

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION: BAPTIST THEOLOGY & POLITY

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AFFIRMING BAPTIST DISTINCTIVES

How important are the distinctive beliefs of Southern Baptists? At the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, we believe that standing strong on our core beliefs is crucial not only in maintaining our Baptist identity, but also in remaining faithful to the Scriptural teachings which are the source and authority for these distinctive doctrines.

In 1917, the founding faculty of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (then named Baptist Bible Institute) crafted a confessional statement known as *The Articles of Religious Belief*, since the school was founded before the first Baptist Faith and Message confessional statement was written in 1925. Every faculty member through the years at NOBTS has signed the same book affirming the confessional stance articulated in these documents. Article 10 of *The Articles of Religious Belief*, entitled “Baptist Loyalty to Distinctive Baptist Doctrines,” asserts the need for affirming Baptist beliefs.

We believe that Baptists stand for vital and distinctive truths, to many of which other denominations do not adhere, and that we cannot compromise these truths without disloyalty to the Scriptures and our Lord. We believe that we should co-operate with other denominations insofar as such co-operation does not affect these truths, but no union with them is possible, except on the basis of acceptance in full of the plain teachings of the Word of God.

The Articles of Religious Belief were written in an era which took Baptist distinctives very seriously, as was evidenced in the classic work edited by J. M. Frost and published in 1900, *Baptist Why and Why Not*. This “Baptist distinctives” literature, which was the focus of the dissertation research of Stan Norman, founder of the Baptist Center, sought to delineate the “lines of demarcation” between Baptists and other faith traditions. However, in our pluralistic age, strong ecumenical pressures are being brought to bear to minimize Baptist distinctives and to maximize our identity with other faith traditions. Much of the “name brand loyalty” that Baptists once accorded toward their denomination and its entities has evaporated. Events such as the “Together for the Gospel” conferences intentionally seek to join hands with believers across denominational lines, highlighting points of agreement and downplaying denominational distinctives.

What are the pressure points that could lead to compromising Baptist identity? Two of the key issues that have arisen recently which could possibly lead to a blurring of Baptist distinctives are the lean toward Reformed perspectives and the fascination with the Emerging/Emergent Church movement. Since these movements have been particularly attractive to many younger ministers. In the September 2006 issue of *Christianity Today*, the

cover page story by Collin Hansen was an article entitled “Young, Restless, Reformed,”¹ which dealt with two trends among younger evangelical ministers, including those within the Southern Baptist Convention. The primary focus of the issue was the Calvinistic turn of many young Baptist ministers toward Reformed traditions; a secondary focus was that many of these young Calvinists were also intrigued with the Emerging and Emergent Church.

These two topics – Calvinism and the Emerging/Emergent Church movement, were also the subject of our most recent Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry conferences on the campus of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Over the last few years, the Baptist Center has sponsored a conference in conjunction with the Greer-Heard Point-Counterpoint Forum, inviting Baptist college faculty and students to join NOBTS faculty and students to address key issues confronting Baptists. The conference has had a full house each year we have utilized this format.

SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND CALVINISM

In February 2007, the theme of the conference was “Southern Baptists and Calvinism.” Given the well-documented turn by many young Baptist ministers toward the Reformed tradition, how far can one go toward the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition and still remain a Baptist? This is the subject that I as acting director of the Baptist Center attempted to answer in a paper entitled, “Baptists and Presbyterians: Nine Marks that Separate Baptists from Presbyterians.” In the paper, I provided three categories of comparison – beliefs that Baptists and Presbyterians share in common, beliefs that some Baptists share with Presbyterians, and beliefs that Baptists do not share with Presbyterians. Harkening back to the “Baptist distinctives” literature, the focus of the paper was to distinguish the areas of disagreement between Baptists and Presbyterians in order to delineate more clearly the “lines of demarcation” between these traditions.

The research for this paper utilized the Baptist distinctives identified in *Baptist Why and Why Not* (in which one chapter by T. S. Dunaway specifically addressed the distinction between Baptists and Presbyterians, and other several chapters contrasted Baptist doctrines from those in the Reformed tradition). The primary methodology of this study, however, was a careful comparison of the Second London Confession of 1689 and the virtually identical Philadelphia Confession of 1742 (both of which were authored by Calvinistic Particular Baptists) with the Westminster Confession of 1646, the doctrinal confession

¹ Collin Hansen, “Young, Restless, Reformed,” *Christianity Today*, vol. 50, no. 9 (September 2006), available online at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html> (posted 9/22/06). Hansen later published an expanded version of this article in *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

adopted by most American Presbyterians.² Since the Second London and Philadelphia confessions virtually quote the Westminster Confession word for word at many points, it is all the more remarkable when the Calvinistic Baptists diverged from the Reformed document. These divergences from the Westminster Confession (even by Calvinistic-leaning Particular Baptists) are the clearest mark of doctrines which divide Baptists from Presbyterians.

After my paper presentation, three theologians from Baptist college faculties participated in a roundtable panel discussion to provide responses to the ideas presented in my paper. The three panel participants were Dr. Mark Rathel, Associate Professor of Theology at the Baptist College of Florida (whom I had earlier incorrectly described as the "designated Calvinist" on our panel, but he has since corrected my impression, affirming that his position would be more accurately characterized as having learned from both the Calvinist and Arminian perspectives -- which from my perspective makes him a good Baptist!); Dr. Randy Hatchett, Professor and Chair of the Department of Christianity and Philosophy at Houston Baptist University; and Dr. Ken Gore, Associate Professor and Chair of the Division of Christian Ministries at Williams Baptist College. Each of the participants provided valuable insights, and we are grateful that they have provided their edited remarks for this issue of the *Journal*.

By the way, as a reminder, the Baptist Center is also co-sponsoring with Jerry Vines Ministries the John 3:16 Conference at First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia, on November 6-7, 2008. The conference will provide a biblical and theological assessment of five-point Calvinism. In addition to hearing from host Pastor and SBC President Johnny Hunt, the conference will feature legendary Southern Baptists preachers and former SBC Presidents Jerry Vines and Charles Stanley preaching sermons on the John 3:16 text. Southern Baptist scholars will then address the five points often associated with Calvinistic theology – Paige Patterson on total depravity, Richard Land on unconditional election, David Allen on limited atonement, Steve Lemke on irresistible grace, and Ken Keathley on perseverance of the saints. The Baptist Center invites all interested Baptists to participate in this important conference.

THE EMERGING CHURCH, THE EMERGENT CHURCH,
AND THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED TO THE SAINTS

“The Emerging Church, the Emergent Church, and the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints,” was the topic of the April 2008 Baptist Center conference, featuring a paper by Dr. Ed Stetzer, director of Lifeway Research. A prolific author and commentator on the Emerging and Emergent Church,³ Stetzer provides a thoughtful and thorough analysis and

² The Westminster Confession was created by the Westminster Assembly in 1664 in the midst of the English Civil War in an attempt to turn from the Episcopalianism of the Church of England to the Calvinism of both the Church of Scotland and Cromwell’s Puritans. The Westminster Confession has been adopted (with minor revisions) by most American Presbyterian groups, including the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA).

commentary on the Emerging/Emergent Church movement in this paper. The audience at the Leavell Center was overflowing with students and faculty to hear Stetzer's presentation. There was also a roundtable discussion panel to interact with Stetzer's paper, consisting of Dr. Matt Pinson, President and Professor of Biblical and Ministry Studies at Free Will Baptist Bible College; Dr. Jack Allen, Assistant Professor of Church Planting and Director of the Cecil B. Day Center for Church Planting at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; and Dr. Page Brooks, Assistant Professor of Theology and Islamic Studies at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Stetzer in this paper offers a thoughtful analysis and biblically faithful evaluation of the Emerging and Emergent Church movements that conservative evangelicals will find helpful in considering the appropriate response to the Emerging/Emergent Church movements.

FORMATIONAL DOCTRINAL ISSUES FOR BAPTISTS

The Fall 2008 issue of the *Journal* will focus on "Foundational Doctrinal Issues for Baptists." Contributors are welcome to submit articles or book reviews for this issue. Book reviews may be submitted to our book review editors: Dr. Dennis Phelps in ministry studies, Dr. Archie England in biblical studies, and Dr. Page Brooks in theological and historical studies. We are particularly honored to have a book review in this issue by Dr. James Leo Garrett, the legendary Baptist theologian from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Himself the author of a major two-volume work on Baptist theology entitled *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (which every Baptist should read), Dr. Garrett provides a thoughtful evaluation on one of the most significant new Baptist theology books in recent years, *A Theology of the Church*. Edited by Dr. Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, each chapter in *A Theology of the Church* is written by a faculty member at an SBC seminary or college, including chapters by Baptist Center founder Dr. Stan Norman ("Human Sinfulness") and former NOBTS faculty member Dr. Ken Keathley ("The Work of God: Salvation"). Many Baptist institutions will be utilizing

³ Ed Stezer, *Planting Missional Churches* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003); *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2003); *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009); "The Missional Nature of the Church and the Future of Southern Baptist Convention Churches, in *The Mission of Today's Church*, ed. R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007); "Calvinism, Evangelism, and SBC Leadership," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. Brad Waggoner and E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008); "Understanding the Emerging Church," *Baptist Press* (January 6, 2006); "Multicultural Teams in Church Planting," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 39, no.4 (October 2003):498-505; Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006); Ed Stetzer and Elmer Towns, *Perimeters of Light: Biblical Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2004); Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007); Ed Stetzer, Elmer Towns, and Warren Bird, *11 Innovations in the Local Church: How Today's Leaders Can Learn, Discern, and Move Toward the Future* (Ventura: Gospel Light, 2007); and Ed Stetzer and Philip Nation, *Compelled by Love: The Most Excellent Way to Missional Living* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2008).

this text over the next few years, thus making Dr. Garrett's insightful review all the more valuable.

We hope that this issue of the *Journal* gives greater clarity, definition, and strength to the distinctive beliefs for which Baptists have literally laid down their lives through the years. Baptists believe these doctrines for one very important reason – we believe that the Bible teaches them! Thank you for giving it your careful consideration.

In Christ,

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