

ROPING THE WHIRLWIND – A RENAISSANCE PLAN

Paige Patterson

“This Cowboy’s Hat” is classic country-western narrative music. Chris LeDoux popularized the Jake Brooks’ song about two cowboys in a coffee shop. They were approached by a biker gang who were overconfident because of their numerical superiority but inferior in wit. They offered to rip the hat off the cowboy’s head. Cowboy LeDoux responds in song:

You’ll ride a black tornado – Across the western skies
You’ll rope an ol’ blue norther – And milk it ’til it’s dry
Bulldog the Mississippi – and pin its ears down flat
Long before you take this cowboy’s hat.

The images of riding tornadoes and roping “blue northers” remind me of the halcyon days of college and of the attempt to return the Southern Baptist Convention to the faith of its founding fathers. “Cowboy Chicken” is a game played in rodeos during bull-riding events. The four most courageous cowpokes sit in the middle of the arena at a table playing cards while the angered male of the bovine species crashes around the arena looking for someone to gore or trample. In college on the plains of West Texas, we developed our own version of this adventuresome challenge. Keeping a card table ready, when the tornado sirens sounded, signaling the approach of a black funnel, we ran to a previously specified open field on the northwest side of Abilene, set up the table, and began to play dominoes. The rules for winning had nothing to do with the score. The last to run for the ditch was the winner. Had the annual Darwin Awards been available, we would all have been candidates, but adrenaline junkies can never get enough.

Having attended a western university, I did learn that roping and riding the whirlwind is not just formidable—it is clearly impossible! Yet, this is precisely what conservative Southern Baptists were attempting in June, 1979, when the convention convened in Houston, Texas. Every denominational executive was either liberal or too frightened to buck the ride. All six seminaries were adrift from the Southern Baptist theology that had been the basis of the denomination’s radical growth. Only 20 or so out of more than 200 professors were conservative, and few would sally forth to battle for conservative theology. Every state paper, except the small publication in Indiana, was unsympathetic to conservative concerns. Denominational leaders were adept at doublespeak, just as Ralph Elliott alleged. They knew well the vocabulary expected by the average Southern Baptist and conveniently failed to inform these followers that the definitions had been altered. These leaders had also become adroit at isolating and humiliating anyone who dared raise questions about the denomination. Only about 5 out of 56 colleges and universities—and these were the smaller, less influential ones—were operating with a biblical worldview.

Against all odds, Bible-honoring Southern Baptists held that the majority of Southern Baptist people and churches believed every syllable of the Bible. The obvious problem was: How do you rope the “norther”? Is there a way to ride the black tornado? About the same time that Southern Baptists were twirling their ropes and testing their spurs, the Missouri Synod Lutherans under the leadership of Robert Preus and others made an apparently successful ride of their tornadic denominational structure. This encouraged conservative Baptist hearts, even if some of the gains secured have not seemed to hold.

Often I am asked, “What was your strategy?” We did have one, of sorts. But honesty compels me to admit that it was more like “The Charge of the Light Brigade” than Normandy. As Alfred, Lord Tennyson, described it:

‘Forward, the Light Brigade!’
Was there a man dismay’d ?
Not tho’ the soldier knew
Some one had blunder’d:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do & die,
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd & thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.¹

Just as Balaclava in October, 1854, so was Houston in 1979. Actually, there were some differences. Conservatives did have the majority following, but they held neither the high ground nor the denominational leadership. In March, 1967, a young lawyer named Paul Pressler, a layman from Second Baptist Church in Houston, with a hankering to assist conservative students and causes, visited New Orleans Seminary where my wife and I were students. Informed by a mutual friend that he should meet me because we shared similar commitments and concerns, Paul and Nancy Pressler appeared at our door in Willingham Manor about 10 o'clock one evening. Weary of study, I suggested a trip to Café du Monde for coffee and beignets.

Ah, the stuff of legend! But the truth is that no big plan was hatched that evening. We doubtless became weightier in thought, friendship, and unfortunately, body, but little more. But

¹ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, “The Charge of the Light Brigade,” stanzas 2-3, transcribed from Tennyson’s handwritten composition of 1854, available online at <http://www.nationalcenter.org/ChargeoftheLightBrigade.html>. First published in *The Examiner*, 9 December 1854; later in Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Poems*, annotated by Alfred, Lord Tennyson; ed. Hallam, Lord Tennyson (London: Macmillan, 1908), 2:225-27.

as the friendship developed, so also the meager plan evolved from a paltry Galapagos finch to a full-blown homo sapien! Here are the basic conclusions that we deduced:

- (1) All previous attempts at reform had failed. We had to determine why.
- (2) We had to do our homework. We had to know the bylaws of the convention and use them effectively.
- (3) We knew that our people were suspicious that the emperor had no clothes, notwithstanding his protests to the contrary. We had to find some courageous souls who would point this out.
- (4) Education about the actual state of the SBC, as well as on how it functioned, had to be begun and vigorously pressed.
- (5) Once education progressed, churches had to be convinced to elect and send to the convention each year every allowable messenger.²
- (6) Potential presidents, who enjoyed appointive powers, had to be protected, and kept as long as possible at arm’s length from the organizers of the effort.³
- (7) Patience was essential. The whole process would need ten years.⁴

Southern Baptists enjoyed one distinctive advantage that many sister denominations could not boast. Few places on earth provide a structure as thoroughly democratic as that developed by Southern Baptists. Churches are autonomous and more often than not operate with

² No church is allowed more than ten voting delegates (called “messengers”). Most, however, were eligible for that many, but often no one but the pastor and his wife attended. That practice had to change.

³ This effort fooled no one. Every attentive Baptist knew that Adrian Rogers, Bailey Smith, Jimmy Draper, Edwin Young, Charles Stanley, Jerry Vines, etc. were one with the conservative renaissance. But because denominational press was unable to trace any of these men to organizational meetings, they received a measure of protection from the scathing rebukes aimed at the organizers.

⁴ This was figured based on the fact that it would take ten years to change the trustee boards of the institutions and agencies of the convention. Also, sustaining any conflict for more than ten years is virtually impossible, as America learned painfully in Vietnam. But the idea of ten years turned out to be laughable. Mistakes and setbacks were not accurately calculated. The renaissance took twenty years. Therein is the most astonishing fact of the conservative movement. The people and churches remained constant and dedicated to the task for twenty years.

congregational church government.⁵ In turn, congregations elect to participate in local associations of churches (usually geographical), in state Baptist associations, and in the nationwide assembly called the Southern Baptist Convention. A single congregation may choose to have fellowship with any or all of these entities. But two concepts are sacred. First, there is no “connectionalism”; and second, while local, state, and national associations are themselves autonomous, under no circumstance does any one of these entities exercise authority over the local congregation. This fierce, robust doctrine of autonomy, while often dangerous if not pinned tightly to biblical mandates, is ultimately what made possible a grassroots referendum in the SBC. In the end, the bigwigs in the SBC—in any generation—bear little resemblance to the bishops of lesser or greater hierarchical churches. They are nothing more than servants with cuff links, luxurious ties, and somewhat overstated titles like the President of Southwestern Seminary.

This loose confederation of churches bound together by common doctrine, passionate purpose, and a unified means of voluntary support has been, even as at this moment, proven fragile.⁶ But as fragile as it may be, the results are frequently an astonishment for other fellowships. This is most often noticed on the missions level where the national entity supports more than 5,000 missionaries, who are entirely funded by the SBC, rather than their being burdened to raise their own support. The other venue noted by many is the support of students in the six Southern Baptist seminaries, who receive essentially half the cost of their training.

⁵ The advent of “elder rule,” either of a single prominent pastor or an oligarchy of elders following something of a Presbyterian model, has emerged in recent years. There are even a few cases now of churches ruled by a board of directors, some of whom may not even be members. In defense of such moves, many of these arose due to the absurdities and embarrassments generated by an abusive, selfish, and godless form of congregationalism developed in many congregations and characterized by the “monthly business meeting” and the hegemony of “bylaws.” Advocates of the new departures seem ignorant or unconcerned that, if widely successful, the “cure” will be worse for Baptist futures than the disease.

⁶ The doctrinal agreement is *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. The purpose is somehow to get the saving gospel of Christ to all nations. The means (in its cooperative expression) is known as the Cooperative Program.

Governing boards for all SBC entities are selected as follows. Messengers to the annual meeting of the SBC elect a president. The president appoints a Committee on Committees, a layperson and a pastor from each SBC state. This Committee on Committees has only one critical function, the appointment of a Committee on Nominations consisting also of a layperson and a pastor from each state. The Committee on Nominations nominates all trustees for the various SBC entities and the following year recommends these to the SBC for election. The convention in session elects these trustees.⁷

Judge Paul Pressler, brilliant, optimistic, and a student of grassroots politics, led a coterie of pastors and laymen, who canvassed to find in each state a pastor and layman who had both sufficient courage and profound conviction and a willingness to promote the necessary educational efforts and strategic attendance at the annual conventions. A major objective each year was to elect a president who endorsed the concept of biblical inerrancy and who understood the issue and the plan.⁸ Assuming that each president made wise appointments, it would take only six years to gain ascendancy on the boards and ten years to have boards consisting only of those committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and other conservative causes.

Conservatives had multiple concerns. In addition to the issue of the reliability of the biblical text, there were uncertainties about where some denominational leaders and professors stood on the nature of the atonement, creation, the resurrection of Christ, abortion, the sanctity of

⁷ The genius of this system is that it provides the president of the convention with significant but strictly limited impact on the direction of the convention. In addition to the six seminaries, the entities include the Executive Committee, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the International Mission Board, the North American Mission Board, LifeWay (the publishing arm), and GuideStone (the retirement and insurance arm).

⁸ These presidents, beginning in 1979, were Adrian Rogers (1979), Bailey Smith (1980-1981), James T. Draper (1982-1983), Charles Stanley (1984-1985), Adrian Rogers (1986-1987), Jerry Vines (1988-1989), Morris Chapman (1990-1991), H. Edwin Young (1992-1993), Jim Henry (1994-1995), Tom Elliff (1996-1997), Paige Patterson (1998-1999), James Merritt (2000-2001), Jack Graham (2002-2003), Bobby Welch (2004-2005), Frank S. Page (2006-2007), Johnny Hunt (2008-present). These calculations are based on the election years of each. Rogers, for example, was elected in 1979 but presided over the 1980 convention.

marriage, and a host of other issues. However, early in the contest the decision was made to focus on only one issue. That decision was the most strategic one made by conservatives. Other issues would not be avoided and would be addressed whenever they arose naturally, but only one issue, i.e., the inerrancy of the Bible, would take center stage. There were three essential reasons for this. First, conservatives believed that all issues resolved ultimately into epistemological issues. How does one know for certain the truth of that which he chooses to espouse? The confidence that God had spoken in special revelation—in Christ and in the Bible— provided abundant hope that orthodox doctrine could be ferreted out from the study of Scripture.

Second, the issue of the nature of the Bible was understood by most Southern Baptists. Stop the average Baptist on the streets of Liberal, Kansas, and ask him, “Is the Bible true?” His answer would likely be, “Of course. Is there anyone who does not know that?” Third, by focusing primarily on one issue, moderates would have less wiggle room and would encounter greater difficulty in fogging denominational air. This proved to be the most strategic decision made. As Adrian Rogers classically opined, “Make them argue with the Bible.”⁹

Educational Advance

The educational advance was a multi-pronged effort. First came various kinds of publications and circulated white papers. *The Southern Baptist Advocate* became the principal mouthpiece of the movement, though there were also other regionally popular journals. Russell Kaemmerling, whose ministry would later suffer tragedy, was the editor for most of the paper’s life. Moderates soon greatly feared him as a keen investigative reporter.

⁹ Roughly commensurate with this effort in the SBC was the organization of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, which did its work from 1977 to 1989. This organization contributed substantively, especially through its publications to the conservative renaissance in the SBC.

In 1980, Russ Bush and Tom Nettles published *Baptists and the Bible*.¹⁰ The SBC denominational press refused to publish the book, but Moody Press agreed to make it available. The volume was devastating to the moderate cause because it demonstrated that while there were some liberal Baptists, the vast majority of Baptist leaders always endorsed the full reliability of the Bible. Try as they might, the moderates could not counter both the logic and the historiography of Bush and Nettles. Both professors at Southwestern Seminary at the time, these men encountered no small hostility from faculty and administration.

Other books, too numerous to mention, were published. Just one other, relatively unknown now, merits special mention. Robison James, liberal professor at the University of Richmond, proposed three debates, two public and one private, after which a book would be issued entitled *Beyond the Impasse*, which would establish an ideological compromise exhibited by four theologians on each side of the theological divide.¹¹ Ostensibly, this would set the stage for a convention compromise. The two public debates were held at the University of Richmond and at Southern Seminary. The private discussion held at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, was recorded by LifeWay. Edited by David Dockery and Robison James, who were opposing participants, moderates were also represented by John P. Newport of Southwestern Seminary; Walter Harrelson of Vanderbilt; and Molly Marshall, then a professor at Southern Seminary and now president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary in Shawnee, Kansas. Conservatives included R. Albert Mohler, then the editor of *The Georgia Baptist Index*; Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School; and Paige Patterson, then the president of Criswell College in Dallas, Texas.

¹⁰ L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, revised and expanded edition (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999).

¹¹ Robison B. James and David S. Dockery, eds., *Beyond the Impasse? Scripture, Interpretation, and Theology in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992).

The value of the volume was that for the first time interested parties could view the perspectives in the format of more recent volumes written from a contrasting position. Further, John Newport was comfortable with neither group and consequently was of little assistance to the moderates. When it became apparent that the positions intensely endorsed in the book were irreconcilable, Robison James suggested that publication be abandoned. Knowing that the debate had not gone well for moderates, conservatives pointed to the publishing contract. However, the title was admittedly misleading since the impasse had not been bridged, but had expanded. Therefore, they suggested that the problem be resolved with the addition of an interrogative to the title. The title became a question, answered helpfully by the book.

Another approach was an attempt to survey relatively current literary contributions from professors related to the institutions of Southern Baptists. In the midst of the controversy, Paige Patterson released a white paper entitled “Evidences.” These citations were from neo-orthodox and liberal professors teaching in state and national Baptist institutions. The effort might have had little effect if it had not been for Presnall Wood of the *Baptist Standard* of Texas who saw the paper and responded, citing some of the evidences and alleging that the authors in question had been taken out of context. Wood alleged,

The April 23 editorial of the *Standard* called on Paige Patterson, president of Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, Dallas to name the names of a ‘a very large contingency in significant denominational posts’ who do not in fact any longer believe that the Bible is totally true and do not hold to the faith of Baptist founding fathers.

President Patterson has responded, and a rather extensive news article appears on pages 5, 8, 9 of this issue of the *Standard*. Since some of these charges against some of those named had been made in some of the meetings of the nationally organized group, it is well that the names are made public in order that any Southern Baptist can know and evaluate the charges. It is helpful for the agenda of the charges to move from the general to the specific.¹²

¹² Presnall Wood, “Serious Charges,” in *The Baptist Standard* 14 May 1980, 6.

The effect was to create an appetite to view both “Evidences” and the books from which the citations had been plucked. Conservatives sold quite a number of heterodox books that probably would have had little audience otherwise. Just to provide a few examples, note the following from the pen of Glenn Hinson:

Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Jesus expected the return of the Son of Man and the consummation to occur within his own lifetime (Mark 13:30). His ‘error’ was due to prophetic foreshortening. So urgent was his sense of mission, it seemed as if God had to consummate his kingdom immediately.¹³

In a separate volume, Hinson came to this conclusion:

The conclusion leaves me with mixed feelings about the applicability of my findings to the church today. Negative sentiments arise out of the way in which early Christianity narrowly defined the boundaries for God’s people. Its expansion was related to an exclusivism and intolerance to which I could not subscribe. Early Christianity grew for the same basic reasons that conservative American churches are now growing. If my thesis is correct, the major ecclesiastical and theological forms had much to do with inculcating and conserving this spirit, helping continually to motivate the Empire-wide effort. Indeed, they figured prominently in inciting the effort to enlist not only non-Christians but others who claimed to be Christians—schismatics, heretics, and others. Did the covenant have to be so narrowly defined and applied through Christianity’s institutional life?

Today, it would appear, the covenant and thus the mission of the church could be defined with a greater measure of tolerance. This would not necessitate an abandonment of monotheism nor the conviction that some sort of special revelation occurred through Israel and Christ and the church. It might necessitate, however, the acknowledgement that the one God has disclosed himself in particular ways through other cultures and religions besides these.¹⁴

Temp Sparkman at Midwestern Seminary concluded that children reared in faith needed no repentance:

¹³ E. Glenn Hinson, *Jesus Christ* (Wilmington, NC: McGrath Publishing Co., 1977), 76. Dr. Hinson was a professor of church history at Southern Seminary.

¹⁴ E. Glenn Hinson, *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1981), 287.

Our children, truly reared in the faith, do not need to throw off the old life of sin and take on the new life of faith. They have, all along, been choosing faith over sin and choosing sin over faith, and will continue to do so throughout their lives.¹⁵

Fisher Humphreys of New Orleans Seminary just could not believe that vicarious punishment was either moral or meaningful:

Men today do not ordinarily hold this view of God as simply willing right and wrong, and so they cannot believe that vicarious punishment is either meaningful or moral. No illustration can be given, so far as I can tell, which makes vicarious punishment morally credible to men today. The stories of one soldier punished for another, a child punished for his brother, a man punished for his friend, may be morally praiseworthy from the point of view of the substitute, but they never are acceptable from the point of view of the punisher. It always seems morally outrageous that any judge would require a substitute. However noble the substitute’s act might be, the judge’s act seems despicable.¹⁶

Frank Eakin of the University of Richmond broke up the Egyptian army in a shallow bog:

When the J source and the Miriam couplet (Ex. 15:21) are juxtaposed, a probable event unfolds. The Hebrews fleeing Egypt were pursued by the Egyptians using chariots. When the Hebrews confronted a shallow body of water, a strong east wind blew back the water in a ready, shallow area, permitting the Hebrews to cross. When the Egyptians sought to follow, their chariots were too heavy and bogged down. As the horses attempted to pull free, some of the Egyptians were thrown into the shallow water and mud. In the confusion some Egyptians died.¹⁷

C. W. Christian of Baylor opted for Darwin and against being bound in any way by the

Bible:

The disparity between Genesis and Darwin, if it comes down to it, has really been decided for all of us in Darwin’s favor. If the Scriptures are not then reliable in matters scientific, how can they be trusted in other matters? Furthermore, scientific (‘critical’) study of the Scriptures has made clear the very human quality of the Bible itself, and has shown the rather surprising variety of outlook, witness, opinion and theology to be found in the Bible. What does this say about its authority? If indeed this book is shot-through with humanity, how can it be relied on as a testimony to faith and a source of doctrine? (p. 67).

¹⁵ G. Temp Sparkman, *The Salvation and Nurture of the Child of God: The Story of Emma* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1983), 25. Dr. Sparkman was a professor of Christian education at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

¹⁶ Fisher Humphreys, *The Death of Christ* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978), 61. Dr. Humphreys was a professor of theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

¹⁷ Frank Eakin, Jr., “The Plague and Crossing of the Sea,” *Review and Expositor* 74 (Fall 1977), 478. Dr. Eakin was a professor of religion at the University of Richmond.

And one cannot begin to understand the clearly provable inadequacies of Scripture scientifically and historically, or its peculiar richness and power to move men to worship and to repentance unless he takes this purpose seriously (p. 70).

But to the question, ‘Are we bound by the Bible?’ we must also answer ‘No,’ for within the dialogue of faith are other sources of insight which we must hear. Our theology is not exclusively biblical theology, even if we formally hold to an exclusive biblical authority, because we continually measure, test, and select from biblical insights in the light of the belief of the church and in the light of our experience (p. 81).¹⁸

Another method of creating awareness was the *Heart of America Bible Conferences*.

Staged in Saint Louis, Louisville, and elsewhere, these conferences brought together some of the best known Southern Baptist pastors to address why they endorsed the inerrancy of the Bible and why they were convinced that Southern Baptists as a whole needed to do the same. The Criswell College, in cooperation with evangelist James Robison, sponsored these events. Later Robison left the movement and became a Charismatic television preacher. But these conferences, plus the annual Pastors’ Conference immediately prior to the meeting of the SBC and the School of the Prophets at First Baptist, Dallas, became rallies for Ma and Pa Baptist to hear their favorite preachers expound these verities.

A feminist sociologist unsympathetic to the conservative cause actually wrote one of the most important accounts of the conservative renaissance. In her work *Baptist Battles*, Nancy Ammerman is one of the few to note the significant role of the pulpit. “The most natural form of communication among Southern Baptists is, of course, the pulpit. And in the medium, as we have noted, fundamentalists excelled.”¹⁹

¹⁸ C. W. Christian, *Shaping Your Faith: A Guide to a Personal Theology* (Waco, TX: Word Books, Inc., 1973), 67-81. Dr. Christian was a professor of religion at Baylor University.

¹⁹ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 181-82. Ammerman is notable for her evenhandedness and scholarly distancing. She is not always fair, but conservatives generally rejoiced in her research more than moderates. Patterson reviewed it for *Christianity Today* (see Appendix A). When protests fell on *Christianity Today* like West Texas hail, Ammerman herself replied with a letter to the editor affirming the accuracy

Another publication, *In the Name of the Father* composed by Carl Kell and L. Raymond Camp, focuses on the rhetoric of conservative Southern Baptist preachers, concluding that the conservative cause triumphed primarily because of the persuasiveness of their pulpits. The authors even appended the full text of Jerry Vines’ famous sermon, “A Baptist and His Bible,” as a prime example of conservative preaching.²⁰

As the thermometer in the Baptist kitchen climbed to unprecedented levels, the ensconced moderate leadership of the SBC felt increasing discomfort. Initial efforts simply to quash the belligerent and bellicose country cousins, who were supposed to have remained in their churches and to have funneled money upline, were unsuccessful. A series of efforts to placate the implacable were launched. For example, in the winter of 1982, *Review and Expositor*, then the journal of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, featured “Fundamentalism and the Southern Baptist Convention.” Charles Allen, a graduate of Southern who was at that time a Ph.D. student at the University of Chicago, submitted an article entitled “Paige Patterson: Contender for Baptist Sectarianism.”

Allen was a high school student in Fayetteville, Arkansas, when I first knew him. Unquestionably one of the most brilliant youths I had ever encountered, he nonetheless had some profoundly troubling personal issues, which he brought to me as his pastor. The *Review and Expositor* article contained considerable critique and analysis with which the subject of the article was less than ecstatic. Nonetheless, Allen’s analysis was much more hospitable than the treatment that I had come to expect. Allen also wrote an appendix to the article, which the

of the review. Another similar monograph, *Uneasy in Babylon* by Baylor professor Barry Hankins, made a concerted effort to be evenhanded, but like Ammerman discovered much greater sociological impetus than is warranted. The “battle” was theological in nature. Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture*, Religion and American Culture Series (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 2002).

²⁰ Carl L. Kell and L. Raymond Camp, *In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 131-45.

seminary refused to publish. In it, Allen attributed to his former pastor the fact that he was married and the father of children. He further indicated that while his own beliefs were now considerably different than Patterson’s, he knew that this was a matter of personal grief to Patterson—and sometimes even to Allen.²¹

Eleven years later, the same publication actually asked Patterson to provide an article entitled “My Vision for the Twenty-First Century SBC.”²² President Roy Lee Honeycutt was kind enough to publish the article but only with an addendum attempting to set the record straight on an issue with a member of the faculty. Nevertheless, the article was published, and once again the contrast of two positions vying for the hearts of Southern Baptists became ever clearer.

Two Events

Toward the conclusion of the open conflict, two events occurred with devastating effects on the moderate counterinsurgency, even though one was orchestrated by moderate leadership. The first was the report of the Peace Committee and, the second, the issuance of the Glorieta Statement by the six SBC seminary presidents. June 11-13, 1985, unveiled the granddaddy of all SBC gatherings in Dallas, Texas. An incredible 45,519 messengers clogged highways leading to the convention center, prompting a helicopter traffic reporter to opine, “What the Democratic and Republican National Conventions failed to do, Southern Baptists have done—we have terminal gridlock on Dallas freeways.” W. A. Criswell delivered to the Pastors’ Conference his now famous message, “Whether We Live or Die.”²³ Charles Stanley was reelected to a second

²¹ Charles W. Allen, “Paige Patterson: Contender for Baptist Sectarianism,” *Review and Expositor* 79 (Winter, 1982): 105-20. Appendix B includes the banned conclusion to Allen’s article, which he sent to me.

²² *Review and Expositor* 88 (Winter 1991): 46.

²³ Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000). Sutton says that Criswell told him that the sermon was the most important message he ever preached (147).

term in the largest vote ever taken by Southern Baptists. Tensions were high, arguments frequent, and, reverting to their early twentieth-century style, there were at least two scuffles among the saints. Somehow, the proposal of former convention president Franklin Paschal for a Peace Committee seemed appropriate, even if the committee had about the same possibilities for a peaceful conclusion as a chance meeting between a Cape Buffalo and a male lion.

Such a committee was the last possible hope for moderates and, therefore, not enthusiastically welcomed by conservatives, who understood political compromise only too well. To make matters worse, conservatives were able to place some of their strongest voices on the tribunal, but so the moderates did as well, and the majority on the panel was made up of what one conservative liked to call “the great unwashed.” Conservatives were not greatly encouraged when the final report came two years later in June, 1987, in St. Louis. When the full report arrived, discouraged conservatives met on Monday night to discuss it. There was talk of opposing the report. One conservative, remembering Gideon with Purah, his servant, and their reconnaissance mission to the camp of Midian, suggested that it was a good idea to sample opposition reaction and insisted that conservatives go to the moderates’ coffee gatherings and listen (Jdg 7:10). “They hate the report” was one conservative’s report, and that clearly became the consensus. The next day, the convention overwhelming adopted the report. The moderate collapse was almost a *fait accompli*. Pressler reports the key results of the report:

It is the conclusion of the majority of the Peace Committee that the cause of peace within the Southern Baptist Convention will be greatly enhanced by the affirmation of the whole Bible as being not errant in any area of reality.

Therefore we exhort the trustees and administrators of our seminaries and other agencies affiliated with or supported by the Southern Baptist Convention to faithfully discharge their responsibility to carefully preserve the doctrinal integrity of our institutions receiving our support, and only employ professional staff who believe in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible and that the Bible is truth without any mixture of error.

They then found as follows:

- We, as a Peace Committee, have found that most Southern Baptists see truth without any mixture of error for its matter, as meaning, for example, that
- (1) They believe in direct creation of mankind and therefore they believe Adam and Eve were real persons.
 - (2) They believe the named authors did indeed write the biblical books attributed to them by those books.
 - (3) They believe the miracles described in Scripture did indeed occur as supernatural events in history.
 - (4) They believe that the historical narratives given by biblical authors are indeed accurate and reliable as given by those authors.

They then issued this charge:

We call upon Southern Baptist institutions to recognize the number of Southern Baptists who believe this interpretation of our confessional statement and, in the future, to build their professional staffs and faculties from those who clearly reflect such dominant convictions and beliefs held by Southern Baptists at large.²⁴

Pressler reports that “Paige supported its formation [that of the Peace Committee] much more than I did,” and intimated that I had greater faith than he.²⁵ The truth is that Pressler almost always surpassed me in faith, confidence, and optimism. In fact, when anyone asked Richard Land how things were going in the convention, he would respond, “Ask Patterson and Pressler. The truth will be halfway between the dark foreboding of Patterson and the unrealistically sunny optimism of Pressler.” There is a sense in which Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, Charles Stanley, W. A. Criswell, Jimmy Draper, Bailey Smith, and others were essential to the return of the convention to the faith of the founding fathers, but any rendition of the story that did not grant primary focus to the layman, Judge Paul Pressler, would be hopelessly misleading.

²⁴ Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die: One Southern Baptist's Journey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 138-39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

The addition of an outside parliamentarian is also noteworthy. Attempting to have a town hall meeting with anywhere from 8,000 to 45,000 participants requires patience, some special rules, and courage. Few attempt this with groups of any size. In the 1986 convention, President Charles Stanley, challenged by a lawsuit from Robert S. Crowder, called an organization of professional parliamentarians and asked for the best. That person turned out to be a Christian Church minister, Barry McCarty. McCarty recognized the challenge and took to it like a polar bear to an ice float. First in the convention of 1986, and until today, McCarty has skillfully guided presidents through the convoluted maneuverings of such town meetings. Any assessment of the conservative strategy and triumph would be incomplete without recognizing the genius of Charles Stanley’s decision and the sure and sane leadership of a Christian Church preacher and professor.

One final event, perhaps the most bizarre of all, must be chronicled. When the Peace Committee convened a meeting on October 20-22, 1986, at the Baptist Conference Center in Glorieta, New Mexico, part of the purpose was to meet for prayer with the agency heads, including the six seminary presidents, four of whom were moderate to liberal with William Crews of Golden Gate and Landrum Leavell of New Orleans relatively quiet conservatives. By this time it had become obvious to almost everyone in Southern Baptist life that the six seminaries were the chief bone lodged in the Southern Baptist trachea. Consequently, sensitive to growing pressure, the six presidents decided to issue a statement, which, in part, declared,

We believe that the Bible is fully inspired; it is ‘God breathed’ (2 Timothy 3:16), utterly unique. No other book or collection of books can justify that claim. The sixty-six books of the Bible are not errant in any area of reality. We hold to their infallible power and binding authority.²⁶

²⁶ “The Glorieta Statement of the Seminary Presidents,” in Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation*, 166.

To assess the reaction of both conservative and moderates to this declaration is not so difficult. But to say which coterie was the more stunned lies beyond my ability. I will not soon forget the look on the face of Milton Ferguson (president at Midwestern Seminary) when I shared with him that I could not have signed the statement since grammar is part of “reality.” I did not think grammar had to be perfect to be a carriage for inerrant truth. The faculties at Midwestern, Southern, Southeastern, and, to some degree, Southwestern were furious with their presidents, certain that the presidents had bequeathed the family farm to the fundamentalist country cousins. Conservatives, on the other hand, found the statement totally inconsistent with practices at most of the seminaries.

Whatever the reactions, the tide now turned decisively in favor of conservatives. Within a short time, five of the six seminary presidents had resigned, retired, or been released. Only an inerrantist, William Crews at Golden Gate Seminary, remained. All six seminaries now had boards with a majority of conservatives, presidents who endorsed the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, and within their faculties growing contingencies who had the same commitments. Soon every agency of the convention had named conservative leaders, and gradually even the editors of state paper news distribution began to change. A long, complicated, difficult—and often painful—safari was in sight of the home from which it had wandered far.

Appendix A

***Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention.* By Nancy Tatom Ammerman. Rutgers University Press, 1990. 388 pages. Softcover, \$23.95.**

The most unfortunate aspect of *Baptist Battles* is that it will not make its author a millionaire. If only this sociological evaluation of Southern Baptist life could sell 5 million copies—Rutgers would be astonished, Ammerman would be basking at Club Med in Phuket, and I would be ecstatic!

A brilliant sociologist teaching in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, Nancy Ammerman is a self-confessed Southern Baptist moderate and feminist. She was a prominent participant in the August meeting of moderates in Atlanta that sought ways of stifling the conservative resurgence in Southern Baptist life.

The author’s purpose is to demonstrate that the divisions within Southern Baptist life reflect “deep cultural divisions separating people who have responded differently to that cultural change.” So, why would I, an ardent advocate of this conservative resurgence, volunteer my services as manager of sales and promotion to Rutgers University Press? My spirit of volunteerism is even more curious in light of the inaccuracies and misrepresentations of conservatives and their views that crop up occasionally in the book.

Neither Sherlock Holmes nor Jessica Fletcher will be required to resolve this curiosity. Astonishingly, Ammerman’s research reveals that just about every concern that conservative Southern Baptists have voiced over the last 30 years is justified!

Consider the following admissions to which Ammerman is driven by her research: 1) The national bureaucracy in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) had become totally pervasive by 1978, with the staffs and trustees of the agencies and institutions overwhelmingly moderate in their sympathies. 2) Even today the vast majority of Southern Baptists are conservatives. 3) Moderates in the SBC tend to be more liberal than their conservative counterparts on ethical issues, with many moderates imbibing alcohol and even swearing. 4) Moderates attach less importance to evangelism and “soul winning” than do conservatives. 5) Moderates in Southern Baptist life are almost exclusively from a white-collar, professional, elitist class, while conservatives are broadly distributed among all kinds of peoples. 6) Influential moderates tend to be from large, historic churches, whereas conservative leadership emerges from a coalition of the smaller churches and the so-called superchurches. 7) During the fifties and sixties, conservative pastors were isolated and excluded from channels of leadership in the denomination.

Concerning the denomination’s educational coterie, Ammerman says, “It is little wonder that the Convention’s colleges and seminaries had created both the ideology and the social networks, both the sources of meaning and belonging, out of which the old establishment was constructed. They were largely responsible for the changes in belief fundamentalists sought to oppose. Our statistical testing...confirmed what fundamentalists already knew—their foremost enemy was the denomination’s education system.”

The mystery is solved. What conservatives have known and alleged is now documented and rehearsed, not from a conservative pen, but from an honest, forthright moderate. With all of its warts and foibles, the conservative resurgence seems more than justified in its efforts given these admissions.

Ammerman also points to certain conservative advantages in the 12-year struggle, which have been largely unnoticed even by seasoned observers. First, the vast superiority of conservatives in the pulpit has given them more than just a leg up in a preaching-oriented denomination. Second, Ammerman notes the overwhelmingly adopted statement of the Peace Committee as effectively authenticating the claims of conservatives. Also, her research suggesting that 88 percent of all Southern Baptists are either self-identified fundamentalists, fundamentalist-conservatives, or conservatives, as compared with only 17 percent moderate-conservatives or self-identified moderates, is probably the most accurate assessment to date.

The book has its mistakes, but most of these are unrelated to the author’s research. The errors usually occur when she shifts to her own opinions or chronicles the usual rhetoric concerning such demonstrably false accusations as conservative mass busing of voters of the allegations that conservatives attempt to undermine individual freedom.

Ammerman stooped to the reporting of moderate paranoia about classroom lectures being clandestinely taped and then shipped off to Dallas. But this is the worst of it: Ammerman does not succeed in her purpose of demonstrating that the current controversy arises out of cultural differences. But the book is still invaluable.

Every “movement conservative” in the Southern Baptist fellowship should purchase two copies of this book. Read one and mark it carefully. It will prove extraordinarily helpful. Give the other copy to a confused Baptist whose theology tends to be orthodox but for whatever reasons has aligned himself with the moderates. If he can still waltz with the moderates after reading this book, then let the orchestra play!

Paige Patterson

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Appendix B

The following is the appendix in Charles W. Allen’s paper, “Paige Patterson: Contender for Baptist Sectarianism, *Fieds Quaerens Suparare*.”

Paige Patterson: An Appreciation

Every once in a while, especially when writing applications that require a biographical sketch, I will stumble on a few memories that shock me with the realization that I did actually do some thinking before Paige Patterson. I have little problem recalling what I was like in the seventh or eighth grade, but the closer I get to my junior year in high school— the year Paige came to be our pastor— the harder it is to recall favorite ideas, hobbies, feelings, and so on. I think it is because I was on the way to a set of values when suddenly I switched directions and started toward another set. So much of my character then is hard to recall because it got rearranged before it could take. After Paige came, I woke up. Either I became a young adult soon afterward, or I haven’t yet, but I found a vocation that so far hasn’t let me down, and for that Paige is largely responsible.

We wanted a pastor who would get all our college students back, but we never got them back. What we got was Paige Patterson, and who can say what I or close to thirty other people near my age would be doing now? It probably wouldn’t be ministry. I know it wouldn’t be in my case.

It’s hard to say, because high school students, like theologians, are always a little unrealistic, but I at least thought I was just about through with Southern Baptists, and maybe Christianity too. Then we got this evangelistic pastor, and I knew I would be leaving soon— and decided to tell him why. So I dropped by one Sunday afternoon and stayed for five years— talking with and learning from my friend and mentor.

Through Paige I came to recognize what the grace of God was, who Jesus Christ is, and what both were making out of me. Not that my conversion hadn’t been genuine enough for an eight-year-old and a re-dedicated ten-year-old, but my real awakening took place at sixteen. Paige was the one who pointed out that my hermeneutic— accept the Bible when you like what it says, reject it when you don’t— left something to be desired. He made me realize that wanting to know the truth was more important than trying to prove you already know it—especially when you pray. And he showed me that evangelism was only sharing Good News, and that I could do it too, if I would. Some of the best experiences of my life have come out of sharing Christ with someone else, and why for the life of me I don’t do it more often now, I can’t explain except by foolishness. Paige still does, and often— and I envy him.

Despite our theological differences now— and they are many and serious— I still feel an unpayable debt to him. He made me grow up, and sometimes I grieve over not turning out exactly as he had hoped. I suppose I still nourish the hope that some day we will both have grown to the point where he will like what I will have become. In the meantime I can only alternate between criticism and praise, following the lessons he taught me then as I can best apply them to today. But we still call each other friends.

Paige made himself available to young people through many varied means. When he first came he taught our training union for one quarter, teaching us about personal evangelism through role-playing and finally through sending us out in pairs one night. He vigorously supported starting a coffee-house ministry in Fayetteville, in an area where most of the bars were located, and encouraged us to become involved with people who really weren't our kind. When several of us dedicated our lives to Christian ministry, he instituted a Saturday morning session for us, appropriately called “Table Talk.” There I first learned such terms as “existentialism,” “demythologizing,” “eschatology,” “logical positivism,” “linguistic analysis,” “neo-orthodoxy,” “evangelical,” “process philosophy,” “JEDP,” “Q,” and so on. For high school and college students, that made us sound pretty sophisticated. Paige also started a Thursday night Bible study for college students in his home, where we often stayed until quite late. He and Dorothy also accompanied us on each of our four mission tours. (By the way, Dorothy could always hold her own in a theological discussion, and sometimes she had to correct Paige.) All of this is to say that his interest in us was obvious, and bonds of love and friendship quickly developed.

So now when I criticize him, it hurts us both. It hurts me because what I am actually criticizing is a period in my life which I can never disown. It hurts Paige because he had high hopes for me to become a major theologian who would help defend conservative evangelicalism. I still confess to having high hopes myself, but I got them because Paige first believed in me. Of course, part of me is compelled to criticize, too— again, I think, because we were so close.

What I would like people to come away with after reading this, is a perception of the man that differs from one they might get just from reading *The Shophar* or various news releases. Probably no one can be reduced to labels, and I am most acutely aware of this when I think of Paige. Somehow, despite all the legitimate objections to his theology and behavior, I still wish everyone could *like* him.