

Progressive Theology and Southern Baptist Controversies of the 1950s and 1960s

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In *Uneasy in Babylon*, Barry Hankins argues that the conservatives who orchestrated the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979 sought principally to save America from the advance of secularist culture. They promoted inerrancy and orthodox theology as a means to this end. The most important difference between conservatives and moderates then was not their theology but how they viewed American culture—conservatives opposed the cultural mainstream and moderates endorsed it. Conservatives thus sought to control the convention—“in order to wage the national culture war.”¹

But their primary concern was a bit less grandiose. They sought to control the convention not to save America but to save the seminaries. They were not seeking a platform for countercultural political endeavors but an orthodox foundation for advancing the faithfulness of Southern Baptists in fulfilling the divinely ordained mission of the church. The truth revealed in the inerrant scripture, conservatives held, was fundamental to the church’s mission.

Conservatives believed that the denomination was drifting from orthodoxy. Although they raised some accusations against other denominational agencies, the seminaries were the main targets. Many aspects of the post-1979 campaign to expunge liberalism from the seminaries arose from denominational experiences in the 1950s and 1960s.

Since the late nineteenth century, progressive or liberal theology spread significantly as many Southern Baptists sought an “intelligent” response to the threat of irreligion posed by the established scientific approaches to evolution and biblical criticism rooted in historicism and comparative religion. By the 1960s conservatives became convinced that liberalism originating from the seminaries gravely imperiled the denomination. They agitated against liberal professors and successfully pressured the seminaries to dismiss some of their most vulnerable faculty members. The seminary faculties nevertheless remained overwhelmingly progressive. The chief impact on the seminaries was to frighten the faculties into becoming more cautious in their writings and public statements. Conservatives sensed that they were losing the war. The seminary purges of the 1950s and 1960s therefore served only to heighten their sense of denominational crisis.

The movement that conservatives inaugurated in 1979 was a new phase of an older movement. From the late 1950s and through the 1960s the seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention were at the center of an intense struggle between conservatives and progressives over the direction of the denomination. In 1962 the contest boiled over in a controversy over Old Testament professor Ralph Elliott and threatened the division of the denomination. By 1966 the seminaries had fired or

forced the resignations of at least eighteen professors and many Southern Baptists clamored for further dismissals. In 1963 conservatives supported the adoption of a revision of the Southern Baptist Convention's statement of faith, the *Baptist Faith and Message*, in an effort to stem the growth of liberal theology in the seminaries. But it soon became apparent to conservatives that the seminaries had merely returned to the *status quo ante bellum*. Conservatives won a few battles, but progressives were winning the war. Conservatives had mustered their convention majorities, but progressives retained control of the seminaries.²

The seminaries were the focal point of the struggles between conservatives and progressives because their different visions derived in large part from differing theological convictions. The conservatives were the majority of the denomination and made the theological issues the central points of contention. They held that the seminaries were abandoning the faith of the Bible for modernist theology. Progressives defended their views and protested that they remained faithful to the Bible and sought merely to lead the churches to a more intelligent faith, a faith that was relevant in modern society.

The progressives drew on the tradition of Protestant liberalism from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They shared its sense of crisis—modern science appeared to contradict many of the teachings of traditional orthodoxy and therefore to discredit the Christian faith as a whole. They shared its conviction that the solution to the crisis was to reconcile faith and science by adopting a view of inspiration that restricted the Bible's meaning to the religious sphere only. They shared its earnest apologetic aim to make Christianity

credible to the modern scientific mind. And they shared its reverence for Jesus and the Bible.³

Both progressives and conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention believed that the very life of true religion in the churches was at stake. Progressives believed that rapid changes in society jeopardized the denomination's future. Southern Baptists were being left behind, as evidenced by the fact they generally opposed or at most acquiesced to the emerging social trends: the civil rights movement; cosmopolitanism, especially as represented by the United Nations; ecumenism and the Federal Council of Churches; concern for the poor in the expansion of federally funded social welfare programs; the peace movement; John F. Kennedy's presidential bid. Unless Southern Baptists embraced a more intelligent faith, progressives concluded, they would become irrelevant to society and would be consigned to atrophy in southern backwaters.

When progressives called for a relevant faith, they had in mind more than support of progressive social trends. They also meant that it had to be intelligent—the truth claims of Christianity must be consistent with modern science. Southern Baptists generally failed in this regard, progressives held, for they rejected evolutionary biology and the biblical criticism of the universities. A faith that rejects these scientific approaches will have no appeal to the educated class of Americans and will therefore be irrelevant. Traditional orthodoxy, with its rejection of evolution and insistence on the historical accuracy of the Bible, was no longer credible. The laity were "being gripped and trained in an age of science," professor Ralph Elliott argued in defense of his views, and Southern

Baptist theologians needed to be free to advance a “fresh expression” of the Bible’s message that showed “no basic conflict” with science. Otherwise, Elliott concluded, “we are going to of necessity abdicate our mission, lose hosts of people, and send them on their way to the deification of science itself. It is a matter of intelligently salvaging faith—not wrecking.” This apologetic aim was characteristic of modernist Protestantism generally and was central to the agenda of Southern Baptist progressives. They sought to show, progressive pastor Cecil Sherman said, that “personal religion can be held by intelligent people.”⁴

The conservative majority also believed that the denomination’s future was in jeopardy, but it was the theology that the progressives promoted that threatened it. Liberalism was spreading in the seminaries and churches. If Southern Baptists permitted it to continue, it would destroy true religion. Southern Baptist churches would become irrelevant because they would no longer proclaim the only message that could save sinners and establish the church of Jesus Christ in its New Testament purity.

The Rise of Progressive Theology in the Southern Baptist Convention

Historians have tended to overlook the rise and spread of progressive theology in the Southern Baptist Convention. It is easy to do. The vast majority of the denomination has remained decidedly conservative. But a significant number of influential pastors and denominational leaders embraced liberal theology after the 1870s. Like liberals in other denominations, they sought to make the faith more relevant to contemporary society by reinterpreting scripture consistently with Darwinism and the new

“scientific” biblical criticism.⁵

A number of Southern Baptist pastors and denominational leaders embraced key aspects of modernism after about 1880. C. H. Toy, who in 1879 resigned under pressure from his position as professor of Old Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, defended his views in a fairly standard modernist manner. All biblical texts were historically conditioned. Their historical dress transmitted truth in the same way that parables and myths did: the outward form consisted of inessential accessories that conveyed an inward religious truth. The proper approach, Toy wrote, was to “take the kernel of truth from its outer covering of myth.” The inner spiritual meaning was inspired and true but its outward statements about history or the natural order were subject to error. Toy found so many historical errors that some Unitarians threatened to withdraw from the Unitarian union in 1883 when the Unitarian board published Toy’s Sunday School book in which he taught that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were legendary and that Moses was a polytheist who did not give Israel the law, not even the Ten Commandments. But Toy aimed to salvage the truth and power of the Bible by gathering its religious message from its historical form.⁶

Toy is only the best known of the Southern Baptist leaders of the time who embraced a modernist view of the Bible. W. C. Lindsay, pastor of the Columbia, South Carolina, First Baptist Church from 1877 to 1910, began publishing articles promoting liberalism in the South Carolina Baptist weekly two years before Toy’s views became known. In 1879, Lindsay acted as Toy’s public advocate by the press and by private letter. In 1881 the Foreign Mission Board rescinded the appointments

of two South Carolina pastors, John Stout and T. P. Bell, because they shared Toy's modernist view of the Bible. W. J. Alexander, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, embraced modernism and Unitarianism, and the University of South Carolina dismissed him on this account in 1889. All four graduated from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.⁷

As progressive views spread on the faculties of Baptist schools, so did the protests. Between 1900 and 1940 many Southern Baptist colleges experienced controversy over professors suspected of modernism, or dismissed professors for modernism after pastors and church members petitioned the schools to dismiss liberal professors. W. L. Poteat, president of Wake Forest College and the most prominent Southern Baptist liberal of the era—Shailer Mathews, the University of Chicago modernist leader, called him a “veritable Atlas of liberalism and sane religious thinking”—overcame two efforts to oust him. Others also survived the campaigns against them. Still others, like Baylor's Grove S. Dow and C. S. Fothergill, Furman's G. B. Moore, Andrew Lee Pickets, and Herbert Gezork, William Jewell's A. Wakefield Slaten, Mercer's Henry Fox, and Limestone's Theron McGee, lost their positions.⁸

Many concluded that the seminaries were the source of modernism in the denomination. In the 1880s W. C. Lindsay took great satisfaction in the notion, for he believed that seminary education would inescapably produce many liberal graduates and that in time the churches would also become intelligent and enlightened. Conservatives however were deeply troubled that the seminaries seemed to yield so much defective doctrine. In 1880, Samuel Henderson, longtime editor of

Alabama's *Southwestern Baptist*, groused publicly about Southern Seminary's apparent complicity in the spread of modernist theology. He complained that some of the seminary's graduates proclaimed the view that the Bible is a checkerboard of divine and human elements. The seminary therefore seemed to be producing “apples of Sodom” that weakened faith in the oracles of God.⁹

The seminaries continued to come under suspicion in the first half of the twentieth century. Fundamentalist leader J. Frank Norris led many Southern Baptists to doubt the orthodoxy of the seminaries. He repeatedly charged that the Southern Baptist Convention seminaries in Louisville and Ft. Worth were riddled with modernists. Many Southern Baptists suspected the soundness of Southern's W. O. Carver especially. The *Texas Baptist Standard* in 1914 accused Carver of denying the virgin birth. Others also came under suspicion of endorsing evolution or ecumenical efforts. In 1931 New Orleans Baptist Bible Institute (now the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary) dismissed Professor James E. Dean for his liberal views.¹⁰

School presidents and trustees generally sought to protect their progressive teachers. But when the complaints of Baptist pastors and lay persons embroiled the school in controversy, administrators often felt that the prudent course was to dismiss the accused. School leaders could ill afford a public controversy that would lead Baptists to doubt the school's doctrinal soundness. Most Baptist donors refused to give money to a school that drifted from orthodoxy. Nor would Baptist parents send their children there. Baptist pastors generally endorsed only sound schools and steered young people toward them alone.

Many Southern Baptists grew indignant

at the situation. In 1930, Missouri pastor W. E. Davis spoke for many fellow Baptists when he complained to Southern Baptist Convention president William J. McGlothlin about the spread of progressive thought in the schools. The schools were endorsing “the modern trend” and “this influence has for some time been spreading as the graduates take their places.” When conservatives promoted efforts to “suppress these trends and back old standards,” denominational leaders turned a cold shoulder. Davis sent his son to a Baptist college and had a brother who was a foreign missionary, but wondered how long he could continue to contribute to a denomination that tolerated modernism. “I still cooperate but my patience is becoming threadbare.” By the early 1960s, many Baptists had run out of patience. They demanded a purge.¹¹

The crisis that enveloped the Southern Baptist Convention seminaries beginning in 1958 marked the beginning of a conflict over the character of theological education that continued into the 1990s. As the conflict proceeded, more and more Southern Baptists became convinced that the seminaries were spreading liberalism and threatened the integrity of the churches. Liberalism was so well entrenched in the seminaries that they felt compelled to purge them of it.

The Firing of the “Dirty Dozen”

In 1958 the trustees of Southern Seminary dismissed thirteen professors. Some of the faculty had known for several years that President Duke McCall’s vision for the seminary differed substantially from their own. He had instituted changes in policy, structure, and personnel. They felt that he intended by these moves to establish his vision of theological education at the

expense of theirs. In 1958 a faction of the faculty decided to force the issue. Thirteen professors presented their grievances directly to the trustees. The trustees concluded finally that the only action that would satisfy the faction was the dismissal of McCall. The majority of trustees retained their confidence in McCall and voted to dismiss the thirteen. J. J. Owens afterward broke ranks with the block and gained reinstatement. Although McCall later recommended that the trustees reinstate the remaining twelve, the trustees refused. The twelve dubbed themselves the “Dirty Dozen.”¹²

The dismissals provoked extensive controversy. Kentucky Baptists’ *Western Recorder* and Virginia Baptists’ *Religious Herald* expressed deep misgivings over the firings. The American Association of Theological Schools (AATS) censured the school. Conservative denominational leaders threatened to pull the seminaries out of the AATS. By one account, Sydnor Stealey and Olin Binkley, the president and dean of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina, saved the relationship by persuading the AATS to refrain from drastic action.¹³

The reasons for the conflict at the seminary are complex. Personal animosities played an important role—by the end of the affair, they may have dominated. The role of the president and his authority played a central role. Many on the faculty felt that McCall was an autocrat. They held that he was trampling on the faculty’s traditional authority to make all significant decisions regarding personnel, policy, or property.

But at bottom the controversy was about theology. The disagreement however was not about fundamentalism and modernism, but rather about the role of the semi-

nary in advancing more liberal views. McCall and most of the faculty agreed broadly with modernist or neo-orthodox approaches to scripture: they rejected plenary verbal inspiration for inspiration of the religious element only, or held that scripture's revelation was personal rather than propositional; they employed historicist and developmental methods of biblical criticism; and they accepted evolution. But most faculty saw the futility of trying openly and aggressively to persuade the denomination of these views. "Publish and perish," seasoned professors admonished their younger protégés. To publish their convictions on these points would likely provoke a storm of protest from many pastors, perhaps resulting in the loss of their jobs. So most chose to express their views ambiguously in traditional terms in order to protect their jobs and thus their positions of influence. But the influence would be a gradual, cautious educating of the churches into more enlightened views of scripture interpretation. McCall promoted this approach.

Most faculty members at Southern Baptist Convention seminaries made their peace with this gradualist approach, though some chafed under the restriction more than others and wondered if it was not in fact cowardice or hypocrisy. But at Southern, a faction of the faculty grew restive under it. The times demanded an honest and forthright program for enlightening the churches, they felt. The faction wanted a school in which the professors were free from the theological constraints imposed by the popular sentiments of the denomination. They wanted liberty to develop theology creatively, rather like such northeastern schools as Yale Divinity School or Union Theological Seminary. The seminary should assert the truth without

compromise and with an independent prophetic voice. They felt that they could strengthen the denomination by open promotion of progressive theology. If they must instead submit to popular will of the denomination and "teach only what all Baptists already believe," then they would not be able to cure the denomination of its intellectual and cultural stagnation.¹⁴

But the denomination did not want to be cured and McCall knew that. If the faculty openly proclaimed their commitment to progressive theology, rank-and-file Baptists would rise up in indignation and impose narrower constraints. The result would be less freedom for the faculty, not more. McCall also recognized the justness of denominational control. Southern Seminary was not an independent seminary and had no right to act like one. The seminary should shape its academic program in deference to the denominational context—the school should prepare ministers who could operate acceptably in the churches to promote and secure the programs and practices of the local church and of the denomination. Southern Baptists had a constitutional right to govern the seminary as they thought best. McCall therefore judged the faculty's desire to strike an independent course in theology as an unjustifiable rebellion against denominational control.

McCall and the faction contended for control not for its own sake, but for the right to determine the posture of the school toward the denomination. The faction wanted to advocate progressive approaches to the faith openly and without denominational constraints. They said that they were striving for "faculty participation in the determination of the character and course of the seminary." McCall, with support from most of the remaining

faculty, wanted to advocate progressive approaches only as far as denominational constraints permitted. As McCall indicated in his formal response to the faction's complaints, the faction thought that they could best serve the seminary by being a "critic of the flaws in the life and practice, the theology and thought of the denomination." They were impatient of gradual progress toward a more enlightened theology and "would refuse to tolerate anything less than the truth."¹⁵

If McCall prevailed, the school would remain under the thumb of populist traditionalists and would aim to serve the express needs of the denomination. If the faculty faction prevailed, they hoped to make the school a place where they were free to advocate progressive theology without fear that the churches would stop paying their salaries. The times and the truth required freedom to speak critically against the denomination's traditional theology and practice.

But McCall and other faculty members believed that the seminary would best serve the interest of the denomination by the closest possible identification with the organization and program of the denomination, seeking to influence it gradually from the inside. And since there was little room in this approach to criticize openly the denomination's theology, it meant emphasizing practical training, denominational programs, and traditional theological language. To the "immediatist" progressives of the faction, this approach appeared anti-intellectual, even cowardly and hypocritical. But such gradualist progressives as McCall appraised the denominational temper more accurately. The only feasible method of promoting progressive views in the overwhelmingly conservative denomination was by quiet

and cautious teaching in the context of deference to the sentiments of the majority.

With the dismissal of the faction, McCall felt that the issue was settled. The seminary would not have a "self-perpetuating faculty which has operating control of the institution." Rather, "Southern Baptists are going to have to keep on running the old school." McCall had been convinced from the beginning of his tenure as president that the school leaned too much toward Yale. He felt compelled "to reverse the tendency to orient the institution around the non-denominational seminaries of the Northeast and bring it back into its proper relation to the Southern Baptist Convention."¹⁶

For McCall and other denominational leaders, the seminary's proper relation to the denomination included showing deference to the denomination's doctrinal views. McCall hoped to advance progressive views but also saw himself as a steward of the seminary on behalf of Southern Baptist churches. Southern Baptists had entrusted the perpetuation of Baptist doctrine to the seminaries. If he permitted his faculty openly to teach views that the majority refused to tolerate, the seminary would be in defiance of its constituency. McCall was present in 1960 when Southern Baptist Convention president Ramsey Pollard admonished a meeting of denominational leaders that the seminaries must be kept doctrinally pure. When Pollard added that "the presidents of these seminaries had a stewardship to the Convention in that regard," Herschel Hobbs reported, McCall "nearly broke his neck nodding approval."¹⁷

Some outside observers attributed the controversy to the spread of liberal theology at the seminary. Hobbs, pastor of Oklahoma City First Baptist Church and

perhaps the most influential Southern Baptist leader in the 1960s and 1970s, believed that the controversy at the seminary erupted because some professors were modernists. He saw the threat of modernism looming in the 1958 reorganization in which the school subsumed the archaeology department under the Biblical Division. "Every discovery in the field of Biblical archaeology has proved the Bible to be infallible," Hobbs wrote in 1959. He wondered whether the loss of independent status was a "move on the part of liberal theologians to de-emphasize archaeology since it is the rampart which liberalism has never been able to conquer in its offensive to discount the vital truths of the Scriptures."¹⁸

Hobbs had been hearing bad reports about the seminary "trickling out of Louisville for some years." He regretted the dismissals but believed that the seminary was due for some purifying. And although he thought some members of the faction were theologically sound, others needed to go. "I think the Lord will use all of this to purge the seminary."¹⁹

Such conservatives as Hobbs feared that the Southern Baptist Convention would repeat the mistakes of the mainline denominations. The Methodist Church, Hobbs recounted, had permitted "modernistic professors" to fill the faculties of its colleges and seminaries. "As a result that entire denomination is rapidly departing from the faith of the New Testament." There was peril also for the Southern Baptist Convention, Hobbs believed, for unsound professors had been tolerated too long in Louisville and New Orleans. "If our seminaries continue to teach heresy then our pulpits will be filled with it in a few years. Other denominations have lost out just by not acting in time."

For conservatives, events at Southern Seminary awakened the determination to halt the spread of liberalism. Hobbs sounded the alarm after the purge at Southern Seminary:

Without doubt the trouble at Louisville was doctrinally based. All the other was just window dressing in a sense. At least the attitudes which developed grew out of wrong doctrinal positions as compared with the normal Southern Baptist position. In my own judgment any man who aspires to teach either in our Christian colleges or seminaries should either stay within the 'pasture' of what Southern Baptist[s] believe and teach or else he should hire his own hall. I am not for furnishing him a place to spout out his own views. Especially in the light of the fact that if we give him such a place it will not be long until he will multiply himself many times over, and his view will be heard in pulpits all over the country. We had better take a lesson from the Methodist[s]. They have departed from their historic faith because they did not nip the thing in the bud in their seminaries. We are rapidly treading the same road if we are not careful.

The soundness of the entire denomination was at stake.²⁰

W. A. Criswell, pastor of the influential First Baptist Church of Dallas, agreed. He wrote Hobbs that the problem at the seminary was modernism and that the dismissals would help purify the school: "Anything in the earth that will help stop this creeping modernism that gradually takes away one bastion of Christ after another will be blessedly helpful."²¹

The dismissals evoked broad fears of liberalism in the seminaries and Southern Baptists sounded the alarm. Ramsey Pollard delivered a broadside blast at modernism in the denomination's schools in his presidential address at the 1960 meeting of

the Southern Baptist Convention in Miami. Hobbs said it would go down in history as “one of the most vital and timely utterances ever made by a president of the Southern Baptist Convention.” And most Southern Baptists agreed with Pollard, Hobbs believed, as indicated by the fact that the convention took the unusual step of voting to have the address printed in the minutes of the meeting. Hobbs endorsed Pollard’s address because he agreed that unsound doctrine imperiled the whole denomination. “If we do not keep our colleges and seminaries pure our denomination is gone. . . . What is taught in our colleges and seminaries today will be preached in our pulpits tomorrow, and will be in our church literature day after tomorrow.” Hobbs even suggested that those professors who wrote to Pollard afterward complaining about his attack on the schools should themselves be investigated. Although McCall did not intend it, the dismissal of the “Dirty Dozen” marked the beginning of a broad effort to purge the seminaries of liberalism.²²

Midwestern Seminary, Ralph Elliott, and the Message of Genesis

The trustees of the Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary fired Ralph Elliott from his position as professor of Old Testament in 1962 after Elliott ignited one of the most heated controversies in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention. The controversy erupted when the Baptist Sunday School Board published Elliott’s *Message of Genesis* in 1961. In the book he argued that Moses did not write Genesis, that the first eleven chapters are parables, that the flood was local, that Melchizedek was a priest of Baal, that God did not command Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, that Jacob did not wrestle with the angel,

and that by Joseph’s natural abilities he interpreted natural dreams. Most Southern Baptists found such interpretations objectionable.²³

Elliott took a traditional modernist approach to Bible. He did not discount or disparage the text of Genesis just because it was not “true” in a scientific or even historical sense. It often was not literally true, but it still had the highest value for religion. The historical meaning of the text—its description of historical events and its interpretation of them—was merely the vehicle in which religious truth came. “The basic thought modes of the day were used to express a higher, inner, more spiritual comprehension.” Scripture authors may have erred in describing events or in the meaning they gave them, but this did no injury to the meaning. “Error in the literary vehicle does not necessarily mean error in message or the essential purpose of God.” Religious scholarship could thus be “critical” and “scientific” and reject the literal meaning of many scripture texts, and at the same time venerate the Bible as inspired because it contained abiding spiritual verities. This is what modernist scholars generally had in mind when they spoke of ostensibly historical texts as myths or parables.²⁴

Most Southern Baptists who read the book or heard about its views were deeply troubled by it. They believed that the Bible was literally true—that historical texts taught historical truths and should not be treated as myths or parables. They felt grieved and angered that their church contributions paid the salary of a professor who held such views. They were troubled also by the fact that the denomination’s Sunday School Board had published it. They wrote letters to denominational leaders complaining about Elliott.

Pastors led their churches to pass resolutions condemning Elliott's views, calling for his dismissal, and threatening to withdraw their financial support of the denomination's Cooperative Program.

Many Baptists in Missouri had been concerned about the soundness of Midwestern Seminary since the school opened in 1958. They had heard "rumblings regarding the 'heretical teachings'" there, but the administration assured the churches that the faculty was orthodox and merely taught liberal views to be comprehensive and by way of information. When Midwestern Seminary president Millard Berquist hired four of the professors fired from Southern Seminary, conservatives' suspicions grew. But when Elliott's book appeared, their suspicions were confirmed and some acted quickly. The Windsor, Missouri, First Baptist Church, for example, voted by September 1961 to withhold all Cooperative Program funds.²⁵

Some pastors organized a campaign to force Midwestern Seminary to dismiss Elliott. The effort in fact began at least eighteen months before the *Message of Genesis* appeared. Mack Douglas, pastor of the large and influential Tower Grove Baptist Church in St. Louis, led the campaign. His efforts provoked the instruction committee of the board of trustees to investigate the beliefs of both Elliott and archaeology professor William Morton in February 1960. When Elliott's book appeared, Douglas again applied the pressure. He published student testimonials impugning the faculty's orthodoxy, presided over a caucus of conservatives at the 1962 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, successfully worked to replace six current trustees with more conservative ones, and wrote letters urging action. Others protested loudly also. John Havlik, Earl

Pounds, Jack Gritz, and K. Owen White, for example, wrote widely disseminated critiques of the book.²⁶

At the 1962 Southern Baptist Convention, the majority came determined to secure the orthodoxy of the seminaries. Herschel Hobbs, who was president of the convention, and other leaders successfully steered the convention to adopt a remarkably mild resolution: the messengers "courteously request" trustees to remedy any "situations" in which views that undermine confidence in the "historical accuracy and doctrinal integrity" of the Bible are disseminated. Afterward a majority of Midwestern's trustees voted to endorse Elliott's approach to the Bible. They absurdly fired him later for insubordination when he refused their suggestion that on his own initiative he volunteer to withhold the book from republication.²⁷

Controversies and Dismissals Elsewhere

In February 1960 the trustees of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary fired Ted Clark, who had taught New Testament at the school since the 1940s. Clark came under attack in 1959 after he published *Saved by His Life*, in which he sought to recast the Christian faith in terms of personalism. Clark argued that a forensic substitutionary view of the atonement was false, that the doctrine of an infallible or inerrant Bible was idolatry, and that Jesus of Nazareth should not be identified with the "Living Christ-Spirit." One to two hundred of Clark's friends and supporters held a banquet to testify their support, but to no avail.²⁸

Many conservatives wanted the seminary to fire Frank Stagg also. A committee of trustees investigated Stagg for heresy in 1956, but could reach no unanimous con-

clusion. Stagg apparently rejected verbal plenary inspiration, the objective character of the atonement, the orthodox understanding of the Trinity, and the penal wrath of God.²⁹

The faculty and trustees of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary experienced a great deal of tension in the early 1960s because the faculty was deeply divided over their theological commitments. In 1960 some professors accused others of endangering the faith by their use of objectionable historical and critical methods. The accusers were no fundamentalists, but rather felt that some professors had gone too far and had become radical in their theology—they embraced the methods and conclusions of Rudolf Bultmann’s approach to the New Testament.³⁰

For five years the faculty, trustees, and president Sydnor Stealey struggled to arrive at some consensus about the acceptability of Bultmann’s views. Stealey favored tolerating such teaching at the seminary. But in late 1964 and early 1965, trustees secured the resignation of three New Testament professors, R. C. Briggs, Harry Oliver, and Bill Strickland, although the trustees brought no formal charges against them. Denton Coker, a professor in the religious education department, also resigned as a result of the controversy.³¹

But for every professor who became controversial, there were many more whom conservative Baptists suspected of modernism. They doubted the orthodoxy of Southern Seminary’s Eric Rust and Dale Moody. In Texas, Boyd Hunt’s conservative critics persuaded the board of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to investigate his orthodoxy formally. In 1966 the Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in California fired church history professor LeRoy Moore for sup-

porting the civil rights movement and for his “ecumenical proclivities.” At New Orleans Seminary, Clark Pinnock’s persistent attacks on certain of his colleagues led to the resignation of Robert Soileau in 1969. Conservatives continued to doubt the orthodoxy of many at Midwestern Seminary. The New Salem Baptist Church in Marianna, Florida, voted to withhold giving to the Cooperative Program after Elliott’s dismissal because the trustees’ endorsement of Elliott’s doctrine raised questions about the soundness of the seminaries generally. The executive committee of the Missouri Baptist Convention was likewise troubled by the trustee action. They passed a resolution in 1963 petitioning the Southern Baptist Convention to instruct the trustees “to complete the removal of the liberalism which is still apparent among some of the faculty at Midwestern.”³²

Most conservatives could identify only a few liberal professors in the seminaries, but they feared that there were many more. Their fears were justified. Other professors certified that Elliott taught nothing beyond what was being taught in the seminaries generally. Some pastors defended Elliott with the plea that the book was no different than what they had been taught in seminary courses. One pastor wrote that the only difference between Elliott and the other professors at Southern Baptist seminaries was that “Elliott stated some of his theological positions in writing.” When Elliott’s colleague Heber Peacock resigned in 1963, he wrote that “most of us believe and teach as Ralph Elliott did.” Southwestern Seminary professors John Newport and Franklin Segler reported that the Fort Worth faculty stood with Elliott—Newport estimated that two-thirds of the faculty stood with him, Segler estimated that it was

almost all. C. R. Daley, editor of Kentucky Baptists' *Western Recorder*, defended Elliott by observing that his views were standard fare at the seminaries: "Professors in all our seminaries know Elliott is in the same stream of thinking with most of them." Conservatives recognized that despite the dismissals, liberalism persisted in the seminaries.³³

Conservative Responses

The majority of Southern Baptists found it reprehensible that professors were teaching liberal theology in their seminaries and that Southern Baptist leaders were doing nothing to purge the schools. The seminaries did dismiss some of their most controversial professors, but the circumstances of the dismissals only deepened the sense of alienation for many Southern Baptists. Seminary administrators and trustees dismissed unsound professors with clear reluctance. And when they dismissed them, they generally dodged the theological issues and found an administrative basis for the dismissals. "Our people are very upset and being very conservative are demanding an accounting," observed a pastor from Houston.³⁴

The conviction had been building for years. "We started this fight against 'Liberalism' twenty years too late," wrote a North Carolina pastor in 1962. Long before the Elliott controversy, students told their pastors and members of their home churches stories of liberal professors ridiculing traditional orthodoxy. Southern Baptists heard reports that Southern Seminary professor Dale Moody rejected the doctrine of perseverance. They read articles claiming to expose the liberalism in Southern Baptist seminaries in such fundamentalist newspapers as John R. Rice's *Sword of the Lord* and Carl McIntyre's *Christian*

Beacon, as well as in independent Southern Baptist newspapers. They saw the young people in their churches, and sometimes their sons and daughters, lose their trust that all scripture was true, and in some cases, abandon the faith, after embracing modernism at a Southern Baptist college or seminary. A pastor in Mississippi reported that several graduate students at New Orleans Seminary told him that the professors there ridiculed the "position that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible Word of God." A laywoman from Louisiana wrote in 1961 that she had been "grieving" for several years over the denomination, especially "our seminaries." A laywoman from Florida related from experience the heartache that many parents felt when their children learned liberal views at college and subsequently rejected "all they had been taught all their life in church and Sunday School and home." Elliott's *Message of Genesis* was only the tip of the iceberg, but it represented the confirmation of conservatives' longstanding fears about the spread of liberalism.³⁵

Southern Baptists felt betrayed by seminary leaders. Seminary presidents and trustees knew that their professors were teaching modernist views, but they took no action against them unless forced by the vocal majority. New Orleans Seminary president Roland Leavell had been telling Ted Clark for five years that if he was not careful, he would get fired, but did not initiate action until pressured by the constituency. Duke McCall protected his outspoken progressive teachers. He successfully defended controversial professor Dale Moody for more than twenty years. McCall assured Ralph Elliott that if Elliott had remained on the faculty at Southern Seminary, he would have protected him from dismissal. Hostility toward the semi-

naries became so great that messengers to the 1962 Southern Baptist Convention booed rancorously the suggestion that the seminary presidents be included on a committee to revise the denomination's statement of faith.³⁶

Southern Baptists saw the progressive policy in action in the Elliott controversy. When denominational leaders urged Southern Baptists to be patient and let trustees and administrators solve the problem, conservatives objected that the officers could not be trusted to do the right thing. The Midwestern trustees knew about Elliott's teaching but did nothing, a Virginia pastor wrote, because "they do not feel that they have a responsibility to root out error." They in fact endorsed Elliott's soundness. The convention could not wait on the action of the trustees of Midwestern Seminary or of the Sunday School Board, for "they have flagrantly betrayed their trust." The reluctance with which presidents and trustees dismissed modernist professors indicated to conservatives that the problem was systemic and not isolated.³⁷

Many felt that denominational leaders deliberately concealed the true character of the theology that many professors espoused. The administration at Midwestern for several years before 1961 parried criticisms of Elliott's theology by arguing that students had misunderstood him. They said that he was explaining what others believed, not what he himself believed. But "it becomes apparent in the *Message of Genesis*," wrote a disillusioned Missouri pastor, "that Dr. Elliott himself is the holder of these tenets." Southern Baptists had endured enough "theological double-talk."³⁸

Many Southern Baptists concluded from 2 John 9-11 that by paying the salaries of

unsound professors through the Cooperative Program, they became partners in the sin. With the public controversies over liberalism in the seminaries, many could no longer quiet their consciences. They had given to the salaries of men who taught soul-destroying errors and sowed their errors throughout the churches. By giving to the Cooperative Program, they now felt, they were advancing the destruction of the denomination. "Please tell me," a Mississippi pastor asked Herschel Hobbs, "what to answer my people who say they cannot put the Lord's money in a program where we have teachers who do not believe the Bible? ... How can I with a good conscience, based on the Word of God, ask my people to support the Cooperative Program when I know, and they know, a part of that money goes to support men like the ones mentioned [in 2 John 9-11] who teach contrary to the faith once delivered to the saints?"³⁹

Liberal theology in the schools would destroy the churches, most Southern Baptists held. The professors taught it to their students and the students transmitted the infection to the churches everywhere. The precedents were clear. Conservatives warned that Northern Baptists had tolerated their seminary professors who taught liberal theology and the negligence resulted in the fall of that denomination into error and desuetude. "Unless our seminaries are purged," a Virginia pastor wrote, "we are going to write the same history that Northern Baptists have written."⁴⁰

They also predicted that unless the seminaries righted themselves the convention would divide. Many warned that their churches were prepared to withdraw their support of the seminaries, or of the entire Cooperative Program, unless the seminaries purged themselves of liberals. "If this

vital matter is not settled at once, it will bring a great schism to our ranks," warned an Arkansas pastor. Individual members and churches had already withdrawn from the Southern Baptist Convention on account of the liberalism in the seminaries.⁴¹

Most Southern Baptists supported denominational policy against ecumenical entanglements because they sought to protect orthodox theology. N. J. Westmoreland, executive secretary of the Kansas Convention of Southern Baptists for more than twenty years, summarized well the views of most Baptists. Other denominations, including American Baptists, had embraced liberal theology and were withering because of it. American Baptist churches continued to abandon that convention to join the Southern Baptist Convention in order to escape liberalism. Southern Baptists therefore would "protest loudly any action which may be made to lead toward merger with the American Baptist Convention." Ecumenism threatened orthodoxy.⁴²

The fundamental concern for orthodoxy determined denominational attitudes toward the seminaries. The churches would support them as long as they could trust that they were orthodox. If liberal theology found any shade or support there, churches would no longer support them, and many churches would leave the denomination. Westmoreland explained how one liberal professor had damaged the denominational cause.

The appearance of liberalism in Midwestern Seminary has been a real blow to Southern Baptists in Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Kansas, and in other areas. We will begin to lose churches if our seminaries refuse to hew the line on conservative theology. . . . I think the ties will not be strengthened without the doctrinal integrity which has made

the Southern Baptist Convention what it is.

For conservatives, denominational identity rested first on orthodox theology. The loss of orthodoxy in the seminaries would spell the end of the denomination.⁴³

Progressive Responses

The force of the opposition to liberalism alarmed the seminary professors. Cautious professors had little to fear, even though the mass of Southern Baptists objected to their views. They were "safe," C. R. Daley noted, as long as they kept silent about their rejection of traditional views. But they were frightened anyway. When liberal Austin pastor Blake Smith gave lectures at Texas Christian University in 1959, he met with six "enlightened" Southwestern professors. They reported that most of the faculty were demoralized and "frightened as titmice." Progressive professors at all schools naturally felt that they also were under attack. "This current of distrust in education (college as well as seminary) runs deeply today," warned Boyd Hunt, professor of theology at Southwestern Seminary.⁴⁴

Most concluded that in such dangerous times safety lay in caution and circumspection. When Morris Ashcraft was at Southern Seminary in the 1940s and 1950s, many professors counseled students to keep their progressive views to themselves or to veil their views by using traditional terminology. They told the students, "'When you publish it, they will get you,' and 'If they had understood me, they would have fired me.'" Several graduate students at New Orleans Seminary told a Mississippi pastor that many professors agreed with Elliott's views, but "do not have the courage to print it in a book for all to see." Progressive pastors often had to pursue the

same course. A Missouri pastor wrote that although one his members had embraced liberal views at Southern Seminary, “he does not dare proclaim it from the pulpit where he serves in Kentucky.”⁴⁵

Many progressives chafed under such constraints. They held that the problem facing the denomination centered on the difference between *training* and *education*. Training consisted of teaching the inherited dogmas of tradition, reinforcing denominational identity, promoting loyalty to the convention and its Cooperative Program for financing the work, and placing greater importance on practical skills of ministry. Training, progressives believed, was what most Southern Baptists wanted the seminaries to provide. But training was destroying the denomination’s effectiveness and relegating it to irrelevance in a time of radical social change. It made the seminaries into mere preacher factories, progressives concluded, turning out pulpit functionaries indoctrinated into the prefitted theology of yesteryear.

Carlyle Marney, mentor to many Southern Baptist progressives, despaired of liberal progress after the firings at Southern Seminary. He felt that there was little hope that the “whole mass” of Southern Baptists would become “either intelligent or relevant.” The denomination was “almost wholly committed to the pragmatic, the political, and strategic.” They wanted the seminaries to inculcate in ministers the pious know-how needed to give “umph” to denominational activities and programs. Progressives felt, as Marney put it, that Southern Baptists were “dead set against theology, intelligence, and therefore, education.” Education was what Southern Baptists needed. It consisted in creative intellectual engagement with modern forms of thought, openness to change, free-

dom to follow “truth” wherever it should lead, and intellectual honesty. Freedom of inquiry was therefore critical.⁴⁶

As the purges proceeded, Southern Baptist progressives despaired as Marney had. After the 1958 dismissals, progressive leaders in the denomination felt that Southern Seminary would no longer educate students nor permit faculty members to think for themselves. They felt the same way about Midwestern after Elliott’s firing. Elliott’s colleague Heber Peacock wrote that “I no longer believe that we can have a school here.” T. C. Smith, who had been fired from Southern in 1958, wrote that with the firing of Elliott “theological education will no longer exist in the SBC.” He thought they would have look to the seminaries of the American Baptist Convention to “educate” Southern Baptist ministers.⁴⁷

Most disappointing of all was the purge at Southeastern. Stewart Newman, professor of theology and philosophy of religion at Southeastern, concluded that establishing progressive theological education in the Southern Baptist Convention was an impossibility. He and the other dreamers who inaugurated a vision of open theological inquiry at Southeastern had been naïve. “We really entertained the serious notion that under Southern Baptist patronage and support there could be established and maintained an enterprise of academic excellence and theological openness. That was a foolish dream.” Newman resigned from Southeastern the following year.⁴⁸

The events of the late 1950s and early 1960s amounted to a catastrophe for genuine theological education in the view of progressives. They sought to establish arenas in which they could pursue enlightened theological education honestly, without doubletalk or cautious temporizing. Such arenas seemed to exist for a season at

Southern, New Orleans, Midwestern, and perhaps most of all, Southeastern. But in one school after another, the conservative constituency seemed to extinguish the lamp of free inquiry. Progressives could not prevent the “vocal majority from strangling it in its cradle,” Stewart Newman explained.⁴⁹

These disappointments demoralized many progressives. Many professors found the situation in the seminaries intolerable and migrated to the pastorate or to college positions. But progressives were vulnerable at Baptist colleges also. Progressive observers believed that Carson-Newman College refused to renew Joe Barnhart’s contract and that Baylor pressured Leonard Duce to resign when influential laymen pressured school officials to fire liberal professors. As a result, many sought positions at non-Southern Baptist colleges. Barnhart went to University of the Redlands and then to North Texas State. Pope Duncan left Southeastern for South Georgia College. Other exasperated progressives left the denomination entirely. Guy Ranson became Presbyterian.⁵⁰

As a result of the dismissals at Southern, New Orleans, and Midwestern, and the investigations or forced resignations at Southwestern, New Orleans, and Southeastern, immediatist progressives discovered that they were powerless to voice their genuine positions. The immediatist approach had failed. Such gradualist progressives as McCall had been right all along—progressives must educate Southern Baptists slowly into enlightened views, since attempts to force the issue were counterproductive. Many immediatist progressives remained on the faculties, but they did so in grief at their inability to accomplish the goals for which they entered theological education. Professors

Dale Moody, J. J. Owens, and Hugh Wamble all chafed at their enforced silence. Wamble spoke for many when he represented their plight: “It has become almost impossible for professors to speak directly to issues confronting Southern Baptists.” Wamble judged that pastors and college professors had rather more liberty to speak critically than did seminary professors and hoped that they would use this liberty to plead for freedom to teach progressive views in the denomination. “The future of theological education” rested with pastors and college professors, he wrote.⁵¹

Most faculty, trustees, and administrators were reconciled to the necessity of a gradual approach. If they took a public stand for their principles, the Southern Baptist multitudes would rise up and force yet more progressives from the seminaries. Denominational statesmanship meant that seminary leaders had to sacrifice the outspoken troublemakers who recklessly broadcast their progressive views. Millard Berquist, president of Midwestern Seminary, for example, finally concluded that it was necessary to sacrifice Elliott in order to appease the conservative majority and save the seminary for the cause of authentic theological education. In the end, most trustees agreed.⁵²

The immediatist progressives had been wrong in thinking that they could establish beachheads for unrestricted inquiry and ask Southern Baptists to subsidize the work. But they were wrong also in concluding that the dismissals of the 1950s and 1960s represented the end of all hope for progressive theology in the seminaries. Indeed, with the aid of such denominational statesmen as Herschel Hobbs and Duke McCall, progressive theology flourished at the seminaries. The immediatist approach alone was discredited.⁵³

Progressives continued to dominate the faculties of the seminaries. When they lost faculty due to the pressures that conservatives applied against them, they replaced them with teachers who held similar views. Joe Barnhart, a progressive scholar who taught at Carson-Newman College before a career at non-Southern Baptist schools, observed that for all the success of the conservative majority in the Southern Baptist Convention, the theological perspective of the seminary faculties remained liberal. “I received second-hand news that Oliver and Briggs have been released from Southeastern. It will be interesting to see what other liberals will replace them. (The super-orthodox keep winning battles and losing the war.)”⁵⁴

Conclusion

For most Southern Baptists throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the chief source of denominational conflict was theology. The conservatives who trekked annually to the Southern Baptist Convention beginning in 1979 came to cast their votes to secure orthodox theology in the denomination’s seminaries and agencies, just as they had in the 1960s. The seminaries were teaching liberalism. If it could not be stopped, the denomination would suffer blight—many conservative churches would withdraw from it and those that remained would wither. Orthodox theology was foundational to heartfelt devotion to Christ and effective evangelistic witness. The faithfulness of the denomination under Christ depended on it. And whether in the 1950s or 1980s, most Southern Baptists held, that was worth fighting for.

ENDNOTES

¹Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American*

Culture (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002) 161, 231, 239, 274, 277.

²Of the eighteen, only three—the New Testament professors at Southeastern Seminary—resigned. This does not count such professors as Denton Coker and Heber Peacock, who resigned in sympathy with those forced out.

³Like postwar liberals in other denominations, Southern Baptist progressives had been influenced by the “realist” social critiques of such neo-orthodox thinkers as the Niebuhr brothers and the personalism of such thinkers as A. C. Knudson, Edgar Brightman, and Michael Polanyi. See Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) and William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

⁴Elliott, letter to H. Gray Carter, 7 May 1962, box 30, f. 6, Herschel Hobbs Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives; Cecil Sherman, “Foreward,” in *What Faith Has Meant to Me*, ed. Claude A. Frazier (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975) 7.

⁵Three recent works that examine aspects of liberal theology in the Southern Baptist Convention are David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), and Randal L. Hall, *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

⁶Toy, “Dr. Toy’s Address to the Board of Trustees of the Southern Baptist Theo-

logical Seminary," *Religious Herald*, 11 Dec. 1879, 1; Toy, "A Bit of Personal Experience," *Religious Herald*, 1 Apr. 1880, 1; untitled, quoted from the *Canadian Baptist*, in *Religious Herald*, 22 Feb. 1883, 2; Toy, *The History of the Religion of Israel: An Old Testament Primer* (Boston: Unitarian Sunday-School Society, 1882) 11-12, 18-26.

⁷See the series of four articles beginning with Senex [W. C. Lindsay], "Letters to My Friend—No. 1," *Working Christian*, 24 May 1877, 2. Lindsay's public defense of Toy began with Lindsay, "Dr. Toy's Paper," *Baptist Courier*, 30 Oct. 1879, 2. On Stout and Bell, see Stout, "Appointment of Rev. John Stout and Rev. T. P. Bell Withdrawn," *Baptist Courier*, 7 July 1881, 2-3. On Alexander, see Daniel Walker Hollis, *The University of South Carolina*, vol. 2 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1956) 103, 108, 163-165.

⁸Shailer Mathews, *New Faith for Old: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1936) 80; Hall, 130-155; Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996) 28; James J. Thompson Jr., *Tried As by Fire: Southern Baptists and the Religious Controversies of the 1920s* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1982) 99, 79; unsigned, "The Action of the Board of Trustees," *Baptist Courier*, 18 Dec. 1902, 4; Alfred S. Reid, *Furman University: Toward a New Identity, 1925-1975* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1976) 95; Z. T.

Cody, "Can It Be Justified?," *Baptist Courier*, 11 Jan. 1923, 2-3; Trustees of Limestone College, "Resolutions Adopted by the Trustees of Limestone College," *Baptist Courier*, 5 July 1934, 2-3.

⁹Samuel Henderson, "A Word of Caution," *Christian Index*, 11 Mar. 1880, 1.

¹⁰James J. Thompson Jr., *Tried As by Fire*, 118-119, 138; O. L. Hailey, "A Significant Review of an Epoch Making Book by Dr. W. O. Carver," *Baptist Standard*, 21 May 1914, 7, 11; W. O. Carver, *Out of His Treasure: Unfinished Memoirs* (Nashville: Broadman, 1956) 72; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998) 386.

¹¹W. E. Davis, letter to W. J. McGlothlin, 8 Oct. 1930, W. J. McGlothlin Papers, Special Collections, James B. Duke Library, Furman University.

¹²For an overview of the 1958 controversy, see Glenn Hinson, "Southern Baptist Theological Seminary," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Broadman, 1971) 1978-1980; and Duke McCall, *Duke McCall: An Oral History* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2001). The twelve were: Guy Ranson, Theron Price, William Morton, Morris Ashcraft, Heber Peacock, J. Estill Jones, William Lumpkin, T. C. Smith, Hugh Wamble, Thomas Hall, John Lewis, and Henry Turlington. Guy Ranson called the group the "Dirty Dozen" at least as early as 1960 (before the book and popular movie of the same name), and the group still used the name in the

1970s (Guy Ranson, letter to Carlyle Marney, 23 Dec. 1960, box 38, Carlyle Marney Papers, Special Collections, Perkins Library, Duke University; Heber Peacock, letter to Carlyle Marney, 14 Sept. 1977, box 35, Marney Papers).

¹³Guy Ranson, letter to Carlyle Marney, 19 Jan. 1960, Marney Papers.

¹⁴Hugh Wamble, letter to Carlyle Marney, 11 Nov. 1962, box 48, Marney Papers.

¹⁵Ora Spaid, "Trustees Dismiss 13 in Faculty Dispute at Baptist Seminary," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 13 June 1958; McCall, "Special Report on the Faculty of the School of Theology," p. 7, in notebook titled "Materials Submitted to Committee of the Accrediting Commission of the American Association of Theological Schools," folder "Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1958," Marney Papers. The remaining faculty issued a statement of confidence in McCall (Ora Spaid, "Seminary Head Blames Bloc Action for Dismissal of 13 Professors," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 14 June 1958).

¹⁶Duke McCall, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 25 July 1958, box 20, f. 10, Hobbs Papers.

¹⁷Hobbs, letter to W. Douglas Hudgins, 1 Mar. 1960, box 21, f. 4, Hobbs Papers.

¹⁸Hershel H. Hobbs, letter to Miss Phylton Hancock, 28 Sept. 1959, box 21, f. 3, Herschel Hobbs Papers, SBHLA; Hobbs, letter to Morris Ashcraft, 3 Oct. 1958, box 20, f. 11, Hobbs Papers.

¹⁹Hobbs, letter to W. A. Criswell, 1 July 1958, box 20, f. 10, Hobbs Papers; letter to W. A. Criswell, 17 July 1958,

- box 20, f. 10, Hobbs Papers.
- ²⁰Hobbs, letter to Miss Phylton Hancock, 28 Sept. 1959, box 21, f. 3, Hobbs Papers; Hobbs, letter to W. Douglas Hudgins, 1 Mar. 1960, box 21, f. 4, Hobbs Papers; Hobbs, letter to W. Douglas Hudgins, 5 Apr. 1960, box 21, f. 4, Hobbs Papers.
- ²¹W. A. Criswell, letter to Hobbs, 3 July 1958, box 20, f. 10, Hobbs Papers.
- ²²Hobbs, letter to Ramsey Pollard, 23 May 1960, box 21, f. 5, Hobbs Papers; Hobbs, letter to Ramsey Pollard, 6 June 1960, box 21, f. 5, Hobbs Papers. Hobbs later wrote that the Elliott controversy was the same one that Southern Seminary had faced (Hobbs, letter to C. R. Daley, 8 Nov. 1962, box 30, f. 7, Hobbs Papers).
- ²³Ralph H. Elliott, *The Message of Genesis* (Broadman: Nashville, 1961) 11, 15, 66-67, 116-117, 144-146, 171-172, 183. For a detailed narrative of the controversy, see Ralph H. Elliott, *The "Genesis Controversy" and Continuity in Southern Baptist Chaos: A Eulogy for a Great Tradition* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1992).
- ²⁴Elliott, *Message of Genesis*, 13, 14. For a helpful discussion of different kinds of liberals, see Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism*.
- ²⁵Fred E. Rains, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 25 Sept. 1961, box 30, f. 6, Hobbs Papers.
- ²⁶Elliott, *The "Genesis Controversy,"* 45, 48-50, 65-68; Millard Berquist, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 27 Apr. 1962, box 30, f. 7, Hobbs Papers; Mack Douglas, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 21 Nov. 1961, box 30, f. 6, Hobbs Papers; Berquist, letter to Hobbs, 12 June 1962, box 30, f. 7, Hobbs Papers.
- ²⁷Elliott, *The "Genesis Controversy,"* 92-94, 116-124.
- ²⁸Theodore R. Clark, *Saved by His Life: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Reconciliation and Salvation* (New York: Macmillan, 1959); Blake Smith, letter to Carlyle Marney, 28 Feb. 1960, box 42, Marney Papers.
- ²⁹Fisher Humphreys, "Frank Stagg," in *Dictionary of Heresy Trials in American Christianity*, ed. George H. Shriver (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1997) 390; Frank Stagg, "The Cross—A Rationale," box 1, f. 8, Frank Stagg Papers, Samford University Archives, Birmingham, Alabama.
- ³⁰Sydnor Stealey, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 13 June 1961, box 21, f. 8, Hobbs Papers.
- ³¹Unsigned, "Resignation Reveals Southeastern Protest," *Baptist Courier*, 14 Jan. 1965, 18; Humphreys, "Frank Stagg," 389-391; unsigned, "Southeastern Trustees Review 'Problem' There," *Baptist Courier*, 4 Mar. 1965, 20; Donald E. Cook, "'Our Message Be the Gospel Plain': The Teaching of the Bible and Biblical Languages at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950-1988," in *Servant Songs: Reflections on the History and Mission of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950-1988*, ed. Thomas A. Bland Jr. (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1994) 25-27, 115-116.
- ³²Herschel Hobbs, letter to Elvis Egge, 28 Sept. 1961, box 30, f. 6, Hobbs Papers; Jerry Vardaman, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 8 Dec. 1962, box 31, f. 1, Hobbs Papers; unsigned, "Not All Is Golden at Golden Gate," *Christian Century*, 25 May 1966, 672-673; unsigned, "New Orleans Professor Quits under Protest," *Baptist Courier*, 30 Jan. 1969, 6; Gene Rister, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 21 Feb. 1963, box 31, f. 1, Hobbs Papers; Executive Board of the Missouri Baptist Convention, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 24 Apr. 1963, box 31, f. 1, Hobbs Papers.
- ³³Hugh C. Peacock Jr., letter to Herschel Hobbs, 4 May 1962, box 30, f. 6; Hobbs Papers; Letcher H. Reid, letter to Ralph Elliott, 8 Feb. 1962, box 30, f. 6, Hobbs Papers; Thomas Nelson, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 16 Nov. 1962, box 30, f. 7, Hobbs Papers; Heber Peacock, quoted in unsigned, "Seminary Loses Another Teacher," *Christian Century*, 13 Mar. 1963, 326; Millard Berquist, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 12 June 1962, box 30, f. 7, Hobbs Papers; Daley, "A Decision of Destiny," *Western Recorder*, 27 Dec 1962, 4.
- ³⁴Millard Box, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 18 Apr. 1963, box 31, f. 1, Hobbs Papers.
- ³⁵Rogers Chenault, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 18 July 1962, box 30, f. 7, Hobbs Papers; G. Arnett McCoy, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 10 June 1962, box 30, f. 7, Hobbs Papers; Mrs. Clyde Morris, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 8 Aug. 1961, box 22, f. 2, Hobbs Papers; Mrs. Jesse B. Jaques, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 30 May 1962, box 30, f. 7. On the influence of non-Southern Baptist fundamentalist papers on Southern Baptists, see William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2001) 213, n. 98.
- ³⁶Herschel Hobbs, letter to Douglas Hudgins, 1 Mar. 1960, box 21, f. 4,

- Hobbs Papers; Duke McCall, *Duke McCall: An Oral History*, 224-227, 250; unsigned, "Southern Baptists Rebuke Their Seminaries," *Christian Century*, 20 June 1962.
- ³⁷Douglas M. White, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 7 May 1962, box 30, f. 6, Hobbs Papers.
- ³⁸Fred E. Rains, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 25 Sept. 1961, box 30, f. 6; Millard Box, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 18 Apr. 1963, box 31, 1, Hobbs Papers. Ralph Elliott later described the pressure on professors to engage in "doublespeak" in his *Genesis Controversy*, 33-34.
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- ⁴⁰Douglas M. White, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 20 Apr. 1962, box 30, f. 6, Hobbs Papers.
- ⁴¹Lewis E. Clarke, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 4 May 1962, box 30, f. 6, Hobbs Papers. Mrs. John T. Cherry told of several couples known to her who had left SBC churches because of liberalism (letter to Herschel Hobbs, 21 Apr. 1963, box 31, f. 1, Hobbs Papers).
- ⁴²N. J. Westmoreland, letter to Emory Trainham, 10 Dec. 1962, Baptist Unity Committee folder, box 7, Carlyle Marney Papers.
- ⁴³*Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴Daley, "Elliott Goes, Problem Remains," *Western Recorder*, 8 Nov. 1962, 9; Blake Smith, letter to Carlyle Marney, 25 Jan. 1959, box 42, Marney Papers; W. Boyd Hunt, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 23 Nov. 1962, box 31, f. 1, Hobbs Papers.
- ⁴⁵Morris Ashcraft, "T. C. Smith: Scholar, Teacher, Churchman," in *Perspectives on Contemporary New Testament Questions: Essays in Honor of T. C. Smith*, ed. Edgar V. McKnight (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992) 17; G. Arnett McCoy, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 10 June 1962, box 30, f. 7; O. A. Winscott, letter to Herschel Hobbs, 2 Nov. 1961, box 30, f. 6, Hobbs Papers.
- ⁴⁶Carlyle Marney, letter to Penrose St. Amant, 5 Nov. 1958, box 40, Marney Papers; Stewart Newman, letter to Carlyle Marney, 18 Aug. 1959, box 34, Marney Papers.
- ⁴⁷Peacock, quoted in unsigned, "Seminary Loses Another Teacher," *Christian Century*, 13 Mar. 1963, 326; T. C. Smith, letter to Carlyle Marney, 24 Oct. 1962, box 43, Marney Papers.
- ⁴⁸Stewart Newman, letter to Carlyle Marney, 2 Jan. 1965, box 34, Marney Papers.
- ⁴⁹Stewart Newman, letter to Carlyle Marney, 28 Apr. 1965, Church and Race Conference folder, box 13, Marney Papers.
- ⁵⁰Carlyle Marney, letter to Jack Kilgore, 1 Apr. 1964, box 27, Marney Papers; Blake Smith, letter to Carlyle Marney, 18 Mar. 1960, box 42, Marney Papers.
- ⁵¹Hugh Wamble, letter to Carlyle Marney, 1 Sept. 1962, box 48, Marney Papers.
- ⁵²See Theron Price, letter to Carlyle Marney, 9 Nov. 1962, box 37, Marney Papers.
- ⁵³Although Hobbs did not apparently moderate his conservative views of scripture, in 1961 he began promoting denominational unity, including broad support for the seminaries, but with censure for any professors who endangered unity by provoking a controversy by means of outspoken liberal views.
- ⁵⁴Joe Barnhart, letter to Carlyle Marney, c. Feb. 1965, box 7, Marney Papers.