

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

J. FRANK NORRIS:
THE SIN HATING SENSATIONALISTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	2
II.	A Formative Childhood filled with Suffering	3
III.	Norris' Time as a Rising Star with the Southern Baptist Convention.....	6
IV.	The Return to the Pastorate and a Fundamental Transformation.....	7
V.	Norris' Early Challenges and Victories	9
VI.	Norris' Battle to Deal with the Fruits of His Sensationalism.....	11
VII.	The Rise of Norris' Fundamental Coalition	13
VIII.	The Cost and Legacy of Unrestrained Pastoral Power	16
IX.	Conclusion	17
X.	Bibliography	19

THESIS STATEMENT

The story of Rev. J. Frank Norris is important to understand because of the inspirational potential of what can be accomplished through earnest determination as well as demonstrating how dangerous Christian leaders can be who lead with unrestrained personalities.

INTRODUCTION

For many, the name J. Frank Norris is practically unheard of, but for Baptists in Texas he is a common name among those interesting figures of the past. During his day, he was called the “Texas Tornado” and other derogatory terms. Yet for all that stood in opposition to this fiery pastor, countless others stood in agreement with him and his causes. While he did have his faults, his strengths were able to diminish the need to deal honestly with his liabilities. It is even said that he revealed in his known inconsistencies.¹ He acquired so much influence and power that he seemed to rise beyond the criticism of others. This lofty position was needed to rally and inspire the mass of Baptist preachers who felt in harmony with the trend of fundamentalism. Fundamentalists, by their very nature, tend to be a very strict and forceful lot. Their leaders must be equally as strong and forthright. Dr. Norris was just the man to provide this vision and presence for a new movement of Baptist fellowships and associations.

The life of Dr. Norris is one of developing ideas and principles. At the beginning of his ministry he was in sync with the normal attitudes and methods of his contemporaries. Yet through a series of encounters with God, Norris begins to change the way he viewed his

¹ Clovis Gwin Morris, “He Changed Things: The Life and Thought of J. Frank Norris” (PhD diss., Texas Tech

purpose and his methods.² During the years before the “roaring twenties” the ministry of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth was going through a very difficult change and membership. It would be during these years of change and development that Norris reached out to the renowned Southern Baptist Sunday School leader, Louis Entzminger to come to Fort Worth with the goal of building the largest Sunday School in the world. While it took some time, by the mid twenties, Norris and Entzminger’s leadership had enabled the FBC Sunday School to become the largest Sunday School in the Nation.³

During the early thirties, the breach between the leadership of the convention and Norris was complete. He had taken unapologetic stands and had created many enemies. However, Norris had become a hero to countless pastors who saw his fight against modernism as inspirational. Through this division, new associations would arise. Groups of like-minded pastors would begin to assemble with general purposes of fellowship, encouragement, evangelism, and ultimately, education.

The area of education would ultimately be the lasting footprint Norris would leave for future generations of pastors. In nineteen-thirty nine, the Fundamental Baptist Bible Institute was formed under the leadership of Norris and Dr. Louis Entzminger. This institution was later changed to the Bible Baptist Seminary of Fort Worth. Over the years disagreements and personalities have caused the establishment of a number schools from this one in Fort Worth. These include, Arlington Baptist College of Arlington (the original Bible Baptist Seminary) Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Norris Bible Baptist Institute of Fort Worth, and Heartland Baptist Bible College of Oklahoma City. The listing of Bible colleges begun as a

² Samuel Kyle Tullock, “The Transformation of American Fundamentalism: The Life and Career of John Franklyn Norris” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Dallas, 1997), 82.

³ Ibid., 201.

result of these mother schools would astound. Even the Liberty University was established through the founding efforts of Dr. Jerry Falwell, who was a 1956 graduate of the Baptist Bible College of Springfield.

This man's story is interesting, painful, and possibly a little motivating!

A FORMATIVE CHILDHOOD FILLED WITH SUFFERING

He was born in Dadeville, Alabama on September 18, 1877 to Warner and Mary Norris. Over fifty years prior, Dadeville was the scene for a major battle between Andrew Jackson who fought against the Creek Indian Nation. The Creeks did not fare too well, over eight hundred were killed in the battle.⁴ Before He was a teenager, Norris moved with his family to central Texas.⁵ Unfortunate for Norris, his father was a mean spirited drunkard. Often he would find himself at the angry abuse of his alcoholic father. One instance, recorded by Dr. Louis Entzminger, told of how a drunk Warner so savagely beat his son that the doctor had to be called to care for him.⁶ One would think that moments such as these would push a son into hatred of the abuser, but instead Norris was still his father's son. One day two men came to threaten Warner from testifying about a horse thief gang. They shot him at the gate of the property and he fell to the ground. While chopping cotton close by in the field, Norris pulled his knife and ran to assist his wounded father. For his courage he was rewarded with three bullets by the would be murderers. Warner recovered quickly, but Norris was not so lucky. His wounds did not heal well and became infected with serious gangrene. Eventually,

⁴ Michael E Schepis, *J. Frank Norris: The Fascinating, Controversial life of a Forgotten Figure of the Twentieth Century*. (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2012), 1.

⁵ Barry Hankins, "The Strange Career of J. Frank Norris: Or, Can a Baptist Democrat Be a Fundamentalist Republican?" *American Society of Church History*. 61, no. 3 (Sept. 1992): 374.

⁶ Louis Entzminger, *The J. Frank Norris I have Known* Reprint. (Shelbyville: BLMF, 2004), 34.

inflammatory rheumatism affected his lower body and he was practically paralyzed for many months.⁷ The suffering and complications that plagued Norris would follow him physically for the rest of his life.

Norris was known in his adult life as an unapologetic crusader against liquor. The victory of Prohibition was due in part to pastors like Norris who attacked the evil and victims of alcoholism. Much of his tenacity concerning the evils of liquor can be found in his own familial experience. It was said that often Mary Norris would have to physically lay across her son to stop the drunkard father from seriously harming young Norris. When Norris was fourteen years old, his mother gave him a note to take to the local men who sold liquor at their run down den of iniquity. The letter kindly asked the men to no longer sell any alcohol to her poor husband who did not have the will to restrain himself. Upon receiving the note, young Norris was thrown out the back door. After returning home and giving the message to his mother, she commanded him to gather the horse and buggy. Norris drove his mother to the hovel where the men sold their liquor. Mary told Norris to stay put then she grabbed the buggy whip and went through the front door! In later years, Norris would say that she not only whipped the two men who had mistreated her son, she also commenced to clearing out the rest of the place!⁸

Mary's fierce faith in God and for righteousness was instrumental upon Norris's understanding and application of his expression of the Baptist faith. Her fundamentalism was significant in grounding him to his. His mother and his influential pastor, Cat Stephens had an enormous impact upon this faith concept of Norris. In latter years, he would defend the

⁷ Morris, 1973. 75.

⁸ Entzminger, *The J. Frank Norris...*, 35.

fundamentalists faith system with all of his energy and ability as if protecting something that was exceedingly personal.

NORRIS' TIME AS A RISING STAR WITH THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

In 1898, Norris enrolled in the Baylor University of Waco Texas. He was 21 years old and ready to commit to a proper education for the ministry that God had called him to fulfill. His years at Baylor were formative and educationally successful. Norris was, however, still a handful to deal with. During his time at Baylor University, he led a student uprising that ended with the resignation of the president. After graduating in 1903, Norris and his new bride, Lillian Gaddy Norris, moved to Louisville, Kentucky in order for him to enroll in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Generally, the student who began the course of study for the Masters of Theology would complete it in three years. It only took him two years to finish his degree. Norris said later "I had a wife and a baby. And that was the cause of the shortening of the course from three to two years."⁹ In May of 1906, he graduated at the top of his class and gave the Valedictory address. Oddly enough, his speech was entitled "International Justification of Japan in Its War With Russia."

He immediately accepted the call to pastor the McKinney Ave Baptist Church of Dallas Texas. His first Sunday attendance was a mere thirteen people, but within a year the membership had grown to over one thousand members. Although much criticism has been levied at Norris for gaining most of the members from First Baptist Church of Dallas. No matter the naysayers, throughout his life Norris was able to draw massive crowds to his ministry. For in the 1940's he would claim to have a combined membership of the Firth

⁹ Entzminger, *The J. Frank Norris...* 65.

Baptist Church of Fort Worth and the Temple Baptist Church of Detroit over 25,000 people!¹⁰ After just two years at McKinney Ave, Norris found himself the majority owner of one of the main Baptist newspapers in the State of Texas, the *Baptist Standard*. It was during this period of time that his ability to practice his promotional spirit came to be fine tuned. Through various promotions, Norris brought the subscriptions up to over 30,000 before he sold his interest in the paper. This period of time saw a great many issues draw the attention of Baptists throughout the state. The first was a legislature fight to outlaw horse race gambling. The second was the move to separate the seminary at Baylor University and establish a seminary in Fort Worth. Because of his affinity towards his previous professor, B.H. Carroll, Norris made every effort to use his paper to promote the establishment of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Doing so, however, cause him to make a number of enemies with the Baptist denominational hierarchy. His ability to endear or alienate people soon became the normal experience of most people who interacted with him. From his statements, he was told so often by great men that he was going to be great that it caused him to behave in ways that he should not have done.¹¹ It seems that Norris began to believe that he was destined for greatness, and he set out to do just that!

THE RETURN TO THE PASTORATE AND A FUNDAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION

In 1909, Dr. Carroll recommended J. Frank Norris to the pastorate of the flagship Baptist church of the great cow town. He had sold his interest in the *Baptist Standard* and was seeking to return to the pastoral ministry. For the first two years all went along smoothly enough. The First Baptist was home to B.H. Carroll and most of the newly established

¹⁰ Hankins, "Democrat Fundamentalist," 375.

¹¹ Entzminger, *The J. Frank Norris...*, 68.

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. But Norris was suffering from some depression or severe discouragement. What happened in late 1910 and 1911 is only legendary. Norris experienced something that changed him and his view of ministry. According to Dwight Moody, his research has revealed an impossibility to fully determine the complete story.¹² Therefore, the details are sketchy but the general concept is that Norris was off preaching a revival meeting in Kentucky and had an experience with God that motivated him to make some extreme changes. Dr. Norris assessed what happened to him with these words:

When I came back from Owensboro, after a month's meditation on the banks of the Ohio, I decided to enter the ministry. I began to preach the gospel after the fashion of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea. I didn't use a pearl handle pen knife; I did what J.T. Pemberton said, I had a broad axe and laid it at the tap root of the trees of dancing, gambling, saloons, houses of ill fame, ungodly conduct...¹³

Norris' renewed perspective may have been exciting to some, but it did not settle well with the well educated and sophisticated membership of the distinguished church. Although many stayed as long as they could, Carroll and all of the faculty eventually left denouncing Norris' extreme behavior. During the initial fallout from this abrupt change, Norris eventually lost over one thousand members from the Fort Worth congregation.¹⁴ While some claim that this was a transformation, Moody actually believes it was more of a reversion.¹⁵ He sees the true Norris character breaking free from the structure he received from his years in seminary. Nevertheless, Norris' behavior and preaching style changed dramatically. His brash

¹² Dwight A. Moody, "The Conversion of J. Frank Norris: A Fresh Look at the Revival of 1910," *Baptist History and Heritage Journal* 45, No. 3(Summer/Fall 2010): 8.

¹³ Moody, *The Conversion of J. Frank Norris*. 17

¹⁴ Kelly David Pigott, "A Comparison of the Leadership of George W. Truett and J. Frank Norris in Church, Denominational, Interdenominational, and Political Affairs." (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993), 6.

¹⁵ Moody, *The Conversion of J. Frank Norris*. 10.

flamboyant style of ministry would define him for the rest of his life. Although years later he would receive the title “The Texas Cyclone”, it would be the fruits of his determination to be a massive voice for Christ, morality and Baptist fundamentalism.¹⁶

NORRIS’ EARLY CHALLENGES AND VICTORIES

The change in behavior led to a drastic state of affairs within the First Baptist Church. Norris was losing members like a river and had a great difficulty dealing with the changes. The years 1911-1913 would be very challenging periods. Along with his determination for larger crowds, came a new and different crowd than most of the established elitist church was used to. One particular incident shows the reaction to the mass of newly converted people that Norris’ new ministry dynamic was drawing. Norris was summoned to the office of the chairman of the board of trustees of the church. The man, unnamed by Norris, was extremely displeased that a “notorious street walker” had been baptized in the same baptistery that he was baptized in years before. Norris quickly corrected him and said “You are mistaken, there was not one; there were two!”¹⁷ Norris stood his ground and set the tone for future dealings with dissenting church officers. Not only did he see a strong negative reaction to his newly found sense of authority and power, he would also face criminal charges. In the spring of 1912, the city was awash with angry reaction to Norris’ fight against crime and immorality in the city. The relations between Norris and Fort Worth mayor, Bill Davis, had turned so antagonistic that the town was arrayed in opposition. Norris charged that Mayor Davis had mishandled city funds. In answer to these charges, Davis held a public meeting at which

¹⁶ Nathan A. Finn, “The Development of Baptist Fundamentalism in the South, 1940-1980” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 89.

¹⁷ Entzminger, *The J. Frank Norris...*, 85.

Norris had sent a stenographer. During the meeting, Davis said “If there are fifty red-blooded men in this town a preacher will be hanging from a limb before daylight.”¹⁸

It was in this environment that brought Norris into a courtroom as a defendant. On the early morning of February 4th, 1912 at 2:12 a.m. a devastating fire broke out in the church facility. By the morning, all that remained of the once beautiful sanctuary was twisted steel and brick rubble. There was also an arson attempt at Norris’ home. Because of the disagreeable relationship between Norris and many of the city leaders, a grand jury was convened. They brought charges against Norris for perjury and arson. After all testimony was heard the jury returned a “not guilty” verdict. The courtroom went into chaos. Morris quotes the *Dallas Morning News* of April 13, 1912 “John E. Homan mounted the witness stand and led others in singing hymns such as ‘Old Time Religion’ and ‘Sweet by and by’¹⁹

The exoneration behind him, Norris went to work rebuilding a building and consolidating his growing congregation. One of the most long lasting decisions Norris made during this time was to reach out for help in building a ministry that would become the world’s largest congregation. The day Norris reached out to fellow Baptist pastor and Sunday School pioneer, Louis Entzminger, would turn out to be one of the best decisions of his ministry. At the time, Entzminger was the superintendent for Sunday School work in the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky. On July 9th, 1913 Norris sent Entzminger a letter which read: “Would you consider coming as superintendent of the First Baptist Sunday School, Fort Worth, to build the largest Sunday School in the world at same salary you are receiving there? If so will you come to Fort Worth my expense for conference? (signed) J

¹⁸ Morris. “He Changed Things: The Life and Thought of J. Frank Norris,” 56.

¹⁹ Ibid., 109.

Frank Norris.”²⁰ Entzminger did come and neither of the men would never have dreamed what they would eventually accomplish together.

NORRIS’ BATTLE TO DEAL WITH THE FRUITS OF HIS SENSATIONALISM

Norris and Entzminger went to work. Norris needed someone do help sustain the church’s growth and Entzminger needed a placed that could afford to test his organizational theories. Morris stated the early results of their collaboration:

Under Entzminger’s leadership First Baptist pioneered many of the methods commonly accepted today as part of any traditional Baptist Sunday School. He organized departments and classes according to age and sex; he set up a record system with grades for attendance. Lesson preparation, and financial contributions. In short, he took the masses which Norris attracted and molded them into a cohesive band for training and financial support. During his first tenure with Norris, Entzminger saw the Sunday School grow from a membership roll of 800 with an average weekly attendance of 250 to a membership of over 1500 in the three and one0half years he served First Baptist.²¹

With great crowds coming to hear this fiery preacher and a tremendous assistant to solidify the growth, Norris began to feel free to follow his path unhindered by the opinions of man. He did not fear losing his congregation because he had basically rebuilt the church. He was therefore, free to be the lightning rod for controversy that he had always hoped for. The leadership model Norris utilized was one of strength in position and power in personality. While his physical frame may have been weakened from his childhood injuries, his powerful voice and penetrating blue eyes presented a man of strength. His ability to intimidate was universally known. William Glass states that this period time demonstrated the rise of the

²⁰ Entzminger, *The J. Frank Norris...*, 22.

²¹ Morris. “He Changed Things: The Life and Thought of J. Frank Norris,” 114.

Fundamentalists and that they are in essence a product of the reaction against ecclesiastical liberalism.²²

During the early days of Norris' rise to fame on a national scale, a number of issues arose that helped to cement his place of notoriety. The first was his stance against modernism and the teaching of evolution. Although Norris was not the only voice standing against the liberalizing of the colleges and seminaries, he was certainly one of the most vocal. The second area was his battles against other preachers within the Baptist General Convention of Texas. These fights were ugly and public. Charges were made and countered. Radio time was used to spread hatred of Norris and cause serious denominational divisions that exist to this day. One of the most bitter of rivalries was between Norris and Dr. George W. Truett. The latter was a very powerful and influential leader among the Baptist Convention. He was also the pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas. With only 30 miles between these two pastors, some thought it would have been better to put 3,000 miles between them. Norris claims against certain pastors within the Tarrant County Baptist Association caused such a stir that Norris and First Baptist were ostracized. For years, Norris felt that Truett was the reason for so much opposition.²³ From 1914 until 1924, Norris and the SBC of Texas endured one another. The relationship practically ended in 1924 when Norris' church was accused of not supporting the fundraising efforts of the Convention. The messengers from the church were no longer allowed to be seated at the annual meeting.²⁴ The third occurrence that helped bring notoriety

²² William R. Glass, *Stranger in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950*. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 9.

²³ Pigott, "A Comparison," 241.

²⁴ Royce Lee Measures, "J Frank Norris: a forerunner of the New Right" *Fides et historia*. 15, no.1 (Fall-Wint. 1982). 63.

to Norris was when he shot and killed D.E. Chipps in his church office on July 17, 1926. Chipps was a personal friend of the Mayor Meacham of Fort Worth. Norris and the Mayor had a large public disagreement. Chipps, being the mayor's close friend, called Norris and said he was coming to the church to settle the issue. When Chipps arrived in the church offices, Norris was meeting with a layman of the church L. H. Nutt. Chipps immediately commenced to threaten Norris to back off with his fight against the mayor. Seemingly whirling to leave, Chipps suddenly turned to rush physically upon Norris. Within a split second, Norris drew out the night watchmen's .38 caliber revolver and shot Chipps three times in the chest and arm.²⁵

Norris was charged with murder. His lawyers fought for, and received, a change of venue. The trial was therefore moved from Fort Worth to Austin, Texas.²⁶ It was in the large Austin courtroom that the details of the last few moments of Chipps life were rehearsed. The prosecuting attorney fought hard to demonstrate that Norris was a mean, terrible man who knowingly killed an unarmed man with nor actual fear for his life. Nevertheless, Norris was found not guilty on January 26, 1927.²⁷

THE RISE OF NORRIS' FUNDAMENTAL COALITION

With the not guilty verdict, Norris went to work with his zeal for ministry but seemingly withdrew from his previous passion of local politics. Instead, he engaged within the growing distinction known today as *Fundamentalists*. These were preachers and laypersons who held strong foundational views about the Bible, the biblical promises, and the

²⁵ David R. Stokes, *The Shooting Salvationist*. (Hanover: Steerforth Press, 2011). 102-108

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

²⁷ Tullock, "The Transformation of America," 148.

accuracy of the miraculous. The Fundamentalists movements within all denominations were beginning to surge. The call for a basic agreement to the general fundamentals of the Christian faith began to take effect throughout Protestantism. The depression era was difficult for the First Baptist Church who had lost their main sanctuary for the second time in 1928. When the Stock Market crashed in 1929 the insurance company who covered the church facilities had gone under. The resulting structure was large and unattractive. But it was all the church could afford and they filled it for the glory of God.

Because of his strong Baptist beliefs, Norris would become very active with the Baptist Bible Union (BBU). From 1928, until 1939, Norris worked many with his pastoral and evangelistic efforts across Texas and the South. It would also be during this time that the *World Baptist Fellowship* would be established. While its members would disdain for the connection to be identified as a denomination, many cataloged fellowships in just that definition. Never too far from association, Entzminger and Norris joined forces once again with the foundation of the *Fundamental Baptist Missionary Institute*, later to be renamed the *Baptist Bible Seminary*. Entzminger believed strongly in solid education, but also about helping men who may not have benefited from a very good education in their younger years. The purpose was to help these type of men and men who excelled to obtain a solid Bible education. Norris made a statement of purpose concerning his school when he said:

What is needed is a school that teaches the whole English Bible. What is needed is a school that will take men from the engine cab, from between the plowshares and teach them the Bible. What is needed is a school that is free from modernism. What is needed is a school that will teach a man how to go out with a Bible under his arms, faith in his heart, and in the power of the Holy Spirit begin in a vacant lot and build a church to the glory of God.²⁸

²⁸ Entzminger, *The J. Frank Norris...*, Inside Cover.

This school would be able to boast the benefit of being an accredited school according to the definition of the U.S. Federal government. Entzminger believed strongly in having official seals of approval for their school. He would even fight attempts by others within the school leadership who tried to make changes in the structure of the school that would have changed the standing of the school before the State of Texas and the Federal government. In personal communications between the two men, Norris and Entzminger both stated wholeheartedly that their held accreditation as an important necessity.

With the development of the institute and the pastor's fellowship, Norris' power and influence became stronger than ever. Although the man had a presence of God upon his preaching and ministry, he also had a sever and domineering aspect to his personality. Countless fellow preachers who worked for Norris during these years claimed to have the brunt of his fiery anger and controlling personality. The manner in which he dealt with people was acceptable to many and rejected by many as well. One of the very reasons why L.R. Scarborough did not want to let the FBC back into the Baptist Association was because of the tactics and church polity of Norris. These were strongly denounced by Scarborough as being un-baptistic.²⁹ Norris would always be known for his controversy and sensationalism. No matter what people thought about his personality and methods, most label him as a common money hungry preacher. Instead, his influence was a great concern to many, even within his own movement.

²⁹ Schepis, J. Frank Norris. 81.

THE COST AND LEGACY OF UNRESTRAINED PASTORAL POWER

As the years moved along, Norris began behave in more erratic patterns. His actions became harsh and insufferable. His treatment of others became an issue of legend. Countless stories abound concerning these final years of his ministry.

At its height, the collective pastor fellowship Norris established was thriving and developing into a major missionary cooperative effort. The seminary was also was strong and successful. However, by 1950, the generation of young men who had come up during the twenties and thirties were now in their prime and ready to leave their mark on the world. Norris was never good at following. In truth, he believed he should always be independent of most organizations.³⁰ Possibly it was his age, dementia, fear of losing control of what he had built, but Norris became very difficult to deal with. It was in this year, that a major faction of the fellowship stood in opposition to Norris and his leadership of the fellowship and seminary. The May meeting that year saw a major split with a group establishing a fellowship office and college in Springfield, MO. The school is a thriving accredited school known as the Baptist Bible College. This issue was devastating to many, especially Norris. Nevertheless, his power character would not let him stay down, he shifted gears and worked with those men who had stood with him.

Fellow pastor, Luther Peak was asked to come to Fort Worth and take over the pastorate of the FBC. Norris desired for Peak to be his successor. But the six months of working together took a toll on Peak and he withdrew himself from the arraignment. Sadly, two months after Peak wrote that letter, Dr. J. Frank Norris died while in Florida preaching at a youth camp. Peak reflected on the fact that if he would have only endured for another two

³⁰ Morris. "He Changed Things: The Life and Thought of J. Frank Norris," 493.

months the whole thing would have been his to lead.³¹ Instead, a young man, Homer Ritchie who was twenty-six years old, was given the helm of this massive ministry. Ultimately, the FBC of Fort Worth lost her place as a leader among what came to be known as the *Independent Fundamental Baptist* type churches. The seminary and the fellowship all exist to this day, but not under the shadow of a solitary figure.

CONCLUSION

The largest unintended legacy of Dr. Norris was those who endeavored to behave and led with his same type of demeanor and sensationalism. His brash manner and unapologetic approach to life and ministry was unique. It was also costly. Many would say that the times demanded men like Norris, and they are probably correct. But the sad truth is that there have far too many cheap reproductions of Norris in for too many pulpits of current day. L.R. Scarborough spoke for countless Baptists when he summarized Norris leadership at the FBC as “unbiblical”.³² He was describing the manner in which Norris controlled the church, ministry, and membership of the Fort Worth congregation. The establishing the pastorate with un-restrained powers was unimaginable for a Baptist assembly. For these groups have historically leaned heavy upon the elder/congregation rule and interaction.

After almost sixty-two years after Norris death, he still casts a strong shadow of influence with the *I.F.B.* He was one of the greatest pulpiteers in the history of Christianity, but he was also a man who displayed many faults in character and personality. Norris was one of the strongest opponents to vice in his city, but he would not hesitate to a drunkard into his home and feed him and reach him with the Gospel. In many ways Norris seems unreal and

³¹ Barry Hankins, “*The Ambivalent Fundamentalist: Luther Peak’s Relationship with J. Frank Norris and Texas Fundamentalism*,” *Fides et Historia*, 27 (Winter/Spring, 1995): 80.

³² Schepis, *J. Frank Norris...*, 84.

unthinkable to this current generation. But for the times in which he was called to serve, he helped usher in countless thousands in the kingdom of God!

It is therefore unfortunate that many emulate his more negative traits while forgetting his more godly aspects. They strive to control, direct, and mandate the lives of their members and every aspect of the church ministry. They rob the church of good servants, by building a one man show who does not share ministry of influence with other lay leaders within the church. The end result of this has been a terribly negative falling away and disenchantment of thousands of people who have followed a man only to be destroyed when he fell into sin and disgrace. For many, Norris is lauded as the perfect model for all pastors, but in truth, he was unique and made especially for his time. Luther left the *Fundamentalist* movement and kept his distance from joining the SBC or the *I.F.B* organizations for the rest of his career. Here is how he described the movement that he had been trained within: "In the realm of Fundamentalism, preachers may split each other's churches, make war upon one another, print and publish lies and slander against the character of others, and all be accepted as the normal procedure. It is a lawless and anarchistic world under the guise of evangelical Christianity."³³

Sadly, this statement made almost sixty years ago can still be a historical description of abusive and controlling pastors. While most Baptist pastors do not exhibit these extremes, far too many for far too long have carried on a negative legacy that will forever overshadow the good attributes of one of the greatest preachers to ever gather a congregation.

³³ Barry Hankins, "*The Ambivalent Fundamentalist*:" 71.

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