the colleagues who bid him a tearful adieu were all aware, as Toy himself put it, that he "no longer stood where most of his brethren did."[\[8\]](#)

Erosion of Theological Consensus

The history of the Baptist movement in the twentieth century could be largely written as the story of the erosion of that theological consensus which obtained in most places until the Fundamentalist-Modernist disputes. In the face of the pressures of this era, the Baptist apologetic made a twofold response, neither of which was really adequate to deal with the challenge at hand. The first response was an appeal to "Baptist distinctives." In part this effort was fueled by old-fashioned denominational braggadocio, as seen in the book *Baptist Why and Why Not* published by Baptist Sunday School Board in 1900. Chapter titles include: "Why Baptist and Not Methodist," "Why Baptist and Not Episcopalian," "Why Immersion and Not Sprinkling," "Why Close Communion and Not Open Communion," etc.[\[9\]](#)

Further emphasis on Baptist distinctives such as the separation of church and state, the non-sacramental character of the ordinances, and the non-creedal character of our confessions appeared as a litany of negative constraints, rather than the positive exposition of an essential doctrinal core. Indeed, for some Baptists these so-called distinctives, often interpreted in an attenuated, reductionistic form, became the essence of the Baptist tradition itself.

This consensus was further eroded by what may be called the privatization of Baptist theology. Historically Baptist life was shaped by strong communitarian features. The congregation was not merely an aggregate of like-minded individuals, but rather a body of baptized believers gathered in solemn *covenant* with one another and the Lord. Nor were Baptists doctrinal anarchists who boasted of their "right" to believe in anything they wanted to. Instead of flaunting their Christian freedom in this way, Baptists used it to produce and publish *confessions* of faith both as a means of declaring their own faith to the world and of guarding the theological integrity of their own fellowship.[\[10\]](#) Nor did Baptists want their young children "to think for themselves," as the liberal cliché has it, but instead to be thoroughly grounded in the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Thus they developed Baptist catechisms and used them in both home and church to instruct their children in the rudiments of Christian theology.

The communitarian character of Baptist life, exemplified by covenants, confessions, and catechisms, was undermined by the privatization of Baptist theology and the rising tide of modern rugged individualism which swept through American culture in the early twentieth century. It should be noted that this movement influenced Baptists at both ends of the religious spectrum. Liberal Baptists followed the theological trajectory of Schleiermacher and Ritschl into revisionist models of theology which denied, in some cases, the most fundamental truths of the gospel.[\[11\]](#) At the other extreme, anti-intellectual pietism and emotion-laden revivalism pitted theology against piety, soul religion against a reflective faith, thus producing a schizophrenic split between sound doctrine and holy living. Although Billy Sunday belonged to another denomination, many Baptists could resonate with his assertion that he did not know any more about theology than a jack-rabbit knew about ping-pong!

Thus there developed, not least among Southern Baptists, a kind of theological vacuity, a doctrinal numbness, which resulted in a "form of godliness which denied the power thereof," an insipid culture religion cut off from the vital wellsprings of the historic Baptist heritage. Denominational pragmatism became the infallible dogma of Southern Baptist life. In the three decades following World War II, Baptist bureaucrats and denominational elites gradually led the SBC toward alignment with mainline Protestant concerns. For example, as amazing as it seems now, the SBC

Christian Life Commission during these years was an ardent supporter of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights. Without some kind of conservative resurgence, Southern Baptists would doubtless have followed the same path of spiritual decline and theological erosion evident in so many of the mainline denominations.[\[12\]](#)

It should be stated clearly, however, that the mere replacement of one set of bureaucrats with another doth not a reformation make! The conservative victory in the SBC will prove hollow unless it is accompanied by genuine spiritual and theological renewal. The 150th anniversary of the founding of the SBC is a proper occasion to consider a renewed framework of theological integrity for a world which looks very different from that of 1845 when 293 "delegates," as they were then called, met in Augusta, Georgia and adopted a plan "for eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort, for the propagation of the gospel."[\[13\]](#)

What are the benchmarks for shaping Baptist theological identity for such a time as this? Rather than put forth subtle speculations or a new methodology, I propose that we look again at five classic principles drawn from our own Baptist heritage. These five affirmations form a cluster of convictions which have seen us through turbulent storms in the past. They are worthy anchors for us to cast into the sea of modernity as we seek not merely to weather the storm but to sail with confidence into the future God has prepared for us.

Identity Markers

1. *Orthodox Convictions.* In 1994 the Southern Baptist Convention unanimously adopted a resolution acknowledging that "Southern Baptists have historically confessed with all true Christians everywhere belief in the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the full deity and perfect humanity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His substitutionary atonement for sins, His resurrection from the dead, His exaltation to the right hand of God, and His triumphal return; and we recognize that born again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ may be found in all Christian denominations."

Baptists are orthodox Christians who stand in continuity with the dogmatic consensus of the early church on matters such as the scope of Holy scripture (canon), the doctrine of God (Trinity), and the person and work of Jesus Christ (Christology). Leon McBeth is correct when he observes that Baptists have "often used confessions not to proclaim 'Baptist distinctives' but instead to show how similar Baptists were to other orthodox Christians."[\[14\]](#) Thus the "Orthodox Confession" of 1678 incorporated (article 38) the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian creeds declaring that all three "ought thoroughly to be received, and believed. For we believe, that they may be proved, by most undoubted authority of Holy Scripture and are necessary to be understood of all Christians."[\[15\]](#) Reflecting this same impulse, the Baptists who gathered in London for the inaugural meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905 stood in that assembly and recited in unison the Apostles' Creed.

Fundamentalism arose in the early part of this century as a protest against the concessions and denials of liberal theologians on such cardinal tenets as the virgin birth of Christ, the inerrancy of the Bible, penal substitutionary atonement, etc. This was a valid and necessary protest and we should be grateful for those worthy forebears who stood with courage and conviction on these matters. However, the problem with fundamentalism as a theological movement was its tendency toward reductionism-not what it affirmed, but what it left out.

In recent years the inspiration and authority of the Bible have again assumed a major role in Baptist polemics. From the drafting of the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1963 through the adoption of the *Presidential Theological Study Committee Report* in 1994, Southern Baptists have repeatedly affirmed their confidence in the inerrancy or total truthfulness of Holy Scripture. As the latter report declares, "What the Bible says, God says; what the Bible says happened, really happened; every miracle, every event, in every book of the Old and New Testaments is altogether

true and trustworthy." In more recent years, however, the SBC has found it necessary to address other pressing doctrinal issues such as the being of God and the importance of using biblical language to address Him (over against contemporary feminism), and our belief in Jesus Christ as sole and sufficient Savior (over against universalism and soteriological pluralism). Southern Baptists need to cultivate a holistic orthodoxy, based on a high view of the Scriptures and congruent with the Trinitarian and Christological consensus of the early church. Only in this way will we avoid the dangers of rigid reductionism on the one hand and liberal revisionism on the other.

2. *Evangelical Heritage.* Baptists are evangelical Christians who affirm with Martin Luther and John Calvin both the formal and material principles of the Reformation: Scripture alone and justification by faith alone. In setting forth these twin peaks of evangelical faith, the Reformers were not introducing new doctrines or novel ideas. They argued like this: If the doctrine of the Trinity really presents us with the true God of creation and redemption; if Jesus Christ really is what we confess him to be, that is, God from God, Light from Light, very God, from very God; and if original sin is as pervasive and debilitating as we believe it to be, then the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the only faithful interpretation of the New Testament promise of forgiveness, pardon and new life in Christ. While not agreeing with everything Luther or Calvin taught, Baptists claim the heritage of the Reformation as their own. We gladly identify ourselves with other evangelical believers who are "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe" (Rom. 1:16).

The word "evangelical" has a myriad of other meanings as well, and Southern Baptists can rightly claim at least two of these. First, we are heirs of the Evangelical Awakening which swept across the eighteenth century producing Pietism in Germany, Methodism in England, and the First Great Awakening in the American colonies. Many features of Baptist life resonate deeply with this mighty moving of the Spirit of God. Our evangelistic witness and missionary vision, our historic emphasis on disciplined church life and godly living, our commitment to a regenerate church membership and Spirit-filled worship, our refusal to divorce the personal and social dimensions of the gospel.

More recently, the word "evangelical" has been associated with the post-fundamentalist resurgence among Bible-believing Christians in North America. Significantly, the two most formative shapers of this movement are both Southern Baptist: Billy Graham and Carl F. H. Henry. While certain moderate Southern Baptists, reflecting an entrenched parochialism, have eschewed the label "evangelical" as a "Yankee word" unworthy for *Southern* Baptists to wear, more and more Southern Baptists are discovering that they have far more in common with conservative, Bible-believing Christians in other denominations than they do with left-leaning Baptists in their own denomination.[\[16\]](#)

Far more important than wearing the label "evangelical," is the substance of the word in the three senses outlined here. Southern Baptists can and should rightly lay claim to the doctrinal legacy of the Reformation, the missionary and evangelistic impulse of the Great Awakening, and a transdenominational fellowship of Bible-believing Christians with whom we share a common commitment to the word of God and the task of world evangelization.

3. *Reformed Perspective.* Despite a persistent Arminian strain within Baptist life, for much of our history most Baptists adhered faithfully to the doctrines of grace as set forth in Pauline-Augustinian-Reformed theology. David Benedict, following his extensive tour of Baptist churches throughout America in the early nineteenth century, gave the following summary of the Baptist theology he encountered: "Take this denomination at large, I believe the following will be found a pretty correct statement of their views of doctrine. They hold that man in his natural condition is entirely depraved and sinful; but unless he is born again-changed by grace-or made alive unto God-he cannot be fitted for the communion of saints on earth, nor the enjoyment of God in heaven; that where God hath begun a good work, he will carry it on to the end; that there is an election of grace-an effectual calling, etc., and that the happiness of the righteous and the misery of the wicked will both be eternal."[\[17\]](#)

When in 1856 James Petigru Boyce set forth his plan for Southern Baptists' first theological seminary, he warned against the twin errors of Campbellism and Arminianism, the distinctive principles of which "have been engrafted upon many of our churches: and even some of our ministry have not hesitated publicly to avow them."[\[18\]](#)

As late as 1905, F. H. Kerfoot, Boyce's successor as professor of systematic theology at Southern Seminary, could still say, "Nearly all Baptists believe what are usually termed the `doctrines of grace.'" [\[19\]](#) E. Y. Mullins, who disliked the label "Calvinist" and "Arminian," sought to transcend the controversy altogether. While retaining most of the content of traditional Calvinist soteriology, he gave it a new casting by restating it in terms of his distinctive theology of experience.

For some the evangelical Calvinism of earlier Baptist generations has been eclipsed by a truncated hyper-Calvinism with its anti-missionary, anti-evangelistic emphasis. Many other factors have also contributed to the blurring of this part of the Reformation heritage which has shaped Baptist identity: the routinization of revivalism, the growth of pragmatism as a denominational strategy, an attenuated doctrine of the Holy Spirit, and a general theological laxity which has resulted in doctrinal apathy. While seeking to restate traditional themes in fresh contemporary ways, Baptists would do well to connect again with the ideas which inform the theology of such great heroes of the past as John Bunyan, Roger Williams, Andrew Fuller, Adoniram Judson, Luther Rice, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

I rejoice in the growing awareness of Reformed theology among Southern Baptists today. I know of nothing that has happened in the history of salvation since the days of James P. Boyce and B. H. Carroll which would make their understanding of God's grace obsolete in the modern world. To the contrary, a renewed commitment to the sovereignty of God in salvation, worship that centers on the glory of God rather than the entertainment of the audience, and a perspective on history and culture which sees Jesus Christ as Lord of time and eternity, all of this can only result in the building up of the Body of Christ.

At the same time, it is imperative for Reformed Southern Baptists to guard against the real dangers of hyper-Calvinism which emphasizes divine sovereignty to the exclusion of human responsibility and which denies that the offer of the gospel is to be extended to all peoples everywhere. And, as we call on our fellow Baptist brothers and sisters to return to the rock from which we were hewn, we must learn to live in gracious equipoise with some of them who don't ring all five bells quite the same way we do! In this regard we do well to heed the following statement by the great missionary statesman Luther Rice: "How absurd it is, therefore, to contend against the doctrine of election, or decrees, or divine sovereignty. Let us not, however, become bitter against those who view this matter in a different light, nor treat them in a super serious manner; rather let us be gentle towards all men. For who has made us to differ from what we once were? Who has removed the scales from our eyes?" [\[20\]](#)

4. *Baptist Distinctives*. While Baptists owe much to the great doctrinal legacy of the mainline reformers, our ecclesiology most closely approximates the Anabaptist ideal in its emphasis on the church as an intentional community composed of regenerated and baptized believers who are bound to one another and their Lord by a solemn covenant. One of the most important contributions which Baptists have made to the wider life of the church is the recovery of the early church practice of baptism as an adult right of initiation signifying a committed participation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In many contemporary Baptist settings, however, baptism is in danger of being divorced from the context of the decisive life commitment. This unfortunate development is reflected both in the liturgical placement of baptism in the worship service-often tacked on at the end as a kind of afterthought-and also in the proper age and preparation of baptismal candidates. This situation muffles the historic Baptist protest against infant baptism, a protest which insisted on the intrinsic connection between biblical baptism and repentance and faith.[\[21\]](#)

We must also guard against a minimalist understanding of the Lord's Supper which reduces this vital ordinance to an empty ritual detached from the spiritual life of believers. Several years ago I experienced a powerful service of the Lord's Supper at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. During a Sunday morning service that great congregation was asked to kneel and prayerfully receive the elements while the meaning of the ordinance was carefully explained from the Scriptures. In this kind of setting the experience of worship is a transforming encounter with the living Christ. We need not fall prey to the lure of sacramentalism or the false doctrine of transubstantiation to reclaim the historic Baptist understanding of the Lord's Supper which has nowhere been better described than in the *Second London Confession* of 1689: "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified and all the benefits of His death: the Body and Blood of Christ, being then not corporally, or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers, in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to the outward senses."

5. *Confessional Context.* On the 150th anniversary of the SBC, we would do well to remember and reclaim the confessional character of our common Christian commitment. Baptists are not a creedal people in that we regard no humanly devised statement as equal to the Bible. Nor do we believe that the state has any authority to impose religious beliefs on its subjects. However, Baptists have historically approved and circulated confessions of faith for a three-fold purpose: as an expression of our religious liberty, as a statement of our theological convictions, and as a witness of the truths we hold in sacred trust. Our confessions are always accountable to Holy Scripture and revisable in the light of that divine revelation.

Just as a confession declares what we believe, so a church covenant is concerned with how we live. It sets forth in practical terms the ideal of the Christian life: a living faith working by love leading to holiness. The congregation's covenant also outlines that process of mutual admonition and responsibility through which fellow believers engage to "watch over" one another through encouragement, correction, and prayer.

Finally, catechisis is concerned with passing on the faith intact to the rising generation. This responsibility is jointly shared by parents and pastors. May God give us again Baptist families and Baptist churches who will take seriously the awesome responsibility of indoctrinating our children in the things of God.

Conclusion

In his *Commentary on Daniel* (9:25), John Calvin compared the work of God among his ancient people with the challenge of his own day. "God still wishes in these days to build his spiritual temple amidst the anxieties of the times. The faithful must still hold the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other, because the building of the church must still be combined with many struggles." That struggle continues today not against enemies of flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against lethargy and laziness, against defection and darkness on every hand. Yet God does continue to build His church amidst the anxieties of the times. For 150 years he has blessed and used the people of God called Southern Baptists in ways that future historians will record as remarkable beyond belief. As we remember and give thanks for the mighty acts of God in days gone by, let us press forward in the earnest expectation that the Lord "hath yet more truth and light to break forth out of His Holy Word." Above all, let us never forget that it is "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."





John Dagg

First Writing Southern Baptist Theologian

[Mark E. Dever](#)

Introduction

There is no doubt that denominations can be pernicious creatures. Enshrining error and immortalizing institutions, they can too easily be living shrines to doctrinal distinctives, while obscuring the essentials of the great Christian gospel which alone is our salvation. Examples of this sad truth abound at every hand. There is no human institution which is not touched by the fallenness of the humans involved with it.

And yet, while eschewing a shallow triumphalism, we can still thank God for His mercies to us as individuals, as churches, and in the organizations which are the result of God-inspired leadership. Just such an institution is the Southern Baptist Convention. Born out of a combination of motives which could only come from creatures fallen, but made in the image of God, the Southern Baptist Convention was designed to spread the good news of Christ, and to ensure that slave-holders would not be excluded from this great task.

The denomination which grew in the tumultuous middle decades of the nineteenth century, though itself new, was composed of men and women from churches with traditions of ministry and service which long predated 1845. Though the denomination might be described as being in its infancy, the tradition of Baptist Christians was a comparatively long-established part of American religious life.

Part of the established tradition of these Baptists was a comparatively articulate, robustly reformed theology, shared in large part with Presbyterian, Congregational, and many Episcopalian pastors around them. For all of the disagreements and even tribulations which established denominations had inflicted on those unestablished churches (particularly Baptist churches), the understanding of the Christian gospel, indeed of most of Christian theology, was not a contentious issue.

John Dagg and His Theology

John Leadley Dagg (1794-1884) was one who inherited and disseminated this body of shared protestant theology, albeit with baptistic distinctives in matters of baptism and church government. His particular distinction comes in being the first Baptist theologian in the south to publish a systematic theology after 1845. In 1857, the Charleston-based Southern Baptist Publication Society (predecessor to the Sunday School Board) published his 379-page *Manual of Theology*. This was followed the next year by the Society's publication of his 312-page companion volume *Treatise of Church Order*, and the next by the publication of his *Elements of Moral Science*. The first two of these, used as theological textbooks throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, were later republished together as the *Manual of Theology and Church Order* (Gano Books, 1982).^[1] As a tribute to the labors of this influential Southern Baptist theologian, this brief article offers a description of Dagg's theology and a defense of its lasting value.

As has already been intimated, Dagg's theology was reformed, or Calvinistic. His theology was not Calvinistic in the

sense of being a full reproduction of the teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564). Calvin's teachings are too far-reaching and complex to be accurately summarized by a single word. On the other hand, Dagg's understanding of Christian theology was Calvinistic not merely in the sense of affirming the sovereignty of God, but in the sense of holding to what are often termed the "five points." First formulated in the Remonstrant controversy in seventeenth-century Holland, the "five points" of the Synod of Dort (1619) were popularized in England and America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by religious controversy over Arminianism.^[2] For two hundred years these doctrines were the dominant orthodoxy of many American Protestants, including the Baptists.

Dagg's *Manual* teaches that our most reliable and most important knowledge of God comes through His perfect Word written, the Bible. This is the book which teaches us of God and His ways with us, and of the response which we are to make to Him. With traditional arguments and texts, but with striking concision and moving devotion, Dagg presents the student with the infinitely attractive God of the Bible--one, spiritual, omnipresent, eternal, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent, infinitely good, always truthful, perfectly just, holy and wise. This is the God who has created us, and revealed Himself to us, teaching us how to live while sovereignly ruling over his creation.

Doctrine of Man

Dagg neither defends or attacks the freedom of the will, but rather defines it quite carefully, so as to exclude a reduction of humans to automatons on the one hand, or irrational, motive-less actors on the other. (Dagg had evidently read Jonathan Edwards' *On the Freedom of the Will*, though he doesn't cite it.)

"The first man, having been placed under a covenant of works, violated it, and brought its penalty on himself and his descendants."^[3] So, Dagg taught, in Adam we all fell. Today, all people sin, thus displaying their fallen natures. Born under God's judgment, we are unable to help ourselves out of our mortal trouble. This help we require comes to us only by God's grace through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, Dagg taught, was fully human and fully divine. The Son of God, "assumed human nature, and in that nature lived a life of toil and sorrow, and died an ignominious and painful death...was raised from the dead, ascended to heaven, and was invested with supreme dominion over all creatures."^[4] As prophet, priest and king, the mediator Jesus Christ reveals, offered himself as sacrifice, intercedes and rules. He briefly treats God the Holy Spirit as the Divine sanctifier and comforter of His people.

Doctrine of Salvation

Dagg presents the plan of God's salvation of sinners as a covenant made within the Godhead before creation, whereby God would graciously save all who repent of sin and believe in Christ. This comes about by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit changing us, sanctifying us, and preserving us to the end. As does Calvin in his *Institutes*, so it is at this point in his theology that Dagg expounds the biblical doctrines of election, particular redemption and effectual calling, as he meditates on the saving work of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Who can deny that the Bible clearly teaches that God's work of salvation is a work of wonderful unity? God the Father graciously elects, God the Son gives Himself as a substitute for, and God the Holy Spirit gives the new birth to the same group of people. Finally, Dagg teaches the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and the final judgment which results in the righteous being taken to Heaven, and the wicked cast eternally into Hell.

Doctrines of Baptism and the Church

As might be expected in a Baptist *Treatise on Church Order*, Dagg gives the largest single amount of space to a consideration of baptism. He explores the command to be baptized, the etymology of the relevant words, the theological significance of it, the proper subjects of it, its relation to church membership, and its administration. He

has a special section where he considers the traditional reformed arguments for infant baptism, concluding that they are far from compelling.

Many other matters are also addressed in his *Treatise on Church Order*. He defends the nature of the church as being most certainly local, but, as over against the Landmarkist tradition which would soon arise, Dagg held to a traditional understanding of the universal church as "the whole company of those who are saved by Christ."^[5] Nevertheless, he maintains that, unlike the unity of the local church, the unity of this church is to be displayed spiritually, and not organizationally. Dagg defends "strict communion" in which only those who have been baptized as believers are to be admitted to the table, and public worship and the ministry of the Word as divinely ordained duties of the church.

Dagg's Ministry

While many today might wonder if such a thoroughly Calvinistic preacher could ever find useful service with evangelistically-minded Baptists, Dagg's years of productive ministry ought to remove all doubt. Indeed, the long list of his services to churches and denominations alone should put to rest any idea of Calvinism leading to lazy inactivity.

Converted in 1809, at the age of fifteen, Dagg knew half a century of fruitful ministry from the time of his ordination in November, 1817, until his infirmities forced him into virtual immobility. In Virginia, from 1817 until 1825, he pastored several small churches, and helped to begin his local association, and the Baptist Convention of Virginia. In 1825 he moved to Pennsylvania, where he took up the pastorate of the prominent Fifth Baptist Church of Philadelphia, which, at the time, was one of the largest congregations in the city. Dagg was an officer in the Philadelphia Baptist Missionary Society (1825-1827) and one of the founders of the Pennsylvania Baptist Missionary Society (forerunner of the Pennsylvania Baptist Convention): He was also the host pastor for the 1829 Triennial Convention (mother of the SBC, ABC and other Baptist denominations in America).

Dagg served on the Board of Managers of the Triennial Convention (1826-1836), as a Vice-President of the Triennial Convention (1838-1845), on the Board of Directors of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society (1832-1836), as Vice-President of the American and Foreign Bible Society (1837-1843), and as President, Vice-President and other positions of the Baptist General Tract Society (1824-1843). He was particularly concerned for mission work in western Pennsylvania and in the evangelization of the Cherokee nation in Georgia.

In the providence of God, this article about Dagg may be written because of a failure in his ministry. In 1834 Dagg's otherwise successful pastorate in Philadelphia ended due to the loss of his voice. Apart from this failure, would he ever have turned his efforts from the pulpit to the pen? Wanting to retain his services in the area, the Baptists of the Philadelphia Association approached him about serving as President and Professor of Theology at a new school (the Haddington Institute) they desired to open. Dagg accepted the position and served there until 1836, at which time the school was dissolved.

From 1836 to 1844, Dagg served as President of the Alabama Female Athenaeum in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. During this time Dagg was active in the Alabama Baptist convention, serving on committees, and as an officer, also helping form the Alabama Baptist Bible Society and serving as its President for two years.

The great distance of Alabama from the eastern seaboard made Dagg's continued participation in national Baptist meetings difficult. Expressing regret to Dagg about his absence from the troubled 1841 Triennial Convention in Baltimore, Spencer H. Cone (1785-1855), prominent Baptist minister in New York City and longtime friend, wrote, "I was much disappointed in not seeing you in Baltimore,...that you lacked `influence' either with the South or North,

I cannot, for a moment, admit, for I know no one whose voice would have commanded more respect in our anxious and important session...."[6]

Dagg served at Mercer University, in Georgia, as President (1844-1854), and as professor of theology (1844-1855). There he labored to build the theological department until, in the early 1850's, it was perhaps the most celebrated theological school in the south. During his successful tenure at Mercer, Dagg was still called upon for larger denominational service. Upon moving to Georgia, Dagg became active in the Georgia Baptist Convention, where he served on the Executive Committee (1844-1855). Dagg was one of ten people appointed to meet on April 28, 1845 in Providence, Rhode Island to arrange for the dissolution of the American Baptist Home Missions Society. One month later, while attending the organizational meeting for the Southern Baptist Convention, he was appointed as one of the Vice-Presidents of the new Domestic Missions Board of the Southern Convention. He also was appointed to the committee to draw up the constitution for the new convention. Dagg again attended the Southern Baptist Convention in 1849. His activities there included chairing a committee on the China mission, and delivering its report to the convention, and addressing the Convention as a corresponding messenger from the American Sunday School Union. In 1856, Dagg retired from teaching theology at Mercer. His remaining years were spent in publishing material, much of which was, no doubt, constructed from his classroom lectures at Mercer.

Dagg's Legacy

Throughout his long life of service, Dagg had developed many close relationships with the religious leaders of the day, and was highly regarded. J. R. Jeter considered him an outstanding preacher. Dagg counted among his closest and oldest friends some of the most influential Baptist leaders in the nation--William Fristoe, Spencer H. Cone, Noah Davis, Joseph Kennard, David Jones, Basil Manly, Sr., and P. H. Mell. His service at Mercer was well-known and greatly appreciated. His writings also served to keep his thoughts often before the minds of thousands of his fellow ministers. In 1879 during the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta, W. H. Whitsitt moved that "a catechism...containing the substance of the Christian religion" be drawn up by the venerable J. L. Dagg. The resolution passed unanimously. Such was the respect and influence of John Leadley Dagg. His *Manual of Theology* saw widespread use throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, extending his influence far beyond his many students, listeners, friends and family.

Evidence of enduring appreciation for Dagg's work can be seen by the fact that almost forty years after his retirement, when a new theology professor was to be appointed at Mercer in 1893, he was recommended by the simple statement that if this person "needed any endorsement, it would be sufficient to say that he was a student under that incomparable theological teacher, Rev. J. L. Dagg, D. D., and that he uses his *Systematic Theology*, as a text book." [7]

Another aspect of Dagg's life which is often overlooked is the influence that he exerted beyond his own person, not merely through his preaching, teaching, writing, and denominational service, but through his family. His son, John F. Dagg served as pastor of the Baptist church at Milledgeville, Ga. (1847-1851), editor of the Georgia Baptist paper, *The Christian Index* (1851-1857), clerk of the Georgia Baptist Convention (1855), pastor of the Cuthbert Baptist Church (1857-1866), professor (1857-1866) and President (1861-1866) of Cuthbert Female College in Cuthbert, Georgia, and President of Bethel Female College, Hopkinsville, Kentucky (1866-1872).

Dagg's stepson by his second wife's first marriage was Noah K. Davis. Since his father died when he was only a few months old, Dagg was the only father that Davis ever knew. Davis graduated from Mercer in 1849. He served as President of Bethel College in Russellville, KY and later became widely celebrated as Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Virginia. (In this capacity, Davis delivered one of the first series of Gay Lectures at the Southern

Baptist Theological Seminary in 1901.)

Dagg's daughter Elizabeth married S. G. Hillyer, a prominent Baptist minister in Georgia who served successively as Professor of Belles Lettres and Theology and President of Mercer University. Their son, J. L. Dagg Hillyer had a daughter, Georgia Hillyer, who married John Roach Stratton, the famous fundamentalist Baptist pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, New York City. In 1926 their son Hillyer Hawthorne Stratton wrote the first thesis on Dagg. Another daughter of Dagg's, Mary Jane, married Rollin D. Mallery, son of the well-known Georgia Baptist, C. D. Mallery. R. D. Mallery graduated from Mercer in 1851, served as President of Southwestern Baptist College in Cuthbert, Ga., Shorter College in Rome, Ga., and Shelby Female College in Shelby, N. C.

Dagg's reputation faded with the ending of the nineteenth century, as his systematic theology was replaced first by that of James P. Boyce, then by Boyce as revised by F. H. Kerfoot, and finally by E. Y. Mullins and W. T. Connor. Yet with the republication of Dagg's theology in 1982, a new generation of ministers and church members have come to appreciate this man's gift for writing a theology which is faithful to the Bible, clear to the mind, and warming to the heart. If no other writer has been able to convince readers of this article that true knowledge of God involves both head and heart in knowing the searching love of our gracious God, then let John L. Dagg have that privilege. He has been a trusted guide for many before; he can be trusted still. As the present author has written elsewhere of Dagg, it must be stated that if Dagg is not a particularly notable doctor in the *content* of theology--finding no new truths or novel expressions--he is almost unsurpassed among Baptists as a doctor in the *purpose* of theology. Dagg would teach that if the pursuit of theology is to be legitimate, its purpose must be clear. To pursue knowledge of the Biblical God, can only properly be done by seeking to know the Biblical God. To be captivated by the knowledge of God is idolatrous, unless one is captivated by God Himself. That Dagg was so captivated himself is clear; that he may so teach us is his enduring contribution.



To Train the Minister Whom God Has Called

James Petigru Boyce and Southern Baptist Theological Education

[R. Albert Mohler, Jr.](#)

James Petigru Boyce is rightly seen, not only as the founder of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and its first president, but also as the leading founder of the vision for organized theological education within the Southern Baptist Convention. This is an audacious but sustainable claim made from the vantage point of well over a century after Boyce's famous manifesto, "Three Changes in Theological Institutions," which articulated with consummate clarity his vision for theological education. This vision was founded within the Baptist tradition and upon the impregnable rock of Christian truth.

By the sovereign providence of God, James Petigru Boyce was superbly equipped and endowed with gifts for ministry, incredible leadership ability, and the full measure of theological conviction. These attributes placed Boyce in the singular position as the Southern Baptist leader best equipped to articulate a founding vision and to draw together the necessary constituencies and resources in order to establish the institution which became known as The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Born and raised in Charleston, South Carolina as the son of one of the South's most illustrious citizens, James Boyce was in a privileged position to receive an enviable education. But Boyce's father wisely prescribed a term of toil in his businesses working as a common laborer. Boyce, though equipped physically for physical labor, found that the experience increased his discipline as applied to classical studies.

Boyce's background in education was matched by the unparalleled experience of growing up among the membership of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina under the tutelage of its gifted pastors. Among these, Basil Manly, Sr. exerted a tremendous influence upon Boyce, framing his theological convictions as well as offering a stellar example of Christian ministry.

The Charleston congregation was the first Baptist church in the South. It was a stalwart Baptist congregation founded on clear Baptist principles and confessing the faith in a constant line of Baptist conviction as articulated in the Philadelphia Confession, which had been formally adopted by the Charleston association as its own, and was commonly referred to as both the "Charleston Confession" and the "Century Confession."

Basil Manly, Sr. was one of the most able exponents of Baptist theology and conviction as well as an able expositor of Scripture. He well represented the classical type identified by historian E. Brooks Holifield as "the gentleman theologian."^[1] As John A. Broadus stated of Basil Manly, Sr.:

His preaching was always marked by deep thought and strong argument, expressed in a very clear style, and by an extraordinary earnestness and tender pathos, curiously combined with positiveness of opinion and a masterful nature. People were borne down by his passion, convinced by his arguments, melted by tenderness, swayed by the force of will.^[2]

Basil Manly, Sr. provided not only a stellar ministry and example for young James Boyce, but he also provided his son Basil Manly, Jr. as Boyce's boyhood comrade and Sunday School classmate and, later, as his founding colleague

at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Boyce experienced a happy and privileged childhood in Charleston, a city of great refinement and prosperity. He attended Charleston College from 1843-1845 and there studied under Dr. W. T. Brantly, another significant gentleman theologian of strong Baptist conviction who served as both pastor of the First Baptist Church and president of the college.

Brown University and Francis Wayland

A significant turning point in Boyce's life came in 1845 when he moved to Brown University, which had been founded as a Baptist College at Warren, Rhode Island in 1765 and moved to Providence five years later. There Boyce came into sustained contact with Baptists from the North and, in particular with one significant individual who was greatly to mold his vision of higher education. That individual was Francis Wayland, who had been president of Brown University for 18 years when Boyce arrived as a student. Broadus commented that Wayland "made a more potent impression upon the character, opinions, and usefulness of James Boyce than any other person with whom he came in contact".^[3] Wayland was one of the most significant educators in antebellum America, a man of tremendous gifts and very definite convictions concerning the educational enterprise.

So far as Wayland was concerned, education was primarily a matter of fine-tuning the intellectual endowments of his students and increasing their moral vision. Nevertheless, Wayland was not a Baptist figure who was greatly marked by definite theological convictions. It is at least fair to say that Wayland advocated a fluid notion of doctrinal development and was opposed to the very form of confessionalism Boyce himself would later represent.

It was perhaps Wayland's view concerning ministerial education which was most formative on James Boyce as a student at Brown University. He was greatly stirred by Wayland's lectures on morality, but he seems to have been much more impressed with Francis Wayland as a leader and administrator who understood the need for quality institutions of higher education, but also understood limitations represented by an institution which required classical preparation prior to entry into formal courses of study.

Wayland, who had been pastor of the First Baptist Church in Boston prior to his election as president at Brown, is in many ways best described as a pragmatist in terms of ministerial education. Many of his students at Brown had been called into the ministry and would leave the university in order to study at one of the existing seminaries in the North. Wayland was not opposed to this. Indeed he felt that men who had received the benefit of a classical education and university could and should extend their study through the formal academic programs of a theological seminary. Nevertheless, Wayland was insistent that based upon Baptist conviction, the ministry should be seen as open to all those whom God called into the service of His church, regardless of their academic preparation.

Wayland was an exemplar of the democratic impulse in antebellum America. He was fully convinced that the genius of Baptist expansion would be found in the reluctance of Baptists to place artificial requirements, educational or otherwise, upon those whom God had called into the ministry and leadership of His church.

Put plainly, Wayland placed high confidence in the Baptist understanding of the Christian ministry. He was an ardent congregationalist, and insisted that each congregation was fully capable of calling out one of its own number to serve as pastor and minister. These ministers who would be called out by churches on the frontier or rural settings were unlikely to have benefit of classical secondary education or formal programs of higher education. Wayland insisted that theological education based upon the model of Andover Seminary should not become the expectation of Baptists as their movement spread across the growing nation.

But Wayland's concerns regarding theological education went beyond this congregational impulse. Wayland was convinced that theological seminaries were inclined to produce sterile, passionless, and overly intellectual graduates who had little power in the pulpit.

As Wayland reflected in a letter to James W. Alexander, son of Archibald Alexander and himself a former professor of Princeton Seminary:

The tendency of seminaries is to become schools for theological and philological learning and elegant literature, rather than schools to make preachers of the Gospel. With every year the general tendency is in this direction as I think I have observed.[\[4\]](#)

Interestingly, Wayland seemed to exempt Princeton Theological Seminary from this critique, at least in this correspondence with one of its former professors, who was also the son of Princeton Seminary's founding figure.

Near the close of his life Wayland reflected upon his reputation as a critic of theological education. His intention, as he understood himself, was not at all to oppose theological seminaries, but rather to protect the congregational convictions held among Baptists and to argue for increased attention to developing a passionate ministry as well as a cultured ministry of refinement. As Wayland stated near the close of his life:

I was said to be opposed to ministerial education because I held that a man with the proper moral qualifications might be called to the ministry by any church and be a useful minister of Christ and that we had no right to exclude such a man because he had not gone through a nine or ten years' course of study. God calls men to the ministry by bestowing upon them suitable endowments, and an earnest desire to use them for His service. Of these thus called, some may not be by nature adapted to the prosecution of a particular course of study. Many others are too old. Some are men with families. Only a portion are of an age and under conditions which will allow them to undertake what is called a regular training for the ministry, that is, two or three years in an academy, four years in college, and three years in a seminary. But does not every man require the improvement of his mind in order to preach the Gospel? I think he does.[\[5\]](#)

Through a review of Wayland's *Memoir*, one gains an understanding of the formative influence Wayland exerted upon young James Boyce.

Though Boyce had received the benefit of a privileged formal education, he was well aware that many of his Baptist brethren were bereft of such preparation and would have no opportunity to pursue such courses of study. In a passage which would be echoed in Boyce's famous address at Furman University, Wayland wrote:

A theological seminary should be so constructed as to give the greatest assistance to each of these various classes of candidates. Some may be able to take a smaller, others a greater amount of study. Let each be at liberty to take what he can, and then the seminary is at rest. It has done what it could. The rest is left to Providence.[\[6\]](#)

Though Wayland experienced a remarkable influence upon James Petigru Boyce in terms of academic vision and understanding of the Christian ministry, it is important also to realize that the influence of Francis Wayland extended to Boyce's own conversion. The Second Great Awakening had spread from Yale College to Brown University while

Boyce was enrolled there. Boyce, though raised within the fellowship of the First Baptist Church in Charleston, had not yet been converted. This he held in common with several other members of his junior class at Brown University—a fact which caused no little distress to the University's president.

Upon his arrival at Brown, Boyce found himself the concern of many of his fellow classmates who prayed for his conversion. Furthermore, Dr. Wayland himself was anxious concerning the conversion of Boyce and several of his classmates. The college held its usual fast on the last Thursday in February of 1846. Dr. Wayland himself led in morning worship and delivered a powerful sermon in the afternoon addressed to those who had not yet been converted. Shortly thereafter Boyce returned by steamer from New York to Charleston and during that voyage struggled greatly with the state of his own soul. By the time Boyce arrived in Charleston he was as Broadus later described him, "deeply under conviction of sin."[\[7\]](#)

Boyce's conversion came under the preaching of Dr. Richard Fuller, who had come from Beaufort to preach in Charleston. The gracious mercy of God as demonstrated in his loving providence was made clear in the life of James Petigru Boyce. As Broadus later reflected, "let us pause to notice that young James Boyce had thus, by the age of nineteen, been brought under the special influence of six of the most notable Baptist ministers in America,—Manly and Brantly, Tucker, Wayland, Crawford, and Fuller."[\[8\]](#)

Princeton Theological Seminary

After completing his course of study at Brown, Boyce became editor of *The Southern Baptist*, located in Charleston. The paper had been established in May 1846 by parties related to the First Baptist Church. Boyce became editor by November 22, 1848, when his name first appeared on the masthead. He was introduced by a notice which stated: "Mr. Boyce is a graduate of Brown University, a licentiate of the First Baptist Church in Charleston, and possesses qualities of mind and heart which give promise of distinction and usefulness in the new field of labor he has entered."[\[9\]](#)

The pages of *The Southern Baptist* were filled with news of interest related to Baptist life in the larger Christian community. More importantly, the mark of Boyce's editorship was found in the serious attention given to doctrinal and theological concerns. In particular, an extensive series of articles entitled "On Imputation" appeared in successive issues of the journal. This was later found remarkable by no less than John A. Broadus.

An unusual article appeared on March 28, 1849 which advocated the establishment of a "central theological institution" for all Baptists in the South. This issue was not entirely new to Baptist discussion but it reflects without question the thoughts of the editor as he prepared to leave Charleston to attend Princeton Theological Seminary.

James Boyce enrolled at Princeton in September 1849. By God's providence, he arrived at a critical moment in the life of that institution. The faculty of Princeton at that time included its first professor, Archibald Alexander, and his two sons, James and Addison. Dr. Samuel Miller, the second professor named to the institution, had been elevated as emeritus professor in 1849—the very year of Boyce's arrival, though he continued to teach.

In 1840 Archibald Alexander had relinquished the chair of didactic theology to Dr. Charles Hodge. Thus, Boyce entered the life of Princeton Theological Seminary just as it was reaching the very height of its elevation as the center for convictional theological education in the Reformed tradition.

Without doubt, the influence of Charles Hodge is most notable in the theological lectures later offered by James

Boyce. Boyce learned the Princeton Theology from its very fountain. He imbibed from Charles Hodge and other faculty colleagues an intense hunger and thirst for theological substance based solidly within the exposition of Scripture. The Princetonians were ardent systematicians. They were unwilling to leave theological truths as unrelated or marginal issues in relation to the marrow of the church. To the contrary, they exhibited in themselves and inculcated in their students an understanding of the unity of truth.

Though Professor Samuel Miller was to live for only a brief time after Boyce's arrival at Princeton, his influence on Boyce's later thought can scarcely be exaggerated, and yet it has been neglected. Miller was a sturdy and committed Presbyterian and an ardent confessionalist. He was also a prophet vindicated by later events within the Presbyterian denomination. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Miller was already convinced that American Protestants were in the process of abdicating their theological heritage and diluting the convictions which established the bedrock unity of the true Church. In 1824 Miller published his most important book, *The Utility and Importance of Creeds and Confessions*. The book, later published under the title *Doctrinal Integrity*, is one of the most forceful and significant arguments put forth by any American theologian concerning the importance of confessional statements and their application as regulative creeds binding members of a church or Christian fellowship together on the basis of truth. Many of the passages from Miller's *Doctrinal Integrity* were reflected in Boyce's address, "Three Changes in Theological Education."

As Miller argued, "The necessity and importance of creeds and confessions appear from the consideration, that one great design of establishing a Church in our world was that she might be, in all ages, a depository, a guardian, and a witness of the truth."^[10] Miller sought to answer the opponents of creeds and confessions by suggesting that any opposition was inherently linked to a desire, conscious or unconscious, to compromise and dilute the truth. The arguments against creeds and confessions most often voiced within contemporary Protestantism, and in particular within the Southern Baptist Convention in recent years, were hardly new to Samuel Miller in the nineteenth century. His arguments stand irrefutable:

It will surely not be said, by any considerate person, that the Church, or any of her individual members, can sufficiently fulfill the duty in question, by simply proclaiming from time to time, in the midst of surrounding error, her adherence and attachment to the Bible. Everyone must see that this would be, in fact, doing nothing as 'witnesses of the truth': because it would be doing nothing peculiar, nothing distinguishing, nothing which every heretic in Christendom is not ready to do, or rather is not daily doing, as loudly, and as frequently as the most orthodox church.^[11]

Miller's arguments for the usefulness and critical importance of creeds and confessions are argued throughout Boyce's call for what became the "Abstract of Principles," which is the confessional basis for all teaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Upon Boyce's return from Princeton, he became pastor of the First Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina. During his ordination examination Boyce was asked if he had committed himself to the pastorate for the remainder of his life. Boyce answered in the affirmative but added "provided I do not become a professor of theology."^[12]

Boyce enjoyed a happy pastorate in Columbia where he was able to see his young and small congregation grow consistently. In Columbia he was in close proximity to the Presbyterian Theological Seminary there and he had opportunity to come to know James H. Thornwell, George Howe and Benjamin Morgan Palmer, who were all leading figures in the Presbyterian church of that day. They represented continuity with the Princeton tradition, to which they added the genteel approach common to the South.

Boyce's caveat uttered during his ordination council was brought to the fore when he was elected professor of theology at Furman University in July 1855. At Furman, Boyce quickly distinguished himself as a professor. As John G. Williams, one of his students reflected: "Dr. Boyce taught us systematic theology (using Dick's Theology as a textbook), church history, Greek New Testament exegesis, and Hebrew. It was easy to see then that theology was his strong point and had already taken a strong hold on him."[\[13\]](#)

The Birth of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

The *Magna Carta* of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was set forth in July 1856 when Boyce delivered his inaugural address as a professor at Furman University. The address, entitled "Three Changes in Theological Institutions," set forth a bold, innovative, and thoroughly comprehensive vision for a central theological institution to serve the needs of Baptists in the South.

The address was perhaps the most important single contribution toward an understanding of theological education in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention. Boyce laid out a vision which incorporated the democratic impulse of Francis Wayland, the academic and scholarly commitments of the most ambitious educational cultures, and a clear mechanism for ensuring convictional fidelity. The address must have stirred those who heard the young theology professor speak both from the clarity of his mind and the passion of his heart. In any event, his message set in motion and accelerated the move toward a centralized theological institution for the Southern Baptist Convention.

Hopes for a denominational theological institution had been voiced even during the organizing sessions of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. Nevertheless, the young denomination turned first to the tasks of Home and Foreign Missions and it was not until fourteen years after the organization of the convention that its first institution was established.

Events led to the report of a Committee on the Plan of Organization, which brought its report in 1858. The committee brought forth a draft of the Fundamental Laws of the institution and stipulated that an *Abstract of Principles* was to be set in place as a safeguard. As described in the report, the *Abstract of Principles* was to be "selected as the fundamental principles of the Gospel, shall be subscribed to by every professor elect as indicative of his concurrence in its correctness as an epitome of Biblical truth; and it shall be the imperative duty of the Board to remove any professor of whose violation of the pledge they feel satisfied."[\[14\]](#)

Boyce's vigorous vision for theological education was set forth by the three changes he suggested in relation to theological institutions. The changes reveal the depth and breadth of Boyce's visionary hopes.

The first of these changes was reflective of the influence of Francis Wayland. Boyce was concerned that most theological institutions had become elitist and removed from the life and work of local Baptist congregations. Though Boyce made clear from the onset his insistence upon the vital importance of education and the dignity and utility of graduate education, he nonetheless feared that Baptists would be sidetracked into a false sense of educational aspiration. Should this aspiration be transformed into standards for ministry in the churches, Boyce felt that both Biblical imperatives and denominational advance would be compromised. As Boyce stated:

The Scriptural qualifications of the ministry do, indeed, involve the idea of knowledge, but that knowledge is not of the sciences nor of philosophy nor of the languages, but of God and His plan of salvation. He who has not this knowledge, though he be learned in all the learning of the schools, is incapable of preaching the Word of God. But he who knows it, not superficially, not merely in those

plain and simple declarations known to every believing reader, but in the power as revealed in its precious and sanctifying doctrines, is fitted to bring forth out of his treasure things new and old, and is a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, although he may speak to his hearer in uncouth words or in manifest ignorance of all the sciences, the one belongs to the class of educated ministers, the other to the ministry of educated men, and the two things are essentially different.[\[15\]](#)

In this regard, Boyce compared John Bunyan with Theodore Parker. Better to be a preacher unlearned in the worldly sciences than a well educated minister who distorts and manipulates the Word of God. Boyce's point here is easily misunderstood. This was hardly a call for lowering educational standards or for minimizing the importance of theological education. To the contrary, the issue was not the value of theological education but *access* to theological education.

In this respect, Boyce significantly advanced beyond the argument of Francis Wayland. Boyce called for a change in theological institutions that would open them to those who were without benefit of a classical education in order that such students might better understand the Word of God and prepare themselves for ministry. As Boyce argued:

Let such a change be made in the theological department as shall provide an English course of study for those who have only been able to obtain a plain English education. Let that course comprise the evidences of Christianity, systematic and polemic theology, the rules of interpretation applied to the English version; some knowledge of the principles of rhetoric, extensive practice in the development from texts of subjects and skeletons of sermons, whatever amount of composition may be expedient, and full instruction in the nature of pastoral duties-let the studies of this course be so pursued as to train the mind to habits of reflection and analysis, to awaken it to conceptions of the truths of Scripture, to fill it with arguments from the Word of God in support of its doctrines, and to give it facility in constructing and presenting such arguments-and the work will be accomplished.[\[16\]](#)

Thus, the theological seminary would train those who came with the benefit of a classical education and study in Greek and Latin, but would train as well those who came with a basic education in English.

This would constitute a virtual revolution in theological education. Boyce's vision transformed the concerns of Francis Wayland into the glory of an institution which would train both the academic elite and those who had no background in classical scholarly aspirations focused upon the former, his full sympathy rested with the latter.

Boyce's second change can be seen as the complementary parallel to the democratic impulse reflected in his first concern. Boyce's concern in this regard was the class of educated men who had no access to theological education designed specifically to train the preacher and minister of the Word of God. If his concern related to the first change was *access* to theological education for those who had no classical training, his second change called for the development of a *quality* theological institution which would call forth and train the most highly qualified minister of the Gospel.

Boyce was concerned that churches were calling educated men who were not educated ministers. Or, as Boyce argued, though these ministers are "familiar with all the sciences which form parts of the college curriculum, they are ignorant for the most part of that very science which lies at the foundation of all their ministerial labors."[\[17\]](#)

Boyce was greatly concerned that these "educated men" who were not yet "educated ministers" would do great damage to the church. He listed concerns which ranged from "unsettled" doctrines and theological error to ill-fed congregations. Boyce prescribed a comprehensive course of theological education based upon the finest and most

faithful scholarship, which would include study of the biblical languages including Greek, Hebrew, and Chaldee. These individuals would be expected to study theology and church history from Greek and Latin primary sources. The benefit of classical education would be put to direct use in their study of the whole counsel of God.

Beyond this Boyce called for the development of a superior theological library within such a seminary which could rival the great theological libraries of Europe. To this Boyce added a call for the scholars who would emerge from such a seminary to take on German scholarship and other continental scholars through writing, research, and teaching.

The third change for which Boyce contended in his famous address reflected his sincere concern that doctrinal compromise would in fact threaten both the theological seminary and its denomination. As he stated, "The change which I would in the last place propose is not intended to meet an evil existing in our theological institutions so much as one which is found in the denomination at large, and which may at some future time injuriously affect this educational interest."[\[18\]](#) In order to meet this concern, Boyce called for a "declaration of doctrine" which would be required of all those who would teach within the institution. Boyce quickly reviewed the legacy of heresy which had called forth this imperative. Even in his own day, Campbellism and Arminianism had already infected many Baptist churches, "and even some of our ministry have not hesitated publicly to avow them."

Southern Baptists should hear with proper rebuke and reproof the words with which Boyce stated his theological concern:

That sentiment, the invariable precursor, or accompaniment of all heresy—that the doctrines of theology are matters of mere speculation, and its distinctions only logomachines and technicalities, has obtained at least a limited prevalence. and the doctrinal sentiments of a large portion of the ministry and membership of the churches are seen to be either very much unsettled or radically wrong.[\[19\]](#)

Boyce warned of a "crisis in Baptist doctrine" which he saw close on the horizon. Those who would stand for historic Baptist convictions and essential evangelical doctrines would have to do so against the tide of modern critical scholarship, which was even by that time beginning to erode conviction among the churches.

Boyce made clear that his concern was for the integrity of the theological seminary in the midst of doctrinal decline. The one who would teach the ministry, "who is to be the medium through which the fountain of Scripture truth is to flow," stands before God with a much higher responsibility and accountability than any other teacher. Boyce argued that it is only proper that such a teacher should be held to a formal and explicit confession of faith which would set forth without compromise, and without forsaking clarity, precisely what would be taught within the institution.

This *Abstract of Principles* constitutes an unbreakable bond and covenant between the seminary and its churches through the denomination. This covenant would in no way compromise the appropriate freedom of the theological professor. To the contrary, that freedom is located *within* the liberty of the confession itself. That is, the theological professor is fully free to teach within the boundaries and parameters of that doctrinal covenant. The professor is not free to violate that covenant either through implicit or explicit disavowal. As Boyce argued,

The theological professor is to teach ministers, to place the truth, and all the errors connected with it in such a manner before his pupils, that they shall arrive at the truth without danger of any mixture of error therewith. He cannot do this if he has any erroneous tendencies, and hence his opinions must be expressly affirmed to be upon every point in accordance with the truth we believe to be

taught in the Scriptures.[\[20\]](#)

Particular obligations lie upon those who would teach the ministry. Such an individual is entrusted with great responsibility, for a theological professor would affect and influence not just one congregation, but multitudes of churches through the generations of ministers who would sit in the classroom.

Theological error was pervasive even in the mid-nineteenth century, and Boyce put forth the historical argument that doctrinal error begins in most cases with one individual who had been entrusted with influence and authority. Such an individual would be dangerous in the extreme, as was Alexander Campbell, Boyce's chief illustration in this regard.

The doctrinal integrity of the seminary surpassed all other institutional concerns. Doctrinal fidelity surpassed every other institutional concern. Doctrinal integrity was more important than finances, facilities, and all other related factors. The theological institution, no matter how healthy by all other organizational barometers, would be only injurious to the church if it did not stand under this covenant and confession of conviction.

Boyce was neither embarrassed nor hesitant to identify the *Abstract of Principles* as a creed. Though he rejected the authority of any secular power to infringe upon the Christian conscience, he asserted that the imposition of a creed upon the one who voluntarily taught within a theological institution was in no way a compromise of Baptist understanding of liberty. His statement is of such importance that it deserves citation in full:

It is, therefore, gentlemen, in perfect consistency with the position of Baptists, as well as Bible Christians, that the test of doctrine I have suggested to you should be adopted. It is based upon principles and practices sanctioned by the authority of Scripture and by the usage of our people. In so doing you will be acting simply in accordance with propriety and righteousness. You will infringe the rights of no man, and you will secure the rights of those who have established here an instrumentality for the production of a sound ministry. It is no hardship to those who teach here to be called upon to sign the declaration of their principles, for there are fields of usefulness open elsewhere to every man, and none need accept your call who cannot conscientiously sign your formulary. And while all this is true, you will receive by this an assurance that the trust committed to you by the founders is fulfilling in accordance with their wishes, that the ministry that go forth have here learned to distinguish truth from error, and to embrace the former, and that the same precious truths of the Bible which were so dear to the hearts of its founders, and which I trust are equally dear to yours, will be propagated in our churches, giving to them vigor and strength and causing them to flourish by the Godly sentiments and emotions they will awaken within them. May God impress you deeply with the responsibility under which you must act in reference to it![\[21\]](#)

Thus would the theological integrity of the institution be established.

The *Abstract of Principles* came primarily from the editorial pen of Basil Manly, Jr., who had been assigned the task of drafting the confession. Manly drew from the very finest and most faithful Baptist tradition by turning to the Charleston confession and its Reformed Baptist orthodoxy. The *Abstract of Principles* stands as a brilliant summary of Biblical and Baptist conviction. It is solidly based within the confessional tradition of the Baptists and was, as acknowledged by those who set it in place, a faithful repetition of the central truths found within the Westminster Confession.

Thus the great truths of the sovereignty of God and the doctrines of grace were incorporated within the heart of

Southern Baptists' first theological institution. Here was to be found no lack of doctrinal clarity and no ambiguity on the great doctrines which had united Baptists to this date. Sincere and earnest Southern Baptist who wish to understand the true substance of our theological heritage need look no further than the *Abstract of Principles* for a clear outline of the doctrines once most certainly held among us. Let there be no doubt that in the years to come Southern Seminary will be unashamedly and unhesitatingly committed to these same doctrinal convictions as set forth in this incomparable document.

The Legacy of James Petigru Boyce

As the Southern Baptist Convention celebrates its sesquicentennial, it is most fitting that we draw attention and honor to this giant of our heritage, who gave birth by heart and calling to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. By the sovereign providence of God, James Petigru Boyce was used to awaken the hearts of Southern Baptists to the need for a theological seminary and, of even greater importance, to understand the requirements that should be made of such an institution in order to guard its integrity for the benefit of the churches. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary stands in tribute to those founding fathers who brought this institution into being, shared those convictions which shaped its substance, and gave of their lives, their fortunes, and their affections in order that this institution might serve the churches.

The first change called for in Boyce's famous address was realized most fully in the openness of Southern Seminary to persons of all educational backgrounds. Southern Seminary was the first theological institution to offer formal course work in the English Bible. This was a revolution in theological education which was fiercely criticized by sister seminaries at the time. Nevertheless, within twenty years almost all theological seminaries in the country had followed Southern Seminary's example. A further development of this concern was reflected in the establishment twenty years ago of the Boyce Bible School, to meet the contemporary needs of God-called ministers who had not yet been able to attain an undergraduate education and thus be qualified to enter the graduate programs of the Seminary.

Boyce's second change, his concern for scholarship, was realized in the fact that Southern Seminary is this year celebrating the centennial of her doctoral program. The institution awarded its first Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1894, the very first non-university based institution in the United States to offer such a degree. Southern Seminary must represent unquestioned and unparalleled theological and Biblical scholarship.

But, as Boyce recognized, that scholarship must ever be in defense of the Word of God and never at the expense of the Word of God. Thus the *Abstract of Principles* stands. In our present generation, which has experienced moral and doctrinal decline beyond James Boyce's most dreadful imagination, it is absolutely and undeniably vital that these doctrinal commitments be restated clearly, loudly, and consistently. For, we now live in the midst of a generation suffering from theological and historical amnesia concerning the Baptist heritage. Ours is the task to train, educate, and prepare a generation of God-called ministers of the Gospel who will stand for these convictions without compromise, and exhibit by their faithful exercise of the Christian calling their testimony to the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and see the conversion of souls as God adds to His Kingdom.

This was the passion of James Petigru Boyce. May Southern Baptists of this generation give our proper respect to that legacy, and leave for generations which will follow the same deposit of truth, and an equal commitment to its perpetuation.



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What Should We Think Of Evangelism and Calvinism?

Ernest Reisinger

One of the greatest evangelists ever to set foot on American soil was George Whitefield. Read carefully the following quote and note his pleading with sinners.

I offer you salvation this day; the door of mercy is not yet shut, there does yet remain a sacrifice for sin, for all that will accept of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will embrace you in the arms of his love. O turn to him, turn in a sense of your own unworthiness; tell him how polluted you are, how vile, and be not faithless, but believing. Why fear ye that the Lord Jesus Christ will not accept of you? Your sins will be no hindrance, your unworthiness no hindrance; if your own corrupt hearts do not keep you back nothing will hinder Christ from receiving of you. He loves to see poor sinners coming to him, he is pleased to see them lie at his feet pleading his promises; and if you thus come to Christ, he will not send you away without his Spirit; no, but will receive and bless you. O do not put a slight on infinite love--he only wants you to believe on him, that you might be saved. This, this is all the dear Saviour desires, to make you happy, that you may leave your sins, to sit down eternally with him at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let me beseech you to come to Jesus Christ; I invite you all to come to him, and receive him as your Lord and Saviour; he is ready to receive you. I invite you to come to him, that you may find rest for your souls. He will rejoice and be glad. He calls you by his ministers; O come unto him--he is labouring to bring you back from sin and from Satan, unto himself: open the door of your hearts, and the King of glory shall enter in. My heart is full, it is quite full, and I must speak, or I shall burst. What, do you think your souls of no value? Do you esteem them as not worth saving? Are your pleasures worth more than your souls? Had you rather regard the diversions of this life, than the salvation of your souls? If so, you will never be partakers with him in glory; but if you come unto him, he will supply you with his grace here, and bring you to glory hereafter; and there you may sing praises and hallelujahs to the Lamb for ever. And may this be the happy end of all who hear me!

George Whitefield was a staunch Calvinist. There is one thing certain--Whitefield's Calvinism did not in any way dampen his holy zeal for the souls of men.

What is Calvinism?

The great Princeton theologian, Dr. B. B. Warfield, describes Calvinism as follows:

Calvinism is evangelism in its pure and only stable expression, and when we say evangelism we say sin and salvation. It means utter dependence on God for salvation. It implies therefore, need of salvation and a profound sense of this need, along with an equally profound sense of helplessness in the presence of this need, and utter dependence on God for its satisfaction. Its type is found in the publican who smote his breast and cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" No question there of saving himself, or helping God to save him, or of opening the way to God to save him. No question of anything but "I am a sinner, and all my hope is in God, my Saviour!" This is Calvinism, not just

something like Calvinism, or an approach to Calvinism, but Calvinism in its vital manifestation. Wherever this attitude of heart is found and is given expression in direct and unambiguous terms, there is Calvinism. Where this attitude of mind and heart is fallen away from it however small a measure, there Calvinism has become impossible.

The Calvinist, in a word, is the man who sees God. He has caught sight of the ineffable Vision, and he will not let it fade for a moment from his eyes--God in nature, God in history, God in grace. Everywhere he sees God in His mighty stepping, everywhere he feels the working of His mighty arm, the throbbing of His mighty heart...Calvinism is just Christianity. The super-naturalism for which Calvinism stands is the very breath of the nostrils of Christianity; without it Christianity cannot exist...Calvinism thus emerges to our sight as nothing more or less than the hope of the world.

John A. Broadus, one of the great and respected Southern Baptist fathers, described the Calvinism of his fellow-founder of Southern Seminary, Dr. James P. Boyce, as nothing less than the technical name for "that exalted system of Pauline truth."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that great soul-winner, once said,

We only use the term "Calvinism" for shortness. That doctrine which is called "Calvinism" did not spring from Calvin; we believe that it sprang from the great founder of all truth. Perhaps Calvin himself derived it mainly from the writings of Augustine. Augustine obtained his views, without doubt, through the Holy Spirit of God, from diligent study of the writings of Paul, and Paul received them from the Holy Ghost and from Jesus Christ, the great founder of the Christian Church. We use the term then, not because we impute an extraordinary importance to Calvin's having taught these doctrines. We would be just as willing to call them by any other name, if we could find one which would be better understood, and which on the whole would be as consistent with the fact.

Spurgeon went on to say,

The old truths that Calvin preached, that Augustine preached, is the truth that I preach today, or else I would be false to my conscience and my God. I cannot shape truth; I know of no such thing as paring off the rough edges of a doctrine. John Knox's gospel is my gospel. And that gospel which thundered through Scotland must thunder through England again.

Diverse Attitudes Toward Calvinism

The subject of this article is one which arouses diverse feelings in the minds of men. History has witnessed no small amount of controversy over "Calvinism." The subject remains vitally important at the present time. This is particularly true in light of modern deviations from historical and biblical orthodoxy.

Unfortunately many harmful yet fashionable opinions have invaded almost every area of religious life. On nearly every side we hear the voice of inquiry with Pilate's old question, "What is truth?" There are a thousand different religious opinions regarding the answer to this query. Sometimes this question is asked by the skeptic, who doubts even the existence of an objective answer. Often, however, it is asked by serious, troubled souls desirous of finding their way through the rocky religious shoals of life's storm-tossed sea of religious confusion. It is the latter I hope will find help in this study.

As diversified as the modern professing religious world may be with regard to its numerous sects and communions, split up as it is with its irreconcilable creeds and contentions, it will nevertheless be found, upon close and critical examination, that among those who can (reasonably) be called Christian, there are basically only two sections or parties. Practices may vary, diverse views on many subjects may be held, different attitudes may be taken up in relationship to many questions, and the outlooks may be fixed at widely differing angles, but the fundamental positions occupied will be found to center on one or the other of two distinct forms of belief. Perhaps it is more correct to say that all such perspectives derive from one of two systems of theology. The root principles of all are to be found embedded either in Calvinism or in Arminianism. Such, at least, are the modern terms used to distinguish and describe these widely differing systems of theological thought and teaching. These terms, however, have a tendency to confuse and mislead.

Christianity should bring us to the feet of the apostles, and, indeed to the feet of our Lord Himself. Any understanding of revealed truth which fails to do so is not worthy of the name "Christian." The views which are stated and defended in the following pages, when properly embraced, have precisely this effect.

We call it Calvinism. It might with equal justice be called Augustinianism. We might, with the same cogency of reasoning, go even further back into the pages of ecclesiastical history and designate it Paulinism. Whichever name we use, however, it should be regarded only as a mere convenience now rendered necessary because of its general adoption. Personally, we regard the name as an entire mistake seeing that it has been the means of fostering many of the ignorant cavilings which have been heard not only in these days but also in days which are past.

There is a genuine resurgence today of this grand and glorious Pauline system of biblical truth--particularly among Southern Baptists. For those of us who are numbered among this group, it is nothing less than coming home to our doctrinal roots. The founding fathers of the SBC were immersed in that stream of biblical truth where no man can touch bottom, and which caused the great Apostle to cry "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! *For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*"

Do Not Go Further Than The Scriptures

The following warning should guide anyone who embarks on a study of Calvinism:

The importance of the subject discussed should lead us to proceed only with profoundest reverence and caution. While it is true that mysteries are to be handled with care, and while unwarranted and presumptuous speculations concerning divine things are to be avoided, yet if we would declare the Gospel in its purity and fullness we must be careful not to withhold from believers what is declared in the Scriptures concerning the truth of Calvinism. That some of these truths will be perverted and abused by the ungodly is to be expected. No matter how plainly it is taught in Scripture, the unenlightened mind considers it as absurd, for instance, that one God should exist in three persons, or that God should foreknow the entire course of world events, as that his plan should include the destiny of every person. And while we can know only as much about Calvinism as God has seen fit to reveal, it is important that we shall know that much; otherwise, it would not have been revealed. Where Scripture leads we may safely follow (L. Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, pp. 54-55).

There are many misrepresentations by those who do not know what biblical Calvinism really is. Most of this group call real Calvinism "hyper-Calvinism." Some think that if you believe in the antinomian view of "eternal security" you are a Calvinist and everyone else is either an Arminian or a hyper-Calvinist.

There is no question that many Calvinists are not as evangelistic as they should be, but this is not because of Calvinism but because of a cold and indifferent heart. Many Arminians are not evangelistic but it is not because of their Arminianism. Again, it is because of a cold and indifferent heart.

It is also true that Calvinism will kill some kinds of evangelism but it will never kill real biblical evangelism. Some people do not like rock-and-roll music but that does not mean that they do not like music. So it is with shallow, unbiblical evangelism. It is repulsive to Calvinists, but this does not mean that they do not love and embrace true, God-centered, biblical evangelism.

Calvinism may kill man-centered evangelism, but true, biblical Calvinism gives evangelism its only proper doctrinal foundation. Furthermore, it guarantees evangelism's success. God saves sinners--that is Calvinism. He does not merely make salvation possible, but actually saves by plan and power.

Doctrine Is Vital to Evangelism and Election

The doctrine of unconditional election is one of the foundational doctrines of Calvinism. Before considering some of the biblical evidence for election, let us distinguish the difference between *means* and *cause*.

God elected the *means* of salvation as well as the recipients of salvation. His Word reveals that He chose to save His own people through preaching and witnessing: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."

But we must always remember that preaching and prayer are the means and not the cause of anyone's salvation. The cause is God's unconditional, electing love. For God so loved the world that the "whosoever" will believe and will not perish.

Who are the "whosoever"?

Answer:

"All that the Father giveth . . . shall come . . ." (John 6:37).

"My sheep hear My voice and I know them and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

Why is it that some do not believe?

Answer:

"But you believe not because you are not My sheep . . ." (John 10:26).

The Father gave His Son some sheep and He has sent us out to preach and witness because that is the means He employs to call them. "As thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as

Thou hast given Him" (John 17:2).

They will come because Christ died for them and Christ has prayed for them. "I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me: for they are thine" (John 17:9). Jesus prayed for the future sheep who would come. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word" (John 17:20). "Father, I will that they also, Whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for thou lovest Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Why is God's electing love so important to the preacher and missionary? It is the doctrine that assures the success of our missionary efforts. The greatest preacher-evangelists in the history of the church believed in the biblical doctrine of election. It is an important part of the doctrinal foundation of Calvinism .

It would be wise for our present day Southern Baptists to heed the exhortation found in Isaiah 51:1--"Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, You who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, And to the hole of the pit from which you were dug."

The Israelites were commanded to call to remembrance their past. Remembrance of God's mercy in the past will be profitable in many ways. A recollection of the past will be sure to excite our thankfulness. God's people are always happy when they are grateful. But at this particular time in our history it will be profitable to examine our doctrinal foundation, "the rock from whence we were hewn." An honest looking back will teach us the importance of sound doctrine, especially, as the foundation for gospel preaching. Southern Baptists, (all Baptists for that matter) have always been marked by their zeal for evangelism and missions. That is why we have over 3,000 foreign missionaries in 91 different countries and about 3,200 home missionaries and nearly 40,000 churches with over 15,000,000 members.

Looking back to the great warriors in the work of evangelism and missions we should ask, "What did these men believe about God, man, sin and salvation?" By looking back it is easy to find that they were mostly Calvinists and their evangelistic efforts were grounded in the doctrinal foundation of Calvinism. A biblical, doctrinal foundation is more important than most Baptists believe. Sound doctrine undergirds all true worship and witness, and that is what Christianity is all about. Doctrine not only expresses the true conversion experience but it determines the message and methods of evangelism.

The doctrinal foundation of biblical evangelism is as important to the work of evangelism as the back bone is to the human body. Doctrine gives unity and stability.

It is the doctrinal foundation that produces the spiritual strength that enables evangelism to endure the storms of opposition, hardship and persecution which so often accompany it. Therefore, the church that neglects the true doctrinal foundation of biblical evangelism will soon weaken its efforts.

The lack of a doctrinal foundation will work against unity and will invite error and instability in all evangelistic efforts. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of a sound biblical foundation for true God-centered evangelism.

Doctrine shapes our destiny, and we are presently reaping the fruits of unbiblical evangelism. The great apostle, instructing a young minister to do the work of an evangelist, tells him that doctrine is the first purpose of Scripture. "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for DOCTRINE" (2 Tim. 3:16).

When I speak of doctrine I am not speaking of any doctrine but that which the founders of our first seminary believed and taught. The doctrines that Boyce believed and taught were the foundation of his devotion and the devotion that he inspired in others. Now, many recognize the importance of doctrine and keep using the term. Jehovah's Witnesses have doctrine, as do Mormons and Christian Scientists. All Baptists have some doctrine. But what doctrine?

What doctrines am I talking about? I mean those doctrines that were defined, defended, expressed and set forth by the Synod of Dort in 1618; the doctrines that were set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism; those doctrines expressed in the Old Baptist Confession of 1689, later adopted by the Philadelphia Association, out of which Southern Baptists came.

These precious doctrines that set forth a God who actually saves, and does not just makes salvation possible for sinners to somehow save themselves by a decision, or by cooperation in their salvation. Rather, these doctrines declare a God who actually saves by plan, by purpose and by power.

I mean those doctrines that reveal the three great acts of the triune God in recovering poor lost sinners, that is:

1. *The loving election by the Father.*
2. *The powerful redemption accomplished by the Son.*
3. *The effectual calling by the Spirit.*

Each Person of the Trinity works for the salvation of the same people, thus securing the salvation of those people infallibly.

These doctrines make salvation depend on the work of God, not on the ability or will of man. These doctrines give all the glory to God for the saving of sinners--not dividing that glory between God and sinners. These doctrines reveal that history is nothing less than the working out of God's preordained plan. These doctrines set forth a God who is sovereign in creation and sovereign in redemption; the Trinity working together for the salvation of the sheep. God the Father *planned* it. God the Son *achieved* it. God the Spirit *communicates* and efficaciously *applies* it. There is no war in the Trinity. They all work together for the same people: "My sheep hear My voice...."

We do not support the erroneous idea that God has done all He can, and is now standing idly by waiting to see what sovereign sinners are going to do with an impotent, pathetic Jesus. No! God saves sinners--salvation is of the Lord. We must not weaken this great truth by disrupting the unity of the Trinity or by dividing the achievement of salvation between God and man.

Calvinists believe and teach that the cross was not a place just to make salvation possible but rather, to actually secure the salvation of His people (Isa. 53:11). These doctrines show the cross as revealing God's power to save, not His impotence. God was not frustrated at the cross. He was the Master of Ceremonies. As Peter declared, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23).

A Calvinist does not believe that God's decision to save man by a decree leaves man passive or inert. No! No! The very opposite takes place! The covenant of grace does not kill man, it does not regard him as a tin can or a piece of wood or a robot; it takes possession of the man, it lays hold of his whole being with all his faculties, his power of soul and body--for time and eternity.

God's sovereign grace does not annihilate man's powers, rather it overcomes his powerlessness. It does not destroy his will but frees it from sin. It does not stifle, or obliterate his conscience but sets it free from darkness. It regenerates and recreates man in his entirety and in renewing him by grace, causes him to love and consecrate himself to God most freely.

I am aware that as I write these words a deep-seated prejudice exists in many parts of the church against the systematic exposition of the doctrines of the Bible. It probably falls within the experience of every pastor to see the gathering frown, the averted shoulder, and the drooping head, as soon as certain doctrines are announced as the theme for discussion. It does not excite or surprise us that the world of the ungodly should manifest this displeasure; for the same "carnal mind" which is enmity against God, is enmity likewise against the truth of God. However, that professing Christians should engage in this unholy crusade against doctrinal religion, and that even ministers of the gospel should sigh over the earnest proclamation of its truths, and accuse the faithful witness of "daubing with untempered mortar," is certainly a most afflictive and atrocious scandal.

Look Back

I have a long-cherished conviction that, next to the Bible, from which all that relates to God and the soul must be drawn, there are no books I would rather recommend for an experimental and devotional use than those written by our Calvinistic fathers, such as, John Bunyan, Andrew Fuller, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Basil Manly, James P. Boyce and John L. Dagg.

In looking back to the rock from which we are hewn we cannot overlook some of our great Southern Baptist Convention fathers and leaders who were committed, articulate Calvinists:

Basil Manly, Sr.--One historian said Manly played the part of concertmaster in orchestrating the events that resulted in the call for a conservative convention of Baptists. Manly produced a strongly worded six-point resolution which led to the separation of Northern Baptists and Southern Baptists. This resolution was "passed standing and unanimously." Basil Manly was a Calvinist of the first order.

James P. Boyce--He was the principal founder of our first seminary (Southern Seminary). Long after Boyce's death, one of his former students, Dr. David Ramsey, gave a Founders Day address on January 11, 1924. His message was entitled, "James Petigru Boyce: God's Gentleman." A few quotes from Dr. Ramsey's address will tell the story that Boyce was a committed Calvinist who loved the souls of men.

Dr. Ramsey said:

My contention is that no other theology than that of an overwhelming and soul consuming love for men will account for James P. Boyce and his career. This passionate love was the motif that directed his thinking in those early conferences and in the preparation of those papers which led to the establishment of the seminary.

This purpose to help his fellowmen ran through all his plans, through his conversation, his writings and his preaching and teaching as the scarlet thread that runs through every foot of cable of the English Navy.

This zeal for souls called out the finest of his being as the morning sun causes the dew laden flowers

and plants to bend toward the god of day."

Dr. Boyce not only loved men, he loved God. Dr. Ramsey said, concerning this point, "Let the thought embrace both the subjective and objective love; man's love for God and God's love for man."

Boyce's close friend and fellow founder of the seminary, John A. Broadus, expressed his own feelings about the theology of Boyce: "It was a great privilege to be directed and upborne by such a teacher in studying that exalted system of Pauline truth which is technically called Calvinism, which compels an earnest student to profound thinking, and when pursued with a combination of systematic thought and fervent experience, makes him at home among the most inspiring and ennobling views of God and the universe He has made."

Dr. Boyce's legacy to us and to our posterity is the biblical theology expressed in the *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, which is nothing other than his classroom teaching. It is pure Calvinism.

William A. Mueller, author of *A History of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, said, "As a theologian Dr. Boyce is not afraid to be found 'in the old paths'. He is conservative, and eminently Scriptural. He treats with great fairness those whose views upon various points discussed he declines to accept, yet in his own teaching is decidedly Calvinistic, after the model of 'the old divines'. Difficulties as connected with such doctrines as the federal headship of Adam, election and the atonement he aims to meet, not so as to silence the controversialist, but so as to help the honest inquirer."

Rev. E. E. Folk, in the *Baptist Reflector* commented on Boyce's abilities and fruits as a teacher of theology: "You had to know your systematic theology, or you could not recite it to Dr. Boyce. And though the young men were generally rank Arminians when they came to the seminary, few went through this course under him without being converted to his strong Calvinistic views." Boyce was a strong Calvinist.

W. B. Johnson--First President of the SBC was a Calvinist.

R. B. C. Howell--Second President of the SBC was a Calvinist.

Richard Fuller--Third President of the SBC was a Calvinist.

Patrick Hues Mell, who was known as "The Prince of Parliamentarians" was Professor of Greek and Latin at Mercer University, Georgia. One of the outstanding things about P. H. Mell is that he was president of the SBC 17 times--twice as many times as any other man. Mell was a polemic defender of Calvinism. Mrs. D. B. Fitzgerald, a member of the Antioch Church and a resident in Mell's home for a number of years, recalls Mell's initial efforts at the church:

"When first called to take charge of the church Dr. Mell found it in a sad state of confusion. He said a number of members were drifting off into Arminianism. He loved the truth too well to blow hot and cold with the same breath. It was a Baptist church and it must have doctrines peculiar to that denomination preached to it. And with that boldness, clearness, and vigor of speech that marked him, he preached to them the doctrines of predestination, election, free-grace, etc. He said it was always his business to preach the truth as he found it in God's Word, and leave the matter there, feeling that God would take care of the results" (*A Southern Baptist Looks at the Doctrine of Predestination*, pp. 58,59).

Names of other Southern Baptist leaders who were committed Calvinists and strong on evangelism could be multiplied. One more, however, will have to suffice.

John A. Broadus, a great preacher and one of the founders of our mother seminary said, "The people who sneer at what is called Calvinism, might as well sneer at Mont Blanc. We are not bound in the least to defend all of Calvin's opinions or actions, but I do not see how any one who really understands the Greek of the Apostle Paul or the Latin of Calvin or Turretin can fail to see that these latter did but interpret and formulate substantially what the former teaches."

No preacher or evangelist since the day of the Apostle Paul ever laid so much stress on the absolute sovereignty of God as did that great soul-winner, Jonathan Edwards. And it may come as a surprise to the promoters of man-centered evangelism of our day to discover that the preaching of God's sovereignty was very fruitful. Under the ministry of Edwards, revival swept through his church. He said, "I think that I have found that no discourses have been more remarkably blessed than those in which the doctrines of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners were stressed."

The man who did more for biblical evangelism internationally than anyone in our generation was the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Dr. Lloyd-Jones saw himself primarily as an evangelist. Those who knew him best also saw him in the same way. Mrs. Lloyd-Jones was once present with a group of men who, in her husband's absence were paying compliments to his abilities. As she listened to them she evidently thought that they were missing the main thing and surprised them by quietly remarking, "No one will ever understand my husband until they realize that he is first of all a man of prayer and then, an evangelist."

As a convinced Calvinist, Dr. Lloyd-Jones opposed some of the most popular features of modern evangelism. This led those who were uncomfortable under his strictures to allege that he was "a teacher, not an evangelist." A critic once challenged his commitment to evangelism with the question, "When did you last have a campaign at Westminster Chapel?" The answer he received was not intended to be humorous, "I have one every Sunday." When Martyn Lloyd-Jones was instructing students for the ministry he said, "I contest very strongly and urge that there should always be one evangelistic service in connection with each church every week." In his case it was the Sunday night service which had this purpose, and he continued that practice from the beginning of his ministry in 1927 until he concluded his pastoral oversight in 1968.

Where is the hope for the success of evangelism?

Calvinism is the certainty of success in the work of evangelism. It is the foundation and hope of missionary endeavor.

If the hope of preachers and missionaries was in their own power and ability to convert sinners, or, if our hope was in the power or ability of dead sinners to give themselves life, all would despair. But when the worker's hope for results is in the work of the Holy Spirit, who alone can quicken, we labor with the expectation that God will do what no preacher can do. We can be sure that He will effectually call His sheep by His own will and power through prayer and preaching.

Much of the modern confusion about Calvinism stems from distortions and caricatures of its actual teachings. For this reason it is vital to understand what Calvinism does not teach.

What Calvinism Is Not

Calvinism is not anti-missionary: Rather, it gives the biblical foundation for missions (John 6:37; 17:20,21; 2 Tim. 2:10; Isa. 55:11; 2 Pet. 3:9,15).

Calvinism does not destroy the responsibility of man. Men are responsible for whatever light they have, be it conscience (Rom. 2:15), nature (Rom. 1:19,20), written law (Rom. 2:17-27), or the gospel (Mark 16:15,16). Man's inability to do righteousness no more frees him from responsibility than does Satan's inability to do righteousness.

Calvinism does not make God unjust. His blessing of a great number of unworthy sinners with salvation is no injustice to the rest of the unworthy sinners. If a governor pardons one convict, is it injustice to the rest (1 Thess. 5:9)?

Calvinism does not discourage convicted sinners, but welcomes them to Christ. "Let him that is athirst come" (Rev. 17:17). The God who convicts is the God who saves. The God who saves is the God who has elected men unto salvation. He is the same God who invites.

Calvinism does not discourage prayer. To the contrary, it drives us to God, for He it is who alone can save. True prayer is the Spirit's prompting, and thus will be in harmony with God's will (Rom. 8:26).

Words Of Caution

1. It is not wise to make derogatory remarks about what is in the Bible whether you understand it or not.
2. It is not wise to reject what the Bible teaches on any subject, especially if you have not studied what the Bible has to say about it.
3. It is not wise to make a hobby out of any one doctrine. Although this doctrine is of vital importance, it must not be separated from all Christian truth.
4. It is not wise to reject any doctrine because it has been abused, misused and confused. All the key doctrines have been perverted and abused.
5. It is not wise to try to learn what a Calvinist is from those who are not Calvinists.

A Word Of Warning

Calvin's warning against undue speculation in respect to the lofty doctrine of Predestination can well be applied to all the doctrines of Calvinism:

"Human curiosity renders the discussion of predestination, already somewhat difficult of itself, very confusing and even dangerous. No restraints can hold it back from wandering in forbidden bypaths and thrusting upward to the heights. If allowed, it will leave no secret to God that it will not search out and unravel. If this thought prevails with us, that the Word of the Lord is the sole way that can lead us in our search for all that it is lawful to hold concerning him, and is the sole light to illumine our vision of all that we should see of him, it will readily keep and restrain us from all rashness. For we shall know that the moment we exceed the bounds of the Word, our course is outside the pathway and in darkness, and that there we must repeatedly wander, slip and stumble. Let this, therefore, first of all be before our eyes; to seek any other knowledge of predestination than what the Word of God discloses is not less insane than if one should purpose to walk in a pathless waste (cf.

Job 12:24), or to see in darkness. And let us not be ashamed to be ignorant of something in this matter, wherein there is a certain learned ignorance" (*Institutes*, III. 21. 1-2).

Conclusion

The harmonious relationship between Calvinism and evangelism has often been expressed in our evangelical hymnody. Two such hymns provide a fitting conclusion to this study.

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found of thee.

Thou didst reach forth thy hand and mine enfold;
I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea,
'Twas not so much that I on thee took hold,
As thou, dear Lord on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but, O the whole
Of love is but my answer, Lord to thee;
For thou wert long before-hand with my soul,
Always thou lovedst me.

--Anonymous

'Tis not that I did choose thee, For, Lord that could not be;
This heart would still refuse thee, Hadst thou not chosen me.
Thou from the sin that stained me hast cleansed and set me free;
Of old thou hast ordained me, that I should live to thee.

'Twas sov'reign mercy called me and taught my op'ning mind;
The world had else enthralled me, to heav'nly glories blind.
My heart owns none before thee, for thy rich grace I thirst;
This knowing, if I love thee, Thou must have loved me first."

--Josiah Conder





Book Reviews

By His Grace and for His Glory

by Tom Nettles, Baker Book House, 1986, 442 pages, \$13.95

Reviewed by [Bill Ascol](#)

"If you believe this Calvinism stuff, you are not a Southern Baptist!" How many times have I heard this from well-intentioned, misinformed Southern Baptist brethren! Prior to the release of *By His Grace and For His Glory*, there was not one single volume to answer the biblical, theological and historical questions raised by these folk. This book is a formidable argument for truthfulness and utility of evangelical Calvinism.

Nettles' thesis is "that Calvinism, popularly called the Doctrines of Grace, prevailed in the most influential and enduring arenas of Baptist denominational life until the end of the second decade of the twentieth century." (p. 13) The purpose of the book is to answer the question, "What place *does* Calvinism have in Baptist life?" (p.426)

The subtitle of the book reveals a thumbnail sketch of its contents: *A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life*. Accordingly, Nettles divides his work into three parts. Part One consists of nine chapters and addresses the "Historical Evidence" which supports the thesis statement. Part Two consists of four chapters and undertakes a "Doctrinal Exposition" of the five great Biblical truths out of which Calvinism springs. This section proves that our Southern Baptist forefathers were more than Calvinists—they were Biblical theologians. Part Three takes up "Practical Exhortations" in three chapters which illustrate that the doctrines of grace are not inconsistent with assurance, liberty of conscience, and missionary evangelism. The author shows convincingly that the doctrines of grace validate and establish each of these matters. The book is brilliantly supplemented by indices pertaining to subjects, persons, and Scripture references.

Part One begins in seventeenth century England, with a discussion of the General (or Arminian) Baptists and the Particular (or Calvinistic) Baptists. The terms "General" and "Particular" come from the respective groups' view of the atonement of Jesus Christ. The General Baptists believed that the death of Jesus Christ made salvation possible for all in a general or universal way. The Particular Baptists believed that the death of Jesus Christ actually accomplished and secured redemption for a definite number of the human race. The roles of Benjamin Keach, John Bunyan and others in propagating the doctrines of grace are chronicled and examined.

In chapter two a considerable amount of space and energy is devoted to clearing away some of the prevailing caricatures of John Gill. Nettles presents evidence which destroys the worst of the caricatures and seriously challenges the claims made by others regarding the hyper-Calvinistic tendencies manifested in the ministry of John Gill. Andrew Fuller is chronicled as the man used by God to rescue the Baptists in England from the subtle grips of hyper-Calvinism.

At this point in the book the author turns his attention to the Baptist advance in America through the gallant leadership of such Calvinistic Baptist worthies as Isaac Backus, John Leland, and Francis Wayland. Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice are set forth as Exhibits A and B to show that Calvinism does not blunt missionary zeal.

The next one hundred pages of the book form some of the most valuable material available for the serious Southern Baptist who earnestly wants to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints. It is in these pages that the historical theology of the founders and former prominent statesmen of the Southern Baptist Convention is set forth.

The names of the men discussed in these five chapters read like a "Who's Who of Southern Baptists." These are the names that are etched on scores of Southern Baptist halls of education and missionary enterprise throughout the length and breadth of the S.B.C. Nettles shows beyond a shadow of doubt that the men who founded, nurtured and led this denomination into the twentieth century were, by and large, evangelical Calvinists. He also shows the leading causes of the demise of these great truths among contemporary Southern Baptists. The only way which the information contained in these vital pages can be discounted is by rewriting history.

Part Two is a fine example of biblical exposition accomplished from the context of historical theology. In this section Nettles demonstrates his competence as a biblical expositor. His grasp of historical theology affords him an amazing depth of perception in handling biblical passages. He opens up the biblical teachings on unconditional election, total depravity, effectual calling, definite atonement, and perseverance of the saints.

Part Three goes right to the matter of the relevancy of the doctrines to Christian living for today. Nettles demonstrates the necessity of these doctrines in order to have a right understanding of biblical assurance. He also masterfully connects that power of a right understanding to both biblical assurance and evangelism.

This work provides irrefutable documentation of the rise, demise, and hopeful resurgence of the doctrines of grace among the Baptists as a whole and Southern Baptists in particular. It was said in the days of the Reformation that a common ploughboy, armed with the German New Testament and Luther's Small Catechism, could refute and confound the typical Roman Catholic priest, bishop, or cardinal. It is not an overstatement to say that the serious Southern Baptist, equipped with an open Bible and a copy of *By His Grace and for His Glory* can be very useful in the two-fold mission of advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ and calling the Southern Baptist Convention back to its historical and theological foundations. May our sovereign God bless His truth to the glory of His name, the advancement of His gospel and the good of His church.

Abstract of Systematic Theology

by James Petigru Boyce. Originally published in 1887; reprinted by the den Dulk Christian Foundation, P. O. Box 1676, Escondido, CA 92025; 493 pages, \$15.00

Reviewed by [Fred A. Malone](#)

One of the greatest jewels in Southern Baptist history is James Petigru Boyce. The beloved founding President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary also served as its first Professor of Theology. This reprint of his class notes, developed gradually while using Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, was the theological textbook for the first fifty years of Southern Seminary's pastoral graduates.

F. H. Kerfoot, Boyce's successor, revised the work in 1899 for his own theological students, saying, "Dr. Boyce was without doubt the greatest leader that Southern Baptists have ever had." Its modern reprinting in the original version has found its way into the hands of thousands of students and pastors, many of whom rejoice in its biblical and theological treasures. In a day of revived interest in the theological heritage of Southern Baptists, Boyce's *Abstract* serves as a major touchstone of historic SBC orthodoxy.

The format follows an expanded outline of traditional topics in systematic theology. Its fullest development was

sacrificed upon the altar of presidential fundraising and administration. Further, topics such as Scripture and ecclesiology were neglected, being covered in other seminary courses. According to William A. Mueller (A History of Southern Seminary), Boyce considered his work not a masterpiece for the learned, but a practical textbook for pastors and students, even those without seminary training. However, these expanded outlines, replete with Biblical quotations for support, are more than adequate for a lifetime of theological instruction both by scholar and layman alike.

After a philosophical introduction on the science of theology, Boyce dedicates the first sixteen chapters to the study of God. He proceeds to creation, providence, the fall of man, Christology, salvation, sanctification, and eschatology. He upholds the absolute sovereignty of God in His decrees yet removes God from responsibility for sin, explaining the entrance of sin because man was free and "necessarily fallible because mere creatures" (p. 123). He teaches the representative headship of Adam in the fall and the total depravity of man's nature which leaves him unable to repent and believe without prior sovereign regeneration.

Following an excellent study of "Christ in the Old Testament," Boyce unfolds the glories of the person and work of Christ. A survey of different atonement positions follows. He clearly accepts the Calvinistic view of particular redemption, summarizing his Reformed position from "Our Confession (The Westminster)" (p. 339). While holding to particular redemption for God's elect only, Boyce also explains Christ's atonement in a general way as securing the only means of reconciliation for all men. This "opens the way for a sincere offer of salvation by God to all who will accept the conditions he has laid down" (p. 340). Thus Christ did not die to "make possible" the salvation of all men without actually saving any. Rather, He died as the only way of salvation for any man so that all are justly commanded to repent and believe in God's only provision. But more specifically, His death effectually accomplished salvation for the elect who would repent and believe because Christ died for them, purchasing not only redemption but also the Spirit's regeneration of their hearts.

As Boyce proceeds to the doctrine of salvation he treats consecutively election, reprobation, regeneration and conversion, repentance, faith, and justification. One can see the clear Calvinistic and Reformed *ordo salutis*, (order of salvation). His long definition of unconditional election (p. 346-7) removes foreseen faith from election and places its origin in God's absolute choice of dispensing grace upon sinners as He will. "Election is an act of God, and not the result of the choice of the Elect" (p. 348). He rejects corporate election in favor of personal election of particular sinners from among Jew and Gentile (Rom. 9:24).

After a challenging discussion on reprobation, he explains the outward call to all men through gospel preaching and the effectual call to the elect only by the inward work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the elect are regenerated (and granted repentance and faith as gifts of grace), to which they immediately respond in outward conversion. Justification occurs instantaneously when that repentance and faith is exercised in Christ. True conversion always results in the beginning of a sanctified and obedient life.

Now that the battle for the Bible has been largely won, we need to ask: "what does the Bible say?" Those who propose returning to old-time Baptist beliefs often confuse that with relatively new Arminian views which replaced the truer oldest beliefs of our Calvinistic SBC founders early in this century. If we are going to assess honestly our theological heritage, we need to study the beliefs of the first seminary teachers we ever had, as well as the first generation of SBC presidents and leaders.

The views which Boyce outlines in his book are the faith which established the denomination. If they were true to Scriptures then, why should we not regard them as true today? Do we have a different Bible than they did? Do we have more biblical understanding than they did? Are we smarter and wiser than they? I think not.

When Jesus visited Mary and Martha, Martha was busy doing things for the Lord while Mary sat at his feet and listened. Martha became irritated with the Lord and Mary. But Jesus commended Mary because she chose the good thing: to sit at His feet and to listen to His Word before getting up to work. Too often we find ourselves so busy that sound doctrine gets neglected. Scripture always has priority in our study, but Boyce's *Abstract* is an excellent source for sitting and listening to our theological heritage before we get up to work. No Southern Baptist who has a genuine interest in learning the beliefs of those who founded our denomination can afford to neglect it.

The Forgotten Spurgeon

by Iain Murray , Banner of Truth, 1966, 254 pp, \$8.95

Reviewed by [Joe Nesom](#)

Can there be a better known name among Baptists throughout the world than that of the great nineteenth century preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon? Probably not. And is it not true that just about every pastor quotes Spurgeon at one time or another?

A significant number of Baptist pastors may even be generally aware of the circumstances of Spurgeon's life and ministry, that he went to London to become pastor of the New Park Street Chapel at a very tender age, and that he became the best known preacher of his day. Some may even know that his sermons were published internationally and read by thousands each week. Many may know about the orphanage, pastor's college, and related enterprises which were sponsored by the Metropolitan Tabernacle in the full bloom of Spurgeon's ministry. Most would perhaps be aware that Spurgeon preached to thousands. Most would be aware of his evangelistic fervor and of the many who came to know Christ through Spurgeon's preaching of the Word. These things have not been forgotten.

But how many are aware that the young preacher's arrival in London was not generally appreciated by many in the religious establishment (including some Baptists) and that Spurgeon was regarded as a throwback to former, less "enlightened" times because of the doctrines that he proclaimed? The publication of Iain Murray's *The Forgotten Spurgeon* in 1966 (most of the chapters appeared first in *The Banner of Truth* magazine) provided the evangelical world with a carefully researched study of Charles Spurgeon as a defender of "the faith once delivered to the saints."

In this excellent volume, which has undergone several reprintings, Murray examines the three major controversies in which Spurgeon played important role: 1) his commitment to Biblical Calvinism and hence his rejection of Hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism, 2) the controversy concerning Baptismal regeneration, and 3) the "Downgrade" controversy. Murray makes clear that Spurgeon's doctrinal moorings never changed throughout his life.

Today's pastor may be amazed to discover that the best known Baptist evangelist rejected the creative methodologies that were beginning to appear in his day, in favor of straight-forward gospel preaching. Murray makes us aware of Spurgeon's resistance to these inventions by demonstrating that the great preacher believed the use of non-biblical phrases such as "open your heart," or "decide for Christ," did damage to the truth and to the souls of men. As Spurgeon said, "The gospel is, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' If we think we shall do more good by substituting another exhortation for the gospel command, we shall find ourselves landed in serious difficulties."

Valuable lessons may be learned from Spurgeon's experience and applied today. Many of the issues are very similar their contemporary counterparts. But above all, Murray demonstrates that Spurgeon was what he was, because he was a man who believed the biblical doctrines of God's grace to sinners. Such a book is of particular value to Southern Baptists. It was during the time of Spurgeon's ministry in London that the Southern Baptist Convention was taking shape. And, it was same Calvinistic theology which Spurgeon owned that was loved and proclaimed by the founders of the Convention.

We have seen a theological downgrade in our century that parallels the one experienced by Charles Spurgeon over a hundred years ago. What will our response be? Shall we take the easy road of accommodation or stand up for the faith? Iain Murray's survey of Spurgeon's heroic defense of the faith should inspire us to do the same. Every pastor needs to read this work carefully to see if he might have the courage to stand for the cause of God and truth today.

