



# Reformation, Revival, & the Religious Right

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# The Founders Journal



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Reid Chapel on the campus of Samford University. Photo by William D. Lollar.

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# Reformation, Revival and the Religious Right

*Tom Ascol*

In 1 Chronicles 13 an incredible event is recorded which is filled with instruction for modern evangelical Christians. David had secured his kingdom and established his headquarters in Jerusalem. The ark of the covenant, which symbolized the blessing and presence of God, had never been returned to the place of prominence among the Israelites since its capture by the Philistines more than forty years before. After consulting with the leaders of his kingdom, David announced an initiative to bring the ark to the capital city. The Scripture says that "all Israel" followed his leadership and marched with him to Kiriath Jearim to take the ark out of storage.

No expense was spared. A brand new cart was built to carry the ark. Loud music marked the occasion as David himself led the choirs and bands. But before the parade progressed very far something tragic happened. The oxen pulling the cart stumbled, and the ark was in danger of falling to the ground. Uzzah, one of the priests who was driving the cart, grabbed the ark to keep it from falling. In response, God killed him.

Not only does this seem severe to modern sensibilities, it also appears on the surface to be exactly opposite of what one might have expected. Uzzah was attempting to do a good thing. Was it not noble to try to keep the ark of God from falling to the ground? We might rather have expected God to bless and reward him for his quick thinking and fast action. After all, even if what he did was not exactly proper, surely his heart was in the right place.

Uzzah was a Levite--a Kohathite. He was trained to transport the holy objects (including the ark) in the Tabernacle. God had given very specific instructions on the manner in which this was to be done. Numbers 4:1-5 spells it out in detail. The first mistake that Uzzah (and all the Israelites with him) made was in selecting the wrong method by which to move the ark. The new cart was an idea taken straight from the Philistine transportation handbook and completely ignored God's simple instructions (cf. 1 Sam. 6:7 and Num. 4:13-15, 7:9). This led to his second mistake: he placed his hand on the ark. Numbers 4:15 contains this sober warning: "But they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die." In discharging their duties the Kohathites were not to touch the ark under any circumstances.

Evidently, Uzzah forgot this crucial part of his training. Or maybe he just reasoned that drastic circumstances--a falling ark--call for drastic measures--a helping hand. Whatever his reasoning may have been, Uzzah's sad experience teaches that good intentions never justify wrong actions. In fact, well-motivated actions that disregard clear biblical instructions are always disastrous for God's people. It is just that sometimes the disaster is not so obvious.

Conservative American evangelicals are living proof of this principle. Since 1979 we have witnessed growing efforts from numerous evangelical organizations to lead churches into the arena of political activism. The first organization of note was the Moral Majority, which was founded in reaction to the terrible immorality which was permeating our land in the late 1970s. Its design was to marshal conservative Christians into a potent voting bloc to press for conservative family values in our nation. Millions of members gave millions of dollars and worked millions of hours to promote a moral agenda through political processes. Before it disbanded in 1989, the Moral Majority was credited with putting evangelicals on the political map and successfully campaigning for the elections of Presidents Reagan and Bush. The so-called "religious right" became somewhat organized participants in American politics.

Since then the Christian Coalition and other similar groups have stepped to the fore in calling on evangelicals to stay politically mobilized for the purpose of curbing the moral blight which is withering our culture. The efforts of these

groups were instrumental in the Republican landslide of the 1992 Congressional elections and also in shaping the Republican platform in the recent presidential campaign.

There is within the religious right much which is commendable. Their stated motivations and intentions are worthy of every Christian's appreciation. Who among the people of God is not dismayed over the cultural decay all around us? Adultery, fornication, homosexuality, abortion, and euthanasia are now widely hailed as standard practices of the new morality. Governmental corruption is accepted as inevitable. Educational lunacy prevails at what are supposed to be the highest centers of learning. The prophetic judgment against "those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isa. 5:20) cannot help but resonate within the heart of the believer.

We all recognize that some kind of action is called for, and at least the religious right is doing something. They will not allow us to close our eyes to the moral degeneration all around us. As citizens, individual Christians who fulfill their calling in this way can provide a tremendous ministry. It is right and proper for Christians to be involved in every level of politics as individual citizens. But when they call for a Christian congregation to become institutionally involved in political activism they are guilty of distracting that church from its God-given mission. It is precisely because of this that the religious right's proposals are disastrous for evangelical churches.

A recent letter from a recognized leader of the religious right illustrates this concern. It was mailed out to 100,000 "Bible-believing pastors" across the United States. "Our great nation stands at a crossroads today," the writer says. "That is why I am calling on you to help me *make a difference* [emphasis added] by using your church to hold a voter registration drive," he continues. After spelling out a four-step process to be followed before, during or after a Sunday worship service (including instructions for ushers, etc.), the most telling line in the whole letter comes: "Perhaps most important of all, please join me in praying for a national revival to come to America." Perhaps? Is there really some doubt that appealing to the Almighty Sovereign of the universe may not be as important in the church as holding a voter registration drive? Sadly, the answer for many, if not most evangelicals is "yes."

Pastors and churches all across this land, under the siren call of political activism, have lost confidence in God's ordained means of accomplishing God's ordained purposes. Whether because of ignorance, expedience or unbelief, many evangelicals are guilty of adopting strategies from the Philistines in an effort to restore a sense of God's presence in our society. "If only we can get our man elected...if only we can get this law passed...f only we can get this judge appointed, then, things will get better; then, we will have made a difference!"

The problem with this line of reasoning is that it is not true. It is also woefully naive and ultimately self-defeating. Martyn Lloyd-Jones regarded such efforts by evangelicals as "sheer folly." Did we learn nothing during the "Reagan-Bush" years? After "making a difference" three times by voting for the "right man" can we say that the moral slide of our society was slowed at all? This is in no way to disparage the administrations of those two presidents. Rather, the point is that the election of conservative political leaders has not solved the moral maladies which provide the rallying cry for the religious right.

It is simply naive to hope that it would be otherwise. The Psalmist knew this and so he warned God's people,

*Do not put your trust in princes  
Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.  
His spirit departs, he returns to his earth;  
In that very day his plans perish (Ps. 146:3-4).*

It is not that the agenda of the religious right is too radical. It is not radical enough. They greatly underestimate the

depth of the problem. We cannot "Christianize" culture. The nature of sin guarantees that. Neither are we called to try! Did Jesus or Peter or Paul ever try to organize believers into a voting bloc to "Christianize" any geo-political structure? Culture can and will be positively influenced when its participants are made disciples of Christ.

The moral crisis in our nation will not be solved by getting the right people in the White House, Congress, and on the Supreme Court. Society will not change until people change. And the only way that people can be changed is by the sovereign power of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Consequently, proclaiming that gospel in the power of the Spirit is the task to which churches must give themselves. This constitutes the only great commission which we have received from Jesus Christ.

The moral decadence of this generation has a spiritual root. As long as evangelical churches overlook this fact or fail to absorb its implications, they will continue to be seduced by worldly wisdom in their sincere but misguided efforts to "make a difference." Alexis de Tocqueville was prophetic when he warned that if America ever ceased being good, she would cease being great. But why has America lost her goodness? Is it because we have elected the wrong people? Because we outlawed prayer in the public schools? Because we have passed immoral laws? No. These are symptoms, not causes. The reason, very simply stated by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, is that "America has forgotten God."

But we must push the question even further. Why has America forgotten God? Whose job is it to speak for God, anyway? Not the schools; not the government; not the culture. That responsibility has been given exclusively to the Church. The sad reality is that the Church--including Bible believing evangelicals--has been derelict in her duty. Our nation is in a mess because our churches are in a mess.

Research consistently shows that the vast majority of evangelicals do not believe in absolute truth. Over 80% believe that in salvation, God helps those who help themselves and over 75% believe that people are basically good and that good people go to heaven whether or not they believe in Christ. Most evangelicals cannot even define justification--the very doctrine which Luther correctly described as that by which a church stands or falls! Doctrinal preaching has been judged out-of-date in many churches. Most members of evangelical churches do not even attend the worship services. Church discipline has vanished almost completely from the scene.

The above facts about evangelicals call for something far more radical than a voter registration drive. They call for reformation or judgment. "The time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). It is high time that we wake up and see the seriousness of the situation. Political activism in the name of the Christian Church has dire consequences. It salves the evangelical conscience thereby inhibiting much-needed self-examination and it diverts resources and energy away from the legitimate work of churches which includes seeking genuine renewal.

It is as if a huge tree of moral evil has grown up in our society. Its imposing branches spread wider while reaching higher, blotting out the sun and killing everything under its canopy. It contains the branch of abortion; the branch of sexual immorality; and the branch of governmental corruption, among others. The religious right, determined to fight against the spread of these evils, go to great expense of time, energy and money to construct a ladder and lean it against the tree. With steadfast determination and at tremendous risk and cost they climb the ladder and begin, as they are able, to saw and hack at some of the more offensive branches. Every once in a while a small limb falls and the "victory" is celebrated with fervor. All the while the roots are growing deeper and stronger. At the bottom, holding the ladder steady, is the devil, very content to let evangelicals trim a few branches as long as the tree itself continues to grow.

It is time for evangelical churches to get off the ladder of political activism and to begin engaging in real spiritual

warfare by laying the ax to the root of the tree. In other words, it is high time that churches start laboring for reformation and revival. For if God does not send a powerful work of doctrinal and spiritual renewal, it will not matter which candidates get elected and which laws get passed, our society will collapse under the weight of its own moral refuse.

It is important that we seek both reformation and revival. The former is what takes place when biblical truth is recovered and leads to the purification of theology. As Tom Nettles has noted, "It involves a rediscovery of the Bible as the judge and guide of all thought and action; corrects errors in interpretation; gives precision, coherence and courage to doctrinal confession; and gives form and energy to the corporate worship of the triune God." When Josiah rediscovered the Book of the Law he led Judah to remove what was unbiblical (Asherah and Baal worship) and to reinstitute what was biblical (worship based on God's Word, the Passover, etc.). When Martin Luther rediscovered the Word of God he followed the same pattern. He began to teach against unbiblical beliefs and practices (salvation by merit, free will, indulgences, etc.) and began to proclaim long-forgotten biblical truths (salvation by grace alone; justification by faith alone; priesthood of all believers, etc.). The result was a reformation which changed the whole course of western civilization.

Revival is a powerful, sovereign work of God's Spirit that rapidly expands His kingdom and revitalizes His church. It is, as Nettles has written, the "application of Reformation truth to human experience." Churches, cities, regions, and even whole nations can be quickly changed when God sends revival. Christians are given fresh zeal and spiritual power. Unbelievers are quickly brought to salvation. There is an intense hunger for the Word of God. During seasons of revival more spiritual work can be accomplished in a day than could otherwise take place in fifty years.

This is seen in both Scripture and history. The whole New Testament is in one sense a revival document. The book of Acts in particular records the work of revival that began with Pentecost. Thousands were converted in a short period of time. New believers grew rapidly in the faith. Churches were planted throughout the Roman Empire. Whole cities were transformed. In short, God worked fast.

The American heritage has been shaped by revival. The founding generation of this nation was still living off of the spiritual capital of The First Great Awakening in the 1730s-1740s. As that revival's influence began to wane the Second Great Awakening brought new life to churches from the closing years of the eighteenth century to the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Once again society was impacted as numerous humane and educational societies came into existence. The western frontier saw whole regions transformed under the power of godliness. Many Universities were changed from places of skepticism to havens for enlivened Christianity. After this the mid-century Prayer Revival of 1858-59 deeply affected the business communities of the nation in places like New York and Boston. The Civil War, with all of its sorrows, was also marked by powerful revivals among both northern and southern forces.

The twentieth century opened riding the crest of these waves of revival. The Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, if it was a genuine revival at all, was short-lived and centered upon experience instead of God's Word. Now we find ourselves coming to the close of this century having outlived the influence of those earlier powerful movements of God's Spirit. The spiritual capital which these revivals placed in our cultural bank account has long since run out. And contemporary churches are themselves so spiritually impoverished that they have nothing to contribute and are consequently making little if any real difference in the world.

Our only hope is reformation and revival. But as long as evangelical churches continue to put hope in political activism there will be little incentive or energy to give ourselves to seeking genuine spiritual and doctrinal renewal. If, however, the tree of moral evil is to fall, we must quit hacking at branches and start doing the hard, painful work of laying the ax to the root. We must begin earnestly seeking God, pleading with Him to revive His work in our

generation as we recommit ourselves to preaching the gospel to everyone we can reach. Though revival is a sovereign work and only God can send it, we are nevertheless responsible to heed His Word in doing what we can to seek it. Two important aspects of this responsibility loom large and are particularly needed.

First, individual churches--including Calvinistic churches--must try to see themselves as God sees them. How many of our local assemblies are afflicted with Laodicean self-deception? Jesus directly exposed this Asian church's condition by comparing their evaluation with His own: "You say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). By definition self-deception is hard to detect. The one who is guilty of it obviously does not know it. The only way to avoid this error is to look intently into the mirror of God's Word--to believe His judgments more than our own. The truth about Laodicea was that they were not as well off as they thought. They were lukewarm and because of their condition Jesus was ready to vomit them out of His mouth.

How many congregations today are even willing to entertain the possibility that just maybe their glowing press reports are completely different from Christ's evaluation of them? Where are the churches that have any concern that their Lord may be willing to vomit them out of His mouth? After Jesus forced the Laodicean church to face the truth about their desperate condition, He called them to repent and extended to them a gracious invitation. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). He offers to revive this self-deceived, lukewarm church if they will listen to Him and be willing to receive Him.

Such willingness involves the next area of responsibility which looms before evangelical churches. Any serious work for reformation and revival must include a renewed commitment to God's ordained means for maintaining the life and health of a church. What instruments has God given for the work of a church? Basically, there are only two: the Word and prayer.

In many churches there is a crisis of unbelief in God's Word. Many have unwittingly lost their confidence in the Bible even while arguing stridently for its authority. The Word of God has been supplanted for lesser authorities which have been imported from the modern world. Psychology, rather than Scripture, governs counseling and personal life; marketing strategies, instead of the Scriptures, guide evangelism; worship is built not on Scripture, but on entertainment; and fellowship is structured by sociology, not Scripture. If we would seek reformation and revival we must humble ourselves to hear God speaking to all of these areas of church-life. We must return to the conviction that the Bible is not only authoritative, it is sufficient. Biblical principles must be seen as regulating every aspect of life.

A return to the sufficiency of Scripture must be coupled with a return to prayer as a priority in the church. Many churches today have canceled the church-wide prayer meeting due to lack of interest. Others who continue to meet find that their gatherings are seldom marked by any felt-sense of the presence of God and very often the prayers sound like they came straight off the triage sheet of a hospital emergency room. If the ordinary prayer life is weak and ineffectual it is no wonder that there should be almost no concern for extraordinary prayer. Yet, if we are to seek a powerful movement of God in our day we must give ourselves to the flesh-crucifying work of prayer and fasting. We must pray as desperate people. We must learn to wrestle with God as did Jacob and refuse to let Him go until He blesses us with refreshing. Such prayer has always preceded revival. Whether it was that small band of men and women in the upper room before Pentecost (Acts 1:13-14), Andrew Fuller, William Carey and their few friends who met to pray specifically for revival every other month for 8 years before the Second Great Awakening, or Jeremiah Lamphier who, almost alone, began meeting to pray in 1857 before the Prayer Revival--every great renewing work of God in history follows this pattern. As Matthew Henry said, "When God intends great mercy for His people, the first thing He does is set them a praying."

When reformation and revival come, they will come through the ministry of God's Word and prayer! This is God's way for His church to do His work in the world. Anything that would intrude on our commitment to these God-ordained means is a distraction and will ultimately keep us from seeking the only remedy which can cure our churches' spiritual apathy and our nation's moral decay.

Several months after Uzzah was killed David and the Israelites tried once again to bring the ark to Jerusalem. This time, however, they did not follow the example of the Philistines. This time they carefully followed the instructions of God's Word. 1 Chronicles 15 tells how the Levites used poles to carry the ark on their shoulders, just as they had been instructed. Verse 26 says that "God helped the Levites who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD." God's work done God's way invokes God's help. Once the ark arrived in Jerusalem, joy, thanksgiving, and blessing filled the land. God's power and grace were celebrated and proper service was rendered to Him faithfully. When God's work is restored, God's people are revived. Let us labor, then, to see His work--the work of proclaiming Christ's gospel and fulfilling His commission--fully restored in our day.

May God cause us to "have done with lesser things" and to mourn our foolishness and desperate condition. May He forgive our unbelief and restore our confidence in His Word and in prayer. And may He send a mighty reformation and revival to our churches, our nation, and our world.



# Unbounded Love or Unbounded License?

A review article on *Unbounded Love. A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* by Clark H. Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994. 189 pp.

[Roger Nicole](#)

Professor Pinnock's productivity is truly remarkable: in the same year in which a major essay from his pen appeared in *The Openness of God*, he produced, in collaboration with Robert C. Brow, the volume we are now reviewing!

In *The Openness of God* a fivefold plea was presented for the view that God's knowledge must be limited, for the decisions of free agents cannot be known in advance if the said agents are really free. The plea is not so much that Scripture presents God's knowledge as limited, but that human freedom requires it by logical necessity, and Scripture, whatever it may say, must be adjusted to this understanding. This move is very bold because it appears not only to conflict with Scripture at many points (1 Kings 8:39; Job 9:4; 12:13; 28:12-29; 37:16; Ps. 94:13, 15; 139:1-9; 147:4; Prov. 5:21; 15:3,11; Is. 40:28; 44:7; 46:10, 11; Jer. 17:10; Dan. 2:22; Mt. 6:8; John 21:17; Acts 1:24; 2:23; 15:8, 17; Rom. 11:33; 1 Cor. 2:7; Heb. 4:13; 1 John 3:20), but it overturns the universal conviction of Christians over the centuries. Indeed few have been bold enough to deny omniscience to God. We do not fully understand how the liberty of human decision can coexist with the omniscience of God, but this is a problem for the Eastern Church, Roman Catholics and Arminians, as well as for Calvinists and other Protestants. To deny that God has omniscience is to undermine the whole prophetic outlook of Scripture as well as the sovereignty of God. Surely if God created free agents without knowing what they would do, He would appear to be no wiser than a man who would exhaust his funds in buying lottery tickets! The problem would be compounded by the fact that God had already failed in this type of venture in connection with the creation of angels and the fall of Satan and his cohorts.

In this new volume Dr. Pinnock goes a large step further. He is so concerned to establish and maintain the supremacy of love over justice that he rejects the forensic element in the scriptural picture of God. Particularly in the atonement he would dispense with God's wrath and justice, with propitiation, with redemption, with sacrifice as an offering to God, and with reconciliation as reflecting anything more than our need as sinners to stop hating God and to turn to Him in a loving response to His love (1 John 4:8).

Now this approach does despite to a sound understanding of the atonement in two ways.

1. The judicial, forensic, or legal forms of language are used in Scripture in great abundance. Leon Morris states that in the Old Testament alone there are over 580 occurrences which represent God as angry,<sup>[1]</sup> and the New Testament follows suit (Mt. 3:7; Lk. 3:7; 21:23; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Th. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; Heb. 3:11; 4:3; Rev. 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10-19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). The notions of justice, of judgment, and of God as the Judge are also prevalent. Abraham raised the question, "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). The answer is "Yes," not "No, because His love has priority!" The concept of justification is fundamental to the Protestant renewal in the sixteenth century and its return to the biblical base. Try telling Luther otherwise!

The idea of punishment is present from the very start of humanity (Gen. 2:17), and it reaches a climactic expression in the book of Revelation. The term occurs more than 100 times in Holy Writ. Isaiah 53:5 says, "The punishment that brought us peace has fallen upon Him."

The idea of sacrifice reflects first of all an offering to God, and Leviticus 4 and 5 stipulate a sin offering and a trespass

offering. If sacrifices denoted merely consecration, the tithes that were required in the Old Testament would be the epitome of sacrifice; yet they are never portrayed that way. Surely at Calvary we contemplate the uttermost dedication of the Savior, but to validate this there must be in his death something more than just an act of consecration; there must be something to be accomplished without which human salvation would be impossible.

Dr. Pinnock thinks that in Scripture the word *reconciliation* refers only to the change in humanity from alienation from God to love for Him (pp. 101-104). He bases his argument on the use of "to be reconciled," which in English regularly means "to abandon objections or grievances," as in "I am reconciled with decaffeinated coffee." In Greek, however, the meaning is the reverse, as proven, for example, by Matthew 5:24, where "to be reconciled with your brother" means "Make sure that the brother who `has something against you' does not maintain his grievance." Similarly in 2 Corinthians 5:20, "Be reconciled to God" of necessity means "Make sure that God does not deal with you in terms of His righteous grievance because of your sin," and not "Stop hating God." Surely there would not be any need for Christ to "be made sin for us" if the latter were the meaning. It would be easy to advance many other examples of this usage from the New Testament, the LXX, and the Koine Greek.

Dr. Pinnock calls for fresh thinking among evangelical theologians (p. 10) and chides James Packer and Charles Ryrie for failing to have given us "mature statements" (p. 181). This is strange in view of the fact that both of these men are, as well as Pinnock, among the thirty-three scholars whose work is discussed in Walter Elwell, *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993). Presumably, Dr. Pinnock is confident that he has exhibited more freshness and maturity than these two men, both of whom are more than ten years older than he is!

We ask, "How can Dr. Pinnock imagine that his presentation of the atoning work of Christ is fresh?" He answers that far from bearing the divine punishment that our sin deserved, Christ's purpose has been to exhibit God's sympathy with our plight so that, moved by this extraordinary, costly love of God, we may return unto Him in love and be saved. Now we do not deny that among other things Christ's atoning also produces this effect. The questions are, "Can this change result from an atonement that is a demonstration of divine love and nothing else?" and "Is this presentation something fresh in Christian thinking?"

To answer the second question first, anyone acquainted with the history of the doctrine of the atonement will immediately say, "Of course not; this is simply a warming over of the well-known moral influence theory of the atonement." Indeed we find this view already in Peter Abelard (1079-1142) whose heresies, instability, and reprehensible conduct give us little encouragement to follow his lead in understanding the saving work of Christ. This type of approach found favor in the sixteenth century with the Socinians. In the nineteenth century it was vigorously advocated by Horace Bushnell (1802-76) in his volume entitled *Vicarious Sacrifice* (1865), an odd name since he considered Christ's death to be neither sacrificial nor substitutionary. To his own disappointment he found that his approach was not exercising a "moral influence" leading to the conversion of sinners, while the preachers of the revival movement who presented the usual orthodox doctrine were eminently successful. This led him to revamp his position and to give more place to the divine justice in *Forgiveness and Law* (1874). Views similar to the early Bushnell were propounded by F. W. Robertson, John Young, F. D. Maurice, A. Ritchie, W. N. Clarke, W. A. Brown, H. Rashdall, R. S. Franks, and a whole bevy of leaders in the liberal camp. How could anyone imagine that this type of view is new?

It is not encouraging to find Dr. Pinnock relying on the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32) as a significant evidence of pardon without satisfaction (pp. 11, 12). This outlook assumes that Jesus meant to sum up the whole plan of salvation in this one parable. Yet we see in it only the Father and the sinner: there is no room for Christ here! Surely no one in the New Testament, least of all our Lord, would accredit any view of salvation in which there is no place for Him. The parable gives us a moving representation of God's gracious and forgiving attitude; it gives us no explanation regarding under what circumstances and conditions this forgiveness may be, in fact, vouchsafed in the case of God and the sinner.

The moral influence view is directly contrary to a number of Scriptures, e.g., Is. 53; Mt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45; Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:24, 25; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 3:13; Heb. 9:14, 15, 22; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 5:9. Moreover, it is severely flawed. It does not show how Abraham, or anyone else prior to Christ's death, could be saved by *Christ*. It does break the

unity of the sacrifice of Christ with the Old Testament sacrifices: the immolated animals hardly demonstrated God's sympathy! It is self-defeating by failing utterly to provide any good reason why the excruciating sufferings of Christ were necessary or even useful. If my friend breaks his leg, it is hardly an appropriate expression of my sympathy for him to go and break my leg as well! Surely the cross is the supreme expression of the triune God's love if it is understood that without it all humans will be lost. Unless there is something objective to accomplish on the cross, besides showing sympathy, the sufferings of Christ are reduced to a senseless and ineffective loss of life.

2. One could have hoped that since Dr. Pinnock until the late 60s presented himself as one who advocated the Reformed view, he would show a better understanding of what this view affirms. Instead of that, he draws a veritable caricature of that position and criticizes it on the basis of his own misunderstanding.

Augustine, Calvin, Turretin, J. Edwards, Hodge, Warfield, Bavinck, J. Murray, and all other orthodox adherents to the Reformed faith have exalted and proclaimed the love of God. They have insisted that this love was the cause of the atonement (e.g., John 3:16). Far from thinking of God as an arbitrary tyrant who takes pleasure in condemning and tormenting the helpless sinner, they have fallen on their knees to worship a God so generous that instead of abandoning our whole guilty race to the well-deserved plight of eternal separation from Him, He has determined to save an innumerable multitude and to bear Himself the frightful punishment due unto sin by entering our race in Jesus Christ, who died in our stead and rose again, thus opening the way of life to all who trust in Him. Did anyone ever preach this truth more effectively than Whitefield and Spurgeon, who were and remained Calvinists to the end of their lives? Anyone has a right to emphasize what he/she considers strong points in his/her outlook, but it is wrong to condemn others on the basis of a caricature.

Meanwhile, two very serious difficulties must be noted in the notion of "unbounded love" advocated in this book.

1. God's dealing with fallen angels does not manifest the kind of love defined by Pinnock and Brow (Heb. 2:16; 2 Pet. 2:4). Because of what the authors have said about God's relation to humanity, they are compelled to acknowledge what they call a defect in God's character!

2. If love is presented as having a kind of preeminence in the divine nature, we are pressed on the horns of a dilemma. Either there must eventually be universal salvation including even Satan or God must be burdened with eternal frustration concerning the ultimate loss of those He loved with redemptive love and who failed to respond.

The first option is untenable since Scripture clearly manifests an ultimate bifurcation of destiny. The New Testament alone articulates this in more than fifty passages (Mt. 7:22, 23; 12:41, 42; 13:40-43; 24:51; 25:41-46; Mk. 12:9; Lk. 13:25-30; 16:19-28; 21:36; John 5:22-30; 12:47, 48; 15:6, 22-25; 16:8-11; Acts 17:31; 24:25; Rom. 1:32; 2:2, 3, 5; 5:16, 18; 14:10; 1 Cor. 5:13; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:7, 8; 1 Th. 4:6; 5:1-10; 2 Th. 1:5-10; 2:3-12; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 4:12, 13; 6:4-8; 10:26-31; James 2:13; 4:12; 1 Pet. 2:7, 8, 23; 3:12; 4:17, 18; 2 Pet. 2:3-10; 3:7; 1 John 3:8; Jude 4-6, 13, 15; Rev. 14:7, 9-11, 17-20; 15:1; 16; 19:1-3, 11-21; 20:11-15; 22:15). Jesus speaks of the "unpardonable sin" (Mt. 12:32; Mk. 3:29; cf. Heb. 6:4-6; 1 John 5:10) and says of Judas, "It would be better for him if he had not been born" (Mt. 26:24), not "It would be better for God if He had not created him"!!

The second option is derogatory to God, who would be seen as having failed in His gamble in creating rational beings, angels and humans, with free will.

The book offers 158 endnotes. The authors quote some 172 different books or essays. More than one-third of the quotations come from books published between 1990 and 1994. All but three (J. Calvin, C. S. Lewis, L. Hodgson) are culled from volumes dated in the second part of this century. So one may not accuse the authors of being antiquarians. In the chapter on Scripture they do not quote or refer to any author who is a clear-cut advocate of inerrancy.

Many of the views espoused in Pinnock's book are often at variance with the path carefully defined by church creeds and

confessions.<sup>[2]</sup> Perhaps it should have been titled, *Unbounded License*.



<sup>1</sup>Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955) p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>The Rev. Brow, as a priest in the Anglican Church, appears to be violating the following statements in the 39 Articles:

II. [Christ] died . . . to reconcile his Father to us.

IX. [Original sin] . . . deserveth God's wrath and damnation

X. The condition of Man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn . . .

XVII. "Of Predestination and Election."

XVIII. "Of obtaining eternal salvation only by the Name of Christ."

XXXI. "The Offering of Christ . . . is the perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction.



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XXXI. "The Offering of Christ . . . is the perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction.



# The Human Will and Doctrinal Decline

*Ernest Reisinger*

(This article is taken from a forthcoming book)

Doctrinal distinctiveness is often overlooked and many times actually discouraged. The following quote by one theologian will illustrate my point. B. Elmo Scoggin said, "Not only would I not vote for it, I would categorically refuse it, and I would fight it to the last drop of my blood to keep the denomination [Southern Baptist] from adopting a creed."[\[1\]](#)

Lynn May, former executive director of the Southern Baptist Historical Commission, said, "A set of doctrinal statements to which [Baptists] must subscribe...would be totally out of keeping with the historical position of Southern Baptists."[\[2\]](#)

These statements are quite contrary to what is expressed in the "[Abstract of Principles](#)" which, according to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's charter of April 30, 1858, "Every Professor of the institution" must "teach in accordance with, and not contrary to."[\[3\]](#)

These statements are also contrary to what the great Baptist B. H. Carroll says in his commentary on Ephesians, in which he underscores the importance of doctrine and creeds:

A church with a little creed is a church with a little life. The more divine doctrines a church can agree on, the greater its power and the wider its usefulness. The fewer its articles of faith, the fewer its bonds of union and compactness.

The modern cry, "Less creed and more liberty," is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish and means less unity and less morality, and it means more heresy. Definitive truth does not create heresy--it only exposes and corrects. Shut off the creed and the Christian world would fill up with heresy unsuspected and uncorrected, but nonetheless deadly.

Just so it is not good discipline that created backsliding and other sins of Christians. But discipline is oftentimes the only means of saving a church. To hold to discipline for immoralities and relax it on doctrine puts the cart before the horse and attempts to heal a stream while leaving the fountain impure. To Christ and the apostles, false creeds were the most deadly things and called most for the use of the knife....

Again, I solemnly warn the reader against all who depreciate creeds or who would reduce them to a minimum of entrance qualifications into the church.[\[4\]](#)

When did the great shift from our doctrinal foundation take place? Harold Bloom's book *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* gives what I believe is the answer to that question:

Edgar Young Mullins I would nominate as the Calvin or Luther or Wesley of the Southern Baptists, but only in the belated American sense because Mullins was not the founder of the Southern Baptists but their re-founder, the definer of their creedless faith. An endlessly subtle and original religious thinker, Mullins is the most neglected of early major American theologians. Pragmatically he is more important than Jonathan Edwards, Horace Bushness, and the Nierbuhrs because Mullins reformulated (perhaps even first formulated) the faith of a major American denomination. Leonard says of Mullins that he personified the Great Compromise only now breaking down in the Southern Baptist Convention. As Leonard notes, Mullins was not a theological liberal, but a defender of Evangelical Baptism who nevertheless found no

threat in science or philosophy to the religious. A thorough pragmatist, deeply influenced by William James, Mullins grounded his faith upon "experience" in James's sense. A deep and powerful subjectivity was the basis of Mullins's intellectual and spiritual strength, linked also to a profound understanding that what Baptists believe depended upon a highly personal relation of each individual to God. I don't find it accidental that Mullins had memorized much of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for Milton had made himself into a sect of one, and his theological position is scarcely distinguishable from that of Mullins. Milton's devotion to the Inner Light is at the heart of Mullins's doctrine, to which I turn now in order to explore the enigma of just what it is that Moderate Southern Baptists believe.[\[5\]](#)

E. Y. Mullins, the fourth president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1899-1928) and president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1921-24, can rightly be called the "re-founder of the Southern Baptists." Mullins articulated theological principles which nearly catapulted Calvinism into oblivion; and when Calvinism goes, the doctrine of man's will goes also.

The title of Mullins's theological dissertation for his Th.D. was *A Baptist Examination of Theological Restatement*.[\[6\]](#) He was a strong advocate of "Theological Restatement."

There is no question that Mullins's doctrinal position put an entirely different complexion on the theological face of Southern Seminary. The move away from Calvinism caused more attention to be drawn to the old Erasmus error. The place of man's will was at the heart of this change. An honest examination of Mullins's theology as found in his dissertation[\[7\]](#) will soon make it very clear that the turning point began with Mullins.

Mullins replaced the theology of James P. Boyce (as well as that of the famous first faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) with his own theology: "The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression." It is interesting to note that Mullins never once quoted his old theology professor James P. Boyce, and there is not one reference to Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology* in Mullins's theology text.

Professor Borden Parker Bowne, of Boston University, and his "personalism" had a great influence on Mullins. Personalism is that philosophical outlook which sees ultimate reality as being explained only and fundamentally in terms of personality. (Mullins wrote a favorable review of Bowne's book.) Another mentor of Mullins's was the philosopher William James, whose work *Varieties of Religious Experiences* (1902) best expresses his philosophy. Certainly, neither Parker Bowne nor William James could be classified as evangelical Christians.

In one of Mullins's theology class lectures, a student recorded the following "values" of experience in theology: "What is there in religious experience that gives it this value?..."

1. It is a reaction of the whole of man's nature upon ultimate reality, and not the reaction of man's reason alone.
2. It includes the sense of dependence of pantheism without immirgeing [sic] the soul in the all. There must be "a Thou and an I," if there is to be worship. Pantheism cancels "the I and the Thou," and makes it all "the I."
3. It includes the emotions without canceling the will and the personality. Mysticism teaches the absorption in the internal. It cancels the will and the intellect.
4. It has the moral element of the theistic views; but add [sic] the vital religious element.
5. It is more vital and inward than merely morality because it embraces communion and fellowship with God.
6. It is more dinamic [sic] than morality because in it the human will is reinforced by the divine will.
7. It is supperior [sic] to mear [sic] beliefs of all kinds because there is a reciprocal relation [between the] believer and the object of belief.
8. Religious experience completes our human reaction upon the universe by assigning to the will its part in that reaction.[\[8\]](#)

By the 1970s the residue of evangelical Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention bore minimal resemblance to that of

its founding fathers. Actually, the high water mark of Calvinistic influence upon the Southern Baptist Convention was reached when the first seminary was founded in 1858. The full tide of Calvinistic influence crested during the era of the famous first faculty of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. For a quarter of a century, stalwart Calvinistic theology rang out with a clarity that the later seminaries never produced. It is safe to say that Southern Baptists were rocked in the cradle of Calvinism.

To answer the question, How did Calvinism fall by the wayside? we must go to Mullins and his "theology of experience" expressed in his own theological work. One writer designated his work "The Theology of Christian Experience in Abstract Doctrine." The very opening chapters in Mullins's text deal with ways of regarding religious experience and the personal need for self-revelation of God. Mullins put us on the road to Erasmusism regarding free will. In *Christian Religion and Its Doctrinal Expression* he said, "God is limited by man's freedom."<sup>[9]</sup> In another place he said, "Free-will eats up divine sovereignty: to ignore man's free-will is to see God arbitrary."

As educator, denominational statesman, and theologian, Edgar Young Mullins's "philosophical personalism" is what remains as perhaps the most significant attempt toward theological restatement in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention. In spite of some theological inconsistencies, his heart and soul were tied to biblical Christianity as he understood it. Obviously, he did not realize some of the conclusions his ideas inherently presupposed. He was, of course, very influential. He was a very confusing and contradictory character. One writer said, "He was both a model and a foil." He has left a theological confusion that is with us in the Convention today.

## Doctrine

"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine...Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself, and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:13, 16). "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine" (2 Tim. 3:16).

These passages of Scripture bring together what should never be separated, that is, doctrine and experience, belief and practice--biblical truth clothed with genuine Christian experience. What God has joined together let no man put asunder.

## Jesus Was a Doctrinal Preacher

In the first chapter of Mark we learn some important lessons from the Preacher of preachers--the wise Master Preacher Himself. First, we learn that He prayed before He preached (Mark 1:13). He was forty days and nights in the wilderness before He came to Galilee to begin His preaching ministry (v. 14). Note in Mark 1:35: "Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." Immediately after He prayed, He said to His followers, "Let us go...that I may preach...because for this purpose I have come" (v. 38). He stated His purpose very clearly: "I have come *to preach*."

In this passage we learn some other important lessons from the Master Preacher. In verses 22 and 27 we learn that He preached with authority; in verse 41 we learn that He preached with compassion. What I wish to emphasize, however, is that He was a doctrinal preacher: "And they were astonished at His doctrine" (v. 22); "What new doctrine is this?" (v. 27). These verses tell us plainly that Jesus was a doctrinal Preacher--a teaching Preacher.

Doctrine is to Christian experience what bones are to the body. A body without bones would be an utterly useless lump of "glob." Likewise, bones without flesh are but a dead skeleton.

There are those who cry "down with doctrine" and "up with experience." Some think it quite pious to say, "Christ is our creed and the Bible is our textbook." On the surface that sounds good. But which Christ are they talking about? There are a thousand "Christs" on the religious market. The Jehovah's Witnesses have a "Christ," but it is not the Christ of the Bible. The Mormons have a "Christ," but it is not the Christ of the Bible. Christian Science has a "Christ," but it is not the Christ

of the Bible. The liberals have a "Christ," but it is not the One who came to us by a virgin's womb, suffered vicariously on a Roman cross, and rose victoriously from a borrowed grave. *There is only one biblical Christ.* The cults also say the Bible is their textbook, but someone must proclaim what this infallible Bible actually says, what it means, and how it applies to our lives and the life of the church. Certainly we are all against substituting a dead, doctrinal creed for a living Christ. But our creed need not be dead--just as our faith should not be dead faith (James 2:20). We do not reject true faith because there is a dead faith.

It is not enough to speak of a mystical experience with God without doctrinal knowledge. We must worship God in truth as well as in spirit. Truth can be stated in real words, and when truth is stated in real words, it is doctrine--teaching. This effort to be a practicing Christian without knowing what Christianity is all about will always fail. The true Christian has a doctrinal foundation. The conflict between our Lord and the Pharisees was over the question of who He was--the doctrine of the Messiah.

To believe savingly in Christ involves believing the right things about Him: *who He was*--the virgin-born Son of God; *what He did*--suffered vicariously on the cross; *why He died on the cross*--because of a covenant with God the Father to redeem an innumerable company of sheep (His people) from every tribe, nation, and tongue. "And she shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

What is true religion? It is not some mystical, nebulous thing, floating around in the sky. True religion cannot be less than this: right thinking in respect to God; right feeling in respect to God; right acting in respect to God. True religion must reach the whole man. It must reach his *mind* because that is what he thinks with; it must reach his affection because that is what he feels with; and it must reach his *will* because that is what he decides with.

## Experience and Doctrine

Christian experience is the influence of sound biblical doctrine applied to the mind, affections, and will by the Holy Spirit. Founder of twenty-five churches, J. C. Ryle said, "You can talk about Christian experience all you wish, but without doctrinal roots, it is like cut flowers stuck in the ground--it will wither and die."

It is impossible, therefore, to overemphasize the importance of sound doctrine in the Christian life. Right thinking about all spiritual matters is imperative if we are to have right living. As men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles, so sound Christian character does not grow out of unsound doctrine. Someone may ask, "How do we test true Christian experience in the midst of so much spurious experience and religious confusion?" Let me suggest three tests:

1. Is this professed religious experience produced by the truth plainly and faithfully presented? It must be biblical truth--not only feeling and emotion or religious excitement.
2. Is this professed religious experience regulated and governed by biblical truth?
3. Do the subjects of this professed religious experience manifest a general and cordial love of biblical truth?

Biblical doctrine is more important than most church members realize. Doctrine not only expresses our experiences and beliefs; it also determines our direction. Doctrine shapes our lives and church programs. Doctrine to the Christian and the church is what the bones are to the body. It gives unity and stability.

The church that neglects to teach sound biblical doctrine weakens the church membership. It works against true unity. It invites instability in its fellowship, lessens conviction, and stalemates true progress in the church.

## What Doctrines?

Perhaps few would disagree with what I have said to this point. But I do not want to speak in general, nebulous terms.

Consider, for example, the word *doctrine*. The word by itself is almost meaningless. All cults have doctrine. I want to be more specific and speak of the doctrines believed and preached by our Baptist fathers--such men as James P. Boyce, John A. Broadus, B. H. Carroll, John L. Dagg, Luther Rice, P. H. Mell, John Bunyan, Charles H. Spurgeon, William Carey, and Andrew Fuller. I am speaking of those doctrines expressed by the Philadelphia Association in which Southern Baptists have their roots. These doctrines were the foundation of their devotion, their worship, their witness, and all their service to Christ and His church.

Before I mention specifically some foundational doctrines, I must make one simple but weighty point: *If what our Baptist fathers believed and taught was true, then it is just as true and just as important today--because the Bible has not changed, truth has not changed, and God has not changed.* The minds of men are like porous sieves out of which truth can leak and into which error may seep to dilute the truth. But truth does not change because God Himself does not change. Our *understanding* of truth may change, but truth does not change.

What specific doctrines am I talking about? I speak of foundational doctrines, not secondary matters. I am talking about those doctrines that were set forth, defined, and defended at the Synod of Dort in 1618 and later expressed in the Westminster Confession and the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689.

I am referring to those doctrines that set forth a God who saves, not this little "God" who just helps man to save himself. I mean those doctrines that reveal the three great acts of the Trinity for the recovering of poor, helpless, lost sinners: election by the Father, redemption by the Son, and calling by the Spirit. All are directed to the same individuals and secure their salvation infallibly. Away with this wicked idea of giving each act of the Trinity a different reference, i.e., the objects of redemption as *all mankind*; the objects of calling as *those who hear the gospel*; and the objects of election as *those hearers who respond*.

Let us instead return to those doctrines which

- give *all* the glory of saving sinners to God and do not divide it between God and the sinner.
- see the Creator as the source and the end of everything both in nature and in grace.
- teach that history is nothing less than the working out of God's preordained plan.
- set forth the God who was sovereign in creation, sovereign in redemption (both in planning it and perfecting it), and sovereign in providence--both historically and right now.
- reveal a Redeemer who actually redeems; a God who saves by purpose and by power; the Trinity working together for the salvation of sinners (the Father plans it, the Son achieves it, and the Holy Spirit communicates and effectually applies it to God's elect).
- proclaim a God who saves, keeps, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners--and loses none in the process.

God saves sinners! We must not weaken this great truth that God saves sinners by disrupting the unity of the work of the Trinity or by dividing the achievement of salvation between God and man. Jonah had it straight: "Salvation [past, present, and future] is of the LORD" (2:9). These doctrines trace the source of every spiritual blessing--faith included--back to that great transaction between God and His Son which was carried out on Calvary's hill.

The Spirit's gift is not just an *enlightening* work. It is also the *regenerating* work of God in men: taking away their hearts of stone and giving them hearts of flesh, renewing their wills, and by His almighty power, determining and causing them to come--not against their will but freely, being made willing by His grace (Ps. 110:3).

"Blessed is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, that he may dwell in Your courts" (Ps. 65:4). It is in this sense that grace proves to be *irresistible*. Why? Because grace subdues man's power to resist.

Though this is all the sovereign work of God, let us not suppose that God's decision to save a man by a decree leaves man passive and inert. It is the opposite that takes place:

- The covenant of grace does not kill man; it takes possession of a man.
- It does not regard man as a tin can, a piece of wood, or a robot; it lays hold of his whole being with all his faculties and powers of soul and body, for time and eternity.
- It does not annihilate his powers but removes 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, it causes him to love and consecrate himself to God freely.

These doctrines show the cross as revealing God's *power* to save, not His impotence. The cross was not a place to make salvation *possible* but a place to actually *secure* the salvation of sinners, fulfilling that prophecy of the great evangelical prophet Isaiah: "He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied" (53:11). God was not frustrated at the cross.

The Bible says, "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:23). God was the Master of Ceremonies at the cross!

William Cowper expressed it in his hymn, "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood:"

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood  
 Shall never lose its power  
 Till *all* the ransomed Church of God  
 Be saved to sin no more.

These doctrines will drive us to proclaim to everyone:

1. All are sinners--not sick and in need help but dead and in need life.
2. Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the only perfect, able, and willing Savior of sinners (even the worst).
3. The Father and the Son have promised that all who know themselves to be such sinners and put their faith in Christ as Savior shall be received into favor, and none will be cast out.
4. God has made repentance and faith a duty, requiring of every man who hears the gospel a serious and full casting of the soul upon Christ as the all-sufficient Savior, ready, able, and willing to save *all* that come to God by Him.

To the question, "What must I do to be saved?" we must answer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). What does that mean? It means:

1. Knowing oneself to be a sinner.
2. Knowing Christ to have died for sinners.
3. Abandoning all self-righteousness, self-confidence, and self-effort.
4. Casting oneself wholly upon Him for pardon and peace.
5. Exchanging one's natural enmity and rebellion against Him for a spirit of grateful submission to the will of Christ through the renewing of his/her heart by the Holy Spirit.

Erasmus had a wrong view of the human will and its relationship to other major Christian doctrines. It is still a serious error in Roman Catholic teaching. It is likewise true that this erroneous view is held by most present-day Southern Baptists--"Take heed to yourself [your experience] and to the doctrine" (1 Tim. 4:16a).

John Sutcliff summed it up very well when he said: "Every increase of religious knowledge should not only make me wiser, but better; not only make my head more clear, but purify my heart, influence my affections, and regulate my life."[\[10\]](#)



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<sup>1</sup> *SBC Today*, 1:9, 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Mueller, *History of Southern Seminary* (Nashville: Broadman Press) 238.

<sup>4</sup> *An Interpretation of the English Bible: Colossians, Ephesians, and Hebrews* (Nashville: Broadman, 1948) 140-141, 150.

<sup>5</sup> Simon and Schuster, 199.

<sup>6</sup> A dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1963.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, pp. 266, 339, 343, 344, 348, and 434-37.

<sup>8</sup> Taken from W.C. Harrell, class notes, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>9</sup> (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1917) 348.

<sup>10</sup> Michael A. G. Haykin, *One Heart and One Soul* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1994) 48.



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# News

## Mark Dever Joins SBFC Planning Committee

Mark Dever, pastor of the historic Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., has recently joined the planning committee of the Southern Baptist Founders Conference. He received his Ph.D. in Puritan studies from Cambridge and serves as an adjunct professor at Beeson Divinity School.

## 1996 Founders Conference

The fourteenth Founders Conference convened once again on the campus of Samford University in Birmingham, AL. Nearly 350 registrants gathered to consider the theme, "The Doctrines of Grace." Despite some difficulties with the accommodations, the conference proved to be full of encouragement and warm fellowship. Geoff Thomas from Wales spoke four times in a manner which not only clearly explained the historic doctrines of Calvinism but also exemplified the character of expository preaching. Six stories on the conference were released by Baptist Press and are available from the Founders web site (<http://www.founders.org>). Cassette tapes of the messages are available from Dick Cook at [Sound Word Associates](#), P.O. Box 2035, Michigan City, Indiana, 46360; (219) 879-7753.

## Announcing the [Founders Works Online](#) Project

Would you like to see a collection of historic Southern Baptist works on the World Wide Web? Efforts are currently underway to make some of the Southern Baptist founders' works available on the Founders web site. We are pleased to announce that John Dagg's [Autobiography](#) and [Treatise on Church Order](#) are already online. As soon as possible, we hope to add his *Manual of Theology*. We also desire to put online James Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, P. H. Mell's *A Southern Baptist Looks at Predestination*, and *Southern Baptist Sermons on Sovereignty and Responsibility*. In order to move forward aggressively with this project we need volunteers to help with the following tasks: scanning/typing texts into a word processor, converting to HTML, and proofreading. If you are able to help in any of these areas please send an email note to Dr. Stan Reeves at [founders@founders.org](mailto:founders@founders.org).

## International Outreach Books

The book publishing ministry of International Outreach is growing with the addition of at least four new titles planned for 1996-1997. Currently in progress is a modernization of *Spiritual Refining*, a classic work on true and false conversion by Westminster divine, Anthony Burgess. Expected release date is November of 1996. Planned for 1997 is the republication of two works by Thomas Hooker, *The Christian's Two Chief Lessons: Self-Denial and Self-Trial* and *The Soul's Humiliation*. International Outreach has also launched a children's book series called, "Proverbs 22:6 Series" which is designed to assist parents in training their children with sound, biblical materials. The first book, *The Rich Man and Lazarus* is beautifully illustrated with 14 full-color illustrations by So-Hee Kim. It teaches children about heaven and hell using Luke 16:19-31 as the text and containing 4 songs from *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* by Issac Watts. Also included are a word to parents by William C. Nichols and a message to children by James Janeway. The next book in the series is scheduled for release in 1997 and is entitled *The True and the False*. For a price list of these and other available titles (including evangelistic tracts) contact William Nichols at International Outreach, 2903 Eisenhower, Ames, Iowa 50010.

## More Drive-by Baptisms

According to recent AP news reports Baptist churches in Florida and Massachusetts are now under investigation by police because of their baptismal practices. The Florida church has evidently been baptizing children who attend their Bible Schools without any parental notification. After two children came home in tears, a police investigation was launched. In Massachusetts, "A Baptist church used promises of pizza and basketball games to attract hundreds of children, and then gave them full-body baptisms into a faith that is foreign to many of them, parents charge." According to the report, "Most of the children are from public housing projects. 'Families around here are lucky to get pizza once a month, so if they offer it to kids, they go,'" said one mother whose three-year-old-son has been repeatedly approached by church members. In defense of his church's practice, the pastor is quoted as saying, "Jesus told us to go into the world to preach the gospel. Baptism is doing more than just hearing what the man said and it's in the Bible, who am I to say what is right?" Hopefully, he was misquoted.



# Book Review

*Lord and Christ, The Implications of Lordship for Faith and Life* by Ernest C. Reisinger; Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1994.

Reviewed by [Steve Martin](#)

As a new Christian in April of 1969. I was invited by the leader of a parachurch ministry at our campus in Indiana to attend a student gathering at the University of Illinois. The song leader/ master of ceremonies shocked me a few minutes into his "warm-up" by stating that though Jesus was his Savior, he had not yet made him Lord of his life. But he assured us that eventually, sometime in the future, he would do just that. I was both amazed and disgusted that he could be so brazen and flippant in admitting publicly that he was living a double life-that he was living for himself and this world but had forgiveness of sins and the hope of heaven too! With what little I knew of the New Testament in 1969 it sounded cavalier-nothing more than a piously worded expression of rebellion. I was even more shocked years later when I discovered that noteworthy seminary professors, pastors, authors and parachurch ministries espoused this same theology while claiming that they were the guardians of the historic gospel!

But God has been gracious to His church since that time. In the 1980's, pastor/commentator John MacArthur "dropped a bomb on the playground" (to borrow Karl Adam's phrase) shared by dispensational theology, "easy believism" and the Keswick ("Victorious Life", "Higher Life" and "Deeper Life") brand of sanctification. MacArthur showed how the "non-lordship" view of salvation was the gospel of neither Jesus nor the apostles (see *The Gospel According to Jesus* and *Faith Works*). Then Mike Horton, Kenneth Gentry and Richard Belcher added their names to the list of biblical critics of the "non-lordship position." Now Ernest Reisinger, a retired pastor and promoter of Christian literature for over forty years, has written the most gracious, yet frank, critique of that unbiblical teaching which has spoken "peace, peace" to many souls when there was, in fact, no peace. The errant theologies which Pastor Reisinger critiques have become the bane of North American Protestantism (second only to Liberalism), and through missionaries, spread to the mission stations of the world.

He has chosen to write on an important topic, affecting tens of thousands of professing Christians regarding the reality of their status before God. Over and over again Reisinger quotes with approval the recognition of Charles Ryrie, a leading proponent of the "non-lordship view of salvation", that both views cannot be true. The gospel recovered at the Reformation and proclaimed by Luther and Calvin, then amplified later by the Puritans and the Protestant confessions and the leaders of the Great Awakening (Whitefield, Edwards) and the modern missionary movement (Carey, Judson, Rice) and the founders of the Southern Baptist Convention (Dagg, Boyce, Mell, Mercer, Broadus, et al) is not the same as that proclaimed by the descendants and disciples of Darby, Scofield, Chafer, and Ryrie. Their exegesis of Scripture shows different results. Both groups and both gospels cannot be right. We must listen to Ernest Reisinger and hear him out carefully.

*Lord and Christ* is an apt title, for in fourteen chapters the author shows how the person and work of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is inextricably linked; one cannot have Christ as Savior without bowing to Him as Lord. Chapter One charts the recent history of the controversy. Chapter Two carefully qualifies what is meant and not meant by the terms involved. Chapter Three traces the family lineage of "non-lordship" teaching back to dispensationalism. Chapter Four charts the origins of dispensational teaching in America in the last century and gives the essence of that theological system. He admits that at one time he too was immersed in the notes of the Scofield Study Bible and the systematic theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer. He writes of what he knows first hand.

Chapter Five is the crux of the matter. It analyzes "the nature of saving faith." He shows that the Bible warns of false

(non-saving) faith (cf. John 3:30-47, especially noting vv. 30-31 and 42-47). He then delineates the differences between saving versus non-saving "faith." Chapter Six covers "Regeneration and Lordship." He rightly shows that "non-lordship" theology has a spurious view of the doctrine of regeneration and all that is connected to the miraculous work of God. The Arminian roots of dispensational theology contribute to its fundamental misunderstanding of regeneration and its results. Chapter Seven covers "Repentance and Lordship." Dispensational theologians have followed the errors of the Dutchman, Arminius, and the Scot, Robert Sandeman, in making repentance something that man can do in his own strength (Arminius) and which is essentially intellectual (Sandeman). Chapter Eight treats "Justification and Sanctification," showing how the two are inextricably linked. If you conflate the two (as in Roman Catholicism) you are left with "you save yourself with Jesus' help; Jesus by Himself saves nobody." If you confuse the two or ignore the differences between the two, you may wrongly try to earn your justification by your sanctification-and gain neither! Justification and sanctification can be distinguished but must never be separated. One cannot be a truly justified person and not be pursuing sanctification (Heb. 12:14, etc.).

Chapters Nine and Ten cover "The Carnal Christian" teaching. One sentence from the opening paragraphs will suffice to whet your appetite: "The 'carnal Christian' teaching was invented to accommodate all the supposed converts of modern evangelism." Pastor Reisinger covers all the reasons why "carnal Christian" theology should be opposed, why it is based upon faulty exegesis of biblical texts, and the consequences of such teaching (Eph. 5:6). Chapter Eleven examines "Assurance of Grace and Salvation." Modern evangelism (since Charles Finney) has been quick to give assurance to its supposed converts unlike biblical and historic preachers and teachers. The true biblical basis for assurance is spelled out and its counterfeit warned against. The chapter closes with two heart stirring examples of historic Protestantism: Hopeful and Christian's conversation from *The Pilgrim's Progress* and David Brainerd's recounting of a work of grace in the hearts of the Indians along the Delaware River.

Chapter Twelve explains "Self-Examination: Duties and Dangers." Modern believers cringe at any hint that they might not be true Christians. Preachers who even hint at this are chided as stealing the joy of God's flock. But if modern professors cannot stand the questioning of puny men, how do they hope to stand before the thrice holy God on Judgment Day? Chapter Thirteen shows how good works are the fruit of true conversion. No fruits, no root! The concluding Chapter Fourteen is a recapitulation of the relationship between the law and the gospel in God's method of grace, ending with a valuable bibliography on that subject.

Pastor Reisinger is to be commended for clarifying issues of great importance for evangelicals. Studying under dispensational and Keswick teachers, attending dispensational schools and imbibing the "easy believism" form of crowd manipulation have filled the churches with "tares and goats." This book should be required reading for all pastors, church officers and seminary students. Many "tares and goats" will find themselves exposed and pointed to the true gospel of the Savior who saves sinners-even "gospel hypocrites" (as the Puritans called "professors" who were not "possessors").

May God use this book (which J. I. Packer says is the best on the subject) to awaken many to their plight and save them to His everlasting praise. And may many preachers and teachers have their eyes opened so that they might "correctly handle the Word of truth." And may those who have been ensnared by a false gospel be given great grace to repent and acknowledge their error before the mill stone of the Savior and Judge is tied around their neck (Jas. 3:1; Heb. 13:17). The stakes are too high to ignore this book!



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# Letters

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Dear *Founders Journal*:

Several years ago I was struggling to enter the ministry as a Southern Baptist. I had felt the Lord's call upon my life ever since I was thirteen, and I had directed my life toward the goal of becoming a pastor. But as I completed my seminary studies, I was chilled with the growing conviction that I might never realize my goal. Either I would pastor a Church--or I would remain a Southern Baptist. I could not do both.

My problem was caused by the theological apathy that pervades our Convention. Most of the pastors I had come into contact with through the years believed in "Eternal Security," but otherwise they were Pelagians. If that sounds a little severe, consider this: Arminians believe that man is totally unable to come to the Lord, even unwilling to come to the Lord, until the Holy Spirit enlightens his spirit. Even John Wesley held the doctrine of Total Depravity, and yes, he used that term and not "Natural Inability." But many of our pastors and teachers today simply teach that it is our choice to come to the Lord. They do not even address the issue raised by Jesus in John 6:44: *no man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*

I was not taught the doctrines of grace in my early years as a Southern Baptist, nor did I even see the issue raised in any of the popular Christian books that I read. All I knew was that the Southern Baptist teaching gave us total free will until we were saved. Salvation was totally subject to our choice, until we were saved. After we were saved, we no longer had a choice. All of this was annoyingly inconsistent. Without knowing about the "five points" of the [contra] Remonstrance and of Dort, I did understand that you could not have absolute free will for the unsaved unless the saved had it as well. If salvation was absolutely subject to our free choice, then we could freely choose to renounce it later. After all, isn't the ability to change your mind about something absolutely essential to free will?

Faced with four point Arminianism versus five point Arminianism, I deemed five point Arminianism to be superior--and I still believe that to be true. If you teach universal atonement and free will, you ought to teach that a Christian can fall from grace.

That was when my pastor, a Calvinist, gave me your address. Not only did you give me a few copies of your Journal, but you also gave me half a bookshelf worth of doctrinal books. In that one mailing, you showed me that there was such a thing as consistent Christianity--in the doctrines of grace. I had seen some passing references to Calvinism in my theological studies, but they were regarded as too dogmatic, and too rational. Your Journal showed me that the doctrines of grace were not only a viable alternative to Arminianism, but that they are an expression of a living and vibrant Christianity in which the Holy Spirit works within us a holiness without which we cannot see God (Heb. 12:14). I discovered no less than this, that Southern Baptists can be biblical Christians, unyieldingly committed to the word of God and to a living walk. Southern Baptists can preach of the necessity for an abiding faith (Col. 1:21-23) which perseveres to the end (Matt. 24:13). Southern Baptists can preach that we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Southern Baptists don't have to assure reprobates with a dead and demonic faith (James 2:19-20). Finally, Southern Baptists can, and once did, preach that the same salvation which has its source in grace, and which flows through faith (Eph. 2:8-9), also irresistibly recreates us unto good works (Eph. 2:10).

At the time I discovered your Journal, I was on the verge of becoming a Methodist. As a result of your Journal, I am now entering my fourth year as a Southern Baptist pastor. Now that I am working on my Doctorate in Theology, I am astonished that the simple consistency of the [contra] Remonstrance and of Dort is so foreign to modern Baptists. In my own county, every pastor I have spoken to is a four-point Arminian, except one (he is considering becoming a

five-point Arminian). I wonder how many young people are like I was only a few years ago. I also cannot help considering that if I could see the problem of theological inconsistency, the best and brightest young men called into the ministry can see it as well. How many of them will leave our convention? We need to be reminded about the fact that Southern Baptists do in fact have doctrines, that they once thought those doctrines were important, and that those doctrines were not only consistent and rational, but intensely Biblical--not only theoretical, but experiential.

Today I keep hearing the cry, "we are Southern Baptists, we don't have any creed." . . . but creeds and catechisms (or beliefs and teachings) are historic Southern Baptist possessions. When so many in our Convention do not know, or simply do not care, what our historic beliefs are, they can pass down nothing but the thinnest milk. We need to be reminded of who we are. Your journal is doing that, and for that, I thank you.

In Him,  
T. C., Hays, NC

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Dr. Ascol and staff:

I would like to express my heart-felt thanks to the editors and staff of the *Founders Journal*. I am a recent convert to reformed thinking and the doctrines of grace. In the journal I find great encouragement from the articles and news of God-inspired changes happening in our denomination. I am currently earning my bachelors degree from Florida Baptist Theological College and rarely have time for extra reading and research outside of my class studies and sermon preparation. The *Founders Journal* provides a much-needed resource so as not to allow stagnation in my spiritual revival.

I am especially exhorted by the biographical sketches of great reformed theologians such as Spurgeon and Manly. Their uncompromising faith and insight into heretical teachings and practices should be a source of strength and a call to steadfastness to each of us who hold on to the glorious grace of our Redeemer!

Thanks again and may God richly bless.  
P. W.  
Graceville, FL

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Your magazine name was given to me by Rev. Dr. Harold F. Green, Chaplain here at High Desert State Prison. After reading your Winter 1996 issue I was left with a full feeling.

Living in an environment that is dominated by Pentecostalism, it is refreshing to finally read and digest solid food. Thanks!

Would you please consider placing my name on your mailing list for the *Founders Journal*? I am indigent and unable to afford the cost of a subscription.

Thank you for your consideration and rest assured that not only will this be a blessing for me, but for all those with whom I share it with.

May God, our Father, continue to bless you as you continue to bless others.

In Your Service Through His Love,  
J. W.  
Susanville, CA

Editor's Note: *A gift subscription has been provided for you.*

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...I read the *Founders Journal* from cover to cover. We were S.B.C. members for 15 years but left when we became aware that the colleges were experiencing tongues, etc. Many of our dear friends are still there. I was thrilled to realize that there are Calvinistic Southern Baptists. Ernie Reisinger's article was one of the very clearest I have ever read on the Doctrines of Grace. . . .

S. C.  
Orland, CA



# Secularized Preaching

## A Crisis Among Southern Baptists

*Lee Weeks*

Secularized preaching, heavy on opinion and light on doctrine, is to blame for an increasingly "widespread biblical ignorance among Southern Baptists," said R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"I believe there is a crisis indeed in Southern Baptist preaching, and it is a crisis to which we had better give our attention," Mohler said September 4th during a chapel address on the campus of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC.

"I believe it is seen and evidenced by immature and even (biblically) ignorant Christians in the pew, many falling prey to false doctrines," Mohler said. "It is seen by an increasingly worldly church proclaiming an evermore worldly message we see not just out in the world but in the church confusion, secularity, lack of discipline, weak and absent doctrine."

Preachers of the gospel must be true to their calling by following the apostle Paul's charge to his protege Timothy to "preach the Word," Mohler stated. "That imperative had better be the imperative by which you enter the pulpit," he asserted.

Preachers on both ends of the theological spectrum, Mohler said, too often are concerned about giving "itching ears what itching ears want to hear."

"On the left wing of the church, the Bible's authority and inspiration are often rejected and thus the Scriptures are entirely absent. But among evangelicals, the Bible's authority and inspiration are confessed, but the Scriptures are often abandoned. Evangelicals are so easily seduced by the culture around us. The Bible is often displaced by the authority of popular culture, pragmatic concerns and personal experience."

Yet without God's Word, Mohler said, there would be nothing to preach.

"This canon which came together by the inspiration of God and the superintendency of the Holy Spirit is the canon of Scripture that does not err, will never mislead and is the substance of our message, or we are preaching some other gospel."

Still there are those who scoff at the notion the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God, Mohler said.

Mohler quoted from a book by David Buttrick, homiletics professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee, *Preaching To Captives: The Liberation of Preaching*.

"So the Bible offers meaning--not in every little passage; some Bible passages may be largely irrelevant or even sub-Christian--the Bible offers meaning by handing out a story with a beginning and an end and, in between, a narrative understanding of how God may interface with our sinful humanity."

And Mohler quoted Edward Farley, professor of theology at Vanderbilt Divinity School, who wrote in a 1994 article in *Theology Today*: "The Christian church is summoned to the apostolic task of preaching the good news, and to preach biblical passages is to reject that summons....But why would someone who thinks that the Bible originated historically, contextually, and editorially, thus reflecting the human and even corrupted perspectives of its writers, think that any passage one happens to select must contain something in it or about it that is proclaimable?"

While writings such as these are unthinkable by evangelicals, Mohler noted there are many inerrantists who routinely fail to preach expositively.

"We cringe and we flinch and we're repelled when we see the Bible rejected and impugned and maligned by those witnesses and we say surely evangelicals preach the Word.

"We hold to the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. We honor the Word. But I have to tell you, oftentimes I wonder. Do we really preach the Word? We confess the authority, the total truthfulness, the inerrancy, the infallibility and the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible only to abandon the text as we preach."

Preachers must be careful not to interfere with the intended message from God's Word, Mohler said. "It is our business to get out of the way. We stand in the pulpit as a door to be opened and not closed. The goal of expository preaching...is to let the text talk and to make clear what the text speaks.

"We are heralds. We are not originators. We are charged to preach a message we have received, not to invent or design a message we believe will be well-received. We are not to develop. We are not to alter. We are not to update. We are not to reformulate. We are not to contaminate. We are to preach the Word."

Mohler cited a recent study conducted by Princeton University sociologist Marsha Whitten to illustrate his point that a kind of "Christianity Lite" is being served up in too many Southern Baptist churches.

In Whitten's book, *All Is Forgiven*, the author compared the sermons from mainstream and liberal Protestant churches and evangelical churches, with the largest sample among Southern Baptists. The sermons analyzed were from the Luke 15 prodigal son parable.

"The message was frighteningly secularized," Mohler said. "There was seen an accommodation to modern culture, especially in the predominance of therapeutic concerns.

"No notion of atonement, no demand, no discipleship, just a blithe, general, soothing non-confrontational message--all is forgiven. Don't worry about it. You're going to be taken care of. God loves you."

Too many pulpits lack the holy boldness that comes with proclaiming God's truths, Mohler said.

"There is a false humility in the part of so many pulpits and so many preachers where there is no exhortation because quite frankly he who preaches has no confidence in what he says....But if it is (God's) Word, it is not confidence in our word, but confidence in God himself, who is its author."

Mohler said "theological seminaries must be measured by whether or not our graduates preach the Word in season and out of season."

"Preach it when it works and when it doesn't seem to work," Mohler exhorted. "Preach it when it bears visible fruit and when it appears to be barren. Preach it when it is appreciated.

"Preach the word when it is denounced....Preach the Word. Preach the Word. Preach the Word."

(c)Baptist Press, September 9, 1996.



# Announcing Founders Press

The Southern Baptist Founders Conference was inaugurated in 1983 in hopes that it might "glorify God honor His gospel, and strengthen His churches by providing encouragement to Southern Baptists in historical biblical, theological, practical, and ecumenical studies" (as taken from the "Statement of Motives" of the conference). From the beginning, the conference has been designed to be "balanced...in respect to doctrine and devotion expressed in the Doctrines of Grace and their experimental [experiential] application to the local church, particularly in the areas of worship and witness" (from the "Statement of Purpose").

As God has blessed the conference, other related efforts have grown out of it. The Founders YOUTH Conference now meets each summer in the Florida panhandle. Various regional Founders Conferences have sprung up -- most notably in the Southwest (Lubbock, Texas) and Midwest (St. Louis, Missouri). In 1990 the Founders Journal was launched. In 1995 Mission 150 took advantage of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention by producing and distributing over 60,000 copies of a special double issue of the journal.

Each of these developments has been consistent with the original intent and purpose behind the Founders Conference. Now, the vision is expanding once again.

The 1996 Founders Conference marked the inauguration of Founders Press, a new publishing enterprise which shares the same concerns and is committed to the same goals as the Founders Conference and Founders Journal. The Founders Press is committed to producing and distributing books, pamphlets and other materials which are consistent with the doctrines of grace. These will cover devotional, theological, expositional, historical and pastoral areas of interest.

The first publication is entitled, [From the Protestant Reformation to the Southern Baptist Convention](#), by Tom Ascol. It is the initial pamphlet in the "Founders Heritage Series" and is now available. Two other works are currently in production: a short historical and theological analysis of the Southern Baptist Convention by Tom Nettles and a treatment of infant baptism and believer's baptism by Fred Malone. Other titles by various authors are in development.

Founders Press intends to provide materials which can assist believers in private and group studies, discipleship efforts, and new member orientation. In addition, materials which introduce the Baptist heritage will also be produced. These will range from small, easy-to-read pamphlets to larger, more scholarly works.

Your support in this new effort is greatly needed. Please pray that God will give guidance and power to all who will be involved in bringing these materials into print. Pray that He will provide financial supporters for this ministry. Consider using Founders Press materials in your home and church. Tell others -- especially bookstores and book distributors -- about this new work. Above all, pray that God will use the literature which is produced to bring much glory to Jesus Christ and much good to His people.



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