

5-10-2014

The Spiritual is Political: The Modern Women's Movement and the Transformation of the Southern Baptist Convention

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THE SPIRITUAL IS POLITICAL: THE MODERN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE
TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

History

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2014

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My most sincere thanks to Marjorie Spruill for sharing her passion for modern women's history and for encouraging me to pursue this topic. Offering relentless enthusiasm and fine-tuned critique, her advisement undoubtedly made this a better dissertation. Additional thanks to my committee members, Laura Woliver, Bill Link, and Pat Sullivan, for providing insightful feedback and ideas for improvement. I am profoundly grateful to the Rubenstein Library at Duke University, the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, and the Gerald Ford Presidential Library for their generous financial assistance and expert archival direction.

I would not have been able to succeed in this endeavor were it not for the steadfast support of my family and friends. Tara Strauch and Sarah Scripps made the work enjoyable through regular work sessions and happy hours. Cash and Sherry Rest generously offered the use of their Lowcountry farm and its fully-stocked fridge for weekend-long writing retreats. My parents were the inspiration for this dissertation and they, along with my brother, provided unwavering support throughout the writing process. Many of these pages were written under their roof, in that chair, and I am so grateful for their constant encouragement and last-minute proofreading. This dissertation is dedicated to my loving partner who, back in 2007, quoted Leonard Cohen: "You go your way and I'll go your way too." Thank you, David, for walking this path with me. May there be many more chapters to come in our own Book of Longing.

ABSTRACT

“The Spiritual is Political” argues that feminist politics were central to Southern Baptist Convention’s notorious schism, which began in 1979, and posits that its new conservative leaders launched the nearly fourteen million member denomination into partisan politics in the 1980s in reaction to their perception that the women’s movement was dangerous to the nation’s moral and spiritual character. By evaluating both religious and political primary sources from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, I trace grassroots mobilization and denominational reactions to contentious issues like women’s ordination, abortion, homosexuality, and the Equal Rights Amendment. Though the Southern Baptist Convention favored moderate gains in women’s equality in the late 1960s to the mid-1970s, its dynamic internal takeover ultimately resulted in reversal of all policies that favored the feminist movement. But my dissertation’s close focus on the period before this 1979 transformation reveals crucial information about the mobilization of the nation’s largest Protestant denomination into the Religious Right in the 1980s, and it demonstrates why aggressive preservation of gender roles remains one of the Southern Baptist Convention’s key priorities.

PREFACE

In the mid-1980s conservative fundamentalists succeeded in rallying Southern Baptists against the women's rights movement as a "threat" to the family. Though these efforts began much earlier, they came to fruition when conservatives succeeded in electing leaders to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979 under the auspices of biblical literalism. These new leaders emphasized biblical gender hierarchy, which they felt had been abandoned after a decade of "women's liberation." They also argued that the denomination went too far in accommodating secular social movements under the moderate leadership which prevailed after World War II. The pre-existing tension between moderates and conservatives dramatically accelerated during this time.

Under the primary leadership of Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson, the Southern Baptist Convention underwent a conservative revolution, first publicly evident at the 1979 Annual Meeting when Adrian Rogers was elected president of the Convention. Over the next ten years, elected conservative presidents appointed like-minded individuals to head major denominational agencies and executive councils. Tellingly, moderates referred to the right turn as a hostile "take over"; Patterson and his supporters referred to it as a conservative "renewal" or "revival."²

² Paige Patterson, "Anatomy of a Reformation: the Southern Baptist Convention, 1978-2004," (Fort Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004), 6.

Whereas overt racism had become unpalatable to most Southern Baptists by the 1970s, gender conservatism proved a successful galvanizing force for those hoping to overtake forces of moderation in the denomination. New leaders, who were heavily invested in the New Right, essentially rolled back progressive changes on gender and blocked new advancements. It was ultimately this “renewed” Southern Baptist Convention, under aggressively conservative leadership, that propelled the denomination into the politics of the New Right in the 1980s.³

The Southern Baptist Convention’s division over feminist politics was hardly unique in the nation at that time. Indeed, many Americans were increasingly polarized after religio-political conservative organizations mounted a significant campaign to turn the Republican Party to the Right. This case study of the role of gender and politics in the Southern Baptist Convention’s right turn, from the late 1960s to 1984, adds to the growing literature on the role of religion and gender in modern conservatism.

Much has been written about the Southern Baptist Convention’s inner civil war in the late 1970s and 1980s and the conservative leaders who orchestrated this right turn. With notable exceptions, such as Nancy Ammerman’s *Baptist Battles* and Barry Hankins’s *Uneasy in Babylon*, many of these books were written by moderate Southern

³ Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6; The New Right has a long period of formation but becomes visible in national politics at the end of the 1970s. See also Marjorie Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71-89.

Baptist scholars who sought to understand what happened to the denomination they knew. Consequently, the focus for these books tends to be the 1980s, when conservatives implemented new policies. They reveal much about this period, including conservatives' sense of triumph by the late 1980s and moderates' feeling that they were, according to one scholar, "exiled" from their own denomination.⁴

This study focuses on events in the 1970s, exploring how the conservatives slowly organized to gain a place of prominence. The intent is to prevent flattening of the denominational narrative in studies of the Religious Right. by acquainting readers with the moderate stance taken by the Southern Baptist Convention and its churches before the conservative takeover, particularly their positions concerning women's role in the home, in the church, and in society, and by analyzing and delineating the limits to which they would go in addressing equal rights for women. Conservatives worked quite hard to pull the denomination into a more active political climate. It was only after its right turn that conservatives could repopulate key agencies with like-minded Baptists and begin to steer the social agenda. Analysis of the moderate Southern Baptist positions in the 1970s reinforces my conclusion that it was not a foregone conclusion that Southern Baptists would automatically oppose the modern women's movement. Some saw the goals and values of the women's movement as compatible and a logical extension of their faith and

⁴ Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon : Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press), 2002; Carl L. Kell, ed. *Exiled : Voices of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 2006.

commitment to human rights. My dissertation adds a nuanced understanding of the denomination's role in 1970s politics.

A large body of literature exists on the Southern Baptist Convention, and it continues to grow as the denomination becomes more entrenched and important in conservative politics. Some address the controversial social issues that divided the denomination. Barry Hankins' *Uneasy in Babylon* devotes one chapter to the denomination's changing position on abortion and another to conservative changes regarding women's status in churches and seminaries. The issue of women's ordination attracted the attention of Susan Shaw, Pamela Durso, and others who have considered the personal experiences of women who were ordained and later forced out of leadership roles in the church after the denomination's right turn.

What needs further exploration, however, is consideration of antifeminist politics as part of the denomination's history. Through emphasizing the Southern Baptist Convention's conservative leadership in the 1980s and the way in which it stirred Baptist activism on social issues, this dissertation makes explicit the link between the denomination's right turn and its espousal of conservative national politics. My dissertation will help to fill this gap in the literature while participating in conversation with existing scholarship from the women's studies, political science, and history disciplines.

It also speaks directly to Elizabeth Flowers' new publication, *Into the Pulpit*, which traces the experiences of moderate women leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention who lost an uphill battle to conservatives in the denomination; while acknowledging Flowers' important findings, I instead emphasize the grassroots

conservative mobilization that rose to counteract the influence of her subjects in the hope that my research will provide a useful counterbalance to the story.⁵ I also look beyond religious issues like women's ordination to emphasize the way that secular politics entered denominational dialogue and forced an inherent tension between religious and non-religious rhetoric. In doing so, my dissertation will emphasize the grassroots conservatives who mobilized within the denomination to enact more conservative policies and encourage antifeminist politics.

Historians have grappled with the portrayal of Southern Baptists as they seek to determine the role of religion in modern politics. The Southern Baptist Convention claimed fourteen million members in the 1970s and 1980s, making it the nation's largest Protestant denomination. In the wave of evangelical revival in the post-World War II era, the Southern Baptist Convention continued its growth throughout the Western states and even in the North, denying any limits to its mission field.⁶ Indeed, one scholar has admitted that "for the unwary novice who does not understand the Southern Baptist Convention or its polity structure, the chances for fatal error are very high."

A political survey from the 1970s revealed that even within the Southern Baptist denomination, there was considerable variance on a spectrum of theological beliefs, based on education levels and geographic placement. Author Robert Thompson

⁵ Elizabeth Hill Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2012.

⁶ Catherine B. Allen 72. It should be noted that in 1950, those known as Northern Baptists took the name American Baptists; they, too, were acknowledging a mission field with no geographic boundaries.

concluded that “the possibility of polarization within the membership, ministry, and hierarchy of the Southern Baptist Convention is real.”⁷ Furthermore, the difficulties involved in capturing a “Southern Baptist sample” are abundant because congregations are self-defined, membership data is often overrepresented, and many national surveys do not distinguish between different associations of Baptists.⁸ The Southern Baptist Convention has had many members in prominent social and political roles in the South and the Sunbelt region, though not all actively participated in denominational politics. I focus on individuals who made active contributions to the denomination through agencies, speaking at annual meetings, or writing in to local Baptist publications, to evaluate who had the greatest impact on denominational affairs at this time.

A great deal of the tension in the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1970s and 1980s arose over terminology. While two opposing ideological forces clearly existed, both insisted they were conservative and resisted other labels. Scholars studying the Southern Baptist Convention’s right turn have struggled over which terms to use; too often, the terminology a scholar uses reveals a hidden bias against one side or the other.

Because the purpose of this dissertation is not to deconstruct religious terminology, I have made conscious decisions about which terms, imperfect as they may

⁷ Robert C. Thompson, “A Research Note on the Diversity Among American Protestants: A Southern Baptist Example,” *Review of Religious Research* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1974): 87-92; 91.

⁸ C. Kirk Hadaway, “Will the Real Southern Baptist Please Stand Up: Methodological Problems in Surveying Southern Baptist Congregations and Members,” *Review of Religious Research* 31, no. 2 (December 1989): 149-161, 160.

be, to use in the presentation of my narrative. I utilize “moderate” and “conservative” in reference to the two opposing camps of Southern Baptists and their corresponding ideologies. Though use of the term “moderate” in this case would not accurately reflect a large-scale measure of American attitudes—in this case it is used on a very insular scale—it indicates a certain level of openness to other ideas, and that is exactly what this dissertation aims to evaluate.

Many conservatives did not want to be called fundamentalists because of its association with earlier challenges to the Southern Baptist status quo, and toward the end of the 1970s, because of the violence associated with Muslim fundamentalists in Iran. The term “fundamentalism” references *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, an edited collection published from 1910-1915, and its description of basic Christian truths: “inerrancy of the Bible, deity of Christ, virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement of Christ, and bodily resurrection and second coming of Christ to earth.”⁹ In this dissertation, I will use “fundamentalist” to describe attitudes that mimic early twentieth century

⁹ Quoted from James Leo Garrett, Jr., “Who Are the Evangelicals?” in *Are Southern Baptists ‘Evangelicals’?* eds. James Leo Garrett, Jr., E. Glenn Hinson, James E. Tull, 33-63 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983). For an excellent overview on fundamentalism, see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991).

fundamentalism. I will not use the label pejoratively, but rather as a description of religio-political beliefs. Most often, I use the labels “moderate” and “conservative.”¹⁰

"The Spiritual is Political" consists of five chapters, together covering the period 1964-1986. They are organized chronologically, reflecting change over time. Chapter One of “The Spiritual is Political” introduces elements of moderate and conservative ideology in the Southern Baptist Convention and highlights the longstanding internal tension that dominated its politics. Chapter Two argues that the denomination as a whole did not oppose many feminist ideas in the early 1970s; in fact, many Southern Baptists, including the denomination’s Christian Life Commission (CLC), actively worked to promote progressive policies on birth control, sex education, abortion, women’s leadership, and equal employment.

Chapter Three traces the challenges of politically-motivated conservative coalitions within the denomination in the mid-1970s, which mobilized in reaction to perceived “liberalism.” Chapter Four argues that feminist politics came to the center of the denominational civil war in 1979, and that national coverage of the feminist movement in previous years played a key role in the conservatives’ victory. After the 1977 International Women’s Year conference held in Houston, Texas, the perceived connection between the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion and homosexuality caused many Southern Baptists to reconsider their views. Frustrated with President Jimmy

¹⁰ I admire Nancy Ammerman’s rationale for her choices of terminology. See *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

Carter's support of IWY – he was one of their own, after all – Southern Baptists began articulating clearer rejections of feminist ideology.

Chapter Five untangles the aftermath of the denomination's right turn, and discusses how leaders like Bailey Smith and Charles Stanley nurtured existing relationships and forged new connections with Religious Right coalitions, effectively thrusting the Southern Baptist Convention into the national politics of feminist backlash in the 1980s. Additionally, it discusses the denomination's mobilization behind Reagan in 1980, and subsequent fidelity to the Republican Party.

This is more a study of politics than of religion, though Jon Butler correctly argued that religion has too often been deemed tangential in modern history. He claimed that contemporary religion “both affected and was affected by other aspects of modern US history.”¹¹ In this case, the women's movement and the emergence of the New Right were those “aspects” in which religion had a dually influential relationship. After its right turn, Republicans could count on Southern Baptist support in ways that they could not before. Gender played a crucial, but understudied, role in this transformation.

Conservative pastor Paige Patterson explained: “Some allege that the developing conservative mood in the country provided assistance to the conservative resurgence [in the SBC]. I do not question this, although I believe that the mood swing in the American

¹¹ Jon Butler, “Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (March 2004): 1357-1378; 1372.

public arena was also greatly assisted by developments in the largest Protestant denomination in America.”¹²

When the Southern Baptist Convention entered politics, it solidified the stronghold of the Religious Right as a permanent fixture within the Republican Party. Its historic support for the separation of church and state was violated and ultimately abandoned as the denomination reconfigured under the auspices of its conservative faction in the 1980s. After this turn, the Southern Baptist Convention proved to be a staunch opponent of feminism and instead preached the politics of “backlash” as an important part of the Pro-Family Movement.

¹² Patterson, “Anatomy of a Reformation: The Southern Baptist Convention, 1978-2004,” Ft. Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004, available online at http://www.paigepatterson.info/ppatterson/assets/documents/anatomy_of_a_reformation.pdf.10.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
PREFACE	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xvi
CHAPTER 1: A HOUSE DIVIDED: POLITICAL CONFLICT AND POLARIZATION WITHIN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: “CONSCIOUSNESS MUST YET BE RAISED”: SOUTHERN BAPTIST RESPONSES TO THE EARLY SECOND WAVE.....	35
CHAPTER 3: “THE BAPTIST PROJECT IS WELL UNDERWAY”: PARTISAN POLITICS AND CULTURE WARS IN THE MID-1970S	78
CHAPTER 4: “SATAN’S FIB ABOUT WOMEN’S LIB”: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION	124
CHAPTER 5: THE SPIRITUAL IS POLITICAL: CONSERVATIVE PROMINENCE AND PARTISAN ENTRENCHMENT IN THE EARLY 1980S	161
BIBLIOGRAPHY	204

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BFMF	Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship
BJCPA.....	Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs
CLC.....	Christian Life Commission
ERA.....	Equal Rights Amendment
IWY.....	International Women's Year
SBFER	Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights
WHCF	White House Conference on Families
WMU	Woman's Missionary Union

CHAPTER 1

A HOUSE DIVIDED: POLITICAL CONFLICTS AND POLARIZATION WITHIN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

In the 1970s, the Southern Baptist Convention experienced painful rifts in denominational fellowship between conservatives and moderates. Much of this owed to their different responses to the modern women's movement. Denominational leaders who adopted a moderate position battled the conservative rank and file at the same time that national political leaders encouraged the Southern Baptist Convention to participate in partisan politics. During this time, moderates exercised more influence than their numbers commanded, which only exacerbated conservatives' frustrations. The women's movement was an important contributor to what Nancy Ammerman has called the "Baptist battles" of the 1970s and 1980s.¹²

¹² For a superb study of cultural and theological issues that divided Southern Baptists in the 1980s, see Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995; Arthur Emery Farnsley II argued that efforts to define the denomination in the 1970s plagued churches when they encountered the modern women's movement. Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics: Authority and Power in the Restructuring of an American Denomination*, University Park (PA): Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

During this time, moderate leaders in office supported the women's movement and its implications for women in the denomination, just as it had supported efforts to desegregate churches and public facilities in the 1960s. They saw support for the women's movement as part of a broader human rights movement and felt they had a responsibility to help shape a moral and equitable society. They wanted the Southern Baptist Convention to be on record in favor of these human rights issues because they thought it would complement their mission work around the world.

Other Southern Baptists took a nearly opposite view of the women's movement. These conservatives did not support feminism because it challenged their biblical understanding of gender roles and threatened their societal stability. They saw their opposition to the movement and willingness to take a hardline stance as a defense of biblical values and longstanding tradition.

These two perspectives were not new in the 1970s. Though the incompatible views concerned a contemporary social movement, the polarized attitudes were consistent with longstanding divisions between Southern Baptists that existed for much of the denomination's history. The Southern Baptist Convention's fundamentalist constituency, though not always in power, had a continuous presence in the denomination. So too did its moderate wing, though it became more predominant after World War II. As the moderates, many of them highly educated from denominational seminaries, took leadership in the denomination, fundamentalists mobilized slowly over the course of several decades to gain enough clout to present a formidable challenge to moderate leadership at the end of the 1970s. Thus, fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist Convention did not disappear in the twentieth century between often-cited

“waves” of American fundamentalism; rather, it remained a constant presence in the denomination.

A strong pattern of conservative political activism emerged over changes to gender roles in the twentieth century as American women moved from Victorian ideals to embracing freedoms available to the New Woman. The Southern Baptist Convention’s response to the modern women’s movement had its origins in several chapters of its own history: the Landmark movement of the late nineteenth century; division over the establishment of a social concerns agency; fundamentalist efforts to address changing women’s roles in the early twentieth century; and moderate leaders’ support of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Conservatives learned from their victories and setbacks, using these lessons to their advantage when rallying against gender-based changes in the 1970s.

Conservative Southern Baptists had a long history of opposing “liberal” social changes that preceded the women’s movement. Upholding the status quo was central to its *raison d’être*; indeed in 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention was founded primarily to preserve the slaveholding rights of southern missionaries. Baptists in the South claimed that antebellum northern efforts to advocate abolition were not merely propaganda, but “unscriptural, ... against the national constitution, ... against the peace and prosperity of the churches, and dangerous to the permanency of the national union.” Additionally, Baptists in the South resented that their national denomination seemingly allocated fewer missionaries and less money for mission work in their region than they did in the northern states and western territories. Though many Baptists in the South were

rural farmers and not large slaveholders, they still espoused political rhetoric about states' rights to defend the region's economic institution.¹

When southern Baptists officially broke away from their northern counterparts in 1845, the political concept of states' rights was present in the proposed structure of the Southern Baptist Convention. Baptists consistently resisted efforts to create a powerful central entity, preferring a structure less likely to control local interests and would defer to local church autonomy and state organizations in a more "democratic" fashion. This type of organization allowed for as much local control as possible to prevent the type of systematic discrimination they perceived from northern Baptists. For over a century, they held on to skepticism of centralized authority, even within their own circles.²

¹ William W. Barnes, "Why the Southern Baptist Convention was Formed," *Review and Expositor* 41, no. 1 (January 1944): 3, 12-17, 16. For more information on southern religious responses to slavery see Kenneth Moore Startup, *The Root of all Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveowners* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

² Farnsley argues that this bottom-up emphasis reflects not only the denomination's "distinctly populist way," but also its theological precept of priesthood of the believer, which grants individual Christians authority to navigate and interpret biblical truths; Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*, 35-54.

Founders of the Southern Baptist Convention intended the denomination to function as a group of individual, self-governing churches that chose to participate in the larger structure through sending delegates, called “messengers,” to annual meetings and to contribute a portion of their funds to large-scale mission efforts.³ Though the denomination had a president and an executive board to administer the denomination’s agencies, these individuals held little power and could not speak on behalf of the entire convention. Even resolutions approved by messengers at annual meetings technically had no binding power over individual churches. There was no mandated creed for participation in the Southern Baptist Convention as there were in other denominations. The establishment of a central body allowed churches to amass “financial and numerical clout” and to more efficiently fund missionary work but it remained a constant source of tension. The denomination’s potential as a unified body was stunted by its democratic, de-centralized structure. Political disagreements often prompted widespread fear that its bureaucratic structure was being misused to promote non-majority viewpoints.⁴

Southern Baptists’ insistence on the separation of church and state was consistent with their focus on individual salvation instead of dependence on the interpretation of clergy. It was mostly a one-way barrier to prevent the state from intruding into the life of

³ These individuals speak as Baptists, not with any authority to speak on behalf of the congregations that sent them to the meeting. For a more detailed explanation, see Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*, 13.

⁴ Norman Alexander Yancey, *Religion Southern Style: Southern Baptists and Society in Historical Perspective* (Danville, VA: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978), 19; Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*, 3.

the church. Close examination of the Southern Baptist Convention shows that the denomination was never fully separated from politics, however. Perhaps this should not be a surprise given that the denomination was born in the midst of sectarian political strife. On “moral” concerns like gambling and liquor, Southern Baptists were politically vocal before 1900.⁵ On issues that were not deemed “moral,” however, pastors were urged to stay out of politics.

Southern Baptists were not always eager to cooperate with other denominations but never was this principle more clearly illustrated than in the Landmark movement of the late nineteenth century, which concerned the issue of baptism. Southern Baptists practiced adult immersion, rather than infant sprinkling as the only sanctioned form of baptism. Many felt this practice made them the truest heirs of the New Testament’s intention for the sacred ritual. The Landmark movement arose in the early 1870s in response to comments made and later published by William Heth Whitsitt, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He stated that since sixteenth-century Anabaptists did not utilize immersion in their baptism rituals, Southern Baptists could not claim an unbroken chain to biblical immersion practices.

⁵ For information about antebellum temperance campaigns, see Kenneth Moore Startup, *The Root of all Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 29-32. Certainly, Southern Baptists did not express the only religious support for temperance. See Kenneth K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 18, 36-38.

Many Southern Baptists were outraged at Whitsitt's findings. Several denominational press writers wrote about the dangers of denying the legitimacy of Southern Baptist rituals and demanded Whitsitt's resignation.⁶ Some Southern Baptists felt there needed to be some sort of code of beliefs upon which seminary professors and ministers could be judged. Landmarkists defended immersion as a form of Southern Baptist orthodoxy, though there had not been any previous call for such a creed or code.

While confined primarily to the baptism issue, the Landmark movement demonstrated that, though Southern Baptists traditionally were not considered to be creedal, there were precedents for the establishment of a code to document Southern Baptist beliefs. Furthermore, it demonstrated that many Southern Baptists saw themselves as exceptional among other Protestant denominations. Essentially, Landmarkists were non-cooperationist and "rejected all non-Baptist congregations as false churches" as a result of their deviation from practicing baptismal immersion.⁷ These demands threatened the vitality of the denomination from its own right wing, not from the left. When attitudes resembling the Landmark movement were revived among some conservatives who opposed broad religious coalitions in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it prompted

⁶ Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism*, 12-15. Ultimately Whitsitt lost his job at the seminary in 1897 as a result of the controversy and popular disgust over his denial of Baptist tradition. In some ways this provides an important precedent for seminary firings over gender issues in the 1980s.

⁷ Barry Hankins, "Southern Baptists and Northern Evangelicals: Cultural Factors and the Nature of Religious Alliances," *Religion and American Culture* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 271-298.

moderates in the denomination to view these conservatives with skepticism, though they did reinforce denominational isolationism.⁸

Fundamentalism was prevalent in the South from 1880 to 1930 and its influence was felt strongly in the Southern Baptist Convention. The first wave of American fundamentalism introduced biblical literalism as a defense of conservative politics. For those who subscribed to the Landmark movement, fundamentalism provided a logical extension of their beliefs. Just as conservatives utilized the Landmark movement to prevent change to “orthodox” Southern Baptist beliefs, so too did they use fundamentalism to prevent the enactment of modernist political views into the canon.

Fundamentalists used their populist denominational influence to push for an orthodox creed of Southern Baptist beliefs in the mid-1920s but they won few victories due to the growing power of the denomination’s non-fundamentalist leadership. A compromise was reached in the form of a “Statement of Baptist Faith and Message,” a document of Baptist beliefs passed by messengers at the 1925 Annual Meeting. The “Baptist Faith and Message” was not binding, and was not, however, intended to provoke fear of further centralization of beliefs. The document quelled fundamentalist worries about theological liberalism. It was essentially a “statement of denominational consensus” on biblical inerrancy. Fundamentalist efforts to force a position on evolution ultimately failed until later years.⁹

⁸ For a fuller history of the Landmark Movement, see James E. Tull, “A History of Southern Baptist Landmarkism in the Light of Historical Baptist Ecclesiology,” (PhD Diss, Columbia University, 1960); republished by Arno Press, 1980.

⁹ Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*, 9.

In the aftermath of the fundamentalist challenge to the denomination, many Southern Baptists avoided association with the most radically conservative fundamentalists who continued to “rabble rouse” within the denomination, and instead, upheld the conservative status quo.¹⁰ These fundamentalists, not satisfied by denominational efforts to quell their demands, ultimately left the denomination. Unhappy with the “liberal” Southern Baptist bureaucracy, they renounced their affiliation and became independent Baptists. Some, less hardline fundamentalists, remained in the denomination and continued to push for conservative reform.

The Southern Baptist Convention’s democratic structure helped those who wanted to avoid taking stances on social issues. Opponents could claim that the denomination had no right to voice political stances because it was not allowed to usurp local autonomy and “speak” for local churches. Yet, there were some within the Southern Baptist Convention who insisted on the establishment of an agency to address issues of social and political concern. After years of attempts to form such a denominational agency, the Christian Life Commission was founded in 1947 to function as a social conscience for Southern Baptists.¹¹

¹⁰ Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism*, 64-67.

¹¹ The Christian Life Commission was founded as the Social Service Commission in 1946 but was replaced with the name Christian Life Commission in 1953, partly due to the growing perception that Social Service meant “social work,” and partly due to the success of the Baptist General Convention of Texas’ prototype Christian Life Commission organization that operated within the confines of the state. David Stricklin argues that the Social Gospel movement, largely perceived by contemporaries as a

There were several unsuccessful attempts to form an organization like the CLC in the SBC's history: Committee on Social Service (1913-1914), Committee on Temperance and Social Service (1914-1920), and Social Service Commission (1920-1947). These organizations were scantily funded and had little power within the denomination to call for reform, aside from small-scale efforts to publish informational pamphlets on contemporary social issues. Scholars have argued that the agency went largely unnoticed by many Southern Baptists. Baptist historian Leon McBeth claimed that the failure to establish a successful body for social action in the early twentieth century was partly due

“northern movement,” had little impact on the Southern Baptist Convention, though he acknowledges early efforts to create “social service” organizations within the denomination as the national movement was becoming less popular; *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 23-24, 28. Bailey chronicles attempts to establish this type of commission in the 1930s but argues that conservatism had a greater hold on the denomination; in fact, he claims that of the southern Protestant denominations, the Southern Baptist Convention was least amenable to social reform efforts at this time (121-124). Yancey interprets the period before the establishment of the CLC instead as a “time of social awakening,” but this interpretation perhaps minimizes the efforts of conservatives to actively prevent the denomination from establishing a strong social-minded agency. Foy Valentine became leader in 1960; David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*; Norman Alexander Yancey, “Southern Baptists and Social Action: An Historical Interpretation of the Christian Life Commission and its Denominational Role,” (PhD Diss, George Washington University, 1973), 26-27, 36.

to the rural location of many Southern Baptist churches, along with the denomination's emphasis on individualism and personal salvation.¹² This oversight quickly evaporated after Foy Valentine assumed leadership in 1960.

For decades, members debated whether the Southern Baptist Convention's democratic structure necessarily required or justified isolationism. Landmarkists prevented Southern Baptists from cooperating in ecumenical alliances because of doctrinal differences. Southern Baptists did not participate in interfaith councils like the National Council on Churches, choosing to take part instead in the Baptist World Alliance.¹³ In 1936, messengers voted to replace the Committee on Chaplains of the Army and Navy with a more utilitarian Committee on Public Relations. Still intended as a liaison with military chaplains, the new agency would also have the responsibility of standing up for Baptist rights, if necessary, to the federal government.¹⁴ It was intended

¹² Leon McBeth, "Origin of the Christian Life Commission," *Baptist History & Heritage* 1, no.3, (1966): 29-30.

¹³ "Southern Baptist Isolationism," *Christian Century*, August 7, 1940, 966-968.

¹⁴ Stanley LeRoy Haste, "A History of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, 1946-1971," (ThD Diss, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973). The BJCPA eventually included representatives from American Baptist Churches, USA, Baptist Federation of Canada, Baptist General Conference, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc., North American Baptist General Conference, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc., Seventh Day Baptist General Conference, Southern Baptist Convention.

to function separately from the Christian Life Commission and its power was limited, as approved by messengers to the 1937 Annual Meeting:

The power of this Committee is...not permitted to enter the field of politics; it possesses none of the characteristics of a lobby, seeking to secure legislation favorable to moral reform; it has no right to initiate anything, unless requested to do so by some official of this Convention; its mission is to secure facts, and it declines to make recommendations unless the facts, in the judgment of your Committee, unmistakably call for that action.¹⁵

The Committee on Public Relations communicated with a similar organization developing within the Northern Baptist Convention, and by 1941, the two committees worked jointly to protect Baptist interests, including a persistent call for the separation of church and state.¹⁶

After World War II, this committee set up an office in Washington D.C. for greater political visibility and access to government affairs, and it soon attracted cooperation from Seventh Day Baptists, Baptist General Conference of America, and the North American Baptist General Conference. In 1948, the Southern Baptist Convention afforded the Committee on Public Affairs with powers to act politically to protect denominational interests in Washington D.C. Renamed the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA) in 1950, the agency continued to grow, and it soon gained the right to propose resolutions in annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention based

¹⁵ 1937 SBC Annual, cited in Haste, "A History of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs," 101.

¹⁶ Haste, "A History of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs," 20.

on what was happening in the nation's capital.¹⁷ By the 1970s, BJCPA also attracted the support of the Baptist Federation of Canada and the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Though it was designed to protect Baptist beliefs, the BJCPA was not universally popular among Southern Baptists; its growing power to speak for the denomination—in conjunction with other denominations—caused many conservatives to view its actions with a high level of suspicion.¹⁸

The fundamentalist movement of the early twentieth century was crucial in the ideological formation of conservative church leaders later in the twentieth century. For many of these individuals, biblical literalism provided ample evidence for church involvement in politics due to moral issues or principles that threatened biblical truth. It also provided a biblical foundation for opposition to changing gender roles and was used to quell threats to gendered social convention in the face of challenges to women's roles at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Anne Firor Scott has argued that “woman's sphere”

¹⁷ Hastey describes its activism in opposing federal support of parochial schools, opposing an official representative to the Vatican; it supported the UN, endorsed antiliqor bills in Congress (prohibiting its advertisement), “A History of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs,” 61.

¹⁸ See Hastey, “A History of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs,” 152-154. For example, the agency supported the Supreme Court's ruling in the 1963 case *Engel v Vitale*, which deemed unconstitutional any form of mandated prayer in schools.

¹⁹ DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 136. It should be noted that some fundamentalists consider themselves “separatists,” meaning they hesitate to participate,

in the South was among the most “sharply defined” in the nation, and that Baptists views on women were even more conservative than other Protestant denominations in the region.²⁰ Fundamentalists within the Southern Baptist Convention expressed opposition to changes to the traditional family hierarchy by “divinizing” the home and presenting Victorian domesticity as God’s will.²¹ A woman’s life was more rewarding in the home, according to a Southern Baptist from Kentucky, as “she is at her best when in her God-given sphere.”²²

Southern Baptist fundamentalists looked to the Bible for evidence supporting their skepticism of feminism. Noted one writer:

Christ, in the appointment of apostles, did not include women among them, and this is a fact of much significance...there is certainly, in the New Testament, no intimation that any woman was a preacher of the gospel or the pastor of a church.

or even reject participation, with other religious entities or secular culture. For more on separatist fundamentalism, see George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²⁰ Anne Firor Scott, “Women, Religion, and Social Change in the South, 1830-1930,” in *Making the Invisible Woman Visible* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 190-211.

²¹ For complete analysis of rhetoric claiming the Victorian family structure was sacred, see DeBerg, *Ungodly Women*, 60-67.

²² A.C. Dorris, “Women’s Sphere in the Church,” *Western Recorder* (KY) 86, no. 35, July 6, 1911, 3.

But in her appropriate sphere of Christian work and Christian usefulness, how lovely is woman...!²³

They also offered a host of other Biblical passages providing instructions for women to avoid taking on roles outside the norm for their gender, including the often-cited third chapter of Genesis, which recounted Eve's creation from Adam's rib. For fundamentalists, these passages offered formulas for Christian living and they dictated the boundaries of appropriate gendered behavior.

After the end of the Civil War, Southern Baptist women organized missionary circles to help rebuild churches and raise funds in the midst of widespread devastation to the southern landscape and psyche. There was some suspicion among southern men, however, that women's groups in their churches might present similar threats to their traditions as did antebellum northern women's missionary organizations that had supported abolition. Women were not allowed to be messengers to Annual Meetings in the postwar period. Male leaders had expressed fear of disorder and hysteria were women allowed full participation in the denomination. At the 1888 Annual Meeting, supporters found a male representative to propose a resolution that would recognize and encourage missionary circles which would be responsible for keeping separate account books, provided they reported their earnings annually to the executive board. The effort, which

²³ J.M. Pendleton, "The Woman Question," *Western Recorder* (KY) 61, no. 28, March 19, 1885, 1.

did not specify gender to avoid prejudice, provided an entry point for the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention's Woman's Missionary Union.²⁴

The goals of the Woman's Missionary Union as outlined during the organization's first meeting in 1888 were to raise awareness and encourage mission work in the denomination, to raise funds for missionaries, and to teach children the value of missionary work. Members of the Woman's Missionary Union, while staying within their allowed role of religious guardian in the confines of Victorian Womanhood, contributed significantly to national and international missionary efforts. The organization, which acted independently instead of as an auxiliary group, provided women's only sanctioned voice in the denomination for thirty years.²⁵

Uncertainty about the motives behind the women's organization furthered fundamentalist ire, especially as the Woman's Missionary Union gained a sizeable membership. By the early twentieth century the organization had established chapters in every state, financed staff members, and demonstrated an ability to raise huge sums of money from its regular small offering collections. Other than establishing the Woman's Missionary Union, the Southern Baptist Convention did little to redefine women's role in

²⁴ Catherine Allen, *A Century to Celebrate: History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union publication, 1987), 44-45. Ann Firor Scott points out that it took Southern Baptist women ten years longer to achieve a female organization within the denomination than it did for Methodist women because of the Baptists' more conservative stance on gender roles. See Scott, "Women, Religion, and Social Change in the South, 1830-1930," 199.

²⁵ Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*, 47-51.

the denomination to reflect the New Woman of the early twentieth century.²⁶ Male messengers continually emphasized disapproval the prospect of women “speaking before popular assemblies or in anyway [sic] usurping the duties which the New Testament imposes exclusively upon men.” They even replaced the word “messenger” with “brethren,” meaning men, in order to specify that attendees to annual meetings should not be women.²⁷ Southern Baptist women challenged these restrictions in the early 1910s and requested the right to serve as official representatives of their churches at attending annual meetings; they did so amidst hostile opposition. In 1917 meeting attendees voted to change “brethren” back to “messenger” in the guidelines, and in the subsequent year, messengers voted to formally allow women to join their ranks.²⁸

There was considerable backlash against this seemingly democratic move. In reaction to admission of women into annual meetings, J.W. Porter, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lexington, Kentucky, and editor of the state’s Baptist newspaper, *Western Recorder*, edited a book that condemned changes to women’s role in the church and in

²⁶ See Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*, 58. *Baptist History and Heritage* devoted an entire issue to “Women, Baptists, and Progress” in 1977. Its contents reveal telling attitudes towards women seeking denominational changes throughout the twentieth century. Interestingly, two contributors noted the significance of intradenominational debates over the Equal Rights Amendment as inspiration for the journal’s theme and as reason for thoughtful reflection on women’s role in the denomination.

²⁷ 1879 SBC Annual, cited in David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 56-57, 60-63.

²⁸ Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 66-67.

society. An ardent fundamentalist and anti-evolutionist, Porter argued that the denominational vote was evidence of “the utter disregard of the teaching of God’s word, by the feminist, concerning women speaking in mixed public assemblies...”²⁹ He regarded the decision to let women vote in annual meetings as merely an opening for inappropriate behavior. Citing that “the Northern Baptist Convention has already witnessed the spectacular stunt of a woman president,” he urged his Southern Baptist brethren not to follow the North’s liberal precedent, but rather to read scriptural directives about women speaking in public and quickly discredit those who displayed sympathy toward “the menace of feminism.”³⁰

By the time Porter’s book was published, the Nineteenth Amendment, establishing women’s right to vote, had already been ratified for several years. He saw the goals of the women seeking messenger status in the denomination as “unconsciously influenced” by members of the National Woman’s Party who had supported suffrage with radical tactics.³¹ But in reality, some of the most vocal support of female enfranchisement in the previous decade came from male denominational leaders, including Leslie L. Gwaltney, editor of Alabama’s state Baptist paper; James B. Gambrell, editor of Texas’s state Baptist paper and president of the Southern Baptist Convention when women were

²⁹ J.W. Porter, *Feminism: Woman and Her Work* (Louisville, KY: Baptist Book Concern, 1923), 40.

³⁰ Porter saw feminism as a “rebellion” against God’s plan for women and its ultimate result was immodesty among young women, higher rates of divorce, fornication, crime, and a lower birth rate. Porter, *Feminism*, 24-40.

³¹ Porter, *Feminism*, 41.

voted in as messengers; and James P. Eagle, longtime president of Arkansas's state Baptist convention. Eagle's wife had been one of the women challenging the male-only messenger policy; when Eagle served as governor of Arkansas in the late 1880s, he hosted Susan B. Anthony in her visit to the state.³²

Many Southern Baptist groups, including the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), did not offer vocal support for woman suffrage. While a slim minority of Southern Baptists desired women's right to vote as a conduit for Christian social reform, most authors writing in state Baptist publications espoused widespread southern concerns about suffrage's potential to degrade womanhood or repeated concerns about its potential to benefit African Americans.³³ Porter reminded readers that "the Woman's Rights, Antislavery, and Social Equality movements were rocked in the same cradle, and fostered

³² In her assessment of the denomination's efforts in the suffrage movement, Catherine B. Allen acknowledges that these individuals were not representative, but that their prominent positions of leadership did present a veritable challenge to the prevailing denominational opposition to woman suffrage, *A Century to Celebrate*, 235-237.

³³ Bill Sumners, "Southern Baptists and Women's Right to Vote, 1910-1920," *Baptist History and Heritage* 12, no. 1 (1977): 45-51. Sumners argues that it is unwise to think that all Southern Baptists opposed woman suffrage. He claims that many Southern Baptists belonged to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League – organizations that officially supported women's enfranchisement. For more information about debate between Southern Baptists in Texas over female suffrage, see Frances Hazmark, "The Southern Religious Press and the Social Gospel Movement, 1910-1915," (Master's thesis, Lamar University, 1979), 96-98.

by the same friends.” This argument was consistent with widespread southern arguments against female enfranchisement.³⁴ Given their efforts, support for traditional gender roles persisted in the denomination for much of the twentieth century. But in the meantime, the WMU continued to grow and address a variety of social ills, such as the danger of alcohol, under the banner of traditional womanhood. And, as the organization grew, its ability to raise money for missions became a major asset to the denomination.³⁵

Fundamentalism retained its influence throughout the mid-twentieth century when societal disorder in the South was challenged by desegregation. The civil rights movement provided an important bridge to politics for many Southern Baptists who came of age during Scopes trials and desired the preservation of southern social order.

Southern Baptists had excluded African Americans from local denominational associations in 1869.³⁶ In 1892, the Home Mission Board claimed that “the white people

³⁴ Porter, *Feminism*, 11. For an examination of the woman suffrage movement in the South, see Marjorie Spruill, *New Women of the New South: the Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

³⁵ Catherine Allen notes that the WMU did not officially endorse Woman’s Christian Temperance Union until 1912 – quite late, considering the overlap of many of their goals. The WMU’s mission fund, as the only surviving denominational account with a surplus at the time, was actually used to bail out the Home Mission Board and the Foreign Mission Board during the Great Depression. See Allen, *A Century to Celebrate*, 129-132 and Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 136-137.

³⁶ See Kenneth K. Bailey, “The Post Civil War Racial Separations in Southern Protestantism” *Church History* 46 (December 1977), 455-57, 467-70; also Mark

of the South have done and are doing a vast amount of helpful work for this race. No people since the world began ever had so much or such efficient aid.”³⁷ But in reality, many Southern Baptists, adhering to the ideology of the Lost Cause and justifying the actions of their ancestors, had little desire to come to the aid of African Americans and held on to the stereotypes that justified Jim Crow segregation laws in the wake of the *Plessy v Ferguson* Supreme court case.³⁸

After World War II, there were a few Southern Baptist pastors who called for a “more just South.”³⁹ As it became a more central part of denominational affairs, the CLC became a battle ground for those with conflicting political agendas. For example, the Christian Life Commission received considerable attention from laymen when it took a bold stance on the 1954 Supreme Court case, *Brown v Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas*. Supporting desegregation created a formidable wedge between the agency, mostly staffed by educated employees, and a more conservative rank and file.⁴⁰

Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 3-4.

³⁷ SBC Annual, 1892, Appendix A, available online at sbhla.org.

³⁸ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 100-105.

³⁹ See Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 27.

⁴⁰ In fact, messengers to the Annual Meeting that year only accepted the Christian Life Commission’s recommendation after fierce debate. Only after one speaker’s impassioned call for the denomination to do “the Christian thing” were attendees motivated to vote in

Before *Brown v Board of Education* was issued in 1954, many conservatives within the denomination opposed desegregation and supported the preservation of a racially segregated society.⁴¹ One scholar of antebellum proslavery religious rhetoric concluded that ministers often “consciously and unconsciously reflected or reinforced their culture” in regard to these locally accepted views on race.⁴² Indeed, the same held true for informal pulpit defenses of *Plessy v Ferguson*. Theological justification for segregation was loosely based on biblical passages and precepts, namely that God created races differently and intended them to remain separate. Segregationists used passages from Genesis 7-9 to explain the ways in which God created races at the Tower of Babel; they took it further by claiming that any efforts to tamper with this system on a local level would incite divine punishment. They also cited Acts 17:26, claiming that though human races had a common biblical origin, God soon “marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.” The boundaries of segregation, therefore, were consistent with land boundaries from Scripture. Because most Southern Baptists believed

the affirmative. See Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 2001), 75.

⁴¹ While a vast majority of Southern Baptists condemned the activities of the Ku Klux Klan during the Civil Rights Movement, the denomination contained plenty of participants in Klan activity. See Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 110-118; Alan Scot Willis, *All According to God's Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race, 1945-1970* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 107-108, 197.

⁴² Startup, *The Root of All Evil*, 32.

that the Bible contained unchanging truths, those so inclined could use these texts to prove they were not wrong in supporting segregation.⁴³

Not all Southern Baptists were open to the idea of racially integrated church fellowship in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, some Southern Baptists were prominent in local Citizens' Councils, like Carey Daniel, who at the same time served as executive Vice-President of Dallas's Citizens' Council and as pastor of First Baptist Church in West Dallas, Texas.⁴⁴ A study of Southern Baptist publications during this time points to no shortage of opposition to the efforts and tactics of the civil rights movement. Massive resistance among the rank and file was not uncommon after the courts began striking down Jim Crow laws. Probably the most notorious Southern Baptist advocate of massive resistance in the 1960s, Governor Orval Faubus, sent in the Arkansas state's National Guard to block desegregation of Little Rock schools.

There were other Southern Baptists, however, who discouraged massive resistance and, instead, countered segregationists with biblical justifications for desegregation. Billy Graham, the denomination's revered evangelist and member of First

⁴³ Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 48-58. Many Southern Baptists also subscribed to the makeshift fundamentalist idea that the societal practice of desegregation was a form of modernism. Some even claimed it was a form of human-driven evolution intended to mix the races together and destroy white purity. These claims blurred the lines of first-wave fundamentalist rhetoric with that of white supremacy and proved that fundamentalist thought had not completely lost its influence in the Southern Baptist Convention, even after it waned nationally after the 1930s.

⁴⁴ Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 53.

Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, encouraged Southern Baptists to support desegregation in a “Christian manner” after his own crusades did so in 1953. Graham encouraged Christians to reject racial discrimination through individual acts of kindness rather than systemic overhaul. This attitude was consistent with the denomination’s theological emphasis on individual salvation, and it mollified some southerners who were not eager to accommodate racial change but could admit the Christian values implicit in acts of kindness.⁴⁵

Clearly not adhering to the ideas of his famous churchgoer, Rev. W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, presented a passionate defense of the segregation system that set him up as a trusted voice for politically conservative Southern Baptists in the late 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁶ Criswell had a reputation as an educated, dynamic preacher who appealed to masses of Southern Baptists in an anti-intellectual, plain-spoken fashion. His large congregation and sizeable operating budget afforded him additional clout among Southern Baptists, and this influence provided him ample opportunity to underscore his denominational goals and political ideals.

On February 21, 1956, Criswell utilized this platform to emphasize his opposition to desegregation in a passionate criticism of the Supreme Court’s decision on *Brown*. At a denominational State Evangelistic Conference held in Columbia, South Carolina, he decried efforts by the NAACP, National Council of Churches, and other integrationists as anathema to the South’s welfare: “...this thing they are trying to ram down our throats

⁴⁵ Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 3.

⁴⁶ Miller, *Billy Graham*, 37, 39.

now is all foolishness; it is idiocy.” He continued, “If they will leave us alone and stay up there with their dirty shirts, we’ll save more souls and do more good than they.”

Criswell’s political stance caught the front page of the state capital’s newspaper with the headline: “Baptist Leader Blasts Integration as ‘Idiocy.’”⁴⁷

The next day, Criswell spoke before a joint session of South Carolina’s Legislative Assembly at the request of Governor Timmerman to elaborate on his defense of voluntary assemblies. He started the address by admitting he was sure the Civil War victory was given to the North by “mistake,” and then vociferously criticized the ministers in attendance at the local evangelism conference for their unwillingness to engage with the “volatile” politics of desegregation. Though he claimed to harbor no prejudice against African Americans, he strongly supported white southerners’ right to their own religious assemblies. Claiming that Southern Baptists and Catholics segregated peacefully and with no ill will, he advocated a similar approach for black and white congregations: “it is better for them to be over there in their own way, in the church, with their preacher, carrying on as they like to do, and then I’m over here with my flock and my kind and we are carrying on like we want to do; and everything is just fine.” He later reasserted: “brother, it’s a free country. If I want my group, let me have it...Don’t force me by law, by statute, by Supreme Court decision, by any way that they can think of,

⁴⁷ “Baptists Open Evangelism Conference Monday,” *The State* (SC), February 19, 1956, 14-B; “Baptist Leader Blasts Integration as ‘Idiocy,’” *The State* (SC), February 22, 1956, p. 1-A, 3-A.

don't force me to cross over in those intimate things where I don't want to go.”⁴⁸

Needless to say, Criswell's ideas were welcomed in the South Carolina legislature, but he did receive denominational criticism for his comments.

The following Sunday morning, Criswell defended to his home congregation the remarks he made in Columbia and reinforced his original point: “...every man has the privilege and the opportunity, under God, to choose those around which he's going to build the circle of his home and his family, and God made it that way.” After tacitly apologizing for using the phrase “dirty shirts” to characterize northern proponents of desegregation, Criswell argued, “We'll work this problem out if they'll leave us alone...But why, why would agitators want to come down here where we are and create tension and sensitivity and bitterness? Why can't they say, “Those people love God! Give them time!””⁴⁹ Criswell quickly became an influential figure in Southern Baptist denominational politics as a representative of social and theological conservatism. Though he claimed to be disinterested in politics, he showed influences of fundamentalism and its opposition to social change; over time he became much more politically active.

⁴⁸ “An address by Dr. W.A. Criswell, pastor, First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, to the Joint Assembly, Wednesday, February 22, 1956” South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁴⁹ W.A. Criswell, “Second Letter to Corinth,” February 26, 1956, Sermon delivered at First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX, transcript, available online at <http://www.wacriswell.com/sermons/1956/second-letter-to-corinth/>.

For most Southern Baptist churches, the desegregation process happened slowly and painfully.⁵⁰ E.S. James reflected on 1954, the year he became editor of Texas' denominational publication, *Baptist Standard*: "You're aware of the fact that after the action of the Supreme Court, if you had asked a Baptist in Texas what he thought about integrating or desegregating the schools, my guess is that ninety-five out of a hundred of them would have told you he was opposed to it."⁵¹ Some individual churches slowly began accepting black members, and local Southern Baptist associations began accepting black congregations into fellowship, in a dual alignment with the National Baptist

⁵⁰ There is a growing body of excellent literature that investigates Southern Baptist attitudes towards desegregation. See David Stricklin, in *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 48-81, and Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God, 1945-1995*, for more information. Terry Goddard evaluates the ways in which Brooks Hays, former President of the Southern Baptist Convention and member of the House of Representatives (D, Ark.), brought race to the fore of Southern Baptist rhetoric in the 1950s through his early alliance with Governor Faubus and his later desire to see the denomination accommodate incremental change in race relations; Terry D. Goddard, "Southern Social Justice: Brooks Hays and the Little Rock School Crisis," *Baptist History and Heritage* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 68-86.

⁵¹ E.S. James, interview by Thomas L. Charlton, May 25, 1972, in Dallas, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/2240.

Convention. At best, many Southern Baptists were becoming “non-segregationists” by the 1960s.⁵²

The civil rights movement brought an important question back to the fore in the mid-twentieth century: was it the responsibility of local churches or denominational organizations to influence church-goers’ attitudes towards social issues? Southern Baptist responses to the movement varied geographically and based on education levels. By the mid-1960s, Southern Baptists were statistically more rural and less educated than many Americans, but they also were more educated and more urban than ever before in the denomination’s history. The civil rights movement bared deep theological and social divides, educational divides, and political divides. It provided inspiration and a concrete precedent for conservatives using the pulpit to oppose political intrusion into church affairs.

In reaction to those who supported massive resistance in the denomination, racial moderates became more outspoken in their support of progress and reconciliation.⁵³

⁵² Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism*, 152-153; Newman, *Getting Right with God*, 74-75.

⁵³ Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 19-21; 29-39. The legacy of most modern Southern Baptist moderates can be primarily traced to the ideas of a North Carolinian, Walter Johnson, who denounced racial exploitation of African Americans in the 1920s and 1930s as a hindrance to spiritual renewal. Espousing a philosophy of “Radical Christianity,” Johnson inspired a limited but visible presence of racial concern within the denomination, especially in North and South Carolina, and Southern Baptists who adhered to his ideas about race formed small networks across the South. Stricklin argues

Southern Baptists' reactions to social changes brought by the civil rights movement made clear distinctions between social moderates and social conservatives within the denomination. Battle lines began to form as each group wrestled for bureaucratic control of denominational agencies. There was more at stake, however, in the postwar era when the Southern Baptist Convention expanded and tried to standardize its programs to unify the denomination since it had grown outside of the regional South. The denomination's growing bureaucracy meant conflict over direction of its program. As moderates gained control over many seminaries, the Christian Life Commission, and executive councils, conservatives felt their voices – and traditional values – were being abandoned.⁵⁴

Several prominent pastors supported desegregation, forcefully bucking more widespread conservative stances on race. Martin England and Clarence Jordan established Koinonia Farm in southwest Georgia as an interracial experiment with Radical Christianity. The farm attracted racial liberals within the denomination who used the area to form a sense of community.⁵⁵ Bob McClernon and later Warren Carr of Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina, held the first interracial meeting in the town's history shortly after *Brown v Board*. Carr explained: "I did not believe that there

that Johnson's followers later opposed the denomination's right in the late 1970s, constituting some of the "liberals" explicitly targeted by conservatives.

⁵⁴ Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*, 50-51.

⁵⁵ Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 40-41.

was any way the church could justify being exclusive.”⁵⁶ They defended their support of the civil rights movement biblically as well, using Genesis 1:27: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them.” The threat of competing biblical interpretations put these two groups further at odds. Notably, these individuals worked within the denomination, instead of participating in national movements for civil rights.⁵⁷

Foy Valentine became head of Christian Life Commission in 1960, and under his leadership the denominational body came to reflect his moderate social ideology, much to the ire of segregationist conservatives. He was heavily influenced by the Koinonia Farm while he was studying at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the 1940s, and his dissertation on the topic of civil rights not only cited instances of denominational racial injustice but also called for Southern Baptists to embrace cultural changes, arguing:

...if Southern Baptists are as interested in the New Testament church and the application of the gospel as is commonly supposed and preached by them, then it is of utmost importance that they apply this interest and belief in the area of race relations.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Warren Carr, interview by David Stricklin, April 18, 1985, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, Texas, available online at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buiroh/id/2045>.

⁵⁷ Newman, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 65-68.

⁵⁸ Foy D. Valentine, “A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1949,” (Th.D. Diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1949). Valentine’s dissertation chronicled instances of Southern Baptists deeming African Americans

Rejecting the idea that “everything was all right between the races in the South,” Valentine used the agency to help “educate” Southern Baptists on African Americans’ need for civil rights.

Racial conservatives were opposed to Valentine’s ideas during the civil rights movement, and they tried to eliminate funding for the CLC, especially after its literature was praised by the National Council of Churches.⁵⁹ Moderates, however, stepped up in a new way to thwart the conservative efforts, enacting a new type of political dissent. They became a legitimate challenge to the status quo and prevented the denomination from moving wholesale into radical massive resistance during the 1950s and 1960s. These individuals stayed in the Southern Baptist Convention rather than changing denominations because they wanted reform, but a denominational consensus was admittedly fragile.

Many Southern Baptist moderates supported women’s rights as an extension of civil rights, and vice versa. When the women’s movement became perceived as the next major threat to Southern Baptist traditions for conservatives, the denominational battle

racially inferior in denominational publication and accepting segregation and disenfranchisement, though he also took note of progressive trends within each decade of his study, citing Southern Baptists who encouraged the denomination to take social action against the prevailing attitudes. In keeping with moderate views on separation of church and state, Valentine concludes that Southern Baptists should not “[sponsor] legislative action” but rather address racial inequality on a denominational and private level through promotion of Christian values.

⁵⁹ Newman, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 76-77.

lines remained uncompromised. The language of the fundamentalist movement – and, to a degree, even that of the Landmark movement – remained visible as a standard for conservative theological and political beliefs. Indeed, in the South, fundamentalist ideas did not become passé as they did in many places around the nation after the 1930s; instead, they defined gender debates in the modern movement for many Southern Baptist conservatives.

In the midst of massive cultural changes, renewed emphasis on the practice of traditional gender roles allowed conservatives to retain control of their homes. In the late 1950s, W.A. Criswell, infamous for his segregationist rhetoric, also upheld literal gender roles and reinforced a continuation of “woman’s sphere”:

A woman can teach women, a woman can teach little children, a woman can share in the service of the Lord, in the public house of Jesus, but, the authority of the service, the organization of the church in the Old Testament, in the New Testament is always the same...In the New Testament, the apostle is a man. The pastor is a man. The deacon is a man. The authority of the house of God is always invested in the man.⁶⁰

This hierarchy provided structure and safety for fundamentalists, but it provided few opportunities for women who felt a spiritual call to do more. Criswell became more prominent in the denomination after serving as convention president in 1968, and as his congregation, First Baptist Dallas, continued to grow in size.

⁶⁰ Dr. W.A. Criswell, “All About Women,” July 13, 1958, Sermon delivered at First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, transcription, available online at <http://www.wacriswell.com>.

At a time when many white southerners were beginning to abandon the Democratic Party, conservative politicians begin making appeals to evangelicals. The civil rights movement challenged traditional church practices and the racial social order in the South and demanded that southerners to adjust to new cultural norms. The women's movement came at a time when some places were still fighting desegregation. But furthermore, women's movement activists stirred up old battles against the earlier wave of the feminist movement focusing on woman suffrage, and fundamentalists had scriptural justifications already scripted from the early twentieth century to use in their defense. Women's equality was a key issue that divided moderates against fundamentalists, and it contributed to the denomination's schism as neither side was willing to compromise.

There had been a strong fundamentalist presence in the Southern Baptist Convention throughout the twentieth century. After the 1960s, however, defense of the Southern Baptist conservatism transferred to a new generation of fundamentalist leaders who learned from the mistakes of segregationists and moved forward to reestablish denominational prominence. One scholar described this contemporary fundamentalist revival as "both a recent, unique social movement responding to specific changes within their culture *and* descendants of a similar reactionary movement begun in the late nineteenth century."⁶¹ They revived early twentieth century fundamentalist rhetoric to criticize modernism in society, liberalism within the seminaries and, later, feminism as hostile to the tenets of traditional conservative Southern Baptist ideology.

⁶¹ Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics*, 62.

As early as the 1960s, Southern Baptist individuals who opposed the feminist movement invoked their long heritage of political involvement to oppose its challenge to traditional gender hierarchy. In the late 1970s they worked together to rally the denomination around biblical inerrancy to justify opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment and women's ordination. Fundamentalists, with literal belief in the Bible, argued that the Bible's truths transcended historical context or scholarly criticism. These Southern Baptists were skeptical of modernism and cultural trends as part of their religious ideology, but it was actually very political. Though there were different definitions of what constituted "modern" in the 1970s as compared to the early twentieth century, fundamentalists used the same tactics from the first wave of fundamentalism to protect a traditional gender hierarchy in their homes and churches.

By the end of the 1970s, however, prominent Southern Baptist conservatives vocally opposed the women's movement. They wanted the denomination to stay away from "liberal" social movements that produced new cultural norms and threatened their traditional practices. Through their existing religio-political connections, these individuals led the denomination to become active in partisan politics in the 1980s as a way of protecting traditional gender roles and reversing the progress of feminists and moderate leaders in the denomination.

CHAPTER 2

“CONSCIOUSNESS MUST YET BE RAISED”: SOUTHERN BAPTIST RESPONSES TO THE EARLY SECOND WAVE

In the 1960s, many male leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention’s social action agencies, including the Christian Life Commission and Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, supported the feminist movement in its goal to end discrimination against women. As they continued to pay attention to the movement in the early 1970s, they placed emphasis on helping women in the denomination fulfill their God-given potential in the church and society at large. The Southern Baptist print media outlet, *Baptist Press*, along with weekly state denominational newspapers, communicated these agencies’ views on the movement with little criticism.¹

Agency leaders, like Foy Valentine of the Christian Life Commission, expressed opposition to gender discrimination just as they had verbally condemned the practice of racial discrimination. They were not radicals and struggled to remain open-minded when the women’s movement challenged traditional views of female sexuality and when young people advocated looser sexual politics. The Christian Life Commission developed an “office of moral concerns” specifically for gender, family, and sexual issues. Harry N.

¹ *Baptist Press* functioned much in the same way as the *Associated Press* – it had several offices around the region and published press releases every day containing material of interest to Southern Baptists.

Hollis, Jr., leader of this new division, shared many Southern Baptists' views that sex should be restricted to married couples and that chastity should be practiced by single persons. Hollis was also willing, however, to engage with feminist critiques about the church's involvement in the subjugation of women, and his office helped the denomination remain relevant amidst confusing political rhetoric and changing cultural norms. In regard to the women's movement's legal gains in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the Equal Pay Act, access to oral contraceptives, and abortion rights, the Southern Baptist Convention offered no formal critique because its agency leadership directed them to interpret the changes as positive for ending discrimination.

During this time there was a growing divide between the denomination's progressive leadership and its rank and file members. Many conservatives who opposed the women's movement felt that it undermined the role of motherhood and threatened their performance of traditional gender roles. Their opposition to feminism was not formally organized, and conservatives had a hard time gaining denominational credibility. There was room for diversity of thought on the role of women in the Southern Baptist Convention in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A major turning point occurred when Jessie Sappington, a pastor's wife from Texas, stood before the denomination in 1973 and argued that the women's movement was infiltrating the denomination. Though it took time, her efforts, which she soon focused on opposition to women's ordination, started to turn the rank and file against agency leaders and their positions on the women's movement.

Seminary students at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the denomination's oldest educational institution, began considering the modern women's movement and its

effect on the denomination in the 1960s. The seminary was exclusively male for many years until the denomination's postwar growth and new church-related occupational specializations provided women with an opportunity to attend. After graduation, female graduates were traditionally limited to jobs in church music, denominational education, and missions. In 1961, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville established a Women's Committee, which provided financial assistance to women who were enrolled in seminary programs. Even if it had little to do with the movement itself, newspaper reporter Mary Kay Moore argued that the establishment of this committee added "a feminist touch" to the seminary.¹

In the late 1960s, feminist ideas about equal employment prompted some of these women to pursue their calling to the ministry, a role previously reserved for men.²

¹ Mary Kay Moore, "Women's Committee Works As 'An Arm of the Seminary,'" *The Gadfly*, April 24, 1973, 4; James P. Boyce Centennial Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

² For more information about female seminary students at this time, see Eileen Renee Campbell-Reed, "Anatomy of a Schism: How Clergywomen's Narratives Interpret the Fracturing of the Southern Baptist Convention," (PhD Diss., Vanderbilt University, 2008). Campbell-Reed's data includes statistics on female enrollment in seminaries as early as the 1930s, but that information is misleading. Though Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Texas had female enrollment at that time, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary did not matriculate women until the late 1950s. Statistics in Southern Baptist Convention Annual reports from the Education Division indicate that

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, began admitting women like Elizabeth Smith Bellinger in religious education tracts and a Master of Divinity program during this time. Bellinger recalled as many as fifty-seven female students in her on-campus dormitory.³ Some of these seminary students also sought ordination in the 1970s, which took the women's movement into churches in new ways.

Women's ordination was a major concern for fundamentalists early in the denomination's history. Indeed one author from the late nineteenth century asserted that "there can be but one opinion among intelligent and thoughtful people as to the propriety of setting [women] apart, by laying on of hands, to the work of the ministry; and that is, that it should never be done."⁴ Historian Betty A. DeBerg argued that during this period, fundamentalists feared that "God's and nature's order would be disrupted by placing women in positions of authority over men, thereby destroying the integrity of the gender-based hierarchy and the separate spheres of activity."⁵ Because of the Southern Baptist Convention's structural hierarchy, individual churches had the power to ordain candidates of their choosing without denominational oversight. As larger numbers of

some women in other seminaries and institutions of higher learning in the 1930s and 1940s were "Girl Volunteers," not ministerial students.

³ Elizabeth Smith Bellinger, "I Listened to the Story and I Believed," 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), 31-42; 36.

⁴ "Ordination of Women," *Western Recorder*, May 7, 1885, 4.

⁵ DeBerg, *Ungodly Women*, 79.

women attended seminaries in the 1960s and 1970s, women became better trained to fulfill leadership roles in churches.

The first female ordained to the ministry by a Southern Baptist Church ultimately was able to do so because she appealed to a church that was actively supporting civil rights at the time. In 1960, Addie Davis enrolled at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, but even though some professors were supportive of her aspirations, she had great difficulty finding a church in the Southern Baptist Convention that would ordain her or even let her practice preaching. Warren Carr, pastor of Watts Street Baptist Church in Wake Forest, finally agreed to let her preach and later ordained her to the ministry in 1964.⁶

Yet even within the walls of this progressive Southern Baptist church, which had served as a meeting site for interracial community meetings when there were few similar safe havens, Davis faced internal skepticism about her candidacy. A male candidate seeking ordination at Watts Street at the same time espoused a much more liberal theology than did Davis, but faced less initial opposition from the board of deacons. Responding to the board's discrepancy in its reception of the two candidates, Carr announced: "Brethren, you leave me confused. In the case of our first candidate, you

⁶Addie Davis's story is available in greater detail in David Stricklin, "Oral Memoirs of Warren Tyree Carr," April 18, 1985, Wake Forest Baptist Church, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buich/id/2045>. Also see Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*; Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power since World War II*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

were quite insistent that he believe that a Virgin bore the word. How is it that you are now so adamant that a virgin should not preach the word?" He then emphasized the sincerity of her "genuine call," and affirmed, "Her sex is a secondary consideration to me." Carr revealed to the board of deacons that Davis was a virgin before their final vote. She adhered to a high code of personal conduct that bucked stereotypes of sexual liberation in the women's movement, and it played well to a male deacon board that otherwise was suspicious of her intentions. After Carr's intervention, the ordination committee voted unanimously to affirm Davis, with one abstention notwithstanding.⁷ Both Davis and Carr received hosts of negative letters after the ordination, and ultimately, Davis took a pastorate in an American Baptist-affiliated church in Readsboro, Vermont, when it became clear that she would be unable to find employment in a Southern Baptist congregation.⁸

⁷ Carr quoted in Keith E. Durso and Pamela R. Durso, "Cherish the Dream God Has Given You": The Story of Addie Davis," in Durso and Durso, *Courage and Hope: The Stories of Ten Baptist Women Ministers* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 18-30; 23. Second quote from David Stricklin, "Oral Memoirs of Warren Tyree Carr," April 18, 1985, Wake Forest Baptist Church, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buich/id/2045>.

⁸ The American Baptist Convention passed a resolution in 1965 affirming women's right to be ordained to the ministry, meaning Davis had a much better chance of finding employment outside of her home denomination.

Like many Americans, Southern Baptists expressed heightened concern over changing attitudes towards sex in the 1960s. FDA approval of “The Pill” encouraged discourse about a “sexual revolution” in which women would be free to enjoy sexual intercourse without fear of pregnancy. Women’s movement activists insisted that women had the right to control their own bodies.⁹ Alternate forms of birth control, such as diaphragms and condoms, had existed for some time, but the pill transferred reproductive control to women who chose to utilize the oral contraceptive. By and large, Southern Baptists supported the pill as a form of family planning for married couples, but they firmly advocated abstinence before marriage and faithfulness within marriage. Ultimately, Hollis decided that the Southern Baptist Convention needed to engage with public debate on sex in order to encourage Christian moral behavior. He felt that the church could not do that from a distance, or by simply discarding all modern ideas. Exclaiming “It is time for the church to join the sexual revolution,” Hollis encouraged Southern Baptists to become educated about cultural trends and engage with popular ideas in order to find the right perspective.¹⁰

To that end, the Christian Life Commission sponsored a series of lectures in 1966 at Glorieta, a Southern Baptist retreat center, called “Toward a Christian Interpretation of Sex.” It hosted a panel of speakers with varied perspectives, not all of whom were likely

⁹ For more information, see Donald T. Critchlow, *Intended Consequences: Birth Control, Abortion, and the Federal Government in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 15.

¹⁰ Harry N. Hollis, Jr. “Toward a Theological Understanding of Sexuality,” *Review and Expositor* 68, no. 2 (1971): 157-168.

to find sympathizers in Southern Baptist audience members. The lecturers addressed biblical passages about sex, sex within the marriage, sex and parenthood, and sex in modern society.¹¹ Four years later, the agency hosted a conference entitled “Toward Authentic Morality for Modern Man” to provoke dialogue about broadly construed topics such as race, sex, health concerns, and war. One of these speakers was Anson Mount of *Playboy* magazine.¹² Though not the typical speaker at a Southern Baptist conference, perhaps organizers thought his perspective might help attendees articulate a more educated and meaningful political stance on the issue. Regardless of its original aims, the Christian Life Commission endured harsh criticism for its inclusion of provocateurs in the conference program, and it lost credibility with conservatives who were unwilling to engage with those responsible for the dissemination of pornography.

Another topic of concern to the Christian Life Commission, closely related at this time to the issue of sexuality and birth control, was the perceived problem of rapid population growth. To address the growing problem that had long concerned supporters of family planning, President Richard Nixon encouraged Congress in 1969 to create a Commission on Population Growth and the American Future and a separate government agency. The outcome of his plea was the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act which was widely supported by both Democrats and Republicans.¹³ On

¹¹ Yance, “Southern Baptists and Social Action,” 270.

¹² Yance, “Southern Baptists and Social Action,” 311-318.

¹³ For more information about this legislation, see Critchlow, *Intended Consequences*, 91-93. He argued that “little opposition to the bill emerged during the hearings,” indicating that it was not a divisive issue for many Americans (non-Catholics).

December 9, 1969, James M. Dunn appeared before a Senate Subcommittee meeting in support of this bill. Speaking as Executive Secretary of Texas's Christian Life Commission, Dunn informed the committee that Texas Baptists had voted at their state annual meeting that year to "lend their support to the passage" of the Senate bill. Nixon signed the act into law just several weeks later.¹⁴

Dunn had supported a resolution the year before that called for Baptists to "endorse the right and responsibility for family planning...an affirmative public policy regarding birth control information is required in order that the right of free choice in the private life of husband and wife may have a basis in fact rather than being an empty statement." Clarifying that Southern Baptists did not oppose birth control, Dunn reaffirmed the support of Texas's Baptist population: "It is one thing to acknowledge freedom of conscience, but it is another thing, by inaction, to deny the reality of choice for the individual."¹⁵

¹⁴ *Family Planning and Population Research, 1970: Hearings on S. 2013 and S. 3219, Before the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 91st Cong.*(1969) (statement of James M. Dunn, Executive Secretary, Christian Life Commission, Baptist General Convention of Texas); Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970, Pub. L. No. 91-572, 84 Stat. 1504 (1970).

¹⁵ Dunn testimony; Also see "Christian Life Commission Recommendations," Texas Baptist Convention Bulletin 84, no. 3 (November 6, 1969), Folder 1: "Abortion 1960's," Box 8, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Southern Baptists, even staunch conservatives, had supported legalization of therapeutic abortion in cases of physical, mental, or emotional hazard to the pregnant woman. The Christian Life Commission acknowledged the need for compassion on this matter, much in the vein of what was supported by the National Council of Churches about women's bodies in 1965: "Are we, as Christians, concerned only with the pulse and breathing of a baby, or are we also concerned with the health of the living body?"¹⁶ Four years later, W.A. Criswell, the same pastor from Dallas that opposed church desegregation, expressed support for legalization of abortion, claiming life begins at birth, "when the Lord breathes into him the breath of life." The Baptist Standard reported that Criswell had recently seen a badly deformed baby and thought it would have been "humane" to terminate, summarizing: "anyone who really cares about human beings favors liberalizing the abortion laws."¹⁷ A Baptist VIEWpoll taken in January 1970 revealed that less than one-quarter of respondents, consisting of pastors and Sunday School teachers, expressed that they would oppose legislation that would legalize therapeutic abortion, while over three-quarters of these same Southern Baptists would oppose legislation allowing termination for any reason during the first months of

¹⁶ Rev. William H. Gennee, "Abortions: Questions for Christians," *Concerns for Christian Citizens* 5 no. 4 (January 1965): 1-2, Folder 1: "Abortion 1960," Box 8, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

¹⁷ "Criswell Charges 'Hypocrisy,'" *Baptist Standard*, (TX) November 12, 1969, 4.

pregnancy. These findings were more conservative than the data taken by Gallup in 1965 and 1969, though they hardly indicated a widespread hardline approach to the subject.¹⁸

By 1968, the women's liberation movement was underway. Numerous groups of young women inspired by the civil rights movement and the radical student groups of the decade were eager to overturn normative gender conventions and what they deemed a male-dominated societal structure. In contrast, members of the National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966, were disproportionately professional, white, middle-class women, though they adopted some ideas from women's liberation. One common tool for raising awareness about women's need for liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s was called "consciousness-raising," and it consisted of open conversations among women about the limitations and frustrations in their lives that were a result of their gender. Inspiring a popular slogan, "the personal is political," these sessions allowed women to network and find political meaning in their personal experiences. The women's movement addressed issues of economic, educational, political, sexual, and cultural equality.¹⁹

¹⁸ Kenneth Hayes, "Baptist Leaders Favor Revision of Abortion Laws," Baptist Press news release, September 9, 1970, available online at sbhla.org; "Baptist VIEWpoll," September 1970, Folder 3: "Abortion 1970-72," Box 8, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. For fuller information on Gallup polls conducted on American attitudes towards abortion in 1965, 1969, and 1972, see Critchlow, *Intended Consequences*, 141-142.

¹⁹ For more information about consciousness-raising, which Sara Evans claimed was "most powerful in the first five years of the women's movement," see *Tidal Wave: How*

Foy Valentine, Director of the Christian Life Commission, was quite sympathetic to women's economic equality and social equality. A representative of the United States in the Baptist World Alliance, an organization started in London in 1905 for every country with Baptists, Valentine helped author the alliance's platform on human rights at its 1970 meeting in Tokyo, which read: "In commitment to freedom and responsibility, we will seek equal civil rights for all men and women and support the responsible use of these rights by all."²⁰ Valentine upheld these ideals in the Southern Baptist Convention as well. Under his leadership, the Christian Life Commission collected information on the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It tried to apply the same principles of equality from civil rights to the women's movement, and vice versa.

In addition to the Christian Life Commission, Southern Baptist seminaries were some of the first institutions to engage with the ideas of the women's movement. The school's student-produced newspaper, tellingly named *The Gadfly*, unabashedly explored controversial national issues and published student opinions on topics like the war in Vietnam, presidential candidates, theological debates, and gender roles. Authors explored the ways in which feminist ideas should be translated to the seminary, from relaxing double standards in dorm room regulations to developing more gender-inclusive

Women Changed America at Century's End (New York: Free Press, 2003), 44, and Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How The Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 196-201. For an excellent synopsis of women's liberation, see Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

²⁰ Yance, "Southern Baptists and Social Action," 189.

ministry practices. In an article earmarked by *Gadfly* editors with the caption, “Men, Read This!” student Judy Tuggle critiqued the common practice of offering lower salaries for female church employees, claiming it represented “big prejudice” and merely reinforced the reality of “glass ceilings” for women in business. Tuggle ended the piece by quoting a famous contemporary catchphrase, with an added caveat: “We’ve come a long way baby! But...”²¹ She saw that the denomination had much work to do before achieving anything that resembled gender equity. *Gadfly*’s editors did not hesitate to criticize the denomination, seminary administration, or national leaders on a regular basis for positions in which they opposed.

Despite the efforts of the Christian Life Commission, there was a lot of misinformation among Southern Baptists about what exactly the women’s movement was and what its activists hoped to accomplish. In 1971, Nancy Olmsted, a pastor’s wife from Russell, Mississippi, wrote in a Baptist publication to educate readers about the women’s liberation movement. Questioning where Southern Baptist women best fit into the movement, she underscored disunion in the women’s movement between the “conservative movement,” led by National Organization for Women, which wanted to eliminate gender discrimination, and a “radical element of Women’s Lib” which

²¹ Judy Tuggle, “Female Seminarian Explains Woman’s Liberation Ideas,” *The Gadfly*, May 19, 1970, 7; James P. Boyce Centennial Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY.

advocated a complete overhaul of gender and societal norms.²² Olmsted criticized the media's selective portrayal of movement activists "as men-hating, bra-burning, lipstick-shunning banner bearers who fight for the right to use their bodies as they please." Instead, she encouraged readers to not consider extreme portrayals of feminists as representative participants in the larger movement for women's rights.

Olmsted posited that once readers could detach themselves from biased media images of the women's movement, a Christian woman ought to be able to find, through "even a small investigation... a basic motive with which she can identify." She acknowledged that most readers would likely identify with the conservative movement goals of ending double standards and eliminating discrimination against women. She also argued that an average female Southern Baptist reader "wants freedom to find her special place," whether that place was in the workforce or in the home.

One difference between movement activists and Southern Baptist women, Olmsted noted, was that Christians relied on God to provide fulfillment past the limits of what the women's liberation could accomplish. Arguing that Christian women should still defend traditional marriage roles in the midst of the women's movement, Olmsted affirmed the validity of the Apostle Paul's words on submission of women to men. Emphasizing the responsibilities that men had to women, she argued that the passage was intended to present mutual dependence rather than a relationship of dominance and subjugation. She concluded by leaving readers the opportunity to figure out what the

²² Nancy Olmsted, "Women's Lib and Baptist Freedom," *People* (August 1971): 26-29; Folder 20: Women: Women's Liberation 1974-1988, Box 78, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

women's movement meant for them, affirming that "whatever the role we choose in society, our commitments to Christ allow us the privileges of constructively and prayerfully putting our yearnings into action." She encouraged readers to direct gratitude to God for granting women the right to express themselves in society as they please.²³

One woman who was able to take advantage of feminist momentum was Shirley Carter who was ordained eight years after Davis. Though her experience was very different than that of her predecessor – hers was, in fact, a very unusual situation – it demonstrated the limits of Southern Baptists' willingness to support women in ministry. Originally from Fulton, Missouri, Shirley Carter received a Master's degree in religious education from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and joined Kathwood Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina in June 1971. By that fall she was serving as church clerk, but ultimately hoped to serve as a prison chaplain, which required ordination.²⁴ On August 22, 1971, Kathwood Baptist Church ordained her, and newspaper accounts claimed that negative responses to the service were "surprisingly small." Even though at the time of the ordination she was primarily interested in counseling work, she saw the potential in the denomination for female leadership, claiming: "I believe in change and I

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Minutes, Kathwood Baptist Church, June 9, 1971; Minutes, Kathwood Baptist Church, November 10, 1971; Furman University Special Collections and Archives, SC Baptist Historical Collection, South Carolina Church Records on Microfilm, James B. Duke Library, Greenville, South Carolina.

may someday consider a pastoral (church) ministry.”²⁵ Carter’s experiences suggested that the denomination might impose fewer limitations for women in leadership roles in coming years, and perhaps, even eliminate the longstanding “stained” glass ceiling.

In September 1970 while practicing at South Carolina State Hospital for her chaplaincy training, Carter met W. Pringle Lee, a Roman Catholic priest. He was in the process of terminating his priesthood, according to an Associated Press article on the couple, “partly because of a disagreement with church teachings on birth control.” Carter was then hired by Harbison Correctional Institute for Women, and her salary was paid by the South Carolina Baptist Convention and the Home Mission Board.²⁶ Carter incited mild controversy in her church when she announced that she was engaged to marry Lee, who was not only a Roman Catholic priest, but was nearly twice her age.²⁷ The couple wed on May 28, 1972, in a service officiated by Rev. Eddie Rickenbaker, the same minister who had performed Carter’s ordination.

Reporting six weeks after the marriage ceremony, writer Sam Covington of the *Charlotte Observer* relayed news that the couple was expecting a child due in November. According to his account, Shirley Carter Lee was about three months pregnant at the time of her wedding, a detail only known by “a close relative.” After her husband emphasized

²⁵ “South Carolina Woman Ordained to Ministry,” Baptist Press news release, September 3, 1971; available online at sbhla.org.

²⁶ “Kathwood Rescinds Mrs. Lee’s Ordination,” *Baptist Courier* 104, no. 30, July 27, 1972.

²⁷ Associated Press, “Ex-Priest to Marry an Ordained Baptist,” *Omaha World-Herald*, May 15, 1972.

that “we don’t apologize for” the timing of the pregnancy, Shirley Carter Lee suspected that “the people who would make this issue important are those who made an issue of my going into the ministry or of the marriage.”²⁸

Kathwood Baptist Church had a problem with her sexual indiscretion. Some members felt she was no longer worthy of ordination, which they viewed as a sacred privilege. The board of deacons felt her conduct was “unbecoming for a minister of the Gospel.” At a special church meeting on July 12, Pringle Lee spoke on behalf of his absent wife, voicing her belief that after experiencing such criticism by the church’s leadership, “she could no longer function in an atmosphere of censure and non-acceptance.” Shirley, he said, wished to be “relieved of her ordination as a minister.” The congregation voted to rescind her ordination, 56-39, with five abstentions.²⁹

Though she did not attend the church meeting, Shirley Carter Lee responded to its decision in the press, claiming it was “grossly unfair” and that by virtually forcing her to support her own demotion, the church was “destroying my ministry.” She reasserted that she was engaged at the time of conception and claimed “we were married in the sight of God...we could find nowhere in the Bible that marriage begins only with the wedding ceremony.” Furthermore, Lee claimed that stripping her of ordination was evidence of

²⁸ Sam Covington, “Ex-Priest, Baptist Pastor Find Happiness Together,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 16, 1972.

²⁹ “Minutes from Special Called Business Meeting,” Kathwood Baptist Church, July 12, 1972, Furman University Special Collections and Archives, SC Baptist Historical Collection, South Carolina Church Records on Microfilm, James B. Duke Library, Greenville, South Carolina.

gender discrimination, as the harsh penalty was not bestowed upon male offenders. Instead, even consequences for male pastors – a ranking much higher than chaplaincy – were far less severe than that bestowed upon Lee; they were not forced to rescind ordination, but instead, were merely instructed to move to another church. Lee insisted that without ordination, she could no longer fulfill the requirements necessary for her prison ministry, and she subsequently resigned her chaplaincy at Harbison Correctional Institute for Women.³⁰

Clearly, there were limits to what even progressive Southern Baptist churches would tolerate. They were willing to support female leadership under only limited circumstances. Lee’s moral impurity was not tolerated. The pre-marital pregnancy delegitimized her claim to virtuous womanhood. Her case was a setback for the cause of women’s ordination. Advocates for women’s ordination in the Southern Baptist Church could not use her as evidence of why women should be ordained. For those favoring women’s ordination, it was best to forget about her. Shirley Carter Lee virtually disappeared from the public eye after the scandal. She was not active in denominational leadership after this time, and she is rarely mentioned in more than a footnote in studies of women’s ordination in the Southern Baptist Convention.

John Roberts, editor of South Carolina’s denominational publication, ended his coverage of the scandal by urging readers to revisit her allegations of sex discrimination: “If good can come of this embarrassing situation it is suggested in a remark she made.

³⁰ Associated Press, George W. Cornell, “Woman Chaplain Raps Church After Ouster From Ministry,” *Mobile Register*, August 4, 1972; “Kathwood Rescinds Mrs. Lee’s Ordination,” *Baptist Courier* (SC) 104, no. 30, July 27, 1972, 5.

What would have been expected of a man in the ministry involved in a similar situation?”

Roberts, who had publicly voiced support for aspects of the women’s movement in previous issues, reaffirmed his opinion that, regardless of the outcome of Lee’s ordination, individual churches should still retain the power to ordain those whom they deem fit for ministry.³¹

Despite the Shirley Carter Lee controversy, women continued to seek ordination in the Southern Baptist Convention and in higher numbers.³² Significantly, most of these women did not seek pastorates, but, like Lee, they sought positions in chaplaincy or missions, those less likely to incite biblical controversy about women’s authority over men.³³ Many of these women were often forced to defend the sincerity of their calling

³¹ John Roberts, “Can Good Come of This Situation?” *Baptist Courier* (SC) 104, no. 31, August 10, 1972, 3.

³² For more information about these women, see Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 175-180.

³³ It should be noted that the controversy surrounding female ordination extended to the office of deacon, because it was usually a prerequisite for service in that capacity. In April 1973, *The Deacon* (SBC) featured a roundtable of opinions on whether females should be allowed to serve as deacons in local churches George W. Knight, “Thoughts from the Editor: The Issue of ‘Women Deacons’; Yvonne H. Callahan, “Mrs. Betty Galloway: Portrait of a Woman in the Deaconship”; George W. Knight and Patsey Pritchett Winfrey, “Women in the Deaconship: A Survey of Selected Southern Baptist Churches.”

beyond a mere political challenge to the denomination.³⁴ The women's movement did provide an outlet for women to discuss the lack of leadership roles for women in the denomination. Sarah Frances Anders, Chair of the Sociology Department at the Southern Baptist-affiliated Louisiana College, began researching the numbers of women ordained by the Southern Baptist Convention. She was an ardent supporter of women's right to church leadership, claiming in 1973 that "I cannot really believe that men of my own faith are so insecure that they fear their own positions of leadership if women are elected or ordained to significant leadership places."³⁵

³⁴ This position was consistent with many "first women," who, according to Ruth Rosen "rarely mentioned the women's movement. When they did, they took special pains to distance themselves from the 'women's libbers' the media had so successfully created." See Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 306.

³⁵ Sarah Frances Anders, "The State of the Second Sex: Emancipation or Explosion," *The Student* (SBC) (May 1974): 34-38; In the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Mark Chaves and James Cavendish found that collective action efforts of the modern women's movement contributed to the successful ordination of women, especially in those denominations that did not ordain women before 1970. They noted that women's access to higher education in seminaries during the second-wave feminist movement contributed to this rise in the Southern Baptist Convention in particular, citing its doubled female attendance rate over the course of the 1970s; Chaves and Cavendish, "Recent Changes in Women's Ordination Conflicts: The Effect of a Social Movement on Intraorganizational Controversy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 4 (1997): 574-584.

Seminary students remained at the forefront of progressive ideas about gender in the denomination. In his 1973 dissertation on the women's liberation movement and its implications for the Southern Baptist Convention, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary student Norman Letsinger defined several goals of the feminist movement that had been brewing for the previous decade and outlined key strategies that the denomination could use to address women's equality. Among other feminist concerns, he considered "discrimination against women in education, employment, and other social settings," the idea "that the church was not relevant in its teachings about sex, birth control, marriage, and divorce," and the notion that many women faced "a basic identity problem related to their roles as housewives and mothers." Letsinger argued that the church had contributed to women's (denigrated) status in society and should bear some responsibility in rectifying these injustices.³⁶

The Christian Life Commission's 1973 "Conference on the Family" highlighted implications of the modern women's movement for Southern Baptists. While most of the conference focused on cultivating healthy and intimate family relationships, and raising Christian families, it also addressed several potential "crises," including abortion, divorce, secularism, and feminism. Sarah Frances Anders gave an address called "The State of the Second Sex: Emancipation or Explosion," in which she sought to educate attendees about the range of views represented by feminist organizations while emphasizing the positive effects that feminism could have on Southern Baptist girls and women in modern society. Anders claimed:

³⁶ Norman Herbert Letsinger, "The Women's Liberation Movement: Implications for Southern Baptists," (ThD Diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1973), 1-2, 5-6.

Until little girls are taught that they don't need to play the hooker role and trade on sex to get places in a man's world, that they are mentally and emotionally no weaker nor stronger than men, that they are not less feminine because they have achieved – only then will they know real satisfaction in any new role.

Anders saw the women's movement as a tool to help women achieve equality, to fully develop their abilities and surpass the limits of antiquated gender stereotypes that were not biblical, but cultural. Further clarifying that the spirit of feminist equality was not out of line with spiritual teachings, she discussed Jesus's association with women and other people considered inappropriate or radical in biblical times; in harboring these friendships, she argued, Jesus was not acting against God, "but against his culture."³⁷

In Wallace Denton's scheduled response to Anders' seemingly provocative address, he offered virtually no criticism. He acknowledged that Anders' talk was "the most outrageous ... that he has heard in twenty years" because it had to be said in a modern society that should have progressed past the limitations of sexism. Placing the conversation of women's liberation in a larger framework of human liberation, Denton emphasized many ways in which men needed to be liberated from the gendered constraints of masculinity. He offered the following insight: "Perhaps when men see that as women are liberated we men, too, can be liberated from unrealistic burdens of being men, then we will all be free indeed to be fully human. And we are indebted to you, Dr.

³⁷ Sarah Frances Anders, "The State of the Second Sex: Emancipation or Explosion?"

Proceedings from the 1973 Christian Life Commission Seminar: A Future for the Family (Nashville, TN: Southern Baptist Convention, 1973), 43.

Anders, for heightening the level of our consciousness about this matter that involves us all.”³⁸

Susie Ratliff of Granbury, Texas, fundamentally disagreed with Anders’s “Baptist interpretation” of the women’s movement. In *Baptist Standard*, Texas’s denominational publication, she asserted the importance of her work as a homemaker, explaining that as wife and mother in a Christian family, she actually worked as a home missionary, just “not in the usual sense.” In motherhood, a role which she had long waited to fill, Ratliff found fulfillment, and claimed that, together with her children, “we are in happy bondage to each other and to God.” In contrast to other women of the day who identified with Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* and felt oppressed by the limitations of being a career homemaker, Ratliff celebrated the bondage she felt in her family relationships and in her spiritual life. She stated that “women’s liberation has nothing to offer me,” positing, instead, that faith “liberates us from ourselves.” With implications that the women’s movement was a selfish pursuit from which sympathizers needed liberation, Ratliff’s message relayed acute fears that the women’s movement was undervaluing the role of families and homemakers in American society.³⁹

³⁸ Wallace Denton, “Response to Sarah Frances Anders’ Address on Women’s Liberation,” *Proceedings from the 1973 Christian Life Commission Seminar: A Future for the Family* (Nashville, TN: Southern Baptist Convention, 1973), 45.

³⁹ Susie Ratliff, “A Special Home Missionary, Christian Life and Mother: The Joys and Responsibilities of Christian Home Life,” *Baptist Standard* (TX) 84, no. 29 (July 19, 1972), 16.

But other Southern Baptist women expressed outright anger over feminism's challenge to traditional gender responsibilities, though like Ratliff, most did so in publications that had limited circulation. Decrying the idea that anyone who is not a feminist "is too dumb to know her plight until Women's Lib brings her light," Elizabeth Baker argued in a Sunday School Board publication that the modern women's movement was really a "propaganda campaign," not to merely prevent discrimination in the workplace, but to eventually overturn Biblical gender distinctions. Asserting that she would "refuse to be ashamed of the word 'housewife,'" Baker protested, "A war is being waged against me and others like me, and I resent it!" Like Ratliff, Baker firmly rejected the notion that she needed any liberation and cited several Biblical passages which justified her belief that women should cherish traditional roles in the home.⁴⁰

Jessie Tillison Sappington, a pastor's wife from Houston, Texas, took her opposition to the modern women's movement one step further by presenting it to the denomination at large at the 1973 Annual Meeting, held that year in Portland, Oregon. Sappington was a mother of three who was very involved in the WMU and her regional Baptist association, serving as receptionist there for some years while her husband, Richard, pastored at local churches.⁴¹ Not connected to Criswell or other prominent denominational conservatives, Sappington brought her own suspicion of the women's

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Baker, "Liberate? Who Me?" *Home Life* (SBC) 27, no. 10 (July 1973): 16-17.

⁴¹ Lawana Wynette Sappington Sharp to Baptist Historical Library, March 30, 2009, Baptist History File, "Sappington, Richard Lee," Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

movement to the attention of the entire denomination. In her memoir of her denominational activism in the 1970s, Sappington claimed that her efforts ultimately shaped the “‘in-fighting’ of our denomination” during that decade.⁴²

An active member of the Woman’s Missionary Union in Texas, Sappington was intimately concerned about the role of women in Southern Baptist churches. As she attended the organization’s session, one of the many held during the Annual Meeting, she was alert for any denominational messages on the subject. Rev. Kenneth Chafin, pastor of the sizeable South Main Baptist Church in Houston, gave the WMU keynote address that year and encouraged Southern Baptist women to channel their femininity and continue their traditional missions work; he reminded the audience that Christian women were “the only truly liberated women.”⁴³ Inspired by his affirmation of traditional womanhood, Sappington decided to propose a resolution at the meeting that would set a precedent for denominational opposition to liberalized women’s roles that, if embraced, would present an undesirable challenge to Southern Baptist women’s longstanding place in the denomination.

Sappington stood before the denomination to present a resolution denouncing the effects of “women’s lib” in the nation. Her memoir explains that she opposed the modern women’s movement because of feminists’ support of “the lawful recognition of prostitutes and lesbians...[t]heir avowed intention to get women out of their homes,

⁴² Jessie Tillison Sappington, *From My Point of View on the Ordination Issue*, Houston: M&M Printing Company, 1978, 29.

⁴³ “WMU Roundup,” Baptist Press news release, June 12, 1973. Available online at sbhla.org.

under the guise of ‘freeing’ them from the bondage of husbands and children [and their support of] public day-care centers, funded by taxpayers, patterned after the structure of China...”⁴⁴ Frightened by these extreme possibilities, she cringed at the thought that the goals of the women’s movement would infiltrate her denomination and affect her spiritual life.

Tuesday afternoon, June 12 [the first day of the three-day meeting], Sappington stood before the convention to present a resolution “on the Christian woman versus ‘woman’s lib.’” Anticipated resolutions were usually submitted in advance of the meeting, so the presiding officer, Owen Cooper, referred her to the Committee on Resolutions, with whom she met the following day. On Thursday the Committee on Resolutions reported on their deliberations and presented Sappington’s amendment. However, it did not contain the same wording as the original. It read:

Resolution No. 12, On the Place of Women in Christian Service: Whereas, The Scriptures bear record to the distinctive roles of men and women in the church,

⁴⁴ Sappington, *From My Point of View*, 29. It is unclear from her memoir where her fear of women’s lib originated. She discusses no source except for what she saw on television. Rosen has written about a “media blitz” in the late 1960s and early 1970s that portrayed feminists as extremists and then contrasted them with “‘ordinary women’ in supermarkets who were sure to ridicule feminists as social or sexual misfits.” Rosen argues that the media began to accept parts of the women’s movement after this early blitz, but that “stubborn images” of extremists lingered. It is likely that Sappington was influenced by some of these media portrayals and felt compelled to protect her denomination from the influence of radical feminism. See Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 297-301.

and Whereas, Christian women have made and are making a significant contribution to the cause of Christ, and Whereas, The role of modern woman has opened up new opportunities for leadership. Be it resolved, that we give full recognition to women in leadership roles in church and denominational life.⁴⁵

This was nearly the opposite of the sentiment Sappington had expressed. It seemed to Sappington that the resolution presented by the Committee on Resolutions was designed to encourage women's ordination – something Sappington had not mentioned at all but surely opposed based on her views of woman's place in the denomination.

Horrified by this alteration, Sappington presented a substitute motion as an alternative to the resolution presented by the committee:

Resolution No. 12, On the Place of Women in Christian Service: Whereas, The Scriptures bear record to the distinctive roles of men and women in the church and in the home, and Whereas, Christian women have made and are making a significant contribution to the cause of Christ, and Whereas Christian women have been exhorted to redig the old wells of mission promotion and education in our churches by Kenneth Chafin, and Whereas, There is a great attack by the members of most women's liberation movements upon scriptural precepts of woman's place in society, and Whereas, The theme of the Convention is 'Share the Word Now' and this Word we share is explicitly clear on this subject. Therefore, be it resolved, that we 'redig' or reaffirm God's explicit Word that (1) man was not made for the woman, but the woman for the man; (2) that the woman

⁴⁵ 1973 SBC Annual, 74, 87, available online at shbla.org; Sappington, *From My Point of View*, 31-32.

is the glory of man; (3) that as woman would not have existed without man, henceforth, nether would man have existed without the woman, they are dependent one upon the other—to the glory of God.⁴⁶

In floor debate over her amended resolution, Sappington denounced the committee's actions and proclaimed dramatically, "It is with great disturbance of heart I see the effects of women's lib on our women."⁴⁷ Ultimately her floor motions convinced messengers to reject the committee's resolution and instead adopt her resolution, which denounced the women's liberation movement and reaffirmed traditional gender hierarchy.

Moderate Baptists' criticism of Sappington was overwhelming. According to newspaper reports, Sappington was surrounded by angry seminary students and pastors as soon as the hearing ended. One of these individuals was Rev. John Claypool of Fort Worth, Texas whose Southern Baptist congregation had just ordained a woman to the ministry. Journalist Lester Kinsolving reported that Claypool "quietly growled" at Sappington, saying surely she believed that women were supposed to be silent in church. To that Sappington "flashed a great big smile" and quipped, "This isn't in church!" When asked by another protester whether she ever found fault with any of her husband's sermons, she responded that, indeed, once she had, but "almost immediately he showed me where I was wrong."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Sappington, *From My Point of View*, 32-33.

⁴⁷ "Watergate, Women Spark Resolutions," *Baptist Standard* (TX) 85, no. 25, June 20, 1973, 5.

⁴⁸ Lester Kinsolving, "Antilib Wife of Pastor Stirs Up Placid Southern Baptist Parley," *The Plain Dealer* (OH), August 4, 1973, 7-D.

An article in *Christian Century* claimed that regardless of the text of the passed resolution, “there is reason to hope that in another year and under other circumstances, this traditionally conservative denomination may yet reverse itself and accept a proper perspective on women's rights.” Authors lambasted Sappington’s performance at the annual meeting for its emotional overtures and its central message that feminism was dangerous to the Southern Baptist Convention. They mocked her brand of womanhood, noting that “Not even the denomination's press service could tell us her first name; and invariably she was identified in terms of her husband's profession – as ‘a Houston pastor’s wife.’” Interestingly, *Christian Century*’s takeaway from the incident was not the success of Sappington’s appeal, but rather on the hard-fought efforts of the “mostly male and establishment-oriented resolutions committee,” who “virtually wrote a brief for women's rights in the church.” The piece concluded, “Given a less emotion-charged atmosphere and an ‘attractive and articulate’ woman speaking for the pro-liberation viewpoint, the Southern Baptists just might decide that ‘woman's place’ is in the forefront of church leadership.”⁴⁹ Implicit sexism notwithstanding, this national publication saw a window of opportunity for the Southern Baptist Convention to take a more progressive stance on woman’s role.

Surprisingly, national news coverage was overwhelmingly negative and focused on the resolution as a blow to women’s lib instead of highlighting moderate efforts to affirm women’s progress. The headline from *Dallas Morning News*, for example, was “SBC Delivers Blow to Feminism.” Even Ruth Rosen took this position in *The World Split Open*; in her list of feminist setbacks in the year 1973, she reported that “eighty-six

⁴⁹ “Woman’s Place in the SBC,” *Christian Century*, July 4, 1973, 725-726.

hundred delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution affirming male superiority.” Though technically correct, these interpretations undervalued the significant power struggles during the meeting that could have easily produced the opposite result.⁵⁰

Sappington’s experience at the 1973 Annual Meeting did, in fact, shape the denomination’s infighting in the following years as it pertained to woman’s appropriate role in church and society at large. In her series of encounters, she faced opposition from the denomination’s Resolutions Committee, from moderate Southern Baptist ministers, and from the press. Sappington found herself in a battle against “the establishment” on an issue in which she thought she would certainly find little opposition. In 1974, Jessie Sappington was determined to pass another resolution denouncing the feminist movement; though this time she knew the opposition she was up against. In anticipation of the annual meeting, held that year in Dallas, Texas, she drafted a new resolution, called “Unisex and the Scriptures,” that was designed to emphasize distinctive gender differences between men and women. It was immediately referred to the Committee on Resolutions, and it did not get past the committee. Though her efforts seemingly failed, her husband gave an interview outside of the Convention Hall where he voiced his support for her efforts and praised her convictions.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 91.

⁵¹ Sappington, *My Point of View*, 51-53; “Mrs. Sappington Expounds on Women in Press Conference,” Baptist Press, June 12, 1974; Bonita Sparrow, “Richard Sappington: ‘My Wife is Right in What She’s Doing,’” Baptist Press news release, June 13, 1974. Available online at sbhla.org.

By contrast, the Christian Life Commission planned to propose a resolution in 1974 called “Freedom for Women,” which emphasized human liberation for women and men, though the agency acknowledged that men traditionally had access to more freedom than did women. Though its statement cautioned Baptists from supporting “every person who unfurls the women’s liberation banner,” the agency’s resolution claimed that freedom for women was in keeping with the spirit of Galatians 3:28, which seemingly acknowledged gender equality in Christ Jesus. The Christian Life Commission hoped to reassure Southern Baptists that freedom for women “need not be detrimental to the stability of the family and the spiritual health of the church.” Instead, it hoped that churches would emphasize human equality while teaching distinctive gender roles. The resolution also encouraged Southern Baptists to practice sensitivity to discrimination by upholding equal pay laws, opposing job discrimination, including women in denominational leadership, and by voting to amend official bylaws by deleting gender bias in descriptions of leadership positions.⁵²

The Christian Life Commission viewed freedom for women as part of a larger program of Christian ethics that ought to govern Southern Baptist individual behavior. Accordingly, the agency also advocated a quota system for minimum board representation. Valentine acknowledged that having such a requirement was less than ideal, but he admitted that “it was all we could hope to get...” In hindsight, he recollected that “we brought that recommendation which we really didn't expect to pass, which we

⁵² “A Christian Life Commission Statement with Accompanying Recommendations,” Folder 25: Women, 1976-1979, Box 40, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

brought partly for the purpose of surfacing this sexism that pervaded our official Southern Baptist life.”⁵³ In preparation for that year’s Annual Meeting, however, Jessie Sappington learned about convention procedures, and she pulled a parliamentary maneuver to table the Christian Life Commission’s recommendation on Freedom for Women, including the quota system; nearly singlehandedly she took down the agency’s effort to incorporate women’s equality into denominational protocol.⁵⁴ Though the maneuver ultimately failed, it represented a clear effort to overturn sex discrimination in the denomination’s decision-making.

As the sole vocal female opponent to the women’s movement in the Southern Baptist Convention in 1973-1974, Sappington’s crusade was remarkable. Before the 1973 meeting she thought she would have no opposition in presenting an antifememinist resolution. Afterwards, however, she was horrified to learn that there were powerful moderates who wanted to see feminist influence in the denomination increase. She had no longstanding affiliation with prominent conservatives in the denomination, but her grassroots campaign to block moderates’ support of feminism at the annual meetings

⁵³ Letter, Foy Valentine to Charlene Lindsey, November 22, 1974, Folder 20, Women: Women’s Liberation, 1974-1978, Box 78, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Foy Valentine, interview by Dan B. McGee, November 19, 1965, interview five, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buich/id/2045>.

⁵⁴ 1974 SBC Annual, available online at sbhla.org.

succeeded nonetheless. Her story is usually relegated to a mere footnote in denominational history, if mentioned at all.

By 1975, Jessie Sappington was a full-fledged public opponent to women's ordination in the Southern Baptist Convention. She spoke at every Annual Meeting from 1973 to 1977, each time seeking to pass a resolution limiting the role of women in the church, each one based on literal biblical descriptions of male authority. She was ridiculed in Baptist newspapers and in the secular press. An article in the Arkansas Baptist News Magazine referred to her as "heroine of the male chauvinist wing of the Convention." The Convention Bulletin called her "the 'militant apostle of submission.'" She was told by a professor of history at Southwestern Baptist Seminary that she would have "as much success holding back the ordination of women in the Southern Baptist Convention as I'd have standing on the seashore holding back the tide."⁵⁵

The Christian Life Commission did not stop its efforts to apply Christian ethics to the modern women's movement. Just a few weeks after the Annual Meeting, the agency sponsored a conference called "Christian Liberation for Contemporary Women" at Glorieta, the denomination's conference center in New Mexico. The resulting publication, *Christian Freedom for Women and Other Human Beings*, recounted presentations by the conference's major speakers, including Louisiana College sociologist Sarah Frances Anders and Harry N. Hollis, Jr., of the Christian Life Commission.

⁵⁵ "Gifted Women' Ignored," *Texas Baptist Convention Bulletin*, October 31, 1974, p. 5; cited in Sappington, *From My Point of View*, 26-29, 58.

Anders resumed her efforts to educate Southern Baptists about the multifaceted women's movement, separating radical feminism from moderate efforts to eliminate gender discrimination. She also emphasized that sexism was present in contemporary churches and should be eliminated to be in keeping with the Christian ethos.⁵⁶ Hollis warned attendees against stereotyping all feminists as "frustrated women who are interested in participating in such nonsense as bra burning." Admitting that some feminists were interested in provoking nonproductive controversy, Hollis argued that those individuals "do the cause of genuine liberation great harm," and that many other women with less radical personas and intentions were working for change. Hollis charged: "To belittle decent women, who are resisting discrimination, is to ignore Christ's call to set at liberty the captives."⁵⁷

In the aftermath of the 1974 meeting, several women contacted Foy Valentine at the Christian Life Commission to voice concern about Mrs. Sappington's resolution and how it might negatively affect the denomination's views on women. Charlene Lindsey of Vidor, Texas, worried that passage of Mrs. Sappington's resolution meant that the Southern Baptist Convention had taken a stand against the women's liberation movement. Valentine reassured her that there was not even a tacit resolution against the movement. He emphasized that Sappington's arguments were largely against women's ordination, not against the Freedom for Women amendment itself; he felt her objection should have been ruled "out of order" and nullified because it did not directly address the

⁵⁶ Harry N. Hollis, Jr. et al., *Christian Freedom for Women and other Human Beings* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1975), 72-73, 30.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

resolution under discussion. Sharing her concerns fully, he exclaimed, “We still have a long way to go!”⁵⁸

Phyllis Eggers Lyle of Knoxville, Tennessee, worried that Sappington was not acting alone, but rather, in some covert conservative effort. Realizing the threat that such a coalition could present, she argued that the denomination needed “a dedicated sincere woman opposite Mrs. Sappington who can and will represent women, who under God, think differently.” Valentine agreed, though he reassured Lyle that Sappington was indeed acting upon her own accord. Valentine lamented that Sappington “has carried the Convention along with her that way for two years running now in spite of all that we have been able to do to prevent the Convention from making those serious blunders.” He insisted that denominational opposition to gender equality was not in its best interests. Again standing up for women in the Southern Baptist Convention, he strongly encouraged Lyle to stand up to Sappington “to the very limit of [her] ability” and offered the help of his agency in supporting her activism.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Charlene Lindsey to Christian Life Commission, November 18, 1974; Foy Valentine to Charlene Lindsey, November 22, 1974, Folder 20: Women: Women’s Liberation, 1974-1978, Box 78, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁵⁹ Phyllis Eggers Lyle to Foy Valentine, November 21, 1974; Foy Valentine to Phyllis Eggers Lyle, November 25, 1974, Folder 20: Women: Women’s Liberation, 1974-1978, Box 78, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Keller H. Bumgardner of Columbia, South Carolina, wrote to the Christian Life Commission after the 1974 Annual Meeting, primarily to express her approval of a Home Missions article entitled “The Christian and Politics.” In it, Weldon Gaddy, director of the Christian Life Commission’s Christian Citizenship Development department had expressed support for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. As an active member of Columbia’s First Baptist Church and ERA coordinator of the national League of Women Voters, Bumgardner often sought religious materials on the proposed amendment, especially ones produced by her own denomination. To Valentine, she acknowledged that some Baptists, along with Mormons and Catholics, were working against the ERA in many unratified states. As she applauded the Christian Life Commission’s leadership for its efforts to support the women’s movement, she lamented “the lag between the leadership and the laity” on the matter.⁶⁰

Moderate Southern Baptist leaders applauded and encouraged the efforts of women like Bumgardner. Not only had Valentine told Bumgardner that “we certainly share your enthusiasm for the excellent materials provided by the League of Women Voters [on the ERA],”⁶¹ but, three months after her correspondence with the Christian Life Commission, the South Carolina Baptist Convention’s Christian Life and Public

⁶⁰ Keller H. Bumgardner to Weldon Gaddy, August 4, 1974, Folder 20: Women: Women’s Liberation, 1974-1988, Box 78, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁶¹ Foy Valentine to Keller H. Bumgardner, August 13, 1974, Folder 20: Women: Women’s Liberation, 1974-1988, Box 78, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Affairs Committee presented Bumgardner with the Edward A. McDowell Award, an annual recognition given for “applied Christianity in the State.” In his description of her merits, the committee chairman cited her activism in the League of Women Voters, including her role as ERA coordinator for the national board, along with her service to First Baptist Church of Columbia and community outreach. Furthermore in 1974, the agency recommended the commencement of a study to further investigate discrimination against female denominational employees in the state in regard to both hiring practices and equitable pay.⁶²

Christian Life Commission leaders were distressed that their efforts to lead the Southern Baptist Convention in favor of the women’s movement had not succeeded in 1974 but they kept pressing for support. “Consciousness must yet be raised, and skirmishes will have to be fought,” proclaimed Harry Hollis at the Glorieta conference, “but women are going to be free.” He continued that the “idea” of women’s liberation “cannot be killed by women who want to stay in their male-imposed places...Male arrogance cannot kill it. Female indifference cannot kill it. It is Christ’s idea and it is here and will not go away.” Instead, he thought that the setbacks at the Annual Meeting would only serve to demonstrate the problem of discrimination over time.⁶³

⁶² Program and Minutes, South Carolina Baptist Convention Annual Session, November 12-14, 1974, 37-38, 152-153; South Carolina Baptist Convention Building, Historical Room, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁶³ “Dallas Action on Women’s Freedom May Have Long-Range Effect of Awakening,” *Baptist Courier* (SC), August 15, 1974, 4.

Feminists in the Southern Baptist Convention had to address accusations of fundamentalists whose literal scriptural interpretations deemed gender equality outside their view of biblical truth. In a sermon entitled “What is Man,” Rev. W.A. Criswell questioned the concept of female advancement and leadership in light of a biblical gender hierarchy that originated in the first chapter of Genesis:

How the woman’s lib movement will ever get away from [woman’s role in the Garden of Eden and Original Sin] I do not know. I think of it. I read about it. I look at it and I can easily see how the government can make an employer pay as much to a woman as he does a man. And I can see how the opportunity for economic amelioration, advancement, could say, “Now you got to give this woman as much opportunity to be president of the bank as this man here.” And I can see all of that, how by law they can make that sort of a thing come to pass. But inwardly, how the thing is put together, I don’t see how in the earth you’re ever going to make the man and the woman just alike, just the same. I don’t see it. I cannot see it. There is something about the way the man is made, how he looks, how he is, and there’s something about the way the woman is made, how she is, how she looks, how she is; that makes it impossible for them to be other than what God made here. You have a weak, weak situation when the man does not lead. If the woman leads—that may be better than no leadership at all—but it is not according to the Word of the Lord. When a woman takes the name of her husband, she thereby shows that the whole order of society is in that keeping of the arrangement of God.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Dr. W.A. Criswell, “What is Man,” Sermon delivered at First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX, February 13, 1974, transcript, available online at <http://www.wacriswell.com/transcript/?thisid=C900062A-E141-46BA-8C7ED8AF4BD4943B>

While tacitly acknowledging the logic behind laws mandating equal pay for equal work, Criswell strongly criticized the foundation of any attempt to make men and women “just the same.” His biblical interpretation was clear: God intended men to be leaders; women, based on the way they were divinely created, should not overstep this biblical “arrangement” through pursuing leadership roles over men. Criswell’s interpretation differed very little from first wave fundamentalist rhetoric on gender.⁶⁵ Criswell’s revival of fundamentalist language about gender roles provided key evidence that these women – probably feminist agitators – were acting against God’s will and should not be supported by Southern Baptists. In a 1974 sermon about the Garden of Eden, Criswell warned the congregation: “You may have woman's lib movement forever, you'll never change the dominance of the man; you never will!”⁶⁶

Criswell had reason for alarm. Denominational efforts to support the modern women’s movement were on the rise regardless of his efforts. In 1975 the North Carolina Baptist State Convention passed a resolution that reaffirmed “the right of all Christian

⁶⁵ This was happening in many denominations at this time, but the Southern Baptist Convention was one of the last to allow women to become ordained. For comparisons to other Protestant denominations, see Sarah Frances Anders, “Woman’s Role in the Southern Baptist Convention and its Churches as Compared with Selected Other Denominations,” *Review and Expositor* 72 (Winter 1975): 31-39.

⁶⁶ Dr. W.A. Criswell, “The Story of the Beginning,” Sermon delivered at First Baptist Church, Dallas, TX, September 18, 1974, transcript, available online at <http://www.wacriswell.com/transcript/?thisid=76B9D223-EF03-4D48-87AFAAFEAA2E503E>.

women to follow God's will in their lives" and the right of individual churches to ordain whomever they deemed worthy.⁶⁷ This resolution reflected the idea that women's desire to seek ordination did not originate in feminist activism, but rather, from a place of sincerity and personal spirituality.

Though the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), the ministry organization for women in the Southern Baptist Convention, failed to take an official stance on the modern women's movement, its leaders took special note of women's ordination and opportunities for female leadership. According to Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler (then Carolyn Weatherford), who was leader of WMU in Florida and Alabama during the 1960s and early 1970s and executive director of the national WMU from 1974-1989, young women often approached her with questions about the limits of feminism within the denomination, no doubt stemming in part from women's new leadership roles.

Many of these young women were concerned about their legal rights. A feature article in a gender-focused issue of *The Student*, a Southern Baptist college publication, started by warning female readers, "...watch out, because cold water from the shower of the cruel world is about to hit you. It's still a man's world out there." The author listed legal challenges for women in employment, housing and obtaining credit and asserted, "...if any of you are real fighters, laws can be made or changed to ensure women their

⁶⁷ "Body Confirms Local Option on Women; Elects Cecil Ray," Baptist Press news release, November 13, 1975, available online at sbhla.org.

God-given equality as human beings.”⁶⁸ The article educated readers about gender provisions in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ways in which the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was designed to help enforce equity in the workplace, while pointing out loopholes and common employer violations. The author encouraged women to report infractions, take cases to court if necessary, or even undertake “a planned assault on the media” to attract publicity about discrimination in employment. The author urged readers to push for eradication of laws allowing sex discrimination in housing, and carefully explained provisions of the Fair Credit Reporting Act of 1971 to help women establish personal credit history. She concluded by urging readers to keep up with court cases and changing laws on women’s rights to make sure that they can protect themselves against discrimination.

Weatherford acted as a sounding board for these women in the mid-1970s and she was open to their exploration of women’s rights. After assuming the national WMU leadership post, she explained her position: “I’ve tried to make women sensitive to their worth as individuals, and I think WMU must do more to help women realize their own personal worth and the worth of other women. I see discrimination against women as an overall part of discrimination against races, minorities, religions.” She claimed to be no feminist and said that Christian women did not need liberation because they already were

⁶⁸ Teena Andrews, “Women and the Law,” *The Student* (SBC) 54, no. 8 (May 1975), 10-15, Folder 23: Sexuality, 1970, Box 36, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

liberated through Christ. Her opinion was that they just needed to find out “what he’s liberated us for.”⁶⁹

Over time, however, Weatherford became more sympathetic to the goals of the women’s movement. Just two years later, though she clarified that she still did not self-identify as a “radical bra-burning feminist,” she indicated her experiences at WMU taught her that “many churchwomen want to be freer than they are.” She applauded the Southern Baptist Convention’s moderate leadership for its willingness to make strides towards increasing women’s representation in leadership and admitted to *Baptist Press* that “the more I talk the more feminist I sound.”⁷⁰

As Southern Baptists encountered the ideas of the modern women’s movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they responded with a variety of opinions. Moderates who had supported the civil rights movement tended to see women’s rights as an extension of these political rights, and were more likely to support women’s challenges to leadership roles in the church. Some Southern Baptists, though not in leadership roles, opposed the women’s movement politically and for its implications for church life and structure. Thanks in part to Sappington’s initiative, women’s ordination became a deeply divisive issue that split the moderate leadership and the conservative rank and file, who opposed the practice because it threatened traditional gender roles and even literal biblical translations. Theological and social opposition to the women’s movement

⁶⁹ “WMU Head Says Baptist Women Involved as Ministers, Witnesses,” *Baptist Courier* (SC), June 20, 1974, 2.

⁷⁰ Teena Andrews, “Carolyn Weatherford is as Liberated as She Wants to Be,” Baptist Press news release, January 5, 1976, available online at sbhla.org.

provided a constant conservatism which pervaded the denomination in the 1960s and early 1970s. Over the course of the decade, the denomination's ability to contain such differing views on gender caused deep fractures and threatened its sustainability.

CHAPTER THREE

“THE BAPTIST PROJECT IS WELL UNDERWAY”:

PARTISAN POLITICS AND CULTURE WARS IN THE MID-1970S

Though conversations about the women’s movement took place inside the confines of the Southern Baptist Convention in the early 1970s, by mid-decade the denomination encountered conservative critiques of feminism from a wider network of evangelicals and secular political conservatives looking to find support in its large, relatively conservative, membership. Agency leaders in the Christian Life Commission and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs continued to support the women’s movement, as they had earlier in the decade. Increasingly, they faced stronger challenges to their leadership from denominational conservatives and fundamentalists, especially on divisive cultural issues like the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, and gay rights, which became more closely associated with the modern women’s movement.

The presidential election of 1976 brought national attention to the Southern Baptist Convention and exacerbated the pre-existing tensions between moderates and conservatives. The denomination contained a wide range of political views in the mid-1970s, best illustrated by two prominent Southern Baptists, Jimmy Carter and Anita Bryant. Carter endorsed the ERA, supported civil rights for homosexuals, and, though he personally opposed abortion, he argued for its legality. Bryant, on the other hand, opposed the ERA, strongly opposed civil rights for homosexuals, and supported right-to-

life positions. Though Southern Baptists considered both of these figures “their own,” Bryant’s brand of politics appealed mainly to the rank and file and conservative pastors and moderate leaders tended to defend Carter’s views.

The denomination’s split vote in the election of 1976 reflected its lack of ideological cohesion at the time, and its political cache intensified existing internal tensions. Dissatisfaction with Carter’s treatment of social issues after his inauguration prompted conservative Southern Baptists to question the denomination’s democratic structure, which was tolerant of a wide range of Baptist views. Challenges to moderate Southern Baptist leadership abounded from Republicans, New Right leaders, and antifeminists, but Anita Bryant’s campaign against homosexuality received the most Southern Baptist support. Though conservative Southern Baptists saw few major successes in the mid-1970s, they slowly gained momentum at the grassroots level and prepared for denominational battle. Their arguments that moderates had more power than their numbers warranted became increasingly persuasive during this time.

The election of 1976 was not the first to highlight the participation of the Southern Baptist Convention’s primary constituency. At mid-century, white southerners were a demographic commodity that both political parties wanted to attract. Democrats wanted to keep them in the New Deal coalition, but Republicans started to lure white southerners through subtle overtures to racist politics. This so-called “southern strategy” included President Richard Nixon’s opposition to “forced busing” and promises of less federal oversight of desegregation. Through such politics, he earned the support of two prominent racial conservatives, Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms, both of whom were

affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention but neither of whom were particularly involved in denominational affairs outside of their own congregations.¹

Though the southern strategy is well known, fewer scholars have noticed Nixon's Southern Baptist strategy as he tried to gain the support of evangelical Christians.² The Southern Baptist Convention was the largest southern denomination, and unlike many other Protestant denominations at the time, it was experiencing a period of rapid growth. Nixon enjoyed a close friendship with evangelist Billy Graham, who willingly helped Nixon navigate evangelical networks. Graham, whose influence in the late 1960s was tremendous among Southern Baptists and many other conservative Christians, publicly endorsed Nixon several days before the 1968 election. In a 1972 letter to Nixon, Graham

¹ The term "southern strategy" was first coined by Kevin Phillips, assistant to Nixon's campaign manager John Mitchell, in his 1969 publication *The Emerging Republican Majority*. Matthew Lassiter emphasizes Nixon's "suburban strategy" in the 1968 election, arguing that because he was campaigning against George Wallace, Nixon first needed to get suburbanites involved in the "politics of middle class warfare" before he could proceed with racialized overtures to southerners. See Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 227-233. For more information on Thurmond's and Helms's roles in the partisan transformation, see Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Bill Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008).

² Daniel K. Williams first used this phrase in *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96-98.

referred to the many conversations in which they had discussed “an emerging evangelical strength in the country that is going to have a strong bearing on social and political matters probably for a generation to come.” Graham strongly encouraged Nixon to continue tapping into this voter base in his bid for re-election. Historian Steven P. Miller cautions observers from assuming that the relationship between Nixon and Graham was one-sided; instead, he emphasizes that Graham supported Nixon for nearly two decades. With Nixon, Miller argued, Graham “played out his political dreams.”³

Perhaps in deference to Graham’s advice, Nixon attempted to run someone from his administration as a candidate for the Southern Baptist Convention presidency at the 1972 Annual Meeting. His representative, Fred Rhodes, had appropriate experience in the Southern Baptist Convention, as a member of the national executive council in the mid-1960s and as an active leader in the D.C. Baptist Association. But Rhodes also had excellent Republican credentials, which were bolstered after Nixon appointed him deputy administrator of the Veterans Administration. Rhodes was not elected as president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1972, which indicated that there were, indeed, limits to Nixon’s political coalition.⁴ In his important book on the Religious Right, William

³ Billy Graham to Richard Nixon, August 4, 1972; available online via the Nixon

Presidential Library at

http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/donated/080472_graham.pdf. See

also Steven P. Miller, *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 126-138.

⁴ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 96-98. Williams discusses the Rhodes candidacy as evidence of a calculated “evangelical strategy” to control the Southern Baptist

Martin argued that Nixon's efforts to court evangelicals in 1968 and 1972 "initiated a new era for 'civil religion'" in America and provided evangelicals with newfound political currency in national politics.⁵

In reaction to many of these same trends that concerned Nixon's "silent majority," some conservative Southern Baptists reaffirmed fundamentalist rhetoric in the 1960s. Isolated at first, they steadily built a new coalition of like-minded fundamentalists within the Southern Baptist Convention. The 1925 Baptist Faith and Message statement, penned during the first fundamentalist movement, was renewed and amended at the 1965 annual meeting to reflect modern challenges to Southern Baptist tradition, including an acknowledgment that freedom "in any orderly relationship of human life is always limited and never absolute."⁶

This renewal inspired M.O. Owens, a pastor from Gastonia, North Carolina, to organize pastors at the grassroots level to stop the spread of liberalism within the denomination and reaffirm a denomination-wide commitment to biblical inerrancy and "doctrinal fellowship." The Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, named for the doctrinal statement which Owens revered, was designed to pull together several small

Convention. At the Annual Meeting, Rhodes was nominated for office by James H. Semple of Texas. One of many candidates in the race for presidency, Rhodes lost the election to Owen Cooper of Mississippi. See SBC Annual, 1972.

⁵ William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 97-99.

⁶ See "Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message," available online at sbc.net.

local groups that had sprung up around the country so that fundamentalist Southern Baptists could organize into a larger coalition.⁷

The Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship commissioned a new publication in late 1973, called the *Southern Baptist Journal*, to disseminate more broadly its criticism of liberalism in the denomination. William Powell served as editor of the journal which was independently funded. He aimed primarily “to present the position of the infallibility of the Bible,” though he also published exposé pieces on liberal denominational activities. Powell worked for many years at the Home Mission Board and came to the conclusion that the tendency of Southern Baptist agencies (including the Home Mission Board, but also others designed to address social problems and concerns) to place emphasis “upon the old social gospel is dulling some of the cutting edges in evangelism.” In other words, he felt that these agency’s efforts to address the demands of modern social movements were taking emphasis away from mission work which he felt ought to be the denomination’s priority.⁸

Leaders of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship realized that their opposition to the denomination’s leadership and their tactics for doing so, in some ways, mirrored secular politics. In early 1972, M.O. Owens admitted that “it is distasteful to be engaged in what is patently ‘political’ action.” But he emphasized, “I have come to the conclusion

⁷ “Basic Strategy of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship,” n.d., Folder 33: Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship – 1975 (B), Folder 2 of 2, Box 2, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁸ “‘Faith and Message’ Group Starts its own Magazine,” October 9, 1973, Baptist Press news release, available online at sbhla.org.

that we have no choice. It is either work together to protect what we believe in, or else throw in the towel, and abandon the Convention.”⁹ Owens did not want these individuals to leave the denomination as fundamentalists had done in the 1920s and 1930s. Instead, he wanted them to stay within the denomination and work for conservative reform. As he appealed to pastors of large churches for support, he found a receptive ear and a powerful ally in W.A. Criswell. When Owens voiced frustration that moderates could fund social programs through their control of the denomination’s sizeable operating budget, or that these programs provided a “weapon for those with liberal ideas,” Criswell agreed. Planting an idea that took five years to materialize, he remarked, “I wish to God we could get at them directly.”¹⁰

⁹ M.O. Owens to Dr. W. Ross Edwards, January 6, 1972, Folder 3: “Conservatives—1972 (E-F),” Box 7, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

¹⁰ M.O. Owens to W.A. Criswell, with handwritten note from Criswell, May 14, 1974, Folder10: “Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship – 1974 (C),” Box 2, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. The Southern Baptist Convention’s Cooperative Program commanded the largest budget in the denomination because its revenue came from a percentage of individual church revenue across the country. As moderates and conservatives battled over theology in the late 1970s and 1980s, the Cooperative Budget was perceived as a weapon of power and was hotly disputed as a result. Criswell published *Why I Preach That the Bible is Literally True* in 1969, and this fundamentalist credo was highly inspirational to many members of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship.

Though the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship did not gain control of the denomination in the mid-1970s, it raised awareness about the conservative cause among many sympathetic congregations. Laverne Butler, pastor of Louisville's Ninth and O Baptist Church, soon became the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship's Chairman of the Board and brought his resources and many members of his sizeable congregation to the organization. Adrian Rogers, pastor of Memphis's Bellevue Baptist Church helped to form a local chapter of Baptist Faith and Message in Tennessee. Additionally, the organization gained the support of Dr. Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta. His church celebrated a "*Southern Baptist Journal Day*" in 1974, and distributed copies of the publication to all members, along with educational materials about the organization and an offering envelope to encourage contributions.¹¹

Though leaders of the Baptist Faith and Message were able to attract interest from prominent conservative pastors in the Southern Baptist Convention, the group itself did not have enough clout to make major differences outside of its own membership base in the mid-1970s. It did, however, start building a base of grassroots membership that would amass much more power as its numbers increased over the next several years.¹²

¹¹ "Membership Bulletin of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, No. 1, May 24, 1974," Folder 8: "Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship – 1974 (B) Folder 1 of 2," Box 2, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

¹² Paige Patterson elaborates on this point: "...they were novices playing in a league with experienced professionals whose political prowess and, when necessary, determined ruthlessness rendered the efforts of rookies useless." See "Anatomy of a Reformation:

Members of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship were staunchly opposed to the modern women's movement and they sought to find examples of its influence in the denomination. Issues of the *Southern Baptist Journal* closely tracked, and noted with ire, each time a woman was ordained in a Southern Baptist Church. Authors often followed the announcement of ordination with a notation that if these women and their host churches really read their Bibles, they would realize that they were acting against God's will. Members could simply, from then on out, discuss opposition to increased women's roles in Southern Baptist churches under the coded mantra of biblical "inerrancy."

One of the major political goals of the women's movement in the 1970s was ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, a constitutional amendment originally proposed in 1923 by members of the National Woman's Party, who wanted to make gendered discrimination unconstitutional. Supporters quickly encountered opposition from those who favored sex-based protective legislation in the workforce. While introduced regularly in Congress, the amendment did not produce lively Congressional debate until the early 1970s, after the modern women's movement was well underway.

The Southern Baptist Convention, 1978-2004," Ft. Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004, available online at http://www.paigepatterson.info/ppatterson/assets/documents/anatomy_of_a_reformation.pdf.

Related political discussions of equal pay and workplace discrimination led to broader questions of women's protection under the law.¹³ The House of Representatives passed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1970 and sent it to the Senate for review. It quickly faced an uphill battle, however, when Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina added nine amendments to the bill, hoping to preserve some special protections and exemptions unacceptable to feminists. Most troubling for Ervin was the idea of women serving in combat or compulsory military service and he doubted the benefit of eliminating protective legislation for women. Ervin's amendments were all defeated after debate, and the Equal Rights Amendment ultimately passed the Senate in 1972 and was sent to the states for review. Many state legislatures rushed to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, and within the first year, thirty states had endorsed the proposed addition to the Constitution.¹⁴

When conservative author and grassroots activist, Phyllis Schlafly, read about Senator Sam Ervin's Congressional efforts to stall ratification of the ERA, she became inspired to oppose its ratification in the states. Schlafly mobilized supporters from her

¹³ For more information about the early history of the ERA, see Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 120-142.

¹⁴ "The Legislative History of ERA," *Phyllis Schlafly Report* 10, no. 4 (1976), 1; Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 11, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. For greater detail on Ervin's perspective, see Donald T. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA: A State and the Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 35-49.

publication, *Phyllis Schlafly Reports*, and those from her connections in the Daughters of the American Revolution and the National Federation of Republican Women. STOP ERA, which stood for “Stop Taking Our Privileges,” had its first national meeting in St. Louis in September 1972, and, shortly after, members began setting up offices around the country.¹⁵

Phyllis Schlafly concurred with Ervin’s assertion that the proposed amendment would be harmful for traditional womanhood. Her early writings echoed his themes that the ERA would not protect women, represented too much unnecessary intrusion of the federal government, and would open the door for radical legal precedents. Soon after getting in touch with Ervin in 1972, she urged him to utilize his congressional office to circulate his anti-ERA speeches and build a political network. In a short time period, he did exactly that, and the speeches reached politicians and sympathetic voters in twenty-five states.¹⁶ Echoing Ervin’s paternalistic sentiments, Schlafly rejected arguments from some women who found homemaking unfulfilling and wanted “liberation” from that role. Instead, Schlafly promised to stand up to feminists; she argued, “The truth is that American women have never had it so good. Why should we lower ourselves to ‘equal rights’ when we already have the status of special privilege?”¹⁷

¹⁵ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 214-220.

¹⁶ See Donald G. Mathews and Jane Sherron De Hart, *Sex, Gender, and the Politics of ERA*, 36-49, for elaboration on Ervin’s anti-ERA platform; they discuss Schlafly’s “concordat” with Ervin on page 51.

¹⁷ “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” *Phyllis Schlafly Report* 5, no. 7 (February 1972), 1; Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 11, Manuscript, Archives, and

Furthermore, Schlafly viewed economic equality as a smokescreen for ERA activists. She saw, instead, a radical feminist conspiracy that aimed to minimize the importance of traditional gender roles and promote a gender-neutral culture not based on God-given differences. As a deeply devout Catholic, she had a fundamental conflict with the underlying rationale of the Equal Rights Amendment. In her view traditional gender roles were crucial to social order and personal fulfillment. In one of her earliest writings about the ERA, published in February 1972, she emphasized that traditional family structure gave women not just stability, but, more importantly, access to the privileges of motherhood:

Respect for the family as the basic unit of society, which is ingrained in the laws and customs of our Judeo-Christian civilization, is the greatest single achievement in the entire history of women's rights. It assures a woman the most precious and important right of all – the right to keep her own baby and to be supported and protected in the enjoyment of watching her baby grow and develop.¹⁸

Rare Book Library, Emory University. In many ways, her emphases were remarkably similar to fundamentalist arguments that woman suffrage was “anti-family” and a “burden rather than a right” in the early twentieth century. For elaboration, see Susan E. Marshall, “Ladies Against Women: Mobilization Dilemmas of Antifeminist Movements,” *Social Problems* 32, no. 4 (1985): 348-362; 356.

¹⁸ “What’s Wrong With ‘Equal Rights’ for Women?” *Phyllis Schlafly Report* 5, no. 7 (February 1972), 1; Kathryn Funk Dunaway Papers Box 11, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Schlafly found receptive audiences in Christian women who shared her view of traditional womanhood and its “most precious rights.” She emphasized the phrase “Christian values” in her writings to appeal to a broader base of religious supporters, and she utilized her existing connections with Protestants in STOP ERA to gain an ecumenical following.¹⁹

Schlafly’s STOP ERA groups were quite successful in the mid-1970s. Her network spread quickly, particularly in unratified states, and local chapters quickly affected state legislatures. Schlafly traveled personally to state legislative hearings to speak for the anti-ERA perspective and debated feminists in unratified states. After the initial wave of national support for the Equal Rights Amendment, the rate of ratification slowed considerably, and supporters started to worry about the possibility of not getting the needed states for the amendment to be added to the Constitution. To feminists’ chagrin, several states voted to rescind their passage of the ERA, which prompted subsequent legal cases to review states’ rights in these circumstances.²⁰

¹⁹ Kent Tedin found that theological conservatives tended toward opposition to the ERA, but emphasized that participation in non-religious organizations can also affect a preference on the amendment. Though his study included a range of Protestant denominations, it did not distinguish between different types of Baptists. See Kent L. Tedin, “Religious Preference and Pro/Anti Activism on the Equal Rights Amendment Issue,” *Pacific Sociological Review* 21, no. 1 (1978): 55-66.

²⁰ For more information on ERA rescission movements, see Nancy Baker, “Too Much to Lose, Too Little to Gain: The Role of Rescission Movements in the Equal Rights Amendment Battle, 1972-1982,” (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2003).

Because the Southern Baptist Convention had no official policy on the Equal Rights Amendment, it was not involved in ratification debates on a national scale at that time. But some state denominational boards were concerned with local rescission efforts, including the 1974 meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, which passed a resolution asking the state legislature to review its 1972 ratification of the ERA. It cited as dangerous the amendment's eradication of protective legislation and the legislature's omission of a clause that would not let the ERA "impair" women's rights in any way. Messengers concluded that the realization of these threats made it the responsibility of the Texas convention to reconsider its ratification of the ERA.²¹ In 1975, messengers to the Kentucky state meeting passed a resolution stating, "Equal Rights Amendment will open the doors of legal action to many harmful ideas in our society and could possibly be a serious impairment of the cherished doctrine of separation of church and state." They urged lawmakers to review Kentucky's ratification and vote to rescind the ERA.²²

Regardless of her broad appeal among women in Christian denominations, Phyllis Schlafly was not able to get blanket approval of her STOP ERA movement from the Southern Baptist Convention. The June 1974 issue of *Phyllis Schlafly Report* included the Southern Baptist Association [sic] in a group of organizations that opposed the ERA. The list was misleading, however, because it did not list only those who had voted to

²¹ "SBC and BGCT Resolutions on Women," n.d., Folder 19: "Women: Women's Liberation, 1974-1988," Box 78, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

²² "Kentucky Baptists Oppose Equal Rights Amendment," Baptist Press news release, November 13, 1975, available online at sbhla.org.

denounce the amendment; it also included groups that had voted against supporting the amendment.²³ The Southern Baptist Convention had no official policy on the Equal Rights Amendment in the early-to-mid 1970s, and its vote against supporting ratification reflected a denominational inclination to remain neutral on the matter. Certainly, the Christian Life Commission's emphasis on "Freedom for Women" in 1974 indicated at least theoretical support for legislation on gender equality, but ultimately, there was no resolution to affirm or condemn the Equal Rights Amendment in the mid-1970s.

Regardless of Schlafly's religious affiliation and ecumenical networks, some Southern Baptists were inspired by her arguments, finding that they meshed with their own form of religious fundamentalism. Into the late 1970s, conservative Southern Baptists grew more discontent with the moderate leadership's refusal to take strong stances in opposition to what they came to perceive as a liberal product of the modern women's movement.

In 1973 the Supreme Court ruled that woman's right to privacy gave her the right to terminate a pregnancy, in a decision that provoked considerable backlash from social conservatives.²⁴ Though the Supreme Court was divided in interpreting the Constitution to acknowledge a women's absolute right to control her own body as "personal privacy," the defense had not proven that an unborn fetus had rights to due process under the Fourteenth Amendment. In a seven-to-two decision, the Supreme Court voted that

²³ "Who Opposes the Equal Rights Amendment?" *Phyllis Schlafly Report* 7, no. 12 (July 1974), 1, Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 11, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

²⁴ Lawyers Sarah Weddington and Linda Coffee tried this case on behalf of "Jane Roe," Norma McCorvey, in Texas before appearing before the Supreme Court.

Texas's abortion statute violated a pregnant woman's due process, and ruled that, during the first trimester of pregnancy, the choice to abort was a legal decision made between a woman and her physician.²⁵ Feminists celebrated the outcome of *Roe v Wade* as a victory for women's control of their bodies and for facilitating safer abortions by taking them "out of the back alley" and making them subject to medical standards and regulations.

Almost immediately, legislators sought to restrict women's reproductive rights by supporting laws that limited the circumstances under which women could legally obtain an abortion. The *Roe* decision indicated that women could legally terminate a pregnancy during the first trimester, but after that marker, which Supreme Court judges admitted was arbitrary, the states had power to regulate abortions as their courts deemed best for mother and child. Some opponents criticized the decision for its broad interpretation of the Constitution, others for its intrusion on the rights of states to regulate its citizens, and still others for its refusal to grant due process to the unborn. State legislatures were quickly flooded with bills to restrict women's abortion rights by various means.²⁶

Especially in the immediate wake of *Roe*, most of the opposition was led by Catholics. Catholics had formed grassroots anti-abortion groups as early as 1968 as

²⁵ An important precedent for the decision in *Roe v Wade* was the 1965 case *Griswold v Connecticut*, which broadly interpreted the Constitution to allow for a "right of individual privacy." For a superb narrative of the judicial life of *Roe v Wade*, see Barbara Hinkson Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1993), 5-32.

²⁶ Craig and O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 29-30, 32, 77, 103.

states began repealing laws against abortion, and they stepped up their activism after the landmark Supreme Court case.²⁷ By this time, the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) had gained some political traction, but it needed a broader base of support to become a viable interest group and affect national policy. Many Protestants, including Southern Baptists, dismissed anti-abortion groups as exclusively Roman Catholic organizations.

There was still evidence of anti-Catholic sentiment in the Southern Baptist Convention in the early 1970s, and these attitudes provided barriers to interdenominational political cooperation. Southern Baptist leaders voiced persistent opposition to Nixon's (and later, Carter's) efforts to commission a national envoy to the Vatican because of their fear that it would threaten the separation of church and state. Beyond state matters, the prejudice was also theological. In 1973, the editor of Mississippi's *Baptist Record* expressed outrage that a Wake Forest professor had participated in a "dialogue" between Southern Baptists and Catholics and noted with apology that he had to deny communion to Catholics due to doctrinal differences. The complaints of the *Record's* editor echoed the late nineteenth-century Landmark movement which emphasized Baptist exceptionalism in its claim to Christian tradition in

²⁷ For related conversations about the early right-to-life movement, see Robert N. Karrer, "The National Right to Life Committee: Its Founding, Its History, and the Emergence of the Pro-Life Movement Prior to *Roe v Wade*," *Catholic Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (2011): 527-557.

baptism and its suspicion of the Catholic hierarchy, which adherents viewed as a threat to religious freedom for Protestants.²⁸

To help the NRLC appeal to non-Catholics, Judith Fink, a Baptist from Pittsburg, established an Intergroup Liaison Committee to communicate with sympathetic organizations and Protestant denominations and help produce more “active participants.”²⁹ As a Baptist, Fink was particularly interested in getting Protestants involved in the anti-abortion movement, but she understood the challenges that bridging denominational borders would entail. In her interactions with the media, she always spoke “as a Baptist,” and she portrayed her leadership role in the NRLC as evidence of widespread Protestant support.

One goal was to mobilize the Southern Baptist Convention using a denomination-specific organization to help circumvent widespread anti-Catholic bias. In early 1974, Fink reported to the NRLC board of directors: “Sorry that in order to maintain some

²⁸ “Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed?” *Baptist Record*, August 2, 1973, Folder 14: “Conservatives – 1973 (A-G),” Box 7, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

²⁹ Memorandum, Judith Fink to Intergroup Liaison Committee, NRLC Inc., Re: Activation of Intergroup Liaison Committee, September 7, 1973, Folder NRLC 1973 (5), Box 4, American Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc. Records, Gerald R. Ford Library. It should be noted that Judith Fink was not a member of a Southern Baptist church. For related discussions, see Neil J. Young, “We Gather Together: Catholics, Mormons, Southern Baptists, and the Question of Interfaith Politics, 1972-1984,” (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 2008).

security, I cannot be more specific, but the Baptist Project is well underway... Please cooperate with us in sending in our contacts. If we succeed, it will be because you helped.”³⁰

One of the only Southern Baptists engaged in this early effort to get Baptists involved in the fight against abortion was Rev. Robert Holbrook, pastor of First Baptist Church in Halettsville, Texas. Holbrook helped Fink implement “the Baptist project” through coordinating “Baptists for Life,” a right-to-life group specifically for Baptist membership, though it was purposefully inclusive of all Baptist affiliations. For Holbrook, his concern for abortion as a moral issue superseded his denominational loyalty or theological purity. Unlike many Southern Baptists at the time, he was willing to work in an ecumenical organization to fight the legalization of abortion. As Vice President of the Texas Right to Life Committee, a state subsidiary of the national organization, Holbrook was deeply involved in the NRLC, and as the only southerner on the six-member Intergroup Liaison Committee, his participation provided the national organization with an entryway into the Southern Baptist Convention. Despite this enthusiasm and his national NRLC connections, Holbrook faced an uphill battle as he began promoting the “Baptist Project” in his own denomination.³¹

³⁰ Letter, Judith Fink to NRLC Board of Directors, March 12, 1974, Folder NRLC – Board and Executive Committee 1974 (5), Box 8, American Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc. Records, Gerald R. Ford Library.

³¹ It should be noted that Fink (as well as Marjory Mecklenburg) resigned NRLC in 1974 over fiscal worries and the organization’s failure to emphasize alternatives to abortion. They created American Citizens Concerns for Life shortly thereafter; see Susan Fogg,

One of Holbrook's biggest hurdles to getting the denomination on record against *Roe* was the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJCPA), which voted in 1973 to oppose laws suggested by some members of Congress that would criminalize abortion by granting a fetus personhood. Dr. James Wood, Executive Director of BJCPA and a staunch defender of Planned Parenthood, considered abortion an "absolute, right of conscience" and a matter of "civil liberties and religious freedom." Furthermore, in his leadership position he was obligated to defend the positions of the agency.³² He strongly opposed Jesse Helms's amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, which would restrict international aid for abortions, and signed an agency letter to the legislature indicating its opposition to Helms's initiative. In response, Holbrook wrote an open letter to all Baptists, urging "the strongest possible protest" of BJCPA, explaining that its refusal to

"Abortion Opponents Part Ways, *Newark Star Ledger*, September 29, 1974, Folder: NRLC 1974 Board and Executive Committee (12), Box 7, American Citizens Concerned for Life Records, Gerald R. Ford Library.

³² "Baptist Joint Committee: Abortion Proposal Opposed," *Baptist Standard* (TX), October 10, 1973, 5. For elaboration on Wood's association with Planned Parenthood, see James E. Wood, Jr., interview by Jimmy D. Neff, March 12-13, 2003, in Yorktown Virginia, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at Baylor University Digital Libraries, <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/4905>.

support Helms's legislation put the organization in the company of "some of the most radical anti-Christian organizations in America."³³

To further counteract BJCPA's influence, Holbrook testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments to support a proposed Human Life Amendment on behalf of "Baptists for Life." He strongly denounced "the involvement of the liberal Protestant clergy in the women's rights movement," claiming that it produced "in some religiously Protestant women a self-righteous indifference about the destiny of the fetus in their overriding preoccupation with the 'dignity of woman' as a sovereign individual who should not be socially enthralled by motherhood."³⁴ Disdaining feminists' call for reproductive choice, Holbrook argued instead that the modern women's movement inspired even pregnant Christian women to lose interest in the well-being of their unborn children. In his view, the movement, aided by liberal clergy members, endangered the future of humankind.

Robert Holbrook furthered "the Baptist project" by taking it straight to denominational messengers at the 1974 Annual Meeting. Desiring a stronger anti-abortion stance, he hoped to amend the proposed resolution on abortion to express "opposition to abortion in any case and to seek a Constitutional amendment prohibiting

³³ Robert Holbrook to "Fellow Baptist," January 7, 1974, Folder 10: "BFMF – 1974 (C)," Box 2, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁴ Rev. Robert Holbrook, Testimony before Senate Judiciary Committee, March 7, 1974, Folder 1: "Abortion, 1974-1975," Box 79, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

abortion.” Texas’s *Baptist Standard* reported that his motion lost “by a big margin,” indicating that Southern Baptists were not yet ready to take such a hardline stance.³⁵ Additionally, Holbrook presented a motion that would require the Christian Life Commission to alter its materials to reflect “proportionate balance given to the arguments both for and against abortion,” charging that current materials did not reflect enough criticism of abortion as destructive of human life.³⁶

After Holbrook’s motion was referred to the Christian Life Commission for review, Foy Valentine reported that the agency gave “careful attention” to the “complex ethical issues related to abortion” and stood by the “carefully prepared” materials in existence.³⁷ Instead, the denomination passed a resolution that reaffirmed its 1971 resolution on abortion, which “[called] upon Southern Baptists to work for legislation that will allow the possibility of [therapeutic] abortion.” Messengers to the Annual Meeting in 1974 defended their earlier resolution because it “reflected a middle ground between the extreme of abortion on demand and the opposite extreme of all abortion as murder” and “dealt responsibly” with the subject “from a Christian perspective.”³⁸ For the time being, the agency was able to maintain the denomination’s support for therapeutic abortion and keep the Right to Life movement at a distance.

³⁵ “Convention Reaffirms Abortion Stand,” *Baptist Standard* (TX), June 19, 1974, 4.

³⁶ Proceedings, 1974 SBC Annual, 73, 75-76, available online at sbhla.org.

³⁷ Report, Christian Life Commission, 1975 SBC Annual, 200, available online at sbhla.org.

³⁸ “Resolution on Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life,” June 1974, Available online at sbc.net/resolutions.

Holbrook reached out to members of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship in 1975 to emphasize the Christian Life Commission's "liberal" treatment of the abortion issue at the previous annual meeting. He cited an article in the *San Diego Union* that listed the Southern Baptist Convention, alongside the United Methodist Church, as Protestant denominations "steadfast in their support" for *Roe v Wade*. He claimed that the article, "providential" in its timing just before the Annual Meeting, was "exactly what certain Convention leaders want to see in print and why they oppose any type of strong opposition to abortion."³⁹ He also wrote an article for the *Southern Baptist Journal* to emphasize the "parliamentary dike-plugging" that took place in 1974. Holbrook claimed that denominational leaders "manipulated the messengers" by putting forward a resolution that was written before *Roe v Wade*.⁴⁰ Again, he called for the SBC to "abhor the widespread practice of abortion, its commercialization and exploitation by

³⁹ Robert Holbrook to M.O. Owens, May 25, 1975, Folder 1: BFMF – 1975 (H), Box 3, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. A copy of the article is located in another box. See: Claire Cox, "Antiabortion Drive Grows; Other Groups Join Catholics in Opposition," *San Diego Union*, May 10, 1975, B-8, Folder 31: BFMF – 1975 (A), Box 2, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴⁰ Bob Holbrook, "Why the 1971 Abortion Resolution Should be Replaced," *Southern Baptist Journal* 3, no. 4 (May/June 1975): 7, 15, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

irresponsible abortion advocates,” but despite these efforts, his resolution was not approved.⁴¹

Still determined to persuade the denomination to revise its position and oppose abortion in 1976, Holbrook went to the grassroots. He sent out fifteen thousand letters to pastors, at a cost of \$1700, to advocate an anti-abortion resolution at the Annual Meeting to be held that year in Norfolk, Virginia. In the letter, in which he was careful to be clear that the funding came from “numerous Baptists,” not the NRLC, Holbrook continued his critique of agency leaders: “They retreat behind ‘hard cases’ and insist we be on record as supporting those ‘tragic exceptions,’ he lamented, ‘all the while ignoring that over 99 percent of the abortions are done simply because women do not want the baby.’” He insisted that the denomination’s stance gave liberals “a perfect opportunity to paint Southern Baptists as being in support of a legal situation which will permit any kind of abortions [sic].” Holbrook’s newest resolution called for the SBC to denounce the *Roe v*

⁴¹ “Proposed Resolution on Abortion,” Folder 31: BFMF – 1975 (A), Box 2, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Following the lead of Judith Fink and Marjory Mecklenburg, Holbrook resigned his place on the National Right to Life Committee’s advisory board. He claimed that Baptists for Life had “grown considerably” and he was overburdened by responsibilities to the national organization. Holbrook to Carolyn Gerster, October 2, 1975, Folder: NRLC - 1975-Board of Directors (5), Box 10, American Citizens Concerned for Life, Inc. Records, Gerald R. Ford Library. By 1976, he was listed as an advisory board member for American Citizens Concerned for Life.

Wade decision as “contrary to both biblical and traditional views of the sanctity of life.”⁴² He hoped his appeal to the grassroots would produce more sympathetic messengers that would vote for stricter denominational policy against abortion.

When Holbrook brought the resolution he had shared with pastors to the 1976 meeting, his efforts proved to be only partially successful. Messengers did approve a resolution on abortion that included within its text language about the immorality of termination and denounced its use as a form of birth control. The resolution ended, however, with an affirmation of the right of “expectant mothers to the full range of medical services and personal counseling for the preservation of life and health.”⁴³ Despite his leadership in Baptists for Life and his activism at annual meetings from 1974-1976, Holbrook was not able to inspire messengers to pass a truly anti-abortion resolution. Consistently thwarting his efforts, moderate Southern Baptist leaders were able to maintain their influence on messengers concerning the denomination’s policy on abortion.

⁴² “Pastor Sends 15,000 Letters Urging SBC Action on Abortion,” *Baptist and Reflector* (TN), June 3, 1976, 9, Folder 2: “Abortion: 1976,” Box 79, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴³ See SBC Annual, 1976, available online at sbhla.org; “Resolution on Abortion,” June 1976, available online at sbc.net. Barry Hankins has argued that this resolution was “either pro-choice or at least opposed to a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion.” He also argued that the 1971 pre-Roe resolution was “clearly a rather pro-choice statement” as were those that essentially affirmed that resolution in following years. See Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 182-183.

The presidential election of 1976 was particularly momentous for members of the Southern Baptist Convention, as they struggled to maintain consensus amidst new social and political challenges to the denominational status quo. During a concurrent transitional period in partisan loyalty, Southern Baptists paid close attention to political issues during this election cycle to see which party reflected their conservative values. Perhaps not since the election of 1960 had they been so energized about a presidential election, and this electricity was intensified because one of their own, Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia, was running as the Democratic candidate against Republican nominee, President Gerald Ford.⁴⁴ The Election of 1976 brought Southern Baptists to the fore in national politics, just as the New Right was beginning to utilize cultural issues to galvanize political conservatives in the Republican Party.

The Republican Party was in a state of disarray after Nixon's involvement in the Watergate scandal led to his resignation in 1974. Many of his supporters felt personally betrayed. Billy Graham, one of Nixon's strongest supporters, said that he "felt like a

⁴⁴ During the Election of 1960, many Southern Baptists expressed concern that a Catholic president, referring to Democratic nominee John F. Kennedy, would threaten religious freedom by acquiescing to Vatican policies on political issues. Causing minor controversy was Texas oil magnate H.L. Hunt's widespread distribution of Criswell's sermon that expressed opposition to the Kennedy candidacy. See Jerome Tuccille, *Kingdom: The Story of the Hunt Family of Texas* (Jameson Books: Ottawa, Ill: 1984); "Kennedy is Attacked," *New York Times*, July 4, 1960; "Anti-Kennedy Tract Stirs Senate Study," Special to *New York Times*, October 18, 1960.

sheep led to the slaughter.”⁴⁵ As Republican Party leaders sought to regain public trust, the Republican “establishment” experienced viable challenges from the Right, including not only people concerned about economic and foreign policy, but also social conservatives who thought that traditional American values and culture were “under attack by the Left.”

Gerald Ford, a moderate on social issues whose wife was closely identified with the feminist movement, barely won the 1976 Republican nomination in a close primary race against California governor Ronald Reagan, who had the support of Jesse Helms and other prominent conservatives.⁴⁶ Once he won the presidential nomination, Ford faced an uphill battle to garner votes from conservatives within his own party and from independent voters who were disillusioned by Nixon’s corruption. The Democratic Party’s selection of Jimmy Carter for its presidential nominee in 1976 made it even more difficult for Ford to gain conservative votes, especially in the South. Carter was a Southern Baptist from Plains, Georgia, and though he lacked experience beyond one gubernatorial term, he had the pedigree of an old-guard Southern Democrat. More significantly he was a “born-again Christian” and was active as a Sunday School teacher in his Southern Baptist church.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 147.

⁴⁶ Donald Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 42. Critchlow argued that Ford’s campaign was limited in its success because it “underestimated the growing strength” of the Right.

As a result, during the 1976 election, political strategists paid close attention to Southern Baptists. As one commentator noted, Carter's religiosity had the potential to "bring back to the Democratic fold the kinds of voters who defected to George Wallace in 1968 or Richard Nixon in 1972."⁴⁷ Shortly before the election, *Newsweek* magazine declared 1976 the "Year of the Evangelicals." Gallup poll findings showed that as many as one third of Americans identified with the label. As the American media struggled to characterize Carter's religious background, the Southern Baptist Convention was put into the political spotlight in new ways.⁴⁸ Many Southern Baptists were initially thrilled to have "one of their own" running for the presidency. Rev. Robert Maddox, who later joined the Carter administration as religious liaison, explained:

It was a brand-new phenomenon to have a man running for president who would so clearly state his faith, and clearly coming out of the religious community.

Many of us, as Baptists...had great hopes that as president he could leverage the country spiritually and morally in ways that we had not seen in a long time.⁴⁹

Carter's image as Washington outsider and government reformer during the campaign helped inspire political support in his denomination. Even Bailey Smith, fundamentalist

⁴⁷ Memorandum, Stu Eizenstat, "'Religion' and 'Religious Issue,'" May 3, 1976, Box 27, Stuart Eizenstat's Files, Jimmy Carter Library; Philip Meyer, "Poll: Believers Rallying to Carter," (Knight-Ridder) *Macon Telegraph and News* (GA), May 9, 1976, Folder RM 5/1/76-1/20/77, White House Central Files, Subject File, Gerald R. Ford Library.

⁴⁸ "Year of the Evangelical," *Newsweek*, October 25, 1976, 3; Kenneth L. Woodward, "Born Again!" *Newsweek*, October 25, 1976, 68.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 151.

pastor from Del City, Oklahoma, told messengers to the 1976 Annual Meeting, only hours after an appearance by President Gerald Ford, that America needed “a born-again man in the White House . . . and his initials are the same as our Lord’s.”⁵⁰

Yet to a certain extent, Carter’s candidacy intensified the ideological, and even theological, divide between moderates and conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention. Carter’s disclosures about his religious views actually damaged his reputation in the eyes of some Southern Baptists. When questioned more closely about his favorite theologians and philosophers, he seemed too liberal for a Southern Baptist. *Why Not the Best?*, his pre-campaign autobiography, featured a three-part epigraph with quotes from Reinhold Niebuhr, Bob Dylan, and Dylan Thomas. Early in the campaign, Carter received a letter from Virginia Spurgeon, a Southern Baptist writing on behalf of her Sunday School class, who wanted to know if he really was a “disciple” of Niebuhr, Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Søren Kierkegaard. Before she voted, she needed to know Carter’s answer to the following question: “DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD OR THAT IT IS FALLIBLE, FILLED WITH HISTORICAL AND SCIENTIFIC BLUNDERS AND THEOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS? [emphasis in original]”⁵¹ Implicit was her idea that a “good” Southern Baptist would not be reading, and agreeing with, the ideas of liberal scholars.

⁵⁰ Myra MacPherson, “Evangelicals Seen Cooling on Carter,” *Washington Post*, September 27, 1976, A1, A3. This article was published several months after Smith’s comment, but it reprinted his earlier statement.

⁵¹ Letter, Virginia T. Spurlock to Gov. Jimmy Carter, July 25, 1976; Folder: Form Letter – Protestant II and Correspondence, Box 308, David B. Graham’s Files, Jimmy Carter

One of the major issues that emerged in the presidential election of 1976, as Ford and Carter looked to distinguish their records, was the legal status of women's reproductive rights. Jimmy Carter's views on abortion seemed just as discordant as those expressed by messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Democratic Party moved toward a pro-choice position in the mid-1970s, and it staunchly opposed constitutional amendments that would ban or limit abortion.⁵² Carter, admittedly more moderate than some pro-choice Democrats, maintained a personal, moral opposition to abortion and to federal funding for the procedure; on the other hand, he agreed with his party's opposition to prohibitive constitutional amendments. This position was politically tenuous; conservatives had room to argue that he was pro-choice and feminists criticized his stance as not supportive enough of women's reproductive freedom.⁵³

As a result of internal party pressure from the Right and presented with a ripe opportunity to get votes from the Left, Ford felt pressured to appeal to NRLC supporters for votes, especially after major anti-abortion demonstrations attracted record numbers in

Library. For elaboration on Carter's admiration of Niebuhr's concept of "Christian Realism," and its subsequent effect on the president's politics, see J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011) 26-27.

⁵² Williams, *With God on Our Side*, 125-130.

⁵³ For elaboration, see Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 154-157, and Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 72-73.

Washington D.C..⁵⁴ Before the primary election, Ford gave an interview with Walter Cronkite and tried to position himself as a moderate on *Roe v Wade* despite Betty Ford's public affirmation of the Supreme Court ruling. Though Ford did not take a hardline stance against abortion or favor a constitutional amendment that would limit procedures, he insisted that "each individual state should decide what it wished to do," thereby indicating that he might not oppose local efforts to scale back the *Roe* decision.⁵⁵ Throughout the campaign, Ford faced continued pressure to disavow his support of therapeutic abortion, and though he repeatedly expressed opposition to abortion on

⁵⁴ Ford picked Dole as running mate because he had utilized an anti-abortion strategy in Senate race – Dole also advocated a platform change that would call for anti-abortion constitutional amendment (Williams, *God's Own Party*, 131); Melich reflected, "Under Nixon's tutelage, the national Republican party was now adopting Phillips's New Majoritarian strategy, using control of women's decisions about whether to go to work or to have a child as a way to win votes from Catholics and conservative southerners, the old New Deal Democratic stalwarts." See *The Republican War Against Women: An Insider's Report from Behind the Line*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 33.

⁵⁵ Ron Nessen, "Interview with Walter Cronkite," Schedule Summary, n.d.; Transcript, Interview of the President by Walter Cronkite, February 3, 1976, Folder: February 3, 1976, Walter Cronkite, Box 52, Ron Nessen Papers, Gerald R. Ford Library.

demand, his efforts to appease the pro-life lobby without taking a hardline stance made him appear nearly as ‘untrustworthy’ on the issue as Carter.⁵⁶

During the campaign, Carter was criticized by Southern Baptists for anything he did that seemed traditionally “unBaptist,” including the consumption of alcohol, and demonstrated discord between the candidate’s faith and politics. When a photograph surfaced of the Carter’s thirtieth anniversary featured the couple “lifting what looked like a glass of champagne,” he received letters from Baptists concerned about the genuineness of his faith. F. James Norris of Ohio asked, “How can a deacon, a member of a national committee in the Southern Baptist Convention, a S.S. teacher [sic] of a Men’s Bible Class, who knows the Baptist stand against alcohol be allowed to get into such a situation?” If the glasses were “filled with water or tomato juice,” he concluded, “it should have been stated.” J.R. Aiken of Florence, South Carolina, wrote campaign headquarters, asking if Carter was “a Scotch whisky drinker.” Flora Kidd worried that Carter might host political functions that served alcohol, resulting in “a mark of reproach against your profession of a ‘born again’ Christian and a child of God.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ For elaboration on Ford’s struggle with NRLC leaders and its effect on his campaign, see Neil J. Young, “We Gather Together: Catholics, Mormons, Southern Baptists, and the Question of Interfaith Politics, 1972-1984” (PhD Diss., Columbia University, 2008).

⁵⁷ F. James Norris to Jimmy Carter, September 8, 1976; Flora Kidd to Jimmy Carter, n.d., Folder: Form Letter – Protestant I and Correspondence, Box 308, David B. Graham Subject File, Jimmy Carter Library; J.R. Aiken to Jimmy Carter Headquarters, July 1, 1976, Folder: Correspondence from the Public, North Carolina to South Dakota, Box 326, Betty Rainwater’s Files, Jimmy Carter Library.

Most damaging to Carter's popularity among Southern Baptists, however, was his consent to an interview which was published in *Playboy* magazine in November 1976. In an attempt to appear genuine and relatable to readers, he admitted, "I've committed adultery in my heart many times," and then explained why this was just as sinful as physical adultery: "Christ says, Don't consider yourself better than someone else because one guy screws a whole bunch of women while the other guy is loyal to this wife..." Though the sentiments were in line with Baptist attitudes towards the sin of lust, many Southern Baptists were outraged that Carter was willing to grant an interview to the seedy publication. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Bailey Smith tried to reconcile his previous endorsement of Carter, given the political controversy, but he struggled to do. As Christians, he said, "we're totally against pornography...And, well, 'screw' is just not a good Baptist word."⁵⁸ The Carter campaign knew that the *Playboy* interview cost them a number of evangelical votes on which they were counting in the November election.

The Ford campaign had largely written off Southern Baptists, as strategists predicted that Carter would "undoubtedly carry all of the Deep South," but there was some evidence to the contrary.⁵⁹ A denominational conference for teenagers, called FREEDOM '76, featured a mock election in San Antonio's Freedom Hall to see how the youth rated the candidates for each party's primary contest. Over five hundred teens participated, ultimately choosing Ford over Reagan and Carter over Wallace, Humphrey,

⁵⁸ Myra MacPherson, "Evangelicals Seen Cooling on Carter," *Washington Post*, September 27, 1976.

⁵⁹ White House Memorandum, Jim Reichley, "Groups of Voters," June 5, 1976, Folder: Campaign, Box 1, A. James Reichley Files, Gerald R. Ford Library.

and Kennedy, indicating a preference for “moderate conservative” candidates over those that represented ideas further to the right or left. Interestingly, Ford received twice as many tallied votes among the participants as did Carter. Interpreting these results, Harry Hollis observed, “Southern Baptist young people are essentially conservative, both religiously and politically. There's no question about it.” But apparently they were also centrist to a certain extent, given their rejection of Reagan’s more conservative primary challenge.⁶⁰

Indeed, President Ford had surprising opportunities for support among Southern Baptists. A South Carolina newspaper reported that though Carter held the current lead among local voters, “...come November 2, the Dixie faithful believe it’ll be an entirely different story.”⁶¹ In June 1976, Gerald Ford became the first sitting United States president to visit the denomination’s Annual Meeting. Though it was a bicentennial celebration and there was reason to celebrate the nation’s political system, Ford’s visit prompted disagreement within the denomination because the offer was not also extended to Carter. Some Southern Baptists felt Ford’s visit brought unnecessary partisan politics into the denomination. Ford was encouraged “to keep his remarks nonpartisan,”

⁶⁰ “Presidential ‘Primary’ Reveals Conservatism of Young Adults,” Baptist Press news release, January 5, 1976, 2, available online at sbhla.org.

⁶¹ Lee Bandy, “Dixie Republican Leaders Claim Jimmy Carter is Beatable in the South,” *The State* (SC), July 4, 1976, 4-B.

according to one source, “despite the fact that it [was] an election year.”⁶² Just to emphasize the point, messengers passed a motion reaffirming the denomination’s “long tradition of non-endorsement of any political candidate.”⁶³

While in Dallas for a campaign circuit several weeks before the election, Ford visited First Baptist Church for Sunday morning services, and he was met with a startling show of support. From the pulpit, W.A. Criswell welcomed Ford and praised his speech at the annual meeting, and then he heavily criticized Carter for his *Playboy* interview and his policy on taxable church property. Notes from the Presidential press corps reported: “Satan was never mentioned at Church, but Jimmy Carter caught hell from the Rev. Criswell, although Carter’s name [was] not mentioned.”⁶⁴ After the service, Criswell endorsed President Ford’s presidential campaign from the front steps of the church building.

Southern Baptists concerned with the separation of church and state were aghast at Criswell’s political maneuver. But Helen Parmley, religion writer for the *Dallas Morning News*, defended the local pastor: “Criswell did not demand that the church’s deacons endorse Ford. He did not say the endorsement was on behalf of the 18,500 members of the church, and he did not pledge a portion of the church’s budget to Ford’s

⁶² “Ford to Talk to Baptists in Norfolk,” *Virginia Pilot*, June 9, 1976, Folder “Virginia, 6/15/76, Southern Baptist Convention,” Box 13, Gwen A. Anderson Files, Gerald R. Ford Library.

⁶³ SBC Annual, 1976, p. 52, available online at sbhla.org.

⁶⁴ Pool Report, October 10, 1965, Folder 10/4-9/76 CA, OK, TX (3), Box 83, Ron Nessen Papers, Gerald R. Ford Library.

campaign.”⁶⁵ Others defended Criswell’s position in light of the entire election’s focus on religion. J.F. Martin asked, “Why the flap over Dr. W.A. Criswell’s public endorsement of President Ford? Jimmy Carter has been campaigning from the pulpit since the day he was nominated.”⁶⁶ After the election, Ford sent a personal letter of thanks to Criswell for the “most inspiring experience” at First Baptist, and Criswell was even invited to the White House in December “to acknowledge his support during the campaign.”⁶⁷ Staffers knew that it had stirred some negative public relations for the pastor, and advised that “a meeting with the President now would demonstrate an interest that transcends the election.”⁶⁸

The presidential election of 1976 inspired many Southern Baptists to awaken to their denomination’s political currency – and that, more broadly, of conservative Christians. The final election count was close; Carter received 297 electoral votes to

⁶⁵ Helen Parmley, “Ford Endorsement Wasn’t Demanded,” *Dallas Morning News*, October 16, 1976, A20.

⁶⁶ J.F. Martin, “From the Pulpit,” *Dallas Morning News*, letter to the editor, October 16, 1976, D2.

⁶⁷ President Gerald Ford to W.A. Criswell, October 12, 1976; Folder “First Baptist Church,” Ford Presidential Library Name Files, Gerald R. Ford Library; Memorandum, Richard S. Brannon, “Meeting with Dr. W.A. Criswell,” December 15, 1976; Folder RM3-3 “Protestant,” White House Central File Subject File, Gerald R. Ford Library.

⁶⁸ Richard S. Brannon, “Presidential Greeting, Rev. W.A. Criswell,” White House Schedule Proposal, Folder RM3-3 “Protestant,” White House Central File Subject File, Gerald R. Ford Library.

Ford's 241 votes.⁶⁹ According to ANES surveys, however, Gerald Ford actually received more votes from regular church attending Southern Baptists; fifty-three percent of those surveyed supported Ford and forty-seven percent supported Carter.⁷⁰ The denomination's membership was clearly in the process of transition from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party.

After Carter took office, Southern Baptists debated the significance his presidency to their denomination. A local reporter questioned if what he called the "Jimmy Carter coattail phenomenon" would be a major source of division for Southern Baptists in the coming years rather than a "proud rallying point," as he saw it, in mid-1977. With controversial political issues on the horizon, it was risky for Southern Baptists to identify so closely with the president of the United States. In an ominous forewarning to messengers, denominational president James L. Sullivan, cautioned Southern Baptists against riding Carter's politics. He explained, "When you ride the tide, you're going to have to be ready to hit the bottom as well as the top."⁷¹

Sullivan's admonishment proved to be particularly insightful for Southern Baptists. Because of his intentionally vague campaign platform and discordant voter base of evangelicals, southern conservatives, liberals, and feminists, Carter struggled to

⁶⁹ For more particulars on the election stats, see Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 104.

⁷⁰ Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 159, table 6.3.

⁷¹ James E. Adams, "Southern Baptist Could Face Trouble Over Carter Tie-In," *Southern Baptist Journal* 5, no. 6 (July 1977): 7, 10, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

navigate his support of feminist goals. Carter had campaigned on support for the ERA, but three more states were needed for the amendment to become law, and by 1977 five states had voted to rescind. Indiana ratified ERA at the time of Carter's inauguration, but only after the First Lady made a phone call to intervene in the vote.⁷² Additionally, when Carter took office, the Equal Rights Amendment's original seven-year ratification deadline was quickly approaching. He supported an extension to that deadline, a decision that was very unpopular with evangelicals and conservatives.

Anita Bryant's anti-homosexual activism in Dade County, Florida, began soon after Carter's inauguration, and his popularity floundered as headlines about homosexuality and abortion and ERA dominated newspapers "for weeks." During the campaign, Carter had advertised in gay newspapers and had been endorsed by gay rights leaders, but his political stance was more complex: Summarized historian Daniel Williams, "as a Baptist he opposed the homosexual 'lifestyle,' he also assured gays that he was on their side, telling them that he 'oppose[d] all forms of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.'"⁷³

There were differences between Carter's views and that of even moderate Southern Baptists. In late February 1976, Harry N. Hollis, Jr., head of the Christian Life Commission's Office of Moral Concerns outlined primary denominational issues concerning homosexuality. Examining Old and New Testament passages, Hollis concluded that homosexuality was a sin and prevented salvation without repentance. On

⁷² Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 127-128. ERA opponents complained that her intervention was a misuse of executive power.

⁷³ See Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 132; Williams, *God's Own Party*, 147.

the “question of legalization,” he recommended no changes to liberalize current laws, but discouraged enforcement through incarcerating offenders in “overcrowded jails where homosexual practices are already rampant.” The aim, according to Hollis, should be “rehabilitation” consisting of counseling and education about biblical messages about sexuality.⁷⁴ Through its emphasis on rehabilitation, the Christian Life Commission’s position was, indeed, more conservative than Carter’s, though it likely represented a middle ground between the views of conservatives, who desired a hardline stance, and moderates in the denomination.

Messengers articulated a more conservative stance at the 1976 Annual Meeting later that year to reflect their growing awareness on the issue. In a passed resolution, messengers labeled the “individual life-style” of homosexuality as sin, carrying the penalty of eternal damnation, and strongly urged churches to “not afford the practice ... any degree of approval through ordination, employment, or other designations of normal life-style.” The resolution still affirmed the autonomy of individuals and congregations, but it urged them to comply, emphasizing that the lifestyle was a sin.⁷⁵ That same month,

⁷⁴ Harry N. Hollis, Jr., “Homosexuality: The Issue of Legalization,” Baptist Press news release, February 25, 1976, available online at sbhla.org.

⁷⁵ Southern Baptist Convention, Resolution on Homosexuality, 1976, Triangle Community Works Records, Box 1, Folder: Southern Baptist, 1976-1994, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University. See also “Resolution on Homosexuality,” June 1976, Available online at sbc.net.

some Southern Baptists took an even more militant approach to opposing gay political rights when pastors from Atlanta protested the city's Gay Pride Day.⁷⁶

In the latter 1970s, gay rights advocates sought to gain legal protection against discrimination on the national and local level as a form of civil rights. On Capitol Hill, Representative Ed Koch proposed Congressional legislation (HR2998) to amend the 1964 Civil Rights Act to prevent discrimination against homosexuals. Quickly, activists in many states began to support legislation to prevent discrimination at the local level. Acting on this political wave, Dade County Metro Commission in Miami proposed an ordinance in January 1977, prohibiting any discrimination of homosexuals in "housing, public accommodations and employment," which passed with a vote of five to three.⁷⁷

After hearing about the ordinance at a prayer revival at her church, Northwest Baptist Church of North Miami, Anita Bryant and her husband, Bob Green, launched a petition campaign to compel a referendum vote to repeal the ordinance, and ultimately inspired a national movement against gay civil rights. Key to their concern about the ordinance was the idea that religious schools, much like the Baptist school their children attended, would not legally be able to turn down a homosexual teacher for employment. Bryant feared that gay educators would not teach students prudent moral values, or even worse, would inspire their students to also choose a homosexual lifestyle. She explained:

⁷⁶ Williams discusses this protest within a larger conservative "counterattack" on Carter's refusal to take a stronger stance against homosexuality, *God's Own Party*, 146-147.

⁷⁷ "Bias Against Homosexuals is Outlawed in Miami," January 19, 1977, *New York Times*.

“Homosexuals cannot reproduce—so they must recruit. And to freshen their ranks, they must recruit the youth of America.”⁷⁸

While on a media circuit, Bryant answered questions about her campaign, initially named “Save Our Children, Inc.” Speaking to Pat Robertson on “700 Club” in February, Bryant brought national attention to her efforts to reverse the local gay rights legislation. She explained on these programs that homosexuals had experienced no discrimination and that the passed legislation impinged on her rights to shield her children from exposure to homosexuality. After Bryant’s appearance on Jim Bakker’s “PTL Club,” husband Bob Green, linked ERA with homosexuals through advocacy of NOW.⁷⁹

“Save Our Children” capitalized on Anita Bryant’s fame, but it depended upon the volunteer efforts of conservative voters. Initially, local women stepped up to support the organization through signing petitions in opposition to the Dade County ordinance. Playing to the gendered dynamics of her audience, she asked men in her church to help, later explaining: “We knew we could go no farther unless the men were not only in union

⁷⁸ Anita Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation’s Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977), 62; see also “Anita Bryant Wins; Continues to Fight,” Baptist Press news release, June 8, 1977, available online at sbhla.org. For analysis of rhetorical connections between anti-busing racial trends and Anita Bryant’s anti-homosexuality crusade, see Gillian Frank, “‘The Civil Rights of Parents’: Race and Conservative Politics in Anita Bryant’s Campaign against Gay Rights in 1970s Florida,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 1 (2013): 126-160.

⁷⁹ *The Anita Bryant Story*, 43.

with us, but were leading us.”⁸⁰ Within a month, Bryant and members of “Save Our Children,” including people who were also members of STOP ERA and other conservative organizations, had acquired the necessary petitions and had inspired the scheduling of a local vote to repeal the ordinance.

Anita Bryant enjoyed some prominent political support from national conservatives. When Singer, a sewing machine company, dropped Bryant as spokeswoman, Senator Jesse Helms expressed his ardent approval of her campaign. Known for his profound personal opposition to homosexuality, Helms proved a powerful ally for Bryant, providing her campaign with funds from his Congressional Club. Helms circulated a statement: “...Maybe you’d like to drop Miss Anita Bryant a note of encouragement. If so, send it to me, and I’ll make certain she receives it. She is fighting for decency and morality in America—and that makes her, in my book, an All-American lady.” While at a political rally hosted by Florida Conservative Union, even Ronald Reagan voiced support to Bryant’s cause by bringing her California oranges.⁸¹ This support situated her at the forefront of the burgeoning Religious Right.

While on tour with Christian networks, Bryant’s campaign attracted more national attention than ever. Jerry Falwell, pastor of the independent Thomas Road Baptist Church, invited her as a guest on his “Old Time Gospel Hour” May 8, 1977. In one of his first visible political stances, Falwell suggested that they hold a large rally in Miami to mobilize opposition to the ordinance, and he helped set the plan in motion. The rally, called “Christians for God and Decency,” was held May 22 at the Miami Beach

⁸⁰ *The Anita Bryant Story*, 59.

⁸¹ *The Anita Bryant Story*, 95-96, 101-102.

Convention Center. In addition to Falwell and Jack Wyrzten, head of Word of Life Ministry, the conference was attended by crowds of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Notably, Adrian Rogers, a leader of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship in Memphis, came to the rally, perhaps foreshadowing his role in encouraging Southern Baptists to become more active in opposition to liberal political trends.⁸²

Bryant received a great deal of support from local Southern Baptists because she was one of their own, and she justified her activism through Biblical passages deeming homosexuality a sin, a strategy with which fundamentalist Southern Baptists particularly could back. Miami Baptist Association's Christian Life Committee took out a full page advertisement, published in the Miami Herald, supporting her initiative the day before the referendum vote. According to Baptist Press, the ad was “endorsed by 110 clergy from various denominations in the greater Miami area” and it united them in a campaign for religious liberty. Nationally, messengers to the 1977 Annual Meeting passed another resolution on homosexuality, which reaffirmed its previous stance but, more pointedly, denounced the existence of a “radical scheme” which aimed “to secure legal, social, and religious acceptance for homosexuality and deviant moral behavior at the expense of personal dignity.” Concurrently, messengers voted to “commend Anita Bryant and other Christians during the recent referendum in Miami, Florida for their courageous stand against the evils inherent in homosexuality.”⁸³

Most likely due to increasing cultural connections between the ERA and homosexuality, the Southern Baptist Convention also passed its first anti-ERA resolution

⁸² *The Anita Bryant Story*, 122.

⁸³ “Resolution on Homosexuality,” June 1977, available online at sbc.net.

at the 1977 Annual Meeting. The main emphasis of “Resolution No. 10—On Human Rights and Certain Misapplications” was protection of “free exercise of religion as determined by a free conscience” but it also contained a provision expressing particular opposition to privileges for homosexuals, including:

... all governmental efforts to define discrimination in such a way that ridiculous extremes, repugnant to the Christian faith and life, become the law of the land, such as the legalization of homosexual marriages, permitting homosexual couples to adopt children, prohibiting father-son banquets or single-sex choirs, requiring sexually integrated housing and restroom facilities, requiring governmentally financed housing to be made available to persons living in adultery or fornication, prohibiting a draft law that applies to men only...⁸⁴

On the one hand, this resolution took the place of several individuals’ efforts to express explicit opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, and the amendment was not named as such in the final resolution. There was little doubt, however, that the intent of this resolution was to identify the “ridiculous extreme” of gay rights and to oppose potential cultural implications of the Equal Rights Amendment that went past simple civil rights. Through its opposition of homosexuality, the Southern Baptist Convention passed its first anti-ERA resolution.

In the midst of Bryant’s campaign, the Carter administration struggled to appeal to feminists and evangelicals – two of the groups that had helped send him to the White House. When the National Gay Task Force petitioned Midge Costanza to meet with the President to address efforts to oppose antidiscrimination legislation, Costanza was

⁸⁴ SBC Annual 1977, available online at sbhla.org

receptive but the White House officially “remained silent.” Costanza finally pushed White House officials to grant a meeting with the group, but even though Carter did not personally meet with them, he received considerable criticism for “endorsing gay rights.” Indeed, Carter held complicated views on gay rights, explaining: “I don’t see homosexuality as a threat to the family...I don’t feel that society, through its laws, ought to abuse or harass the homosexual.”⁸⁵

Carter’s rationale did not appease vocal opponents of gay rights. Phyllis Schlafly, who by 1977 often emphasized links between feminist support of both the ERA and civil rights for lesbians, reported on Carter’s meeting with leaders of the National Gay Task Force and posited: “With this kind of welcome extended to homosexuals, is it any wonder that the Carter Administration is lobbying so hard for ERA?”⁸⁶ When Carter tried to maintain his coalition, he ultimately satisfied no one and only intensified criticism of his presidency. When he took political action based on his conscience, he alienated conservative Southern Baptists who thought his conscience was much too liberal for a Southern Baptist. In this way, Carter’s political stances contributed to some Southern Baptists rejection of his presidency, and more generally, the Democratic Party.

By the late-1970s, leaders of the women’s movement had achieved many of their legislative goals and faced more contentious social issues, including support for abortion rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and gay rights. These issues inspired national political critique and proved effective issues to mobilize American evangelicals into

⁸⁵ Quoted in Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 149; Also see Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 133-137.

⁸⁶ Eagle Forum Newsletter, June 1977, Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 11, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

secular politics. Because of its numbers and general conservative ideology, the Southern Baptist Convention was desirable to political conservatives, from single-issue groups and from the burgeoning New Right, which looked to restore conservative ideas to American society on multiple fronts.

Though Southern Baptist rank and file was largely sympathetic to these conservative causes, and some joined in as individuals, the denomination was much slower to voice support because of a long history of joining with Baptists who did not consider themselves akin to other evangelical religious groups and parachurch organizations. Though individuals experienced small successes in attempts to get the Southern Baptist Convention into the National Right to Life Coalition, STOP ERA's campaign to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment, and both political parties in 1976, it was ultimately Anita Bryant's campaign that inspired the most denominational participation with conservatives because of its defense of biblical guidelines on homosexuality. With energy abounding from the emerging Religious Right, Southern Baptists slowly began to come into the fold of a developing conservative bloc based on their belief that the modern women's movement was a threat to Christian families.

CHAPTER FOUR

“SATAN’S FIB ABOUT WOMEN’S LIB”:

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

In the late 1970s, the New Right capitalized on the support of religious conservatives who became politically active to oppose cultural changes brought on by the women’s movement. In recent scholarship, Phyllis Schlafly has received her due for bringing together the New Right and religious evangelicals several years before Ed McAteer or Jerry Falwell organized their prominent religio-political coalitions.¹ Before Anita Bryant’s movement against gay rights and the International Women’s Year (IWY) conferences of 1977, however, Schlafly was unable to get the full attention of Southern Baptists, aside from that of a few committed individuals. After the National Women’s Conference, the culminating event of the IWY conferences accepted several controversial planks in the “National Plan of Action” it adopted to recommend to Congress and the president including support for lesbian rights, Schlafly, Bryant, and other opponents were able to cement a political “pro-family” coalition that gained a great deal of popular support.

¹ Melich, 56. She positions Schlafly at the center of both the New Right and Religious Right; See Marjorie J. Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71-89.

Over the course of the 1970s, increasingly controversial political debates about abortion, homosexuality, and the ERA became conflated in cultural interpretations of the feminist movement. Nowhere was this amalgamation more evident than in the political opposition to the International Women's Year Conference. Many Southern Baptists were caught between both the impulse for civic equality and for maintenance of tradition, and they still viewed ecumenical alliance with skepticism. But Anita Bryant's anti-homosexuality crusade opened the door for broader political alliance based on conservative social values; it brought together Southern Baptist fundamentalists and non-Baptist cultural fundamentalists. In the aftermath of these secular cultural clashes, conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention successfully elected a fundamentalist president to the convention and began the political transformation of the denomination.

Even though conservatives gained momentum in the late 1970s, moderates still firmly supported the women's movement at this time. They supported women in the ministry and tried to buck conservative efforts to implement antifeminist resolutions at annual meetings. Both moderates and conservatives moved forward and showed few signs of compromise. By the end of the 1970s, divisions between moderates and conservatives led to a complete fracture in the denomination, as each group not only expressed polar opposite views on the women's movement but also open disdain for each other.

These denominational tensions coincided with the peak period of influence and visibility of the modern women's movement in the late 1970s, an era historian Sara Evans called the "crest" of the second wave of American feminism. This "crest" did not appear in the United States alone. After sponsoring International Year of the Woman in

1975 including a worldwide conference on women's issues in Mexico City, and proclaiming 1975 to 1985 the "Decade for Women," the United Nations encouraged individual countries to hold national conferences to further investigate women's hardships and seek an end to discrimination on the basis of sex. The United States sent representatives to Mexico City's international conference, and upon their return, Congress approved legislation that would appropriate five million dollars for the national conference, in accordance with United Nations recommendations.¹

The National Women's Conference, The United States' International Women's Year meeting, was designed to provide officials in Washington with policy recommendations to help the government meet the needs of diverse groups of women in each individual state and territory. But when responsibility for planning the conference programming transitioned from the Ford administration to the Carter administration, the new president appointed feminist Democrats who hoped the state and national IWY gatherings would increase popular support for their goals and pressure unratified states to reconsider the ERA. Recalled Tanya Melich, a conference participant, on this partisan transition:

With Republicans in charge, the IWY had a less radical image than it would have had with Democrats. They gave the women's movement a centrist cachet and a mainstream legitimacy that was needed, for most Americans knew little about the

¹ "The Spirit of Houston: An Official Report to the President, the Congress, and the People of the United States, March 1978," 9-10; See also Melich, *The Republican War Against Women*, 47 Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 291-292.

movement beyond the more radical headlines it had attracted in the early seventies.²

Carter chose Rep. Bella Abzug, one of the conference's Congressional supporters, to head the planning commission. His appointment made some Americans feel as if the IWY program would not represent all women, but instead, just women like Abzug who wanted to push a feminist agenda. Pat Robertson, a Southern Baptist pastor with lofty political aspirations, expressed outrage: "I wouldn't let Bella Abzug scrub the floors of any organization I was head of, but Carter put her in charge of all the women of America, and used our tax funds to support that convention in Houston."³ Phyllis Schlafly also opposed Abzug's leadership and claimed that feminists should be responsible for funding their own conference if its intent was to promote the ERA and other movement goals. Accordingly, she urged her supporters to voice opposition to the federally-funded IWY program, a "front for radicals and lesbians."⁴

Despite protest by conservatives, the National Women's Conference took place from November 18-21, 1977, after individual state meetings and a 2,600 mile symbolic torch run from Seneca Falls to Houston. In attendance were 2,000 official delegates from

² Melich, *The Republican War Against Women*, 95.

³ Quoted in Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 166.

⁴ For a longer articulation of her stance on the National Women's Conference, see "What's Wrong with \$5 Million for IWY Commission?" *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, January 1976, 3; "How the Libs and the Feds Plan to Spend Your Money," *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, May 1976, 1; Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 11, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

all fifty states and six territories, and 20,000 additional observers, including three First Ladies, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, and Rosalynn Carter, who together took part in the opening ceremonies. For the historic occasion renowned poet Maya Angelou wrote an updated “Declaration of Sentiments,” further emphasizing the symbolic connection between the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and the contemporary political gathering.⁵ The conference’s National Plan of Action included twenty-six recommendations, which were open to debate during the conference, and its planks addressed widely accepted views on women’s employment, health, child care, elder care, and domestic violence. Conference organizers worked to address the rights of all women, including poor and minority women, in the planks. The Equal Rights Amendment was a contentious issue, opposed by the minority of elected delegates who were conservatives, but a plank supporting ratification was approved by the majority of delegates who were feminists.

The most divisive issue included in the Plan was lesbian rights. It was not among the recommendations sent by the National Commission to be considered in the states for the Plan of Action but was added to the planks to be voted on in Houston after thirty-six delegations adopted resolutions asking that it be added. The National Women’s

⁵ For related discussions about IWY, see Marjorie J. Spruill, “Gender and America’s Right Turn,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 71-89. Spruill argues that the IWY conference brought gender to the fore of national political debates in the late 1970s, but was a polarizing event that galvanized and politicized both feminists and conservatives and set the stage for further conflict between them.

Conference took place just months after Anita Bryant's political campaign in Miami, and public opinion was very divided on the volatile issue of homosexuality. In fact, not even women's movement leaders agreed on the role of lesbian rights in the modern women's movement. Betty Friedan, who previously insisted it would divert attention from other feminist issues, publicly reversed her position on the stage in Houston, and the plank was subsequently approved. Friedan later explained: "It would have been immoral, wrong, to sacrifice the civil rights of lesbians to appease the right wing. It would not have appeased the right. It would not make the issue go away. It would only increase the bitterness and division that for too long dissipated the energies of the women's movement."⁶ Though the amended Plan of Action unified feminists in support of their "lesbian sisters," among conservatives it reinforced the idea that the modern women's movement was not just about eliminating discrimination but about promoting extremism and unwanted social change.

The Southern Baptist Convention's press agencies cited mixed reactions about the IWY and the National Women's Conference among rank and file members of the denomination. But not only did Southern Baptist attitudes toward the conference reflect the denomination's ideological split in the mid-1970s, they deepened it. *Baptist Press's* depictions of two Southern Baptist delegates to the conference exemplified the wide range of attitudes about the modern women's movement at this time. North Carolina delegate Tennala Gross, a member of Greenville's Memorial Baptist Church, went to Houston feeling optimistic about the conference and its aims. Gross, a university math professor and wife of a pastor, initially supported the women's movement for its aim to

⁶ Quoted in Melich, *The Republican War Against Women*, 99-100.

equalize gendered pay discrepancies in institutions of higher education. To Baptist Press, she described her activism in the women's movement as "the most meaningful thing I've done as a Christian."⁷ She justified her support of the Plan of Action as based on her interest in social justice, explaining that her Baptist beliefs led her to support "basic human rights for all people." Like many delegates, Gross left the conference more resolute than ever in her belief in the importance of the feminist movement. As a result, she became more active in promoting women's issues in North Carolina state politics.

On the other hand Baptist Press also reported on the experiences of Dr. Curtis Caine of Jackson, Mississippi, a delegate who had a nearly opposite perspective on the conference compared to Gross. Caine and his wife Evelyn, both delegates, were active in right-wing organizations in Mississippi including the John Birch Society and Women for Constitutional Government. In Houston they were harshly critical of the proposed Plan of Action, and they felt their purpose as delegates was to make sure conservative opinions about the role of women were voiced. Dr. Caine was one of only six male

⁷ Mary Ann Wood, "Baptist Conference Delegates Find Little Accord on Issues," Baptist Press news release, November 28, 1977, available online at sbhla.org; Pam Proctor, "Has the Feminist Movement Reached a Turning Point?" *Mobile Register*, February 15, 1976, 121. Gross later became more directly involved in politics; by 1984 she was president of the Alamance Women's Political Caucus. Six years later, she became president of the Democratic Women of Alamance County and she vigorously supported candidate Harvey Gantt's challenge to Jesse Helms's Congressional seat. See Robin Toner, "An Underdog Forces Helms Into a Surprisingly Tight Race," *New York Times*, October 31, 1990.

delegates in attendance in Houston, and he and Evelyn were one of three couples at the conference.⁸

The Caines' election to the Mississippi delegation was evidence of the conservative "takeover" that occurred at the state conference earlier that year, in which conservatives in attendance, many of whom were part of a "loose coalition" called "Mississippians for God, Country, and Family," that battled feminists over proposed resolutions; they ultimately elected a state delegation full of white conservatives, one of whom was married to a prominent member of the Ku Klux Klan.⁹ Dr. Caine had not even been present at the state IWY conference but was nevertheless elected as a delegate. He claimed that he accepted the role only after he was "asked" by "untold numbers of women" to represent their views.¹⁰

⁸ Louisiana's *Times-Picayune* reports that Caine was not only in the John Birch Society as late as 1988, but was traveling as a speaker to other chapters. See "John Birch Leader from Miss. to Speak," *Times-Picayune* (LA), April 21, 1988.

⁹ Nancy Stevens, "IWY Conference in Retrospect," *Delta-Democrat Times* (Greenville, MS), July 14, 1977, Folder: "International Women's Year, 3/77-3/78," Margaret McKenna's Files, Jimmy Carter Library; Ellen Goodman, "Yesterday's Conservatives, Today's Radicals," *Washington Post*, November 7, 1977; Folder "International Women's Year Conference, Houston 11/77," Box 6, Midge Costanza's Files, Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁰ Caine quoted in Marjorie Julian Spruill, "The Mississippi 'Takeover': Feminists, Antifeminists, and the International Women's Year Conference of 1977," in *Mississippi Women: Their Histories Their Lives*, vol. 2, eds. Elizabeth Anne Payne, Martha H. Swain, and Marjorie Julian Spruill (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 287-312,

Conservatives also successfully elected a majority of the delegates in Alabama, thanks in part to the efforts of Southern Baptist Eunice “Eunie” Smith, Vice President of the state’s Eagle Forum chapter. Smith “was booed by the IWY group” as she opposed the Equal Rights Amendment at the state meeting, and she later accused feminists of “being poor losers” when it appeared that the resolutions and delegates chosen at the state conference were not going to reflect their intended goals. Local newspapers reported that at the conclusion of the state meeting that, as a result of Eagle Forum efforts, no resolutions were sent to Houston from Alabama. Additionally, twenty of the available twenty-four delegate slots were filled by conservatives, and like Mississippi, the delegation was overwhelmingly white.¹¹

Though Evelyn Caine reported that her primary concern with the conference and its platforms was “government control,” her husband expressed a deeper underlying discontent with the meeting’s premise and goals which he saw as threatening his Christian views. Dr. Caine informed the *New York Times* that women from his state “don’t feel the way the majority here feels. To them, lesbian rights is a shocker, and being

300. The conservative delegation was challenged by Mississippi organizers, and nine women from Mississippi served as Delegates-at-Large to fulfill the conference’s diversity requirement.

¹¹ Associated Press, “Leaders to Challenge IWY Delegate Slate,” *Mobile Register*, July 13, 1977; Bessie Ford, “Anti-Feminist Movement in Alabama Scores Victory Over Feminists in Weekend Voting,” *Times Daily (AL)*, July 11, 1977; John Doty, “And the Feathers Flew in Capitol,” *Times Daily (AL)*, July 17, 1977.

for murder is a shocker. The feminists here spit on God...”¹² After the lesbian rights plank was passed by the majority of delegates, followed by the release of “We are Everywhere” balloons, the Mississippi delegation turned away from supporters in protest, holding signs that read: “Keep them in the closet.”¹³ Mississippi’s delegation was certainly not the only group in Houston upset by the addition of the gay rights platform to the Plan of Action, but its immediate political reaction represented some of the boldest opposition. Though only one member of the Mississippi delegation contributed to the “Minority Report,” written by IWY delegates who opposed more polarizing parts of the adopted platform, the Caines likely supported its premise.

With the support of Phyllis Schlafly, Lottie Beth Hobbs of Fort Worth, Texas, organized a large-scale event to protest feminist domination of the National Women’s Conference.¹⁴ Hobbs, Church of Christ leader, an author of spiritual books, and President of “Women Who Want to be Women” (Association of the W’s), explained that as eighty percent of the elected delegates were supportive of the feminist planks it was the

¹² Lucy Komisar: “With the Women at Houston, Feminism as National Politics,” *The Nation*, December 10, 1977, 624-627, 626-627; Judy Klemesrud, “Men at the Women’s Conference: Few in Number, but Hard to Miss,” Special to *New York Times*, November 22, 1977, 57.

¹³ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 294.

¹⁴ A newsletter from IWY Citizens’ Review indicates that the event was actually dubbed a “Pro-Family, Pro-Life Rally.” See letter, Rosemary Thomson to Citizens’ Review Coordinators, September 26, 1977; Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 12, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

responsibility of conservatives to make it clear the feminist majority at the IWY conference did not reflect the views of all American women. In other words, Hobbs organized the Pro-Life, Pro-Family Conference “to let our lawmakers in Washington and our State Houses know that THE IWY CONFERENCES DO NOT REPRESENT US [emphasis in original].”¹⁵ Instead of hosting a female-dominated conference, she appealed to conservatives’ defense of gender hierarchy and advertised the rally accordingly, urging men to step up and lead the opposition: “For too long the women’s libbers have tried to make the men believe that the current women’s movement is none of their business...MEN, IT IS YOUR BUSINESS. (emphasis in original).”¹⁶ Her pitch alerted WWW members and other attendees that their traditional values would not be challenged at her event, unlike the women’s conference.

Hobbs and other organizers of the Pro-Life, Pro-Family Conference were thrilled to witness a turnout of more than 15,000 people at the Houston Astrodome for their rally; she could only describe it as “Indescribable! Fantastic! Incredible!”¹⁷ Perhaps the most significant part of the rally, however, was implicit in its chosen name; it brought to one event conservatives who supported different causes, including the antiabortion, anti-ERA, and anti-homosexual movement. The rally included taped welcomes from Jesse Helms

¹⁵ WWW: Association of the W’s Newsletter 4, no. 8 (October 1977); Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 11, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Association of the W’s Newsletter 4, no. 9 (November 1977); Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 11, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

and Anita Bryant and featured several keynotes denouncing the ERA, including one given by Phyllis Schlafly.¹⁸ Notably, Southern Baptist evangelist James Robison made a public appearance and criticized the National Women’s Conference’s Plan of Action as “a summary of the feminist/humanist movement’s grand plan for destroying the American family.”¹⁹ Over the next several years, Robison mobilized conservative Christians into politics. Taking into account his participation, this event, to a certain extent, set a precedent for the religio-political gatherings typical of the politics of the Religious Right in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Also foreshadowing future political coalitions, Southern Baptist pastor Paige Patterson gave the opening invocation prayer at the Pro-Life, Pro-Family Rally, just before the pledge of allegiance and official welcome. Patterson served as president of Criswell College in Dallas, Texas, a conservative school founded by W.A. Criswell. As a prominent denominational figure with powerful connections, Paige Patterson’s participation in the rally signaled to Southern Baptists his endorsement of the burgeoning pro-family movement and his clear opposition to the National Women’s Conference.

¹⁸ Pro-Family Rally Program, November 19, 1977; Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 6, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁹ Quoted in Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 167. By the late 1970s, the emergence of secular humanism as a “religious,” yet godless, persuasion threatened the values of many evangelical Christians, who often cited it as a scapegoat to blame for many cultural problems. Here, Robison used the term interchangeably with feminist, providing a telling view of his attitudes towards the modern women’s movement.

Dorothy Patterson, his wife, wrote a book in 1976, called *Sensuous Woman Reborn*, to provide Christian women with a guide for mastering the role of traditional housewife. She saw the women's movement as a threat to godly relationships, which she claimed had been "marred by the vociferous battlecry for personal rights and universal equality—the unisexual utopia of a new generation." Mrs. Patterson expressed clear disdain for feminists, who in her view wanted liberation from the "gifts" of womanhood and sought to "[erase] the winsome femininity of God's perfect 'building' – a creature of limitless beauty and influence."

Dorothy Patterson proclaimed that her husband encouraged her to write the book, and its dedication provided insight into the Pattersons' marriage dynamic: "He loves and delights my soul, He protects and possesses my body, He teaches and edifies my spirit, He praises and challenges my mind... He is friend and counselor, husband and lover, pastor and teacher, inspiration and ideal... His name... PAIGE PATTERSON [emphasis in original]." The book featured forwards from both W.A. Criswell and Paige Patterson. Criswell wrote: "Girl—if you want to know all about how to be attractive, beautiful, successful, happy and win to keep the man of your choice, just peruse these pages. There is nothing like it in the English language."²⁰

Opponents' efforts to make the IWY conference and the ERA synonymous with more radical feminist goals worked to discredit defenders of the modern women's movement. Marie Mathis, former president of the WMU, explained: "Most women I know don't worry about the ERA. They can do what they want to without it. Most women

²⁰ Dot Patterson, *The Sensuous Woman Reborn* (Dallas: Crescendo Publications, 1976), vii, 115, 132-133.

I know don't care about it. They're turned off by militancy such as we saw at the International Women's Year meeting in Houston."²¹

In 1977, pieces began to fall into place for conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention, even though moderates were still elected to high office. As the issue of abortion was increasingly linked with the Equal Rights Amendment and the modern women's movement in general, Baptist members of the NRLC continued to attend annual meetings with the hopes of facilitating a hardline stance against abortion under any circumstances. At the Southern Baptist Convention's 1977 Annual Meeting, Rev. John F. Wilder, pastor of Tower Grove Baptist Church in St. Louis, attempted to amend a pending resolution on abortion, but was ruled out of order; he then presented a substitute motion that would constitute a hardline stance against abortion, much tougher than pending resolution indicated.

Wilder had organized "Christians for Life" earlier that year to supplement the Robert Holbrook's efforts to promote denominational pro-life activism. He attracted a wide variety of members in this organization because it was broadly designated as "Christian," not "Southern Baptist." One news source claimed that Wilder raised nine thousand dollars for his cause "by soliciting \$1 a month from contributors."²² Even though Wilder's amendment and substitute motion lost, and the original resolution was adopted by the messengers, his advocacy through Christians for Life added to pressure on

²¹ Robert O'Brien, "Men Must Open Themselves to Have Impact, Mathis Says," Baptist Press news release, April 10, 1978, available online at sbhla.org.

²² Laurie Johnston, "Abortion Foes Gain Support as they Intensify Campaign," *New York Times*, October 23, 1977.

the denomination to question its stance on abortion. By the end of the 1970s, the rank and file offered less and less opposition to Wilder's demands.²³

Building on Wilder's critique of denominational agencies, conservatives found an opening to rally the rank and file to their cause, though they told Wilder that they would not be able to help fight his battle against abortion in the denomination; they feared the group would be "destroyed" if "diverted to side issues". Indeed, some conservatives had been planning their move for several years. Bill Powell, author of *Southern Baptist Journal*, published articles on the liberal activities of seminary professors and liberal congregations around the nation, explaining to readers how their activities were contrary to traditional Baptist beliefs. Powell astutely recognized that moderates in the denomination had retained influence larger than their relative numbers through exercising control in seemingly-peripheral denominational agencies.

Powell contacted Paul Pressler, a Princeton graduate and well-connected district court judge from Houston, Texas suggesting that conservatives could redirect the convention away from the liberal cause through replacing the bureaucratic leadership with conservative Southern Baptists. Though Pressler was inspired by the thoroughness of Powell's "fact-finding" on liberals in the Southern Baptist Convention, he declined an invitation to join BFMF because he was unconvinced that the organization had the means by which to enact widespread denominational change. Pressler designed his own plan—

²³ SBC Annual, 1977; available online at sbhla.org; Theo Sommerkamp, "Baptist Faith And Message," Baptist Press news release, June 15, 1977, Folder 23: Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship – 1977 (B), Folder 2 of 2, Box 3, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

which looked a lot like Powell's—to root out liberalism in the denomination as part of a longer trajectory, utilizing Powell's insight into the significance of the denomination's centralized bureaucracy.

One of the key aims of Pressler's plan was control of seminaries to prevent the furtherance of liberal theology and social concerns. In his memoir of the takeover, he reflected upon the strategy that developed after this meeting:

...we kept losing the war because we did not understand how the system operated.

When a plan of action was developed to use the system and elect conservative trustees, our institutions could be returned to the principles that had made them great. To change the trustees would mean changing the institutions. Conservative trustees would hire a conservative president, who would then hire conservative professors and administrators.²⁴

Control of seminaries meant control of information that trained the next generation of pastors and ministers in the denomination. A conservative seminary, in other words, would produce conservative clergymen who would not threaten a liberal interpretation of Scripture by analyzing intent or questioning context. In order to enact this plan, Pressler needed the endorsement of prominent Southern Baptist leaders who could help win over the votes of large numbers of messengers at the next Annual Meeting. He looked ahead to a long-term strategy for producing conservative leadership, and for the next few years, he started putting his plan into place.

²⁴ Pressler, Paul, *A Hill on Which to Die: One Southern Baptist's Journey* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 77-79.

Pressler and other conservatives continued to build momentum and they designed a plan to elect Anita Bryant in 1978 to the office of First Vice President, a key post whose occupant over the election of seminary trustees and could put conservatives in power. Anita Bryant held considerable appeal in the denomination after her stand against homosexuality in Dade County, Florida, but she was hesitant to run, indicating that she was only willing to accept a nominal position in the denomination, not one that required extensive responsibilities. Conservatives thought that her celebrity status might make her a winnable candidate for office, and if successful, her election would be their first victory in their quest for conservative executive leadership. Bailey Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist of Del City, Oklahoma, and president of the Pastor's Conference that year, ardently supported her candidacy, arguing: "I think this is the time to get behind this courageous Christian who is bucking the tide of immorality."²⁵

With protestors from the Atlanta Gay Rights Alliance gathered outside World Congress Center, Anita Bryant appeared, with police protection, at the Pastor's Conference in 1978. Encouraging these pastors in attendance to get behind her efforts to oppose liberalization of anti-sodomy laws, abortion laws, and ratification of the ERA, Bryant emphasized, "I don't care who you are, if you don't stand opposed to immoral issues, then you will suffer." She expressed gratitude for "the strong support by Southern

²⁵ David E. Anderson, "Some Baptists Afraid Anita Bryant May Get Top Southern Post,"

Morning Advocate, June 3, 1978.

Baptists for Anita Bryant,” gushing, “Thank God, there are a few men left in this nation that have the backbone to tell it like it is.”²⁶

Bryant’s campaign was opposed by Southern Baptists who disagreed with her politics and by those who felt she had little experience or interest in denominational affairs. Rev. Harold Graham of Cobb County, Georgia, correctly suspected her campaign was being pursued by the denomination’s far right wing solely “for the sake of a big plug.”²⁷ Moderate leader, and SBC President that year, Jimmy Allen, indicated that he opposed her nomination because “she has been identified with only one issue in the public mind and Southern Baptists are involved in far more issues.”²⁸ Jack Harwell, editor of Georgia’s *Christian Index*, was concerned that, if she was elected, Bryant would be “one heart-beat away from the presidency.” Finding himself in the odd position of defending a woman’s right to leadership, Pressler tried to paint the opposition as sexist.²⁹

With the 1978 Annual Meeting approaching, Bryant’s fans were not the only observers looking to inspire conservative change. The Georgia STOP ERA chapter issued a news release on September 21, 1978, entitled “How Nine Convinced 22,680 – or – God Uses Small and Broken Things.” This document, presumably authored by Kathryn

²⁶ United Press International “Anita Hits Ministers for Silence,” *Marietta Daily Journal* , June 12, 1978.

²⁷ Susan Miles, “Cobb Pastors Like Anita, But Not as SBC Officer,” *Marietta Daily Journal* (GA), June 12, 1978.

²⁸ Associated Press, “Baptist Vote Denies Anita New Platform,” *Times-Picayune* (LA), June 14, 1978.

²⁹ Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die*, 91-92.

Dunaway, state president of the organization, claimed that six of its members infiltrated the Southern Baptist Convention's Annual Meeting three months prior, and, with the assistance of three denominational members, they prompted the Southern Baptist Convention to go on record against the Equal Rights Amendment.

The STOP ERA chapter saw the Annual Meeting's location in Georgia that year as an opportunity to reach thousands of untapped and potentially sympathetic voters and draw them into their political movement.³⁰ To promote this goal, several STOP-ERA members and their children passed out antifeminist literature before morning meetings. Dunaway claimed they would not have succeeded with the "infiltration," were it not for the assistance of Dr. Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, and host of "In Touch," a syndicated religious program.³¹

Georgia's STOP ERA organization called this victory their "own David and Goliath feat" – it was David, up against Goliath, or the Southern Baptist Convention,

³⁰ For related information on Dunaway's role in opposing the ERA in Georgia, see Robin Marie Morris, "Building the New Right: Georgia Women, Grassroots Organizing, and Party Realignment 1950-1980," (PhD Diss, Yale University, 2011).

³¹ Because the Annual Meeting was held in Atlanta that year, Stanley held considerable local clout and would have had the visible support of his sizeable congregation, in addition to those of other local churches, able to attend this particular meeting because of the convenience of its location. Stanley's involvement was mentioned in *Southern Baptist Journal's* update on the ERA, and he was listed as the resolution's sponsor in the 1978 Annual. See "ERA Scoreboard," *Southern Baptist Journal*, July 1978, 10, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

which had avoided taking a direct stand against the Equal Rights Amendment. Dunaway claimed that they succeeded despite an “unfriendly presiding officer,” presumably a moderate, and the efforts of the resolutions committee (including Texas CLC leader, James Dunn), who tried to turn Dr. Stanley’s original anti-ERA resolution into a “‘say-nothing’ resolution” by diluting his tough stance into a less confrontational and more palatable statement. Through Stanley’s parliamentary efforts on the floor, the passed resolution reflected his original intent. ERA opponents clearly regarded the Baptist establishment as opponents to their cause and, in portraying themselves as David in the Bible story, they represented themselves as underdogs in the denomination’s ERA debate.³²

Ultimately, STOP ERA’s stunt worked, and the Southern Baptist Convention approved its strongest antifeminist resolution that had been proposed at that meeting. The final statement, “On Preserving the United States Constitution and the Amendment

³² “How Nine Convinced 22,680 – or – God Uses Small and Broken Things,” September 21, 1978; Kathryn Dunaway Papers, Box 3, Emory University, MARBL. Unfortunately, the document only mentions one STOP ERA member, Sue Stumm, who assisted Charles Stanley at the meeting, though it claims that nine people helped facilitate passage of the resolution. Stanley retained at least amicable relations with the Georgia STOP ERA. When it held a special statewide meeting in December 1978 to host Phyllis Schlafly and discuss further strategy for blocking the ERA in the state, Stanley graciously allowed them to gather at his home church, First Baptist Church of Atlanta. See Memorandum, “On to Victory!,” n.d., Kathryn Fink Dunaway Papers, Box 12, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Process,” not only expressed denominational opposition to the extension legislation as a “misuse of the democratic process,” but it also rebuked any governmental effort to “pressure” unratified states or to deny states the right to rescind their ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.³³ Stanley’s resolution directed power away from the moderate establishment and into the hands of conservatives on a very symbolic issue. Though this anti-ERA resolution was an important win for conservatives in 1978, their success was limited because Anita Bryant lost in her bid for the office of First Vice-President. Her celebrity status and bold political activism, however, was not ignored at the meeting. Messengers passed a resolution entitled “On Commendation of Anita Bryant” to underscore their continued support of “her firm stand” against gay rights.³⁴

The same weekend that the Georgia STOP ERA publicized its Baptist victory, some Southern Baptists hosted a conference in Nashville which celebrated feminist gains in the denomination, proving that STOP ERA had achieved only limited success. This event, called “Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations,” provided denominational agencies with the opportunity to investigate the status of female employment in the denomination and to hear from female employees about their experiences as women in a conservative, male-dominated workforce. Through a series of presentations and discussion groups, the consultation provided space for participants to

³³ “Resolution on Preserving the United States Constitution and the Amending Process,” June 1978, available online at sbc.net.

³⁴ “Resolution on Commendation of Anita Bryant,” June 1978, available online at sbc.net.

discuss the meaning of gender in the Southern Baptist Convention in the wake of the modern women's movement and the denomination's recent stances on feminist issues.

The consultation was technically open to the public, but it had limited registration, and the nearly three hundred conference attendees were grouped by their status as agency representatives or as members of the general public. The sponsoring Southern Baptist agencies were the Home Mission Board, Sunday School Board, Woman's Missionary Union, Brotherhood Commission, Foreign Mission Board, Christian Life Commission, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Historical Commission, Radio and Television Commission, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.³⁵ The consultation was a counterpart to a National Baptist Conference of Men, held earlier that year under the leadership of Glendon McCullough, a close friend of President Jimmy Carter and head of the Brotherhood Commission. Carter was the featured speaker at the men's event, and he encouraged men to reject speaking out on human rights "with a voice...that's too timid."³⁶ Members of the Woman's

³⁵ "For Executives of Sponsoring Agencies, Background Information and Status Report/Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations," May 31, 1978, Folder 2: Background Information, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Remarks to Members of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission," June 16, 1978, transcript, available online through The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara; <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3096>. The relationship between McCullough and Carter was quite close; in fact, in his wedding to Marjorie Jones, held at the Georgia

Missionary Union did the heavy lifting as the speakers for the women's conference, though some men did speak out boldly for women's rights in the denomination.

In many ways, the conference mimicked the International Women's Year conference held in Houston, Texas the previous year. Not only did organizers target increased participation of minority women in the denomination, but they also utilized a quota system, not unlike Houston's delegate system, to provide equitable representation for campus ministers, church staff members, church members, seminary personnel, and seminary and college students.³⁷ Like the National Women's Conference, the consultation was designed to "develop a body of findings" at the end of the program, though there was no plan to offer policy recommendations to denominational leaders. Some of the key evidence demonstrating discrimination against women in the denomination came from an informal survey of women's employment in the Southern Baptist Convention, but organizers could not publish its findings after charges of bias in the sampling.

The consultation's sessions addressed topics of relevance to women in church employment, including the psychology of female ministry (broadly defined) and the educational experiences of women in Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries. Frank

Governor's Mansion in 1974, Carter served as McCullough's best man. Tragically, McCullough died in an automobile accident on August 23, 1978, less than a month before the women's consultation.

³⁷ At the suggestion of WMU leader Doris Diaz, the Home Mission Board's Department of Language Missions contributed one thousand dollars to facilitate the transportation and registration of minority women.

Stagg, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor, and his wife Evelyn, provided brief lectures on Women in Biblical Perspective at the start of each session in order to draw attention to contributions made by women throughout the Bible. He hoped that attitudes expressed at the conference would, over time, “lead to a recognition that sexual distinctions are as irrelevant as racial distinctions when it comes to salvation or ministry.”

Organizers crafted a panel on “Government Policy and its Impact on Employment of Women” with particular sensitivity because it provided a forum for discussion of the ways in which the women’s movement applied to women in denominational employment. Stan Hastey, an executive of the sponsoring Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, felt strongly that the consultation needed to address topics related to “the larger societal scene” and wanted to bring more attention to government efforts to fight discrimination in employment. Bobbie Sorrill agreed that “we need this presentation,” admitting that education about the government’s efforts to protect women’s rights in the workplace was one of the major intentions of the conference.³⁸

Initially, the consultation’s program committee tapped Margaret “Midge” Costanza, then working in President Jimmy Carter’s Office for Public Liaison, to preside

³⁸ Stan L. Hastey to Bobbie Sorrill, September 27, 1978, Folder 13: Program Committee Correspondence, Bobbie Sorrill, 9/78-11/78., Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Bobbie Sorrill to Stan L. Hastey, March 7, 1978, Folder 12: Program Committee Correspondence, Bobbie Sorrill, 10/77-8/78, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

over this session on government policy. Costanza had made national headlines back in 1977 when Carter appointed her as the first female Assistant to the President. More recently, she had sparked controversy when she invited to the White House a number of female appointees who opposed the President's views on abortion as too conservative. When conference organizers looked to finalize the program in the spring of 1978, Costanza was unable to commit to the future scheduling, and as a result, Sorrell asked Hastey to "uninvite" Costanza. Unbeknownst to conference planners, Costanza was relieved of many of her White House duties just two months after they changed the program; she officially resigned her office just six weeks before the consultation began.³⁹

Organizers struggled to find a speaker to replace Costanza, but they settled upon Ruth Harvey Charity, an expert in employment law, and she voiced strong support for the women's movement before Southern Baptist audience members. Her session provided attendees with an overview of governmental efforts to eliminate sex discrimination in the workplace, and she encouraged women to use their votes and even litigation to promulgate social and economic equality. Admitting that she was probably "stepping on somebody's toes," Charity then strongly urged attendees to support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to ensure legal equality, explaining, "I'm telling it like it is."

She continued:

³⁹ James T. Wooten, "Midge Costanza: Enduring a New Life in a Niche in the White House Cellar," Special to *New York Times*, July 4, 1978; Karen De Witt, "Miss Costanza Resigns as Assistant to Carter, Citing Problems of Style," *New York Times*, August 2, 1978.

The challenge is clear, our responsibility is inescapable. We must turn this system around through our creative efforts which must as in everything else be under the guidance and direction of God. Politics is the system by which our government runs, and burying our heads in the sand won't change it. We must exert the political force necessary to bring about the actual equal employment of women if we do nothing else.⁴⁰

Scheduled responses to Charity's presentation by members of the Sunday School Board and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs reinforced her political themes by exploring the delicate interweaving between employment law and ecclesiology. Though this panel was the only one that focused explicitly on government policies, instead of theological or church-related themes, conference organizers, and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in particular, felt it rounded out their investigation of the "status of women" in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Conference attendees were especially eager to address the topic of women's ordination, one that had not been scheduled since it was such a divisive issue in the denomination. Though the Southern Baptist Convention kept no official or exact numbers, some estimated as many as fifty women ordained to the ministry in Southern Baptist churches; consultation organizers were surprised to see two dozen of these

⁴⁰ Ruth Harvey Charity, "Government Policy and its Impact on Employment of Women," Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations proceedings manual, 20-23, Folder 12: "Manuals and Papers – Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations 1979," Box 19, Porter Routh Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

women in attendance. Even though ordination was “outside the range of this consultation,” one leader claimed the subject “repeatedly came up. People wanted to talk about it.”⁴¹ Indeed, panelists were flooded with questions about ordination and options for Southern Baptist women wanting to follow a sincere calling.⁴² Significantly, Jimmy Allen, denominational president that year, offered strong support of more opportunities for women in ministry, claiming “I think all tasks in the churches ought to be filled by people according to their gifts and callings, not according to their gender. It seems to me that’s the basic question.”⁴³

⁴¹ Catherine Allen, “Background Information—Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations,” Folder 2: Background Info, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; “Help Us Complete the List of Southern Baptist Ordained Women,” *Called and Committed* 1, no. 2 (November 1978): 2, Folder: Called and Committed (SBC), 1978-1979, Box 7, Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South records, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁴² For information about more specific questions about ordination that came up at the consultation, see Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 61-67.

⁴³ Carl Carter, “Serving God Not a Matter of Gender,” *Birmingham News*, September 30, 1978, 21, 24; Bruce Buursma, “The Kitchen or the Pulpit: Baptists Ponder Women in Religion,” *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), October 1, 1978, G9; “Women’s Consultation Focuses on Church-Related Vocations,” *Baptist and Reflector* (TN), October 5, 1978, 1, Folder 5: Clippings, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church

Denominational response to the consultation was telling, and, not surprisingly, split among moderate and conservative lines. Jack Harwell of Georgia's *Christian Index* wrote that the event was "one of the most important SBC functions in a long time." In regard to female employment in the denomination, he stressed that "separation of church and state cannot be used to dodge discrimination laws." Edna Shows, a lay attendee from Atlanta, agreed, and wrote that the conference was "like a light at the end of a long, black tunnel of prejudice, of discrimination against and opposition to women, of misunderstanding of the role of women in the kingdom of God." She hoped it would help usher in "a new day for women" in the denomination.⁴⁴

But other observers questioned whether the conference was a thinly-veiled attempt to promote women's ordination, and even feminism, among the denominational agencies and personnel who were most likely to support it. As he struggled to interpret the meaning of the conference, John Hopkins, of the Kansas and Nebraska's *Baptist Digest*, expressed concern that the consultation's sessions drew more from societal acceptance of wider roles for women than Biblical precepts. Similarly, Presnall Wood of the Texas-based *Baptist Standard* questioned the conference's validity because the

Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives,
Nashville, Tennessee

⁴⁴ Jack U. Harwell, "Study Needed on Baptists and Women," *Christian Index* (GA), November 2, 1978, 2; Edna Shows, letter to the editor, *Christian Index*, November 30, 1978; 12, Folder 5: Clippings, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

attendees, mostly moderates, faced few challenges to their conclusions about women's employment in churches, unlike the less positive response they would have likely seen from a larger, more representative, Southern Baptist audience.⁴⁵

Even more piercing was the criticism of Willel W.G. Reitzer, of Washington, D.C., who attended the conference as a layman specifically with the intent of counterbalancing liberal views on women's role in the church. Baptist Press quoted Reitzer's concerns about the conference: "This consultation is essentially feminist... What disturbs me is that it is supported by the hierarchy and the traditionalist viewpoint is not being represented." With criticism that echoed conservative criticism of International Women's Year, Reitzer emphasized women's subordination to man in all areas of her life and blamed the Woman's Missionary Union for starting "to encroach on the work of the church" through promoting female leadership. He then pointed to J.W. Porter's early fundamentalist interpretation of "woman and her work" which claimed that "any advocate of women's speaking in mixed assemblies" essentially doubted the truth of the Bible. He later clarified his statement to acknowledge that women's prayer groups were "all right" as long as they did not "get involved in decision-making."⁴⁶ He was a firm

⁴⁵ John F. Hopkins, "Real Ministry Issue Obscured at Recent Women's Meeting," *Baptist Digest* (KS), October 9, 1978; Presnall H. Wood, "Women in Church-Related Vocations," *Baptist Standard* (TX), October 11, 1978, 6, Folder 5: Clippings, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴⁶ "Layman Espouses Traditionalist Views," *Florida Baptist Press*, October 5, 1978, 3; Willel W.G. Reitzer, letter to the editor, *Capital Baptist*, November 16, 1978; Willel

believer that the Southern Baptist Convention should not be supportive of the modern women's movement at all, and he looked back to the early fundamentalist movement for proof that his view was correct.⁴⁷

Several state Baptist newspaper editors, including those from Tennessee and South Carolina, called for publication of the consultation's findings to educate Southern Baptists about the status of women in the denomination. Largely, they expressed support for, not opposition to, the conference and its aims. The editor of South Carolina's *Baptist Courier* ultimately called for a statewide study of women's role in the church to further investigate the "controversial ... continuing and accelerating" changes. He hoped that initiative at the state level would provide South Carolina's leaders with "an opportunity to lead...in an area where enlightenment is urgently needed."⁴⁸ Eventually the session

W.G. Reitzer, letter to the editor, *Florida Baptist Witness*, n.d., 2, Folder 5: Clippings, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Reitzer took a political stand against the Supreme Court confirmation of Sandra Day O'Connor in 1981, going so far as to submit his writings to be published in the hearings transcripts; see Reitzer, "The Case Against Women in Certain Occupations," Hearings on the Nomination of Sandra Day O'Connor of Arizona to Serve as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, September 9, 10, and 11, 1981, 97th Congress, 1981, 413-414.

⁴⁸ Alvin C. Shackelford, "Consultation and Women's Ordination," *Baptist Messenger* (OK), October 19, 1978, 16; originally appeared in *Baptist and Reflector* (TN); John E. Roberts, "Study Needed on Women's Role in Church," *Baptist Courier* (SC), October 5,

transcripts were bound and distributed on a limited basis later that year through the Inter-Agency Council.

Consultation organizers left the meeting with feelings of success. Participants expressed delight that such a conference had taken place in the confines of the Southern Baptist Convention at all. One panelist exclaimed: “Its symbolic worth is fantastic. To me the most outstanding thing about it is that it WAS.” They hoped that the conference would open and affirm attendees’ attitudes about women’s worth and their role in the church. Harry Hollis of the Christian Life Commission commended leaders for executing the consultation “with integrity” and “with responsibility.” Stan Hasteley hoped that it would be “but a prelude to a growing denominational awareness of the problems women experience within our fellowship.”⁴⁹ Voicing no desire to slow the pace of gender equality in the denomination, Hasteley’s statement, and those of moderate Southern Baptists more generally, indicated strong support of efforts to fight discrimination against women. Organizers and participants knew that the conference’s scope, though limited in attendance and program, would spark controversy in the denomination. One participant

1978, 3; Folder 5: Clippings, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴⁹ Gladys S. Lewis to Bobbie Sorrill, October 4, 1978; Harry N. Hollis, Jr. to Bobbie Sorrill, October 11, 1978; Stan L. Hasteley to Bobbie Sorrill, September 27, 1978, Folder 13: Program Committee Correspondence, Bobbie Sorrill, 9/78-11/78, Box 1, Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

stressed that “women will not get affirmation unless they spread the things heard at the meeting.”⁵⁰ Indeed, attendees left eager to draw more attention to women’s status in the denomination and provide proactive efforts to see female employees brought into political equality.

The implications were much broader and addressed support for the women’s movement at large, however. In David Stricklin’s study of Southern Baptist moderates, he correctly observed that the drive for women’s ordination contributed, in part, to the dramatic ascendancy of fundamentalists, whose advocates he described as “the least hospitable of Southern Baptists toward the aspirations of the women,” to denominational prominence. He asserted, “Women...became the most vilified, and their efforts actually contributed to the downfall of the 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.”⁵¹

Supporters of women in ministry did take action following the consultation, starting a publication entitled “Called and Committed,” which provided a support network, testimonies, and useful resources for women “in ALL forms of ministry—traditional and nontraditional, employed and volunteer.” Under the editorial leadership of Helen Lee Turner, an ordained minister, the publication provided encouragement for

⁵⁰ “Conclusions,” Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations proceedings manual, 1979, Folder 12: “Manuals and Reports— Consultation on Women in Church Related Vocations 1979,” Box 19, Porter Routh Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁵¹ Stricklin, *Genealogy of Dissent*, 140-141.

women following a spiritual call. Recalling the recent consultation and the energy it provided supporters, Johnni Johnson reported: “Change is happening, the conferees agreed, and with it must come new definitions, new statements of theological presuppositions, new understandings of roles, opportunities, challenges and responsibilities.” These women had no intention of returning to subjugation in the church. Through emphasizing links between negative feminist stereotypes and adversity for women in church employment, then, editors of *Called and Committed* linked their mission with basic feminist ideas of gender equality and helped cultivate a supportive community for women in ministry.⁵²

At the 1979 Annual Meeting in Houston, Texas, conservatives rallied to elect a like-minded pastor to serve as denominational president; if successful, their efforts would send a powerful message to moderates that the bureaucratic establishment was no longer under their control. Though conservative groups had been slowly mobilizing over the course of the 1970s, the plan for this particular election was birthed in 1978 at the home of W.A. Criswell in Dallas, where Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson, along with conservative pastor, Jerry Vines, asked Criswell for guidance.⁵³ Following Criswell’s advice, the trio corresponded with conservative pastors in their network to make plans to attend the meeting, as well as the Pastor’s Conference, which preceded the Annual Meeting and had a reputation for slating a clear frontrunner in the election for

⁵² *Called and Committed* 1, no. 2 (November 1978): 1, Folder: Called and Committed (SBC), 1978-1979, Box 7, Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South records, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁵³ Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die*, 94-95.

denominational president. At this 1979 meeting, conservative pastors were inspired by a sermon from James Robison, nationally-renowned evangelist who was becoming deeply invested in the politics of the emerging Religious Right and wanted Southern Baptists to become more politically active in the Republican Party. Over the next few years, Robison would keep close connections with conservative pastors to facilitate grassroots mobilization of Southern Baptists.

Also featured at the Pastor's Conference was Adrian Rogers, the candidate whom Patterson, Pressler, and Vines wanted as president. Using similar conservative themes to those of Robison, but adding more explicit opposition to the modern women's movement, Rogers's address recalled themes from another sermon in his queue, "Satan's Fib about Women's Lib." He expressed clear opposition to the modern women's movement and its tendency to disrespect biblical inerrancy, lamenting, "Did you know there are ladies today who think that Paul is a male chauvinist pig?" But he did not stop with his criticism of feminists' biblical interpretation, and in doing so, he revealed the political nature of his "theological" complaint. In a thinly-veiled reference to the Equal Rights Amendment, Rogers declared:

I see these women demonstrating for what they call equal rights. They don't understand that they already have equal rights in the Lord Jesus Christ. But when some of them get what they want, they will not want what they get. You mark it down. When they get what they want they will not want what they get. A woman is suited for having babies and not for fighting wars. A woman is suited for certain things and not for other things. Oh, I know there are some women who may temporarily prosper and make other women envious as they go out in the

world of business and they're having their say, and so forth. But I want you to know there are some people who prosper when we have a war, but war is not necessarily good. And some women may prosper in this thing, but there will be, you mark it down, when ladies get this thing that they are crusading for, which includes not only equal pay, but daycare centers, legalized and free abortion, and all of the other things that go with this mess, when they get it, and when they continue more and more to go out in the work-a-day world, there will be as we are already seeing, that corresponding lack of respect that God has wanted gentlemen to give to ladies.⁵⁴

Rogers, the favored candidate of Criswell, Pressler, Patterson, and Vines, demonstrated clear antifeminist politics and a willingness to utilize biblical inerrancy as justification for conservative activism. Unsurprisingly, Adrian Rogers received the most votes for the presidential nomination among the conservative pastors in attendance.⁵⁵

At the Annual Meeting, held several weeks later in Houston, Pressler's hometown and Patterson's and Criswell's home state, conservatives were ready to take their slated presidential candidate to victory. Pressler used his local connections to arrange meeting

⁵⁴ For Rogers's Pastor's Conference sermon, see "The Great Deceiver," June 10, 1979, in Walter Shurden and Randy Shepley, eds., *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 14-23. Adrian Rogers also iterated this same theme in "Satan's Fib about Women's Lib," sermon, undated, audio available online at Discipleship Library, <http://turret2.discipleshiplibrary.com/6897A.mp3>.

⁵⁵ Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die*, 100-101.

space for conservatives in the Summit's skyboxes, most of which were owned by business executives of local corporations, to discuss proposed resolutions and closely monitor the election process. Ultimately, Rogers won the election by 51.36% (6,129 votes), beating out moderate candidate Robert Naylor, who received only 23.39% (2,791 votes). The remaining votes were spread between other moderate candidates on the ballot.⁵⁶ In the aftermath of the election, some people—those who had been watching currents in Southern Baptist trends, and those who knew enough about the denominational bureaucracy to understand what a convention president could do with his power—understood the significance of this momentous vote. The vast majority of Southern Baptists, however, did not understand what this victory represented. Nevertheless, Rogers's election represented a conservative turn in the denomination's leadership, and it decisively changed the denomination's political momentum.

The conservative forces that propelled Rogers to victory at the 1979 Annual Meeting had big plans – they wanted to fulfill the goals of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship through facilitating conservative “renewal” in agencies, seminaries, and in the denominational press in order to counteract liberalism in these parts of the denomination. After Rogers assumed the presidency, Southern Baptist conservatives had newfound

⁵⁶ Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die*, 98-104. After Rogers's victory, moderates accused Pressler of unfairly using the skyboxes to promote “factional” activities. In their accounts of the 1979 denominational election, some moderates indicated their belief that Pressler spearheaded a conspiracy to “bus in” conservatives to vote for Rogers, and they saw the skyboxes as evidence that he was using “political tactics” to influence a denominational decision. Pressler denied these charges.

access to the power they needed to expedite some of these major changes. Moderates, suddenly aware of the challenge to their establishment, scrambled to counteract the conservatives' momentum. Gender became a key indicator of conservative or moderate identification, and as conservatives consolidated their power in the 1980s, they worked to roll back major changes implemented by moderates in the 1970s.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SPIRITUAL IS POLITICAL: CONSERVATIVE PROMINENCE AND PARTISAN ENTRENCHMENT IN THE EARLY 1980S

At the end of the 1970s, the New Right, which had slowly gained political currency over the course of the decade, converged with a developing Pro-Family movement to attract Christian evangelicals concerned with a number of conservative issues. Though the activists representing anti-abortion, anti-ERA, and anti-gay rights campaigns did not necessarily express universal agreement, they all strongly criticized President Jimmy Carter for his reluctance to endorse their campaign to protect traditional values from the politics of feminists and other liberals. Many conservative and fundamentalist Southern Baptists shared the Pro-Family movement's disappointment in his refusal to take a hardline stance against homosexuality, especially given the White House's preparations to host a national conference on families at the start of the new decade.

In the months leading up to the presidential election of 1980, the Pro-Family movement became increasingly connected to new religio-political organizations which targeted evangelical Christians for involvement in the political Right. Several prominent fundamentalist Southern Baptist pastors, including Adrian Rogers, not only participated in these organizations, including Religious Roundtable and Moral Majority, but served on

their advisory boards. These Southern Baptists adeptly utilized their connections to help align the denomination with burgeoning “Religious Right,” or “New Christian Right.” Coupled with widespread dissatisfaction with Carter’s presidency, these denominational changes profoundly affected Southern Baptist politics; though Southern Baptists’ votes in the 1976 presidential election were relatively split between candidates, twice as many Southern Baptists ultimately voted for Ronald Reagan over Jimmy Carter in 1980.

The year 1980 was also significant for fundamentalists in the Southern Baptist Convention, who rallied behind conservative president Adrian Rogers and looked forward to the changes that resulted from his strategic efforts to put conservatives on the Resolutions Committee and the Calendar Committee. When Bailey Smith, another staunch conservative, was elected president at the 1980 Annual Meeting, conservatives secured the denomination’s right turn by passing hardline resolutions on gender issues. The conservatives’ momentum began to outpace that of the moderates, who formally mobilized in late 1980 to take back denominational control, believing they could easily do so if they simply organized their efforts.

From 1980 to 1984, the Southern Baptist Convention experienced painful ruptures between moderates and conservatives concerning denominational control and gender politics, which increasingly resembled existing partisan divides. Walter Shurden, a leader in the moderate movement, characterized 1979-1983 as the “first five rounds” of “Baptist battles”— years in which moderates thought they could expose fundamentalist politicking to the Baptist mainstream and restore their control. But during these years, moderates realized that they were fighting a strong contingent with deep political roots. In hindsight, Paige Patterson remembered that moderates “wrote ’79 off as being “Adrian

[Rogers] could be elected any time he wanted to,” because of his widespread popularity, and they regarded the next two years’ elections as “flukes.” By 1982, Patterson explained, sardonically, “by then they were taking us seriously.”¹

Indeed, by 1982, moderates were no longer predominant in denominational affairs. Aided by strategic ties to new religio-political organizations, fundamentalists reinforced the denomination’s conservative transformation in the early 1980s and began to disassemble moderates’ work on gender from the previous decade.² Once they facilitated hardline denominational stances on homosexuality, the ERA, and abortion, fundamentalist leaders returned their attention to women’s ordination and worked to rid the denomination of its last overture to the women’s movement. By 1984, they suppressed that last obstacle by successfully supporting a resolution that expressed strong opposition to women’s ordination, which had been the purview of individual churches in the past, and, instead, it affirmed women’s traditional roles in the home and the church.

Religious Right organizer Ed McAteer was thrilled by the denomination’s right turn, especially its election of Adrian Rogers in 1979; he saw potential for its large-scale mobilization into the politics of the Right. A former Colgate-Palmolive salesman, who became involved in the New Right after working with Christian Freedom Foundation and

¹ Paige Patterson, interview by Barry Hankins, May 20, 1997, in Wake Forest, North Carolina, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/3379>.

² William Martin, historian of the political Right, summarized: “In short, the first four presidents of the SBC’s new fundamentalist era were all closely aligned with the Religious Right. It showed.” Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 234.

Conservative Caucus, McAteer developed close relationships with Howard Phillips, Richard Viguerie, and Paul Weyrich in the mid-1970s. But McAteer was particularly concerned that Christian views were not represented in the government. McAteer formed Religious Roundtable in 1979, which functioned, in his words, as “a coalition of business, political, military and religious leaders whose focus is public policy concerning moral issues.”³ The issues that interested him most were abortion, busing, and voluntary school prayer; once these problems were addressed, McAteer stated, other problems plaguing the nation would “adjust themselves.”⁴

A member of Bellevue Baptist Church, McAteer sought the support of his pastor, Adrian Rogers, and that of other prominent conservative Southern Baptist leaders to help lead his organization. Rogers was present at the first Roundtable meeting, as were Atlanta pastor Charles Stanley, televangelist James Robison, and Southern Baptist conservative resurgence leader, Paige Patterson. McAteer explained that he “went after Paige right

³ Edward Eugene McAteer, interview by David Stricklin and Larry Braidfoot, October 28, 1988, in Memphis, Tennessee, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/5090>.

⁴ John D. Lofton, Jr., “Roundtable’s President Ed McAteer is Music Man of Religious Right,” *Conservative Digest* 7, no. 1 (January 1981): 7, Folder 1: Evangelical Political Involvement, 1983, Box 158, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

away knowing his mind-set,” but found Adrian “a little harder to get nailed down.”⁵

James Robison was, however, ready to get involved in Religious Right politics and utilized his platform as televangelist to mobilize voters at the grassroots.

Though McAteer skillfully brought in Southern Baptists to the leadership of Religious Roundtable to a degree unrealized by leaders of the New Right in the 1970s, he wanted the organization to have a broader base of religious supporters. He regarded his ability to weave together differing religious communities as his “real expertise, from a marketing standpoint,” and the Roundtable effectively involved Catholics, Jews, and Protestants.⁶ McAteer’s Religious Roundtable was not the only religio-political organization that vied for Southern Baptist leadership; one other particularly influential group was Moral Majority, led by Jerry Falwell, pastor of an independent Baptist church in Lynchburg, Virginia. Falwell met Adrian Rogers in Miami during Anita Bryant’s campaign against anti-discrimination legislation. He also developed connections with Tim LaHaye, an independent Baptist pastor from California, who conducted a similar anti-gay rights political campaign in the late 1970s. Because he already commanded a sizeable following from his television program, “Old Time Gospel Hour,” leaders of the New Right approached Falwell about forming a political coalition to promote Christian values. Moral Majority, which began in 1979, attracted mostly Baptists and Pentecostals,

⁵ Edward Eugene McAteer, interview by David Stricklin and Larry Braidfoot, October 28, 1988, in Memphis, Tennessee, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/5090>.

⁶ Lofton, “Roundtable’s President,” 3.

and Charles Stanley, pastor of First Baptist Church of Atlanta, served on the advisory board.⁷

Falwell was already opposed to the ERA and homosexuality, but Viguerie and Weyrich, both Catholics, along with McAteer and Howard Phillips, convinced him that pro-life politics was crucial to cementation of any religious alliance. Falwell was influenced heavily by theologian Francis Schaeffer, founder of L'Abri Christian Retreat Center in Switzerland and author of *How Should We Then Live?* Schaeffer's writings emphasized the danger of "secular humanism" as a threat to – and even conspiracy against—the values of evangelical Christianity.⁸ Schaeffer reached out to Falwell when he was forming Moral Majority and encouraged him to embrace ecumenical politics.⁹ Schaeffer's anti-abortion book and film production, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, inspired Falwell to confirm a pro-life emphasis in his political program. Though Moral Majority had a similar membership base as Religious Roundtable – though Roundtable was more geared toward pastors than the rank-and-file—some Southern

⁷ For more information about the founding of Moral Majority and Falwell's introduction to national politics, see Michael Sean Winters, *God's Right Hand: How Jerry Falwell Made God a Republican and Baptized the American Right* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012); Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁸ For more information about Schaeffer's significant role in the formation of the Religious Right, see Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

⁹ Williams, *God's Own Party*, 173-174.

Baptists, while sympathetic to Falwell's politics, were hesitant to join Falwell's organization into politics. These individuals, who were suspect of non-affiliated Baptists, were more likely to support McAteer's "home grown" organization, which had more than one Southern Baptist on its board.

Though Religious Roundtable and Moral Majority were highly critical of the Carter White House, some Southern Baptist leaders still defended the Southern Baptist president at the end of the 1970s. Jimmy Allen, denominational president from 1977-1978 and executive director of the Radio and Television Commission, awarded President Carter the Christian Service award in February 1980. After finding out about this denominational award, however, one critic wrote to complain:

As a loyal Southern Baptist, I am ashamed of you and any members of the Radio and Television Commission...Do you reward his drinking parties, profanity, broken promises, his appointment of anti-God people on his White House Family Conference...I consider him morally bankrupt. It is totally false when half-believers within the denomination say that Bible-believers are dividing Southern Baptists. It is people like you who are dividing us deeply.¹⁰

Pierce not only decried Carter's personal moral choices, but he gave the impression that, like many Southern Baptists, he thought Carter would exercise a teetotaler evangelical lifestyle and one-sided Christian politics in the White House. Importantly, Pierce connected his political frustrations to the denominational tensions regarding biblical

¹⁰ Herbert M. Pierce to Jimmy Allen, February 21, 1980, Folder 3: BFMF—1980 (A), Box 4, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

inerrancy. Because Allen supported Carter and was a theological moderate, he was only a “half-believer,” and Pierce rejected the idea that the conservatives, or “Bible-believers,” were to blame for divisions in the Southern Baptist Convention. His attitude was typical of those Southern Baptists for whom, Oran P. Smith found, “it became simultaneously acceptable to be frustrated with Jimmy Carter, the Democratic Party, and the moderate leadership of the SBC.”¹¹

Tensions between moderates and conservatives rose in the summer of 1980 during the denomination’s Annual Meeting and as the White House Conference on Families brought family politics to the fore. Pressler and Patterson’s plan to take the denomination for conservatism continued in 1980, and it became clear that it was, indeed, a fundamentalist movement, despite some conservatives’ protests to the contrary. Conservatives successfully elected Bailey Smith, evangelist and pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Oklahoma, to the denominational presidency, representing their second executive victory. Tellingly, Smith wrote a letter to Paul Pressler thanking him for “the investment [he] made in my life.” Telling Pressler about press releases that called him an “inerrant constructionist” and “fundamentalist,” Smith said, “Well, guess what—I am guilty.” In this private correspondence, he owned up to this appellation, and furthermore, he affirmed Pressler’s continued efforts to take the denomination where “God wants it to be”—in other words, out of the hands of moderates.¹²

¹¹ Smith, *With God on Our Side*, 96.

¹² Bailey Smith to Paul Pressler, July 8, 1980, Folder 47: “P—Correspondence, 1980-1981,” Box 1, Bailey Smith Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Generally, Southern Baptist presidents are re-elected without

The 1980 Annual Meeting offered conservatives more than a like-minded executive. They also made strides toward institutionalizing fundamentalist views in the long term. The resolution, “On Doctrinal Integrity,” provided a precedent for conservatives to start eliminating personnel in seminaries and agencies who did not believe in biblical infallibility “without any mixture of error.” The resolution indicated that academic freedom should be limited to adherence to the boundaries of Baptist beliefs in denominational institutions.¹³ This position offered a clear dividing line between moderate and conservative beliefs on the purpose of seminaries. Enactment of this resolution provided fundamentalists an opportunity to achieve a longtime goal: reclaiming seminaries under conservative control.

Messengers to the 1980 meeting debated divisive issues and effectively furthered the denomination’s right turn by passing resolutions that reflected and legitimized conservative social and political stances. Ed McAteer attended the meeting to promote Religious Roundtable and its political agenda. He intended to present a resolution encouraging Southern Baptists to become more politically active, but moderates ruled him out of order because he had not been elected a messenger by his church. Despite McAteer’s setback, messengers to the 1980 Annual Meeting passed notably stronger stances against abortion, the ERA, and homosexuality. The “Resolution on

challenge, but Rogers elected not to serve a second term. Smith was a self-proclaimed fundamentalist, but some conservative Southern Baptists avoided the label for its historical application to “disloyal” Southern Baptists who broke from the Convention or for its modern political association with the activities of Islamic extremists in Iran.

¹³ “Resolution on Doctrinal Integrity,” 1980, available online at sbc.net.

Homosexuality” provided, essentially, a call to political action. Though Anita Bryant had fallen from denominational favor after she filed for divorce in 1980 and withdrew from anti-gay politics, her cause was still of utmost concern to Southern Baptists.¹⁴

Citing “a concerted effort by ‘Gay Activists’” to pass legislation affording civil rights to homosexuals “under the deceptive guise of human rights,” the passed resolution indicated that Southern Baptists should become active at the community level to reflect God’s condemnation of the practice of homosexuality. Most troubling to messengers was the message that civil rights based on sexuality would ultimately afford “public approval to the homosexual lifestyle, making it equally acceptable to the biblical heterosexual family life style.”¹⁵ Though Southern Baptists had expressed opposition to homosexuality in the past, this statement interpreted gay rights as militant and a widespread conspiracy.

Messengers to the 1980 Annual Meeting also passed the denomination’s first truly pro-life resolution which indicated opposition to abortion under any circumstance except saving the life of the pregnant woman. Southern Baptists “had generally supported a woman’s freedom of conscience in making a decision on abortion since 1971,” and supported *Roe v Wade* as protection for the separation of church and state. When they

¹⁴ For elaboration on Bryant’s divorce and corporate problems with Anita Bryant Ministries and Protect America’s Children, see “Barry Bearak, “‘Situation’ Explodes around Anita Bryant,” *Seattle Times*, June 20, 1980. One messenger proposed a resolution expressing concern for Bryant, but the resolutions committee deemed it “inappropriate.” 1980 Annual, available online at sbhla.org.

¹⁵ “Resolution on Homosexuality,” 1980, available online at sbc.net.

reversed this longstanding position, *Boston Globe* reported “a major earthquake within the nation’s largest Protestant denomination.”¹⁶ Larry Lewis, pastor of Tower Grove Baptist Church in Missouri, home of Christians for Life, took a place at the forefront of antiabortion activism in the denomination in the early 1980s. Playing on denominational prejudice against liberal Protestant groups during debate on abortion, Lewis, who had been appointed to the Resolutions Committee by Adrian Rogers, stood before the convention and displayed an article, entitled “Religious Leaders Speak Out for the Right to Choose Abortion.” He emphatically demonstrated to messengers that the Southern Baptist Convention was listed among pro-choice groups, noting dramatically, “...and here we are, right by the Unitarians and the Universalists.”¹⁷ Despite lengthy debate over the resolution, and proposed amendments to temper its hardline stance, Lewis’s stunt worked.

¹⁶ James L. Franklin, “Baptists and Abortions,” *Boston Globe*, July 7, 1980.

¹⁷ J.Kirk Shrewsbury, annotated clippings, n.d.; Lewis challenged Frank Susman, who prepared the full-page advertisement, for the name of the individual who gave consent to place the Southern Baptist Convention on this list, and asked particularly if Foy Valentine was responsible. After threatening legal action if he did not reveal his source, Susman gave the name “Reuben South.” See attached article, James E. Adams, “Baptist Pastor Denounced Abortion Advertisement,” (Missouri) *Post-Dispatch*, August 12, 1977, Folder 8: “Pro-Abortion Baptists, 1985-1990,” Box 8, Southern Baptists for Life Records, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

The resulting resolution stated that messengers to the 1980 meeting:

...reaffirm the view of the Scriptures of the sanctity and dignity of all human life born and unborn and be it further resolved that opposition be expressed toward all policies that allow 'abortion on demand' and be it further resolved that we abhor the use of tax money, our public tax-supported medical facilities for selfish non-therapeutic abortion; and be it finally resolved that we favor appropriate legislation and/or a Constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion except to save the life of the mother.¹⁸

The final indicator of conservative resurgence at the 1980 annual meeting was approval of a resolution strongly denouncing the ERA, though debate over the resolution reflected the depth of division at the center of the denomination's tension. Messengers passed an anti-ERA resolution several years earlier, which denounced the three-year extension and feminist boycotts to punish unratified states, but continued arguments about women's equality were still of concern to conservatives. Messenger Lynne Gurney of Colorado proposed a moderately-worded resolution "On Women," which encouraged denominational sensitivity "to the contemporary pressures facing women," "fairness for women in compensation, advancement, and opportunities for improvement," and acknowledgment of women's contributions in "the home, in the church, and in the work-a-day world."¹⁹

¹⁸ "Resolution on Abortion," 1980, available online at sbc.net. See also *SBC Annual*, 1980, available online at sbhla.org.

¹⁹ Dan Martin, "Wrapup: SBC Takes Sharp Right Turn in St. Louis," *Baptist Press*, June 12, 1980, available online at sbhla.org.

During the meeting, Paul Pressler's wife overheard moderates discussing the proposed resolution, and she told him about their plan to put the denomination "on record as endorsing the Equal Rights Amendment" if the resolution passed as drafted. Pressler immediately took the matter to the Resolutions Committee, which had been handpicked by Adrian Rogers, and would likely oppose the moderates' intent. According to Baptist Press, the chairman of the Resolutions Committee added orally an amendment to the end of the resolution, which stated that "this Convention, reaffirming the biblical role which stresses the equal worth but not always the sameness of function, does not endorse the Equal Rights Amendment." Though one messenger tried to remove the amendment from the resolution, it passed with the added provision. Demonstrating the newfound power of the denominational Right, Baptist Press reported that the "conservative-led resolutions committee transformed what had appeared to be a pro-women's rights statement into an explicit denunciation of a major goal of the woman's movement, ratification of the ERA."²⁰

Though the 1980 anti-ERA resolution reflected conservative opposition to the amendment, there was still a great deal of debate at the grassroots, especially during its last two years for ratification. In South Carolina, an unratified state, the *Baptist Courier* published ten letters to the editor about the ERA from August to October, with nearly one in every weekly issue. The back and forth arguments were heated; supporters attempted

²⁰ "Resolution on Women, 1980, available online at sbc.net; Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die: One Southern Baptist's Journey* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 116-117; Dan Martin, "Wrapup: SBC Takes Sharp Right Turn in St. Louis," *Baptist Press*, June 12, 1980, available online at sbhla.org.

to maintain the rhetoric of their original arguments about the benefits of the ERA, but opponents responded with arguments about biblical inerrancy, fear of gay rights, and general disdain for feminists and other supporters of the amendment.²¹

Some moderate Southern Baptists even wrote Bailey Smith to voice discontent about the anti-ERA resolution, though they were met with little success. Linda E. Connell of New Mexico wrote Bailey Smith, expressing that “the recent actions taken against the Equal Rights Amendment by the Southern Baptist Convention left me rather stunned – then I got indignant.” Smith replied that “one cannot be for the ERA and for women at the same time” because women should be revered or “elevated.” Furthermore, he emphasized that the ERA was really more about “homosexual rights” than women’s rights, and encouraged her to “read carefully the enclosed booklet” because she would “be shocked” by the truths it contained. Two months prior to Connell’s letter, Bailey Smith’s secretary, acting on behalf of the SBC President, wrote the Texas Eagle Forum and requested five hundred copies of its booklet, “Christian Be Watchful,” for Smith’s

²¹ See *Baptist Courier* (SC) letters to the editor from Mary R. Richardson (August 7, 1980), Wynness Thomas (August 21, 1980), Louise R. Jenkins (Aug 28, 1980), Ralph Seeley (August 28, 1980), Harry E. Mims (September 25, 1980), Mrs. James T. Compton (October 2, 1980), Vivian B. Rice (October 16, 1980), Mrs. T.H. Grubbs (October 23, 1980), Lari McDonald (October 30, 1980), anonymous pastor’s wife (October 30, 1980); South Carolina Baptist Convention Historical Room, Columbia, South Carolina.

office. Connell responded to Smith's gesture with the retort, "I read your pamphlet. I hope my tithe wasn't used to print it."²²

As the scheduled White House Conference on Families (WHCF) approached in the summer of 1980, many Southern Baptists harbored skepticism about the Carter White House and its willingness to engage with conservative ideas about traditional family structure and life. During the planning stages, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution about the conference that echoed the White House's support for an investigation of families, but, among other trepidations, it expressed concern that the primary focus would be on "strengths of the family rather than so-called alternatives to the family."²³ By 1980, many Southern Baptists were displeased with Carter's support of

²² Linda E. Connell to Bailey Smith, July 29, 1980; Bailey Smith to Linda E. Connell, August 11, 1980; Linda E. Connell to Bailey Smith, August 13, 1980, Folder 18: Equal Rights Amendment, 1980, Box 1, Bailey Smith Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Marjorie Malone to Texas Eagle Forum, June 30, 1980, Folder 50: Purchases, "Christian Be Watchful," 1980, Box 1, Bailey Smith Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Neil Young's 2009 dissertation also mentions this exchange with Texas Eagle Forum. He posits that it was "likely distributed to bureaucrats throughout the Convention's agencies and to its pastors and concerned members who wrote into the Convention seeking direction about how to respond to the ERA." (97). I agree with this interpretation; Smith's response to Connell's letter seems to make this connection explicit.

²³ "Resolution on White House Conference on Family Life," 1978, available online at sbc.net.

the ERA and with his carefully rehearsed lines on abortion and homosexuality. Amidst the other social issues discussed at the annual meeting that year, messengers revisited the denomination's stance on the conference. A new resolution declared that "traditional Judeo-Christian family values are being threatened" and resolved that Southern Baptists affirm only the biblical family unit in political conversations.²⁴

The planning and implementation of the White House Conference on Families (WHCF) cemented many conservative Southern Baptists' disapproval of Carter. Historian Leo Ribuffo argued that the conference, in its planning and execution, was a "third-level campaign promise... turned into at least a second-level political liability" and a "landmark in politics rather than policy."²⁵ From a government standpoint, the planning was marred by personnel turnover and a bureaucratic "demotion" to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Under the leadership of Jim Guy Tucker, who took over the planning in mid-1978, the Carter administration finalized plans for three summer conferences in the summer of 1980, preceded by five national hearings in late 1979 to establish primary issues of concern, and gatherings in spring 1980 for experts to establish a "factual framework for the issues," and to specifically discuss African American families²⁶ Harry Hollis played a prominent role in the planning of the conference. He

²⁴ "Resolution on the White House Conference on the Family," 1980, available online at sbc.net.

²⁵ Leo P. Ribuffo, "Family Policy Past as Prologue: Jimmy Carter, the White House Conference on Families, and the Mobilization of the New Christian Right," *Review of Policy Research* 23, no. 2 (2006): 311, 333.

²⁶ Ribuffo, "Family Policy Past as Prologue," 328.

was invited to participate as one of forty members of the WHCF National Advisory Committee, and he was an active supporter of the conferences' aims.

Leaders of the Christian Life Commission were worried that WHCF might exacerbate existing denominational divides over social issues and further polarize the nation, but they felt compelled to participate in meaningful conversations about the status of families in America. Foy Valentine, who took part in the National Research Forum on Family Issues, together with a colleague, sent letters to leaders of eleven mainstream religious organizations, to encourage discussion of pragmatic issues during the conferences that would minimize division. They expressed concern that “powerful forces, representing highly explosive issues” might utilize the conference as an opportunity for self-promotion instead of creating “sound, workable national policy.” They articulated a shared belief that traditional families were not “outworn or obsolete social institutions” and emphasized the Southern Baptist Convention’s opposition to the “acceptance and encouragement of the so-called ‘alternative life-styles,’” or legitimization of homosexual families, which messengers had specifically articulated in its 1980 resolution on WHCF.²⁷

The conferences in Baltimore, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles were deeply politicized and the pro-family movement flexed its muscles, projecting a powerful narrative about liberal feminist and White House agendas. Indeed, this conference put

²⁷ Foy Valentine and David Mace, “To the Organizers of the White House Conference on Families,” n.d., Folder 19: “White House Conference on Families,” Box 40, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Carter in a vulnerable position, just months before the 1980 presidential election. Prominent conservative leaders, including Connie Marshner, claimed that state delegates to the conferences were disproportionately feminist, and that the White House did not take into account pro-family politics. During the conferences, bitter arguments about abortion and the ERA disrupted working groups, and some conservatives staged walk-outs to protest the underrepresentation of their views. Though the Minneapolis conference delegates passed a strict definition of family as “two or more persons related by blood, heterosexual marriage, adoption or extended families,” others did not, further displeasing the Right. Certainly, Tucker and the WHCF Advisory Committee expected disagreement over contentious issues, but they hardly expected such prominent conservative opposition. In a plan reminiscent of the 1977 National Women’s Conference boycott that started their pro-family coalition, some conservatives, not invited to WHCF, formed an alternative “American Family Forum” in Washington D.C., and hosted one thousand participants.²⁸

After observing conservative backlash against WHCF, Hollis voiced strong optimism to Baptists in order to counteract the pro-family activists’ negative messages. In support of Tucker and other conference planners’ efforts to address meaningful issues, he argued: “If you want to know who is pro-family, look beyond the rhetoric and ask who is hard at work at the modest but crucial proposals made by the delegates to the White

²⁸ For elaboration on this point, see Ribuffo, “Family Policy Past as Prologue,” 324-329.

Flippen argued that the problem of family decline could not possibly sustain consensus in the midst of such a politically-charged moment with the election on the horizon, *Jimmy Carter*, 266-272.

House Conference on Families.” Hollis emphasized that he supported the Minneapolis conference’s biblical definition of the family, but acknowledged that it was one of several issues “which could not be harmonized.”²⁹

As president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Bailey Smith was not sure what to think about the conference, before or after it took place. The White House scheduled a meeting with Smith and his wife on August 7, 1980, but he reported afterwards that “their explanation [about the aims of WHCF] didn’t help me a lot.” White House staffers noted that Smith “circulated among the more conservative segments of the Southern Baptist world” and recommended that he should ask questions during the meeting instead of receiving a “prepared talk” from Carter.³⁰ Though certainly interested in other matters of energy and the economy, Smith was particular interested to find out if the WHCF conferences did, in fact, “approve the homosexual family.” After receiving correspondence from a Southern Baptist who was worried that Carter planned to include gay rights on the Democratic Party platform in 1980, Smith said that he asked the White House about that directly. “They say that they disagree with the homosexual effort,” he reported, and the position on gay rights that emerged from WHCF meetings “in no way

²⁹ Larry Chesser, “White House Conference Shifts to Implementation,” Baptist Press news release, August 21, 1980.

³⁰ Memo, Tom Laney to Terry O’Rourke, Re: Meeting with Bailey Smith, August 7, 1980, Folder: Memos, Box 107, Bob Maddox’s Files, Jimmy Carter Library.

represents the President's feelings." Smith, who lamented that "the whole matter is enough to make you sick," concluded: "Let's pray for revival."³¹

In addition to Bailey Smith, other Southern Baptists were not willing to give the Carter White House the benefit of the doubt on "pro-family" concerns after WHCF. Insulted by Carter's assumption that he could retain Baptist votes after the event's political conclusions, Mrs. Albert Kemp of Oklahoma wrote to Smith with concern. "It seems," she observed, "that Mr. Carter is trying to get the Southern Baptist's support, while at the same time woo the Homosexuals." Mrs. Kemp denounced the conference's broad definition of "families" and Mrs. Carter's willingness to share "the same platform with confirmed lesbians in Houston, whom her husband appointed to represent your wife and me." She concluded: "A man that can't rule his family has no business in the White House."

Looking ahead to the presidential election that fall, Mrs. Kemp asserted:

The Blacks are given credit for electing Mr. Carter to office, but I firmly believe it was the Southern Baptists, and other Christians hoping that he was 'born again.' I know that you cannot use your pulpit as a platform for politics, but in your contact with people I beg you to please point out the discrepancies of Jimmy Carter's [sic]. Our country cannot stand him for another four years.

³¹ Bailey Smith to Foy Valentine, August 18, 1980, Folder 8: Christian Life Commission, 1980, Box 1, Bailey Smith Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Bailey Smith to Mrs. David Franklin, August 25, 1980, Folder 28: "Homosexuals, 1980," Box 1, Bailey Smith Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Indeed, Bailey Smith used his pulpit as a political platform— but this time, to criticize Jimmy Carter. Smith responded to Kemp’s letter with several “Amens,” and, agreeing with her points about Houston, he emphasized, “ERA is the Extremely Ridiculous Activity.”³² Several weeks later, Smith addressed another Southern Baptist’s complaints about Carter’s support of the ERA with a telling response: “It is enough to make us sick. Maybe we can do something about it.”³³

Ed McAteer saw an opportunity to pull Southern Baptists behind a conservative political candidate in the election of 1980. Initially a supporter of John Connally, McAteer became a strong supporter of Ronald Reagan, despite his lackluster religious pedigree. McAteer explained: “...I wasn’t struck with the fact that he was a deep spiritual man or that he had a great grasp of scripture. But the thing that impressed me was his openness and appreciation for the Christian faith.”³⁴ Religious Roundtable was technically nonpartisan, so McAteer invited both the Democratic and Republican party

³²Mrs. Albert Kemp to Bailey Smith, July 2, 1980; Bailey Smith to Mrs. Albert Kemp, July 8, 1980, Folder 18: “Equal Rights Amendment, 1980,” Box 1, Bailey Smith Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³³ Bailey Smith to Gerald Entrekin, July 23, 1980, Folder 18: “Equal Rights Amendment, 1980,” Box 1, Bailey Smith Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁴ Edward Eugene McAteer, interview by David Stricklin and Larry Braidfoot, October 28, 1988, in Memphis, Tennessee, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, available online at

<http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/5090>.

candidates when James Robison and he planned a large gathering in Dallas to increase voter engagement among local preachers. *Southern Baptist Journal* kept conservative Southern Baptists informed about Roundtable's National Affairs Briefing that August, which was the first overtly political event to draw the participation of prominent Southern Baptist pastors and denominational leaders. Drawing a crowd of seven thousand pastors were influential figures in the Religious Right, including Jesse Helms, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Phyllis Schlafly, Howard Phillips, Bailey Smith, Charles Stanley, Jimmy Draper, and W.A. Criswell. The featured event was a keynote speech from Ronald Reagan, which drew fifteen thousand attendees.³⁵ Carter declined Roundtable's invitation to attend.

Before the event, Robert Maddox, Southern Baptist pastor and White House religious liaison, tried to dissuade Bailey Smith from speaking at the National Affairs Briefing. He argued, "Baptist to Baptist," that it would put Smith in an uncomfortable political position in terms of protecting the separation of church and state. Smith, rejecting Maddox's overture, said he felt "loyalty to James Robison" and had a responsibility to his "best friends" to participate.³⁶ Smith further justified his involvement, claiming that the Briefing would "balance" out his participation in the

³⁵ Kenneth A. Briggs, "Evangelical Preachers Gather to Polish their Politics," *New York Times*, August 21, 1980.

³⁶ "Maddox Urged Bailey Smith Not to Attend Dallas Briefing," *Baptist Standard (TX)*, September 3, 1980, 5, Folder 2: Evangelical Political Involvement 1982, Box 158, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

National Democratic Convention held the previous week. At the gathering, Smith gave a two-and-a-half minute prayer that focused primarily on immorality and the sanctity of life, in protest of the party's updated platform on abortion.³⁷

Before the start of the National Affairs Briefing, Ronald Reagan met privately with Smith, McAteer, Robison, Adrian Rogers, and several others to discuss his commitment to key evangelical issues. Robison was blunt: "If we help you get elected we expect you to appoint qualified Christians to serve in your administration." McAteer left the meeting feeling confident that he would be rewarded with a political appointment if Reagan won the election in November.³⁸ Reagan's speech followed a rousing call to arms by Robison, who urged Christians to come "out of the closet" for the election. In a sound bite that rocked evangelical politics, Reagan then acknowledged that the pastors could offer no endorsement from their pulpits, but added, "I want you to know I endorse you and what you are doing."³⁹

In his sermon at the Briefing, "Winning the World to Christ," Bailey Smith again focused on his opposition to homosexuality, while simultaneously demonstrating his

³⁷ "Smith Leads Prayer at Demo Convention," Baptist Press news release, August 19, 1980, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

³⁸ "Reagan Pledges to Appoint Christians," *Southern Baptist Journal* 8, no. 7 (October 1980) 9, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁹ Howell Raines, "Reagan Backs Evangelicals in their Political Activities," *New York Times*, August 23, 1980. According to William Martin, James Robison suggested the line to Reagan in their preliminary meeting, and that Reagan was so impressed that he used it.

Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 216.

loyalty to James Robison. The televangelist recently lost a suit against WFAA, the television station that stopped programming his show after he claimed on-air that homosexuals actively recruited children to their ranks. Smith, referencing a recent newspaper interview of a homosexual about Robison's case, told the Dallas attendees, "We are in deep trouble in America when we interview a pervert about a preacher. The evil persons in this world have no right to evaluate a man of God." After much protest, much of which came from First Baptist Dallas, Robison's show was eventually returned to its original timeslot.⁴⁰

The statement that gained much more attention in its aftermath was Smith's religious observation about the event as a whole:

It is interesting at great political rallies how you have a Protestant to pray, a Catholic to pray, and then you have a Jew to pray. With all due respect to those dear people, my friends, God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew. For how in the world can God hear the prayer of a Jew, or how in the world can God hear the prayer of a man who says that Jesus Christ is not the true Messiah? That is blasphemy. It may be politically expedient, but no one can pray unless he prays through the name of Jesus Christ...

This proclamation caught headlines after a participant circulated a transcript of the speech to Jewish leaders, and Smith was denounced as "ignorant" and anti-Semitic. Edgar R. Cooper, editor of *Florida Baptist Witness*, however, took a different stance, claiming that

⁴⁰ Toby Druin and Jerilynn W. Armstrong, "Reagan, Southern Baptists Keynote Political Meeting," Baptist Press news release, August 25, 1980; Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

Smith was not actually expressing anti-Semitism, but rather, Southern Baptist convictions about any person who does not believe in Jesus. Cooper echoed longstanding Baptist distrust of ecumenical alliances when he criticized the briefing's Judeo-Christian alliance, claiming it dulled an acute need for widespread evangelism to "the unbelieving soul."⁴¹

The National Affairs Briefing allowed Religious Roundtable to effectively mobilize local pastors for the Reagan campaign. Said Robert Maddox, "The meeting came out about like I thought it would. It was a Ronald Reagan religious pep rally."⁴² Reactions to Smith's statement indicated the discomfort to which Southern Baptists felt about ecumenical participation under a "Christian" or "Religious" label. Otherwise, the Roundtable's program of New Right leaders, Pro-Family leaders, evangelists, and Southern Baptists leaders, presented the perfect formula to encourage Southern Baptist pastors to join its religio-political movement.

Not a fan of the Roundtable's intentions, Jimmy Allen urged Southern Baptists to "avoid naïveté" concerning the event as well as the new role of Southern Baptist pastors in promoting Republican Party politics. He explained:

⁴¹ "Baptist Leader Criticized for Statement About Jews," *New York Times*, September 18, 1980; Edgar R. Cooper, "Statement Lacks Tact—But," *Florida Baptist Witness*, October 9, 1980, 4, Folder 12: Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship – 1980 (R-U), Box 4, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴² "Maddox Urged Bailey Smith Not to Attend Dallas Briefing," *Baptist Standard (TX)*, September 3, 1980, 5, Folder 2: Evangelical Political Involvement 1982, Box 158, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

A recent, so-called ‘briefing’ in Dallas, for instance, was billed as non-partisan... It was a perfectly American exercise in political rallies. No one can fault that. To call it non-partisan or non-endorsing, however, is at best naïve... The most offensive element in the current effort to transform religious followings into political power is the spirit that claims that all real Christians arrive at the same political or economic solutions to the problems of a society. To imply that a vote is not a ‘Christian’ vote unless it favors your candidate or your position is heresy of the most unbiblical kind.

Allen warned against New Right efforts to build a “religious party bloc vote,” because he thought its political agenda would weaken the divide between separation of church and state.⁴³ But Allen had his own political agenda because he actively supported the reelection of President Jimmy Carter. He actively worked with Robert Maddox to help identify sympathetic church leaders to support the president, much in the way that Billy Graham helped support Nixon’s election.⁴⁴

⁴³ Jimmy Allen, “Television, Religion, and Politics,” n.d., Folder 2: Evangelical Political Involvement 1982, Box 158, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴⁴ Memo, Anne Wexler to Phil Wise, “Meeting with Main Line and Moderate Evangelical Religious Leaders,” July 18, 1980, Folder: Memos—FYI to Bob Maddox, Box 107, Bob Maddox’s Files, Jimmy Carter Library. Memo, Bob Maddox to Mrs. Carter, “Suggestions for Relating to Conservative Evangelicals,” n.d., Folder: Memos, Box 107, Bob Maddox’s Files, Jimmy Carter Library.

In addition to Allen, Foy Valentine rejected Roundtable's efforts to mobilize Southern Baptists for the Republican Party. He argued that "[t]he brain trusts and power brokers of the so-called New Right are now seeking openly, aggressively and shamelessly to use Baptists and other Bible-believing Christians." He urged Southern Baptists to "not so [sic] submit" to these overtures because it would constitute "prostitution of the body of Christ" to "political bosses." Echoing Allen's critique of the Briefing, Valentine argued that Christians must be involved in both political parties to ensure the longevity of Christian "goals of righteousness, justice, peace and morality." He concluded: "America does not need a so-called 'Christian' political party."⁴⁵

Carter received vocal support from James Dunn, new director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. Dunn had previously served as chief of the Texas Christian Life Commission and had expressed strong views against the Religious Right's initiatives. Bucking the view of fundamentalist leaders, Dunn signed a BJCPA statement which emphasized the continued separation of church and state, asserting: "God is minimized in any marriage of religion and politics. We wind up making God the national mascot and that's civil religion at its worst."⁴⁶ Additionally,

⁴⁵ W.A. Reed, "Don't be Political Pawns, Valentine Urges Baptists," *Tennessean*, October 17, 1980, Folder 2: Evangelical Political Involvement 1982, Box 158, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁴⁶ Helen Parmley, "New Right Makes God 'National Mascot,' Baptist Says," *Dallas Morning News*, October 15, 1980. Dunn was also widely quoted for his assertion that

leaders of the South Carolina Baptist Convention supported Carter in his reelection bid. John Roberts, editor of *Baptist Courier*, expressed his support to the national Carter-Mondale Headquarters and sent a list of possibly supportive church leaders in the state. Flynn Harrell, Assistant to the Executive Secretary Treasurer (top leader) for Business Affairs requested material for eight Southern Baptists and himself, to help “confront locally the militant fundamentalist New Right that opposes our President and desires to take control of our government.”⁴⁷

Despite this support, Robert Maddox sorely underestimated the denomination’s political conservatism when he said that he felt “very strongly” that Carter would “keep the Southern Baptists” in the 1980 election.⁴⁸ In fact, American National Election Studies data indicated that sixty-six percent of regular church attending Southern Baptists voted for Reagan that November; only thirty-four percent voted for Carter. Interestingly, these numbers matched exactly the percentages polled of all Americans in the survey.⁴⁹

“we’ve got a bunch of TV preachers who want to establish a theocracy in America, and each one of them wants to be Theo”; citation from Williams, *With God on Our Side*, 192.

⁴⁷ John E. Roberts to Tom Laney, September 17, 1980; Flynn T. Harrell to Tom Laney, October 9, 1980, Folder: South Carolina, Box 109, Bob Maddox’s Files, Jimmy Carter Library.

⁴⁸ John Herbers, “Ultraconservative Evangelicals A Surging New Force in Politics,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1980.

⁴⁹ Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 159, table 6.3, “Support for Presidential Candidates in United States/South/SBC, 1968-1992.” His data, supported by an American National Election

The Southern Baptist Convention was in the process of a significant political transformation. To political observers, the presidential election of 1980 also was a key marker that the old partisan politics were, indeed, over. Republican strategists indicated that the South had been in the process of partisan transformation for several decades, citing its support of Richard Nixon, and even Democrats agreed that the times of the old New Deal Coalition were over.⁵⁰

Concerned with the summer's explosive political developments, a group of seventeen moderates organized in the fall of 1980 with the explicit purpose of counteracting fundamentalist gains in the denomination. The "Gatlinburg Gang," whose nickname came from their initial meeting location, discussed how moderates might prevent the further conservative takeover of the denomination. The Gatlinburg Gang had members from North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and Texas, and they defined the aims of their movement as "freedom for the Word of God, freedom to

Studies survey, found that regular church attending Southern Baptists were more likely to vote for Reagan than were those Southern Baptists that did not attend regularly. Among those who affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, regularly attending or not, sixty-one percent voted for Reagan and thirty-nine percent voted for Carter.

⁵⁰ John Herbers, "Once-Democratic South: An Era Ends," *New York Times*, November 6, 1980. For related discussions, see Glenn Feldman, ed., *Painting Dixie Red: When, Where, Why, and How the South Became Republican* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011); Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

hear and respond in obedience to God.”⁵¹ They wanted to reclaim the denomination in the 1980s, and felt that if they could reveal Pressler’s and Patterson’s long-term takeover plans to Southern Baptists, they would vote to reject the fundamentalist initiatives.

These moderates thought there was still hope that they could turn back the clock on the influence of fundamentalists and the Religious Right on the denomination, but they were under no illusion about the weapons being used by their opponents. Said participant Kenneth Chafin, “They have taken a theological word (inerrancy) and have used it to confuse the issue. The issue is really power.”⁵² Cecil Sherman emphasized that the Gatlinburg Gang was reluctant to organize: “We are just people who think the stated objectives of Judge Pressler and Dr. Patterson mean harm to the convention... We did not turn this corner, we were jerked around it by events in Houston and St. Louis.”⁵³

Moderates disagreed with fundamentalist charges that the denomination was fraught with

⁵¹ For more information on these individuals, see Cecil E. Sherman, “An Overview of the Moderate Movement,” 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), 19-21. See also E. Glenn Hinson, “The Background of the Moderate Movement,” 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), 3.

⁵² Dan Martin, “‘Concerned’ Pastors Discuss Future; Deny Forming Faction,” Baptist Press news release, October 3, 1980, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

⁵³ Ibid.

liberalism, and they staunchly defended the convention's existing agencies, unlike fundamentalists, who were already planning to eliminate their leaders and programs. They realized that they were going to need support outside of their traditionally moderate strongholds in order to gain enough clout to retake the denomination. Conservatives had nearly a decade to mobilize among the rank and file, and the moderate movement had few laypersons at all.⁵⁴

After 1980, moderates and conservatives in the denomination fought to see their ideas prevail in theological politics, but it became clear that their battling ideologies could not sustain a consensus. Conservatives continued to institutionalize their views at annual meetings through resolutions and through appointment of conservatives to places of denominational influence. Despite the Gatlinburg Gang's efforts to consolidate moderate denominational influence, Bailey Smith was reelected to SBC presidency in 1981, and they saw no lessening of fundamentalist pressure in the next few years.

After the conservative turn, clearer connections emerged between denominational fundamentalists and activists in the Religious Right. A clear link was in fundamentalists' efforts to establish a conservative denominational stance on gender. A female writer to

⁵⁴ Cecil E. Sherman, "An Overview of the Moderate Movement," in *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC*, 23. As they set up moderate spheres of influence, however, Sherman explained: "As a general rule, the farther East one went, the easier the organization [of moderates] was. People in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina saw Fundamentalism as a clear threat to a Baptist body. They were ready to be organized, and they rallied to the Moderate cause early." He emphasized that moderates had a difficult time organizing in the West, where fundamentalism was more accepted and even dominant.

the *Southern Baptist Journal* urged women to “join together in supporting our husbands that they might lead the Georgia & Southern Baptist Conventions back to its[sic] former fundamental stand.”⁵⁵ The idea was that women could help the denomination by deferring to their husbands and offering them support in the conservative resurgence. Adrian Rogers spoke to the Pastors’ Conference before the 1981 Annual Meeting to again emphasize women’s subservient role to men.⁵⁶ He still preached a hardline position on family hierarchy, and his wife, Joyce, hosted a three-day “Mid-Continent Christian Women’s Concerns Conference” at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis to help women navigate their appropriate gender roles. Lillian Butler, wife of LaVerne Butler, head of Kentucky’s Moral Majority and local leader of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship in the 1970s, sponsored an “International Women’s Concerns Conference” in late 1981 to accomplish a similar goal to Rogers’s. The conference, which took place at Butler’s Ninth and O Baptist Church in Louisville, focused on qualities of “The Virtuous Woman,” and sessions addressed child raising, housekeeping, organization, etiquette, and a healthy dose of politics. These conferences intended to remind women that, regardless of the feminist movement, their biblical role was that of

⁵⁵ Mrs. Troy E. Morris, “Ladies Help Us,” *Southern Baptist Journal* 9, no. 4 (April/May 1981): 12, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁵⁶ “‘Submissive’ Wives,” *Biblical Recorder* (NC), June 20, 1981, 11, Folder 18: Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship – 1981 (R-W), Box 4, M.O. Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

submission. But they were also quite political, and perhaps represented the clearest link of all of between theological conservatism and the anti-feminist politics of the Right.⁵⁷

Fundamentalist efforts to reinstitute traditional views of womanhood in the aftermath of the denomination's right turn did not please women who were still eager to see gender equality in the denomination and in American society at large. Moderates at Binkley Baptist Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, began an organization in April 1981 called Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights, which offered support for the Equal Rights Amendment and opposition to right-wing measures perceived to damage families, such as cuts to education, social services, health services, and mental health services.⁵⁸ Though a small organization, members attended a rally for the ERA in

⁵⁷ Roy Jennings, "Biblical Submission Explained to Women," Baptist Press news release, May 20, 1980; Mike Davis, "Women Praised, Chided, Encouraged at Conference," Baptist Press news release, May 20, 1980; available online at sbhla.org; Program, "International Christian Women's Concerns Conference," Folder 24: Women: 1980-83 (2), Box 57, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. For related conversations about the conference, see Flowers, *Into the Pulpit*, 76-81.

⁵⁸ Newsletter, "Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights," vol. 1, no. 2 (October 1981); Newsletter, "Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights," vol. 1, no. 3, (April 1982), Folder: "Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights, 1981-1985," Box 7, Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South records, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University. SBFER supported the Equal Rights Amendment in North Carolina with help from New York City's "Religious

Washington, D.C. and they received some national attention for their presence. With a sense of optimism, SBFER strived to “educate Southern Baptists to the injustices within our churches, our denomination, and our society that deny women the right to reach their full potential as human beings.”⁵⁹ In a newsletter article entitled “On the Power of Words,” the organization protested the denominational usage of sexist terminology:

We have spent our lives in the Church. We have poured out our energies and our devotion, and now we choke on hymns that speak only of ‘men’ and ‘sons.’ We struggle with the deepest soul-stirrings, and are blocked by male-dominated images and language. We are crying out to be included in the *words of the Church*, as well as in the *work of the Church* [emphasis in original].⁶⁰

But Southern Baptist entrenchment in the politics of the Right continued in 1982 as Vice President George Bush spoke at the Pastor’s Conference before the annual meeting and another fundamentalist, Jimmy Draper, was elected president of the

Committee for ERA,” North Carolina United for ERA, and the North Carolina chapter of National Organization for Women.

⁵⁹ Newsletter, “Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights,” vol.1, no. 2 (October 1981), Folder: “Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights, 1981-1985,” Box 7, Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South records, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁶⁰ Newsletter, “Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights,” vol. 1, no. 3, (April 1982), Folder: “Southern Baptists for the Family and Equal Rights, 1981-1985,” Box 7, Resource Center for Women and Ministry in the South records, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

denomination. Resolutions passed at the meeting reflected the agenda of the Religious Right, as messengers offered support for constitutional amendments on voluntary prayer in schools and against abortion; also one on scientific creationism, indicating there is a broader agenda in common with the Religious Right. Stan Hasteley of Baptist Press observed that messengers to the meeting “effectively delivered the denomination to the right-wing fringe” in line with fundamentalists who “attached to their cause the baggage of the political New Right.”⁶¹ Hasteley credited McAteer, and his close association with Adrian Rogers and Bailey Smith, for orchestrating the transformation. The editor of Kentucky’s state Baptist paper, *Western Recorder*, expressed dismay about the politicization of the meeting, claiming Bush’s “defense of the religious right and its political involvement was ill-advised and inappropriate in such a service.” He asked, “When will we learn that worship services are not enhanced by self-serving politicians?”⁶²

Though by February 1983, the *Southern Baptist Journal’s* front page headline read “SBC IS TURNING RIGHT!,” fundamentalist Southern Baptist leaders still wanted

⁶¹ Stan Hasteley, “McAteer Key Figure in SBC Swing to the Right,” Baptist Press news release, July 8, 1982; Folder 2: Evangelical Political Involvement 1982, Box 158, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁶² C.R. Daley, “Bush’s Defense of Religious Right Called ‘Inappropriate,’” *Biblical Recorder* (NC), reprinted from *Western Recorder* (KY), n.d., Folder 15, Box 3, Paul Pressler Papers, Archives and Baptist Materials Room, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina.

to see Southern Baptists connected more strongly with anti-abortion organizations. Accordingly, they began to create structures that would protect their pro-life views in the denomination after there were enough conservatives in bureaucratic office to support their efforts. In 1983, J. Kirk Shrewsbury, a former electrical engineer and employee of Oklahomans for Life, formed Southern Baptists for Life.⁶³ With prominent Southern Baptist pastors on the Advisory Board, such as Adrian Rogers, Larry Lewis, Jimmy Draper, and Mike Huckabee, and by the 1984 Annual Meeting, executive director Kirk Shrewsbury and president of Southern Baptists for Life, Rich Moore, were ready to unveil their organization to messengers beyond Oklahoma.

Southern Baptists for Life was much more successful than its predecessor of the 1970s, Baptists for Life, because it had the support of prominent fundamentalist pastors who exercised a great deal of denominational influence.⁶⁴ Leaders of Southern Baptists

⁶³ Oklahomans for Life actually paid Shrewsbury to work on Southern Baptists for Life, as long as it focused on Oklahomans. As a result, Oklahoma was the “pilot state” for the organization in its early years. See J. Kirk Shrewsbury to Ron Chastine, August 21, 1985, Folder 8: Correspondence—Outgoing—1985-1991, Box 4, Southern Baptists for Life Records, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; also Norman Jameson, “Anti-Abortion Efforts Grab Top Attention,” *Baptist Messenger* (OK), December 19, 1985, 8, Folder 2: Christian Life Commission, Box 3, Southern Baptists for Life Records, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁶⁴ According to Shrewsbury, who tried to recommend Robert Holbrook for a Christian Life Commission service award at the end of the 1980s, Holbrook was practically “the

for Life considered the Christian Life Commission pro-choice and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs a “thorn in the flesh” for its support of abortion rights, so they decided to align the Southern Baptist Convention with a pro-life agenda subtly at the meeting.⁶⁵ According to Nancy Ammerman, at the 1984 Annual Meeting, an “unknown

only Southern Baptist engaged” in pro-life politics in the 1970s. Shrewsbury affirmed that Holbrook saw “no encouraging results in his work with Baptists for Life,” but “sowed the seeds for future Southern Baptist involvement” in the pro-life movement. Holbrook did not receive an award from the Christian Life Commission – a note on the filed letter indicated that “he was charismatic and left the SBC.” See, J. Kirk Shrewsbury to Richard Land, August 2, 1989, Folder 2: Christian Life Commission, Box 3, Southern Baptists for Life Records, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁶⁵ For Southern Baptists for Life’s views on the CLC and BJCPA, see J. Kirk Shrewsbury to unaddressed donor, December 1986 (form letter), Folder 6: Correspondence—Donor Letters, 1986-1991, Box 4, Southern Baptists for Life Records, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Also see Norman Jameson, “Anti-Abortion Efforts Grab Top Attention,” *Baptist Messenger*, December 19, 1985, 8. Foy Valentine had received criticism for several years for his refusal to align with the pro-life movement. One article in the Southern Baptist Journal called him out for a variety of liberal offenses, but concluded by focusing on “the killing of 1.5 million unborn babies each year and where Foy Valentine draws the line on this life and death issue.” The author considered that Valentine’ worst offense. See Ralph D. Stewart, Jr., “Foy

person” proposed to the Calendar Committee the observance in January of a Sanctity of Life Sunday. That committee was dominated by conservatives, and noted that if the proposed date was observed the third week of January, it would closely coincide with the anniversary of *Roe v Wade*, often celebrated by national pro-life organizations. Though the decision received criticism from Foy Valentine, who preferred “another day which was not being used for crass political purposes,” the calendar committee was easily able to schedule their pro-life celebration. Though Southern Baptists for Life was not financed in any way by the Southern Baptist Convention, Ammerman claimed that it actively competed with existing agencies that addressed social issues, like the Christian Life Commission and BJCPA, and “challenge[d] the legitimacy of those structures” through providing a conservative alternative.⁶⁶

Valentine & Abortion,” *Southern Baptist Journal* 9, no. 4 (April/May 1981): 7, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁶⁶ See Nancy T. Ammerman, “Organizational Conflict in a Divided Denomination: Southern Baptists and Abortion,” Paper presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, October 1985, Folder 8: “Pro-Abortion Baptists, 1985-1990,” Box 8, Southern Baptists for Life Records, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. Ammerman noted that utilization of the calendar committee for pro-life activism was shrewd because it “rarely presents anything very interesting or controversial, increasing the likelihood that the report might just slide through unnoticed.” It should be noted that one participant on the Calendar Committee was Skeet Workman, an active participant in Eagle Forum; she won one of Schlafly’s Eagle Awards in 1979.

Messengers to the 1984 Annual Meeting also passed a watershed resolution opposing women's ordination.⁶⁷ The resolution, affirmed by fifty-eight percent of messengers in attendance, represented a major turning point for conservative momentum, and allowed fundamentalists to begin ousting ordained women from fellowship. Conservatives justified the resolution "to preserve a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall." The resolution declared, in part:

That we not decide concerns of Christians doctrine and practice by modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends or by emotional factors; that we remind ourselves of the dearly bought Baptist principle of the final authority of Scripture in matters of faith and conduct; and that we encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination.⁶⁸

Women in ministry felt betrayed by the resolution, and it was particularly painful because they had just begun to formally organize the year before in an organization called Southern Baptist Women in Ministry.⁶⁹ This was a very symbolic victory for

⁶⁷ Adrian Rogers's wife, Joyce, tried to pass a resolution like this in 1983 but was not successful.

⁶⁸ "Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry," 1984, available online at sbc.net.

⁶⁹ For more information about this organization, see Eileen Campbell-Reed, "Anatomy of a Schism: How Clergywomen's Narratives Interpret the Fracturing of the Southern Baptist Convention" (PhD Diss., Vanderbilt University, 2008); David T. Morgan,

fundamentalists, and the consequences were long-reaching. Though the resolution was not technically binding for churches, moderate Bill Leonard observed that the resolution “apparently served as a guide” for the Home Mission Board’s trustees, who decided, in light of the resolution, that they would deny agency funds to congregations with female pastors.⁷⁰

Feminist scholar Susan M. Shaw argued that the resolution had a “profound” effect on the psyches of women ministers, but emphasized that it also represented the extent to which women in the denomination had successfully entered the profession in the last two decades. She explained that their success had prompted fundamentalist fear “that an unchecked women’s movement would undermine the patriarchal constructions of the home, the church, and the SBC.”⁷¹ Some churches, including Jefferson Street Baptist Chapel in Louisville, Kentucky, and Richland Baptist Church in Falmouth, Kentucky, expressed their intentions to disregard the resolution based on their belief in gender equality.⁷²

Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845-2000 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003); Susan M. Shaw, *God Speaks to Us Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home, and Society* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

⁷⁰ Leonard, 153.

⁷¹ Susan M. Shaw, “I am Woman: Southern Baptist Women and Feminism,” *Baptist History and Heritage* (Spring 2010): 6-19.

⁷² Andrew W. Manis to Charles Stanley, July 12, 1984, Box 1, Folder 79:

Correspondence, Women’s Ordination, 1984-85, Charles Stanley Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee; Deborah McSwain et al.

By the mid-1980s, the convention had established a strict fundamentalist set of beliefs, and the rejection of women's ordination was a significant hurdle for conservatives hoping to re-establish traditional gender hierarchy in the church. The resolution was a major turning point for moderates, who realized that their ideas about local control and gender equality were no longer welcome. As conservatives increased their presence on denominational boards, they moved from the bureaucratic periphery to a dominant political force within the Southern Baptist Convention.⁷³

to undesignated recipient, July 6, 1984, Folder 22: Women, 1984, Box 57, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

⁷³ Valentine retired as head of the Christian Life Commission in 1986 after receiving extensive criticism for his unwillingness to support pro-life politics. He was replaced by a moderate for two years, then fundamentalist Richard Land took the helm in 1988. Land had been connected with Pressler and Patterson since the 1960s. James Dunn received a great deal of criticism because of his unwillingness to endorse the Religious Right, and in 1986 BJCPA reorganized to give the Southern Baptist Convention (i.e. conservatives) more seats. Seminary board of trustees began purging professors who supported women's ordination in the 1980s, and these efforts lasted until the 1990s for more "liberal" seminaries like Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. After a "Peace Committee" tried to mediate tensions between moderates and conservatives in 1987, moderates created the Southern Baptist Alliance as an outlet for their theological views. The Alliance eventually resulted in the creation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a separate denomination which provided a refuge for moderates who no

Adeptly utilizing their connections to help align the denomination with the Religious Right, fundamentalists ultimately fulfilled their goals and retook the nation's largest Protestant denomination from moderate forces. As the presidential election of 1984 approached, there was little question but that Southern Baptists would be aligning with the Republican Party. W.A. Criswell gave the closing prayer for the Republican National Convention after Ronald Reagan received the nomination for a re-election bid.⁷⁴ LaVerne Butler brought the message into his church, arguing that the Democratic

longer felt representation in the Southern Baptist Convention (See Ammerman 271-282). There is a large body of religious studies literature on these changes that took place as fundamentalists sought to establish bureaucratic control of the Southern Baptist Convention after the right turn. See David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, The New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996); Russell H. Dilday, *Columns: Glimpses of a Seminary Under Assault* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2004); Carl L. Kell, ed., *Exiled : Voices of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006); Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon : Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: the Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990); Walter B. Shurden and Randy Shepley, eds., *Going for the Jugular: a Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1996).

⁷⁴ *Standing on the Promises: The Autobiography of W.A. Criswell* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishers, 1990), 241.

National Convention and Republican National Convention were as different "as a sex orgy and a Sunday School picnic."⁷⁵ From 1984, the denomination continued to become more conservative and institutionalize right-wing politics into its theology. Indeed, the spiritual had become quite political for both conservatives who stayed in the denomination, and for moderates who eventually left it; but the modern women's movement brought cultural changes into the denomination that revealed deep splits among Southern Baptists and demonstrated the political nature of their theological beliefs.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Richard V. Pierard, "Religion and the 1984 Election Campaign," *Review of Religious Research* 27, no. 2 (1985): 104.

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