

# THE CONSERVATIVE RESURGENCE: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## Introduction

Since the early 1980s, dozens of scholarly or semi-scholarly books, dissertations, articles, and essays have been written about the Conservative Resurgence (CR) in the Southern Baptist Convention. The CR in the SBC began with the Houston Convention in 1979 and lasted through the end of the century. I would argue that the best ending date for the CR is 2000, the year the Baptist Faith and Message was revised. Though the “national” CR ended over a decade ago, statewide versions of the CR continued in some areas throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The CR goes by many different names, depending upon one’s interpretation. The period has also been called the “Inerrancy Controversy,” “The Fundamentalist Takeover,” “The Fundamentalist-Moderate Controversy,” or simply “The Controversy.” Each of these labels contains some truth, though I opt to call the period the Conservative Resurgence because I believe this label best captures the heart of the issue. Grassroots theological conservatives, displeased with the leftward drift of many denominational servants, used democratic means to effect a leadership change in the Southern Baptist Convention.

This list of resources is not intended to be exhaustive, but it does represent some key works for those interested in studying the CR in greater detail. For the sake of space, I have not included any dissertations, though plenty have been written. Since my personal theological sympathies are with the resurgent conservatives who gained control of SBC leadership during the CR, my bias is reflected in my comments about these sources.

## Primary Sources

Walter Shurden and Randy Shepley, eds., *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Mercer University Press, 1996). This is the best place to start if you want to read sources such as press releases, excerpts from key sermons, resolutions, etc. The editors are moderates, so the introduction reflects their perspective.

Paige Patterson, *Anatomy of a Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Seminary Hill Press, 2004). Patterson was one of the three key leaders among conservatives, along with Paul Pressler and Adrian Rogers. This pamphlet reflects Patterson’s personal thoughts on the CR, including the major issues at stake and the rationale for the conservative strategy.

Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die: One Southern Baptist's Journey* (B&H, 1998). This book is Pressler’s autobiography. The latter half focuses on the CR. A personal anecdote: I was flirting with becoming a CBF-friendly moderate in college until I read this book. It literally changed the direction of my ministry.

Cecil Sherman, *By My Own Reckoning* (Smyth & Helwys, 2008). Sherman was perhaps the most important moderate leaders in the 1980s and 1990s, so the second half of his autobiography provides an interesting counterpoint to Pressler's aforementioned memoir.

Grady Cothen, *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention? A Memoir of the Controversy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Smyth & Helwys, 1993). Cothen was a vocal moderate leader and a former president of the SBC Sunday School Board. Another insightful memoir.

L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (B&H Academic, 1999). Bush and Nettles argue that most Baptists have historically affirmed biblical inerrancy, though the term "inerrancy" is of recent vintage. This book, which was first published by Moody Press in 1980, has the distinction of being a secondary study in historical theology that functions as a primary source for one studying the CR.

Walter Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Mercer University Press, 1994). In these essays, key moderate leaders discuss why they formed alternative ministries to compete with SBC denominational ministries in the aftermath of the CR.

In 1985 and 1988, the journal *Theological Educator* published special editions dedicated to "The Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention" and "Polarities in the Southern Baptist Convention," respectively. Articles were written by key figures on both sides of the controversy. *Theological Educator* is the former faculty journal of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

### **Conservative Secondary Sources**

Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (B&H Academic, 2000). This is probably the most widely-used history of the CR written from a conservative perspective. It is triumphalistic in tone and relies too much on interviews with key conservative leaders, but it's still essential reading.

James Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis*, 6 volumes (Hannibal Books, 1986-1991). This series provides a journalistic account of the CR written from a conservative perspective. Though clearly biased and largely uncritical in nature, Hefley gets some of the "human stories" of the CR that are missed by most other studies of the era.

Jason G. Duesing and Thomas White, "Neanderthals Chasing Bigfoot? The State of the Gender Debate in the Southern Baptist Convention," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 5-19. This article focuses upon the gender debate in the SBC, which is closely tied to the CR.

Nathan A. Finn, "Baptists and the Bible: The History of a History Book," in *Ministry By His Grace and For His Glory: Essays in Honor of Thomas J. Nettles*, eds. Thomas K. Ascol and Nathan A. Finn (Founders Press, 2011), pp. 3-16. This essay focuses upon the reception and influence of the book *Baptists and the Bible*.

Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (Oxford University Press, 2009). The changes at Southern Seminary were some of the most explosive events related to the CR. Wills covers this material in chapters 10-13.

David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future* (Crossway, 2009). Several of the essays in this book discuss the CR and its legacy for Southern Baptists. See especially the essays by David Dockery, Al Mohler, Stan Norman, Greg Wills, and Nathan Finn.

Adam Greenway and Chuck Lawless, eds., *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God's Mandate in Our Time* (B&H Academic, 2010). Another collection of essays that includes several chapters related to the CR. See especially the essays by Thom Rainer, Al Mohler, and Nathan Finn.

The Summer 2003 edition of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, the faculty journal of Southern Seminary, was dedicated to "Theology, Culture, and the SBC." The articles interact with Barry Hankins's book *Uneasy in Babylon*, which is discussed below. The Spring 2005 edition of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* was dedicated to "The Conservative Resurgence in the SBC."

### **Moderate Secondary Sources**

Walter Shurden, *Not A Silent People: Controversies that Have Shaped Southern Baptists*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Smyth & Helwys, 1995). Chapter 7 offers the best brief introduction to the CR written from a moderate perspective.

David Morgan, *The New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991* (University of Alabama Press, 1996). This is probably the best history of the CR written from a moderate perspective. Though I frequently disagree with Morgan's interpretations, he does the best job of any author in describing conservative activism in the decade prior to 1979.

Nancy Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religion Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Rutgers University Press, 1990). This is one of the most important books to come out of the controversy. Ammerman is a moderate sociologist who demonstrates the significant theological and cultural differences between conservatives and moderates.

Bill Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Eerdmans, 1990). Another standard moderate history. Leonard does the best job of describing what SBC culture was like prior to the CR, though Ammerman also covers some of this ground.

Bruce Gourley, *The Godmakers: A Legacy of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Providence House, 1996). This is not really a purely historical work because Gourley critiques the theological and especially ethical motivations of the "fundamentalists" who took over the SBC. For Gourley, the CR was more about power politics than theological renovation.

Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (University of Alabama Press, 2003). In this important book, Hankins argues that SBC conservatives were at least as concerned with a socially conservative political agenda as they were biblical inerrancy. I'm sympathetic to Hankins's thesis. The Summer 2003 edition of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* included several articles that interacted with *Uneasy in Babylon*, including a rejoinder by Hankins.

The October 1993 edition of the journal *Baptist History and Heritage* was dedicated to the CR. The contributors wrote from a mostly moderate perspective.

### **The Conservative Resurgence and Southeastern Seminary**

Nathan A. Finn, "The Story of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950-2000." This short essay recounts the history of SEBTS during her first six decades, including the tumultuous years of the CR. The essay is available online at <http://www.nathanfinn.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/The-Story-of-SEBTS-1950-2010.pdf>.

Thomas Bland, ed., *Servant Songs: Reflections on the History and Mission of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1950-1988* (Smyth & Helwys, 1994). This collection of essays, written by moderate ex-SEBTS faculty members, provides a surprisingly candid account of what Southeastern was like prior to the conservative takeover of the trustee board in 1987.

Jason G. Duesing, "The Reclamation of Theological Integrity: L. Russ Bush III and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989-1992," *Christian Higher Education* 9.3 (July 2010): 185-206. This fine journal article describes how former SEBTS dean Russ Bush implemented conservative changes at SEBTS prior to Paige Patterson's presidency.

The Fall 2012 edition of *The Outlook* includes several popularly written articles about the CR at Southeastern in particular and among North Carolina Baptists in general.

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