ANATOMY OF A SCHISM:
HOW CLERGYWOMEN'S NARRATIVES
INTERPRET THE FRACTURING
OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Graduate School of Vanderbilt University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Religion

August, 2008

Nashville, Tennessee

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To the Baptist clergywomen

who invited me into their lives and told me their stories

ACKNOWLEGEMENTS

The clergywomen at the center of this study graciously invited me into their lives. They told me stories. We laughed together and occasionally cried. Without them this project would not have come to pass, and I have dedicated the dissertation to the eight of them collectively.

Each member of my dissertation committee was first my teacher, and they have functioned as village elders helping to apprentice me into the world of academe. Their words and ideas are now permanently embedded in my thinking, and I fear I will not ever be able to thank them enough for the ways they have shaped me as a scholar and teacher. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore has been my advisor from day one at Vanderbilt, chairing my exam and dissertation committees. We have also worked together in numerous other projects and teaching assignments. I am grateful for her encouragement, trust, and critical insights, which all served to bring out more in me than I might otherwise have found alone. I am thankful to Kathleen Flake, historian of American religion, who patiently supported my forays into the study and teaching of history, and who offered important critical feedback all along the way. My thanks go also to James P. Byrd, historian of American religion and Baptists in particular, who has invited me to teach and collaborate on other projects and been a consistent encourager for my work. Deborah Wells Rowe, qualitative researcher and teacher of teachers, supported me through the Institutional Review Board process and has always been enthusiastic about my research, giving me many reasons for gratitude. Mary McClintock Fulkerson taught at Vanderbilt long enough for me to benefit from two courses of study. Since returning to Duke University's Divinity School she has continued to inspire me to keep feminist theology and the study of religious practices in lively conversation. When I asked Bill J. Leonard, professor of

history and dean of Wake Forest University's Divinity School to look over my proposal and let me know if I was doing any harm to his theories of Baptist history, he not only offered encouragement but also volunteered to be on my committee. His participation has been a gift and a delight.

My most significant supporter in every way has been, and continues to be, Lynn Reed. He has taken risks and changed professional roles in order to make coming to Nashville possible. And for this season of our lives he has helped me to keep the hard work in perspective with humor, great vacations, and regular reality checks which poke holes in the over-inflated sense of importance that academics tend to give themselves. He has contributed to making the every-day-ness of life, work, and partnership in raising our daughter more bearable and more joyful. Without his innumerable contributions my work might have been possible, but not nearly so enjoyable.

The newest member of my village is Marissa, who arrived at the midpoint of my writing process. She has been my most unwavering and uncritical fan, teaching me the power of unconditional love: not because I give it well, but because she gives it with such unconditioned and total abandon. I hope I might learn something of the unreserved passion and love that she lavishes on me and her dad every day.

Each of these villages of support has been essential, but the work itself has been solitary and whatever it becomes or brings is mine alone to bear. Without knowing where the home bases were I could not have found my way. I will ever be grateful for the riches of this time and journey.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE ANATOMY OF A SCHISM

I tried for a year or more before and after finishing Southeastern [Seminary] to find a place in the less conservative states in the South before turning elsewhere to fulfill my dream. I had hoped to be a Southern Baptist pastor. This was my background; this was my home; this was my dream; but when doors are shut God is good to open others. –Addie Davis[1]

Overview of the Study

On a hot summer afternoon in 1964, Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, ordained Addie Davis, making her the first Southern Baptist woman ordained to pastoral ministry.[2] The event drew lots of controversy. Watts Street pastor, Warren Carr, received nearly fifty letters of protest.[3] Davis was a graduate of Meredith College and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, yet she was not able to find a Southern Baptist congregation to serve. Instead she served churches in New England, which were affiliated with the American Baptist Churches (USA). When Davis retired in 1982, she returned to her hometown of Covington, Virginia, to serve as pastor of an ecumenical congregation.[4]

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[1] Addie Davis, "A Dream to Cherish," *Folio* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 1985): 1.

[2] Leon McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 153. Davis was ordained August 9, 1964. See Pamela R. Durso and Keith E. Durso, "Cherish the Dream God Has Given You," in *Courage and Hope: The Stories of Ten Baptist Women Ministers,* eds. Pamela R. Durso and Keith E. Durso (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 18-30. Davis died in 2005 at the age 88. John Pierce, "Addie Davis, first woman ordained as Southern Baptist pastor, dies at 88" *Associated Baptist Press,* December 9, 2005, http://www.abpnews.com/718.article (accessed December 15, 2005).

[3] Durso and Durso, "Cherish the Dream," 22-24.

[4] Ibid., 26. Davis has been honored multiple times and by various groups for her status as the first woman ordained in a Southern Baptist church.

In the years that followed Davis's ordination Southern Baptists saw a small but growing number of women ordained to ministry. By 1978 on the eve of major changes in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), historian Leon McBeth estimated more than fifty ordained Baptist clergywomen.[5] Over the next two decades the number of clergywomen, ordained in Baptist churches in the South, grew to more than 1,600.[6]

With the election of Adrian Rogers as president of the SBC in 1979, the political landscape of the Convention began shifting in a more conservative direction. Southern Baptists entered into a twelve-year period of political and theological unrest which led to a schism of the denomination. During the same two decades when the number of ordained women was rising dramatically, official Southern Baptist support for clergywomen was halted and reversed. The rejection of women's ordination and pastoral leadership was signaled as complete when Southern Baptists voted to make revisions in the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 2000. The document called for the gracious submission of wives to their husbands and claimed the role of pastor was only to be filled by men.[7]

In recent studies of the SBC schism, Baptist clergywomen are typically portrayed as a chief cause for division in that body over the last quarter century. However, the lives and experiences of clergywomen have seldom been studied as a viable source for understanding the religious conflict. This dissertation challenges the oversight and asks: How can a study of the narratives of Southern Baptist clergywomen contribute to a better

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[5] McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life,* 154-55. McBeth lists more than 50 women who's names had been collected by Helen Lee Turner. McBeth briefly recounts stories about a dozen of the women who were among that early group of ordained Baptist females.

[6] By 1997 Baptist sociologist Sarah Frances Anders had documented more than 1,225 ordinations of Baptist women. By 2000, more than 1600 ordained women were estimated. See Jim Morris, "Southern Baptists Vote against Women Pastors." (June 14, 2000). CNN.com Available: http://www.cnn.com/2000/US/06/14/southern.baptists.02

[7] *Baptist Faith and Message,* 2000. Available online: http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp (accessed February 14, 2008).

understanding of the fracturing of the SBC? The hypothesis holds that such an investigation produces a more nuanced interpretation of Southern Baptists, their controversies, and the recent schism which began in 1979.

To explore this claim the present study focuses on uncovering the psychological and theological underpinnings of one core ideal in Baptist life: *soul competency*. The phrase is used by Baptists from pulpit and pew, and some clergywomen in the study refer to it without prompting. This key principle captures a tension of competing authorities for Baptists: the Bible and religious experience. Like other Baptists, clergywomen struggle to live creatively and meaningfully between these powerful authorities. The *individual's liberty of conscience* grants clergywomen freedom and authority to interpret the Bible and their own religious experience. The *authority of scripture* describes the normative power of the Christian Bible to define and put limits on what constitutes "true" or "proper" religious experience. Each authority constrains the other. They are mediated by communities of faith, and they contribute to defining the parameters of Baptist culture and identity.

Clergywomen who were interviewed for this study tell stories about their calling, education, ordination and ministry, which illustrate how they work out the tensions in *soul competency*. Each woman's Baptist beliefs and practices are shaped in the dialectic between the authority of the Bible and the authority of their personal religious experiences.[8] As women who are geared toward the church, they negotiate these tensions within their various communities of faith. At the same time their negotiations of meaning and belonging are often made in resistance to their church and their denomination. The

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[8] Of course other factors play a role as well, but their negotiations of *soul competency* are the focus of this study.

findings about clergywomen's negotiations contribute to a new interpretation of the anatomy of schism in America's largest Protestant denomination.[9] Rather than functioning merely as a flashpoint of controversy, Baptist clergywomen, through their self-told stories provide insight into the rupture of the SBC.

During the years when Southern Baptists were negotiating a schism (1960 to 2000), a growing number of Baptist women were coming of age, sensing a call to ministry and pursuing that call in the usual ways. They went to seminary. They searched for jobs in ministry at churches and in other community ministries or denominational agencies. Eventually they sought ordination, and they endured the usual rocky road of ministry that their Baptist brothers did. Yet their experiences weren't quite the same as their male peers. Their ordinations stirred up controversy in large and small ways. They struggled longer to find places of service. More than a few left Baptist life altogether. Occasionally when churches took the steps to call, ordain or employ a clergywoman, they paid a heavy price and were cut off from other Baptist churches in their area for choosing to ordain.

The clergywomen interviewed for this study have each lived their own versions of this story. They also grew up and sensed a call to ministry, prepared with a seminary education, and eventually found ordination and work as ministers. The women range in age from thirty to fifty-two. Thus their stories coincided in different ways with the years

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[9] Presently the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is comprised of more than 40,000 churches, over 16 million members, and a multi-billion dollar enterprise of missionary work, theological schools, boards and agencies making it the largest Protestant denomination in America. See Frank Mead, Samuel Hill, and Craig Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States,* 12th ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 213-15; Eileen W. Linder (Ed.) Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 2005 (New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, 2005), 11.

of SBC schism. All of them have lived in and around the controversies of Baptists. Many were ordained during the height of the conflict.

Baptists have written about their clergywomen in ways mostly anecdotal, polemical, or apologetic.[10] With a few notable exceptions, Baptist clergywomen have been misunderstood by those outside Baptist ranks.[11] Although some historical reconstruction has begun to fill in missing data and build a better understanding of women's church leadership in the past, these monographs and collections are mostly inwardly focused and give less analysis or specificity than could be hoped.[12] Rarely have any of these writings studied clergywomen with sustained attention or serious theoretical analysis.

This lack of study, engagement or analysis drew me into a pursuit of understanding Baptist clergywomen in a critical and protracted way. What or who nurtured and supported Baptist clergywomen in the midst of an environment that denied their right to practice ministry? Where did they find support in a denomination that increasingly condemned their call as "mistaken"? During the decades of SBC battles, how did their numbers continue to grow in both seminary enrollment and church

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[10] A thoughtful apologetic offering is in Anne Thomas Neil and Virginia Garrett Neely, *The New Has Come: Emerging Roles Among Southern Baptist Women* (Washington, D.C.: Southern Baptist Alliance, 1989). Several contributors seek to answer practical questions of how and why women struggle to be ordained and to serve. They also address the scriptural arguments for and against women's ministry, and provide case studies, study questions and some sociological analysis of power and gender in the SBC.
[11] A notable exception is Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). Zikmund et al. included 116 Southern Baptist clergywomen in their landmark study of the situation of clergywomen in Christian denominations in the U.S. They also included responses from 107 Southern Baptist men. See Zikmund et al., *Clergy Women*, 137.
[12] Most of the work published about Baptist women in ministry has been historical in genre recounting the work and contributions to Baptist life. Examples of this type include, McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life*; David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003) and Charles W. Deweese and Pamela R. Durso, eds., *No Longer Ignored: A Collection of Articles on Baptist Women,* (Atlanta, GA: The Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007); Durso and Durso, *Courage and Hope.*

ordinations, despite the opposition? What contributed to women finding open pulpits when Baptists increasingly demanded their silence? What propelled churches to ordination, when the denomination was calling for subordination?

These questions came with me to graduate school and drove my early study. Only when I began to question the clergywomen themselves, in interviews designed to capture their narratives, did my research questions begin to change. Somewhere in the back-and-forth between reading the contemporary clergywomen's situation, and reading about eighteenth century Baptist women, did I come to see new potential connections.[13] The stories of Baptist clergywomen had something significant to add to the interpretation of the recent schism in the SBC.

Before going any further some self-disclosure is only fair. I, too, came of age during the years of Southern Baptist "holy war." I learned about an important resolution against women's ordination in 1984 while sitting on the back pew in the Southern Baptist church where I had grown up. It was the summer after my high school graduation, and I was in the midst of answering a call to ministry. I planned to pursue that call in the usual ways. I was about to embark on a six-month volunteer missionary assignment. But before I even had a chance to start, I found myself in the crucible of conflict.

Over the next ten years, I completed my mission assignment, majored in religion at a Baptist college, and specialized in pastoral care at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. After graduation it took nearly two years and more than a dozen interviews at agencies and churches before I found a place to serve. During these years, while I negotiated the twists and turns of becoming a minister, the SBC was negotiating a

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[13] In a conversation with Kathleen Flake about my essay about Separatist Baptist women preachers and deaconesses, she helped me see the argument I was using might also be useful to the contemporary situation of Baptist clergywomen, who are the focus of my dissertation.

schism. I was called to a new Baptist church, which had ties only to the Cooperative

Baptist Fellowship (CBF) and the Alliance of Baptists (AB), groups that had broken

away from the SBC. I was ordained by the Southern Baptist church where I grew up.

More than a dozen years later I remain the only woman to have received ordination for

ministry in that church.

In the years since my ordination I have been a member, leader, consultant,

minister, volunteer, and at times, critic of the new "moderate-to-progressive-

constellation" of Baptist churches, agencies and denominational groups.[14] I served for

more than five years as the minister of Christian education and youth in a medium sized

church in Georgia. I've been on coordinating councils, special study committees, editorial

boards, training teams, and strategic planning groups which have helped to nurture and

build those new Baptist institutions. I've written extensively for ministerial, educational,

devotional and editorial publications aimed toward the new Baptists. I am decidedly an

insider, although not an uncritical one. I am after all a Baptist.

These self-disclosures may bring the reader up short. What can I possibly write

that will not be at least biased and apologetic or at worst, proselytizing and polemical? In

the first place, I hope my training has prepared me to be more self-aware on the one hand,

and to be more able to recognize the influence of my own social and religious location on

the other hand. Additionally, I am convinced that all humanities writing is situated and

selective, and thus it brings particular perspectives and even bias to its subject matter. As

researchers we both change and are changed by the people and situations we study. Our

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[14] This is my personal description of the new groups which emerged on the left during and after the SBC
schism. See Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso "The State of Women in Baptist Life, 2005,"
in *No Longer Ignored: A Collection of Articles on Baptist Women,* ed. Charles W. Deweese and Pamela R.
Durso (Atlanta, GA: The Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007).

obligation is not to remain objectively neutral, but to assess our impact explicitly, and when appropriate fold it into our findings.[15]

Along these same lines, I would offer that I have taken a number of reflexive measures to guard against losing my perspective or becoming oblivious to my own biases. This step of beginning forthrightly with self-disclosure makes my perspective and location explicit rather than implicit. Along the way I've attempted to detach myself from any particular outcomes of my findings. This is a detachment of focused attention which resists control and seeks clarity, not a detachment of apathy. I have also subjected the study and my methods to feminist and other postmodern critiques, which are elaborated in Chapter II. Finally, I am striving for appropriate critical distance from which to make my arguments. One of the central ways to do this has been to choose some new terminology and new methods for making my arguments.[16]

The language used by those who lived through the Southern Baptist schism is not one of charity or compromise, but one of division, disdain, and disgust. Rather than wade into the tangle of available labels and terms, I'm offering something new. Even "schism" is a relatively novel metaphor for describing the events of the Southern Baptist divide.[17] During the years of greatest conflict between 1979 and 1990 when the reigns of power were wrested from one group to the other, there was little doubt about who was on which

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[15] As a feminist practical theologian, I stand in good company on this point. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore says, that feminist pastoral and practical theologians "have focused on women-centered knowledge and relationships." She goes on, "knowledge emerges within particular contexts and is defined by one's proximity to practices and not always along conventional academic lines." See "Feminist Theory in Practical Theology" in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology,* eds., Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 89-90, 93.

[16] The methods of practical theology and qualitative research are not new in themselves, although they will be newly applied to the situation under investigation. The terminology which follows is an attempt to treat each party in the schism with the greatest possible fairness.

[17] The term schism comes up occasionally in the literature about the SBC controversies, often as "schismatic." The term "anatomy" is used in at least one article by Larry L McSwain, "Anatomy of the SBC Institutional Crisis," in *Review & Expositor* 88, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 25-35. I was not aware of McSwain's article when choosing the dissertation title.

side.[18] In this study I will refer to the two parties as the "Biblicist Party" and the "Autonomist Party."

Those I'm including in the Biblicist Party are leaders who referred to themselves as conservatives, inerrantists, or traditionalists. Their Baptist detractors referred to them most often as fundamentalists and sometimes as ultra-conservatives or literalists. Scholars who have studied or written about these groups sometimes refer to those in the Biblicist Party as evangelicals, neo-evangelicals, or primitivists. Members of the Biblicist party most often referred to the events and outcome of the SBC schism as a "conservative resurgence" or a "course correction."

Those I'm including in the Autonomist Party referred to themselves alternately as moderates, denominational loyalists, or conservative-moderates. Their Baptist critics most often called them liberals or secular humanists. Scholars have at times called them modernists or progressives. Members of the Autonomist Party most often referred to events of the schism as "the takeover."

Both parties and some scholars refer to the events of Baptist life between 1979 and 1990 as "the controversy." Both parties include individuals who self-identified in ways different from others in their party. Both sides (and their individual members) claimed to be *authentic Christians* and *true Southern Baptists*. Members of both parties argued at times that they were the most loyal to Christ, the most traditional in their belief or the most serious about the Bible.

Out of the conflict that ensued in the 1980s and 1990s, two national splinter groups emerged: the Alliance of Baptists (AB) and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

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[18] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 72-73ff.

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(CBF).[19] A number of state Baptist organizations, special interest groups, and more than a

dozen new theological schools also came into being as a direct result of the schism.[20] The

CBF is the larger of the two national groups, in terms of budget, staff and number of

affiliating churches. CBF also functions as a centralizing force and draws together a loose

confederation of state and regional organizations, and other like-minded, special-interest

Baptist groups.[21]

 Contrasts between the SBC and the newer groups are varied and numerous, yet all

three national groups (and the societies and schools, too) continue to declare themselves

to be authentically Baptist. One major difference among the groups can be found in their

institutional positions on women's ordination. Since 1979 SBC annual resolutions,

confessional statements, Bible study literature, and most official convention publications

persistently refocused women's roles toward the private, familial, and supportive, and

away from the public, ecclesial, and authoritative. They moved increasingly toward

making a case against women's ordination for ministry by arguing from the Bible,

tradition and nature.

 By contrast, churches, schools and other societies affiliated with the AB and CBF

have increasingly declared open support for women's leadership and continued to call,

ordain, and hire women for ministry. Their study materials, organizational mission

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[19] Founded in 1987, the Alliance estimated in 2003 a membership of 62,000 in 122 churches, and a combined missions and operating budget of $336,000.00, according to the Alliance newsletter *Connections* 6, no. 11 (November 2003). The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was founded in 1991 and estimated in 2004 a membership of 210,000 in 1200 churches and an annual budget exceeding $17 million. See Mead, Hill, and Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations*, 186-87, 195-96, for overviews of both groups.

[20] In the state conventions the schism continues to work itself out with renewed battles each fall when they meet for business. The Texas and Virginia conventions clearly aligned themselves with the groups who left the SBC. Those loyal to the SBC have formed opposition parties. The reverse is true in other states, where such opposition takes different forms.

[21] In addition to the new seminaries and schools of theology, the other "special interest" groups focus on a wide range of concerns: religious liberty, women in ministry, ethics and justice, church curriculum, news and information. Collectively they cover most of the services and concerns that churches once, but no longer, turned to the SBC to deliver.

statements, meeting topics and media portrayals increasingly included women in a variety

of leadership roles including ministers and pastors. Clergywomen themselves have

gravitated toward these newer Baptist groups and the churches which support them. Like

most institutions in American culture, conflict about appropriate roles for women (and

men) existed in the SBC prior to 1979. From the first ordination of Addie Davis in the

1964, women's ordination has been a debated issue. However, some support for women's

church and denominational leadership could be found in Southern Baptist churches and

denominational agencies. Even that limited support for clergywomen began to evaporate

after 1979 when a growing schism in the SBC polarized Baptists into oppositional parties

who fought for the appointive powers of the convention presidency.[22]

The schism in the SBC has been documented over the past two decades in both

partisan literature, which captured sentiments from both sides, and in more critical

analyses of the religious divide.[23] The focus in most of these analyses remains at the

institutional level on the variety of social, political, and theological currents that shaped

the schism. Evidence for these trends relies on official publications and reports of the last

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[22] The appointive powers of the SBC president are key to controlling the boards, agencies, policies and personnel of the entire convention. This multi-layered process is described in greater detail in Chapter IV.
[23] Academic studies include: Bill Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*; Nancy Tatom Ammerman, ed., *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993); Arthur Emery Farnsley II, *Southern Baptist Politics: Authority and Power in the Restructuring of an American Denomination* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1999); Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon; Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2002). Among the more partisan literature one finds: James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis: The Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Dallas, TX: Criterion Publications, 1986); James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1991); Walter B. Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993); Rob James and Gary Leazer, eds., *The Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention: A Brief History* (Decatur, GA: Baptists Today, 1994); Carl L. Kell & Raymond L. Camp, *In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999).

quarter century, and in some cases first hand accounts by official leaders and decision makers. In these studies women's ordination and ministry are portrayed as a one important cause of the controversy and typically reduced to one chapter in the larger discussion of the splintering denomination. However, clergywomen are almost never taken seriously for their contribution toward understanding the recent schism in the SBC or the ways gender is conceived in the Baptist culture.

This study contests the portrayal of women's ordination as a mere fault line for division, and considers how the stories and experiences, as told by clergywomen in their own narratives, deepen and complexify an understanding of the Southern Baptist schism. By analyzing carefully how Baptist clergywomen negotiate the tensions between the authority of scripture and the individual's liberty of conscience and find ways to remain Baptist while pursuing their callings, this study reveals the ways that crucial Baptist tensions of belief and practice allow for creativity, maturity and trust. The project also brings into focus some psychological and theological dynamics of schism which seethed in the 1980s and fostered a climate of polarization, conflict, and hostility in the SBC.

Exploring this anatomy through the lenses of object relations theory and theological anthropology, insights revealed in the clergywomen's stories are analogous to the dynamics of institutional conflict which were at the heart of the denominational schism. Conversely the women's stories also bring into focus the durability and flexibility of the tensions, which are at the core of the Baptist ideal of *soul competency*. Authority of the individual's liberty of conscience and authority of scripture constrain and chasten one another such that a space within the tension allows for negotiations, mediated by communities and individuals, and gives rise to meaningful and creative

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work. These same poles of authority and tension are also perennially prone to have a polarizing and conflicting effect on the communities of faith where they are operational.

To get at the shape and form of the tensions in *soul competency,* calls for a framework for interpretation. Baptists are not easily defined either by adherence to doctrinal statements or by their following of any central charismatic figures. Instead they are better understood historically as a group, which over time negotiates a particular set of tensions of belief and practice, which make up the parameters of what it means to be Baptist. Such a framework for describing these tensions of Baptist conviction is suggested by Bill Leonard in his introduction to the *Dictionary of Baptists in America.*[24] He observes the following tensions as enduring through four hundred years of Baptist history: 1) individual liberty of conscience versus the authority of scripture; 2) the autonomy of the local church versus associational cooperation; 3) clergy versus laity; 4) religious liberty versus loyalty to the state; and 5) dramatic conversion versus nurturing process.[25] Each pair works as a constraint on Baptist life and polity. Together they work like (permeable) walls defining the group's life over time (see Figure No. 1 below).

Although the tensions identified by Leonard can be observed as functioning in various registers of Baptist life (i.e. in sermons, news publications, denominational histories, congregational polity documents and covenants, etc.), this study will examine how they can be observed within the narratives of the Baptist clergywomen. Further the study will demonstrate how the narratives of clergywomen can illuminate the dynamics of *soul competency* and interpret the Southern Baptist schism of the last three decades.

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[24] Bill J. Leonard, ed. *Dictionary of Baptists in America* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 4-6.
[25] In his recent text, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003) Leonard identifies three additional tensions: doctrinal statements: invariably confessional, selectively creedal; ordinances: sacraments and symbols; diversity: theological and ecclesial.

Tensions of Conviction in Baptist Life and Polity
Adapted from Bill Leonard's *Dictionary of Baptists in America* (1994)

Authority of Scripture

Associational Cooperation

Laity

Dramatic Conversion

Association

Competency

of All Believers

& Calling

Religious Liberty

of Church and State

FAITH COMMUNITY

Loyalty to the State

Separation

Salvation

Nurturing Process

Priesthood

Soul

Voluntary

Clergy

Liberty of Conscience

Local church Autonomy
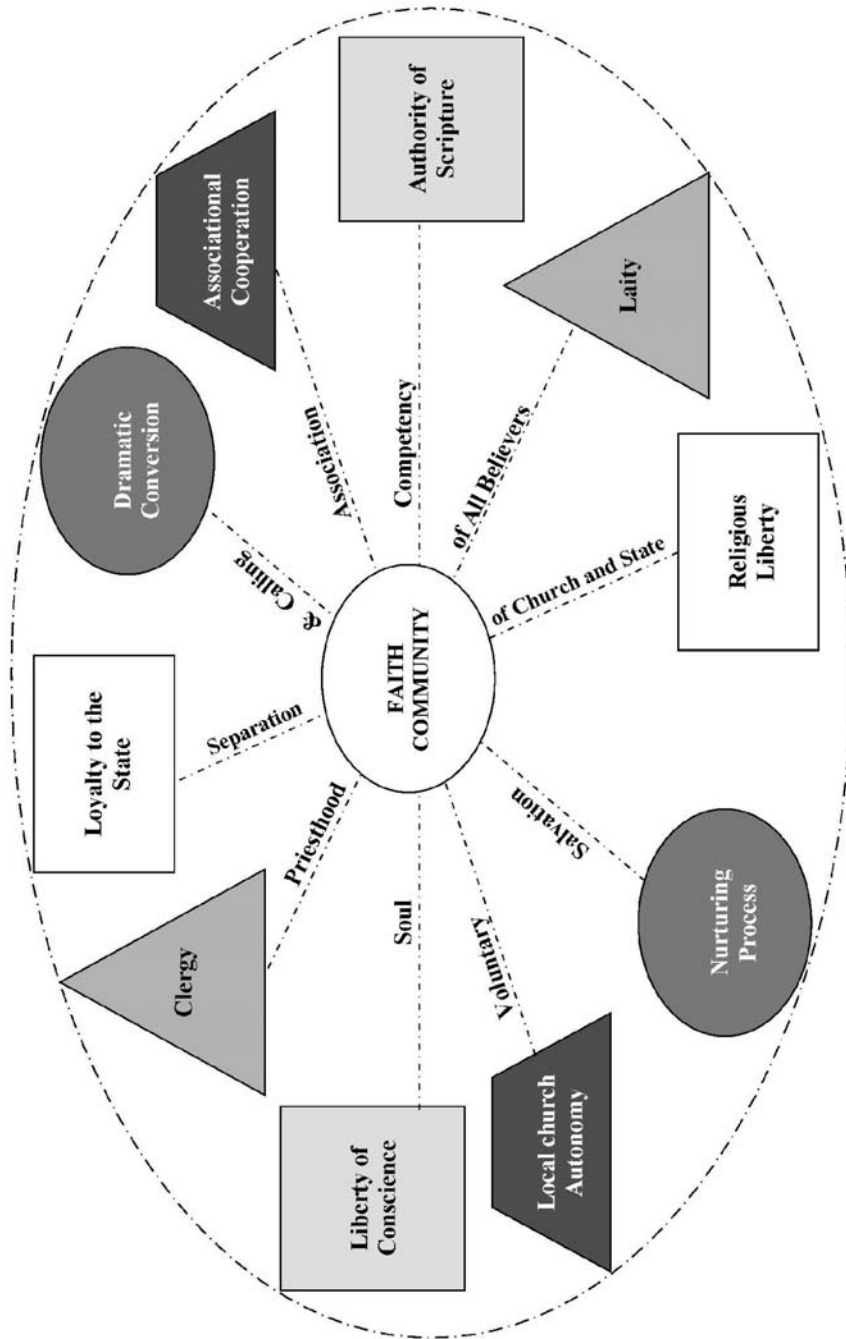
Although all the tensions could be fruitful for exploration, the central Baptist idea of *soul competency* is the focus of this study. The local faith communities and larger groups of Baptists mediate the tensions of conviction. Within that matrix meanings of

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gender are constructed and reified. The meaning of gender is both found and discovered

by clergywomen. It is also created and reinterpreted in their efforts to fulfill their

vocations and remain Baptist. The construction of gender is a social task, which includes

both theological and psychological choices and implications. For all Baptists generally,

and for the clergywomen in this study particularly, soul competency carries with it

gendered understandings of freedom and authority, which are reinterpreted by the

clergywomen.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter II describes the methodological approach of the study including the

protocol for collecting data from Baptist clergywomen and rationale for choosing

participants for the study. It also situates the study in the field of practical theology and

several other fields of study. The chapter raises a number of ethical and epistemological

issues, which set parameters around the study. The chapter also introduces briefly the

narratives of the women who are central to the analysis that follows.

The study can be situated in the field of practical theology, which in recent years

has taken an increasingly nuanced approach to the study of lived religion and the

individual and collective lives of a variety of religious people by mounting arguments

about a variety of community rituals, family issues, and other practical problems.[26] In

order to make their arguments, these studies have crafted analyses from various social

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[26] See for example: Mary Clark Moschella, "Food, Faith and Formation: A Case Study on the Use of Ethnography in Pastoral Theology and Care" *The Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 12 (2002): 75-87; Don S. Browning, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Pamela D. Couture, K. Brynolf Lyon, Robert M. Franklin, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate*, 2nd Ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); and Leonard Hummel, Jane Maynard, and Mary Clark Moschella eds., *Pastoral Bearings: Lived Religion and Pastoral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, forthcoming).

scientific perspectives, historical studies, and theological points of view. Pastoral and feminist theologians have made use of data collection methodologies such as anthropology and qualitative research. Such approaches do not depend solely on historical texts, previously collected data, or the observations of others. Rather the primary sources for such studies are the narratives and experiences of "living human documents" or the social networks and shared experiences of those in "living human webs."[27]

Much of the recent work in these fields assumes an overarching practical theological method, as described by Don Browning which includes sub-moments of thick description, historical analysis, engagement with normative texts, and constructive or strategic proposals.[28] My research appreciates the basic outline of practical theology as sketched out by Browning, as well as the notion of Edward Farley that practical theology is best understood as an "interpretation of situations."[29] Thick descriptions of both the situation of Southern Baptists and the stories of eight Baptist clergywomen will be essential for portraying the problem, and make up the major content of the work. Secondary sources and texts will be employed to describe the history of Southern Baptists since 1920. These sources are important to the argument, but alone they are inadequate to the task of interpreting the SBC schism.

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[27] See Anton T. Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World* (New York: Willett, Clark & Company, 1936); Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984); and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century," in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care,* ed. Jeanne Stephenson Moessner (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 9-26.

[28] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991).

[29] Edward Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology" in *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

A central concern of practical theology is to extend beyond thick description of social situations and analysis of theological problems. The goal of Browning's practical theology is to offer strategic theological responses to the problems or issues at hand. While my work shares a caring horizon with other studies in practical theology, my concern for the group studied (both the clergywomen and the SBC), and/or responses to their particular social situations, will be bracketed in order to do a more thorough analysis. Pastoral responses and/or constructive proposals may be offered in future publications.

Practical theology itself is not without need for revision. Several assumptions of the interdisciplinary field are challenged first by feminist appraisals of practical theology and then by six postmodern critiques of anthropology identified by theologian Kathryn Tanner. These critiques help set parameters around what is meant by "culture" and where the limits of interpretation are for the study. The chapter also gives a narrative of the research events from gaining Institutional Review Board approval to interviewing Baptist clergywomen, to the emergent design of the study, which moves back and forth between data and theory. Special attention is given to describing the methods of qualitative research used to collect and analyze ethnographic data. Finally the chapter introduces the clergywomen who were interviewed for the study.

Chapters III and IV present a history of Southern Baptists since 1920, including the trends in the denomination regarding leadership, service and ordination of women. The framework identified by Leonard provides a guide for the historiography of Southern Baptists since 1920. Following World War I, Southern Baptists took significant steps to enhance organizational and institutional efficiency during the 1920s, including

centralizing their decision-making and funding mechanisms. Efforts to increase efficiency were renegotiations of *voluntary association,* or the tension between associational cooperation and local church autonomy. Pleas for cooperation, unity and progress de-emphasized local church autonomy. During the 1920s women began voting at annual SBC meetings, and the first woman addressed the convention in 1929. White women as well as black men and women, despite their official and legal enfranchisement to American politics and civil society, continued to live and work among Baptists in the South through secondary and tertiary positions of authority, mainly through separate organizations.

Greater freedom for Southern Baptist women to vote and to work strained the tension between liberty of conscience and authority of scripture in the 1920s and 30s. However, during this era *soul competency* continued, in hidden ways, to support both patriarchy and white supremacy and appealed to biblical texts to maintain the ideologies.[30] The fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s rocked the religious landscape in the U.S., and it produced several denominational splits. However, it had a lower impact on the SBC. Southern Baptists did not split during the volatile decade. They chose instead to respond to the demands of fundamentalism and modernism with a spirit of compromise. They maintained their commitment to *soul competency* by adopting the *Baptist Faith and Message* in 1925, insisting it was a confessional statement and not a binding creed.

The middle decades of the twentieth century started at a low point with the stock market crash of 1929, the Dust Bowl, and the subsequent Great Depression. Southern

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[30] Extended examples of the rhetoric against women's leadership can be found in J.W. Porter, ed., *Feminism: Woman and Her Work* (Louisville, Ky.: Baptist Book Concern, 1923).

Baptists, like most denominations, lost ground numerically and financially until the population and economy turned around following World War II. Renewed religious revivals of the 1950s put Baptists in debates over the proper way to *salvation* either by dramatic conversion or the slower nurturing process of education and persuasion. Communism and the Cold War strained the Baptist commitment to *separation of church and state* with demands for patriotism and state loyalty at the expense of religious liberties. Nevertheless, Baptists were so delighted at the tremendous growth of adherents, budgets, and buildings that such tensions were minimized and growth itself was esteemed.

The 1960s brought renewed threats to authority, not unlike threats of the 1920s, only wielding greater force and straining the careful compromises and alliances that held the SBC together.[31] Controversies over scriptural interpretation, seminary teaching, the ordination of women, civil rights and the Vietnam War, together contributed to a climate of fear, distrust, and anxiety, which strained every tension identified by Leonard, and laid the groundwork for schism in the 1980s and 1990s. Again Southern Baptists turned to their confessional statement in the *Baptist Faith and Message,* revising it in 1963 with hopes of maintaining unity. However, such unity was tenuous in the face of these new encroachments of modernism into the Southern Baptist way of life.[32]

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[31] Bill J. Leonard argues that four major forces kept unity among Southern Baptists while simultaneously maintaining a "Grand Compromise": Southern cultural identity, which arose following the Civil War, a broadly based doctrinal unity, which was upheld by centrist political leaders of the agencies and institutions, uniform programming, which week to week and around the year kept Baptists focused on the same concerns of missions, evangelism and Bible study, and finally a commonly held piety, based in experience, scripture and a Baptist understanding of faith. See Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 58.
[32] Nancy T. Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 8. Ammerman notes, "Only where traditional orthodoxy must defend itself against modernity does Fundamentalism truly emerge." Although fundamentalism had a lesser impact on

Church roles for Southern Baptist women changed dramatically between 1960 and 2000. Between 1964 and 1975 the first wave of Southern Baptist women were ordained and feminism began to raise questions about women's place in church, home and society. After 1970 women's seminary enrollment began a steady climb, and as the decade wore on opportunities for professional ministry increased. In the watershed year of 1979 the Biblicist Party elected their first SBC president and the trajectories of growth and support for women's leadership were openly called into question.

During the 1980s two trends collided: women's seminary enrollment and ordinations continued to grow, but opposition to women's leadership was on the rise among the Biblicist Party. A foreclosure on official support from the SBC for women in ministry looked imminent. As the Autonomist Party lost power and influence in the SBC, and the Biblicists gained more control of the seminaries and agencies at the end of the decade, women's roles became a major source of disagreement between the parties. Biblicists, who took the reigns of leadership in the denomination, understood their mission to include direct challenges to culture on many points, including proper roles for women. Biblicist hopes for reversing the inroads of feminism culminated in revisions to the *Baptist Faith and Message*, 2000, which declares a complementary view of marriage, and a male-only view of the pastorate.[33]

Chapter V presents a case for why the literature about the SBC schism needs contesting. The small number of academic studies about the Southern Baptist schism lack attention to the roles and contributions of women during the dramatic events of the

the SBC in the 1920s, during the 1960s the threats of modernism were much more powerful and immediate, and fundamentalism became a potent response. Ibid, 21-22.

[33] *Baptist Faith and Message,* 2000. Available online: http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp (accessed February 14, 2008).

schism. The literature does not use a phenomenological approach, such as psychology

and theological anthropology can offer. Because in some ways the story of the SBC

schism is still unfolding, the existing literature lacks a broad enough historical analysis to

make a compelling and non-partisan argument about the causes of schism.

Preoccupations with inerrancy also tend to distract the literature from considering broader

tensions, such as soul competency, which animate the Baptist schism. To begin filling in

these gaps in the literature, the present study investigates the narratives of Baptist

clergywomen and argues that their stories contribute to interpreting the schism. The

chapter also presents warrants for an argument which lays the ground for clergywomen's

narratives to interpret the schism.

Chapters VI and VII analyze the most central and widely identified tension in

Baptist life: the principle of *soul competency.* The goal of these chapters is to build an

interpretive model based on the observable ways that Baptist clergywomen negotiate the

tension, and reinterpret the meaning of soul competency. Their experiences elucidate the

tensions also present in the SBC schism. The tension between individual liberty of

conscience and biblical authority in Baptist clergywomen's narratives opens up the

apparent conundrum in the following question: If the Bible prohibits female leadership,

how do Baptist clergywomen continue to honor some authoritative claim of scripture and

yet find support for their work? One lens for this analysis is the theological anthropology

of systematic theologian, Edward Farley. In Chapter VI soul competency is described as

a Baptist ideal in which the individual believer may present oneself to God, read

authoritative texts, act with conviction, participate in community and resist coercion from

any quarter. Farley's insight into the human condition opens up the depth of meaning in

soul competency. The analysis reveals how Baptist clergywomen negotiate this tension

between the competing authorities and reinterpret soul competency, challenging the

hidden assumptions about gender and claiming their own places of service to the

community.

Within the tensions of belief and practice in *soul competency,* the possibilities for

good and for harm are present. In Chapter VII psychoanalytic theories of D.W. Winnicott

and Jessica Benjamin provide rich theories for interpreting the meaningful possibilities of

soul competency. They also help theorize its potential to become polarized and

stultifying. Benjamin describes the powers of domination and subjugation, which

contribute to constructions of gender. Winnicott and Benjamin expand the conceptual

material, which contributes to understanding an anatomy of Baptist belief and practice.

Finally Chapter VIII shifts the insights of psychological and theological analysis

from a focus on the clergywomen to focus on understanding the institutional conflict

which resulted in schism in the SBC. The Biblicist Party and the Autonomist Party both

came into being as a part of the public and vociferous conflict which raged for a dozen

years (1979-91). During this time leadership of every major Southern Baptist institution,

board and agency was transferred to the Biblicists from the Autonomists. After twelve

years of losses, the Autonomist leaders set out to start new Baptist groups.[34] The

negotiations of schism continued for another decade, but more quietly and with greater

distance between the two parties. Official support for women in ministry grew among the

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[34] Some Baptist leaders in the Autonomist party, characterized as "moderates," were denominational employees, who refused to participate in the arguments and political maneuvering. This left members of the Autonomist Party who were church leaders feeling betrayed. Some of the denominational employees stayed on in their positions even after Biblicists took over the policy making boards. Other Autonomists left the SBC to become leaders in new Baptist organizations. See Cecil Sherman, "An Overview of the Moderate Movement," ed. Walter B. Shurden, *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 39-40.

new groups started by Autonomists (CBF and AB). Evaporation of support for ordained women and concurrent elevation of male pastoral authority was officially complete in the SBC by 2000 when additional revisions to the *Baptist Faith and Message* declared "gracious submission" as the ideal role for wives and that the "office of pastor is limited to men."[35] Although the schism appeared to split and splinter the denomination, all resulting parties continue to claim to be authentic Baptists. In many respects they are all right. The durability of these Baptist tensions of authority is remarkable both for its power to recreate itself and its power to make Baptist community possible and sustainable for clergywomen and others as well.

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[35] *Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville, TN: Southern Baptist Convention, 2000), http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp (accessed May 30, 2006).

CHAPTER II

METHODS FOR INTERPRETING
THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST SCHISM

I saw your ad in FOLIO. I am "all those things" in the ad and would love to help you. . . . Whatever questions you have, I'll try to answer and help you as much as I can. – Beth[1]

Introduction

Any research project about a small, understudied group such as Baptist clergywomen, conducted by an insider to the group, raises questions about the motivations of the study and the bias of the researcher. In response, this chapter will consider questions of epistemology and method, related to both practical theology and qualitative research, lay out investigative strategies and protocols, address questions about the purpose and outcomes of the research, and introduce the clergywomen who are central to the study. One overarching purpose of this chapter is to define the research methods which have guided the inquiry into clergywomen's lives. Another major purpose is to describe how the methods of practical theology and ethnographic research have informed and shaped a new interpretation of the Southern Baptist schism.

Like other academic inquiries, one goal of this research project is to critique the shortcomings of existing knowledge and to produce new knowledge about a subject of interest. In this case the findings critique recent attempts to explain the schism of the

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[1] This initial (and typical) response to a paid advertisement seeking participants for this study came from "Beth," who, along with the other seven clergywomen, was interviewed for the present study. Their names and other identifying information have been changed to hide their identities and protect their privacy.

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) which began in 1979 and offer an alternative model for interpreting that cultural shift. As it is used here, "model" means something more than a metaphor but less than a means of prediction. For example the descriptor "schism" is a metaphor which offers a vivid description of events of the past thirty years in SBC institutions; however the metaphor is not adequate for interpreting or explaining what happened. This study attempts to go beyond the hermeneutical task of *naming* what happened to a more detailed explanation (or anatomy) of how and why it happened. It does not, however, hope to provide a comprehensive explanation, but rather a new interpretation of the events. The interpretive model developed in this study uses a variety of multilayered theories to bring greater clarity to the situation. The resulting arguments and interpretive model do not attempt to predict any future findings or generalize those findings beyond the situation under consideration.[2]

This study examines the narratives of eight Baptist clergywomen and argues that the findings about their ways of remaining Baptist within a particular matrix of tensions contribute to a model of interpretation of the Southern Baptist schism. Like some previous studies, this one concludes that the split of the SBC was inevitable, yet presents a new way of interpreting the dynamics of the division.[3] Examining the dynamics that the clergywomen themselves negotiate along their paths of vocational discernment, seminary training, ordination and entry into ministry within the Baptist culture, provides an analogy for the seeing how very similar dynamics within the SBC played out during the

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[2] See Volney P. Gay, "GDR 3054: Syllabus on Methods," (n.d.), 5-12. The model that is built in this study is, in the language of philosophy of science, a "weak model" because it *explains* rather than predicts. Only "strong models" take the additional step of predicting what might happen next or generalizing the findings to other similar situations.

[3] Unless otherwise noted, references to "Baptist(s)" in this chapter will refer to participants in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and its affiliated agencies. Although the clergywomen in this study all had ties to the SBC at some point in their lives, most have gravitated to churches and groups which are no longer Southern Baptist.

years of schism. The personal, political and theological negotiations of clergywomen –
within a set of perennial tensions of Baptist belief and practice – make the study subject
to a variety of feminist and postmodern critiques. And as a project of practical theology,
this study pushes the methods of that field into new directions.

The first section of this chapter situates the study as it relates to several academic
fields, and describes how the work is most at home in the field of practical theology.
Classical definitions of practical theology, however, are inadequately nuanced for a
postmodern inquiry. Thus the second section of the chapter presents established
approaches to practical theology, which make particular modern assumptions about the
meaning and study of culture. These assumptions are challenged first by several feminist
appraisals of practical theology and then by six postmodern critiques of anthropology
identified by theologian Kathryn Tanner. These critiques help redefine what is meant by
culture and also chasten the study itself so as not to exceed its interpretive boundaries.
The third major section of this chapter offers a narrative of the research protocol followed
while interviewing Baptist clergywomen for this project, paying special attention to
methods in qualitative research for collecting and analyzing ethnographic data. The final
major section of the chapter introduces the clergywomen who were interviewed for the
study.

Situating the Study in the Field of Practical Theology

The study of Baptist clergywomen, and what their narratives say about the schism
of a major American religious denomination, is primarily a project of practical theology;
however, it is also prefigured by ethnographic studies, congregational and leadership

studies of the church, projects in American religious history and lived religion. Who is

the audience of this interdisciplinary study? The project should be of interest to those

with both scholarly and amateur interests in Baptists of the twentieth century and to

historians of religion in America, because the study attempts to bring together themes of

the wider study of American religion with the specific events and ideas of a single

denominational history.[4] It may be of particular interest to those who are working to

understand the cultural changes of the SBC in recent decades.[5] It should also be of

interest to historians who have a concern for women's professional leadership in the

church.[6] It may also interest researchers who are exploring the interdisciplinary task of

bringing together various social scientific methods for the study of religion, particularly

ethnographic and practical theological methods.[7] Additionally it could be of interest to

theorists concerned with the intersection of gender and religion in the study of American

culture.

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[4] Chapters III and IV of this study attempt to frame the history of Southern Baptists in terms of recently identified themes of American religion, while focusing specifically on the events of the Southern Baptist institutional context, ideology and practices. Nancy Ammerman argues the study of denominations must include an understanding of "beliefs and practices, organizations, and cultural identities" in her essay "Denominations: Who and What Are We Studying?" in *Reimagining Denominationalism: Interpretive Essays*, eds. Robert Bruce Mullin and Russell E. Richey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 111-133. Other contributors to the same volume chronicle the demise of "denominational histories" and point to new ways of valuing local indigenous stories of religious life in America, while seeing them through some broader categories and interpreting in light of more general themes.

[5] The literature which attempts to elucidate the Southern Baptist schism is reviewed in Chapter V.

[6] A form of literature that prefigures this study is a small body of work that recounts and/or analyzes the dawning of women's ordination in America. Many of these histories are denominational in focus, although a few are pan-denominational, such as Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). See also Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Frederick W. Schmidt, Jr. *A Still Small Voice: Women, Ordination, and the Church* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Jackson W. Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, Adair T. Lummis. *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches (First Ed.)* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983); and Edward C. Lehman Jr., *Gender and Work: The Case of the Clergy* (New York: SUNY, 1993).

[7] Leonard M. Hummel, *Clothed in Nothingness: Consolation for Suffering* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg/Fortress, 2003). Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1994). Mary Clark Moschella, *Living Devotions: Reflections on Immigration, Identity, and Religious Imagination* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008).

In this interdisciplinary vein, several genres of study pave the way for the present project. Some take their departure from the correlational model first suggested by Paul Tillich and revised by David Tracy, Don Browning and others.[8] For instance congregational studies combine social scientific methods of various kinds with theological analysis and reflection.[9] A growing number of self-identified practical theologians are utilizing ethnographic and qualitative methods in their projects. In recent years some have taken an increasingly nuanced approach to the study of lived religion and the individual and collective lives of a variety of religious people by mounting arguments about community rituals, family, children, and suffering, to name a few examples.[10] In order to make their arguments, these scholars have crafted analyses from various social scientific perspectives, historical investigations, and theological points of view. Even systematic theologians, who traditionally took philosophy as their preferred conversation partner in the twentieth century, have taken a turn to examining practices

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[8] Don Browning, following Paul Tillich and David Tracy, describes two poles of a correlational process in these terms: "A theology is revisionist if it critically correlates its investigations into the two principal sources of theology. . . 'Christian texts and common human experience and language.'" See Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 60-61; David Tracy *Blessed Rage for Order* (Minneapolis, MN: Seabury Press, 1975), 43, 76. See also James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

[9] See Carl S. Dudley and Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002); Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney (eds.), *Handbook for Congregational Studies* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986).

[10] In addition to monographs noted above (see footnote 7), see also Mary Clark Moschella, "Food, Faith and Formation: A Case Study on the Use of Ethnography in Pastoral Theology and Care" *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 12 (2002): 75-87; Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003). Don S. Browning, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, Pamela D. Couture, K. Brynolf Lyon, and Robert M. Franklin, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate,* 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); and Leonard Hummel, Jane Maynard, and Mary Clark Moschella, eds., *Pastoral Bearings: Lived Religion and Pastoral Theology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, forthcoming).

and starting intentionally with the messiness of life in the hopes of constructing more satisfactory doctrinal proposals for the twenty-first century.[11]

From the starting point of anthropology, a number of ethnographic studies of religion precede and inform the present project.[12] A variety of qualitative and quantitative studies of women's ordination and the leadership of clergywomen in the U.S. also stand in the background of this study.[13] David Hall, editor of *Lived Religion in America,* suggests that ethnographic studies of lay men and women are at the heart of understanding religious beliefs and practices of Americans.[14] The present study argues that *clergy*women also hold potential for enlivening the historical understanding of the cultural dynamics of lived religion. Baptist clergywomen can be conceived as standing at the boundaries between popular religion and ecclesial religion (as are many clergypersons). They do not necessarily participate in the academic production of religious knowledge, yet they are influenced by it through their own training under the tutelage of *academic* elites in colleges and seminaries. Neither are the eight women in the present study among the *ecclesial* elites, publishing church doctrine and policy or acting

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[11] For example see Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Eds.), *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002).

[12] M. Jean Heriot, *Blessed Assurance: Beliefs, Actions and the Experience of Salvation in a Carolina Baptist Church* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1994). Ellen M. Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists: A Subculture in Transition,* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

[13] Edward C. Lehman, Jr., *Women's Path into Ministry: Six Major Studies,* no. 1, Fall 2002 (Durham, NC: Pulpit and Pew Research Reports), summarizes previous studies about clergywomen in the U.S. including Zikmund, et al., *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*; Carroll, et al., *Women of the Cloth;* Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women;* Lehman, Edward C. Jr. *Women Clergy: Breaking Through Gender Barriers* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1985); Lehman, Edward C. Jr. *Gender and Work: The Case of the Clergy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993); and Paula D. Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[14] David Hall, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). Hall describes a constructive project of reorienting the common (academic) understanding of what constitutes "religion." Although I admire his project, I am concerned to elucidate with more depth and complexity those phenomena which are already widely accepted as "religious" in American culture. My work is grounded in both the study of American religious history, and the academic tradition of practical theology which uses resources in theology and the social sciences to interpret beliefs, actions, rhetoric, and practices of individuals and groups.

as denominational power brokers. On the other hand they are highly invested in the future of their denominational affiliations because their livelihoods are linked to the shape and direction of those institutions. By virtue of their work in ministry, which includes both reflection and proclamation, they are also skilled and articulate about their religious experiences and able to relate them to Baptist beliefs and practices.

Although the study is preceded and informed by each of these disciplines and approaches, it is most at home in the field of practical theology. That field itself has undergone a revitalization and clarity of purpose in some significant ways in the last couple of decades. The renewed need to understand situations, practices, problems and events in church and society, and the particular need to understand the religious aspects of each one has expanded the need and place of practical theology. As a discipline practical theology has developed a set of tools and dexterity for using them, which offers a careful account of situations in need of interpretation, including a multiplicity of perspectives, and brings recommendations for their renewal.

Practical Theology in Anatomy of a Schism

Two main definitions of practical theology inform this project: Don Browning's conception of "fundamental practical theology" and Edward Farley's description of practical theology as "the interpretation of situations." Twenty-five years ago, Don Browning argued for an increasingly hermeneutical approach to theology which considers interpretation to be a form of conversation. He also argued for theory that arises out of practice and leads back to practice. He proposed a "revised correlational model"

for doing practical theology.[15] His method takes a dynamic approach to psychology and is rooted in the care of systems and individuals within those systems.[16] He argues for a practical theology, which is both critically reflective (even of itself) and reasonably asserted.

As Browning developed this method for doing theology further he identified four major moments in the work. "Fundamental practical theology," he argues, is "critical reflection on the church's dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation."[17] It consists of four sub-movements: descriptive theology, historical theology, systematic theology and strategic/fully practical theology.

For Browning the moment of "descriptive theology" is one in which "special attention [is] given to the influence of religion on the theory-laden practices being studied."[18] In this initial moment of investigation, the practical theologian attempts to describe and by various means, including theories from the social sciences, the richness and multiple textures of the practices, events, contexts or crises which are under study. This aspect of theology tries to capture, using thick description, what may be going on beneath the surface, and thus raising important questions to be addressed in other submoments of the process of analysis.[19]

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[15] Don S. Browning, *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 50. Browning distinguishes his approach from Paul Tillich, who raises questions in philosophical discourse and answers them in theological discourse. Browning wants to raise and correlate both questions and answers in multiple discourses.
[16] Ibid., 15-17.
[17] Don S. Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 36.
[18] Ibid., 48.
[19] Ibid., 134.

The submoment of "historical theology" is both communal and historical in its concern. In this aspect of practical theology, researchers attempt to examine various "levels of textuality" in a setting to see how they are at work in the practices of the community.[20] The process includes examining biblical texts as well as considerations of the influence of religious practices and Christian thought.

At the submoment of "systematic theology" the practical theologian considers the "fusion of horizons between the vision implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of the normative Christian texts."[21] So in this moment of study, the researcher may focus on the presence of "effective histories" or ways that "events of the past shape present historical consciousness."[22] Practical theologians are especially concerned at this submoment with general themes and existential questions at work in the setting being examined, rather than the earlier focus on the specific and concrete aspects of the situation, event or crisis.[23]

What Browning calls "strategic" or "fully practical" theology is the fruition of the previous moments, and/or the culminating active moment, "where the interpretation of present situations joins the hermeneutical process begun in descriptive theology and continued in historical and systematic theology . . . where these earlier steps join final critical efforts to advance relatively adequate justifications for new meanings and practices."[24] After the careful and multi-layered explorations of the first submoments, this final step of strategic practical theology responds to questions such as 1) "How do we

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[20] Ibid., 49-51.
[21] Ibid., 51.
[22] Ibid., 40. Browning follows Hans-Georg Gadamer on this point of seeing the influence of past ideas and practices on the present situation. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1988.)
[23] Browning *Fundamental Practical Theology,* Ibid., 140.
[24] Ibid., 57.

understand this concrete situation in which we must act?" 2) "What should be our praxis in this concrete situation?" 3) "How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation?" And 4) "What means, strategies, and rhetorics [sic] should we use in this concrete situation?"[25]

In a slightly different direction, systematic theologian, Edward Farley calls for an understanding of practical theology as the "interpretation of situations." Farley is contesting and correcting an older traditional understanding of practical theology that had evolved into a system of study, within seminary or clergy education, which covered responsibilities of the minister for pastoral care, preaching and worship, Christian education, administration, etc.[26] He wants to correct this "narrowing" of the understanding of practical theology to regain both its practical usefulness and to extend it such that it considers the larger ecclesial situation, not just the functions or training of clergy.[27]

Farley captures the purposes of practical theology as an "interpretation of situations" in his closing thesis statement: "The tasks of a hermeneutic of situations are to uncover the distinctive contents of the situation, probe its repressed past, explore its

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[25] Ibid., 55-56.

[26] Edward Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology," first appeared in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology,* eds., James N. Poling and Lewis S. Mudge (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1987), 1-26. As another form of correction he also calls for an area or discipline of theology which considers Christian practices and "brings to bear theological criteria on contemporary situations and realms of individual and social action." See Edward Farley, "Practical Theology, Protestant," in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling,* ed. Rodney J. Hunter (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990). This kind of practical theology, which makes theological constructions normative for activities of ministry and church life, seems to be that which has been taken up by systematic theologians in the last decade. See for example, Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

[27] Edward Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology" in *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 31-33. Farley actually describes two "narrowing" moments in the history of practical theology. The first uncoupled it from the ethics (or normative decision making tasks of the church), and the second limited it to narrowly understood ministerial tasks.

relation to other situations with which it is intertwined, and confront the situation's

challenge through consideration of corruption and redemption."[28] Although they do not

correspond exactly, these steps or tasks complement the descriptions of the four

"moments" proposed by Browning.

Farley elaborates how "situations," the objects of analysis by practical theology,

are present and formative, yet usually remain in the background or taken for granted until

a crisis arises, a decision becomes imperative or some other problem comes to the

forefront.[29] He joins his voice to earlier criticisms of the "oblivious" application of

theory, in the form of authoritative texts or traditions, to situations of which one has little

grasp. Instead he calls for a "conscious, self-critical, and disciplined" approach to

interpreting situations.[30] He develops the four tasks of interpreting situations in the

following ways. He says of the first task, "'Reading a situation' poses the double task of

probing these layers and of identifying the genres of things that constitute the situation."[31]

Some of the "layers" to which he refers are basically on the surface, evident in a

situation, while others "reside in deep, invisible strata," which take careful investigation

to uncover. The second task attempts to consider these deeper meanings and layers by

looking to the past to uncover the "disguised suppressions" and "bring awareness of what

is going on in the present."[32]

In each of these first two tasks Farley is making a case for getting at the "deep

structures" of meaning present in a situation. In the third task he commends stepping

back and trying to understand the "intersituational issues" or the "impingement of other

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[28] Ibid., 43.
[29] Ibid., 36.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 39.
[32] Ibid.

situations on the local situation."[33] The final task, Farley says, may be the most complex because it tries to understand the "challenge" or "demand" of the situation on individuals or communities of faith. This final task assumes a normative aspect of the theological investigation which calls for a response. Farley says about the variety of possible demands, "One kind of demand occurs when the situation endangers the participants. Another kind occurs when promise and possibility are offered; another, when obligation is required."[34] He also argues that in every situation one can imagine there is a possibility of both corruption (idolatry or evil) and redemption. This very particular viewpoint assumes Farley's own theological commitments and categories, which are also adopted in this study.[35]

Although they need some additional caveats, the understandings by both Browning and Farley, about the method or tasks of practical theology, have shaped the ways of inquiry, analysis and presentation of the findings of this study. In Browning's terms, this study attends to the first two submoments of practical theology. First this study attempts to give a rich description of Southern Baptist schism, in as much particularity of meaning, cause and effect, and historically complex dynamics, that can be discerned and also to give a descriptive account of Baptist clergywomen in their experiences of living and working within that culture. Secondly, the study gives a thick historical examination of the beliefs and practices present in the Baptist culture by examining both the historical accounts of Baptists since World War I and the first-hand

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 40.

[35] What Edward Farley means by corruption and redemption will be elaborated in later chapters. Browning makes a very similar point about theological categories and meanings, and he makes use of the systematic theology of Reinhold Neibuhr in the examples of the practical theological task he offers in *Fundamental Practical Theology,* 142-65, passim.

experiences of clergywomen. The study focuses especially on the practices and beliefs found in the core Baptist concept of soul competency. The study does not attempt to put these concepts, beliefs and practices into dialogue with a full systematic theology, but takes forays in the Browning's third submoment by considering how these objects of analysis may be understood in terms of theological anthropology, or the doctrine of humankind, as developed by Edward Farley.

In terms of Farley's practical theological tasks, this study is mainly preoccupied with the first, second and third aspects. First the study attempts to probe the deeper meanings of perennial Baptist tensions using both theological and psychological categories, and in retelling the historiography of the SBC in a way that highlights otherwise hidden or suppressed meanings and accumulations of power within that culture, especially as they relate to women's experience of that culture. Secondly, the study employs the recent categories of understanding American religious history, as a framework for the historiography by looking at the social, political and theological context of American religion from 1920 to the end of the century. The study also attempts to relate some of the "intersituational" nature of Southern Baptists, a task which has often been ignored.

The first situation that is the focus for the present study can be described as an event of schism between 1979 and 1990, located within a distinguishable, though not fully comprehensible, culture of Southern Baptists. A longer history and aftermath of that schism are also considered as they bring more light to the schism itself. The very fracturing of that culture and the outcomes of those events are what stand in need of additional interpretation. The situation of the clergywomen interviewed for this study is

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an important site because of the way their negotiations bring new interpretive perspective to the SBC schism. Studying the overlap of these situations – Baptist schism and Baptist clergywomen – potentially brings greater understanding to both.

Browning defines the goal of practical theology as transformation for individuals and/or communities, and Farley calls for the possibility of redemption, but this study does not attempt to take the final constructive step in either case. Both theologians assume a caring horizon, and commend the full task of practical theology as taking the final steps by making recommendations or constructive proposals.[36] However, that is a task larger than this study will undertake.

The practical theology employed here does indeed assume a caring horizon, just as the many women who are informants in the study seemed to believe when they volunteered to take part. When I enlisted women into the study, they frequently assumed, or asked explicitly, if the project is designed to help "the cause" – not so much to help them personally, but specifically to help the cause of women in ministry in Baptist life. By this they seem to mean the advancement of women in the profession of ministry, in Baptist churches and in agencies. Additionally, this "cause" can be defined as raising the level of acceptance of clergywomen in Baptist life and increasing the possibility that women can find and accept work in ministry. The transformation for which they hope includes desires for ordination, finding places to work, earning a fair and equitable wage for the work, and keeping jobs despite the lack of historical, social and theological support from churches in Baptist life. Clergywomen appear to volunteer for the study

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[36] Browning discusses the presence of focus and horizon in the social sciences and theological research in *Fundamental Practical Theology,* 91-92.

with a hope that they will also be part of helping "the cause," and they indicate their belief that something can be done to change it.

Another way to frame this limit of the study is to say, that I have concern both for the larger SBC situation and that of the women themselves, yet my interest in how to improve their situation is not a focus but an important horizon for my study. The goal of this dissertation is not to make specific constructive proposals. Rather, thick description and deeper understanding of the situation are its preoccupations.

Farley makes explicit in his description of practical theology a self-critique of the church, and he argues for making "the issues of contemporary political and social life the focal point of practical theology."[37] He also makes explicit a self-critique of the practical theologian, and a constant sorting of assumptions and viewpoints in order to complete the tasks he outlines. He calls this an "act of serious even theological self-criticism."[38] In the spirit of that self-criticism, several caveats need to be offered both to the field of practical theology, and to the present study as an attempt to embody its methods.

Correctives to the Effective History of Practical Theology

The effective history of practical theology as a disciplinary field, in relation to gender, class, and race has privileged the perspectives and performances of whiteness, maleness and the elite perspectives of academic and (to a lesser degree) ecclesial writers. The long concern with the clerical paradigm continues to shape and color the discipline, sometimes limiting its power and motivation to move beyond that paradigm to investigate

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[37] Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 33.
[38] Ibid., 38.

other situations in need of analysis.[39] Although practical theology tends to begin with the

messiness of human experience and proceed toward theological norms and constructive

proposals, the powerful influence of the metaphors and models of systematic theology on

one hand, and the increasing demand for rising to (social) scientific standards of evidence

and argumentation, on the other hand, have each shaped practical theology in the last

century.[40]

To contest this particular effective history this project attempts to resist the

privilege of elite perspectives by giving equal or greater weight to the particular lived

experiences of a small group of clergywomen. The attempt to construct an interpretive

model, which explains something, acknowledges the demands of science for coherence

and logical consistency. Yet there is no attempt to over-reach the power of the model or

to make any predictions. The use of object relations theories, as proposed by D.W.

Winnicott and Jessica Benjamin, also challenges the hegemony of historical or

theological categories *alone* to explain complex situations.[41]

Feminist Critiques of Practical Theology

When compared with systematic theology or biblical studies, practical theology

only received a thoroughgoing feminist critique in more recent years. Practical theology

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[39] Bonnie Miller-McLemore has argued recently for rehabilitation of the much decried "clerical paradigm" in order to attend to the needs and practices of clergy for whom much of theological education is designed, but about whom little attention is given in theological education. She also argues convincingly that an "academic paradigm" may be equally or more at fault for having abandoned the church and its ministers while bemoaning the decline of their status in the university, and blaming the clerical paradigm for that demise. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The 'Clerical Paradigm': A Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness?" *The International Journal of Practical Theology* 11, no. 1 (2007): 19-38.

[40] Feminists have argued that practical theology is easily beholden to one or the other group. See more about this below.

[41] Browning argues for using the practical reasoning of social sciences and other discourses about the human condition to give a thick description of any situation. However, he is less explicit in naming the power of the effective histories of race, gender and class to shape his categories (or those he adopts from Reinhold Neibuhr), thereby rendering them problematic for interpreting most communities and situations.

has benefited from the critiques launched by members (most often women) of the various

guilds who employed "feminist critical theories" to evaluate the work of their

discipline.[42] Practical theology has also received critique and expansion with regard to

"feminist theology" a field of study which grew out of women's disgruntlements with

systematic theology. In the past four decades feminist theology has grown into a

formidable discourse and field of its own,[43] and its scholars have critiqued and reshaped

other sub-disciplines of Christian theology in multiple ways.

Practical theologians, Denise Ackermann and Riet Bonn-Storm in their edited

volume, *Liberating Faith Practices,* argue that practical theology is a product historically

of the Western modern period, which took as its subject in nearly all cases, the male.

Furthermore, they argue, that male subject was most often the male *cleric* operating to

train, admonish, care for and strengthen the church. Even when the field of practical

theology expanded its notions of the church to the leadership and responsibility of all

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[42] For example, see, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern, eds., *Feminist & Womanist Pastoral Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999). In her chapter, "Feminist Theory in Pastoral Theology" Miller-McLemore examines the simultaneous rise of feminist theory and feminist theology, and she notes the lag by pastoral theology in developing an explicit feminist agenda. She observes the following reasons for the lag: proximity to congregational life, the tenuousness of the field itself, and the similarities in method, 87. For a feminist critique of Christian Education, see Carol Lakey Hess, "Gender, Sin, and Learning: A Response to Reinhold Niebuhr" *Religious Education* 88, no. 3 (June 1, 1993): 350-376.

[43] See Sheila Greeve Devaney, "Introduction," and Rebecca S. Chopp "Theorizing Feminist Theology" in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition and Norms* eds. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Devaney (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg/Fortress, 1997), 1-16, 215-31, which offer accounts of the "coming of age" of feminist theology, and a description of various ways that it converses with feminist, poststructuralist and pragmatist theories, using them critically and also drawing the attention of these other theories toward the concrete religious lives of women. In the same volume, Kathryn Tanner argues that the task of feminist theologians is the same as the constructive project of all theologians, but with a particular political agenda in mind: to undo harm to women, and to work toward a culture of acceptance and equality for all people. She puts it this way: "feminist theologians contest the cultural hegemony of patriarchal forms of theological discourse on the way to constructing new theologies for a new set of interpersonal relations, in which women are finally to be granted their full humanity." See Tanner, "Social Theory Concerning the 'New Social Movements' and the Practice of Feminist Theology," in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition and Norms,* ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 187.

members, still it tended to ignore the needs, differences and contributions of those who did not fit neatly into the "clerical paradigm."[44] From the late 1960s forward, nearly all forms of Christian theology that were operational in the academy underwent similar feminist and liberationist critiques, creating major shifts in the landscape of theological and religious studies. [45]

Ackermann and Bons-Storm point out that "proximate others," who questioned authority in both theological and religious studies, arrived later to the field of practical theology for the additional reason that the field has long had a sense of crisis and insecurity. This lack of certainty in the field can be attributed to many causes, including the following: 1) the interdisciplinary nature of the field itself, which subjects its scholars to the critiques of numerous fields and challenges both standards of evidence and methods of study; 2) a lack of two-way engagement with other Christian theologies at the academic level due to the use of master practitioners rather than theologically trained scholars to teach in theological schools; 3) a perennial preoccupation with self-reflection. These factors combine to produce regular fits of identity crisis inside practical theology, and bouts of questioning by scholars outside the field asking, is there any "there" there?[46]

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[44] Denise Ackermann and Riet Bons-Storm, eds., *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 4.

[45] In a co-authored article seven feminist theologians in 1983 describe their stance on theological education, pedagogy, and responsibility for justice for all human beings. They also describe their relationship to Black and Liberation theologies which arose in the same time period, but which lack a suitably serious address women's situation. See Carter Heyward (Chair), Katie G. Cannon, Beverly Wildung Harrison, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Mary Pellauer, Nancy Richardson and Delores Williams, "Christian Feminists Speak, Mud Flower Collective" in *Theological Education* 20, no. 1 (Autumn, 1983): 93-103.

[46] Ackermann and Bons-Storm *Liberating Faith Practices*, 2-6. The elaborations about the insecurity of the field of practical theology were garnered mainly in my work with Vanderbilt Divinity School's Lilly Endowment funded grant "Teaching for Ministry" (2003-04).

Ackermann and Bons-Storm make four major critiques of the "reigning models" of practical theology, which deserve response in terms of the choices in this study.[47] First they say practical theology has been lacking in a thorough analysis of gender, race, class and other differentials in power. The present study has an overarching concern with analyzing the stories of clergywomen and the larger SBC institution to understand the dynamics of gender and power particularly. The historiography includes some discussion of the interlocking issues of race and class, but those matters remain more in the background of this study, while the former issues are foregrounded. Browning in particular, and Farley as well, lack a thorough analysis of race, class and gender in their descriptions of practical theology.

"Second," Ackermann and Bons-Storm say, "the hegemony of white males in the writing and teaching of practical theology silences the voices of women and other marginalized and oppressed people."[48] By wading into the fray of discourse and argumentation in practical theology this study is, in its entirety, a response to this concern on two levels. First is the location from which I, as the researcher am speaking, which brings my own insights to voice. Secondly, the study makes central the voices of Baptist clergywomen through the stories they conveyed to me as a means for interpreting the larger phenomena of the schism in the SBC.

Ackermann's and Bons-Storm's third critique points out the dominance of the clerical paradigm, and says practical theology, "does not accord sufficient significance to

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[47] Ibid., 3-4. They don't make direct references in their introduction, but they imply that they are referring to models such as those developed Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, Farley, *"Interpreting Situations,"* and Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry.*

[48] Ackermann and Bons-Storm *Liberating Faith Practices*, 4.

the communicative actions of the majority of people of faith."[49] Bonnie Miller-McLemore, in her chapter in the same book, adds that the problem of the obsession with the "clerical paradigm" is not only one which rests with the practical theologians. Her greater concern is that other theological disciplines (she names systematic theologians) have distanced themselves from engagement with "the messiness of human suffering."[50] Women entering ministry have forced the boundaries of the clerical paradigm to be reconfigured in many ecclesial circles including Baptists, who proclaim but do not always practice "the priesthood of all believers." Yet Miller-McLemore's critique is also concerned with faithful people who are not ever going to enter the ranks of professional clergy, and with issues and problems that rarely start out as points of theological reflection.

Practical theology as the "interpretation of situations" pushes far beyond the narrow understanding of training ministers, or supporting the church. Feminist practical theologians in recent years have been attempting to display the power and efficacy of their methods and training to interpret complex, multilayered situations and problems, while continuing to engage with the theological and historical traditions and practices of faith that motivate and inspire their research. The quest to understand "what is really going on here," and to do so by starting with the situation at hand before bringing any other critical resources to bear on that problem is at the heart of many projects in feminist practical theology including the current study.

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The Subject and Practice of Pastoral Theology as a Practical Theological Discipline: Pushing Past the Nagging Identity Crisis to the Poetics of Resistance," in *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context,* eds. Denise Ackermann and Riet Bons-Storm (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 193.

The final critique offered by Ackerman and Bons-Storm is that practical theology must embrace "feminist research methods" which try to understand the role of gender construction for the contributions it makes "in the shaping of consciousness, skills and institutions."[51] Their concern is with the ethics of research, including a need for greater self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Simultaneously they are concerned about the relationship between the researcher and those who are the subjects of study. They call for a relationship of "mutual subjectivity." And finally they want to encourage an increase in "specificity at the contextual level in order to see how larger issues are embedded in the particulars of everyday life."[52] These concerns for reflexivity, mutuality and thick description are contributing factors in my choice to take up qualitative research methods, to gather data and to follow a research protocol that holds at the center the clergywomen's stories. The research and writing also starts the analysis and argument with the clergywomen's experiences, and attempts in the end to draw out the underlying constructions of gender which may be at work in the situation of the study.

Postmodern Critique of "Culture" in Practical Theology

For at least two (and possibly more) reasons this study is subject to scrutiny about its use of "culture" to describe Baptist beliefs, practices, institutional life and social influence. First because it is a project of practical theology, the assumed meanings of culture in the practical theology of Browning and Farley need critique and revision. Secondly, because of the choice to use qualitative methods for researching the lives of clergywomen, this project is subject to emerging postmodern critiques of the modern

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[51] Ackermann and Bons-Storm *Liberating Faith Practices*, 5.
[52] Ibid.

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discipline of anthropology. Systematic theologian and feminist, Kathryn Tanner, in

Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology, offers definitions for the terms *culture*

and *post/modern,* which contribute to a further revision of practical theology's use of the

former term, and a more chastened use of culture in the study itself.[53]

After tracing a history of usage of the term culture from the seventeenth century

forward, Tanner offers an extended definition of culture as it relates to its anthropological

usage, which has been widely adopted throughout other academic disciplines since

1920.[54] "Culture" is commonly accepted in the following terms: 1) it is a "human

universal" experienced by all people;[55] 2) it emphasizes "human diversity" 3) it "varies

with social group;" 4) it "tends to be conceived as [an] entire way of life;" 5) it is

"associated with social consensus;" 6) it is "understood to constitute or construct human

nature;" 7) it is also constructed by humans; 8) it is contingent on the diversity of human

history and biology; and 9) it contributes to "social determinism" by shaping "the

character of its members."[56]

Following this explication of the modern definition of culture, Tanner identifies

briefly the ways that the notion was adopted by history, philosophy, literary theory, and

other disciplines beginning in the 1970s. She says: "What we might call a postmodern

stress on interactive process and negotiation, indeterminacy, fragmentation, conflict and

porosity replaces these aspects of the modern, post-1920s understanding of culture, or . .

. forms a new basis for their reinterpretation." [57] She identifies six modern

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[53] See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), chapters 1 and 2.
[54] Ibid., 24.
[55] By "universal" Tanner is concerned to point out not the uniformity of culture, but that no human beings can be understood as outside the presence and influence of culture.
[56] Tanner, *Theories of Culture,* 25-29.
[57] Ibid.*,* 38.

misperceptions about the practices of cultural anthropology: 1) ahistoricity; 2) portraying cultures as internally consistent, unified wholes; 3) the illusion that findings among small groups can be generalized to a whole culture; 4) the idea that social order constitutes and perpetuates meaning; 5) the false assumption of cultural stability; and 6) the colonialist view that clear definable boundaries exist for each culture. From a postmodern perspective, Tanner offers correctives to each misconception.

Each critique points out a limit of the present study, and is followed by a response, which sets some appropriate boundaries in terms of subjectivity of the researcher and representations of the informants and possible understandings of the Southern Baptist culture in which they are situated. Additionally the critiques can be seen as correctives to the assumptions about "culture" found in Farley's and Browning's portrayals of practical theology. To their credit, they each attempt to thicken description and discover the effective histories and accumulations of power in any given object of analysis; however, Tanner's postmodern perspective brings additional nuance to their perspectives.

Tanner's first critique is ahistoricity, which treats cultural forms as if they appeared unmediated and existed outside the actions of persons or the iterations of time. Ideas such as *soul competency* and *priesthood of all believers* are abstractions which can and do change over time. Thus, my use of Bill Leonard's five tensions, and the way I have related them theoretically, runs the risk of *ahistoricity*.[58] Leonard has systematized them in a very attractive and usable fashion, and I am attempting to take them beyond his observations and parse them further into ideas that capture aspects of the human condition and the tendency of human beings to polarize such concepts psychologically

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[58] See Figure 1 in Chapter I.

and culturally. A specific risk I run can be expressed this way: Am I absolutizing them? Chapters III and IV trace a history of the presence and function of these ideas over the course of the twentieth century since World War I. The historiography attempts to show how the ideas are constantly in a state of negotiation and compromise by the historical actors in power at various times in those eight decades. My portrayal of these collective tensions as permeable boundaries for both individual and collective Baptist identity should be taken to point out how each tension is a liminal boundary to the meaning of being Baptist, but also how it is a site of contest and struggle for power by real actors at any given time. In particular, clergywomen in the study illustrate these struggles.

The specific language of the tensions, identified by Bill Leonard, indeed matches the language that twentieth century Baptists often used to describe themselves. *Soul competency* is not just an academic term, but one used by Baptist clergy and lay people to talk about what it means to them to be Baptist. The perpetuation of this language is most apparent in the discourses of the ecclesiastical elite or academically-oriented Baptists. Nevertheless, it can still be found in the common language of average "people in the pew." This potentially constrains the study to speak mainly about institutional understandings, and since the goal is to re-interpret the meaning of the schism of an institution, this concern is not enough to abandon the arguments. In other words Leonard's categories of tension capture language that appears both to proceed historically and be used by cultural participants to describe themselves and their institutions.[59]

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[59] As an influential actor within Baptist life, Bill Leonard is not only an historian and critic of Baptist culture but also shaper and influencer within the context over the last three decades. For example, clergywomen interviewed readily recognize his name, likely have read something written by him and/or have heard him speak in person.

Tanner observes a second postmodern critique about depicting cultures as internally consistent and unified wholes.[60] This concern finds a mark with Farley, who discusses "intersituationality," but does seem to assume more unity and consistency than may be present in most "situations." The critique asks of the present study: Am I in danger of portraying the culture of Southern Baptists in the institutional life of the SBC as a "unified whole" in such a way that it is unrealistic, insufficiently complex, or simply out of touch with what was going on? Tanner says, "the anthropologist's own needs, and not the needs of practice, are behind the idea of culture as a whole."[61] Browning, Farley, and I risk operating from a "superior perspective" as practical theologians by assuming the power to "read" the various aspects of the situation into some meaningful whole. This raises the question: what constitutes enough evidence to make a compelling argument?

One goal of the historiography in the next two chapters is to show the "messiness" or at least some contradictions of Southern Baptist institutional life. For example, Woman's Missionary Union was often at odds with the wider Convention, when the women interpreted significant Baptist ideals differently. The story also demonstrates ways that the institution of the SBC drifted back and forth in constant contest and renegotiation of their perennial beliefs and practices. Certainly factors other than ideology or religious practice influenced this process, although this study focuses on the way that ideas and practices, mainly in the form of Baptist theology, provide insight into political and institutional change. Those ideas were contested in situations where power struggles were central. Material factors will remain in the background of the study.[62]

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[60] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 42 ff.
[61] Ibid., 42.
[62] By "material" I am referring to physical "artifacts, landscapes, architecture, and art," which are part of a culture, and which are studied for their meaning by anthropologists, and numerous others. Colleen

Rather than take the SBC to be a unified body, my portrayal strives to express how it is a "contradictory and internally fissured whole."[63] In fact that is precisely how several historians of Baptists have attempted to understand the sub-culture. Contradictions and fissures are hallmarks of the SBC and of Southern culture. The SBC schism is precisely a case study of such divisions.[64]

The *institution* of the SBC in this study is understood as one aspect of Southern Baptist culture, and is the focus of the questions in the study, in order to make the inquiry more manageable. Other cultural forms include, but are not limited to: different institutions such as local churches and theological schools; artifacts such as texts of sermons, news stories, religious periodicals, and church documents; values as expressed in material forms such as budgets, architecture, furnishings, and art; social habits and rituals such as those found in church attendance, liturgy, and small groups within the local church. None of these cultural forms can or should be neatly separated from the others. However, most of them will remain background concerns and not be addressed directly. Meanwhile, the institution of the SBC will be in the foreground of the historiography and the corresponding analysis of the beliefs and values as they appear in both the institution and the clergywomen's narratives. The major arguments of the study depend on the analogy between the way institutions are expressed in ideas and action,

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McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1995), 2. She says of her own study of material Christianity, "It shares with historians, archeologists, folklorists, art and architecture specialists, and social scientists the goal of understanding American religious practice and thought through a close examination of the physical, sensual, corporeal, and phenomenal world. The non-written text is also a language of expression of American life and culture. Neither utilitarian nor uniquely artistic, the products of human skill and imagination embody and symbolize patterns of beliefs, social needs, and behavior."

[63] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 57.

[64] Chapter V reviews specific arguments about the schism by anthropologists, sociologists and historians.

and the way that beliefs and practices can be observed in the narratives of clergywomen who participated in the study.

Whereas the SBC, its annual Convention and its myriad of structures, can be considered a macrocosm of Southern Baptist culture, the narratives of clergywomen in the study should be considered microcosms of the same. Each provides a different perspective on a shared culture. Leonard's tensions capture both the sense of a unified whole way of Southern Baptist life, and also the contradictions and tensions which Baptists are constantly negotiating. Still the warning against assuming too much consistency or coherence of beliefs, values, practices or behaviors is useful, particularly when assessing individual narratives. Clergywomen live in more than one cultural world. They experience numerous personal, familial, and social factors which cannot be accounted for by the outlines of Southern Baptist culture. These other interests influence the women's decisions, actions and relationships. The clergywomen's narratives illustrate and illuminate the messy negotiations of Baptist beliefs and practices.[65]

The postmodern critique of seeing a "unified whole" also points out the potential danger experienced by researchers across the humanities. We are always trying to make arguments about what is *really going on here*: beneath the surface, in the effective history, behind the scenes, in the unconscious, or in some underlying structure. Such arguments can be 1) easily presumed before starting the research, 2) assumed in the questions asked of texts or human subjects, and 3) found post facto in the analysis. Such

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[65] Tanner, *Theories of Culture,* 44, observes: "Cultural elements as part of the public domain of social practices come to be interrelated in and through social interactions. Their interrelations are not intrinsic to them, not formal or syllogistic relations, but social ones arising within social life by way of interconnections among the practices in which cultural forms are involved. Given such a mode of production, interrelations among cultural elements tend to be far messier in fact than they appear to be in abstract theory." They are not like parts of a machine, she argues, but more like "tentacles of an octopus."

logical fallacies (i.e. because there is water on the floor, the bathtub must leak) make for uncritical researcher bias and poor argumentation, but worse they contribute to the perceived importance of the researcher him- or herself. As Tanner observes, "Much interpretive digging is necessary to bring out the structural, functional or hermeneutical depths that prove the coherence of a given cultural surface. By such interpretive efforts, both literary critics and anthropologists justify their own significance. The need for such efforts establishes their unique privilege and authority. The discrepancy between the levels of surface confusion and hidden unity translates in this way into a difference of power."[66]

In my conversational interviews with clergywomen, I asked open-ended questions and requested stories, rather than seeking their thoughts or opinions on specific beliefs or practices; however, there is little doubt that my questions were theory-laden, that they suggested various categories (like beliefs and practices). The very questions I asked must have influenced responses in ways I may not be able to notice or understand fully.[67] This postmodern dilemma is surely unavoidable for Browning, Farley, and me, as well as other academic researchers. Yet, recognizing that *research* itself is a theory-laden practice and brings discipline-specific theory to each project is a critical and reflexive step toward avoiding self-aggrandizement. Additionally, as a theologian I am committed to a "caring horizon" in my work generally, which leads eventually to the process of making normative claims. Farley and Browning work in the same neighborhood, and practical theology as they each conceive it, requires a self-reflexive approach.[68] My use

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[66] Ibid., 45.
[67] The questions which guided each interview can be found in Appendix A.
[68] As already noted, my concerns for the personal well-being of clergywomen, their efforts to find places of ministry, and the rise or fall of their status in Southern Baptist life, are bracketed for the sake of

of interpretive powers to select, name, describe and analyze the situation will be tested in the reactions and questions it elicits, and thus constrained by both academic and ecclesial review.

The third critique of modern anthropology, and thus of the present ethnographic study is the "optical illusion" created "by generalizing from the small sample of individuals with whom he or she is acquainted to conclusions about the whole."[69] The main concern is that members of a culture who are interviewed cannot be portrayed as having viewpoints, beliefs, values or perceptions, which are identical with the larger culture. Such an assumption suppresses diversity of opinions and portrays the anthropologist's point of view (or that of the informants) as a singular reality. Such representations hide differences among and between informants as well as the opinions of others in the culture who were not interviewed.

While I make no effort to speak of a "Baptist clergywomen's point of view" as a unified perspective, there is a danger of misrepresenting the women's experiences collectively as the main or only alternative to the sanctioned (SBC) view on important issues such as women's ordination, theological training or ministry. This is a danger I seek to avoid, but which is complicated by the choice to limit participants in the study to a very small group. The study portrays Baptist culture as a "site of struggle and contention" and attempts to highlight some specific ways that the conflict was negotiated.[70] The clergywomen's narratives illustrate perspectives different from both

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understanding their experiences and attempting to interpret the cultural schism that occurred among Baptists.
[69] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 45.
[70] Ibid., 46. Tanner goes on: "The anthropologist accepts the official definition of social reality and ignores other native accounts of it, thereby reproducing within his or her discourse the false universality that is one mark of ideology, the false universality by which the powerful in the society under study disguise the particularity of their own interests."

mainstream media portrayals of Baptists and partisan (insider) representations of Baptist culture since the 1980s.

In a quantitative study, which includes a randomized sample, researchers would strive to generalize their findings to a larger population such as all clergywomen in America or all Baptists. However, this qualitative study aims instead to analyze the findings *in their specific context* and to argue by analogy in order to build a model that interprets other related and overlapping cultural forms and dynamics. If any of the findings of this study are transferable to other settings beyond Southern Baptists, that will be a matter for readers to determine, or for another consideration at a later time.[71]

In order to take seriously these first three critiques and write in such a way that avoids bringing a false unity or suppresses divergent voices (which are by necessity not represented in the work), I bring the voices of the women into the work often and extensively.[72] Their experiences of Baptist culture also contest grander narratives suggested by the academic and ecclesial elites who have written about the Southern Baptist schism. Underlying these concerns is the problem of representation. My selection of material and interpretation of its meaning cannot be avoided, but it is tempered by making the voices of the clergywomen prominent, and by including their feedback about my representations of their stories. Although I'm attempting to bracket my immediate concerns for participant well-being and avoid constructive proposals, still I am a Baptist

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[71] In a qualitative studies paradigm, the concept of "generalizability" is replaced by a concern for "transferability." Qualitative researchers generally hold that "no true generalization is really possible; all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur." See David A. Erlandson, Edward L. Harris, Barbara L. Skipper, and Steve D. Allen, *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods* (Newberry Park, CA: Sage Press, 1993), 32.

[72] See additional discussion about methods of qualitative research or naturalistic inquiry below.

clergywoman myself, and I came of age in the era of the schism. As an "insider"

researcher I am unavoidably engaging in a contest of power. As Tanner points out:

> Power is therefore at stake in the interpretation of beliefs, values, or notions with a cultural currency. Struggles over power come to be enacted in struggles over meaning. In that space that poststructuralism opens up between a cultural form and the multiple possible meanings of it, contests over power are engaged.[73]

How will I be accounting for power? How do Leonard's ideas about Baptist tensions

allow for that? These questions point to the main tasks of the study: to consider the actors

and issues, dynamics of authority, and differentials of power. The movement back and

forth between the women's stories and several interpretive theories led me to conclusions

about the clergywomen themselves and also to a new way of grasping the SBC schism.

A fourth and closely related critique identified by Tanner is that culture cannot be

understood as "a principle of social order."[74] Culture is not a force or fact that can be

disseminated in such a way as to bring about social order constitutively. This (false)

assumption misses the ways that culture is in fact contested and disorderly (in other

words social order does not equate communal meaning). It also misses the surplus of

meaning found in cultural forms.[75] Finally, it gives more importance (and power) to the

educated elite and justifies their existence and privilege in the culture. A different, but

related, logical mistake assumes that where order is evident, a clear cause and effect can

be detected. In other words observation does *not* equal prediction. Norms exist in most

cultures, but rather than *causing* behavior or social action, they often come into play only

when there is confusion or a crisis of meaning. This logical mistake can be understood as

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[73] Tanner, *Theories of Culture,* 47.
[74] Ibid., 47 ff.
[75] For an elaboration on the "surplus of meaning" see Paul Ricoeur, "Rhetoric-Poetics-Hermeneutics" *From Metaphysics to Rhetoric.* Ed. Michel Meyer. (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 137-149.

the "fallacy of normative determinism" and misses the appropriate warrants for making such cause and effect arguments.[76]

Also related to these mistakes is the misuse of the word (and concept) "rule." It becomes problematic, Tanner says, when "anthropologists 'slip from the model of reality to the reality of the model.'" In so doing they mistake something observed (a "rule") into a normative rule which directs behavior.[77] For example just because I've observed that "as a rule" clergywomen in my study waited longer than men to pursue ordination, does not necessarily indicate that a cultural norm or rule about women waiting for ordination is in place.[78] Many other factors play into the observed rule, pointing to a much more complex and tangled set of conflicting cultural rules or norms at work in any particular situation.[79] In this study the unpredictable and often messy actions and behaviors of individual clergywomen complicate, distort and defy the "rules" of Baptist culture. The very fact of their existence as a group contests the Baptist norm of male ordination and leadership.

Another concern about modern understandings of culture suggested by Tanner is the false assumption of cultural stability. Of this fifth critique she says, "Historical processes that bring with them the constant possibility of change are the baseline against which stable, established cultural forms are measured, and not the reverse."[80] Culture is

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[76] Tanner, *Theories of Culture,* 49. Other factors such as ideas, values, sentiments, power, money, media, etc. also influence behavior, not just norms or rules of culture.

[77] Ibid.

[78] On the surface it appears to be a "rule" that they wait longer to pursue ordination. A little closer investigation reveals that some of the women waited until they were asked to consider ordination by mentors or congregations. Thus a more complex set of factors (some "rules" and some idiosyncrasies) are at work in the ordination process.

[79] Tanner, *Theories of Culture,* 49. She calls this a "fallacy of internalism." She continues: "The social effects of a cultural form cannot simply be read off of it; in between the cultural forms and their influence on action come historical agents and what they make of those cultural forms in particular situations."

[80] Ibid., 51.

not only changed by seemingly external forces or by biological factors, but change also

occurs from processes, internal to the culture itself, which are always in motion.[81] To

address this concern I chose to include a history of Southern Baptists from the 1920s to

provide ample evidence of the contingency of ongoing negotiations both within and

outside the SBC. The framework for understanding Baptist culture provided by Leonard

also has inherent in it a dialectic of meaning and power which is always contingent,

always subject to negotiation. Both Farley and Browning advocate that practical

theological investigations must look to the past for "disguised suppressions," or observe

the "historical moment," respectively. Tanner's insistence on a search for historical

processes, not merely events or meanings, pushes these practical theological tasks further.

It also improves the credibility of the present study to attend to such processes.[82]

The final critique offered by Tanner points out the lingering nationalistic and

colonial perspectives of modern anthropology, which assume clear definable boundaries

for any given culture. She says, "Cultures are simply not distributed in space as

possessions of different social groups."[83] Southern Baptists are not a clearly definable

subculture separate from other Southerners, other Baptists, other Protestants or

Christians, or even other Americans. They have overlapping, shared, and contested

cultural boundaries and similarities with each of these social groups and others besides.

They also have divergent and contested internal fissures and gaps, tensions and

contradictions within their own group, even at the height of their unity and growth during

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[81] Ibid. Tanner says, "Historical processes that bring with them the constant possibility of change are the baseline against which stable, established cultural forms are measured, and not the reverse."

[82] As noted above, "transferability" replaces "generalizability" in a qualitative research paradigm, and it offers an appropriate form of *external* validity. When evaluating the *internal* validity of a qualitative study, the more appropriate focus is on "credibility." Is the study credible? Does it "ring true"? Do the findings reflect the thinking and statements of the informants? More about methods for ensuring credibility will be offered below. See Erlandson, et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry,* 29-31.

[83] Ibid., 53.

the middle decades of the twentieth century. This project attempts to appreciate the

differences and tensions in both the historiography of the decades preceding the schism,

and in the analysis of divisions which splintered the group in the 1980s and 1990s.

In summary, the method of this study follows the overarching method of practical

theology, as chastened by feminist and postmodern theory. It focuses on tasks or

moments of thick descriptions and historical narration of the schism of Southern Baptists

in the late twentieth century. The analysis of two overlapping situations is extended

through a deep look at the narratives of a handful of clergywomen who minister in the

midst and the aftermath of denominational schism. Those narratives have interpretive

power for showing how the schism was inevitable and simultaneously how the Baptist

tensions of belief and practice are sturdy and reproducible in new settings.

Collecting and Analyzing Ethnographic Data

In order to collect the stories of clergywomen I needed a more specific set of tools

and methods. A qualitative research paradigm has informed the techniques of collecting

and analyzing ethnographic data for this project. The following research narrative will

introduce the concepts, procedures and measures of the project. It will also recount

several major events and conceptual shifts, and will be more transparent than a didactic

presentation of research practices.[84]

In her useful guide, *Qualitative Researching,* Jennifer Mason opens with two

simple yet provocative questions: "What is the nature of the phenomena, or entities, or

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[84] See Erlandson, et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry;* Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985); Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002); Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing the Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995); and Robert S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

social 'reality' that I wish to investigate?" and, "What might represent knowledge or evidence of the entities or social 'reality' that I wish to investigate?"[85] My project, however, did not begin in the places where Mason guides her readers per se (ontology, epistemology). Instead it began with the broad research area (an understudied group of Baptist clergywomen in the South) and slowly took shape as I worked my way toward the puzzles I hoped to solve. Along the way I have attempted to go back to make theoretical assumptions more explicit, and to draw connections between the theories I bring to the work and the practices which I have been learning in order to complete the research.[86] In particular the following narrative highlights the issues of *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability* and *transferability*, which are recognized as hallmarks of excellent qualitative research.[87]

Before I completed my course work at Vanderbilt I knew enough about my research interests to apply for Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for my project. After several revisions, final approval for the "Baptist Clergywomen Research Project" came in April 2002.[88] One month later I requested an

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[85] Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 14, 16.

[86] The graduate level courses that most influenced the methodology of this project were in Ethnography taught by Edward Fischer in the Department of Anthropology, Qualitative Research taught by Deborah Wells Rowe at Peabody, and two methods courses in the Graduate Department of Religion taught by Volney Gay and Bonnie Miller-McLemore.

[87] As the field of qualitative research has grown, a series of apologetics have been mounted against critiques that the newer paradigm is not "real research" or not adequately able to build theory or knowledge. Most of the defenses offered to such critiques are written in response to the positivist paradigm of research. These four hallmarks of excellence in qualitative studies are formulated over against these values of quantitative projects: internal validity (credibility), external validity (transferability), reliability (dependability), objectivity (confirmability). As should now be obvious, I am not attempting research in either a positivist paradigm, or in a quantitative project. Rather a naturalistic or constructivist approach informs my practical theological research. Erlandson, et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry,* 28-35. See also Del Slegel, "Trustworthiness" on-line: http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/research/Qualitative/trust.htm (accessed November 8, 2007).

[88] My study protocol was approved by Vanderbilt University's Institutional Review Board, April 16, 2002.

advertisement in *Folio* which was delivered to recipients in August 2002.[89] The use of an

ad was a research choice to help assure a level of *credibility* or confidence in the

truthfulness of the data I would collect.[90] Over the following months I received email and

phone responses to the ad that resulted in nineteen formal requests to participate in the

study.[91] One woman, who responded to the ad, also took it upon herself to send out

information to her own personal network regarding the study. Some of the volunteers

contacted me at her urging.

I replied to initial inquiries with emails to arrange a phone call with each potential

volunteer. I spoke with fourteen of the potential informants and qualified each of them

using the questions from my IRB approved phone transcript (see Appendix B). The

criteria for participation in the study included: seminary education, ordination, ministry

practice for one or more years, and affiliation with at least one of the following: SBC,

Alliance of Baptists (AB), Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), or American Baptist

Churches in the U.S.A. (ABC-USA). All eight women who participated in the study have

a personal history of affiliation with the SBC; however, like a majority of clergywomen

(and churches that support them) most have migrated to the AB, ABC-USA or CBF for

denominational affiliation.

The rationale for requiring these qualifications for study participants includes four

aspects. Although a number of women who are trained in seminaries never pursue

ordination, it is extremely rare that a woman without seminary training is ordained in a

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[89] *Folio: A Newsletter for Baptist Women in Ministry* 19, no. 4 (Summer): 7.

[90] Erlandson, et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry,* 29. Rather than just depend on my own contacts (which are extensive) in the world of Baptist clergywomen, I chose to recruit participants with an ad in *Folio,* the primary communication instrument of (Southern) Baptist clergywomen.

[91] Women from the following states responded to the advertisement: Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia.

Baptist church. There is no standard of practice for ordination among Southern Baptists, heirs of the free-church tradition where setting aside clergy is a matter of local church polity. Nevertheless, in contemporary practice a professional ministry degree from seminary or divinity school is fairly common.[92] Asking for affiliation with one of the main Baptist denominational groups that played a role in the schism of the 1980s and 90s was initially an effort to limit the number of Baptist subcultures that needed understanding and explication for the study. In the final direction of the study this became a fortuitous choice because of the decision to build an interpretive model about the SBC schism based on the experiences of the informants.[93] Seeking women with one or more years of work in ministry was an effort to focus on clergywomen who are somewhat seasoned in their work, and somewhat beyond the novice stage of their vocations.[94]

One of the fourteen women was too well-known publicly to include her as an anonymous informant, so we agreed that she would not participate. The remaining potential volunteers received consent forms in the mail, and were given opportunity to

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[92] No formula or universal process exists in Baptist life for ordination. However, ordination for males typically follows a somewhat identifiable pattern: 1) licensure so the candidate can begin exercising his gifts for ministry; 2) ordination by a local church to confer the blessing for service which included a) convening a council or presbytery including ministers from neighboring churches b) examining the candidate for authenticity of call and doctrinal soundness; c) taking a vote in the council and/or the local church; d) holding a ceremony (often on the same day as the examination) to bless the candidate and lay on hands. See G. Thomas Halbrooks "The Meaning and Significance of Ordination Among Southern Baptists, 1845-1945." *Baptist History and Heritage* Vol. 23, No. 3 (July 1988) 24-32. In the more moderate-to-progressive traditions, personal call, is often followed by college and seminary education, a call from a church or ministry setting, then ordination. For women the process has tended to follow the latter sequence, but has often taken years longer or precluded ordination.

[93] American Baptist Churches, USA was not a group involved in any direct fashion in the controversies of the SBC in the 1980s and 90s. I chose to allow that affiliation originally because anecdotally it was known as a haven for Southern Baptist women who felt called to ministry.

[94] See Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso, "The State of Women in Baptist Life, 2006" in *No Longer Ignored: A Collection of Articles on Baptist Women,* ed. Charles W. Deweese and Pamela R. Durso (Atlanta, GA: The Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007). Their findings indicate that it is not uncommon for women to work in ministry for several years before ordination is sought or offered. This was true for most (not all) of the women in this study.

ask questions and express concerns. Twelve informants returned consent forms and agreed to be interviewed. I conducted eight in-depth interviews between March of 2003 and April of 2005. On the advice of my faculty advisor, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, I limited the study to eight interviews because each in-depth interview generates a vast amount of data, and moving forward with writing was a priority.[95] At no time in the project did I experience difficulties recruiting informants or gaining consent from participants, nor were there any withdrawals from the study.[96]

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. As I conducted the research and continued to read and write about the topic, themes and directions began to emerge. I attempted to balance the protection of the identities of the women, which restricted my observations and participation in their lives and work, with the need to understand their narratives, identities and negotiations of belief and practice. The questions that guided our conversations (see Appendix A) were open-ended enough to evoke their stories and get them talking about what they think, feel, believe, and do related to their work.

Throughout my research process I attempted to strengthen the credibility of the study using several established techniques. *Prolonged engagement* is designed to guard against distortions caused by anomalies, to gain trust, to overcome efforts by participants to impress the researcher, and to gather enough data to portray the situation adequately.[97] My own engagement with Baptist clergywomen began more than 20 years ago when I first became aware of them as an "issue and problem" among Baptists. A little over ten years ago I joined their ranks officially with my own ordination and entry into a career of

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[95] The remaining four participants who consented to the study were informed in March 2005 of my intention to limit the study, and thanked for their willingness to participate.

[96] During the two year period in which I was interviewing, I also finished course work, took my qualifying exams, and wrote my dissertation proposal, which was approved in May of 2005.

[97] Erlandson, et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry*, 133-36.

ministry. Prior to my ordination, and since that time, I have written about Baptist

clergywomen and the issues surrounding their vocations for ecclesial audiences.[98] I did

not begin sustained academic research until I reached graduate school in 2000. However,

my role as a participant observer is long-standing. Doctoral coursework and exams have

increased my critical distance about the situation of Baptists generally and clergywomen

particularly. As I have pursued a variety of ways to study the group, the research has

helped me let go of polemical stances and embrace the value of the women's stories for

better understanding a larger social situation.[99]

The research also used forms of the following techniques. *Triangulation* is

designed to get the best possible data, by checking multiple sources, employing multiple

researchers, and/or multiple data collection methods to find out if stories match up.[100]

Using either explicit (potentially invasive) forms of data collection or more implicit (and

less invasive) ones to gain background and context-defining materials is called *referential*

adequacy, and might include documents, recordings, video taped interactions, or other

materials that reference the context or suggest a "slice of life" of the setting.[101] *Peer*

debriefing and *member checks* are both forms of asking for help from others outside or

inside the research setting respectively to assist in verifying the accuracy and fairness of

the information presented, making these ethical as well as procedural considerations.

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[98] For example: Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "Molly Truman Marshall: Midwife of Grace, Sign of Hope" *Folio* 11, no. 3 (Winter, 1994): 6; Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "Annette Hill Briggs: Piecing It All Together" *Folio* 11, no. 4 (Spring, 1994): 8; Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "Julie Pennington-Russell: A Journey Through Open Doors" *Folio* 12, no.1 (Summer, 1995): 9; Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "Mary Zimmer: From Wandering Call to Empowered Leader," *Folio* 12, no. 2 (Fall, 1994): 6.

[99] *Prolonged engagement* and *persistent observation* are closely related techniques concerned with the credibility and depth to the quality of data by utilizing numerous sources and taking each opportunity presented to gain better information. Erlandson, et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry,* 136-37. See Chapter I for additional discussion about my efforts to increase critical distance, yet remain explicit about my own located perspective.

[100] Ibid., 137-39.

[101] Ibid., 139-40.

Additional sources of data about Baptist clergywomen and women in Baptist life include: numerous "profiles" of clergywomen in *Folio*,[102] news stories and articles about clergywomen in Baptist publications in the past three decades, and a few brief conversations with women who were involved in pivotal moments of Baptist history that impacted changing roles for Baptist women in the past forty years. I have also asked each participant to read and respond to my write-up of her narrative. Additionally some of the clergywomen have taken it upon themselves to volunteer additional documents (i.e. sermon manuscripts) to help me understand their stories. These sources strengthen both the historical analysis and provide a form of "triangulation" of the data. Conversations and close readings of the data with other peers in my field have also provided additional feedback about my conclusions.[103]

Keeping a *reflexive journal* is a technique recommended for assuring that one's data is trustworthy. In my case the "journal" has taken several forms including field notes, and a series of files called "Idea Logs" which have provided me with a record of my insights, reading notes, data analysis, engagement with theory, and emerging patterns or arguments in the research design and findings.[104] In qualitative research there are no "double blind" studies that lead to external validity or verifiability, instead the concept of transferability is emphasized. *Thick description* is a primary technique assuring transferability, by allowing readers to see the situation apart from the conclusive findings of the researcher, giving them the opportunity to evaluate and compare their conclusions

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[102] *Folio* is a quarterly newsletter published by Baptist Women in Ministry. The "profile" section of the newsletter was a standard entry in most issues between 1989 and the 2002. Although some editions are missing this feature, there are on average three to five "profiles" of approximately published each year in *Folio* between 1983 and 2003. The brief articles describe variously the work, calling, education, ordination and personal journeys of Baptist clergywomen.

[103] I am especially grateful to Jan Holton and Annette Rogers-Vaughn for reading the data with me and discussion my findings and conclusions.

[104] Erlandson, et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry*, 143.

with the findings of the study.[105] In this study rich descriptions have been carefully

balanced with a need to protect the privacy and confidentiality of my research partners.[106]

Many instances of the words and stories of the clergywomen fill the pages of this report.

As I read, listened, and re-read the stories of the clergywomen, I used a method of

"constant comparative analysis," which has an end goal of building a "grounded theory."

The constant comparisons do just as they suggest, comparing data collected with previous

data collected.[107] In my case the comparisons of data also were held in conversation with

my other reading about Southern Baptists and about other clergywomen. Rather than use

random sampling (a common technique in quantitative studies), the qualitative research

paradigm calls for purposive sampling. The former assumes *a priori* design, but the latter

assumes an "emergent design." And purposive sampling looks for both positive

(reinforcing) and negative (contradictory) instances of any given finding within the site or

among the informants. When the same responses begin to reappear (redundancy) the

purposive sampling can draw to an end.[108] In my case the "emergent design" began with

open structure of collecting the narratives of clergywomen and began to move toward

greater shape as I continued through the process of collection, reading and writing.

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[105] Ibid., 146. The phrase, "thick description," can be credited to Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) and has been advocated by qualitative researchers and practical theologians alike. See for example Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology,* 107; Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century." In *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed., Jeanne Stephenson Moessner (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996) 24. See also Rubin & Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing,* chapter 11 and Mason, *Qualitative Researching,* chapter 9.

[106] My research design calls for changing all identifying data about each woman in my study when I write up the descriptions and findings for publication.

[107] Erlandson, et al., *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry*, 112-13. Initially I moved toward building a "grounded theory;" and data I collected was rich. However, the interviews would need to be expanded to a greater number of women in order to accomplish the task of building grounded theory fully. I would need to continue to sample the population of Baptist clergywomen and interview them more extensively and in a more structured way about the themes that came to the fore in the initial data collection.

[108] Ibid., 148.

A major point of clarity emerged as I read the women's stories. Several particular moments stood out as crucial times when they had chosen to remain Baptist despite adversity. Those moments included vocational calling, seminary training, ordination and entry into ministry. This point of clarity along with the reading I was doing about Baptists and theologies and psychologies of human experience converged in an "aha moment" in a conversation with Kathleen Flake. As we discussed a different project I was able to see how the stories of the clergywomen could re-interpret the schism in the SBC, if they were considered carefully. I came to realize that their stories challenged the literature about the Baptist controversy which treated clergywomen as an issue rather than as a source of insight into the fractured denomination.

I did not set out to make arguments about the SBC. In fact I had in mind that the schism in the SBC would need to be rehearsed as background and context in order to develop an understanding about what was happening with the clergywomen. Only after collecting their stories and seeing their resiliency and willingness to remain Baptist despite the schism, did I begin to see that the ways in which these women dealt with the perennial tensions in Baptist life. Their stories could shed new light on the dynamics of the schism itself. Despite the disappointments, anger and the collective frustration (not to mention the inability of outsiders to understand why women would pursue ministry in the SBC) Baptist women continue to be ordained and find places of service. Although a majority of them have gravitated to the newer groups (CBF and AB), the context of Baptist culture remains both a nurturing space in which Baptist clergywomen are able to participate in vocations of meaning, creativity, trust and faithfulness, and simultaneously the context continues to be prone to polarization and controversy.

Introducing Eight Baptist Clergywomen

A major portion of evidence for the claims in this study emerges from clergy narratives at critical points when each woman's role and status as a minister is challenged. Often such challenges arise at moments of decision and action related to her 1) call to ministry 2) theological education, 3) ordination to ministry, and/or 4) acceptance or dismissal from a ministry position. Clergywomen experience these confrontations as an opportunity to clarify their role and status in the face of verbal disagreements, questions, ridicule, blocked access, and isolation. At other times they find or create communities which offer support, affirmation and sanction for their actions. All of them have enacted strategies which help them to negotiate the perennial tensions of Baptist belief and practice, to remain Baptist, and to pursue their callings.

Despite the small number of clergy interviewed, the variety they embody as a group is impressively diverse. They come from different religious backgrounds and regions of the country.[109] They range age from thirty to fifty-two, and have engaged in a variety of ministry positions. The women attended four of the six Southern Baptist seminaries, and two Baptist houses of study.[110] They range in age from thirty to fifty-two, most in the prime of their professional lives. Because their lives have coincided with the years in which Southern Baptists were negotiating a schism, the clergywomen's

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[109] Although most of the clergywomen were raised in Baptist contexts, one grew up in a "lapsed Catholic" family and another was influenced by multiple denominational churches.

[110] No younger women from any of the new Baptist seminaries which have begun in response to the schism of the last thirty years were part of the study, although at least one showed interest and one of the participants was working toward a Doctor of Ministry at one of the new schools, another was teaching at one of the new schools. The requirements for seminary education and ordination, as well as ministry experience (of one year or more) contributed to this outcome. One study participant is in that age group, but she attended a Methodist school with a Baptist House of Study. The oldest of the "new" schools, Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, opened in the fall of 1991, and graduated its first small group of students in May 1993. The lack of younger women may also reflect the readership of *Folio*.

narratives also provide insight into the years of conflict and division in the SBC from 1960 to 2000.

The areas of ministry which are represented among the clergywomen include: pastor, associate pastor, education minister, music minister, military chaplain, hospital chaplain, children's minister, campus minister, youth minister, and non-profit agency administrator. Geographically the women have lived mostly in the South, but also in the far west, Midwest, and mid-Atlantic. Affiliations with four denominational groups of the study are present: SBC, CBF, AB, and ABC-USA. All of the women are white. Several are married, two are single, one is divorced, one is questioning her sexual orientation, and three of the eight married men who are also ministers. Five of the eight are mothers.

We will return to the stories of these clergywomen after first considering the history and context of Southern Baptists from 1920 to 1960. In the recounting of events from 1960 to 2000, the clergywomen's stories lead the narrative and illustrate the major themes of the era. In Chapters VI, VII and VIII a model of interpretation will be gradually assembled from the stories of the clergywomen, demonstrating how they personally traverse the tension between individual autonomy and scriptural authority and reinterpret the Baptist concept of soul competency. Insights gained from their negotiations of this perennial tension will open a new interpretation of the schism in the SBC.

CHAPTER III

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS NEGOTIATING TENSIONS
IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY

As the twentieth century was drawing to a close, historian Bill Leonard found
himself in a quandary as he attempted to interpret Baptists to a broader American public.
Just a decade and a half earlier Martin Marty had observed that Protestantism in the
South with Southern Baptists as exemplars, were among the most "intact" religious
subcultures in the U.S.[1] In just a dozen years this "intactness" broke apart and spun off
two new denomination-like entities, the Alliance of Baptists (AB) and the Cooperative
Baptist Fellowship (CBF) and an entire constellation of newly organized seminaries,
news agencies, mission support groups, religious societies and special interest Baptist
organizations, which were no longer willing to be peaceably affiliated with the Southern
Baptist Convention (SBC). In *God's Last and Only Hope,* Leonard argues that a
synthesis of theology and practice which had been held together by "common cultural,
organizational, and religions experiences"[2] finally broke under the pressures imposed by
a uniform fundamentalist ideology applied to a denominational structure, which had been
designed to hold the tensions together in careful balance.

In his introduction to the *Dictionary of Baptists in America,* Leonard elaborates
this notion that Baptists are best understood in terms of a set of tensions which are
negotiated over time and circumstance. While some American religious groups can be

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[1] Martin Marty, "The Protestant Experience and Perspective," in *American Religious Values and the Future of America*, ed. Rodger Van Allen (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 45-46.

[2] Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last & Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 3.

understood through a range of particular doctrinal commitments, or in the light of

charismatic founding figures, Baptists, he suggests, are best comprehended in terms of

the following tensions: 1) individual liberty of conscience versus the authority of

scripture; 2) the autonomy of the local church versus associational cooperation; 3) clergy

versus laity; 4) religious liberty versus loyalty to the state; and 5) dramatic conversion

versus nurturing process.[3] Each pair works as a constraint on Baptist life and polity.

Together they work like (permeable) walls defining the group's life over time (see Figure

1, Chapter I). These tensions can be observed as functioning at various sites in Baptist

life (i.e. in sermons, news publications, denominational histories, congregational polity

documents, covenants, etc.). At the center of all the tensions of conviction and practice is

the mediating presence of the particular faith community. In Baptist life this is most often

understood to be the local church, but other groupings and institutionalized associations

of Baptists also serve as arbiters of the inherent tensions of Baptist belief and practice.

The Southern Baptist Convention itself is one such mediator, responding to pressures of

churches, charismatic leaders, cultural claims and trends, other Baptist agencies and

religious groups outside Baptist life.

Each tension can be conceived as a paradoxical set of beliefs and/or practices, and

the two extreme poles should be understood as both interpenetrating and dialectical in

relationship to each other, as well as present in the central Baptist idea that is negotiated

along the continuum of each tension: 1) soul competency, 2) voluntary association, 3)

priesthood of all believers, 4) separation of church and state, 5) salvation and calling. One

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[3] Bill J. Leonard, *Dictionary of Baptists in America* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 4-6. In two more recent texts, Leonard identifies several additional tensions: 1) doctrinal statements: invariably confessional, selectively creedal; 2) ordinances: sacraments and symbols; 3) diversity: theological and ecclesial. See *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 6-10. See also *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 88-90.

way to summarize the various tensions found in each pair of constraints would be to observe that Baptists have an *overarching conflict concerning the character and location of authority*. They struggle in varying times and places with issues of authority related to: paid and volunteer ministry, congregational polity, powers of the state, individual conscience and religious experience, loyalties to differing Baptist institutions, appropriate roles for men and women, and matters concerning the proper interpretation of traditions and texts. Each tension identified by Leonard can be viewed as a shared way to negotiate the tensions of authority in the major beliefs and practices of Southern Baptist people. The ways in which Baptists resolve the tensions in *soul competency* is the focus of this project, but the historical description of Baptists which follows will highlight other tensions as well.

The following story of twentieth century Southern Baptists, after World War I, will explore selected events of the period using the guiding framework of these tensions of conviction. Picking up the Baptist story at the end of the Great War, this chapter will address significant historical circumstances of Baptists in the four and a half decades leading up to the first ordination of a female to ministry (1964), and describe how Baptists were negotiating various tensions as they relate to each identified issue. The first major section the chapter focuses on the growing threats to authority of the 1920s, and the second half of this chapter examines the shifting Baptist tensions in the middle decades of the century. Chapter IV will pick up the story in the 1960s and focus on renewed threats to authority as they developed in Southern Baptist life following 1964, particularly as they relate to women's ordination and the splintering of the SBC which began in earnest in 1979. This review will set the stage for observing the same tensions of

conviction and practice within the narratives of eight Baptist clergywomen in the chapters
that follow.

Mounting Threats to Authority in the SBC, 1920 to 1930

Following the Great War, the social and religious landscape in America held a
spirit of progressivism and restored optimism in the power of humankind to bring a
peaceable kingdom to fruition. That was the surface of it. Under the optimistic face lay
shifting plates of millennial pessimism, scientific optimism, and burgeoning feminism,
each of which threatened to open up new fault-lines of division in American religious
life. Southern Baptists plunged into the 1920s buoyed by a spirit of optimism and
determined to consolidate their influence, efficiency and growth in the South, despite
challenges which threatened to undermine them. By the beginning of the Second World
War, many changes had struck the American religious landscape resulting in a drop in
enthusiasm for popular, institutional and academic religion. While Baptists, too,
experienced a variety of challenges and shifts, overall the period was one of continued
consolidation, increased organization, and a renegotiation of perennial Baptist tensions.
The Baptist conviction about *voluntary association* shifted toward more cooperation
between entities, shifting authority subtly away from the local church. The concept of
soul competency continued to mask the racial and gendered convictions about humanity.
Arguments about the inferiority of women and blacks appealed to biblical authority and
assisted in keeping the construction in place. White Southern Baptist women and African
American Baptists countered with arguments appealing to religious experience and by the
formation and maintenance of separate organizations that expressed their conviction

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about the individual liberty of conscience. Challenges from modern biblical scholarship, agitation from fundamentalists, and theories of evolution also stirred up conflict and heightened tensions about the Baptist understanding of *soul competency.* However, Southern Baptists maintained a way of compromise with the passage of the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message*, which afforded ascendancy neither to individual conscience nor to biblical authority, and resisted both modernism and fundamentalism's efforts to shift authority entirely in one direction or the other.

Post-war Recovery

Although there was initial opposition to U.S. involvement in The Great War in many Southern Baptist quarters, soon after troops were committed, Baptists in the South, along with most religious Americans threw their support to the war effort, the troops and the universal causes of freedom and "brotherhood."[4] In the northern states and among many Protestants in America the immediate response following World War I was to support the League of Nations and to see a renewed opportunity to expand the limits of Christendom around the globe by means of both the missionary enterprise and U.S. participation in the League. Organized support for both causes came in the form of the "Interchurch World Movement" of 1919 and 1920. More than 30 mainline denominations jumped onto the bandwagon supporting surveys, evangelistic campaigns, educational efforts and a massive fundraising endeavor.[5] However, in typical fashion, Southern

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[4] John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 98-99. When referring to Baptists of the South, and those affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention in this chapter, reference will most often be simply to "Baptists." When other Baptist groups are referenced a clear delineation will be offered.
[5] Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 161-170.

Baptists found a unique outlet for expressing the optimism of the times while consolidating their own institutions and needs simultaneously. Rather than join the Interchurch movement, which consisted primarily of denominational members of the Federal Council of Church, the SBC embarked in 1919 on their own "$75 Million Campaign" partly out of their sense of ongoing competition and animosity with Northern Baptists,[6] and partly from their insistence on the mandate to do all work for, "the glory of our Master, the salvation of the lost, and the establishment of Christ's Kingdom throughout the whole world."[7]

Efforts to centralize, consolidate and perform functions more efficiently in the 1920s can be understood as a Baptist effort to resolve the tension in the Baptist ideal of *voluntary association*. The move was increasingly in the direction of associational cooperation and subtly away from local church autonomy. During the decade of the 1920s the practice of traveling representatives from every Baptist cause from the state paper to the regional children's home, dropping in on local churches, commandeering the pulpit and pleading for funds, was replaced by a coordinated effort to raise funds through the newly devised "Cooperative Program," divide them equally between state conventions and the SBC, and distribute them more equitably to the causes of education,

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[6] Following the split between Baptists in 1845, Baptists in the north continued to organize in loosely knit societies for tasks such as missions and publications, which eventually came together in 1907 to form the Northern Baptist Convention (1907-1950). They changed their name in 1950 to the American Baptist Convention and again in 1972 to the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A See William H. Brackney, "American Baptist Churches in the USA" in *Dictionary of Baptists in America,* ed. Bill J. Leonard (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994). Like other Protestant groups in America, Northern Baptists also launched a fundraising campaign following WWI. Although American Baptists have continued to foster ecumenical relationships, Southern Baptists have tended to operate in an independent fashion lacking much serious engagement with other Protestant denominations, joining instead the Baptist World Alliance. See H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 566-67, 600-605. See also Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 120-21.

[7] *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1919, quoted in H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 453.

home and foreign missions, and other benevolent agencies.[8] This centralizing feature

contributed greatly to the growth of Southern Baptists, and served to isolate them further

from mainline Christian denominations.

An impressive $92 million was pledged to the SBC's campaign to fund all of its

mission boards and agencies, but only $58 million of the "$75 Million Campaign" was

collected in the next five years. Nevertheless, this move represented a significant

consolidation of purpose and identity for Southern Baptists. Although the effort was

incomplete, a central contribution to the campaign's success was the carefully organized

efforts of women in the churches to promote and practice tithing at a time when the

concept was not in vogue. The women not only pledged $15 million, but also gave more

than $16 million while others fell short, setting a significant precedent of commitment to

the total work of the SBC, rather than limiting their support to foreign missions.[9] After

five years of effort, the culmination of the $75 Million Campaign was the formation of

the Cooperative Program in 1925. Whereas other major Christian denominations were

increasingly moving toward cooperation with *each other* in efforts of mission, education,

social justice and public engagement between faith and civil society, Southern Baptists

were putting greater emphasis on the consolidation, increased efficiency and consistent

funding of their own programs and interests.

During the "Great War" years SBC leaders recognized a need for an interim

group which could act on behalf of the Convention when they were not in session (which

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[8] Southern Baptist "home" and "foreign" missions were operated by separate and competing boards from 1845. The Cooperative Program not only cut down on the financial competition between various Southern Baptist entities, but also initiated more coordination of their efforts.

[9] McBeth, *Baptist Heritage,* 664. Woman's Missionary Union was founded in 1888 as an auxiliary to the SBC, with the primary purpose of supporting missionary causes. During the $75 million campaign they adopted a stance of wider support for the total program of the SBC. Not an official board or agency of the convention, they maintained independent, "auxiliary," status while supporting fully the work of the SBC.

only lasted a few days each year). The Executive Committee of the SBC was formed in

1917 and charged with the purpose of coordinating efforts of the state work and the

various boards, agencies and committees of the Convention. Eventually, they oversaw the

distribution of funds collected through the Cooperative Program, in which churches

contributed through the state Baptist conventions and by which Baptists funded

everything with three exceptions: special offerings to home and foreign missions and the

work of Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), Auxiliary to the SBC.[10]

In the 1920 report to the SBC, George W. Truett, committee chair for the $75

Million Campaign, recounted both the success of receiving more than $90 million in

pledges, and the difficulties of the previous year which prevented a greater response to

the plea for funds. He identified the following problems: limited time of six months for

launching the campaign, wars around the globe combined with the concern that "the mind

of the people was disturbed over the League of Nations and the Treaty of Peace,"

industrial strikes, and a burgeoning number of fund-raising campaigns. The greatest

difficulty as noted in the meeting minutes, however, was the "unprecedented weather

conditions of storms and rains over the South."[11]

In their efforts to return to normalcy following the World War I, Southern

Baptists were on their way to becoming more organized, more expansive, more

intentional about their efficiency and more financially stable. These efforts called on

Baptists, who were already united socially through a common way of life, which had

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[10] Even following the consolidation of funding through the Cooperative Program, the home and foreign mission agencies remained separate entities. The Lottie Moon Christmas Offering funds foreign missions directly and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering funds home missions directly. WMU raises its funds primarily through the sale of missions education periodicals and books.

[11] *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 1920, quoted in McBeth, *Sourcebook*, 447-61. The report noted: "From September through December and much since it rained and stormed throughout a large part of the Southern territory . . . ." (451).

been solidly in place since the end of the Civil War, to grapple with the tension in the principle of *voluntary association*. Women both supported and made major contributions to this new found efficiency and cooperation by their financial giving and expanded promotion of the SBC through WMU programs and literature. They were among the most loyal supporters of the denomination. The demand for more cooperation between the state organizations and the national SBC, the states and local associations of Baptists, and among the various boards and agencies of the convention strengthened the overall machinery of the denomination and followed the wider cultural trends toward organization and efficiency. However, these newly strengthened connections also subtly eroded the authority of the local church to act on its own autonomy.

Weather was not all that created setbacks in organizational efforts of the SBC. In those same years of optimism and expansion in the convention, storms of controversy over the role of women, the authority of scripture and the power of scientific theory were also fermenting. Quieter were the rumblings of social conscience and relations between blacks and whites in the South.

Suffrage for White Women and Jim Crow for African Americans

The fight for woman suffrage in America is generally marked as beginning in 1848 at the Seneca Falls convention on women's rights. The struggle for women's right to vote was sidetracked as the nation turned its full attention to Civil War in the 1860s. And the double intent of gaining a vote for white women as well as black men and women was severed during the efforts at Southern Reconstruction that followed the war. In the South interlocking systems of race, class and gender were held in check by the

religious institution of the local church and its denominational affiliations. In the north similar systems held, but with less residue of the structure of slave economy which had shaped culture, politics and religion in the South for more than two centuries. Popular religious culture of the 1920s was replete with biblical arguments by feminists on one side supporting suffrage and by fundamentalists on the other side opposing it.[12] During the first decades of the twentieth century white Southern Baptist WMU leaders outpaced their male counterparts in the SBC by engaging in personal relationships, financial and organizational support and involvement in the program of "racial uplift" among African American women who led the National Baptist Convention's Women's Convention. And yet attitudes and strategies employed by the white leaders maintained the social relations which were based on views of white superiority.

An effort to gain the vote for women in the annual meeting of the SBC itself began in 1914, and was accomplished amid much protest in 1918, two years before (white) women were afforded the vote in the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Although *all* women were technically enfranchised into American politics, poll taxes and literacy tests, formalized in Jim Crow laws and reinforced by tactics of violence and intimidation, increasingly kept black women and men away from civic involvement.

The Southern Baptist attitudes toward women in the 1920s, marked by hostility to the "modern woman," and apathy toward the plight of black women and men living in the devastating aftermath of Reconstruction under constant threats of lynching, represents the ever-present Baptist tension between the individual's liberty of conscience and the

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[12] Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale, 1993), 54-56

authority of scripture. For whom did liberty count? Baptists found ways to justify their

discriminations biblically in the case of women, and to dodge the issue altogether it the

case of blacks living under the tyranny of Jim Crow who were forced to flee north in the

Great Migration of the 1920s to Chicago, Detroit, and other industrial centers.[13] For

Baptists questions of social justice and human equality were governed by overarching

commitments to individual salvation and personal morality. The argument ran along these

lines: if each person accepted the salvation offered in Christ and lived a moral life, then

no societal problems would remain. Justice was really a matter of each person living

righteously thus assuring the goodness of social relations. This argument masked social

inequities, and closely held beliefs about gender and race, which existed for white women

and persons of color, and those not of U.S. origin.

For 30 years, a "separate but equal" policy, minus the violence, was the practical

reality for most Southern Baptist women. From the formation of WMU in 1888 until the

women were admitted as messengers to the Convention in 1918, women maintained a

separate organization. Previously women had attended the annual SBC meeting, but

when two women attempted to register as messengers in 1885 the Convention took action

and changed the language of the constitution to say "brethren" instead of "messengers." [14]

"Messengers" were the representatives from churches and other Baptist agencies to the

SBC each year. By changing the language to "brethren" the constitution made it

impossible for women to register, participate, or vote in the annual SBC meeting. Other

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[13] The Public Broadcasting System web page "People & Events: The Northern Migration of Sharecroppers in the 1920s" records the transition thus, "From 1920 to 1930, the African American population exploded in Chicago, increasing from 109,458 to 233,903 residents in just a decade." http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/flood/peopleevents/e_sharecroppers.html (accessed: September 13, 2005).
[14] Women were probably admitted to the convention prior to 1918 and with regularity after 1913. See McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life,* 111.

fearful invectives were offered by men in the halls and from the platform about the intentions of the women. Even the women's meeting across town was turned over to men to read and give reports to the gathered women.[15]

In the years between 1888 and 1914, the women literally met (usually in a nearby church or hotel), heard reports, voted on WMU business and carried on a program of missions support concurrently while the men were meeting at the annual Convention. A pattern emerged in the early part of the twentieth century in which a trusted man was enlisted by the leaders of WMU to present their annual reports to the Convention. Nevertheless there were "hidden intrusions of women's voices into the bass and tenor harmony of the SBC" when the occasional female missionary or pastor's wife made it onto the platform and spoke briefly.[16] In 1916 a dramatic shift occurred in which WMU executive, Kathleen Mallory gave the WMU report in person at the request of the Home Mission Board secretary, B. D. Gray. This action set off a two year debate that ended in reversing the language of the constitution back to "messengers" and allowing women to register and vote in the annual meeting in 1918.[17]

Voting in the convention was one symbol of liberty granted to white women. To understand the tensions in *soul competency* related to African Americans, who for the most part met in separate conventions, a survey of the social attitudes of Southern Baptists is helpful. In *Churches in Cultural Captivity,* John Lee Eighmy elaborates the

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[15] *SBC Annual*, *1885,* 14, 30. For a recounting of the 1885 meetings and its implications for state women's organizations, see also Catherine B. Allen, *A Century to Celebrate: History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Birmingham, AL: Woman's Missionary Union, 1987), 37-40.

[16] These incidents were rarely recorded in the official minutes of the SBC meeting, but were noted in records of the meetings in state Baptist newspapers. See Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*, 303-05.

[17] This was also the year that the "$75 Million Campaign" was launched and it is not insignificant that the timing of the first convention-wide cooperative effort and the official enfranchisement of women happened in the same meeting and with crucial leadership from women's supporter and convention president, James B. Gambrell. See Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*, 303-08.

lack of social conscience embodied by the Southern Baptist Convention itself in the early decades of the twentieth century. He observes the meager efforts by the Social Service Commission (SSC) and various other committees to pass resolutions at the annual SBC meetings on social topics which emphasized personal morality, such as temperance, gambling and keeping the Sabbath.[18] Additionally, little funding was available to do any educational programming or social action, and the commission was made up of prominent, and very pre-occupied, pastors representing their state conventions and serving brief, one-year terms. These were inadequate conditions for accomplishing anything more than approving the director's annual report to the Convention. No service, action or education filled the intervening times between SBC meetings. Eighmy observes further: "The commission offered a modified version of social Christianity partly because as a denominational agency it depended on the good will of the constituency. Since local churches cooperated on a voluntary basis, the need for consensus made unlikely a strong policy on any issue that might threaten unity."[19]

The SSC was directed by Arthur Barton for 28 years and the agency's overarching approach during the 1920s can be characterized as extolling a religion of the individual: personal salvation leads to moral living and in turn corrects social problems. Barton was a denominational loyalist and was never paid for his duties. Instead he maintained successive pastorates and state denominational positions. Barton was not seminary trained, yet had large influence and always put individual salvation ahead of social gospel. He was life-long member of the Temperance League and would engage in

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[18] Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 93-94. Although it claimed to balance the emphases of social Christianity and individual Christian responsibility, the reports of the Social Service Commission consistently leaned toward an individual-moral response to issues.
[19] Ibid., 96.

discussions, debate, and congressional testimony about temperance, Sabbath laws, and obscenity; he did not, however, engage in action related to racial tensions, women's rights or economic justice. His socially conservative ideas never drew votes of opposition during reports or resolutions at the annual SBC. Reports included such topics as "war and peace, race relations, the economic order, and personal morality . . . [which included] temperance, Sabbath desecration, gambling, obscene literature, motion pictures and divorce."[20]

According to Eighmy, attitudes of the SSC continued to uphold an ideology of white racism and the inferiority of "Negroes" [sic] including a defense of second rate education, and the paternalistic care of whites for the spiritual welfare of blacks. A regular criticism of lynching appeared in the annual reports to the SBC, but they only took the form of pleas for peace between the races. The reports never called for justice or changes to white supremacist attitudes.[21]

Eighmy notes that conflicts over the relationship of personal salvation and social gospel are more readily found in the skirmishes among leaders of the state organizations. Unfortunately, Eighmy never turns his attention to a major locus of social conscience in the SBC: Woman's Missionary Union.[22] Paul Harvey argues the counterpoint to Eighmy. Although the SBC tended to lack social conscience, education and action (or rather reduced it to individual salvation), WMU operated comfortably and consistently in the realm of social action and took on numerous educational and social projects deeply

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[20] Ibid., 98.
[21] Ibid., 100-01, 107.
[22] Eighmy's work was incomplete at his death from a heart attack in 1970. Historian Samuel Hill took the unfinished manuscript from Eighmy's widow and completed the work for publication in 1972. It is possible to speculate that Eighmy might have expanded his research to investigate the role of WMU in the social conscience of the early twentieth century if he had not suffered an untimely death.

resonant with the social gospel, minus the rhetoric of social Christianity.[23] For example WMU sponsored Baptist centers in numerous cities, attempted cooperative efforts with African American Baptist women's groups, and promoted programs of care for women, children, immigrants, the sick, imprisoned, poor, and unemployed.[24] Following both Harvey's arguments and Catherine Allen's careful reading of the programs and leadership of WMU, one may conclude that the social conscience of the SBC between the World Wars (and beyond) resided primarily in the programs, leadership and values of WMU.

WMU exercised its influence related to social issues on Southern Baptist life by maintaining a careful and systematic program of education and training the pervaded nearly every Baptist church in the South in the decades of the 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. In the consistent, age-graded programs of training, WMU taught Southern Baptists the theology and biblical mandate of stewardship as well as the techniques and practices of collecting tithes and offerings on a weekly basis. They taught women and girls (and boys until 1954) the mandate of missions and a vocational obligation to the gospel.[25] They encouraged every member to involve herself in social action and personal evangelism.[26] Additionally, women and girls learned specific leadership skills through their work with women in churches and the communities beyond the walls of the churches. They learned skills of promoting their work, organizing volunteers into action, handling money, speaking publicly, teaching, offering care, doing benevolence work, and disciplining

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[23] Paul Harvey, "Saints but Not Subordinates; The Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention" in *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism,* ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 13-15.
[24] Ibid., 15-16.
[25] Allen, *Century to Celebrate,* 107-08.
[26] The promotion of evangelism became one of the unifying factors for all SBC agencies, including WMU.

themselves and their sisters to study, prayer and financial giving. Through their various

publications and programs WMU served to keep alive a social conscience and provide an

outlet for leadership and calling among girls and women.

The WMU Training School in Louisville, Kentucky, founded in 1906 was busy in

the years between the wars training professional Christian social workers for churches

and agencies, preparing missionaries for home and foreign fields, and teaching women to

be religious professionals.[27] Many of the Training School graduates spent their careers

working for WMU's national, state and associational organizations. The professional

WMU staff cultivated skills among a cadre of women, which included writing, editing

and publishing periodicals and books, fundraising (and eventually investing and

managing large endowments), marketing, producing enormous events for thousands of

women and girls, and working collaboratively with other boards and agencies, even those

beyond Southern Baptists.

As Harvey points out, at the level of denominational leadership, the women were

never militant in their demands for equality or authority in the SBC. In fact they believed

they could do their work with or without a vote at the Annual Convention.[28] He argues

that the auxiliary status of WMU allowed them to construct a new kind of Southern

evangelical womanhood that was neither feminist nor fundamentalist. Another way to

understand their work is through the lens of *soul competency:* they expressed their

Baptist convictions about the competency of the individual through their work and

programs of missions, social work and leadership by acting in a separate realm of

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[27] Laine T. Scales, *All that Fits a Woman: Training Southern Baptist Women for Charity and Mission, 1907-1926* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000).
[28] WMU President Kathleen Mallory saw the inclusion of women in the SBC meeting as a potential distraction to the work of WMU. See Allen, *Century to Celebrate,* 307.

organizational life. They practiced appeals to scriptural authority that emphasized the

universal demands of the gospel rather than on the proscriptions against women's

speaking or leading.[29]

The social conscience fostered by the leaders of WMU during the Reconstruction

period in the South following Civil War included education and benevolence for poor

Southern blacks recently emancipated from slavery, and some limited partnerships with

middle class black women for the purpose of "uplift" of the race. In the early twentieth

century WMU developed a "plan of work" which focused on numerous social ministries

including work with African American Baptist women who led the Woman's Convention

(WC) of the National Baptist Convention (NBC).[30] Aspects of the partnership included

financial support of the WC, partnership in publications, support of individual African

American women who ministered in local communities in the South, and participation in

the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching.[31] The work done by

the white Southern Baptist women can be characterized by the same benevolent

paternalism of the larger SBC. The difference was in the level of initiative, activism and a

greater willingness to risk speaking out against racial injustices, such as lynching and Jim

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[29] The permanent watchword (motto or theme) of WMU is "Laborers Together With God." See Allen, *Century to Celebrate,* 362.

[30] The National Baptist Convention (NBC) was formed in 1895 when three other national organizations of black Baptists voted to unite. The Woman's Convention (WC) was formed in 1900 after previously failed attempts both to form women's auxiliaries to the various agencies which eventually made up the NBC and to include women in existing structures of the NBC. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham notes: "While supportive of the programs of the NBC's boards, the Woman's Convention held tight control over its own finances, programs, and leaders," in *Righteous Discontent: the Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 153-57.

[31] Allen, *Century to Celebrate,* 247-48. Four WMU leaders were part of the formation of this group, and WMU passed resolutions calling for an end to lynching in 1932. The Association itself was made up of 40,000 women. It called for fair trials for the accused, and supported the idea that white women could influence their husbands and male relatives not "to avenge their honor outside the law" in order to prevent lynching of black males accused of crimes against white women. WMU leader, Katherine Test Davis hosted meetings in her home during racially tense times in South Carolina which contributed to a reduction in the number of lynchings in the state during the 1930s.

Crow laws. The Social Service Commission of the SBC would only plea for peace between the races rather than demand justice. Harvey describes it this way: "The theological racism of the Southern Baptist tradition, emanating from prominent pastors and denominational agencies, was not the same barrier to members of the WMU as it was to progressive-minded men, for WMU had developed a quite counter-tradition of biracial cooperation."[32]

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham argues that during the early years of the twentieth century the rhetoric of respectability exercised by African American women who led the WC was resonant with the personal morality approach of white Southern Baptists and for that matter also "sounded uncannily similar to the racist arguments they strove to refute."[33] She continues, "The black Baptist women asserted that "proper" and "respectable" behavior proved blacks worthy of equal civil and political rights and made it possible for them to "demand what they can not hope to demand if they are boisterous and unclean." Conversely, the politics of respectability equated nonconformity with the cause of racial inequality and injustice.[34]

The emphasis on respectability which was keyed on white middle class mores appealed to white Baptist women and made common ground possible. However, it also kept the racially constructed understanding of the individual in place for whites, despite the calls for reform, justice and social change issued by their black Baptist sisters. So black and white Baptist women in the early decades of the twentieth century forged partnerships and engaged in common social improvement programs growing out of their shared commitment to social gospel values, and uplift of African Americans, yet the

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[32] Harvey, "Saints but Not Subordinates," 16.
[33] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 203.
[34] Ibid.

involvement only went as far as it could without upsetting the dominant understandings of difference between blacks and whites and the many forms of institutional racism. Put another way, both black and white women leaders in Baptist organizations of the 1920s agreed that "manners and morals" mattered in the work of spreading the gospel, but African American women pushed the logic of respectability to its valid conclusion which included traditional forms of protest, such as petitions, boycotts, and verbal appeals to justice."[35] Such resistance was rarely in the interest or agenda of the white women.

In the era of change during the 1920s individual liberty of conscience remains a racially constructed value, supporting white, male-dominated superiority and subordination of women and persons of color, assuming particular scriptural interpretations to maintain the ideology. White Baptist women as well as black Baptist men and women, despite their official and legal enfranchisement to politics and civil society, continued to live and work in secondary and tertiary positions of authority mainly through separate religious organizations (i.e. WMU, NBC, WC), reflecting also the racialized and gendered construction of the concept of *soul competency*. However, in these separate but unequal realms each group cultivated skills of leadership, organization and fundraising that would empower them to challenge the status quo in the decades to come. The Southern Baptist Convention structures and leadership maintained paternalistic and white supremacist values rather unconsciously and uncritically during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Although the white women may have taken greater steps to practice the inclusion of all people in idea of *soul competency*, the individual's liberty of conscience was still primarily understood in terms of one's ability to experience personal salvation and to live a morally upright life. Thus practical justice

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[35] Ibid., 187.

and equality were not priorities to most white Southern Baptists, and the authority of scripture was esteemed by most Southern Baptists to justify and maintain the interlocking systems of race, class and gender. Moreover, the poles of tension in the concept of *soul competency* were held in place by refusal to see or extend their implications to social situations of injustice. Yet the strength of the tension served to empower Baptist women and Southern black Baptists outside the SBC to continue to build leadership structures and communities of subtle resistance which would come to full flower in just a few decades.

Fundamentalist – Modernist Controversy

The influence of Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Charles Darwin on the thinking and social landscape of twentieth century America has been so powerful that each thinker and his influence remains under wide-spread consideration and debate well into the twenty-first century. America's educational and cultural institutions were not only influenced by new ways of thinking about the human condition, social relations, and the power of science to explain the natural and social worlds, they were also deeply divided by the controversies that arose over psychology, social and natural sciences and the study of religion and theology. Churches and denominations in the 1920s were especially riddled with debates over theology and biblical interpretation resulting in permanent rifts in their social fabric and historic loyalties. The divides were not simply along clear lines in every case, but most every major Christian denomination in the U.S. endured battles between modernist/liberals on one side and conservative/fundamentalists on the other.[36]

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[36] For interpretations of religious fundamentalism in America see: George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford

Splits, withdrawals, compromises and new doctrinal statements of all kinds reshaped America's religious landscape in the 1920s. Two major debates were national in their scope and part of nearly every local and denominational dispute: how did the world and humanity come into being (evolution vs. creation)? And how does one read the Bible (inerrancy vs. historical critical method)?

The debate over evolution was the central feature of the famous 1925 "Scopes Monkey Trial" in Dayton, Tennessee. The summer of 1925 found high school teacher John Scopes on trial for illegally teaching evolution in violation of an anti-evolution statute in the state of Tennessee. He was found guilty and fined $100; however, he was of little interest or concern as the country gathered around radios to listen to populist and three-time presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan, argue the prosecution of Scopes, only a sub-text for defending creation against defense attorney, and representative of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Clarence Darrow. The two men did verbal battle in the courtroom, while the media covered what became a "three ring circus" illustrating with high drama the disputes which were already prevalent in educational and religious circles.[37]

Quarrels about the authority of scripture had been brewing for decades already, and they raged between those espousing inerrancy and those advocating the use of historical-critical methods of interpretation of the Bible. The debate had roots on one side in the growing coalescence of ideas about the unquestionable authority of the Bible

University Press, 1980); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism*, 1800-1930 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

[37] Peter Williams, *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 281-82.

among conservatives and fundamentalists, and on the other side in the European

theological trend toward a scientific approach to reading scripture among modernists and

liberals.[38] In Southern Baptist circles the fundamentalist–modernist debate had a less

visceral tone than many other denominations; however, the controversy did reach the

annual Convention floor, and a series of meetings between 1921 and 1926 solidified a

Southern Baptist compromise on the issue. In addition to the Scopes Trial, several other

precursors, that shaped the fundamentalist movement, and two main figures, J. Frank

Norris and E.Y. Mullins, give light to the unfolding controversy over the Bible among

Southern Baptists.

The rise of Christian fundamentalism in the U.S. is a complex phenomenon with

multiple roots. Scholars who have written about the era have identified the following

significant factors. Like other groups nineteenth and twentieth century Baptists were

influenced by "Princeton Theology," which emphasized the inerrancy of the scriptures in

all matters of faith and science.[39] Some have argued that the rise of theories about the end

of time grouped under theologies of premillennialism, and specifically the notion of

dispensational premillennialism, as outlined in C.I. Scofield's King James Version study

Bible, were a central feature of fundamentalism.[40] Millennialism spread through Baptist

circles through pan-Baptist and other non-denominational associations, as well as through

their attendance at Bible institutes and Bible conferences sponsored and led by

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[38] Among Southern Baptists there was a deep and abiding influence of primitivist or so-called literal readings of scripture. See Robert T. Handy, "Biblical Primitivism in the American Baptist Tradition," in *The American Quest for the Primitive Church,* ed. Richard T. Hughes (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 143-52. Handy discusses the aspect of biblical primitivism that was present in Southern Baptist Landmarkism, and other forms of primitivism that swept the South in the nineteenth century.
[39] McBeth, *Baptist Heritage,* 676. McBeth notes that the influence of Princeton theologian Charles Hodge was direct on two Southern Baptist educator/theologians who studied with Hodge and later wrote on various theological topics. James P. Boyce and John L. Dagg both taught on the faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Thus the intellectual link is a direct one.
[40] Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism,* 222-24.

conservative fundamentalists.[41] Yet another influence was through the publication of a set of twelve books entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (1910-15), which were widely distributed to Christian pastors and leaders.[42]

George Marsden and others argue for a much broader set of influences on the rise of fundamentalism, including: the reaction of conservative Christians to the use of historical-critical methods of study of the Bible, growing cultural and religious diversity of the early twentieth century, and the historic roots of the American evangelical tradition including revivalism and conversionism.[43] Marsden defines fundamentalism of the 1920s as "militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism. . . . a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought." According to Marsden, although fundamentalism is related to and co-inheres with other distinctive traditions such as "evangelicalism, revivalism, pietism, the holiness movements, millenarianism, Reformed confessionalism, Baptist traditionalism and other denominational orthodoxies. . . [it] gradually took on its own identity as a patchwork coalition of representatives of other movements." And despite its overlapping with these other traditions, fundamentalism had a "distinct life, identity, and eventually subculture of its own."[44]

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[41] Two important organizations to Southern Baptists were the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, which brought together fundamentalists of Northern, Southern and Canadian Baptist groups and the Niagara Bible Conferences. See Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies that have Shaped Southern Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972), 87; and Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 56. See also Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism,* 239-243, who points out the lack of denominational ties of the fundamentalist movement, with the exception of some Baptists. Bible institutes of the 1920s, Sandeen points out, often reached a large audience through radio broadcasts.

[42] *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth.* 12 vols. (Chicago, IL: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910-15).

[43] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4-8; Ammerman, *Bible Believers,* 17-24; Leonard, *Baptists in America*, 54.

[44] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* 4.

In addition to these theological commitments and motivations which gave rise to the movement of fundamentalism, religious concerns about gender roles were also at work in the arguments and organizational structures of emerging fundamentalist groups. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth argues that fundamentalists worried considerably about feminizing impulses in religion, hoping to prove that men could do religious work, which in the late nineteenth century had been nearly co-opted by benevolent women of the churches.[45] She also observes that the fundamentalist movement was deeply ambivalent toward women early in its formation because on the one hand women made up an overwhelming majority of church membership. Women often responded first to invitations to join schools and promote revival efforts which supported the drive in fundamentalist circles to save the world. Yet on the other hand, it was men the movement most hoped to rally, and scriptural texts were employed to make their arguments for the spiritual leadership of men in church and home, supporting another key value of purifying the church scripturally and doctrinally.

Bendroth sums up the concerns about gender in the movement thus: "This was a sharp break with the evangelical past. Many early fundamentalist leaders clearly viewed women less as partners and more as a threat, a pernicious influence to be silenced and subordinated. Without serious restraints, they believed, women would only impede the quest for doctrinal purity, a pursuit that required the work of trustworthy men."[46] By the 1920s when streams of the fundamentalist movement had begun to merge, "the theological rationale for subordinating women – and elevating men – was firmly in place." The institutionalized efforts to solidify the belief into a cultural reality were

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[45] Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender,* 20-24.
[46] Ibid., 32.

underway among fundamentalists.[47] Because of the lack of denominational infrastructures these battles were waged in the publications and pulpits of fundamentalist churches, schools and Bible conferences.

Just as Marsden notes that Baptist traditionalism and fundamentalism are not equivalents, Nancy Ammerman observes two significant caveats about the influence of fundamentalism in the South during the initial rise of the movement. First she notes that fundamentalism generally took hold where modernism was perceived as the greater threat (i.e. in the North), concluding: "Only where traditional orthodoxy must defend itself against modernity does Fundamentalism truly emerge."[48] Secondly, she notes about the 1920s: "In the South, liberal theology and social change were not yet factors to be defended against, and Protestantism had not yet been displaced as a dominant community force."[49] Yet Southern Baptists were clearly not without fundamentalists. They also shared concerns about recovering the role and responsibility of men in religious matters and decried the moral decline of women. Some Baptists called for explicating and maintaining subordinate roles for females in church, home and society.[50]

In the SBC two figures played central roles in the unfolding controversy of the 1920s. J. Frank Norris, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Ft. Worth, Texas, and fundamentalist agitator, galvanized distrust of modernism and outrage over the teaching of evolution in his various publications, sermons and campaigns against educational

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Ammerman, *Bible Believers,* 8.

[49] Ibid., 21-22.

[50] Betty A. DeBerg in *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990) offers several examples of Southern Baptist fundamentalist concern over the moral failure of women and the need to keep them in roles of wife and mother and away from dancing, carousing, smoking and wearing unsuitably short dresses. See especially chapter 5, "Fundamentalists and the Flapper."

institutions.[51] Norris was also involved in groups such as the World's Christian

Fundamentals Association and regularly called for the SBC to make more declarative

statements of belief and outrage about evolution and all forms of theological modernism.

E.Y. Mullins, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary is a

mediating figure of the era. On one hand he wrote three articles in *The Fundamentals,* but

on the other hand he preached a convention sermon in 1925 calling for both "firm faith"

and "free research."[52] He led the convention in 1925 to adopt the *Baptist Faith and*

Message (BFM), a document which served as a confession of faith rather than a creed,

and yet neither he, nor it, disavowed evolution outright. The document was a revision of

the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* with several additional articles and a preface

making the following qualifications of its use: 1) it expresses a "consensus of opinion;"

2) it does not make "complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or

infallibility;" and "Baptist[s] should hold themselves free to revise" the statements at any

time; 3) Baptists are free to write and "publish to the world a confession of their faith

whenever they may think it advisable;" 4) the "sole authority for faith and practice among

Baptists is the Scriptures . . . Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no

authority over the conscience;" and 5) "they are statements of religious convictions,

drawn from the Scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or

investigation in other realms of life."[53]

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[51] Norris led a long crusade against the faculty of Baylor University with accusations of teaching evolution, in which they were eventually vindicated, although his main target sociology, Professor Dow finally departed the school in 1923. See Shurden, *Not a Silent People*, 91-92.

[52] Shurden, *Not a Silent People,* 95. See Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope,* 75-76 for discussion of the variety of ways Mullins has been understood and portrayed due to the ways he held together seemingly contradictory ideas particularly about scripture.

[53] McBeth *Sourcebook,* 503-18.

The 1925 BFM includes in the preamble these qualifications and ten additional articles (including one about faith and science) which reiterate the compromise position crafted by Mullins. The following year's convention, however, offered an instructive post-script to the drama. At the 1926 convention a statement disavowing any theory of evolution made by SBC president George McDaniel in his convention sermon was immediately adopted by those gathered. The Convention also voted to make the resolution a binding statement on the employees of the SBC.[54]

Compromise between modernism and fundamentalism was not the most dramatic element of the Southern Baptist story of the 1920s since the basic theology of conservative fundamentalism was not actually at stake in an obvious way. As Ammerman observes, liberal theology and modernism did not truly become matters of concern among Southern Protestants until later in the twentieth century. Most Southern Baptists were not making an effort to reject the "fundamentals" identified by fundamentalism.[55] Although modernism was seen as a potential threat and danger to authority by many Southern Baptists in this era, fundamentalism presented the more viable threat to the authority of both the Bible and the individual by raising the "fundamentals" to creedal status and granting them authority over both. Yet Baptists maintained their conviction about *soul competency* which balanced individual liberty of conscience and the authority of scripture by maintaining that the 1925 BFM was a confession rather than giving it the status of a binding creed or setting it above either individual conscience or the Bible. They also

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[54] Shurden, *Not a Silent People,* 99-100. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention,* 143-44. It is unclear if the policy was ever enforced as a litmus test.

[55] "In 1910 the Presbyterian General Assembly. . . adopted a five-point declaration of 'essential' doctrines. Summarized, these points were: (1) the inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the Virgin Birth of Christ, (3) his substitutionary atonement, (4) his bodily resurrection, and (5) the authenticity of the miracles." Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture,* 117.

resisted taking steps to censure teaching in Baptist colleges and universities, mainly out

of their concerns over autonomy: the schools were the responsibility of the state

conventions, not the SBC.[56] While Norris and other fundamentalists declared victory

when the resolution to disavow evolution was passed in 1926, in many ways the more

moderating forces, as represented by Mullins, were the winners in that they maintained

the freedom of the individual and the Bible over dogmatism or creedalism. The

moderates also remained in leadership of the convention. In the decade that followed

many staunch fundamentalists eventually withdrew from direct involvement in the SBC.

They were busy over the next four decades building independent churches and

maintaining connections beyond Southern Baptists. However, their withdrawal was never

complete, and their return came with storm of controversy when next they observed

threats to the authority of the fundamentals of faith. Their story becomes central when

new threats to authority arise in the latter decades of the twentieth century.

Second Disestablishment

While technically the fundamentalists won at the Scopes Trial, it was a short-lived

and hollow victory, punctuated by the death of Bryan six days after the close of

proceedings.[57] Mostly it was overshadowed by dramatic social and political changes

which closed the decade and changed the American religious landscape. By the end of

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[56] Shurden, *Not a Silent People,* 96.

[57] See Susan Harding, "Epilogue: Observing the Observers," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 318-37. Harding offers an alternative way of reading the events of the Scopes Trial and the designation "fundamentalist." From that event, which was and is portrayed with an assumption of a hegemonic "modern" perspective by journalists and historians, came the definition of "fundamentalism" as a departure from the march of progress into the uneducated and unsophisticated backwaters of religious life in America. Modernist academics and journalists, she insists, have made a near boon of studying (and thus objectifying) the "others" whom they call "fundamentalists."

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the 1920s the progressive spirit of Americans and their religious leaders was deflated by the failures of world peace, the perceived moral decline of the nation as evidenced in the repeal of prohibition and the final devastating blow in the collapse of the financial markets which set the nation into a Great Depression. The left wing of Christianity in America was set back not only by the frustrating battles with their fundamentalist brothers and sisters, but also the general failures of progressivism. The kingdom of God did not appear to be coming anytime soon – unless it was a new dispensation of the premillennial variety, preached by fundamentalists. The pessimism and anticipated doom of the right wing of American Christianity portrayed the changes of the decade as part of the signs of the times prefiguring the end of history.

The fundamentalist retreat from center stage along with the questions and doubts raised by the failures of liberal and modernist Christians to bring in the reign of God, together contributed to what some have called a "Second Disestablishment" of religion in America. Several social and religious indicators illustrate the further disestablishment of Protestantism in the 1920s and 30s: 1) the failure of the Interchurch World Movement; 2) a loss in both giving and volunteering for home and foreign missions; 3) a loss of *confidence*, *morale* and *enthusiasm* by religion to solve life's problems or herald progress especially in the face of the apparent powers of science to explain and predict where religion had failed; 4) the loss of respectability for religion resulting from the controversy between modernists and fundamentalists; and 5) an overall "loss of the sense of the

whole."[58] Scholars and cultural critics alike proclaimed the end of religion and a dawning age of secularism.[59]

Although the future of religion looked bleak in the light of science and secularism, strangely the Southern Baptist influence and growth seemed only to be on the rise.[60] Baptists had been considered part of the Protestant establishment in the nineteenth century, yet they were by no means a monolith and Southern Baptists increasingly distanced themselves from the rest of the main line churches. Unlike their estranged cousins, the Northern Baptists, Southern Baptists never joined the Federal (later National) Council of Churches, but instead put their larger national and global organizing efforts into groups like the Baptist World Alliance.[61]

The resilience of Southern Baptists in this era of disestablishment may be attributed in part to the solidification of civil religion in the South following the Civil War, which consolidated a Southern way of life complete with rituals, symbols, images and language that transcended the mostly Protestant denominations and united white Southerners in a singular way of life.[62] This underlying way of life was transformed in

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[58] Handy, *A Christian America,* chapter 7. See especially 175-78.

[59] Ibid., 169. Handy's theory holds that although religion was officially disestablished with the U.S. Constitution and Bill or Rights, that Protestant religion still formed a centering and powerful force in the social fabric of American life until the time of the Second Disestablishment. This shift he says, "was displacing evangelical Protestantism as the primary definer of cultural values and behavior patterns in the nation." See also, William R. Hutchison, "Protestantism as Establishment," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, ed. William R. Hutchison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 3-18. Hutchison describes the character and inner workings of the establishment prior to its disestablishment.

[60] Handy, *A Christian America*, 169. Handy observes: "In some sections, especially the South, the older Protestant patterns persisted for a longer period and of course in all sections there were those who were hardly aware of what was happening."

[61] Hutchison, "Protestantism as Establishment," 4. According to Baker the two groups were formed very near the same time (in 1905), and although Southern Baptists had cooperated with other denominational groups in some ecumenical efforts of mission work, they gravitated toward a world group of their own rather than the ecumenical body. See Robert A. Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People 1607-1972* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1974), 304-06.

[62] See Charles Reagan Wilson's discussion in "The Religion of the Lost Cause: Ritual and Organization of the Southern Civil Religion, 1865-1920," *The Journal of Southern History* 46, no. 2 (May 1980): 219-38.

significant ways by a growing sense of nationalism and revisioned civil religion which

grew out of the U.S. involvement in WWI and which generally transcended

regionalism.[63] Additionally Southern Baptists had for 80 years been making a point of

going their own way, and while they were inescapably influenced by the events of the

larger American political, economic and religious trends, they also had a way of coping

that was distinctive in the times. The era that has been perceived as a time of further

disestablishment of Protestantism in America, may be understood as a time of significant

growth and expansion, increased organization, and deeper entrenchment of the Southern

way of life and a Baptist convention on its way to becoming "the Catholic church of the

South."[64]

The Baptist tensions of conviction related to *voluntary association* and *soul*

competency were two sites of vigorous negotiation during the 1920s. During the period,

authority shifted toward the growing centralized power of the SBC, pulling some loyalty

and influence away from the local church. Despite a declining influence of mainline

Protestant churches in the North, Baptists in the South continued to accrue social and

religious dominance through increased consolidation and coordination of programs and

powers in the SBC. Those who objected to such forces most openly were often part of the

fundamentalist movement, most of which retreated from SBC life in order to form their

own independent networks, which would resurface in the 1960s. Threats of modernism in

the form of social mores and higher criticism of the Bible, protests by fundamentalists,

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[63] See Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 161, 171-76. Wilson traces the history of transformation to civil religion from one which defined Southerners as righteous martyrs who lost the Civil War for a valiant (if lost) cause, into a redefined cause of freedom and liberty which developed as large numbers of Southerners participated in the Spanish-American War and WWI, and which vindicated the earlier cause, and proved the righteousness of Southerners as patriotic exemplars of American civil religion.
[64] Marty, "The Protestant Experience and Perspective," 46.

and theories of evolution also challenged Baptist understandings of *soul competency*. The
SBC response, as exemplified in the passage of a confessional statement in the 1925
BFM, held the influence of the individual and the Bible in tension rather than giving
either one total authority. Despite the compromise between individual liberty of
conscience and the authority of scripture, found the 1925 BFM, the concept of *soul
competency* continued as a thin veneer covering ideologies of white racial supremacy and
separate spheres and roles for men and women.

Recovery, Growth and Shifting Identity in the SBC, 1930 to 1960

In the period between 1930 and 1960 Southern Baptists entered a time of
unprecedented growth, expansion and solidification as the nation's largest Protestant
denomination. The corporate identity of the SBC shifted from one of regionalism and self
identity as a "south-wide" denomination to that of national influence and increasing
global responsibility for evangelizing the masses world-wide. Growth in numbers of
churches, total membership, geographical expansion, and increasing uniformity of
programming in churches continued to shift loyalties in Baptist life toward the
denomination, tilting the balance in *voluntary association* toward cooperation and subtly
away from the local church. Doubling the number of Southern Baptist seminaries from
three to six, more than doubling the number of students in Baptist institutions and
emphasizing the increased specialization and professionalization of ministry challenged
the compromise in the *priesthood of all believers*. The intellectual and theological
distance between laity and clergy grew, although the tension remained a gendered
construction with males filling the clergy roles and females dominating the laity roles.

Although women were clearly still on the margins of professional ministry in these decades, they did find more opportunities to fill professional roles in churches and denomination which laid ground work for the eventual ordination of women in the 1960s.

The 1930s in America opened bleakly following the 1929 collapse of Wall Street and the ensuing failure of banks, businesses and sustainable life in many quarters. Despite high hopes, the religious revivals expected and hoped for in the late 1920s and early 30s did not materialize until the nation's fears and anxieties were awakened by the Second World War.[65] In the 1930s and 40s President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal," along with the public schools, took over roles of social benevolence, education and enculturation and that had previously resided almost exclusively within the domain of the churches.[66] As the effects of a second Protestant disestablishment unfolded, the structures of Protestant influence in local politics and civic organizations remained in place in many communities, but the shape of the influence and its national scope were seriously altered.[67]

Although many churches were disrupted and in some cases closed and disbursed by the upheavals of the Depression and Dust Bowl,[68] Roosevelt's inauguration of the New Deal in 1933 put Americans to work, began an economic revival that was expanded through the industrial machinery of the Second World War, and set the nation on a path of consumerism and capitalistic quest for success. Churches were not exempt from the enthusiasm or the growth, but instead became part of the suburban expansion that

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[65] Handy, *A Christian America,* 179-80.
[66] Edwin Gaustad, "Consensus in America: The Churches' Changing Role," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 36 (March 1968), 35-36.
[67] Handy, *A Christian America,* 180.
[68] Handy in *A Christian America,* 179, observes: "It was on a Protestantism weakened by the spiritual decline of the twenties that the weight of the economic depression fell, slashing budgets, reducing memberships, halting benevolent and missionary enterprises, dismissing ministers, closing churches."

followed the periods of depression and war and reshaped social, economic and religious life in America.

Following World War II Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faith groups attained unparalleled growth in size and specialization. Growth in American religion was marked by increased church membership and attendance, construction and expansion of church and synagogue facilities, and significant growth in per-capita giving to religious institutions. These indicators were not merely a reflection of the post-war population growth, but went above and beyond changes wrought by the baby boom.[69] The professionalization of ministry in this era was unequaled in the history of the church, and it mirrored the rise of the managerial class in other major professions in the U.S. (i.e. medicine, law, teaching, engineering, etc.). Although the modern university emerged in Europe in the seventeenth century, and some classes of ministers consistently trained in those institutions, it was not until the twentieth century that the academic schools fully displaced the apprenticeship model for authorizing and validating the professional minister.[70]

Following the Second World War a renewal of religious interest reached a new zenith in America. In his book *Looking for God in the Suburbs,* James Hudnut-Beumler outlines a variety of social and cultural factors which set the stage for the unprecedented "return to religion." Suburbanization was a response to the long period of substandard urban housing in the early decades of the twentieth century followed by years of virtually no new building or growth in American housing during the 30s and 40s. Capturing

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[69] James Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945-1965* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 33.
[70] William F. May, *Beleaguered Rulers: The Public Obligation of the Professional* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 1-4.

farmlands surrounding urban centers and building new suburbs led to a need for accompanying social infrastructure including churches and synagogues, which experienced building rates in the 1950s second only to hospitals. The increased popular interest in science took two primary forms of influence on culture and religion by mid-century: individual psychological health and well-being became a widespread concern even for churches and ministers; and the nuclear arms race inspired a renewed faith in progress to change the world, cure disease and simplify work. However, science also raised new and more complex ethical questions.[71] The growth of mass media and a national consciousness dominated the leisure activities of Americans through time spent gazing at televisions, magazines, movies, and paperbacks, while simultaneously shaping the desires, values and national identity. The social landscape was concurrently blemished by the ongoing moral failures of racial segregation and violence, nationalist visions of policing the world's dictators and regimes not up to America's democratic standards, and in the late fifties by the paranoia and ruinous effects of Joseph McCarthy's dogged mission to root out communism.[72]

The 1950s return to religion included not only growth in popular interest, personal financial giving and spending on new construction, but an intellectual and academic shift also marked the era. Hudnut-Beumler observes, "What had happened to religious thought was that it had made its peace with the philosophic and scientific discussions of the contemporary academy while simultaneously seeking to reclaim traditional concepts like sin, salvation, and gospel – and indeed the Bible – from the dustbins of the liberal

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[71] For instance, "whom should you allow into your family's fallout shelter?" Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs,* 14.
[72] See Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs*, chapter 1.

theologians and the proprietorship of literalist conservatives."[73] Although fundamentalists had for the most part withdrawn from the limelight and were steadily building churches, schools and organizational networks outside mainstream Protestantism, a new form of pessimism, or Christian realism, began to emerge in the 1930s and took hold over the ensuing decades. Neo-orthodoxy came partially in response to the failures of progressivism and optimistic predictions of the coming of God's reign in America. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich were among the most well-known and widely read spokespersons of an intellectual and religious movement that impacted both academic theology and popular religion, and paralleled the social mood which accompanied "the war to end all wars" and the cold war that followed. Not only did academic observers of religion regain a place in the academy by reopening conversations with philosophy, but also by their willingness to engage with the burgeoning social sciences, psychology in particular, which shared overlapping concerns about meaning and well-being.[74]

Neo-orthodoxy helped to reestablish a place for religion and theology in the academy, and reshaped religious thought in America by re-conceiving sin, tragedy and anxiety as endemic to the human condition. Far from being removed from the problems of real life, these scholars attempted to speak of faith as it came to bear on the cultural and existential situations of contemporary people. They summed up the modern condition and offered faith as a clear option for responding to such overwhelming needs and

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[73] Ibid., 67.
[74] Ibid., 67-68.

challenges. The intellectual return to religion also functioned to challenge the captivity of the church to culture and society.[75]

Southern Baptists experienced a period of recovery, growth, and expansion that mirrored the wider social and religious "return to religion" in which the country regained its footing after war, depression and disillusionment. In these middle decades of the twentieth century Southern Baptists continued to grow and to shift subtly the practice of *voluntary association* toward increased outside cooperation and away from local church autonomy through 1) concern with growth itself, 2) increased unity and uniformity of SBC programs, and 3) identity shifts that moved Southern Baptists away from a regional mind-set and into a view of themselves as a national and international player in the work of God to bring salvation to the world. Closely related was the ongoing struggle over what shape *salvation and calling* should take. During the mass-revival period of the 1950s concern for dramatic conversions rose, although during the same era growing emphasis on nurturing young people toward salvation was bolstered through the programs of the church and the emphasis on *Christian* education for those attending Baptist colleges and seminaries. Increased size and influence also heightened the tensions in the SBC related to *separation of church and state.* On one hand Baptists continued to champion the cause of religious liberty, but in the face of wars and perceived threats of communism, preferred not to raise any question or doubt concerning their loyalty to country. As the denomination shifted its identity from regional to national following

[75] See Robert W. Jenson, "Karl Barth" in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, Second Edition,* ed. David Ford (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 21-36; and David Kelsey, "Paul Tillich," in *The Modern Theologians,* 87-102; and William Wepehowski, "Theological Ethics," in *The Modern Theologians,* 311-26. See also Peter W. Williams, "Neo-orthodoxy and Ecumenism," in *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 345-55.

WWI, its forms of civil religion also expanded beyond the religion of the "lost cause" and embraced an American nationalism that prepared the ground for many disputes of the 1960s when threats to authority re-emerged with new force.

Recovery, Expansion, and Growth

In the South, the Great Depression was a final blow to an already depressed farm economy. Southerners, black and white, were giving up their rural way of life and flocking to cities and suburbs.[76] As Baptists moved out of the Bible Belt they looked for or began new churches and contributed to the enormous church growth of the era. In the previous century Baptists, in the dozen years following the Civil War, experienced a comparatively low rate of growth, averaging increases of just 2.25 percent. However, during the period between 1877 and WWI the growth rate averaged 5.22 percent per year, outpacing the general population growth rate of only 3.27 percent in the same period.[77]

Recovery from losses between world wars was charted in the *1940 SBC Annual*, and despite widespread economic and psychological set backs between 1919 and 1939, still Southern Baptists grew in school enrollments, church membership and financial giving.[78] In 1920 Southern Baptists held affiliations with 114 academies, junior and senior colleges and seminaries in the South. School enrollments were uneven in the years between the wars, declining in some years and resulting in a net loss of the total number of colleges and academies. However, by 1925 the SBC had taken ownership of two new seminaries: the Baptist Bible Institute in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Southwestern

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[76] McBeth, *Baptist Heritage,* 623-24; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent,* 171-72.
[77] Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People*, 249-50, 321-22.
[78] *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: SBC, 1940), 425-30.

Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.[79] And by 1940 Southern Baptist schools were showing

record enrollments: academies and junior and senior colleges had 28,577 students, and

the three seminaries enrolled 1,492 students. The same year total endowments of all 67 of

the SBC-related schools stood at $73.5 million, an increase that more than tripled the

1930 total endowment of $21.7 million, demonstrating sizable growth through the

economic difficulties of the 1930s.[80]

The SBC's Education Commission, begun in 1916, reported often on the status

and situation of SBC-related schools with special attention given over the years to both

enrollments and endowments.[81] The summary chart below paints a picture of impressive

growth in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

In 1920 the Education Commission did not report the enrollment of the 114

Southern Baptist related schools, but they did describe a deplorable condition of debt held

by those schools. The 1918 campaign to raise funds for education was merged with the

$75 Million Campaign the following year. The debt for colleges was "practically wiped

out" by the "Twentieth Century Baptist Miracle," as the $75 Million Campaign was

called.[82] However, such good fortunes did not last.

As numbers in Table 1 indicate, the Great Depression and the Second World War

put dents in the number of students enrolled in Baptist schools and it also depleted their

endowments. Baptists complained in 1930 that the niche for junior college education was

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[79] Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 130. The name of the Baptist Bible Institute was changed to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in 1946. Fletcher observes distinctive foci of each school in the period: Southern Seminary emphasized an educated ministry; Southwestern put the focus on training preachers; and New Orleans steadily gave its attention to missionary preparation.
[80] *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: SBC, 1930), 56; *Annual,* SBC,1940, 62.
[81] J.W. Storer, "Southern Baptist Convention," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists,* vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958), 1255.
[82] *SBC Annual, 1920*, 99-100.

Table 1: Enrollment Statistics in Southern Baptist Schools

Year	Seminary Enrollment			Senior College & University Enrollment			Junior College Enrollment			Other SBC School Enrollment			Total # of SBC Schools	Total Enrollment
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total		
1930	731	376	1,107	6,526	9,182	16,123	1,453	2,976	4,745	2,676	2,711	5,387+	97	27,362
1935	524	259	883	7,244	7,316	14,560	1,712	3,100	4,812	990	566	1,556~	72	21,811
1940	1,002	490	1,492	9,011	8,535	17,890	2,386	5,221	7,607	1,232	517	1,749~	67	28,738
1945	1,431	705	2,136	5,545	9,308	14,853	915	5,066	5,972	1,427	315	1,742~	59	24,703
1950			3,147			32,611			9,721			1,201*	67	46,680
1955			5,782			41,477			9,048			2,932*	72†	59,239
1960			6,699			47,863			11,308			3,545*	71	69,415

+ Totals include academies and high school students attending Junior Colleges
~ Totals are for academies (high school) only
* Totals reflect enrollment in academies and Bible schools
† In 1955 the total number of schools includes for the first time statistics from the American Baptist Seminary, Nashville, Tennessee, a school jointly sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention since 1913 as well as two newly opened SBC seminaries: Golden Gate and Southeastern

Table 1[83]

[83] These enrollment totals were assembled from each year's *SBC Annual*, Education Commission Report. See also, McBeth, *Baptist Heritage,* 654.

being filled by state-sponsored schools and hurting the Baptist schools.[84] However,

despite these setbacks and the drop in total number of Baptist schools, during the period

from 1930 to 1955, overall enrollments jumped significantly, more than doubling during

that quarter century.

In these same years Southern Baptists increasingly heard reports of overcrowding

in the seminaries. They called for self-studies which resulted in votes to take on

ownership of two additional seminaries. Simultaneously the vision of convention leaders

was expanding to think of the SBC as a national religious body and was accompanied by

a desire to make ministerial training available from coast to coast. Golden Gate Baptist

Theological Seminary, which had opened in 1944 in San Francisco, California, and was

previously under the auspices of the California Baptist Convention, transferred to

ownership by the SBC in 1950. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary was initiated

by the SBC at the same 1950 Annual Convention held in Chicago, and it opened to

receive students in 1951 in Wake Forest, North Carolina on the previous campus of Wake

Forest University.[85] In 1957 Southern Baptists voted to open a sixth seminary in the

Midwest as a part of the same expansionist impulses that motivated the opening of

Southeastern and Golden Gate in the eastern and western coastal states. Midwestern

Baptist Theological Seminary began to take students in 1958 and although it was the

newest of the SBC schools, it soon became a center of controversy in the 1960s.[86]

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[84] In 1930 the Education Commission reported the loss of 11 schools leaving the number of junior colleges at 30 and academies at 31. By 1955 the numbers had dropped to 22 junior colleges and 8 academies. Some junior colleges became senior colleges, while others went out of existence. See *SBC Annual, 1930,* 53-54, 58-59; and *SBC Annual, 1955,* 322.

[85] Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention,* 194-95. Wake Forest University moved its campus to Winston-Salem, North Carolina after selling the property to the SBC for $1.6 million.

[86] Ibid., 195-96. See Chapter IV for more about controversy surrounding Ralph Elliott's book, which was published while he was on faculty at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Statistics representing growth in the number of churches, baptisms, and members during the period 1919 to 1939 was equally impressive. The total number of baptisms reported was over 4.3 million with a net gain in church membership for the two decades of more than 2.1 million.[87] The growth in numbers of adherents during the middle decades of the twentieth century catapulted Southern Baptists into the place they still hold as the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S.

Although Methodists had grown more quickly than Baptists in the nineteenth century, the opposite was true in the twentieth. In 1900 Methodists could claim about 5.5 million adherents, while Baptists claimed around 4.5 million. During the decade of the 1920s the two groups exchanged first and second place as they both reached the 7.5 million mark. From that point forward Baptist growth continued to spiral upward and pulled away dramatically from all other Protestant denominations in terms of size.[88]

SBC annual meeting registrations exemplify the growth. During the decade of the 1920s the average attendance was 4,986. The average dropped to 3,877 quite predictably in the 1930s, due to the burdens of the Depression and associated costs for travel. During two years of WWII (1943, 1945) the annual convention did not meet, but the average for the other eight years of the 1940s was up impressively to 6,806 per meeting. In the decade of the 1950s the average attendance leapt to 10,603; and it increased yet again in the 1960s to 13,144.[89]

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[87] *SBC Annual, 1940,* 426.
[88] Edwin S. Gaustad, Philip L. Barlow, and Richard W Dishno, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Figures C.15 and C.16, 374-75. Gaustad et al. are counting all Baptists in their figures for the early twentieth century rather than Southern Baptists alone.
[89] These averages were calculated using the summary charts in Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, Appendix 2: "Annual Meetings," 397-98.

Per capita giving to religious causes was up in virtually every denomination in the U.S. during the 1950s. Not only were people giving more money to religious causes, in relation to other expenditures, they were also giving proportionally more, meaning the churches had never before had so much income to expend on buildings, mission efforts or expanded programs. Southern Baptists were no exception to this growth, but rather epitomized it. Between 1950 and 1955 the rate of growth in financial giving among Southern Baptists was 40.3 percent; between 1955 and 60, it added another 13 percent.[90]

During these same middle decades of the century, Baptists formalized programming for local churches offering a uniform calendar, which was followed as rigorously as any mainline church ever followed the lectionary. It promoted the programs of WMU, the Sunday School, Home and Foreign Mission Boards, and all the other schools and agencies. Each year Baptists gave to the same annual missions offerings: Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions. Each week's Sunday school lessons were the same, and each week WMU age-level groups met for study and prayer, and Baptists sang from the same hymnal and worshiped in churches designed by the same architecture department at the Sunday School Board. They participated in the same church-wide emphases, annual Bible studies and revivals. And every week they brought their envelopes with tithes to the church house and marked the boxes indicating whether they were in attendance, were on time, had read their Bible and Sunday school lesson, and if they would be attending preaching.[91] These uniformities of program had a way of uniting Southern Baptists not

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[90] Hudnut-Beumler, 36.
[91] Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope,* 1, 54. Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist 'Synthesis': Is it Cracking?" *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (April 1981): 2-11. Merrill D. Moore, "Promotion, Southern

only at an institutional level, but also in piety and spirit. Their shared practices of church going and program participation contributed to the solidifying of their shared identity as Southern Baptists.

The natural outgrowth of the organizational emphasis during the 1920s on efficiency, centralization and increased loyalty to the denomination, was increased renegotiations of the Baptist tension of *voluntary association* during the middle decades of the twentieth century. While churches continued to hold unquestionable freedom to choose their associations and affiliations with Baptists or others, the centralizing forces of the denomination combined with the national trends identified as a "return to religion" to place subtle pressure on Baptists to conform to the programs offered by Southern Baptists and to be counted among the loyal of the SBC as they continued to expand their vision to national scope and grow at impressive rates in virtually every sector. Thus local church autonomy was increasingly defined in terms of the national SBC identity, eroding the power of the local church to define its own path without the help of the seemingly benevolent denomination.

Shifting Southern Baptist Identities

The identity of Southern Baptists during the middle decades of the twentieth century changed in response to their own numerical and financial growth, geographical expansion, and changes to the shape of civil religion in the U.S. Other aspects of the identity shift were related to larger social and economic changes during the middle decades of the century. Industrialization, cross-country migrations and (sub)urbanization of America each contributed to the changes.

Baptist Methods of," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists,* vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958), 1116-1119.

The migrations that followed on the heels of the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl

and the military relocations of the 1940s spurred Southern Baptists to cling to their way

of life even if they found themselves living in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, or

Detroit, despite the fact they might be living just around the corner from a Northern

Baptist Church. Southern Baptists took their faith traditions with them in the early

migrations out of the South. When they did not find a satisfactory home in the existing

churches of the cities where they settled, they simply started new churches, which

became enclaves of the Southern way of life and the Baptist way of faith.[92]

Other Baptists in the South joined a migration off the family farm and into to the

Southern cities the likes of Atlanta, Birmingham, Nashville and Richmond. These cities,

too, experienced suburban growth and the need for new social structures to accommodate

the shifting population centers. During the 1940s and 50s the South began to catch up

industrially and economically with the rest of the nation.[93] Industrialization of farms sent

more people away from the countryside and to the growing industrial centers in cites

across the South. The resulting urbanization changed the size and make-up of SBC

churches in Southern states, contributing to numerical and financial growth.

These geographical changes, no matter how much Southern Baptists attempted to

maintain their Southern, rural, and Baptist identities, also brought additional shifts in

denominational self-understanding. Southern Baptists began to see themselves less as a

regional group and increasingly as a religion with a national scope and world-wide

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[92] McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 623-26.
[93] T.B. Maston, "Social Change in the South" *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists,* vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958), 1206-10. "Although as late as 1953 every Southern state fell below the national average income per capita, yet the percentage increase from 1929 to 1953 was greater in the Southeast (337 per cent) and the Southwest (311 per cent) than in the other regions of the nation." Ibid., 1209.

mission that propelled forward their sense of being "God's last and only hope" to effect the salvation of the world.[94]

Church growth and missionary expansion outside the Southern U.S. contributed heavily to the evolving identity of the SBC as a national religious body. From the end of the nineteenth century until the period after WWII, Northern and Southern Baptists maintained a set of "comity agreements" that clarified which geographical areas of the U.S., and its territories, were in the purview of each group for sending missionaries and beginning new congregations. However, Southern Baptists increasingly saw their domain as the whole of the geographical United States and their mission field consisting of the entire world. Changes in Missouri, Oklahoma and Arizona during the 1940s led to the dissolution of the comity agreements, and by 1951 Southern Baptists declared their missionary work to have no boundaries. They referred to work in the areas previously assigned to Northern Baptists as "frontier regions" and to missionaries sent there as "pioneers." Unsurprisingly the Northern Baptists felt the move to be something of an invasion and protested forcefully.[95]

This shift in identity can be observed the mid 1950s campaign called the Baptist Jubilee Advance, which joined Southern Baptists to other Baptist groups in America for the purpose of evangelizing the nation."[96] The national evangelistic emphasis continued and came to full flower in the mission campaigns of the 1970s and 80s that proclaimed

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[94] Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope,* 2. "In 1948, Levi Elder Barton, an Alabama preacher, echoed the sentiments of multitudes when he declared that 'the last hope, the fairest hope, the only hope for evangelizing this world on New Testament principles is the Southern Baptist people represented in that Convention. I mean no unkindness to anybody on earth, but if you call that bigotry then make the most of it.'" quoted from *Alabama Christian Advocate,* June 29, 1948, p. 2.

[95] McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage,* 623-32. Following a couple of decades of encroachment on the old comity agreements, Northern Baptists changed their name in 1950 to American Baptist Churches, and tensions over geographical differences subsided as both groups now saw the entire nation as fair game.

[96] *Annual,* SBC, 1956, 40.

such lofty goals as "Good News America: God loves you!" and attempted to put a new Testament and the plan of salvation in the hands of every person in the U.S. It was followed by "Bold Mission Thrust," a plan for reaching the entire world's population with the gospel by the year 2000.[97]

In addition to numerical, financial and geographical expansions, changes to the U.S. political landscape also contributed to the shifting of Southern Baptist identity in the middle decades of the twentieth century. During the 1950s the federal government made several symbolic changes that reflected national sentiment, were fueled by the new popular obsessions with all things religious, and led by a president who helped to strip the ideological impulses from both religion and politics of the 1950s. Dwight D. Eisenhower contributed to the popularizing of religion through his speeches, church attendance and personal image. Hudnut-Beumler points out, "As soldier, statesman, war hero, college president, and small-town boy, Eisenhower embodied all that was good in America . . . [he] embraced and endorsed religion in a thoroughly American way, showing that one could be religious without being a weak sissy, an overly intellectual egghead, or a dogmatic zealot."[98] The first of the changes made by Congress was to add the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance (1954). The second was to add "In God We Trust" to all U.S. coins and currency (1955). And finally they made this phrase the national motto and dropped "E pluribus unum" (1956).[99]

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[97] Thomas C. Berg, in "'Proclaiming Together'? Convergence and Divergence in Mainline and Evangelical Evangelism, 1945-1967," in *Religion and American Culture* 5, no 1 (Winter 1995): 51-52, notes that the churches of the Federal (National) Council of churches called for a similar campaign in 1936-37 and undertook the work in the early 1940s. Southern Baptists were, as often was the case, several years behind the national religious trend, and undertaking the task in their own way.

[98] Hudnut-Beumler, 52.

[99] Ibid., 50.

What reaction did Southern Baptists have to such changes? The long-standing commitment to religious liberty and freedom of expression continued to be present in the resolutions of the annual convention meetings, yet no protests were raised to the imposition of one generic brand of religious language being applied to the national patriotic expressions of civil loyalty. For instance the following statement in relation to perceived growth of religious liberty world-wide appeared in 1955: "Believing in the complete separation of church and state, we do not desire to identify ourselves with any political group but only with the principle of full religious liberty. We abhor the invasion of the conscience of men whether by constitutional authority of the state or, as is too often true today, by religious bigots in violation of the constitution of a nation."[100] However, the rhetoric of civil religion that held together American and Christian values, blurring the lines between them, also appeared regularly in convention reports and resolutions during the mid 50s about a variety of topics including war and peace, the United Nations, Social Security, race relations, school desegregation, and evangelism, and military chaplaincy.[101]

Beginning with the Social Security Act of 1935 Southern Baptists faced the question of whether Social Security threatened the cherished principle of the separation of church and state. Over the 20 years that followed, Social Security encompassed more and more types of employees which were originally excluded (i.e. all employees of non-profit agencies including churches). Eventually lay employees of churches and religious organizations were covered (1950) and the debate about whether coverage should be available for ministers grew. Southern Baptists originally opposed any coverage for

[100] *Annual,* SBC, 1955, 64.
[101] *Annual,* SBC, 1954, 56, 401-7. *Annual,* SBC, 1955, 53, 56, 60, 62, passim.

church employees or ministers because it was seen as a violation the separation of church and state, and it threatened the prophetic voice of the minister if he was beholden to a government pension. However, the pressures of respectability and uniformity pushed Baptists toward a compromise. Congress, influenced by the testimony of Southern Baptists, passed new laws in which ordained ministers were exempt from paying Social Security, but could choose to opt in or out of the program during the first two years following ordination. This compromise shifted the burden of responsibility to ministers who were considered "self employed" for the sake of taxation, while allowing churches less entanglement with government politics and control.

The compromise was fully supported by Southern Baptist leaders, who testified before Congress, and allowed them to remain both loyal to the state in a broad way, yet uphold the value of *religious liberty* for churches in relation to the state. However, the compromise did move the denomination more in the direction of *loyalty to the state* than they had been previously when churches neither paid taxes nor were supported by taxation.[102] The move was also influenced by rising professionalism of the clergy in America, a movement from which Southern Baptists were not exempt.

Professionalizing Ministry

Seminary expansion in the 1950s was not only an indicator of growth in the number of Southern Baptist adherents and sign of the general interest in religion during

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[102] Walker Knight, "Social Security for Ordained Ministers," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists,* vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1958), 1210-11. Although the churches weren't supported directly by government tax dollars, they did of course benefit in various was from public utilities, roads, fire protection, etc. See also *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: SBC, 1954), 41. The Executive Committee recommended: "that request should be made to the Senate Finance committee for a Social Security bill covering ministers which would be least objectionable to our people and presenting fewer complications in the future. It should be a bill calling for a social security contract between the Federal Government and the individual, without in any sense involving the churches."

the mid-century, it was also a marker of changes to the intellectual and practical understanding of the need for an educated and professional ministry that was a part of the shifting identity of Southern Baptists. Like other U.S. professional schools of medicine, law, business, nursing, engineering and teaching, schools of divinity, too, were expanding to meet the changing demands of their employers: churches and religious institutions. In his investigation of the purpose and shape of theological education in America, Clark Gilpin describes the shift in the middle decades of the twentieth century. "By mid-century, belief that raising educational standards could improve the quality of the ministry had led the mainstream churches to insist on genuinely graduate education in theology as the prerequisite for ordained ministry, an insistence that paralleled the general expansion of American higher education following World War II. A three-year graduate professional degree (today the Master of Divinity) became the formal standard of ministerial education. The classical encyclopedia of biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, and practical theology persisted . . . ." [103]

Although ordination for ministry (and thus authorization for working as a pastor in a church) remains a local church decision and responsibility for Baptists, it is apparent from the growth in student enrollment and expansion of schools that this trend had influence among Southern Baptists.[104] In most cases education for pastoral ministry was

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[103] W. Clark Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 114.
[104] The process of ordination in Southern Baptist polity was a matter of local church choice, but followed a fairly consistent and predictable pattern. When an individual (male) expressed a call to preach, he was often licensed first to get some time and practice at exercising his gifts for ministry. Later he would be ordained by a local church which knew him and was willing to confer the blessing. A council or presbytery was convened including ministers from neighboring churches (or the local Baptist association); the candidate was examined by them for authenticity of call and sometimes doctrinal soundness; a vote was taken by the council and/or the local church; a ceremony was held, often as a part of regularly scheduled worship, either on the same day as the examination or soon thereafter; the ceremony most often included a prayer of dedication, a sermon to charge (challenge) the candidate and a time of laying on hands by other ministers

recognized as a benefit by Southern Baptists, yet "the warning was often given that education should be 'kept under the control of piety.'"[105] Such a caveat reflects the tension in *the priesthood of all believers* between laity and clergy, and the concern for the authority for ministry to remain with the influence of the divine and not depend too heavily on the knowledge offered by mere humans.

According to Gilpin one aspect of the impulse to improve theological education might be understood as a response to the emphasis in social institutions generally on "efficiency" in all work: ministry should also be performed more efficiently in part to assure the survival of the institutional church, and such a goal was embodied by numerous liberal leaders of the 1920s, 30s and beyond.[106] Gilpin describes two significant views of theological education as elaborated in two important studies of the state of ministerial education, first by William Adams Brown in 1934 and later by H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams and James M. Gustafson in 1957.[107] In Brown's assessment the purpose of theological education assumed an understanding of the church as a "teacher to the nations" through its ecumenical witness, and a role for the minister as a teacher who could facilitate a "renewal of the church's 'mission to organize society as a whole in accordance with the religious principle.'"[108] Brown's perspective represented a

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and/or laity. See G. Thomas Halbrooks, "The Meaning and Significance of Ordination among Southern Baptists, 1845-1945," *Baptist History and Heritage* 23, no. 3 (July 1988): 24-32.

[105] Ibid., 27. Baptists on the "frontier" and those influenced by Landmarkism were less likely to value formal education for ministers.

[106] Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology*, 117-18.

[107] Brown wrote the first of four volumes in William Adams Brown and Mark A. May, *The Education of American Ministers, 4 Vols.* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934) which surveyed schools, students, and faculties from 1929-34. The later study by Niebuhr, Williams and Gustafson, is entitled *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York: Harper, 1957). See Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology*, 113-14.

[108] Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology,* 118.

zenith of liberal theological perspective that still accepted progress and a unity of culture

and church in the purpose of God.

Two decades later, Niebuhr's perspective on the purpose of the church and

theological education was more critical of itself and the world, and saw instead a church

that struggled mightily with the world, but within the presence of God, in order to bring

about transformation which resulted in love of God and neighbor.[109] Both studies were

critical of denominationalism as a centralizing (or limiting) feature of education for

ministry. Brown thought the ecumenical cooperation of the church was crucial for

extolling the value of unity within difference in order that the church might influence and

shape nations. Niebuhr emphasized that neither nation nor denomination was the context

of theological education, but rather the church was its appropriate context and the object

or target of that education was the love of God and neighbor.

Both of these perspectives had influence on the self-understanding and identity of

theological schools in the U.S., especially those, like SBC seminaries, that were members

of the American Association of Theological Schools (ATS), which grew out of the first

report and sponsored the second study.[110] However, these important studies do not

explain adequately the perspective of Southern Baptist seminaries, their growth in the

twentieth century, or their understanding of theological education for ministry.

The 1950s were a critical time of growth and expansion for Southern Baptist

seminaries, as described previously. Gilpin's identification of "efficiency" as a

motivating factor in theological education fits the Southern Baptist mentality of this era,

and can be seen in expansion during the decade of the 1950s when the number of SBC

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[109] Ibid., 123-39.

[110] Ibid., 113, 120. The organization is now called the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada.

seminaries doubled from three to six, and the women's training schools were consolidated into the general seminary curriculum. However, as the minutes of the 1956 Annual SBC meeting attest, neither ecumenism nor the ideal of love for God and neighbor, nor even the church itself could be construed as the center of purpose around which theological education, or preparation of ministers, was expanded. For Southern Baptists personal salvation and more subtly the growth of the denomination, together under the umbrella term of *evangelism*, were the primary motivating factors for growth of all kinds including theological education and specialization of ministry.[111]

In preparation for the Baptist Jubilee Advance, a joint effort between major Baptist groups in America to celebrate the 150th anniversary of nationally organized Baptist work, evangelism was the organizing principle through which all other aspects of the five-year program were gauged. Successive annual programs of church revivals, Bible teaching and stewardship were framed by the purpose of evangelism and "the dramatization and deepening of the Baptist witness to the world."[112] The effort was one that united major Baptist groups in America, black and white, but was in no way to be considered "a movement toward organic union or a program to emphasize, rehearse, or even consider past or present differences" among the Baptist fellowships. The rhetoric illustrates again how Baptists were not only disinterested in ecumenism, but even by pan-

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[111] Delos Miles "Unique Contributions of Southern Baptists to Evangelism" *Baptist History and Heritage* 22, no. 1 (January 1987): 39 observes that Baptists have had "a denominational infrastructure for evangelism that has no equal in any major American denomination" and includes mechanisms for planning, coordinating, promoting, publicizing, and financing evangelism" at every level of denominational life from the local church to the associations, state conventions and the SBC. He also notes that the infrastructure came to shape during the 1940s.

[112] *Annual,* SBC, 1956, 40.

Baptist efforts at deeper unity.[113] Yet efficiency and professionalism in the task of evangelizing the world were highly valued.

Despite the lack of interest in cooperation for the sake of unity itself, the Southern Baptist effort "to carry out their world-wide denominational program" in the name of evangelism did awaken the seminaries to the need for expansion and ongoing attention to young people answering a call to ministry. Southern Seminary president Duke McCall offered this recommendation on behalf of Southern Seminary, "to think in terms of enlisting young people to serve as educational directors, music directors, church secretaries, writers, and in other full-time Christian vocations, as well as those who feel the call to definite service as ministers or missionaries at home and abroad."[114] A concern was also expressed for the "increasingly heavy demands" on pastors and the needs of both agencies and churches for greater specialization in the areas of missions, education and music. The upshot of the recommendation was to enroll more students in Baptist colleges and seminaries, yet the action clearly reflects both the cultural influences of specialization and professionalization, and the idiosyncratic perspective of Baptists to promote their own preferred causes no matter the national religious trends or directions.

The combination of these factors – expanding denominational infrastructure which promoted evangelism and personal salvation in every area of Baptist life, the expansive growth of churches in the middle decades of the century, and specialization of ministry roles – combined to make way for more and more women to be employed as professionals in Baptist churches and agencies. Until 1964 women did not serve as

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[113] Ibid. Groups named as participating in the Baptist Jubilee Advance include: American Baptist Convention, National Baptist Convention of the U.S.A., Inc., National Convention of America, North American Baptist General Conference, Baptist General Conference of America, and Canadian Baptists.
[114] Ibid., 41-42.

ordained ministers, but found service as missionaries, in supportive and administrative church staff roles, as directors of age group ministries, as educators in Baptist schools, and as administrators and editors in Woman's Missionary Union and some other SBC agencies.

The enfranchisement of women into civic and political life in the U.S. that came with the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 marked a clear victory for the suffrage movement; however, it did not have the same effect when it came to helping women enter the labor force or the professions. Barbara Harris reports that professional women made up 12.3% of the total female labor force in 1940, which was a similar percentage to that of 1920. The main professions women excelled in were teaching, nursing and library science. Any gains made during the 1920s (which were quite small) were lost during the Depression years when there was little organized feminist activism, and labor policy and law conspired to sanction discrimination against working women in the name of giving jobs to men who needed to support their families.[115] Prior to American involvement in World War II, only twenty to thirty percent of adult women in America participated in the paid labor force at all, most of them prior to marriage and children. By 1970 more than fifty percent of women were employed outside the home and many women returned to work after an interim period of bearing and raising children (at least until school age).[116] The turning point for women's work and professional advancement came during the labor shortage created by World War II.

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[115] Barbara Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 142-45.
[116] Valerie Kincade Oppenheimer, "Demographic Influence on Female Employment and the Status of Women," *The American Journal of Sociology* 78 (January 1973): 946-61.

Tracing both intellectual and social history Harris interprets the apparent

dichotomy between women's reality as employees and professionals and the ideological

values about women's primary roles as wife and mother following World War II. She

argues that the following factors shaped the context and made the discrepancies possible.

The crisis of the war itself created the demand that women go to work, power the war

machine and fill in gaps left by men in the military. Following the war women lost those

jobs in massive lay-offs. However, a large majority of women returned to work within a

short time, but to lower paying jobs in more traditional roles to make room for returning

veterans.[117]

The end of the war brought two important shifts: the popularization of Freudian

psychoanalytic theory and a middle class exodus to the suburbs. These two factors

contributed to a major disconnection between reality and social attitude. Freudian views

reinforced the separate (Victorian-like) spheres for males and females and the basic

intellectual and biological inferiority of women. Freudian disciple Erik Erikson and

others also argued for the moral superiority of women, making them most suited for the

home and care of children. Despite the popularity of these notions, Harris argues:

> The female labor force continued to grow, particularly among well-educated
> wives with children. Among women whose husbands earned from $7,000 to
> $10,000, the percentage who worked outside the home grew from 7 percent in
> 1950 to 25 percent in 1960. Two years later, 53 percent of all female college
> graduates were employed, while 36 percent of those with high school diplomas
> held jobs. Seventy percent of all females who had five or more years of higher
> education worked. There was, in short, a continuing revolution in female
> employment, especially among the comfortable suburban women who were
> allegedly finding contentment in domesticity. What was even more significant
> was that many of these women reported receiving more gratification from their
> jobs than they did from their roles as wives and mothers.[118]

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[117] Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere*,152-56
[118] Ibid., 165-66.

In 1967 Wilbur Bock surveyed the U.S. Census data to assess the increase in the number of female clergy from 1900 to 1960.[119] He found the number of women serving as professional clergy increased from 3,405 in 1900 to 4,695 in 1960. However, a peak in the increase came in 1950 when 6,777 women (89.6 % of them white and 10.4% of them black) reported being professional clergywomen. In 60 years the number of women increased 38% in the profession. However, during the same period, the numbers of male clergy increased by 81%, meaning a net loss in the numbers of women who made up the total clergy professionals in the U.S. (from 3.0% of the whole in 1900 to just 2.3% in 1960).[120] Although fluctuations in the data were not clearly explicable, Bock concluded rightfully that women in the profession of ministry made up a small percentage, were not increasing substantially, and constituted a place of "professional marginality."[121]

Southern Baptist women may have been about as far out on the margins as any other religious women, in terms of professional advancement in careers of ministry.[122] No Southern Baptist women served as ordained ministers until 1964; however, women worked in a variety of professional, non-ordained roles in Baptist life. Historian Carolyn Blevins observes in her survey of the types of professional ministries women have

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[119] E. Wilbur Bock, "The Female Clergy: A Case of Professional Marginality," *The American Journal of Sociology* 72 (March 1967): 531-539.

[120] Ibid., 534.

[121] Ibid., 531.

[122] Between 1853, when the first woman in the U.S. was ordained to Christian ministry, and 1964, when the first woman was ordained by an SBC church, at least 33 Christian denominations in America began ordaining women, including the National Baptist Convention, which allowed the ordination of women from its inception in 1895, the Northern Baptist Convention (1907), the Baptist General Conference (1918), and the General Association of General Baptists (1925). See Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 16, 48.

occupied in Baptist life that roles have included "four basic types of work: missions, education, the denomination, and the local church."[123]

Missions had been the focus and goal of Woman's Missionary Union since its inception in 1888, and with WMU's promotion, nurture and urging, numerous women found places of service and ministry among the ranks of Southern Baptist home and foreign missionaries. In 1922 Foreign Mission Board secretary J.F. Love "estimated that twice as many women as men were volunteering for missionary service." And according to Catherine Allen, in her history of WMU, Love attributed the phenomenon to the influence of WMU.[124] Missionary appointment was one of the few legitimate outlets of religious vocation for young Southern Baptist women of the time, and the WMU Training School in Louisville, Kentucky was turning out qualified women in search of places of service.[125] In the years following World War II, because both the Home and Foreign Mission Boards were finally out of debt, and growth was expanding SBC organizations of all kinds, "WMU decided to turn up the volume of God's call" to women to become missionaries.[126] Those efforts came quickly to fruition. In the mid 1950s FMB secretary Theron Rankin wanted to know why "there were 300 men missionaries, 300 wife missionaries, and 300 single women missionaries," and he called for WMU to put greater

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[123] Carolyn DeArmond Blevins, "Patterns of Ministry Among Southern Baptist Women," *Baptist History and Heritage* 22, no. 3 (July 1987): 41.

[124] Allen, *Century to Celebrate,* 176-77. Love's assessment was reaffirmed in a 1957 a survey of foreign missionaries, which indicated that 37 percent of them attributed the greatest influence on their choice of a career in missions to the WMU organizations, outranking even direct contact with missionaries, which came in second at 33 percent.

[125] Ibid., 178. Allen reports that WMU leaders volunteered in 1929 and following to sit in FMB meetings in which single women missionary candidates were interviewed for service. Previously the fear of possible impropriety meant most single women were appointed on the word of local church pastors and parishioners who knew them. They did not undergo the scrutiny of the examining board that men did. Wives were not examined either, nor were they always recognized as missionaries in their own right.

[126] Ibid., 176.

effort into calling their sons into mission service.[127] However, following the appointment of 119 single women in the 1940s, the numbers declined over the next four decades.[128] WMU also appointed, sometimes paid, and persistently advocated for women to serve as home missionaries, and in the 1930s, thirteen percent of Southern Baptist Home missionaries were single women.[129]

As the number of single women decreased the number of missionary couples increased. Women continued to serve as missionaries but also contributed to the export of the 1950s neo-Victorian ideology of men and women's roles, noted by Harris. Women were accepting assignments of "church and home" while their husbands were assigned as pastors, administrators, evangelists or church planters. Despite the designation, many of these women were working in the same roles as their husbands.[130]

Missionary service was the first place of compensated and professional ministry open to Southern Baptist women, and education was possibly the second, but it did not come easily. As Catherine Allen observes, "As the twentieth century arrived most Southern Baptists were willing to grant women places of service on missions fields. But they would not grant women diplomas for professional education for their task."[131] According to Harris, teachers and nurses and librarians were the only female dominated professions by 1920.[132] In the teaching profession women also found places of service in Baptist life during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Blevins identifies a variety of roles that women filled in public and private education: "the early female

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[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., 178-79. The total number and percentage of the whole both declined in the 1950s through 1980s.

[129] Ibid., 182-83.

[130] Ibid., 179. In 1974 Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of WMU, with full support of her board, convinced the FMB to change the designations of married women serving as foreign missionaries, if they so desired, to reflect the actual work they were doing.

[131] Ibid., 263.

[132] Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere,* 105, 124.

school, co-educational schools, schools in the mountains of Appalachia, schools in the villages of South America, women's colleges, co-educational colleges, and eventually seminaries."[133] From their beginnings, the training schools at Southwestern and Southern Seminaries employed women as teachers and administrators, although they hired numerous men to teach classes as well. Blevins identifies several women who were college founders and presidents as well as teachers.[134]

After missions and education, one of the most likely other places for women to be employed in a professional capacity in Baptist life at mid century was in SBC agencies. At the top of the list was WMU who employed women almost exclusively, assigning them roles from editors and program directors to chief executives and financial officers. WMU workers were paid for their labors by their state sponsors as early as 1883 although the earliest professionals in the national organization refused pay.[135] By 1921 most state WMU organizations in the South employed professional field workers. Those women organized themselves into a professional society in order to support each other and gained a vote in the matters of the national WMU organization, which itself had a number of professional employees by that time.[136]

Although the early WMU professionals often began as volunteers and eventually became paid employees, by the 1930s the Louisville training school was graduating women trained and educated to fill professional roles in WMU's state and national organizations. Many young graduates in the 1930s and 40s went to work directing the youth organizations sponsored by WMU. In 1951 state WMU organizations employed 51

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[133] Blevins, "Patterns of Ministry," 42.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Allen, *Century to Celebrate,* 57.
[136] Ibid., 58. WMU is structured to have both a volunteer elected board and a staff of more permanent employees to carry out day to day workings of the organization.

professionals, and by 1955 the national staff included a professional staff of 90, which

was reorganized at that time "for modern efficiency."[137] Allen also notes, "Most early

career WMU workers were never-married or widowed women. In the national office, the

first professional staff member with [a] husband was hired in 1964."[138] This pattern of

employment at WMU helped maintain the 1950s ideology about women's roles observed

by Harris: professional women were single, and married women didn't need or want to

work. However, in WMU circles married women were typically elected to boards and

offices, which in effect put them in the role of "professional volunteers."[139]

Women have been employed by Southern Baptist agencies other than WMU, but

not often as executives, or in professional positions. More often they have worked in

supportive and secretarial roles. No woman has ever directed another SBC commission,

board or agency outside of WMU.[140]

Among Southern Baptists, even prior to World War II, women were hired by

large multi-staff churches not only as secretaries, but also as "directors" (not "ministers")

of music, education, youth and children. A perusal of written histories of larger Baptist

churches across the South reveals women serving in all these roles as early as 1916, and

sometimes with tremendously long tenures.[141] Mary Eisenhauer is a good example. She

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[137] Ibid., 59.

[138] Ibid., 60. While paid workers were generally not married in the first half of the twentieth century, the elected WMU leaders most often were married.

[139] Blevins, "Patterns of Ministry," 44.

[140] Sarah Francis Anders and Marilyn Metcalf-Whittaker, "Women as Lay Leaders and Clergy: A Critical Issue" in *Southern Baptists Observed,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 208-09.

[141] See the following local church histories for examples of women serving in professional roles in local churches. As early as 1932 women were employed as directors of music, youth and young children at Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta, GA. See: Douglas Weaver, *Second to None: A History of Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, 150 Years of Service, 1854-2004* (Brentwood, TN: BHHS and Nashville, TN: Fields Publishing, Inc., 2004). Between the 1946 and 1970 women were employed by The Baptist Church of Beaufort, SC to play the organ (which often included directing music) conduct choirs, and direct music, education, and youth. See: Annette Milliken Maddox, *A Lamp Unto the Lowcountry: The*

and three of her sisters were college graduates in the 1930s and early 1940s. She served

first on the staff of First Baptist Church Fayetteville, North Carolina, from 1941 to 1944.

Later, she worked at First Baptist Church of Asheville, North Carolina from 1944 to 1946

as the "pastor's assistant," which included educational and administrative responsibilities.

In 1955 to 1963, she served on the church's staff as youth director. In the Asheville

church fourteen women served in various professional ministry roles between 1924 and

1984, although they were given the title "director" until 1974, when they began to be

called "minister."[142]

During the period following WWII, professionalization of ministry for Southern

Baptists tested the tension between laity and clergy and called the *priesthood of all*

believers into question. The trend toward more theological education and greater

professionalization was motivated by the growing interest in religion, numerical and

financial growth, the desire for greater efficiency in ministry and the more potent concern

for evangelizing the nation and the world. The increased emphasis on educating ministers

challenged the theological idea of the priesthood of all believers because it widened the

educational gap between ministers and lay people. One compromise in this time was to

Baptist Church of Beaufort, 1804-2004, Beaufort, South Carolina (Brentwood, TN: Baptist History and Heritage Society and Nashville, TN: Fields Publishing, 2004). Memorial Baptist Church in Greenville, North Carolina employed four female educational directors between the late 1930s and the early 1950s. See: Hugh Wease, *A Journey of Faith: The Memorial Baptist Church, Greenville, North Carolina, 1827-2002* (Brentwood, TN: Baptist History and Heritage Society and Nashville, TN: Fields Publishing, 2002). Immanuel Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee employed three women between 1916 and 1937 who directed music, education and young people. Gaye L. McGlothlen, *A History of Immanuel Baptist Church, 1887-1986* (Nashville, TN: Immanuel Baptist Church, 1987). Two women served as music directors between 1923 and 1929 at First Baptist Church of Gainesville, Florida. See: C. Douglas Weaver, *Every Town Needs a Downtown Church: A History of First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Florida* (Brentwood, TN: The Southern Baptist Historical Society and Nashville, TN: Fields Publishing, 2000). A woman served for 25 years as education director beginning in the 1950s at First Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee. See: R. Paul Caudill, *Intertwined: A History of the First Baptist Church, Memphis , Tennessee* (Memphis: Riverside Press, 1989).

[142] Charles W. Deweese, *The Power of Freedom: First Baptist Church, Asheville, North Carolina, 1829-1997* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1997). Personal communication with Charles Deweese, February 9, 2007.

remain focused on the shared goal of evangelism, which should be the work of all

Baptists. Another compromise of the era was the dramatically larger church, which

employed more specialized staff, for the sake of efficiency and growth. However, where

women were concerned, they could fill roles that contributed to efficiency and

professionalism, but the role of pastor or ordained minister moved further out of range for

them. Thus the priesthood of all believers continued to be divided along the lines of

gender: men filled the clergy side of the equation while women made up the majority of

the laity side.

Although WMU made a notable exception by keeping the ranks of their

professional females single (unmarried or widowed), more married and single Southern

Baptist women went to school and work following World War II (see Table 1), and they

filled a variety of non-ordained roles in Baptist life as teachers, church staff ministers,

denominational employees, and missionaries. While these women were not ordained,

their presence in non-ordained ministry roles laid groundwork for the questions that

would arise in later decades: Who should be ordained? Which roles called for ordination?

Should it be limited to males? Are females, who are trained and qualified for ministry,

also candidates for ordination? What does the Bible say about ordination?

These questions and others like them become the opportunity for the tensions of

Baptist life to be renegotiated in more dramatic ways beginning in the 1960s when

questions about authority, and questions directed to those in authority, are watchwords of

the day. As this chapter has illustrated, Baptists are always in the process of negotiating

the tensions of these major convictions and practices of the tradition. The Southern

Baptist Convention provides a rich site for testing the ways that Leonard's tensions shift,

change and give rise to new compromises in each era. In the final three and a half decades of the twentieth century, the capability of the institution to bear the weight of compromise becomes unbearable, and lasting schism is the result. Women's ordination, along with debates over the Bible, and other social issues are at ground zero of the controversy that ensues.

CHAPTER IV

**SOUTHERN BAPTISTS NEGOTIATING A SCHISM
IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

*There is always hope. The denomination was certainly digressing, and the
affirmation is limited, yet there is hope to do ministry.* – Anna

Nearly every year for a century and a half Southern Baptists have met in the late

spring or early summer of the year and to conduct their business, elect a few officers,

hear a couple of rousing sermons, maybe pass some resolutions, and return home to

attend to the business of being Baptist in more local ways. In 1979 the Southern Baptist

Convention met in Houston, Texas, and all the usual things happened. But something

momentous also happened, something that will forever mark that year as the beginning of

a schism. It was a simple thing really. Those gathered elected Adrian Rogers, pastor of

Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, president of their Convention. What

made this election unusual? It was the beginning of a sea-change for Southern Baptist

culture. In the years that followed, Southern Baptists elected a dozen SBC presidents,

who in turn appointed scores of committees and hundreds of committee members, who in

turn reshaped every SBC agency, school and board. The net effect was an increasingly

conservative direction and purpose for the nation's largest Protestant denomination, a

direction they have continued to go with little interruption for nearly thirty years.

Just nine months prior to the fateful Convention meeting of 1979 was a different

kind of gathering of Baptists in Nashville, Tennessee. All those assembled were also

affiliated with the SBC, as church members, agency heads, seminary students, pastors, journalists or historians. They gathered for the first and only "Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations." No one was elected, and no committees were appointed, but the 300 or so in attendance heard reports, survey results, historical accounts, and psychological analysis about women in Southern Baptist churches and agencies.[1] Those gathered also heard impassioned pleas and insistent questions from women who felt called by God to be ministers. Some of those women were already ordained and serving, others were still trying to discern what their call meant. Southern Baptists seemed poised to hear these concerns and lend support, or at least not hinder these women in their call.

The Consultation of 1978 and the Convention of 1979 are two snapshots of Southern Baptist stories which are intertwined, but rarely told together. The story of the Southern Baptist schism is the better known, and the better documented of the two.[2] The story of Southern Baptist clergywomen is much less known, less-often told, and little documented. Yet to tell one story without telling the other is to diminish both.

Between 1963, when Baptists adopted a new *Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM) and 2000, when they revised it again, Southern Baptists were negotiating a schism. From the ordination of Addie Davis in 1964 to the official "confession" in the 2000 BFM that declared the role of pastor should only be filled by men, clergywomen have been negotiating all the tensions of what it means to be a Baptist woman called to ministry. There has never been a moment in those four decades when Baptist clergywomen were

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[1] *Findings of The Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations* (Southern Baptist Convention, September 20-22, 1978). Located at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
[2] See Chapter V for a review of the literature about the SBC schism and a not about the varieties of literature which tell the stories of this era from 1960-2000.

free of controversy. Baptists generally are not ever far from controversy, but in the last four decades they have been especially vocal and public with their differences.[3]

Ironically the years of the most intense fighting among Baptists, which led to schism, were the same years of steady, at times dramatic, growth for women's seminary enrollment, ordinations and entry into ministry. From 1979 to 1990 Southern Baptists were polarized and embattled for theological and political ascendency in the Convention. Women were treated like a political football, raised in victory by one group and spiked by the other as a sign of all things wrong in the Convention and the wider American culture. Clergywomen who were interviewed for this study were among those sometimes held high in victory and other times dashed to the ground in frustration. None of them see themselves any longer as "Southern Baptist," and in that way might be regarded as casualties of the schism. On the other hand, the schism resulted in several new organizations of Baptists, and each clergywoman in the study is now affiliated with one or more of those new groups.[4]

The following account of Southern Baptists between 1960 and 2000 includes the institutional story of Baptists who negotiated a denominational schism, and the clergywomen who lived amid the tensions of Baptist culture and tried to answer a call to ministry. Their stories are inseparable, and they are influenced by many larger currents of culture, theology and politics. In order to know the deeper ways in which Baptist

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[3] See Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies that Have Shaped Southern Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972).

[4] These "new" groups include the Alliance of Baptists (AB), Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America (BPFNA), Baptist Women in Ministry (BWIM), and other state and special interest organizations which are part of the "moderate to progressive constellation" of Baptists.

clergywomen's stories can interpret the denominational struggle, both stories need to be told in close proximity.[5]

Challenges to Authority Reprised 1960 to 1978
Southern Baptists Face Pluralism and Modernism

Lydia grew up on a farm and in a rural Southern Baptist church in the 1950s and 1960s. She's now an ordained Baptist military reserve chaplain. As a child she felt the call of missionary service while attending GA, a program of missions education sponsored by Woman's Missionary Union.[6] Her more lasting sense of call came, however, while she was in college. She recalls that she was questioning the Vietnam War, and "coming of age . . . not just inheriting my parents' religion, but testing it and finding my own." Lydia was asking, "Why does God allow these things?" And, "If there's a real God out there, why isn't he fixing it?" She insists, "These are important questions for everybody to ask."

The decade of the 1960s dawned with a sense of prosperity and expansiveness on the heels of a booming economy, expansion of the nuclear family, a steady stream of new media, growing suburbs and churches, jet travel and rock and roll. But undercurrents of cold war, McCarthyism, and youth rebellion also tugged at the nation's character, and major social challenges which had ebbed were about to flow again. Before the decade was out the country Southern Baptists, and their religious neighbors, would be awash with concern about civil rights, women's rights, and the Vietnam War. Questions to

[5] The clergywomen whose stories will be included in this narrative are Anna, Beth, Chloe, Hannah, Joanna, Lydia, Martha, and Rebecca. Each name is a pseudonym, and all the identifying information about their lives has been changed to try and protect their identities.

[6] GA was the name, prior to 1970, for "Girl's Auxiliary," which was changed into two programs, Girls in Action (the new GA) and Y-teens. More than half the clergywomen in this study tell very similar stories of feeling called to missions as a child while attending one of the programs or camps of WMU. None of them became career missionaries.

authority took multiple forms. Even divine revelation and biblical authority were not safe

from doubt. The status quo was beleaguered at every turn. Neither whiteness nor

maleness, nor unbridled militarism could carry on assuming the support of its

subordinates. Wives, students, and non-white citizens demanded a voice and a hearing, a

full enfranchisement into the social fabric of life in America. The nation's churches

reeled in the turmoil, and most of the old landmarks and beacons of religion in America

were swept away in the tides of change.

If the 1950s were characterized by a "return to religion" on a large scale, the

upheaval in the 1960s can be described as a "radical turn" in religion.[7] In 1970, Sydney

Ahlstrom argued that one feature of the radical turn of the 1960s was the final eclipse of

the "Protestant establishment."[8] Like technological and social changes the further

disestablishment had been long in coming, but was accelerated first, by urban growth

which did not anticipate and could not keep up with demands for health care,

infrastructure, security, and basic utility services to populations swelling the cities.[9]

Another factor in the radical turn was the technological advance in agriculture and

industry, which created migrations and further disestablished Protestant hegemony and

"WASP ascendancy" when "the implications of true pluralism began to be realized."[10]

The sensational developments of the decade in science, electronic technology, health

innovations and space travel rendered the need for a transcendent divine presence

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[7] James Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945-1965* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 55-84. Hudnut-Beumler gives an extended account of America's "return to religion" in the post-war era.

[8] Sydney E. Ahlstrom, "The Radical Turn in Theology and Ethics: Why It Occurred in the 1960's" in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 387, "The Sixties: Radical Change in American Religion" (January 1970): 1-13.

[9] Ibid., 11.

[10] Ibid., 11-12. WASP is an acronym for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

irrelevant.[11] Optimism about such advances, however, was undercut by traumas like the cold war and events like the Cuban Missile Crisis. The escalation of the Vietnam War became a catalyst for student protest and eroded trust which contributed to "an unprecedented loss of confidence in American institutions."[12]

If Lydia's questions about the Vietnam War challenge Ahlstrom's conclusion that a need for "transcendent divine presence" was no longer in vogue, she nevertheless captures his "loss of confidence" in institutions like government and church. Hannah's experience, in another vein, confirms and illustrates Ahlstrom's "implications of true pluralism." Now, an ordained Baptist campus minister, Hannah was born in the Deep South in the mid-1950s to educated, middle class parents. Her father taught at a local community college at the time of desegregation. Hannah has a vivid memory of his rejection by the deacons at her all-white Southern Baptist church when they learned that he would not oppose teaching African Americans in his classroom. Within ten years of their refusal to ordain him, every one of the deacons had come with an apology, but Hannah's dad never served as a deacon, and these events left an impression on his youngest daughter.

In the early 1970s Hannah took her first job teaching elementary school in a Southern state, "when integration was still working itself out." She recalls, "The school I was in…really the only thing that was integrated was the faculty. There were two white children in the school, and I loved my kids and we had a great time. It was a real period of adjustment to me coming from a white church and a Baptist school that was mostly white." Her attempts to adjust to the school's culture and adapt her teaching were

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[11] Ibid., 12.
[12] Ibid.

significant challenges. Hannah was tempted to give up in frustration, but she recalls, "I stuck with it because I wanted to prove to myself that it was not a racial issue and I grew up in a home where acceptance of all people was [our belief]."[13]

The effect of the massive social changes on the church, argued Ahlstrom, was to render it irrelevant and to judge church attendance a hindrance rather than a help to condition of the country. Taken together, the events of the 1960s make a bleak picture, indeed. At least one other factor is missing from Ahlstrom's analysis. He makes not a single mention of the role of women, the protest of women, or the changes wrought to work, home or society by the challenges of feminism. Those challenges seem not to have penetrated his consciousness.

Feminism was penetrating the consciousness of young women in Baptist churches across the South. And its ideas were challenging young minds. Martha, who is now an ordained Baptist clergywoman and who has worked as a pastor and in community agency ministry, grew up in a "progressive Baptist church" in Asheville, North Carolina. In that church Martha witnessed first-hand, church votes to accept Christians baptized in other non-Baptist denominations and to ordain women as deacons in the mid-1970s. These changes to her local church shaped her sense of what church should be, as did her weekly worship leading through singing in the youth choir. In the spirit of the times Martha felt herself compelled to do something for the cause of the women's movement. She wanted to make a difference that she perceived was unavailable to her mother and grandmothers. She wanted to enter "a predominately male profession." She recalls,

> And I can't say I really had a sense of call. I probably did, but would not have characterized it or understood it as such. When I was in GA as a young child, I

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[13] An analysis of the white privilege which has contributed to Baptist clergywomen's advance in their profession is not a topic explored herein, but it is worthy of further consideration.

had a real sense of "I want my life to count for stuff. I want to serve and honor God with my life." And like anybody, I'm not special or unique in that regard . . . As I made career decisions, as I made personal decisions, they all really arose from that sense of "I want to matter. I want to do something. I don't want to waste or squander my gifts and my life."[14]

The "influence of the women's liberation movement" gave Martha a sense of obligation not just for her own life, but also the women who were in the generation older than her. If she didn't make her life "count" then Martha felt she would be "letting down my mother and Mrs. Smalley and all these formative important women. I don't know that they were, but I [felt like] they were expecting me to live up" to their hopes. Ironically, even though she grew up in a "progressive church," Martha says that she only knew, "subliminally [that] there were women who go into ministry, but," she recalls, "I'd never seen one."

The social and political changes and upheavals identified by Ahlstrom demanded a religious response. Lydia's questions about God's existence and care for the suffering in the world, demanded a religious response. And what did the Southern Baptist churches have to offer Hannah in her attempts to adjust her teaching in a school with an integrated faculty and an all-African-American student body? How would the church assist Martha in making sense of her feelings of obligation to the women's liberation movement, and more importantly her mother and grandmother? Each woman's experience sought a response from the religious institutions of their lives, but those responses were slow in coming from Southern Baptists.

Responses by America's churches to upheavals and questions of the 1960s, argues James Hudnut-Beumler, were more than a simple rejection of church attendance.[15] Yet

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[14] "GA" or Girls' Auxiliary, later Girls in Action, was a youth organization of Woman's Missionary Union.
[15] Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs,* 195-96.

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another strain of events and ideas coming from inside religious America contributed substantially to the upheavals that characterize religion in the 1960s. He traces the influence of "suburban jeremiads," intellectual critiques written during the 1950s to challenge the "return to religion" that had boomed across post-war America. The "jeremiads" were typified in *Noise of Solemn Assemblies* by Peter Berger, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, by Will Herberg and Gibson Winter's *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*, and they called the church and its clergy to task.[16] Clergy ought not to be preaching a soft warm religion, said the critics, when social injustice, poverty and war demanded a moral-ethical response. Sunday worship should be a call to action, not a morning at the country club.

Hudnut-Beumler identifies the effects of the jeremiads on both the clergy and church members.[17] One effect produced by the critiques was a chastening of Protestant clergy who attended seminaries, read the critiques of suburban religion and took them to heart.[18] Those internalized critiques caused some clergy to become disenfranchised by parishes which could not live up to such high prophetic expectations. To complicate matters, a neglect of pastoral needs for the comfort and nurture of churches left a hollow ring to the sermons of young clergy who wanted change, but could promise little in return.[19] In their disillusionment some clergy quit altogether. Others went into specialized ministries outside the church context (i.e. chaplaincy and campus ministry). This growth

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[16] Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1955); Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches: An Analysis of Protestant Responsibility in the Expanding Metropolis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961); Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies: Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961).
[17] He also discusses the effects on academic elites. See Hudnut-Beumler, *Looking for God in the Suburbs,* 183-94.
[18] Ibid., 178-83.
[19] Ibid., 181-83.

in specialization also opened up additional places where women found early acceptance as professional religious leaders, and eventually as ordained ministers.

The effect of the suburban jeremiads was less dramatic for parishioners in the 1960s. Some numerical and financial decline followed the popularity and growth of religion in the 1950s, as a bust often comes on the heels of a boom. Congregations aged, but maintained their physical spaces and kept paying their staffs through the 1960s despite the fact that their children grew up and moved away.[20] Although church members kept coming to church through 1960s, the more substantive effect of the decline in popularity of religion in the 1960s was the way that differences among academic, clerical and popular religion became clear.[21]

Despite Ahlstrom's predictions of decline, Southern Baptists continued to grow numerically and financially through the decades following 1960.[22] Southern Baptists continued to rank as the largest Protestant religious group in the U.S., second in membership only to Roman Catholics.[23] Growth and organizational efficiency were highly valued by Baptist bureaucrats. Engaging in social trends, or acknowledging questions to authority, might upset the machinery of development and expansion.

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[20] Ibid., 195-96

[21] Ibid., 198. Hudnut-Beumler concludes: "The exposure of divisions between groups over what religion was, and why it was valuable, had the effect of making religion seem to be under attack in the sixties in a way it had not been in the fifties."

[22] In his study of the effects of the 1960s upheaval thirty years later, Phillip E. Hammond, agreed with Ahlstrom that much of the nation had experienced a "third disestablishment of religion." *Religion and Personal Autonomy: The Third Disestablishment in America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 139. Hammond refers to the first federal disestablishment of religion in the U.S. Constitution and the second disestablishment, which occurred when Protestantism lost its sway in society between the World Wars. However, his study found less evidence of such a decline in North Carolina, possibly indicative of a lower impact in the South.

[23] Although church enrollment may have continued to grow, it would appear that Sunday school attendance did slow down dramatically between 1960 and 1980. So, although it did not decline, growth did come to a near stand-still. See Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 236 reports that enrollment in Sunday School only increased between 1960 and 1980 from 7.3 million to 7.4 million.

Historian Samuel Hill, long-time observer of Southern religion, notes that the SBC's preoccupation with missions, evangelism and bureaucratic growth and efficiency were uppermost in the minds of denominational leaders.[24] When forces of modernism and pluralism challenged these preoccupations, and denominational leaders did not attend sufficiently to them, many young intellectuals from Southern Baptist ranks drifted away leaving a "missing generation" of potentially progressive leaders. These young leaders must surely have been of the same generation of clergy and intellectuals described by Hudnut-Beumler as disaffected by their church's inability to live up the demands of the suburban jeremiads.

Additionally, Hill argues, the leaders of the SBC not only refused to take up the challenges of civil rights and women's rights, but lay people were also unprepared to do so after long years and a steady diet of devotional literature, which lacked substantive resources for taking stands on politically charged issues.[25] This same diet of devotional literature must also have contributed to their lack of preparation for understanding the nuances of modern biblical scholarship.[26] Efforts to maintain stability and the priority of missions meant both progressives and conservatives within the denomination were curbed, and it also meant that engagement with the social issues of the day were minimal at best. Overall the churches were little prepared to answer the questions and challenges faced by the likes of Hannah, Martha or Lydia. Yet the insistence of civil rights, women's equality and modern biblical scholarship could not be ignored.

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[24] Samuel S. Hill, "The Story before the Story: Southern Baptists Since World War II," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 30-46.

[25] Ibid., 35, 44.

[26] Ibid. Hill rests a great deal of responsibility on clergy, and their seminary professors as well, for the lack of critical engagement with texts and social concerns.

Southern Baptists Respond to Civil Rights

A few churches in the South were exceptions to this lack of preparation. Baptist journalist, Walker Knight, retrieves a lesser known history about Southern Baptist engagement, albeit reluctant at times, with the civil rights movement which began in the late 1950s. He tells several tragic and representative stories of churches that ousted their ministers for supporting integration or attempting to welcome blacks into their all-white congregations. He recounts the stories of churches that moved or folded rather than integrate.[27] Prior to 1968, some ecclesial publications and outspoken leaders challenged the assumptions of segregation, but not without enduring criticism, recalled books and heated controversy.[28]

Following the assassination of black Baptist preacher and civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the denomination finally began to take noticeable action to resist racist policies and make small, slow changes to the organization's structures.[29] Responses by the Home Mission Board, Christian Life Commission, Woman's Missionary Union, the Sunday School Board and the seminaries began to make integration of the denomination look like a real, if terribly slow, possibility. Knight credits three factors for animating those changes: the force of federal law, the drive of Southern Baptists to become a national organization, and the missionary impulse of the denomination, which rendered respect to the missions agencies which led the way.

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[27] Walker L. Knight, "Race Relations: Changing Patterns and Practices" in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 168-70.

[28] Ibid., 170-71.

[29] Ibid., 172-73. As often happens, action for change in the SBC began with a resolution entitled, "A Statement Concerning the Crisis in our Nation." It was adopted in Houston at the 1968 SBC Convention and called for agencies to make changes, charging the Home Mission Board to take the lead.

Power, race, class and gender are inextricably linked in the stories of religion in the South. Since 1979, Knight argues, civil rights and racial equality have taken a back seat for two primary reasons. First new leaders at the helm of the SBC do not share the values embodied in the civil rights movement and are often associated with militant racial bigotry.[30] Secondly, the moderates who championed earlier movements toward greater racial inclusivity threw their energy into the battles for women's rights to ordination. In the process, Knight argues, the extension of greater rights to non-white Baptists was among the big losers in the battles of the 1980s.[31]

Southern Baptists Respond to Feminism

The lack of interest or discussion about feminism and "women's rights" also exemplifies Baptists' slow and reluctant efforts to engage with the social challenges to traditional authority. Maintaining the status quo was much easier, but the reality of changes to women's status by their entry into the labor market, and rise of enrollments in professional schools, including seminaries, meant that Southern Baptists could not ignore the changes being wrought in women's lives.

In 1950 the World Council of Churches sponsored a study on the status of women in the church. In the resulting book Kathleen Bliss states, "During the past thirty years there has been debate in many Churches about the ordination of women. The debate has not been universal," she explains, "nor has it been continuous."[32] But rather it had been an intermittent conversation within and among the churches sometimes coming to a vote

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[30] Barry Hankins provides a more nuanced account of the relationship between new conservative SBC leaders and issues of race. See Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 240-71.
[31] Knight, "Race Relations," 179.
[32] Kathleen Bliss, *The Service and Status of Women in the Churches* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1952), 132.

and other times dying down, only to reappear when yet another group desired to know what and how women were doing in churches where their leadership was welcomed.[33] Before the decade was out, both Methodists and Presbyterians in the United States voted to accept women's full ordination as pastoral ministers. Universities in their dedication to reconsider matters of truth in each new generation were compelled to change in the face of feminist critique. Christian churches, which shared a similar historic commitment both to truth and ongoing interpretation of that truth, were also drawn into practical discussions of women's role in church and society as well as more philosophical (and heated) discussions of feminism and the challenges it brought to the structures, norms and practices of the church.[34]

By 1965 a third of the Protestant denominations in the U.S. had ordained one or more women to ministry. By 1976 as many as 10,000 women were ordained by Protestant churches making them about five percent of the total clergy in the U.S.[35] After 1970 the numbers of clergy, both men and women, rose dramatically across the church landscape. By 1994 Barbara Zikmund and her colleagues found women clergy made up between 10 and 30 percent of the clergy in eight mainline denominations.[36]

The first woman to be ordained in a Southern Baptist church was Addie Davis, in 1964. Baptist historian Leon McBeth, in his 1979 book *Women in Baptist Life*, listed

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[33] Ibid.

[34] See Schneider and Schneider, *In Their Own Right,* 182.

[35] Ibid., 185.

[36] Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 139, 155. In the 15 denominations included in Zikmund's study, the percentages of clergywomen ranged from one percent to 30 percent. Southern Baptists were included in the study, and in 1994 were estimated to have 1,130 women out of 34,000 ordained ministers. The names for the study, and most likely the clergywomen's statistics were collected from Sarah Francis Anders.

fifty-eight women ordained between 1964 and 1978 by Southern Baptist churches.[37] By 1995 sociologist Sarah Frances Anders, who collected names and data about Southern Baptist women in ministry, estimated 1,130 Southern Baptist clergywomen.[38] Like other denominations the number of clergywomen rose sharply and continued to rise, such that more than 1,800 Baptist clergywomen were estimated in 2006.[39]

Feminism was not to be ignored by churches of American Protestantism, on either the right or the left. Neither could it be ignored by Southern Baptists. Conversations about ordination may not have been taking place publicly from the 1920s through the 1950s among Southern Baptists, although some protests about women's leadership in the church did appear on state Baptist editorial pages and other publications.[40] And no doubt there were quiet parlor conversations about such matters. In greater evidence was the activity of Woman's Missionary Union, the women's organization affiliated with the SBC, formed in 1888, that most influenced women's roles and laid groundwork for the changes ushered in by feminism in the 1960s.[41] The values, programs and training offered by WMU for young boys, girls, and women in the churches focused on missions, but also used methods for that prepared generations of women for other kinds of

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[37] Leon McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 153-55.

[38] Zikmund, et. al., *Clergywomen,* 155.

[39] Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso, "The State of Women in Baptist Life, 2006" in *No Longer Ignored: A Collection of Articles on Baptist Women,* ed. Charles W. Deweese and Pamela R. Durso (Atlanta, GA: The Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007), 295.

[40] The most blatant example of protest over women's preaching and leadership in church can be found in J. W. Porter, ed., *Feminism: Woman and Her Work* (Louisville, KY: Baptist Book Concern, 1923).

[41] Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the SBC can be thought of as the Southern Baptist response to the first wave of feminism, while women's ordination was its response to the second wave. See Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 36-37.

leadership in the church. Many female deacons and ministers credit WMU for their early training in church leadership.[42]

When women began moving into more leadership roles in the church, they forced a reconsideration of the divide between clergy and laity, which had long existed in Baptist life. Denominational anxiety about the role of women, and the reinterpretation of the priesthood of all believers, showed itself in numerous ways, including efforts to change WMU. One leader of the era recalls that the SBC was making changes that threatened to "program [WMU] right out of existence."[43] In response to threats from the SBC, and at the very height of political and social upheaval in the U.S., WMU initiated a major overhaul of all its programs, refocusing age groups, renaming each program of the organization, leaning more into its educational role, and introducing all new publications for each age group. They reaffirmed their commitment to supporting women who served in ministry, or "church-related vocations."[44]

Yet, after 1964 and the ordination of Addie Davis, the door was open and there was no turning back. On the eve of the SBC controversy Woman's Missionary Union and other SBC agencies sponsored "Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations." The meeting brought together Baptist scholars, clergywomen, denominational bureaucrats and the media. Presentations about the role of women in church and society

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[42] In an earlier paper I argued that WMU, through its educational and achievement programs, powerful symbols and rhetoric about vocation and mission empowered women for a variety of leadership roles in church, community and missionary settings and provided a foundation for many hundreds of girls who grew up to embrace a vocation in professional ministry.

[43] Helen Fling, president of WMU through the tumultuous changes of late 1960's and early 70's, made this observation some years later. See Catherine Allen, *A Century to Celebrate: History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Birmingham, AL: WMU, Auxiliary to the SBC, 1987), 112.

[44] As women went back to work in the 1960s, the enrollment of women's groups in WMU dropped. In response to criticism for their support for clergywomen WMU executive director, Carolyn Weatherford remarked, that "women in ministry" was simply a modern term for "women in church-related vocations" (including missionaries). She continued, "WMU always used the word *minister* even for laypersons." Allen, *A Century to Celebrate,* 342.

filled the program. As with nearly all Baptist gatherings, no decisive pronouncements or calls to action went out. The congregational polity of the SBC does not make room historically for such conclusions. However, the report of findings made it clear that clergywomen wanted places to serve and recognition of their status by their fellow Southern Baptists. [45] A few of those clergywomen realized that hope among Southern Baptists, but the direction of the convention in the next two decades displaced the hopes of most clergywomen onto the new Baptist groups which emerged out to the schism.

Southern Baptists Respond to Biblical Criticism

During the early 1960s Baptist differences over civil rights or women's role in the church were practically under the radar. However, clashes over biblical interpretation were front and center in the SBC. Two biblical commentaries about the book of Genesis generated controversies in the early 1960s and again in the early 1970s. These controversies laid groundwork for the later schism. In 1961 the SBC's house press, Broadman, published *The Message of Genesis* by Ralph Elliott, which met with a storm of controversy because the authorship of Moses was questioned and a multi-author theory was put forth.[46] When Elliott refused to stop a reprint of the book by a non-SBC press in 1962, he was charged with insubordination and lost his teaching appointment at Midwestern Seminary, but not before a bomb was ignited on his front porch.[47]

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[45] *Findings of The Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations* (Southern Baptist Convention, September 20-22, 1978). Located at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

[46] Broadman Press was the Sunday School publishing house. Ralph H. Elliott, *The Message of Genesis* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1961). See also Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 206-09. "Elliott said he was seeking to clarify many of the vexing questions that blocked young intellectuals from seeing the truth of God's Word in the Book of Genesis in light of scientific advances and increasing acceptance of modern scientific theory." (206)

[47] Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 205-07, 241.

One outcome to the storm of controversy was the decision by the convention to revise the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message* in an effort to assuage the loud protests of conservative Baptists about the "liberal drift" in the seminaries.[48] As with controversies past, denominational loyalists strategized to maintain calm and restore order so that convention programming for missions and evangelism could remain the central focus of Southern Baptists. Convention president Hershel Hobbs chaired a committee of state Baptist convention presidents to revise the *BFM*. Just as it went in 1925, the adoption of the revised *BFM* was accompanied by loud insistence that it was not a creed but a confessional statement.

A decade later convention goers must have felt a sense of déjà vu when another dispute erupted over a commentary about Genesis. This time the book was a newly minted *Broadman Commentary of the Bible,* the first in a twelve-volume series. The same arguments were proffered by conservatives, and compromises were offered by Sunday School Board executives, but the first volume of the series (Genesis-Exodus) was withdrawn, and in 1971 the convention voted to find a new writer for the Genesis commentary. Baptist professors and progressive pastors and leaders were more inclined to enter the fray this time and express support for Elliott who had basically put into writing what was being taught in the seminaries. Protests about the use of historical-critical methods were led by SBC president W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, who lashed out at the SBC Executive Committee, "How far do you

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[48] Tellingly in a year when civil rights strife was the largest news story, Baptists were instead wrapped up in a controversy over scriptural authority. They did add a statement about the dignity of "man" to the new *Baptist Faith and Message*, as a response to the challenges of the civil rights movement. That same year they also elected the first woman to a convention office. Marie Mathis was the elected president of WMU in 1963, the same year she was elected as the first woman vice-president of the SBC. She later resigned and was hired by WMU to direct its Promotion Division. See Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention,* 209-10, 233.

compromise what you believe in order to stay together?"[49] This question continued to resound from different quarters over the next thirty years as the Southern Baptists synthesis began to crumble.

Hannah, Lydia and Martha each came of age in the era when questions to authority were all around them. In the Southern Baptist era between Addie Davis's ordination in 1964 and the Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations in 1978, these three women and scores of others were living lives that prompted them to think about race relations, women's place in society, home and church, and the meaning of the Bible for their religious experiences. None of them explicitly identified a call to ordination, or church ministry or the pastorate during the decade of the 1960s, yet they heard the powerful messages of calling from their Baptist churches. They were recruited simultaneously by other clarion calls based in the deep needs of the world around them.

Although future clergywomen like Hannah, Lydia and Martha were grappling with understanding what these challenges meant for their careers and relationships, Baptist leaders of churches, seminaries and the denomination heard in those challenges something altogether different. The major effect of the upheavals, which began in the 1960s for Southern Baptists, was not that they quit going to church as Ahlstrom suggested (although in part, surely they did). Rather the effect was more like that described by Hudnut-Beumler: they drew lines of division more sharply between those who previously tolerated each other for the sake of missions and evangelism. Baptists on the left and right, who had been held at bay by powerful denominational brokers in hopes of preserving the growth of the institution, were gathering in frustration and organizing for action. All were still committed to the authority of the Bible, even if it seemed

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[49] Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 238.

undermined by scholarly inquiry. All remained committed to the power of the individual

to act responsibly before God and the assembled faith community. But the forces of

society were straining the mutuality of these concepts, and Baptists found themselves

lining up on opposing sides of the social issues. It seemed, as Walter Shurden wondered

in 1981, that the synthesis might be cracking.[50]

Two Parties Emerge 1979-1990
Southern Baptists Negotiate a Schism

Although the election of Adrian Rogers in 1979, as president of the SBC, signaled

an important change in the direction of Southern Baptists, news that something was afoot,

was slow getting out to the churches and individuals. Some Baptist women only realized

there was a "controversy" when it slammed into their lives in some very personal ways.

Looking back, Anna, now a Baptist hospital chaplain, says, "I didn't realize there was a

huge problem about being a woman . . . . We didn't have women on staff. We didn't have

women deacons. But there wasn't any 'you can't do this.' And at that point there wasn't

any 'you can do this' either. I wanted to go to the seminary. And probably in that process

I began to realize there was a controversy . . . . Then when I went down to Southwestern,

and I had to be specially interviewed because I was starting school and my husband

wasn't. And it really hacked me off."[51]

A generation younger than Anna, Chloe's realization that all was not well with

Baptists came earlier in her life. She was baptized at the age of twelve, only a few years

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[50] Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist 'Synthesis': Is it Cracking?" *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (April 1981), 2-11.
[51] Anna was required to have a special interview because her husband was not also a seminary student. Only married women, not single ones, whose husbands were not students had to undergo the questioning.

after SBC presidential elections had started going to the "Biblicist Party." Soon after her

baptism Chloe's family chose to leave that Southern Baptist church, because the new

pastor was unsupportive of women in leadership roles. They joined a new church in

Raleigh, North Carolina, where the atmosphere was more supportive of women. The

church had been electing women as deacons since the early 1970s. The pastor of her

family's new church was also involved in the SBC Controversy, a prominent member of

the "Autonomist Party."

Who were these parties? Beginning in the 1960s, with each challenge to authority,

SBC employees, professors, and loyal Southern Baptist pastors slowly, and in some cases

reluctantly, began to engage some measure of the questions from civil rights activists,

feminists and modernist scholars of the Bible. These engagements expressed the

modernist and pluralist impulses in the denomination. It was exactly this type of mingling

with modernism that rankled conservative Baptist pastors and some laity. And those most

distressed by the engagement with social issues tended to be conservatives who were also

critical of the SBC bureaucracy for their emphasis on efficiency and organizational

growth, in the name of missions and evangelism. The mounting disgruntlement fed into

the formation of two new groups.[52]

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[52] The choice of new names for the battling groups is an effort not to obscure their internal differences, but to clarify the differences between the two parties. Nancy Tatom Ammerman through surveys and interviews identified five groups on a continuum: self-identified fundamentalists, fundamentalist conservatives, conservatives, moderate conservatives, and self-identified moderates. These are important distinctions for getting at the subtleties of self-understanding among Southern Baptists of the 1980s, but in the end polarization defined the schism and most everyone was forced to identify with one group or another, thus the choices: Autonomist Party and Biblicist Party. See Ammerman, *Baptist Battles,* 78-80. In the accounts written from the left wing of the Baptist controversy, labels for two opposing parties are most often called "moderates" and "fundamentalists." The labels favored in the literature from the right are usually, "liberals" and "conservatives." Both "liberal" and "fundamentalist" are used by the opposing groups in a pejorative fashion.

The Biblicist Party had been organizing, strategizing and setting its sights on change since the adoption of the 1963 BFM. They formalized their organization in the "Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship."[53] Those who gravitated to what is called here, the Biblicist Party included many mega-church pastors, and those who have been variously identified as fundamentalists, ultraconservatives, neo-evangelicals and biblical inerrantists. By 1979 the Biblicist Party had coalesced around the political strategy of Baptist layperson and judge, Paul Pressler, and biblical scholar, Paige Patterson. They also had the full support of Rogers, and popular preacher and pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, W.A. Criswell, as well as dozens of pastors of other large Baptist churches.

The Autonomist Party was further behind organizationally. Although it was not unknown that the Biblicists were organizing in the months running up to the 1979 Convention, holding meetings and raising funds to support their strategy, many who were sympathetic to the Autonomists were unwilling to believe that the threat was real or lasting. Only when it was essentially too late, did the Autonomists gain traction among those who were variously identified as moderates, progressives, liberals, or denominational loyalists. Their leaders included Cecil Sherman, and a group assembled in 1980 known as the "Gatlinburg Gang." They made greater and lesser attempts over the next dozen years to win the SBC presidency or find a means of compromise with the Biblicists. However, the Autonomists never caught up in organization, support, funding

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[53] One of the outcomes of the second "Genesis Controversy" was the formation of the "Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship." The group and its publication, *The Southern Baptist Journal,* took "an aggressive path from the first publication, attacking 'liberal' professors and through letter and print, challenging leaders to affirm their conservative positions." Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention,* 247.

or strategy.[54] They were never successful in their attempts to win the presidency. The SBC became the domain of Biblicists.

Many historians and other scholars have outlined the unfolding events of the Southern Baptist controversy.[55] Some have presented those facts as a matter of "conservative resurgence" or "course correction" while others have portrayed it as a "hostile takeover."[56] Many of the most basic facts are undisputed by either side, although their interpretation and meaning are hotly contested.[57] At the heart of the story is a twelve-year span in which Autonomists lost influence, control and theological hegemony as the leaders and shapers of the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. In that same time a group of conservative yet charismatic leaders from the margins of denominational life organized themselves and gained a substantial following. The Biblicists achieved their goal by winning the presidency of the SBC and subsequently appointing like-minded leaders to all the boards of trust, who in turn hired like-minded staff in all the

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[54] Ammerman, Baptist Battles, 174-78.

[55] See Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History*, chapters 7-8. For a recounting from the perspective of those in the Autonomist party, see Walter B. Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993). And for a recounting of the history from the Biblicist perspective, see James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1991).

[56] In the accounts written from the left wing, the schism was typically called "the takeover." Those writing from the right generally referred to the Baptist controversy as "course correction" or "resurgence" of conservative ideals.

[57] One question that seems unresolved in the literature is that of schism itself. Did a split really happen? The initial reluctance to admit a full schism was related to several factors. The nearer the study to the time when moderates withdrew (1990-91), the more skeptical the writers seemed about reality of a split, still speculating about possible reunion. Both Leonard's and Ammerman's final chapters are devoted to possible future scenarios (see *God's Last and Only Hope,* 173-187; *Baptist Battles,* 253-85). Another factor that contributed to skepticism about the permanence of the schism was the size of the newer groups in relation to the magnitude of the SBC. The relative smallness of the AB and CBF was complicated by the many cases in which local churches continued sending (even minimal) financial support to the SBC. The schism was a slow rending for many local congregations, reflecting the long-standing and complex social networks which tie Southern Baptists together. These factors seem to leave some doubt in the minds of observers as to whether it was a schism, a splintering, a temporary retreat, or something else. Only the reflections of later historians and analysts may say for sure, but after more than twenty years since various Baptist societies began to pull away from the mother denomination, the resulting changes appear lasting and clear.

agencies and institutions of the Convention and turned it in a decidedly more conservative direction. Many leaders in the Autonomist Party (pastors, professors, and denominational agency staff) lost positions and career trajectories, and eventually re-gathered their energies and purpose to form new Baptist societies and organizations which serve the needs of disaffected Southern Baptists.[58]

Each group launched publications, held rallies, supported candidates for president, and devoted large amounts of energy and time to the "The Controversy." Formal attempts to negotiate a peace between the parties were begun at the Dallas SBC in 1985. This Convention was attended by the largest number of messengers ever recorded. More than 45,000 Baptists gathered after a year of campaigning by both parties. SBC agency directors and seminary presidents had finally joined their support with the Autonomist Party, but still the Biblicists won by fifty-five percent, and they re-elected Charles Stanley, television evangelist and pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, Georgia, as president. A committee to negotiate peace was also elected and charged to report to the next year's convention. However, efforts of the "Peace Committee" were in vain. The report in 1986 only managed to cast more doubt on the seminaries and other SBC agencies, and give more ammunition to the Biblicist Party as they sought to gain control of boards and agencies of the Convention.[59]

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[58] Some local churches were embroiled in the controversy while others remained unaware. The ways the SBC controversy played out in local churches is a different story, and not the focus of this study, although it cannot and will not be completely avoided. The chapters about clergywomen will touch on the cultural site of the church in some minor ways.

[59] The process by which this control was achieved is outlined in a variety of places. It entails electing a president who will appoint sympathetic members to the "Committee on Committees" who in turn nominate a "Committee on Nominations" who in tern nominate the trustees of each SBC board for each agency. Members of the boards of trust serve three year terms. Thus it took several years to completely replace those existing boards with members who were sympathetic with the Biblicist Party's agenda. See Ammerman, *Baptist Battles,* 169-71.

In 1984 a Gallup Poll revealed that religion in America was deeply divided in a way that cut across denominations, communities and families. People who defined themselves as religious "conservatives" or religious "liberals" disagreed over doctrine, worship style, social issues and even the very ways they viewed themselves.[60] Robert Wuthnow, one of the designers of the poll notes, "People who identified themselves as religious liberals were prone to stereotype their conservative brethren as intolerant, morally rigid, fanatical, unsophisticated, closed-minded, and simplistic." On the other side, "Self-identified religious conservatives thought religious liberals were morally loose, were too hung up on social concerns rather than truly knowing what Christianity was all about, had only a shallow knowledge of the Bible, and were deeply compromised by secular humanism."[61]

Several observers of the Southern Baptist schism have argued that the rise and influence of the "New Religious and Political Right" had a powerful hand in shaping the conservative movement among Baptists.[62] Wuthnow makes a more complex and subtle argument about changes to all American denominations and religious groups following

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[60] Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 132.

[61] Ibid. Some scholars disagree with Wuthnow's findings and Phillip Hammond's arguments about an increasingly polarized religious America. In *Reforming the Center* binary approaches to American Religion, including Wuthnow's, are challenged; and more pluralistic frameworks are suggested for understanding the state of Protestantism in the U.S. The authors have as their goal overcoming the divide not just for the sake of accuracy but also so that "it will be easier for contemporary American Protestants themselves to come together in constructive new ways." See the "Introduction" Ed. Douglas Jacobsen and William Vance Trollinger Jr., *Re-Forming the Center: American Protestantism 1900 to Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 1-14. They do allow that in some cases assessing a two-party system is quite accurate and heuristically useful for understanding. In the analysis offered here, I have employed Wuthnow and Hammond as points of departure to describe Southern Baptists within a larger American context and in fact their divisions resonate with the picture sketched by Wuthnow. Whether sociological and historical studies are mainly descriptive or prescriptive is a topic for another discussion.

[62] See Ellen M. Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists: A Subculture in Transition,* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 180-214.

World War II.[63] Wuthnow argues that the structures of Protestant denominations during the 1960s and 70s declined in their importance to members, and new special-interest groups rose up in their place claiming the loyalties of religious people in America. Switching between denominations became common, and affinities for shared social concerns often outweighed the power of one's childhood ties to church, particularly as education and mobility increased. According to Wuthnow, these changes were part of a larger set of trends that resulted from a creeping involvement into every aspect of life from American government. Until the 1940s the state had relatively little to do or say about the day-to-day lives of Americans, but increasingly government began to regulate and order much of daily life. One result was a growing polarization which cut across denominations, and which found conservative Baptists and Catholics, formerly wary at best, joining together to support prayer in schools, to stop abortion and to promote certain forms of family.

Some of the roots of both the Biblicist and Autonomist parties can be located in the choice by young Baptists during the 1950s and later to attend colleges and universities outside the South. David Stricklin traces a "genealogy of dissent" among the most "progressive" Baptist spokespersons in the 1970s and 1980s. He discovered that many attended religious schools in the North.[64] Barry Hankins seeks to understand the influences on "conservative" leaders in the new SBC of the 1990s. He found a major influence on those Baptist intellectuals came from outside the SBC seminaries and

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[63] The following very brief recounting of Wuthnow's argument, serves here to give context for the influence of politics in every American denomination, and to temper the polemical nature of the arguments by Baptists on the left who blame the NRPR for the demise of the SBC.

[64] See David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999)*,* 6-7.

outside the South.[65] Progressives were influenced by mainline liberal and ecumenical traditions, and within Baptist circles they read and followed the likes of Clarence Jordan, Carlyle Marney, and Will Campbell. The new conservatives were influenced by the neo-evangelicalism of Carl F. H. Henry and Frances Schaeffer. Within Baptist life they found support with W.A. Criswell and other mega-church pastors.

As Wuthnow suggests, in the era running up to 1979, a spate of special interest groups rose up to capture the concerns and loyalties of Southern Baptists. Some groups were actually sponsored by the denomination while others existed outside the official structures of the SBC. For instance the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, an independent group supported by Biblicists, advocated for more conservative teaching practices at SBC seminaries and attracted disaffected pastors of conservative mega-churches. Participants formed a basis of the Biblicist Party. Conferences and publications sponsored by the Christian Life Commission (CLC), the Historical Commission, and Southern Seminary were supported financially by the SBC and drew the loyalties of progressives and denominationalists in the same era.[66] These networks of leaders formed the basis of the Autonomist Party.

Arthur Farnsley, who studied the political character of the SBC for a decade, has argued that, although the SBC was founded on a model of democratic decision making, it depended for more than a hundred years on an underlying consensus culture in which to

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[65] See also Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon,* 21-39.
[66] For example in 1974 the CLC sponsored a conference at Glorieta (one of the SBC conference centers) entitled, "Christian Liberation for Women." A book on the topic soon followed: Harry N. Hollis, ed. *Christian Freedom for Women and Other Human Beings* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975). The Historical Commission published a volume of articles "Role of Women in Baptist History," *Baptist History and Heritage* 12, no. 1 (January 1977): 1-64. See also a volume devoted to "Women and the Church," *Review and Expositor* 72, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 3-69.

make its decisions by majority vote.[67] It was not a democratic structure designed to bear the weight of theological nuance and subtlety. The consensus-democratic structure and system were in place even when newer social and political influences began to insert themselves into the Baptist situation in the 1960s. Essentially there was no room for dissenting theological voices, a point claimed by those in the Biblicist Party who had felt alienated for some years. As the polarizing effects of new special interests grew in the 1960s and 70s, Southern Baptists continued making their decisions in the same ways they always had. Although the mythology of the "dissenting voice" was powerful in Baptist history, as Farnsley argues, still there was no *formalized* way to make room for that dissent. The consensus model of decision making means the winners take all. Or in the case of the 1970s controversy the winners "take over."[68] After it was clear that they had lost power, Autonomists, too, decried the lack of space for a dissenting voice.

In the years leading up to 1979 Southern Baptists were testing the tensions found in voluntary association with increasingly complex and powerful forces. For decades Baptists had felt free to associate, cooperate, and pool their funds (now in the millions and approaching billions annually) in order to accomplish tasks upon which they all agreed. However, just because Baptists were sharing in similar, and even what appeared to be identical *practices* of attending the SBC, giving their money to its causes, promoting missions, theological education and religious liberty, all in the name of "free and voluntary association" did not mean they really had a consensus of *beliefs*. Rather as

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[67] Arthur Emery Farnsley II, *Southern Baptist Politics: Authority and Power in the Restructuring of an American Denomination.* (University Park: PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 35-41.
[68] Ibid., 56, 140-43.

numerous historians and other observers have pointed out, they simply avoided talking about belief and focused instead on the practices they could agree were worth pursuing.[69]

The new social and political pressures of a changing American landscape, encroaching governmental forces, greater mobilization and diminishing denominational loyalties helped create conditions in which Baptists were forming new kinds of associations, and straining to maintain older loyalties that had lasted many decades. In the years ahead this stress and strain would be further complicated by an increasing number of issues which divided Baptists, such as women's ordination, and a growing number of organizations that would plead for Southern Baptist loyalties. The troubles with voluntary association would be played out in local churches, the larger denomination, and numerous other sites during the years of controversy.

When Anna arrived at Southwestern Seminary, the politics of the denomination and the policies of the school were already changing. Concerns for women's roles in church and home were being guarded by school officials. Despite her frustration, Anna did not let the questions, or other ill treatment deter her from getting her education. Anna, like hundreds of other Baptist young women, was heir not only to the Baptists ideals of soul competency and priesthood of all believers, but also a recipient directly or indirectly of the ideals and practices of feminism.

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[69] Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope,* 9-24, 98-99; Samuel S. Hill, "The Story before the Story" 30-46. See also Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices" in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,* ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 228-42. Tanner argues that belief and practice may overlap, but clearly cannot be assumed to be contiguous. Those appearing to engage in a coordinated practice do not necessarily shares a set of beliefs (or any beliefs at all), which uphold the practice. Investigations into such practices (i.e. communion) reveal a tremendous variety of religious beliefs and other reasons given by practitioners for their participation.

Riding the Second Wave of Feminism 1960-2000
Southern Baptist Women Claim New Roles in the Church

In 1985, as the Autonomists and Biblicists were locked in combat over control of the SBC, Hannah was finishing her master's degree in religious education at a Southern Baptist seminary. She felt she had been faithful and trusting, and she recalls praying, "Oh, Lord, where am I going?" A church where her husband Henry had served previously called "out of the blue." They had known her in her role as accompanist and assistant to Henry. Now they wanted her to be their minister of education. As she began her job the question of ordination was introduced by the pastor. She recalls it this way, "The church wanted to ordain me when I first went, and I really did not want to do that because I felt like there would be some in the community or maybe even some in the church who thought, 'Oh, she's feels like she's got to be ordained," you know? They didn't . . . know me as a full time minister. They knew me as Henry's wife."

Hannah wanted to be sure she was ordained for her own calling and gifts. She decided to wait. The church came back again a couple of times and Hannah said, "Let's just wait." After two years, they came back again. Hannah recalls, "The pastor, Marcus Shore, was very supportive of women in ministry and said that they would ordain us separately or together. He didn't ever want it to look like Henry had to be ordained so that I could get ordained. . . He said, 'we'll do yours separately, but we want to recognize your gifts for ministry.'"

Hannah was the first woman the church ordained for ministry, although they had been ordaining women as deacons for a number of years. She recalls: "The congregation believed in the laying on of hands that everyone was invited. So I had children, youth, everybody who was a part of that service, and it was just a very special time. And I had a

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man who came up afterwards, and he said, 'I just don't know when I have felt the spirit of God so strongly in our congregation.' It was a Sunday afternoon so the people who wanted to be there, were there." Hannah and Henry were both ordained 1987, as the controversy in the SBC was clearly moving toward schism, and the first wave of the Autonomist Party was pulling out. Her church was among those affiliated early on with the Alliance and CBF.

When Addie Davis was ordained in 1964, letters of protest flooded her mailbox, and that of Warren Carr, the pastor of Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina. She spent years looking for a place to pastor. She ended up going north to the American Baptists to find a church that would receive her gifts. What happened in two decades that turned the tables in such a way that a Southern Baptist church was calling a woman like Hannah and asking her to join their church staff? Coming repeatedly to ask her to be ordained? Saying the event was spirit-filled?

In 1963 Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* and began to describe a "problem with no name" felt by thousands of housewives who had inherited the belief that a woman's greatest ambition should be becoming a wife and mother.[70] The women in that year who were born before 1920 remembered giving up their dreams of a career and aspirations of achievement in order to take on the perfect role for women in a privileged America: housewife. Younger women had grown up without realizing they had any other options. They were marrying younger and having more children and in the process losing their sense of identity, claimed Friedan.[71]

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[70] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963).
[71] Ibid., 22-24, 26, 61, 1774-77, 370. The birthrate following WWII soared and women in the U.S. married younger than in most other developed countries (between ages 15 and 19).

The book named the problem experienced by America's "happy housewives" and began debunking the "feminine mystique." Friedan surveyed, interviewed, and overheard hundreds of women who described themselves as empty, incomplete, depressed, exhausted, fragmented and bored by their routine lives. Their very existence and identity was tied completely to the needs and wishes of their families.[72] To remedy the problem with no name, Friedan recommended seeing housework, marriage and motherhood for what they really were: *not a career.* Housework should be done efficiently and relationships were made for love, but neither should be an end in itself for women. "The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own. There is no other way."[73]

The book was a wake-up call to thousands of women who embarked on journeys to "find themselves" and in the process challenged the inequities and myths of society which kept the "feminine mystique" alive. In the two decades that followed the water-shed publication women moved into education, the professions and politics in unprecedented numbers. Three federal labor acts in 1963 and 1964 put some teeth into the changes – at least in theory, although in reality women's wages remained comparatively low. In 1975 the national average indicated that women earned only 57 percent of wages earned by men. College educated women did not do significantly better, earning 59 percent of their male peers.[74] Women had limited success at breaking into

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[72] Ibid., 16-18, 26 passim.

[73] Ibid., 330-32.

[74] Federal legislation which extended protection of women's rights in the workplace included the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which prohibited discrimination in pay based on sex. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 also legislated against discrimination at work based on "race, religion, color, national origin and sex;" however, the latter was added in an effort to trivialize and defeat the bill. Nevertheless, it passed into law giving women a new arsenal of weapons against workplace discrimination. See Barbara Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 174-75, 184.

male-dominated professions, and they still struggled to overcome the powerful stereotypes of the feminine mystique.

By the close of the twentieth century women were continuing to enter most professions in greater numbers and had increased their earning potential, when compared with men's pay for performing the same work, from 63 percent on average in 1979 to 78 percent among all age categories in 2002.[75] When Barbara Harris published her findings in 1978 the changes since 1960 were still minimal in terms of women entering the labor force or earning equal pay. However, increases on every front can be found in the two decades that followed.[76]

Even before *The Feminine Mystique,* women in religion were raising questions about the role and status of women in church and in theological understandings of human being. Valerie Saiving wrote an essay and helped to launch a revolution within academic theology, which extended to many churches the goal of equality for women.[77] Saiving wrote ten years before other substantive feminist arguments appeared,[78] arguing that women's sin can be understood as "hiding," as opposed to the traditional and popular notion of sin as pride and hubris. Redemption for female hiding, she said, must be found in regaining a lost or hidden self, rather than the redemptive move from male hubris to

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[75] U.S. Department of Labor, "Women at Work," *Monthly Labor Review* (October 2003): 45-51. http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2003/10/ressum3.pdf (accessed February 9, 2008). "The women's-to-men's earning ratio has increased in every major age group over the 1979-2002 period. The ratio is highest in the youngest age categories." Women aged 16-24 earn 78.6% of what their male colleagues earned in 1979, but that percentage had risen to 93.4% in 2002. Presumably these figures reflect work in low-paying and entry-level jobs. Ibid., 49.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion.* Ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1979 [1960]), 25-42.

[78] Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, "The Essential Challenge: Does Theology Speak to Women's Experience?" in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion,* ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1979), 19-21.

giving up oneself in sacrificial service.[79] In one way her argument keeps old stereotypes of difference between men and women in place by arguing that women's experience is different. On the other hand it challenged Christian theology which accepted uncritically the experience of men as normative, elevated it to a universal theology, and ignored the second-class status of women in work, home, society and church.[80] Her concerns about women's need to come out of hiding and find themselves for the sake of their own redemption resounded with the Friedan's recommendations for overcoming the feminine mystique.

Friedan pointed out that many deep-rooted values would confront women if they attempted to claim freedom from the feminine mystique and would make the liberation of finding oneself especially difficult. The long list of challenges and blockades included: making the leap from amateur to professional; being underpaid or taking jobs that don't really contribute to society; society's commitment to "occupation: housewife;" second shift housework; arguments from religious groups that a working woman neglects, or worse rejects, her husband and children; some men's wish for an ever-present mother; hostility from other housewives trapped in the mystique ("secret envy"); and grief and loss that comes with change.[81] These concerns and others were mounting among religious groups as feminism began to challenge family arrangements, work, religious institutions, biblical interpretation and the roles of women in every facet of church and society. Christian leaders on the right, left and middle came face-to-face with feminist critique

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[79] Saiving, "The Human Situation," 27, 39-40.

[80] Christ and Plaskow, "The Essential Challenge," 20.

[81] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,*" 337-42. In her list of possible blockades (and at other points in the book) it is evident that Friedan was speaking to educated, middle class, white women. See Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere,* 180.

and calls for change. As the second wave of feminism rolled into the churches Southern

Baptists could not escape the tide.

According to Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, religious fundamentalists were caught

flat-footed by the challenges of second-wave feminism, but soon put up seawalls of

resistance. Arguments from the previous century were replayed between feminists and

fundamentalists, with little change or movement, and the same appeals to inerrant

scripture as before.[82] However, neo-evangelicals proved more prepared for the battle.

Rather than being steeped in premillennial dispensationalism, which buttressed the

arguments about gender for most fundamentalists, neo-evangelicals built their arguments

out of a conservative Calvinism. As such, the new evangelicals had made increasing

forays into the culture in the decades since World War II, and they held on to the idea

that society could be restored and remade in Christian fashion. They not only shared with

fundamentalists the desire to bring order to all of church, home and society, they also had

a reformist approach that made their insistence on the proper role of women even more

ardent.[83] Evangelical feminists, however, made some inroads, and as a canyon of

divergence opened up through the evangelical world on the issues of women's role and

even the question of ordination, new organizations came to represent the differences. The

Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood upholds the complementarian view of

marriage and the importance of separate spheres for males and females, and they oppose

women's pastoral leadership. Meanwhile, another evangelical group, Christians for

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[82] Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale, 1993), 118-21.

[83] Ibid., 123-24. This distinction between fundamentalist approaches to arguing against feminism and neo-evangelical approaches, particularly those of conservative Calvinists are significant for understanding the turn away from support of Southern Baptist clergywomen during and following the SBC schism. See also Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 229-31.

Biblical Equality, holds out a view of egalitarian marriage, and supports the leadership of women in all positions in the church.[84]

Between 1979 and 2000, despite the growing number of clergywomen, and Southern Baptist churches willing to confer ordination, numerous news events and actions on the part of the convention point to growing resistance and backlash against feminism in general and women's ordination in particular. A few key events during these three decades will attest to the texture of the times, which in many ways mirrored trends in society. Women attended seminaries in greater numbers, gathered and organized for mutual support, continued to make inroads, and yet they simultaneously met with sustained opposition.[85]

SBC Statements

For many years before and after the 1979 watershed, the issue of woman's role in church, home and society was brought to the annual convention as an issue to be voted on by the gathered body.[86] Between 1972 and 1984 nine resolutions about the role of women

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[84] See Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 229. See also Carl J. Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997)*,* 210. The first national group that formed out of women's participation with neo-evangelicals in the "Chicago Declaration" in 1973 was the Evangelical Women's Caucus (now the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus). Later the group was unable to resolve disputes over homosexuality, and out of those disagreements, Christians for Biblical Equality was formed. See also Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender,* 122.

[85] There is not room to recount all the local Baptist stories which made news in the era from 1979-2000 regarding women's ordination or leadership in Southern Baptists churches. To name a few other examples: Numerous churches were "kicked out" of their local associations for ordaining and/or calling women to serve as pastors. Clergy couples were ordained. Female campus ministers were censured or fired for being ordained. Leaders were "uninvited" to speak at Baptist gatherings if they were on record for supporting women's ordination.

[86] Resolutions in Baptist life have no binding power, since each church is autonomous and the authority was intended to flow from the churches to the convention, but in practice, the SBC exercises tremendous accrued authority on its member churches and is understood to speak as a representative body by public media and others outside the SBC. See Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990)*,* 204-07. See also *SBC Annuals* for 1972, 1973, 1974, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, and 1984.

in society, home and/or church were brought to the convention. Some died in the

Committee on Resolutions, others were voted up or down. The polarization of positions

became evident over time, with resolutions proclaiming freedom, equality and the pursuit

of vocation for women being less favored, and those supporting women, but opposing the

Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, being adopted. In Kansas City, the

now infamous 1984 Resolution on women's ordination was adopted. The resolution was

introduced by long-time *Christianity Today* editor, Carl F. H. Henry, who had become a

Southern Baptist.[87] It claimed "the man was first in creation and the woman was first in

the Edenic fall." It also proclaimed support for "the service of women in all aspects of

church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing

ordination." [88]

In 1998, the Convention approved an amendment to the 1963 *BFM* about

women's role in the family. Now that conservative leaders were firmly in control of the

convention and its boards, schools and agencies, it was time to make up ground in the

culture war. The most obvious place to make some headway was in the realm of women's

role. Despite the fact that other neo-evangelicals were willing to disagree over roles for

women as either complementary or equal with men, the new Southern Baptist leaders

wanted to push back further, insisting on a subordinate position for women. As Barry

Hankins observes, "The answer to the question 'why a submission statement' is that SBC

conservatives want whenever possible to strike a countercultural position."[89] The new,

yet traditional position was formalized yet again in 2000, when the *Baptist Faith and*

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[87] Fletcher, *Southern Baptist Convention,* 272.
[88] Ammerman, *Baptist Battles,* 223-24.
[89] Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 229.

Message was revised, specifying not only the gracious submission of wives to their husbands, but also making explicit that the role of pastor belongs solely to men.[90]

Missions

As conservatives took greater control of the mission boards and their policies, they began to make changes that reflected resistance to (and rejection of) women's ordination. In 1986 the SBC's Home Mission Board (HMB) stopped providing financial support to any new church started in a mission area if that congregation were pastored by a woman. In 1989 the Foreign Mission Board refused to appoint Greg and Katrina Pennington as foreign missionaries because Katrina was ordained. With the passage of the new *BFM* statement of 2000 another round of reversals was set in motion at the mission boards. In 2002, the North American Mission Board (formerly HMB) ended the practice of endorsing of women as chaplains if they were ordained for ministry.[91] All of the SBC agencies, including the mission boards, asked employees to sign the new *BFM* 2000, which prompted a number of overseas missionaries to resign their positions rather than be forced into stating agreement with the new confession. Others refused to sign and were terminated.[92]

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[90] *Baptist Faith and Message,* 2000. Available online: http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp (accessed February 14, 2008).

[91] Rob James and Gary Leazer, eds., *The Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention: A Brief History* (Decatur, GA: Baptists Today, 1994) 31-37. The decision to stop the Pennington's appointment was a case of the elected board of trustees overriding the employed staff of the Foreign Mission Board. See Ammerman, *Baptist Battles,* 230-33. For changes to the endorsement policy, see *The Baptist Standard,* "SBC to Cease Endorsing Ordained Female Chaplains" (February 18, 2002), http://www.baptiststandard.com/2002/2_18/print/endorsing.html (accessed May 31, 2006).

[92] Mark Wingfield, "Missionaries Told They Can't Return to Field without Signing Statement"(January 24, 2003) Associated Baptist Press, Volume: 03-06.

Theological Education

In 1963 Betty Friedan argued that the key to getting out of the trap of the feminine mystique is education.[93] Federal law was enacted in the form of Title IX of the Educational Amendments Act in 1972 which "forbade discrimination on the basis of sex in all federally assisted educational programs."[94] During the time from 1972, when the data was first collected until 1989, the percentage of women enrolled in American and Canadian theological schools rose steadily from 10.2 percent to 29 percent.[95] During the period from 1970 to 1979, the enrollment of women in the SBC seminaries nearly tripled, and the percentage of female students jumped from ten-point-seven percent to seventeen percent of the total enrollment.[96] Two decades later, in 1998 approximately thirty-five percent of all students in enrolled in U.S. seminaries were women.[97] By 2005 women's enrollment had dropped to twenty-two percent on average in the six SBC Schools.[98]

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[93] Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique,* 344. Most of the women Friedan interviewed and her target audience were women of the middle and upper classes who had earned their college educations, or even doctoral degrees. She did address the complexity of work (or the elusive "career") for women of the lower or working classes. Her ideas were challenged by feminists such as Simone de Beauvior who wondered if real freedom for women could ever exist in a capitalist society. See Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere,* 180.

[94] Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere,* 183.

[95] Constant Jacquet, Jr. ed., *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, 1990* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 282.

[96] Albert McClellan, "Southern Baptist Convention, The" in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists,* vol. 3 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1982), 2473. "Seminaries reached an all-time high in enrollments. This came in 1978-79 when 10,954 persons were enrolled in the six schools. These included 1,876 women. These students were taught that year by 303 full-time faculty members. At the beginning of the decade, the enrollment stood at 5,848 including 628 women, and there were 234 faculty members."

[97] Barbara Wheeler, *Is There a Problem? Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future.* (New York: Auburn Seminary, 2001), 5. Although about a third of seminary students in 1998 were women, half of those surveyed by Wheeler were not planning to pursue ordination.

[98] The averages ranged from 18 percent at Southern Seminary to 27 percent at Golden Gate Seminary. In schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada the overall percentage of women enrolled was 36 percent, which is the comparable figure to those given for the 14 CBF schools and programs, which ranged from 17 percent at one school to 53 percent in two of the schools. See Eileen R. and Pamela R. Durso, "The State of Women in Baptist Life, 2005" in *No Longer Ignored: A Collection of Articles on Baptist Women,* ed. Charles W. Deweese and Pamela R. Durso (Atlanta, GA: The Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007), 256-58.

However the average enrollment of women in the new Baptist seminaries which grew out of the schism exceeded the national levels at thirty-eight percent.[99]

Baptist sociologist Sarah Frances Anders tracked the presence of women on the faculties of SBC seminaries in 1989. She found that women in SBC seminaries accounted for twenty-six out of 322 total faculty (eight percent). Within a few years the hiring policies at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) changed to become more restrictive, and several newsworthy events occurred around women losing positions at Southern. Theology professor, Molly Marshall was forced to resign in the face of unspecified heresy charges in 1994, and dean of the Carver School of Church Social Work (SBTS), Diana Garland, was fired in 1995.[100] In 2005 female faculty held appointments in all six SBC seminaries, but constituted only nine percent of the total faculty. However, with only one exception, no women were teaching in the areas of theology, biblical studies, ethics or history in the SBC schools. Among the newer theological schools which partnered with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship women made up 26 percent of the part- and full-time faculties.[101]

Clergywomen Support

In 1983 Southern Baptist clergywomen and their supporters decided it was time to get organized. Libby Bellinger, in her brief history of the organizational efforts, says Southern Baptist Women in Ministry offered a site of resistance to the status quo, as well

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[99] Ibid., 256-60.
[100] Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon,* 82-88. Chapter three details the demise of Marshall and Garland, and it includes the role played by Southern Seminary president Albert Mohler in the dismissal of both.
[101] In even starker contrast, female faculty made up 58 percent of faculty in American Baptist Church, USA affiliated schools. See Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso, "The State of Women in Baptist Life, 2005" in *No Longer Ignored: A Collection of Articles on Baptist Women,* ed. Charles W. Deweese and Pamela R. Durso (Atlanta, GA: The Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007), 259.

as a central gathering site for support among the clergywomen. She observes that the

original intent of the movement was to try new forms of leadership and organizational

structure. She concludes, however, that after a few years the organization "conformed to

the white-male system of control and structure."[102] From 1983 forward Southern Baptist

Women in Ministry and their supporters met prior to the SBC annual meeting. After the

changing of hands of power from Autonomists to Biblicists was complete in 1991, the

group dropped "Southern" from its name (1994) and moved the annual meetings to

coincide with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Alliance of Baptists. A number of

state organizations have also flourished at times during the last twenty-five years,

especially in North Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, and more occasionally in Kentucky,

Tennessee, Texas, South Carolina and Florida.[103]

The period from 1964 to 1979 may be considered a time of growth and

exploration for women entering the ranks of Southern Baptist clergy. The period during

"The Controversy" (1979 to 1990) was something of a crucible of conflict, shaping many

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[102] Libby Bellinger, "More Hidden than Revealed: The History of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry," in *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement*, ed. Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 150. Actually Bellinger's criticism may relate to Lehman's observations that three distinct cohorts of female seminary graduates (and thus ordained clergywomen) can be deciphered in mainline Protestant denominations. Differences between cohorts can attributed in part to the influence of feminist thought on their seminary curricula: graduates from 1970 and earlier are less interested in enacting feminist ideals in their congregations or places of ministry; graduates from 1971-80 are most interested in making application of feminist theory; and graduates from 1981 or later, who were also much greater in number, benefited in many ways from the tactics of earlier feminist seminarians, and thus could take the ideals in new directions. Seminary curricula often included feminist courses taught by feminist faculty for this last cohort, and thus their approach to ministry and organizations was more focused on institutionalization and the shaping new goals. See Edward C. Lehman Jr., *Gender and Work: The Case of the Clergy* (New York: SUNY, 1993), 134-41. Although Southern Baptists may have lagged behind these dates slightly, the same three cohorts can be detected among Baptist clergywomen. The other distinction would be that SBC seminaries (especially Southern and Southeastern) experienced similar developments as the mainline seminaries, but major disruptions brought an abrupt end when Biblicists gained control of policy at the two more progressive SBC schools.

[103] A Women's Resource Center was opened at Southeastern Seminary in 1984, and following changes to the board of trustees of the seminary, moved its offices to the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia in 1992. *To Silence the Daughters of God . . . A Brief History of Women in Ministry in Baptist Life Since 1868* (Kansas City, KS: Baptist Women in Ministry, 1997).

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women in ministry during their most formative years. Some unknown number of clergywomen departed during those years for other denominations, and others relinquished their sense of call to ministry altogether. A remarkable number of women continued to enter Baptist ministry during the years from 1979 to 1991. The third period from 1991 to 2000 followed the departure of the Autonomists from the SBC to form new Baptist groups. This period was marked by greater institutional acceptance, growing numbers of ordinations, and the opening of new seminaries and divinity schools premised on the acceptance of men *and* women desiring to prepare for ministry. Thus, despite a slow start, years of controversy, repeated instances of resistance and backlash, and maybe even as an outcome of the conflict, the number of Baptist clergywomen in the South has continued to grow. In 2006 *The State of Women in Baptist Life* estimated that at least 1,825 ordained clergywomen affiliated with the SBC and mainly in moderate-to-progressive groups which came out of the schism.[104]

Throughout the period Baptists were struggling to renegotiate the meaning and practice of the priesthood of all believers. The tension between a congregationally led church and a specialized ministry has created challenges for Baptists over four centuries. However, the pressure to redefine the Baptist understanding of clergy to include women, and not to limit women to the category of the laity was a new challenge from the mid-1960s forward. In these decades the tension has been fought over and preached around, written about and cried over by untold numbers of Baptists. The resolutions to the tension which have emerged have gone in a multitude of directions. Two stand out starkly. Biblicists have reasserted that the role of clergy belongs to men, as supported by their readings of scripture, although the laity can be populated by men and women, but even

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[104] Campbell-Reed and Durso, "The State of Women in Baptist Life, 2006," 295.

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the roles of laity must remain ordered with wives in submission to their husbands'

leadership. The other direction that resolution has taken is the embrace of clergy and laity

as roles to be filled by men and women, and the priesthood of all believers to remain

open to every baptized Christian in mutuality. Autonomists have argued the latter point,

and made it central to the purpose and identity statements of new Baptist institutions and

schools.

Going Separate Ways 1991-2000
Southern Baptists Finalize a Schism

While she was in her final year of seminary and the middle of a unit of Clinical

Pastoral Education, Joanna was hired as a minister to children at a progressive Baptist

church in Virginia. She served as the minister with children for almost three years, during

which time the pastor retired. In the interim time which followed, several staff conflicts

arose and Joanna found herself meeting with a consultant/therapist from the congregation

so that she could process her anger. The positive outcome of those consultations was

Joanna's realization that she was not just a wounded person in need of healing, but also a

gifted person able to observe and process things quickly. This helped her to conclude that

she might be able to make use of those gifts. Together with her sense of prophetic vision,

Joanna decided to seek the role of solo-pastor, an idea she had not previously considered.

In the years following the political organizing and battles to gain the upper hand

in the SBC, animosity cooled at the national Convention meetings. The Alliance of

Baptists was begun in 1987, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship got started the

summer after the twelfth loss by Autonomists in New Orleans. These and other new

Baptist societies went about the business of forming new organizations and charting new

directions. Conflict moved as several writers had predicted to the state Baptist conventions and the colleges and universities owned or run by those conventions.[105] Many more schisms happened in these agencies between 1991 and 2000, and a vast number of new Baptist theological schools, associations and societies were formed to fill the needs of churches no longer interested in affiliating with the SBC. Several state conventions split along moderate and conservative lines, with different groups winning control of state agencies and budgets.[106]

The finalizing of a schism among Southern Baptists brought grief and angst to many in the convention and among those who departed to begin or join one of the new groups. However, the choice to move away from the conflict and start something new was a kind of release and renewal for many Baptists. Like Joanna, who survived religious conflict and found a new sense of identity, Baptists of the Autonomist Party who left the fighting days behind to become part of something new, have discovered new possibilities for how to be Baptist. Those in the Biblicist Party who retained leadership in the Convention seem relieved in some ways to be able to pursue their agenda of cultural reform without giving too much energy to fighting within the SBC fold. This is not to imply that conflict has not continued in the aftermath of schism. It clearly has. In many Southern states the battle ground shifted to state conventions and many of the fifty Baptist colleges and universities with ties to those state conventions.

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[105] See Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence*, 311. See also Larry L. McSwain, "Swinging Pendulums: Reform, Resistance, and Institutional Change," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 256-75.

[106] In Texas and Virginia, where Autonomists controlled the state conventions, new groups of conservative opposition, feeling disenfranchised from their state conventions, formed separate associations. In Missouri the newer outside group was the more moderate one, which was formed in opposition to conservative control of the state convention. A number of Baptist colleges and universities also severed ties with the state conventions in the last three decades, such as Baylor University (Waco, Texas), Furman University (Greenville, South Carolina), and Mercer University (Macon, Georgia).

With a new thought in mind about becoming a pastor, Joanna attended the next

ABC-USA biennial meeting and went to various regional meetings with her résumé in

hand. An area minister told her about a new church that would likely be willing to call

her. After voting "no" initially, Gentry Memorial Baptist Church in Turner, Illinois,

eventually called her as their pastor. According to Joanna the "no" vote was the result of

undermining by a church member who had been serving as the interim pastor. He left the

congregation. As Joanna recalls, "In retrospect I shouldn't have [accepted the call], but at

the time I didn't have anybody to counsel with me."

Just because the explicit Baptist battles that posited women as issues and tokens,

has died down, does not mean that ministry for Baptist clergywomen is all smooth

sailing. One of the difficulties faced by the first couple of generations of female clergy is

a lack of guidance and mentorship. In many ways this is a common problem for all

ministers in free-church traditions, but it was particularly problematic because of the

inexperience of both young women in ministry and older male ministers who could not

fully understand their dilemmas nor offer adequate advice. The isolation and loneliness of

pastoring, small rural congregations also takes its toll on Baptist clergywomen who tend

to be called by such congregations.

Despite growth in the numbers of women in denominational leadership, seminary

enrollments, and church staff ministry during the 1970s, these numbers were largely

reversed among Southern Baptists as the Biblicists came to power in the 1980s and began

to reject the challenges to tradition that the women's presence and their stated criticism

proffered. In fact Biblicist Party leaders pushed back mightily against the advances of

women into leadership in the church, and mounted numerous counter-claims during the

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1980s and 90s. Their resistance to women's leadership in church and home was formalized in two statements which were adopted in the *Baptist Faith and Message*, 2000. In an article about "The Church" the BFM states, "While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture." [107] Under a newly created article, "The Family," Biblicists reaffirmed the now infamous, "gracious submission" statement: "A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation."[108]

The SBC itself leveled off on the financial front and some of its affiliated seminaries and other schools dropped enrollments for several of the years following Autonomist withdrawals. Eventually SBC agencies refused funds collected by CBF. In the long run the institution is clearly different, but seems little worse for the wear of the struggle. Predictions on both sides about the failures of old enemies have not yet come to pass, and all the Baptist groups still claim to be the standard bearers for the tradition. The following discussions, in the remaining chapters, concerning the flexibility and durability of the Baptist ideal of soul competency, seek to demonstrate how all such claims may indeed be relevant.

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[107] *Baptist Faith and Message,* 2000. Available online: http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp (accessed February 14, 2008).
[108] Ibid.

INTERPRETING THE MEANING OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST SCHISM
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is no accident of course, that until now women have been nearly invisible in our analysis. This denomination's official story is told almost entirely by men about men.[1] – Nancy Tatom Ammerman

Ordained women are naturally controversial and symbolic, and they are aware of it. They sit at the heart of the fundamentalist-moderate controversy, representing each side's cause—either to be purged from the Southern Baptist Convention as the embodiment of liberalism or to be held up in triumph as the symbol of open-mindedness and independence.[2] – Sarah Frances Anders and Marilyn Metcalf-Whittaker

In the last two decades a growing shelf of book-length treatments and collections

of essays about the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) schism have been making their

way to print. Southern Baptists and those outside their ranks can satisfy their curiosity,

read first-hand accounts, or take sides, by reading from the partisan accounts.[3] Those with

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[1] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, "Observing Southern Baptists: An Introduction," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 8.

[2] Sarah Frances Anders and Marilyn Metcalf-Whittaker, "Women as Lay Leaders and Clergy: A Crucial Issue," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 214. It is not overly clear what is meant by "naturally," but based on the tone of the essay it seems more akin to "apparently" or "obviously" rather than a stricter meaning such as "biologically" or "organically."

[3] The partisan literature from the Biblicist Party perspective includes: James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis: The Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Dallas, TX: Criterion Publications, 1986); James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1991). Hefley also published four other volumes between these first and last books in his series. From the Autonomist Party perspective come the following: Walter B. Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993); Rob James and Gary Leazer, eds., *The Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention: A Brief History* (Decatur, GA: Baptists Today, 1994). Walter B. Shurden and Randy Shepley, *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996). A couple of attempts to chronicle the events with little editorializing and/or little analysis include: Joe Edward Barnhart, *The Southern Baptist Holy War* (Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press, 1986); David T. Morgan, *The*

more academic interests in the SBC schism can choose from several historical or social

scientific studies.[4]

Despite some careful analysis of Baptist history, politics and theology, the

existing literature about the Southern Baptist schism lacks an adequate analysis of the

roles played or the contributions made by women. Although the schism literature

includes sociological and political analyses, it lacks any serious phenomenological

reading of the situation such as psychology or theological anthropology can offer.

Because the "history" of the SBC schism is so recent, and in some ways still unfolding,

the existing literature is also short on solid historical analysis that makes a compelling

and non-partisan argument about the reasons that schism occurred.[5] Finally the concern

with "biblical inerrancy" has functioned to distract attention from the dialectical tension

between competing authorities of scripture and individual freedom. This distraction has

resulted in a missed opportunity to explore the depths of meaning in soul competency.

New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991 (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996); and Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994). Two volumes of "partisan" literature are attempts to illustrate the rhetoric used by leaders (and laity) who were first-hand participants in convention during the years of schism. See Carl L. Kell and Raymond L. Camp, *In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999) and Carl L. Kell, *Exiled: Voices of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

[4] In this review I will only treat those books which came near the end of the twelve years of schism, or since that time. The most comprehensive academic studies appeared in the following order: Ellen M. Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists: A Subculture in Transition* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Bill Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, ed., *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993); Arthur Emery Farnsley II, *Southern Baptist Politics: Authority and Power in the Restructuring of an American Denomination* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1999); Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2002).

[5] Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope* and Ammerman, *Baptist Battles* make the most comprehensive arguments about the causes of the schism, but these volumes appeared as the most intensive fighting was coming to a close in 1990, and before a schism had fully been negotiated.

To begin filling in these gaps in the literature, and add to the growing body of analysis, the present study investigates the narratives of Baptist clergywomen and argues that their stories contribute to interpreting the schism. The following discussion develops a case for the contributions of this project by 1) presenting major contributions of the existing literature; 2) highlighting gaps and unexplored regions of that literature; and 3) describing how this study begins to correct the deficits outlined to above. The SBC schism literature lends itself to a roughly chronological consideration, and the four major deficits or gaps that the present study attempts to address are grouped into the following categories: sources, methods, context, and focus. The final section of this chapter outlines warrants needed for making the arguments about the SBC schism from the narratives of Baptist clergywomen.

Sources for Interpreting the Schism

The most comprehensive arguments about the SBC schism describe multiple causes and effects and utilize a variety of investigative and interpretive methods. Historian Bill Leonard and sociologist of religion Nancy Ammerman, both careful observers of Baptists and religion in America, offer complex and multi-layered analyses of the controversy. Writing before schism was certain, they still each manage to capture many of the salient features of the coming change, and offer compelling historical, theological and sociological evidence for its causes. Each addresses of the role of women's leadership and ordination in Baptist controversy, but say little about the possible contributions of women as a source for interpreting the schism.

In 1990 Nancy Tatom Ammerman released *Baptist Battles,* a wide-ranging

sociological study undertaken during the height of the conflict among Southern Baptists.[6]

In addition to describing the powerful factors of modernism and pluralism which

encroached on Southern religious life, Ammerman and her team of researchers employ

various anthropological modes of data collection, and use a host of sociological theories

in their analysis. She argues that "moderate Baptists" simply did not have the

organizational strength or "resource mobilization" needed to win the annual convention

elections of SBC presidency. The SBC presidential elections are imperative for changing

the structures of bureaucracy and power in the Convention.[7] "Fundamentalists," she

argues, brought to the battle: effective leadership, a clear agenda, successful

communication of a resonating message, and funding to back the plans. They mobilized

these resources and effected major changes to the leadership, theology and politics of the

denomination.

Ammerman also details a very different situation among "Baptist moderates."

Before 1979 those who later became "moderates," tended to be denominational officials

or pastors who were loyal to the SBC, and who did not set out to risk their jobs. When the

"fundamentalists" began to grow in power, the "moderates" lacked a critical mass of

persuasive speakers. They did not marshal or mobilize their forces adequately, and they

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[6] Ammerman, *Baptist Battles,* xi, 7.
[7] Ibid., 170. Ammerman explains the precarious situation under which leaders are elected and power may be transferred in the SBC organization. The election of an SBC president confers on one individual the power to appoint a powerful committee which nominates all other boards of trustees in SBC agencies who hold all personnel and policy power in convention agencies and schools. Ammerman, 170-71, says the notion of "'resource mobilization' approach to social movements . . . as developed by [Mayer N.] Zald, will turn our attention to the 'infrastructure' of 'means of communication, work schedules, and discretionary resources . . . preexisting networks, associations, and organizations of involved groups.' Achieving change in an organization requires changes in the beliefs people hold about that organization's goals and procedures, as well as changes in their behavior relative to the decision-making process. They have to come to believe that change is necessary and that they can and should act to try to effect that change."

failed to appreciate the lasting effects of the changes.[8] Other "moderates" seemed to hope

quietly that all the former rules of denominational life would again become operative, and

in their misplaced hope, they failed to join or act with like-minded Baptists.[9]

Ammerman devotes a major section of one chapter to telling the story of Baptist

clergywomen. She finds that they had become "symbolic of the division facing the

convention." She illustrates her point: "When fundamentalists claimed that moderates did

not really believe the Bible, they were likely to point to women pastors as the perfect

example of defying God's Word. And when moderates wanted to contrast their tolerance

and open-mindedness with fundamentalist oppressiveness, they pointed to their

acceptance of women as proof."[10] Not only were women symbols of difference in the

schism, they also faced, "overt opposition . . . routine exclusion . . . invisibility, along

with occasional jokes and hostile remarks."[11] The Southern Baptists that Ammerman

surveyed agreed that women's ordination constituted a "major issue" in the

denomination, and they agreed with that sentiment no matter their support or rejection of

the issue. One's position about Baptist clergywomen served as a "litmus test on both

sides," clearly drawing the "battle lines" between parties in the schism.[12]

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[8] Ibid., 177.

[9] Ibid., 177 ff. Ammerman describes a "fatal dilemma" faced by paid denominational leaders (heads of the major SBC agencies) who were sympathetic with "moderates." They had accrued, through the years, legitimacy as leaders with great influence over millions of Southern Baptists through literature, theological education, church programming, and the like. However, they had no official authority from denomination or churches. When "fundamentalists" attacked their leadership and their agendas, they had no legitimate authority on which to stand, and when they finally joined the fray of rhetoric and political action, they appeared self-serving. "Because their symbolic legitimacy had already been undermined, they could never regain a platform from which to address the majority of Baptists." Pastors and laity in the "moderate" camp also became weary of losing and unwilling to expend the time and energy to fight a losing battle.

[10] Ibid., 93.

[11] Ibid., 94.

[12] Ibid., 94-97. Ammerman surveyed 1,000 Baptists and was able to parse out the theological parties across a spectrum that locates small clearly defined groups at two extremes and several groups in the middle. Those in the middle varied in their willingness to identify with the extreme groups (i.e. "fundamentalists" and "moderates") and the set of ideas over which they will or will not claim to agree. Other issues

Also in 1990, Bill Leonard released *God's Last and Only Hope*, in which he observes "The Controversy" before a schism is finally decided, but he recognizes the dynamics and predicts with accuracy several outcomes of the battles.[13] He argues that the century-old "Grand Compromise" of Baptists was already a cracking synthesis when "fundamentalists" stepped forward with new revisions of Baptist history, belief and practice.[14] A variety of factors stressed the tenuous compromise that held the SBC together. He includes in his list: the erosion of Southern identity, growing pluralism in the South, pressures from business and industry to operate the church as a business, loss of shared religious experiences which were reinforced by the SBC's numerous church programs, and attempts by denominational bureaucrats and seminary educators to lead and teach in such a way that biblical authority and modern values might be bridged. As the old adhesives which held Southern Baptists together began to disintegrate, the rhetoric and ideology of "fundamentalists" became the new social glue which held the institution together by "re-mythologizing the SBC."[15] In the transition first "progressives" and later "moderate" leaders took their leave or changed their allegiance to the new leadership.

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contributing to the division included: authority of scripture and pastors, social issues (such as abortion and homosexuality), and the proper way to share the gospel.

[13] Bill Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope,* 173-87. Leonard suggests four possible future scenarios: schism, sustained conflict, hostile takeover, or formation of a new coalition. Portions of each prediction played into the outcome over the decade following his speculations.

[14] Ibid., 177. Walter Shurden posed the question of a "cracking synthesis" in 1981. See Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is it Cracking?" in *Baptist History and Heritage* 16, no 2 (April 1981): 2-11. In the essay Shurden identifies at least five stressors on the Southern Baptist synthesis: cultural, denominational, financial, creedal and theological. He concludes that some elements of the SBC synthesis are in need of cracking, and that Southern Baptists needed to know their history in order to understand what was happening to their denomination.

[15] Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope,* 177.

In an essay presented by Leonard several years later he elaborates the causes of schism by focusing on the changes experienced by local Baptist churches. [16] He argues that the following factors contributed to the "decentering" of the SBC. Local Baptist churches are no longer populated by members loyal to a denomination, and those same churches have been forced to take sides in the battles which began in the early 1980s. Funds in those churches are increasingly redirected to local rather than national or even regional causes. And decisions related to affiliations of the local church are increasingly made by intention rather than assumed loyalties. The largest of local churches ("mega-churches") no longer have need of the supports of a denomination. They send their own missionaries, write their own educational literature, and the largest even support their own schools of theology. Younger ministers are graduating from seminaries (both the traditional SBC schools and the newer "moderate" ones) and entering churches with less denominational loyalty and more energy to spend on non-denominational causes.

Leonard says the issue of women's role in church and society was one of the doctrinal issues that crossed the "thin line" between "inerrant Scripture and inerrant dogma."[17] The limited role of women in church and home was one of several logical conclusions from the "fundamentalist" view of the inerrancy of scripture. Ironically, he argues, the increasing number of women entering places of ministry in SBC churches and agencies was *also* a logical conclusion – of the "deep spirituality of the Southern Baptist people." It was "less of a sign of rabid liberalism" and more a predictable outgrowth of

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[16] Bill J. Leonard, "One Denomination, Many Centers: The Southern Baptist Situation" in *Baptists in the Balance: The Tension between Freedom and Responsibility,* ed. Everett Goodwin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997), 228-42. The paper was first presented at The 157th Annual Conference of The American Society of Church History, Jan. 5-8, 1995, Chicago, IL.
[17] Ibid., 151.

years of nurture for girls who were encouraged throughout their lives to hear and follow God's call.[18]

Leonard describes how the 1984 Kansas City resolution about women's role in ministry functioned as more than a non-binding resolution.[19] It guided policies at the Home Mission Board, prompting the elimination of salaries to women who were pastoring in new churches.[20] This in turn raised questions in individual congregations, which ordained and hired women as ministers, about their willingness to continue supporting the SBC financially. This reconsideration, Leonard argues, was among the earliest signs of true fragmentation of the SBC.[21] He observes that the 1984 resolution elicited fears by some Baptists that women's ordination could become as divisive as inerrancy itself. Women's ordination functioned as an accelerant to a fire of division that was already burning in the SBC. Leonard repeats the "fundamentalist" line of thinking: "If women thought that God had 'called' them, they were simply mistaken, since God would not violate his inerrant and infallible Word as fundamentalists interpreted it."[22] He concludes that the issue of women's ordination "is a major source of fragmentation for the denomination with no sign of resolution in sight."[23]

Both Ammerman and Leonard give a wide ranging analysis of the SBC battles in the 1980s, and observe the salient features of the division. They both argue that women's

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[18] Ibid., 154.

[19] Ammerman, *Baptist Battles,* 223-24. At the 1984 SBC, which met in Kansas City, a resolution on women's ordination was adopted. The biblical logic against women's ordination included this statement: "the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall (I Tim. 2:13ff)." It also proclaimed support for "the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination."

[20] One of the ways the SBC supported new churches was to sponsor them through the Home Mission Board and provide some limited funding for the pastor's salary during the first few years of operation.

[21] Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope,* 153.

[22] Ibid., 152-53. This sentiment was captured in a Public Television interview of W.A. Criswell by Bill Moyers.

[23] Ibid., 154.

ordination played a major role in the disputes which led to schism. However, they do not

plumb any further to explore how the women's experiences might contribute to an

interpretation of the SBC division.[24] In fairness, the schism was still incomplete at the

time their writings appeared, but both returned again to investigate the aftermath of SBC

division. And still women are reduced to a chapter of the discussion or not mentioned at

all.

Methods for Interpreting the Schism

Another small group of studies can be considered together for their emphasis on

observing change in the SBC, and arguing that socio-cultural and political analysis bear

out the best explanations of the schism. Ammerman provides a scholarly bridge between

her early, multi-layered analysis in *Baptist Battles* and her later edited collection of

essays in *Southern Baptists Observed*.[25] Arthur Farnsley and Ellen Rosenberg each

provide essays for the collection, and each released a book-length treatment about

changes in the SBC. Rosenberg's came before schism was certain. Farnsley was a

member of the research team that contributed to *Baptist Battles*, and his interests in the

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[24] Rosemary Skinner Keller points out that the dawning of social history and the inclusion of women's contributions and experiences in the scholarship of religious history in America only came to the fore in the early 1970s. In her analysis a quarter century later, she observes, "historiography, as it demonstrates the inclusion of women and the difference that their presence makes in interpreting the history of religious institutions as well as the interaction of religion and American culture, has not come as far in the last twenty-five years as feminist scholars of women and religion would have hoped." Her follow up question is at the heart of the present study: "what is *possible* at this stage in the process of developing a new direction in American religious history based upon the leadership and participation of both men and women?" See Keller, "'When the Subject is Female': The Impact of Gender in Revisioning American Religious History," in *Religious Diversity and American Religious History: Studies in Traditions and Cultures*, ed. Walter H. Conser, Jr. and Sumner B. Twiss (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 104.

[25] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, ed., *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination* Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993). In this volume, Ammerman brings together Baptists and non-Baptists, scholars of religion and the social sciences, and even journalists. Her framing of the book helps unify the methodological diversity of their approaches.

SBC led to his own analysis of the changing denomination, *Southern Baptist Politics.*[26]

Although they do utilize a variety of research methods and offer a range of perspectives

on the SBC schism, none of the studies in this group put the events under the microscope

of either psychology or theological anthropology. And even though they offer a great

diversity of interpretations of the schism, only one essay in *Southern Baptists Observed*

gives any serious consideration to the experiences of Baptist women during those years.

In 1989 ethnographer, Ellen M. Rosenberg published her account of the nation's

largest Protestant denomination in the mid-to-late 1980s.[27] The anthropological study

entitled, *The Southern Baptists: A Subculture in Transition* is not primarily concerned

with the relentless controversy (not yet a schism), but Rosenberg was unable to avoid a

discussion of it. Her argument concludes that there had been a disappearance of a "caste

system" in the South based on race and class. The loss of religious power and cultural

influence prompted "fundamentalists" to wage a campaign to prove their form of religion

was still potent, argues Rosenberg. Their "principal battleground is sex and family,

particularly the issues of abortion, homosexuality, and pornography."[28] These issues are

in concert with "the context of the current social movement variously termed the New

Right, New Christian Right, or New Religious Political Right (NRPR)." [29] She finds

every Southern Baptist attitude also present in the NRPR's ideology: "militarism,

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[26] Neither Rosenberg nor Farnsley are Southern Baptists. The contributors to Ammerman's edited collection are about half insiders and half non-Southern Baptists. See also Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics.*

[27] Ellen M. Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists: A Subculture in Transition,* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

[28] Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists*, 9-10.

[29] Ellen M. Rosenberg, "The Southern Baptist Response to the Newest South" in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 180.

chauvinism, sexism and sexual repression, familial authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism,

intolerance . . . racism."[30]

Up to the time of Rosenberg's study, most reports and portrayals of the religious

dispute had been offered by those internal to the SBC. As a non-Southern Baptist,

Rosenberg emphasizes that the SBC conflicts were not mainly internal issues. She

asserts, "The genius of the "fundamentalist" leadership is to realize how well the focus on

sex and family, and Biblical literalism, go together."[31] It allowed, in her estimation, a

joining of the upsurge in conservative U.S. politics with a similar movement in the largest

religious group of the South. Maintaining "white male authority" was central in the

purpose of the "fundamentalists" in Rosenberg's judgment.

Rosenberg does little to addresses the issue of women in ministry directly,

assessing women in the pastorate as evidence of one of several contradictions among the

beliefs and practices of Southern Baptists. She mentions a few leaders' positions about

the ordination of women as well as disputes that ensue over the issue.[32] She does not see

clergywomen as a cause of the schism. Instead she understands the women to be

ostracized as a *result* of the fighting: "The steady marginalization of the handful of

women pastors is an important result of fundamentalist pressure."[33]

Arthur Farnsley, who was part of Nancy Ammerman's team of researchers in her

early study of Southern Baptists, *Baptist Battles,* pursued his insights about the

denomination which resulted in is own analysis published in 1994. In *Southern Baptist*

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[30] Ibid. 180-81.
[31] Ibid., 10.
[32] Ibid., 136, 143, 199-200, passim. Even Rosenberg's discussion of the 1984 Kansas City Resolution against women serving as pastors is couched in terms of its dependence on the story in Genesis of the "fall" of Adam and Eve, rather than focused on the lived experience of contemporary Baptist women.
[33] Ibid., 127.

Politics Farnsley argues that in the end it was politics which had to settle theological differences between "fundamentalists" and "moderates."[34] The procedural structures and practices of the SBC made possible the creation of a two-party system in which the "fundamentalist majority" won the day after a dozen years of victories in the Convention's presidential election. Whatever else the controversy was about, he says, the issue of pluralism was central, and how to manage the differences of theology and belief ultimately were decided by democratic vote and majority rule.

He argues that the political effect of trying to hold together disparate points of view in a two party system, such as the one that emerged for Southern Baptists, draws the organization toward the center and urges consensus by majority rule. The SBC was founded on a common purpose and did not envision itself negotiating a great variety of special interests. Rather it organized itself in the mid-nineteenth century as a populist democracy that reached consensus on practical matters (i.e. how to spend the money it collected), not to negotiate complex theological differences.[35] One hundred years later numerous special interests, expressing the modernist and pluralist context, came into play at any given SBC meeting. It became apparent that most any interest can hold the center for a time, but will ultimately fail to maintain a consensus over the long run. The power of the vote, and the non-coercive culture in which religion thrives in the U.S., make holding consensus very difficult.[36]

Farnsley gives almost no attention to the role of women or their ordination in the unfolding political battle of the SBC controversy. From his argument it can be inferred

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[34] Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics,* 140-43.
[35] Ibid., 40-43.
[36] Ibid., 139-43. Farnsley suggests that the resulting arrangement might not remain if the "fundamentalists" were ever to lose the simple majority of those attending each year's convention meeting.

that like every other "special interest" at stake in the SBC battles, the women's ordination issue may have operated in some significant way. However, in the end it could not hold the center and was eclipsed by democratic procedures that held sway in the convention.

Nancy Ammerman continued her quest to interpret the changes to the Southern Baptist Convention by gathering a group of insider and outsider scholars to offer analysis of the schism. She edited *Southern Baptists Observed,* which appeared in 1993 and provided numerous additional discussions about cause and effect in the SBC schism.[37] These contributors to the scholarly debate also brought numerous methodological approaches to their work, from sociology and anthropology to religious discourse and journalistic inquiries. The essays in the collection, especially taken together, highlight the complexity of causes in the schism from multiple perspectives. Notably Samuel Hill, historian of Southern religion, observes the complexity of causes in a succinct fashion. He argues that both "progressives" and "fundamentalists" were kept out of the central decision making of the SBC for social and theological reasons, respectively. He argues that a number of factors coincided in the late 1970s which made a dramatic change in SBC leadership and politics possible. He summarizes his case this way: "The tug-of-war that has characterized recent SBC life is part and parcel of the modernization process, the reality of plural philosophies, and the deprovincialization of the South. But the crisis also has its roots in SBC denominational values, those reflected in programs and strategies, common attitudes toward education, and theological-ethical teachings."[38]

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[37] Ammerman, *Southern Baptists Observed.*
[38] Ibid., 46.

Many collections and monographs about the Baptist schism treat women or women's issues in one chapter.[39] In *Southern Baptists Observed* Ammerman comments in her introduction to the edited volume, "It is no accident of course, that until now women have been nearly invisible in our analysis. This denomination's official story is told almost entirely by men about men."[40] Although it is not entirely clear what "official story" she references here, Ammerman does go on to say that Sarah Frances Anders and Marilyn Metcalf-Whittaker will challenge the occlusion. The challenge they present is inaugural at best. They do provide data about the numbers of women serving in various capacities in Baptist life, and they report on personal interviews and a survey of 300 clergywomen. This statistical data is foundational, but the analysis is minimal.

Anders and Metcalf-Whittaker observe, "Ordained women are naturally controversial and symbolic, and they are aware of it. They sit at the heart of the fundamentalist-moderate controversy, representing each side's cause—either to be purged from the Southern Baptist Convention as the embodiment of liberalism or to be held up in triumph as the symbol of open-mindedness and independence."[41] They go on to say that the women they have surveyed and interviewed prefer not to be understood or portrayed in this fashion, yet the essay itself effects similar understandings by pointing out the minority status of women in every leadership role in Baptist life. Findings of the survey of Baptist clergywomen explore the dilemma of clergywomen in relation to the

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[39] Already this has been demonstrated as the case with other scholarly monographs. It is the case in some of the partisan literature. For example, see *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993). The chapter in that collection is by Elizabeth Bellinger, "More Hidden than Revealed: The History of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry," 129-50.

[40] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, "Observing Southern Baptists: An Introduction," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 8.

[41] Anders and Metcalf-Whittaker, "Women as Lay Leaders and Clergy," 214.

SBC, but do not move beyond the impasse to consider any ways that the women's experiences might deepen understanding or analyze the Southern Baptist schism.[42]

Repeatedly the authors draw connections between clergywomen and the SBC which serve to reinforce the marginalized and symbolic status of women in the controversy without really challenging that status or suggesting other ways the relationship might be understood. This portrayal of women described and furthered by Anders and Metcalf-Whittaker gets at the heart of the disagreement that the present study has with the existing literature about SBC schism. Women are treated as symbols and issues, but not taken seriously as sources of information or insight for understanding or explaining the schism.

Of the monographs and collections considered thus far, only Ammerman's *Baptist Battles* and Anders' and Metcalf-Whittaker's accounts provide a minimal description of the situation experienced by Baptist clergywomen. They skim the surface phenomena, but they do not explore the depths of experience or potential meanings in the situation. This study seeks to take those next steps by means of thick historical description and also a deeper phenomenological exploration of the women's experiences in dialogue with object relations theory and theological anthropology.

Context for Interpreting the Schism

As recently as the spring of 2008 during the final writing months of this study, remnants of the Autonomist and Biblicist parties continue to spar publicly and disagree

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[42] Ibid., 207. While the factual information provided in the Anders and Metcalf-Whittaker essay is useful, at some points the facts seem vague and minimally supported. For instance they claim that women filled "as many as one-third to 40 percent of nonpastoral church-staff positions" in the 1940s and early 1950s. However, it is unclear the source of such findings or if they are referring specifically to Southern Baptist women.

over a variety of issues.[43] The "history" of the SBC schism is not yet entirely finished,

although the new institutions which have resulted and the differences between them are

hardly in dispute. Thanks to time and critical distance, the two remaining (and most

recent) monographs do slightly more to consider the roles and contributions of women in

the schism. However, they too, have not gone far enough. Both David Stricklin and Barry

Hankins admit to being on the margins of Baptist life, seeing it up close, yet not being

full participants themselves. This may contribute further to their ability to bring new and

different analyses to the question of the SBC schism. An important facet to their analysis,

in each case, is their ability to see multiple situations which need their focus and

attention. By looking at the "genealogies" of intellectual influence on the two extreme

parties in the SBC schism, Hankins and Stricklin reach beyond the insularity of

interpretations which keep recycling previously told stories.[44]

 In *Genealogy of Dissent,* David Stricklin traces three different but overlapping

"genealogies" or networks of Baptists, which were influenced directly or indirectly by

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[43] Examples of newsworthy events in the spring of 2008 which highlighted the differences between the remnants of the two parties include: 1) refusals by SBC leaders to participate in the New Baptist Covenant meetings; 2) a failed discrimination lawsuit by former Southwestern Seminary professor, Sheri Klouda. See the following reports from *Associated Baptist Press*: Hannah Elliott, "Covenant Most Important Baptist Event Since Civil War, Organizer tells CBF" (February 19, 2007); Elliott, "Dismissed Professor Files Lawsuit against Southwestern Seminary," (March 9, 2007); Elliott, "Trial Set for June as Dismissed Prof Klouda Makes a Life in Indiana" (January 7, 2008); and Ken Camp, "Unity the Focus of Baptist Gathering, Organizers Insist (January 30, 2008).

[44] Much of the partisan literature continues to quote secondary sources and observations about the SBC schism, without introducing any new perspectives or analysis. Attempts by Hankins and Stricklin to consider the other "overlapping situations" are akin to Edward Farley's third task of "interpreting situations" which entails taking a view that tries to understand the "intersituational issues" or the "impingement of other situations on the local situation." See Edward Farley, "Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology" in *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 39. The problem of "recycling history" is addressed by Philip E. Thompson and Anthony R. Cross in their introduction to *Recycling the Past or Researching History? Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2005), xv - xviii. They note the ongoing debate about Baptist origins, the great variety of sources for Baptist thought and practice, the perennial concern for Baptist identity, and dilemma of balancing primary and secondary historical writings as contributors to the problem of "recycling the past" for Baptists.

Walter Nathan Johnson. A denominational bureaucrat in the early twentieth century,

Johnson became disillusioned with Southern Baptists, and began to challenge traditional

views and systems in the South. He inspired several generations of dissenters to challenge

and critique SBC denominational leaders in the areas of race relations, peace and justice

and equal rights for women.[45] Stricklin says of this group:

> Their activism arose from many wellsprings, but all drew inspiration, in part,
> from sources that ultimately can be traced back to Walt Johnson. Some of these
> people achieved heroic status among large numbers of Southern Baptists; some
> even held positions of leadership in Southern Baptist educational institutions and
> agencies. But many suffered for their actions and beliefs, losing jobs,
> experiencing physical danger and injury, or suffering various forms of character
> assassination. In the end, many found themselves held up as examples of
> denominational drift into liberalism and took on powerful roles as symbols in the
> political struggle that culminated in the fundamentalist resurgence within the SBC
> and its affiliated agencies and institutions in the 1980s and 90s.[46]

At its heart Stricklin presents a political history of Southern Baptists by

identifying three groups. "Progressive dissenters" shared a network of influence, ideas

and values, and their interests were mainly local. They held little concern for

denominational bureaucracy or ownership of the SBC institutions. "Fundamentalists"

desired doctrinal purity, he argues, and are the most closely aligned with average

Southern Baptists theologically. "Moderates" preferred institutional loyalty. They

tolerated the "progressives" and those more conservative or "fundamentalist." However,

in the end true moderates cared more about preservation of SBC institutions than

doctrinal purity or social justice.

Women, Strickin says, were more willing to take action than most of the

progressive dissenters, in order to achieve ordained status and jobs in ministry. The

resulting "movement" for women's ordination, Stricklin argues, energized the forces on

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[45] Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 20-21, 29-31.
[46] Ibid., 21.

the far right to mobilize and take over the leadership of the convention. He says, "The movement of women toward ordination may have been the single most important factor in bringing about the fundamentalist resurgence in the SBC."[47] In the end, he says the women did everyone a favor by letting a pluralistic (and antagonistic) group divide into its major camps and *all* still remain Baptist.

Stricklin portrays Southern Baptist women seeking ordination as the "closest thing to an actual movement that Southern Baptist progressive activists ever achieved."[48] He suggests three sources for their inspiration: connections, sympathy and some outright support from the other dissenters growing out of the Walt Johnson genealogy, the general feminist awakening in the second half of the twentieth century and the influence of evangelism as promoted by Woman's Missionary Union.[49]

Some of his arguments are missing important evidence. For instance he fails, in other parts of the story, to mention the contributions of WMU to the social conscience of the SBC in the twentieth century. Specifically he does not mention WMU's appropriations of the Social Gospel or their commitments to improve race relations and cooperation with African American Baptist women's groups.[50] He does, however, credit WMU with being the only denominational agency to offer strong support to early female ministers.[51] And he claims that WMU "created an unintentional undercurrent of

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[47] Ibid., 140.
[48] Ibid., 118, 131-38. The "movement" included the organization Southern Baptist Women in Ministry (SBWIM) and more than just the organization. In 1996 the group dropped "Southern" from its name.
[49] Ibid., 120-22.
[50] Although he notes the influence of WMU on the young women seeking ordination, Stricklin fails to make connections between the Social Gospel and progressive reform by WMU in the twentieth century. For a counterpoint, see Paul Harvey, "Saints but Not Subordinates; The Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention" in *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism,* ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 13-15.
[51] Initially the Christian Life Commission made some commitments to women's ordination by printing materials in support of the practice, and holding a conference, "Christian Liberation for Women" in 1974.

radicalism that caused many women who had grown up Southern Baptist to question the assumptions behind this common experience."[52]

Stricklin's research methods included gathering oral history of major actors in the life of the SBC in recent years and consulting with texts and archival materials. He tells the stories of individuals as evidence of the larger trends he is attempting to show. His argument is mainly a discursive one, concerned the history of ideas and the influence of Baptist actors on one another in the "genealogy." He is not as interested in practices as he is in ideas, although he does take notice of practices as they relate to political power, and observes for instance how "fundamentalists" used their resources to gain control:

> For one thing the culture of protest they [fundamentalists] created was much stronger than that of the progressives. It was formed into a movement, something done among progressives only by the women in ministry. This happened partly because the fundamentalists cared more about the institutional life of the SBC than did any progressives except the women. Also unlike the progressives, however, the fundamentalists built on the traditionalist foundation of Southern Baptists in clear rhetorical, organizational, and tactical ways.[53]

It can be disputed that women seeking ordination cared for SBC institutions, as Stricklin argues, save the church itself (or other places of ministry). Nevertheless, by matters of degree his observation makes sense, despite the lack of solid evidence. In other words, by forming a movement the women do show more initiative and political will than other male "progressives." Yet at least two things give evidence to the contrary. First the progressives did form movements which resulted in new and more viable alternative organizations: the Alliance, the Baptist Peace Fellowship, for instance, each have paid staff and sizeable budgets. Baptist Women in Ministry continues to be mainly a volunteer

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[52] Stricklin, *Genealogy of Dissent,* 120.
[53] Ibid., 160.

organization. Women didn't want to save institutions. They wanted to serve in them, mainly in the churches.

The most recent analysis of the SBC schism is Barry Hankins' *Uneasy in Babylon.* In the 2002 book Hankins aims to illuminate the motivations and purposes of new "conservative" Southern Baptist leaders who took the helm of the SBC in the aftermath of the schism. [54] He traces the intellectual influences of neoevangelicalism on several influential current SBC leaders, and shows how those influences galvanized the movement to turn the convention in a new direction.

Hankins argues that the attraction of neoevangelicalism in the late twentieth century to "conservative" SBC leaders was its "reengagement with culture" after decades of cultural withdrawal and isolation.[55] Hankins presents Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Richard Land, director the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, and Paige Patterson, SBC president and president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, as three exemplary types of "culture warriors." The value of reengagement in politics and culture for Southern Baptist conservatives suits the two most important perceptions they hold: 1) American culture is in a serious and perilous crisis, and 2) as Christian leaders they are called and commanded by scripture to battle the culture using the directives of scriptures to guide them in all matters, starting with regaining control of the denominational machinery.[56]

Hankins uses an extensive oral history collection, much of which he personally gathered, and documents of recent decades to portray the conservatives as "culture

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[54] Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon,* 11-12. Hankins chooses the terms "conservative" and "moderate" to describe the two parties of the schism.
[55] Ibid., 40.
[56] Ibid., 9-10.

warriors," who hold varying degrees of confidence about what can be changed, but little disagreement about who the enemy is and how Southern Baptists lost their way. They believe that both American culture and U.S. government have become hostile to the Christian religion. They also believe that moderate Southern Baptists "bought in, or perhaps sold out, to the secular progressivist impulse" in the middle and late twentieth century.[57]

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president, Albert Mohler, is an intellectual spokesperson for Southern Baptists, and he is deeply concerned about a crisis of culture he and other Baptists perceive in America. He holds that the South of thirty years ago was an intact Christian culture, and that the liberalism brought to the South by progressivists ruined that intactness.[58] As a Calvinist he believes in the power of Christ to transform the culture in small and local ways, but also in larger more powerful ones. He depends on the model of sixteenth-century Calvinism for a way forward. Mohler calls for building "a Christian, or at least Protestant, culture from scratch in the midst of great adversity and hostility."[59] The goal for the seminary he leads is to form pastors who can undertake this task. No longer do pastors need to be trained for a "church culture" he insists. "The United States is now a mission field where evangelical leaders must interpret the culture and stand as prophets against it."[60]

While Mohler is the leading intellectual who articulates this position, Richard Land is an exemplary "informed activist" who simplifies and argues in Washington D.C. and other public forums for the right of Southern Baptists (and other Christians) to

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[57] Ibid., 45.
[58] Ibid., 50.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

reclaim their heritage and keep alive the traditions of a country they perceive to have been built on Judeo-Christian principles.[61] A third group of leaders are the preachers who popularize these views through their writing and speaking, the likes of which include Adrian Rogers (now deceased) pastor of a mega-church in Memphis, and James Draper, executive of LifeWay, the SBC's publication and marketing agency.[62] Both men served as convention presidents in the early years of the conservative rise to power.

The issue of the inerrancy of the Bible, which was touted by the conservatives as the central issue over which conservatives and moderates split, is key for these culture warriors, but it has been nearly eclipsed in populist appeal by later issues including abortion and women's role in the home and church.[63] Mohler and other conservatives perceive SBC moderates as getting it right when they took sides with progressive liberals on the issue of civil rights against racism, but they believe that moderates blindly lined up on the wrong side of the issues of abortion, school prayer, and women's rights.

Hankins believes that conservative leaders made the issue of women in pastoral leadership central to their culture war for several reasons. He suggests it was "merely one aspect of an overall theology of gender that carves out separate roles for men and women, both in churches and in families."[64] Additionally he says, "The conservative effort to resist the cultural forces favoring gender equality is part of a broader attempt to be

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[61] Ibid., 22-24, 52-57ff.
[62] Ibid., 61-70.
[63] Ibid., 43. In 1997 Mohler called abortion "a stick of dynamite that exploded the issue" of the divisions between SBC moderates and conservatives. For him it brought clarity to the inerrancy question. Hankins notes, "If some seminary professors and other moderate elites could be wrong on abortion, that was all the conservatives in the churches needed to know."
[64] Ibid., 201.

faithful to scripture as conservatives understand it, but this issue also offers them a very visible platform to oppose the prevailing trends of society."[65]

In the wider neo-evangelical world a diversity of legitimate stances on the issues of women's roles in home and church is tolerated. Both the egalitarian understanding and the complementarian view are held widely among evangelicals.[66] However, Southern Baptist conservatives chose to take a hard-line stance on the issue beginning with early convention resolutions in the 1980s. They solidified their stance in the hiring policies of Southern Seminary (and other SBC agencies) in the early 1990s. And the issue was culminated in the adoption of the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message*, which called for the gracious submission of wives to husbands and limited the role pastor to males.

Why this insistence on female submission, when other evangelicals agreed to disagree? And why not recognize the legitimacy of various practices and interpretations of scripture? Hankins contends that for Southern Baptist conservatives these issues "are ultimately matters of biblical authority." He also observes, "SBC conservatives in the late twentieth century were therefore resisting the prevailing trends of the larger culture by denying women full equality within their churches and insisting that they submit to the authority of their husbands within the family. Full equality of opportunity for women in all spheres had become the culturally orthodox position, and SBC conservatives continue to resist this and even attempt to reverse it."[67] With this highly visible issue conservatives

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 225-28. Evangelical organizations typify these positions: The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood espouses the complementarian view of marriage and refuses women roles of pastoral leadership; Christians for Biblical Equality upholds the egalitarian view of marriage and women's ability to fill pastoral roles.

[67] Ibid., 238.

also gain traction for their larger concerns by capturing media attention and espousing their positions in a public forum.[68]

Like other studies of the SBC schism, Stricklin and Hankins each devote a chapter to discussion of the role of women in the debate. Stricklin makes a case that women seeking ordination were exemplary "dissenters," calling for gender justice in the early 1980s. In the process of launching a movement of support and action, he argues, they became catalysts, which galvanized "fundamentalists" to commit themselves to winning the denominational apparatus of control for their cause. Hankins tells the story of women's submission from the perspective of "culture warriors" who say they were galvanized not by women's ordination, but by the of issue abortion to win control in the denomination and to regain a stronghold in the culture. They made women's submission in home and church a cause for expressing their concern about the culture crisis and the right response from an inerrant Bible. They used every possible opportunity to challenge the cultural norm of women's equality and gain a hearing for their other concerns.

Focus of Interpretations of the Schism

Contributors to the academic literature about the schism recognize the significance of the issue of meaning and authority about biblical texts. Inside the SBC this concern was framed by the Biblicist Party as an impassioned debate about biblical inerrancy and all that it implied. Members of the Autonomist Party were reluctant to mount credible arguments in direct, explicit opposition to inerrancy for fear of reprisals,

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[68] Ibid., 41-52. On this final point, the ability to speak out publicly about truth as they see it, conservatives believe they suffer from the cultural crisis in America which previously would have allowed and even welcomed such speech, but now rejects it. Mohler, Land and other SBC culture warriors take every opportunity to speak and debate their views publicly. See Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 218. Mohler is a frequent guest on *Larry King Live* and other radio and television talk shows.

including loss of respect, credibility and their jobs. This internal aspect of the schism has

spilled over to the analysis of its meaning in several significant ways. On one hand

historians, sociologists and journalists have been slightly dismissive of fundamentalism,

in ways suggested by Susan Harding, treating the "fundamentalist" as the supreme

"other."[69] On the other hand analysis has also lacked a serious engagement with the other

side of the tension in soul competency: the individual's liberty of conscience. The third

problem in being captured by the inerrancy debate is a failure to see potential for

exploring deeper existential human questions, which are present under the surface

discussions about soul competency.

Exploring such depths of meaning in soul competency is to interpret the dialectic

between the competing authorities. Often the preoccupation with "biblical inerrancy" has

been a distraction from other important issues, or else it has been seen as so central that

everything else is portrayed as orbiting around it. This is more the case in the partisan

stories than academic accounts reviewed herein. However, one of the subtle losses in this

preoccupation is the lack of attention to the dialectical tension itself. Not only is there a

dialect between competing authorities of Bible and individual liberty of conscience, but

as poles of tension, they also correspond to deeper human tendencies and needs, premoral

goods, and realms of human well-being. The role of the individual's conscience, and its

constraints by community and biblical text, disappear in stories that are caught up in

questions about the inerrancy debate: Who took which side? And what were the shades of

belief and disbelief about the Bible? How far does one go before sliding down the

"slippery slope" of unbelief? This study tries to recover from these distractions and

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[69] Susan Harding, "Epilogue: Observing the Observers," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 318-37.

reclaim the opportunity to explore the depths of meaning in soul competency. To do this, we will explore the ways that Baptist clergywomen navigate its depths and reinterpret its meaning.

As time and distance grow the analyses of the SBC schism continues to offer better and more nuanced accounts of the role and contributions of women to the events and dynamics of the split. However, none of the observers yet goes far enough in locating the experiences and stories of Baptist clergywomen at the center of their interpretations. It is time, however, to take additional steps to remedy this shortcoming. The story thus far has been recounted, as Ammerman points out, "by men and about men." Yet women were present and living in the context, not as public figures, but as real actors. They have negotiated the every-day tensions of the uncomfortable situation, the unsupportive parishioner, the mystified outsider. They have also negotiated the deeper and more pervasive tensions between authorities of experience and tradition, between competing values about meaning and power, and between call and ministry. Analyzing *their* situation will contribute to a better interpretation of the situation of the SBC schism.

Clergywomen have also lived in the tension of being misunderstood and misrepresented in life and in the literature about the schism. Until recently Baptist clergywomen have never had a chance *not* to be controversial. Since Addie Davis was ordained over forty years ago they have been portrayed as anomalies, issues, tokens, symbols and even jokes. It is time to see their more substantive contributions to Baptist life and to understanding the schism. Finally, as Stricklin points out, clergywomen did constitute one of the early organized movements of those in the left wing of the

convention. It is time for their stories to be considered deeply and in a way that takes the social and historical analysis into new territories.

Building an Interpretive Model of the SBC Schism

Although all the major studies of the Southern Baptist schism, and most of the partisan literature, make some observations about the cause and effect of social factors in the schism, nearly none of them offer any insight into psychological dynamics of the split.[70] In the remaining chapters of this study, the argument will extend in yet another direction beyond these social aspects, which were indeed factors, to investigate the psychological dynamics, which may also be observed in the events of the SBC institutions. My attempt to build an interpretive model for understanding the schism will map psychological and theological dynamics, and their attending premoral goods onto the social and political factors that the existing literature attends to more carefully.

How does one go about making such arguments? The following discussion is a brief attempt to reveal the scaffolding of the arguments which form an interpretive model and which are developed more fully in other chapters. To reveal this framework the following discussion addresses the warrants for the major arguments of the study, and how various disciplines of the study are conceived as relating to each other.

Four divergent premises or warrants are necessary for making the arguments and building an interpretive model. First, this study understands culture as a human universal and as "a way of life" which both shapes its participants and is shaped by individuals and

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[70] A few concerns are addressed, such as charismatic leadership, grief over loss, grandiosity, etc., are hinted at or mentioned, but no sustained psychological analysis of the schism has been offered to date.

institutions in that culture.[71] Following the summary definition of culture offered by

Tanner in Chapter II, this study understands Southern Baptists to engage in one such

culture, which in itself is multi-variant, contested, dynamic, evolving and yet identifiable

over an extended period of time, including (but not limited to) the range of years covered

by this study from the end of World War I to 2000.

Secondly, this study assumes that within the culture of Southern Baptists

something actually happened over the past three decades which can be observed at

various cultural sites in Baptist life, such as the elite writings of trained observers. The

happenings which are the object of study may also be observed through official

ecclesiastical actions and documents of the institution itself, such as annual meeting

minutes, official changes to the denominational leadership and structure, and media

reports of these changes. They may also be seen through the refraction of the experiences

of persons who participated actively and knowingly as stakeholders, although not as

officially sanctioned leaders in Baptist life.

Additionally, this study assumes that something can be argued *from* the careful

observations of people's lives and narratives who live in the culture *toward* an

understanding of the larger whole based on the intensity of the phenomena as

experienced by the persons in the study.[72] Personal psychological experiences of conflict,

and the accompanying intensive emotions, are analogous with the public and very

visceral conflict that played itself out over the years of disruption and resettling of the

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[71] An elaboration of this notion of culture, based on Kathryn Tanner's discussion in, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 25-29, was discussed in Chapter II.
[72] This is not the traditional "generalization" in randomized scientific studies from a small representative sample to the larger social entity. Rather the argument is one by analogy based on the affects, psychological dynamics, and theological themes, which can be observed in both individuals and institutions.

Southern Baptist landscape.[73] Not only is the intensity of emotion a basis for analogy but also the presence of particular psychological dynamics, which can be observed in both individuals and larger social groups. In addition to the psychological dynamics present in both realms, certain theological ideas and negotiations appear to be at work in both the individual and the social realm as well.

Finally the study assumes that *more* has happened than has to date been articulated or demonstrated. This is an assumption shared by most social science fields of study as well as philosophy and religion. For example an individual's "unconscious" behavior and the "effective history" of an institution are both matters for exploration that go beyond the surface phenomenology of an event, situation or experience. Most human experience is not yet reducible to formulas or logic, provable by theory. Certain aspects of bodily process, disease, and genetics, for instance have been mapped, modeled and reduced to formulas that both explain and predict. However, the vast complexity of human experience which is biological, emotional, rational, social and *more than any or all* of these aspects cannot be reduced to a formula or digitized and reproduced.[74] Thus the best that social scientists and those who study religion and philosophy can do at present is to look at artifacts from the past and attempt to explain what has happened by offering complex reasoning and arguments which attempt to account for why it

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[73] Charles Darwin identified six basic affects common to all humans (anger, joy, sadness, surprise, fear, and disgust), and his findings have been supported by psychologists and cultural anthropologists. Volney Gay argues that although a discreet set of affects can be identified and that they share a "curve of intensity that builds up slowly then rises faster and faster, is satiated, and subsides." These affects cannot be reduced to formulas, but are better understood metaphorically "through *analogue* devices like those available in poetic metaphor or dramatic action." See Volney Gay, *Joy & the Objects of Psychoanalysis: Literature, Belief, and Neurosis* (New York: SUNY, 2001), 131, 142. See also Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals,* 3rd ed. (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998).

[74] See Volney Gay, "Mapping Religion Psychologically: Information Theory as a Corrective to Modernism," in *Religion and Psychology: Mapping the Terrain,* ed. Diane Jonte-Pace & William B. Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 94-109.

happened. Some patterns are distinguishable and redundant enough to justify making

some predictions, but weak or interpretive models are generally the best that can be

offered.

In this spirit my research and reflection has led me to offer a complex model to

interpret the schism of Southern Baptists in the last quarter century, but not to make any

additional predictions. Thus the goal of the study is to assemble an interpretive model

built on my best understandings of the narratives of Baptist clergywomen. Their stories

interpret the schism in the SBC by revealing an anatomy of their negotiations of soul

competency. That anatomy makes many interpretive claims about both the durability of

Baptist belief and practice and the dynamics of the unfolding conflict which fractured the

institution.[75]

The present study could conceivably have been pursued under the auspices of

history, psychology, feminist theology or culture studies. However, I believe it is stronger

and more compelling because it tries to take an interdisciplinary approach under the

banner of practical theology, which values the critical interchange among these

disciplinary perspectives. It also values the larger goal of transforming faith practices,

which in not the focus but an important horizon of this study.[76] In such a model, what

counts as "evidence" for making the argument? Each discipline which contributes to the

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[75] I am not hoping to construct a (strong) model that is predictive, because each cultural situation is unique and thus findings are not generalizable or predictive at this level of human organization. The more modest goal is to assemble a (weak) explanatory model, which offers a clearer understanding of the conflict. See Gay, "GDR 3054: Syllabus on Methods."

[76] The dissertation is only designed to provide thick description and analysis of the situations of Baptist schism and Baptist clergywomen. Recommendations for transforming practices may be attempted in later work.

model holds different standards of evidence.[77] My primary sources of evidence based on warrants offered above, are the self-reported stories of the clergywomen, and various documentary records and historical artifacts of Southern Baptists. The real test of this argument will be whether the reader is compelled, after sifting through the women's stories and my interpretation of them, to believe I have offered any new insight about the SBC schism.

By making use of data collection methodologies standard in anthropology and qualitative research, the move away from theory qua theory presents a different epistemological standard for what counts as adequate evidence. These approaches do not depend solely on historical texts, previously collected data, or the observations of others. Evidence is compelled to rise toward established standards of scientific method, and requires a basis in commonly accepted experience and/or fact. Additional problems arise when attempting to argue by analogy from small, selective group of informants. The primary sources for such ethnographic studies in theology are the narratives and experiences of "living human documents" or the social networks and complex shared experiences of those in "living human webs."[78] By "narratives," I simply mean the stories told to me by the women in our conversational interviews.[79]

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[77] Different ways of valuing evidence is yet another factor that leaves practical theology open to a variety of criticisms from other academic disciplines. See Chapter II for a discussion and response to some of these criticisms.

[78] Anton Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World.* New York: Willett, Clark & Company, 1936). Charles V Gerkin, *The Living Human Document: Revisioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century," in *Through the Eyes of Women: Insights for Pastoral Care*, ed., Jeanne Stevenson Moessner (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996).

[79] I run a risk of overlaying too much of my own theory and framework by interpreting the women's stories, lifting out portions for analysis, presenting them in a chronological fashion, etc. However, I try when possible to use their words and to remain as close to the spirit in which they shared their stories as I can.

All of the disciplines that I have recruited into my practical theological task (history, psychology, culture studies and theology) demonstrate interest in questions and theories about the human condition and the cultures that humans create and by which they are created. Each one specializes, however, in more complex theories about particular aspects of those questions. It will be helpful to outline my assumptions about how these disciplines relate to each other, what each one adds of value to the project, how it may not be adequate alone, and how it provides a needed corrective to the other disciplines.

History as a discipline offers important frameworks for understanding the issues at stake in this study in relation to other religious groups and themes over time. What sorts of ideas and practices have been typical for Southern Baptists? Who have they been and what have they done? What preceded the years of schism? How have they been shaped by or resisted larger currents in American religion? Typically Southern Baptists have been studied in isolation or in a fashion that leaves them undifferentiated from other Southern religious groups or from other Protestants in the U.S. My effort at re-telling the Baptist story since World War I is to investigate Baptist records in light of themes of American religion which have emerged in recent decades of study, and to show how they were often going their own way despite the wider religious and cultural trends.[80] The historiography also tries to keep in view the tensions of belief and practice identified by Bill Leonard by highlighting those negotiations in each era. And finally it has the purpose

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[80] Studies of American religion in the last thirty years have thematized widespread trends that can be seen in a variety of religious groups and highlight what is distinctive to the American context. See for example, Thomas Tweed, ed. *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

of paying particular attention to the roles women were (not) playing in the decades that are presented (1920 to 2000).

Neither the themes of U.S. religious history, nor the tensions identified by Leonard, are adequate alone to account for the Baptist schism. They offer context and important metaphors for understanding, but by themselves do not interpret with as much detail the phenomena of crises and polarization that can be observed in individual lives and the larger institution of the SBC. For this type of analysis, psychology and theological anthropology enrich the description and provide additional frameworks for seeing the dynamics among ideas, practices, and human needs. They also suggest possible relationships between and among these differing aspects of the human condition.

Although it could be argued that these disciplines are incommensurable, my warrants for utilizing them rest in the questions to be answered or puzzles they attempt to solve related to the human condition. Together these disciplines share a potential for a rich study of the multiple situations in need of interpretation. The remainder of the problems rest in my own capacity to be self-reflexive and represent my findings in a way that does as little harm as possible to the study participants and their ideas and stories. To uphold such values is a shared concern of each discipline that I am utilizing to build the interpretive model.

CHAPTER VI

THEOLOGICAL REINTERPRETATION OF SOUL COMPETENCY FREEDOM AND MEANING VERSUS ALIENATION AND CORRUPTION

There's a sense of freedom, as a Baptist woman, that's important. I think that, for me, the issues of soul competency and priesthood of the believer have always been important. And, as I continue on my own journey, I'm realizing how very crucial that is. A huge part of pastoring for me is making sure that I'm nurturing my own personal relationship with God and helping [the congregation] to do the same. And, through that relationship, encountering scripture, worshipping and praying together . . . seeking God's presence together. – Chloe[1]

Describing Protestantism in the late 1970s Martin Marty noted that one of the most pervasive and commonly shared features of Protestantism in America was their "fidelity to and awe for the authority of the Bible." He notes further, "From the most conservative to the most liberal, Protestants in many senses have had nowhere to go but to the Bible as a source and norm."[2] As he goes on to describe various subcultures of Protestantism, he writes, "Southern Protestant culture more than any other large community has nurtured and renewed the combination of religious experience and the context of a churchly tradition."[3] These two observations capture the tension which is the focus of this chapter, a tension of belief and practice that is crucial for understanding Southern Baptists and their schism, and a tension that is negotiated by each individual

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[1] Chloe said this as part of her response to my question, "What does it mean to you to be to be a Baptist woman in ministry?" All names and identifying information has been changed to protect the identities of the study participants.

[2] Martin Marty, "The Protestant Experience and Perspective," in *American Religious Values and the Future of America*, Ed. Rodger Van Allen. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 38.

[3] Ibid, 46.

Baptist including the clergywomen whose narratives tell us about the Baptist meaning and experience of *soul competency.*

What Marty observes in Southern Protestant culture as the important relationship between "religious experience" and "churchly tradition" is found more specifically in the Baptist tension between individual liberty of conscience and authority of scripture, the two poles of tension that hold together Baptist beliefs and practices about *soul competency*. These poles of tension are discernable in many layers or cultural sites of Baptist life: personal religious practices, sermons and rhetoric, structures of small groups in local communities of faith, and in the structures and values of large Baptist institutions, like the SBC. An examination at the site of individual clergywomen's narratives about their lives reveals their negotiations of authority between the power of their own personal religious experiences and the normative weight of scriptural texts. The findings suggest a (weak) model for interpreting the dynamics of the very similar negotiations at the institutional site of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Tensions of Baptist conviction, observed by Bill Leonard, collectively create a potential space for individuals and churches to live faithfully as Baptists and to develop lives and communities marked by creativity, maturity and trust.[4] At the same time these same tensions contribute to both the state of benign alienation experienced by human beings, as well as the possibility of psychological splitting and subsequent views of one side as "all good" and the other side as "all bad" giving rise to lives and institutions

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[4] Creativity, maturity and trust are marks of psychological health and well-being (or freedom) recognized by many psychoanalytic theorists. See Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?* ed., by Arnold Goldberg with Paul Stepansky (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 166-71. See also D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971). These are also theological markers of human fulfillment and well-being. See Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), for his descriptions of creativity, trust and freedom, 168-70, 242-47.

marked by alienation, idolatry, and social corruption.[5] Theological interpretations of soul competency, as negotiated by clergywomen, will be the focus of this chapter, and psychological aspects will be the focus of the next chapter.

In this chapter soul competency will be described first in its historical understanding among Baptists, and also as a competition among the faithful of differing sources of authority. Then soul competency will be discussed in terms of its contribution to Baptist meaning-making, or the underlying desire for reality. This passion for knowing the meaning of things is easily and inevitably corrupted, opening the possibility for idolatry and more malignant alienation. Yet soul competency as a belief and practice among Baptists offers the potential for freedom and creativity. The concept has been understood subtly in terms of particular Baptist notions of gender that prescribe limited roles to women (and men), but clergywomen have reinterpreted the meaning of the concept in such a way that they are able to remain Baptist and live creatively with their work of ministry.

Chapters III and IV traced a history of Southern Baptists in the twentieth century since World War I. The framework of tensions outlined by Bill Leonard guided the narrative and analysis of events among Southern Baptists between 1920 and 2000, with particular attention to the decades leading up to and following the first ordination of a Southern Baptist woman to ministry in 1964, as well as the causes for animosity among Baptists during the years of controversy (1979-1991). Baptists were portrayed as negotiating the various tensions through each time and circumstance. These tensions are more descriptive of Baptists' long-standing quarrel with authority than one sees by simply laying out doctrinal commitments or elaborating the work of charismatic founding

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[5] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 56-60, 119-130, 234-42, 251-59.

figures. To recap, Baptists may be understood in light of their negotiations of the

following tensions: 1) individual liberty of conscience versus the authority of scripture; 2)

the autonomy of the local church versus associational cooperation; 3) clergy versus laity;

4) religious liberty versus loyalty to the state; and 5) dramatic conversion versus

nurturing process.[6] Each pair works as a constraint on Baptist life and polity. Together

they work like (permeable) walls defining the group's life over time (see Figure No. 2).

Soul Competency: Primary Tension of Baptist Conviction
Adapted from Bill Leonard's *Dictionary of Baptists in America* (1994)
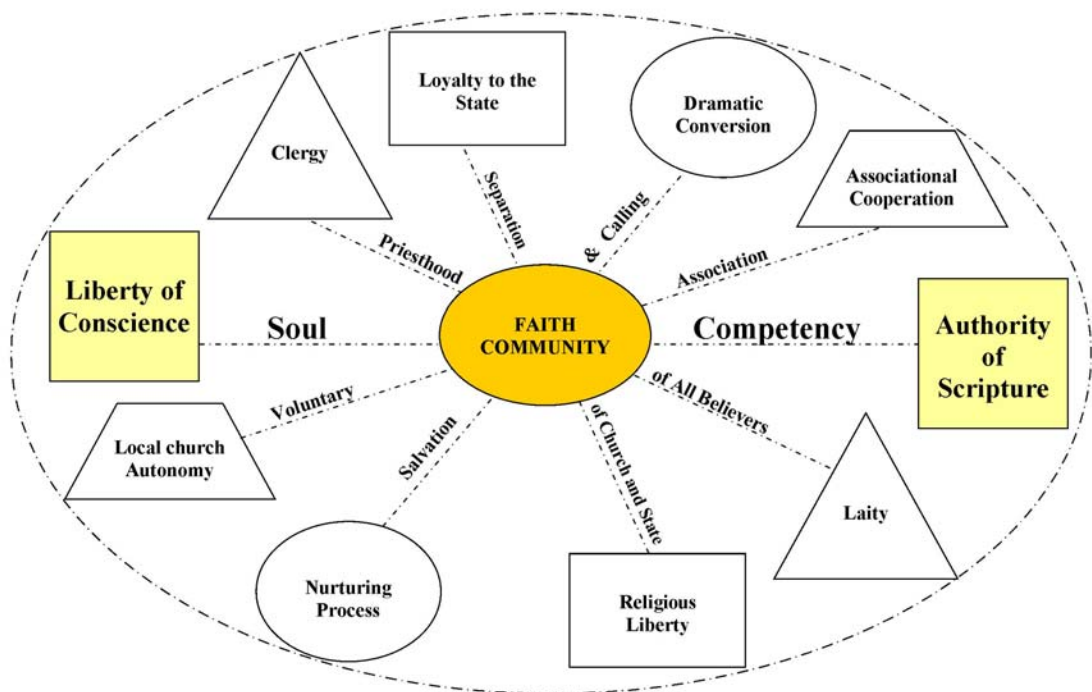
Figure No. 2

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[6] In a more recent text Leonard identifies three additional tensions: doctrinal statements: invariably confessional, selectively creedal; ordinances: sacraments and symbols; diversity: theological and ecclesial. Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 6-10.

As noted, the tensions of belief and practice can be noticed at various sites in Baptist culture (i.e. in sermons, personal narratives, news publications, denominational histories, congregational polity documents, confessional statements, etc.). At the center of all the tensions of conviction and practice is the mediating presence of a particular faith community. In Baptist life this is most often understood to be the local church, but other groupings and institutionalized associations of Baptists also serve as mediators of the tensions. The SBC itself is one such mediator, responding to pressures of churches, charismatic leaders, cultural and religious claims and trends, other Baptist agencies and religious groups outside Baptist life.[7]

Each tension can be conceived as a paradoxical set of beliefs and/or practices, and the two extreme poles should be understood as both interpenetrating and dialectical in relationship to each other, as well as present in the central Baptist concept that is negotiated along the continuum of each tension. In other words, soul competency, as a cherished belief and multi-variant practice holds together two different but related ideas: individual liberty of conscience and the authority of scripture. One underlying tension, or common denominator, found in each pair of constraints the *overarching conflict concerning the character and location of authority,* which is common among Baptists, and which animates many of their internal struggles. For instance they struggle with issues of authority related to: paid and volunteer ministry, congregational polity, powers of the state, individual conscience and religious experience, loyalties to differing Baptist

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[7] Kathryn Tanner points out that consensus, concerning beliefs and practices in any cultural setting, is rare if not impossible. One beauty of Leonard's observations is that concerns for power, authority and conflict are assumed. Of course other ideas, meanings and social movements are also at work outside the range of this analysis, including economic and material factors. See Tanner *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 45-47.

institutions, appropriate roles for men and women, and matters concerning the proper interpretation of traditions and texts.

The tension most central for the following discussion demonstrates the variety of ways that Baptist individuals and institutions navigate the waters between personal rational faith, as informed by religious experience (individual liberty of conscience), and inherited, storied faith which invokes scriptures and traditions (authority of scripture). The contest is between competing meanings, competing authorities, differing practices, and the competing positions emphasize different aspects of the human condition. Premoral goods for life and well-being are present in all aspects of these poles of tension, yet they are also unavoidably and irreconcilably at odds with one another.

To explore *soul competency* theologically, stories told by clergywomen will provide compelling examples of how the tension is negotiated theologically by individuals. Stories in this chapter come mainly from 30-year-old Chloe, a Baptist pastor of a small church in Virginia; 47-year-old music minister, Beth; 42-year old hospital chaplain, Anna; 49-year-old Lydia, a military reserve chaplain, and 37-year-old Rebecca, a Habitat for Humanity manager. They have found both freedom and community in the space created between tensions like *liberty of conscience* and *authority of scripture,* which allow them to pursue vocation, redefine roles for women, and still remain Baptist. The negotiations of the clergywomen, taken together, offer a new interpretation of the schism of Southern Baptists, demonstrating both the durability of the Baptist culture for nurturing creativity, maturity, and trust, and also the inevitability of the fracture in the denomination.

Soul Competency: A Theological Hallmark for Baptists

All of the tensions identified by Bill Leonard could be explored for their significance related to the narratives of Baptist clergywomen or Southern Baptist schism; however, *soul competency,* as a recognized hallmark of Baptists offers a depth of meaning on which to build an interpretive model. Like each pole of each tension, identified by Leonard, soul competency can be understood as capturing a set of particular Baptist beliefs, several related practices, and various mundane goods, which are important for human well-being. To picture the depth of meaning in the poles of *liberty of conscience* and *authority of scripture*, imagine the diagram of tensions being turned onto a flat plane such that what is under each pole of tension can be seen. The anatomy of concepts which comes into view is historically particular for Baptists, theologically descriptive of the human condition, psychologically expressive of dynamics of both creativity and polarization, and evocative for showing how gender is multiply inscribed.[8]

Chloe made a decision to become a Christian and join her parents' Baptist church at 12. Soon after her baptism a new pastor was called to the congregation. She remembers her mother, a school teacher, attending a question-and-answer session prior to the church vote. "My mom came home and said that she had asked [the pastor] about women's role in leadership in the church and what he said was very negative and that we were going to look for a new church. And we were out of there so fast that our heads were spinning."

Chloe's much quieter father, an engineer, shared her mother's feelings. When the family ran into some former fellow church members, she recalls, "They asked why we had left. And I remember my dad saying, 'Because we don't want our girls growing up

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[8] Kwok Pui-Lan describes ways that women are "multiply marginalized" especially outside the domains of western culture. See Kwok Pui Lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 31, 46, passim.

not believing that God can call them to be whatever God calls them to be.' But the funny

thing… the ironic thing about that story, that I still say, is that my dad was never thinking

of my being called to pastor. And neither was I. He was thinking that he didn't want us

not being able to be a lawyer or doctor."

Despite the fact that his imagination did not include "pastor" among the

possibilities for his daughters' vocations, Chloe's dad and her mom did imagine calling

as a matter of individual conscience and while it might be informed by scripture, it should

not be limited by only one particular interpretation of scripture. Or put differently,

authority of personal religious experience was constrained but not overridden by the

authority of scripture. Chloe's story also displays the way that gender was implicated in

thinking about vocation, and who exactly is competent to lead others in ministry.[9]

Soul competency is one of the most commonly shared doctrinal ideas held by

Baptists of all kinds.[10] It grows out Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther's declaration that

salvation comes through justification by faith alone.[11] It is called by a variety of names

and phrases including: "the competency of the soul before God . . . soul liberty . . .

experiential religion . . . sanctified individualism."[12] The idea has connections to both the

Hebrew Bible and New Testament passages which declare that people are created in the

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[9] Chloe's story about leaving her childhood church could be explored in terms of the tension between clergy and laity (priesthood of all believers) or the tension between dramatic conversion and nurturing process (salvation and calling), but in this chapter the discussion will be limited to the tension between individual liberty of conscience and authority of scripture (soul competency).

[10] See Frank Mead, Samuel Hill, and Craig Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States,* 12th ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 181. Mead, et. al note "soul competency" as first in their description of Baptist doctrine and polity: "Baptists are bound together by an amazingly strong 'rope of sand' in allegiance to certain principles and doctrines based generally on the competency of each individual in matters of faith."

[11] The idea of soul competency has roots in Martin Luther's reformation ideals: *sola fide* (faith alone), *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) and *sola gratia* (grace alone). Leonard, *Baptist Ways,* 18.

[12] Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 1993), 23. Shurden also includes: "individual competency . . . personal faith . . . spiritual religion . . . believer priesthood . . . conversion by conviction . . . individualism in religion."

image of God (Gen. 1:26); that they are unique individuals of singular worth (Ps. 8); that they are capable of personal appropriation of divine grace (Eph. 2:8-9); and responsible to interpret and teach from the scriptures (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:15).

The idea of soul competency is thought by Baptists to be *drawn from* scripture; however, it is also understood by Baptists to be a *means by which* believers are urged to interpret scripture. In other words, soul competency is the principle by which the individual believer, with guidance from the Holy Spirit and the community of faith, is free to read and interpret the Bible.[13] Other corollaries that follow from soul competency for Baptists include: the primacy of direct access to God; the significance of personal religious experience in the individual's choice to become a baptized believer and church member; and the individual's inalienable freedom from creeds, clerical interference, and government intervention when it comes to matters of conscience and faith.[14]

In addition to these theological beliefs held by Baptists, each pole of tension also expresses several key practices of the Baptist faithful. Although belief and practice are not neatly separable, it is helpful to give example of ways both are present in each pole of tension.[15] Practices that can be related to *soul competency* include reading scripture (personally or devotionally; for guidance in moral decisions; in matters of faith and conscience); speaking of faith (confessionally, prophetically and from personal conviction); and acting on conviction (in the form of prophetic action, enacting vocation,

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[13] This was a revolutionary idea when first put forward by seventeenth-century English Baptists in a culture where the Book of Common Prayer and the priesthood stood between the common believer and the Bible (not to mention literacy and accessibility, barriers which had only been removed in the sixteenth century).

[14] Ibid., 23-31.

[15] Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices" in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,* ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 228-42. Tanner points out that belief and practice cannot clearly be separated, nor can one assume that a group appearing to engage in a coordinated practice necessarily shares a set of beliefs upholding that practice. Investigations into such practices (i.e. communion) reveal a tremendous variety of religious beliefs and other non-religious reasons given by practitioners for their participation.

or attempting to follow biblical mandates). The difference between the poles of tension when thinking about shared, coordinated religious practices such as the ones just named, can be conceived of as a difference in the primacy of authority. Practices are thought to be guided by individual rational and experiential faith at one extreme and thought to be guided by the authority of the Bible at the other extreme. At their best, practices of soul competency are constrained by the traditions found in scripture as well as the interpretation and experience of the individual within the community of faith. Authority in these tensions balances internal personal experience with enduring wisdom, norms and purposes found in an ancient set of traditions. (See Figure No. 3.)

Chloe's descriptions of her parents, and the kind of space they created for her give evidence of several practices of soul competency. Their decision to *act* based on their own interpretation of the Bible, and to leave a church because they did not agree with the viewpoint of the new pastor offer evidence of practices which are part of the tradition of soul competency. Chloe says of her Sunday-school-teaching parents:

> My mother has always been very Baptist, very educated and informed about what that means . . . . And at the time that I was very little she would say things like, "They're trying to take away what it means to be Baptist." And she was very personally affected by the struggle.
> Both my parents are very enlightenment people. Like very rational. Their faith is very cerebral, very thinking people . . . . In my own journey, I've become much more mystical, although I would say . . . they think that I'm sometimes going off the deep end. But (laughs) that's the kind of environment I was brought up in. Like you could think anything out, what you believe is important. "Experience" I'm not sure was as firm as knowledge and knowing and reading and all that. So my mom read a lot and always read the state Baptist paper and *Baptists Today*.[16]

Soul competency took shape in Chloe's family in beliefs and practices such as thinking rationally, reading for understanding, valuing knowledge, solving problems

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[16] *Baptists Today,* a newspaper sponsored by the Autonomist Party, communicated concerns of their cause.

Theological Anatomy of Soul Competency

Liberty of Conscience

Soul

Baptist beliefs
- faith is experiential, personal and rational
- soul competency is basis for reading the Bible

Baptist practices
- conscience guides reading, speech and action

Realm of agency

Elemental desire to create meaning out of ones' experience

Authority is internal and personal

Gender is shaped by society and personal experience; males and females are equal

Faith Community

Competency

Baptist negotiations of soul competency
Faith is personal and experiential as well as socially prescribed, shaped by tradition and mediated by communities

Practice: interpretation of living traditions includes reading and speaking within community

Realm of the interhuman
- elemental desire for reality (meaning-making)
- face to face community
- freedom to experience openness and participation
- benign alienation remains

Authority is internal, external, mediated

Gender is both given and chosen

Authority of Scripture

Baptist beliefs
- Bible is source of wisdom, norms, purpose
- soul competency is a biblical idea

Baptist practices
- scriptures guide reading, speech and action

Realm of the social

Elemental desire to discover meaning in existing institutions and traditions

Authority is external and impersonal

Gender is prescribed by biology and scripture; males and females are complementary

Figure No. 3

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through reasoning, and trusting these practices to be more reliable than "experience."

Chloe judges such "experience" by looking back and seeing something more akin to her

preference for practices she calls "mystical," which imply more emotion, and less rational

mastery of belief.[17] Although they sound different, and Chloe views experience and

rationality differently, each of these practices value the individual's liberty of conscience,

which are informed by the Bible, maybe even shaped and constrained by it, but not

defined by the Bible alone.

Soul Competency as Negotiation between Competing Authorities

Chloe's choice of words "going off the deep end" to describe her parents'

potential alarm at her putting too much emphasis on religious "experience," provides an

excellent metaphor for the judgments that are made among Baptists about who is (or is

not) "Baptist enough." The two poles of the tension are perennially and simultaneously at

odds with one another. Two common stereotypes of Baptists have a way of capturing the

shape of this tension.

Historically, Baptists have been accused of rugged individualism, of being too

"individualistic," even too opinionated. This stereotype belies the Baptist emphasis on

soul competency as a matter for the "individual in community" and the notion that soul

competency is itself a biblical idea.[18] The stereotype hints at how the problem of taking

the individual's liberty of conscience too far, failing to accept the constraints of

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[17] This observation is also based on other descriptions by Chloe of her changing devotional practices and growing interest in more "mystical" aspects of faith. For her the shift came in the form of practices such as meditation and contemplative prayer. Although she differentiates affective, embodied practices from more rationalistic ones, both kinds of practices put more emphasis on the authority in the role of the individual than the authority in the role of scriptural text.

[18] Shurden, *The Baptist Identity,* 23-24, 34.

knowledge from scripture, or wisdom from the community, can be considered "going off the deep end" and moving beyond the parameters of what it means to be Baptist by engaging in an overly individualistic and privatized religion.[19]

More recently, Baptists have been accused of being too fundamentalist, literalist or unthinking in their beliefs and practices, despite their emphasis on the role of individual conscience in matters of faith. This stereotype captures the aspect of taking the authority of scripture too far, or of insisting that authority extends only to one particular interpretation of a given passage. This stereotype highlights how someone may be "going off (the other) deep end" by diminishing the priority of direct religious experience or by failing to exercise one's conscience when the wisdom of scripture needs rational explanation or interpretation.

"Literal readings," in the name of the *authority of the text*, reduce or eliminate the faith community, the individual, and the presence of God from participation in the process of interpretation. "Pure religious experience" in the name of *individual liberty of conscience* belies the influence of religious communities, traditions and biblical texts on the thinking and behavior of the individual. In each case, emphasizing one pole of the tension to the exclusion of the other, that which "goes off the deep end" in either direction, takes the form of idolatry which reduces the individual's humility and place within the faith community as well as one's ultimate dependence on God. A similar type of splitting happens in larger cultural and institutional settings. Southern Baptist Autonomists and Biblicists displayed such reasoning in their vociferous battles of the 1980s and 1990s as splintering was underway. Both sides accused the other, and were guilty themselves sometimes, of "going off the deep end" in one direction or another.

[19] Ibid., 26.

Giving Chloe's new pastor the benefit of the doubt, it seems reasonable to assume that he probably held his interpretation of what the Bible had to say about women's leadership in good faith. However, Chloe's parents thought he was extending the authority of the Bible too far in the direction of a narrow interpretation of a few passages of scripture. They wanted to maintain the decision making responsibility of the individual, and they held a high view of the individual's role in the process when it came to decisions about vocation. Both the pastor and Chloe's parents may be understood in this story to be reading, believing, speaking and acting in ways that honored the scriptures (in their respective, although differing, interpretations) and expressing freedom of conscience within community. However, they each saw themselves as right and the other as wrong. Such is the nature of conviction, and of splitting the world into good and bad. This idea is taken up again in the next chapter.

Soul Competency as Meaning-Making

In addition to these particular Baptist beliefs and practices, each pole of tension may also be understood as corresponding to basic human desires and the mundane goods that support human well-being. Many mundane human goods exist at each pole of the continuum between liberty of conscience and authority of scripture. The primary human good explored here is described by systematic theologian, Edward Farley, as the "elemental desire for reality," or stated differently, the human passion for meaning-making.[20] Often clergywomen told stories of trying to make and find meaning in their lives, the Bible and the events that happened to them.

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[20] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 106.

Edward Farley's theology of the human experience provides an interpretive understanding and philosophical position which are complimentary for the practical feminist theology this study is attempting. In his elegant phenomenology of human experience, Farley is mainly concerned with reinterpreting the doctrine of humanity by exploring the deep and enduring meanings of corruption and redemption in the human experience. In order to engage the language Farley uses to explore the depths of human good and evil, a brief introduction to his terms and categories will be useful.

To understand humanity's condition, Farley abstracts three realms of human being: the individual subject, the relational or interhuman, and the social. He observes that the three realms interpenetrate and that each is capable of transcending the other two. No realm can be understood apart from its connections to other two. However, to make distinctive observations about the each realm we can consider them independently. Each realm is tragically structured by passions, needs and aims, which inherently conflict. This tragic structure does not indicate evil in itself, but often is the opening for corruption and evil in the form of idolatry to enter into a subject, relationship, or social system. In Farley's work, tragic should not be understood as sad, unfortunate or a terrible loss (although these are possible descriptions). Rather he is making a philosophical point that there is a tragic structure to human existence such that we can see truth, beauty and goodness, but we cannot escape our finitude or the irreconcilability of the many aspects of human being.

Another aspect of the tragic nature of being is that the three realms are alienated from each other, and life is not a unified whole, but structured by competition, striving and incompatible meanings. Corruption enters into a situation when, in response to these

contingencies of life, some particular good is absolutized. This absolutization is a form of idolatry in which the horizon of the sacred is not open, but rather the object of need—an idea or anything temporal—is embraced in an effort to escape one's finitude.

And what of redemption? In every realm the agent, relationship or social system needs to be "founded," according to Farley, that is, to transcend self-securing and to open in freedom to the horizon of the sacred. This is best understood through the metaphor of the "face" or a "summons to compassionate obligation," which recognizes the inescapable need for the other, and visa versa.[21]

Chloe describes her own search for meaning as intense and precocious. It was also clearly shaped by a Baptist context which esteems the Bible. She says, "I was always somebody who has always been very, very interested in a relationship with God, always been straining to hear God and trying to hear God. What is God saying? What is God thinking? I mean, during the time I was very little, the Bible was huge. I mean I had Bible verses taped all around my bed and [I wondered] what is God saying to me?"

Lydia, a 49-year-old military reserve chaplain, was like many women who grew up in Southern Baptist churches. As a child she felt the call of missionary service while attending GA, a program of missions education sponsored by Woman's Missionary Union.[22] Her more lasting sense of call came, however, while she was in college. She recalls that she was questioning the Vietnam War, and "coming of age . . . not just inheriting my parents' religion, but testing it and finding my own."

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[21] Ibid., 43
[22] GA was the name, prior to 1970, for "Girl's Auxiliary," which was changed into two programs, Girls in Action (the new GA) for girls in grades one through six and Acteens for girls grades seven through twelve. See Allen, *Century to Celebrate* , 109-14. More than half the clergywomen in this study tell nearly identical stories of feeling called to missions as a child through the programs and camps of WMU. None of them became career missionaries.

As a child, Rebecca, 37-year-old Habitat for Humanity manager, attended a Baptist church until her parents' divorce. She remembers an abrupt change from being "in church all the time, Sunday morning and Training Union and Sunday School and Vacation Bible School and all of that, to like, not going at all." She didn't question the change, as a child, but later, looking back she wondered, "What happened? And why did this happen?" She feels grateful that before her family left the church, she was old enough to hear and recall stories of the faith. She says, "I got a really good grounding in scripture and the stories in the Bible and that God loves me." She goes on, "And I got a really good grounding in women being inferior and (chuckling)..." When I asked her how she knew this, she said, "The messages about women were never spoken. You saw what women did and didn't do in the church. Osmosis."

She went on to tell about other ideas she took from her childhood church experiences, "And so from my perspective (which I guess was different than my parents') by osmosis I figured out that we weren't a real family. And I knew that we didn't look like the families in my Sunday school books and we didn't act like the families in my Sunday school books, and I knew that it wasn't okay to talk about that. Now looking back, I know that had to be going on in lots of families." When I asked, "What was the part about not acting like a family in Sunday school books?" She replied, "Well...my parents fought and they didn't have a perfect relationship. . . . My stepdad was pretty emotionally divorced from the family. And so...it's just that we didn't look anything like that."

The meanings that Rebecca attributes to her childhood church experiences have often found their way into her sermons. She summarized the church messages of her childhood this way during our interview:

> I got the parallel messages that on the one hand God loved me...and that has been a really sustaining message my whole life. There were all these adults who obviously cared about me enough to teach Sunday school, make cherry Kool-Aid for VBS, and tell stories with [the felt board]. And so I got this very clear message that I was important and worthwhile and loveable, and also this very clear message that I was inferior and that my family didn't fit in. And I guess maybe my parents got that message a little less subtly, which is why they still don't go to church. And they would tell you that...they're people of faith, they believe in God, they're Christians, but they don't go to church.[23]

Farley's phenomenological description of human experience gives us three realms of human being (the subjective, the interhuman, and the social), through which to view Rebecca's story. It highlights the ways these realms of human experience cannot be neatly separated, but neither can they ever be finally harmonious with each other. In Rebecca's story about her childhood church "messages" we see the inner subjective world in her own mind and heart. Simultaneously we see the social institutions of church and marriage and even state law, as well as social norms of acceptability in a Southern town present in her story. The realm of the interhuman is apparent in the spaces in which Rebecca felt both love and alienation between her self and her family and church teachers. The realm of the agent or individual subject corresponds readily to the pole of individual conscience in the model. The realm of the social corresponds most readily to the pole of scripture as an institution and tradition. The realm of the interhuman correlates best with the middle space where the faith community mediates the other realms.

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[23] Vacation Bible School (VBS) was a common summer time activity in Southern Baptist Churches, often lasting one, two or more weeks. Children came to the church to sing, hear Bible stories, make crafts, eat snacks and play together.

The irreconcilability of the three realms points out the tragic character and ever-present possibility of chaos in the human situation. Nevertheless, enduring possibilities for beauty, meaning and creativity are also present in the human condition.[24] Rebecca felt both loved and discounted by the same people in her family and church. This is endemic and inescapable in the human condition. This is an incidence of benign alienation.

Farley also describes three basic human drives or elemental passions: 1) the desire for survival, or elemental passion for subjectivity in each person; 2) the desire for the interhuman, or recognition and acceptance by the other which implies a deep need for the social; and 3) the desire for reality, or the elemental passion to know the meaning of things. Lydia's story of discovering meaning by questioning the Vietnam War and testing her received beliefs, illustrates the desire to become one's own person, to think for oneself, to define one's positions over against the authority of parents, church or state. Rebecca's desire for love and acceptance comes through in the remembered messages of her childhood. She desired not only acceptance, but belonging and self affirmation, self-states which require a community of others. None of these desires is ever fully realized or fulfilled, but each is ever-present in human experience. They are interrelated and interdependent. Each passion is personal and connected less to feelings about possessing the desired object and more to feelings about the *striving* after some particular state of being.[25] That sense of striving can be seen in Chloe's self-description about her early search for God's meaning, and in her later drive to find a purpose for her life.

After college Chloe took a job in broadcast journalism as a television reporter at a small-market TV station in Oklahoma. She recalls the disconnection between her new

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[24] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 164-70.
[25] Ibid., 97-113.

profession and her sense of purpose. "Vocationally, it was not where I was supposed to

be." She recalls covering "house fires and car wrecks" where she was expected to report

"objectively" on each disaster. It was years later that she was she able to name her

dilemma:

> I think, for me, a huge issue is that I am relational when I minister. So I went into journalism with this kind of crusader point of view that I'm going to change the world. And that's great if somebody's house burns down because they didn't have smoke detectors: I can help other people install smoke detectors. But my job was to not get involved with the person that was in front of me . . . I felt like it was very soul stifling to be interacting with people but not truly being in a relationship.
> And I just really began to ask, "God, is this really where you want me to be? Is this the best way…?" And I had the sense that I did have a gift of being in a relationship with God and knowing that God loved me and that that was something that the world could use. And I wasn't so sure that I was using it in the best way. That was kind of my initial questioning.

The passions or desires, described by Farley, create a sense of vulnerability on the

part of every human person who is always striving toward that which cannot be

permanently satisfied. Underlying these elemental passions is an ultimate striving, or

fundamental desire for fulfillment. No matter which desires are fulfilled, they continue to

point to a desire for the eternal horizon. "The eternal horizon of the passions is not simply

a nothingness but is whatever would fulfill the passions. . . . [It is] whatever would

ground the self and constitute the mystery of things. . . [it is] that feature of the human

agent apart from which there could be no question of God. . . ." Farley makes clear that

he is not equating God with the eternal horizon, but connects the ideas this way: "It is

only because we are able to passionately desire through our penultimate satisfactions that

the very notion of God is meaningful."[26]

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[26] Ibid., 112-13. We will return shortly to the idea of the sacred presence which may be contemplated at the eternal horizon.

Chloe's dissatisfaction with her situation in a career of journalism underscores both the benign alienation created when one's desire for community is unfulfilled, and also the benign alienation within oneself when the passion for meaning is unfilled. Chloe responded to these forms of benign alienation by attending at length to her practices of prayer and reading. She read an article sent to her by her mother which reported a doctor in her hometown serving a deeply impoverished and vulnerable population in the city. He quoted the scripture passage: "To whom much is given much is required" (Luke 12:48). A sense of compassionate obligation (implied in the saying attributed to Jesus) activated and further personalized Chloe's search for meaning which eventuated in her return to work in her home city and enrollment in seminary to become a minister.[27]

Soul Competency as an Opening for Corruption and Idolatry

Farley describes two related problems or corruptions of the passion for reality or meaning-making: "quest for certainty" on one hand and a sense of "false skepticism" on the other. These aspects of the passion for reality correspond to the tensions in *soul competency* in our growing interpretive model. Farley describes two major aspects (or vulnerabilities) within the passion for reality or knowing: "This desire to know engenders the need for and finally commitments and loyalties to institutions, social systems, methods, and categorical and conceptual schemes."[28] In other words the desire for knowing with complete certainty corresponds to the idea of "going off the deep end" with *authority of the scripture.* A "quest for certainty" can be seen in the search for meaning

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[27] Ibid., 40-43. "Compassionate obligation" is the phrase used by Farley to describe the feelings and action evoked by the presence of another. The converse is murderous rage, which may also be evoked by the presence of another. The otherness or alterity of another is represented in Farley's estimation by the literal and metaphorical "face" of another.
[28] Ibid., 196, 197-205.

which insists that all answers are in some social tradition or institution, in this case the Bible. The result is corruption of the good (wisdom, beauty and freedom) in that social institution or tradition, which leads to idolatry. In this case the result is a diminished sense of the wisdom, beauty and freedom in the Bible, which is replaced by an idolatrous view of the Bible as a self-sufficient end in itself. The Bible itself claims uncertainty (or mystery) about many things, thus to demand certainty of it, undermines its good purposes.

Conversely, the elemental passion for knowing is also about survival of the self. The survival of oneself means there is an appropriate sense of skepticism about the world and all the meanings which are presented by other individuals, institutions and traditions. Not accepting these external authorities blindly or without question contributes to the well-being and survival of individuals who have learned that institutions do not always have the best interests of the individual in mind. A fitting or proper sense of skepticism is a necessary part of one's daily survival: knowing what is really in the water, if the electrical wire is live, or if the rail road crossing gate works. However, the over-inflation of skepticism, the total doubt of social traditions and institutions, even if it is in the spirit of self-protection, corresponds to "going off the deep end" at pole of *individual liberty of conscience,* and experiencing the corruption of one's desire for personal certainty.

Rebecca's story about a scholarship gives flesh to Farley's observations about meaning and the human condition. She says she's been told often that she has, "a talent for saying those obvious things that nobody wants to say. And yet," she goes on, "they always just seem so obvious to me that it's not like I think it's any big deal (chuckling)." When Rebecca was in college she had to meet with a Mercer University financial officer

about a "church-related vocation scholarship," which she was receiving. She sat down,

and the woman opened Rebecca's file, and said, "Oh, you're our problem student."

Rebecca says she was thinking, "'What?' Well it turns out they are just having a

conniption-fit that here I am, this Baptist student, and I'm working at an Episcopal

Church." Rebecca goes on:

> So then she starts telling me, "Well what happens if you go to seminary and you
> get all this training and then nobody will hire you?" And I said, "Well you know
> I've thought about that, and it seems to me that...if that happens I really do feel
> like I'm being called by God, and it would be a really difficult decision, but I'd
> probably have to go to another denomination." Well she hit the roof! Just, "We're
> giving you all this money!" I'm thinking, "Five hundred bucks! This is supposed
> to tie me to you for the rest of my life?!"

Rebecca went to her campus minister to tell him about the meeting. She relates the

encounter this way:

> Okay, what was I supposed to say? [to the financial officer] That I feel called by
> God, I have a seminary education, it's clear no Baptist Church is ever going to
> hire me. I'm going to sit around and twiddle my thumbs for 20 years and wait for
> the Baptist Church to get a clue!? I mean is this being faithful to God?" And he
> was very nervous, like there was no right answer. They ended up renewing my
> scholarship, my 500 dollar scholarship. And there probably are Baptist schools in
> which 500 dollars would make a difference but Mercer was not one of them.

Both a "quest for certainty" and a sense of "false skepticism" are evident in

Rebecca's story. Rebecca through that the college, representing the denomination,

wanted her "to be a Baptist for the rest of my life, whether or not they ever let me live out

my calling." They wanted the assurance that their own interests (in the form of a

scholarship) would be represented in a way that fit with the institution's understanding of

what was true and right. This raised questions about Rebecca's motivation and her own

quest for certainty in relation to her calling to ministry. The competition between

differing meanings is a part of the "benign alienation" that is always present between the

subject and the social realms, and between all subjects and all realms, because differences

of meaning abound. Rebecca's response hovers on the brink between a healthy

skepticism regarding her ability to find work as a Baptist minister, and a greater

vulnerability, covered with a blustery rhetoric, which indicates the fragility of meaning

within oneself when that meaning is questioned by someone in authority. Rebecca stops

short of a disavowal of all Baptists or all possibilities for finding a place of ministry.

How could the benign alienation (of differing meanings, healthy skepticism, and

potential vulnerability) open up to the possibility of greater malignant alienation? The

threat can be heard in Rebecca's response, which hints that she could give up any and all

trust in Baptist churches to hear or accept her call to ministry. In the process Rebecca

could give in to a false skepticism about either her own abilities or the possibility of her

ever finding a ministry position (the small kernel of truth in the financial officer's

comments). In the officer's comments we hear a quest for certainty that holds the

potential to give up on the individual student in front of her as a "problem" rather than a

person who is capable of creativity and meaningful work, and deserving of empathy. The

officer stops short of questioning whether Rebecca's experience of call to ministry is

mistaken or sinful. In the process both Rebecca and the officer, as a representative of the

Baptist school, experienced the corrupting power of an institution which strives to

perpetuate itself, at the expense of the individual. Rebecca and the officer also

experienced the possibility of greater alienation in the form of lost trust and failed

community.

Responses to one's anxiety about the uncertainty of knowledge or meaning can

cause one to embrace a social tradition or institution, and one's commitment to that

institution may slip toward a corrupted (and impossible) quest for certainty. Anxiety about the survival of the self, and the need to be appropriately skeptical about what one can know tends to open up a possible slide toward false skepticism. The two forms of corruption are intertwined: a quest for certainty is a sure path to failure, and the despair tied up in such failures leads inescapably to a false skepticism.[29]

Soul Competency as Freedom and Creativity

Soul competency, as an enduring Baptist concept, not only has features of benign alienation which can lead to corruption and idolatry, it also has features of openness and participation, which can lead to freedom and creativity. These features can be found in the space between liberty of conscience and authority of scripture, between the individual ego and the wisdom of tradition, between the individual agents who claim different meanings. The characteristics identified by Farley in this space are "openness and participation," which hold the tensions together in freedom to accept the relativity of meaning and to accept the shared well-being of the self and the other.[30] Traditions (including biblical texts) inform meaning without rigid predetermination. Individual experience and agency shapes the way one interprets traditions and texts. Faith is personal and experiential as well as socially prescribed, shaped by tradition and mediated by communities.

Chloe approaches this kind of freedom and creativity when she responds to the question, "What does it mean to you to be a Baptist woman in ministry?" She replies, "I

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[29] Ibid., 202-03.

[30] Ibid., 206. This intersubjective well-being of self and other corresponds nicely to Jessica Benjamin's notion of mutuality which lies between assertion and recognition. See Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 15, 22.

think as a Baptist woman . . . part of my identity, is the freedom of being Baptist." She

tells about her Methodist friends who have been "accused, in ordination processes, of

having problems with authority." She grants,

> I'm sure I do have problems with authority. So there's a sense of freedom, as a
> Baptist woman, that's important. I think that, for me, the issues of soul
> competency and priesthood of the believer . . . have always been important. And,
> as I continue on my own journey, I'm realizing … how very crucial that is. For
> me… a huge part of pastoring is making sure that I'm nurturing my own personal
> relationship with God and helping [the congregation] to do the same. And,
> through that relationship, encountering scripture, worshipping and praying
> together . . . seeking God's presence together. I've tried in my ministry… to
> practice the presence of Christ in community. . . . About half of our church has a
> Baptist identity and the other half just comes because it's a mixed community and
> they feel loved when they're there. And I try, periodically, to talk about why *I'm*
> Baptist – why that's important to me. Why that's important to my identity.

Many portrayals of Southern Baptists suggest a rigid and confining cultural space,

particularly for women. Yet Chloe and other clergywomen emphasize the freedom of

being Baptist where meaning is both found and created, and where soul competency is

not without its benign alienations, yet it also holds the promise (or horizon) of a meaning

and creativity, hallmarks of human freedom and fulfillment.

Soul Competency as a Gendered Construction

The meaning of gender in Southern Baptist culture is one of the most vociferously

contested in recent decades. Historically *soul competency* appeared to express freedom

for all Christians, yet in the history of Baptists it has continued to hide, beneath rhetoric

of freedom, interlinked notions of white racial superiority and male normativity.[31] Thus

specific and differing gender roles for women and men have been maintained under a

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[31] See Chapters III and IV for discussions about the history of linkage between gender, race and notions of
liberty in Baptist history.

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Corruption and Malignant Alienation in Soul Competency

Liberty of Conscience

Corruption and Malignant Alienation of the Agent

Baptist belief and practice is too privatized and individualistic

Meaning is corrupted by "false skepticism"

Idol: religious experience highest good; truth is relative
Disavowal: Bible is fallible, mistaken record

Gender roles: men and women idealized as equals, yet maleness is normative

Faith Community

Corruption and Malignant Alienation of the Interhuman

- Loss or denial of the need for community,
- Loss of dialectic between tradition and experience
- Political maneuvering and ideological debate replace being founded in communities of love, trust and empathy

Gender continues to be both a barrier and an opening to women who want to serve as ministers

Authority of Scripture

Corruption and Malignant Alienation of the Social

Baptist belief and practice is too literal and legalistic

Meaning is corrupted by a "quest for certainty"

Idol: Bible is highest good, infallible; defines truth
Disavowal: Human experience is sinful and mistaken

Gender roles: men and women are different and their relationship is complementary; roles are rigid and impenetrable

Soul

Competency

Figure No. 4

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banner of soul freedom for all. In fact the main contests for the meaning of gender gather around the *roles* which are understood to be acceptable to various factions in the denomination.[32]

Feminist theological understandings and conflicts about gender have been a major source of both debate and production of new insight for the last four decades, roughly paralleling the second wave of the women's movement in the U.S. and Southern Baptist ordination of women, all of which began in the mid 1960s. Arguments and constructive proposals at academic, ecclesial, and popular levels of culture have taken many directions, from the ideal of androgyny to utopian visions of separate worlds for male and female, to the complete undermining of the meta-narrative of gender as a dualistic concept.[33]

The challenges of feminism were felt in the churches and theological schools of the Southern Baptist Convention as portrayed in Chapter IV. The eight women in this study range in age from thirty to fifty-two at the time of the interviews. They were all born after 1952 so while some came of age with feminism, and others were born well after the second wave began, all have benefitted in some way from the changes to work,

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[32] When I say "gender is contested" that does not mean that Baptists question the basic categories male and female, but rather that meaning is contested in how males and females relate to one another (as in the questions about marriage, heterosexuality and homosexuality) and the roles women and men should fill in home, church and society. This study does not take up questions of marriage directly, but rather focuses on ways that women's (and men's) roles are contested among Southern Baptists with particular interest in church roles.

[33] Feminist theologians conclude different uses of Christian traditions, which imply a range of understandings of the possibility of relationships between men and women. For example Daphne Hampson and Mary Daly reject the usefulness of the past in terms of the Christian tradition, and Daly calls for a separate understanding of theology from a feminist perspective. Other feminist theologians, such as Anne Carr and Elizabeth Johnson, want to rehabilitate understandings of God distorted but not obliterated by the tradition. Still others, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, hope to retrieve particular aspects of the tradition for use in project of women's liberation. See Hampson, *Theology and Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973); Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Row, 1988); Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); and Johnson, *She Who Is; the Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

education, family and church prompted by the challenges of feminist thought and practice. Many have also felt the powerful backlash which followed in their work, education or service to the church.

Chloe and other participants in the study told stories and answered questions about what it means to them to be a Baptist woman in ministry.[34] Chloe's response, as we have seen, indicated that it was simply a part of her identity, and gave her a sense of freedom. Beth, a 47-year-old ordained Baptist minister, public school teacher, and divorced mother of two adult daughters, says gender didn't really matter when it came to her ordination. "It wasn't like they were ordaining a woman. It was that they were ordaining *me*. It was not a woman. It was me. So, I could have been a Martian or something."

Like other Southern Baptist women, in the past two decades Lydia has often seen her main obstacle to being a woman in ministry as the SBC itself. She is particularly frustrated by the changes that came to its agencies when Biblicists took over the trustee boards at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) and the North American Mission Board (NAMB). She felt insulted and betrayed by those changes, and she responded with action.

After graduating from SEBTS, in North Carolina, Lydia was working in an associational Baptist office in a neighboring state, while her husband was on assignment.[35] She said it "broke my heart" when she saw her friend, a woman who was a member of the board of trustees, treated with such disrespect. So she took action, "I

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[34] A question was posed to each woman about what it meant to be a Baptist woman in ministry. I did not have a specific theory about gender or its construction in mind at the time, yet each woman seemed to understand the question and began responding readily. See the guiding questions in Appendix A.
[35] Lydia's husband is a United Methodist military chaplain, so his assignments have moved the family frequently around the globe.

resigned my job and wrote up a letter that I couldn't support the Southern Baptists any more because of that. But it was probably also, the reality that I just wanted, that I was tired of being called the administrative assistant with a Master of Divinity degree." She was doing a number of tasks and "kind of running the show," including planning and leading the annual associational training conference.

Later Lydia became an endorsed chaplain in the Army Reserves. After 12 years of endorsed status with the NAMB, Lydia read in her state Baptist newspaper that they would no longer endorse ordained women.[36] When NAMB finally contacted her they said she and scores of other women would be "grandfathered" into continuing endorsement, but the board would no longer accept ordained women. Her response was, "Who are you to tell me that I can't be a minister now? You didn't call me into the ministry. Twelve years ago you said, 'You can be a chaplain for us.' And now you say I can't? That's what they did. They didn't even talk to me about it." In protest, and because NAMB would not renew it, Lydia moved her endorsement to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF).

Anna never had the chance to be endorsed by the SBC. She came late to chaplaincy after years of student ministry. During her seminary education, finding a job, ordination and endorsement, Anna experienced a sense of rejection and belittlement related to her status as a woman in each situation. When it came to endorsement, Anna recalls,

> It saddened me that now I had to turn – not that CBF is bad at all – but that I can't ask for the denomination [SBC] that grew me up and told me "Wherever He Leads I'll Go" was a great hymn, except if you're a woman, and now they won't endorse me. . . . But as a woman in ministry, I just hoped, and have hope, and I will continue to hope, that I would just get to do ministry, because that's where

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[36] For changes to the endorsement policy see *The Baptist Standard,* "SBC to Cease Endorsing Ordained Female Chaplains" (February 18, 2002), http://www.baptiststandard.com/2002/2_18/print/endorsing.html (accessed May 31, 2006).

my heart is. And I have to be a woman, and I have to bring that to the table. Just as other people feel they have certain . . . gifts and perspectives . . . that has always been my thing.[37]

These four stories from the narratives by Anna, Beth, Chloe and Lydia display a variety of meanings related to being a woman in the context of Baptist ministry. They range from, "it is part of my identity" to "it is cause for protest" and from "it doesn't matter at all" to "it makes all the difference." What implications can be drawn from these various meanings related to gender and the Baptist ideal of soul competency? It is a contested site for the meanings of gender, and contributes further to the interpretive model we are building (see Figures 3 and 4).

Responding to philosophical challenges of postmodernism, Rebecca Chopp and other feminist theologians have articulated important questions and conflicts related to the meaning of gender. In early academic feminist theology a set of modern liberal assumptions upheld the human subject as structurally coherent and knowable, the powers of reason capable of understanding the subject and the world, and the capacity of language to explain clearly subjects, cultures, history, and language itself.[38]

With these assumptions in hand, feminist theologians worked to elucidate the universal human subject called "woman." However, both liberal modernism and feminism were undercut by burgeoning deconstructive philosophies, such as post-structuralism. They also suffered critique from womanist and mujarista theologians and other women outside the powerful structures of "white feminism," which challenged the

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[37] B. B. McKinney, "Wherever He Leads I'll Go" *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1975), 361. The endorsing agency stopped endorsing female chaplains following the passage of changes to the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000). The change to policy was reported in *The Baptist Standard,* "SBC to Cease Endorsing Ordained Female Chaplains."

[38] Rebecca S. Chopp, "Theorizing Feminist Theology" in *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition and Norms,* eds. Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 215-31.

idea of a universal "woman." Ironically at a time when women and others outside the

traditional structures of power began to find voice, the question arose as to the legitimacy

of *any* universal human subject.

Southern Baptists, particularly in the years of schism, consistent with many

popular religious traditions, would not question the category of "woman" as something to

be defined as distinct and other than "man." Precisely because of this definition of

woman in terms of man, the meaning of women's roles (and by implication men's roles),

were and continue to be hotly contested. Much of that contest takes place in the form of

rhetoric and action related to women's ordination. Biblicists who now lead the

denomination see definitions of gender as one of the spaces in which they can assert their

positions over against the surrounding culture and make counter-cultural claims about the

proper order of creation and role of women.[39]

This study of Baptist clergywomen contests the literature which limits the role of

women in ministry to one "cause" of the schism. An articulate expression of the

argument (clergywoman as one cause of the schism) is offered by David Stricklin in his

1999 study of progressive, left-wing Southern Baptists, *Genealogy of Dissent.*[40] He

asserts that Baptist women who asked for ordination detonated a charge, which became a

burning desire by fundamentalists to return the denomination to more conservative roots.

These women, he argues, were extremely devoted to the denomination, while

simultaneously most disruptive to its stability. He says:

> Women, the most loyal of progressives among Southern Baptists, became the
> most vilified, and their efforts actually contributed to the downfall of the

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[39] Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 229.

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

moderate consensus more decidedly than those of any other progressive element because they threatened the last major area in which Southern Baptist ultraconservatives thought they still had some control: gender relations. Racism had become such a thing to be avoided that nobody dared express racist sentiments openly. But as fully as public racism came to be shunned in the South, even among the most fundamentalist Christians, restrictive views of women's roles in society became one of the cornerstones of the traditionalist structure that fundamentalists planned to "restore" to Southern Baptist life.[41]

Stricklin's work is mainly concerned with demonstrating the role played by "progressives" in the fight between "moderates" and "fundamentalists," but his claim about clergywomen's role in igniting the passions of fundamentalists to launch a takeover is not well-supported by evidence from those on the right in his treatment. However, the conservatives are admittedly not the main objects of his analysis.[42] Nevertheless, his point about the contest over gender is well taken. And he, like others who write about the schism, still fail to explore what the stories of the women themselves contribute to an understanding of the anatomy of the schism.[43]

One way to frame the theological problem of gender within soul competency is to ask: How is gender, as one category of human experience, both a barrier and an opening

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[41] Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent,* 140-41. Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon,* 59, 230 and chapter 8, offers a different reading of the "conservative" concern about race relations. Rather than something to be avoided, new SBC leaders believe that "moderate" Baptists lined up on the correct side of civil rights, but failed when they also joined secular progressives in supporting women's rights, abortion rights and other social issues with which they disagree.

[42] Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent,* xiv-xv. Stricklin is focused on "progressive southern white church people" and a "southern tradition of reformist Christianity" which have previously been overlooked by scholars of southern religion who have tended to focus on the conservatism of southern whites.

[43] The perception that women's ordination as an idea and practice is one of the causes of the schism is a commonly argued point in literature about the SBC controversy. However, none of the writers, including Stricklin show much interest in exploring what the women's experiences contribute to a greater understanding of what happened and why. Stricklin depends heavily on Libby Bellinger's historiography of the organization Southern Baptist Women in Ministry, and the personal stories of one other woman in ministry, Martha Gilmore, for his evidence of the role women played in the conflict. See Bellinger, "More Hidden than Revealed: The History of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry," in *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement,* ed., Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 129-50.

for the well-being of women?[44] Baptists in the Biblicist party tend to employ arguments

for difference, and sometimes for complementarity: women and men are different

(according to biology and scripture) and thus should fill different roles and

responsibilities. Their differences complement one another in marriage, but in terms of

power, women are always in a helping or supportive role. In other words women should

occupy separate (and unequal) domains of home, church and society. This view is

exemplified in the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message (BFM).*[45] In this understanding

upholds gender as a universal aspect of human being, which is not only biologically

given, but also theologically prescribed by scripture. The roles for women are rigid and

impenetrable.

Baptists from the Autonomists' camp argue at times for similarity between

genders and other times for their difference and complementarity; they tend to use each

set of arguments in the service of their implied goal of ending oppression and of fostering

liberation for women. They may argue that "there is no male or female in Christ" (Gal.

3:28), thus all people are equal before God and other human beings, and bear the same

burdens for leadership.[46] Less often they make a case for the differences between men

and women in which women are espoused to possess special gifts and graces needed for

the work of ministry that complement and enhance the work of men. Autonomist views

of gender roles can range from given and universal to chosen and embodied, but when

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[44] Chopp, "Theorizing Feminist Theology," 219. Chopp poses an important questions related to understanding subjectivity and gender: "How does the subject in gender or the gendered subject both deconstruct the universalizing of gender and work for change for women?"

[45] *Baptist Faith and Message,* 2000. Available online: http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp (accessed February 14, 2008).

[46] This argument erodes the historical assumptions about gender that are held within the idea of *soul competency,* which have worked to keep gender inequity in place.

pressed, many would say that gender as we know it has both types of features.[47] In every

argument, the problem of gender is persistent, and theologically the alienation remains.

At times the alienation turns malignant, as demonstrated in the last thirty years, causing

irreconcilable differences and seemingly permanent rifts among Baptists over the

meaning of gender.

Differences in the ways Anna, Beth, Chloe and Lydia see the significance of

being "women" in light of their ordination, endorsement or ministry, point to both the

possibility of different interpretations of that meaning, and to the contested nature of

gender and its potential for alienation. Particular ways that alienation can become

malignant and open the possibility for corruption and evil are explored in the next chapter

where the psychological notions of splitting and polarization are found to have a

detrimental effect on the meaning of gender and in a host of other aspects of Baptist

culture.

Soul Competency: A Reinterpretation by Baptist Clergywomen

Before leaving the theological anatomy of soul competency and its capacity for

giving meaning to gender, a few other questions deserve attention. What about the more

positive aspects of meaning-making, despite the necessity of benign alienation? What

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[47]Autonomist interpreters of scripture and tradition have tended to emphasize the ways that women are
equal to men, although some have also discussed women's unique contributions to life or ministry. Most
Baptist interpreters continue to give tremendous weight to scripture. For example, see Frank and Evelyn
Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1978). Jann Aldredge-Clanton makes
an argument for women's complete equality with men and the freedom of God to call women as well as
men to ordained ministry. She offers historical and scriptural support for her position in "Why I Believe
Southern Baptist Churches Should Ordain Women," in *Baptist History and Heritage* 23 no 3 (July 1988):
50-55. Dorothy Kelly Patterson offers a Biblicist counterpoint to Aldredge-Clanton, in which she argues
the scriptural reasons that women should not hold ecclesial office, making ordination a mute point. See
Patterson, "Why I Believe Southern Baptist Churches Should Not Ordain Women" in *Baptist History and
Heritage* 23 no. 3 (July 1988): 56-62.

makes for community, maturity and trust – as opposed to alienation, corruption and

hostility – within the model we have been building? And what is the role of the mediating

community for clergywomen in the study?

Beth served more than a dozen years at Harvey Memorial Baptist Church. They

ordained her and saw her through several family crises, including a major accident which

hospitalized her for weeks, and from which she was not expected to live. I asked her,

"What was the best part of those years [at Harvey Memorial]?" She replied,

> I think it was – well, it was the people. And how much they just loved you. They
> – oh, my. It was – and when I had my accident. Good grief. There were my two
> little girls. One in the fourth grade and one in the first grade. They just came and
> took over stuff that I probably still am unaware of at this moment. Besides the fact
> that my family was coming. And they just made sure that they were taken care of.
> And that we had meals. You know, stuff that churches do . . . it was just – they
> were ministers to me. For sure.

Despite the challenges of being a woman in ministry presented by the context of the SBC,

despite the alienation between persons and meanings, Beth like all of the women I

interviewed had moments, which they could point to that bespoke a sacred presence, a

genuine community, a sense of well-being and belonging.

In each of the three realms of human being, Edward Farley argues, the individual

subject, the relational or interhuman sphere and social institutions and traditions have a

need for being "founded." The idea of "being-founded" can be understood as relating to

the passion which strives through all the other passions.[48] Where the common experience

of benign alienation goes awry is where we attempt to make one of the "goods at hand,"

into something which will satisfy the underlying passion of human existence. Thus we

find ourselves caught in the web of idolatry and evil, which confounds and debilitates.

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[48] Farley, *Good and Evil,*143-44. Freedom is defined at one point as: "the power to live in the condition of
tragic vulnerability without insisting on being secured by goods at hand."

What frees us from such places of corruption and malignant alienation? Only a sacred presence is capable of satisfying these longings and freeing us from the idolatry of striving after good things as if they were ultimate.[49]

And where or how does one experience such "founding"? Farley, in expert fashion describes the difficulties with searching for a pure example of "being-founded," which is often undertaken by searching through sacred scriptures, but which results in failure in every instance.[50] Instead we are left to "experience being-founded in conjunction with community-mediated exposures of the dynamics of idolatry. Being founded is, thus not a discrete apprehension that chases away a worried and insecure world-view but a participation in a historical milieu that existentially mediates the eternal horizon as a sacred presence." In other words Beth's relaying the love, kindness, support and help she received from her community during her near-death experience, gestures toward such participation – in an actual historical community which mediated to her a sense of the sacred presence.

When asked what nurtures her and helps her to keep doing her work of ministry, Rebecca says, "I would say first that I'm not very good at any of those things. Self care is not something I find it easy to do. So there's a part of me that hears the question and just feels guilty because I don't do those things. But as I mentioned, the times that I've been able to feel like I'm in the right place at the right time, that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing, that's a very sustaining belief for me." The idea of a feeling of "being in the right place and time" recurred several times through Rebecca's story, which I reiterated

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[49] Ibid., 144.

[50] Ibid., 145. Attempts to explain scientifically how "being founded" functions fail because they are impossible. "What we cannot do is discover in these texts pristine incidents of being-founded in individuals that are so compellingly real and public that they mediate our own founding."

this way, "It's almost a vision for living your life the way it's supposed to be . . ?" She replied,

> I think one of the things that really sustains me is the knowledge that wherever I am, I'm being the role model that our generation didn't have. One of my very favorite possessions in the world is this church bulletin that a church member got for me and gave to me. She had noticed that the two young girls sitting behind her in church were passing notes back and forth, and . . . she picked it up afterwards to see what it said, and she gave it to me. . . . It was the Sunday I happened to be preaching and it said "what I love about this church is that a girl preached today. Girl power!" And I thought, you know, there were no girls growing up in this church who were going to grow up with the belief that women can't preach because they will have seen it.

The human condition places human beings in situations, which in their tragic structure bring us into contact with the evil and alienation in ourselves, others, institutions and all of the spaces and relations in between. We are tempted and give in to the desire to make one of those secondary goods into an ultimate good, and in the process make it an idol. Only our needs to transcend self-securing (or absolutizing a particular good) can lead to openness in freedom to the possibilities of creativity, vitality, empathy and wonder.[51] In Rebecca's story this dynamic is present: the creativity and wonder of a moment when girls in her church no longer feel alienated but are founded and empowered by seeing an embodied person, they perceive like themselves filling a role they might not otherwise have known was possible. The power of freedom is experienced by the girls, and also by Rebecca. We also see in the story the ever-present temptation to uphold a possession or an idea as an ultimate good, such that the transcendent good which is presenced in the story can become lost or hidden.

A stream runs through the stories of the women I interviewed. It is a stream which assumes a sense of belonging in one's work. These clergywomen have all experienced

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[51] Farley, *Good and Evil*, 168-70, 178-83, 226-30.

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both benign and more malignant alienation and most have felt outright rejection at times, yet they remain Baptist. They do not reject the claims of the Bible, although they temper them with their own religious experiences and emotional and rational interpretations. They have redefined soul competency implicitly or explicitly to include their own sense of belonging, to act with conviction about their calling and to offer ministry in myriad ways. Despite the historically gendered notions of soul competency which would limit the expression of women in certain roles, including ordained ministry, the clergywomen in this study have reinterpreted the concept to include themselves and to extend that new sense of belonging to others, especially younger women.

Another way to conceive of the benign alienation in gendered understandings of soul competency involves considering yet another way to describe making meaning. Although theological anthropology contributes several powerful concepts to the model, the approach of object relations theory will further expand the growing understanding of the dynamics at work in soul competency. At the pole of liberty of conscience we can discern an emphasis on meanings of gender which are made or created (by persons and communities). At the pole of scriptural authority the emphasis rests more on meanings of gender which are found or discovered (in the text). This difference will become apparent in the exploration of the psychological dynamics of splitting and projective identification at work in the model. Insights of D.W. Winnicott and Jessica Benjamin will bring into focus how splitting and projective identification turn benign alienation into corruption and malignant alienation in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER VII

PSYCHOLOGICAL ANATOMY OF SOUL COMPETENCY: POTENTIAL SPACE VERSUS SPLITTING AND PROJECTIVE IDENTIFICATION

I sort of subliminally knew there were women who go into ministry, but I'd never seen one. I mean, I really hadn't. Like personally, I never attended a church where a woman was on staff. – Martha[1]

To this point the study has examined the history of Baptists since 1920 paying special attention to the ways they have negotiated a set of tensions of belief and practice. The primary tension under discussion is soul competency, the Baptist ideal in which the individual believer has the right and responsibility to present oneself to God, to read authoritative texts, to act with conviction, to participate in community and to resist coercion from any quarter. Baptist clergywomen inhabit this tension between the competing authorities of the individual conscience and the biblical text by reinterpreting soul competency, challenging its gendered notions to include them fully as women called by God to serve the community with freedom and creativity. Yet theologically the potential for alienation remains, and the possibility of corruption and malignant alienation are always present.

To understand better the anatomy of failures of trust, community and creativity, a turn to object relations theory with a particular focus on both the nurturing and polarizing aspects of human minds and relationships will contribute further to the interpretive model under construction. In the final chapter, with the growing interpretive model in hand, the

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[1] Martha is one of the eight clergywomen interviewed for this study. Although she did not know a female minister growing up, she eventually became the pastor of a small Baptist church.

remaining task will be to draw connections between what was discovered in the

clergywomen's stories with what happened in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

during the years of controversy and schism.

Soul Competency as a Playground

In his important work, *Playing and Reality,* pediatrician and child psychiatrist,

D.W. Winnicott, describes the significance of playing for the normal development of a

healthy child.[2] His theories are evidenced in his direct observations of hundreds of

mothers and babies who visited his practice for treatment of various physical and

emotional crises. He practiced both medicine and psychotherapy in England, and drew

his theory from the numerous interactions and his reflections about them.

Winnicott describes the area "between mother and baby" as a playground.[3] The

creation of potential space, or playground between a mother-figure and baby, is important

to the development of a child's capacity for trust and maturity. Briefly, the developmental

steps which take place prior to the "playground" becoming available include a time of

merger between caregiver and child. That initial phase is followed by a time in which the

mother is "repudiated, re-accepted, and perceived objectively," which in effect is the

separation or splitting which is necessary for a baby to see him- or her-self as separate

from the caregiver or care-giving environment. In this stage the mother-figure "is in a 'to

and fro' between being that which the baby has a capacity to find and (alternatively)

being herself waiting to be found."[4] This is the mother or caregiver acting in such a way

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[2] D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (New York: Routledge, 1971).
[3] Ibid., 47. Mother, mother-figure, and care-giving environment are interchangeable in this discussion.
[4] Ibid. I chose not to deal specifically with the closely related issue of "transitional phenomena" or the objects thought to be adopted almost universally by children to help them in the transition from dependent

as to make a "good enough holding environment" for the child's feelings and self-perceptions, such that the infant may develop trust and begin to play creatively.

For an environment of care to be "good enough" means it does not meet every need perfectly, but adequately for the well-being and growth of the child. The next stage of play allows the child to able to play alone in the presence of the person who "loves and who is therefore reliable [and] available and continues to be available when remembered after being forgotten." And finally the baby and mother enjoy playing together which makes possible the capacity for human relationships.[5]

Beth is 47, an ordained Baptist minister, public school teacher, and divorced mother of two adult daughters, living and working in Texas. She begins recounting her story of calling to ministry this way: "Let me tell you how I got started in the ministry. My dad was a minister of music." Calling, for Beth, grew slowly from her experience as one of the "born-into-the-church kids" present each time the doors were open. Her father was her minister of music much of her life, and he tapped her in seventh grade to fulfill her first ministry role by leading a children's choir. Hearing Beth tell her story, it is striking that calling was a gradual process, with each next step sounding like part of a normal progression.

Psychologically the tensions which are found at each pole of *soul competency* can be understood as contributing to a "potential space" in which individual members of local Baptist communities of faith, can, in Winnicott's words, "play creatively" and negotiate

and merged with caregivers to autonomous and interdependent children and adults. A variety of possible objects and ideas may serve clergywomen as transitional phenomena within the schema we are investigating, including the Bible, and even the idea of soul competency itself. This concept may be worth exploring in later work. See Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* 1-5, 40, passim.
[5] Ibid., 48.

imaginatively the possibilities of life within that space.[6] Put another way, these Baptist tensions, together with the others identified by Bill Leonard, make up a "good enough holding environment" or a "playground" which allows for creative negotiation of the tensions into social arrangements which contribute to trust, maturity, creativity and meaningful work.[7] The tensions themselves represent the "good enough" caregiver, in that they remain constant, yet they are durable enough to stand the repudiation and reacceptance of generations of Baptists growing up in their care.[8]

In Beth's case the potential space of Baptist culture made room for her to play with the ideas she received about calling as a child. Even before her dad recruited her to lead a children's choir, she attended a Woman's Missionary Union camp for girls where she felt called to be a missionary to Uganda.[9] More than half the women in the study tell nearly identical stories about hearing missionaries speak (either at a Baptist camp or in a local church) and experiencing a sense of compelling desire to become a missionary.

Beth attended college, majored in music and married someone also pursuing a career in ministry. Following seminary, Beth returned to Texas where she served as a minister of music at Harvey Memorial Baptist church for thirteen years. After Beth had been on staff at Harvey Memorial for about three years, the pastor led the church in an eight-week study to consider ordination.

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[6] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*. 71.

[7] Ibid., 71, 81, 89.

[8] See Robert C. Dykstra, *Discovering a Sermon: Personal Pastoral Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001). I am indebted to Dykstra for drawing on the work of Winnicott, and for pointing out the ways that traditions and their representatives (ministers) can bring forth new meaning by playing creatively with the text and their own experience and for the possible ways that meaning can be both found and created.

[9] GA, or "Girls in Action" ("Girl's Auxiliary" until 1970) is a missions education program of Woman's Missionary Union, SBC. Summer camps are often sponsored by state WMU organizations for elementary aged girls. A "missionary in residence" is often assigned to the camp to tell stories and inspire missionary service among the children. Beth's experience of feeling compelled to become missionary is extraordinarily commonplace among Southern Baptist children, especially girls.

The weekly Wednesday night study took place while Beth was busy directing children's choirs, so she could not participate in the discussion. However, members of the congregation asked if Beth was ordained. When the pastor said, "No," the church members wanted to know, "Why not?" More discussion followed and the congregation finally asked, "Well, why don't we ordain her?"

Beth recalls it being just that straight-forward. Although ordination for women has been an idea and practice that divided congregations and the denomination as a whole, in Beth's case it was not divisive. Instead it was affirming to her creative capacity to embody the role of minister and for her congregation to acknowledge her calling through a service of ordination.

When asked if she'd thought about it previously or brought it up for discussion with her pastor, her parents, spouse or friends, Beth said,

> Yes, I'd thought about it. . . . but no, I hadn't brought it up, because, well, I didn't know any woman who was ordained. And I wasn't even sure how. Do you bring it up or who brings that up? Do you ask "Will you please ordain me?" You know. So, I didn't – I just said, "Oh, I'm fine." But, they brought it up and continued with discussion on it and that was it. It wasn't like they were ordaining a woman. It was that they were ordaining *me*. It was not a woman. It was me. So, I could have been a Martian or something.

Like many of the congregations who ordained the women in this study, Harvey Memorial provided a potential space in which Beth could creatively exercise her gifts, mature in her self understanding as a minister, build a sense of trust with the congregation and the larger Baptist tradition, and receive public affirmation through ordination, despite the previous absence of any ordained women in the congregation. Her family, steeped in Baptist tradition, also provided a potential space into which Beth could create something new by improvising on a common theme of ministry in her family. Not only her father,

but also her brother and grandfather and great-grandfather were all Baptist ministers. She was simply the first *female* minister in the family.

Soul Competency as Finding and Creating Meaning

Winnicott notes often the continuity he sees between the experience of play as it is so easily observed in babies and children, and what he calls a "cultural experience."[10] These two spaces, play and cultural experience, exist neither totally as an inner reality, nor totally an outer one, but rather they take place in between in a "potential space" created by good enough care-givers, or other holding environs, such as the therapeutic space created by a therapist.[11] In order for an infant or an adult in a therapeutic setting, or for any person to experience a sense of autonomy, and achieve some sense of a separate self, they must be able to move from total dependence with "a degree of confidence in the mother's [therapist's, tradition's] reliability" and capacity for empathy.[12] When this move has been achieved, the capacity for playing alone, and for both finding and creating meaning in one's life or work is one positive result.[13] (See Figure No. 5.)

For Joanna, age 40, calling to ministry came gradually. She grew up in a Catholic family and rarely attended church. She had limited exposure to other Christian groups, but she had a rather poor opinion of Baptists. She was quite surprised to find herself a few years later in college attending an American Baptist church that was deeply

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[10] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* 53, 106
[11] Ibid., 106-07.
[12] Ibid., 108.
[13] Dykstra, *Discovering a Sermon,* 13-18.

Psychological Anatomy of Soul Competency

Liberty of Conscience

Good Enough Authority In the Self

- Meaning is created
- Autonomous self is trustworthy
- Gender: assertion

Splitting

Idealization: Pure religious experience is only reliable source of revelation

Disavowal & Projection: Bible is fallible, mistaken record

Gender roles: subjugation

Soul

Faith Community

Potential Space

- **Potential space** for creativity and play
- **Good enough holding environment** to develop trust and maturity
- **Authority** is internal, external, and mediated in communities
- **Meaning** is found and created, informed by experience and tradition
- **Gender** is marked by "mutual recognition"

Splitting

Absence of creative engagement; loss of trust, hope and community

Gender roles:

marked by domination and subjugation

Competency

Authority of Scripture

Good Enough Authority In the Tradition/Text

- Meaning is found
- Traditions are trustworthy
- Gender: recognition

Splitting

Idealization: Bible is infallible and inerrant revelation from God

Disavowal & Projection: Human experience is sinful and mistaken

Gender roles: domination

Figure No. 5

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concerned with the meaning of community and issues of social justice. She was drawn in by the enthusiasm of her friends, the charismatic influence of the young pastor and his wife, and the promise of food and hospitality for college students.

After hearing a great deal of her story, I said to her the following, "Well, your journey certainly has lots of turns in it. I'm wondering if there's anything (you talked earlier about your teacher, and some of the important turns you took) . . . are there any sort of threads you could pull through there that you think… things you've done, ideas you've held as most significant visions of God or the world that have sustained you through all that? Or that have been touchstones, or things you return to?"

Her reply took my use of "turns" as a pejorative judgment of her narrative. She said, "I guess (and this is not going to answer your question) I actually don't see it as many sorts of *turns* on the journey. There is a sense to me, although at the moment I sort of feel derailed, but overall there always seems to have been a progression or something I'd learned that led me to another place. So that it set more of a progression than a lot of turns." She continued:

> Some people say, gosh you're a lawyer and you went to seminary. I always knew that [being a] lawyer would be the background, not the end product. I didn't know I'd go to seminary, I didn't know I'd feel the need to go to seminary or feel called to seminary but that I wasn't staying with being an attorney was no surprise to me.
> In many ways I've always felt that things have sort of progressed. So maybe the overall theme is… I think there's been a constant drive to sort of integrate all the facets. And that's definitely a continuing call. I feel like I want to find a place where …who I am as an intellectual is not in a different place than who I am as a minister with children, or who I am as this or that . . . Surely there's a place, whether in a traditional ministry setting – which I have my doubts – or some other sort of setting… So there's a striving or a calling toward that integration. Being able to not have different compartments for my gifts. And then creativity, maybe that's why things don't seem like turns to me, because it is sort of creatively integrating . . . . I don't like reinventing the wheel if there's a perfectly good wheel to use, but I'm also not above improving the wheel.

Jumping off from something that's there and creating a new thing, and a lot of times actually finding there are no wheels and having to hue out the wheels myself -- to take that analogy to its bitter end (laughing).

In Joanna's description of her journey, the capacity to describe her journey as both an inner and outer experiences, moving fluidly back and forth between internal feelings or descriptions and external events, demonstrates the capacity to play creatively in something like a potential space. She even describes the experience of "reinventing the wheel," which can be taken as a form of "creating meaning" about her work and life. Simultaneously she relates a theme of "progression" in her journey which implies a "discovery of meaning" outside or beyond herself. These themes are intermingled in her description of her own life story. I checked with Joanna to find out if I had missed the mark, by asking her, "When I said turns, that seems negative to you?"

She replied, "Not negative but it seems like a veering off path, or not turns…" I tried again, "As if there's just one path?" She replied, "Okay, mess me up. Turns – it almost seems like, oh I went his way, that's not the right way and so I'm turning this way. You're sort of doing shifts. . . . it felt disjointed. So maybe that's it. Whereas I feel a much more gentle path."

I clarified again, "And that's exactly what I'm looking for – what makes it feel like one thing to you? The creativity you're definitely naming. I hear that but, say more about that. . ." She replied,

I guess what makes it feel like – I don't know maybe this is stating the obvious – for me what makes it feel like all the same thing is because it's always a way to live out ministry. A way to live out serving God in whichever way I feel that God's calling me at that juncture. Does that make sense? That's what makes it seem integrated. That even when I didn't know, wouldn't have named it "God," that's where it seems like that path has gone. And at the moment I feel a little lost in that. So that's why I said I think I feel derailed. Because I have no hope for the institutional church. Although if I lived in Virginia, I'd be happy to be a part of

Charleston [Baptist Church] again. And part of that is my self-consciousness, or mother-consciousness of what kind of place do I want my daughter raised in? And it's like, okay why would I expose her to this sick way of being? And obviously there are some better churches, but the institutional church sort of creates a certain madness in and of itself.

Joanna attributed her feelings of "derailment" and "no hope" to her recently lost position as pastor of a small church in Illinois. She was unsure of her return to ministry as a pastor, or to work in the institutional church at all. Although she was making and finding meaning about her own life, she had clearly also experienced a serious loss of trust and confidence in the "mother church" and its capacity to support her in her calling. This kind of loss and betrayal can lead to a polarizing effect, to which we turn now and explore the case of splitting and projective identification.

Soul Competency Lost in Splitting and Projective Identification

So how does the potential space in a family, a church, or other caring environment stop providing room for creativity, maturity and trust? One potential path is that of psychological defense which splits the holding environment into oppositional tensions which are idealized as "all good" or devalued as "all bad" and which demand a choice. Initially splitting is a natural defense and protection for an infant, but it can become pathogenic.[14] Psychological defenses grow out of an infant's way of perceiving the world, which at first does not differentiate clearly between self and outer world. The infant thus thinks s/he is omnipotently in control of all that happens, but eventually when the world and self begin to differentiate in the experience and cognition of the infant/child a kind of natural splitting takes place, in which self and other are no longer

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[14] See Volney Gay, *Joy & the Objects of Psychoanalysis: Literature, Belief, and Neurosis* (New York: SUNY, 2001), 104-111.

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merged. Such differentiation is necessarily an "either/or" and "this/not that" type of

processing which easily gives rise to the psychic defense of splitting.[15]

Initially infants are incapable of object constancy, thus unable to see that the same

parent who appeared while s/he was feeling frustrated and hungry was the one who also

appeared when s/he was feeling content and full. Instead a good parent and a bad parent

exist as separate unrelated objects in the preverbal mind of the infant. In good enough

settings of care the "good parent" and "bad parent" will eventually be merged into one

more complex and "real parent" as an object of multiple feelings and source of multiple

experiences to the child.[16]

As a defensive process, splitting is an effort to ward off danger, discomfort,

unpleasant affects and pain (physical or psychic). All human beings experience forms of

splitting as a part of their development. In a less benign situation the child may split the

caregiver into good and bad objects and as the self/ego develops may also perceive all

internal self-states and external objects and as either "all good" or "all bad."[17] This initial

stage of defensive process may continue to predominate as a way of coping or in milder

situations may become a preferred defense mainly in times of crisis or trauma.

If the defense continues to be used as a measure to ward off danger, discomfort

and pain, particularly if the child's world is traumatic, unpredictable and chaotic, the

defensive process of splitting takes the additional steps of projecting internal affective

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[15] Glen O. Gabbard, *Psychodynamic Psychiatry in Clinical Practice, Third Edition* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Press, 2000); Otto F. Kernberg, Michael A. Selzer, Harold W. Koenigsberg, Arthur C. Carr, Ann H. Appelbaum, *Psychodynamic Psychotherapy of Borderline Patients* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Nancy McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis: Understanding Personality Structure in the Clinical Process* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).
[16] Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 332. The concept of "good enough mothering" or parenting is discussed by Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* 111-12.
[17] McWilliams, *Psychoanalytic Diagnosis*, 112-13.

and cognitive states, which are unpleasant or dangerous, out onto the external world (projection). In this kind of projection the internal "goodness" or "badness" is seen only in the other, and not recognizable in the self. (See Figure No. 6.)

Primary defensive processes may be observed not only in infants, but also in transference which emerges in therapy situations, in everyday human interactions, and in larger social-cultural phenomena. Social situations of splitting may be analyzed in a way analogous to the individual's experience. Psychoanalytic therapist, Nancy McWilliams observes, "Political scientists can attest to how attractive it is for any unhappy group to develop a sense of a clearly evil enemy, against which the good insiders must struggle. Manichean visions of good versus evil, God versus the devil, democracy versus communism, cowboys versus Indians, the lone whistle-blower against the hateful bureaucracy and so on have pervaded the mythology of our culture. Comparably split images can be found in the folklore and organizing beliefs of any society."[18]

The dynamic of splitting can also be observed in the cultural conflicts of Southern Baptists, especially in relation to the tensions of belief and practice already introduced. For example the Bible might be seen as infallible and inerrant ("all good") while personal religious experience is considered fallible and suspect ("all bad"), or the splitting could take an opposite form which sees the Bible as oppressive, totally lacking authority, and full of errors ("all bad") and personal spiritual or religious experience as the only reliable source for truth or meaning ("all good"). Yet neither of these options fosters creativity or trust. Rather each escalates an environment of hostility, scarcity, and danger, setting the stage for conflict. (See Figure No. 6.)

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[18] Ibid., 113.

Splitting and Projective Identification

1) Bad internal objects [or bad self-representations] are disavowed and split off, then projected onto an outside party (therapist or competing group).

2) The recipient of the projection (therapist or group) begins to act and/or feel like the projected bad object or self-representation

3) The therapist or group modifies the projection and delivers it back—as a countertransference enactment, which is re-introjected by the patient or initiating group

Therapeutic goal: to contain the projections and modify them non-anxiously in a way that they are re-introjected as less damaging to the internal world of the patient.

Social context: In cultural or religious conflicts this process is often at work unconsciously in both directions which has the effect of escalating rhetoric and reinforcing "bad" self conceptions or identifications.

Figure No. 6[19]

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[19] These diagrams come from Gabbard, *Psychodynamic Psychiatry in Clinical Practice* and his rendition of T. Ogden, "On projective identification" *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 60 (1979): 357-373.

Before turning to the social splitting among Southern Baptists at the institutional level, it is instructive to see where splitting was experienced negatively by Beth. A clear and internalized sense of calling and affirmation from her ordination provided Beth with an important source of strength to endure her congregation's splitting later in her career. After a dozen years at Harvey Memorial a new pastor came. Beth was still in the role of minister of music, and she along with other church staff ministers and secretaries were dismissed, quietly and not all at once. They were let go with instructions to discuss none of the particulars, or else lose their severance pay. The congregation was not informed, and Beth was in shock when a lay leader came to her with the news, "We had a meeting and we decided we don't need you anymore. We're going to go in a different direction, and you're not invited to come."[20]

This sort of dismissal after changes in leadership in Baptist churches is common. In Beth's case it was accepted, not without frustration, but without putting up a protest. The idealization of a new guard (new pastor), and devaluation of the old guard (staff who served with the previous pastor) happens frequently, and often covertly in congregations. Other splits over leadership are common as well. It happened to Beth more than once. After serving five years as a minister of music in the smaller Locust Baptist Church, Beth found herself in a divorce initiated by her husband. She felt that she had to resign. Reflecting on her reasons, she said, "It's not because they don't love me. But, they had lots of talks and discussions and group meetings. But, they had a hard time with a divorced person being in leadership. So, that was hard for all of us. It was like my second divorce."

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[20] This was not Beth's attempt at a direct quote of the lay leader, but her rendering of the message she received.

By implication the "hard time" with divorced persons came from an idealization of certain scripture and a devaluation of the five years of experiencing Beth as their minister and leader. This split was obviously painful for Beth, although she defends the church actions to a degree. It is not clear what direct or conscious role Beth's gender played in either of these losses of ministry position for her, if any. However, assumptions about gender run just beneath the surface, and influence decisions like hers in ways worth exploring.

Soul Competency as a Gendered Psychological Construction

Martha, age 44, presently works for a small non-profit agency, but at the time of our interview had just ended a three-and-one-half-year stint as a pastor in Virginia. Previously she spent more than 15 years in other part- and full-time church staff positions, mostly in music and education. Although Martha considers herself a skilled musician, and has sung and directed music in churches and many other settings, she still says she is an amateur: she does it for the love of the music. It is always a part of her life, but music was not the central focus of her life.

When she thinks of her calling, however, she says the "the women's liberation movement" was most influential. She says, "The world does not need somebody with a more perfect piano technique. I mean, you know, like these are important times. There's a war going on . . . . We're all falling apart. The world is terrible. And women really need to step up. And if you're smart and if you're talented as a woman, you need to step up because you can. Our mothers and our grandmothers and our aunts couldn't, but we can. And if we don't, then shame on us. So I'm not going to go major in voice. I am going to

go major in business, which was - I mean, that really was part of my thinking [about vocation]."

She said to herself, "I need to get myself into a predominately male profession. I mean I just need to go for it. And if I don't, I'm letting down my mother and Mrs. Smalley and all these formative important women." She believed they were expecting her to live up to the higher calling that they could not.

Women, who came of age during the second wave of feminism on occasion, like Martha, felt and can articulate a direct influence of the movement on their own careers and vocations. Martha interpreted the challenge of feminism to have a direct impact on her life, and she felt the urging of a generation of women who lived under the feminine mystique to go beyond the traditional roles assigned to women.[21] Betty Friedan perceptively observed that Freudian thought about the "nature of women" was a major contributing factor to the "problem without a name." Freud had universalized a view of women that was solidly rooted in his own cultural time and place (middle class Victorian Vienna).[22] Yet the view of "woman," perpetuated by Freud and his followers, was taken up by intellectuals, social scientists and magazine editors alike, and women were universally presented as a naturally and indisputably passive and envious of male success.

In the Victorian age Sigmund Freud saw male sexuality and anatomy as normative and summed up female sexuality as a wish to be male (penis envy) which was

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[21] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963).
[22] Ibid., 95-97.

eventually replaced by a wish for a baby.[23] In the mid-twentieth century Winnicott

theorized about pure "male" and "female" elements, features of human personality that

he assigned to male or female. He suggested that males gravitate toward doing (active

and impulsive in object relations), while females gravitate toward being (passivity and

sameness in object relations). This dualistic thinking reproduces modern notions of

difference and complementarity between males and females. He further reifies the

dualism by separating the "female" and "male" aspects of personality in time. Infants

initially pass through a passive female stage then progress through the more mature male

stage.[24]

Hannah is a fifty-two-year old campus minister, born in the Deep South in the

mid-1950s to educated, middle class parents. She graduated at the top of her high school

class and was voted most likely to succeed by her six dozen classmates. She attended a

Baptist college and majored in music education. She met her husband, Henry, the first

year, and they married following their graduations. She recalls about that time in her life

that she was "fully thinking, at that point, at I would be teaching school, being a

minister's wife and fulfilling the role in the church and all that. I never had a pastor say,

'You can't be what God is calling you to be' in my formative years. Now they probably

were thinking, 'Women do this; men do this,' but I never had anybody say…if you ever

think about this, that or the other, you can't do that because you're a woman; never did

anybody tell me that."

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[23] Sigmund Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925a), 19: 233-39.

[24] Compared with Freud, Winnicott does make a theoretical improvement by adding the idea of male envy. See Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* 76-85. See also, Freud, "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes."

Hannah's recollection of never being told outright that she was ineligible to serve as a minister is common. A study of the history of Baptists makes abundantly clear that the concept of soul competency sounds on the surface like freedom for all, but on closer examination reveals how it maintained a set of assumptions about roles appropriate for men and women. This functioned to many average Baptists in the pew as a highly mystified concept. Like Hannah many women never heard spoken aloud the underlying reality that there were no official roles for women who were interested in ordained ministry. One way that women who felt a call to ministry dealt with this mystification was to take the surface meaning and create for themselves a deeper meaning that included their experience. They took meaning they "found" in soul competency (liberty and competency for all) and creatively combined it with their own experience of calling and sense of autonomy to reinterpret it as a usable concept to support their vocation as ministers.

When Joanna arrived at seminary, a Baptist House program at a Methodist school, she found herself the first week feeling incredulous at the Dean's presumption. During orientation he said to the new students, "When you're buried in this [program] we know what your experience will be." Joanna turned to the person next to her (who she had just met the previous week) and said, "Did you hear that?! How could he possibly know what our experience is? He doesn't know who I am . . . and he doesn't know how I personally am going to respond!"

Joanna was astounded that no one could understand what seemed so obvious to her, that he could not comprehend her reality. "And obviously, being a feminist, which I never really felt like I needed to say, I was quote, a feminist, before. But being a Baptist,

a feminist, but what I really found, was just having a life before you were seminary, there was something in it about no one can stand out." It was like the school was saying, "We want to sort of mold you to all look the same so that there was something wrong with admitting you had gifts in certain areas. And it was just the most bizarre thing. That I felt that I was being punished for having a life." The rigidity of the boundaries in the seminary seemed to polarize the environment, so that rather than a playground, to Joanna, it felt like a battleground, and she spent most of her first year of seminary adjusting to the lack of trust and lack of expectation of personal autonomy that she found among the faculty and administration. Joanna was applying both a feminist critique and a Baptist one to the setting where she was training for ministry. She and other Baptist feminists gathered to plan worship, challenge the student placement policies, and support one another through their education.

Feminist psychologists in the late twentieth century arrived at questions similar to those raised by feminist theologians with regard to gender. The tension between subjectivity and social construction of persons remains unresolved and pushes to the forefront questions of how gender is constructed and reified by forces biological, interpersonal and social. Psychoanalytic theorist and practitioner Jessica Benjamin in *The Bonds of Love,* adds to the interpretive model we are building.[25] Benjamin confronts both the contributions and assumptions of Sigmund Freud and his followers concerning the problem of domination. Freud helped illuminate the perennial state of domination not as purely a matter of nature but as a problem of human relationships. More specifically he cast it as a problem between men. The "Oedipal conflict" was portrayed as a power

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[25] Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988).

struggle between fathers and sons, with the subordination of women always assumed.[26]

Females only functioned as "prize or temptation to regression, or as the third point of a

triangle," in Freud's interpretation.[27]

Benjamin's work challenges the predominating myth of the Oedipal drama, which

assumes an authoritarian relationship between genders (male domination and female

submission). These assumptions also shape the hierarchical relations between other

dualisms in the culture such as "autonomy and dependency, and . . . the positions of

master and slave."[28] She argues that a more primal understanding of domination needs to

be unveiled as a "complex process of psychic development," which endures despite

society's claims of equality between the sexes. Benjamin sets out to show "how the

structure of domination can be traced from the relationship between mother and infant

into adult eroticism, from earliest awareness of the differences between mother and father

to the global images of male and female in the culture." [29]

Benjamin argues that "assertion" and "recognition" are two tensions which exist

in human relationships, and which at their best are resolved in the paradox of shared

mutuality.[30] In the Baptist ideal of *soul competency,* assertion maps onto the individual's

liberty of conscience and recognition onto the authority of texts. Benjamin argues that the

polarity of these ideas is difficult to sustain, and "sets the stage for domination" and

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[26] "In the beginning was the deed," says Freud, and by the deed he means the killing of the father in the primal horde, the father who previously had control of the females for his sexual pleasure, and punished or expelled any sons as they came to maturity if they attempted to possess the females. See *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics,* trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Dover Publications, 1998 [1918]), 138. This primal deed and its aftermath for Freud were not only the beginnings of relationships between fathers and sons, but were for him also an important exploration of the hypothesis that the primal horde and "killing the primal father" are precursors to the rest of humanity's social and cultural institutions.

[27] Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love,* 6.

[28] Ibid., 7

[29] Ibid.

[30] Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love,* 15, 22

subjugation.[31] She says, "A condition of our own independent existence is recognizing the other. True independence means sustaining the essential tension of these contradictory impulses; that is for both asserting the self and recognizing the other. Domination is the consequence of refusing this condition."[32]

She goes on to argue that in the Western model of parenting, in which many (middle class) mothers in the twentieth century raised their children as the primary caregiver, boys have the task of breaking their first bond of mutual recognition with their mothers. Girls have the different task of separating from their mothers in order to discover their own identity. Often boys are not able to complete the breaking task, because the bond is so strong, and they are left to objectify their mothers and by turns all women. Girls conversely are left with a denial of self. Together these dynamics lay an internal psychological foundation for domination and subjugation. Significantly these dynamics can also be observed at work in the wider cultural ethos.[33]

Beth maintained that her gender did not play a role in the church's decision to hire or ordain her. She was less sure about how being a woman might have played into the endings of her two church ministry jobs. But her submission to the decisions of the church, with little or no protest, and the invocation of biblical authority to back up the decisions, displays a lack of "mutual recognition" on the part of Beth and her church community and suggests an internalized acceptance of the domination of the Bible, the church, and its decisions about her life.

Nevertheless, in the face of these conflicts Beth held on to her vocational purpose and self-understanding even when two different churches were no longer able to see her

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[31] Ibid., 50, 51 ff.
[32] Ibid., 53.
[33] Ibid., 76-84.

as valuable or needed, preventing her from practicing ministry in their communities. Their views no doubt were influenced by particular interpretations of the New Testament which allowed authority to the text, and diminished the authority of their experience of her as their minister. Yet Beth still sees herself as a minister and her work with music students in a public school as ministry. At the time of the interview she was not willing to risk seeking a traditional church ministry position; however, neither her sense of calling and nor her self-understanding as a minister had been seriously diminished by either congregation's division over her role.

In a similar fashion, Baptists who no longer felt welcome by the SBC or its agencies were not diminished in their sense of being Baptist or of having a mission to fulfill. Collectively they experienced a sense of loss and mourning over the changes they experienced in their denominational home. However, they managed to transcend the split and start over where they found themselves, creating new expressions of Baptist culture, starting as movements and blossoming into social institutions.

Soul Competency as Resiliency through Alienation and Schism

When Anna arrived at one of the SBC seminaries in the early 1980s, officials insisted she undergo a special interview before beginning the program. Single women and married women, if their husbands would also be students, were exempt. However, married women whose husbands would *not* be attending seminary, had to endure one

additional interview. The main question was not to Anna, but to her husband Mark: "Do you understand that your wife is preparing for ministry, and do you support her?"[34]

The story of Anna's pre-entrance interview for seminary sounded a wake-up call for her. She recalls, "only when I got down there [did I] really begin to realize that there was a problem . . . . a huge divide . . . . and I really didn't care; *I just wanted to minister*. So I thought, 'I'll do the best I can. There [will be] someplace I can minister.'"

That initial interview and a job interview two years later functioned like sexist bookends to Anna's formal theological education. Nearing graduation and searching for a ministry position, Anna recalls that her male peers were getting three and four times more interviews than she was. She described a time when she felt mocked and degraded by one interviewer:

> A guy from Georgia was interviewing me. And he said, "You're married?! You want to do ministry and you're married?!"
> I said "Yeah."
> And he said "What do you think you can do married?"
> "Anything I can do single." I didn't understand what [he was talking] about ... I think he got the name, and started interviewing and assumed that I was single. And then when he saw I was married he became very degrading.
> "Well, God can't use you."
> And I said, "Well chances are you aren't going to hire me, so maybe we should just end this interview." And I walked out.

At first Anna was bewildered by this man's remarks, before realizing that he was looking for a single woman and assuming that a married woman had obligations to her home and family, which prevented her from doing ministry – the same sexist assumption of the pre-entrance interview. If the entrance interview had been a wake-up call, two

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[34] Anna recalls that the seminary official who performed the interview also thought it "stupid" and didn't draw out the line of questioning but changed the subject. Nevertheless, he was required to hold the interview and ask the question.

years later Anna was wide awake and ready to act. She chose not to endure the man's insults but rather to walk away.

Anna could have kept walking – away from Baptists altogether.[35] However, she chose to remain and believe herself *competent* to hear and respond to a call to ministry. Although seminary officials perceived her as inept for ministry, because as a woman she was to be under the authority of her husband, Anna resisted their challenges and doubts about her competency and chose to pursue her education and search for ministry placement. With persistence she found a youth ministry position, and in effect redefined the tacit gender inequities assumed in *soul competency* by acting as a full and equal participant, creating a way to remain Baptist and to sustain her vocation.

Other places where the politics of gender and negotiation of Baptist tensions are evident in Anna's story are at the points of her ordination and endorsement as a chaplain. Despite continuous ministry in several churches following seminary, it was over 12 years after publicly declaring a call to ministry that Anna received ordination.[36] Although she hoped not to create conflict, Anna felt that God was "putting on her heart" a desire to be ordained. She remembers earlier in her ministry when she had preached at Grove Baptist Church, a member of the congregation said, "Oh! You did a great job! But it's just a shame they will never ordain you." She knew the man well, and so replied to him, "You know what? You don't have to. God already has!" She laughingly teased him about not putting his hands and on her anyway. Later he came back and said, "You know what?

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[35] Many women, upon experiencing similar and multiple confrontations, have chosen to walk away from Baptist life and pursue vocational ministry in other denominations or to change vocational directions altogether. Many outsiders hear stories like these and fail to comprehend why anyone would remain within the Baptist milieu. This study focuses on the situations of those who have chosen to remain, but other investigations about those who have departed would enrich an understanding of the dynamics.

[36] Anna has served five churches since taking her first job as a youth minister in college.

You got the best ordination." Anna concluded, "I guess that's always the way that I

looked at it – about ordination itself. I really felt like God had called and ordained me."

The final chapter of this story came several years later when Grove was indeed

the church that ordained Anna at the request of Calvary, the church she was serving at

that time.[37] She contacted all the young women who had been in her youth groups and

served as interns and invited them to the service. At her ordination Anna said she felt

confirmed that "there is always hope. The denomination was certainly digressing, and the

affirmation is limited, yet there is hope to do ministry."

> More recently Anna sought endorsement for her work as a chaplain. She recalls:
>
> It saddened me that now I had to turn – not that CBF is bad at all – but that I can't ask for the denomination [SBC] that grew me up and told me "Wherever He Leads I'll Go" was a great hymn, except if you're a woman, and now they won't endorse me. . . . But as a woman in ministry, I just hoped, and have hope, and I will continue to hope, that I would just get to do ministry, because that's where my heart is. And I have to be a woman, and I have to bring that to the table. Just as other people feel they have certain . . . gifts and perspectives . . . that has always been my thing.[38]
>
> Anna's story reveals several negotiations of the tensions of *soul competency*.

These brief excerpts and the longer narrative told by Anna reveal her faith to be both

experiential, often recounting personal conversations with God and modes of discernment

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[37] No universal process exists for Baptist ordination. However, for males the process typically follows a somewhat identifiable pattern: 1) licensure so the candidate could begin practicing ministry; 2) ordination by a local church to confer blessing for ministry including a) convening a council or presbytery including ministers from neighboring churches b) examining the candidate for authenticity of call and doctrinal soundness; c) taking a vote in the council and/or the local church; d) holding a ceremony (usually on the same day as the examination) to bless the candidate and lay on hands. See G. Thomas Halbrooks "The Meaning and Significance of Ordination Among Southern Baptists, 1845-1945." *Baptist History and Heritage* 23, no. 3 (July 1988): 24-32. For women the process has tended to follow the latter sequence, but has often taken years longer or precluded ordination.

[38] B. B. McKinney, "Wherever He Leads I'll Go" *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1975), 361. The endorsing agency stopped endorsing female chaplains following the passage of changes to the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000). The change to NAMB policy was reported in *The Baptist Standard,* "SBC to Cease Endorsing Ordained Female Chaplains" (February 18, 2002), http://www.baptiststandard.com/2002/2_18/print/endorsing.html (accessed May 31, 2006).

and reflection that express her dependence on the divine. Simultaneously she holds a deep reverence for the Bible, interweaving its stories, norms, symbols and imagery into her own life's story. Despite the larger context of conflict in the SBC, local communities of Baptists were available and present to Anna throughout her life and especially during the time from college when she first named her sense of vocation until the present. These communities supported her call, employed her and eventually ordained her to ministry, and the CBF endorsed her for chaplaincy.

Although feelings of betrayal, anger and disappointment toward the SBC run like a current through Anna's years of ministry, so does a refrain of hoping that she would "just get to do ministry." Various Baptist communities provided potential space for creativity, trust and maturity to develop in Anna's identity as a minister. In retelling the story of her ordination, Anna displays how meaning was both created and found in relation to her vocation and purpose. She believed God had already ordained and blessed her in the best possible way, which in effect created the meaning for her pastoral identity and helped her to claim her own internal authority to speak and act as a minister. When she courageously asked for ordination, and a conferral of external authority, she found a renewed sense of hope despite the potential conflict it might cause, and the continued alienation she felt from her denomination. The authority conferred by the two congregations emboldened her later to take up the role of hospital chaplain. In terms of gender, Anna's narrative exposes again hidden inequities in traditional Baptist understandings of soul competency. In effect her persistence in the face of humiliations and rejections demonstrated her courage to remain Baptist, pursue her calling, and assert her ministry role as one appropriate for women.

Clergywomen's narratives display how "potential space" created by the tensions of Baptist belief and practice can make room to play creatively with ideas and actions found in calling, soul competency, religious liberty, and other Baptist convictions. All eight clergywomen in the study have faced similar life-defining challenges and creatively strategized ways to redefine key Baptist concepts within their own experiences. Their stories also suggest not only how they negotiate the theological tensions of Baptist life, but also how the milieu or culture of Baptists, and families steeped in that tradition, can offer a "good enough" holding space for clergywomen to experience creative living and meaningful work. However, potential space is tenuous and easily dissipated when the tensions are polarized. The creative tensions may shift into "good and bad" polarities, and the dynamics of splitting and projective identification make the poles which hold the space unavailable, leaving no room for play or creative growth. As splitting creates greater polarities, the opening for relationships of domination and subjugation can further corrupt the space. The history of domination and subjugation is pervasive and powerful in the wider culture, and insinuates itself into the constructions of gender in Baptist life.

Clergywomen in this study have found numerous ways to reinterpret soul competency to include their own experience while not giving up entirely on either scripture or the church community, although the limits of the Baptist culture were severely tested. Like the caregiver who withstands rejection and reappraisal, the poles of tension in Baptist culture withstand the rejection and rejuvenation of their value as "good enough" convictions. They continue, despite periods of polarization and conflict, to provide a playground and potential space for vital and thriving ministry and work of Baptist clergywomen and others. Still the times of conflict and splitting in the SBC have

been difficult to endure and have left long-term marks on the lives of many Baptists. To that recent schism and its dynamics we turn finally.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT SOUTHERN BAPTIST SCHISM AND RENEWAL

> *Historically, Baptists have lived with a certain creative tension at the point of freedom and authority. Without authority freedom becomes a kind of theological anarchy. Without freedom authority becomes oppressive and wooden. Both the problem and the glory of our Baptist heritage are rooted in the authority of the Word of God and in the freedom of man's mind and conscience to understand it.* – Penrose St. Amant[1]

During the very years in which the clergywomen in this study were coming of age, attending seminary, finding ordination, and beginning their work as ministers, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was in a major transition which included vociferous conflict, theological difference, and political maneuvering for control of the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. Between 1979 and 1990 the SBC and its affiliated boards, schools and agencies changed from the hands of the Autonomist Party to the Biblicist Party.[2] A significant aspect of the dramatic change was the loss of women's leadership and status at the institutional level. There are many ways to understand the lives of Baptist clergywomen, and there are extensive forms of analysis to understand the schism of Southern Baptists. So far the previous chapters have left aside other

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[1] C. Penrose St. Amant, "Southern Baptists: Unity in Diversity" in *Baptist History and Heritage* 7, no. 1 (January, 1972): 15-16.

[2] The organizing efforts of Biblicists in the SBC were meticulous and used the appointive powers of the SBC president to insure that every board and agency elected only those (mostly men) in step with the program of steering the convention in a more conservative direction. Moderate resistance to the changing of the guard became impossible when they did not win a single SBC presidential election after 1979. This change is well documented in several studies including Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), chapters 7-8. A moderate perspective can be found in Walter B. Shurden, (Ed.), *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993). And a conservative perspective is represented in James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1991).

possibilities to focus on the ways that both individuals and institutions negotiate the tension of Baptist conviction called *soul competency.* When considered in terms of theological anthropology and psychoanalytic theories of object relations, soul competency and its poles of tension show themselves to be rich dynamic metaphors which taken together suggest an interpretive model for understanding the schism.

The major findings of the constituent parts of the model so far (see figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 in the previous chapters) include the following observations. Soul competency is a theological hallmark for Baptists which holds together the competing authorities of the individual liberty of conscience and social institution and tradition of the Christian scriptures. The idea and practice of soul competency keeps Baptists from "going off the deep end" or moving significantly outside Baptist belief and practice by the restraints each tension places on the other. The authority or veneration of experientially- and rationally- shaped religion are not neatly separable from the biblically-shaped religion because of the historical emphasis of soul competency, which is both an idea found in scripture and an approach to reading the Bible. Additionally both ideas shape the Baptist practices of reading, speaking and acting on faith in overlapping ways.

Soul competency is one Baptist expression of humanity's elemental passion for reality, or the drive to make sense of the world, through discovering or creating meaning out of life experiences and received religious traditions. The perennial task of meaning-making is always shaped by anxiety and benign alienation between the one and the many and among individuals, groups and communities because of the infinite ways that reality and meaning can be approached. Within that task reside the always-present possibilities for corruption and idolatry. Yet soul competency also holds out the possibilities of

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experiencing redemptive freedom and creativity of the individual within community and of embracing a faith that is at once personal and experiential as well as socially shaped by the traditions of scripture and mediated by communities of love and mutuality.

With its language of freedom for all to stand before the divine, to approach scripture without aid of a cleric, and to associate with a community without interference or coercion, soul competency has historically maintained a greater measure of freedom for men and less for women. It does so by mystifying the gendered and racially prejudiced constructions of human liberty. Ironically Baptist clergywomen have negotiated the tension creatively and embraced the sense of freedom in soul competency by reinterpreting it and by de-mystifying the hidden gender constructions. In the process they have claimed their own places among a priesthood of all believers, including those who feel called out to join the ordained ministry.

Often the concept and practice of soul competency can go wrong, when the faithful "go off the deep end" in one direction or another, making idols of their own ideas or the Bible, and are not able to be founded in freedom. The psychological dynamic of splitting is especially prevalent in cases where groups begin to coalesce around one pole of the tension or the other, and they make the easy mistake of turning goods at hand (like the task of making meaning, or the wisdom of the Bible) into ultimate goods. Quickly the tensions can escalate and something akin to psychological splitting can be detected in the rhetoric, argumentation and political maneuvering of antagonistic groups.

Existing literature about the controversy of the SBC is replete with language that fits the paradigm of splitting and projective identification. Even the names for the change that came to the SBC evoke the language of splitting: battle, takeover, resurgence,

political intrigue, theological heresy, and holy war, to name a few. Jesse Fletcher, who

chronicled the changes to the SBC tried to capture the spirit of the times: "This conflict

was a civil war with a difference," He observed. "This time there was no Mason-Dixon

line neatly dividing he antagonists. Only where the Civil War had divided families along

its borders was there a counterpart, in that brother and sister were increasingly divided

from brother and sister."[3]

Individual Baptists called their antagonists everything from skunks to liars. Stan

Hastey, among the first wave of progressives to depart the SBC noted, "More than any

other matter dividing Southern Baptists into fundamentalist and moderate camps, it is this

demonizing of the opposition that has made rapprochement unlikely, if not impossible."[4]

Fletcher described the maneuvering as "constant efforts on the part of the most polarized

groups to preempt the categories and name the agenda."[5] And he also sees a similarity of

political tactics employed in the form of spreading rumors. "The impact of rumor mills

was significant at a number of Conventions that followed [after 1980], and each side

accused the other of planting them for their own purposes."[6]

Biblicists argued that their Bibles were violated, and Autonomists argued that it

was their consciences which were violated.[7] The early book titles about the controversy

captured the language as well: *Baptist Battles, Going for the Jugular* and *Truth in Crisis.*

It was not just language, however. Many people lost jobs, status, a sense of place and

belonging. One feature of such religious conflicts is the deeply personal way that many

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[3] Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1994), 260.
[4] Stan Hastey, "The Southern Baptist Convention, 1979-93: What Happened and Why?" in *Baptists in the Balance: The Tension between Freedom and Responsibility,* ed. Everett Goodwin (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997), 127.
[5] Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention,* 263.
[6] Ibid., 268.
[7] Ibid., 271.

stakeholders experience the upheaval. A newspaper journalist in San Antonio attempted

to sum up the carnage: "Without a twinge of conscience or hint of remorse, conservative

laymen and preachers smeared the names of Baptists brothers and sisters and conducted

witch hunts that battered the reputations of holy men and women. In their wake, they left

damaged institutions, wounded spirits, and broken hearts. All in the name of God." [8]

Social Evil in Baptist Institutions

Before completing an analysis of the corruption at work in the SBC, a brief

survey of Farley's depiction of social evil is necessary. The social realm, which

interpenetrates with the realm of agency and the interhuman, is tragically structured by

elemental passions, which inherently conflict. This tragic structure does not indicate evil

in itself, but often is the opening for corruption and evil in the form of idolatry to enter

into a social system. Corruption becomes possible in a situation when in response to the

contingencies of life, some particular good is absolutized. This absolutization is a form of

idolatry in which the eternal horizon is not open, but rather the object of need—an idea or

anything temporal—is embraced in an effort to escape vulnerability and finitude.[9] Farley

observes:

> Thus, the perennial candidates for things that remove our vulnerability and
> provide a securing foundation are religions, sciences, nations, social movements,
> comprehensive interpretive schemes, methods that enable criticism of or interpret
> the world, value-preserving institutions, and even revolutions to procure freedom
> and justice. This insisting on and finding a substitute for vulnerability is not just a
> repetition of the passionate striving through mundane goods toward their horizon.
> It transforms that striving into attempts to make these goods at hand fulfill these
> passions and end the tone [of] discontent.[10]

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[8] Ibid., 291. Fletcher is quoting Roddy Stinson of the *San Antonio Express* (June 18, 1993).
[9] See Farley, *Good and Evil,* chapter 6.
[10] Ibid., 133.

In the social realm corruption often takes the form of self-absolutizing or idolizing of the institution itself or of its aims. When the self-perpetuation of the institution or the pursuit of its secondary rather than primary aims become central, then the tragic and inevitable competition between social groups turns into domination and subjugation, and the sacred horizon is diminished. A social institution will take on a life of its own, by virtue of the primacy of its purposes, and by the way it draws in the loyalties of individuals and smaller groups who need the mundane goods it offers. Such competition with other institutions together with member loyalty generates a fear of scarcity and stigmatizes, then victimizes potential enemies. The depth of oppression becomes apparent by observing the effects of subjugation on individuals and relations in the social setting. Such corruption spreads like an infection, says Farley, and then the work of collusion keeps the corrupted system in place.[11]

In the case of the social realm, institutional corruption and evil can be recognized by viewing its effects in individual agents and interhuman relations. Additionally, redemption is not possible until a presencing of the sacred is returned to the social system through attention to the individual, as represented in the metaphor of the face. An excellent example of this dynamic is captured in the now common aphorism, which has evolved over the past forty years since women have been ordained in Southern Baptist life: *ordination becomes possible only when it stops being an issue, and becomes a person, with a face and a name, somebody's daughter.* Such transcendence requires radical critique of social evil and participation in communities which prioritize face-to-face community.[12] Farley uses the phrase "communities of the face" to describe actual,

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[11] Ibid., 256-57.
[12] Ibid., 289-92.

historical communities which prioritize the individual agent and in so doing reshape their own values to attend to that person and all persons, which has the effect of drawing them beyond their own "self-absolutizing" tendencies "to larger settings of human good."[13] In such communities, individuals can approach one another through shared suffering and empathy.[14]

Anatomy of a Southern Baptist Schism

Southern Baptists have been negotiating the tensions identified by Bill Leonard from their start in ways both creative and corrupted. The poles of tension in *soul competency* represent not only theological tensions in Baptist belief and practice, but also mundane goods of human life including freedom and agency for the individual and meaningful traditions (embodied in but not limited to the Bible) in the social realm. Biblicist leaders in the SBC embraced the religion and comprehensive interpretive scheme of belief found in the inerrancy of scripture and allowed it to corrupt their rhetoric, purpose, and organizing social structures in ways that devalued or disavowed anything outside their own understanding. Autonomists who battled on the other side were hoping for the security of a revolution which would ensure freedom and justice for "true Baptists." Both groups embraced goods at hand in an effort to secure themselves against the tragic nature and chaotic structure of the human condition. The mundane goods of life and the eternal horizon are confused in each case because the former are expected to act (permanently) as the latter. Each side "split" the two poles of *soul competency* into "all good" and "all bad" and blamed the other side for not "believing"

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 43-44

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rightly or not acting rightly. The polarization can be visualized with the Autonomist Party

valorizing individual freedom, while the Biblicist Party gathered around the pole of

scriptural authority. The accumulation of dualistic thinking eventuated in a schism of the

denomination, and the emergence of two additional Baptist groups.[15] (See Figure No. 7.)

Nearly a decade before "the controversy" was underway, one Baptist historian

observed the tensions of soul competency, and detailed their potential corruption. In

1971, amid the controversy over the Broadman Bible commentary on Genesis, C.

Penrose St. Amant wrote the following:

> Our Baptist heritage is based equally on the biblical faith and man's freedom to
> understand it according to the dictates of his conscience. The final arbiter of what
> the Bible means for Baptists is not the biblical scholar, nor the pastor, nor the
> editor of this or that, nor a consensus of the Southern Baptist Convention, nor the
> so-called liberal or conservative or moderate by whatever definitions. We do not
> believe in the authority of popes or synods or conventions or associations or
> churches or pastors or professors over the individual conscience. Either we take
> seriously the competency of the individual in this matter or we do not. And if we
> do not, we repudiate in one fell swoop an essential element in our Baptist
> heritage. Diversity among us is the result of what has been called soul
> competency.[16]

As St. Amant warned, two parties coalesced, their positions became polarized, the

shape of the controversy grew increasingly divided, and the rhetoric and activity became

more intense on both sides during twelve years of contention. The Biblicist Party took the

lead on defining many terms of the battle. The Autonomist Party had difficulty agreeing

on their own terms, but they were able to make their disavowals clear. In other words

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[15] In addition to Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Alliance of Baptists, the two nationally oriented groups, several state conventions (i.e. Texas, Virginia, and Missouri) also split into moderate and conservative groups in similar struggles in the decade which followed the SBC schism.

[16] C. Penrose St. Amant, "Southern Baptists: Unity in Diversity" in *Baptist History and Heritage* 7, no. 1 (January, 1972): 15. It was simultaneously disconcerting and affirming to stumble across the writings of St. Amant near the end of this study. His insights prior to the SBC schism were prescient, and apparently his thoughts were influential on the writings of other Baptist historians in the decades which followed.

Soul Competency Polarized in the Southern Baptist Schism

Liberty of Conscience

Autonomist Party

Bible is a source of doctrinal authority to be interpreted
- "false skepticism"
- **Idol**: freedom is highest good; truth is relative
- **Disavowal**: anyone who believes in an inerrant Bible

Authority is vested in each individual, mediated through Christ
- **Idol**: unrestrained autonomy
- **Disavowal**: hierarchical pastoral authority

Gender: chosen and embodied; women's roles are diffuse and unclear
- **Idol**: equality between sexes *which maintains* status quo
- **Disavowal**: anyone not for equality

Soul

Faith Community

SBC's Institutional Ethos

Bible is used as a weapon by both sides
Authority is contested, highly suspect and politicized in every decision
Gender is reduced to *women* and their role
Meaning is embattled in the annual SBC struggle over resolutions and in changes to the *Baptist Faith and Message*
- Political maneuvering
- Rhetoric takes tone of ideological debate and blame

Community is strained and eventually lost
- Churches must choose sides
- Authorities (pastor and congregation collide)
- Personal feelings are injured
- SBC is further alienated from wider culture
- Domination and subjugation characterizes the struggle between parties
- Primary purposes become secondary (missions, evangelism, growth)

Competency

Authority of Scripture

Biblicist Party

Bible: "ultimate good" and inerrant in every way
- "quest for certainty"
- **Idol**: Bible is highest good, infallible; defines truth
- **Disavowal**: anyone who does not believe in inerrant bible;

Authority is vested in the Bible and conferred on the pastor to oversee the community
- **Idol**: charismatic leadership
- **Disavowal**: congregational decision making

Gender: given and universal; women's roles are rigid and impenetrable
- **Idol**: male headship
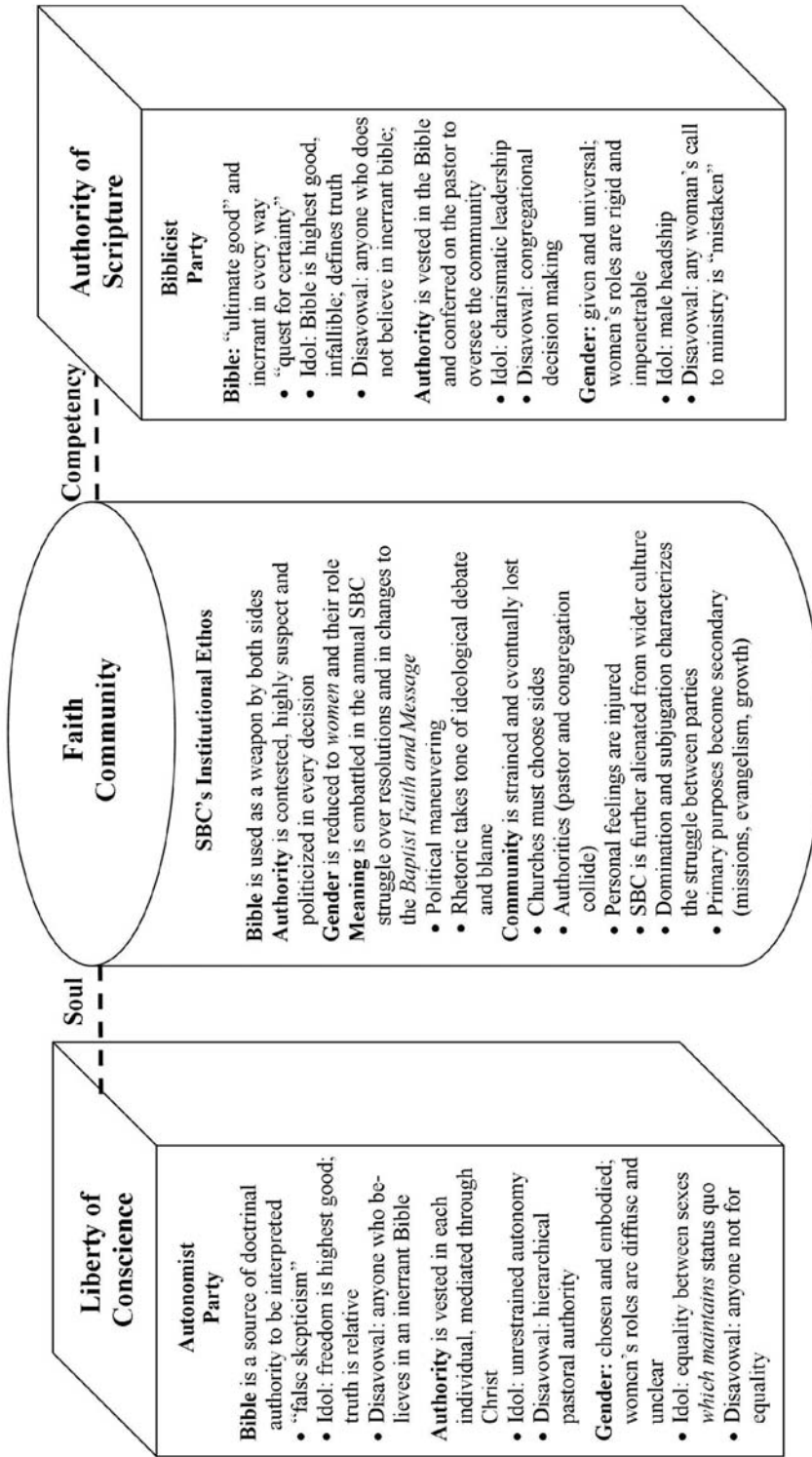- **Disavowal**: any woman's call to ministry is "mistaken"

Figure No. 7

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Autonomists were first to be on the defensive, and thus not always sure what were

defending; however, they were more sure about who they were defending against. The

following discussion of polarization in the SBC describes the features of each party

during the controversy in terms of their differences about the Bible, authority, and

gender. It is followed by a description of the ways the institutional ethos was corrupted in

the process.[17]

The Bible

Although the sixty-six books of Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament, known

simply as "the Bible" to most Baptists, is among the highest sources of authority for

Baptists of all stripes, during the controversy, Biblicists elevated the Bible to an "ultimate

good." Some scholars have argued that is was not new for fundamentalists, but the

novelty came at the point of the intensive amount of splitting and polarization. Not only

did Biblicists claim that "the truth" (of the Bible) was in crisis, but also their love and

admiration for the Bible was expressed in rhetoric that elevates the Bible to a place of the

highest good. For example in his 1987 Convention sermon, "A Baptist and His Bible,"

SBC President, Jerry Vines preached:

> "The Holy Scriptures." That is Baptist talk. Wherever you find a Baptist,
> somewhere nearby you will find a Bible. That Baptist will speak of the Bible in
> his hands with respectful tones. Baptists are early taught to love and respect the
> Bible. On a hot summer day, at Vacation Bible School, little Baptist feet carry
> little Baptist bodies into the awesome church auditorium. Billy Baptist stands
> before his little classmates and with trembling hands holds a Bible. Little Baptist
> voices sing, "holy Bible, Book divine, precious treasure, thou art mine." Baptists

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[17] Other major points of polarization could be explored (i.e. the church, the family, theological education,
or a variety of social concerns), but the Bible, authority, and gender are the areas most central for this
study, and the Baptist tension in soul competency.

are known as a people of The Book. We are a Bible-readying, Bible-believing, Bible-loving and Bible-sharing people. [18]

Vines says the Bible is not equal to salvation or to God, but he opines, "Because we understand the Bible's intention, Baptists get concerned when there is any hint of attack upon it. We get upset when there is any undermining of its authority, questioning of its reliability or denying of its accuracy. This Book has to do with man's eternal destiny. To attack the Bible is like tampering with medicine for a sick man; like poisoning the bread of a hungry man."[19] The idea that the Bible might be under attack appeared to be felt genuinely and broadly by Biblicist leaders. Yet, Baptist Autonomists also continued to show a deep respect for the Bible and a great seriousness in their attempts to understand it. Still the differences in approach sound quite polarized in the rhetoric of the opposing groups.

In their "Address to the Public" Autonomist leaders, Walter Shurden and Cecil Sherman say about the Bible in relation to the years of controversy,

> Many of our differences come from a different understanding and interpretation of Holy Scripture. But the difference is not at the point of the inspiration of or authority of the Bible. We interpret the Bible differently, as will be seen below in our treatment of the biblical understanding of women and pastors. We also, however, have a different understanding of the nature of the Bible. We want to be biblical—especially in our view of the Bible. That means that we dare not claim less for the Bible than the Bible claims for itself. The Bible neither claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching. Bible claims must be based on the Bible, not on human interpretations of the Bible.[20]

Splitting and projective identification on each side makes claims about the Bible which serve to disavow those on the other side who do not believe or act in the prescribed

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[18] See "A Baptist and His Bible, II Timothy 3:144:13" by Jerry Vines in Carl L. Kell and L. Raymond Camp, *In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 132ff.

[19] Ibid., 133-34.

[20] Walter Shurden and Cecil Sherman, "An Address to the Public from the Interim Steering Committee of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship," in Walter B. Shurden, (Ed.), *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 311.

ways. The selected quotes about the Bible illustrate the ways Biblicists saw the scriptures as an ultimate good, and those who would question their certainty of an inerrant and infallible Bible as attackers and enemies. They also demonstrate the more subtle condescension on the part of the Autonomists by claiming the Bible as something to be interpreted, and freedom to interpret as the higher good. Each group seems to project its own enmity on to the other. The disavowals in each direction escalated as the controversy wore on, and the rhetoric took on the tone of each group trying to hold the high ground while disavowing the other side, and projecting all enmity onto the other party.

Authority

Intertwined with questions about the authority of the Bible are questions about the authority of the individual, as this study has tried at length to demonstrate. St. Amant observed over three decades ago: "Historically, Baptists have lived with a certain creative tension at the point of freedom and authority. Without authority freedom becomes a kind of theological anarchy. Without freedom authority becomes oppressive and wooden. Both the problem and the glory of our Baptist heritage are rooted in the authority of the Word of God and in the freedom of man's [sic] mind and conscience to understand it."[21] During the years of controversy the creativity in the tension evaporated and was replaced by hardened suspicions, doubts and open fighting. Skirmishes over personal authority took many turns and forms, but the ones over the role of a Baptist pastor illustrate vividly the polarization between parties.[22]

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[21] St. Amant, "Southern Baptists: Unity in Diversity," 15-16.
[22] Authority in Southern Baptist culture is by no means limited to a discussion of pastoral authority. As noted previously, various struggles with authority run like a current through the history and disputes of Southern Baptists.

Biblicists saw the ultimate authority in the Bible as extending to a variety of

relationships in church, home and society. In particular they believed the office of pastor

was one of oversight over his (always "his") congregational flock. "The pastor is the ruler

of the church. There is no other thing than that in the Bible."[23] They took their lead from

scriptural passages, combined it with corporate/business models of leadership, and

envisioned it in the charismatic pastors who led Biblicist Party among Southern Baptists.

[24] They also chaffed at the suggestion by SBC agencies that leadership ought to be shared

among ministry staff and laity. And of course they insisted that the office of pastor was

limited to men.

Autonomists on the other hand put their emphasis on a shared, servant leadership

of pastors, who were called out, as one among many in their congregations. Within the

local congregation, they argued, was the source of congregational authority, understood

in the Baptist conviction of the priesthood of all believers. Shurden and Sherman argued

at the end of the controversy, "Our understanding of the role of the pastor is to be a

servant/shepherd. Respecting lay leadership is our assignment. Allowing the

congregation to make real decisions is of the very nature of Baptist congregationalism.

And using corporate business models to 'get results' is building the Church by the rules

of a secular world rather than witnessing to the secular world by way of a servant

Church."[25]

Autonomists saw Biblicist's emphasis on pastors as rulers as an attack on the

priesthood of every believer and individual autonomy. Biblicists viewed an emphasis on

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[23] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 87. The quote is from W. A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, leader and spokesperson for the Biblicist Party.
[24] Ibid., 87-88.
[25] Shurden and Sherman, "An Address to the Public," 312.

servant leadership or laity involvement in pastoral leadership to be attacks on the

pastorate.[26] Biblicists disavowed Autonomists as weak and lacking biblical leadership,

while Autonomists saw Biblicists as patriarchal and controlling. The differences between

the groups came to a head in 1988 when Biblicists sponsored and passed a resolution

stating, "the doctrine of the Priesthood of the Believer in no way contradicts the biblical

understanding of the role, responsibility, and authority of the pastor which is seen in the

command to the local church in Hebrews 13:17, 'Obey your leaders, and submit to them;

for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.'" The resolution

concluded, "we affirm the truth that elders, or pastors, are called of God to lead the local

church (Acts 20:28)."[27]

Not only were Biblicists concerned about the authority of the pastor, but also the

gender of Baptist pastors. They made it clear that women should not fill the role in the

1984 Kansas City resolution.[28] The conservative view about pastors was finally and

officially formalized in the *Baptist Faith and Message,* 2000:

> A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local
> congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and
> fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His
> laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word,
> and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation
> operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a
> congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its
> scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted
> for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by
> Scripture.[29]

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[26] Ammerman, *Baptist Battles,* 87-88.

[27] Ibid., 88.

[28] See Chapter IV for a discussion of the resolution against women's ordination.

[29] *Baptist Faith and Message,* 2000. Available online: http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp
(accessed February 14, 2008). The revision committee added a scriptural reference from II Timothy 2:9-14.
They interestingly omitted verses 8 and 15 which are part of the pericope and italicized below: "8 *I desire,
then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument*; 9 also that
the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided,
or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, 10 but with good works, as is proper for women who profess

Although Biblicists did not remove the language about democratic processes from the previous BFM 1963, they added scriptures which supported their concerns about women not having authority over men in the church. They also added explicit language to the *BFM 2000* about the office of pastor belonging to men which is consistent with their overall concern for hierarchically ordered relations in church and home.

Both groups which emerged out of the SBC schism state official support for servant pastors who may be either men or women. The Alliance of Baptists (AB) covenant states that members commit themselves to "The freedom of the local church under the authority of Jesus Christ to shape its own life and mission, call its own leadership, and ordain whom it perceives as gifted for ministry, male or female."[30] The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) states in its "Core Values": "We believe in the autonomy of every local church. We believe Baptist churches are free, under the Lordship of Christ, to determine their membership and leadership, to order their worship and work, to ordain whomever they perceive as gifted for ministry, and to participate as they deem appropriate in the larger Body of Christ."[31]

Autonomists accused Biblicists of claiming "authority without freedom" which was "oppressive and wooden" in St. Amant's words, that disregarded congregational polity and made an idol of the pastor. Meanwhile Biblicists accused Autonomists of "freedom without authority" which resulted in "theological anarchy" that allowed a great

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reverence for God. 11 Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. 12 I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 *Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.*" (New Revised Standard Version of the Bible)

[30] The Alliance Covenant, Available online: http://www.allianceofbaptists.org/covenant.html (accessed March 3, 2008).

[31] Cooperative Baptist Fellowship "Core Values." Available online: http://www.thefellowship.info/About-Us/Who-We-Are (accessed March 3, 2008).

variety of interpretations about pastors, even letting women preach, and made an idol of

the idea of equality. Despite the stated support of women clergy by the Autonomists

Party and the rejection by Biblicists Party, women continued to attend seminary, seek

ordination, and find places of ministry in Southern Baptist churches and agencies.

However, in the aftermath of the controversy women gravitated increasingly to the new

organizations and the churches which affiliated with them. Polarization of the parties

about the issue of pastoral authority took gender as a part of the contention, and although

it appears that one side championed the cause of clergywomen and the other side

disavowed it, in many ways women continued to be on their own to make their way in the

Baptist culture.

Gender

The poles of tension in soul competency have functioned to hide and perpetuate

dualistic thinking about gender which limits various leadership roles to men and excludes

women. Domination and subjugation curtail any possibility of "mutual recognition."[32]

Paradoxically these same tensions, along with others observed by Leonard work together

to create a potential space where adherents can experience creativity, maturity and trust;

find and create meaning; negotiate authority; and locate a sense of belonging in the

community by fulfilling various roles within it. When, however, the larger institutions of

this system, such as the SBC itself, emphasize their own survival and self-perpetuation,

the slide to corruption and schism becomes inevitable.

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[32] Jessica Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*, 23. "the need for *mutual* recognition, the necessity of recognizing as well as being recognized by the other – this is what so many theories of the self have missed. The idea . . . implies that we actually have a need to recognize the other as a separate person who is like us yet distinct."

In the same way that the Biblicist Party felt that the Bible and the pastorate were under attack from the wider U.S. culture and within the Baptist fold, they also perceived that the family and proper roles women (and men) were also under fire. They preached and wrote and passed resolutions about the roles for women and men which were given in the Bible, as they read it, and thus universal in their estimation. Biblicists made a virtue of godly women who submitted themselves graciously to their husbands, followed biblical injunctions to keep silence, and did not claim any authority over men. They tried to hold this virtuous submissive woman together with the ideal of woman who was equal to man in every other way. The resulting complementarian position made an ultimate value of male headship in home and church, and dismissed women who felt called to ministry as "mistaken."[33] In the years following, with SBC seminaries firmly under the control of Biblicist trustees and presidents, these views were institutionalized in seminary curricula for pastors' wives.[34]

Although initially they received a lesser public hearing about issues of the Bible or pastoral authority, when Biblicists spoke about renewing traditional roles for women, reversing the social trend of greater equality, and restoring male headship in home and church, they got a hearing in the media. This allowed them to make their case for other issues such as abortion, prayer in schools, and homosexuality in a public forum.[35] Their views on gender and women's role in church, home and society fit with a more extensive

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[33] This was the response of W. A. Criswell in a PBS television interview, when he was asked by Bill Moyers if women could be called by God as pastors.

[34] Both Southern and Southeastern Seminaries now offer tracks of study for pastor's wives.

[35] Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 218.

program of Christian reform of culture and a hierarchical model of Christian relationships in each domain.[36]

Autonomists approached the issue of women's roles differently. They were more admittedly influenced by the second wave of feminism which had covered the U.S. Although they may not have fully embraced it, neither had they rejected it outright as conservative Christians were doing. However, moderate ambivalence continues to be evident in the sheer lack of women entering the pastorate and the small numbers of women ordained as a percentage of the total Baptist clergy in the moderate groups 15 years after the controversy has ended. The most generous estimate figures women fill less than six percent of the pastorates among moderate and progressive Baptist churches in the South.[37] Not completely unlike their conservative brethren, Autonomists attempted to hold together two conflicting ideals: the equality of men and women in every way, and the status quo of women's leadership being secondary and supportive. During the controversy itself some moderate leaders hedged on their personal feelings about women's ordination, and others outright rejected it.[38] One way this a lack of clarity and ongoing uncertainty about women's roles played out for Autonomists was that it gave them a clear way to disavow Biblicists, without necessarily resulting in any improvements for Baptist clergywomen.

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[36] Ibid., 229-30 – "Framing the cultural debates of our time is what SBC conservatives want most. They want to be at the forefront of the culture war, resisting secular forces at every turn. Southern Baptist conservatives insist that wifely submission, as outlined in their statement, is what the vast majority of Southern Baptists have always believed. They also acknowledge, however, that the time was ripe for addition of this doctrine to their basic confession of faith as a statement of resistance to a secular culture."

[37] Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso, "The State of Women in Baptist Life, 2006" in *No Longer Ignored: A Collection of Articles on Baptist Women,* ed. Charles W. Deweese and Pamela R. Durso (Atlanta, GA: The Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2007), 295.

[38] One notable example of the rejection was by Daniel Vestal, who later became Coordinator (top executive) of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. During the controversy, he claimed not to support women's ordination, but after being elected to the top CBF post, he offered a public confession of his "sin" in not accepting women as full participants in the church, including ordained ministry.

Between 1979 and 1990 women's roles were often debated in at the annual Convention. News stories in and out of Baptist life appeared often reporting ordinations, churches which were "kicked out" of their local associations, actions on the part of SBC agencies which impacted the ministries of women.[39] Women and women's ordination were treated like political hot potatoes. Sarah Frances Anders and Marilyn Metcalf-Whittaker summed up the situation this way: "Ordained women are naturally controversial and symbolic, and they are aware of it. They sit at the heart of the fundamentalist-moderate controversy, representing each side's cause—either to be purged from the Southern Baptist Convention as the embodiment of liberalism or to be held up in triumph as the symbol of open-mindedness and independence."[40] As noted in previously, the meaning of "naturally" is not abundantly clear in this statement, although it appears to be something more like "apparently" or "obviously" rather than the more discrete meaning of "biologically" or "organically." However, that women are seen as naturally controversial may be a truism for both sides of the Baptist controversy.

In 1984, in the edition of *Folio,* which followed the Kansas City Resolution against ordaining women, one of the editors, Betty McGary Pearce wrote about her findings concerning the status of women in Southern Baptist life. She found in her survey of Sunday School literature, "With a few exceptions females were portrayed as either all 'good' or all 'bad' while males were portrayed as having both strengths and weaknesses.

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[39] See Chapter IV for more detail about these events.

[40] Sarah Frances Anders and Marilyn Metcalf-Whittaker, "Women as Lay Leaders and Clergy: A Crucial Issue," in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination,* ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 214.

Over twice as many characteristics were attributed to males as females. Females are portrayed as limited. Males are portrayed as unlimited, expansive."[41]

In both parties of the SBC Controversy, women do nearly all the work of "gender." Men's roles tend to be assumed and unquestioned, and are rarely discussed explicitly. One result is that in both parties "appropriate" roles for women are mystified, and they provide an ongoing source of confusion for Baptists and non-Baptists alike. The attempted reversal of women's ordination in the SBC during the 1980s and 90s was among the more baffling aspects of the controversy to many outside Baptist culture, particularly due to the lack of understanding of local church autonomy which determines who can be ordained. Increasingly the newer groups (AB and CBF) are understood as supporters of clergywomen while the SBC is seen as a place unwelcoming of women in ministry. Polarizations of women as all good or all bad becomes confused with the idealizations and disavowals between Southern Baptist factions, and women end up subjugated in ways all across the Baptist spectrum. The greatest irony and surprise is that despite the idealizations, disavowals, splitting and projections, Baptist women continue to find places of creative work and ministry within the Baptist culture.[42]

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[41] Betty McGary Pearce, "SBC Women: Research Reveals Slow Progress" in *Folio* 2, no. 1 (Summer, 1984), n.p.

[42] Telling this story in a new way opens the possibility of bringing change to the misrepresentations of gender and the ongoing subjugations of women across the Baptist spectrum. In her 1997 article Mary McClintock Fulkerson argues that the explaining or deconstructing situations alone will not bring about change or liberation for women. Instead, she says, "stories are the way that we make connections between situations and invoke change." See Fulkerson, "Contesting the Gendered Subject." In *Horizons in Feminist Theology: Identity, Tradition and Norms*, ed. Rebecca S. Chopp & Sheila Greeve Davaney (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 113.

Corruption in the Baptist Community

In the decades of struggle for control the SBC took on the features of social evil, not only in the form of competition, subjugation, and collusion, but also in the splitting and projective identification, when each faction took extreme positions and blamed the other for the conflict. Women called to ministry who desired ordination became symbols of this exchange, and some were villainized or martyred in the battle. The polarization led to a more final splitting between the factions in the struggle and served to bring an actual parting of ways by Baptists. The SBC remains a strong and influential force in the South, throughout the U.S., indirectly in American politics and is by some accounts the most ethnically diverse denomination in the U.S.[43] The Alliance, CBF and a the constellation of moderate-to-progressive Baptist groups and agencies which emerged from the schism were begun and led by those who led the Autonomist Party. These newer groups continue to thrive in many ways judging by markers such as budgets, networks, growth and staying power. One of the many ironies of the schism is that all groups that emerged when the dust settled continue to claim themselves authentically Baptist. And by

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[43] Without much fanfare, Southern Baptists have become one of the more diverse denominations in the U.S. in the last two decades. See Cary McMullen, "Any Way You Count it, Fewer Southern Baptists," *NYT Regional Newspapers,* 17 June 1999, in *Paltka Daily News,* http://www.adherents.com/largecom/baptist_fewerSBC.html (accessed February 11, 2008). The article reports: "According to [Robert] Wuthnow, future growth in the Southern Baptist Convention may depend on reaching a variety of ethnic groups. 'The reason they're holding their own is new immigration. One of the largest Baptist churches in California is Chinese,' he said. It is a strategy the convention is pursuing. African-Americans and Hispanics are the two largest non-Anglo groups in the convention and the fastest-growing, said Robert Wilson, manager for the African-American planting unit of the convention's North American Mission Board. In 1989, there were about 1,250 black Southern Baptist churches. Today there are more than 2,000, said Phil Jones, a researcher for the Southern Baptist Convention. Jones said the convention does not collect racial information on its members, but he estimated there are more than 700,000 members in predominantly non-Anglo churches. And there are 25 ethnic fellowships - such as Korean, Russian and Hmong - under the Southern Baptist umbrella. 'We are one of the most multi-ethnic denominations. We're not stepping back from reaching Anglos, but we are stepping up our efforts to reach ethnic groups because of the disparity for years of not doing that,' Wilson said."

Leonard's account of the tensions that Baptists have historically negotiated, they are all likely justified in their claims.

During the years of controversy, what dynamics contributed to a final schism of Southern Baptists? The following observations about some of the effects of "the controversy" demonstrate not only how polarization between parties played out, but also how intense and pervasive were the divisions and the corruption of the institution. Many effects could be noted, but in keeping with the themes of the study, we will consider the effects on the Bible, authority and gender, as well as meaning and community.

In 1985 at the most highly attended annual SBC meeting on record, Autonomists lost the presidential race yet again to Biblicist incumbent, Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia. In the year running up to the meeting more seminary presidents and agency heads were speaking out against the politics of the convention, and taking sides explicitly with Autonomists.[44] The Biblicists were aligning themselves more explicitly with organizations such as the American Coalition for Traditional Values, political leaders, the likes of Ronald Reagan, and well-known television evangelists Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson.[45] The Autonomist's presidential candidate, pastor Winfred Moore, was elected first vice-president of the SBC. Both Moore and Stanley were made ex-officio members of the "Peace Committee" elected in Dallas to investigate the "roots of the denomination's ongoing division and propose solutions leading to reconciliation."[46]

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[44] Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention,* 282-83. More than 45,000 Baptists attended the meeting in Dallas.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 284.

The destiny of the committee was not peace, but a sword of greater division. In addition to finding "significant theological diversity" among the convention's seminaries and agencies, they also reported that both Autonomists and Biblicists were using political tactics as well as "intemperate, inflammatory, and unguarded language" in their partisan journals, as well as in some official SBC and state convention publications. This moment in the controversy – the midway point in the twelve-year battle, sealed the factions into their polarizations, and demonstrated the power of institutional evil when the desire to maintain control overrides the more enduring functions of a religious institution.

Throughout the years of controversy the Bible was used like a weapon between factions. Verses were quoted in and out of context, hurled in sermons, speeches, editorials and "hall talk" to prove one party's position and renounce the other's view. All forms of authority were suspect, and challenged at every turn during SBC annual meetings and in interim gatherings and publications of Baptists. The personal authority of leaders was no longer exercised in a consensus forum, but was increasingly polarized and politicized. Everyone's actions were scrutinized for which party they served, and where the pay off would come.

Gender during the controversy, as has been noted, was mainly contested in roles opened or barred for women. Men's roles remained assumed and unquestioned, and men were the on-stage and in-print actors in much of the convention controversy. However, the ordination of women, the presence and work of Woman's Missionary Union, and the growing number of women attending seminaries and filling professional ministry roles contributed to a heightened sense of the significance of women's presence and contribution to Baptist culture. However, the effect was in many cases greater alienation

of women (and men who supported them) from the Convention. Women were considered not for their contribution to Baptist life, but for the disruption and divisions they represented.

Meaning was not so much created or found as it was contested and embattled at every turn. Annual meeting resolutions were used to stake out positions by the warring factions, and meaning was voted up or down. The tenuous balance between meanings found in religious experiences and the forming power of traditions was lost in the fights over who was right and who was wrong. Pathogenic beliefs about those on the "other side" corrupted the creative process of meaning making, and turned it into a competition for power and control.[47] The effect was a highly politicized atmosphere at meetings, and at gatherings of Southern Baptists throughout the years of controversy. Rhetoric on both sides was accusatory and grandiose, illustrating the fractures that ran throughout the Southern Baptist world.

Community, the place of interhuman meaning, belonging, and support, did not offer a potential space of trust or mutuality, but rather one in which sides had to be chosen, jobs and futures were on the line, and feelings were injured. In local churches the already challenging relationships between pastor and people were exacerbated by national debates over pastoral authority, the priesthood of all believers, and the roles women could or should play in church leadership. Each party in the battle sought domination (or called for agreement, but hoped to own control) for themselves and

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[47] Volney Gay, *Joy and the Objects of Psychoanalysis* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2001), 90-92. Gay defines pathogenic beliefs as "theories of mind that aim to predict another person's behavior". In an individual they are unconscious beliefs developed early in childhood trauma, which give rise to neurotic behavior/symptoms, work together to form "patient's secret, unconscious belief system," and abide by certain rules. In a social system (i.e. the SBC) pathogenic belief is suggested to indicate beliefs that try to predict the mind of the social opponent in ways that are not rational, are rule-bound and which lead to suffering rather than joy. Ibid., 21-22.

wished the other side would simply submit to their point of view. As boards and agencies changed hands jobs and careers came to an end, and others quietly went on working, but without any enthusiasm. The hopes for bringing a global message of salvation quietly receded to the background, while institutional survival boiled on the front burner. The chaos of the SBC caused observers and pundits to make dire predictions. Meanwhile Baptists in the pews were embarrassed to admit their religious affiliation.

When Autonomists lost space for their voices of dissent in the emerging two-party system that made no room for the losers to be heard (or even to offer a minority opinion) they were left with the option of accepting what they perceived to be the polar opposite of all they believed and practiced, or departing to start something new. Biblicists clearly had the upper hand in the SBC and were moving forward with an agenda to reform the schools and agencies. So like many other polarizing conflicts, the otherwise creative tensions disintegrated into dualisms in which one side won and the other lost. Shurden and Sherman observed: "Something is wrong with a religious body that spends such energy in overt political activity. Our time is unwisely invested in beating people or trying to beat people. We have to define the other side as bad and we are good. There is division. The existence of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship is a simple confession of that division; it is not the cause of that division."[48]

The Alliance, CBF and other new Baptist societies and theological schools were surely more than just witness or confession about a divided institution. They may have been both cause and effect in the SBC schism. Surely there are ways they contributed to the polarization which further pushed open the divide. However, in the rending new potential space also opened. The separation itself created great anxieties both for the

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[48] Shurden and Sherman, "An Address to the Public," 313.

Baptists who left and those who stayed in the SBC.[49] The differences were in many ways irreconcilable, yet still within the realm of Baptist belief and practice. Individual liberty of conscience and the authority of scripture may be negotiated in ways that result in an amazing array of possible meanings and institutional forms. The last thirty years have been a massive illustration of this point.

Possibly the greatest genius at the heart of Baptist culture is the enduring emphasis on local congregations of believers as the central and most important social unit. Local congregations are more likely to remain communities which honor the interhuman realm and its potential for exposing participants not only to the anxiety and alienation of a tragically structured human existence, but also to participation in a flesh-and-blood, historically limited, face-to-face community. Such communities hold the possibility for members to open themselves to an eternal horizon which is experienced as divine presence. This is possible because members of such communities may offer one another mutual recognition, hold the tensions together in a way that make creativity, meaning, maturity, and trust possible even in the face of (or only because of) corruption and splitting of the larger institutions with whom they affiliate. It is within these smaller communities that clergywomen have survived and thrived for more than forty years.[50]

Confrontations experienced by clergywomen are analogous to the divisions that Baptists have faced since 1979, and theological and psychological strategies observable in the clergywomen's stories provide a window into the conflicts that eventuated in the fracturing of the SBC. The dynamics of their conflicts and the ways of negotiating

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[49] In the 1990s while many political battles moved to state conventions and Baptist colleges, sending and receiving funds from individuals and churches remained major cultural sites of contention and anxiety.
[50] Small communities are not necessarily valorized here, and they also feature corruption and splitting, but the possibilities for positive negotiation of the tensions seem more likely.

tensions highlight the structure of the institutional rupture. Rather than being merely one of several causes of schism in the SBC, as argued in existing literature, the stories of clergywomen illustrate an anatomy of the divide which can be conceived as an inevitable expression of social corruption and evil. However, their stories also illustrate the resilience and reliability of the perennial tensions of Baptist belief and practice to express contingencies of the human experience and to make potential space for individual creativity and vocational sustainability. Their stories also illustrate the possibility that Baptist communities can continue to reinvent themselves even when they appear to be torn asunder.

Future Questions for the Study

When coming to the conclusion(s) of a lengthy study, it becomes apparent that it is not ending so much as opening up new directions for continued inquiry and ongoing attempts at better understandings. There is also the matter of its impact, or lack thereof, when it reaches its intended audiences. Not being able to predict the latter effect, still there are other questions and directions suggested by the study. First there is the possibility of exploring the other poles of tension in Baptist culture through the narratives of the clergywomen. Revisiting the practical theological question of "so what?" in regard to the plight and cause of women in ministry also continues to press at the study and beg for a response. And finally, several larger inquiries into the lives and work of Baptist clergywomen are needed if the history, influence and social value of the changes these women have brought to Baptist life are to be fully appreciated. I'll close this study then with a very brief elaboration of these three possibilities.

The interpretive model that has been under construction would be more effective

and potentially explain more if all five of the tensions were developed in ways similar to

the one I have offered in this study. (See Figure 1 in Chapter I.) Particularly the

clergywomen's stories would be a rich resource for examining the tension between

nurturing process and dramatic change, in the ways they have experienced *salvation and*

calling. And the tension between laity and clergy as expressed in the Baptist conviction

about the *priesthood of all believers* could also be understood at greater depth by

investigating the dynamics of the clergywomen's experience. The tension between local

church autonomy and associational cooperation would be worth exploring in a different

sort of ethnographic study that chose several local churches and considered their histories

as they negotiated this tension through the years of controversy, as well as the ways that

all the tensions function to define them in vastly different ways, yet still within the

Baptist matrix. An exploration of the tension between loyalty to the state and religious

liberty would be fruitful for understanding the Baptist culture's ongoing and ever-

changing engagement with governments, social issues, and other religious groups (not

just other Christian groups). Not all of these tensions might call for psychological

analysis, but the first two could benefit from the insights of psychoanalytic theory, and all

of the tensions, could be elucidated by considering what enduring human goods they

represent in their long-lasting presence as powerful ideas and practices among Southern

(and other) Baptists.

The present study has an academic audience in mind, but other public sectors are

interested in the plight of Baptist clergywomen, and interested in understanding the SBC

schism. When the findings are presented to Baptist clergy and lay people they, like the

clergywomen in the study, assume a response, a suggestion, help for the cause of Baptist women's ordination and ministry. Although this horizon of the study was set aside for the sake of foregrounding the question of how the women's narratives contribute to understanding the SBC schism, the long-term intention is not to hold the question at bay permanently. What has been learned that would aid the situation of Baptist clergywomen? How might they advance their own cause and contribute to greater potential space in which to live creatively and find meaningful work? These are questions that can be addressed and presented to the church. The responses deserve several forms including a thoughtful and thematic historiography which outlines the changes professional women in ministry have experienced in the last four decades.

The questions assumed by study participants and other Baptists who learn about the study also may be answered more authentically if additional women are invited to participate in a systematic inquiry related to moments which emerged as significant in their lives (i.e. call, seminary education, ordination, entry and exit of ministry positions, etc.) or themes which emerged from this study (i.e. negotiations of Baptist tensions of conviction, ways clergywomen find and create meaning, and challenges that women face related to gender role expectations, etc.). Rather than collect more open-ended narratives (although that might prove useful) designing surveys or more structured interviews could help bring to light issues that would benefit clergywomen in their own vocational pursuits. Collecting enough data to build a grounded theory about the practices of ministry for clergywomen could potentially contribute to both a deeper understanding of the needs of ministers and also to fostering greater pastoral excellence and ministry preparation for leadership.

APPENDIX A

Baptist Clergywomen Research Project
Interview Questions

The following questions were approved in my research protocol for Vanderbilt's Institutional Review Board, and guided my interviews, although the questions were rarely or never asked verbatim.

1. Beginning with your call to ministry experience - tell me the narrative version of events from then until now. Please include sense of calling, including how you made that public, preparation/education, ordination, call to place of ministry, description of that work, loss of place of ministry, aftermath of that loss, recovery/rediscovery of place of ministry. As other major life events became significant to this narrative, also include them.

2. What does it mean to you to be a Baptist woman in ministry?

3. What theological and spiritual resources have sustained you through the journey you describe? What communities of people supported you through this journey? What religious practices and rituals have helped you to make meaning of your journey?

4. How has your theology or sense of spirituality changed or shifted through this journey? What have been and are currently the images or visions of God that you hold central to your life and faith? Has your sense of calling shifted? If so, how?

5. How would you summarize what you have learned through these experiences? What do you know about power, relationships, people, money, and gender that you did not know at the outset of your calling to ministry?

6. What do you see in your future as a minister? What advice would you give a young Baptist woman who says she is feeling called to ministry?

Baptist Clergywomen Research Project
Phone Transcript

Script for initial telephone conversation with potential study volunteers:

Hello. My name is Eileen Campbell-Reed. I am a student at Vanderbilt University, and I understand from your response to my ad in _____ (publication) that you might be interested in participating in my "Baptist Clergywomen Research Project," which will eventually become part of my dissertation for the degree I am working on in Religion & Personality.

Before we go any further, I want to go over with you the criteria for being included in the study, to see if you meet all of them.

1) Do you have a master's degree from a seminary?
2) Have you been ordained in a Baptist church?
3) Have you served in at least one ministry position for one year or longer?
4) Are you <u>affiliated</u> with at least one of the following: the Alliance of Baptists, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, American Baptists or the Southern Baptist Convention?
5) Are you are willing to be interviewed about your experiences as part of my dissertation research project?

[If the volunteer answers "NO" to any of these questions, then say,]
    I greatly appreciate your response to request for volunteers, however, because you could not answer, "yes" to all five of these questions, I'm afraid I won't be able to include you in the study. I hope the outcome of the study will be useful to women in ministry like yourself, and I encourage you to keep up your good work! Thanks again for your response to my ad. [End call]

[If the potential volunteer answers "YES" to all 5 questions above, I will ask one more:]
Although it is not a requirement for the study, I have one additional question for you,
    6) Have you been dismissed, forced to resign or been fired from a ministry position?

Because you do in fact meet all my criteria for participants in the research project, I would like to send you a consent form, so that you may look it over, consider the inconveniences and/or risks <u>involved</u> in my study, and then we will talk again (in ____ days or weeks) about any questions you might have about agreeing to take part in the study itself. If you agree, you can return one copy of the signed form to me, and then we will proceed with setting up a time and place for the first interview. Do you have any questions now?

[I would then answer any initial questions, referring as often as possible to the consent form as having more complete information]

Let me make sure I have the correct spelling of your name:
What is your mailing address?
Phone number?

Thanks again. I will be mailing the consent form to you by _____ (day), and then I will call you again on _____ (day) to answer any additional questions you may have.
[End call]

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