

EMBRACING EQUALITY: TEXAS BAPTISTS, SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY, AND CIVIL
RIGHTS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Joseph J. Davis

Thesis Prepared for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

May 2013

APPROVED:

Elizabeth Hayes Turner, Major Professor
Gustav L. Seligmann, Committee Member
Jennifer Wallach, Committee Member
Richard McCaslin, Chair of the Department of
History
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate
School

Davis, Joseph J. Embracing Equality: Texas Baptists, Social Christianity, and Civil Rights in the Twentieth Century. Master of Arts (History), May 2013, 138 pp., bibliography, 165 titles.

Texas Baptists in the twentieth century struggled to overcome prejudice and embrace racial equality. While historians have generally agreed that Baptist leadership in Texas was more progressive in regard to race relations than that of other southern states, Texas Baptists acquiesced to calls for racial justice with great difficulty. This study seeks to analyze the relationship between Texas Baptists' understanding of social Christianity and their views of racial equality. Furthermore, this study seeks to examine the extent to which white Texas Baptists actually changed their racial views and incorporated African Americans into their church services following the civil rights movement. An analysis of the racial transformation of one of Texas' most famous Baptists, W. A. Criswell, and the history of the Christian Life Commission, which is the ethical arm of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, provides great insight in to the racial progress made by Texas Baptists in the twentieth century. As Texas Baptists enter the twenty-first century and encounter a large and growing Hispanic population, the findings of this study will render aide to those who wish to embark on a new future by learning from the mistakes of their past.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On June 19, 2012, for the first time in its one-hundred-sixty-seven-year existence, an African American stood as president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The election of Fred Luter Jr., former street minister and current pastor of a black church in New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward, marked a watershed moment in the long history of a convention that has been fraught with racial controversy.¹ At its sesquicentennial meeting in 1995, the SBC openly acknowledged the reality of its discriminatory history by issuing a formal resolution on racial reconciliation. The resolution not only acknowledged the central "role that slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention," but also contained an apology to all African Americans for "condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism" since the founding of the convention in 1845.²

For the SBC, traditionally a lily-white denomination and one that currently boasts a minority population of only 20 percent, the election of Fred Luter was an important stride in the direction of racial justice. The demography of the South is such that the SBC has needed to either include minorities in positions of influence or face a decline in prominence and power.³ While the past few decades have seen the SBC gradually acquiesce to racial realities, further progress is greatly needed. The danger of social ambivalence, something that has plagued Southern Baptists in the past, is an issue that each new generation must face for itself.

¹ *Baptist Standard*, June 19, 2012. It was on June 19, 1865 that Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war was over and the slaves were free. This date is now celebrated as emancipation day, Juneteenth, in Texas.

² Southern Baptist Convention. "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention." Official Website of the Southern Baptist Convention. <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amresolution.asp?id=899> (accessed March 16, 2012).

³ Bruce Nolan, "The Rev. Fred Luter is Unopposed for Presidency of Southern Baptist Convention," *The Times-Picayune*, Sunday, June 17, 2012, http://www.nola.com/religion/index.ssf/2012/06/the_rev_fred_luter_is_unoppose.html (accessed: Aug. 7, 2012).

This study seeks to examine Texas Baptists as they struggled with racial equality, desegregation, and civil rights in the twentieth century. In regard to racial attitudes, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) is generally viewed by historians as one of the more progressive state conventions in the SBC. Historian Mark Newman wrote that “The North Carolina, Virginia and, especially, Texas conventions followed a progressive course” in the way they dealt with desegregation in the latter half of the century.⁴ In like manner, John W. Storey has applauded the work of Texas’ Christian Life Commission (CLC) – an agency of the BGCT devoted to ethical issues including race relations – for its efforts to educate Texas Baptists on the need for social involvement. In 1987, he wrote that “Texas Baptists today understand more clearly the ethical imperatives of faith than did their parents or grandparents a generation or two ago.”⁵

Though the leadership of the BGCT and its Christian Life Commission often was more liberal than that of the SBC and many other states, progressive leadership did not always translate to progressive churches. The structure of the SBC and the Baptist denomination at large is designed in such a way that gives the local church full autonomy. There is no hierarchy of power like that which is found in Catholicism. Like all Baptist conventions, the BGCT is subject to congregational polity, and had no authority to impose policy on its members and their churches. Baptist conventions are annual meetings of messengers, elected by member churches, who vote whether to adopt reports and resolutions made by their agencies and committees. The adopted resolutions and reports, however, are in no way binding on the churches.⁶ Therefore,

⁴ Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 206.

⁵ John W. Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), 224.

⁶ John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), xix-xxi.

BGCT leadership might set an example for churches to follow, but it could not force member churches to fall in line with a certain creed or dogma, and it certainly could not force churches to desegregate.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Texas Baptist churches saw limited integration for a number of reasons. Most white Texas Baptists harbored the same intense racism that was common among whites in the rest of the South. They lived in a culture that embraced segregation and white supremacy and, in turn, they did not let go of their prejudices easily. Texas Baptists also had a long tradition of fervent evangelism in which their focus overwhelmingly centered on salvation from sin. When Texas Baptists did show signs of social concern it usually involved personal vices such as drinking and gambling.⁷ Therefore, when the CLC began to emphasize racial reconciliation and a more liberal social agenda after 1950, fundamentalist Baptists viewed it as an attack on their faith as well as their culture. Finally, while the CLC began promoting racial reconciliation in the 1950s and 1960s, it did so by conservative methods. The commission chose to proceed with caution and encourage racial harmony rather than immediate integration.

The consequence for Texas Baptist churches was that they lagged behind secular institutions in their racial development. Active support for desegregation was uncommon, and the integration of churches proceeded at a slow pace. Most Baptist churches with an “open door” policy achieved little more than tokenism within their congregations during the 1960s. To compound the lack of progress, Texas Baptists began to refocus their attention to new, modern issues in the 1970s – world hunger, planned parenthood, and drug abuse. By the end of the decade, racism ceased to be a focal point as conservatives took over the SBC and began waging denominational warfare over the question of proper doctrine and the interpretation of scripture.

⁷ Harry Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History* (Dallas: Baptistway Press, 1998), 244; Samuel S. Hill, Jr., *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 112.

Ultimately, the racial emphasis in the BGCT ended prematurely, and Texas Baptist churches remained largely segregated for much of the twentieth century.

At the start of his groundbreaking 1903 publication, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois wrote that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.”⁸ These prophetic words were more than a revelation of contemporary or future struggles; they briefly summarized the longstanding dilemma of American history. The “double-consciousness,” or the “twoness” that Du Bois spoke of, moreover, has been more than merely an African American phenomenon. The United States, along with its people, has developed in this conflicted reality. At its inception, the United States was already divided among free whites and enslaved blacks. It has been celebrated as a land of the free, while simultaneously being home to millions of slaves. This unique racial dichotomy has always been present within American culture and continues to manifest itself in various ways today. Only recently in the American saga have the bonds of racial prejudice begun to dissolve.

Due to the unique nature of race relations in the United States, the problem of the color-line has become ubiquitous, pervading all aspects of the American experience. For more than a century following emancipation, white demagogues in the South denied black Americans the franchise through both legal and extralegal means. In the 1890s and the early twentieth century, state conventions throughout the South enacted legislation in the form of poll taxes, residency requirements, literacy tests, and property qualifications that successfully disqualified blacks from political participation. When constitutional amendments failed to keep black men from the polls, many white southerners resorted to physical intimidation and violence to safeguard the southern

⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903, reprint (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 3, 8.

system of white supremacy. By 1910, blacks across the South were effectively banished from politics and would largely remain that way until the dawn of the civil rights era.⁹

In similar fashion, the solidification of a segregated society by the early twentieth century consigned African Americans to a second-rate social existence as inferiors to their white counterparts. According to C. Vann Woodward, Populist politics in the 1890s backfired on those attempting to form interracial political coalitions. As southern Democrats led violent campaigns to rid the South of black voters and race-mixing politicians, northern Republicans abandoned African Americans in the name of sectional reconciliation. Black Americans became the scapegoat for the troubles of the nation.¹⁰ African Americans not only lost the franchise, but the white South also implemented a system of segregation that alienated black Americans and stymied aspirations for social equality throughout the South. Jim Crow laws and customs reached all black southerners and dictated social behavior in public, the work place, religious institutions, and even recreational activities. Woodward notes, moreover, that Jim Crow laws did more than merely subordinate blacks to a “fixed status in society. They were constantly pushing the Negro farther down.”¹¹

As does the history of American politics and the Jim Crow South, the history of southern religion poignantly portrays the problem of the color-line in American culture. The formation of the Southern Baptist Convention was itself the offspring of a debate over the legitimacy of slavery. Following the American Revolution, the question of slavery was still unanswered

⁹ Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 223-226; Edward L. Ayers, *Southern Crossing: A History of the American South 1877-1906* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 225-226; Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 38-45; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 224-234; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 319-328.

¹⁰ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 1955, reprint (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 69-70, 78-81.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 97-99, 108 (quotation).

among southern churchmen, but as the institution further permeated the South during westward expansion, Southern Baptist ministers whole-heartedly defended the peculiar institution, giving it biblical justification. Central to their argument was this: that slavery provided an opportunity to evangelize an “inferior heathen” race.¹² While the institution was spreading rapidly below the Potomac, however, abolitionist sentiment was growing among Baptists in the North. Mounting tensions between northern and southern Baptists came to a head in 1844, when the Georgia Baptist Convention chose to test the racial waters and sponsor slaveholder James E. Reeve as a missionary to the Cherokee Indians. The Baptist General Convention’s Home Mission Society responded by rejecting Reeve’s nomination on moral grounds. Essentially, they did not believe that keeping human beings as property was compatible with the doctrine of Christianity. This also revealed the extent to which anti-slavery sentiment had infiltrated Baptist thought in the North. Quick to take offense, many southerners concluded that abolitionists were in control of the convention and, in May 1845, they met in Augusta, Georgia to organize the Southern Baptist Convention.¹³

For the next century, the SBC developed in accordance to ideals consistent with those of the South. This was particularly true in regard to race. Writing in the early 1960s, historian Rufus B. Spain argued that Southern Baptists conformed to the society in which they lived. Rather than mold their environment to reflect Christian principles, the churchmen of the South lent their efforts to supporting and perpetuating traditional southern values, and central to

¹² Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 6; John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 194; H. Shelton Smith, *In His Image, But ...Racism in Southern Religion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972), 152-165; Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 136-137.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

southern identity at this time was white supremacy. According to Spain, “The Baptist view of race was the Southern view!”¹⁴

The underlying causes of Baptist denominational comfort within their regional “Zion” are explained by Spain in terms of regional distinctiveness. Southern religion experienced relatively little change in the decades following the Civil War, precisely because the forces that were revolutionizing northern religion were almost non-existent in the South. In the North, new scientific theories, the availability of higher biblical criticism, and the unparalleled social ills created by industrialization caused mainstream Protestantism to reconfigure its theology. This “new Protestantism” described by Spain sought to align traditional Christianity with the new understanding of the universe. What emerged was an unprecedented emphasis on the amelioration of adverse social conditions. Thus, influenced by new scientific thought and witness to the cruel injustices of the modern era, northern Protestantism was quick to embrace the “social gospel” and focus its efforts as much on redeeming society as Southern Baptists did on redeeming the soul.¹⁵

An exact definition for the social gospel can at times be elusive. According to historian Robert T. Handy, the “social gospel in America was part of a developing world-wide interest in social Christianity” that coincided with the industrial revolution. The human problems that arose “from industrial strife, from the unequal distribution of wealth, and from the worsening of urban conditions for the poor,” caused many Protestants to reconfigure their theology in such a way that it would address the needs of modern society.¹⁶ At their pinnacle of influence in the first

¹⁴ Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961), 126.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vii-xi.

¹⁶ Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 4.

two decades of the twentieth century, leaders of the social gospel movement expressed their new theology in various ways. Central to the social gospel was the “conviction that the social principles of the historical Jesus could serve as reliable guides for both individual and social life in any age.”¹⁷ Although variations existed within the social gospel movement, it generally stressed the “immanence of God, the goodness and worth of man, and the coming kingdom of God on earth.” Rather than stress individual sin, social gospel leaders believed that sin was transmitted corporately through oppressive social institutions that sought to establish “power over the working classes.”¹⁸ Leaders of the social gospel reasoned, however, that men and women could be conditioned through education to choose the good of society over private advantage and, thus, create a utopian environment on earth that would be void of the sinful institutions that corrupted humankind.

While the social gospel grew in popularity in the North during the early twentieth century, it had much less success in the South. Rufus B. Spain noted that the South was still largely rural, uneducated, and agricultural in nature. The sectional mindset of many southerners, moreover, combined with these factors to insulate Southern Baptists from the social and religious upheavals taking place in the North. The absence of a sufficient motivational force to embrace the need for social change essentially led Southern Baptists into a sort of cultural captivity. Spain reasons, however, that to censure southerners for not embracing social Christianity in this era would be tantamount to condemning them for “not accepting an innovation for which they felt no need and for which there was little apparent need.”¹⁹ In other words, southerners’

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁸ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 1917, reprint (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 145.

¹⁹ Spain, *At Ease in Zion*, 210, 211 (quotation).

understanding of the need for social change would have to be predicated upon a societal transformation.

On the heels of Spain's publication came Samuel S. Hill, Jr.'s warning to the southern church in 1966, appropriately titled, *Southern Churches in Crisis*. After giving an overview of southern religious history and the social revolution taking place in the 1960s, Hill offered a harsh critique of contemporary southern Christianity. He determined that the lack of social concern among southern churchmen would inevitably lead to the downfall of their regional religion. Of particular concern to Hill was that young southerners might reject Christianity if their religious institution did not escape the captivity of its regional folkways and regain its "relevance for those to whom it seeks to minister."²⁰

Hill's thesis revolves around what he called the "central theme" of southern Protestantism. This central theme – "the salvation of the individual" – is the foundation from which "all the affirmations of popular southern Protestantism have grown."²¹ According to Hill, southern Protestantism's overbearing concern with individual salvation blocked any understanding that "other Christian concerns might be equally central." Indeed, Hill wrote that "there is virtually no recognition of any responsibility to redeem the secular dimensions of community and national life, inasmuch as life and the Christian life are construed to be essentially individualistic."²² Southern Protestantism as described by Hill lies in stark contrast to the social gospel movement that stressed the corporate nature of sin and the redemption of society.

²⁰ Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis*, xii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 73 (first quotation), 77 (second quotation), 76 (third quotation).

²² *Ibid.*, 79 (first quotation), 82 (second quotation).

Southern Protestantism's almost fanatical obsession with the individual conversion experience had serious repercussions for the church in the racially charged 1960s. Hill argued that southern Protestants lacked any understanding of a Christian social ethic. "In their eyes the New Testament does not contain one," he wrote. Therefore, Protestants in the South did not believe that the racial crisis of the 1960s was in its realm of responsibility. Ultimately, Hill viewed the future of southern religion, and the Southern Baptist denomination particularly, with great pessimism. "The picture of the Southern Baptist future is depressing," he concluded. Essentially, he thought that the "new breed" of socially concerned Southern Baptists was too late in stepping on the scene and lacked the necessary institutional structure to be the "agents of the denomination's redemption." Other historians have not shared Hill's pessimism choosing, rather, to focus on some of the more positive developments in the history of southern religion.²³

John Lee Eighmy saw limited concern for social issues among Southern Baptists and documented aspects of the South's reluctant embrace of the social gospel in his book, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*, published in 1972. Although the South was not motivated by the same industrializing forces of the North, southern church leaders adapted a social conscience peculiar to their particular region. Historian Dewey Grantham characterized southern progressivism as an "attempt to modernize the South and to humanize its institutions without abandoning its more desirable values and traditions."²⁴ Eighmy showed how southern progressivism and social Christianity worked in tandem toward similar goals. Reforms initiated by southern progressives addressed problems unique to the South and

²³ Ibid., 112 (first quotation), 208 (all other quotations).

²⁴ Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), xvi.

were backed heavily by southern ministers. Areas that garnered the most attention from southern reformers included child labor, education, political corruption, and agriculture.²⁵

Temperance committees founded by both individual state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention, for the purpose of promoting prohibition, evolved into social service commissions by the second decade of the twentieth century.²⁶ The adoption of the Social Service Commission (SSC) by the SBC highlighted the growing awareness among southerners of the social mission of the church. Eighmy makes it clear, however, that southern churches never fully embraced ecumenism and liberal theology, which were the driving forces behind the social gospel in the North. Regardless of theological differences, northern progressivism and social-gospel ministers did influence southern thought and end the “intellectual solidarity” among nineteenth-century Southern Baptists. According to Eighmy, the twentieth century brought an end to Baptist churches functioning merely as “cultural establishments” that uncritically supported the “prevailing order.”²⁷ Essentially, southern churches in this era experienced a growing, albeit limited, sense of social responsibility while adhering to traditional theological perspectives.

Following Eighmy’s publication, church historians developed a growing interest in the more moderate aspects of southern Protestantism. John W. Storey viewed Hill’s pessimistic outlook on Southern Baptists as too “severe” and built upon Eighmy’s research by documenting

²⁵ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 62-65; For the nuances of child labor reform in the new South see Shelley Sallee, *The Whiteness of Child Labor Reform in the New South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); For educational reform in the new South see William Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); James L. Leloudis, *Schooling and the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Other important studies of the nature of southern progressivism include: Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*; William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 131-134; Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

²⁶ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

the social progress among Texas Baptists. Writing in the late 1980s, Storey chronicled the progression of social Christianity in Texas during the twentieth century. Contrary to Eighmy's thesis, Storey argued that the social attitudes of Southern Baptists did not develop mainly in response to the social gospel movement in the North. While he admits that the most prominent Baptist leaders in Texas were familiar with such northern ministers as Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong, and Walter Rauschenbusch, all well-known "social-gospelers," Storey asserts that "Baptist support for orphanages, insane asylums, educational institutions, and prohibition... developed independently of and, in some cases, pre-dated, the social gospel movement." Southern Baptists who did embrace the social aspects of Christ's message essentially applied their faith in ways that were unique to their region.²⁸

Furthermore, Storey is unwilling to characterize the developing social attitudes of Texas Baptists as an acceptance of the social gospel. For Storey, the use of this term is inappropriate because it suggests social activism based on a liberal interpretation of scripture, which most Texas Baptists did not advocate. In fact, central to his thesis is the premise that Baptist leaders in Texas were successfully able to promote aspects of the social gospel, particularly regarding race relations, precisely because they based their appeals to the public on conservative theology. Theological conservatives differed from liberals in that they believed strongly in the inerrancy and authority of scripture and continued to stress the need for individual salvation over social redemption. In this way, the social awareness of Southern Baptists differed greatly from the movement that originated in the North. This is why Storey prefers to use the terms "social Christianity" or "applied Christianity" when referring to the social activities of Texas Baptists.²⁹

²⁸ Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership*, 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5

To be sure, not all supporters of social Christianity in Texas or throughout the South shared a loyalty to conservative theology. In *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century*, historian David Stricklin chronicled the long tenure of a southern social gospel tradition based largely on liberal theology. Though many of these “dissenters” existed on the periphery of the Baptist world, they remained devoted to transforming the Baptist denomination from within and objected to segregation, militarism, and traditional gender roles in both society and the church.³⁰ Not inclined to divide over doctrinal concerns, many progressive Baptists viewed it as their Christian responsibility to make God’s presence visible to individuals through their actions. This “incarnational theology,” as Stricklin calls it, made individual believers the embodiment of God’s love on earth, an idea that had undeniable social ramifications for modern Christianity.³¹

Still, as noted by historian Barry Hankins, until conservatives took over the SBC in 1979, the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention primarily consisted of moderates.³² Sociologist Nancy Ammerman describes moderates as being just “left of the middle.” Many Baptists were considered moderate for not falling in line with traditional interpretations of scripture, especially in relation to supernatural events such as the Genesis account of creation and the virgin birth of Christ.³³ Hankins notes, furthermore, that moderate Baptists adhered to a wide range of viewpoints: “some were biblical inerrantists, others appropriated features of neo-orthodoxy, still others were influenced by the Social Gospel, some were Calvinists, and many

³⁰ David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), xiv.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

³² Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 3.

³³ Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 17 (quotation), 79.

others simply pietistic Baptist Christians whose primary concern was living a holy life and evangelizing their neighbors.” These moderate leaders remained in power despite of the fact that the majority of Southern Baptists were theologically conservative.³⁴ Among others, church historian Bill J. Leonard has called this organizational structure, in which moderates led the SBC, the “Grand Compromise.” It was essentially an agreement to set aside theological differences for the sake of denominational unity and the growth of missions.³⁵ As the influence of SBC leaders rested in their power of appointment to denominational boards and colleges, for much of the twentieth century leaders sympathetic to social Christianity held significant sway over the Baptist seminaries and publications in the South.

Both John W. Storey and Mark Newman confirmed these findings in their research on Southern Baptists. In Texas, possibly the most influential advocate of social Christianity was T. B. Maston, professor of Christian Ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. His long tenure as a professor provided him the opportunity to mold the social attitudes of a new generation of young Texas Baptists. In 1950, Maston was a central figure in the creation of Texas’ Christian Life Commission.³⁶ The CLC was devoted to educating its fellow Baptists about the social responsibilities of the Christian faith, which had direct implications for Baptists and race relations. The first five subjects that the commission began to research and publish information on were family issues, race relations, public morals, economic life, and the world order. The commission itself grew out of Texas’ Ministry for Minorities, which was headed by Acker C. Miller. Following Miller’s tenure as executive secretary of the CLC, the next four secretaries were former students of Maston at Southwestern Theological Seminary.

³⁴ Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 3.

³⁵ Bill Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 29.

³⁶ Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership*, 136-137.

Both Miller and his successor Foy Dan Valentine then consecutively directed the newly formed Christian Life Commission of the SBC after their tenure with the BGCT. These men set the precedent for Texas Baptist leadership in the social arena.³⁷

In addition to the voices of moderation proceeding from Southwestern Seminary, the *Baptist Standard*, Texas' leading Baptist newspaper, and its editor from 1954 to 1966, Ewing S. James, contributed to the moderate influence on Texas Baptists during the turbulent civil rights era. James, who was in close contact with the directors of the CLC, increasingly addressed the need for racial justice and greater exercise of Christian charity among Southern Baptists.³⁸ The result for Texans was a steady barrage of literature that functioned as a panacea to the social ills of the day.

In his book *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995*, Mark Newman indicated that the influence of progressive thought, which helped shape the Baptist position on race relations in Texas, operated in similar fashion throughout the South. Newman argued that progressive leaders effectively appealed to the primary commitments of Southern Baptists – scripture, evangelism, law and order, and education – in order to persuade segregationists to relinquish their views. Baptists believed that the Bible commanded them to obey the law and that education was necessary for understanding scripture, therefore, when the federal government outlawed segregation in schools and public accommodations, Baptists became more agreeable to change. Furthermore, many Baptists believed that a public resistance to desegregation would have impeded the effectiveness of foreign missions. Consequently,

³⁷ McBeth, *Texas Baptists*, 244-245.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 187-188.

moderate segregationists began “gradually and reluctantly” to yield to the destruction of *de jure* segregation.³⁹

As documented by southern church historians, Southern Baptists have generally been more progressive in regard to social issues in the upper-South, regions on the periphery of the old Confederacy, and in areas with large urban populations. Education and age have also factored into the development of more liberal social attitudes among Southern Baptists. Mark Newman notes that seminary-educated ministers, who usually constituted the majority of large urban pastorates, along with young Baptist students were most likely to embrace a progressive stance on race-relations.⁴⁰ These dynamics are precisely what made Texas so important in the civil rights struggles of the mid-twentieth century. Located on the southwestern most corner of the former Confederate South, the state of Texas was the home of two of the South’s most prominent Baptist colleges – Baylor University and Southwestern Theological Seminary in Fort Worth – and laid claim to the largest urban population in the region during the civil rights era. John W. Storey cites these factors as two of the reasons Texas Baptists were in the vanguard of the battle for racial equality.⁴¹

While Texas was home to some of the most racially progressive Baptist leaders in the South, it was still a bastion of conservatism that harbored much racism. In regard to race relations, historians of southern religion have tended to highlight the progressive nature of Texas Baptist leadership, and with good reason. Texas Baptists founded the first state Christian Life Commission in 1950, held the first state-wide Baptist workshop on race relations in 1962, and had men from Texas in charge of the SBC’s Christian Life Commission from its inception in

³⁹ Newman, *Getting Right with God*, ix.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 206-208.

⁴¹ Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership*, 141.

1953 until 1986. The great progressive leadership in the state of Texas, however, has at times masked the difficulty that Texas Baptists had in transitioning from a culture of racism and segregation to one of equality and inclusion.

Texas Baptists were strongly conditioned by their own history and heritage to shy away from social issues and devote intense focus solely to evangelism. Historian Leon McBeth noted a distinct tradition among Texas Baptists based on their own unique history. The “Texas Baptist Tradition,” as he called it, is characterized by a militant “Baptist imperialism,” linked directly to the “spirit of regional conquest” found in the southwestern region of the United States. A sort of religious manifest destiny swept over Baptists in the Southwest causing them to focus their efforts on expanding the kingdom of God above all else. McBeth saw this as a main reason that many of the largest churches in the SBC lay west of the Mississippi River. The theology that developed in this atmosphere was “conservative and practical” and focused exclusively on denominational growth through mass evangelism.⁴²

The fervent evangelistic spirit among Texas Baptists became a significant hindrance to the efforts of the Christian Life Commission to promote racial equality in the 1950s and 1960s. In their particular understanding of the gospel that centered on salvation from sin, and in their zeal for winning souls to Christ, conservative Baptists neglected what the CLC argued were the social responsibilities of the Christian faith. For conservative Baptists, the central responsibility of the Christian was to evangelize the lost, which could act as a blinder to institutionalized racism and economic injustice.

In their fear of racial mixing and amalgamation, some Baptists attacked integration as a manifestation of the liberal social gospel, which conservatives interpreted as a departure from the

⁴² Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope*, 36-37. Here, Bill J. Leonard is writing about a series of lectures given by Leon McBeth in May 1988 at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

message of individual salvation in favor of a concerted effort to improve social conditions, in this case, the social conditions of African Americans. Thus, some conservative Baptists determined that integration was not just a danger to white hegemony but, also, if integration was preached from the pulpit, then it would weaken the integrity of the gospel of personal salvation. During the twentieth century, when black-white race relations was one of the most grave social concerns, Texas Baptist ministers continued in the evangelistic tradition of their forefathers to the detriment of racial equality.

The Texas Christian Life Commission, which was one of the most progressive entities in the SBC and led the charge for racial equality among Texas Baptists, determined upon a conservative approach in its attempt to transform public opinion on race relations. While the leaders of the commission were quite progressive for their day and much is to be said for their role in shaping a new Baptist understanding of the ethical imperatives other their faith, their racial strategy was far from a call for radical change. Although created in 1950, the CLC did not make direct and overt pleas for integration until the closing years of the 1960s. Before this, the commission prodded Baptists to reject the misconception of African American inferiority and treat them as equals, but it did so in a way that would not create denominational unrest.

The consequence of the entrenched racism among white Texas Baptists, their discomfort with social Christianity, and the conservative methodology implemented by the CLC was that Texas Baptists progressed slowly toward racial equality in the civil rights era. Even when church leadership began to understand the sin of forced segregation, most churches did not integrate for some time. As a further hindrance to quick and effective desegregation, the CLC began refocusing its attention away from race relations in the late 1970s to new issues, and by 1980, the entire Southern Baptist Convention became embroiled in doctrinal warfare that took

precedence over all else. In the end, racial equality took a back seat in the 1980s to a new era of conservatism that reversed the modern trends in denominational life, and racial tensions in the SBC heightened once again in the 1990s. Even in 1995, when the SBC issued a formal apology for its history of racism, African American pastors and leaders were suspicious of the resolution and did not take it seriously.⁴³

⁴³ Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 250-252.

CHAPTER 2

THE DILEMMA OF DESEGREGATION: TEXAS BAPTIST CONSERVATIVES AND RACE

The ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 heightened the public debate over race relations in the United States. With the doctrine of separate but equal dismantled by the highest authority in the land, conservative southerners accustomed to the system of white supremacy, which had reigned supreme in the South for almost three centuries, set out to defend their traditional way of life. Fearful of a change in the social hierarchy of the region, segregationists developed detailed arguments to combat the action the government and other pro-civil rights entities were beginning to take. Many in the South saw forced desegregation as a form of federal imperialism and thought that the national government was overstepping its bounds. The government was impeding on the rights of the individual states to legislate for themselves. As in the years leading up to the Civil War, this defense caused the concept of states' rights to become closely identified with racism. Scores of other southerners, moreover, went as far as to identify integrationists with Marxism and characterize the civil rights movement as an extension of Communism. Segregationists used whatever means possible to discredit desegregation and justify the prevailing order of Jim Crow. For Southern Baptists opposed to desegregation, the separation of the races could be justified both biblically and through appeals to American patriotism and the preservation of the democratic tradition of the South¹

¹ Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 1; The Communist Party in the U. S. reached its height of influence in the South among black sharecroppers and ideologues during the 1930s. As the only political party in the nation that endorsed integration, many white southerners connected Communism with desegregation and considered their own opposition part of the Cold War defense. See Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Robin D.G. Kelly, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Though Texas produced some of the most racially progressive Southern Baptist minds of the civil rights era, the Lone Star State continued to be a bastion of conservatism throughout the twentieth century. As was the case across the rest of the South, moreover, many of these conservative Baptists were segregationists who were not willing to sit by quietly while so-called northern agitators and civil rights organizations like the NAACP critiqued the prevailing order of the southern racial system. Their defense of segregation showcased the strong hold that southern culture and tradition had on southern churches. Perhaps the most prominent symbol of religious conservatism in the South during this time was W. A. Criswell, pastor for more than fifty years at First Baptist Church, Dallas.

Born just a few miles north of the Texas border in Eldorado, Oklahoma in 1909, the same year as the establishment of the NAACP, W. A. Criswell grew up in a relatively isolated Southern Baptist world in which dancing, gambling, and alcohol were “unspeakable evils.” Each of his parents had previous marriages that ended tragically before finding each other in Eldorado sometime in 1905. W.A.’s father, Wallie Amos Criswell, witnessed the death of his wife and daughter from Typhoid fever in 1903. His mother, Anna Currie, suffered the shame of abandonment by her husband, who left her in New Mexico to care for two young children. By 1905, she lost all hope of his return and moved to Eldorado to live with her sister. There she met Wallie Amos Criswell and started a new family. In 1909, their first child together, W.A. Criswell was born. They remained in Eldorado for the next six years trying to make a living from the dust of the earth, which was no easy task in the arid land of Oklahoma. A dust storm that swept through their town in 1914 crushed their spirit and caused them to seek a new life elsewhere.²

² W. A. Criswell, *Standing on the Promises: The Autobiography of W.A. Criswell* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 9-12.

Hoping to begin again, his parents moved young W.A. and his siblings to the small town of Texline, Texas, sometime early in 1915. It was on this trip that young Criswell encountered a black man for the first time in his life. The man was a porter on the train that transported the Criswell family from Oklahoma to the northwestern most point in Texas, and little W. A. recalled looking upon the porter with “not a little curiosity.” In the small town of Texline, Criswell lived out a provincial existence fraught with the difficulties of rural life in the early twentieth century.³

With no electricity, running water, or distractions such as television and radio, Criswell’s world revolved around household chores, books, and church. From an early age he developed a love for the written word and consumed as many books as he could get his hands on. The most intriguing one he found at this time was the Bible. Even before he officially became a Christian convert at ten years of age, he wanted nothing more than to become a Baptist preacher. Criswell read scripture so much as an elementary student that certain of his peers ridiculed him as the “little Bible reader.” Against even the wishes of his religious parents, young Criswell was determined to become a Baptist minister one day. Preaching was in his blood. There was nothing he could do about it. “I was born serious,” Criswell recalled, and “My life was shaped almost entirely by the church.”⁴

Criswell later referred to Texline as “that little outpost on the edge of nowhere.” The all-grade elementary school, which was also an all-white school, was so small that all the grades met in the same room, sitting at different tables to differentiate between them. One teacher oversaw the instruction for all of these elementary students. In 1925, when Criswell was fifteen, his mother learned that his Texline high school was not accredited and promptly moved him and

³ Ibid., 13, 19 (quotation), 25.

⁴ Ibid., 32 (first quotation), 62 (second quotation), 61 (third quotation).

his brother to Amarillo in search of a better education. His father remained behind for a time in Texline working as a barber and sending the family money each month.⁵

In Amarillo, Criswell was introduced to debate, band, and a church that rivaled the size of the town in which he grew up. What Criswell was yet to encounter in his yet brief life was the complicated dynamics of racial segregation in the South. Later, he would recall that he was never around black people growing up, so he did not develop any feelings toward them one way or another, good or bad.⁶ In Amarillo, Criswell began to show signs of the fundamentalism that would later characterize his lifelong ministry. The Scopes “Monkey” Trial began in 1925, shortly after Criswell enrolled in Amarillo High School, and garnered considerable national attention. In March 1925, a jury found John Scopes guilty of teaching evolution in a state-funded Tennessee high school. The prosecutor of the case, William Jennings Bryan, was a three-time presidential candidate for the Democratic Party and a well-known fundamentalist. Bryan died suddenly just a few days after the trial from a cerebral hemorrhage.⁷ Criswell “felt the loss personally,” remembering Bryan as a hero who “defended the literal interpretation of Genesis.” Shortly following the Scopes trial, the fifteen-year-old Criswell had the opportunity to stand before the Baptist Youth Training Union class he had joined in Amarillo and bring a message. In step with Bryan’s fundamentalism, the young Criswell delivered a stirring attack on “modernism” and “evil-lution,” as he called it. With all his power Criswell sought to defend the “literal interpretation of scripture.”⁸

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ W.A. Criswell, “Oral Memoirs of W.A. Criswell,” interview by Thomas L. Charlton, Dallas, Texas, March 1972, p. 261, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Criswell).

⁷ Edward J. Larson, *Summer of the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 38, 199-200.

⁸ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 51.

In 1927, at the age of seventeen, Criswell moved to Waco to begin his college career at Baylor University. Majoring in English, he worked his way through college as a part-time preacher at various local country churches. The Baptist General Convention of Texas at that time paid the tuition costs of pre-ministerial students, but Criswell still needed money for rent and living expenses. At Baylor, Criswell's "Christian faith had prospered" along with his "confidence in the Bible." Following graduation, Criswell faced the tough decision of where to continue his education. While strongly tempted to move to Rhode Island and attend Brown University, Criswell feared that Brown had strayed too far from its Baptist heritage and set his eyes on Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.⁹

At Southern Seminary from 1931 to 1937, Criswell earned both his Masters and Doctoral degrees in theology. He met his wife, whom he described as a "Kentucky blueblood with historic roots in that great southern tradition," while pastoring a church just across the Tennessee border. Upon finishing school in 1937, Criswell quickly found work as a minister in Oklahoma. He spent the first three years pastoring a church in Chickasha and during the war years from 1941 to 1944 pastoring a moderate sized church in Muskogee. Then in 1944, the death of famed minister, Dr. George Truett of First Baptist Church, Dallas, set in motion Criswell's sudden rise to the national spotlight.¹⁰

When W.A. Criswell accepted the pastorate of First Baptist, Dallas, he inherited the largest Baptist congregation in the world and one of the most prestigious pulpits in America. His predecessor, George W. Truett, was well known throughout the country. One of his biographers, Keith E. Durso, described Dr. Truett as "perhaps the most outspoken and eloquent Baptist defender of religious liberty for all people." While pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Truett

⁹ Ibid., 130 (first quotation), 131 (second quotation).

¹⁰ Ibid., 136, 140 (quotation), 150, 157.

peached an average of one sermon a day, served three terms as president of the SBC, led the Baptist World Alliance for one five-year term, helped found a Dallas hospital, and traveled the world on numerous evangelism tours.¹¹ The year before he became president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson accepted an invitation from Truett to speak at First Baptist, Dallas, and in the spring of 1918, during the waning months of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson invited Truett to Paris. There he preached to war-weary soldiers in dire need of comfort and hope.¹²

Needless to say, Criswell had large shoes to fill when he reached Dallas. His ministry in the heart of Texas was characterized by strong fundamental Bible preaching. Criswell wrote many books during his tenure in Dallas aimed at defending the Bible from the dangers of liberal Christianity.¹³ One of Criswell's biographers, Billy Keith, described his ministry as a "running battle with the liberals."¹⁴ He soon became known as an outspoken champion for the fundamentalist faith, and his energetic sermons, which billowed forth from the pulpit, echoed the sentiment of conservative Baptists around the globe. A far stride from his humble beginnings in rural Oklahoma and the Panhandle of Texas, Criswell ascended to the pinnacle of Southern Baptist life in 1968 when he became the president of the Southern Baptist Convention. He served two consecutive one-year terms as president, which was the accepted tradition for SBC presidents, and fought to defend what he viewed as the fundamentals of his faith. Today, no

¹¹ Keith E. Durso, *Thy Will Be Done: A Biography of George W. Truett* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), xi-xii.

¹² *Ibid.*, 137 (quotation), 138-139, 84.

¹³ A few of the books Criswell wrote in defense of fundamentalist Christianity include: *These Issues We Must Face* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953); *Did Man Just Happen?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957); *In Defense of the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967); *Why I Preach the Bible is Literally True* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969).

¹⁴ Billy Keith, *W.A. Criswell The Authorized Biography: The Story of a Courageous and Uncompromising Christian Leader* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973), 191.

history of southern Baptists in the twentieth century would be complete without a thorough examination of W.A. Criswell.¹⁵

While Criswell had a good education and many years of ministerial experience, his background did not prepare him for the unsettling changes that began taking place in the 1950s. Criswell was accustomed to defending his faith from the liberalizing influences of modernity, but in 1954, when the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling declared segregation to be unconstitutional, Criswell began sailing through uncharted water. How would he handle having to defend his southern heritage from the modern forces seeking to integrate the races?

Because he was such a prominent religious figure during one of the most turbulent and public periods of racial conflict in the United States, it is understandable that Criswell's position on desegregation became so widely publicized. Before the Supreme Court decision in 1954, Criswell showed little to no interest in the topic of race relations, but following the ruling, he began to venture down a social and political path that he would later regret. Two years after the *Brown* decision, Criswell delivered a passionate address to the South Carolina state legislature that marked him as a racist in the eyes of the country.¹⁶

On the morning of February 22, 1956 Criswell spoke in Columbia, South Carolina, at the State Evangelism Conference. On this occasion, Criswell's initial silence on the topic of desegregation transformed into a heated tirade when he could no longer suppress his opposition

¹⁵ Criswell is discussed briefly in many books on Baptist history in the twentieth century. He is most frequently cited in reference to fundamentalism or race relations. A few Baptist histories that discuss him are: John W. Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987); Andrew Michael Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Black and White Baptists and Civil Rights* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987); Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001); and David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004).

¹⁶“An Address by Dr. W.A. Criswell, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, To the Joint Assembly,” Wednesday, February 22 1956, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (Cited hereinafter as Address, Criswell); “Criswell Rips Integration,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 23, 1956.

toward the *Brown* decision. After hearing members of the local First Baptist Church refer to desegregation as a subject to avoid, Criswell decided upon an impromptu speech on that very topic. The speech was so well received that a senator from South Carolina, Strom Thurmond, invited Criswell to deliver the same message to a joint assembly of the state legislature. At 12:30 p.m. that afternoon, the booming voice of the Dallas pastor filled the statehouse chamber with a passionate articulation of what he deemed important southern values. He began his speech by expressing his desire to “say some things that are in my soul and in my heart” about the topic of desegregation. In his own words, the ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* was an attempt by the federal government to force upon the South a situation that would have been “a denial of everything we believe in.” For Criswell, the privilege to worship in a segregated church was something that not only the people of the South but also Southern Baptists viewed as an integral part of their heritage.¹⁷

Criswell devoted his harshest criticism to the National Council of Churches and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For their efforts in promoting integration, Criswell referred to them as “two-by scathing, good-for-nothing fellows.” “Let them integrate,” he said, “let them sit up there in their dirty shirts and make all their fine speeches. But they are all a bunch of infidels, dying from the neck up.”¹⁸ It was this divisive language that sparked such a heated debate in the months and years to come. In 1972, when recalling his South Carolina address, Criswell attributed his past anger to the fact that many of the people criticizing the South’s racial situation were from the North. “I just seethed on the inside when those people up there tell us how to solve the racial problem. Why don’t they solve

¹⁷ Address, Criswell.

¹⁸ Ibid.

it in Harlem? Why don't they solve it in South Chicago? Why don't they solve it in Watts?" he asked.¹⁹

Billy Keith wrote in 1973 that Criswell "never was antiblack." Criswell was simply opposed to forced integration on the southern states by northern liberals and genuinely afraid that integration would lead to intermarriage, which he and many others thought unwise.²⁰ It never dawned on Criswell that his support of segregation in any way betrayed a racist attitude. Rather, assuring the audience that he did not hold racist views by saying "I don't hate a colored man" and "I don't look down on a colored man," Criswell felt confident that he was upholding a Christian standard of love for his fellow man. Ultimately, his address to the South Carolina state legislature revealed that he was oblivious to the sufferings of black Americans. When explaining to the assembly the unique harmony of southern race relations, Criswell may have exaggerated just a bit. "We get along fine. We are not having any trouble. We are not having any trouble at all. We are just getting along the best you ever saw in your world. I have no trouble at all, none at all."²¹ Although Criswell may not have been having any trouble as a white Baptist in the heart of the Bible Belt, black Americans were daily experiencing the humiliating effects of discrimination, and their affiliation with the Baptist church did not keep southern white racists from hurling slurs their way.

Upon closer examination of Criswell's speech that day, one can find four central underlying reasons for his opposition to desegregation – a deep pride in the South and the Confederate legacy, a strong devotion to states' rights and democratic principles, a deep-seated belief in the inherent inferiority of African Americans, and finally the fear of miscegenation.

¹⁹ Oral Memoirs, Criswell, 262.

²⁰ Keith, *W.A. Criswell*, 217. Billy Keith was a friend of Criswell and an apologist for his ministry. In his introduction, Keith suggests that you can only know Criswell as you "understand the mind of God" (p. 9).

²¹ Address, Criswell.

Criswell's love for his region was apparent from the outset of his address. "My grandpap and my great-grandpap fought in the Confederate Army," he said, before joking about how General Lee's surrender to General Grant after the battle of Appomattox was all just a big mistake. "I am also glad not only to be a Southern," he continued, "but I am glad to be a Southern Baptist."²²

While pretending that he held malice toward none and believed no group of people to be superior to any other, Criswell proceeded to berate northerners for their lack of *southernness*. "There are people, there are people – they are not our folks," Criswell proclaimed. "They are not our Kind. They are not our stripe. They don't belong to the same world in which we live. I mean that in many categories, lots of categories, spiritual categories, democratic categories, most every category that I am proud to belong to."²³ Indeed, Criswell was proud of the cultural, social, and spiritual history of the South; he was proud of his identity as a southerner. Unfortunately, for most of America's history, the South has been closely identified with white supremacy, an ideology that Criswell did not publicly proclaim but, nonetheless, was a reality that he either consciously or subconsciously defended.

Criswell's sectional mindset was common among white southerners. Numerous historians have debated the underlying reasons for southern distinctiveness. In 1928, one of the earliest renowned historians of the South, Ulrich B. Phillips, published "The Central Theme in Southern History." In this article Phillips attempted to pinpoint that which made the South unique and gave southerners their identity. In short, he concluded that the answer was white supremacy. Phillips argued that amidst the great diversity of individuals and experiences within the southern region, the sole unifying factor in southern history was the "common resolve" of the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

white populace that the South “shall be and remain a white man’s country.”²⁴ While others attempted to explain southern identity in different terms – agrarianism, climate, tradition, and conservatism – white hegemony was a major source of pride for many southerners.²⁵

For a man of Criswell’s nature, a man who had great pride in his identity as a southerner, desegregation threatened to undo the world he knew, to trample upon a significant part of his own, and his fellow southerners’ identity. C. Vann Woodward examined the concept of a southern distinctiveness in “The Search for Southern Identity,” which first appeared in 1960, just four short years after Criswell’s infamous address. In this text, Woodward argued that while it is natural for southerners to desire to maintain a distinct identity, most have not fully understood what it is that makes them distinct. Contrary to the Phillipsian perspective, Woodward concluded that the regional distinctiveness of the South consisted not in white supremacy or segregation, but in its uniquely un-American history. It was the common experience of southerners prior to, during, and following the Civil War that imparted to the South its distinctiveness. While America’s identity has traditionally been found in prosperity, success, and innocence, southern history is fraught with poverty, defeat, and guilt over slavery.²⁶

Furthermore, Woodward warned of the dangers that come with associating an entire region’s identity with an immoral tradition such as segregation. According to Woodward, in the antebellum period, when slavery came under intense scrutiny, the South’s defensive reaction was to identify its whole cause with that very institution. The end result was the destruction of slavery and a disillusioned white southerner populace struggling to find meaning amidst chaos.

²⁴ Ulrich B. Phillips, “The Central Theme in Southern History,” *American Historical Review* 34, no. 1 (October, 1928), 31.

²⁵ For a detailed view of the South as an agrarian society see, Donald Davidson, et. al., *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1930).

²⁶ C. Vann Woodward, “The Search for Southern Identity,” in *The Burden of Southern History*, 3rd edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 15-21.

In the same way, Woodward understood that southerners, like W. A. Criswell, who identified the South with the eroding institution of segregation, would defend it as they would their own heritage, and eventually, the defense of a decaying system could cause the next generation of southerners to lose their appreciation for their regions true heritage.²⁷

In Criswell's address to South Carolina's state legislature, his second argument for the defense of segregation was essentially an appeal to democratic principles, what he called "the right of choice." He articulated his belief that a people's freedom to choose their friends, companions, and who they wished to share their lives with was "one of the glories of a democratic society." In the eyes of Criswell and much of the white South, forced desegregation was nothing less than an example of the erosion of personal liberty. Segregation "enters all the realms of our lives," he thundered, "and there is no escaping from it if a man has the liberty of choice." He continued by outlining the usefulness of segregation in all aspects of individual and communal life. In his eyes, segregation was a natural phenomenon. Just as he tried to "segregate" his daughter from "people that are iniquitous and vile and dirty and low down;" and just as his family was "segregated" in their home from the outside world; and just as the Catholic Sacred Heart Cathedral in downtown Dallas was "segregated" from his own First Baptist Church a few blocks away; Criswell believed black people should be separated from white society. Indeed, "the same thing obtains with regard to our church and our colored people," he explained.²⁸

The fear that desegregation would diminish political liberty was not uncommon among Southern Baptists. Historian Andrew Michael Manis wrote that Baptists have traditionally "rejected any ideology that restricted individual choice, except where blacks were concerned."

²⁷ Ibid., 12.

²⁸ Address, Criswell.

Much like their fear of an atheistic communism and the perceived threat of coercive Catholicism in the 1950s, Southern Baptists increasingly viewed civil-rights as a threat to American democracy.²⁹

At a conference in Austin in 1955, Texas Governor Allen Shivers denounced the Supreme Court decision as one of the most “unwarranted and unjustified invasions of states’ rights in the history of our country.”³⁰ A columnist for the *Dallas Morning News* wrote that “Everyone who argued against segregation was opposing the constitution as it had been construed.” He hoped that new Supreme Court justices might later repeal the decision, because the new policy was “unlikely to make headway against the dead weight of community opposition.”³¹

Circuit court judge Thomas P. Brady of Brookhaven Mississippi, who was an active Baptist layperson, documented his opinion of the *Brown* ruling in a book he published through the Association of Citizen’s Councils in 1955. In this indictment of desegregation, Brady mourned May 17, 1954 as “the date upon which the declaration of socialistic doctrine was officially proclaimed throughout this nation.” Brady viewed the Supreme Court decision as one of the most tragic events in American history.³² Both Judge Brady and Pastor W. A. Criswell believed that desegregation was a usurpation of power by the federal government, which was not granted in the U.S. Constitution, and a hindrance upon the rights of individuals to choose what manner of life they wanted to live.

²⁹ Andrew Michael Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict: Black and White Baptists and Civil Rights, 1947-1957* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 49 (quotation), 58.

³⁰ “States’ Rights Crux of Struggle,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 2, 1955.

³¹ “Desegregation is Integration,” *Dallas Morning News*, April 13, 1955.

³² Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict*, 67.

The unavoidable question that arises from Criswell's appeal to democratic principles and each person's right to choose, is how he and so many white southerners failed to understand that segregation directly prohibited African Americans from having the right to choose and participate in the democratic ideal. Historian Kevin Kruse points out that segregationists tended not to think of themselves in terms of what they opposed. They preferred instead to think in terms of what they were supporting. This effectively blinded many segregationists to the injustices they were trying to perpetuate. They adopted democratic language to better defend segregation and attack civil rights activists as enemies of true democracy. Thus, segregationists like Criswell argued for principles such as the "right" to choose their neighbors, employees, and friends along with the "right" to remain free from the dangerous intrusions of the federal government.³³

For decades, Jim Crow in the South kept black Americans from exercising the freedom to choose where to eat, where to shop, where they would live, where they would go to school, where they could receive medical treatment, where they could find recreation, and how they would make a living. Not surprisingly, black Baptists viewed the desegregation ruling as a validation of the Declaration of Independence and its enunciation of the inherent equality of all men. Rather than perceive desegregation as an injury to American democracy, they viewed it as a necessary step in realizing true democracy in the United States. In this way, both black and white Southern Baptists used appeals to the same "sacred document" in order to support two completely opposite points of view.³⁴

³³ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 9.

³⁴ Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict*, 76-77.

So the question remains, how could Southern Baptists complain that the government was inhibiting their freedom of choice, while being so blind to the simple reality that segregation had been denying an entire group of Americans that very freedom for numerous decades? The answer lies in white southerners' belief in the innate inferiority of the African race. Historian August Meier notes that even southerners most sympathetic towards African Americans believed that distinctive biological differences separated the races. Scholarly opinion in the North, moreover, which had espoused the doctrine of social Darwinism at the turn of the century, only solidified the South's belief in the inferiority of the black race.³⁵ With such views of black Americans, white southerners adapted the paternalistic beliefs popular in the antebellum South to fit the system of segregation adopted throughout the region after Reconstruction. Seeing blacks as perpetual children justified the South's racial hierarchy and protected white supremacy. Historian Guion Johnson argued that paternalism could be broken down into five main classifications – modified equalitarianism, benevolent paternalism, separate but equal, separate but permanently unequal, and permanently unequal under paternal supervision. He defines these categories thus:

1. Modified equalitarianism: The Negro is a retarded race which only needs education and the sympathetic treatment of the white race to rise eventually to the level of the superior race.
2. Benevolent paternalism: The Negro is a retarded race which performs the menial work of the South and, therefore, deserves the most benevolent considerations of the superior white race.
3. Separate but equal: The Negro is an inferior race which can be greatly improved by education but must be separated from the superior white race for the best interest of both.
4. Separate and permanently unequal: The Negro is a permanently inferior race which can be somewhat improved by education. He must be forever segregated but permitted to rise in his own society within the limits of his capacities.
5. Permanently unequal under paternal supervision: The Negro is a permanently inferior race on which it is a waste of money to attempt education but Negroes can fill the need

³⁵ August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 161-162.

for unskilled labor when supervised by whites and should be protected as long as they keep their place.³⁶

Under these parameters, white Southern Baptists could support segregation under the guise of genuine concern for their black neighbors. Criswell's racial views hovered around the "separate but equal" category of paternalism. He believed in the inferiority of African Americans and genuinely thought that segregation was best for both races. Around the time that Criswell spoke in South Carolina, a young woman who had graduated from Southwestern Theological Seminary and subsequently became a youth leader at First Baptist, Dallas petitioned Criswell to allow a black scholar to speak at the church. Denied a platform in the church, the black scholar spoke at the house of a local denominational leader with Criswell in attendance. After the man's lecture, Criswell spoke to him in the doorway before leaving. "Don't you think that its better for Negroes to belong to their own churches? Not in our churches?" He asked. The black scholar silenced Criswell with a witty reply insinuating that God himself had been denied entrance into segregated churches.³⁷

Criswell's speech betrayed his belief in black inferiority and that segregation was mutually beneficial for both races. He believed that African Americans should worship in their own churches because they would not be capable of leading in white churches, particularly his church. Directing his best advice to black Baptists during his South Carolina address, Criswell remarked that blacks should not come to his church, because they would not enjoy it. "Why, men, you couldn't excel here in our group," he said; "you couldn't be a leader in our

³⁶ Guion Griffis Johnson, "Southern Paternalism toward Negroes after Emancipation," *Journal of Southern History* 23, no. 4 (November, 1957), 485-486.

³⁷ Thomas B. Maston, "Oral Memoirs of Thomas B. Maston," interview by Rufus B. Spain, Fort Worth, Texas, June 1, 1971, 132-133, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Maston). Maston was a professor of ethics at Southwestern Seminary in attendance that night and overheard the conversation between Criswell and the black scholar. Though he did not recall his name at the time, Maston remembered that the black scholar later earned a PH D. in Christian ethics and became a professor at Drew University.

congregation. And my dear Mrs. Colored-Wife, you couldn't be a Sunday School teacher or a president of our Women's Union here in our congregation." Criswell then directed all of those "blessed colored friends" of his to continue attending segregated churches where they could "express themselves within their group...in their social stratum... among their kind." African Americans would "like it, and they will prosper in the Lord," he concluded.

Criswell's reasoning did not reflect the thoughts of most black Baptists. While many black Baptists undoubtedly enjoyed fellowshiping with each other, they believed forced segregation kept Christ's church from truly unifying, which was unacceptable and unchristian. Two black ministers from Dallas went on record within days of Criswell's speech denouncing his position. Reverend J.B. Loud of the St. Paul Methodist Church for Negroes found it hard to believe that Criswell said what he did, because he thought that it did not reflect the character of the man he thought he knew. Similarly, Reverend T.H. Wicks of the Griggs Chapel Baptist Church for Negroes opposed Criswell's position and commented that there is no race distinction in the New Testament church. "If we are to be separated here, are we to be separated in heaven?" he asked.³⁸

The final point upon which Criswell's argument against integration hinged was that desegregation would inevitably lead to miscegenation. "Wherever you cross over those social lines, that's going to get into your family," he said, and then "you're going to get into all kinds of trouble." Criswell warned that the fruit of desegregation would divide churches and ruin families. After listing examples of the tragic effects of interracial marriage, Criswell continued by personalizing the situation. "I want my girl to be thrown with a certain kind of boy," he exclaimed, "you know what kind I'd want. I don't want one that gambles and drinks and

³⁸ "Criswell Talk Stirs Comment," *Dallas Morning News*, February 24, 1956.

carouses and cusses. I'm segregating her all I can." These statements portrayed the age-old stereotypes of African Americans by whites; they were brutish beasts, undisciplined in nature, and sexually aggressive.³⁹

During the final decades of the nineteenth century, southern opinion was becoming increasingly hostile towards black Americans, and by the early decades of the twentieth century a host of blatantly racist books such as *The Leopard's Spots*, *The Negro a Beast*, and *The Clansmen* transformed the image of black men as ignorant, docile creatures into "lustful and violent beasts."⁴⁰ Historian Joel Williamson documented this phenomenon in his book *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation*. Williamson describes the various circumstances that resulted in a mass of southerners succumbing to a widespread "rage against the black-beast rapist."⁴¹ This rage manifested itself in the notorious Atlanta Race Riot of 1906. Historian David Godshalk chronicled the series of events leading up to the riot and its terrible aftermath. Local newspapers worked the public into a frenzy by publishing sensationalized accounts of black men assaulting and raping white women, which attacked the "chivalric tradition" of white southern males, who found honor in their ability to protect their women from outside threats.⁴²

White southerners' fears of interracial sexual activity also expressed itself in religious terms. In "The Theology of Massive Resistance: Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,"

³⁹ Address, Criswell.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 78; Thomas Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden* (New York: Doubleday and Page, 1902); Charles Carroll, *The Negro a Beast, or In the Image of God* (Saint Louis, MO: American Book and Bible House, 1900); Thomas Dixon, *The Clansmen: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1905).

⁴¹ Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 115.

⁴² David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 39.

Jane Dailey reveals how Christian anti-integrationists created a worldview that blamed miscegenation for world catastrophes such as the Fall, the Flood, and the Holocaust. One interpretation used by some of the most extreme segregationist ministers replaced the serpent in the biblical account of the temptation of Eve with a “pre-Adamite black man” offering more than just fruit. Using this hermeneutical approach to scripture, southern ministers understood the biblical narrative of the great flood as the consequence for race-mixing, while the Holocaust became the punishment for an adulterous Israel that refused to keep its people untarnished from other cultures. According to Dailey, evidence of these ideas were everywhere in the South during this time – “in legal decisions, in personal correspondence, in sermons, pamphlets, speeches, and newspapers.” It was in fact through sex that “racial segregation in the South moved from being a local social practice to a part of the divine plan for the world.”⁴³

Though many pastors throughout the South made use of it, a biblical defense of segregation was the one argument not implemented by W. A. Criswell in his South Carolina address. Some of his previous sermons and at least one speech implied that Criswell believed that segregation could be explained biblically. He did not go so far as to argue that the Bible supported segregation, but he insinuated that segregation was a result of Noah’s curse on Canaan, as detailed in Genesis 9:20-27. In 1958 Criswell spoke on the curse of Ham while delivering the baccalaureate address to the graduating seniors of W.W. Samuell High School. In this speech he justified segregation as the result of God’s curse on Ham’s supposed descendants, Africans.⁴⁴ In one of Criswell’s most famous sermons, “The Scarlet Thread through the Bible,”

⁴³ Jane Dailey, “The Theology of Massive Resistance: Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,” in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154 (second quotation), 155 (first quotation), 156.

⁴⁴ Curtis W. Freeman, “Never Had I Been So Blind”: W.A. Criswell’s “Change” on Racial Segregation,” *Journal of Southern Religion* X (2007), 10-11.

which he preached in Dallas in 1961, he once again invoked the “Hamite myth” to explain why African Americans were a servant people.⁴⁵ While this was not an argument that Criswell made frequent use of, there was not a want of biblical segregationist propaganda from one of his neighboring pastors, Carey Daniel.

Reverend Carey Daniel pastored the First Baptist Church of West Dallas at the time of the *Brown* ruling. He was raised by Southern Baptist missionaries to China, educated at Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, became president of the White Citizens’ Church Council, and was one of the most obstinate segregationists in Texas. Daniel was never bashful about his racial views and dedicated much of his energy in the civil rights years to defending segregation from a biblical perspective. Much like Criswell, Reverend Daniel denied harboring any hatred for the black race, yet his pejorative descriptions of African Americans betrayed a different reality.⁴⁶

Immediately following the Supreme Court decision of 1954, Daniel delivered a sermon titled, “God the Original Segregationist.” As suggested by the sermon’s title, Pastor Daniel maintained that God’s original plan for the races was permanent separation. “We have no reason to suppose that God did not make known to Noah and his children His divine plan for racial segregation immediately after the flood,” he said, “But they were all slow to obey.” He then indicted the infamous King Nimrod, who built the Tower of Babel, as mankind’s original

⁴⁵ W.A. Criswell, “The Scarlet Thread through the Bible” (sermon, First Baptist Church, Dallas, December 31, 1961) <http://www.wacriswell.com/index.cfm/FuseAction/Search.Transcripts/sermon/1638.cfm> (accessed Feb. 13, 2013).

⁴⁶ Carey Daniel, *God the Original Segregationist and Seven Other Sermons on Segregation*; this hardbound “book” is a compilation of sermons on segregation preached by Carey Daniel after the *Brown* decision. His sermon “God the Original Segregationist” was originally published as a pamphlet and distributed by Bible Book Store, Dallas, May 23, 1954. This pamphlet was advertised in the *Citizens’ Council*, July 1957. The hard bound compilation of his segregation sermons is located in the general collection of the Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University. Carey Daniel boasted that more than a million people read this “book” in the few years that it circulated.

integrationist. According to Carey Daniel, one of Nimrod's two great sins was rebelling against God's plan of racial segregation.⁴⁷ Daniel then spent the remainder of his sermon chronicling the great heroes of the Christian faith – Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Paul, and others – explaining their segregationist teachings.

The first scripture that Daniel used as a basis for his biblical defense of segregation was Acts 17:26, which declares that “God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” Pastor Daniel understood the phrase “boundaries of their dwelling place” to be proof that God Himself desired the different races to be physically separated. Similarly, in another sermon, Daniel used the account of creation in the book of Genesis to argue the same point. He reasoned that if God made each different species after their own kind, man was no exception to the rule. Essentially, his argument rested on the idea that each race was a completely different species of creation. With this fallacious understanding of scripture as his foundation, his ultimate conclusion on the issue of race relations is not surprising: “Segregation is therefore a Divine principle that operates throughout all nature, and mongrelization is a sinful and satanic mockery of it,” he alleged.⁴⁸

In this last statement, Daniel revealed the rotten root of his erroneous theological outlook; the Africans were a mongrel race, which was in no way equal to the Anglo race. He confirmed this belief when he said that while all men are spiritually equal, “physically, mentally, socially, racially, hereditarily, environmentally, and geographically... there are many thousands of differences” between them. Ultimately, for Daniel, racial mixing was sinful, and the end result of interracial marriage was the deterioration of the white race. In yet another of his

⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

sermons on segregation, he quoted a long-time missionary to Africa, David Livingstone, who said that “the devil made the mulatto.”⁴⁹

Even while defending segregation as the only way to save America from deterioration, Carey Daniel maintained that he was only trying to do what was in the best interest of the black populace. He denied any malicious intent on his part. “God knows my heart, and He knows that I am anything but a ‘nigger-hater,’” he confirmed. In fact, “Southern white people... have earned the unquestionable distinction of being the greatest friends and benefactors the darkies have ever had.”⁵⁰

The perspective of Carey Daniel reflects the most extreme of the Baptist segregationists and many were embarrassed to be associated with such views. Historian David L. Chappell wrote that segregationist leaders who wanted to maintain their authority and respectability were careful not to affiliate themselves with “zealots” such as Carey Daniel.⁵¹ Ministers who promoted integration especially disliked the fanatical position of the religious far right. Sickened by the murders of three civil rights activists in Mississippi in 1964, the director of the Committee of Southern Churchmen, Reverend Will Campbell, hinted at the destructive nature of Daniel Carey’s book when he said that he would not sit on a jury and convict the murderers unless church leaders who preached that “God is the original segregationist were on trial, too.”⁵² In this way, Reverend Campbell placed much of the guilt for racial violence on Southern Baptist ministers.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁵¹ David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 110.

⁵² “Baptist Racial Inaction Called Danger to Church,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 13, 1964.

The cases of Carey Daniel and W. A. Criswell, both Texas Baptist pastors in favor of segregation, present an interesting reality. Each man claimed to be free from racist ideology, free from hatred; however, each also clearly spoke of African Americans in a pejorative manner and argued for the separation of the races. The truth of the matter was that the *Brown* ruling presented every man and woman in the country with a decision. For Baptist leaders in particular, their position was a precarious one. The pastors who retreated into a defense of segregation and the cultural norms of the South had to be careful to couch their arguments in a way that made segregation seem beneficial to all people. Other pastors, who were more in step with the changing racial climate of the civil rights era, had to be sure not to offend their individual congregations and lose their jobs. David L. Chappell notes that there were a substantial number of pastors in the South who had been displaced by their congregations for supporting desegregation.⁵³

W. A. Criswell and Carey Daniel were examples of Southern Baptist preachers who could not free themselves from the racist ideologies that shaped their understanding of the South and their own identities. While Criswell later expressed deep regret over his public comments in regard to desegregation, his initial reaction revealed the extent to which he, and many others, had been molded by the culture in which they were raised and also the depth of their loyalty to the social traditions of the South. The landmark ruling by the Supreme Court in 1954 not only created an immediate dilemma over desegregation for southern churches, but it also raised questions as to the church's role in social affairs. In the years that followed the *Brown* decision, a debate emerged in the South over the nature of the Christian gospel and whether or not it was

⁵³ Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 132-133.

the place of a minister to address social problems. This debate had serious implications for race relations in the middle decades of the twentieth century and continues to be relevant today.

CHAPTER 3

“TO SEEK AND SAVE THE LOST”: SEGREGATIONISTS, THE SOCIAL GOSPEL, AND RACE

“If a man preaches the gospel, what he preaches is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried and the third day He was raised for our justification.”¹ This simple statement, made by W. A. Criswell in 1973, presents the predominant Southern Baptist view of the gospel since the creation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. Personal religion and individual salvation dominated southern sermons well into the twentieth century and continue to do so now in the twenty-first. With relatively few exceptions, the understanding of the social responsibilities of Christianity did not infiltrate the South to any significant degree until the creation of the first Christian Life Commissions in the 1950s. With the formation of these commissions in the southern states, along with the creation of the denominational commission in 1953, came the first major push for social Christianity in the South.²

Progressive Texas Baptists founded the first Christian Life Commission in 1950, to “help our people to understand the grave issues of our day in terms of Christian faith and practice.”³

Texas was the first state convention to establish an agency devoted to ethical concerns, but other

¹ W. A. Criswell, “Great Doctrines of the Faith: Atonement for Sins,” sermon, First Baptist Church, Dallas, April 18, 1973, <http://www.wacriswell.com/index.cfm/FuseAction/Search.Transcripts/sermon/3038.cfm> (accessed: January 24, 2013).

² Historians since the 1970s have increasingly highlighted the social concern among southern Protestants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The social issues that southern Protestants embraced at this time, however, were largely relegated to moderate or conservative issues such as support for mission work, orphanages, hospitals, insane asylums, and the temperance movement. Advocacy for more liberal social causes – racial integration, economic justice, and women’s rights – did not garner significant attention until the middle decades of the twentieth century. Some of the important publications documenting the social awareness of southern Protestants before World War II include Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961); John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972); John Patrick McDowell, *Social Gospel in the South: The Woman’s Home Mission Movement and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1886-1939* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

³ *Baptist Standard*, June 15, 1950.

states and the Southern Baptist Convention soon followed and adopted the name chosen in Texas, Christian Life Commission. The CLC in Texas devoted itself to educating the public on the social application of their faith through publications and from pulpits. Its leaders believed that Jesus' gospel spoke to every aspect of life – the social, the economic, and the political – not just to the soul of an individual.⁴ This broad understanding of the gospel was relatively new to Texas Baptists who had been reared in the “Texas Baptist Tradition” of fervent evangelism and rugged individualism.

The “Texas Baptist Tradition,” so dubbed by historian Leon McBeth, has been characterized by zealous evangelism and an emphasis on individualism. McBeth argued that the “spirit of conquest” in the Southwest during the nineteenth century permeated the Baptist religion in Texas, making it even more devoted to the task of evangelism than other areas in the South. According to McBeth, Texas Baptists never doubted they would conquer their region for Christ, saying that they aspired in the Southwest to build “one of the greatest Baptist empires in the world.”⁵ The way to build this Baptist empire was to convert individuals through emotional preaching of salvation from sin. Thus, when the CLC began to emphasize the social teachings of Jesus in the 1950s, and specifically the implications they had on southern race relations, Texas Baptists were ill-prepared to incorporate social equality into their religion.

The most stubborn segregationists, who believed in the divine sanction of segregation, viewed integration as an attack on their religion and the inerrancy of the Bible. They condemned those who favored racial mixing as theological liberals who had revived the social gospel of the early twentieth century. Other segregationists, including those who did not biblically defend the

⁴ Harry Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History* (Dallas: Baptistway Press, 1998), 245.

⁵ Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 36 (quotation), 37.

institution, viewed with suspicion the denominational leaders who espoused racial equality, because they equated their support of liberal social issues with liberal theology. For these Baptists, any theology that was not directly concerned with individual salvation or personal morality was liberal. Still, other Baptists, who might have understood the need for social change, were limited in their support of social action by their firm conviction that improvements in society could only come from the transformation of individual souls. These Baptists consequently kept in line with the evangelistic tradition of their forebears. In any case, a fear of liberalism hindered the response of Texas Baptists to calls for racial equality, and the social gospel became a pejorative term that segregationists used to describe the liberal concerns of the civil rights era – social, racial, and economic justice.

First originating in northern churches during the waning decades of the nineteenth century, the social gospel movement spread rapidly among northern Protestants. Buttressed by new, more liberal theology, the social gospel sought to address the needs of a modern industrial society. The “gilded age,” characterized by rapid industrialization and a vast disparity between rich and poor, created an environment of need that seemed to expand beyond the reach of the traditional Christian gospel aimed exclusively at saving souls. Many Protestants no longer wanted to wait for an afterlife to realize the promise of justice and progress. Liberal Protestants increasingly viewed the traditional gospel as inadequate, unable to address the immediate problems that plagued urban slums. Worried that Christianity would soon be outdated by new science and modern social problems, intellectual northern ministers began the process of reconciling Christian thought with Darwinism and historical criticism of the Bible. The new and relevant product of this endeavor was the evolution of the social gospel.⁶

⁶ C. Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism 1865-1915* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 3-7.

In its developing stages during the late nineteenth century, the social gospel came of age under the patronage of Walter Rauschenbusch at the start of the twentieth century. While not among the initial founders of the social gospel, Rauschenbusch soon became its most visible and notable spokesperson. His theological outlook stemmed from his exposure to Darwinian thought and biblical criticism while at Rochester Theological Seminary in New York and his unnerving experience with the squalor of urban poverty while pastoring a German Baptist church near the Hell's Kitchen, a gang hot-spot in modern-day Manhattan. Immersing himself in study, Rauschenbusch began carefully to develop a theology for social Christianity.⁷

In *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, published in 1907, Rauschenbusch wrote that “the essential purpose of Christianity was to transform human society into the kingdom of God by regenerating all human relations and reconstituting them in accordance with the will of God.”⁸ Rauschenbusch’s emerging theology was a sort of hybrid between traditional Christianity and socialist ideas. While opposed to both capitalism and dogmatic socialism, Rauschenbusch identified himself as a Christian socialist. His goal was to alleviate the ills of modern society by furthering the kingdom of god, which he viewed as a social entity united for the progress of humankind.⁹ As his own understanding of scripture evolved, Rauschenbusch revised long-held conceptions of Jesus, sin, salvation, and the Church in a way that democratized the Christian message. Salvation took on social dimensions characterized by Rauschenbusch as “the voluntary socializing of the soul.” Essentially, the salvation of the social gospel entailed the refocusing of

⁷ Paul Lewis, “Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918): Pioneer of Baptist Social Ethics,” in *Twentieth Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics*, ed. Larry McSwain (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 3-5.

⁸ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), xiii.

⁹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 1917, reprint (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 142.

one's life from self to others. Sanctification, moreover, became the process of serving others through one's labor.¹⁰

Although the social gospel effectively permeated northern churches, it remained largely focused on economic justice. This is because it arose specifically in response to the poverty and squalor of the northern industrial society. Accordingly, all other ethical problems – family life, alcoholism, immigration, and race relations – became secondary issues.¹¹ Rauschenbusch did address racism at times, going so far as to condemn the southern racial system of segregation as the “Kingdom of Evil.” He also wrote that the best justice for a white lynch mob would be for them to be reincarnated as black men and be lynched by their own grandchildren.¹²

Rauschenbusch's attention to racial issues, however, was extremely narrow. Historian Ralph E. Luker attributed Rauschenbusch's limited attention to racial issues to his geographical distance from the heart of America's racial problem.¹³ So while Rauschenbusch occasionally spoke of his abhorrence for racial violence, he consigned his ministry to the most severe problems of his immediate community and region.

In the South, where the “race question” was the central issue, the social gospel never gained the momentum needed to make a lasting impact. Church historian Rufus B. Spain contends that the reason for the social gospel's slow migration south was the vast geographical, economical, and cultural differences between the two regions. He posits that while the North adopted the social gospel largely out of necessity, the South was distinctive in that it had not yet experienced the social ills created by mass industrialization. The sectional mindset of most

¹⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹¹ James Sellers, *The South and Christian Ethics* (New York: Association Press, 1962), 77.

¹² Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 78-79.

¹³ Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 320.

southerners also worked to further insulate the South from Darwinian ideas and higher criticism of the Bible.¹⁴

There is, however, more to the story. When ideas from the social gospel movement did finally begin to trickle south, Southern Baptists were not immediately opposed to it. Thomas B. Maston recalled that the “whole atmosphere of Southern Baptists at that time was rather sympathetic” toward the social gospel.¹⁵ It had become so popular in the North by the end of the first World War and had begun to spread across the rest of the nation to such an extent that Walter Rauschenbusch confidently wrote in 1917 that the social gospel “is a novelty only in backward social or religious communities. The social gospel has become orthodox.”¹⁶ Southern society and the social gospel proved to be incompatible suitors, however, and the honeymoon between the two was short-lived. Possibly falling into Rauschenbusch’s categorization of a “backward” community, Southern Baptists became disenchanted with the message of this new Protestantism when they “identified it with theological liberalism.”¹⁷

The theological liberalism that came to characterize the social gospel movement departed from orthodox Protestantism in its interpretation of the Bible. Traditional orthodoxy stressed individual salvation and other well-articulated doctrines such as the belief in the reality of heaven, a literal hell, and substitutionary atonement. The liberal theologians of the social gospel used biblical criticism to interpret scripture and called the supernatural doctrines of orthodoxy

¹⁴ Rufus B. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1961), vii-xi.

¹⁵ Thomas B. Maston, “Oral memoirs of T. B. Maston,” interview by Rufus B. Spain, Fort Worth, Texas, June 1, 1971, p. 24, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Maston); Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White*, 14. Luker notes that the social gospel first moved south with officers and supporters of the American Home Missionary Association after the Civil War. This was the main vehicle of social Christianity in the South until the formation of the Federal Council of Churches in 1909.

¹⁶ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 2.

¹⁷ Oral Memoirs, Maston, 25.

into question. Orthodox Protestants unwilling to compromise on doctrinal issues became known as fundamentalists and fought back against the liberalizing effects of modernity in what came to be known as the “fundamentalist-modernist” controversy of the early twentieth century. Liberal Protestantism came to stress the social nature of Christian philosophy, while fundamentalists continued to focus on sin and the individual aspects of Christianity.¹⁸

Though the battles between liberal Protestants and fundamentalists over Christian doctrine had been raging in the North for some time, fundamentalism did not solidify in the South until the 1920s. In Texas fundamentalism manifested itself as a “form of religious warfare against the cultural and educational changes associated with modernism.” Of particular concern to fundamentalists in Texas was the infiltration of evolutionary thought into the state’s religious institutions. A battle began for control of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), its colleges, and its seminaries. During the 1920s southern fundamentalism gained momentum from the fiery preaching of a hot-blooded Southern Baptist in Fort Worth.¹⁹

Texas pastor, J. Frank Norris, was “one of the most controversial figures in the history of American Christianity.”²⁰ Under investigation at various times for killing an unarmed man in the office of his church and his possible involvement in the burning of that same church, Norris provided his critics with plenty of ammunition. Hated by liberals and even the mainstream of the Southern Baptist Convention, Norris spearheaded the southern front in the battle against modernism. From his base of operations in Fort Worth, Norris launched an all-out assault on

¹⁸ Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel*, 14-16.

¹⁹ David Stricklin, "FUNDAMENTALISM," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/itf01>), accessed March 05, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

²⁰ Barry Hankins, *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 1.

anything he perceived to be tainted by modernist theology. Norris was most concerned in the postwar years with the growing controversy over evolution.²¹

By the start of the 1920s, Norris had become increasingly involved with northern fundamentalists and began preparing for the onslaught of modernism in the South. As there were relatively few, if any, true theological liberals in the SBC, Norris essentially created his own enemies and accused them of liberalism. He began by aiming his fury at Baylor University, which he accused of teaching evolution, and eventually secured the removal of one professor on that charge. He also attacked Southwester Theological Seminary in Fort Worth for not holding his particular views on eschatology. During the 1920s, the Fort Worth pastor increasingly distanced himself from the leadership of the BGCT and the SBC. In 1922 and 1924, his church was excluded from the Tarrant Baptist Association; in 1924 and again in 1925 it was refused seats at Texas' Baptist state convention; and by the mid-1930s, the SBC excluded Norris's church on the grounds that it was not in "friendly cooperation" with denominational work.²² This was not necessarily due to his theological perspective, which was not in the least uncommon, but rather, it was the way in which he set out mercilessly to divide the Baptist conventions that angered denominational leadership.

Ultimately, the demise of southern fundamentalism was a consequence of unfavorable public perception. The Scopes trial of 1925, which pitted fundamentalists determined to ban the teaching of evolution against the forces of modern thought, played a significant role in its downfall. William Jennings Bryan – the prosecutor in the case and one of the most prominent fundamentalists of his time – happened to be a close friend of J. Frank Norris. Together they unintentionally hurt the very cause they were trying to defend. While narrowly winning the

²¹ Ibid., 7.

²² McBeth, *Texas Baptists*, 167-168.

Scopes case, a hostile media capitalized on the questionable behavior of some of the principal actors who appeared for Bryan and effectively portrayed all fundamentalists as backward hicks driven by primitive superstitions. The following year, in 1926, Norris fueled the flames already biting at the fundamentalist movement by shooting and killing an unarmed man in the office of his Fort Worth church. Though acquitted of the murder charge, his actions further tainted the movement's image. Before long, many southern conservatives left the fundamentalist fold and began a realignment of sorts. The result was a "network of fundamentalist churches, schools, and associations" patiently awaiting a future resurgence.²³

The similarities between the fundamentalists of the 1920s and the segregationists of the civil rights era are striking. The debate over evolution showed just how closely fundamentalists equated Darwinism with the social gospel. A resolution adopted in 1921 by Texas Baptists denounced both "Darwinian evolution" and the "substitution of social service and culture in the place of regeneration and personal evangelism" in the same thought. Similarly, many segregationists in the 1950s and 1960s often attacked moderate Baptist leaders attempting to promote racial reconciliation by damning their message as a manifestation of modernism and the social gospel.²⁴

By the 1940s the social gospel, as existed in the early decades of the century, had largely disappeared. Historian Robert T. Handy argued, however, that the social gospel's major contention – "that Christian churches must recognize and deal responsibly with social and economic question" – was not forgotten. Rather, the ideas of Walter Rauschenbusch and other social gospel leaders went through a reorientation of sorts and "continued in many ways in quite

²³ Hankins, *God's Rascal*, 23, 24 (quotation).

²⁴ *Texas Baptist Annual* (Dallas: BGCT Press, 1921), 35 (Cited hereinafter as *Annual, BGCT*); *Baptist Standard*, December 8, 1921.

different theological settings” where they “left a lasting impression on American church life.”²⁵ The legacy of the social gospel reached as far as the civil rights movement and beyond. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, while not a liberal in the same manner as Walter Rauschenbusch, nonetheless incorporated theologically liberal ideas into the peaceful resistance of the civil rights movement.²⁶

The connection that segregationists made between integration and modernism stemmed from their belief in the inerrancy of the Bible and the Bible’s supposed support of segregation. The two most common scriptures used in defense of segregation were Genesis 9:24, where Noah cursed his grandson Canaan, who supposedly fathered the African race, and Acts 17:26, which declares that God created mankind and “set the boundaries of their dwelling places.”²⁷ In both cases segregationists interpreted these passages to mean that God established the separation of the races according to his divine plan.

David M. Gardner, editor of the *Baptist Standard* from 1944 to 1954 and also a segregationist, argued that if “God created and established the color line in the races... we have no right to try and eradicate it.”²⁸ Another woman wrote to the *Baptist Standard* saying that God himself separated the races and called integration “unthinkable, disgusting, and contrary to His divine plan!”²⁹ Segregationists who understood the separation of the races to be divinely sanctioned by God’s word reasoned that the powers promoting integration were doing nothing

²⁵ Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 15.

²⁶ David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 45, 53.

²⁷ Randy J. Sparks, *Religion in Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 229; Jane Dailey, “Sex Segregation and the Sacred after Brown,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (June, 2004), 123. Dailey argued that segregationists used the passage in Acts more than the passage in Genesis; Acts 17:26 (English Standard Version).

²⁸ “Racial Equality Demanded,” *Baptist Standard*, October 4, 1945.

²⁹ Mrs. Sam Fowler Stowers to the *Baptist Standard*, January 25, 1958.

less that attacking the very truth of scripture much like they believed the modernists had done previously in the century.

If God created the races according to his divine plan, and intended the races to remain distinct, as many segregationists assumed, then in their minds those endorsing integration must have also been evolutionists. Their race-mixing ideals must have come from a denial of creation itself. Church historian Mark Newman sums up this viewpoint well writing that “in segregationists’ minds, integration represented a form of Modernism since it implied that the races should not be regarded as immutable.”³⁰ Simply put, some segregationists linked integration with evolution, evolution with modernism, and modernism with an attack on the Bible. This form of reasoning led some segregationists to believe that integration would ultimately undermine Christian faith altogether.

The inerrancy and authority of scripture has always been of the utmost concern for fundamentalist-minded Baptists. Thus, when the idea of evolution questioned the literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation, fundamentalists could not bring themselves to succumb to the new science. Likewise, for those segregationists who defended racial separation with the Bible, integration was once again challenging their religious beliefs. In many ways, the segregationists of the civil rights era were merely picking up where the fundamentalists of the 1920s left off. Evolution, however, was no longer the central issue threatening to destroy Southern Baptist orthodoxy and heritage. For those continuing in the legacy of the fundamentalists, desegregation now became a key indicator that modernism was rearing its evil head once again. The reasoning that linked integration with evolution and modernism was less

³⁰ Mark Newman, *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 56.

popular, however, than the approach that coupled integration with the liberal theology of the social gospel.

The influence of the social gospel reached deep into Texas even after its decline in the 1940s. Earlier generations of Texas Baptists participated in conservative social programs that were acceptable in southern culture, but after 1950, the members of the Christian Life Commission of Texas became advocates of more liberal social involvement, which specifically included racial equality, desegregation, and economic justice. In the late-1960s, the CLC began to use its influence as a lobbying bloc to realize some of its social goals.³¹ Though progressive Texas Baptists were never in the “mainstream of the social gospel movement,” as John W. Storey asserts, they did learn from the social teachings of certain northern liberal Protestants.³² Acker C. Miller, the first executive secretary of the CLC, said that he had had no understanding of the social aspects of his faith until he went to Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky and studied the works of social gospel leader Walter Rauschenbusch and noted liberal minister Harry Emerson Fosdick. Miller said that reading the sermons of Fosdick “did me a great deal of good... and I found nothing that was so terribly upsetting as far as his statements were concerned.”³³ The influence of the social gospel on Texas Baptist leadership manifested itself in the CLC’s heightened stress on social concerns – greater than Texas Baptists had previously been accustomed to. Thomas B. Maston, an ethicist from Southwestern Theological Seminary

³¹ John W. Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 169. From 1968 to 1980, under the leadership of James Dunn, the CLC lobbied for higher welfare ceilings, more lenient abortion laws, consumer rights, and prison reform.

³² *Ibid.*, 5.

³³ Acker C. Miller, “Oral Memoirs of Acker C. Miller,” interview by Rufus B. Spain, Dallas, Texas, January 3, 1972, p. 24, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Miller).

and one of the founders of the CLC, illuminated the commission's progressive view of the gospel by saying:

My viewpoint is that when you open the Bible you open a book that would apply to all of life (there isn't any limit here). The God we find revealed there is the sovereign God of the universe. That means He's concerned with the totality of life. He's not exclusively concerned with one segment of life, but all of life...³⁴

His statement, "there isn't any limit here," is a critique of the conservative perspective of the gospel, which focused solely on the salvation of the believer from the consequences of his or her own sinful nature. Due to their intense identification of the gospel with spiritual realities and individualism, conservative Baptists found it difficult to accept a biblical message that spoke to social issues, or to the "totality of life," particularly when those issues regarded race relations. What ensued among Southern Baptists during the civil rights era was a confrontation not just over the treatment of African Americans, but also over the very nature of the gospel.

To be sure, not all segregationists were as sincerely devoted to the conservative view of the gospel as others. Some segregationists were genuinely concerned about the integrity of the gospel, while others undoubtedly used arguments about the nature of the gospel as a means to keep ministers silent about desegregation. However sincerely devoted to the traditional gospel segregationists were, they spent their energies on keeping liberal social issues such as integration and economic justice out of the pulpit.

In 1948, David M. Gardner of the *Baptist Standard* called for the abolition of the Social Service Commission of the SBC, a small commission created in 1913 that pushed for conservative social reform. The commission's major focus, however, was liquor control. By the 1940s, Gardner had become worried by the SSC's increasing focus on other social problems. He denounced the commission and wrote that "the modern method of renovating society by

³⁴ Oral Memoirs, Maston, 35.

cleansing slums and creating a better environment, is like treating symptoms while we ignore the deadly disease that eats like a cancer at the heart of the social order. It clashes with the spirit and genius of Christianity, which begins with the regeneration of individuals.”³⁵ Gardner’s hardline position on social activism is highlighted by the fact that the SSC was still a largely conservative and impotent commission at this time. Its “social activism” in the first half of the twentieth century was a mere shadow of what was to come when the SSC morphed into the CLC in 1953. Gardner eventually resigned from his editorial position at the *Baptist Standard* in 1954 after the Supreme Court’s desegregation ruling. He failed to reconcile his antiquated perspectives with the changing times, and the *Baptist Standard* needed a more moderate editor.³⁶

In 1949, the same year that Thomas B. Maston and the Committee of Seven were meeting to lay the foundation for the Christian Life Commission, W. A. Criswell presented his own indictment of the social gospel. He ardently warned his readers about the “false prophets” of the social gospel, denouncing them as “utopian dreamers” and “impractical idealists.” “Our work is that of saving men,” Criswell said, underscoring the need for traditional evangelistic ministry. It was not that Criswell viewed humanitarian efforts as sinful in their own right, rather, he believed that humanitarianism was replacing the individual gospel. Thus, he denounced the so-called “social gospelers,” for occupying themselves with mere “pimples on the skin when the disease of death lies in the blood-stream of the heart.”³⁷

Throughout the rest of the South as well, many Baptist ministers and laypeople alike viewed integration as a result of the social gospel. One Louisiana man wrote to the Home Mission Board expressing opinion that the push for integration was initiated by the dastardly

³⁵ “Crusaders or Meddlers,” *Baptist Standard*, April 22, 1948, p. 4.

³⁶ Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership*, 182.

³⁷ *Baptist Standard*, September 22, 1949.

“proponents of the social gospel.” Not acclimated to hearing a Christian social message, another concerned Baptist wrote a response to an editorial advocating for integration and expressed her fears that the Home Missions Board was “getting off on a social gospel.” “I am afraid the Southern Baptists are getting into modernism,” she expounded.³⁸ Whether real or imagined, Southern Baptist fears of the social gospel and their subsequent coupling of it with racial integration greatly hindered their response to the growing crisis.

In his book *Southern Churches in Crisis*, published in 1967, Samuel S. Hill, Jr., poignantly elucidated the difficulties that southern Protestantism encountered during the civil rights movement. “Having restricted its concerns largely to the conversion of individuals, the cultivation of piety, and institutional expansion,” he explained, southern Protestantism was “painfully unprepared” to deal with real social issues. The real social issues that Hill wrote about were primarily segregation and the economic disparity between the races. As a result of the tradition of largely ignoring liberal social issues, many Southern Baptists found it particularly difficult to let go of long-standing beliefs and prejudices. According to Hill, the change that the South of the 1960s had to undergo was nothing less than “dramatic, basic,” and “overarching.”³⁹

For fundamentalist Baptists the “dramatic” change that Hill spoke of was two-fold. First, and undoubtedly the most tangible change was the actual integration of the races. Second, and more subtle, was a change in the way that they viewed the gospel. Moderate Baptist ministers in Texas advocated for racial equality based on their belief in a broader gospel that was relevant to all aspects of life. Zealous for their faith, and fearful of change, fundamentalist Baptists fought the shift toward applied Christianity tooth and nail. Less than a year after his fiery address to the

³⁸ Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 56.

³⁹ Samuel S. Hill, Jr., *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 5.

South Carolina state legislature denouncing integration, W. A. Criswell once again made headlines for a scathing review of the perilous social gospel.

In 1957, the annual Texas Baptist Evangelistic Conference closed its last session with a speech from the pastor of Dallas's First Baptist Church. In front of nearly 2,500 people at the Will Rogers Auditorium in Fort Worth, Dr. Criswell delivered a dire warning to Texas fundamentalists. Criswell dove right into the topic and immediately identified the social gospel with "religious liberalism and a modernistic movement." He did not stop with a simple denunciation of social Christianity, however. Without reservation, Criswell condemned the social gospel as the very manifestation of evil. The social gospel is the "the dead, dry rot that has destroyed Christendom under the guise of social consciousness," he said to the resounding amens of the crowd. The proliferation of its liberal theology was a "triumph of the kingdom of darkness" that would result in "spiritual decay," he continued. Criswell viewed the growing social emphasis of the gospel message as an outright attack on the Christian faith. In the end, it would result in a "dead church, a dead gospel, a dead denomination, a dead seminary, and a dead preacher." The stakes were high, and the battle was in full swing.⁴⁰

The seriousness with which many devout southern Protestants viewed the promulgation of the social gospel is further clarified by the life of Howard Drummond Smoot. Dan Smoot, as he was called, spent more than ten years working for the FBI before he retired to focus his efforts on fighting communism in the United States. For nearly twenty years he published *The Dan Smoot Report*, which chronicled alleged communist infiltration of American government and society. For much of his life he lived in Tyler, Texas, and in 1958 he published, via a Dallas publishing company, a contemptuous analysis of the Social Gospel. In the mind of Dan Smoot,

⁴⁰ "Dr. Criswell Flays the Social Gospel," *Dallas Morning News*, January 17, 1957.

the social gospel was nothing less than a Communist attempt to infiltrate American churches for the end goal of limiting the importance of God in American life and destroying the capitalist system.⁴¹

With this conspiratorial perspective, the social gospel became a subversive communist weapon, rather than merely a different hermeneutical method of interpreting scripture. Smoot's first argument in his 1958 publication *The Hope of the World*, was that the forces protecting American freedom were Christian forces. He followed this argument with its counter – that atheistic socialism was the main enemy of freedom in the world. Thus, by Smoot's deductive reasoning, the social gospel operated also as the enemy of world freedom.⁴²

The religious realm, moreover, was most susceptible to communist infiltration because “religious people are the most gullible and will accept almost anything if it is couched in religious terminology.” Smoot argued that communists such as Lenin realized this and began to carry out a mission to infiltrate Christianity with socialist dogma. Before long, Christian ministers, wearied by the failures of exhortation and prayer, turned to government, rather than God, to correct the evils of society. “It is at this point that the social gospel becomes socialism,” Smoot reasoned, denouncing social gospelers as “class-conscious political robinhoods.” Smoot supposed that advocates of social Christianity must have forgotten that “the Gospel of Jesus is spiritual,” rather than a message focused on solving the problem of “human relations.” This fundamentalist perspective of the gospel, which placed spiritual limits on the Christian message,

⁴¹ Howard Drummond Smoot, *The Hope of the World* (Dallas: Tom Newman Lithography, 1958), 37-47.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 55.

demonized those moderate leaders who showed too much “zeal for brotherhood and togetherness.”⁴³

That the Christian Life Commission owed its existence to Texas Baptists zealous for true brotherhood, togetherness, and the improvement of human relations is without question. The first executive director of the Texas CLC, Acker C. Miller, noted that one of the central reasons for Baptist opposition to the Social Service Commission in the 1940s was its “emphasis on social relationships.”⁴⁴ Likewise, the CLC of Texas quickly began developing “social ministries” designed to enhance the lives of those in impoverished communities. Some of these ministries included launching medical clinics, literacy programs, counseling centers, and teen shelters.⁴⁵ While moderate Baptists viewed these as natural manifestations of Christian charity, the most fundamentalist-minded Baptists, such as those in line with Dan Smoot’s perspective, saw this outreach as a departure from the true faith. As controversial as one would imagine Smoot’s book was, it received a surprisingly warm review in the *Dallas Morning News*. Assistant editor Dick West referred to it as “a powerful little book,” before proceeding to insert his own commentary on the matter. In the editorial that followed, West said:

You can’t smell the difference between “social gospel” and socialism because hardly any difference exists. When ministers – under the guise of social gospel – favor government housing, government welfare, government security they are furthering socialism which is more and more government until the state runs everything. To call it social gospel is pretense. The greater it becomes entrenched, the weaker capitalism becomes; the weaker capitalism becomes, the weaker the American church – dependent on private capital – becomes.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., 38 (first quotation), 40 (second quotation), 42 (third quotation), 55 (fourth and fifth quotations), 56 (sixth quotation).

⁴⁴ Oral Memoirs, Miller, 119.

⁴⁵ Oral Memoirs, Allen, 176-177.

⁴⁶ “Social Gospel is Socialism,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 7, 1959.

The fear of communism in the middle decades of the twentieth century was no trivial affair. Many segregationists linked integration with the communist agenda. Smoot's view of the social gospel as a communist weapon targeted at "the hope of the world," however, was more unique. It was not uncommon for segregationists to view integration as a communist agenda to weaken the Anglo-Saxon race by means of intermarriage. The fear of racial amalgamation was the foundation of massive resistance to desegregation in the civil rights era. Jane Dailey asserts, "It was through sex that racial segregation in the South moved from being a local social practice to a part of the divine plan for the world. It was thus through sex that segregation assumed, for the believing Christian, cosmological significance." Some segregationists also believed that desegregation was a communist inspired attack on America's founding documents, because they did not believe desegregation was constitutional.⁴⁷ These conspiratorial views of integration provoked the imaginations of southern segregationists and effectually created imaginary enemies for Americans to fear. This reality is poignantly displayed in Dan Smoot's view of the social gospel. Unfortunately, the tragic result of this unfounded fear was that Southern Baptists had one more reason to oppose desegregation.

An article published in the *Dallas Morning News* in 1960 highlights the paranoia of some in regard to the social gospel. Columnist Lynn Landrum denounced church support for the United Nations and Planned Parenthood as manifestations of the social gospel "as it actually works nowadays." He accused the social gospel of infiltrating churches and "handing out contraceptives and refreshments in the House of God... Now maybe this is the way it ought to be," he wrote, "but if it is, the Columnator has been brought up all wrong by his parents."⁴⁸ Interestingly, the CLC began reporting on the need for birth control and abortion reform in the

⁴⁷ Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 57.

⁴⁸ "Is This Social Gospel?," *Dallas Morning News*, March 12, 1960.

late 1960s. The annual reports in these years indicate the commission's support for Planned Parenthood and church involvement in disseminating information on birth control.⁴⁹ Worry at the liberal direction of the SBC is also seen in a letter written by a segregationist minister to W.A. Criswell after his election to the presidency of the SBC in 1968. Pastor James W. Parrish of Winter Park, Florida wrote, "Those of us who saw the social gospel trend beaten back some three decades ago regret the trend which our Convention is now taking. Knowing your sound basic approach in all matters... You are indeed our hope for leading us back to the faith of our fathers."⁵⁰

Another argument that fundamentalist Baptists made against social Christianity was that real social change would only come through changed individuals. David Gardner insisted in an editorial that the only way to transform "composite society" was to transform the souls of individuals. Using the same line of thought as Gardner, pastor W. A. Criswell maintained that there can never be a better world "until better people live in it." If ministers focused on the message of individual salvation, then all else would naturally work itself out. "The root of our trouble is not in the system," he contended, "but in the sin of the soul."⁵¹ In an interview in 1968, Criswell insinuated that the *Brown* decision was a futile effort to racism. "You can't change people by coercion and legislation," he said, "You've got to change a man's heart."⁵² Editor of the Alabama Baptist newspaper, Leon Macon, wrote an article and argued that "the only permanent way to solve inequities in society is by permeating society with regenerated

⁴⁹ *Annual, BGCT*, 1968, p. 105; *Annual, BGCT*, 1969, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Letter from James W. Parrish of Winter Park, Florida to Dr. Criswell (June 18, 1968), quoted in Curtis W. Freeman, "Never Had I Been So Blind: W. A. Criswell's 'Change' on Racial Segregation," *Journal of Southern Religion* X (2007), 5.

⁵¹ *Baptist Standard*, September 22, 1949.

⁵² "Time Mellow Criswell's Views," *Dallas Morning News*, June 1, 1968.

individuals.”⁵³ By this reasoning, once individuals became Christians, the indwelling Holy Spirit would naturally work to transform the morality of the new believer. Thus, by converting individuals through traditional gospel preaching, the morality of society would increase as a result. This line of argument was common among conservative Baptists, but it was not supported by tangible results in Southern Baptist history.

Conversely, those advocating a Christian message that spoke to social issues did so because they did not believe salvation was a cure-all for the ills of society. T. B. Maston clarified, saying “just to get an individual right with the Lord does not automatically mean that he’ll be right in his attitude on all the issues of life.”⁵⁴ This reality was the driving force behind the ethical concerns of Maston and the leaders of the CLC, and the history of the SBC lends much support for this argument as most Southern Baptists participated in the perpetuation of slavery and Jim Crow. White Southern Baptists lived peaceably in the racist culture of the South without recognizing the immorality of their own behavior. Consequently, the goal of progressive Baptists was to minister to those who were already Christians, in order to instruct them how to behave as such.

Historian David L. Chappell argues in his book, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, that black southerners participating in the nonviolent protests of the civil rights era found their inspiration in the prophetic traditions of the Old Testament. Rejecting liberal faith in human reason, these black protestors did not believe in a world that would naturally improve. They consequently undertook the task of trying to “force an unwilling world to abandon sin – in this case, the sin of segregation.” In much the same way, white Baptist leaders in Texas, functioning through the CLC, were acting out the example of the Jewish

⁵³ “Baptists and Social Action,” *Alabama Baptist*, May 1, 1958.

⁵⁴ Oral Memoirs, Maston, 34.

prophets by critiquing the social sins of their people. They viewed their message as a biblical mandate and set forth to transform the hearts of their brethren.⁵⁵

Whereas progressive Baptists purposed to instruct congregants to minister to the whole of an individual, rather than simply their soul, and communities rather than only individuals, fundamentalist Baptists saw something more sinister in their actions. Possibly misinterpreting the motivations and ultimate goals of social Christianity, fundamentalists assumed that speaking to social issues necessitated completely forsaking the individual aspects of the gospel. Although much more liberal minded than the fundamentalists, the leaders of the Texas CLC never envisioned replacing the individual gospel with the social gospel; they simply hoped to expand upon what they viewed as a limited gospel in order to help a society in need. Nonetheless, many fundamentalists insisted that preaching to social issues had no place in the pulpit. In 1972, Acker C. Miller expressed dismay over the fact that many Southern Baptists still felt that social issues were not a part of the gospel at all.⁵⁶ His opinion was well-grounded, as many ministers yet remained silent on important contemporary social issues even in the 1970s. W. A. Criswell substantiated Miller's assertion and succinctly defined the conservative position in regard to social Christianity while preaching a sermon at First Baptist Church, Dallas in 1973:

There are two kinds of Christianity. There is a Christianity of social amelioration. In that kind of Christianity, Jesus is looked upon as a great hero, and martyr, and teacher contributing to the amelioration of society. For example, they say that Socrates was a great teacher, contributing to the welfare of the human race. Confucius was a great teacher, contributing to the needs and necessities of humanity. They say that Aurelius and Justinian were great teachers; they helped the social order. And then they say, 'And Jesus was a great teacher and leader; He also helped ameliorate the hurts and heartaches of humanity.' That's one kind of Christianity: it is a Christianity of the social gospel, of social betterment, of social amelioration.

There is another kind of Christianity: it is a Christianity of redemption. And it goes like this: that the human race fell from its high holy communion and fellowship with God;

⁵⁵ Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 3-4.

⁵⁶ Oral Memoirs, Miller, 91.

and because of sin, judgment fell upon the human race and it faced death and judgment. And God in His mercy and in His pity looked down from heaven and saw the man in his desperate need, and out of love and compassion He sent His own Son to die for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and to be raised for our justification, to be our great Mediator and Savior in heaven.⁵⁷

In this gospel presentation, Criswell drew stark lines between what he viewed as the two kinds of Christianity. While it would appear, however, that Criswell was opposed to social Christianity of any kind, that is not the case. Criswell supported certain social issues that he deemed moral, specifically, alcoholism, the separation of church and state, and drug abuse. In reference to these social issues Criswell said, “I think there’s no limit to the extent that we ought to bring pressure on anything that has a moral issue in it.” He then qualified his statement saying “Now, of course people would differ about what’s a moral issue.”⁵⁸ Criswell clarified that he believed alcohol and drugs were moral issues because they violently affected the “lives of people, their homes, their children, their wives, their jobs... the highways, everything.” Beyond those limited social issues Criswell said, “I don’t think we ought to go.”⁵⁹

Leaders in other Protestant denominations expressed similar thoughts in regard to social activism. Reverend Thomas F. Zimmerman, a leader in the Assemblies of God denomination warned that churches risked sacrificing their spiritual position by taking stands on contemporary social problems. “The basic function of the church is not to be a dispenser of material goods or help,” Zimmerman said, “It is to be the instrument by which the gospel can be related to man’s needs irrespective of color, nationality, creed or social state.”⁶⁰ In a similar vein, the founder of

⁵⁷ W. A. Criswell, “Great Doctrines of the Faith: Atonement for Sins” (sermon, First Baptist Church, Dallas, April 18, 1973) <http://www.wacriswell.com/index.cfm/FuseAction/Search.Transcripts/sermon/3038.cfm> (accessed: January 24, 2013).

⁵⁸ W.A. Criswell, “Oral Memoirs of W.A. Criswell,” interview by Thomas Charlton, March, 1972, p. 272, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁶⁰ “Gospel – Not Social Action – Church Mission, Says Cleric,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 22, 1969.

a Texas-based conservative bloc of the Episcopal Church, Reverend Paul Kratzig, denounced his denomination for its involvement with “secular activities.” Kratzig called on the church to “clothe the naked, feed the poor, administer to the sick and visit those in prison,” but proclaimed that people will never change “until you change them through their hearts and their minds.” The hope for the church, he reasoned, was for a return to Bible teaching rather than the “social mishmash” then being distributed by his denomination.⁶¹

In the 1950s and 1960s, the legacy of the social gospel that manifested itself in the work of the Christian Life Commission caused Texas Baptists to assess the very nature of their faith. To what extent was Jesus’ message individual, and to what extent was it social? Militant, Bible sanctioning segregationists responded to calls for racial equality and integration as they would an attack on their religion. They thought that social issues involving race naturally stemmed from the liberal theology of the social gospel and modernism, because they believed that it subverted God’s divine plan of perpetual segregation. Other Texas Baptists, those less inclined to defend segregation from the Bible, disagreed with forced integration insisting that society could only change in relation to the transformation of individuals as they experienced personal salvation. In this way, the “Texas Baptist Tradition” of fervent evangelism hindered the prerogatives of racially progressive Baptists to bring about equality. These factors concomitantly worked to limit the effectiveness of the CLC’s message of racial equality in the mid-twentieth century.

Ultimately, the fear of social Christianity, or the nefarious social gospel, was a significant reason for the slow acceptance of racial equality among Southern Baptists in the civil rights era. Fundamentalism’s limited view of the gospel created an atmosphere in which ethical considerations were stigmatized. Though Texas Baptists had no dilemma with supporting

⁶¹ “Cleric Blasts ‘Social’ Gospel,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 18, 1971.

individualistic moral reform regarding alcohol and other personal vices, they were less likely to understand how broader racial and economic issues related to their responsibilities as Christians. Consequently, many Southern Baptist ministers greeted the critical issue of race relations with silence, and they justified their silence with the facade of defending the integrity of the gospel. Fear of the social gospel helped put the topic of desegregation on the back-burner in many churches. The result was that much of the Baptist laity failed to understand a central truth of their own scriptures – “that God is no respecter of persons.”⁶² Hence, by refusing to speak from the pulpit about racial issues in the civil rights era, Southern Baptist ministers denied their congregants the opportunity to lead in the racial reconciliation of the country. While segregationist ministers denounced integration, and many other ministers chose to remain silent on racial issues, there is yet more to the story. Other Texas Baptists, particularly those working through the Christian Life Commission, chose the path less traveled and attempted to create greater understanding between the two races. They embraced the need for a Christian social message and used the field of ethics to advocate for racial equality and integration. It would be these men, along with the youth they influenced, who would slowly help to bring about a transformation on the issue of race among the South’s segregationists in the years to come.

⁶² Acts 10:34 (English Standard Version).

CHAPTER 4

“CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PRACTICE”: MODERATE BAPTISTS AND RACE IN TEXAS

The fear of the social gospel that drove conservative Baptist preachers into silence was not present among the racial progressives in Texas during the twentieth century. In fact, the most influential of these leaders cited the social gospel as a vital influence on the evolution of their own racial views. In some circumstances, understanding that the gospel had social implications caused them to encourage racial equality, and in other circumstances, observing the injustice of racial discrimination led them to understand the need for a Christian social message. In either case, a direct correlation between social Christianity and the racial attitudes of Baptists is evident.

The lives of six of the most visible promoters of social Christianity and racial reconciliation in Texas – Joseph Martin Dawson, Thomas Bufford Maston, Acker C. Miller, Foy Dan Valentine, Jimmy Raymond Allen, and James Milton Dunn – reveal the impact of the social gospel on white Southern Baptists. Their view of the gospel as something that should be used to correct social problems directly correlated to their support for desegregation and their subsequent work on behalf of black Texans. Their ministry to Texas Baptists in the 1950s and 1960s initiated a shift in preaching from a message focused primarily on individual salvation to one that incorporated the need for social change.

Although social concern did not become widely popular among Texas Baptists until the 1950s, its emergence in the South dates back to the late nineteenth century. Following the Civil War, Southern Baptists lent increasing support to specific social reform movements. Spearheaded by southern progressives, these reforms focused primarily on problems that were unique to the South – child labor, education, political corruption, agriculture, and temperance.

Fundamentalists and Protestant women primarily championed these efforts, and temperance became perhaps the most prevalent reform issue by the turn of the century. As early as the 1840s, Texas embraced local-option laws that enabled counties to ban alcohol on a limited basis. In 1870, prohibitionist advocates founded the first state-wide dry organization, and between 1881 and 1883, Francis Willard organized the first local chapters of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in Texas. Dedicated to putting liquor dealers out of business and promoting total abstinence from alcohol, the WCTU hoped to reduce crime, poverty, and immorality by making liquor illegal. Prohibition was always controversial and continued to divide Texans until the states ratified the Eighteenth Amendment in 1918.¹

In 1913, Southern Baptists formalized their growing interest in societal reform by creating the Social Service Commission, an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. Created to address social issues important to the South, the commission, at that time, almost solely supported the cause of temperance. This is evident because the following year, in 1914, the SSC merged with a previously established Committee on Temperance created to "promote in every possible way the cause of temperance until there shall not be a licensed saloon in our land, until the whole liquor traffic shall be banished not only from our land, but from every land."² While the commission spoke to other social issues at times, it ultimately failed to create serious discussion about anything other than liquor control. Moreover, the commission was relatively impotent. It had no teeth. It consisted of a chairman and a small group of men who met to prepare annual reports for the Southern Baptist Convention. There was no permanent staff. All

¹ K. Austin Kerr, "PROHIBITION," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/vap01>), accessed February 15, 2013. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

² Kenneth K. Baily, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 40.

members of the committee, including the chairman, were unpaid, and after the SBC adopted the annual reports of the commission, no further steps ensured the implementation of the group's appeals. The importance of the SSC, however, lies in the precedent it set by acknowledging the value of the church's role in correcting social problems.³

In the vanguard of the Southern Baptist push for social action were progressive Baptist leaders in the state of Texas. They saw the need for the church to involve itself with family, economic, and racial issues, while the SBC continued to remain focused primarily on alcohol and prohibition. Their progressive stance on race relations set these particular leaders apart from other socially concerned Baptists, because even the most devout segregationists supported social movements such as temperance.⁴ Two of the most prominent spokesmen for racial reconciliation and social Christianity during the first half of the twentieth century were pastor Joseph M. Dawson of Waco, Texas and ethicist Thomas B. Maston of Southwestern Theological Seminary. Influenced to some extent by liberal theologians from the North, these men devoted their careers to promoting the ethical demands of the Christian gospel.⁵ The young men they influenced – Acker C. Miller, Foy Valentine, Jimmy Raymond Allen, and James Dunn – became key strategists in the struggle for racial equality and social justice in the civil rights era, and they consecutively led the Texas CLC during these years.

³ *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: SBC Press, 1915), 126 (Cited hereinafter as *Annual, SBC*); Acker C. Miller, "Oral Memoir of Acker C. Miller," interview by Rufus B. Spain, Dallas, Texas, January 3, 1972, p. 79, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco Texas; John W. Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 14-15.

⁴ David M. Chalmers, "Ku Klux Klan of the Twentieth Century," in the *Encyclopedia of Southern History* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 697-698. While vehemently racist, the revived KKK of the twentieth century supported temperance and claimed the enforcement of prohibition as one of their goals.

⁵ Both Joseph M. Dawson and Thomas B. Maston studied the works of Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, both prominent northern Social Gospel ministers in the early twentieth century. Harry Emerson Fosdick, a northern leader of liberal Protestantism in the early twentieth century, was of particular influence to long-time Waco Pastor Joseph Dawson.

While each of these men grew to embrace a broad view of the gospel – one that included social improvement along with individual salvation – the early development of their social consciousness centered around race relations. Ubiquitous in the South, racial prejudice acted as one of the main conduits through which these men came to understand the need for a practical Christian message that would instruct people on social issues. Furthermore, they implemented a program of education and involvement that helped transform Baptist thought on the very nature of the gospel itself. By the end of the civil rights era, Texas Baptists had begun to accept the social implications of the gospel, which require believers to act a certain way in and toward society, and to comprehend even the dangerous corporate nature of sin, which is the collective sin of a particular community.⁶

In his book *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity*, John W. Storey argues that racially progressive Baptists had success because of their commitment to conservative theology.⁷ Storey describes the basis of conservative theology as a belief in the “flawed nature of humanity and the tenacity of sin.”⁸ Therefore, to be conservative one must only believe in the need for salvation from sin on a personal level. In contrast, theological liberalism de-emphasizes the centrality of sin in the Christian faith and replaces it with an “ethical optimism and social idealism grounded in the benevolence of God.” Liberal Protestantism was essentially the

⁶ Thomas B. Maston, “Oral memoirs of T. B. Maston,” interview by Rufus B. Spain, Fort Worth, Texas, June 1, 1971, pp. 20-26, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Maston). Maston remarked in this interview that the Social Gospel movement of the 1920s had a significant impact on Southern Baptists later in the century and may have indirectly caused Southern Baptists’ understanding of the very “nature of the gospel itself” to shift.

⁷ Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership*, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

religious arm of the Progressive Movement and, thus, accentuated the ability of humankind and society continually to improve.⁹

Whereas all of the progressive Baptists discussed by Storey indeed believed in the need for personal regeneration, or spiritual rebirth, placing them into the conservative theological camp, it is important to note the broad range of doctrinal beliefs that the umbrella of conservative theology covers. One could plausibly deny the traditional doctrines of hell, special creation, and virgin birth while still not being characterized as having “liberal theology.” Thus, to label all of the progressive Texas Baptists as conservative can be misleading. To be sure, some of the Texas leaders of social Christianity were more doctrinally liberal than others and would have undoubtedly been thought of as liberal by the more conservative factions of Southern Baptists. In 1949, W.A. Criswell wrote that many liberals “call themselves conservative” when in reality they are not.¹⁰ Therefore, it may be more accurate to label these progressive Baptists as moderates. While still holding to the belief in the destructive power of individual sin, the moderates did not always conform to other traditional doctrinal positions such as a literal hell and special creation.¹¹

Ultimately, the moderate champions of social Christianity chose not to focus on differences in theology. Their goal was to use the Bible to show men and women that Christian social concern was biblical and even mandated by scripture. They wanted to help people with the difficulties of Christian living. In essence, their message was one of ethics and morality,

⁹ Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., “Liberal Protestantism” in *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, Vol. 3, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1086, 1087 (quotation), 1089.

¹⁰ *Baptist Standard*, September 22, 1949.

¹¹ Joseph M. Dawson for example, along with other moderates, was a theistic evolutionist and did not adhere to the doctrine of a literal hell. Therefore, to some extent, he could be labeled a liberal due to his modern views of natural science and his acceptance of historical criticism of the Bible. With John W. Storey’s definition of conservative theology as a general acceptance of human depravity only, however, Dawson fits more comfortably in the conservative camp. The problem is one of semantics, which can make the categorization of theological positions more difficult.

which directly spoke to southern racism and segregation. Pastor Joseph Dawson, along with Dr. T. B. Maston and his protégés, initially faced a difficult task, but they were able to cover much ground as social Christianity gained momentum throughout the twentieth century.

Joseph M. Dawson was one of the earliest progressive Baptists of influence in the twentieth century. Born in Waxahachie, Texas, in 1879, Dawson was a pastor, social-activist, and a writer. He pastored First Baptist Church, Waco from 1915 to 1946 and served on numerous denominational boards before his death on July 6, 1973.¹² Two years before he died, Dawson looked back upon his efforts fighting for social justice with pleasure. Even when his behavior “brought censure from fellow Baptists,” he held firm to his convictions.¹³

Influenced at an early age by northern ministers of the social gospel, who were prominent in the 1920s, Dawson was committed to instructing others on the social application of the Christian message. What set Dawson apart from other Southern Baptist ministers interested in societal affairs, however, was his willingness publicly to critique Southern Baptists’ dealings with a broad range of issues. Indeed, his social message went far beyond the topic of temperance to include race, child labor, the exploitation of immigrants, and women’s rights.¹⁴

In 1916, just one brief year after becoming the pastor of Waco’s First Baptist Church, Dawson was able to view first hand just how volatile the southern racial situation had become. On May 15th of that year, more than 10,000 white spectators gathered outside the city hall to witness what would later be known as the “Waco horror.” Jesse Washington, a young black man from the small town of Robinson, Texas had been accused of raping and murdering his

¹² Joseph M. Dawson, *A Thousand Months to Remember: An Autobiography* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1964), ix-xi.

¹³ Joseph M. Dawson, “Oral memoirs of Joseph M. Dawson,” interview by Rufus B. Spain, Corsicana, Texas, May 18, 1971, p. 120, The Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Dawson).

¹⁴ Dawson, *A Thousand Months to Remember*, 5.

employer's wife. Following a trial that lasted only one hour, an irate mob violently took the seventeen-year-old culprit from the Waco courthouse in order to administer a southern brand of justice.¹⁵

The crowd immediately stripped Washington of his clothes and proceeded to beat and stab the young man on the way from the courthouse to the site previously prepared for the lynching. Before Washington arrived, other men had prepared wood for a bonfire at the base of a tree outside city hall. The leaders of the mob then placed Washington on the wood securing him firmly with a chain to the tree and proceeded to cut off his fingers, toes, ears, and genitals. Next, they doused the victim with oil and set the wood on fire. The crowd slowly roasted Washington alive by repeatedly raising and lowering the young man's tortured body into the bonfire. Thousands of men and women along with children who were out of school for the afternoon stayed to watch the spectacle. The fire died down after two hours allowing spectators from the crowd to take souvenirs; some got a toe or a finger, others a link of the chain or a piece of wood, one man even collected a piece of the victim's genitals to take home.¹⁶

The detestable butchery of that fateful day occurred in full view of the Waco pastor Joseph Dawson. Standing just a "few feet from where the Negro was burned," Dawson said that he was helpless to intervene. "Five thousand monsters participated, and who was I, a lone individual, to do anything about it," he remarked. The following week at a pastors' association, Dawson introduced a resolution that repudiated the incident and was subsequently published across the nation.¹⁷ According to Dawson, he also preached at least one full sermon on the topic

¹⁵ Patricia Bernstein, *The First Waco Horror : The Lynching of Jesse Washington and the Rise of the NAACP* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005, 2006), 106-107.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108-113.

¹⁷ Oral Memoirs, Dawson, 54-55.

of lynching, which must have been a considerable task as “nearly all” in his church were members of the Klan.¹⁸

What saddened the Waco minister most following the incident was the silence of his Christian peers in the aftermath of the lynching. While other ministers privately supported Dawson’s public denunciation of the “Waco horror,” remarkably few of them personally spoke out about the incident. Dawson expressed his disappointment in the silence of a particular friend of his and blamed the man’s silence on his “intense Southern rearing.”¹⁹

The tragedy that Dawson witnessed that day was indelibly imprinted upon his mind, and undoubtedly increased his fervor for social Christianity. Before becoming the pastor of First Baptist Waco, Dawson remarked that he had little interaction with African Americans. As a child he “saw few Negroes” and “knew little about racial attitudes.” That all changed for him during his cruel initiation into the racial realities of the South. But “when I became pastor of the First Baptist Church, Waco,” he said, “There, I witnessed the burning of an innocent Negro by a furious mob.” His disgust toward the intolerance among Baptists persisted throughout his years. Later on in life, Dawson would take on the cause of equal educational opportunities for minorities, commenting that “Baptists of the South deliberately kept the Negroes illiterate!”²⁰

While Joseph M. Dawson set an example for progressive Baptists who would emerge later in the twentieth century, the most notable and influential of the early progressive Baptists in Texas was Thomas B. Maston. The reason for the breadth of his influence stems directly from his long tenure as a professor at Southwestern Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. There he was able to mold the minds of the young men who later became the propagators of

¹⁸ Dawson, *A Thousand Months to Remember*, 165.

¹⁹ Oral Memoirs, Dawson, 54.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65 (first and second quotations), 66 (third quotation).

social Christianity in the civil rights era and helped other Baptists deal with the dilemma of desegregation.

Having been concerned with Christian ethics from an early age, Maston emerged as a well-educated Baptist who was devoted to the social application of his faith. After graduating as a ministerial student from Carson-Newman College in Tennessee, Maston received both his masters and doctorate degrees in religious education from Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, where he would teach for more than fifty years. Immediately following his doctoral work, Dr. Maston began working on a second masters degree in sociology at Texas Christian University, also in Fort Worth. With two masters degrees, however, and a Doctorate of Religious Education, the bright young professor still desired to expand his horizons with greater knowledge. One summer spent studying sociology with Howard Odum at the University of North Carolina and another spent at the University of Chicago led Maston in a new direction. In 1933, at the nadir of the Great Depression, he began coursework for his PH. D. in Christian Ethics at Yale University. He graduated in 1938, with two masters degrees and two doctorates from three universities.²¹

Originally unsure about whether to become a preacher or a teacher, Maston decided on the latter because he thought it would give him more influence in the lives of other people.²² His early decision proved worthwhile as his long tenure at Southwestern influenced many who became Baptist leaders. Foy Valentine, a student of Maston's who later became an important denominational leader, described the impact of the professor best in an address delivered in 2002:

²¹ Oral Memoirs, Maston, 23, 26-28.

²² Ibid., 20.

T. B. Maston rose like Venus on a summer evening to champion the cause of Christian ethics for some forty years of profoundly important ethics leadership that influenced literally millions. Spawning an impressive array of students, men and women whom God had called and whom he had encouraged and inspired and nurtured and enabled, truly impressive strides were made. Second and third generations of competent and committed Christian ethicists have been in turn aided and abetted by the Maston heritage.²³

During his life, Maston was an indefatigable advocate for equality. While encouraging social action in all realms of life, the renowned ethicist placed particular emphasis on the need for racial reconciliation beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1927, long before most Baptists expressed social concern for minorities, Maston published his first pamphlet on the issue entitled “Racial Revelations.” This pamphlet was followed by a series of lessons on race published throughout the 1930s under the title of “The Christian Attitude Toward Other Races.” Maston also designed and taught a course called “Social Problems in the South” in 1938 that focused largely on racial issues.²⁴ During World War II, he taught another class on race relations entitled “The Church and the Race Problem.” For this class, he took students on trips through black neighborhoods in Fort Worth, where they saw first-hand the disparities between black and white neighborhoods and public schools.²⁵ In an article written in 1946, Maston went on record encouraging Baptists to work closely with such organizations as the Southern Regional Council, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Urban League. His goal was to reduce racial prejudice, and while not very active in

²³ Address by Foy Dan Valentine delivered at the Texas Baptists Committee Meeting on June 28, 2002, in Ft. Worth, Texas, published online, Foy Dan Valentine, “Ethics East of Eden,” *Journal of Christian Ethics* 4 (December 2010), 10, <http://christianethicstoday.com/cetart/index.cfm?fuseaction=Articles.main&ArtID=501> (accessed February 13, 2013).

²⁴ W.T. Moore, *His Heart is Black* (Atlanta, GA: Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1978), 51.

²⁵ Jase Jones, “To Race Relations,” in *An Approach to Christian Ethics: The Life, Contributions, and Thought of T.B. Maston*, ed. William Pinson (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 62-63.

these organizations, he was a member of all three. In fact, Maston served on the Fort Worth branch of the Urban league for several years.²⁶

Maston was far ahead of his peers in the way of racial attitudes. He did not merely espouse a paternalistic kindness toward African Americans like many others who thought themselves racially aware. Maston went so far as to consent to interracial marriage in a book he published in 1958. He realized that this was the heart of the issue for many Baptists who were fearful of desegregation. In his writing, Maston not only encouraged integration, but he also gave his approval for blacks and whites to intermarry if they so wished.²⁷ In spite of his progressivism, Maston was careful in the way he approached his fellow Baptists. While he did encourage compliance with court-ordered desegregation, he did not think the courts should impose it too rapidly in areas with large black populations, where it might incur the hostility of white segregationists.²⁸

Maston was also directly involved in denominational affairs. In 1949 and 1950, he was a central participant in the formation of the Christian Life Commission of Texas, organized with a direct emphasis placed on Christian living. At the Baptist General Convention of Texas, held in El Paso in 1949, Maston was one of seven men appointed to investigate how best to incorporate a social emphasis in the matter of Baptist faith. The executive secretary of the convention announced that a “committee of seven” was to “initiate some plan by which we can help our people to understand the grave issues of our day in terms of Christian faith and practice.” The

²⁶ “The Christian Strategy in Regard to Race Relations,” Aug. 26, 1946, T. B. Maston Collection, Miscellaneous Articles.

²⁷ T. B. Maston, *Segregation and Desegregation: A Christian Approach* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 87.

²⁸ T. B. Maston, *Integration* (Nashville, 1956), 56.

Committee of Seven then set out to initiate such a plan, and the following year disclosed its idea for the creation of a commission dedicated to the Christian life.²⁹

Formally created at the 1950 convention in Fort Worth, Texas, the Texas Christian Life Commission was the first of its kind in the southern states. One member of the original committee of seven, Acker C. Miller, then became its executive secretary. Miller was the logical choice due to his previous involvement in Baptist social ministries. During World War II, while Miller was participating in a ministry for soldiers, the BGCT formed a committee for interracial cooperation, which sought to “develop a better fellowship among the Negro people.” In 1947, the interracial cooperation expanded and morphed into the Ministry for Minorities, headed by Acker C. Miller.³⁰

What was taking place in the years leading up to the creation of the CLC was a growing desire among certain progressive Baptists, such as Maston and Miller, for the denomination to be more involved in addressing all of the relevant social issues of the day. Believers needed to take their Christianity home with them after Sunday services and incorporate Christ’s teaching into their daily lives. This first meant understanding the full implication of the gospel and then engaging the community in an attempt to heal the wounds of society and meet the needs of those who were suffering.

The fact that the Texas Christian Life Commission grew out of the BGCT’s Ministry for Minorities shows the extent to which racial concerns sparked the growth of social Christianity in

²⁹ Oral Memoirs, Dawson, 120; *Texas Baptist Annual* (Dallas: BGCT Press, 1950), 65-66 (Cited hereinafter as *Annual, BGCT*). The proceedings of the BGCT refer to the Maston committee simply as the “committee of seven.” While remembering the committee later in life, Joseph Dawson also referred to it as the “committee of seven.” It appears that the committee was given no formal name. It consisted of seven men who met three times between the 1949 and 1950 BGCT conventions to create a plan for the establishment of a new commission on Christian ethics. The title of Christian Life Commission was not officially adopted until the convention in 1950.

³⁰ *Annual, BGCT*, 1943, pp. 67-70; *Annual, BGCT*, 1947, pp. 197-201; Acker C. Miller, “Oral Memoirs of Acker C. Miller,” interview by Rufus B. Spain, Dallas, Texas, January 3, 1972, pp. 63-64, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Miller).

the 1950s and 1960s. While the commission addressed topics including gambling, crime and punishment, mental health, pollution, and war and peace, the early years of the CLC hovered closely around the increasingly volatile racial environment of the twentieth century's middle decades.³¹

After two productive years of service as the executive secretary of the CLC in Texas, Acker C. Miller left for Nashville, Tennessee, the base of operations for the Southern Baptist Convention. Following the precedent set in Texas, the SBC decided to create its own Christian Life Commission and summoned Miller to lead the way. The creation of the SBC's commission on Christian life was essentially a reorganization of its longstanding Social Service Commission. The reorganized commission, however, would now address a wider variety of topics and adopt a new name, largely because the South had come to identify the word "social" with the theological liberalism of the North that stressed social redemption over individual salvation from sin.³²

Following Miller's departure to the SBC, the first of three students influenced by Dr. Maston consecutively led the Christian Life Commission of Texas. For the next seven years, from 1953 to 1960, Foy Dan Valentine broadcast the message of social Christianity in Texas, as he later would throughout the nation.³³ Taking a sincere interest in racial issues while studying under Maston at Southwestern Seminary, Valentine wrote his dissertation on Southern Baptists

³¹ David Stricklin, "An Interpretive History of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1950-1977" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1981), 72-73; Oral Memoirs, Dawson, 121.

³² John W. Storey, "Texas Baptist Leadership, the Social Gospel, and Race, 1954-1968," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 83 (July, 1979), 39-40.

³³ Oral Memoirs, Dawson, 120.

and race relations in the early twentieth century and was eager to help his fellow churchmen to “see the light” in regard to race.³⁴

Valentine’s own understanding of the social aspects of the gospel originated in his youth. When referring to the social gospel, Valentine remarked that he understood it as “Christian social concern in action,” and his “understanding of that was pretty clear” from the time when he was converted. Valentine’s understanding of the social gospel shaped his entire Christian life. He said that social concern was what he understood the gospel to be in the beginning and he meant to “die with that understanding of what the gospel of God in Jesus Christ is all about.” As his Christian social concern applied to race relations, Valentine was influenced significantly by a summer that he spent at Koinonia Farm in Georgia.³⁵

Founded in 1942 by a progressive Southern Baptist, Clarence Jordan, Koinonia Farm was an integrated farm community established in Americus, Georgia. Devoutly dedicated to the equality of humankind, Jordan, his partner Martin England, and their wives intended Koinonia Farm to be a visible example of the application of Christian principles. A sort of “City on a Hill,” the community housed many black and white youths who came from different areas of the country to spend their summers in an integrated Christian fellowship. As a “demonstration plot for the Kingdom of God,” the farm won the praise of such civil rights leaders as Martin Luther King Jr., who referred to it as a “beloved community.”³⁶ While Koinonia Farm set an example for racial interaction and affected the lives of many individuals, its enduring legacy rests in the

³⁴ Foy Dan Valentine, “A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947” (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1949).

³⁵ Foy Dan Valentine, “Oral memoir of Foy Dan Valentine,” interview by Thomas L. Charlton, Nashville, Tennessee, April 22, 1975, p. 57, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Valentine).

³⁶ Tracy Elaine K’Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 77.

formation of one of Koinonia's auspices, Habitat for Humanity, which grew out of Jordan's original vision of self-sufficiency and economic justice.³⁷

Under the leadership of Valentine, the CLC of Texas continued what it began under Acker C. Miller and proceeded to instruct Texas Baptists on how to handle modern social issues. The central vehicle by which Valentine and his staff at the CLC reached the public was literature. The first group of publications authored by the CLC was a pamphlet series called "The Bible Speaks." The first three of these – "The Bible Speaks on Race," "The Bible Speaks on Economic Life," and "The Bible Speaks on Marriage" – were published during Miller's tenure as executive secretary, while the remainder of the series came out in the following years. The pamphlet "The Bible Speaks on Race" focused on educating Christians about race from a biblical perspective. While not openly promoting integration, it did however teach the equality of all races.³⁸

During the early years of Texas' Christian Life Commission, the goals of its leadership were primarily related to education, specifically, educating churchmen on the social aspects of the gospel. When interviewed in 1972, Acker C. Miller remarked that educating the public on the need for getting involved in social affairs was necessary "because any number of our people even yet feel that social issues are not a part of the gospel at all, not a part of Christianity."³⁹ Thus, the unwavering objective during these formative years was to convince Baptists of their social responsibilities as Christians.

The 1954 Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, heightened the need for a mediating voice among Southern Baptists in the already heated race debate. Formed just four

³⁷ David Strickland, "Koinonia Farm: Epicenter for Social Change," in *Twentieth Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics*, ed. Larry L. McSwain (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 175.

³⁸ Oral Memoirs, Miller, 90.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

years earlier, the CLC was in a perfect position to act as a voice of reason for white Baptists unsure how to respond to such a landmark ruling. Without delay, Foy Valentine and his staff stepped in to the fray and called for a tranquil transition in regard to desegregation. The CLC report in the fall of 1954 exhorted Texas Baptists thus:

In the realm of race relations the world is watching what Baptists in the South are doing and are about to do. And what is far more important, God is watching. We can not afford, under God, to sit around and whine about what the Supreme Court has done and wait timorously and fearfully to see what they are going to do. Our God is no respecter of persons and He has made it abundantly clear from Peter's day to our own day that He does not want His people to be respectors of persons. In a peculiar way the Christian principles of justice and love ought to be exercised not just with general reference to the Negro people in our midst and with particular reference to the issue of segregation in our public schools lest we add to the problem instead of becoming a part of its solution. "The hour cometh and now is" for Texas Baptists not only to believe right but to do right with regard to race relations.⁴⁰

Without directly stating it, Valentine appeared to be suggesting that Baptists needed to peaceably accept integration in order to become a part of the solution to the South's racial problems. In doing this, Valentine took a conservative approach to promoting a progressive solution and, thus, remained a bit unclear on what exactly the CLC was actually advocating. A staff writer for the *Dallas Morning News* wrote an editorial on the racial resolution commenting that it "failed to specify whether continued segregation of Negroes or desegregation was the answer."⁴¹ The ambiguous wording of some of the CLC's racial publications reveals the precarious situation they were in. If the CLC were too conservative, then it would have no prophetic voice, but if it appeared too liberal, then it might lose public support and cease to exist as a commission. Nevertheless, under Valentine's direction, the CLC gained a reputation for its involvement with racial issues. James Dunn, executive secretary of the CLC from 1967 to 1979, said that Valentine focused on race relations to such an extent that many others began to think of

⁴⁰ *Annual, BGCT*, 1954, p. 170.

⁴¹ "Texas Baptists Vote to Work for Solution to Race Problem," *Dallas Morning News*, October 21, 1954.

the CLC as being “concerned primarily with the race question” during his tenure as executive secretary.⁴²

While Valentine was careful during his career not to alienate the largely conservative block of white Southern Baptists with militant calls for integration, he was more liberal than his methods sometimes revealed. His summer spent on the integrated Koinonia Farm and his study under Thomas B. Maston had tremendous influence upon his racial views. In his research on Southern liberals, historian Morton Sosna discovered that a “pervasive acceptance of segregation had come to characterize southern liberals” during the Jim Crow era. “While patronizing,” he wrote, southern liberals “departed from traditional paternalism in that they believed blacks should become self-reliant citizens.”⁴³ Valentine’s liberalism surpassed that of Sosna’s “southern liberals” in that he did believe in the necessity of integration. The CLC’s racial message appeared more conservative at times only because of the methodology it implemented to sway public opinion.

Thomas B. Maston specifically addressed the cautious manner in which the CLC approached racial issues in the 1950s and 1960. When asked about a minister’s role in improving race relations, Maston suggested that the best way to bring about change was to “start where people are and gradually move in the direction in which they ought to go.”⁴⁴ Through literature, newspapers, and the pulpit, this is precisely what the CLC did during its formative years. That is why the commission began with consensus issues when it first started to lobby for social change under Jimmy Allen and James Dunn. Acker C. Miller further clarified the

⁴² James Milton Dunn, “Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn,” interview by H. Wayne Pipkin, Dallas, Texas, June 13, 1974, p. 46, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Dunn).

⁴³ Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 18-19.

⁴⁴ Oral Memoirs, Maston, 93.

conservative methodology of the CLC during its early years. By promoting consensus issues such as family life, the commission was able to make friends that would not desert them when they embraced hot issues such as racism. “You don’t fight people who are trying to help you with your family life,” he recalled, so “when we’d get to a hot issue, we had enough relationships because these guys liked what we were doing on this thing, that it made it difficult on another thing.”⁴⁵ In this way, by their conservative progressivism, the CLC tried to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of other, less understanding Baptists.

Valentine’s racial work at the Texas CLC continued through the 1950s until the SBC invited him to be Acker C. Miller’s successor as the executive secretary of the Christian Life Commission of the SBC. In 1960, when Foy Valentine accepted the position, a second student of T. B. Maston stepped in to the leadership role of the Texas commission. Jimmy Raymond Allen was born in Hope, Arkansas in 1927. At the age of five his family moved to South Dallas, where he would spend the remainder of his formative years. As with many other Southern Baptists, his ethical evolution was a gradual process spurred on initially by a growing racial consciousness. Later, Allen recalled that there was a “great degree of racism and race hatred” in his background. He described his South Dallas neighborhood as being “pretty tough” and remembered fighting other black boys “often.” There was “that kind of hostility” between the races, he said.⁴⁶

Racist thought shaped Allen’s understanding of African Americans from an early age. As a boy he remembered reading a book that glorified the Ku Klux Klan and developing a silent resentment towards black people. His own grandmother did not think that black people even had

⁴⁵ Oral Memoirs, Miller, 117.

⁴⁶ “Jimmy Raymond Allen, “Oral memoirs of Jimmy Raymond Allen,” interview by Thomas L. Charlton , Fort Worth, Texas, September 15, 1972, pp. 1, 18, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Allen).

souls. It was not until his sixteenth year that Allen had to think seriously about reconciling his prejudice with Christian principles. That year he reached the highest rank in the Royal Ambassadors, a youth organization of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Women's Missionary Union sent him as Ambassador-in-Chief of Dallas to the Young Men's Mission Conference in Ridgecrest, North Carolina. Once there, the young Allen personally encountered Clarence Jordan, the founder of Koinonia Farm, who previously helped shape Foy Valentine's view of the racial situation. Upon hearing Jordan teach on the need to desegregate, Allen remembered publically arguing with the man. "I was in his class every day," he said. "I took a totally segregationist stance," and "We argued the whole time." Initially angered and "shook up" by the "demands of the Christian ethic," Allen could not dismiss the logic of the argument. Similar to Valentine's experience, meeting Clarence Jordan was a significant turning point in the young man's life.⁴⁷

While Allen's opinions on racial issues began to change in his young adulthood, he was not yet particularly interested in pursuing Christian ethics until his practical experience convinced him of its importance. While finishing up his masters degree at Southwestern Seminary, Allen took a pastorate at a church in Van Alstyne, Texas, a place where racial prejudice ran deep. When he arrived, he found himself "confronted with the necessity of helping people with practical decisions." Allen specifically recalled getting into hot water when he and a fellow pastor organized an integrated service. "Our real purpose was to pull the people together across the racial lines", he said. Not all in his congregation were on board with the idea,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 33-34; for a more thorough account of Allen's life and specifically his experience at Ridgecrest, see Larry McSwain, *Loving beyond Your Theology: The Life and Ministry of Jimmy Raymond Allen* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 50-52.

however. Two of the deacons were “very upset” over the matter, and it was a “tense, very tight” situation.⁴⁸

Allen’s encounters with prejudice in the church continued in similar fashion at different locations. Soon, at another pastorate in Wills Point, a small, East Texas town, he faced “even deeper racial prejudice.” It was just before his move to Wills Point that he decided to pursue a doctorate in ethics under Thomas B. Maston, and his new pastorate caused him to believe that he had made the right decision. His experience with prejudice there reinforced in him a “realization that this was really where the vacuum was in Southern Baptist life and that something had to be done about it.”⁴⁹ It was during his time at Wills Point that he faced the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, which created discussion on the matter within his church. In this situation, Allen learned a valuable lesson:

I discovered again that if you are in a very highly prejudiced culture but you have a real love for your folks and they have a confidence in you, that they will either listen to you and believe you or they will respect you. The fringe will gripe, but the basic mainstream of the church went well.⁵⁰

Finally, the up-and-coming pastor transitioned into an urban church where the “race thing was really tight because this is where the competition with the blacks economically is felt, the laboring, working, hard-hat types.” At Cockrell Hill Baptist Church, located in Southwest Dallas, Allen felt as if he gained exposure to the various nuances of urban ministry that would help to qualify him for his later work at the Christian Life Commission. His “evolving awareness of ethical needs,” coupled with his “exposure in the toughest places for communicating that,” prepared him for his future work and gave him the necessary “empathy toward the pastor and his particular set of problems.” From a hot-headed racist to a racially

⁴⁸ Oral Memoirs, Allen, 92 (first quotation), 93 (second and third quotations).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 95-96.

aware, ethics-preaching minister, Jimmy Allen continued to nurture his developing social conscience during the turbulent 1960s.⁵¹

After taking the reins of the CLC from Valentine in 1960, Jimmy Allen began to stabilize the commission and increase its influence in Texas. Specifically, Allen decided that the time was right to throw some weight behind political legislation in order to have a “moral impact.” While his experiences regarding race relations initially spurred his social action, Allen’s political involvement during his brief tenure as executive secretary of the Texas CLC focused largely on consensus issues among Texas Baptists – liquor, gambling, and the separation of church and state.⁵² Allen’s political involvement at this time showed the limits of Baptist racial progress. He could not politically support integration, because he did not have the widespread support of Texas Baptists. Therefore, he stuck to the traditional issues that white Southern Baptists supported. This did not mean, however, that Allen gave up on issues of social and economic justice. Allen hoped that the CLC’s work in consensus issues would open the door for more radical change later.

On March 12, 1962, Jimmy Allen and the CLC opened a two-day race relations workshop in Fort Worth, the first of its kind in Texas. Top Texas Baptist pastors and lay leaders from all over the state attended and discussed how best to prepare their congregations for integration. Here, for one of the first times, Baptist leaders seriously discussed the need to integrate not only communities, but also churches. The main speaker, Dr. Frank Stagg, professor of New Testament and Greek at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, denounced segregation as evil and said that it was a “wicked act of falsification to put the Bible on the side of racial segregation and discrimination.” Dr. Foy Valentine, who was then the executive

⁵¹ Ibid., 97 (first quotation), 98 (second, third, and fourth quotation).

⁵² Ibid., 141.

secretary of the SBC, spoke at the conference and cited numerous convention colleges and churches that had already integrated. Hoping that America's racial animosities would soon end, he declared that the race problem "has been an albatross about the neck of the nation for 350 years." Valentine seemed to be advocating church integration, while suggesting that there would be no quick cure for the nation's racial dilemma. "We've been a long time getting into the race problem," he said, "and we'll probably be a long time in getting out of it."⁵³

In 1967, after seven years as executive director, Allen left his position at the CLC to become the pastor of the First Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas. The previous pastor died suddenly of a heart attack, leaving the congregation without a leader, and Allen preformed well as the interim minister for six months. During this time, the church decided to offer the pastorate to Allen, who prayerfully thought over it. He concluded that his future and the cause of Christian ethics "would be made in the most significant fashion in a downtown church." He desired to be in the "frontlines of the battle", with a church that had the same weaknesses as other churches. Ultimately, Allen was enamored with the thought of leading the San Antonio church in a new direction and setting an example from which other churches might learn.⁵⁴

Following Jimmy Allen's move to San Antonio, the Christian Life Commission selected James Milton Dunn as his replacement. As another former student of T. B. Maston, Dunn was well-suited for a leadership role at the commission. Even as a youth, Dunn was more socially aware than many of his peers. Particularly in regard to racial issues, Dunn understood the demands of Christian ethics as a child better than many of his adult contemporaries. In this aspect of Christian morality his father was vitally influential. "I was never permitted to say 'nigger,' though everybody around us did," he remembered. Living only a block away from the

⁵³ "Professor Hits Race Bias as Evil," *Dallas Morning News*, March 13, 1962.

⁵⁴ Oral Memoirs, Allen, 165-169.

segregated black neighborhood in Fort Worth, Dunn recalled never being allowed to use any slang words for minorities. In fact, his father had African Americans over frequently as guests, “not visitors who came in by the back door as servants but guests,” he insisted in an interview in 1973. He referred to these guests as “friends on an equal basis.” In the 1940s and 1950s, when Dunn was growing up, this sort of racial interaction was remarkable.⁵⁵

In addition to the racially progressive influence of his parents, T. B. Maston was of particular importance in the shaping of Dunn’s social outlook. It was as a teenager that the indirect influence of Maston first reached James Dunn. W. W. Phelps, the pastor of a local church that James Dunn and his family attended during the late 1940s, held a Doctorate of Theology from Southwestern Seminary and had studied Christian ethics under Dr. Maston. Dunn said that Dr. Phelps was the first pastor that “took on flesh and became a human being to me.” In that way, the young pastor had a “tremendous impact” on Dunn’s life. After absorbing the “ethical emphasis” of Pastor Phelps’s sermons, Dunn proceeded on to Texas Wesleyan College and then to Southwestern Seminary, where he would then personally study ethics under Thomas Maston.⁵⁶

Dunn had the highest esteem for Maston during his seminary years and long afterward. Maston had the “most outstanding influence” upon his developing understanding of social Christianity and strengthened his ethical concerns. While at Southwestern, Dunn broadened his knowledge of Christian ethics and learned about the work of Joseph M. Dawson. In fact, Dunn wrote his dissertation on the ethical thought of Joseph Dawson. During this time, Dawson taught him much about Baptist heritage, its politics, and its personalities. Dunn later remembered him

⁵⁵ Oral Memoirs, Dunn, 7-8 (first quotation), 8 (second and third quotation).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 (first quotation), 10 (second and third quotation).

as a “great” and “interesting man.” Dawson was “piercingly outspoken,” Dunn recalled.⁵⁷ As Dawson was imminently concerned with the separation of church and state, he most assuredly helped inspire James Dunn to champion the same cause when he became the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee of Public Relations, a position that Dawson had held before him.⁵⁸

When James Dunn became the executive secretary, there was a shift in the primary goal of the CLC. Whereas Acker C. Miller and Foy Valentine had previously devoted themselves to educating the Baptist masses on the importance of social Christianity, Dunn put his knowledge into practice. Specifically, under Dunn, the Christian Life Commission really began to be a significant political force in social issues. Although the CLC’s transition into political action started taking place under the leadership of Jimmy Allen, James Dunn greatly strengthened the commission’s political arm. Under Dunn’s direction the CLC grew to new proportions and expanded its ministry to address new social issues such as welfare reform and abortion. Under his leadership, the CLC became a legitimate lobbying power in the state legislature. During the 1970s, Dunn battled for an increase in Texas’ welfare ceiling and more lenient abortion laws that took into account rape, incest, and the health of the mother.⁵⁹ To be a successful lobbyist group the CLC had to be cautious of the issues it chose to support.

While the CLC came to embrace new concerns, however, the fact remains that the commission grew largely out of the soil of southern racism. Racial progressives, motivated by a

⁵⁷Ibid., 15 (first quotation), 16 (all other quotations).

⁵⁸ Joseph M. Dawson was the chief organizer of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State as well as the first full-time executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee of Public Relations. He opposed federal aid to church hospitals and parochial schools, as well as sectarian instruction in public schools. James Dunn would later devote much energy to ensuring the separation of church and state and also became an executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee of Public Relations in 1981.

⁵⁹ Oral Memoirs, Dunn, 121-125.

socially oriented gospel, used the Christian message to subvert racial prejudice and curb discrimination. Racial reconciliation was the most pressing issue of the decades that birthed the CLC, and moderate leaders sought to help their fellow Baptists obey God's command by loving their black neighbors. Without directly agitating for integration, they tried to convince Texas Baptists that they had a Christian social responsibility to end the unequal treatment of African Americans.

Ultimately, the progressive Baptists who steered the denomination in the direction of applied Christianity during the civil rights era participated in one the most groundbreaking epochs in modern Baptist history. For Southern Baptists, the era saw the beginnings of a shift from a message focused primarily on individual salvation to one that incorporated the need for social change. The leaders of the Christian Life Commission made it their goal to convince their fellow Baptists that if the social implications of Christianity continued to be ignored, then the gospel itself would be incomplete. The change was gradual, but constant, and in time, more and more Baptist ministers began to embrace the message of applied Christianity in not only race relations, but also in all aspects of life. The transformation of racial attitudes among Baptists, however, was not without its limits. The CLC's conservative approach to racial reconciliation and their reluctance to directly call for immediate integration ensured that church segregation and racist attitudes would linger on into the coming decades.

CHAPTER 5

GOING THE DISTANCE: TEXAS BAPTISTS AND DESEGREGATION

During the civil rights era, Southern Baptists had much to overcome in the way of racial attitudes. A century of southern heritage was effectively working against them, threatening to make the process of desegregation an arduous endeavor. After the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, segregationists invoked various arguments in an attempt to maintain the status quo. With appeals to states' rights, tradition, and even biblical sanction, they waged war for their second lost cause.¹ While previously held captive to their southern culture, as John Lee Eighmy asserts, the 1960s saw quick, dramatic cultural change, and the South could no longer isolate itself from national developments.² The Supreme Court decision repealing the legality of segregation had the unforeseen effect of forcing Southern Baptists to question their long-held racial beliefs and practices. Was segregation in fact immoral? Was their view of African Americans racist? If so, how could they reconcile their prejudices with their faith? These questions were of great importance to Southern Baptists in the 1950s and 1960s.

With prodding from moderate Baptist leadership, public opinion, and the national government, segregationist Baptists slowly began to acquiesce to the reality of desegregation. Historian Mark Newman argues that Southern Baptists' commitment to evangelism, law and order, and public education made them more "amenable to change" after court-ordered desegregation in 1954 and the Civil Rights act of 1964, which outlawed segregation in public

¹ C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity," in *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 12. Here, Woodward refers to segregation as another southern lost cause.

² John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972).

accommodations. By the 1970s, most Southern Baptists rejected forced segregation and overt racism. This did not mean, however, that Southern Baptists desired to integrate.³

By the late 1960s, Texas Baptists seemed to be taking significant steps toward racial justice. In 1968, First Baptist Church, Dallas officially desegregated under the leadership of W. A. Criswell, who had become well known as a leading segregationist in the previous decade. The Christian Life Commission of Texas also continued its advocacy for racial equality and found increasing support from the leading Baptist publication in Texas, the *Baptist Standard*, in the 1960s. Members of the Baptist laity, moreover, were slowly growing accustomed to the social application of their faith as more literature on the matter became available.

Two questions remain, however: To what extent did Texas Baptists experience true conversion on racial matters in the civil rights decades, and did that transformation produce tangible results in the following years? The fact that the Southern Baptist Convention remains an overwhelmingly white religious institution more than forty years after the civil rights movement ended reveals the limits of its racial progress. While Texas Baptists made huge strides toward equality by the end of the 1960s, little integration actually occurred in the Baptist churches across the state and many Baptists still held tightly to their racist mentality. In addition to the limited change among church goers, new concerns emerged in the following decades that shifted the denomination's focus away from racial issues to new areas of interest – abortion, world hunger, and drug abuse – and the rise of conservatism in the 1980s stymied the progressive trends of the previous decades.

W. A. Criswell's drastic change of opinion on the matter of segregation presents a vivid picture of the process that many racial conservatives underwent. Following his vehement

³ Mark Newman, *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), ix (quotation), 108.

denunciation of desegregation at the South Carolina Evangelism Conference in 1956, Criswell entered a period of silence on the issue that lasted for almost twelve years. When he finally decided publically to denounce his previous stance on segregation, it came in 1968 on the heels of his election as president of the SBC. Historian Curtis W. Freeman sees more than irony in this timing. “To even the casual observer,” Freeman writes, “it is clear that something more than Biblicism was driving Criswell’s change.” While not willing to portray Criswell as a “mere opportunist,” Freeman nevertheless asserts that Criswell’s “racial conversion” was “less than compelling.” Freeman ultimately concluded that Criswell was “willing to make pragmatic concessions as the social arrangement of Southern culture changed,” in order to ensure the prominence of his Dallas church.⁴

Freeman’s argument was in part a response to an article published in 2004 by Russell D. Moore. As a professor of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Moore published a conservative perspective of the civil rights era and rejected the traditional historical interpretation of why Southern Baptists altered their opinions on racial segregation. Contrary to the accepted view, which “credits liberals with the advances in civil rights over the obstructionism of conservatives,” Moore asserts that conservative evangelicalism was, in fact, responsible for “crucifying Jim Crow.” Only through appeals to the segregationists’ “conservative theological tradition” were racial progressives able to “shame white evangelical churches by the standards of their own orthodox theology and conversionist zeal.” In this way, Moore was able to credit the conservative theology of the segregationists with the ultimate victory over segregation, rather than the influence of the more liberal social gospel.⁵ Using

⁴ Curtis W. Freeman, “Never Had I Been So Blind: W. A. Criswell’s “Change” on Racial Segregation,” *Journal of Southern Religion* X (2007), 8 (first quotation), 9 (second quotation), 12 (third quotation).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7; Russell D. Moore, “Crucifying Jim Crow: Conservative Christianity and the Quest for Racial Justice,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8/2 (Summer, 2004), 6.

Moore's reasoning, Criswell's change of mind on segregation would have been the result of a return to the foundational principles of the Bible. Thus, his motives would have been genuine. While Criswell's sincerity may be difficult to judge, what cannot be refuted is the fact that his public conversion on segregation was remarkably timely for both his career and the reputation of his church.

Criswell's silence on the issue of race following his widely published speech in 1956 was the result of pressure applied by certain of his fellow Texas Baptists and bad publicity for his prominent congregation. The morning after Criswell's speech in South Carolina, the headlines of the *Dallas Morning News* read "Criswell Rips Integration." The paper reported that Baptist officials in the Dallas area reacted to the news with a "mixture of surprise and silence."⁶ Criswell's scathing denunciation of integration was uncharacteristic for a minister of his standing. Most pastors, both those in favor of and those opposed to desegregation chose not to address the issue from the pulpit. Following the 1954 Supreme Court ruling, most ministers either gave their consent to the decision or attempted to remain indifferent to the matter. Charles Marsh poignantly described the precarious situation that many Baptist pastors found themselves in following the Supreme Court ruling. He wrote:

If you are a Baptist preacher and want to be successful, you better size up the people quickly. If they want aqua carpet instead of the standard maroon, you'll take a sudden liking for the aqua. If they root for Ole Miss over the Crimson Tide, you'll not say too much about your fondness for the Bear. If they want you to keep quiet about Negroes, you'll put a lid on your uneasy conscience. No bishop or presbyter will come to your defense.⁷

Ironically, Criswell's speech had the unforeseen effect of forcing the issue with other Baptist leaders and clergymen not only in Texas but also throughout the entire country. Such

⁶ "Criswell Rips Integration," *Dallas Morning News*, February 23, 1956.

⁷ Charles Marsh, *The Last Days: A Son's Story of Sin and Segregation at the Dawn of a New South* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 173-174.

polarizing remarks emanating from the pastor of the largest Baptist church in the world compelled ministers and religious leaders to speak out in favor of or in opposition to the speech. Moderate Baptist leaders tried their best to limit the fallout in the following months. Immediately after the speech became public, Dr. Stewart A. Norman of Southeastern Baptist Seminary said, “It is a sorry day in the history of Baptists when we damn those who choose to differ with us.” He then insinuated that Criswell’s rhetoric was the result of “weakness” of character rather than “confident strength.”⁸ While on a mission trip in Tokyo, Billy Graham, the celebrated evangelist and a member of First Baptist, Dallas, told the Associated Press that he and his pastor had never agreed on the issue of segregation.⁹ Even Finney W. Tinnin, editor of the *Baptist Message* in Louisiana and arch segregationist, denounced Criswell’s remarks. Tinnin called Criswell’s “mudslinging” tactics “cheap and tawdry.” It was not that he disagreed with Criswell, but he feared that such an approach to the issue would hurt the segregationist cause.¹⁰

Thomas B. Maston remembered the address as “Very tragic.” Maston worried that it would undermine the work that the SBC was doing with the African American community. Shortly after the address, the Advisory Council of the SBC, of which Maston was a member, met to discuss the situation and their work among black Baptists. They decided to form a committee that would write a resolution to try and “counteract the impact” of Criswell’s speech, which was then being circulated by southern Citizen’s Councils. Although it did not mention Criswell, the resolution was a direct response to his “fiery talk” in South Carolina.¹¹ Criswell later confessed

⁸ “Racial Issue Placed Before General Assembly,” *Florence Morning News*, February 23, 1956.

⁹ “Criswell Rips Integration,” *Dallas Morning News*, February 23, 1956.

¹⁰ “Dr. Criswell’s Remarks,” *The Baptist Message*, March 15, 1956.

¹¹ Thomas B. Maston, “Oral Memoirs of Thomas B. Maston,” interview by Rufus B. Spain, Fort Worth, Texas, June 1, 1971, p. 130, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Maston).

in an interview in 1972 that he knew the resolution was directed at him, even though it did not specifically reference his name.¹²

The Advisory Council for Work with Black Baptists sent the resolution to each Baptist state newspaper affiliated with the SBC for publication. In obvious response to Criswell's rant, it referred to the "many influences" that were "contributing to an emotional approach" to racial issues and concluded that it was "urgently imperative that Christians consider them calmly and on the basis of Christian teachings." Stopping well short of calling for integration, the resolution presented seven main points, which focused primarily on promoting "harmony" and the "spirit of good will" between the two races. Many prominent Southern Baptists signed the resolution including the president of Baylor University, W. R. White, and the president of Southwestern Theological Seminary, J. Howard Williams.¹³

Possibly the most troubling repercussions for Criswell, following his ill-advised speech, came from Baptist universities and seminaries across the country. Students and faculty members did not hesitate to let the Dallas pastor know what they thought about his publicized statements. Criswell received "mail by the wheelbarrow full" reprimanding him for his stance on segregation. Many of these Baptist students and professors no doubt thought that he had misrepresented their own faith. Among the hundreds of letters pouring into Criswell's Dallas office were many from Baylor, his own Alma Mater. He recalled that "uncounted numbers of letters and telegrams" came from the university. For Criswell, this reaction from the academic community that birthed him was difficult to handle. "Those kids, those students, faculty

¹² W.A. Criswell, "Oral Memoirs of W.A. Criswell," interview by Thomas Charlton, March, 1972, p. 270, Texas Collection, Carroll Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Cited hereinafter as Oral Memoirs, Criswell).

¹³ *Baptist Standard*, April 14, 1956.

members, just oh, I don't know how many of them came from Baylor," he said when remembering the "tidal wave" of commotion that was created by his South Carolina address.¹⁴

After receiving a letter from the executive secretary of the SBC, Porter Routh, expressing great disapproval of his comments, Criswell responded by sending him a copy of his South Carolina address in order to prove that he had said nothing wrong.¹⁵ The commotion surrounding the address initially caused Criswell to try and defend his position, as he did to Porter Routh, but after the press worked him over for "weeks and weeks and weeks by telephone, by mail, by telegram" and "by letters," he entered into a period of racial hibernation, in which he would remain for more than a decade. Speaking of the incident in an interview in 1972, Criswell said "The whole thing was a colossal blunder and mistake on my part... I didn't want to discuss it. I wanted to drop it immediately."¹⁶ Though he did not instantly change his racial views, he no longer publically defended segregation.

Criswell's silence during the years that followed is characteristic of many segregationist ministers in the civil rights era. Historian David L. Chappell argued that one of the reasons for the collapse of Jim Crow was its lack of support from southern pastors. In order to survive in the Bible-Belt South, segregation needed biblical sanction from the pulpit, something that was lacking, because "honest and literate" segregationists were unable to find reasonable, biblical support for their southern political institution. Jane Dailey disagreed with Chappell and noted that there were "many who believed that segregation was 'the commandment and law of God.'" She also critiqued historians of the civil rights era for "ignoring or condemning" the theology of

¹⁴ Oral Memoirs, Criswell, 271.

¹⁵ Freeman, "Never Had I Been So Blind," 4.

¹⁶ Oral Memoirs, Criswell, 267.

the segregationists in favor of the “colorblind, universalist theology of the ‘beloved community.’”¹⁷

Ultimately, while some segregationists did develop a detailed theology to support their racial separation, integrationists found the Bible to be much more sympathetic to their cause and adeptly used it to support equal rights. Chappell wrote that “The historically significant failure of white southern churches was their inability to live up to the militant image that southern politicians had shown.” What resulted was a prophetic voice of reason sounding from the pulpits of racially progressive ministers and silence from the platforms of most segregationists.¹⁸

The damage control that had begun by denominational leaders immediately after Criswell’s speech continued throughout 1956. Later that year, the Christian Life Commissions of both the BGCT and the SBC published reports heavily focused on improving race relations. Foy Valentine and the Texas CLC included in their annual report an exhortation to “remember that as Christians we are to speak and act in the spirit of brotherliness and Christian love, constantly reminding ourselves that in God’s sight there are no inferior races or people.”¹⁹ Under the direction of Acker C. Miller, the report from the Southern Baptist Convention expressed unusual racial concern and called for “prayer and deep humility” along with “repentance toward God” and confession of “hate and hasty words to our fellow man.”²⁰ These reprisals struck at the heart of Criswell’s impulsive message just a few months earlier.

¹⁷ Jane Dailey, “The Theology of Massive Resistance: Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,” in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, ed. Clive Webb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 153.

¹⁸ David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 107, 115.

¹⁹ *Texas Baptist Annual* (Dallas, TX: BGCT Press, 1956), 117 (Cited hereinafter as *Annual, BGCT*).

²⁰ *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: SBC Press, 1956), 332 (Cited hereinafter as *Annual, SBC*).

In the years following the *Brown* ruling and Criswell's controversial speech, Texas Baptists' experienced some progress in the field of race relations. Continued racism, however, tempered the minor successes of moderate Baptist leadership. While some churches began to integrate, many more remained segregated. Furthermore, the progressive understanding of race that was increasingly gaining a foothold in Baptist colleges and urban pulpits was slow to transform the opinions of lay people and rural church leaders.

In April 1958, three hundred white Protestant ministers in the Greater Dallas area met together and signed a statement calling enforced segregation "morally and spiritually wrong." These ministers called specifically for churches, clubs, community organizations, and media outlets to work together in promoting the "spirit of harmony and peace among all people."²¹ The article reported that these ministers represented the "majority of the white Protestant clergy in Dallas. The following week, 115 black Dallas pastors issued a three page statement calling for an end to "segregation and stratification" and affirming the racial resolution signed by the 300 white Protestant ministers. In their statement, the black pastors referenced the "blight and sinfulness of racial discrimination and forced segregation both in the church and society." They proceeded to denounce segregation referring to black Americans as the "victims of an embarrassing and frustrating dilemma," and it was out of their frustration that they were "moved to speak."²²

In response to these public statements, however, 330 non-Catholic, segregationist ministers of the Greater Dallas area, led by Reverend Carey Daniel, president of the White Citizens' Council of America and pastor of First Baptist Church, West Dallas, signed their names to a statement that read "I believe that enforced integration is wrong, and I am opposed to the

²¹ "Segregation Called Moral, Spiritual Ill," *Dallas Morning News*, April 27, 1958.

²² "Racial Mixing Plea Given by Negro Group," *Dallas Morning News*, May 4, 1958.

mixing of white and negro children in our public school.” The statement urged public leaders and members of the media to “refrain from doing or saying anything that might in any way encourage the racial amalgamation and increased juvenile delinquency which nearly always follow the integrating of school.” The large number of segregationist ministers who backed this statement highlights the great division among Protestant leaders on racial issues in the late 1950s. In all, more than 700 white and black ministers signed public statements either in support of or opposition to segregation in the span of three weeks in 1958. Therefore, it is surprising to find that the pastor of the largest Protestant church in Dallas did not sign his name to any of the documents. Criswell’s silence on segregation continued as he desired not to trouble the racial waters any more than he already had.²³

May of 1958 was a racially charged month for Southern Baptists. Amidst the racial statement wars going on among Protestant ministers in the Greater Dallas area, the SBC convened in Houston for their annual convention. The yearly report of the Christian Life Commission included a section entitled “A Call for Racial Reconciliation,” which sparked a controversy between those in attendance and ended with the SBC accepting the announcement only as “information” and not an official report.²⁴ The “information” submitted by the CLC acknowledged that racial strife was plaguing the country and hindering effective evangelism. It also noted the immediate need for Baptist involvement in implementing constructive solutions to the national crisis. The opposition to the CLC’s report on race in 1958 is telling of the limited racial progress even among Southern Baptist leaders at this time.

²³ “330 Ministers Flay Enforced Integration,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 18, 1958.

²⁴ *Annual, SBC*, 1958, p. 391; John W. Storey, “Texas Baptist Leadership, the Social Gospel, and Race, 1954-1968,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 83 (July 1979-April 1980), 42.

An article published the *Dallas Morning News* later that year gave a harsh critique of the efforts of white preachers to promote integration. The article declared that “the churches of the South have been thrown completely off balance.” “While pastors have been preaching integration to their flocks,” the columnist, Lynn Landrum wrote, “their flocks have been gregarious according to custom and not according to precept from the pulpit.” He continued by denouncing the “declarations of clergy for social equality in schools and congregations” writing that the “church has nothing to offer except scourgings from the pulpit – or discreet silence in the interests of the church budget.” According to Landrum, the great divide between the “partisanship of the clergy” and the “deepest convictions of the laity” gave rise to a failure of leadership in the churches. The end result of this loss of leadership, he argued, was that “there simply is no general integration of church membership in the South.” His article then quickly made a B-line to the issue at the heart of the matter. “The prophetic attitudes of pulpiteers fail in proportion as the congregation begins to reckon on the actual consequences in their midst... If Negro church members are to participate in all the sacraments of the church, that includes the sacrament of marriage.”²⁵

Fear that integration would lead to intermarriage relentlessly haunted Southern Baptists as school desegregation began. In 1961, Dr. Thomas B. Maston spoke at a Dallas Baptist Pastors Conference in response to turmoil created after demonstrations led by African Americans in the city. He attempted to calm fears by arguing that intermarriage was not necessarily an inevitable consequence of school desegregation. Maston, who saw no danger in intermarriage, understood well his fellow Baptists’ reluctance to embrace such progressive views. Rather than reprimand

²⁵ “Churches on Integration,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 1, 1958.

his peers for those views, he continued his conservative approach to the situation and gradually prodded them in the right direction.²⁶

A more optimistic perspective of Baptist social concern appeared in the *Dallas Morning News* in 1962, the same year that Jimmy Allen of the Texas Christian Life Commission organized the historic race-relations conference in Fort Worth, suggesting that Texas Baptists were beginning to create for themselves a new image. “There is a new Baptist emerging on the Texas scene who is more in tune with the times than his counterpart of a generation ago”, wrote columnist Jack Castleman. “A generation ago, the convention was bewailing personal vices of smoking, drinking, dancing, and crime,” he continued, before crediting the Christian Life Commission for expanding Baptist social concern to include other issues. Castleman, who was in attendance at the Baptist General Convention of Texas’ annual session in Fort Worth the week before, interviewed multiple ministers on the changing nature of the BGCT. One minister said of Baptists, “We are finally waking up to the fact that the church must be concerned with all areas of life – not just evangelism.” Castleman agreed with the minister, writing that “Sermons and church programs are slowly being changed with more emphasis on serving the members than on evangelism to win new converts.” Castleman’s article is testimony to the gradual transformation of Baptists’ understanding of the gospel, from one focused primarily on salvation from sin to a gospel more in tune with social concern. Castleman cited a shift of Texans to urban centers, better trained clergy, and a new awareness among Baptists that they could no longer “remain isolated from the world” as primary reasons for increasing social consciousness.²⁷

While the CLC was initiating a transformation of sorts among Texas Baptists, the change was slow and tempered by a serious lack of actual integration in Baptist churches. A study

²⁶ *Baptist Standard*, July 19, 1961.

²⁷ “Baptists: A New Image,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 4, 1962.

conducted by the public relations department of the BGCT in 1963 revealed that Texas Southern Baptist churches were “slowly opening their doors to Negro persons around the state.” To conduct the survey the BGCT sent questionnaires to the pastors more than 4,000 affiliated churches throughout Texas; only 1,259 pastors graced the BGCT with a response. Of the 1,259 churches that responded, however, 234, or almost 20 percent, replied that they would accept a black member if they sought to join. Columnist Carl Harris of the *Dallas Morning News* saw these statistics in a positive light. Many of the churches that did not respond, however, surely did so to conceal their segregationist impulses. The flip side to the columnist’s optimistic perspective, therefore, is that of the 4,000 churches initially asked whether or not they would receive black members, only 234, or less than 6 percent of BGCT churches, responded in the positive.²⁸ In similar fashion, a survey of churches in the Dallas area revealed that while “Negroes would be welcome to visit all services... Becoming a member of the church would be another matter.”²⁹ Regardless of how many churches voiced their openness to African Americans, the reality remained that an overwhelming majority of white Texas Baptist churches did not actually have black members. Another article published in the same year as the study on church integration reported that only fifteen to twenty Texas Baptist churches, or less than half of one percent of BGCT affiliated churches, had African American members.³⁰ Thus, while the social attitudes of many Baptist leaders may have been changing, the racial realities in Baptist churches throughout the state remained largely the same.

As early as the mid-1960s many Southern Baptists thought their efforts in the field of race relations had been enough. In 1964, Foy Valentine, director of the Christian life

²⁸ “Many Texas Baptists Would Accept Negro,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 19, 1963.

²⁹ “Baptist Churches in Dallas Vary on Negro Membership,” *Dallas Morning News*, September 19, 1963.

³⁰ “Two Texans Invited to Race Talks,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 13, 1963.

Commission of the SBC drafted a seemingly harmless resolution stating that Baptists should support laws guaranteeing the legal rights of African Americans. Much to his dismay, the resolution became the “most fiercely debated issue to date” at the convention, and the delegates passed a substitute motion that eliminated the commission’s entire race statement. The convention then applauded the great progress that Southern Baptists had already made regarding racism and supported leaving future racial pronouncements to individuals and local congregations.³¹ This highlights the greater challenges that faced the SBC’s Christian Life Commission in comparison to the CLC of Texas. On multiple occasions the SBC’s Christian Life Commission came under fire from Southern Baptist leaders. When the SBC commission published *Integration* by T. B. Maston in 1956, the editor of the *Baptist Message*, Finley Tinnin, and several ministers in Louisiana publically expressed their displeasure and called for the abolition of the commission. Tinnin claimed that the CLC “created more discord than peace” by publishing material on desegregation. Similarly, messengers to Mississippi’s annual Baptist convention in 1964 adopted a resolution attacking the CLC for supporting “liberal positions not in accord with the thinking of many Southern Baptists.”³²

In May of 1968 the topic of race relations in the Southern Baptist world was headline news once again as the messengers to the 1968 annual meeting of the SBC elected W. A. Criswell, a symbol of segregation to many, as president of the convention. While the convention was in session, a fanatic’s bullet took the life of Senator Robert F. Kennedy. This took place just two short months after the tragic assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee. Overcome by racial violence, the Vietnam War, and the murder of yet another

³¹ “Southern Baptists Turn Down Liberal Resolution,” *Dallas Morning News*, May 22, 1964.

³² “A Timely Protest,” *The Baptist Message*, August 8, 1957; “Baptists Ask Halt to Race Interference,” *Dallas Morning News*, November, 19, 1964.

Kennedy sympathetic to the plight of black Americans, the SBC decided to issue a statement concerning the racial and political turmoil in the nation. The statement not only confessed past wrongs, but it declared that Southern Baptists would “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.”³³ The statement was profound in that it announced the SBC’s intent to accept church integration; however, it could not speak for the thousands of independent churches scattered across the South. Like all Baptist conventions, the SBC was subject to congregational polity, and had no authority to impose policy on its members and their churches. Baptist conventions are annual meetings of messengers, elected by member churches, who vote whether to adopt reports and resolutions made by their agencies and committees. However, the adopted resolutions and reports are in no way binding on the churches.³⁴

Racial animosities were running high in 1968, and many expressed surprise at the timing of Criswell’s election. Eager to interrogate the new leader of the SBC about his segregationist leanings, reporters crowded around and hammered Criswell with questions. The emotionally charged press conference that followed resulted in Criswell claiming that the press misrepresented his speech before the South Carolina state legislature in 1956. “I never said 99 percent of what I was supposed to have said,” he responded. He largely sidestepped most other questions regarding race insinuating that he never held racist views, but he was upset at the northern agitators trying to force their hand upon the South.³⁵ Criswell said as much in an interview the previous week. Referring to the press coverage of his address twelve years earlier, he said that “There were a lot of qualifying phrases in there that didn’t get reported.” In any

³³ *Annual, SBC*, 1968, p. 68.

³⁴ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, xix-xxi.

³⁵ “Dr. Criswell Charges Misrepresentation,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 6, 1968.

case, Criswell did admit to some change in his understanding of race relations in the years since his last public pronouncements on the issue.³⁶

The *Houston Chronicle* presented Criswell's press conference in a more positive light saying that the Dallas pastor "fully backed" the SBC's resolution to allow blacks to join all-white churches as full members.³⁷ This may have been a bit of a stretch as Criswell kept his answers vague. Commenting on the racial resolution adopted by the SBC, Criswell said that it was "good democracy. Let the people decide and it will come out right."³⁸ This was not exactly an enthusiastic endorsement of the resolution. In his interview with the *Dallas Morning News* the previous week Criswell spoke of integration as an inevitable affair. He recognized that integration was going to happen regardless of whether or not white southerners wanted it to. Desegregation "ultimately must come" he said. "It may not come soon, but it will come in God's time."³⁹ Just how long exactly it would take God to bring about the integration of Southern Baptist churches Criswell left unanswered.

Upon his return to Dallas, Criswell did not wait long before facing the issue of desegregation with his church. At a deacon's board meeting the week before the convention he announced that "we must face this issue and face it now." He admitted to wrestling with the issue of allowing black members to join the church for some time and struggling over what decision to make in weeks of "restless, agonizing prayer." Criswell later wrote in his autobiography that by 1968, he was "done with preaching and worrying even as I preach that someone who is black

³⁶ "Time Mellows Criswell's Views," *Dallas Morning News*, June 1, 1968.

³⁷ "New Southern Baptist Leader Fully Backs Open Church Policy," *Houston Chronicle*, June 6, 1968.

³⁸ "Dr. Criswell Charges Misrepresentation," *Dallas Morning News*, June 6, 1968.

³⁹ "Time Mellows Criswell's Views," *Dallas Morning News*, June 1, 1968.

might respond to my invitation.”⁴⁰ The Sunday after returning from Houston Criswell preached a sermon titled “Church of the Open Door” in which he triumphantly declared First Baptist Church, Dallas to be officially open to African American membership. “Anybody can come – anybody, and may God bless him and God attend him in the way as he comes,” he proclaimed.⁴¹

While Criswell had finally acquiesced to the inevitability of racial integration, the extent of his sympathy for minorities did not extend much farther. Just as Criswell thought that the only answer to racism was to “change a man’s heart,” he saw the solution to poverty in the same light. Amidst the racial commotion of the 1968 SBC presidential election Criswell gave an off-hand critique of the American welfare system, saying, “You can’t give to the poor forever. They’ll just stay poor. What’s needed is a new heart and new spirit. Once you win them to the Lord, they don’t live out there in squalor any more. They pay their debts and buy a home.”⁴² In Criswell’s understanding, personal regeneration solved all problems. It broke down racial barriers and provided good enough jobs for society’s poor to buy homes. The implication for the large portion of minorities being assisted by government welfare programs was that they were too lazy to find a job and provide for themselves. This view completely discounted the social restraints of a racist society.

Historian Kevin Kruse notes how racism played a significant role in shaping the views of conservative white southerners toward welfare. According to Kruse, the “supposed disparity between the tax burdens of whites and blacks took on a strongly racist tone, as whites charged that they unfairly bore the financial burden for a welfare system that catered to blacks.”

⁴⁰ W.A. Criswell, *Standing on the Promises: The Autobiography of W.A. Criswell* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 211.

⁴¹ W.A. Criswell, “Church of the Open Door,” in *Baptists See Black*, ed. T.B. Maston (Waco: Word Books, 1969), 73-82.

⁴² “Time Mellows Criswell’s Views,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 1, 1968.

Conservative white southerners viewed the welfare system in such a way that turned working class white Americans into the victims of a socialistic, robin-hood government seeking to take from the hard working white man in order to give to the lazy, drug-abusing African American. It takes little digging to uncover the racist underpinnings of this conservative perspective.⁴³

Although he publically lent support to integration in 1968, Criswell voiced his opposition to desegregation by bussing in 1972. He did not think it was appropriate to use “educational programs for social reformation.” Criswell thought that massive integration in such a short time would result in hostilities among the students. “If you can just keep them from killing one another, well you’re doing pretty good,” he said.⁴⁴ Also, in 1972 Criswell founded a private Christian school, First Baptist Academy, across the street from his church in the heart of downtown Dallas. Just as segregationists cited their high regard for education in their opposition to bussing, many also opted to send their children to private schools in hopes that integration would not reach their families so quickly. Historian Joseph Crespino notes that many segregationists founded private schools in the late 1960s and 1970s as a strategy to avoid desegregation. While he freely admits that the southern private school movement was not solely the result of racism, he found that “Few church school defenders actually denied that racism played some part in the remarkable growth of private schools during the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.”⁴⁵ While Criswell said that he hoped to provide scholarships for a few African American students, it was more than a dozen years before a black student graduated from his school.

⁴³ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 126-127.

⁴⁴ Oral Memoirs, Criswell, 264.

⁴⁵ Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 248, 249 (quotation).

Thus, like Criswell's transformation on race, Texas Baptist racial progress also had its limits. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Christian Life Commission of Texas continued to press for racial equality. The commission aimed its message at the heart of Texas Baptists in the hopes that they would see the immorality of racism and embrace the social responsibilities of their faith. By 1972, T. B. Maston thought Baptists had made significant progress in the area of applied Christianity. When asked if he thought that Southern Baptists had shifted from a "personal religion to a more social religion," Maston replied in the positive. "I think there has been considerable change here. We are more concerned in the contemporary period than has been true in the past with the broader social problems."⁴⁶ Baptists' enlarged concern with social problems, however, did not necessarily result in integrated churches or desegregated neighborhoods.

After the racially fraught 1960s came to a close, apathy toward race relations crept into the SBC and threatened to silence the CLC's prophetic voice. At a conference on race relations in Ridgecrest, North Carolina in 1973, numerous Southern Baptists expressed their frustration at the growing indifference of denominational churches toward further integration. The progressive pastor of the First Baptist Church of Asheville, North Carolina commented that, "Most people feel 'We've tried, and it didn't work. And I told you so!'" Larry McSwain, a professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary got to the heart of the problem and declared: "Much of the apathy and inactivity in racial affairs is the result of the widespread belief by white America that since the riots have stopped, the problems are solved."⁴⁷ This sentiment is also expressed in the CLC report to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1974. It reads:

⁴⁶ Oral Memoirs, Maston, 33.

⁴⁷ David Gooch, "News Releases Concerning Conference" in *Race: New Directions for a New Day, Addresses from Conferences at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center* (Nashville: Christian Life Commission, 1973), 68.

A fatigue both of heart and of will grips the church today at the point of race relations. Not many take the risks of Christian crossbearing and sacrificial action to alleviate racism, prejudice, and injustice. There is a quiet and subtle violence about our retrenched and solidified racism in the middle 1970s... The Christian way in race relations is not apathy but involvement, not despair but hope, not frustration but persistent commitment to do what we can.⁴⁸

Apathy among Southern Baptists in Texas was a serious threat in the 1970s just as it was throughout the rest of the South. The Texas CLC tried to combat this racial indifference at the start of the decade, however, in ways that other state conventions and the SBC did not. At the annual BGCT meetings in 1968 and 1970, the CLC issued reports that openly called for church integration. These years were the first wherein the commission submitted straightforward appeals for Texas churches to “open the doors of ministry and membership to all people.” Previously, the commission tried to keep from being too divisive and focused the emphasis of their reports on the promotion of “racial harmony.”⁴⁹

In 1971 the CLC included in its annual report the need for continued cooperation with school desegregation, and in 1973 the commission went so far as to defend bussing as a necessary step in that process.⁵⁰ The Texas and North Carolina conventions were the only Baptist state conventions that endorsed bussing as an effective means of school desegregation.⁵¹ Even though the Texas CLC agitated for peaceful integration in ways that other state commissions were unwilling to, its focus on race relations began to shift in the mid-1970s from segregation to other issues. In 1976, the Texas commission submitted their last report of the decade that included the topic of race relations. That report, however, acknowledged the work that still needed to be done among white Southern Baptists. “We rejoice in the progress made in

⁴⁸ *Annual, SBC*, 1974, p. 209.

⁴⁹ *Annual, BGCT*, 1968, p. 105; *Annual, BGCT*, 1970, p. 94.

⁵⁰ *Annual, BGCT*, 1971, pp. 29-33; *Annual, BGCT*, 1973, pp. 27-31.

⁵¹ Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 193.

our churches and in our hearts,” the report said. “The road of reconciliation has been rough and long, and we are not there yet,” it concluded.

In 1976, the BGCT was indeed “not there yet.” While none of the 4,000 Southern Baptist churches in Texas had formal laws forbidding blacks from membership at this time, more than a few had “unwritten policies” that banned African Americans. Many churches in “the more radically conservative areas of the state” had yet to encounter an opportunity to desegregate, and they hoped for their luck to continue. One pastor from Southeast Texas told his congregation, “We have a policy of openness, and we are not going to turn anyone away that comes here. But we are not going after them.” The reality for many white churches was that significant barriers still kept congregations from integrating. James Dunn classified the barriers as “geographical, logistical (absence of public transportation), economic, educational, aesthetic and cultural.” The consequence was that little more than “token integration” had occurred “in most churches.”⁵²

Sadly, the late 1970s saw the end to a serious emphasis on race relations from the BGCT. Although the new issues that the CLC chose to focus their attention on were of great importance – world hunger, abortion laws, pornography, morality on television, and drug abuse – real desegregation was not yet a reality as churches were slow to integrate and white residents fled cities and surrounding suburbs to escape racial mixing. In 1981, the CLC made a last effort to address the problem of “white flight” and its destructive consequences by exhorting white Texas Baptists to remain in their neighborhoods and try to promote good relations with their African American neighbors.⁵³

One of the central reason for the silence on racial issues as the 1980s approached was a drastic transformation in denominational leadership that took place in 1979. The 1979

⁵² “Baptist Churches Considered Integrated,” *Dallas Morning News*, November, 13, 1976.

⁵³ *Annual, BGCT*, 1981, p. 79.

convention meeting was a watershed event in the history of the SBC. It marked the end of a tacit agreement among Southern Baptists, called the “Grand Compromise,” not to let any ideological party, either the left or the right, take control of the denomination. In this agreement, moderates controlled the convention for most of twentieth century. This changed in 1979 when SBC conservatives initiated a plan that had been years in the making to take control of the denomination.⁵⁴

For conservatives, the heart of the issue was the inerrancy of scripture. Inerrancy, the belief that the Bible was written without mistakes of any kind, had long been the rallying cry of fundamentalists. Conservative Baptists, however, did not have a monopoly on the belief in biblical inerrancy. Many moderate pastors and lay leaders also believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman found that there is a “wide variation” in the beliefs of “inerrantists.” In a survey conducted in 1985, 85 percent of the Southern Baptist leaders questioned agreed that “the scriptures are the inerrant Word of God, accurate in every detail.” However, among the 85 percent who considered the Bible inerrant, only 44 percent believed in a literal interpretation of scripture. For example, almost two thirds of those surveyed believed that the creation account in Genesis appeared simply to tell about “God’s involvement” in creation rather than the “how and when” of creation. “While inerrancy may be the dominant view in Southern Baptist life,” Ammerman wrote, “literalism is not.” Thus, the battle lines of the 1980s were drawn over a literal interpretation of scripture, or a particular hermeneutical approach to the Bible that understood it to be compatible with both history and science.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 4.

⁵⁵ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 74-75.

In the years leading up to this turning point, conservative Baptist were became increasingly convinced that the moderate leadership of the SBC was heading down a far too liberal path and taking the denomination with them. Of particular concern for the conservatives was the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation being used in SBC seminaries. They feared for the integrity of the convention and developed a plan for denominational change. Their initial goal was consecutively to elect conservative, fundamentalist pastors as president over a period of at least ten years. By controlling positions of power in the SBC, the architects of the movement – Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, and pastor Adrian Rogers – planned to gain control of the denominational agencies and seminaries. Two of the three leaders in this movement, Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler, were from Texas. In fact, Paige Patterson served as the head of the Criswell Bible Institute in Dallas from 1975 to 1992. In this “three-leader-movement,” Patterson functioned as the theologian, Pressler was the organizer, and Rogers acted as the “visible popular preacher.”⁵⁶ The SBC power structure is set up in such a way that gives the president of the convention significant authority if used carefully. The president appoints a body of members that then appoint the trustees for denominational agencies and seminaries. If the trustees bend to the will of the convention president and hire likeminded executive directors and seminary presidents, then the SBC’s influence will affect even the daily affairs of the denomination. In this way, the conservatives who took over the SBC in 1979 hoped to purge the convention of “liberals” who did not adhere to similar means of biblical interpretation.⁵⁷

The consequences of the “conservative takeover” of the SBC in 1979 became increasingly apparent in the following years. Denominational life in the 1980s reflected the

⁵⁶ Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 6 (first and second quotations), 110.

⁵⁷ Bill J. Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 134-138.

growing hostility between conservative leaders and moderates as the conservatives fought tooth and nail to keep control and the moderates battled to stem the conservative tide and regain some measure of denominational authority. By the 1990s, conservatives in the SBC had effectively transformed the denominational agencies and its six seminaries into bastions of conservatism. At this time, the infighting among Southern Baptists continued at the state level, where moderates could still hope for limited victories.⁵⁸

The “Baptist battles” of the 1980s had significant implications for state conventions, including Texas. At the meeting of the BGCT in 1979 delegates followed the conservative lead of the SBC and published a resolution that defended an inerrant and literalist interpretation of scripture. Interestingly, preceding this was another resolution on “public policy concerns” that reprimanded the Texas Christian Life Commission for supporting a political agenda not endorsed by the conservative base of the BGCT. Part of the resolution read, “Therefore be it resolved that we underscore the mandate that the Christian Life Commission speaks to Texas Southern Baptists but not for them.” This particular dispute was over the CLC’s endorsement of SALT II, an international arms limitation agreement. There was certainly more to the issue, however, as another man, Don Wortman, introduced a motion that denounced the commission for meddling in inappropriate social and political affairs and specified that “if any employee or official of the Texas Christian Life commission feels so strongly about a candidate or issue that the Texas Baptist Convention or its elected official has not previously endorsed... then they should resign as a representative of the Texas Christian Life Commission.” After discussion and debate, the

⁵⁸ Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 8.

motion failed, but it served as a warning to the commission to steer clear of “liberal” political issues.⁵⁹

With the rise of conservatism in the 1980s, race relations ceased from being a point of interest for white evangelicals, and the CLC had difficulty not only emphasizing racial reconciliation but also their greater message of Christian social concern.⁶⁰ The denomination became entangled in doctrinal issues much to the neglect of other concerns. The 1985 Christian Life Commission report reflected the way in which the denominational battles over proper doctrine were relegating social concerns to the status of an after-thought among Texas Baptists. It noted the changing demographics of suburban neighborhoods in Texas and expressed concern over the way Baptists were reacting to those changes. “How will our new neighbors perceive us?” it asked. “Will their impression be of people whose primary attention is focused inward as we debate theological differences? Or will they see people who indeed have learned to love our neighbors as ourselves?” The report was essentially a warning to stop bickering about “issues of doctrine” saying that “Our prayer should be for the ability to understand priorities. Among history’s clearest tragedies is the propensity of religion to make things matter terribly that intrinsically do not matter.”⁶¹

As the years passed, the racial emphasis for which the Christian Life Commission became widely known in the 1950s and 1960s began to diminish. From the inception of Texas’ CLC in 1950 through 1968, the commission devoted a section of each annual report to the issue of race relations culminating in direct calls for integration in 1968 and 1970. During the 1970s,

⁵⁹ *Annual, BGCT, 1979, p. 73.*

⁶⁰ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 88-91. Sociologists Emerson and Smith argue that white evangelicals became “color blind” following the civil rights era because of their isolation from minorities and their belief in individual, rather than institutional, racism.

⁶¹ *Annual, BGCT, 1985, p. 76.*

however, only four reports mentioned race relations, and only once did they do so after 1973.⁶² While the BGCT was one of the more hospitable conventions for racial progressives, the CLC moved into new areas of focus during the latter half of the decade. The Christian Life Commission of the SBC went through a similar transition. Mark Newman found that after 1974, the SBC's commission neglected race relations in its reports in favor of new issues such as "women's rights, homosexuality, world hunger, pornography, morality on television, and drugs."⁶³ Although the BGCT increasingly focused on the same issues, it did not address women's rights issues or homosexuality to the same extent as the SBC. Only in 1983 and 1989 did the Texas commission devote a section of their report to sexual discrimination and women's rights issues.⁶⁴

Interestingly, the annual report of the CLC in 1980 included a section on race relations that focused solely on Mexican farm workers, a fast-growing demographic in South Texas. Again in 1982, the commission included a section titled "Hispanic Issues," in which it documented the rise in Hispanic population from 15 percent in 1970 to 21 percent in 1980. This new concern was making itself clear to the CLC as the report acknowledged that "Texas Baptists cannot ignore the needs of such a large number of people."⁶⁵ At this time, what little racial emphasis that was left in the CLC began to shift toward Texas' Hispanic population.

Some final findings on integration in the Christian Life Commission report of 1981 determined that city schools were still largely segregated. It said that "many whites withdrew to the suburbs and private schools," when the government ordered forced integration and bussing to

⁶² *Annual, BGCT*, 1970, p. 94; 1971, pp. 29-33; 1973; pp. 27-31; 1976, pp. 69-72.

⁶³ Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 196.

⁶⁴ *Annual, BGCT*, 1983, p. 77; 1989, pp. 84-90; The issue that dominated Texas CLC reports in the 1970s was world hunger. While the SBC's commission began to focus on women's rights and homosexuality in that decade, Texas' commission did not begin to do so at all until the 1980s.

⁶⁵ *Annual, BGCT*, 1980, pp. 119-120; 1982, p. 77.

help desegregate students. “Some progress has been made,” the report stated, “but the non-white makeup of many central city school districts has forced the continued existence of predominantly brown and/or black schools.” After this report, the Christian Life Commission of Texas did not report on integration again.⁶⁶

In Texas, the deterioration of racial prejudice among Baptists occurred gradually as a consequence of prodding by moderate leaders. The change that took place, however, was limited in its scope and depth, and the CLC’s emphasis on improving race relations ended prematurely as white Baptists grew increasingly apathetic toward African American equality and civil rights. Furthermore, the doctrinal battles of the 1980s shifted denominational attention away from racial equality as Baptists squabbled over interpretation of scripture while neglecting the social concerns of the previous decades.

The conservative methodology that the Christian Life Commission used to persuade Texas Baptists of the need for racial reconciliation enjoyed limited success. While the CLC was courageous in its efforts to promote good will toward African Americans, it took the commission eighteen years, from 1950 to 1968, to directly call for church integration in its annual reports. The gradual approach to solving America’s race problem had the effect that one might expect. In Texas, the civil rights era came to a close with very few churches actually integrated and many white Baptists trying to avoid desegregation by fleeing to the suburbs and enrolling their children in private schools. To compound the problem of desegregation, Texas Baptists moved quickly to new concerns in the 1970s, a decade that saw a decreasing focus on race relations, and one that culminated with the dawn of a new era of conservatism in the 1980s.

⁶⁶ *Annual, BGCT*, 1981, p. 78.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In the twentieth century, Texas Baptists faced a prolonged cultural and religious crisis over the issue of African-American civil rights. During the first half of the century, there was a dearth of leadership in the racial arena as most white Baptists fully supported racial segregation and viewed blacks with great prejudice. There were a few individuals, however, who spoke out in favor of better treatment of blacks. Drs. Joseph M. Dawson and Thomas B. Maston were two notable Baptist who took a leadership role in these endeavors. Both men were prolific authors and influenced a new generation of Baptists that took a more progressive stance on race relations in the civil rights era. Dawson championed improvements in black education in the 1920s, and Maston began instructing his students at Southwestern Seminary as early as the 1930s to implement the teachings of Jesus in their dealings with African Americans. Perhaps Maston's greatest achievement as an ethicist was his involvement in the formation of the Christian Life Commission in 1950 and his role in shaping the ethical thought of its leaders.

As the leadership of the CLC dealt with the issues of segregation and civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, it implemented a multiphase strategy by which it hoped to destroy the foundations of racism and its concomitant injustices. The first strategy implemented by the CLC was educational in nature. The first two executive secretaries of the commission, Acker C. Miller and Foy Valentine, implemented an aggressive literary campaign aimed at teaching Baptists of the social imperatives of their faith. This was not an easy endeavor as it entailed overturning a long Baptist tradition of zeal for evangelism, and evangelism only. The limited social awareness that Southern Baptists had displayed in previous decades was largely devoted to personal vices, not social prejudice.

Another aim of the CLC's literature barrage in the 1950s was to attack the biblical defense of segregation. Hard-line segregationists believed that integration was an attack on the Bible and the very nature of the Christian faith. These segregationists equated the social message of progressive Baptists with theological liberalism and the Social Gospel. Other Baptists, who may have been more sympathetic toward African Americans, still believed that the only way to transform society was to transform individuals. Thus, they did not believe that a direct approach to race relations from the pulpit was the place of the pastor. Therefore, the leaders of the CLC used any means possible – tracts, pamphlets, pulpits, and newspapers – to try and convince segregationists that the Bible itself taught racial equality and social action was not, in fact, diametrically opposed to Christianity.

The great shortcoming of this approach to racial reconciliation was that it took nearly two decades for the commission to move from teaching about racial equality to expressly advocating integration. The Christian Life Commission reports from the 1950s and 1960s indicate the gradual strides taken by the CLC in these years. The leaders of the commission understood the precarious nature of their situation and chose to proceed with caution. On some occasions, leaders of the commission spoke more directly about the need for integration. For example, when speaking at a Baptist Student Union convention in 1963, Acker C. Miller said that “Desegregation is not enough... We Christians must reshape the wrong attitudes and prejudices of all men, even ourselves.”¹ The CLC reports in the 1960s, however, did not expressly urge churches to desegregate until 1968.

The second strategy used by the CLC was that of political action. Under the leadership of Jimmy Allen and James Dunn, from 1960 to 1981, the commission began to lobby the state

¹ “Examine Racial Role, Baptist Students Urged,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 21, 1963.

legislature on specific issues. While Allen was executive secretary the commission stayed largely focused on limiting alcohol sales. This was because liquor was one of the few issues that he could use to rally Baptist support. Unfortunately, the CLC never garnered much support from Baptists to lobby for racial reform, and by the 1970s, when James Dunn made the commission a lobbying power, the commission was in the process of refocusing to other social issues. While Dunn was able to make significant strides in the way of welfare reform, the commission neglected most areas of concern for African Americans.

The sad reality for Texas Baptists was that the church shamefully lagged behind secular society in regard to desegregation. While Dallas schools began desegregating in 1961, First Baptist Church, Dallas, the largest Baptist church in the world at that time, did not open its doors to black membership until 1968. The same was true for other Texas churches. By 1964, when the Civil Rights Act banned segregation in public accommodations, only a couple of dozen white churches, out of more than 3,800 BGCT churches, had black members.² The CLC's educational approach to racism in the 1960s did not translate into racially integrated worship services. Perhaps W.A. Criswell's warning in 1956 that desegregation was "going to get into your family" was too much for Texas churchmen to contemplate. Much like old habits, old prejudices die hard. The fear of intermarriage was too much for many Baptists to overcome. It was a simple matter for Baptists to voice support for racial equality. It was not as easy, however, for them to implement a plan in which they would be active agents in the desegregation process.

The limited integration that occurred in Texas Baptist churches during the 1960s is further highlighted by the growing apathy toward racial integration among Baptists in the 1970s. As legal segregation ended and race riots ceased, Baptists commended themselves for a job well

² *Texas Baptist Annual* (Dallas, BGCT Press, 1960), 220; 1970, p. 228. The number of churches affiliated with the BGCT in the 1960s hovered right around 3,800. That number increased to almost 4,000 in 1968, but dropped back down to just above 3,800 again in 1970.

done. Many joined other Texans as they withdrew from cities to the suburbs, where they could stave off integration for longer. The state's Christian Life Commission, moreover, entered a transitional period of its own as it increasingly focused its attention on issues of world hunger, welfare reform, and abortion. By the end of the decade, Texas Baptists became embroiled in the greater denominational battles taking place throughout the SBC over doctrine. Thus, racial reform took a back seat to new liberal issues in the denomination as well as old conservative concerns related to scripture and biblical interpretation. In this environment, many churches were left to deal with the changing nature of their neighborhoods and communities without much instruction.

A growing awareness in the 1990s of the detrimental effects of white flight on churches led the SBC to hire Earl Nobles, a specialist in demographics. Nobles found that as demographics changed in suburban neighborhoods, one of three things happened – churches either integrated, relocated, or declined in membership. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman, who began an eighteen-month study in 1993 of churches in changing communities found that congregations in predominately white neighborhoods did not want to reach out to new residents as the racial makeup of their communities changed. This underscored, “the difficulty that people have imagining a congregation that is racially diverse,” she said.³ The effects of resistance to integration and the rise of white flight persisted through the 1990s and have continued on into the twenty-first century.

Today, Texas Baptists are facing issues resulting from the fast-changing demographics in the state and can learn from the mistakes of their past. The overwhelming concern for the BGCT in the twenty-first century is the ever-growing Hispanic population in Texas. This concern

³ “White Flight,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, February 8, 1993.

extends into the realm of immigration reform and Mexican-American civil rights. David Hardage, current executive director of the BGCT, is traveling the state encouraging churches to extend their outreach to the Hispanic community. “Texas is changing rapidly,” Hardage said, and “It’s an enormous issue for us.” Over the past decade, from 2000 to 2010, Texas’ population increased by 21 percent, but Baptist numbers increased only by 6 percent. In light of future demographic projections, which foretell Hispanics comprising 45 percent of the population, followed by Anglos at 39 percent, and African Americans at 10 percent, the need to incorporate Hispanics into Baptist life becomes all the more imperative for Texas Baptist churches to thrive.⁴

The Christian Life Commission’s involvement with the Hispanic population in Texas has also peaked over the past ten years. Suzii Paynter, current director of the BGCT’s Christian Life Commission, noted that they have been “advocating for comprehensive immigration reform for almost a decade.” Just as in the middle decades of the twentieth century, CLC leaders tried to educate Southern Baptists about racial integration. CLC leaders have implemented a strategy of education on the topic of Latino immigration. Their goal is to show that the impetus to deal with immigration comes from the Bible. “Scripture is full of migration – everything from the Exodus to Jesus and his own family having to flee to Egypt,” she said, “So, biblically, we’re looking at the Scriptures that have to do with migration.” Paynter believes that there is a reasonable path to citizenship for immigrants and that Texas Baptists have an important role to play in that process.⁵

The question for Texas Baptists today is much the same as it was for Texas Baptists in the twentieth century. Will they heed the advice of the Christian Life Commission and adapt in a

⁴ “Texas’ Changes Require Baptists to do ‘Whatever it Takes,’ Harding Insists,” *Baptist Standard*, February 26, 2013.

⁵ “It’s Time to Embrace the ‘Stranger,’” *Baptist Standard*, February 22, 2013.

positive manner to the changing racial dynamics of the state, or will they attempt to hang on to a nostalgic past and resist new realities to the detriment of their churches? Just as Baptist resistance to the civil rights movement in the 1960s threatened the legitimacy of the denomination, resistance to immigration reform and Mexican-American civil rights threaten to delegitimize the BGCT in the eyes of Texas' fastest growing ethnic population in the years to come.

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