

SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

CONTROVERSY COLLECTION

1980 – 1995

AR 812



Winfred Moore and Charles Stanley at the 1985 Southern Baptist Convention

Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

Updated September, 2012

The Southern Baptist Convention Controversy Collection

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Summary

Main Entry: The Southern Baptist Convention Controversy Collection

Date Span: 1980 – 1995

Abstract: Artificial collection compiled by the Archives staff. The collection contains newspaper clippings, documents, partisan publications, and copies of published and unpublished scholarly writings that document key issues and events in a controversy regarding the doctrine of biblical inerrancy in the Southern Baptist Convention.

Size: 1.5 linear ft. (3 boxes)

Collection #: AR 812

Historical Sketch

Beginning in 1979 and continuing throughout the 1980s, the Southern Baptist Convention was engaged in a controversy over the doctrine of biblical inerrancy that had major implications for the structure and governance of the denomination's agencies and institutions. Those who called themselves "conservatives" became concerned that doctrinal laxity had crept into the denomination's agencies and institutions. They sought to correct what they viewed as "liberal" drift by developing a systematic effort to get people, committed to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, elected or appointed to positions of leadership within the Convention, especially to the Convention's presidency and to the boards and directorships of seminaries and agencies. Leaders of this movement included Paul Pressler, a Houston judge, and Paige Patterson, then president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies in Dallas. This effort was largely successful because, since 1979, all of the Convention's presidents have openly identified themselves with the conservative cause. Those presidents included:

1979	Adrian Rogers, Bellevue Baptist, Memphis, TN
1980 – 1982	Baily Smith, First Baptist, Del City, OK
1982 – 1984	James T. Draper, First Baptist, Euless, TX
1984 – 1986	Charles Stanley, First Baptist, Atlanta
1986 – 1988	Adrian Rogers
1988 – 1990	Jerry Vines, Jacksonville, FL
1990 – 1992	Morris Chapman

The conservatives were opposed by those who came to refer to themselves as “moderates.” Moderates held a range of views on the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and were united primarily by their belief that the conservative effort stemmed from a desire for power rather than from doctrinal principles. In 1985, Charles Pickering, president of the Mississippi Baptist State Convention, and Franklin Paschall, retired pastor of Nashville’s First Baptist Church, succeeded in persuading the Convention to establish a Peace Committee to try to resolve the conflicts. The Peace Committee was established following the 1985 Convention. Twenty-two individuals, including partisans on both sides and non-partisans, met for two years and presented their final report in 1987. Conservatives generally considered the Peace Committee’s final report a victory. Some moderates became increasingly discontent with the direction of the Convention and responded by establishing alternative organizations, including the Southern Baptist Alliance (1987) and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (1990 – 1991). Leaders of the moderates included Cecil Sherman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Asheville, NC, Roy Honeycutt, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Lloyd Elder, executive director of the Baptist Sunday School Board.

Scope and Content Note

The SBC Controversy Collection consists primarily of newspaper clippings, ephemeral documents, partisan publications, and copies of published and unpublished scholarly writings. The material documents key issues and events at the heart of the controversy, such as the doctrine of biblical inerrancy and the dismissal of two employees of Baptist Press. The collection also provides information about annual meetings of the Convention and leading personalities of the controversy, including Paige Patterson, Paul Pressler, and Lloyd Elder. The material is organized into four series.

1. **Chronological File.** This file consists of material best suited to an organization that chronologically traced the events and issues of the controversy as they unfolded between 1980 and 1995. Items include newspaper editorials, newspaper accounts of annual meetings, press releases, official statements of convention officers, partisan publications, and a spiral-bound compilation of news stories and editorials that ran in the Indiana Baptist between 1988 and 1992.
2. **People.** This series consists of newspaper articles, editorials, copies of letters, and other statements about several of the key leaders on both sides of the controversy. Some files also contain individuals’ writings on key issues.
3. **Subject File.** This file consists primarily of newspaper clippings about key issues related to the controversy, such as the doctrines of inerrancy and the priesthood of believers, the status of the seminaries and Baptist Press, and the founding of such alternative organizations as the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. In addition to clippings, the file includes some published partisan literature, press releases, and other types of documents.
4. **Writings.** The content of this series includes scholarly journal articles, book excerpts, academic papers, research reports, and a few lengthy newspaper or magazine articles. The items in this series, while not necessarily neutral in tone, make some attempt to describe or analyze the historical development of the issues and events embedded in the controversy.

Arrangement

Arranged into four areas: Chronological, People, Subject, and Writings

Provenance

The collection began as part of the “Baptist Historical File,” a vertical file of ephemeral material organized according to a wide array of topics related to Baptist history. The “Southern Baptist Controversy Collection” contains material received incidentally and in no way represents an effort to provide a comprehensive view of the issues and events related to the controversy. The “SBC Controversy Collection” was removed from the “Baptist Historical File” because it became too bulky and required some type of imposed organization in order to ensure its continuing usefulness. The collection description and inventory is intended to serve as a research guide on the subject of the controversy, with the topics and names of people and organizations serving as reference points to other sources within the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives and elsewhere.

Preferred Citation

Southern Baptist Convention Controversy Collection, 1980 – 1995, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

Access Restrictions

None

Subject Terms

Southern Baptist Convention

Southern Baptist Convention – History – 20th Century

United States – Church History – 20th Century

Baptists – United States – History – 20th Century

Fundamentalism

Church controversies – Baptists – History – 20th Century

Related Materials

AR 455 Baptist Public Relations Association Minutes, 1954 – 1989

AR 607 James T. Draper Papers, 1982 – 1984

AR 627-1 SBC Executive Committee Administrative and Program Planning records, 1917 – 1989

AR 627-2 SBC Agency Minutes, 1917 – 1984

AR 671 Bailey E. Smith Papers, 1980 – 1982

AR 691 Adrian Rogers Papers [unprocessed]

AR 692 Peace Committee Records, 1985 – 1988

AR 738 Jerry Vines Papers, 1988 – 1990

AR 780 Morris Chapman Papers, 1990 – 1992

AR 811 Russell Dilday. Collection on Termination as President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978 – 1994

Container List

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- 1.2 Touchton, Don. "A Cry of Concern," April 4, 1980
- 1.3 Southern Baptist Convention, Pittsburgh, 1983
- 1.4 Convention Focus Panel Discussion at Southern Seminary, September 28, 1984
- 1.5 Editorials, 1984
- 1.6 "Facts for Southern Baptists," Foundation: A Magazine of Biblical Fundamentalism, Vol. VI, Issue 1, 1984
- 1.7 Langford, Jack W. "A Critique on the Baptist Brawl," 1984
- 1.8 Southern Baptist Convention, Kansas City, 1984
- 1.9 "The Controversy in the SBC," Theological Educator, special issue, 1985
- 1.10 Editorials, 1985
- 1.10a The Call: Dallas '85
- 1.11 Watkins, James. "Stop the Takeover," 1986
- 1.12 "What Jesus Said On the Vital Issues Facing Our SBC," Christ for the World Family Magazine, May – June, 1986
- 1.13 Editorials, 1987
- 1.14 Peace Committee Report, 1987
- 1.15 Southern Baptist Convention, St. Louis, 1987
- 1.16 Press Releases, 1988
- 1.17 Southern Baptist Convention, San Antonio, 1988
- 1.18 Call to Solemn Assembly and Prayer, September 17, 1989
- 1.19 A Conservative Voice in Arkansas, Sept., Nov., 1989
- 1.20 Cunningham, Jack. Chapel Address Outline, SBC Building, October 6, 1989
- 1.21 "The SBC Cause," (Conservative Communications, Inc.), June, 1989
- 1.22 Southern Baptist Convention, Las Vegas, 1989
- 1.23 The Baptist Sentinel, 1990
- 1.24 Church bulletins and letters, 1990
- 1.25 Editorials, 1990
- 1.26 Southern Baptist Convention, New Orleans, 1990
- 1.27 Church letter, May 10, 1991
- 1.28 SBC Executive Committee, "Meet Southern Baptists," April, 1991
- 1.29 Southern Baptist Convention, Atlanta, 1991
- 1.30 "Another Look at the News: Selections from the Indiana Baptist," 1988 – 1992
- 1.31 Culpepper, Robert H. "The Peace Committee Report: Five Years Later," SBC Today, May 28, 1992
- 1.32 SBC Executive Committee, "A Question of Heritage," 1992
- 1.33 Editorials, 1993
- 1.34 SBC Executive Committee, "We Thought You'd Like to Know," February, March, 1993
- 1.35 SBC Executive Committee, "We Thought You'd Like to Know," May, 1995

Box 1 People

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- 1.37 Elder, Lloyd, 1988, 1991, 1993

- 1.38 Hobbs, Herschel, 1987, 1993
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- 1.41 Parks, R. Keith, 1990
- 1.42 Patterson, Paige, 1980, 1987, 1991
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- 1.44 Rogers, Adrian, 1980, 1986, 1990
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Box 2 Subject Files

- 2.1 Abortion, 1988 – 1990
- 2.2 Associated Press, 1990
- 2.3 Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, 1989 – 1990
- 2.4 Baptist Press, 1984 – 1985, 1988, 1990
- 2.5 Baptists Committed to the SBC, 1988 – 1990
- 2.6 Baylor University, 1990 – 1991
- 2.7 Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, 1990 – 1991, 1994
- 2.8 Cooperative Program, 1990 – 1991
- 2.9 First Baptist Church, Dallas, 1980, 1992
- 2.10 Inerrancy, 1980, 1986 – 1990
- 2.11 Priesthood of Believers, 1988
- 2.12 Satire, 1988 – 1989
- 2.13 SBC Today, 1989 – 1990
- 2.14 Seminaries, 1985 – 1986
- 2.15 Seminaries – “The Seminary-Approved 'Orthodoxy' Thesis: Positive Evidence Teachers Destroy Faith,” 1981
- 2.16 Seminaries – Southern, 1984, 1990
- 2.17 Seminaries – Southeastern, 1988 – 1989, 1992
- 2.18 Seminaries – Southwestern, 1984
- 2.19 Separation of Church and State, 1988 – 1991
- 2.20 Southern Baptist Alliance, 1987 – 1988
- 2.21 State Convention Presidents' Statement
- 2.22 Sunday school literature, 1990
- 2.23 Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1988
- 2.24 Women, 1988

Box 3 Writings

- 3.1 Baker, James T. “Southern Baptists in the Seventies,” Christian Century, June 27, 1973
- 3.2 Brown, Vicky. “Baptist Crossroads” (series), Nashville Banner, May 7 – 9, 1991
- 3.3 George, Timothy. “The Southern Baptist Wars: What Can We Learn from the Conservative Victory?” Christianity Today, March 9, 1992.
- 3.4 Goode, Stephen. “A Struggle for Earthly Power Bruises the Baptists,” Insight June 3, 1991
- 3.5 James, Rob. “The Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention,” c1989
- 3.6 Kell, Carl L. “In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of Exclusion in the Southern Baptist Convention,” October, 1993

- 3.7 Kell, Carl L. "They Have Seen a Great Light: Towards a Rhetoric of the Inerrancy Movement in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1970 – 1987" (1988)
- 3.8 Kelly, Mark. "Persuasion or Propaganda? A Comparative Analysis of Two Southern Baptist Advocacy Publications," June 1, 1988
- 3.9 "Lessons from the Baptist Controversies," Controversies that Shaped Southern Baptists
- 3.10 McClendon, James W., Jr. "Forged in the Crucible of Conflict," Books and Religion, September, 1986
- 3.11 McKibben, Thomas R. "Report on the Southern Baptist Convention to the Dunster Society," October 20, 1987
- 3.12 Morgan, David T. "Alabama Baptists and the Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1979 – 1991"
- 3.13 Morgan David T. "Upheaval in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1979 – 1990: Crusade for Truth or Bid for Power?"
- 3.14 Shurden, Walter B. "The Erosion of Denominationalism: The Current State of the Southern Baptist Convention, November 12, 1984
- 3.15 Waldman, Peter. "Holy War: Fundamentalists Fight to Capture the Soul of Southern Baptists," Wall Street Journal, March 7, 1988
- 3.16 Warner, Greg. "Who are Those Guys? A Reader's Guide to the Identity and Intentions of the Factions in the Southern Baptist Convention," Florida Baptist Witness, May 11, 1989
- 3.17 White, Perry. "Southern Baptists," Daily Oklahoman, March 13, 1983
- 3.18 Wilkerson and Associates. "A Study of the Attitudes and Opinions of the Southern Baptist Convention," 1986

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