

FREE AND FAITHFUL FUNDAMENTALISTS?
HOW TO BE AUTHENTIC BAPTISTS AND RESURGENT CONSERVATIVES
(AT THE SAME TIME)

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Southern Baptist Conservatives of Alabama
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A few years ago, a woman from an independent Bible church background in New Hampshire moved to the Mississippi Gulf Coast and began visiting the church I served as associate pastor. My church's very typical SBC bulletin listed a schedule of very typical SBC activities. "SS" was at 9:45 AM, and "DT" at 6:00 PM. We didn't think of explaining the initials "SS" and "DT", any more than we would have thought to explain the meaning of "AM" and "PM". This new visitor, foreign to our Southern Baptist atmosphere, assumed that "DT" stood for "detox." Impressed that our church ministered to the alcoholics and drug addicts of the Coast, she asked me how many we usually had for "DT" on Sunday evenings. "About 250," I replied. Her eyes widened with surprise. "That's wonderful!" she replied. "Are you able to get any of them to stay for the Sunday evening service?" I answered with a shrug, "Of course. They are the core leaders of the church."

Most of us know the meaning of "DT." More than that, we know that Baptist Young People's Union begat Training Union and Training Union begat Discipleship Training. We know that when one directs us to a "Family Life Center," he means a gymnasium. In our ever-widening Baptist chasm, however, there are those who say that this meeting today represents a repudiation not only of your Southern Baptist background, but of your very Baptist heritage

itself. Since the inerrancy controversy of the 1970s and 1980s, moderate Baptists have claimed for themselves the mantle of “free and faithful Baptists,” attempting to protect “historic Baptist freedoms” against the invading hordes of “fundamentalists.”

Russell Dilday, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes that conservative Baptists are simply “pseudo-Baptists, rogues inside the family who either never knew or have forgotten what our true identity is.”¹ In 1993, James Dunn, then head of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, compared the “*faux* Baptists” of the conservative resurgence with the “real Baptists” who share in “the heart of what makes a Baptist a Baptist.” The “real Baptists,” Dunn suggested, were those such as the new President Bill Clinton and “countless citizens who resonate to the rhetoric born of his faith.”²

And now the moderates are channeling the “authentic Baptist” rhetoric through a group of covert ground operations units (generously lathered with Texas money) called “Mainstream Baptists of (the name of your state here).” Thus far, the “Mainstream Baptists” groups have met with the same grassroots enthusiasm that once greeted the “Evangelicals for Dukakis” movement. Nonetheless, a forum at last year’s Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly trained CBF loyalists on how to use “Mainstream” groups to influence their state convention elections. The primary strategy mentioned was to convince pastors and church members that SBC conservatives are not really Baptists at all.

Why do the moderates continue to use this tactic? They have little choice. As theologian Carl F. H. Henry once remarked, the consensus that unites the various streams of the SBC

¹ Larry Chesser, “‘Authenticus Baptistus’ Growing Extinct, Dilday Tells American Baptists,” *Baptists Today*, 13 July 1995, 5.

² James M. Dunn, “Shurden Volume Describes Essence of ‘Baptistness’,” *Baptists Today*, 26 August 1993, 18.

moderate movement is negative, a common rejection of biblical inerrancy.³ A stirring defense of an errant Bible probably will not rally Southern Baptists to return their state conventions to moderate control.

The CBF and the Mainstream Baptists of Alabama are sure to continue their insistence that the conservative resurgence is not authentically Baptist. Their charges are false. The danger, however, is that we may leave these charges unchallenged for so long that we may begin to believe them ourselves. There is far too much at stake to concede our Baptist heritage to the revisionist politicians of Baptist liberalism. Even as the Baptist left parrots the “authentic Baptist” slogans, they are tossing aside the Baptist distinctives along with the other facets of revealed truth. If the Baptist distinctives are to continue into a new century, it will mean that conservatives must be the ones to conserve them.

Believer’s Baptism by Immersion

The baptistery behind me reminds us of perhaps the most historically contested distinctive of the Baptist heritage. Indeed, it is from our insistence that baptism is to be administered to believers only that we received our very name. It is sadly ironic that the moderates who hail themselves as the protectors of the Baptist heritage seem increasingly willing to broaden the Baptist tent wide enough to welcome sprinkling and even infant baptism.

The moderate national newspaper *Baptists Today*, for instance, published an article a few years ago calling for acceptance into the membership of Baptist churches of those who had been christened as infants and refused to submit to believer’s baptism.⁴ The moderate newspaper of

³ Interview of Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry in *Know Your Roots: Evangelicalism Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* [video recording] (Deerfield, IL: Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1991).

⁴ Edward Erwin, “Reclaiming Baptism’s Centrality for Baptists,” *Baptists Today*, 4 March 1993, 18. See also G. Todd Wilson, “Why Baptists Should Not Rebaptize Christians from Other Denominations” in *Proclaiming the Baptist Vision: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, ed. Cecil P. Staton Jr. (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 1999), 41-48.

the Baptist General Association of Virginia, the *Religious Herald*, has editorialized that a refusal to limit baptism to immersion comes from a commitment to “soul competency.”⁵ This is quite an evolution from the days when the *Religious Herald* published books indicting sprinkling and pouring as “barbarisms” and “substitutes for baptism” that must be “ruled out” by Baptists.⁶

Will Campbell, the poet laureate of the Baptist left, is even more remarkable as he describes the baptism of his infant grandson.

My daughter Bonnie asked me if I would baptize her three-year-old son, Harlan, on Christmas. And my daddy was here. At that point, he had been a Baptist deacon for 60 years. And I was afraid. In Baptist circles infant baptism is quite a scandal- particularly if not by immersion.

So I asked in deference to him, “Daddy, do you believe in infant baptism?” And he said, “Believe in it, son? I’ve actually seen it.” That was his way of saying, “Don’t be silly! Baptize your grandson!” So we did, at the breakfast table. Harlan got to giggling while we were doing this. And when we got finished, he said (he called me Papa), “Papa, what’d you put on my head?” I said, “Water.” And he said, “Why?”

Bonnie was squirming. She didn’t want her three-year-old son traumatized by her daddy’s horse-and-buggy theology. But it was a fair question, so I was glad to answer it. I talked about guilt and forgiveness. He said, “What is guilt?” I said, “You know that big lump you get in your throat when you and your mama quarrel?”

Well, when I got through with the little homily, he jumped down from the table, wiped the last of the runny egg with his biscuit and started off toward the door to the television room. Then he came back and grabbed me around the knees, looked up and, in the throes of a deep-down belly laugh said, “Well, well, Papa. Thank you then.”⁷

⁵ Mike Clingenpeel, “Baptists’ Hub,” *Religious Herald*, 3 August 2000, 8.

⁶ John A. Broadus, “Only Immersion Is Baptism,” in *Baptist Principles Reset*, ed. Jeremiah B. Jeter (Richmond: Religious Herald, 1902), 73.

⁷ “Taking Baptism Seriously: An Interview with Will Campbell,” *Baptist Peacemaker* Spring-Summer 1994, 12. See also Will Campbell, *Forty Acres and a Goat* (Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 1986), 153-4.

How can Campbell, who has long claimed the “authentic Baptist” label in his criticism of SBC conservatives, sprinkle water on the head of a three-year-old who doesn’t even understand guilt and call it baptism? Campbell’s comments on his own baptism are instructive here. He recounts that there was “nothing really unusual about it”:

Joe, my brother, joined the church, so I was going to join too. He originally tried to talk me out of it. And the white britches that were ordered from Sears and Roebuck for me to be baptized in didn’t come in on time. I said, “I hate Sears and Roebuck.” Joe said I wasn’t supposed to get mad. He told me that he would be the propitiation for my sins. That’s what baptism is all about.⁸

Is this indeed what baptism is all about? These baptismal views fit naturally with Campbell’s understanding of the gospel. “Jesus didn’t talk about the ‘Plan of Salvation’ or the Trinity or any of these things, that I can find,” Campbell concludes. “He talked about the backward notion of community: things like a cup of cold water.”⁹

Conservatives must insist that believer’s baptism by immersion cannot be severed from the gospel of grace. When we submerge a penitent sinner beneath the waters of the baptistery we are confessing something quite particular before the congregation, the watching world, and the principalities and powers of this age. We are confessing that we believe Jesus of Nazareth was immersed in the very wrath of God in the place of this sinner, that He was buried, and that God raised Him from the dead. We are confessing that we believe that this sinner may die and may rot away in the grave, but that at the last day she will join the pioneer of her salvation in the resurrection from the dead. Believer’s baptism apart from a clear proclamation of the gospel is nothing more than our version of a Baptist Bar Mitzvah or “first communion.” When moderate Baptist theologian Frank Stagg tells the Louisiana CBF that he is tired of those who continue to

⁸ “Taking Baptism Seriously,” 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

preach “there had to be a killing at Golgotha” to save sinners, with no ensuing outcry from his hearers, then the doctrine of believer’s baptism is in far greater peril than we ever imagined.¹⁰

Our forefathers were drowned in European rivers, chained to the walls of English prisons, and driven from the borders of New England colony towns, not because they saw baptism as a maker of ethnic identity, but because they believed that every word of Scripture (including the word *baptizo*) was breathed out by an infinitely holy God, and thus carried with them the very authority of His majesty. They were willing to be indicted, convicted, horsewhipped, and martyred because they believed that when Jesus said through His inerrant revelation, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” He meant something specific.

Like them, we are biblical inerrantists. Like them, we must be the ones to guard the precious doctrine of believer’s baptism. This means that we should carefully guard against what Paige Patterson calls “late stage” infant baptism that has made unregenerate church members “superlative fishing waters for various cults.”¹¹ We should insist on the evangelism of children and the baptism of believing children, but we should preach to children the exact same gospel of sin, judgment, and redemption that we preach to their parents. Leading a child to the baptistery immediately after we have hastily asked them if they love Jesus and want to go to heaven is not consistent with Baptist identity, especially when we would probably refer to a therapist the child who responds that he hates Jesus and wants to go to hell.

If believer’s baptism becomes simply a hoop to jump through on the way to service on the flower committee, then it will not survive the relativistic morass of the coming century. Many of you pastors have faced the fury when Aunt Flossy is offended by your suggestion that

¹⁰ Relma Hargus, “Retired Seminary Professor Advises Baptists to Use Bible as Jesus Did,” *Baptists Today*, 23 May 1996, 8.

she undergo something as undignified as immersion even those she was “baptized” as a baby in the Methodist church down the street. If the Baptist churches of the twenty-second century hold on to the biblical truth of believer’s baptism, it will be because this generation of inerrantists maintains that biblical authority applies not only to the crusade tent, but to the baptistery as well.

Regenerate Church Membership

A moderate Baptist church in Birmingham recently saw two of its very gifted members, a husband and wife team of deacons, take to the radio airwaves to promote their new book, a memoir of their marriage. In the book and in countless media interviews, the couple celebrated their “open marriage,” riddled with numerous adulterous affairs. The book recounts the abortion of a child because the wife did not know the identity of the baby’s father. She compared the blood of the aborted infant to the blood of Jesus, a sacrifice for sin. “We are naked,” said the husband, “But we are not ashamed.”¹²

When some local pastors, saddened that this couple was so publicly identified as Baptists, encouraged their pastor to discipline the pair, they were rebuffed. The pastor responded that the two were “good people” and that the church would refuse to discipline them. The matter, he said, had been “blown out of proportion.”¹³ The couple continues in the church, while the wife has begun a column entitled “Meditations for Bad Girls” in a literary magazine. Her first

¹¹ Paige Patterson, “What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem: How to Tighten Greek and Hebrew Requirements and Triple Your M.Div. Enrollment at the Same Time,” *Faith and Mission* 17 (1999): 55.

¹² Janet Jimmerson, “The Story of a Marriage,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 11 May 1999, www.postherald.com/fe051199.shtml

¹³ Don Hinkle, “Tell-all book stirs Baptist association to pro-marriage, anti-adultery stance,” Baptist Press, 2 November 1999.

two columns were entitled “Women I Kissed” and “Men I Kissed,” each capping off stories of sordid liaisons with Bible passages.¹⁴ They are Baptist church members still.

On a national level, the debate over the Baptist commitment to a regenerate church has been most heated on the issue of homosexuality. Most of you know of the firestorm that followed my dispatches from the CBF General Assembly last year, after I reported that the CBF-funded Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America was distributing in the exhibit hall a Bible study curriculum advocating same-sex unions, gay ordination, and the idea that sexual orientation is unchangeable. I spent well over an hour talking with Baptist Peace Fellowship executive director Ken Sehested, who told me that the Holy Spirit was leading the church to gay marriage and homosexual ordination. He told me that these issues were the primary matters of justice facing Baptists today, comparable to the civil rights movement of the last generation.

The response from the CBF leadership to my articles was something like this: “We didn’t do it, and we will never do it again.” First, they charged me (and the SBC Executive Committee) with inaccurately portraying the General Assembly and falsely charging them with having anything to do with the Peace Fellowship’s material. Then they (narrowly) passed an ambiguously worded resolution denying funding to organizations promoting homosexuality, sparking outrage from various sectors of the CBF constituency. Last week, the CBF released a list of activities at this year’s upcoming General Assembly. Leading a breakout seminar at the meeting is Ken Sehested, executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

Why is this issue so desperately important? This is not the difference between the platforms of two competing political parties. This is a heart-breaking question of whether Baptists will be involved in evangelism or anti-evangelism. The Scriptures tell us that

¹⁴ Vicki Covington, “Women I Kissed,” *Oxford American*, January/February 2000, 17-19; “Men I Kissed,” *Oxford American*, March/April 2000, 11-12.

unrepentant homosexuals “will not inherit the Kingdom of God” (I Cor 6:9). The same Bible also tells us, however, that the sovereign Spirit is able to free sinners, even from the sin-slavery to homosexual passions, to make them new creations in Christ (I Cor 6:11).

The CBF leadership does not want to address this matter, but this is the defining issue of this generation regarding what we believe about the truth of the gospel. At the very moment in history when the culture mavens in Hollywood and Washington are telling homosexuals that they cannot change and must simply accept their lives as they are, Baptist churches in Atlanta and around the nation are hiding from the homosexuals in their congregations the only message that can rescue them on the coming day of judgment. Such is not love for neighbor; it is hatred for him.

To say to homosexuals, “Sing in our choir, play in our orchestra, serve on our deacon body, and pay no mind to those who tell you that you are at enmity with God,” is to say to homosexuals, “To hell with you.” The only way that we can countenance that is if we believe that Jesus did not die for homosexuals, or that there is at least one sin that is more powerful than the new birth. Conservative Southern Baptists have fought long and hard for the priority of verbal evangelism, against those who would prefer non-confrontational programs of “lifestyle witnessing” or “hospitality evangelism.” Now we must continue to offer freely to gays and lesbians the same truth that saved those of us who previously were adulterers or thieves or liars or idol-worshippers or disobedient to parents: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

The Baptist distinctive of regenerate church membership, even the doctrine of regeneration itself, is under assault. Because conservative Southern Baptists are the ones who have fought for the reality of the new birth, we must be the ones to guard our heritage of a

regenerate church. That means that we must realize that days of our neglect of biblical church discipline must come to an end. We can preach the coming judgment with all the fervency of Billy Sunday. We can see to it that every teenager in the youth group signs a “True Love Waits” card every February. Do not be deceived, however, about the message we are sending to our children when we ignore the open adulterer in the choir, the slumlord on the finance committee, or the man who takes up the offering despite having abandoned his wife and children. The message is as clear as that of the vestment-wearing liberal pastor down the street: “We don’t really believe what we claim we believe.”

Free and faithful conservatives will fight for regenerate church membership by realizing that as Baptist churches we are announcing to the world that we consider every one in our membership to be a born again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the Shepherd goes after the one erring sheep, we must pursue with gospel fervor our “inactive members.” After all, do we love the names on our visitor cards any more than the names on our church rolls?

Religious Liberty and Church/State Separation

The Baptist left has long caricatured conservatives as opposed to the Baptist distinctives of freedom of conscience and separation of church and state. Again, our temptation may be to uncritically see these matters as “not our issues” when a closer examination reveals that the moderate Baptist commitment to religious liberty is not quite as consistent as their promotional literature would imply.

In the aftermath of the controversy over the *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), one prominent moderate leader listed the avenues with which “free and faithful Baptists” could combat the idea that the pastorate is restricted to men only, as qualified by Scripture. One temptation, he noted would be to “wait patiently for the government to solve our problem” since

“equal opportunity for women is now the law of the land, making discrimination by reason of gender illegal.”¹⁵ Even to mention such a possibility should be chilling to those of us who are here today because Baptists such as John Leland and Isaac Backus and Obadiah Holmes went to the whipping post for the freedom to order our churches in the way we believe the Bible mandates.

Equally disturbing is the discovery of exactly what many moderate Baptists mean by the phrases “religious liberty” and “separation of church and state.” Paul Simmons, a moderate Baptist ethicist and the leader of the movement to plant a moderate Baptist seminary in Kentucky, has argued that the unrestricted right to legal abortion is part of the Baptist distinctive of religious liberty.¹⁶ Simmons’ latest crusade for “religious liberty” is to join the American Civil Liberties Union in its attempt to force the Kentucky Baptist Homes for Children to hire gays and lesbians as counselors, against their biblical convictions. To paraphrase another famous Baptist moderate, it depends on what the meaning of the word “liberty” is.

The early Baptists, however, did not believe in religious liberty and church/state separation because they were part of a coalition against the “religious right.” In fact, they *were* the religious right! They sought freedom for themselves so that they could freely preach the universal sinfulness of humanity, the substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection of Christ, and the need for faith in Him, themes that are not exactly roaring from the offices of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs of late. They sought freedom of conscience for everyone else

¹⁵ William E. Hull, “Women and the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Christian Ethics Today*, August 2000, 11-12.

¹⁶ Paul Simmons, “Dogma and Discord: Religious Liberty and the Abortion Debate,” *Church & State*, January 1990, 17-21. More recently, see Simmons’ defense of abortion as a religious liberty issue in his edited volume, *Freedom of Conscience: A Baptist/Humanist Dialogue* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000).

because they believed in the new birth, or, as George W. Truett once said, “Persecution may make men hypocrites, but it can never make them Christians.”¹⁷

Southern Baptist conservatives are on the forefront of protecting religious liberty and separation of church and state, precisely because we believe in evangelism. Condemned by the secular media, the mainline churches, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Southern Baptists have been forced to issue statements claiming their right to share the faith with unbelievers. Against an often-bullying bureaucracy, Southern Baptist conservatives have been compelled to argue that school children have the right to gather together voluntarily for prayer. With hearts broken by the crucifixion of fellow believers in the Sudan, Southern Baptist conservatives have been a prophetic voice for religious freedom around the world.

How do we instill a love for religious liberty in the next generation of Baptists? It is not by devising slogans like “Being Baptist means freedom.” Such will last as long as “Just say no” and “Stop, drop, and roll.” We instill a love for freedom of conscience by teaching our children that the Bible is the authoritative Word of the living God. We teach them what the Bible announces, that salvation comes by the sword of the Spirit, not by the sword of steel. We so saturate them with a love for the glory of the Triune God that if, God forbid, the dark days of persecution should ever come, they will be willing to stand in churches just like this one and to the sound of gunfire, shout with their dying gasps, “Jesus is Lord!”

Soul Competency

At the CBF General Assembly last year, I had a conversation with Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, a leader in the CBF and former executive director of Woman’s Missionary Union. After listening to countless Assembly-goers tell me that no one could question a woman’s “call”

¹⁷ George W. Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1920).

to the pastorate or a homosexual's "call" to ordination, I was surprised to have Mrs. Crumpler tell me that "Southern Baptists have the Bible as their authority. We have Jesus as our authority." The Baptist left has used the Baptist concept of believers' priesthood and E. Y. Mullins' formulation of soul competency in increasingly bizarre way. Some moderate leaders have defined "soul competency" to mean that pregnant teenagers should not have to face protesters on the way to the abortion clinic, or that conventions cannot refuse to cooperate with churches that "marry" same-sex couples.¹⁸ Others have suggested that soul competency means that "the pro-choice position on abortion, by definition, is more Baptist" than the pro-life view.¹⁹ To say that this is not exactly what Dr. Mullins and Herschel Hobbs had in mind is an understatement.

Again, the Baptist left's commitment to soul competency and believers' priesthood rings a bit hollow in recent days. Despite all the egalitarian rhetoric, the CBF is proposing this year to take their coordinating council out of the hands of the "competent priests" in the churches and turn it into a self-perpetuating governing board.

Similarly, Baptist moderates do violence to the concept of "soul freedom" by severing it from the gospel context in which it was first articulated: namely, the understanding that no one's proxy faith can save our neighbor at the coming judgment. He will stand before the tribunal of God with a mediator in the Lord Jesus, or he will stand alone. This means that soul competency is a terrifying doctrine. Every human being is in need of salvation through faith in Christ. Every one. There is no one who can claim that he is innocent or disqualified or "incompetent" to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Thus, the sound of soul competency is not the voice of a dean

¹⁸ Grady M. Cothen and James M. Dunn, *Soul Freedom: Baptist Battle Cry* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2000), 35037, 53, 105-6.

¹⁹ Stan Haste, "A Worthy Nominee," *Baptists Today*, 4 May 1995, 19.

celebrating the latest lesbian at Wake Forest Divinity School; it is the voice of R. G. Lee thundering “Payday Someday!”

And yet, at last year’s CBF General Assembly, I spoke with Baptist after Baptist after Baptist who rejected the idea that those who die outside of Christ will go to hell. It is hard to call this an aberration when, at the same meeting, the moderate Baptist publishing house Smyth and Helwys promoted a new book on missions authored by a man infamous for his rejection of the exclusivity of the gospel of Christ. The book came complete with an endorsement and foreword by CBF coordinator Dan Vestal. The author, Alan Neely, a former missions professor at Southeastern Seminary and Princeton, has publicly rejected that the idea that those around the world who never come to faith in Christ are “lost.” In fact, he said in a 1990 article, the idea that personal faith in Christ is necessary for salvation, he said, “reflects arrogance, ignorance, and superficiality.”²⁰ I would suggest to you that this is a blatant rejection of soul competency.

Baptist heroes such as William Carey, the Judsons, and Lottie Moon abandoned everything for the cause of missions precisely because they were haunted by the specter of a biblical view of soul competency. The pagans across the seas were in fact lost apart from Christ. Unless they heard the message of the gospel of Christ, they would find themselves in hell. Conservatives, we should be sobered by this truth. Right now as I speak, there are those in Tibet who believe they have found cosmic wholeness by praying Buddhist meditations. There are those in Indonesia who believe they have peace with God by bowing facedown before Allah. You and I have family members and friends who are a heartbeat away from the judgment of God. There are millions of perilously competent souls slipping into the terror of an eternity without Christ. It should propel us to the streets and to the mission fields, urgently pleading with sinners that they might find salvation in Christ.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul defended himself before Agrippa by noting that he was “standing trial for the hope of the promise made to our fathers; the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve God night and day” (Acts 26:6-7). Similarly, Baptist conservatives must continue to defend themselves against the “pseudo-Baptist” label simply because they hold to the confessional convictions of their Baptist forebears. Ironically, moderate Baptists continue to toss aside the Baptist distinctives of believer’s baptism, regenerate church membership, religious liberty, church/state separation, and even those of the priesthood of all believers and soul competency.

Your temptation, however, will be to focus narrowly on your own church, your own people, your own concerns, and to forget the internal machinations of the state convention. After all, you have a church to grow, sinners to evangelize, hurting people to counsel. The state convention can rest safely in the hands of those who are interested in such things. It is a burden, after all, to get all ten messengers from your church to a state convention meeting halfway across the state.

I would point you, however, to the Baptist concept of the priesthood of all believers and, more pointedly, to the biblical teaching on your responsibility as pastors of God’s flock. You have been entrusted with caring for the souls of your people, and you will give an account for them (Heb 13:17). You have been entrusted with the state convention and agencies that spend the hard-earned money of the people of God for the advancement of the Kingdom of God. That means you are responsible for the work of your state convention. You are responsible to see to it that Alabama Baptists continue to support the SBC’s faithful Kingdom activity in missions, evangelism, theological education, and cultural engagement. You are responsible to see to it that

²⁰ Alan Neely, “Baptists and Peoples of Other Faiths,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 17 (1990).

Alabama Baptists continue to stand behind the University of Mobile as they stand courageously for their right to be a distinctively Christian university. You are accountable to see to it that the religion department at Samford University is a bastion of biblical orthodoxy and soul-winning vitality. Think about that one for a while. You are accountable.

You are Baptists, after all.