

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Controversies in a Changing World

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Following World War II, Baptists in the English-speaking world became embroiled in several controversies. The quest by African-Americans for civil rights ushered in significant cultural change, especially in the southern states. Baptists were among both the key leaders and most vocal opponents of the civil rights movement. Baptists in many denominations also confronted the advance of progressive theology during this period. While some Baptist groups weathered theological changes with relatively little controversy, others experienced significant turmoil. During the final two decades of the twentieth century, Southern Baptists endured the most extensive (and widely reported) theological controversy of any major denomination in North America.

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### **Baptists and the Civil Rights Movement**

Following the American Civil War (1861–65), African-Americans were freed from slavery and given full citizenship rights with the passage of the Thirteenth (1865) and Fourteenth Amendments (1868) to the US Constitution. However, when Reconstruction ended in 1877, Southern states began to pass laws that undermined the civil rights of African-Americans. These so-called Jim Crow laws, named for a well-known black character in traveling minstrel shows, prohibited African-Americans from voting, thus rendering them politically impotent. The Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) that racial segregation was legal as long as the segregated facilities were equally maintained — the famous “separate but equal” doctrine. As a result, for the first half of the twentieth century, the South was almost totally segregated, and African-Americans were mostly prevented from having leadership roles in the community beyond their local churches. With the exception of some early Pentecostal churches and underground music clubs in cities like Memphis, Tennessee, blacks and whites mixed socially in few venues. Vigilantism, including lynching, was often tolerated when whites felt African-Americans had committed a wrong, especially if the wrong was against a white woman.

#### *The Civil Rights Movement: A Brief Overview*

Several important precursors led up to the civil rights movement. In 1909, activists founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Many African-Americans and some whites opposed segregation and other forms of racial discrimination through the NAACP and similar groups. Another important precursor was President Harry Truman’s desegregation of the United States Armed Forces in 1948.

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In response to Truman's decision, fellow Democrat and Baptist Strom Thurmond, at the time the governor of South Carolina, led a temporary exodus of southern Democrats from the national party. Thurmond ran a third-party presidential campaign with the States' Rights Democratic Party, or the "Dixiecrats," as they were popularly known. But Truman was reelected, the Dixiecrats returned to the Democratic Party, and Thurmond was subsequently elected to the senate, where he served from 1954 to 2003.

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By far the most important precursor to the civil rights movement was the landmark Supreme Court ruling *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). *Brown* struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine as unconstitutional, paving the way for desegregation of public schools in the South and elsewhere. At the time of *Brown*, one of the associate justices of the Supreme Court was Hugo Black, a Southern Baptist and former senator from Alabama. During his long career on the bench (1937–71), Black was a vocal defender of desegregation in the South. He was also a leading proponent of the strict separation of church and state in America, writing several decisions to that effect, including the *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) decision that ruled teacher-led prayer in public schools to be unconstitutional.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama (1955–56) marked a turn in the pursuit of civil rights. The boycott began when a woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the front of a public bus to a white man, even though social custom dictated that blacks sat in the back of the bus when whites wished to sit in the front. Parks was a seamstress, an active member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP. She was arrested and fined for her obstinacy. In response to her arrest, a new organization named the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) called upon all African-Americans to boycott public transportation in the city. The boycott lasted 381 days and resulted in the desegregation of public transportation in Montgomery. The boycott was led by two young African-American Baptist ministers in the city: Ralph David Abernathy called the organizational meeting of the MIA while Martin Luther King Jr. became the leader of and chief spokesman for the boycott.

The civil rights movement remained an influential force in America throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Several of the movement's key organizations were at least influenced by Christian principles, including the newly formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC, 1957) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, 1960). King was the first president of SCLC while SNCC was comprised of mostly college-aged activists. Some older organizations influenced by Christianity and other religions also played a key role, including the NAACP, the ecumenical pacifist group the Fellowship of Reconciliation (1935), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE, 1942).

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Some key moments in the civil rights movement included the Freedom Rides in 1961, the March on Washington in 1963, and the passage of the civil rights act in 1964. Numerous sit-ins, marches, and other forms of protest were also part of the civil rights movement. By the mid-1970s, the South was mostly desegregated; and racism, though present, was de facto rather than de jure.

## *African-American Baptists and the Civil Rights Movement*

Several African-American Baptists emerged as key leaders in the civil rights movement, King (1929–68) being the most important. King was raised as a Baptist preacher's son in Atlanta and showed academic promise from a young age. He graduated from Baptist-related Morehouse College and Crozer Seminary before graduating in 1955 with a PhD in theology from Boston University. Along the way he was influenced by his evangelical roots in the National Baptist tradition, Social Gospel advocate Walter Rauschenbusch, neo-orthodox theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich, an Anabaptist-like reading of the Sermon on the Mount, and Indian nonviolent resistance advocate Mohandas Gandhi. King embraced a curious mix of conservative and progressive views: he affirmed universal human depravity and the need for repentance and faith in Christ, but he harbored doubts about Jesus' divinity, his blood atonement, and the Second Coming. Though famous for his role as a civil rights leader, King was first a Baptist minister. He served as the pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery from 1955 to 1960 and then co-pastor, with his father Martin Luther King Sr., of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta from 1960 to 1968.

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## Martin Luther King Jr. Criticizes White Racial Moderates

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative....

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Excerpted from Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963).

Between 1955 and 1968, King was associated with numerous civil rights organizations and initiatives. He led the Montgomery Bus Boycott, was the founding president of SCLC, and was active in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He spoke widely on behalf of civil rights. He led famous marches on Washington, DC (1963), and Selma, Alabama (1964). At the March on Washington, King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" oration, one of the most influential speeches (and sermons) in American history. In that speech King proclaimed, "When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every tenement and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.' "

King was arrested several times for his activism. In his widely read "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (1963), he excoriated moderate white pastors who were sympathetic to the plight of blacks but were urging King to slow down and be less controversial. He famously argued, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." King received numerous recognitions and awards for his activism, including the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and the *Pacem in Terris* Peace Award from the Vatican in 1965. In his later years King expanded his work to include activism to secure labor rights, improve the plight of the

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poor, and end the Vietnam War. Tragically, King was assassinated in Memphis in 1968 while speaking on behalf of striking sanitation workers.

Many other African-American Baptist ministers were important civil rights advocates as well. Some, like King, were located in the South. Ralph David Abernathy, who was King's closest friend, was instrumental in the Montgomery Boycott and the founding of SCLC. When King was shot in 1968, Abernathy, who by then was also a Baptist pastor in Atlanta, held King in his arms as the famous preacher-activist died. Fred Shuttlesworth, longtime pastor of Baptist churches in Birmingham, Alabama, and Cincinnati, Ohio, cofounded SCLC and helped organize the Freedom Rides in 1961. His fame spread during the Birmingham campaign of 1963, which brought national attention to the segregation in that city and the manner in which city officials often enforced segregation with violence. When four Ku Klux Klansmen responded to the Birmingham campaign by bombing Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, resulting in the death of four African-American girls, it marked a turning point in national perception of the civil rights movement. Other leaders pastored churches in the North. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. was pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York. In 1945, Powell became only the second African-American to be elected to Congress since Reconstruction. He was a key congressional ally of the civil rights movement until his death in 1972. Gardner Taylor, a native southerner, was pastor of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn. Taylor was a vocal proponent of civil rights and was widely considered one of the best preachers in America during the second half of the twentieth century.

While all African-American Baptists wanted social equality, not all responded in the same way to the civil rights movement. In 1961 the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., the largest black Baptist denomination in America, split in part over how best to respond to the movement. Convention president Joseph Jackson wanted the denomination to be officially detached from the civil rights movement and believed some activists were too radical. Younger leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Gardner Taylor wanted the NBC to be more proactive. They also desired presidential term limits; Jackson had been serving since 1953. After Jackson defeated Taylor in the 1960 presidential election, a group that included King, Taylor, Abernathy, and Venchael Booth filed a lawsuit against Jackson. They lost and subsequently left the NBC to form the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) in 1961. The PNBC became the most theologically and socially progressive black Baptist denomination. It vocally advocated civil rights, passed resolutions against the Vietnam War, and eventually embraced the ordination of women.

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## Southern Baptists Respond to the Civil Rights Movement

The Christ we serve, the opportunity we face, and the crisis we confront, compel us to action. We therefore declare our commitment, believing this to be right in the sight of God and our duty under the lordship of Christ.

We will respect every individual as a person possessing inherent dignity and worth growing out of his creation in the image of God.

We will strive to obtain and secure for every person equality of human and legal rights. We will undertake to secure opportunities in matters of citizenship, public services, education, employment, and personal habitation that every man may achieve his highest potential as a person.

We will accept and exercise our civic responsibility as Christians to defend people against injustice. We will strive to insure for all persons the full opportunity for achievement according to the endowments given by God.

We will refuse to be a party to any movement that fosters racism or violence or mob action.

We will personally accept every Christian as a brother beloved in the Lord and welcome to the fellowship of faith and worship every person irrespective of race or class.

We will strive to become well informed about public issues, social ills, and divisive movements that are damaging to human relationships. We will strive to resist prejudice and to combat forces that breed distrust and hostility.

We will recognize our involvement with other Christians and with all others of goodwill in the obligation to work for righteousness in public life and justice for all persons. We will strive to promote Christian brotherhood as a witness to the gospel of Christ.

Excerpted from "A Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation" (1968).

### *White Baptists and the Civil Rights Movement*

White Baptists also responded to the civil rights movement in several different ways. Some actively promoted civil rights. American Baptists, located mostly in the North, favored desegregation and supported the civil rights movement through resolutions and



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denominational literature. Many white Baptists in the American Baptist Convention (ABC) also lent material support to the cause. Martin England, whose roots were in the Southern Baptist Convention, used his position with the ABC's Ministers and Missionaries Benefits Board to aid black civil rights activists in the South. Edwin Dahlberg, a former president of the ABC and a committed pacifist, used his platform as a denominational leader and later president of the National Council of Churches to champion civil rights.

The situation was more complicated among Southern Baptists. Many convention leaders wanted equal rights for all regardless of ethnicity and led the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) to endorse desegregation in official denominational pronouncements. For example, messengers passed a resolution praising *Brown v. Board of Education* at the 1954 SBC annual meeting. The SBC's Christian Life Commission (CLC) proposed the resolution. The CLC argued that racial equality was the most important moral issue facing Southern Baptists. Foy Valentine, who became executive secretary of the CLC in 1960, was a key proponent of civil rights in the SBC. He and others led the convention to adopt a document in 1968 titled "A Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation." The statement denounced racism, affirmed the full spiritual and legal equality of all people, and emphasized a holistic approach to gospel proclamation that included cultural engagement.

Some Southern Baptists were particularly aggressive and overt in their promotion of civil rights. Will Campbell, an ordained Southern Baptist minister, became an activist who worked closely with civil rights leaders and participated in several marches. Progressive North Carolina pastors Carlyle Marney and W. W. Finlator were also controversial advocates of civil rights. Many Southern Baptist professors taught African-American ministerial students on nights and weekends in local churches or privately tutored black Baptist pastors. Clarence Jordan, author of the *Cotton Patch Gospel* (1968–73) and a PhD graduate in New Testament from Southern Seminary, founded Koinonia Farms in 1942, an intentionally racially integrated community near Americus, Georgia, that caused a stir in the 1950s and 1960s. Southwestern Seminary ethicist T. B. Maston wrote three books on racial equality and regularly referenced the topic in his other writings. Maston argued, "If God is no respecter of persons, if he shows no partiality, our ultimate goal should be the elimination of all partiality, prejudice, and discrimination from our lives. All men should be considered as of infinite worth, created in the image of God, actual or potential children of God, and as members of the human race rather than of some division within that race."

In contrast to these racial progressives, many Southern Baptist pastors opposed desegregation, including denominational leaders such as Douglas Hudgins of First

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Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi, and W. A. Criswell of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas—though Criswell eventually changed his view. Some Baptist laypeople were militantly opposed to desegregation and active in groups like the White Citizens' Council and sometimes even the Ku Klux Klan. Many churches amended their constitutions and bylaws to preclude African Americans from their membership. Segregationists in the SBC were concerned that the denomination's leadership was too open to desegregation. When Martin Luther King Jr. spoke in chapel at Southern Seminary in 1961, segregationists in the SBC and beyond responded with a wave of criticism.

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## **Southern Baptists Repent of Racism**

Be it further RESOLVED, That we lament and repudiate historic acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest, and we recognize that the racism which yet plagues our culture today is inextricably tied to the past; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously (Psalm 19:13) or unconsciously (Leviticus 4:27); and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we ask forgiveness from our African-American brothers and sisters, acknowledging that our own healing is at stake; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we hereby commit ourselves to eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry

Excerpted from "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention" (1995).

The Woman's Missionary Union and Foreign Mission Board missionaries to Africa proved to be some of the greatest champions of the Civil Rights movement among Southern Baptists. These missions-minded Baptists argued that it was inconsistent to preach the gospel to dark-skinned people in Africa but refuse to interact socially with dark-skinned people in the American South. With the exception of forward-thinking missionaries, as a general rule conservative Southern Baptists were opposed to, or at least lukewarm toward, civil rights while progressive Southern Baptists were more favorable to desegregation. By the 1970s, however, many theological conservatives were changing their views. Criswell was one of the first, leading First Baptist Dallas to open its



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membership to African-Americans in 1968. As discussed in chapter 6, in 1995 Southern Baptists corporately repented of the racism that had characterized much of the convention's history and even contributed to its formation in 1845. In 2012, Southern Baptists elected Fred Luter of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans as the first African-American president of the convention.

## Progressive Advance and Conservative Dissent

Around midcentury several Baptist groups, especially in North America and the British Isles, witnessed a surge of left-leaning theology within their ranks. This leftward trend renewed tensions between progressives and conservatives. The progressives who came of age after World War II were influenced by a number of traditions, including theological modernism, the Social Gospel, neo-orthodoxy, and eventually liberation theology. As in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of an earlier generation, many progressives were professors in Baptist colleges and seminaries, denominational servants, and pastors of influential (especially older) congregations. Progressives advocated a variety of positions that put them at odds with the more conservative Baptists who were often in the majority. Like the earlier fundamentalists midcentury, conservatives dissented against progressives, leading to controversy and sometimes schism.

### *Progressive Trends*

Baptist progressives and conservatives disagreed on a number of issues, including the nature of the Bible, the person and work of Christ, the role of women in ministry, and matters of war and peace. As a general rule Baptist progressives in North America were influenced by an individualistic interpretation of the doctrines of soul competency and liberty of conscience that they identified with Southern Baptist theologian E. Y. Mullins. Progressives often coupled individualism with neo-orthodox understandings of Scripture, denying biblical inerrancy and arguing the Bible merely "contained" God's revelation; Scripture is not a revelation from God in and of itself, they said. The tension between progressives and conservatives was somewhat less pronounced among American Baptists and Canadian Baptists because most fundamentalists had broken away from the large, leftward trending bodies prior to the mid-twentieth century and formed new denominations. Conservative groups that broke from American Baptists included the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (1932) and the Conservative Baptist Association (1947). In Canada conservative splinter denominations included the Union of Regular Baptist Churches (1928) and the Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches (1933), which merged to form the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches (1953).

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Theological progressives and centrists who tolerated leftward drift led the American Baptist Churches in the USA after the 1920s. ABC-USA schools continued to move in a progressive direction in the postwar era while American Baptist missionaries focused more on social uplift than evangelism and church planting. Women's ordination became increasingly accepted after the 1960s, the ABC-USA remained heavily involved in the ecumenical movement, and the denomination actively supported the civil rights movement and criticized the Vietnam War. In part because of these emphases, the ABC-USA was identified with mainline Protestantism more than most other Baptist denominations in North America. Membership did not decline in the ABC-USA as much as it did in other mainline denominations, but the group was plateaued for most of the twentieth century.

Among Canadian Baptists increased secularization in Canadian culture and a decline in revivalism contributed to a progressive theological shift. Between World War II and the 1970s, several Canadian Baptist colleges closed due to declining enrollment. The leading Baptist institution, McMaster University in Toronto, became a private secular university in 1957, though McMaster Divinity School continued to be affiliated with the Canadian Baptist Federation. Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, made a similar transition in 1968, becoming a secular school and establishing Acadia Divinity College, which was affiliated with the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches. A progressive ethos characterized McMaster Divinity School and Acadia Divinity College while Carey Theological College in Vancouver (est. 1975) remained broadly evangelical. Mainline Canadian Baptists remained involved in the ecumenical movement, which led to growing calls for open membership and mutual recognition of baptism with pedobaptist groups.

After World War II, Southern Baptists experienced far more tension over progressive theology than other Baptist groups. Since the denomination's identity centered on programs more than on theology, opportunity arose for the encroachment of liberalism even though most Southern Baptists were doctrinally conservative. Convention agencies focused on evangelism and missions, emphasized denominational loyalty, and avoided theological disputes as much as possible. Southern Baptists increasingly downplayed theology as they rallied around their programs rather than a confessional identity, despite their adoption of the Baptist Faith and Message in 1925. The robust theological vision of the nineteenth century was gone. As younger Southern Baptist scholars who were educated with postwar G.I. Bill funds began to push a leftward theological agenda in denominational colleges and seminaries, convention leadership began inching to the left as well. By the 1960s the youth counterculture was contributing to the progressive milieu in SBC-related colleges and seminaries.

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The Christian Life Commission adopted a center-left social agenda that focused on advocating civil rights and critiquing American involvement in the Vietnam War. Convention programs that focused on youth and collegians, particularly Baptist Training Union in local churches and Baptist Student Union (BSU) in colleges, adopted a similar social agenda. *The Baptist Student*, the official publication of BSU, became a key means of promoting the progressive understanding of ethnicity, war and peace, and eventually theology among Baptist collegians. In 1968, BSU members in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, formed Baptist Students Concerned as a grassroots movement to combat racism and the war in Vietnam. Foy Valentine hosted a panel discussion with members of Baptist Students Concerned at the 1968 SBC annual meeting.

Most of the overt theological controversy centered on schools because outspoken convention progressives tended to serve on the faculties of Baptist colleges and seminaries. Few professors were classical theological liberals, though higher criticism and neo-orthodox views of Scripture had influenced many scholars. Theodore Clark and Frank Stagg were both accused of holding liberal views at New Orleans Seminary during the mid-1950s. The former was terminated while the latter was acquitted in a heresy trial. Both men denied substitutionary atonement. At Southeastern Seminary conservatives accused three New Testament professors of teaching Rudolf Bultmann's "demythological" views of Scripture during the 1960s. None of the three were terminated though all were encouraged to find new positions. In 1966, James McClendon was forced to resign from Golden Gate Seminary. McClendon's departure was precipitated by his vocal advocacy of the Civil Rights movement and open opposition to the Vietnam War. In 1969, W. A. Criswell promoted biblical inerrancy in his *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True*. He wrote of inerrancy, "Let me speak directly to Southern Baptists. If our preachers, evangelicals, pastors, churches, and institutions are true to that expression of faith, we shall live. If we repudiate it, we shall die." The book was publicly denounced by the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, which represented professors at Baptist colleges.

Several controversies centered on Southern Seminary. As early as the 1940s, Harold Tribble and W. O. Carver drew the attention of conservative critics. In 1947, the Congregationalist liberal theologian Nels F. S. Ferré was invited to lecture at Southern, provoking the ire of conservative Southern Baptists and Independent Baptists. In the 1950s Eric Rust was criticized for claiming the virgin birth was a myth while in the 1960s Dale Moody came under fire for advocating neo-orthodoxy and teaching that true believers can fall away from the faith. In 1970, New Testament professor Bill Hull preached a controversial sermon titled "Shall We Call the Bible Infallible?" that was subsequently published in *The Baptist Program*, the newsletter of the Executive Committee. Hull answered his own question in the negative: "Let us say, kindly but

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firmly, that here is not the decisive place for our denomination to take a stand, nor is this an issue worthy of splitting our ranks. There are many wonderfully unambiguous affirmations that we may all make about the Scriptures, but this is not one of them.” Perhaps the most significant controversy at Southern during this period was the so-called Lexington Road Massacre of 1958, when the school’s trustees terminated thirteen professors following a brief power struggle with seminary president Duke McCall. Most of the professors joined the faculties of Midwestern Seminary and Southeastern Seminary.

Women’s ordination was another controversial issue. In 1964, Addie Davis became the first Southern Baptist woman to be ordained to the ministry at Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina. Two Southeastern Seminary professors, R. C. Briggs and Luther Copeland, participated in the ordination service. Davis was subsequently invited to pastor an American Baptist congregation in Vermont. The number of women in ordained ministry slowly grew during the 1970s and 1980s, though women’s ordination remained uncommon in the generally conservative SBC. By the early 1980s, women were beginning to be hired as professors at Southern Baptist seminaries and in religion departments at Baptist colleges. In 1983, Southern Baptist Women in Ministry was formed to promote the ordination and placement of female ministers in Southern Baptist congregations.

By far the most important clashes between progressives and conservatives were two that concerned the biblical book of Genesis. In 1961, Midwestern Seminary professor Ralph Elliott published *The Message of Genesis* with Broadman Press. Elliott’s book used the historical-critical method to question the historicity of Genesis 1–11 and suggest that Moses was not the author of the Pentateuch. In 1962, K. Owen White, pastor of First Baptist Church Houston, Texas, published a widely read essay criticizing Elliott titled “Death in the Pot.” White wrote, “If the appeal is made for ‘academic freedom,’ let it be said that we gladly grant any man the right to believe what he wants to—but, we do not grant him the right to believe and express views in conflict with our historic position concerning the Bible as the Word of God while he is teaching in one of our schools, built and supported by Baptist funds.” White was subsequently elected president of the SBC, serving 1963 to 1965.

In 1962, the convention adopted a motion criticizing heterodoxy in SBC seminaries and asking seminary trustees to deal with theological problems when they occurred. The motion was clearly directed at Elliott. The administration and trustees at Midwestern were supportive of Elliott, resolving that despite “disagreement with some of the interpretations” in *The Message of Genesis*, “we do affirm our confidence in him as a consecrated Christian, a promising scholar and teacher, a loyal servant of Southern

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Baptists, and a dedicated and warmly evangelistic preacher of the Gospel.” The trustees informed Elliott that if he would not permit a second edition of his book to be published, all would be well. Elliott refused to acquiesce to the request and was fired for insubordination. He became an American Baptist pastor and later academic dean at Colgate-Rochester Divinity School. Elliott claimed that his beliefs were mainstream among Southern Baptist professors but that others used “doublespeak” to hide their true convictions while still sounding relatively conservative.

In the wake of the Elliott Controversy, the convention revised the Baptist Faith and Message in 1963. The revision committee was led by SBC president Herschel Hobbs, who was a theological conservative, though one who had been influenced by E. Y. Mullins’s individualistic understanding of Baptist identity. Several articles in the revised confession were vague, including the article on Scripture, which both included a statement that the Bible contained “truth, without any mixture of error” and claimed that “the criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.” Conservatives appreciated the former statement, which seemed to affirm biblical inerrancy, but expressed hesitance at the latter, which they believed at least implicitly created a “canon within the canon.” Many conservatives also balked at the claim that Scripture is a “record of God’s revelation” rather than a form of God’s revelation. Also troubling to some conservatives, the preamble exalted soul competency to such a degree that it appeared the confession was not intended to bind any convention employee.

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## Confessions and Soul Competency

Baptists are a people who profess a living faith. This faith is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ who is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Therefore, the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is Jesus Christ whose will is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

A living faith must experience a growing understanding of truth and must be continually interpreted and related to the needs of each new generation. Throughout their history Baptist bodies, both large and small, have issued statements of faith which comprise a consensus of their beliefs. Such statements have never been regarded as complete, infallible statements of faith, nor as official creeds carrying mandatory authority. Thus this generation of Southern Baptists is in historic succession of intent and purpose as it endeavors to state for its time and theological climate those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us.

Baptists emphasize the soul’s competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean that there is an absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified.

Excerpted from the preamble to the Baptist Faith and Message (1963).

A second Genesis controversy erupted less than a decade later. In 1969, Broadman Press began to publish a new commentary series titled the Broadman Bible Commentary. G. Henton Davies, a British Baptist, was commissioned to write the commentary on Genesis. Davies was chosen because Broadman did not want a Southern Baptist professor to come under scrutiny as had happened with Elliott. Davies’s commentary argued for positions similar to Elliott’s, though Davies’s work was written at a more scholarly level than *The Message of Genesis*. Conservatives once again mobilized, and in 1970 a motion was passed calling on the Sunday School Board to cease production and sales of the commentary and have it rewritten from a conservative perspective. However, the conservative victory was not total. A motion requiring all SBC seminary professors to annually sign a statement affirming biblical inerrancy was ruled out of order. Conservatives responded by mobilizing in other ways over the next decade.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain was situated in a completely different context than Baptists in North America. Though Baptist fundamentalists were present in the UK, the British version of the fundamentalist controversy was the Downgrade Controversy,



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which reached its apex in the 1890s (see chap. 8). Since that time the Baptist Union had maintained a broadly evangelical identity that encompassed denominational fundamentalists, moderate evangelicals, and progressives. Many British Baptist pastors were committed to a Keswick understanding of holiness and an emphasis on personal evangelism but avoided the language of biblical inerrancy and downplayed premillennialism.

Throughout the twentieth century British Baptists became increasingly open to deaconesses and, by the 1960s, women ministers. The involvement of women in ordained ministry was a slow development, and there was little open opposition to women in ministry. The Baptist Union was involved in the ecumenical movement, which likely contributed to postwar interest in a more sacramental understanding of the Lord's Supper and baptism. Baptist sacramentalism proved more controversial than women in ministry, though a number of prominent theologians, including H. Wheeler Robinson and George Beasley-Murray, were sacramentalists. A handful of British Baptist scholars advocated radically progressive views. The most notable example was Michael Taylor, principal of Northern Baptist College, who denied the incarnation of Jesus Christ in a 1971 address to the Baptist Union Assembly. A subsequent effort to censure Taylor's views was blocked, though the Baptist Union publicly reaffirmed its commitment to orthodox Christology.

## *Conservative Dissent*

As in the fundamentalist-modernist controversies, conservative dissenters pushed back against leftward trends among Baptists. Sometimes conservatives retained their denominational affiliation but identified more closely with evangelical parachurch ministries that reflected their theology. For example, some of the leading postwar evangelical theologians were American Baptists but identified most closely with the evangelical seminaries where they taught. That group included Carl F. H. Henry, Bernard Ramm, Harold Lindsell, and Roger Nicole. Each of these men also identified with Southern Baptists at various points in their lives. In general, these conservative scholars expressed dissent through their writings, with Henry's work proving to be the most influential. His treatise *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947), which called for a wedding of evangelism and cultural engagement, helped launch the postwar evangelical movement. In later years his six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority* (1976–83) helped clarify the doctrine of biblical inerrancy at a time when many evangelicals were experiencing controversy over that doctrine. Henry's views influenced many Southern Baptists when the SBC endured its own inerrancy-related controversy during the 1980s and 1990s, a topic we will discuss in the following section.

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Some mainline Canadian Baptists also identified with evangelicalism, most notably Clark Pinnock. During his time on faculty at New Orleans Seminary in the late-1960s, Pinnock emerged as a vocal critic of progressive theology in the SBC, a champion of biblical inerrancy, and a mentor to conservative dissenters in the SBC. After relocating to McMaster Divinity School in 1977, Pinnock rejected inerrancy and moved in a more progressive direction. By the 1980s and 1990s, Pinnock was one of the most controversial evangelical theologians in North America, advocating inclusivism and open theism. Inclusivists argue that some unbelievers who never come in contact with the gospel will be saved based on their positive response to God's general revelation in nature. Open theists deny that God has exhaustive foreknowledge of all future events.

In most cases conservatives broke away from mainstream Baptist denominations. Some congregations in the ABC-USA affiliated with groups like the Conservative Baptist Association while Canadian conservatives sometimes joined the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches (FEBC) or, in some places, partnered with the SBC. Between 1953 and 1965, about a third of Canadian Baptists identified with the FEBC. More common in North America than joining a conservative group was for conservative churches to become independent Baptist congregations. Most separatists, whether part of a new denomination or independent, emphasized inerrancy, rejected ecumenism, and promoted a revivalistic ethos. The situation was similar among Baptists in the British Isles. In Scotland conservatives criticized the Baptist Theological College of Scotland in the 1940s; eventually many left the Baptist fold. In England most of the theological conservatives who broke with the Baptist Union were either Calvinistic, charismatic, or both.

Among Southern Baptists, midcentury conservative dissenters responded to progressive theology in a variety of ways. As with disgruntled conservative Baptists in other groups, many simply chose to leave the SBC in the 1950s and 1960s and become independent Baptists. In 1956, the Highland Park Baptist Church of Chattanooga, Tennessee, left the SBC after it was disfellowshipped from the Hamilton County Baptist Association. Highland Park had led the convention in baptisms every year between 1946 and 1955. Lee Roberson, the pastor of Highland Park, formed the Southwide Baptist Fellowship (1956) as a fraternal network for fundamentalist Baptists in the South. In 1959, Dallas pastor Jack Hyles left the convention to pastor the independent First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, which pioneered bus outreach and built the largest Sunday school membership in America in the 1970s. Both Roberson and Hyles founded fundamentalist colleges to compete with denominational Baptist schools.

Some conservative dissenters chose to stay within the SBC and fight progressive advance. These denominational fundamentalists subscribed to periodicals like John R. Rice's *Sword*

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*of the Lord*, replaced convention programs like RAs and GAs with fundamentalist children's ministries like AWANAS (1950), and increasingly sent their collegians to independent Baptist colleges such as Piedmont Baptist College (1945) and Jerry Falwell's Lynchburg Baptist College (1971). Southern Baptist evangelists such as Jesse Hendley and Hyman Appleman networked closely with independent Baptists such as John R. Rice and Lee Roberson. Often, when preaching in SBC-related churches, these nominally Southern Baptist evangelists would denounce the Cooperative Program and the denominational compromise they believed it funded.

Conservative dissenters in the SBC often formed new institutions that competed with Cooperative Program-supported ministries. In 1962 conservative pastors in the Jacksonville Baptist Association in north Florida formed Luther Rice Bible College and Seminary. All Luther Rice professors were required to be Southern Baptists and affirm a statement of faith that endorsed biblical inerrancy, a literal six-day creation, and dispensational premillennialism. Luther Rice focused its efforts on educating nontraditional students already involved in ministry through correspondence courses. In 1971, First Baptist Church of Dallas, led by W. A. Criswell, founded the Criswell Institute for Biblical Studies, a Bible college that emphasized personal evangelism and verse-by-verse preaching. Also in 1971, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary began in Little Rock, Arkansas, as a conservative alternative to the SBC seminaries for Southern Baptist ministerial students. In 1975, the school relocated to Memphis, Tennessee, where it became the seminary of choice for many SBC conservatives.

In addition to forming new institutions, denominational fundamentalists also began to network together more deliberately, often for the purpose of trying to move the SBC to the right theologically. In response to the Broadman Bible Commentary, Bill Powell of the Home Mission Board formed a conservative coalition called the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship (BFMF) in 1973. The BFMF published a periodical, *Southern Baptist Journal*, and advocated that conservative theology be taught in SBC-related colleges and seminaries. Conservative dissenters were further energized when *Christianity Today* editor Harold Lindsell wrote *The Battle for the Bible* in 1976. Lindsell's book provided documented evidence that SBC seminaries and state Baptist colleges had numerous professors who denied biblical inerrancy. By the mid-1970s, biblical inerrancy had become a key theological issue for Southern Baptists and would remain so during the final two decades of the twentieth century.

## *The Inerrancy Controversy and Its Aftermath*

In the late 1970s Southern Baptist conservative dissenters began to mobilize in a way they had never mobilized before. The key leaders of this effort were Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Institute and associate pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, and Paul

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Pressler, a Houston judge who had a special interest in teaching the Bible to teenagers in his church. These men were at the center of an activist conservative movement that developed a plan to take over the denominational machinery of the SBC by electing conservative presidents who would use their appointive powers to begin the process of populating trustee boards with fellow conservatives. Though conservatives had served as SBC presidents previously, including several who were vocal opponents of progressive trends, most did not know how the office could be used to help change the status quo.

The plan, originally suggested by Bill Powell, was to elect a string of conservative presidents, each of whom would appoint only movement conservatives to the Committee on Committees. The Committee on Committees would then nominate only conservatives to serve on the Committee on Boards, which would nominate a slate of prospective trustees—again, all conservatives—to fill vacancies at the various convention agencies and institutions. Messengers to the SBC annual meeting would then elect that slate of trustees. If successful, the plan would bring the board of every SBC entity under conservative control in about a decade. (The change would not be immediate because conservatives could elect fellow conservatives as trustees only as current trustees completed their terms of service.) While agency leaders often recommended potential trustees, the two committees involved in the nomination process were not obligated to accept those recommendations. This plan presented a constitutional path for conservatives to advance their agenda, assuming they had the votes to elect their presidential candidates and a viable pool of potential committee and board members who were committed to the conservative cause.

In addition to establishing their electoral strategy, conservative activists made two other key decisions in the late 1970s that proved instrumental to their success. They rejected the label *fundamentalist* in favor of the more benign *conservative*. While the two terms had often been used as synonyms, conservative activists knew that the former was problematic because of its association with J. Frank Norris, the King-James-Only position, strict ecclesiastical separation, and premillennial theology. This decision proved especially prescient after the Iranian Revolution in November 1979 led to the term *fundamentalist* being applied to militant Muslim revolutionaries.

More important, conservatives made biblical inerrancy the central issue of their movement. This proved helpful in at least three ways. First, it provided a unifying doctrine for conservatives that brought them together despite differences within the movement over eschatology, Calvinism, charismatic gifts, and (early on) women in pastoral ministry. Second, it established a starting point from which to discuss theological differences. Finally, it put progressives at a rhetorical disadvantage because they were

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forced to reject (or at least downplay) inerrancy while also arguing for a trustworthy Bible. Inerrancy emerged as the core doctrine for conservatives nervous about theological declension and an unwelcome shibboleth for those concerned that activist conservatives were making a mere power grab.

With their strategy in place, conservatives elected Adrian Rogers as president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979 on the first ballot with just over 50 percent of the vote. Rogers was one of the most popular preachers in the SBC and pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. He remained arguably the most influential Southern Baptist leader until his death in 2005, serving three one-year terms as president (1979–80, 1986–88). Some observers complained about alleged voting irregularities, the busing in of messengers, the use of skyboxes for strategy meetings, and the politicizing of the pre-convention Pastors' Conference surrounding Rogers's election. Nevertheless, the conservative movement continued to surge as growing numbers of Southern Baptists attended the annual meetings and voted for conservative presidential candidates. Every SBC president since 1979 has been a self-avowed inerrantist, and most have been closely identified with the Patterson-Pressler movement. Following Rogers's election, the resolutions adopted by the convention became more overtly conservative and increasingly addressed hot-button issues such as abortion and homosexuality, reflecting the shift in SBC leadership. Controversial resolutions rejected women in pastoral ministry (1984) and a progressive understanding of the priesthood of all believers (1988).

In 1980, a group of seventeen pastors met in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, to discuss ways to counteract the conservative movement. These pastors, led by Cecil Sherman of First Baptist Church Asheville, North Carolina, were convinced that conservatives were really power-hungry fundamentalists shaped more by right-wing secular politics than historic Baptist identity. The conservative resurgence among Southern Baptists coincided with a conservative resurgence in the Republican Party. Many SBC conservatives were supporters of Ronald Reagan and the New Religious Right that helped elect him president of the United States in 1980 over incumbent Jimmy Carter, a progressive Southern Baptist layman and Sunday school teacher from Georgia. The so-called Gatlinburg Gang believed that nonfundamentalist Southern Baptists needed to mobilize politically to prevent a fundamentalist takeover. While conservatives often referred to their opponents as "liberals," the pastors in Gatlinburg adopted the word *moderate* as the preferred descriptor of what they believed to be the mainstream Baptist tradition. The moderate coalition included theological centrists and progressives, as well as many denominational loyalists who were ambivalent about the theological issues but wished to preserve the pragmatic approach to cooperation that was in place for a generation prior to 1979.



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## Two Controversial Southern Baptist Convention Resolutions from the 1980s

Therefore, be it RESOLVED, That we not decide concerns of Christians [sic] doctrine and practice by modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends or by emotional factors; that we remind ourselves of the dearly bought Baptist principle of the final authority of Scripture in matters of faith and conduct; and that we encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination.

Excerpted from “Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry” (1984).

Be it therefore RESOLVED, That the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in San Antonio, Texas, June 14–16, 1988, affirm its belief in the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of the believer (1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6); and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we affirm that this doctrine in no way gives license to misinterpret, explain away, demythologize, or extrapolate out elements of the supernatural from the Bible; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer in no way contradicts the biblical understanding of the role, responsibility, and authority of the pastor which is seen in the command to the local church in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account;” and

Be finally RESOLVED, That we affirm the truth that elders, or pastors, are called of God to lead the local church (Acts 20:28).

Excerpted from “Resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer” (1988).

The Inerrancy Controversy reached its apex between 1985 and 1987. More than 45,000 messengers attended the 1985 annual meeting in Dallas, Texas. Convention president Charles Stanley of First Baptist Church Atlanta, Georgia, was sued over perceived abuse of parliamentary procedure. Eventually the lawsuit was dismissed because a court believed government interference in the SBC’s internal affairs would violate church-state separation. Also in 1985, a Peace Committee was formed that represented conservative, moderate, and unaligned leaders. In 1986, the presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries ostensibly endorsed inerrancy in a document called the “Glorieta Statement.” Conservatives griped that the presidents did not really believe the doctrine while



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moderates complained that the educators had capitulated to fundamentalist pressure. That same year conservative pastor William Crews became president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary without controversy. In 1987, the Peace Committee issued its findings, which stated that theological differences were at the root of the controversy. That same year SBC trustee boards began to come under conservative control, beginning with the Christian Life Commission and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Richard Land became president of the former in 1988, and Lewis Drummond became president of the latter that same year.

By the mid-1990s, every Southern Baptist entity had moved in a decisively conservative direction, often with controversy. In 1990, Al Shackelford and Dan Martin were terminated from their posts as vice president of public relations at the Executive Committee and editor of *Baptist Press*, respectively; many conservatives felt they wrote from a moderate bias. In 1992, following Lewis Drummond's retirement, Paige Patterson became president of Southeastern Seminary. The school experienced significant faculty turnover, but by 2000 Southeastern had grown from under 600 students to more than 2,100 students. Patterson remained among the most influential leaders within the SBC. He served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1998 to 2000, during which time he initiated a major revision of the convention's confessional statement. In 2003, Patterson left Southeastern to become president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In 1993, R. Albert Mohler Jr. became president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The seminary experienced ongoing controversy during the 1990s as Mohler emphasized confessional fidelity to the Abstract of Principles, biblical inerrancy, and a complementarian view of gender roles. However, by the early twenty-first century, Southern Seminary had become the largest SBC seminary. Mohler emerged as a key public theologian among Southern Baptists and the broader evangelical movement. In 1994, the trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary terminated president Russell Dilday; Ken Hemphill became the new president. Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary elected Mark Coppenger as president in 1995, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary chose Chuck Kelley as president the following year. With the election of O. S. Hawkins as president of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board in 1997, a theological conservative sat at the helm of every SBC entity.

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## Theological Education in the SBC After the Inerrancy Controversy

As the presidents of your seminaries, we declare our unbending and fervent resolve to uphold all of these commitments. We will lead our institutions so that no harm shall come to your students and ministers; so that they will be rooted and grounded in the truth; so that they will be trained as faithful and effective preachers and teachers; so that they will bring honor to the church and not dishonor; and so that we shall be able to give a good answer and receive a good report when we shall face that stricter judgment which is to come.

Excerpted from “One Faith, One Task, One Sacred Trust” (1997).

Though contested presidential elections continued until 1990, moderates began gradually to disengage from the SBC during the mid-1980s. Some moderates became mainline Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. In 1986, many among the more progressive wing of the moderate movement formed the Southern Baptist Alliance. Several moderate ministries were formed, including the periodical *SBC Today* (1982), *The SBC Forum* (1984), and Associated Baptist Press (1990). Moderate seminaries included the Baptist House at Duke University Divinity School (1989), Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond (1991), Truett Seminary (1993), Campbell Divinity School (1995), McAfee School of Theology (1996), and Wake Forest School of Divinity (1999). By the early 1990s the controversy had shifted to the state conventions, where schools such as Baylor University, Stetson University, Wake Forest University, Furman University, and the University of Richmond either disaffiliated with their sponsoring convention or took steps to minimize denominational influence on the school.

One year after a preliminary gathering in 1990, centrist moderates under the leadership of former SBC presidential candidate Daniel Vestal formed the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), which became the largest network of moderate Southern Baptists and former Southern Baptists. Cecil Sherman was the founding coordinator of CBF (1992–96), followed by Vestal (1996–2012). After the formation of CBF, moderates began to disengage from the SBC in earnest. By 2014, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship included approximately 1,800 churches, most of which remained dually aligned but only nominally identified with the Southern Baptist Convention. The Southern Baptist Alliance changed its name to the Alliance of Baptists in 1992. The alliance remained smaller, more progressive, and more ecumenical than CBF. As of 2014, approximately 140 congregations affiliated with the alliance, including both moderate Baptist churches in the South and American Baptist congregations.

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By the mid-1990s, SBC conservatives began to bring substantive changes to the culture of the convention. In 1997, the SBC was restructured, resulting in the consolidation of several ministries, the renaming of the mission boards, and a public recommitment by the seminaries to teach conservative theology. In 1998, the Baptist Faith and Message was amended to include an article on "The Family," which stated controversially, "A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ." In 2000, the confession was revised to make it more consistently conservative than its 1963 predecessor. While moderates pointed out that the word *inerrancy* was not added to the confession, which for them confirmed the controversy was more about a power grab than a theological renovation, conservatives argued the addition was unnecessary since the statement had affirmed since 1925 that the Bible "has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter." Conservatives believed the Baptist Faith and Message had always affirmed the doctrine of inerrancy, even though it did not use the word. Southern Baptist seminary professors and missionaries were required to sign the revised confession, precipitating the final disengagement of most remaining moderates from SBC life. For all practical purposes the adoption of Baptist Faith and Message 2000 marked the end of the Inerrancy Controversy.

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