

missiology, present day Baptists would do well to seek understanding of their theology and follow their evangelistic example.

**NOW LET US PRAISE FAMOUS MODERATES: A
REVIEW ESSAY OF THREE RECENT
FESTSCHRIFTEN**

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Jolley, Marc A. with John D. Pierce, eds. *Distinctively Baptist: Essays on Baptist History*, Festschrift Walter B. Shurden. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005.

George, Timothy and Eric F. Mason, eds. *Theology in Service of the Church: Essays Presented to Fisher H. Humphries*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008.

Williams, Michael E. Sr. and Walter B. Shurden, eds. *Turning Points in Baptist History: A Festschrift in Honor of Harry Leon McBeth*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008.

Introduction

Among Southern Baptists and those with roots in that tradition, the theo-political kerfuffle known as ‘The Controversy’ dominated the last two decades of the twentieth century. The Controversy surrounded efforts by conservative dissenters to unseat what they perceived to be inappropriately progressive personnel from the denomination’s paid leadership. For these insurgents, The

Controversy represented a "Conservative Resurgence," a return to Southern Baptist first principles. Denominational loyalists, many of whom were less conservative than the dissenters, rallied around SBC institutions and defended the Convention's status quo against the onslaught. The more progressive faction somewhat begrudgingly took on the name "moderates" and argued the Controversy was a "Fundamentalist Takeover" that paralleled the Reagan Revolution in secular politics.¹

During the 1980s, conservative dissenters won every important victory and gained control of the Convention's denominational machinery. During the 1990s, they consolidated their power, remade the SBC's institutions in their image, and emerged as the new status quo. In response to these changes, the moderates became the new dissenters: They formed new networks and proto-denominations such as the Southern Baptist Alliance, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Mainstream Baptists, and Baptists Committed. They founded new seminaries and divinity schools and promoted special advocacy ministries committed to women in pastoral ministry, pacifism, and strict separation of church and state. Some moderate churches left the SBC completely, while most simply quietly disengaged and remained nominally Southern Baptist. Moderates focused their energies on their own networks, the Baptist World Alliance, and the state conventions, though by the

¹ For examples, see James C. Hefley, *The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1991), and Robison B. James et al, *The Fundamentalist Takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention*, 4th ed. (Macon, GA: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia, 2007).

2000s moderates were pulling away from the latter as the Controversy moved increasingly to the state level.²

Historians, sociologists, and other scholars offer differing interpretations of the Controversy. Some, such as Albert Mohler, Jerry Sutton, Grady Cothen, and Walter Shurden, utilize a two-party paradigm, though they disagree over which faction represented the majority of Southern Baptists and/or the best of the Baptist tradition.³ Others, such as Nancy Ammerman, Bill Leonard, Barry Hankins, and David Dockery, recognize a spectrum of positions within the SBC and offer more nuanced interpretations of the conflict.⁴ At the end of the day, virtually

² See Walter B. Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Takeover* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994), and Cecil Sherman, *By My Own Reckoning* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008), 131–250.

³ R. Albert Mohler Jr., "A Conflict of Visions: The Theological Roots of the Southern Baptist Controversy," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (Spring 2003): 4–11; Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (B&H, 2000); Grady C. Cothen, *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention? A Memoir of the Controversy* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993), 1–18. Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies that have Shaped Southern Baptists*, updated ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1995), 83–112.

⁴ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture, Religion in American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002); David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 1–14.

everyone agrees the pre-Controversy personnel leading the SBC were less theologically conservative, or at least willing to employ and defend those who were less conservative, than their post-Controversy counterparts. Many moderates championed interpretations of Baptist history and identity that emphasized individual liberty of conscience and the autonomy of local churches as the central Baptist convictions.⁵ In the words of one noteworthy book, for many moderates, "being Baptist means freedom."⁶

Recent years have witnessed the retirement and/or death of many key pastors and scholars who were heavily invested in The Controversy. Among conservatives, these were the pastors who were elected to ecclesiastical high office and used their influence to transform the SBC into a thoroughly conservative denomination. Among moderates, these leaders represented the first-generation of a post-SBC moderate Baptist tradition in the South, one that arose from within the Convention but developed largely as a response to changes in the denomination. This essay examines three recent *festschriften* dedicated to first-generation moderate scholars Walter Shurden, Leon McBeth, and Fisher Humphreys. These volumes help us to understand some of the priorities that have shaped first-

⁵ See Walter B. Shurden, *The Baptist Identity: Four Fragile Freedoms* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993); Grady Cothen and James Dunn, *Soul Freedom: Baptist Battle Cry* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000); Charles W. Dewesse, ed., *Defining Baptist Convictions: Guidelines for the Twenty-First Century* (Franklin, TN: Providence House, 1996); Bruce T. Gourley, *THE GODMAKERS: A Legacy of the Southern Baptist Convention?* (Franklin, TN: Providence House, 1996).

⁶ Alan Neely, ed., *Being Baptist Means Freedom* (Charlotte, NC: Southern Baptist Alliance, 1988).

generation moderates as well as new emphases that are being embraced by some second-generation moderates.

Walter Shurden: Shaper of Moderate Baptist Identity

Walter Shurden is a church historian with expertise in Baptist history and denominational identity. During the course of his career, Shurden taught at McMaster Divinity College, Carson-Newman College, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Mercer University. During the early years of The Controversy, he served as dean of the School of Theology at Southern Seminary, an institution that was at the center of the storm, much as it has been for nearly every theological controversy in Southern Baptist history. From 1983 until his retirement in 2007, Shurden served as chair of the Roberts Department of Christianity at Mercer and then founding executive director of Mercer's Center for Baptist Studies.

Shurden was arguably the key public intellectual of the moderate movement until the early twenty-first century. His books and essays, many of which were shaped by denominational conflict, articulated the freedom-oriented vision of Baptist identity that characterized virtually all first-generation moderates.⁷ Shurden

⁷ In addition to the previously cited works by Shurden, see Walter B. Shurden, *The Doctrine of the Priesthood of Believers* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1988); Walter B. Shurden, ed., *Priesthood of all Believers*, Proclaiming the Baptist Vision (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1993); Walter B. Shurden, ed., *The Bible*, Proclaiming the Baptist Vision (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994); Walter B. Shurden, ed., *The Church*, Proclaiming the Baptist Vision (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1996); Walter B. Shurden, ed., *Religious Liberty*, Proclaiming the Baptist Vision (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994);

was a polemical historian who used his interpretation of the past as a key tool in forging the convictions that buttressed the early moderate movement, particularly the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He is widely regarded by many second-generation moderate historians, and his views permeate the Baptist History and Heritage Society, which is strongly influenced by Shurden's protégés.⁸ Second-generation moderate theologians have been somewhat less sanguine in their view of Shurden, particularly

Walter B. Shurden, ed., *Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, Proclaiming the Baptist Vision (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1999); Walter B. Shurden and Randy Shepley, eds., *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996); Walter B. Shurden, *Not as Easy Journey: Some Transitions in Baptist Life* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).

⁸ For several years, a group of moderate historians have met with Shurden annually for a primary source reading seminar. These scholars, many of whom are serving or have served in leadership roles in the Baptist History and Heritage Society, recently released a document titled "An Affirmation of Common Baptist Themes," which is available online at <http://www.baptisthistory.org/bhhs/affirmationbaptisttheme.html> (accessed December 1, 2010). This document was drafted in response to a proposal that the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina revise its foundational statement to reflect Bapto-Catholic emphases. See Bob Allen, "State CBF Proposal Sparks Debate about Baptist Identity," Associated Baptist Press (September 19, 2010), available online at <http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/5708/53/> (accessed December 1, 2010). An additional group of moderate scholars and pastors, including Shurden, have subsequently endorsed "An Affirmation of Common Baptist Themes." See "Common Baptist Themes: Additional Endorsements," available online at <http://www.baptisthistory.org/bhhs/commonbaptistthemesendorsements.html> (accessed December 1, 2010).

those who embrace the so-called Bapto-Catholic vision of Baptist identity.⁹

In 2005, Mercer University Press published a *festschrift* dedicated to Shurden titled *Distinctively Baptist: Essays on Baptist History*. The volume, edited by Mercer University Press director Marc Jolley and *Baptists Today* editor John Pierce, includes a personal tribute, fourteen historical essays, and a bibliography of Shurden's publications. Many of the essays bear the marks of Shurden's particular understanding of Baptist identity and strongly negative assessment of the post-Controversy Southern Baptist Convention. This is especially true of the essays written by contributors who were educated under Shurden and/or served in a Southern Baptist context during the 1980s and 1990s. Like a number of other works written by many of these same authors, *Distinctively Baptist* is a work of historical apology for a freedom-centric moderate vision of Baptist life.

Many essays advocate a moderate view of Baptist identity. For example, an essay on the ministerial use of Baptist history, written

⁹ Bapto-Catholicism is a term used to describe a group of second-generation moderate theologians and historical theologians who have rallied around a 1997 document titled "Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America," available online at <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/reenvisioningbaptistidentity2.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2010). This so-called Baptist Manifesto has been republished in a number of different venues. The original authors were Mikeal Broadway, Curtis Freeman, Barry Harvey, James McClendon, Elizabeth Newman, and Philip Thompson. For a scholarly introduction to Bapto-Catholicism, see Cameron H. Jorgenson, "Bapto-Catholicism: Recovering Tradition and Reconsidering the Baptist Identity" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2008).

by Charles Deweese, ends with a Shurdennesque call to educate Baptist people about Baptist history so they will not be duped by conservative Southern Baptists, who apparently are ignorant of said history. The implication is that moderates are the true heirs of authentic Baptist identity.¹⁰ Doug Weaver makes a similar argument in his essay on how the Second Baptist Church of Atlanta understood its identity in the nineteenth century. Predictably, the church is cast as a moderate congregation that valued the Bible over creeds and individual conscience over community orthodoxy, though Weaver concedes the church adopted a confession of faith and was in fact characterized by orthodox doctrine.¹¹ In an essay dedicated to the eighteenth-century British Baptist pastor Robert Robinson, Karen Smith argues that Robinson was a leading defender of freedom of conscience, as evidenced in his own embracing of Unitarian-like views while remaining a Baptist minister.¹²

Other essays articulate moderate criticism of the contemporary SBC. In an essay on Baptist responses to global pluralism, Bill Leonard contends that conservative Southern Baptists have responded inappropriately to pluralism by maintaining a commitment to the exclusivity of the Christian faith. Leonard

¹⁰ Charles W. Deweese, "Baptist History as Ministry," in *Distinctively Baptist: Essays on Baptist History*, Festschrift Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 60–73.

¹¹ C. Douglas Weaver, "Second Baptist Church, Atlanta: A Paradigm of Southern Baptist Identity in the Nineteenth Century," in *Distinctively Baptist*, 75–97.

¹² Karen Smith, "The Liberty Not to be a Christian: Robert Robinson (1735–1790) of Cambridge and Freedom of Conscience," in *Distinctively Baptist*, 151–70.

suggests that in a pluralistic context, Baptist soteriological particularism represents a potential threat to the historic Baptist commitment to religious liberty.¹³ In an essay on the mid-twentieth century bureaucratization of the SBC, Glenn Hinson bemoans the structural changes in the Convention that created the very system conservatives used to gain control of the denomination. Most troubling to Hinson is that moderates, who ought to have known better, were the ones who led the Convention to modernize and expand.¹⁴

Still other essays provide a positive spin on moderate emphases. In an essay on Baptist women in America prior to 1800, Pam Durso focuses on the ways women have served Baptist churches, including leadership roles.¹⁵ The role of women in ministry, of course, remains a major point of contention between Baptist conservatives and moderates. Carolyn Blevins writes a similar essay about Baptist women in seventeenth century England.¹⁶ Merrill Hawkins authors a history of the religion department at Carson-Newman College, a place where authentic education and Baptist freedom flourished during the final quarter of the twentieth century, in spite of conservative efforts to squelch

¹³ Bill J. Leonard, "Changing a Theology: Baptists, Salvation, and Globalism, Then and Now," in *Distinctively Baptist*, 7–15.

¹⁴ E. Glenn Hinson, "Oh, Baptists, How Your Corporation Has Grown!" In *Distinctively Baptist*, 17–33.

¹⁵ Pam Durso, "Baptist Women in America, 1638–1800," in *Distinctively Baptist*, 193–218.

¹⁶ Carolyn DeArmond Blevins, "Baptist Women in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Distinctively Baptist*, 219–35.

these noble emphases.¹⁷ William Hull takes a similar approach in his essay on William Whitsitt, adopting the common moderate interpretation that Whitsitt was a champion of academic freedom and truthful historical inquiry who was professionally martyred for his old-fashioned Baptist integrity. In short, Whitsitt was a good moderate under fire from the fundamentalists of his own day, a role model for today's beleaguered but faithful Baptists.¹⁸

On the whole, those chapters of *Distinctively Baptist* written by moderate Baptists in the South provide an excellent starting point for those who wish to understand the way many first-generation moderates understand Baptist history and identity. These essays are a fitting tribute to Shurden as they reflect his freedom-driven, highly individualistic understanding of Baptist history and identity, a view that continues to characterize many contemporary moderate Baptists.

Leon McBeth: Moderate Denominational Historian

Leon McBeth is a church historian who, like Shurden, has focused most of his attention on Baptist history. McBeth spent his entire career with one institution, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he taught from 1962 until 2003. Whereas Shurden is primarily concerned with Baptist identity, McBeth emerged as arguably the most influential denominational historian

¹⁷ Merrill M. Hawkins Jr., "A History of the Department of Religion at Carson-Newman College," in *Distinctively Baptist*, 115-35

¹⁸ William Hull, "William Heth Whitsitt: Martyrdom of a Moderate," in *Distinctively Baptist*, 237-78.

among Southern Baptists during the final quarter of the twentieth century. Following his Southwestern predecessors W. W. Barnes and Robert Baker, McBeth penned a Baptist history textbook titled *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness*. In addition to other works, he has also written histories of the Education Commission of the SBC, Baptist women, and Texas Baptists.¹⁹

As a scholar dedicated to institutional and denominational history, McBeth has done more than perhaps any other historian to popularize a moderate interpretation of Baptist history. For example, McBeth advocates an egalitarian understanding of gender roles in his monograph and numerous articles about the history of Baptist women, though as a historian he does so less overtly than many other Baptist egalitarians.²⁰ In journal articles dedicated to Baptist fundamentalism, McBeth paints SBC conservative dissenters as modern fundamentalists who are the heirs of arch-

¹⁹ H. Leon McBeth, *The History of Southern Baptist Higher Education* (Nashville, TN: Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1966); H. Leon McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1979); H. Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists: A Sesquicentennial History* (Austin, TX: Eakin, 1999).

²⁰ In addition to *Women in Baptist Life*, see H. Leon McBeth, "Role of Women in Southern Baptist History," *Baptist History and Heritage* 12, no. 1 (January 1977): 3-25; H. Leon McBeth, "The Changing Role of Women in Baptist History," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 22, no. 4 (Fall 1979): 84-96; H. Leon McBeth, "The Ordination of Women," *Review and Expositor* 78, no. 3 (Fall 1981): 515-30; H. Leon McBeth, "Perspectives on Women in Baptist Life," *Baptist History and Heritage* 22, no. 3 (July 1987): 4-11.

fundamentalist J. Frank Norris.²¹ The most controversial example is McBeth's commissioned institutional history of the Baptist Sunday School Board, which was never published after that entity's trustees determined the book reflected a moderate bias.²² *The Baptist Heritage*, which remains a popular textbook a quarter century after its initial publication, introduced thousands of collegians and seminarians to a moderate reading of the Controversy and related issues.²³

In 2008, Mercer University Press published a *festschrift* dedicated to McBeth titled *Turning Points in Baptist History*, co-edited by Shurden and Michael Williams of Dallas Baptist University. *Turning Points* is noteworthy because, rather than representing new scholarship, each of the essays is introductory in nature and is written for a broad audience. The book could easily be used as a textbook in a Baptist History course, which seems an appropriate way to honor a scholar who often used his gifts to popularize Baptist history for students and laypersons. Not surprisingly, a number of the essays articulate a moderate

²¹ See H. Leon McBeth, "Baptist Fundamentalism: A Cultural Interpretation," *Baptist History and Heritage* 13, no. 3 (July 1978): 12-19, 32; H. Leon McBeth, "Fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist Convention in Recent Years," *Review and Expositor* 79, no. 1 (Winter 1982): 85-103; H. Leon McBeth, "John Franklyn Norris: Texas Tornado," *Baptist History and Heritage* 32, no. 2 (April 1997): 23-38.

²² For a moderate interpretation of this controversy, see Cothen, *What Happened to the Southern Baptist Convention*, 245, 329-31. For a conservative view of the situation, see Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation*, 295-305.

²³ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 679-701.

interpretation of Baptist identity and past events, especially those essays dealing with Southern Baptist history.

Significantly, Shurden is tapped to do much of the writing about Baptist identity. In an essay on freedom of conscience, Shurden casts the earliest Baptists as freedom-loving individualists. Regrettably, he downplays the fact that early Baptists such as Thomas Helwys and John Clarke specifically wanted freedom to follow the Scriptures in those areas where they believed the state churches were neglecting biblical precepts.²⁴ In a brief closing essay titled "Baptists at the Twenty-First Century: Assessments and Challenges," Shurden succinctly summarizes some of the main contours of the individualistic theology that characterizes most first and many second-generation moderate Baptists in the South.²⁵ Brad Creed's essay on church-state separation advocates a strict separatist approach, which most moderates embrace, but this view is also held by some conservatives as well.²⁶

Moderate interpretations also characterize many of the historical essays, especially those written by scholars with roots in the SBC. Karen Bullock and Pam Durso each offer essays on

²⁴ Walter B. Shurden, "Baptist Freedom and the Turn Toward a Free Conscience: 1612/1652," in *Turning Points in Baptist History: A Festschrift in Honor of Harry Leon McBeth*, eds. Michael E. Williams Sr. and Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 22-33.

²⁵ Walter B. Shurden, "Baptists at the Twenty-First Century: Assessments and Challenges," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 302-08.

²⁶ J. Bradley Creed, "Baptist Freedom and the Turn toward Separation of Church and State," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 153-66. For a discussion of the varying perspectives on church-state separation among SBC conservatives, see Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 107-64.

Baptist women that, like McBeth, adopt an egalitarian understanding of women in ministry (though this is less pronounced in Bullock's chapter).²⁷ In a chapter on the Baptist World Alliance, Glenn Jonas briefly summarizes The Controversy before criticizing SBC "fundamentalists" for disrupting worldwide Baptist unity by pulling out of the BWA in 2004.²⁸ Glenn Hinson positively gushes over Baptist Social Gospel advocates such as John Clifford and Walter Rauschenbusch; such a reading would be less likely among more conservative scholars.²⁹ Not surprisingly, by far the most anti-conservative chapter is Doug Weaver's essay on conservative Southern Baptists and the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.³⁰ For many moderates, the revised Baptist Faith and Message represents anti-Baptist emphases and a creedal imposition against individual conscience.³¹

²⁷ Karen Bullock, "Baptists and Women and the Turn toward Gender Inclusion," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 204–21; Pamela R. Durso, "Baptists and the Turn toward Baptist Women in Ministry," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 275–87.

²⁸ Glenn Jonas, "Baptists and Global Unity and the Turn toward the Baptist World Alliance: 1905," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 222–34.

²⁹ E. Glenn Hinson, "Baptists and the Social Gospel and the Turn toward Social Justice: 1898–1917," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 235–48.

³⁰ C. Douglas Weaver, "Baptists and Denominational Identity and the Turn toward Creedalism: 2000," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 288–301.

³¹ See "What's All the Fuss About: An Analysis of the 'Baptist Faith & Message' Statement

and What It Could Mean for You and Your Church" (Atlanta, GA: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, n.d.), available online at <http://www.thefellowship.info/Files/About-Us/fuss.aspx> (accessed December 2, 2010), and Robert O'Brien, *Stand with Christ: Why Missionaries Can't Sign the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2002). For

Despite the clear moderate bias in most of the essays, *Turning Points* differs from *Distinctively Baptist* in that several chapters succeed in providing less ideologically driven treatments of their respective topics. Charles Deweese's chapter on regenerate church membership and Lloyd Allen's essay on believer's baptism by immersion are less overtly moderate and, in fact, would receive agreement from many scholars of more conservative inclinations.³² William Brackney's essay on Baptist theology and Jerry Faught's contribution on the Downgrade Controversy, both of which could provide easy fodder for some moderate interpreters, steer clear of direct criticisms of SBC conservatives.³³ Fisher Humphreys' essay on Baptist confessionalism is arguably contra mainstream moderate interpretations; Humphreys underscores the importance of confessions in Baptist history, a clear rejection of the oft-repeated moderate assertion that Baptists have no creed but the

more scholarly works along this line of thought, see Jeff B. Poole, ed., *Sacred Mandates of Conscience: Interpretations of the Baptist Faith and Message* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 1997), and Jeff B. Poole, *Against Returning to Egypt: Exposing and Resisting Creedalism in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).

³² Charles W. Deweese, "Baptist Beginnings and the Turn toward a Believers' Church: 1609/1612/1633/1639," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 13–21; Wm. Lloyd Allen, "Baptist Baptism and the Turn toward Believer's Baptism by Immersion: 1642," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 34–48.

³³ William H. Brackney, "A Turn toward a Doctrinal Christianity: Baptist Theology, a Work in Progress," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 74–90; Jerry Faught, "Baptists and the Bible and the Turn toward Theological Controversy: The Downgrade Controversy, 1887," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 249–60. While Brackney is not a Southern Baptist by background and is admittedly more centrist in his approach than most self-confessed moderates, he previously taught at Baylor University, a moderate-sympathetic school.

Bible.³⁴ This bodes well for historians of all theological stripes who want to study Baptist history and theology but wish to be cautious against inappropriately reading present convictions into past events and/or use history as an apologetic for present convictions and emphases.

With a couple of exceptions, the essays that comprise *Turning Points in Baptist History* are somewhat less overtly critical of Southern Baptist conservatives and/or the post-Controversy SBC. This is possibly due to the textbook nature of the *festschrift* and the fact that some of the essay topics do not lend themselves to flagrant denominational polemics. Whatever the reason, the less abrasive tone appropriately reflects McBeth's own approach, which was openly moderate but less polemical than that of Shurden.

Fisher Humphreys: Centrist Moderate Theologian

Fisher Humphreys is a theologian who has spent much of his career articulating a moderate Baptist theology that is

³⁴ Fisher Humphreys, "Baptist Confessions of Faith and the Turn toward Public Theology: 1644," in *Turning Points in Baptist History*, 49–62. The idea that Baptists embrace biblical authority to the exclusion of creeds and confessions was expressed by William B. Johnson, the first president of the SBC, but the term better characterizes the Campbellite tradition than mainstream Baptist thought. For a second-generation moderate scholar who openly challenges the anti-confessional attitude of many of his fellow moderates, see Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 27 (Bletchley, Milton Keynes, UK, and Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), especially chapters 1, 2, 4, and 8.

simultaneously centrist, ecumenical, and evangelical. Humphreys taught for many years at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary before becoming a founding faculty member at Beeson Divinity School, a nondenominational evangelical school associated with Baptist-affiliated Samford University. Humphreys' writings demonstrate a wide interest in matters such as systematic theology, the Trinity, miraculous spiritual gifts, the atonement, biblical inspiration and authority, Baptist historical theology, Calvinism, and fundamentalism, among other topics.³⁵

For most of his ministry, Humphreys was less controversial than Shurden or McBeth. This is in part because he taught from 1988 on in a more ecumenical and evangelical context, but this is also likely related to his centrist theology and the mostly irenic

³⁵ Fisher Humphreys, *Thinking about God: An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (New Orleans, LA: Insight, 1994); Fisher Humphreys, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," *The Theological Educator* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1982): 78–96; Fisher Humphreys, "The Revelation of the Trinity," in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 285–303; Fisher Humphreys and Malcolm Tolbert, *Speaking in Tongues* (New Orleans, LA: Insight, 1973); Fisher Humphreys, *The Death of Christ* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1978); Fisher Humphreys, "The Baptist Faith and Message and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 317–29; Fisher Humphreys, "Biblical Inerrancy: A Guide for the Perplexed," in *The Unfettered Word: Southern Baptists Confront the Authority-Inerrancy Question*, ed. Robison B. James (Dallas, TX: Word, 1987), 47–60; Fisher Humphreys, *The Way We Were: How Southern Baptist Theology Has Changed and What it Means to Us All*, rev. ed. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994); Fisher Humphreys and Paul E. Robertson, *God So Loved the World: Traditional Baptists and Calvinism* (New Orleans, LA: Insight, 2000); Fisher Humphreys and Philip Wise, *Fundamentalism* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2004).

tone of his writing. Even when addressing controversial subjects, such as miraculous gifts, inerrancy, Calvinism, and fundamentalism, Humphreys is rarely combative, even if some of his readers believe he is wrong in his assessments. Humphreys also seems to couple an appreciation for the revivalistic conversionism of grassroots Southern Baptists with an interest in ecumenical dialog, especially with Roman Catholics.³⁶

Not surprisingly, Humphreys' *festschrift* includes the most diverse group of contributors. *Theology in the Service of the Church*, published by Mercer University Press in 2008, is co-edited by Southern Baptist historical theologian Timothy George and American Baptist biblical scholar Eric Mason. Some contributors affirm inerrancy such as George, New Testament theologian Frank Thielman, homiletics professor Robert Smith, and ethicist Richard Land. Other contributors identify with moderates, including historian Bill Leonard (the only contributor to all three *festschriften* under consideration), pastors Gary Furr and Philip Wise, and biblical scholar Norfleete Day. At least three

³⁶ Fisher Humphreys, "A Theology of Salvation," *One in Christ* 17, no. 3 (1981): 219–30; Fisher Humphreys, "Salvation: A Southern Baptist Perspective," *Review and Expositor* 79 (Spring 1982): 279–89; Fisher Humphreys and Mark Heath, "Salvation: An Epilogue," *Review and Expositor* 79 (Spring 1982): 290–92; Samuel S. Hill, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), s.v. "Altar Call (Invitation)"; Hill, *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*, s.v. "Conversion"; Fisher Humphreys, "Salvation," in Laos: All the People of God, eds. Fisher Humphreys and Thomas A. Kinchen (New Orleans, LA: New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984), 20–38; Fisher Humphreys, "The Roman Catholic–Southern Baptist Dialogue," *Ecumenical Trends* 18 (December 1989): 172–74.

of the contributors are moderates who identify with the Baptist-Catholic movement: Steven Harmon, Curtis Freeman, and Ralph Wood; devotees of this brand of moderate Baptist theology were noticeably absent from the other two *festschriften*.³⁷ Contributors come from at least three different denominational traditions: Baptist, Presbyterian, and Roman Catholic.

Most of the chapters in *Theology in Service to the Church* are either original scholarship or relate theology to other disciplines. In light of the present review essay, two characteristics of the Humphreys *festschrift* stand out. First, the moderate contributors do not all come from the same "camp," and they are almost completely devoid of any reference to The Controversy. Freeman, who writes on Trinitarianism, and Harmon, who writes on ecumenical theology, are each key leaders in the Baptist-Catholic movement whose respective chapters represent interests shared by Humphreys (who is not openly identified with the Baptist-Catholics).³⁸ Furr and Wise author thoughtful essays on theology

³⁷ The absence of Baptist-Catholic contributors from the Shurden *festschrift* is perhaps understandable. When "Re-Envisioning Baptist Theology" was first published in 1997, Shurden and Curtis Freeman debated the future of moderate Baptist identity in the journal *Perspectives in Religious Studies*. As noted above, many of Shurden's protégés and others sympathetic with a freedom-centric vision of Baptist identity reject the Baptist-Catholic movement as an aberration that fails to represent historic Baptist identity. See Curtis W. Freeman, "Can Baptist Theology be Re-Envisioned?" *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 273–302, and Walter B. Shurden, "The Baptist Identity and the Baptist Manifesto," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 321–40.

³⁸ Curtis W. Freeman, "Back to the Future of Trinitarianism?" In *Theology in the Service of the Church: Essays Presented to Fisher Humphreys*, eds. Timothy George and Eric F. Mason (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press,

and the arts and the virtue of friendship, respectively.³⁹ Wanda Lee, executive director of the necessarily centrist Woman's Missionary Union, writes on the mission of God and the Great Commission.⁴⁰ Day writes on spiritual theology for evangelicals, while Wood focuses on radical Christian themes in literature.⁴¹ Even Leonard refrains from criticizing (or even mentioning) The Controversy, which marks a departure from his chapters in the other two *festsschriften* under consideration.⁴²

2008), 36–61, and Steven R. Harmon, “Remembering the Ecclesial Future: Why the Church Needs Theology,” in *Theology in Service of the Church*, 82–95.

³⁹ Gary Furr, “Theology, Worship, and the Arts: Dorothy Sayers and the Trinity,” in *Theology in the Service of the Church*, 127–42, and Philip Wise, “Friendship as a Theological Virtue,” in *Theology in the Service of the Church*, 248–70.

⁴⁰ Wanda S. Lee, “Into all the World: The Missionary God Who Calls and Sends,” in *Theology in the Service of the Church*, 143–56. The national WMU remained officially neutral throughout The Controversy and in ensuing years because of a desire to work with Baptists from all perspectives. Conservatives have often interpreted this stance as pro-moderate and have pressured WMU to abandon auxiliary status and become an official convention agency. These efforts have consistently been rebuffed by WMU and the wider Convention. See David Roach, “Messengers Reject Recommendation Asking WMU to Reaffirm SBC Loyalty,” Baptist Press (June 13, 2006), available online <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=23460> (accessed December 6, 2010).

⁴¹ J. Norfleete Day, “Spiritual Theology for the Evangelical Church,” in *Theology in the Service of the Church*, 96–112, and Ralph C. Wood, “Jesus Thrown Everything Off Balance”: Emily Dickinson, William Faulkner, and Flannery O’Conner on the Necessity of Christian Radicalism in the Study of Literature,” in *Theology in the Service of the Church*, 199–227.

⁴² Bill J. Leonard, “Why Study Church History? Listening to Saints and Sinners,” in *Theology in the Service of the Church*, 62–81.

The second noteworthy characteristic is the inclusion of several conservative contributors, even conservative Southern Baptist Baptists such as George and Land.⁴³ To be fair, both of these men are close friends of Humphreys and George was Humphreys’ dean at Beeson. And it bears repeating that Humphreys’ scholarship has been more irenic and centrist than that of McBeth and especially Shurden. But personal considerations aside, this *festsschrift* points to at least three interesting trends among some moderates.

First, some of the second-generation moderates focus upon different scholarly interests than those championed by most first-generation moderate scholars; this is especially true of the Baptist-Catholics.⁴⁴ Second, some moderates, though maintaining an identity separate from the more conservative SBC, are pursuing a post-Controversy scholarly agenda that is not preoccupied with the fallout resulting from the battles of the late-twentieth century.⁴⁵ Third, for some moderates such as Humphreys and many of his second-generation theological colleagues, it remains possible to maintain relationships and perhaps even collaborate in some ways

⁴³ See Timothy George, “Introduction,” in *Ibid*, 1–17, and Richard Land, “Moving toward the Kingdom of Racial Reconciliation,” in *Theology in the Service of the Church*, 184–98.

⁴⁴ See Jorgenson, “Bapto-Catholicism: Recovering Tradition and Reconsidering the Baptist Identity.”

⁴⁵ There are at least two other initiatives that are moderate-led, but mostly post-Controversy in tone and interests. The first is the Young Scholars in the Baptist Academy Program, jointly sponsored by Georgetown College in Kentucky and Regents Park College, Oxford University. The second is the Paternoster Press series Studies in Baptist History and Thought. Bapto-Catholic scholars are involved in both.

with theologically conservative Southern Baptists, real differences notwithstanding.⁴⁶

valuable information from the essays (and there is much there), but also to seek to understand the past, present, and possible future(s) of the moderate Baptist movement.

Conclusion

Like their conservative counterparts, moderate Baptists are in a time of transition. The first-generation of leaders is retiring or passing away, including Shurden, the primary popular shaper of moderate identity, and Cecil Sherman, the leading moderate political strategist and institution-builder. Tensions exist between freedom-driven individualists and Bapto-Catholics, traditionalists and "Baptimergents,"⁴⁷ centrists and progressives, and those still reeling from The Controversy and those who desire to articulate a post-Controversy identity.⁴⁸

The various chapters included in these *festschriften* provide an informative glimpse into the convictions and priorities that animated many first-generation moderates and demonstrate how those emphases have been owned and, in some cases, adapted by second-generation moderates. Baptist historians and theologians would do well to read these important volumes, not only to glean

⁴⁶ *The Journal of Baptist Studies* is one such project. The editorial board of this peer-reviewed journal includes conservative Southern Baptists, freedom-oriented moderates, and Bapto-Catholics, as well as Baptists who come from backgrounds outside of the Baptist South.

⁴⁷ Zach Roberts, ed., *Baptimergent: Baptist Stories from the Emergent Frontier* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2009).

⁴⁸ For an example of the generational tensions among moderates, see Vicki Brown, "Young CBFers, Responding to Sherman, Call for End to Bitter Anti-SBC Rhetoric," Associated Baptist Press (June 25, 2008), available online at <http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/3375/53/> (accessed December 2, 2010).