

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

“THE SICKLE OR THE CROSS”: W.A. CRISWELL AND SOUTHERN BAPTISTS DURING
THE EARLY COLD WAR

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Introduction:

W.A. Criswell served as the long-time pastor of The First Baptist Church of Dallas and led the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) as its president from 1968-1970.¹ Regarding Criswell, historian David Stricklin asserts, “The experiences of one Southern Baptist help explain the ways many Southern Baptists blended their understandings of themselves, the theological underpinnings of the particular ways they chose to live out their sense of God’s requirements, and their resultant prospects for an afterlife of eternal bliss with God in heaven.”² He argues that Criswell provides insight into the beliefs of the vast majority of Southern Baptists.³ The historiography regarding Criswell often seeks to discount the theologian and cast him in a negative light due to his involvement with the infighting during the SBC controversy and its eventual split; however, there is much more to this Southern Baptist preacher from Dallas, Texas.

Recent scholarship has analyzed how religion influenced the foreign and domestic policies of the United States, Western Europe, and the Vatican during the Cold War.⁴ However, there is a striking lack of scholarship concerning how Protestants and individual denominations viewed and taught the Cold War. While historians recognize the impact that World War II had on denominations, a study of Southern Baptists needs to be placed within the larger context of

¹ “For almost 170 years, Southern Baptists have sought to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people everywhere. The Southern Baptist Convention was formed with a Gospel vision... The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) has grown to be a network of more than 50,000 cooperating churches and church-type missions banded together to make an impact of God's Kingdom.” “About Us: Meet Southern Baptists,” Southern Baptist Convention, accessed March 27, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/>.

² David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 13.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Philip E. Muehlenbeck, ed. *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), vii.

the Cold War. Even though historians have largely ignored Criswell, he provides insight into the mindset of Southern Baptists during the Cold War.

Scholarship regarding the Cold War and religion predominantly concentrates on efforts to forge a “national religion” in order to combat the atheism of communism. Religion is essential to a study of the Cold War because the rivalry of ideas was an integral aspect of the conflict, and the United States and Soviet Union often viewed one another through a religious lens.⁵ William Inboden’s *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* argues that U.S. leaders summoned American people to a religious crusade in order to maintain the domestic support needed for the extraordinary measures necessary to combat the Soviet Union.⁶ Inboden also states that religion was not only a cause, but also an instrument in the Cold War conflict.⁷ Historian Andrew Preston notes that religion in the Cold War has now become a vital part of international history. However, in 2012 he expressed his desire for a shift in the historiography of the Cold War and religion.⁸ He writes, “But we would do just as well to speak not simply of ‘religion *and* the Cold War’ or of ‘religion *in* the Cold War,’ but of ‘*the religious* Cold War,’ for matters of faith permeated the conflict, particularly certain episodes, to the extent that they often came to define the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union and between West and East.”⁹ W.A. Criswell personifies this view as he used religion as a vital instrument in his ministry by incorporating Cold War vernacular into his sermons and stating that

⁵ Ibid., xii-xiii.

⁶ William Inboden III, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 5.

⁷ Ibid., 2-5.

⁸ Andrew Preston, “Introduction: The Religious Cold War,” in Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*, xi.

⁹ Ibid.

God had offered a specific revelation concerning the fate of Russia.¹⁰

Several historians like Inboden and Preston have researched the impact of religion on U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. However, there is a gap in the historiography regarding to what degree Southern Baptists influenced foreign policy or were influenced by U.S. relations with other countries. Criswell was heavily involved in politics and boasted relationships with several presidents, yet there remains to be a study on the views that Southern Baptists contributed to national conversations. Historians have explored how U.S. politicians used religion to mobilize their citizens, but an examination of how religious leaders taught and used the Cold War within their own denominations is warranted.¹¹

It is vital to understand how Criswell and his ministry did not align with the historiography that casts religion in the Cold War as a diplomatic tool. Preston discusses how President Harry S. Truman recognized that religion was a source of democracy that protected freedom of conscience and in turn the individual's independence from the government.¹² He shows that Truman added religion to the Cold War tools of politics, economics, diplomacy, and military power. Truman desired to rally the forces of world religion in order to win the spiritual Cold War.¹³ Preston makes a convincing argument, but in a direct contrast to Truman, Criswell used the Cold War to ultimately grow the kingdom of God instead of vanquishing a political

¹⁰ W.A. Criswell, "America and Russian Communism," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, September 19, 1965, accessed on January 18, 2015, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>. See also W.A. Criswell, *Welcome Back, Jesus!* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1976), 148.

¹¹ See Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*; and David S. Fogelsong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire': The Crusade for a 'Free Russia' Since 1881* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹² Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 412.

¹³ *Ibid.*

enemy.¹⁴

Herzog's recent work, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War*, espouses similar views to Preston. He states, "The spiritual-industrial complex represented the deliberate and managed use of societal resources to stimulate a religious revival in the late 1940s and 1950s. It was an amalgam of institutions that straddled two worlds – one within the realm of policy decisions and the other within the realm of theological conjecture."¹⁵ Like Herzog and Preston other historians have explored how politicians encouraged and manipulated American religion in order to combat the Soviet Union. However, Criswell's sermons and books prove that he used Cold War vernacular and current events in order to draw people into his church and make Biblical principles comprehensible.

Religious historian Alan Scot Willis writes of the Cold War, "Historians – including historians of the Southern Baptists – have offered surprisingly few insights into how history was taught within religious institutions."¹⁶ Another historian, Charles Lippy argues, "Not a great amount of critical matter exists on W.A. Criswell. He has been the subject of countless brief articles in the religious and secular press, though most of these have had an ax of some kind or another to grind."¹⁷ This thesis fills a void by showing how Criswell's conviction during the early Cold War that the apocalypse was imminent motivated his ministry. Criswell offers a representation of Baptist ministers and Southern Baptist Convention presidents whose actions

¹⁴ In 1962 Criswell stated, "I have a word here concerning a call to a renewed commitment to Christ. The two philosophies, the two religions are irrevocably, eternally incompatible and irreconcilable!...But in this there is no middle ground: the world is not big enough for both. It is either Christ or communism; it is Christ or Marx." W.A. Criswell, "Communism Contra Christianity," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, July 1, 1962, accessed on March 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

¹⁵ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 6.

¹⁶ Alan Scot Willis, "Symbolic History in the Cold War Era," in Keith Harper, ed. *Through a Glass Darkly: Contested Notions of Baptist Identity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 273.

¹⁷ Charles H. Lippy, *Twentieth-Century Shapers of American Popular Religion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1989), 102.

were influenced by the grim circumstances of the Cold War.¹⁸

This work examines the writings and ministry of W.A. Criswell to demonstrate that the encompassing fear of the Cold War molded the sermons of many Southern Baptists pastors. David Stricklin argues that Criswell is essential to examine because, “In the twentieth-century, W.A. Criswell embodied the standard Southern Baptist attitude as well as anyone...His life provides a microcosm of the probable mentality of the majority of Southern Baptists.”¹⁹ Criswell believed that God favored his congregation of First Baptist Church of Dallas more than God favored any other.²⁰ Criswell’s books and sermons show that he was not just attempting to manipulate Americans’ fears regarding the Cold War. Rather, he firmly believed that the conflict with the Soviet Union indicated the world would end soon. This conviction motivated Criswell’s ministry and actions during the 1960s as he preached in downtown Dallas and served two terms as the SBC’s president.²¹

Historian David Settje shows that there has been a gap in the historiography regarding the religious language employed by this significant conservative demographic. He writes, “They [histories of American Christianity] have tended to focus on the 1950s and early 1960s, without

¹⁸ Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell are also key religious figures in the second half of the twentieth-century and offer similar stories to Criswell. Falwell was a fundamentalist preacher, who formed the Moral Majority in direct opposition to the cultural and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s. Falwell’s work mirrors Criswell’s in that he stated during the antiwar protests of the 1960s that churches should be solely concerned with transforming their communities through the saving power of the Gospel. Criswell and Falwell both considered the Bible to be their inerrant guide. Falwell firmly believed that a return to the Bible and its principles would allow America to be the base for world evangelization. Billy Graham echoed Criswell’s fears of the Soviet Union’s connection with Armageddon. By 1960, Graham had held crusades on every continent except Antarctica, including in communist countries. Graham denounced communist ideology, and viewed its rise as a sign of the apocalypse (a final conflict between Christ [good] and Antichrist [evil]) rapidly approaching. For more information on these men and other prominent religious figures during the Cold War, see *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁹ Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century*, 12-13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹ During his terms as president, the SBC had over eleven million members and was the largest denomination in the United States. See W.A. Criswell, *Standing on the Promises: The Autobiography of W.A. Criswell* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1990), 216.

pulling this important thread through the Vietnam War. Most studies have failed to look at Christian Americans' viewpoints into the 1960s to see why and how they employed this language of a holy war and crafted a theology to fit this ideology well into the 1970s.”²² A thorough examination of Criswell's sermons and resolutions from the SBC will offer clarity for what motivated his ministry and beliefs and the fundamentalist portion of the SBC during the Cold War.²³ His works demonstrate the theology that Southern Baptists molded to combat the Soviet Union.

Criswell's published writings merit examination in order to determine exactly how many Southern Baptists incorporated politics and current events into their sermons and theology. The sermons and exposition style of Criswell offer insight into how he relayed current events to his congregation, and how his preaching style shifted throughout the tumultuous Cold War. Even though Criswell was a trailblazer in the SBC during the Cold War, an assessment of how he influenced and shaped other leaders of the congregation is needed in order to define the true extent of his ideas and ministry. There needs to be a clear examination and distinction between how politicians and governments employed religion to combat the Soviet Union, and how

²² David Setjé, *Faith and War: How Christians Debated the Cold and Vietnam Wars* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 24.

²³ Angela M. Lahr defines evangelicals as, “Christians who consider the scriptures essential guides for their personal and political lives. They profess to connect with Jesus Christ directly and individually through prayer, fellowships with other believers, and obedience to their own interpretations of God's commands according to the Bible. Historian George Marsden characterizes them as Christians who hold to five basic beliefs: the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, the belief in the ‘real historical character’ of God, the belief in eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, the emphasis on evangelism, and the belief in a ‘spiritually transformed life.’” See Angela M. Lahr's *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism*. Political consultant Oran P. Smith offers a clear framework for defining the essential characteristics of fundamentalism. He states, “In fundamentalism, there is a reciprocal reinforcement between creedal belief and ritual action. Fundamentalists derive legitimacy by appeal to scriptural authority. Fundamentalism encourages Charismatic leadership. Fundamentalism is characterized by a religious ideology that arises out of scripture.” He also outlines criteria for assessing the SBC on a fundamentalism scale: “Fundamentalists see themselves as advocates of a pure minority viewpoint against a sullied majority or dominant group. Fundamentalists are oppositional and dominated by male elites. Fundamentalists generate their own technical vocabulary. Fundamentalism has historical antecedents but no ideological precursors.” See Oran P. Smith's *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

Criswell and the SBC used religion to grow their congregation, lead people to Christ, and combat the atheism of communism.

Scant attention has been devoted to how Southern Baptists combatted the atheism of communism during the Cold War. It is vital to examine Southern Baptists because at the beginning of the twentieth century they boasted membership numbers that were four times greater than the next largest denomination.²⁴ This commanding and influential presence warrants examination. *Newsweek* stated, “[Texas] is where Southern Baptists have literally inherited the earth and faith is as partisan as football.”²⁵ The writer V.S. Naipaul considered Criswell’s church a necessary shrine for a Southern Baptist pilgrimage.²⁶ This kind of press attention demonstrates that Criswell and Southern Baptists deserve particular attention in historical scholarship. Christians viewed the Cold War through their unique theological views and historical beliefs. Popular culture sources, anti-communist groups, and government officials all employed language of an “evil empire” that needed to be combatted with a democratic and Christian America.²⁷ Comprehending the characteristics of Baptists helps explain their role in the Cold War.

Criswell’s recorded weekly sermons serve as a representation for how Southern Baptist ministers utilized preaching to comfort their congregations and win converts to Christianity. Numerous personal accounts attest to the fact that members of Southern Baptist churches often behaved and believed like Criswell. Criswell’s discussion of Russian communism attracted

²⁴ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: Norton, 2011), 14.

²⁵ Ellen M. Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists: A Subculture in Transition* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 15.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷ Settje, *Faith and War*, 24.

fearful Americans into his church pews. His sermons capitalized on the negative aspects of communism in order to inspire Americans to fight for the benefits of capitalism and the American way of life. He relayed these views were related to his large congregation and through his weekly radio broadcast.²⁸ As of the mid-1970s First Baptist Church of Dallas boasted 19,000 members, and Criswell was able to reach many of America's thirteen million Southern Baptists through his radio program. Criswell's ministry provides a illustration of how the SBC reacted to the early Cold War and used fears related to the nuclear threat in order to reach Americans with the gospel

²⁸ Ibid.

Chapter One: How the Nuclear Age Influenced the Eschatology of W.A. Criswell and Other Leaders of the SBC

It is vital to establish the specific tenets of Criswell's eschatology, or beliefs concerning the end times, in order to outline exactly what he believed about the earth's final days. Criswell identified himself as a member of the futurist school of interpretation. Members of this group believe that starting in the fourth chapter of Revelation an apocalypse is described. This apocalypse entails Jesus Christ coming in great power and glory to establish himself as ruler of the world. Christ will bind Satan with an iron chain and will create a new heaven and new earth that includes a new Jerusalem. This kingdom will serve as the eternal home for Christians to dwell together with Christ as their ruler.¹ In order to fully explain his eschatology and demonstrate that Christ was rapidly approaching, Criswell incorporated current events into his sermons that he believed directly related to the book of Revelation.

Criswell boldly preached that the end of time would result in judgment for works that individuals committed during their time on earth. He proclaimed, "At the end time, at the end of this intermediate state when all of the souls that are saved are in, the body of Christ is complete—the bride hath made herself ready—there'll be a resurrection. There'll be a great banquet supper, and the Lord is going to give His people their rewards."² As there would be rewards for those that dedicated their lives to Christ, there would also be consequences for those that rejected Christ and his Word. Criswell's sermon continued, "All of the wicked dead, all of those whose names are not in the Lamb's book of life, they shall appear resurrected before the

¹ W.A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 28.

² W.A. Criswell, "Where We Go When We Die," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, February 5, 1956, accessed on January 25, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

great white throne of God, and they will be judged according to their works.”³ His belief in an eventual judgment inspired him to give Cold War era Americans specific instructions on how they could live out their final days for Christ.

The religious battle against communism exerted a powerful influence on American society during the Cold War.⁴ Evangelical anti-communism of the 1950s and 1960s surpassed its predecessors in its fervor and activity. Herzog states, “This second wave of anti-Communism had one disadvantage: relatively few people were willing to spend time and energy confronting a threat that most Americans no longer viewed as imminent.”⁵ Criswell was able to demonstrate that the threat of communism and the return of Christ was imminent. His sermons emphasized that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were in a religious, political, and military conflict. He stated,

Thursday morning, in the Dallas News, I read this article from the congressman of California, Congressman Holt. He described his experiences in the Soviet Union. And Holt said that during his entire time in Russia, he was not able to see anything off the beaten path. There is no freedom for the tourist going there. You see what they want you to see! And then they come back and say marvelous things about the Soviet Union. But you never see their slave camps! You never see their concentration camps! You never see their terrible factories! You never see the awful tyranny and slavery by which their people are ground to death under an impossible dictatorship. And their only hope lies that we will be true to the basic freedoms that belong by the Word of God and under heaven to every man that lives.⁶

Criswell believed that political trends and current events supported his belief that the return of Christ was a future event and had not already passed. He contended that the book of Revelation contained prophecy that indicated the establishment of Christ’s kingdom was an upcoming event. He held to the conviction that Revelation stated that the inevitable consolidation

³ Ibid.

⁴ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 198-9.

⁵ Ibid., 207.

⁶ W.A. Criswell, “A Report to the Church,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, September 11, 1955, accessed on March 19, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

of political power would be towards one great government, and that religious trends indicated that religions would merge into one great religion led by one prodigious leader that the book of Revelation calls the false prophet.⁷

Even though Criswell believed that the return of Christ was imminent, it is important to establish that he did not predict a specific date for Christ's return. Criswell clearly preached that the time of Christ's return was near, but he instructed his congregation that the book of Revelation did not offer a specific timeframe. He wrote, "There is no set time for the consummation in the Revelation. One can study it and study it, but there is no date in it. God's clock is not like our clock. God does not compute time as we compute time."⁸ The foundational belief that man could not know the exact hour when Christ would return added urgency to Criswell's ministry. He taught that God was shaping history and moving humanity towards its reconciliation with the coming king. He focused on the bodily return of Christ and the general signs that Jesus revealed so that his congregation would be prepared when the final days approached. He stated, "We are always to live in view of the imminency of the coming of Christ...Even though we are not to know the day and the hour (Matt. 24:36) we may know the general time when he will come back again. One thing we do know is that we are nearer the coming of Christ today than we have ever been before in all of history."⁹ Criswell made direct parallels between current events during the Cold War and the prophecies revealed in the Bible in order to show that the end times were rapidly approaching.

This focus on analyzing prophecy in light of the nuclear age reflects Criswell's conviction that the world was approaching its end. Regarding the cycle in history of good

⁷ Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, Vol. 1, 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹ W.A. Criswell, *Welcome Back, Jesus!* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1976), 138.

combating evil Criswell stated, “The thing is in a cycle; and it is vicious, and it is terrible. It was evil in the days of Hitler, and Tojo, and Mussolini; and it is evil today. And if the cycle continues to go as it has in days past, the hour will come when the whole world will be another Hiroshima—quailing, trembling before the lurid death that falls out of the sky.”¹⁰ Criswell clearly believed that the world would not be able to achieve lasting peace on its own, and that the creation of the atomic bomb indicated that the cycle of good and evil would end soon with the return of Christ and the destruction of the world. He went on to state, “We face annihilation. We face war and destruction...Ah, no. I got a Book in my hand. What’d Paul mean when he said: “Knowing the time...now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand?”¹¹ Criswell’s interpretations of Revelation offered answers to the nuclear threat. The atomic age showed Southern Baptists that the fulfillment of prophecy could be near, and they must turn to the salvation that God offered.

According to Criswell’s beliefs, the preacher of God’s Word was to proclaim God’s message with power, and then apply it to his own generation and congregation.¹² He instructed Southern Baptist preachers that the ultimate goal of preaching was to move the soul towards God and heaven. Additionally, in his guidebook for pastors Criswell stated that pastors must give their sermons an attractive title and clearly relate the message to the needs of the people.¹³ Through discussing the dangers of Communism and the threat of the Soviet Union, Criswell constructed relevant sermons that relied on current events to assuage people’s fears. Criswell used the expansionist goals of Communism to indicate to his congregation that the end times

¹⁰ W.A. Criswell, “Knowing the Time,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, January 16, 1955, accessed on January 29, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² W.A. Criswell, *Criswell’s Guidebook For Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 124.

¹³ Ibid., 78.

were approaching. He stated,

The avowed sustained drive and purpose of Red Communism is the domination of the whole world; it is revolution everywhere. In fact, Lenin said, “Communism could never be the government of one country until finally it came to be the government of all of the countries of the world.” And he said that meant world revolution. So we have it today; every council of war or peace, and every legislative assembly that always is before us, a shadow over the earth, the worldwide purpose of worldwide domination by the Red Communist international.¹⁴

Not only did he use the political aims of communism to connect with his congregation and prove that the end times were near, but he believed there were religious concerns as well.

Criswell reminded his congregation that throughout history empires had exerted extreme efforts to achieve religious uniformity. During sermons, he highlighted his concerns related to the atheism of communism. Criswell reminded his parishioners that Christ would one day establish his own kingdom and these current events highlighted the importance of evangelism. He proclaimed, “The great driving purpose of the church of God is to win men to Christ everywhere, everywhere, everywhere. Wherever there’s a lost man, preaching to him the gospel of the Son of God; wherever there is a family outside of Jesus, praying that they might come to know the Lord; that east and west, north and south, might be one in Him.”¹⁵ Criswell preached that through the signs in Revelation God gave comfort and encouragement to his people. God revealed these signs so that Christians may study and know them and that in the midst of disaster or wars, Christians would be able to receive solace from the knowledge that Christ would soon return to earth and establish his kingdom.¹⁶ This focus on evangelism would resurface as Criswell outlined instructions for his congregation to follow during the end times.

¹⁴ W.A. Criswell, “The True Red International (Part 1),” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, December 1, 1957, accessed on January 25, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, Vol. 1, 31.

Criswell's sermons and eschatology convinced his congregation and followers that the Jesus Christ of the Bible would one day physically return to earth and establish a permanent empire. He believed that this physical return was imminent. The Soviet Empire threatened Americans, but Criswell used sermons based on the Biblical book of Daniel to proclaim a coming triumphant empire. He wrote, "Daniel 2:35 plainly states that the fragments of world empire are completely swept away. Instead of these broken and decimated kingdoms, God establishes an empire that includes all humanity, all the earth, and that endures throughout all eternity."¹⁷ He directly connected the Soviet Union to the end times. He stated, "That raging sea—pictured in Daniel, pictured in the Revelation, the sand itself—that raging sea and its multitudinous sands, they are pictures of the violent chaotic masses in a day of crisis and revolution! And out of these horrible and terrible chaotic revolutions arise these great tyrannical leaders, without exception. Out of the vast chaotic revolution of the Soviet government, a Lenin was born."¹⁸ This enduring empire would offer a security to Christians that the American government could not guarantee.

Criswell connected his books and sermons on the book of Daniel to the book of Revelation. Using Revelation 19:11, Criswell preached that Jesus would intervene in human history and would reign on earth for a millennium. During this reign, Christ would bind up Satan and create a new heaven and a new earth. Criswell informed people that Christ would ultimately vanquish evil, and that individuals could reign with Christ if they accepted his offer of salvation.¹⁹ In a period where Americans were unsure about the safety that their government

¹⁷ W.A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on the Book of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 123.

¹⁸ W.A. Criswell, "The Beast from the Raging Sea," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, November 25, 1962, accessed on March 19, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

could offer them, Criswell was proclaiming that the day of Christ's return would surely be soon. He wrote, "A few years ago this prophecy of Ezekiel²⁰ seemed remote, but today we have seen many countries taken over by Russia, brought under the hammer and sickle. We are today living in the very day of the fulfillment of these prophecies. And Russia still marches on!"²¹ Criswell shared the gospel through detailed discussions of Biblical prophecy to inform people that they could ensure ultimate triumph and victory over evil if they believed in Jesus Christ.²²

Criswell's hope in the midst of threats from the Soviet Union resulted from his belief in the physical return of Christ. He stated, "I am not discouraged. You cannot discourage me. I am not downhearted. They cannot get me too downhearted. And I am not in despair. Why? Because the Lord God Omnipotent reigns. When death and destruction and tribulation overwhelm our earth like a flood, there is, then comes, and here reigns our Lord and our King, Christ Jesus."²³ Criswell proclaimed and exemplified hope and resoluteness. Criswell often wrote of the fact that history and the Bible did not offer reassurance that good always triumphed over evil here on earth. Criswell's writings stated that even if America was moral compared to the Soviet Union, only faith in Christ could guarantee the faith that Criswell possessed.²⁴ He preached that only faith in God could offer hope and solutions for the issues that confronted Americans. He declared, "It is not for us to understand why God permits the war, and the blood, and the persecution, and the martyrdom, and the death of His children...And God holds the earth, and

²⁰ "God's revelation concerning the northern confederacy, Russia and her allies, is in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Gog is the name of a leader, and Magog is his land, so in these chapters we see God's wrath against a man and his land." Criswell, *Welcome Back, Jesus!*, 148.

²¹ Ibid., 149.

²² Ibid., 123.

²³ Ibid., 135.

²⁴ Ibid., 132-4.

God holds the world, and God holds the creation, and God holds all destiny in His hand.”²⁵

Not only would the Soviet Union play a pivotal role in the earth’s final days, but Criswell also preached that God had delivered specific revelations connected to the fate of the United States that Southern Baptists needed to heed. Criswell believed that the Soviet Union was in danger of God’s wrath due to their refusal to live according to the Bible. He stated, “But the great denial is the basic one and the all-inclusive one: the denial of spiritual and soul freedom, the denial of religious liberty... ‘All of these churches are closed by government decree, not because they’re not patronized by the people.’ By government decree, the churches are made into railroad stations, and museums, and instruments of atheism, and warehouses, and grain storage. Or else they’re falling into decay.”²⁶ He pleaded with Americans not to allow their own religious beliefs to fall into decay, for surely the Lord would return some day. In 1965 he declared from the pulpit,

And some glorious day, some triumphant day, out of the blue of the sky, when the heavens shall be rolled back like a scroll, shall our King descend in triumph, in glory, in victory. And His feet shall stand upon that place, and we shall gather around Him by the thousands, and the tens of thousands, and the hundreds of thousands. And we shall rejoice, and clap our hands, and weep for gladness, and hug one another, and kiss one another, and say, “Our King has come back, our Lord has returned. O, glory to His marvelous and matchless name.” Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus for the victory belongs to God. And the triumph lies in His gracious hands and His people are to be faithful unto death.²⁷

Sermons related to these prophecies convinced Criswell’s congregation and similar Southern Baptist churches that they were experiencing the earth’s final days. SBC leaders wanted to ensure that their members reacted wisely to the communist threat. An article in *The*

²⁵ W.A. Criswell, “The Beast from the Raging Sea,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, November 25, 1962, accessed on March 19, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

²⁶ W.A. Criswell, “America and Russian Communism,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, September 19, 1965, accessed on January 25, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

²⁷ Ibid.

Baptist Standard stated, “It is the concern of many that the United States’ firm stand against world communism will not drive it toward an extreme “rightest” position that would at last lay the country bound hand and foot at the throne of the papacy.”²⁸ Southern Baptists desired to safeguard Americans against any alternative to communism that threatened their Evangelical beliefs since their days on earth were numbered.

Criswell reminded his parishioners that during the final days America would not escape God’s wrath. He implored his congregation, “Our hope lies in a great revival... It lies in our turning; turning, turning to God. This is the Lord’s appeal for us. However they may do out there, however somebody else may do over there, as for us and our house, let us turn to God. And for the sake of those righteous, Lord spare our country, our homeland, our city. Lord, in wrath, remember mercy.”²⁹ These prophecies and warnings inspired many Southern Baptists to solemnly live out their final days, and devote their time and energy towards preparing for the certain return of Christ to earth.

A 1961 article from the Baptist publication, *The Beam* evidences Criswell’s influence. Dr. Herschel H. Hobbs, President of the SBC from 1961 to 1963, wrote an article entitled “The Second Coming” that stated Billy Graham had asked three prominent theologians what the prominent theme of preaching should be for the upcoming decade. Without hesitation, Graham and these theologians declared that it should be eschatology. Like Criswell, Hobbs did not predict a specific date for Christ’s return, but he reminded Southern Baptists that the promise of the Lord’s return hangs over the world and that if they accepted the gospel they could anticipate the Lord’s return with joy. Hobbs begged those hearing his message to heed the words of

²⁸ “What Alternative to Communism?”, *The Baptist Standard*, January 4, 1961, 8-9.

²⁹ W.A. Criswell, “Is This The End Of The World?,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, September 10, 1961, accessed on January 25, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

Christ.³⁰ Criswell clearly serves as a representation of prominent SBC leaders that preached eschatology and urged people to turn to the Lord during the Cold War.

The books that Criswell produced informed people that the greatest event of the future would be the physical return of Jesus to collect his saints, and that there was nothing that was separating the people of the 1960s and 1970s from that event. Criswell repeatedly wrote that the return of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom could happen at any moment.³¹ Criswell's certainty of Christ's return is apparent through his descriptions of the role of Russia in the end times. Criswell referred to the evil and depravity of Russia as a bud that would indicate that the return of the Lord was soon. Since Christ's return was soon, the only hope resided in the Bible. He stated, "There has never been a people that refused or hesitated to use its destructive weapons to achieve its ultimate gain: the gun with powder; dynamite; TNT; the atomic bomb; and the next, the hydrogen; and beyond that, the dissolution of civilization and the annihilation of mankind...Not in history is there any measurable hope of an ultimate triumph for the peace and the glory and the salvation of the world."³² Criswell wrote that the descendants of Noah's son Japheth in Genesis 10 had settled in Russia.³³ Through his books, Criswell stated that not only was the rise of Russia a sign of the end times, but that God had offered a revelation that directly concerned Russia. He wrote, "God's revelation concerning the northern confederacy, Russia and her allies, in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Gog is the name of a leader, and Magog is his land, so in these

³⁰ "The Second Coming," *The Beam*, April 1961, 36-41.

³¹ Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation*, Vol. 1, 171.

³² W.A. Criswell, "Knowing the Time," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, January 16, 1955, accessed on January 29, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

³³ Criswell, *Welcome Back, Jesus!*, 148.

chapters we see God's wrath against a man and his land."³⁴ Based on these Scriptures, Criswell surmised that in the final days, Russia would take the risk and attack Israel, and then Russia would face God's wrath.

After establishing what Criswell believed regarding the end times and the ultimate fate of the Soviet Union, it is important to outline the general eschatological beliefs of the SBC.

Southern Baptist publications reveal that leading Southern Baptist ministers also believed that the movements of the Soviet Union indicated that the earth's final days were approaching. John R. Sampey Jr., who taught at Furman University, wrote in 1962 that the communists realized that the Cold War struggle was a struggle to the death, and he believed that they were disciplining themselves accordingly. He urged Southern Baptists to study their greatest combat orders, which he believed to be Jesus's command to go into all the world and make disciples. He wrote, "For 2,000 years soldiers of the Cross have disregarded this imperial command; but our generation will either dedicate their all in its execution, or we shall see mankind plunged into the ghastly horrors of a nuclear holocaust."³⁵ Sampey clearly believed that the end of the world was near, and like Criswell, he desired that Southern Baptists prepare by pursuing evangelistic efforts.

Also aligning with Criswell, Dr. Paul M. Stevens, director of the Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, argued that the greatest weapon against communism was Christianity. In November 1961, he wrote that the choices and actions of Christians would determine the future of Christianity and America. He argued that Christians could meet the needs of the world through Christian concern and sharing, or communists would change the world through class revolution. He warned Southern Baptists that these were perilous

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "Combat Orders," *The Baptist Standard*, August 29, 1962, 6.

times and Christians needed to act immediately.³⁶ America's precarious relationship with the Soviet Union inspired Southern Baptists, to utilize their final days on earth by combating Communism through a strong commitment to sharing their faith.

Criswell's eschatological views resulted from his fundamentalist belief that the Bible was without error. Criswell's dogmatic views regarding prophecy resulted from his certainty that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. Criswell's books reveal his belief that not a single critic could bring forth a discrepancy in the Bible that could not be resolved. Criswell wrote, "A critic with the rash misjudgment to announce an indubitable error in the Word of God ought to leave himself plenty of room to retreat. He had better be infallible himself or face certain humiliation."³⁷ Criswell's writings clearly affirmed his belief that the Bible is literally true. His writings after his election as SBC president in 1968, also appealed to Southern Baptist ministers to be true to the teachings of Scripture so that they could thrive. He believed that if Southern Baptists denied the power of the Bible that their powerful witness and message of grace would also cease.³⁸ He stated, "Let me speak to Southern Baptists. If our preachers, evangelists, pastors, churches, and institutions are true to that expression of faith, we shall live. If we repudiate it, we shall die."³⁹

The fundamentalist belief that the Bible contained true words of prophecy offered great comfort for Americans confronted by the nuclear threat. In 1969, during his first term as president of the SBC, Criswell published *Why I Preach that the Bible Is Literally True*. Criswell believed that his work represented the positions and beliefs of the majority of Southern Baptists,

³⁶ "The Ultimate Weapon," *The Beam*, November 1961, 6-9.

³⁷ W.A. Criswell, *Why I Preach that the Bible is Literally True* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishing, 1995), 44.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

but liberal critics vehemently denounced the book. The Association of Baptist Professors of Religion passed a formal resolution criticizing the book. However, while formidable critics denied Criswell's views on Biblical authority, the book continued to sell at a remarkable rate.⁴⁰ In this work he stated, "God alone can declare the end from the beginning. People are powerless to find out things to come...None of the books of other religions contain the phenomenon that is called prophecy. If the authors of these writings of other religions had attempted to foretell the future, they would have furnished the strongest evidence of their lack of inspiration and of their manifest deceptions."⁴¹ He was convinced that the prophecies that the Bible contained directly concerning the Soviet Union would not only comfort Americans, but also show that Christians could guarantee their eternal security. Criswell believed that fulfilled prophecy was a powerful argument to support the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible.⁴²

Not only did Criswell preach that Jesus' physical return to earth was certain, he also offered instruction for Christians who were awaiting the final days. Through his writings, Criswell urged Christians to foster compassion for the world that was ignorant of the Gospel. Due to the pressing fears of the Cold War, Criswell called for lay involvement in increased foreign missions actions. He clearly articulated what he believed was the true mission of the church, "Our assignment is to be witnesses for Christ in our Jerusalem, in our Judea, in our Samaria, and in our earth. It's a rather wide commission, don't you think? But a true church and a faithful association of churches, a denomination, will be found in obedience to that Great

⁴⁰ Timothy George in Criswell, *Why I Preach that the Bible is Literally True*, 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Commission.”⁴³ More than founding churches or schools, Criswell believed that the main goal of Southern Baptists was reforming and rejuvenating churches, and instructing people in church membership.⁴⁴ Until the Cold War ended with Jesus’ return, Criswell firmly preached that the Southern Baptist strategy for foreign missions must be courageous and pursued to the highest degree.⁴⁵

In 1964, Criswell called on every Southern Baptist to reach the world with the gospel message. He stated,

We’re not going to answer God’s call in our generation and in this world without a tremendous program, I mean a tremendous one. And I’m not talking about just a great program for our Southern Baptist Convention. I’m not talking about just a great program for our state conventions. I’m not talking about just a great program for our associations. I’m talking about every man in every pulpit in this land must be a giant for God, and he must offer to his people such a tremendous challenge, such a vast outlay, that the people are staggered by what the pastor asks of them, and believes that they are able and capable of doing it.⁴⁶

His urgency and call for lay involvement highlights the fears caused by the Cold War. Criswell clearly instructed his parishioners to live as though Christ was returning soon, and admonished Southern Baptist preachers that they must strictly adhere to the message of the Bible in order to ensure their eternal fate during the end times. The SBC and its pastors also established rules and guidelines for how Southern Baptists should act before the Lord’s imminent return. These instructions mirror Criswell’s convictions and display the true reach of his sermons and ministry.

Like Criswell, prominent members of Southern Baptist churches used the dread of the

⁴³ W.A. Criswell, “Our Far-flung Mission Line,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, March 5, 1967, accessed on February 13, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁴⁴ W.A. Criswell, *What To Do Until Jesus Comes Back* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1975), 54-55.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁶ W.A. Criswell, “The Divine Outreach (SBC) Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, May 19, 1964, accessed on November 11, 2015, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

Cold War and the end of World War II to promote a resurgence of religion. This resurgence took place in the form of a call for the advance of foreign mission efforts to reach people who had not heard the gospel. During the 1960s, the SBC and its presidents instructed their pastors and members to place an urgency on missions. In 1962, the SBC issued this resolution, “That we recognize that the proper and only adequate response to the challenge of communism is to be thoroughly Christian, and to seek to establish and support New Testament churches at home and throughout the world.”⁴⁷ President John Kennedy had inspired young people across America, and after his assassination, these young individuals lost their ideological leader. Despite the loss, they still desired to respond to social concerns.⁴⁸ Baptist Training Unions recognized the potential of these students and increased their activities and outreaches on college campuses. Jesse C. Fletcher writes of this time, “Seminary enrollments grew as these feeder movements delivered more and more young people who felt that the real answers to the turmoil of the period lay in the spiritual realm.”⁴⁹ Southern Baptists as a whole used political events to mobilize a new demographic of young people to evangelize the world before the end times.

Despite the success of young people, Southern Baptists continued their original goal of foreign missions. In 1948, Southern Baptists resolved to strengthen their efforts in their 119 missionary centers active in nineteen countries.⁵⁰ In 1963, the Foreign Mission Board was able to report more than 1,750 missionaries. The growing flow of seminary graduates responding to the goal of Southern Baptists permitted the Foreign Mission Board to maintain high standards

⁴⁷ Resolution On Communism San Francisco, California – 1962, accessed January 24, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/359/resolution-on-communism>.

⁴⁸ Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 210.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 211.

throughout their efforts to grow missions.⁵¹ In addition, the Home Mission Board worked to meet needs and combat crises on the American domestic scene. In 1963, the Home Mission Board began training Spanish-language missionary appointees at the Mexican Baptist Bible Institute located in San Antonio. In 1964, Texas Baptists joined the Foreign Mission Board in a “Crusade of the Americas”.⁵² Also in 1963, after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Home Mission Board shifted their work from Cuba to Miami in order to work with the growing number of refugees located there.⁵³ It is clear from SBC resolutions and increased missions efforts that Criswell’s specific instructions to gain converts due to the threat of the Cold War aligns with the Southern Baptist aim to advance the gospel and gain converts before the end of the world.

It was Criswell’s fundamentalist belief that the Bible was inerrant that led him to proclaim and elaborate on certain prophecies connected to the fate of the Soviet Union. Criswell incorporated headlines into his sermons to show the dangers associated with the Soviet Union and to demonstrate that war and the end of earth was imminent. He declared, “Every missile is pointed to the United States of America...and every bomber is being made to over span the United States of America. And the next war will be fought in our skies. We shall see livid death hurtling into our homes, and our streets, and our cities. War: the judgment of God, the signs of the times.”⁵⁴

The beliefs of prominent Southern Baptist ministers regarding the threat of the Soviet Union and the end times also resulted from the Southern Baptist commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible. In 1963, the SBC determined to revise the 1925 Confession of Faith with hopes to

⁵¹ Ibid., 211-212.

⁵² Ibid., 214.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ W.A. Criswell, “The Signs of the Times,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 8, 1963, accessed on January 25, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

contain the spreading liberalism occurring at SBC universities and seminaries.⁵⁵ Concerning the Scriptures they stated,

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is the record of God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. It reveals the principles by which God judges us; and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

In order to approve this 1963 document, the Baptist Faith and Message Committee that revised the articles brought together 13,000 Southern Baptist messengers in Kansas City in May 1963. After a heated debate guided by ministers such as Herschel Hobbs and Albert McClellan, the convention agreed to approve the document as it was originally presented.⁵⁷ This example demonstrates the commitment of the SBC to clearly outline their belief that the Scriptures were to be interpreted solely through Jesus's words.

The Southern Baptist tenet that God authored the Bible led their leaders not to view prophecy figuratively. Prominent Evangelist Billy Graham upheld this belief from his national platform. In 1969, in front of 800 Southern Baptist leaders Graham defended the Southern Baptist commitment to inerrancy and Criswell's, *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True*. Graham stated, "We have a responsibility to guard against error, one of Satan's techniques is to infiltrate us."⁵⁸ He warned Southern Baptists that they must always guard against theological error within their ranks. This belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible reflects Criswell's fundamentalist belief that the Bible is without error. This article also demonstrates that other

⁵⁵ Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 209.

⁵⁶ 1963 Convention Item 122 Committee On Baptist Faith And Message (not A Resolution), accessed January 23, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/search/>.

⁵⁷ Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 209.

⁵⁸ "Graham Agrees with Criswell on Liberalism," *The Baptist Standard*, December 17, 1969.

prominent evangelists shared Criswell's beliefs, and defended his conviction that the Bible must be interpreted literally.

Literal interpretations of Scripture and the SBC's focus on the end times increased with the threat of the nuclear age. The prominence of religious beliefs during the early Cold War increased the dramatic fears connected to the atomic bomb. Aligning with Criswell's beliefs, prophecy writers during the late 1950s and early 1960s continued to point to the nuclear threat as evidence for the inerrancy of the Bible. Not only did atomic weapons confirm that the earth would end one day, but they also indicated how the prophecies revealed in the Bible would be accomplished.⁵⁹ Evangelicals believed that the atomic bomb proved that once again the Bible was ahead of science, and that an atomic blast offered an exact picture for what the end of the world that the Bible foretold would look like.⁶⁰ Interpretations during this period led religious leaders to the conviction that the Cold War pointed to another great war, and that the nuclear arms race was a training ground for Armageddon.⁶¹ Historian Paul Boyer writes, "Given this conviction, prophecy writers dismissed Washington's message of peace through strength, survival through civil defense, and Utopia through peacetime use of atomic energy. Whatever the soothing rhetoric, they insisted, the nuclear arms race obviously represented a giant step towards Armageddon."⁶² Literal interpretations of the prophecies related in Scripture offered a peace and security that government programs could not guarantee.

The dawn of the nuclear age came with a grave warning from news commentator H.V.

⁵⁹ Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 125.

⁶⁰ Paul Boyer, *Fallout: A Historian Reflects on America's Half-Century Encounter with Nuclear Weapons* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 132.

⁶¹ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 124.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 124-5.

Kaltenburn, “For all we know, we have created a Frankenstein. We must assume that with the passage of only a little time, an improved form of the new weapon we use today can be turned against us.”⁶³ Since the end of World War II, Americans were struggling to reconcile the fact that they had emerged victorious; yet they faced a new opponent as evil as the ones that they had just defeated.⁶⁴ The nuclear age and Cold War witnessed one of the first times that a victor from a war emerged with a sense of trepidation and uncertainty, and with the knowledge that the future and survival were not guaranteed.⁶⁵ Historian Andrew Preston states that religious faith became a natural reaction to the nuclear revolution.⁶⁶ He writes, “Religion and antireligion also provided the Cold War’s contestants with their ideas, values, and motivations. And religion itself changed as the Cold War brought new pressures, especially modernization and state centralization, to bear on individuals, nations, and societies.”⁶⁷ Americans realized that their survival was not certain, but religion provided them with comfort and answers for the future and a hope for what lay beyond the grave. A 1954 Gallup Poll reported that the increase in church attendance could be traced to fears regarding the future. Three in ten Americans that were interviewed reported that public unrest and a renewed faith in God as the Supreme Being drew them into church. At this time forty-six percent of American adults, or some forty-seven million individuals, attended church on a typical Sunday. This is an astonishing growth from four years prior when only

⁶³ Ira Chernus, *Nuclear Madness: Religion and the Psychology of the Nuclear Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 145.

⁶⁴ Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America’s Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 10.

⁶⁵ Chernus, *Nuclear Madness*, 145-6.

⁶⁶ Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*, xii.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, xviii.

thirty-nine percent of the adult population regularly attended church.⁶⁸ A 1965 poll showed that forty-four percent, or fifty million, adults attended church on a weekly basis.⁶⁹ Clearly, religion was one of the era's most vital mass movements.⁷⁰

Due to the era's focus on religion, it is important to analyze and explore how the nuclear threat created by the atomic bomb affected interpretations of prophecy and views of the end times. Until 1945, theologians typically believed that the end of the world would come about in naturalistic terms, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, or a volcanic eruption. With the creation of the atomic bomb, man believed that he had created his own means of prophesied doom.⁷¹ Boyer states, "In the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, however, such prophetic biblical passages as 'The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up' (II Peter 3:10)⁷² took on a chilling resonance."⁷³ Due to the nuclear arms race, Christians had to reckon with the possibility that their generation could be the last one. In 1950, a Gallup Poll reported that the threat of war was considered the most pressing issue facing the issue. This threat was so encompassing that this answer was stated three times more than the next most pressing issue, the rising cost of living and other economic concerns. Forty percent of

⁶⁸ George Gallup, "New Fears of Future Cited In Increase of Church-Going," *The Washington Post and Time Herald*, December 17, 1954, 23.

⁶⁹ George Gallup, "50 Million Americans Attend Church in Week," *The Washington Post and Time Herald*, December 27, 1965, 2.

⁷⁰ Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*, xvii.

⁷¹ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 115.

⁷² "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (KJV)

⁷³ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 237.

Americans singled out war as the chief worry for the nation; this was the highest percentage since the end of World War II.⁷⁴ A 1951 Gallup Poll revealed that fifty percent of Americans would not feel safe in their town or city in the event of an atomic war. They stated that their anxiety resulted from their perception that state officials were not doing enough to organize civil defense.⁷⁵ Christians now knew that they had a moral obligation to make preparations and win converts before the end of the world.⁷⁶ The dropping of the atomic bomb brought the end times into the forefront of religious discussions, and caused Christians to reevaluate their role in reaching the secular world. An article published in *Christian Century* in 1946 reflects this point.

A function of Christians is to make preparation for world's end. For generations this fundamental aspect of the Christian faith has been ignored or relegated to the subconscious. But now eschatology confounds us at the very center of consciousness... We need to consider the meaning of the first century eschatology for our scientific era and the role of Christians as they face the threat offered by the atomic bomb.⁷⁷

A statement from George F. Kennan in 1981 best represents that Americans believed the end was near. He described the American response to the nuclear threat in this way, "We have gone on piling weapon upon weapon, missile upon missile, new levels of destructiveness upon old ones. We have done this helplessly, almost involuntarily, like the victims of some sort of hypnotism, like men in a dream, like lemmings headed for the sea."⁷⁸ Americans were gripped by nuclear fears due to the end of America's atomic monopoly in 1949, and the fact that in the 1950s the United States and the Soviet Union developed the hydrogen bomb and sophisticated

⁷⁴ George Gallup, "War Threat Held No. 1 Problem," *The Washington Post*, May 5, 1950, 14.

⁷⁵ George Gallup, "50% of Voters Say They Feel Unsafe From A-Bomb Attack," *The Washington Post*, February 24, 1951, 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁷⁷ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 117.

⁷⁸ Boyer, *Fallout*, 107.

control systems increased the reality of a push-button war that could extinguish millions of lives instantly.⁷⁹ During this period, nuclear anxieties were increased by the emphasis on civil defense initiated by the “Operation Alert” program of the Civil Defense Administration. This program created radio alert systems, evacuation plans, warning sirens, school air-raid drills, and films on how to survive an attack.⁸⁰ Kennan’s statement and the frightened reaction of Americans to the nuclear threat demonstrates why Southern Baptist leaders believed the end of the world was near. This terror provided an opportunity for Southern Baptists, like Criswell, to articulate what comforted them in the atomic age.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 108.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Chapter Two: The Forging of a National Religion and the SBC and Criswell

During the Cold War, Christian attitudes unquestionably affected U.S. foreign policy. The majority of Christians believed that the atheism of communism needed to be combated, thus religious institutions made significant contributions to the national conversation.¹ Religiously charged Americans mobilized society throughout the Cold War.² Additionally, the U.S. government also utilized the spiritual dynamisms of the nation. One clear example of this is the language incorporated in NSC 68. Historian Dianne Kirby writes of NSC 68, “[NSC 68] began not with a geopolitical evaluation but with the vision of an apocalyptic struggle between American good and Soviet evil. NSC 68 wanted to defeat the ‘fanatic faith’ of communism by mobilizing a superior counter-force, awakening ‘the latent spiritual energies of free men everywhere.’”³ Clearly, during the Cold War, Southern Baptist preachers and other Christians were not the only ones who integrated religion into their thoughts and actions. Religion became a valuable tool of the U.S. government that allowed politicians to construct their messages and aims in terms that resonated with an American public that believed the Cold War was a battle between good and evil.⁴

American wars have been waged with more than artillery and tanks. Over the decades religious language and symbols served as a powerful defense against godless countries attempting to squash liberties. President Dwight D. Eisenhower believed that America’s spiritual

¹ Settje, *Faith and War*, 24.

² Ibid.

³ Dianne Kirby, ed. *Religion and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 2.

⁴ Settje, *Faith and War*, 24.

weapons were the nation's greatest defense.⁵ Not only has religion factored into debates regarding foreign policy, it has also deeply influenced the personal lives of important politicians.⁶ A national interest in religion arose in response to the perceived and real threat of the Soviet Union. Historian T. Jeremy Gunn writes, "The majority of the American public and the vast majority of its political leaders ultimately came to adopt a new worldview that did not place primary importance on American foreign policy promoting democracy, human rights, or non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. Nor did American foreign policy resist the use of military force as a tool to advance its interests."⁷ Many politicians such as Eisenhower, Harry S. Truman, and John Foster Dulles used God in the political arena not to call Americans to true repentance, but rather for the political purpose of creating a defense against America's enemies at home and abroad.⁸

Focusing on religious issues and shaping the religious conscious of Americans was a quest undertaken by the U.S. government to unite the forces of religion against the atheism of communism. Politicians considered communism to be the ultimate threat to faith and democracy, and religion seemed to provide the only true and lasting answer.⁹ Scrutinizing religion during the Cold War, particularly Criswell's sermons, shows that sermons directly impacted foreign policy. Herzog argues, "Most history books tell us that for Americans the Cold War was a conflict

⁵ T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 3.

⁶ There was a marked change in Americans' views regarding religion. 1964 Gallup Polls revealed that college students were much more conservative in their religious beliefs than their parents and more than 80 percent of young Protestants believed that life would continue beyond the grave and that Jesus was divine. College students exhibited a great change in their interest regarding religion. Kenneth Dole, "Religion Gaining in U.S. Colleges," *The Washington Post and Time Herald*, August 1, 1964, A13.

⁷ Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons*, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 413.

between rival economic and political systems – of Minuteman missiles, publicized images of Soviet bread lines, and well-planned celebrations of personal liberty. But for US policy makers, the Cold War was also a contest between religious systems.”¹⁰ Examining the forging of a national religion and discussing the religious aspects of the Cold War is not an attempt to rewrite history. Rather, the goal of recent religious scholarship is to reexamine an influential but overlooked aspects of the Cold War.¹¹ Religious history during the Cold War, including Criswell’s activities, contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the Cold War.

During the early Cold War, as America’s political and military leaders described their communistic enemies as evil, they were instrumental in laying the groundwork for the Cold War to be viewed in religious terms. Herzog writes, “The Cold War was in this sense a rare moment when Americans faced a theologically alien enemy. Although they could defeat political regimes with the usual implements of warfare, the annihilation of a religious system would require something more. To fight communism, Americans would have to fight faith with faith.”¹² The actions of Protestant evangelical leaders, such as Criswell, exhibit the interaction of domestic and religious issues. Protestant leaders did not consistently lead the fight against communism, but once they took up this cause they accomplished the most for religious anti-communism. Herzog shows that when religious leaders defined communism and its beliefs that they were ultimately outlining a path for its defeat. The implementation of this defeat, however, relied on the policies and tactics of public servants.¹³

Truman and Eisenhower represent American leaders that combined religious factors and

¹⁰ Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*, 45.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

political issues. In 1959 Eisenhower stated, “I think we should never forget we are supporting principles which are after all religious in their derivation. And I mean politically speaking, as against a godless atheism--and because this is an atheistic ideology, denying all human rights, any kind of human dignity--we have an enemy operating under a dictatorship that has us always at a disadvantage.”¹⁴ Leaders such as these provided the foundation that permitted Criswell and other Southern Baptists to enjoy great success and prominence. These politicians recognized that employing spiritual leaders and means was not simply a rational way to combat the Cold War, but an essential element.¹⁵ U.S. political rhetoric underscored the conclusions reached by politicians in private.¹⁶ Religious leaders did not desire to make religion the main lens that interpreted the events of the Cold War; rather they sought to draw attention to the role that religious considerations played in the entanglement.¹⁷

President Truman utilized religious principles in order to round out America’s arsenal against the Soviet Union. During his administration, America possessed military might and economic power, but Truman believed that religious faith ultimately differentiated America from their communistic opponent.¹⁸ Truman believed that religion was the missing element in U.S. foreign policy. He stated, “When the sages and the scientists, the economists and the statesmen have exhausted their resources in the search for peace and security in this troubled world, one solution and only one solution will remain – the substitution of conscience for force in the government of man. The alternative is the annihilation of civilization... Religion alone has the

¹⁴ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Remarks to a Delegation From the National Council of Churches, September 9, 1959, accessed on March 9, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11504&st=Religion&st1=>

¹⁵ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 8.

¹⁶ Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*, 53.

¹⁷ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 9.

¹⁸ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 412.

answer to humanity's twentieth century cry of despair."¹⁹ As Truman rallied the forces of religion together to combat the Soviet Union, he provided the foundation that granted prominence to religious figures such as Criswell. In the following decades, the prominence of religion would grow and religious leaders would utilize their platform to influence domestic and international policies.²⁰

Government officials initiated the forging of a national religious consciousness, "Rather than serving as an institution protected by a Constitutional guarantee, religion became a protective shield, slashing sword, and the bedrock upon which American freedom drew its justification and strength. Simply put, religion became part of the Cold War solution for America's public servants."²¹ Part of this solution derived from Truman's definition that true freedom was the right to do that which was morally righteous.²² In 1948 Truman declared, "We must always make spiritual values our main line of defense."²³ He expressed his desire that all loyal Americans unite in prayer. Truman's battle against atheism insinuated that loyal Americans were those that girded themselves with prayer.²⁴ Religion was not simply a tool in the government's arsenal, rather it was America's ideological armor.²⁵ A national religion was essential to America's defense because the Cold War divided people along economic and

¹⁹ Ibid., 412.

²⁰ This prominence of religion is perhaps best exemplified by the ministry of Billy Graham. Graham was an adviser guide for every president from Harry Truman to George W. Bush. Graham found his way into countries not receptive to Americans and drew millions of people to hear him. For more information see Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House* (New York: Hachette Book Group USA, 2007).

²¹ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 76.

²² Ibid., 81.

²³ Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons*, 52.

²⁴ Ibid., 52.

²⁵ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 87.

political lines, but the president and his advisers took advantage of every opportunity to cast the war in religious and spiritual terms in order to unify the American people.²⁶ The unanimity of Congress and the American government to enact these religious changes denotes something significant.

Religious influences were evident in cultural changes stemming from the government. In 1955, Congress mandated that “In God We Trust” be inscribed on all U.S. currency.²⁷ George Washington also provided an example of a man who relied on religion to sustain him during the uncertainty of war. The image of Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge, while there is no evidence that this scene occurred, became an important tool during the Cold War.²⁸ During this period, opposition to sacralization was equated with disloyalty and un-Americanism.²⁹ Herzog describes this national unity in a profound way,

It is telling that lawmakers in the Cold War decided that faith in God, rather than faith in the nation’s ability to weld together disparate interests, was “superior”...As the years passed, the new national motto, like the new pledge and the political rhetoric accompanying it, seemed less a Cold War construction and more an eternal American truth – passed down, perhaps, from the lips and quills of the founders themselves.³⁰

One vital area to recall in an examination of the forging of the national religion is the Cold War era belief that the religious could not be communists, and thus the irreligious could not be true and faithful Americans.³¹ During the Cold War, Soviet elites considered religion a hindrance for their goals and the ultimate good of the nation. Karl Marx’s theology preached that

²⁶ Ibid., 94.

²⁷ Ibid., 107.

²⁸ Ibid., 120.

²⁹ Ibid., 105.

³⁰ Ibid., 108.

³¹ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 42.

God was nothing without man's creation, and that human reason was superior to personally felt belief.³² In direct contrast, American intellectuals and politicians deemed religion to be a cornerstone of the nation and worked to promote and preserve it. Americans believed that progress required faith.³³ Conservative Christians added a powerful voice that no other more liberal denomination could provide during the early Cold War era.

Religious liberals critiqued America's role in the world, but conservative Christians such as Criswell supported the containment theory and the promotion of economic development and human rights.³⁴ Criswell stated, "Have you decided in your mind where you're going to draw that line? Somewhere, sometime, you've got to stand before communist aggression and that's why we have drawn the line in South Vietnam! If you don't draw it there you will draw it some other place, only nearer and nearer and nearer and nearer and nearer."³⁵ Religion adds a powerful dynamic to the discussion of the Cold War, and the contributions of conservatives demand their own examination. Herzog argues for the importance of religion in a study of the Cold War. He states, "American leaders recognized that Communism was an armed doctrine... Intellectuals, journalists, and theologians who studied Communism... began to conclude that it stood for more than atheism and the destruction of organized religion. They saw it also as a powerful religion of materialism, complete with its own scripture, prophets, and eschatology."³⁶ The realization that the Soviet Union was promoting its own eschatology, one that opposed the Christian belief

³² Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 61.

³³ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 5.

³⁴ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 481.

³⁵ W.A. Criswell, "Questions Teenagers Ask," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 23, 1967, accessed on February 21, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

³⁶ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 5-6.

system, demonstrates why an examination of Criswell's beliefs is essential.

Not only did a national religion aid in America's fight against the Soviet Union, but religious terms also raised the stakes of the entanglement. Religious leaders viewed the world in theological terms and believed that the world divided along a spiritual fault line that was irreconcilable. The physical division may have appeared between the Western and Eastern blocs, but American politicians believed there was also a dividing line in the spiritual realm.³⁷ J. Edgar Hoover stated his belief that communism was the bitter enemy of religion, and that communists would like to extirpate religion.³⁸ Policymakers concluded that Russian leaders showed no signs of compromising their beliefs, thus Americans desperately needed to strengthen their resolve that they would not forsake their moral and religious beliefs in order to achieve leadership in a world that was searching for spiritual answers.³⁹

Throughout the Cold War, American leaders realized they could only defeat the Soviet Union by relying on a faith system that rivaled communism. American presidents recognized that their battle against communism was unprecedented, and that communism was more than a political movement. Policymakers acknowledged that communism was hostile to religion. A secret report penned by Edward F. Willet on January 14, 1946 stated, "It should be clear at the outset that under these circumstances the United States is laboring under a severe disadvantage, Russia is a nation with the Messianic goal, the driving force around which a crusading spirit can be built up. Our driving force is only the somewhat passive concept of self-defense."⁴⁰ Clearly,

³⁷ Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960*, 229.

³⁸ J. Edgar Hoover, "Communism: The Bitter Enemy of Religion," Communism 1962 12-8, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

³⁹ Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960*, 230.

⁴⁰ Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*, 51-2.

the United States would be at a disadvantage if the government did not provide a counter faith that channeled American passion into defeating this formidable foe.

Aligning with this need for a religious defense, a prominent Catholic leader paved the way for Criswell to gain his own prominence. Fulton Sheen studied communism throughout his career, and hosted radio and television programs. Starting in 1930 he hosted a Catholic radio show broadcasted across America. Two decades later he hosted an enormously popular television program *Life Is Worth Living*.⁴¹ He regularly discussed the spiritual elements of communism and how Americans could resist these elements. According to Herzog, Sheen believed that “Communism merely invaded spiritually weak hosts. The enticements of Marx would fail to penetrate the psyche of religiously grounded men and women. Yet he thought that America’s increasingly liberal, materialistic, and secularized culture lowered resistance to Communist infection.”⁴² This logic taught Americans that you could not fight a holy war with earthly weapons.

The mobilization of religious leaders shows the true scope and power of a national religion during the Cold War era. Criswell’s gospel-centered preaching was paramount because religious revival ensured that the communists would lose their monopoly on passion and zeal.⁴³ Religion thrived during the Cold War because it provided a solution that involved many Americans. Preston explains the success and attraction of religion during this period, “This new breed of evangelical missionary, eager to dispense a material aid as well as the gospel, thrived in the Cold War. They promised to deliver a solution to instability and the expansion of

⁴¹ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 57.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 67.

communism because the two seemed fundamentally connected.”⁴⁴ Religion took on a new form during the Cold War, Herzog asserts, “Religious leaders had long called for revival in times of trial and triumph. What made the early Cold War different was the degree to which other, secular institutions had reached the same conclusion.”⁴⁵ This newfound public piety arose because as the communists fervently proclaimed their ideals, Americans had to rally to bolster their own faith. Spiritual aspirations were woven together with political and economic goals in a way that best supported the aims of politicians.⁴⁶

Historian David S. Fogelsong’s scholarship demonstrates that Americans understood the Soviet Union through a religious lens. His work, along with the contributions examined from Herzog, Preston, and Inboden, reflect the importance of bringing together religious and diplomatic history.⁴⁷ Starting with the late 1950s Americans began to favor a relaxation of tensions and a call for increased interactions between the two superpowers in order to provide an avenue for the softening of communistic ideology. Right-wing political activists and religious leaders were creating the ideological base for a new crusade against the Soviet Union that called for the exchange of cultural and education ideals that they believed would cause the foundation of communism to crumble.⁴⁸ Religion served as an ideal political and ideological weapon during the Cold War.⁴⁹ American conservatives, such as James Burnham, William F. Buckley, and David Lawrence, emphasized the instability in the Soviet Union. Washington wanted to highlight

⁴⁴ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 481.

⁴⁵ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 70.

⁴⁶ Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960*, 258.

⁴⁷ Muehlenbeck, *Religion and the Cold War*, 45.

⁴⁸ Fogelsong, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 131.

⁴⁹ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 415.

the crises in the Soviet Union in order to expedite true liberty for the Russians.⁵⁰ Americans desired to engage with Russians and show them the disparities between the two political regimes and lifestyles. Religion was not only a diplomatic tool that the government utilized to mobilize its citizens and combat the ideology of communism, the spreading of Protestant faith highlighted the differences between the two nations.

The culture of the early Cold War explains how deeply religious messages resounded with American citizens. This religiously charged culture owes much to the influence of Billy Graham. While Graham cannot be strictly defined as a Southern Baptist, his church membership was at Criswell's church.⁵¹ Graham's vigorous anti-communism appealed to Americans and made him the most famous evangelist during the postwar era. His sermons combined the fears of Armageddon with the assurance of redemption that only God could provide, this was similar to Criswell's approach.⁵² He stated, "Only as millions of Americans turn to Jesus Christ at this hour and accept him as Savior, can this nation possibly be spared the onslaught of a demon-possessed communism."⁵³ When Graham mentioned revival he connected this with halting the spread of communism, and he would often devote entire sermons to the combat between Christian America and atheistic Russia.⁵⁴

During the early Cold War, churches were the most trusted institution in America, and in 1947, Americans reported that they believed that religious leaders were doing the most good for

⁵⁰ Fogelson, *The American Mission and the 'Evil Empire'*, 134-5.

⁵¹ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 188.

⁵² Steven J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 78.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

their country.⁵⁵ The Cold War demanded action from Christians in order for America to defeat the Soviet Union. Throughout the 1960s, conservative Christianity undergirded U.S. public opinion regarding the Cold War and assisted the government in its aims to hold to the containment theory.⁵⁶ Stephen Whitfield points out that it is imperative not to view the 1950s and following decades as another Great Awakening. Rather, he argues, that which was revived was not necessarily religious belief, as it was a revival in the belief of the value of religion. The theology of this era was based on the conviction that religion was synonymous with American nationalism.⁵⁷

This religiously-minded culture also had to determine how they would engage those who sought to reform or target its religious beliefs. Historian Mark Oppenheimer argues that Catholics, Episcopalians, and Jews made way for countercultural individuals and allowed aspects of American counterculture such as music, clothes, language, and permissiveness to find their way into these denominations.⁵⁸ However, the SBC reacted in a unique manner to the social upheaval of the 1960s. Oppenheimer argues that the only Southern Baptists speaking the language of the culture were those evangelists who were attempting to bring young people into the church. He asserts that in order for young people to be accepted by traditional Southern Baptists they had to adjust their political views and actions or leave the denomination altogether.⁵⁹ Southern Baptists believed that counterculturalists were actively challenging the ethics that governed aspects of their everyday lives. Oppenheimer asserts that Southern Baptists

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁶ Setje, *Faith and War*, 23.

⁵⁷ Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 86-7.

⁵⁸ Mark Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: American Religion in the Age of Counterculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 173.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

did attempt to engage the counterculture, but these attempts were on the Baptist leader's terms. The SBC endeavored to adopt the young people's language and go out and evangelize to youth or hippies, but they did not desire that these hippies enter their churches.⁶⁰

In order to not vilify the SBC's efforts to engage the culture in the 1960s, it is vital to remember its history and study its mindset. Historically for Southern Baptists, cultural dissent has always been the method used by outsiders to end a way of life. Since the Civil War, they believed it was their job to guard their religion and way of life from such attacks.⁶¹ Thus, it was vital for the Southern Baptists to prevent the counterculture from infiltrating their way of life no matter how much young Americans pleaded to transform the denomination. The debates that Southern Baptists experienced reflected those occurring in the U.S. government. Policy makers debated traditional and moderate approaches. Traditional Southern Baptists asserted that the containment theory was still necessary, while moderates desired a new approach due to the changes of the 1960s.⁶²

Oppenheimer argues that Southern Baptists had to resist the counterculture because they understood the true threat of countercultural values to their way of life and ethics. He argues, "For Southern Baptists, the 'church' was, by the 1960s, a unified system of traditional values, patriotism, and cultural homogeneity. The other four religions [Judaism, Catholicism, Episcopalians, Unitarians] lacked that kind of integrated ethos."⁶³ Clearly, the Southern Baptists presented a united front that they needed to preserve. Criswell provides an excellent example of how Southern Baptist ministers attempted to engage the young people on their own terms while

⁶⁰ Ibid., 210.

⁶¹ Ibid., 211.

⁶² Settje, *Faith and War*, 26.

⁶³ Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, 210.

still preserving the theology and traditions of their religion.

Criswell's ministry provides a lens to examine how Southern Baptist ministers fought against the cultural changes of the 1960s by utilizing the newly forged national religion. As part of his sermon series that journeyed through the Bible, Criswell taught his congregation that since the first missionary Christians had faced opposition from multiple groups, including the government. He reminded his parishioners that despite any opposition that they encountered, the Holy Spirit was working throughout the world and Christ's return was certain. He instructed his congregation on the best relief plan Christians could offer their nation and those suffering around the globe. He claimed, "The most salutary and beneficial and blessed and helpful of all of the movements of the world is when God's people, and the Christian people, band themselves together in prayer, in intercession, and in appeal, and when the great moving spirit of revival sneaks through them and over the land."⁶⁴

Not only did Criswell desire to use the forging of a national religion to spread the gospel, but he also desired to fight against the liberal cultural changes and preserve his church. In 1965, he delivered a message that outlined the theological assaults confronting SBC churches. Criswell identified that Americans were denying the authority of the Scriptures and were being infiltrated by humanism, evolution, materialism, and secularism.⁶⁵ He used these aspects of the changing culture to educate his congregation on traditional Biblical principles that would aid them in preserving the Bible and fighting against the moral upheaval of the period.⁶⁶ Criswell did not retreat during the upheaval of the 1960s, rather he utilized the changing culture and national

⁶⁴ W.A. Criswell, "The Christian Faith and World Revolution," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, September 18, 1955, accessed on February 21, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁶⁵ W.A. Criswell, "The Church of the Apostasy," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, May 2, 1965, accessed on February 21, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

religion to continue his ministry.

It is important to note that Criswell incorporated the fears of the American people into his sermons in order to grow the Kingdom of God and his congregation at the First Baptist Church of Dallas. Criswell did not seek to include Cold War imagery and prophecies related to the Soviet Union into his sermons solely to gain prominence or influence for himself or his church.⁶⁷ He taught that the effectual minister of God's Word must never cease to be a student. He believed that pastors must exhibit strict discipline and remain steadfast in their study of God's Word in order to resist temptation. He wrote, "A profound conviction that study- persistent, regular, and lifelong- is the first duty of the man who seeks to stand before God in the pulpit as an instructor of the people. Let other duties have their place, but the first, the most imperative duty of him who teaches others is to teach himself."⁶⁸ Criswell recognized the importance of reaching individuals, regardless of their station in life. He declared, "Let us say to any despairing preacher or evangelist, the word from the pastor James, 'Let him know, let him know that he that converteth a sinner, one sinner, from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins.'"⁶⁹ He desired to reach each man with the gospel, and the current events surrounding communism served as a powerful way to connect with Americans. Even though politicians and government officials relied on religious themes to promote their anti-communist agenda, Criswell incorporated anti-communist rhetoric into his sermons to assert that the end times were rapidly approaching and Americans must turn to God.

Not only did the resurgence of religion allow politicians to cast domestic and

⁶⁷ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 233.

⁶⁸ Criswell, *Criswell's Guidebook For Pastors*, 64-5.

⁶⁹ W.A. Criswell, "Tomorrow Is Too Late," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, March 21, 1954, accessed on February 17, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

international issues in religious terms that resonated with the American public, but also the era's focus on religion provided Southern Baptist pastors with an avenue for gaining political influence and power for their denomination. The increase in religious consciousness in America inspired Christians to spread this religion throughout the world. Evangelicals believed that missionaries ushered in revival, and that as missionaries grew in their success this indicated that the end of the world was near. Missions provided an activity for evangelicals to focus on as they awaited Christ's return.⁷⁰ American missionaries reflected the phenomenon of a national religion because they spread a dual Cold War message. They proclaimed the eschatological gospel and anticommunism.⁷¹ The SBC believed that the secularization of the general public was one of the greatest threats of their time. Historian Barry Hankins argues that this period was marked by a penchant for activism and an emphasis on what could be done to change the American culture.⁷² This era concerned Southern Baptists because they believed that the culture was growing increasingly hostile to traditional forms of religion and that the South had become more like the rest of the country in regards to culture and faith.

The SBC desired to put the country's largest Protestant denomination at the forefront of this culture war.⁷³ Clearly, the efforts of Baptist missionaries were vital to securing the future of America and spreading the gospel around the world. Foreign missionaries working in countries oppressed by communism preached that Christianity was the alternative to communism. Lahr writes of this period, "By providing a tangible evil to exploit, communism ironically eased missionaries' efforts to spread the message of Christianity. It fulfilled two specific prophetic

⁷⁰ Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 82.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷² Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservative and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 41.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2.

signs by providing an ideology for the Antichrist and by indirectly aiding missionary endeavors throughout the world.”⁷⁴ Missionaries pursued their work in the name of God and country and secular organizations adopted a similar technique.

Religion and politics joined forces in the missionary efforts of the SBC. Lahr asserts, “Unapologetically, anticommunist organizations utilized religious methods to promote the U.S. Cold War position. Missionaries’ embrace of anticommunism and the way they wielded it in both the religious and the Cold War arenas signaled their acceptance of a political faith in a way that could have emerged only after World War II as the United States assumed a new world role and a global perspective.”⁷⁵ Missionaries did not simply serve as religious weapons; they served as diplomatic ambassadors that spread the American government’s ideals throughout the world.

A definition of the typical characteristics of Baptist Republicanism demonstrates how the development of a national religion encouraged Southern Baptist political involvement. The SBC is too conservative to be deemed a mainline religious group, but aligns with religious fundamentalism, which holds great political significance. Protestant fundamentalists compose a portion of a larger group called evangelicals, who feel that they are called by God to win converts to Christianity. These converts come from nonbelievers and from individuals who adhere to other forms of belief, including other branches of Christianity.⁷⁶ Criswell is an ideal case study of a fundamentalist and their typical beliefs and mindset.

Professor and political consultant Oran P. Smith offers a framework to define fundamentalism and determine how the SBC and its actions during the 1960s fit into this model.

⁷⁴ Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 85.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁶ David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 2.

He argues, “In fundamentalism, there is a reciprocal reinforcement between creedal belief and ritual action...fundamentalists derive legitimacy by appeal to scriptural authority ...fundamentalism encourages Charismatic leadership...fundamentalism is characterized by a religious ideology that arises out of scripture.”⁷⁷ Fundamentalists believe that the Bible is the final authority; they must reach other people with this news; and the trepidation of the Cold War and nuclear threat provided an ideal opportunity for Southern Baptists to reach their fellow Americans. Criswell firmly believed the Bible was inerrant. He stated, “If the Bible is the Word of God, we have an absolutely trustworthy guide for all the answers our souls desire to know...But if the Bible is not the Word of God, if it is the mere product of man’s speculation, if it is not altogether trustworthy, then we are all in a trackless wilderness not knowing where to go or to turn.”⁷⁸

However, this definition of fundamentalism does not directly indicate why Southern Baptists believed that they should be politically involved. Over the course of history, Southern Baptists adopted the mentality that they were somehow the keepers of a lost flame and they developed a lost cause mentality that inspired them to combat the hopelessness of the world around them.⁷⁹ The separatist mentality of Southern Baptist combines with a sense of religious autonomy to add a political and ideological portion to this religious group. Fundamentalists are typically oppositional and are willing to fight against factions that are more moderate. Smith argues, “Fundamentalism has historical antecedents but no ideological precursors...SBC fundamentalism is not a true ideology because it is not truly intellectual...only a custom developed over time and is hallowed, much like a tale passed down from generation to

⁷⁷ Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 11-13.

⁷⁸ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 218-9.

⁷⁹ Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* , 14.

generation.”⁸⁰ The custom and tradition of fighting against leftward leaning movements and moderate factions, combined with the fundamentalist custom of the lost cause mentality, inspired ministers to use the political climate of their times in order to be relevant to their congregations during the upheaval of the 1960s. The turmoil highlighted the horrors of communism and caused SBC leaders to recognize the necessity of instructing their pastors how to make the church a vital force against godless communism. Southern Baptists’ engagement was justified by traditional views regarding the relationship of America to God.

American exceptionalism is a form of patriotism that contains support for American myths and ideals, and believes that God has a special covenant with the United States. Similarly, in the South there is a type of “Baptist exceptionalism” that when the denomination obtains real or perceived dominance of the culture, Southern Baptist growth is encouraged. Due to this phenomenon, Southern Baptists view themselves as a civic religion, that causes the denomination to view itself as the cultural majority and it seeks to absorb society instead of rejecting it.⁸¹ The SBC policy of the 1950s was, “Say little about local or convention politics, say a lot about religion. When addressing politics, maintain the civic status quo and do not challenge the culture, but take every opportunity to merge anti-Communism with the gospel. Build the church.”⁸² The only men who were successful in the convention during the 1950s were those who appealed to evangelism.⁸³ During the 1950s, even as communism gained in popularity and strength, Criswell was able to lead a time of revival at First Baptist Church of Dallas and all

⁸⁰ Ibid., 13-14.

⁸¹ Keith Harper, ed. *Through a Glass Darkly: Contested Notions of Baptist Identity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 39.

⁸² Ibid., 40.

⁸³ Ibid.

across North America.⁸⁴

During the upheaval of the 1960s, Southern Baptist ministers followed the patterns that the convention established during the 1950s. They did not attempt to attack or reject the culture; rather, they took advantage of the uncertain times in order to show Americans that the Christian faith was the only thing that could offer true security. Due to the mentality and goals of the SBC, originating in the 1950s, Southern Baptists realized that the culture debates and Cold War were not an opportunity to vilify the evils of society, but were an ideal time to share the gospel and evangelize.

The threat of an atomic bomb increased the opportunities for the SBC to share the gospel. President John F. Kennedy's grave warnings increased nuclear fear in the early 1960s. His 1960 campaign maintained that America faced a "missile gap", and he approved a nuclear buildup to close it.⁸⁵ After his debates with Nikita Khrushchev in 1961 over Berlin, Kennedy called for a program of fallout shelter construction and teachers instructed schoolchildren to hide under desks during nuclear drills. The development of these programs increased anxiety related to the apocalypse.⁸⁶ Paul Boyer asserts that the Cuban Missile Crisis was the most frightening event during a long chain of nuclear threats, which made the end times terrifyingly real.⁸⁷

This threat of nuclear disaster led many Americans to rely on their faith, and the dire situation caused even politicians to remember and rely on the religious elements of the Cold War. Lahr asserts, "The crisis either demonstrated or renewed many Americans' faith in God.

⁸⁴ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 185.

⁸⁵ Boyer, *Fallout*, 96.

⁸⁶ David Snead, *The Gaither Committee, Eisenhower, and the Cold War* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), 169-173.

⁸⁷ Boyer, *Fallout*, 96.

Church attendance in the country rose 10 to 20 percent on Sunday, October 28.”⁸⁸ The Cuban Missile Crisis brought the threat of nuclear disaster directly into the everyday lives of average Americans. Even government officials recognized the importance of relying on a religious element during the threat. Washington officials residing in a bunker asked for increased military support and for the assistance of chaplains that could meet their spiritual needs.⁸⁹ Lahr’s assessment of this period is vital to note, “God has been used as a religious weapon in the Cold War, and many Americans who felt otherwise powerless, again turned to their faith when tensions peaked.”⁹⁰ A 1964 Gallup Poll revealed that 63 percent of Americans identified themselves as individuals who prayed frequently, and only six percent of American adults claimed that they never prayed.⁹¹ For Southern Baptists and politicians alike, religion became one of the only sure ways to cope during this crisis.

The Southern Baptist response to the Cuban Missile Crisis best demonstrates this religiously charged society created by the threat of the nuclear age. The reaction to this crisis exhibits how the forging of a national religion provided an opportunity for pastors to have a unique platform during October 1962. Historian Angela M. Lahr argues, “The Cuban Missile Crisis brought the amalgamation of foreign policy and apocalypticism directly into the everyday lives of the population.”⁹² The apocalyptic environment related to the Cold War had culminated in the largest sign of the end times to date; the world had never been so close to ending. This reality allowed Southern Baptists to have an impact on secular identity by increasing

⁸⁸ Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 115.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ George Gallup, “63% of Adults Pray ‘Frequently’”, *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, February 8, 1964, A10.

⁹² Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 114.

understandings of the end times.⁹³ Responses to the Cuban Missile Crisis show that Southern Baptist leaders typically believed that America had entered into a special covenant with God, and there was an urgency and apocalyptic nature to their literature following the crisis. An examination of tracts and pamphlets during this period provides a lens for analyzing how Southern Baptists interacted with their government and displayed typical conservative values. The dire nuclear threat produced by the Cuban Missile Crisis created an opportunity for Southern Baptist preachers to incorporate apocalyptic language into their literature in order to remind their congregations of the importance of turning to Christ.

Likewise, Criswell meticulously responded to the threat in Cuba with a sermon series to ease the fears of his congregation. Starting on Sunday morning, October 14, 1962 Criswell started a sermon series on Revelation. He desired to share with his congregation that even though the promises of the government may fail, God would keep his promises regardless of any earthly turmoil. He stated, “But lest you be afraid, and lest you be discouraged, ‘the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his covenant.’ The ark of His covenant—in that golden chest, the promises of God—all of them. And not a one will fall to the ground. Not a one will fail.”⁹⁴ Criswell recognized that time was precious, and thus he continued his series on Revelation that very evening. He proclaimed that when time on earth concluded God would gather the nations together and establish his millennial kingdom on earth. Criswell stated that there would be a distinct separation of earth’s inhabitants at this time. He taught his congregation that they would not be divided based on nationality or political affiliation, but some would receive eternal life and some would receive eternal damnation based on whether or not

⁹³ Ibid., 113.

⁹⁴ W.A. Criswell, “The Sounding of the Last Trumpet,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, October 14, 1962, accessed on January 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

they accepted the message of Christ.⁹⁵

Criswell reminded Americans that their citizenship or democratic system could not save them. True salvation only came from remembering the religious heritage of their forefathers. He stated, “And what that ancient prophet did in calling his people back to a remembrance from whence they came...we are doing the same thing now in this series of addresses: looking back to those martyrs and to those patriots and to those forefathers who brought to us, and placed in our hands, the incomparably glorious liberties that we enjoy today.”⁹⁶ A dire nuclear scare and the threat of war constantly surrounded Americans; Criswell’s sermons offered a refuge from the impending war. On October 28, 1962, Criswell declared to his church that even though Christ had come to earth once as a suffering servant, he was returning soon as the reigning king. He stated, “This age of grace in which we sorrow, and are in travail, and war is still here, and things that make men’s hearts stand still for fear, but the clock is going to start again some of these days. He is coming again.”⁹⁷ October 28, 1962 saw President Kennedy fighting to preserve his country and prevent nuclear disaster. That date also saw a pastor in Dallas, Texas fighting to remind Americans that only Christ and salvation could ensure the ultimate end to warfare.

In 1963, Criswell completed his journey of preaching through the entire Bible line by line. This feat took seventeen years and eight months.⁹⁸ As he voyaged through the Holy Scriptures, Criswell’s congregation grew to 13,291 people, and Sunday school attendance swelled to 8,322 individuals. Criswell reflected on his sermon series through the Bible by stating,

⁹⁵ W.A. Criswell, “Great Separation,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, October 14, 1962, accessed on January 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁹⁶ W.A. Criswell, “The Birth of Religious Freedom,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, May 17, 1964, accessed on March 9, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁹⁷ W.A. Criswell, “The Radiant Woman,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, October 28, 1962, accessed on January 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁹⁸ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 206.

“To hear those stories, one by one, is to have your life transformed, your spirit renewed, and your hope born again. And in the midst of a great ‘Cold War’ between the superpowers, East and West, in the midst of growing nuclear tension and calamity, the Word gave us strength for our journey and comfort and guidance along the way.”⁹⁹ The ancient Biblical stories that Criswell recounted throughout the 1950s and 1960s offered Americans an escape from the threat of nuclear annihilation. The widespread influence of this sermon series is evident in the revivals led by Criswell during the decades following World War II. Even though Criswell resolutely believed that he was called to minister to his congregation full-time, he would travel to various cities around the United States and the world to lead revivals and preach the gospel. He believed that this sermon series was vital to America’s cause because, “In the way of the ultimate goals of atheistic communism, lies Christian America. As long as there is a strong America, the communists will not triumph.”¹⁰⁰ Preaching through God’s Word not only brought revival to Dallas and cities around America, it allowed Criswell to equip Americans with the knowledge necessary to combat communism.

A specific examination of SBC resolutions surrounding the Cuban Missile crisis demonstrates how the typical Southern Baptist response aligned with Criswell’s response to the threat. The SBC issued a resolution in 1962 directly related to the threat of communism:

Christian and Communists are agreed that vital Christian faith is incompatible with communism. In the light of recent world events we are more aware now than ever before that communism seeks to conquer the world... We do believe that Southern Baptists should study communism as medical experts study cancer. We therefore commend those among us who are undertaking to learn and to teach Christian truth as it applies in this area. We affirm that our answer to the challenge of communism is a profound, vital, and living Christian faith. We speak our "No" to communism when we say "Yes" to Jesus

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 184.

Christ.¹⁰¹

They determined that only a Christian response was adequate to combat the horrors of communism. The events of 1962 led the convention to conclude that the appropriate agencies of the SBC must accelerate their activities in order to properly inform people about the true threat of communism.¹⁰²

Pastors and theologians recognized the necessity of leading their congregations beyond the emotionalism that surrounded communism and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and they began to instruct them about the true nature of communism. On November 4, 1962, Foy Valentine, executive director of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, wrote an instructional paper for Southern Baptist pastors to utilize as they discussed communism with their congregations. He argued, “Christian citizens have ample reason to be alarmed, for communism is not just a political system which wants to control the world. It is also an ideological system which wants to conquer the minds and hearts of men. It is most important that Christians give serious study to this evil movement which is dedicated to the destruction of Christianity.”¹⁰³ This pamphlet went on to detail the characteristics and agenda of communism, going so far as to even include a glossary of terms related to the communist party. Valentine desired that members of Southern Baptist churches show those enslaved by communism that God was not dead, and that Christianity maintained its relevancy. In his conclusion, Valentine quoted Hosea 4:6 “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” He asserted that the type of knowledge regarding communism that Southern Baptists needed to gain was essential for defeating their formidable

¹⁰¹ 1962 Resolution on Communism, Southern Baptist Convention, accessed April 10, 2015. <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/search/>

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ “The Nature of Communism,” November 4, 1962, Communism 1962 12-8, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

foe.¹⁰⁴ In the month following the Cuban Missile Crisis, training papers from the SBC included supplementary reading lists for personal growth and program enrichment¹⁰⁵ to ensure their members knew the true horrors of communism and how to combat the ideology.

Tracts published during 1962 further outlined why Southern Baptists should vehemently oppose communism. A tract entitled, “Insurance against Communism,” provided a citizen’s code of conduct that stated, “I will never forget that I am an American Citizen, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles that made my country free. I will trust in God and in the United States of America.”¹⁰⁶ As a part of a series on how Christians should confront communism, the SBC published the tract, “Why Christians Should Oppose Communism”. This tract argued that an individual could not be a committed Christian and an adherent of communism at the same time. It asserted that the two systems were diametrically opposed by contrasting how each ideology viewed history, morality, God, death, eternity, religion, the world, and humanity.¹⁰⁷

An additional tract in this series cautioned Southern Baptists that they must make their citizenship count. It wrote, “We strike an effective blow against communism when we help strengthen democracy by participating in the democratic process...the ideals of democracy are

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. The reading list included the following titles: J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit* (New York: Pocket Giant Cardinal Edition, 1962); Walter Lippman, *The Communist World and Ours* (Bloomsbury, UK: Hamish Hamilton, 1959); T.B. Maston, *Christianity and World Issues* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1957); Harry Allen Overstreet, *What We Must Know About Communism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1958).

¹⁰⁶ “Insurance Against Communism,” Dr. Fred Schwarz, Communism 1962 12-8, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

¹⁰⁷ “Why Christians Should Oppose Communism,” Communism 1962 12-8, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

worth struggling to achieve.”¹⁰⁸ This tract reflected the fundamentalist commitment to political involvement in order to preserve the nation and democracy. Southern Baptist leaders stated that the church needed to be a vital force. They believed that Christians needed to express the same level of loyalty and devotion to the church that communists displayed to their party and ideology.¹⁰⁹ These tracts demonstrate that Southern Baptist leaders realized they needed to clearly outline a method to combat communism after the direct threat of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Religion has consistently played an integral role in determining how Americans view their government and the world around them. Criswell’s religious beliefs led him to the conviction that Christ’s return was imminent and that the Soviet Union would contribute to the events of earth’s final days. It is important to establish why religion is vital for comprehending American diplomacy and politics. Preston argues, “Religion has had an almost uniquely intimate relationship with American war and diplomacy. In times of war, religious liberals and conservatives, militants and pacifists, have all called upon God to sanctify their cause, and all have viewed America as God’s chosen land.”¹¹⁰ An examination of the Cuban Missile Crisis proves Preston’s point that religion is central to American politics and political thought. He argues that American foreign relations have always somehow been rooted in religion.¹¹¹ Criswell period literature and Southern Baptist leaders attest to the fact that not only is religion central to a complete study of foreign relations, but religious literature adds to the historical picture of how

¹⁰⁸ “What Christians Should Know About Communism,” Communism 1962 12-8, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 4.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 14.

religious leaders used republican attitudes in order to appeal to their congregations.

Chapter Three: Evangelism Techniques Employed by W.A. Criswell and the SBC during the Cold War.

Due to their interpretations of Scripture and prophecy, and the growth of Cold War tensions, W.A. Criswell and the SBC leadership held to the belief that the return of Jesus Christ was imminent. This belief increased the urgency that the convention and its prominent pastors placed on evangelism. During the twentieth century Southern Baptists possessed membership numbers that were four times higher than the next largest denomination.¹ The sheer numbers of Southern Baptists demonstrate that an examination of their evangelistic efforts will reveal how mission outreaches influenced the United States, especially in the South, during the Cold War. An examination of propaganda and tracts published by Southern Baptists reveals that Criswell exhibited typical evangelism techniques of the SBC. These images and pieces of literature demonstrate exactly how the fears of the Cold War transformed domestic and foreign missions efforts.

After America experienced the upheaval of World War II, Southern Baptists determined to break out of the social complacency that was born out of a laissez faire evangelical faith.² According to records from the convention meetings, as a denomination, Southern Baptists were distraught by their irrelevance to the nation's crises.³ A year after the war, the SBC undertook more specific actions to advance practical Christianity than in all the years since the denomination was first influenced by the social gospel.⁴ It determined to adopt an official declaration of the denomination's social responsibilities, drafted a progressive statement

¹ Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, 14.

² John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of the Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), 147.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

regarding race, oversubscribed a sizable world relief fund, and established the Joint Committee on Public Relations and the Social Service Commission.⁵ The convention approved a progressive statement regarding race in order to proclaim a gospel that would be applicable for individuals everywhere. A North Carolina newspaper covering the 1946 Baptist convention described the meeting as, “Application of the Gospel to Social and Economic Life.”⁶ Likewise, an editor from Illinois, B.J. Murie, wrote, “Baptists are changing, they are becoming more conscious of the social gospel. It is high time that they did.”⁷ Every speaker of the 1946 Baptist convention meeting stressed the obligation of the denomination to meet world needs through humanitarian service and social uplift.

After the war, the convention needed to establish effective methods for social action that also respected Christian principles. This was a necessity because Southern Baptists needed to justify their social and political activism by demonstrating that their religion was applicable to man’s entire being. Even before the war’s end in 1944, the operating philosophy of the convention was established. Regarding Christian responsibilities towards social issues the SBC determined, “The base line of all our social judgments and proposals should be Christian moral teachings.”⁸ Southern Baptist leaders asserted that political actions should be secondary because Christianity was more concerned with inward moral control. Baptist leaders received the charge to awaken their congregations and instruct them on the moral duties for all Christians.⁹

Criswell’s sermons and and propaganda distributed by the SBC outlined these moral

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh), June 5, 1946, 4.

⁷ *Illinois Baptist* (Carbondale), June 14, 1946, 4.

⁸ Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 180.

⁹ Ibid.

duties. These new aims mirror Darren Dochuk's statement that "Southern evangelicals have a faith blended with politics. As custodians of their culture, evangelicals were expected to govern with a Christian conscience and vote in accordance with core Christian values."¹⁰ Pastors believed that once their parishioners grasped the moral aspects of the Baptist faith that they would vote based on godly principles. Even though Criswell and the SBC became a powerful force that politicians knew they must work with and appease, Southern Baptists gained this influence through the moral principles they taught during their mission outreaches.

Criswell believed that Southern Baptists needed to increase their foreign and domestic mission efforts after he truly grasped the depravity of communism. He recognized the true threat of communism after his congregation sent him on a four-month world tour that included Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and the Holy Lands.¹¹ Throughout this journey in 1950, Criswell heard communist speeches and read communist propaganda that demanded the destruction of America. After that trip, he found the threat of communism no longer seemed distant. Christians he met on that journey, who had fled the growth of communism, alarmed Criswell. These believers had lost their homes and liberties. Because of this, Criswell issued a warning upon his return to his congregation. Ultimately, Criswell reminded his congregation that they could only resist communism through a strong commitment to God's Word. He warned, "Our ultimate deliverance lies in the answer of God to the repentant cries of his people. However strong we are, we live or die according to God's final Word. A truly Christian nation, God will bless and deliver. But if we reject God, He will reject us."¹² Criswell's early exposure to the dangers of communism informed him that the only hope for America resided in the Word of God.

¹⁰ Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, xix.

¹¹ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 184.

¹² *Ibid.*

Starting in 1954, and spanning the next fifteen years, the SBC sent missionaries to forty-four new countries.¹³ Criswell's focus on foreign mission efforts reflected the goals of the Foreign Mission Board starting in the 1950s. Aligning with the tenets of the Baptist Faith and Message Agreement, Baker James Cauthen of the Foreign Mission Board and Arthur Rutledge connected to the Home Mission Board used the upheaval of the 1960s to launch an aggressive Southern Baptist missions campaign. Southern Baptists capitalized on the popularity of the Peace Corps by pursuing a short-term program for young adults in 1965 that sent recent college graduates overseas for two years of service. Over the next twenty-five years, the program, known as the Missionary Journeyman program, sent over two thousand young people overseas for two years of service.¹⁴

The Home Mission Board attended to domestic evangelistic efforts as well. The Crusade of the Americas commenced in 1969 and had three ministry objectives: "Deepening spiritual life within the churches, home and individual Christians; evangelizing the American continent; and establishing true moral and spiritual bases for the betterment of mankind's economic, social, and physical welfare."¹⁵ These clear objectives and the implementation of these programs demonstrate that the SBC reflected Criswell's passion for not retreating from ministry during the 1960s.

Alongside his published books, Criswell's sermons provided an answer for how people could escape the fear of death that each propaganda poster and bomb shelter evoked.¹⁶ In 1968, after another extended trip through northern Europe, Criswell realized the importance of not

¹³ Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 220.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 220-1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁶ Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 65.

confining his ministry and influence to downtown Dallas, Texas. Americans and Criswell were conscious of the fact that a communist government was atheistic; however, to Criswell's dismay he observed that people were not forsaking church attendance in northern Europe because the churches closed. Rather, residents of northern Europe, including England, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, Austria, and East and West Germany, did not attend weekly church services because they were apathetic. Churches had been converted into granaries and railroad stations, and Criswell correctly perceived that the people did not grieve the closing of their places of worship.¹⁷ Criswell passionately declared to his congregation on his return that this was a sign of the end times. He proclaimed Scripture passages, “‘In the last days, there shall come perilous times’; there shall be a great *apostasia*, a falling away, an uncaring, and where there is liberty, ‘having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof’. We live in that day.”¹⁸ Criswell's conviction that the final days of life on earth were imminent drove him to combat the horrors of communism.

The events at First Baptist Church of Dallas in late 1968 clearly display the influence of Criswell's convictions. The women of Criswell's congregation joined with the Woman's Missionary Union of the SBC to lead their churches in prayer for the missions efforts of all SBC churches. The convention also emphasized their Lottie Moon Christmas Offering that benefited missionaries around the world. This offering supported one-half of the SBC's foreign mission enterprise.¹⁹ Southern Baptists eagerly supported their missionaries due to Criswell's statements. Criswell preached, “All of us feel as though we live on an atomic bomb, and literally, actually, in

¹⁷ W.A. Criswell, “Why Revival Tarrys,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, March 17, 1968, accessed on November 11, 2015, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ W.A. Criswell, “Prayer and Missions,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, December 1, 1968, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

reality, we do as a nation and as a civilization. A fuse burns. A time clock ticks, and sometimes we're almost persuaded to believe it is only a matter of days or a few years—any exigency, any providence, any turn of fortune, like a chain reaction, can set it off.”²⁰

A 1960 article published by the SBC reflects this conviction. Commission Director Paul M. Stevens wrote, “Because of the witch-hunting of the McCarthy era, a vast number of Americans have decided that ‘Communism isn’t as bad as we first thought.’ Nothing could be further from the truth.”²¹ He stated that communism was a philosophy and ideology that separates man from God. He encouraged Southern Baptists to educate other individuals by showing them that Christianity had not lost its strength and that was able to meet the new demands placed on mankind.²² The SBC desired to show Americans that Christianity provided the answers they sought, and worked to prevent the falling away in America that Criswell mentioned.

Not only does the content of Criswell’s messages reflect evangelism techniques of the SBC during the 1960s, but also his preaching style reveals standard Southern Baptist methods. The 1960s was a tumultuous period for American religions, and Texas Baptists such as Criswell struggled to adapt to the needs of this new period. Baptist historian, Harry Leon McBeth, writes of this era, “The old certainties suddenly seemed less certain, moral convictions which once seemed absolute became relative, and traditional patterns of church life almost overnight looked outmoded.”²³ The editor of *The Baptist Standard* wrote of a new day for America. He pointed out that the 1960s brought about the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Vietnam, the Civil Rights

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “The Cold War on the Christian Front,” *The Beam*, January 1960, 4-5.

²² Ibid., 5.

²³ Harry Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History* (Dallas: BaptistWay Press, 1998), 283.

Movement, and the Supreme Court seemingly kicking God out of the public schools.²⁴

Inevitably, these developments indicated that American religion was also entering a new period. Southern Baptists faced particular challenges during this time. Prominent Texan Baptist T.A. Patterson stated, “Trends during the sixties were disturbing to Southern Baptists. Almost everything but giving was on the decline. During this period, numerous surveys and analyses were made in an effort to determine the causes for the reverses and to suggest possible remedies.”²⁵ The key factor regarding Southern Baptists during the tumultuous 1960s was that the denomination and its leaders did not retreat. McBeth demonstrates that some of the greatest victories for Texas Baptists occurred during this period, and that the SBC worked diligently to implement new ministries and strengthen old programs.²⁶ Southern Baptists in Texas were chastened by the challenges confronting their culture and determined to find new solutions and avenues for combating the fears of the Cold War with their religious faith. This was a contentious decade, but Criswell offers a representation of how Southern Baptists did not neglect their faith or evangelistic efforts.

At the conclusion of 1969, Criswell’s congregation focused on three ministries to combat the growth of communism. He encouraged his parishioners to sacrifice and donate to the church’s foundational stewardship program that supported missions efforts domestically and abroad. He also desired to start a building program that would particularly encourage children to come into the church to learn the gospel. Finally, Criswell’s church sent a group of teenagers on

²⁴ Ibid., 283-4.

²⁵ Ibid., 284.

²⁶ Ibid., 285.

a missions choir tour to the Orient.²⁷ Clearly, Criswell and his congregation wanted to continuously pursue missionary goals at home and abroad, and desired to raise and train the next generation of Southern Baptist missionaries.

In light of the nuclear threat, many organizations arose and dedicated their efforts towards fighting the communist threat. Several of these organizations equated their patriotism and Christianity, and the SBC was one of these establishments. Not only did the changes of the 1960s demonstrate that Southern Baptists needed to discover new avenues for preaching the gospel, but also how they preached in the South. Southern Baptists believed that they needed to engage the culture due to these nuclear threats, not retreat or admit defeat. Foy Valentine, executive secretary of the Christian Life Commission, displayed the Southern Baptist commitment to cultural engagement and evangelism in 1960. He wrote, “Southern Baptists will help to bring about the Christian way in race relations not by sponsoring legislative action or by fostering ecclesiastical fiat but by adopting, as individuals and as churches, the spirit and the mind of Christ in every phase of race relations.”²⁸ This statement from a Southern Baptist leader is important because it reflects Criswell’s belief that ministry programs would be more effective in the fight against communism and social evils than the various programs that the government implemented.

The SBC believed that its members would effectively encourage change when they comprehended the Scriptures and implemented its principles. Southern Baptist pastors remained steadfast to this principle, but the cultural changes of the 1960s still influenced their various preaching styles. Al Fasol argues that the changes that most directly affected preaching were

²⁷ W.A. Criswell, “Our Assignment,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, October 19, 1969, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

²⁸ Jerry Sutton, *A Matter of Conviction: A History of Southern Baptist Engagement with the Culture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2008), 160-1.

“growing governmental intervention in our daily lives, the urbanization of America, and the shrinking of America by increased mobility and the rise of television.”²⁹ The ministries of several prominent Southern Baptist preachers reveal how each of these developments influenced individuals as they used the rapidly changing times to advance the gospel.

Evangelist Billy Graham was one of the first preachers to acknowledge that the old style of oratorical preaching was not reaching crowds. Application and illustration began to define his sermons.³⁰ Both Criswell and Hershel H. Hobbs, SBC president from 1961 to 1963, were strong oratorical preachers, but both men began to blend their style with a personal conversational approach. They studied the cultural changes of the 1960s and determined that Americans desired expository preaching. Due to the rapidly changing times and the threat of the Cold War, congregations expressed a deep desire in Biblical and theological details.³¹ Throughout the 1950s preachers and politicians declared that Christianity, religion, the Bible, and prayer were America’s first line of defense against communism. In 1960, Billy Graham declared that this decade was characterized by the same spiritual yearning as the preceding decade.³² Fasol argues that during this period topical and expository preaching flourished, while a strong emphasis on evangelism was maintained regardless of the influences on Southern preaching.³³

Hobbs exemplifies how the social issues of the 1960s influenced Southern Baptist preaching styles. Hobbs stated that he selected a passage of Scripture for preaching based on the needs of the people. He used alliteration in his sermons to aid his congregation in comprehending

²⁹ Al Fasol, *With a Bible in Their Hands: Baptist Preaching in the South 1679-1979* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 126.

³⁰ Ibid., 131.

³¹ Ibid., 182.

³² Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons*, 73-4.

³³ Ibid.

and remembering his points. Hobbs relied on a conversational style in his sermons in order to make the difficult passages of Scripture comprehensible.³⁴ During his term as SBC President, Hobbs made headlines at the 1963 convention. He did not hesitate to address the race issue confronting the country he stated, “It is impossible to solve [racial problems] by passing a blanket law, or by conducting a social crusade...They must be dealt with on a spiritual and personal basis.”³⁵

Not only did Hobbs recognize that the answer to the turmoil of the 1960s resided in the Scriptures, he also aligned with Criswell’s belief that the Bible is infallible. During the 1981 convention in Los Angeles Hobbs made the motion to reaffirm the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message. He clearly noted his beliefs that he had maintained since the early 1960s, “the whole Bible is truth not just that there is truth in the Bible.”³⁶ Like Criswell, Hobbs had to reevaluate his ministry in order to effectively minister to Americans during the 1960s, but he represented a large portion of Southern Baptists that believed the only remedy to the world’s problems resided in the Bible. Politicians believed that their democracy and government had no sense unless it was founded on Judeo-Christian religious principles.³⁷ Government officials needed religion to serve a social purpose, but ministers such as Criswell and Hobbs could utilize this need to proclaim the gospel in a direct reaction to the Cold War.

Baker James Cauthen served as a missionary to China and executive director of the Foreign Mission Board from 1954-1979. Fasol argues that Cauthen personified foreign missions

³⁴ Ibid., 147-9.

³⁵ Sutton, *A Matter of Conviction*, 168.

³⁶ Ibid., 238.

³⁷ Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960*, 259.

for more than one generation of Southern Baptists.³⁸ Cauthen's commitment to Scriptures revealed itself in nearly all of his sermons through his theme of "following the Master". Cauthen consistently displayed deep humility in his sermons, and he persistently called Christians to, "yield yourself with the fullest abandon to Christ."³⁹ Fletcher argues that Cauthen earned the respect of virtually all Southern Baptists who were enthralled by his preaching style.⁴⁰ After Cauthen took office, he started mission work in twenty-two new countries and allowed the Foreign Mission Board's secretary to pursue a short-term mission program for young adults.⁴¹ At a 1955 convention meeting, leaders reported that the prospect of nuclear war between two great powers greatly increased anxiety and a recent summit convention between the two leaders did little to appease the fears of Southern Baptists.⁴² During this convention, the subject of race was also addressed. Southern Baptists determined that "the social attitudes and actions of American citizens have a direct impact on the reception of our witness on foreign fields."⁴³ Even though Southern Baptists acknowledged that opinions varied among their ranks, they resolved to not be divided in fellowship so that their witness would not be diminished. The commitment to missions exemplified by Cauthen defined the aims of the SBC during the 1960s.

Both of these men reflected objectives and beliefs that defined Criswell's career. His preaching relied on an expository approach that was frequently doctrinal. His sermons included an intense exposition of the text; he often quoted a Greek or Hebrew word and then included a

³⁸ Fasol, *With a Bible in Their Hands*, 169.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁰ Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 221.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 220-1.

⁴² Sutton, *A Matter of Conviction*, 144-5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 145-6.

brief language lesson for his congregation.⁴⁴ Criswell's doctrinal approach assured his congregation that no critic would unearth a discrepancy that would disprove God's Word. He wrote, "We are not to be afraid of any criticism of the Bible... The Bible has been God's rock upon which His people could stand through centuries of rigid examination and it is not likely to go down before that which we might be able to discover today."⁴⁵ On January 20, 1963, Criswell implored his congregation to take the Word of God literally and follow Jesus' command to make disciples of all the nations. He stated, "When we talk about need, and about a frontier, we are not talking about across the seas... The frontiers of the Christian faith run through every city. They go down every street. They pass in front of our own homes. These, who need Christ, are everywhere. They are yonder, yes. They are also here. Now how are these people to know about salvation and to be introduced to our Lord? They need to be taught. They need to be won."⁴⁶ He taught that the hour of Christ's return was at hand, and his parishioners needed to follow God's literal command to go and do the work of an evangelist regardless of their station in life. Ultimately, Criswell designed his sermons to exhibit his commitment to the Scriptures and to evangelize.

Despite growing government intervention in the form of public education regarding air raid drills and bomb shelters, Southern Baptists still believed that the government could not absolutely guarantee their safety in the event of nuclear disaster. Criswell relied on strong Biblical and theological details to prove to wondering Americans that the salvation that Jesus Christ offered provided them with ultimate security. He stated to a reporter, "The peace of the

⁴⁴ Fasol, *With a Bible in Their Hands*, 143.

⁴⁵ Criswell, *Why I Preach that the Bible is Literally True*, 69.

⁴⁶ W.A. Criswell, "Do the Work of an Evangelist," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, January 20, 1963, accessed on February 8, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

world lies not so much in the hands of the statesman and diplomats, as in the moral hearts of the men who frame them. Treaties will be mere scraps of paper unless backed up by moral and spiritual dynamics. Frankly, we do more for the future of the world in winning men and women to a spiritual commitment than is done through all the conferences and conventions and leagues of all the nations.”⁴⁷ Boyer argues that prophecy writers, such as Criswell, used rhetoric of terror to prove to Americans the utter hopelessness of their fate without God. The capabilities of nuclear bombs forced Americans to take the claims of the Bible seriously instead of solely relying on the capabilities of the government.⁴⁸ Criswell’s own writings clearly prove Boyer’s argument:

There is no final security in military might. Our ultimate deliverance lies in the answer of God to the repentant cries of His people. However strong we are, we live or die according to God’s final Word. A truly Christian nation, God will bless and deliver. But if we reject God, He will reject us. The ultimate answer to the question whether we live or die as a nation will be found not in the words or works of Stalin or Mao, but in our willingness to obey God’s Holy Word, to repent of our sins, and to follow the way of life everlasting.⁴⁹

The changing desire in Americans, and particularly Southern Baptists, for an emphasis on doctrinal truths aligned with Criswell’s belief that salvation was the only true security for the end times.

Criswell’s sermons and writings demonstrate that his ministry consistently reflected the Southern Baptist principles of maintaining a personal approach that relied on expository preaching to relay a strong emphasis on evangelism. Criswell unwaveringly held to his belief that the Bible was without error and answered the questions of fearful Americans by including strong Biblical and theological details in his sermons. Not only does Criswell reflect these theological

⁴⁷ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 174.

⁴⁸ Boyer, *Fallout*, 133.

⁴⁹ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 184-5.

principles, but also his commitment to the Scriptures and evangelism reveals that the SBC and its pastors were able to accommodate to the changes of the 1960s, which included growing government intervention and the urbanization of America.

The ministries of these Southern Baptist men demonstrate that the crises of the 1960s required innovation in religion. Prominent SBC pastors reacted to the conditions of the Cold War in order to advance their evangelistic goals. Hugh McLeod argues that this was a period of cautious questioning in regards to religion, and Southern Baptists knew that it was vital that they maintain a powerful voice in order to provide answers for questioning Americans. Regarding this decade McLeod states, “The ‘Christendom’ of the post-war years was still intact, but it was being undermined by satirists who laughed at all established institutions; by those who wanted more individual freedom and so objected both to rigid moral codes and to the regulation of morality by the state; by church reformers critical of the power of the clergy and ecclesiastical hierarchy.”⁵⁰ Churches had to develop new ways to remain relevant and inspiring.

Criswell’s sermons directly related to the Cold War and thus his oratorical style still resonated with Americans. Criswell used the assassination of President Kennedy to connect with his congregation. The horrors of communism had impacted the streets of Criswell’s city, and he stated, “The ideology of communism is one of murder, and blood, and revolution, and violence. There is no part of our civilized world where that vicious and blasphemous and godless system has not penetrated. It is in America; it is here in Dallas, and we have seen a part of its red hand in our own queenly and beloved metropolis.”⁵¹ Even as violence and upheaval reached Dallas, Criswell taught that the means of their warfare were spiritual.

⁵⁰ Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2007), 60.

⁵¹ W.A. Criswell, “The Red Terror,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, November 24, 1963, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

The political conditions of the 1960s allowed religious leaders to show Americans that their fears demanded a religious and political response. Settje argues, “Amidst the liberalism and revolutionary activity of the 1960s, conservative Christians offered a counterpoint that intensified people’s fears about fighting communism as not only a political battle but a religious crusade against the devil.”⁵² Settje shows that *Christianity Today* helped to form this religious crusade. He states that throughout the 1960s editors and writers took advantage of every discussion that related to foreign policy to remind leaders that the Cold War was a battle against evil, and not simply an entanglement between two superpowers.⁵³ A decade of social and moral upheaval demanded innovation from Southern Baptist preachers that desired to remain relevant. Hobbs, Graham, Cauthen, and Criswell exemplify the pastors who were able to meet the demands of their society. The Cold War and the ensuing nuclear threat provided another avenue for Southern Baptist preachers to connect with their congregations.

The evangelical and fundamentalist commitment to winning converts resulted in the emergence of the dominance of the social gospel during the Cold War. Those who adhere to the modernist definition of the social gospel believe that the world’s problems can be resolved through a, “Broad-based, stable moral consensus.”⁵⁴ Baptists no longer believed that they had to choose between following Christ or assimilating and identifying with their culture. Rather, during the Cold War, they viewed Christ as the hero of human history and that he was now a portion of culture, meaning that civilization and the church were no longer in conflict.⁵⁵ Jason W. Stevens argues that during the Cold War Southern Baptists offered solutions “By uncovering

⁵² Settje, *Faith and War*, 28.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁴ Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America’s Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

displaced religious meanings in secular contexts, be they political ideology, psychotherapy, familial discipline, or the phenomenology of art, the Cold War-era critic acknowledged the persistence of problems from one era to another as he also asserted their inescapability.”⁵⁶ The social gospel provided Southern Baptists with an avenue to reach and reform their culture without alienating their members from society.

Criswell believed that social action would increase the audiences of Southern Baptist preachers and thus add converts to Christianity. On June 6, 1968, Criswell was elected as president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Immediately following his election, reporters wanted to know what his goals were for America’s largest denomination. He stated, “I would like to lead our convention into a great evangelistic and missionary effort. I want to get lost people to God.” Reporters then inquired about Criswell’s plans regarding social action. He replied, “You cannot divorce faith and works. You cannot divorce morality and ethics from evangelism and missions. You can’t put a man’s head over here and his heart over there.”⁵⁷ As Southern Baptists demonstrated to the secular world that they cared for their social condition, Criswell believed that they would then be able to articulate to Americans how they could ensure their eternal fate and truly know that communism would not overrun their nation.

The advent of the nuclear threat provided Southern Baptists with an avenue to become socially involved with their secular neighbors. Lahr writes, “On the one hand, conservative Christians speculated and commented on atomic diplomacy extensively, believing that nuclear warfare would play a prophetic role in the future. On the other, evangelicals used their

⁵⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁷ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 217.

eschatology to join the dialogue on the bomb that was raging within their popular culture.”⁵⁸ In 1966, Criswell discussed the details of a recent mission trip to the Soviet Union. He related that despite the fact that Russian Baptists suffered under the oppression of communism, their fervor and commitment to the Scriptures and discipleship was inspiring him.⁵⁹ He recognized that American pastors competed with many activities for the attention of their parishioners, and he desired that his church continue to grow and learn in order to remain relevant. He asked his congregation to approach him if they had ideas to improve the outreach efforts at the First Baptist Church of Dallas.⁶⁰ The nuclear threat provided a way for Southern Baptists to connect with Americans, and Criswell utilized the faith of their supposedly godless neighbor to increase missionary efforts at his church through bettering the social conditions of Americans.

In light of the social gospel, Southern Baptists realized the necessity of utilizing several avenues to reach individuals with the knowledge that salvation could offer them ultimate security during earth’s final days. The SBC implemented unique evangelistic efforts in order to achieve Criswell’s goal of turning the Southern Baptist denomination into a great evangelistic force, one of these efforts took on the form of propaganda cartoons. Evangelicals and Southern Baptists desired to focus their propaganda cartoons on achieving conversions and spiritual growth. Evangelicals believed that the world was ignorant or ignoring the blatant truth and cure of the gospel. They recognized that “evil was loose in the world”, but they also maintained that God had power over this evil.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 31.

⁵⁹ W.A. Criswell, “Preaching the Gospel Behind the Iron Curtain,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, May 24, 1966, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ George Bogaski, *American Protestants and the Debate over the Vietnam War: Evil was Loose in the World* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 103-4.

Propaganda displayed America's opponent as sacrilegious and godless. Evangelicals believed that communists issued arrogant threats like the biblical figure Goliath. Christians thought the battle belonged to God, and that only a nation that sought the Lord would prevail. The Cold War was a spiritual burden, and this firm belief in America's ultimate success did not indicate that there would not be a struggle.⁶² Religious propaganda during the mid-1960s sought to demonstrate that preachers alone knew the true remedy for the world's issues and that the gospel was America's only hope. In 1969, *The Baptist Program* stated, "The gospel, rightly applied, will provoke all the social action needed to bring about the best society."⁶³ Southern Baptists believed that the issues confronting America during this period were the result of sin and that effective preaching would help to alleviate these concerns.⁶⁴

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⁶² Ibid., 109-110.

⁶³ "The Open Meeting: Should a Church be Concerned about Both Evangelism and Social Action?" *The Baptist Program*, January 1969, 23, in Bogaski, *American Protestants and the Debate over the Vietnam War*, 106-7.

⁶⁴ Bogaski, *American Protestants and the Debate over the Vietnam War*, 107.



(Communism 1961 12-7, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.)

The above images illustrate that Americans must not forsake the Bible, which Southern Baptists believed was the foundation for America's freedom and principles. The SBC also desired to remind Americans that while they prepared for a nuclear attack on earth they must not neglect to consider their eternal destiny. Religious propaganda taught Americans that communism could never build a free world, and that true freedom would be achieved only when individuals turned to God. The final image displays the Southern Baptist belief that when the world ended Christ would reign supreme over all earthly forces. Propaganda was a powerful evangelistic force that allowed the SBC to convey their beliefs and the importance of heeding each pastor's words to SBC churches across the nation.

Cold War religious propaganda displayed to Americans that the SBC had solutions for the nuclear threat that the U.S. government was incapable of providing. Historian George Bogaski presents what evangelicals believed regarding ultimate victory. He states, "However, victory came by focusing upward on the exalted world of God not outward. Faced with a multitude of difficulties, Christians alone were privy to the secret of the nature of the world and

its workings. Conversely, world leaders were oblivious of the ever present, divine solution, to their problems.”⁶⁵ The SBC hoped its evangelistic efforts would enlighten Americans about the true nature of the world and its final fate.

Criswell believed that Christ could offer a freedom that the even the United States could not ensure. He did not believe that America was the moral and godly nation that many believed it to be. He stated, “America is becoming a drinking, sodden nation! I don't want to take time to expatiate on those things. I am just pointing out that, as we move toward great federated power, you're not moving to God. You're moving to godlessness—and I say that for us, much less for the slave world beyond us.”⁶⁶ Despite the depravity of America that he witnessed, Criswell preached that Christianity could offer Americans an ultimate security. His sermon continued, “The Christian hope is like Peter said, the one we've just read. It is unfading and never passes away [1 Peter 1:4]. Above the smoke, and the battle, and the death, and the grave, and the war, there He stands victorious now and forever.”⁶⁷ He clearly showed that his confidence in Christ’s ability to defeat Satan during the final days was unwavering. Propaganda displayed the message that Christ would vanquish all earthly foes during the end times.

Regardless of what hardships the Cold War or nuclear age inflicted upon Christians, Criswell believed Southern Baptists must still deliver the gospel to foreign nations before the earth ended. He declared, “That’s been the true Christian faith through all of the centuries since—many hardships, many sacrifices, many discouragements, many impenetrable. But God is living, and the Lord is triumphant, and He never loses any cause, not ultimately and not

⁶⁵ Ibid., 101-2.

⁶⁶ W.A. Criswell, “Christ Beyond the Crises,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, May 4, 1958, accessed on February 13, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

finally.”⁶⁸ While Criswell strove to gain converts during the Cold War, he believed that Christ and the Bible contained the only true answers. Convention boards and local pastors reminded Southern Baptists that since Christ provided the only answer for the world’s issues there was a deep urgency to serve as missionaries. This belief is a prominent theme in SBC propaganda.



(Communism 1961 12-7, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.)

The above images clearly represent the Southern Baptist belief that only missionaries carrying the message of Jesus Christ could deliver the world from communism and the conditions of war. The SBC included release dates for each propaganda cartoon so that Southern Baptist churches across America would receive the same message from their various leaders.

The anti-communist rhetoric of the SBC reflects the typical American belief that a religious component was necessary for combating the Soviet Union. *Christianity Today* asserted that government policies alone would not solve the threat of the USSR. They stated that it was not the U.S. government that needed to fight the Soviet Union, but rather American Christians

⁶⁸W.A. Criswell, “The Christian Faith and World Revolution,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, September 18, 1955, accessed on February 13, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

needed to raise their voice in protest in order to halt the aggressive policies of this communist country.⁶⁹ Settje argues that secular and political concerns laid the foundation for fearing communism that was escalated by religious concerns.⁷⁰ The literature and propaganda efforts of the SBC contributed to this Cold War era religious rhetoric. The SBC's view of the Soviet Union reflected typical conservative views, while also including actual experiences from Southern Baptist missionaries.⁷¹ Southern Baptists buttressed their anti-communist rhetoric with specific proof of Communist aggression obtained from missionaries and fellow Christians residing in oppressive Communist countries. Criswell desired to link the struggles of foreign missionaries with domestic issues. He declared, "You can't isolate yourself, nor can you extricate yourself from the problems of the nations of the world. We are bound up together on this globe. This globe has shrunk to be no bigger than the size of a man's hand. And the problems they face across the sea become our problems... We are together, and what happens there happens here."⁷² These examples provided by the SBC added ranks to the number of Americans that desired their country to stand firm against the threat of Communism regardless of liberal critics.⁷³

Not only did Criswell reflect typical Southern Baptist conservative views, but he also incorporated experiences from missionaries to demonstrate the horrors of Communism. In 1967, Criswell related to his congregations some of his experiences from his recent trip to Leningrad. While overseas, he visited a Baptist church and stated that he had never witnessed so many tears at a church service. He watched in wonder as the congregation cried as they read various letters.

⁶⁹ Settje, *Faith and War*, 30.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 34.

⁷² W.A. Criswell, "Prayer and Missions," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, December 1, 1968, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁷³ Ibid. See also Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 78.

The tour guide informed him that these letters were from family members who had forsaken the church due to the Communist threat, but were now asking the church for forgiveness and reinstatement into the church.⁷⁴ The faithfulness of this Baptist church astonished Criswell, but he wanted to impress upon his congregation the dangers in Leningrad. He stated, “A poor, miserable, and despised people but faithful unto death; I felt as I looked in their faces, as I visited with them privately, as I watched their lives, I felt that I was standing in the presence of first century Christians of whom the Roman Coliseum is forever a type and a symbol of their devotion unto death.”⁷⁵

A 1969 sermon reminded the congregation in Dallas that without diligence the atheism in Russia could appear in Texas. Criswell discussed how he was observing the demonstrations regarding the Vietnam War on television, and they reminded him of speeches that he had heard in Russia, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany.⁷⁶ At the Baptist World Alliance, Criswell listened to Russian Baptists speak. He related that their speeches mirrored the America demonstrations because they were only able to discuss the Communist political lines.⁷⁷ Criswell desired that missionary efforts increase from the First Baptist Church of Dallas because he did not want American Baptists to be restricted to only speaking the government’s words. He stated, “And there’s not any God, and there’s not any Christ, and there’s no truth... Why, my friends, my brothers, if America becomes like that, anybody can sweep us away, destroy us, come into our country, infiltrate us, leave us in shreds. That’s why we need to preach and to teach the Word

⁷⁴ W.A. Criswell, “The Communist and the Living Church,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, March 22, 1967, accessed on February 13, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ W.A. Criswell, “Shepherding the Church of God,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, October 19, 1969, accessed on February 13, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

and the will of God; you cannot stand without the Lord.”⁷⁸ Not only did these accounts remind Criswell’s congregation of the importance of supporting their foreign missionaries, they were encouraged to continuously pursue domestic mission efforts. The examples provided by Criswell and similar Southern Baptist ministers reminded their congregations that fellow Baptists were suffering from communist aggression, and that same hostility would appear in America if Southern Baptists were not resolute.

Southern Baptist propaganda reflected a patriotic theme that equates Christianity with American ideals. Southern Baptists spiritualized issues connected with the nuclear threat, and they continued this approach into the late 1960s. They believed that this was a pivotal moment in America’s history and its citizens must take the correct and godly path.⁷⁹ SBC leaders believed that communism presented an immediate danger not only to their religion, but to the United States. This belief appeared in Baptist theology that warned of God’s judgment if America failed to heed the Scriptures. Southern Baptists clearly stated that God may allow communism to infiltrate America and take over the country if Americans did not return to following Christ.⁸⁰ Regarding Cold War evangelicals Bogaski states, “Convinced of American exceptionalism, these Protestants held out hope that America, unlike other nations, would heed the lessons of others and of Scripture and turn to Christ in facing its challenges.”⁸¹

Southern Baptists recognized that there were many issues confronting the nation at this time. They declared that the only solution for America was Jesus Christ. Bogaski continues, “church leaders insisted that the ‘travail of our times’ flowed from ‘estrangement from God.’

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Bogaski, *American Protestants and the Debate over the Vietnam War*, 107.

⁸⁰ Settje, *Faith and War*, 34.

⁸¹ Bogaski, *American Protestants and the Debate over the Vietnam War*, 108.

The wars and societal ills were only the symptoms of hearts ‘poisoned with the venom of sin,’ hearts which could be cured only ‘through the personal presence of the Holy Spirit.’”⁸² This religious propaganda demonstrates that Southern Baptists believed the world was at a crossroads, and that if Christians did not stand firm on their religious convictions both Christianity and America would be at stake.

Aligning with the propaganda from the SBC, Criswell incorporated a quote from the American ambassador to Moscow, Foy D. Kohler, to demonstrate to his congregation the true depths of the Soviet Union’s contempt for Americans and their way of life:

However the Communists may differ, they all agree on this one thing: an implacable hatred for America and the American way of life.” I read for two weeks the English language newspapers and magazines of the Soviet. They never deviate. There is never a kind word about our country or our people. There is never a syllable of appreciation for what we are seeking to do for an oppressed world. But every line, and every sentence, and every syllable, and every word is one of blasphemous accusation and denunciation.⁸³

Criswell aligned with Cold War era Southern Baptist theology by intimately connecting a fear of God’s retribution and a fear of communism.⁸⁴

The joining of religious and patriotic themes presented in Southern Baptist propaganda was a technique utilized by other groups and campaigns. Secular organizations began to incorporate this fear into their campaigns to attack communism. The National Association of Manufacturers started a quarterly newspaper that was dedicated to fostering cooperation between clergy and businessmen. Their writings stated that both church and industry faced the common threat of communism, and they were dedicated to uniting the two forces in order to eliminate the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ W.A. Criswell, “America and Russian Communism,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, September 19, 1965, accessed on February 10, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁸⁴ Settje, *Faith and War*, 34-5.

evil that seeks to destroy all liberties.⁸⁵ Likewise, religious themes were connected to Americans' only confidence for surviving the nuclear threat. Secular journalist and critic Dwight Macdonald expressed the hope for America this way, "Only this stubborn insistence on acting as a responsible individual in a society which reduces the individual to impotence offered a chance of changing our present tragic destiny."⁸⁶ The Christian call for individual repentance and redemption demonstrates the influence of the individual.⁸⁷ Southern Baptists were not the only demographic to combine patriotic and religious themes to connect with fearful Americans. This approach resonated with Americans that desperately wanted to ensure that communism did not infiltrate their nation.⁸⁸



(Communism 1961 12-7, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.)

⁸⁵ Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 472-3.

⁸⁶ Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 236-7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁸⁸ A 1965 Gallup Poll revealed that Americans worried about international problems outnumbered the total of those concerned by domestic problems. George Gallup, "Americans Most Worried By Foreign Problems," *The Washington Post and Time Herald*, June 12, 1965, A2.

The Beam, a monthly periodical published by the Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, focused on the religious reaction to the Cold War. Starting with its first issue in 1954, *The Beam* reflected the efforts of the SBC to diversify their approaches in order to reach more Americans. In 1960 it wrote, “Televangelism is designed to help you witness to lost friends and relatives. Thousands of Christians were able to use this new idea during 1959 in showing God’s way of life to the unsaved and to unconcerned Christians.”⁸⁹ Southern Baptists believed that with the exception of nuclear science, no other field had made such rapid advances as mass communication.⁹⁰ *The Beam* encouraged members of SBC churches to share films with the neighbors and relatives and then discuss the spiritual applications of the television program with their visitors. Several of these television programs relied on Cold War themes to connect with Americans.

The April edition of *The Beam* in 1960 reported the results of the Southern Baptist endeavor to film services of a Moscow Baptist church. Dr. Louie D. Newton visited the church and its leaders in Moscow. The men on this trip attempted to capture a realistic representation of what life was like for Baptists in Russia, but instead they realized they were limited by government restrictions.⁹¹ The SBC reported this trip in an attempt to remind Americans to cherish their freedoms and pray for their fellow Baptists oppressed in Russia.⁹² A printed sermon in the August 1960 edition written by Dr. Grady C. Cothen, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, discussed the condition of the world and God’s remedy for the evils

⁸⁹ “How To Do It For Televangelism 1960,” *The Beam*, January 1960, 6.

⁹⁰ “WWJ First Commercial Radio Broadcast Station Celebrates 40th Anniversary,” *The Beam*, November 1960, 9.

⁹¹ “A Russian Adventure: Filming Services of Moscow Baptist Church for Television,” *The Beam*, April 1960, 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*

imposed by mankind. This issue stated, “Man is uneasy in the presence of the knowledge of his time. In spite of what he knows, man seems to be less at home in this world than he has ever been before... Another thing that seems to be evident about our world is that technological process is supreme.”⁹³ This article referenced how the Russians were able to launch Sputnik, yet despite this vast knowledge, Americans were more frustrated and confused than ever. He argued that the events in America mirrored those discussed in Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This sermon stated that man’s tremendous knowledge did not provide him with happiness and that only salvation could secure lasting joy.⁹⁴ Southern Baptists attempted to connect with Americans gripped by fear through different avenues such as literature by discussing Russian current events and evangelism techniques.

During July 1962, *The Beam* published an issue that explored the appeal and threat of communism through the viewpoints of eleven American leaders. An article stated that Americans must choose between the sickle or the cross. This article wrote, “Herein is the tragedy of tragedies. Communism is filling the emptiness created by our Christian stagnation, neglect, and indifference. We have the message that will change the world – the only message. But we are never cold, never hungry, and we care little about changing anything!”⁹⁵ Southern Baptists believed that the Soviet Union was beating America economically and ideologically with their propaganda. This particular article encouraged Americans to stand strong by resisting the half-truths that Communist propaganda promoted. These articles were important to the SBC because they believed that communism had a religious component that only devout Christians could

⁹³ “A Prophet Looks at Our World,” *The Beam*, August 1960, 14.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁵ *The Beam*, July 1962, The Sickle or the Cross, Wayne Dehoney, 6-10, Communism 1962 12-8, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

resist.⁹⁶

Additionally, *The Beam* showed that several groups accepted the task of reaching their fellow Americans with the gospel. Texas Christian University students who attended Fort Worth University Baptist Church conducted televangelism-viewing parties during 1960. The college students offered coffee and doughnuts for any who were willing to watch the Southern Baptists' "The Answer" series with them on television each Sunday night. Students reported that attendance was small, but they were able to lead discussions.⁹⁷ The Baptist World Congress met in Brazil June 26-July 3, 1960. During this event, the gathered Baptists could attend sectional meetings directed towards laymen, young people, ministers, and women. These meetings would focus on special interests such as world peace, religious liberty, and radio and television. Billy Graham ended this event by speaking to over 150,000 people.⁹⁸ These examples demonstrate that several ages and demographics used the evangelistic technique of televangelism.

Television programs were not the only avenue that the SBC utilized to reach fearful Americans. Tracts distributed throughout the 1960s reflected the point that Cold War fears influenced the evangelism techniques of Southern Baptists. A tract during the early 1960s stated that communists provided their agents with the proper tools, which allowed their message to spread to the grassroots level. Southern Baptists acknowledged that Americans had a friendly government now, but they wanted to ensure that their lay people were equipped.⁹⁹ In a tract entitled "What Christians Should Do about Communism", Southern Baptists were instructed that

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ "Televangelism in Action! Fort Worth University Baptist Students Conduct Televangelism Viewing Parties," *The Beam*, April 1960, 8.

⁹⁸ "Rio Calls...As Baptist World Congress Plans to Meet in Brazil," *The Beam*, June 1960, 5-6.

⁹⁹ "What Christians Should Know About Communism," Communism 1962 12-8, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

they needed to live out their faith and increase their global influence. They reminded their parishioners that they possessed the resource of prayer, which communists did not have access to. In conclusion, this tract stated,

Maintain confidence in God. Many Christians today as if God were dead. Many of us need a much bigger concept of God than we have. How can we meet the threats of atheistic communism without a strong faith in the sovereign God of the universe, a God whose will ultimately will be achieved? This does not necessarily mean a faith in the preservation of our way of life. God may use communism to punish us. Ultimately, however his judgment will fall on communism. His purpose will be accomplished in the world. He cannot be defeated.¹⁰⁰

Relating how Christians could confront and defeat communism provided a powerful rallying point that allowed the SBC to publish literature that offered common Americans hope and answers.

Tracts distributed by the SBC preached that in order for the United States to achieve lasting reform in the Soviet Union and abroad it must focus on domestic conversions. Criswell stated, “Our frontiers used to be in China and in Africa, and in the Isles of the sea. That is no longer true. Our missionary frontiers now—today, are in every metropolitan area, on every city street, and sometimes through almost and nearly every home. There are no delineated missionary frontiers today across the seas; these frontiers are everywhere.”¹⁰¹ Tracts published by the SBC reflect the desire of the board and Criswell to gain converts in the United States that would then support and serve as missionaries.

Secular thinkers brushed over man’s problems with ease, but even though Christianity could not eradicate the maladies of the modern age, this faith could offer hope and make these

¹⁰⁰ “What Christians Should Do About Communism,” Communism 1962 12-8, Southern Baptist Convention, Christian Life Commission Resource Files, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

¹⁰¹ W.A. Criswell, “Our Far-Flung Mission Line,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, March 5, 1967, accessed on February 10, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

problems more comprehensible.¹⁰² The combination of the Southern Baptist's commitment to winning converts, and their new desire for relevance through the social gospel allowed the Southern Baptists and the SBC to rise to a national level of prominence during the Cold War. It was from this platform that Criswell was able to calm Cold War fears by explaining the personal peace that he received from the Bible, rather than following the pattern of secular thinkers and easily brushing over man's problems.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Chapter Four: The Role of Religious Education within the SBC, and How Their View of History Influenced Cold War Perceptions.

Typical historical interpretations by Southern Baptists reveal why the denomination firmly believed that the Lord's return was imminent. The SBC relied on a compressed timeline that influenced how their leaders interpreted eschatology and the events occurring in the Soviet Union. Their interpretations of American history connected Cold War Christians with prominent religious figures that founded the nation. This understanding caused the denomination to believe that America had a special role to play in God's salvation plan. Its education materials disclose how the SBC and Criswell incorporated Cold War imagery into their curriculum and literature in order to inform Americans that they had a distinct calling during the earth's final days.

Evaluating the history of American education reveals the changing role of religion in American society. During the colonial period, education fell under the domain of the church, and several religious groups founded prominent schools.¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, public educators and students began to question their previous statements regarding religion.² This visible trend in education was not the result of some calculated plan. Herzog asserts, "The place of religion in schools faded due to the decline of classical education, a demand for more rigorous scholarship, and the growing fears of sectarianism and religious irrationality in public institutions."³ Moral instruction was still a vital aspect of public education. Progressive educators believed that religion taught morality by command, whereas education was a progression that allowed students to process lessons and form their own ethical and moral consciousness.⁴ These views of education reveal the belief that children were conditioned by their environment, and

¹ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 26.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

thus children needed to receive proper instruction that allowed them to formulate their own moral consciousness.⁵

Cold War education, both in the religious and secular realm, relied on incorporating religious and moral aspects from America's founding. Historian Alan Scot Willis asserts that the education of this era focused on one overarching truth, "America was a Christian and a chosen nation, shaped by great men acting according to God's will."⁶ In 1947, the American Heritage Foundation created the plans for a Freedom Train. This foundation was composed of America's leading volunteer organizations, chief executive officers, and media moguls. This organization demonstrates how Truman's focus on connecting the importance of religion in order to preserve freedom resonated with varying groups of Americans.⁷ This traveling exhibit went on a twelve-month tour across the country showcasing one hundred original documents.⁸ This train was designed as a Cold War weapon and correctly anticipated the religious dimensions of this struggle. Baptists asserted that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were Christian documents because they founded a nation dedicated to religious freedom.⁹ Aligning with this belief, a group of bishops proclaimed in 1946 that the Declaration of Independence was the basic tradition for their Christian civilization.¹⁰ Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, contributed to this foundation of relying on the spiritual heritage of America. He stated, "Our greatest need is to regain confidence in the supreme value of our spiritual heritage... We

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Willis, "Symbolic History in the Cold War Era", 272.

⁷ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 81.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Willis, "Symbolic History in the Cold War Era", 279.

¹⁰ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 137.

need to have that burning conviction and carry it into daily life if we are to combat successfully the methods and practices that derive from a materialistic creed and if we are to achieve leadership in a world that desperately craves spiritual sustenance.”¹¹

The revelation that Alger Hiss was a Soviet agent in 1950 had significant repercussions on amplifying the public concern that Soviet power and influence was growing.¹² Americans pondered as to which leaders serving in the State Department or United Nations were also aiding the Soviet Union. Whitfield writes, “The demonology of the Cold War was amplified. Transposing the genuine evil that emanated from abroad to domestic politics, influential voices then magnified the danger that American Communism represented and made democratic norms seem like luxuries that the crisis could not permit.”¹³ Americans found themselves engaged in ultimate combat with their enemy and demanded clear distinction between their culture and the Soviet way of life.¹⁴

For politicians and religious leaders alike public education became the crux of the American Cold War defense system. Herzog argues, “If the Cold War was indeed a battle of ideas, as American leaders claimed, then classrooms would be on the front line.”¹⁵ The 1950s saw a rise in revival and interest in religion on college campuses. Students earnestly strained to discover intellectual and spiritual answers for life’s questions, and Americans believed that the study of religion rightfully belonged in the college classroom.¹⁶

¹¹ Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960*, 230.

¹² Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵ Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex*, 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

This focus on America's founding became a prominent theme in other aspects of American propaganda and education. This campaign of recapturing the faith of the Founding Fathers continued into the 1960s. The army instituted a program of religious instruction in 1948 that continued through the early 1960s. This program focused on topics such as the relationship between democracy and religion and the dangers posed by communism. This curriculum taught that moral beings stemmed from following religious codes, and that "civic virtues came from the relationship between a nation and God."¹⁷ The focus on religious education arose partially from the culture of the Cold War that believed that every American had a duty to fulfill in order to ensure the defense of their nation.¹⁸ A school text from 1955 entitled "Exploring American History" encouraged high school students to directly report any suspicions of communist behavior they noticed in their fellow Americans. This text represents a portion of the Cold War culture that believed American citizens had a responsibility to undertake surveillance, and thus American students needed to be informed of American traditions and how they differed from their communist opponents.¹⁹

Southern Baptists clearly promoted the historical narrative that held that America was founded as a Christian nation. The denomination believed that the true story of America's history began at Plymouth, rather than Jamestown. They taught that God prohibited the colonization of America until a people group arrived with an open Bible in their hands.²⁰ Baptist leaders promoted their own timeline by encouraging their youth to participate in historical lessons and plays that incorporated patriotic and religious symbols, such as Thanksgiving plays. This tactic

¹⁷ Ibid., 121.

¹⁸ Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 101.

¹⁹ Ibid., 102.

²⁰ Willis, "Symbolic History in the Cold War Era", 275.

allowed Baptist leaders to mold together the sacred and secular histories of America. Historian Jeremy Black asserts that Southern Baptists tied the Pilgrims to the Founding Fathers and to the present Cold War. He believed that no one made this connection better than Criswell.²¹

Southern Baptists believed that they had a specific role to fulfill during the Cold War and they used historical scholarship to support it. Willis writes,

The history Southern Baptists taught made God the central causal agent in history and clearly linked the nation's past with its present and future, showed America to be on a specific, divinely ordained path. America was a Christian nation because of its past, and a chosen nation because of its future. As each generation fulfilled its Christian destiny, it provided a Christian heritage for future generations to build on.²²

Baptist leaders truly believed that their historical narrative provided a needed correction to the secular history taught at public institutions. Southern Baptists believed it was essential to preserve their religious foundation. *The Baptist Standard* reported that at the 17th International Christian Leadership Conference President Kennedy stated that government officials and leaders at every level must turn to the oldest source of strength and wisdom in light of the nuclear age. Following the president, Billy Graham declared that the strength of America was not in their military might but in the conditions of the hearts of men. He stated that God was examining the heart of America.²³ As the Southern Baptist Training Union and conservative Christian academies grew in popularity, they provided a forum that permitted the belief that America was a Christian and chosen nation to be taught.²⁴

Due to Criswell's four-month world tour in 1950 that included Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and the Holy Lands, he recognized the true threat of communism for the

²¹ Jeremy Black, *Using History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005). In Willis, "Symbolic History in the Cold War Era", 276.

²² *Ibid.*, 273.

²³ "Kennedy, Graham Pay Tribute to Liberty," *The Baptist Standard*, February 15, 1961, 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

American way of life.²⁵ Upon his return, Criswell issued a warning to his congregation, and called for universal military training. He based this opinion off his studies that revealed that the Puritans went to church with a child in one hand and a musket in the other.²⁶ Ultimately, Criswell reminded his congregation that they could only resist communism through a strong commitment to God's Word. He stated that America could, "be a bastion for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. When you look around our world, all of those nations around that globe, one-half of it is sealed off by Communism, the Soviets in Russia and the Red regime in China... The gospel lighthouse of Christ, if it burns at all, must burn in this continent. It must shine in this nation."²⁷

Criswell's use of the Puritans in order to inspire his congregation to follow God and institute universal military training was common. Starting in February 1945 the Southern Baptist Training Union hosted a meticulously planned tea party for children aged nine to eleven, which recounted stories of the Boston Tea Party and George Washington. Southern Baptists manipulated two iconic symbols of American history in order to encourage children to have an enduring affection for America and its courageous past.²⁸ Just as Criswell believed that God would bless and deliver a truly Christian nation, Southern Baptists focused on symbolic history when educating their youth and stated that America was a Christian nation that has been formed by men that were acting according to God's will. Baptist leaders were not concerned with covering the entirety of American history; they focused only on certain events that supported

²⁵ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 184.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ W.A. Criswell, "If the Nations Have Any Hope," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, November 13, 1955, accessed on March 2, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

²⁸ Willis, "Symbolic History in the Cold War Era", 272.

their view of the United States as a Christian nation.²⁹ The Royal Ambassadors program focused on battles throughout American history fought to gain religious freedom. They noted that these battles were important because communism threatened religious freedom. Baptist leaders focused on Roger Williams and then skipped ahead to study George Washington.³⁰ Educational outreaches of the Southern Baptists attempted to plant a desire in their children to fulfill America's destiny to spread Christianity throughout the entire world.³¹

Southern Baptist children were taught that they must live a Christian life in order to work for the Christianization of America that could effectively combat communism. Children were instructed that their faith could come under attack just as their Puritan forefathers had faced persecution and oppression.³² These educational goals mirror Criswell's commitment to strictly adhere to his belief that the Bible was literally true. Southern Baptist leaders joined with Criswell in his belief that American religion could combat Cold War fears and prepare for earth's final days. Resolutions from the SBC indicate the importance of education as Christian confronted communism. The convention stated, "We do believe that Southern Baptists should study communism as medical experts study cancer. We therefore commend those among us who are undertaking to learn and to teach Christian truth as it applies in this area."³³

Criswell exhibits the desire of the SBC to spread Christianity throughout the world before the return of Christ. However, his sermons also epitomize the Southern Baptist's view of history. Criswell declared that historical findings verified that the Bible was accurate. He stated, "Thus

²⁹ Ibid., 277.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 273.

³² Ibid., 277.

³³ 1961 Resolution Concerning Communism, Southern Baptist Convention, Accessed March 2, 2016. <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/358/resolution-concerning-communism> .

all of it sounds very historical. There's not anything in it that you cannot confirm. Read it on the monuments, dig it up with an archaeological spade, look at it in Hebrew and Latin inscriptions, look at it in the classics, the historians like Josephus and Suetonius and Tacitus, just read it."³⁴ Criswell believed that God included historical events and aspects in the Bible to demonstrate that he was consistently active in human lives. He proclaimed, "And just like God moves in the stars above, just like God moves in the infinitesimal electrons beneath, so God moves in the shaping of human history, and so God moves in the inconsequential in your life."³⁵ The sovereignty of God throughout history was a typical Baptist belief. *The Baptist Training Union* wrote, "As we think of the history of our nation, time and time again we are reminded of God's constant protective care. In hours of oppressive trial we have felt the delivering power of his boundless grace, as at Valley Forge, Jamestown, and Plymouth. We somehow forget to realize that God is actually in history, that with his mighty arm he is keeping watch over his own."³⁶ Criswell and the SBC utilized history to prove that God was still sovereign and thus active in the events of the Cold War.

Not only was history used to show the sovereignty of God, but Criswell utilized historical events to encourage Southern Baptists to not lose sight of their religious history. He believed that this religious heritage would inspire them to remain faithful and steadfast against the godless Soviet Union. He did not want his congregation to become indifferent to their heritage. He stated, "We shall listen to their witness sealed in blood. We shall read somewhat of what they had to say, a little fragment preserved by the Holy Spirit here, a little incident kept by the grace

³⁴ W.A. Criswell, "A Decree of Caesar Augustus ," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, December 22, 1957, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Willis, "Symbolic History in the Cold War Era", 278.

of God there. These, these who kept alive and true the flaming truth of the Word of God that is never bowed, that is never burned, that is never destroyed, and that cannot die.”³⁷

In 1964, Criswell announced an upcoming Diamond Jubilee convocation for all of the Baptist conventions in North America commemorating the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the Triennial Convention that started all other Baptist conventions.³⁸ Criswell realized that typical Southern Baptists had little awareness of their heritage, and he desired to construct a sermon series that taught his congregation about, “the rock out of which we were hewn and the hole of the pit out of which we were digged.”³⁹ This sermon series focused on the dedication of martyrs and the faith and practices that defined Baptists throughout the centuries. The important aspect of this sermon series was Criswell’s belief that the world was ending and thus Southern Baptists needed to reclaim their heritage and live faithfully during their final days. He proclaimed,

The same Lord God that wrought powerfully yesterday, works today and shall to the consummation of the age. So in listening to the voice of the prophet, to hearken back in memory to our forefathers, their sacrifices and their martyrdom, we are doing nothing other than following through the story of the grace of God in the acts of the Spirit, through the centuries to this present day and by prophecy to the consummation of the age.⁴⁰

Southern Baptists, such as Criswell, offered their own interpretation of history that focused on the religious aspects of America’s past that inspired Americans to live a moral life in light of the nuclear threat. During this period, “The bomb had transformed not only military

³⁷ W.A. Criswell, “Our Baptist Heritage,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 26, 1964, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

strategy and international relations, but the fundamental ground of culture and consciousness.”⁴¹

The theme of nuclear devastation was prevalent, and Americans sought a coping mechanism.

Religion that relied on a godly past resonated with Southern Baptists.

By aligning with the typical Southern Baptist historical timeline, Criswell increased the connection of Cold War era Christians to their forefathers. Criswell outlined the struggles of John Bunyan and John Milton as they struggled against an oppressive government in England. This discussion led to a detailed explanation of Roger Williams’ experiences establishing the Baptist denomination in America. Criswell taught that Williams was an educated, affluent, and godly man that used his prominent position to ensure that the Baptist church in America did not fall under the same oppression that Baptists experienced in England.⁴² Criswell admonished his congregation that they must strive to safeguard their churches and religion against the interferences of the government that stifled Bunyan, Milton, and Williams. Criswell prayed, “O Lord, what God hath wrought through our forefathers who laid down their lives for the common, everyday, simple gladnesses and freedoms and liberties that we enjoy today, but that were denied to the millions of mankind throughout the history of the annals of their story.”⁴³ In order to preserve the elements of a national religion that were sustaining America against the Soviet Union Criswell taught lessons that directly connected Cold War Christians to their religious ancestors that also fought against an oppressive government. He declared, “Ah, what we have received from the hands of our martyred forefathers and these who paid the price of the liberties we now enjoy in tears, in agony, in banishment, in suffering and in death. May God grant to us,

⁴¹ Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 32.

⁴² W.A. Criswell, “The Birth of Religious Freedom,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, May 17, 1964, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

their children, that worthiness of dedication as shall make us true sons and daughters of those who went before.”⁴⁴

Criswell directly connected his congregation to the Puritans, then to the founding fathers. He discussed the influence of Rhode Island’s religious history on the Declaration of Independence. He stated, “It was the only place in the earth where such liberty of conscience, and freedom, and soul response to God was according to the dictates and the mandates of man’s conscience...under the friendship of George Washington, and of Thomas Jefferson, and of James Madison, and of Patrick Henry, they made it the fundamental and basic law of the United States of America.”⁴⁵ Criswell’s explanations of the fundamental and basic laws of America relied on religious history and called upon Southern Baptists to strengthen their faith and bolster the religious heritage of America.

History was an important discipline for Southern Baptists during the Cold War due to their conviction that the end of history was rapidly approaching and they wanted to demonstrate that Christ would be the ultimate victor. Criswell articulated that God controlled all of human history. He relied on the Biblical example of Daniel and the nation of Israel to prove his point that God controlled the rise and fall of leaders and nations. He also argued that contrary to Darwin’s assertions, history was moving in a downward motion.⁴⁶ He stated,

And God looks at all human history from the beginning to the end, and it is all a “present” before Him. He sees it, and He knows it, and He presides over it. Any man who would say that God is taken by surprise, or that the universe has been wrested from the hands of the Almighty, does not know the Lord nor the revelation of God in this Holy Book. God knows the future and nothing ever surprises God, and the Lord presides over

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ W.A. Criswell, “The Sweep of Human History,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, March 3, 1968, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

that future, the Sovereign of our lives and of the universe.⁴⁷

It was vital for Criswell to show that God was sovereign. He continued, “Whether we live or die does not lie in the hands of our armies, or of our navies, or of our air force, or of our missiles and entire missile system. But whether we live or die lies in the sovereign choice of Almighty God.”⁴⁸ Criswell taught that when a nation deviated from God’s plan and engaged in a sinful lifestyle that they would incur God’s judgment. Criswell’s belief that God dictated the course of history reminded Southern Baptists that while the end times may be near, they could turn to salvation for ultimate deliverance. Criswell and Southern Baptists offered hope by declaring that God was sovereign over history, time, and missiles.

Criswell’s sermons reflected the commitment to American history mirrored in the educational efforts of the SBC. Criswell warned his congregation of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev’s belief that the United States would ultimately switch from capitalism to communism. During a visit to the United States in 1959, Khrushchev stated, “We cannot expect the American people to jump from capitalism to communism, but we can assist their elected leaders in giving them small doses of socialism until they awaken one day to find they have communism.”⁴⁹ To highlight the danger of Khrushchev’s statement, Criswell quoted a statement from James Madison to the 1787 Virginia Convention, “Since the general civilization of mankind, I believe there are more instances of the abridgment of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachment on the part of those in elected power than by violent and sudden

⁴⁷ W.A. Criswell, “God’s Sovereign Choice of Nebuchadnezzar,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, November 5, 1967, accessed on February 27, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ W.A. Criswell, “Christ and Communism,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 15, 1965, accessed on November 11, 2015, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

usurpations.”⁵⁰ Criswell’s use of history reinforced the evil of the Soviet Union, and the dire need for Americans to defend their cherished freedoms.

Baptist leaders compressed the historical timeline in order to impress on their youth a sense of connection with earlier generations.⁵¹ Baptist children received instruction that the answer to communism was a more Christian America.⁵² The mission for Christian Americans was to stand firm in their faith in order to defeat the doctrines of communism. Criswell declared,

And there’s only one way to meet the passion and the fire of this new religion, and that is with a passion and with a fire that excels it! You cannot bomb an idea out of existence. You cannot machine gun a faith into subjection. We must have military strength; but there must also be back of our bombs and our planes and our submarines by which we weave a cordon of blood and of iron around America, back of those instruments of defense and of peace there must be a living and a vital faith among our people.⁵³

The Cold War was an ideological struggle between America and the Soviet Union.

Criswell’s sermons explained the depths of this ideological struggle, “Christianity teaches that the state is to be a servant of man; but communism teaches that a man is to be the slave of the state. Christianity teaches that only God is omnipotent and all-powerful; communism teaches that the state is omnipotent and all-powerful.”⁵⁴ He continued, “Christianity teaches the law of love and the unification of mankind; communism teaches class warfare and the division of people and nations—house against house, family against family, children against their parents.”⁵⁵ Criswell proclaimed that he was not fearful of the Soviet Union or communists

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Willis, “Symbolic History in the Cold War Era”, 276.

⁵² Ibid., 286.

⁵³ W.A. Criswell, “Communism Contra Christianity,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, July 1, 1962, accessed on November 11, 2015, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁵⁴ W.A. Criswell, “Christ and Communism,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 15, 1965, accessed on November 11, 2015, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

because he did not follow a leader that could die suddenly, as Lenin had in 1924. Criswell explained that the leader on the side of America was immortal and infallible. He declared that Christianity would not be heroic unless the followers of God resisted cowardice. Criswell stated that if Americans chose baptism into the Christian faith then they could baptize the world with the victory that Christianity brought.⁵⁶ It was imperative to cast the Cold War in terms of this ideological struggle in order to demonstrate the importance of focusing on historical interpretations that educated Americans about the religious terms that could overcome communist philosophy.

Not only did Criswell's sermons provide a framework for how to combat the prevalent communism of the Soviet Union, but he also utilized communism to make the Bible understandable and relatable. Americans were familiar with the tenets of communism, and this allowed Criswell to use current events in order to connect with his parishioners. One Sunday morning Criswell read newspaper headlines that declared Russia was openly atheistic, and another article detailed Russia's plans for the next world war. He read that Russian bombers studied the landscape of America while every submarine was aware of the outline of America's shores. He read aloud that newspapers declared that missiles were aimed at the United States. Criswell stated, "And the next war will be fought in our skies. We shall see livid death hurtling into our homes, and our streets, and our cities. War: the judgment of God, the signs of the times."⁵⁷ Current events seemingly reinforced Criswell's conviction that the world would soon end with Christ's return. He called for his congregation to evangelize the entire world in order to

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ W.A. Criswell, "The Signs of the Times," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 8, 1963, accessed on March 2, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

halt the evils of communism and truly sustain the work of the Lord.⁵⁸ This sermon proves that the tension of the Cold War was so encompassing, that Criswell incorporated Cold War vernacular into his sermons. This sermon also demonstrates that Criswell combined current events and historical aspects in an attempt to resonated with his congregation.

Education was vital to Southern Baptists during the Cold War due to their conviction that God could readily use an educated mind. Criswell stated, “In all of the history of the development of God’s workings in the realm of religion, you’ll find it done by the trained and the educated man...But I say there is no exception that the great development of the Christian faith and of the revealed religion of God has it ever been wrought and furthered by the man of the school—the man trained, the learned man, the educated man.”⁵⁹ He carefully acknowledged that all individuals could further the kingdom of God, but he believed that the church should correct the errors presented in public schools. He believed that education should be honest and sincere, and thus he encouraged his parishioners to counter the evolutionary doctrine presented in schools.⁶⁰ Criswell firmly believed that communism would only be defeated by retaining religion in the American curriculum. He declared, “Where does materialism and atheism find you...in the country and in the culture where all the sacred values of God are taken out. And that's what Communism is: no God, no Christ, no Bible, no church, no heaven, no hope. You are an atheistic, materialistic, Communist which is a violation of God's Word, of your own soul, of everything we hold dear. True education is always godly.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ W.A. Criswell, “Christian Communism,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, March 6, 1977, accessed on November 11, 2015, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁵⁹ W.A. Criswell, “God's Affinity for the Educated Man,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, May 30, 1954, accessed on February 21, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Criswell's belief that the church must take up the mantle of religious education is evident in the literature produced by the SBC during the late 1950s and 1960s. In 1960, Herschel Hobbs published an article on God's actions in the affairs of nations. He discussed the ancient rivalry of Assyria and Egypt. He stated that these two powers were religious, economic, political, and military rivals. Yet these two nations eventually both engaged in paganism and abandoned their worship of God. He drew parallels between that rivalry and the combat between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁶²

Criswell believed that the hope for America and its youth resided in the religious instruction that children received at home. The moral dissent of the 1960s appeared to be on the verge of moral collapse. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) stated, "America is on the verge of moral collapse as expressed by the 'New Morality' and might more properly be called 'ammorality' leading to 'immorality.'"⁶³ This resolution from the NAE identified the family as the institution most prepared and equipped to save the United States from their depravity and combat the Soviet Union.⁶⁴ Southern Baptists were disturbed by the fact that religion had been taken out of their school systems; Criswell informed his congregation that if they did not teach their children the Bible, infidels would teach religion to America's youth. He was fearful that Baptists were not following their heritage by instructing their children at home, and thus he admonished his church they must take up the mantle of religious education. He stated, "But religious teaching in the home has become almost non-existent. That means that the church must increasingly bear that responsibility and that assignment. We must. Necessity is laid upon us. And if there is any religious knowledge and any Bible teaching in this country, it has to

⁶² "The God of History," *The Beam*, October 2, 1960, 40.

⁶³ Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares*, 187.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

be done through the church.”⁶⁵ Criswell expressed the fear of many Southern Baptists that America was losing its resolve to resist communism. He warned his congregation that if this moral decay and disintegration continued America would surely suffer God’s wrath.⁶⁶

During the early Cold War, Southern Baptists believed that the hope for America resided in the future of their children. They instructed their youth with Biblical and patriotic lessons so that their young people would be equipped to win the world to Christ. In the late 1960s liberal movements gained popularity, and it appeared as though America was moving farther away from the Southern Baptist goal of a Christian nation. Willis writes of this time, “The free speech movement and antiwar movement suggested that youth had learned something other than respect for authority and patriotism.”⁶⁷ The women’s revolution, sexual liberation, the black power movement, and eastern religions alarmed Criswell and other Southern Baptists. Criswell believed that the only true hope resided in Christ. He urged his congregation to faithfully follow God’s Word, “In God’s time and on God’s clock a whole age is a second, it’s a moment, it’s a day. He comes quickly, and His reward is with Him to give to every one of His servants, as his devotion and love and commitment shall be.”⁶⁸ He showed his commitment to this belief even as the Cold War waged into the 1980s when he stated, “In so many ways do we face that crisis. With our hostages in Tehran and Bogota, and in our confrontation with the nuclear and expansive power of Russia, and in the own policies of our government that bring great trepidation and unmitigated fear to many of our hearts; America needs a renaissance. It needs a rebirth. It needs a visitation

⁶⁵ W.A. Criswell, “Shepherding the Church of God,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, May 2, 1965, accessed on February 21, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Willis, “Symbolic History in the Cold War Era”, 288.

⁶⁸ W.A. Criswell, “At the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, July 10, 1960, accessed on March 22, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

and an intervention from heaven.”⁶⁹ He believed that the greatness of America resided in its religious heritage that needed to be reclaimed and preserved not its military might.⁷⁰

The SBC commitment to educating its youth continued despite the moral upheaval of the 1960s. Especially distressing during this period was the news coverage of hippies that called for relaxed sexual standards, dope use, and a rejection of traditional religion.⁷¹ During the 1970s, Southern Baptists were the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, and they provided leaders and adherents for the New Christian Right that would aid America in living up to its Christian heritage.⁷² The defense of freedom during the Cold War resided not in military strength or strategy, but in moral and spiritual development. It was necessary for religious leaders and politicians to bring the conflict down to the individual level. The National Education Association (NEA) called upon American students to develop inner moral restraints that would ultimately strengthen the nation against totalitarianism.⁷³ Most Americans required direction in order to realize the usefulness of religion during the Cold War. This direction called for more than the leadership of religious figures.⁷⁴ Education was able to provide additional guidance and direction that steered the youth as they moved into roles of leadership in their nation and churches. The moral decay affecting the youth, and the departure of America from a Christian nation prompted Criswell to discuss the Vietnam War from the pulpit.

Criswell expanded the focus of his ministry to engage the disenfranchised Southern

⁶⁹ W.A. Criswell, “The Saving Of the Nation,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 4, 1980, accessed on March 2, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Willis, “Symbolic History in the Cold War Era”, 288.

⁷² Ibid., 299.

⁷³ Herzog, *The Spiritual Industrial Complex*, 140.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 173.

Baptist youth during the heat of the Vietnam War. In 1967, Criswell held a revival meeting at a First Baptist Church in Virginia. His revival was in the midst of several college towns and he encouraged students to ask any questions they had at a dinner following the meetings. A student boldly asked for Criswell's opinion regarding the Vietnam War. In his reply, Criswell acknowledged that every American, from the president to the mother whose son received his draft notice, was grieved over the war. He firmly believed that America could not quit this war and abandon the people of Vietnam because America had made a solemn covenant through the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization to protect any countries that came under the attack of communism. Criswell believed that America had to come to the aid of South Vietnam in order to preserve the honor and integrity of America.⁷⁵ He informed the college students that if America did not draw a line for communism in South Vietnam communists would encroach closer and closer.

Criswell firmly declared that the soldiers in Vietnam were defending the life and culture of America, and they deserved the support and prayers of all Christian Americans. He stated that he abhorred the traitors that burned draft cards and protested against the war. He added that his desire was to jail every protestor of the Vietnam War.⁷⁶ It was important for Criswell and prominent leaders of the SBC to address issues relevant to the youth of America. By discussing the containment theory and the threat of the Vietnam War Criswell connected with youth, while still reminding them to adhere to Biblical principles.

The upheaval of the Vietnam War was clearly reshaping American culture. The same day that Robert F. Kennedy died the SBC approved a document titled "Concerning Crisis in Our

⁷⁵ W.A. Criswell, "Questions Teenagers Ask," Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 23, 1967, accessed on February 21, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Nation.”⁷⁷ This resolution lamented racism and violence and called for healing, revival, and renewal in America. Fletcher states that this was the convention’s most direct reaction to political and moral upheaval.⁷⁸ Despite the impact of the war on the American economy, Southern Baptists continued to prosper and grow. Overall, the Baptists’ investments in church building skyrocketed due to increased giving. The years 1964-84 are considered the golden years of church building for Southern Baptists.⁷⁹ Clearly, the war was not diminishing the scope or influence of Southern Baptists in America.

Criswell recognized the potential that the youth of America possessed and wanted to secure their energies for God’s kingdom. He made a fascinating observation to his congregation about the college students’ questions, “They never asked a question about dancing or about morality or about necking or about sex... I thought, I’ll tell you, I believe we’ve got a wrong idea about these youngsters. They’re not faking those things. What they’re struggling about are some of the great, great determining principles that guide their lives and their destiny.”⁸⁰ Criswell’s ministry in Dallas was primarily to families, but he still recognized that teenagers were facing the looming threat of the draft and needed to hear the message proclaimed in the Bible. He was willing to expand his ministry and preach to college students to combat the moral decay and ensure the future of America.

Education at every stage in life was crucial for ensuring that America would not succumb

⁷⁷ Surrounding Robert F. Kennedy’s assassination the nation suffered 211,000 casualties and 57,702 dead or missing in Vietnam. Domestic issues such as student rebellions, escalating crime, a growing drug culture, race riots and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. plagued the nation. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 220.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ W.A. Criswell, “Questions Teenagers Ask,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, April 23, 1967, accessed on February 21, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

to communists. Criswell had the incredible ability to study the thoughts of lofty theologians and then clearly relate these issues and doctrines to his congregation. Paige Patterson, President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, evaluated Criswell's legacy as follows, "But while he greatly admired the accomplishments of the academy, he never saw himself- indeed, he could not see himself- in that role. His life mission was to make the great truths of the Bible leap from the pages of the Book he treasured and watch those truths envelop the hearts of his parishioners with eternity-altering force."⁸¹ Most Christians during the Cold War did not read a book on eschatology or analyze the just war theory; instead they received their theology almost completely from their pastors and churches. Criswell excelled in this manner. He was able to exegete a crucial text and apply it to contemporary issues in a memorable and convicting manner.⁸² Criswell took the great events of history and used these stories to fashion a timeline that showed Americans they must connect with their religious heritage in order to resist the atheism of communism. Criswell's sermons and eschatology reflect not only the timeline that the SBC constructed, but also the Southern Baptist desire to restore America's Christian heritage in order to lead people to the truth of the gospel.

⁸¹ Timothy George and David Dockery, eds. *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 252.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 253.

Conclusion:

Southern Baptists during the Cold War exemplify how deeply the fear of the nuclear threat permeated the daily life of Americans. Settje argues for the importance of studying and preserving the contributions of religious institutions during the Cold War. He states, “Christianity offers one lens through which to analyze American society’s reactions to the Cold and Vietnam wars. Its institutions reflect foreign policy issues from that era, presenting a spectrum of beliefs from far-right conservatives to far-left pacifists... These are important voices to consider when studying the American culture war over foreign policy during these two decades.”¹ He asserts that religious institutions do not simply reflect American society, but they actively shaped foreign policies in light of their religious convictions. He contends that the SBC achieved these aims by framing their support of the Cold War through their missionary outreaches.² Examining religion and the SBC during the Cold War is vital because Christians desired for their religious convictions to shape foreign policies and government leaders. Christians believed that their missionary work was essential for saving souls and thus was a critical factor in how evangelicals and Southern Baptists viewed the Cold War.³ W.A. Criswell provides a voice for Southern Baptists during the Cold War that demonstrates how they reached people with the gospel.

Criswell’s sermons reveal that he viewed the Soviet Union as the antagonist in the earth’s final days. His discourses are a reflection of the ideology and fears that were paralyzing Americans; thus, it is essential to examine how his eschatology shifted towards the end of the Cold War. On July 22, 1990, Criswell preached a sermon that summarized how he believed God

¹ Settje, *Faith and War*, 174.

² *Ibid.*, 175.

³ *Ibid.*, 176.

was working in Eastern Europe. Criswell gripped the crowd by revealing a piece of the Berlin Wall that he received. As always, Criswell utilized current events to win souls. He likened the collapse of the Berlin Wall to the divide that he claims Christ destroyed when he died on the cross, was resurrected, and provided a pathway for individuals to one day enter Heaven.⁴

Criswell constructed this sermon after a recent visit to East Berlin. He uses a description of his hotel there to demonstrate the bankruptcy of communism and that Americanism and Christianity had triumphed. He stated, “The whole thing is deteriorating and deteriorated. That is communism. And there is nothing for the people, nothing at all. The stores are empty. There is not anything for anyone to buy. That is communism.”⁵

According to Criswell, not only did the collapse of communism demonstrate American strength, but now Christians were free to evangelize Eastern Europe and Russia. Criswell rejoiced that the days of smuggling Bibles had ended, and that Russia was now open and receptive to the gospel message that he weekly proclaimed in downtown Dallas.⁶ World events were an avenue for Criswell not only to praise Americanism, but also to challenge his congregation to evangelize the individuals previously enslaved by communism. Although political developments caused Criswell to shift his views regarding the role of the Soviet Union during the end times, he remained steadfast in his dedication to preaching the gospel.

In the 1990s Criswell began to preach that Americans should evangelize the former Soviet Union. He wanted to reach the world, not just downtown Dallas, with the transforming message of the gospel. He stated, “I must speak now of the open door God has given us who

⁴ W.A. Criswell, “What God Is Doing in Eastern Europe,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, July 22, 1990, accessed on March 16, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

have found faith and refuge in our blessed Lord Jesus. The day of smuggling Bibles is past. You can send Bibles over there now by the millions. And God's people are beginning to do it. The whole world over there in Eastern Europe is open. And you can go over there and be a part of the propagation of the faith.”⁷ This shift in attitudes towards the Soviet Union reflects his commitment to declaring the gospel as it is portrayed in the Bible. While Criswell still believed that Jesus would physically return to earth, he no longer viewed the Soviet Union and its leaders as helping to usher in the end times. The fact that Criswell was able to readjust his ministry goals and his views of eschatology clearly demonstrates that his utmost goal was to pronounce the truths of Scripture.

Criswell desired to declare the gospel instead of proclaiming political or social rants. He clearly wrote of the dangers of not staying true to God’s plan of salvation and the infallible Scriptures. He stated, “Instead of proclaiming God’s plan of salvation, these poor, lost preachers ride their own personal hobby horses to death! They’ll ride war and peace until it’s threadbare. Then they’ll pick up civil rights and ride that into the ground. Then along comes ecology, hunger, or nuclear arms to fill another futile Sunday.”⁸ This statement explicitly confirms that Criswell did not believe in using the fear of nuclear weapons to boost the size of his congregation. Criswell’s life was devoted to proclaiming what he believed to be the true gospel that he derived from the Bible. His evangelical, fundamentalists beliefs did not permit him to employ threats of war simply to alarm parishioners and then have them embrace his belief system.

His tenure as the president of the SBC, and his commitment to the First Baptist Church of

⁷ W.A. Criswell, “What God Is Doing in Eastern Europe,” Sermon, First Baptist Church of Dallas, Dallas, July 22, 1990, accessed on March 16, 2016, <http://www.wacriswell.com/>.

⁸ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 222.

Dallas exemplifies that he was passionate about evangelism and returning Southern Baptists to fundamentalism. Criswell desired to inform individuals that the Bible was inerrant and that Christ extended an offer for eternal life. Stricklin writes, “Criswell and his colleagues also promoted a sense of discontent with their denomination for failing to prevent, and in some cases for helping inspire, moral relativism.”⁹ Criswell possessed theological and cultural concerns, but he did not believe that Southern Baptists should rely on progressive reform to reach their communities with the gospel. First Baptist Church of Dallas was a staging ground for the return of fundamentalist principles within the SBC due to Criswell.

After reviewing Criswell’s eschatology, it is vital to recall that Criswell made certain statements in hopes of winning converts. Criswell constructed each sermon with the mission of First Baptist Church of Dallas’ founder, Reverend Truett, in mind. Criswell believed that the future of America was formed in the activities of downtowns and was convicted that he must not allow the power and influence of sin alone to impact the future of his nation. Criswell reflected on his ministry by stating, “The lighthouse that shines the brightest for our Savior Christ Jesus ought to shine among those tall skyscrapers downtown. Money is big and sin is big and the world is big, but God is infinitely bigger. His message is the light and the hope of the human soul, and it must be proclaimed and lived out courageously in the heart of the city.”¹⁰ Criswell’s continued aim was to reach the people of downtown Dallas with the gospel of Jesus Christ. First Baptist Church of Dallas constructed an activities building that boasted six badminton courts, a basketball court, two volleyball courts, a gymnasium, locker rooms, a skating rink, and a

⁹ Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 145.

¹⁰ Criswell, *Standing on the Promises*, 195.

bowling alley.¹¹ The magnitude of this building aids in demonstrating that Criswell did not seek to vilify the Soviet Union or its citizens. Rather, he was incorporating the fears of American people into the subjects of his sermons to reach the citizens of downtown Dallas with the gospel and what he was convinced was proper eschatology. Criswell truly believed that the end times were approaching because of the evil that occurred in the Soviet Union.

Politicians like Truman and Eisenhower assimilated religion into their rhetoric in order to connect with Americans and bolster their defenses against the Soviet Union. Criswell incorporated this belief system into his sermons because he was convinced that the Bible foretold the resolution for the Cold War. He believed the war would conclude with the triumph of America at Christ's return. Criswell's views of the Bible led him to believe that the Cold War would not end, but the world would. The evil of the Soviet Union convinced Criswell that Armageddon was rapidly approaching, and he was convinced that he must warn residents of downtown Dallas and his radio listeners of this impending danger. The prominence of W.A. Criswell and his congregation allows historians to view his ministry and draw conclusions regarding Southern Baptists as a whole. The fear and imminent doom of the Cold War gripped Criswell, and his distress influenced his ministry throughout the 1960s.

¹¹ Ibid., 200.

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