

M. O. OWENS PAPERS

AR 762



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Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

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Milam Oswell Owens, Jr. Papers

AR 762

Summary

Main Entry: Milam Oswell Owens, Jr. Papers

Date Span: 1960 – 1992

Abstract: Correspondence, clippings, articles, manuscripts, and other material related primarily to the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship and the conservative movement among North Carolina Baptists. Owens served as a Baptist minister and leader of theological conservatives in North Carolina.

Size: 4 linear ft. (10 boxes)

Collection #: AR 762

Biographical Sketch

Dr. Milam Oswell Owens, Jr. was born September 4, 1913, in New Holland, South Carolina. He was an honor graduate of Furman University, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree (1933) and met his first wife, Ruby Gertrude Bridges, with whom he had three daughters. (Owens married Ola Presley Carothers in 1980). He earned a Master of Theology degree (1939) from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry degree (1976) from Luther Rice Seminary. A passionate educator, Owens served as a teacher of English, French, and physics and as the principal of Barwick High School in Barwick, Georgia before becoming a Southern Baptist pastor. He served the majority of his career (1964 to 1980) as the pastor of Parkwood Baptist Church in Gastonia, North Carolina.

In addition to his pastoral and teaching roles, Owens is best known as an activist in the conservative movement of the Southern Baptist Convention in the mid to latter decades of the twentieth century. He served as head of the Baptists United for Spiritual Renewal and as an active member of the North Carolina Fellowship of Conservative Baptists. But his most influential role in bringing about renewed conservatism to the SBC came in his involvement in founding the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship. This was a group of theologically-minded conservatives who sought to bring about an end to liberal trends in the SBC in the 1970s by weaning the Convention of individuals who did not believe in Biblical inerrancy. He also took an active role in both the North Carolina and Southern Baptist Conventions. He was chairman of the boards of directors of the *Southern Baptist Journal* (the journal of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, edited by William A. Powell and sporadically published as funds became available), and the *Southern Baptist Advocate*. He corresponded regularly with Gerald Primm, who edited *The Sword and the Trowel* (published by the North Carolina Fellowship of Conservative Baptists), and Worth C. Grant of the Wycliffe Bible Translations group in Washington, D.C.

Owens's contributions to the conservative movement in the SBC are very important. At a "North Carolina Baptist Day" celebration at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forrest, North Carolina, April 2, 2003, Dr. Paige Patterson, then president of SEBTS, said "Owens is 'a towering giant' without whom the struggle to return the Southern Baptist Convention to its doctrinal roots would have been unsuccessful."¹

Scope and Content Note

The M.O. Owens Papers consists of four linear feet of material (253 folders contained in ten document boxes) documenting the career of Milam Oswell Owens, Jr. from 1960 to 1992. The collection focuses in large part on Owens' attempt to steer the Southern Baptist Convention back to philosophy conservatism, but it also includes materials from the 1980s, when Owens served as a trustee for the Home Mission Board (now North American Mission Board) of the Southern Baptist Convention. The collection illustrates ways in which the conservative movement within the SBC first began to take shape in the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the latter half of the 1960s, a growing number of Southern Baptists became disturbed at the more liberal influences that were infiltrating portions of the Southern Baptist Convention. These liberal (later referred to as "moderate") trends included a non-literal interpretation of the Bible, an acceptance of women in pastoral roles, and a denial of the virgin birth and resurrection of Jesus Christ. M.O. Owens served as the founder of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship, an organization mainly of conservatives within the Convention, who desired to help bring about a return to conservatism to the SBC. The M.O. Owens Papers will be especially valuable to researchers of the early movement of Southern Baptists, in the second half of the nineteenth century, to cease the spread of liberal or moderate ideas throughout the SBC.

Prominent individuals with whom M.O. Owens corresponded include Dr. Paige Patterson, President of Criswell College in Texas (later, President of the SBC, as well as Southeastern and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminaries); William A. Powell, long-time Home Mission Board missionary and editor of *The Southern Baptist Journal*, the publication of the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship; Gerald C. Primm, pastor of Eller Memorial Baptist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina and editor of *The Sword and the Trowel* publication; Paul Pressler, a Houston, Texas Appeals Court Judge, credited with spearheading the major efforts of the "conservative resurgence," Porter Routh, former Executive-Secretary of the SBC; as well as Donald Adcox, B. Gray Allison, LaVerne Butler, J.C. Caruthers, Julian Hopkins, Homer Lindsey, Clark Pinnock, Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley, Bob Tenery, Jerry Vines, and Wendell F. Wentz. The collection also contains a letter Owens wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt expressing his opinions on the Second World War.

Other important portions of the M.O. Owens Papers include a wide array of newspaper clippings documenting the history of the Southern Baptist and North Carolina Baptist Conventions (1940s, 1990s), the Wake Forrest University Controversy (1977, 1979), and several files on various

¹ Hall, Jason. "Southeastern hosts Baptist Day for North Carolina Seniors," *Baptist Press* (April 3, 2003).

North Carolina college charters, the Committees of Eleven, Fifteen, and Nine, the North American Mission Board, and the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically by folder title.

Provenance

Donated by M.O. Owens, 1991, 1993.

Preferred Citation

Milum Oswell Owens Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

Access Restrictions

None

Subject Terms

Hopkins, Julian
 Caruthers, J. C.
 Tenery, Robert
 Pressler, Paul, 1930 –
 Primm, Gerald
 Pinnock, Clark, 1937 –
 Adcox, Donald
 Wentz, Wendell F.
 Powell, William
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 Stanley, Charles F., 1932 –
 Vines, Jerry, 1937 –
 Rogers, Adrian, 1931 –
 Grant, Worth C.
 Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship
 Baptists United for Spiritual Renewal
 North Carolina Fellowship of Conservative Baptists
 Southern Baptist Convention – History – 20th century
 North Carolina Baptist Convention
 Southern Baptist Convention. Home Mission Board
 Baptists – Doctrines
 Baptists – North Carolina
 Controversies. Baptists
 Fundamentalism

Related Materials

Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship Collection, AR 518. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

Southern Baptist Convention. Sunday School Board. Sullivan, James L. Papers. AR 795-354. Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

Southern Baptist Convention controversy oral history collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Rec 533vt

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