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BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

J.M. DAWSON INSTITUTE OF CHURCH-STATE STUDIES

The Impact of Social Progressive T.B. Maston Upon Southern Baptist Life in the 20th Century

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T. B. Maston was one of the most significant Southern Baptists of the twentieth century. More than any other figure, Maston was the preeminent shaper of Christian ethics and Christian social concern among Southern Baptists. Foy Valentine, Maston's protégé and Executive Secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission once remarked.

> When Maston responded to God's call to bear the Christian ethics standard of his life's work, the idea of Christian ethics among Southern Baptists existed in only very rudimentary form. No Baptist seminary had a course on the subject. No Baptist agency had published a book on the subject. No state Baptist convention had established an office to focus on the subject. No Southern Baptist Convention agency had been formed to maintain an ongoing emphasis on the subject.[1]

Maston's emphasis on applying the gospel to all aspects of life made his name synonymous with Christian Ethics in the Southern Baptist Convention.[2] By establishing a course on Christian Ethics and later a doctoral program in the same area at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Maston led the trend to focus on social issues among some Southern Baptists. Eventually, Christian Ethics would become a field of academic inquiry at every Southern Baptist seminary. Maston also helped to birth Christian Life Commissions, both on the national level and in many of the state conventions.

An examination of selected views of T. B. Maston is a revealing picture of the ideas of social progressives in twentieth century Southern Baptist life. He was a pioneer in many areas,

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[1] James Dunn, "The Christian and the State: A Constructive Task," in *Perspectives in Applied Christianity: Essays in Honor of Thomas Buford Maston*, ed. William M. Tillman Jr. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986), 2-3.

[2] Mark Wingfield, "Maston's Walking as He Walked," *Baptist Standard* (March 5, 1986), 9-10.

particularly the arena of race relations. His views on church-state relations were "mainstream" Southern Baptist, but his advocacy furthered the cause of religious liberty. Maston's legacy is perhaps his most significant influence, a legacy which lives on in the contributions of his students and their work. A study of T. B. Maston will help Baptists recover his influence upon Baptists in the South in the twentieth century.

The Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists: At Ease in Zion

From the outset, Southern Baptists have found unity in a commitment to a cultural identity. To be Baptist was to be Southern. To be Southern was to espouse a racial orthodoxy of white supremacy that characterized the antebellum period and was maintained in the segregated world of the Jim Crow South.[3] To be Southern also meant that one adopted a Puritan social ethic which associated failure with deficiency of individual character.[4] Undoubtedly, Baptists were archetypal southerners: "racially and sexually hierarchical, suspicious of modern viewpoints, complacent about the exploitation of the economically disadvantaged, militaristic, nationalistic, and generally hostile toward the reformist (and northern) social gospel."[5] According to John Lee Eighmy, Southern Baptist churches, more often than not, reflected the values held by their surrounding society. In other words, they were held captive to Southern culture.[6]

Since the birth of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, Southern Baptists have justified their lack of social activism by insisting that the church's rightful mission was to

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[3] Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 3ff.
[4] John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), 41-43.
[5] David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 8-12.
[6] Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 38-40.

save individual souls rather than society. Political action was deemed inappropriate and ineffective as a means of fulfilling the church's evangelistic mandate.[7] However, Southern Baptists considered alcohol so evil that this line of reasoning was laid aside to preserve the traditional moral values associated with the "Southern Way of Life" during the era of Prohibition. The Southern Baptist Convention's active support of the temperance movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries introduced Southern Baptists to the social gospel movement of the North.[8] When Southern Baptists joined the dry crusade they were beginning to affiliate with national movements of social protest while adopting the essential idea of the social gospel – direct church participation in social causes.[9]

While Southern Baptists as a whole were not socially conscious, there was a relatively small group of ministers, denominational employees, and laypersons who were.[10] By the end of the Progressive era, the social gospel movement had made inroads into the life and social thought of these Southern Baptists. Progressive dissenters had begun to rebuff their culture's values, refusing to be, as the biblical prophet Amos said, "at ease in Zion."[11]

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[7] Rufus Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 288-289.

[8] The social gospel movement - known as a sub-unit in the modernist/liberal tradition - is considered the most radical religious response to economic issues in industrialized America. The rapid industrialization and urbanization late in the nineteenth century created vast inequities in the distribution of wealth. Nowhere were these inequities more apparent than in northern cities where the ravages of unbridled capitalism gave rise to the exploitation of labor and harsh living conditions. The social gospel movement sought to address these ills, emphasizing the doctrine of the kingdom of God as a distinct historical possibility and calling upon Christians to seek the conversion not only of individuals but of sinful social institutions as well.

[9] Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 49-56.

[10] Raymond L. Sikes, "An Analysis of the Speaking Program of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention" (Masters thesis, Baylor University, 1970), 12-13.

[11] Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 19-20.

Unlike the leading social gospel thinkers of the North such as Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong and Walter Rauschenbusch, this small group of socially alert Southern Baptist progressives remained committed to a conservative theological approach that affirmed traditional doctrines like original sin, the transcendence of God, and biblical authority rather than an exalted place for human reason or progress. Most Southern Baptist progressives "studiously eschewed the theological liberalism of their northern counterparts." Thus, because of their conservative theological underpinnings, Southern Baptist progressives were never in the mainstream of the social gospel movement. Included in this group of progressive dissenters is T.B. Maston who has been perhaps the most influential advocate of social Christianity in the history of the Southern Baptist Convention.[12]

T.B. Maston: A Biographical Overview

Born in East Tennessee on November 26, 1897, Thomas Buford Maston answered the call to Christian ministry shortly after being "born again" at the age of sixteen.[13] In 1916, Maston entered the Baptist-affiliated Carson-Newman College where he excelled as a student-athlete on the football team. After graduating from Carson-Newman College in 1920, Maston entered Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas where he earned both the Master of

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[12] John Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership and Social Christianity, 1900-1980* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1986), 3-14. John Storey argues that using the term *social gospel* to discuss Texas Baptists such as T.B. Maston is inappropriate because it usually connotes a social activism supported by a liberal interpretation of Scripture. Since the social awareness of Texas Baptists came about within a conservative theological mold, the terms *social Christianity* or *applied Christianity* more accurately describe the efforts of Maston and others.

[13] Mark Newman, *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 67.

Religious Education and Doctor of Religious Education degrees.[14] While still enrolled as a student, in 1922 Maston began teaching courses on social Christianity through Southwestern's School of Religious Education. Maston also earned a Master of Arts in sociology at Texas Christian University in 1927.

Convinced that further education would significantly enhance his teaching ministry, Maston enrolled at Yale University and earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1939. In 1943, Maston became the one-man faculty in Southwestern Seminary's newly established Department of Christian Social Ethics which was located in the School of Theology.[15] During his years at Southwestern, Maston developed and taught courses on biblical ethics, theological ethics, family, race relations, world crises, communism, moral issues, labor relations, recreation, church/state relations, and many other subjects. His doctoral program in Christian ethics was highly respected across the nation. It is estimated that Maston taught around 10,000 persons during his forty-one-year teaching ministry.[16]

After his retirement in 1963, Maston continued to teach, serving as a visiting professor in numerous colleges and seminaries for nearly two decades. He also held lectureships in many universities and seminaries in the United States and abroad for missionaries and military personnel. Throughout his entire teaching career, Maston wrote twenty-two books, nearly all of them dealing with ethics and social concerns, and published hundreds of Sunday School lessons and articles for newspapers and journals. Although never ordained to the gospel ministry, Maston held several interim pastorates and

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[14] William M. Pinson Jr., "Texas Baptist Contributions to Ethics: The Life and Influence of T.B. Maston," *Baptist History & Heritage*, 33 (Aug 1998), 7-8.
[15] Foy Valentine, "T.B. Maston: A Conscience for Southern Baptists," *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 25, 2 (Spring 1983), 89-90.
[16] Pinson, "Texas Baptist Contributions," 17.

served as a deacon at Gambrell Street Church of Fort Worth where he was a member from 1920 until his death in 1988.[17]

A Biblically Based Social Ethic

In his oral memoirs, Maston acknowledged that his interest in social issues was stimulated and nurtured by his family environment. Growing up as the son of a sharecropper turned railroad section hand, Maston always identified with the working poor. He noted that family conditions "have explained to some degree what I hope has been a genuine, sincere interest in the underprivileged, the poor, and the disinherited in general in our society."[18]

Maston was first formally introduced to the social teachings of the Bible while a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. During his first year at Southwestern, Maston took several courses that dealt with social Christianity. His teacher, Walter T. Conner, a former student of Walter Rauschenbusch, exposed Maston to the teachings of social gospel thinkers such as Rauschenbusch, Gladden, and others. In order to broaden his social thinking, Maston enrolled at Yale University in 1932.[19] At Yale, Maston studied under the renowned Christian ethicist H. Richard Niebuhr and examined the writings of neoorthodox scholars such as Reinhold Niebuhr, Karl Barth, and Emil Brunner. The influence of H. Richard Niebuhr on Maston was truly incalculable. Richard Niebuhr's paradigm of "Christ transforming culture" for approaching social ethics can be traced in Maston's writing and teaching.[20]

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[17] Gary E. Farley, "T.B. Maston: Advocate for Living God's Word in the Marketplace," *Baptist History & Heritage*, 31 (Jan. 1996), 31-33.
[18] Oral Memoirs of T.B. Maston, Waco, 1973, Baylor University Institute of Oral History, 1-6.
[19] Conner did post-doctoral work with Rauschenbusch at Colgate-Rochester.
[20] Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership,* 126-129. H. Richard Niebuhr popularized the paradigm of "Christ" and "culture" for the study of religion and society in American Christianity. In addition to "Christ transforming culture," Niebuhr found evidence for other variations in Christian history

Throughout his life, T.B. Maston attempted to make Christians understand the source of Christian ethics. According to Maston, this indispensable source was the "will of God revealed in the Bible."[21] As the foundation of Maston's social thought, the Bible was held to be authoritative, trustworthy, truthful, and dependable. Maston's hermeneutic was Christocentric. He evaluated Scripture in light of the teachings of Christ. Although Maston had a profound appreciation for the discipline of sociology and other social sciences, he never allowed them to assume the position of Scripture.[22] In his book, *Biblical Ethics*, Maston argued that contemporary Christian living was morally deficient because it "has given up its own ethical standards drawn by the Bible."[23]

Maston studied the Bible carefully to discover principles that could be applied to each and every situation that arose in the life of a Christian. In his writings and in the classroom, Maston addressed a panoply of ethical concerns. Like other ethicists during his time, Maston devoted much space to the subject of communism which he considered to be a serious threat to the democratic way of life and a rival to Christianity for the souls of men and women. Maston asserted that modern communism had made atheistic materialism a religion and as a result could never "satisfy the deeper hungers and needs of man." On the flip side, Maston never hesitated to criticize the weaknesses and excesses of capitalism and those who made

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such as "Christ against culture" (i.e., Christians who oppose identification with cultural practices) and "Christ of culture" (i.e., Christians who are more affirmative of identifying with cultural values). See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco: Harper, 1956).

[21] Hyuck Bong Kwon, "An Evaluation of the Contributions of T.B. Maston to Christian Ethics" (Masters thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 71-72.

[22] Farley, *T.B. Maston*, 31.

[23] T.B. Maston, *Biblical Ethics* (Waco: Word Books, 1970), v.

Adam Smith their prophet. Maston stressed that Christianity should not be identified with any particular economic system.[24]

Having lived through World War I and II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, issues pertaining to war and peace were always a major concern of Maston. Not a pacifist, Maston referred to himself as a "limited conscientious objector." Maston was a fervent supporter for the rights of both the "conscientious participant" and the "conscientious objector." An emphasis on the right of individual conscience was at the heart of Maston's social ethic.[25]

Alcohol and gambling were two other popular issues frequently addressed by Maston. In the book, *Right or Wrong?,* a publication targeted at Southern Baptist youth**,** Maston argued that Christians should abstain from drinking alcohol. He wrote, "In determining what is right or wrong for one to do, a Christian must not only consider the influence of the particular activity upon him but also its influence on others and on the social order. One of the chief counts against beverage alcohol is its effect on society. It corrupts everything it touches."[26] Similarly, Maston held that gambling was inherently wrong. Any activity that is inherently wrong, according to Maston, should be recognized as contrary to the will of God.[27]

Maston's social ethic was not without controversy. He took many controversial stands on issues such as sex education in public schools, capital punishment, and abortion. Maston believed that since many parents and churches failed to educate their children and youth on sex, public schools had a duty to provide a well-planned and comprehensive sex education program for all students.[28] In the 1971 publication, The

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[24] T.B. Maston, *The Christian in the Modern World* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1962), 80-85.
[25] T.B. Maston, *The Conscience of a Christian* (Waco: Word Books, 1971), 137-40. See T.B. Maston, *Christianity and World Issues* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 245-255.
[26] T.B. Maston, *Right or Wrong?* (Nashville: Broadman Press), 1955), 59-65.
[27] Ibid, 88-92.
[28] Maston, *The Conscience of a Christian*, 61-62.

Conscience of a Christian, Maston advocated that state laws concerning abortion be revised. With proper safeguards, Maston felt that abortion should be permitted in the limited cases of incest, rape, and when the health of the mother was in jeopardy.[29] Maston also strongly opposed capital punishment. He felt that any justification for capital punishment violated the spirit and the basic teachings of the New Testament.[30]

Views of Church and State

Southern Baptist voices for freedom of conscience and religious liberty were not rare in the convention's first 100 years. They continued to warn against the establishment of religion, a concern articulated by the earliest Baptists of the 17th century. In the 20th century, two figures most clearly expressed Southern Baptist views on religious liberty: E.Y. Mullins, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1899-1928) and G.W. Truett, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas (1897-1944), one of the most legendary Baptist ministers in the convention's history. For Truett and Mullins, Baptists and America were suited for each other: both were democratic and loved freedom. Truett declared that Baptists "have never been a party to oppression of conscience…Christ's religion needs no prop of any kind from any worldly source, and to the degree that it is thus supported is a millstone hanged about its neck." Both hailed the competency of the individual soul as the keystone truth of all Baptists (i.e., the ability of each person to go directly to God without human or ecclesiastical mediation).[31]

T.B. Maston's views on religious liberty and the principle of separation of church and state did not blaze new ground. Identifying with Isaac Backus, an eighteenth century

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[29] Ibid, 69-70.
[30] Ibid, 74-78.
[31] The idea of soul competency was articulated and popularized in E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1908).

Baptist pioneer of religious liberty, Maston continued to articulate positions voiced earlier by Mullins, Truett and accepted by the vast majority of Southern Baptists.[32] Because of his influence, however, the Baptist commitment to religious liberty was maintained and even expanded through his writings and his students.[33]

Maston's vision of religious liberty was rooted in the concept of voluntary faith.[34] For religious faith to be authentic, Maston believed, it must be free and cannot be coerced. God alone is Lord of the individual conscience. Maston contended that "the final authority for the individual is neither the state nor

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[32] For Maston's appreciation of Backus, see T. B. Maston, *Isaac Backus: Pioneer of Religious Liberty* (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1962). For the religious liberty views of E. Y. Mullins, see E. Y. Mullins, "The Baptist Conception of Religious Liberty," in *Proclaiming the Baptist Vision: Religious Liberty*, ed. Walter B. Shurden (Macon: Smyth and Helwys, 1997). For the views of G. W. Truett, see G. W. Truett, "Baptists and Religious Liberty," in H. Leon McBeth, ed., *A Sourcebook For Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990). Maston never used Mullins' phrase "soul competency" but he likewise put emphasis on the individual conscience. Maston's teacher at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, W. T. Conner, was a student of Mullins at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Conner's theology class during Maston's student days (1918-1922) used a Mullins authored text, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression*. See www.reformedreader.org/conner.htm. Accessed April 28, 2007.

[33] T.B. Maston's doctoral students in Christians Ethics wrote more dissertations with religious liberty themes than any other area. Maston's students wrote on: Southern Baptist attitudes toward church-state cooperation in religious instruction; Southern Baptist reactions to diplomatic relations with the Vatican (1939-1953); Southern Baptists and the relationship of church and state (1918-1952); Contemporary Southern Baptist involvement with the state; and Southern Baptists and labor. Further, fourteen additional dissertations explored the ethical thought of individuals such as Richard Niebuhr, Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Rauschenbusch, Harry Emerson Fosdick, E. Stanley Jones, George W. Truett, John Bunyan, and J. M. Dawson. See James Dunn, "The Christian and the State: A Constructive Task," in *Perspectives in Applied Christianity: Essays in Honor of Thomas Buford Maston*, ed. William M. Tillman Jr. (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986).

[34] Ibid., 19.

the church. Compulsion cannot touch the soul. Neither the state nor the church has the right to attempt such compulsion."[35] According to Maston, a theology for religious freedom is anchored in the "viewpoint of the Christian ethic…that man was created in the image of God." All freedom is from God. The freedom of the individual conscience, then, is the cornerstone that precedes and demands religious liberty and her essential corollary the separation of church and state for all persons in the political arena.[36]

To Maston, separation of church and state meant an organizational and functional separation. Neither the church nor the state should seek to control the other or to use the other to promote its interests.[37] Any threat to the wall of separation between church and state was a direct threat to religious liberty. In a 1964 address to the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, Maston expounded on this critical issue:

> We believe that religious liberty, when properly defined and understood, provides for freedom of worship, conscience, and association for the individual. This means that he is free to believe or not to believe, to worship or not to worship, to associate or not to associate with others of his religious persuasion. He is free to share his religious experiences, opinions, and convictions with others, so long as he does not violate the rights of others. These basic rights of the individual belong to him within the Christian community as well as in the world….These and other rights must be exercised always with proper regard for the rights of others. Freedom for the Christian community also means

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[35] T.B. Maston, *Christianity and World Issues* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1957), 211-212.
[36] T.B. Maston, "The Church, The State, And The Christian Ethic," *Journal of Church and State*, 2 (Spring 1960), 26-30.
[37] Editor, *Journal of Church and State*, 30 (Autumn 1988), 430.

freedom from external control due to any financial, political, or other connection with any political entity.[38]

Maston did not make the mistake of equating "the separation of church and state" with the separation of religion from politics. In a pluralistic democracy, he fully understood that religion and politics will mix, must mix, and should mix though without merging church and state.[39] He believed that Christian principles needed to be applied to the affairs of government, as is true of every other area of life.[40] Thus, Maston advocated that Christians be engaged in public policy debates. Maston insisted that "one of the chief threats to political democracy is the poor citizenship of good people."[41] According to Maston, Christian citizenship requires that individuals actively participate in the political process from the local level to the national arena. Christians should be encouraged to fulfill their Christian vocational calling in the political realm.[42]

For over four decades, Maston addressed various church-state issues in his writings and through his work with the Texas Christian Life Commission. Like many of his fellow Southern Baptists, Maston regularly identified and opposed instances of misguided government favoritism toward religion such as government sponsored prayer, compulsory Bible readings in the classroom, tuition tax credits, and the appointment of a United States ambassador to the Vatican.[43] Maston also frequently addressed the controversial subject of

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[38] T.B. Maston, "Christianity and Religious Liberty," in *Messages from the Eighth Annual Christian Life Workshop: Proceedings of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission* (Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), 116-124.
[39] Dunn, "The Christian and the State," 22.
[40] Maston, *Christianity and World Issues*, 223.
[41] Dunn, "The Christian and the State," 22-27.
[42] Julian Bridges, "Citizenship," in *An Approach to Christian Ethics*, ed. William Pinson (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 147-149.
[43] Maston, "Christianity and Religious Liberty," 116-124.

churches and taxation. In his view, the acceptance of gifts and loans from the government weakened the wall of separation and hence was a threat to religious liberty.[44] Going beyond the generally accepted separationist views of his Baptist colleagues, Maston asserted that "churches should voluntarily make a contribution for fire and police protection."[45] He argued that only the property of local churches used for worship and educational purposes should be tax exempt. Revenue producing property owned by churches, benevolent institutions, seminaries, colleges, and other denominational agencies should be taxed, according to Maston. "Let church-related institutions be more concerned with what is fair and right than they are with what will be most advantageous to them."[46] When it came to church-state issues and a defense of religious liberty, Maston continued the historic Baptist tradition of his predecessors like E. Y. Mullins, G. W. Truett and others before them.

The Issue of Racial Equality

As previously mentioned, recent analysts like John Lee Eighmy have said that the racial attitudes of Southern Baptists (and other Southerners) were "culturally captive." Southern Baptists not only defended the status quo of a Jim Crow South, they promoted it. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Southern Baptists, as well as other Christian groups in the South, continued to believe in white superiority and considered segregation to be the accepted, i.e., biblical way of life. A minority of progressive Southern Baptists, however, pushed for racial equality.

T.B. Maston was one such progressive. Nearly thirty years before the heroic activity of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956, Maston was addressing race relations in his writings and in the classroom. By 1946,

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[44] Dunn, "The Christian and the State," 29.
[45] T.B. Maston, "Taxation Analyzed," *Baptist Standard* (28 May 1975), 19.
[46] Maston, *The Conscience of a Christian*, 95-97.

Maston had established himself as the leading advocate for racial justice among Texas Baptists. For three decades, Maston served as the conscience of a denomination whose roots were neck-deep in the culture of the segregated South.[47]

Maston's first call for racial equality came in the form of a pamphlet entitled "Racial Revelations," which was published in 1927 by the Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention.[48] This pamphlet was followed by a series of Sunday School and Training Union lessons on race throughout the 1930s, one of which was entitled "The Christian Attitude toward Other Races."[49] In 1938, Maston designed and taught an ethics course at Southwestern Seminary called "Social Problems in the South" which concentrated largely on race. During the middle of World War II, Maston taught "The Church and the Race Problem." For this course, he took his class of young seminarians on field trips through black neighborhoods in Fort Worth. They studied first hand specific aspects of Fort Worth's racial problems such as the disparities between the white and black public schools. Maston also regularly invited prominent African-American community leaders to lecture his classes on various issues pertaining to race.[50]

Maston believed that in order for Southern Baptists to speak effectively to contemporary society, they must first confront the "race issue" which he felt was America's most pressing social concern.[51] Out of his desire to change the heart and minds of Southern Baptists, Maston published his first book

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[47] Farley, "Advocate for Living God's Word," 31-32.

[48] W.T. Moore, *His Heart is Black* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1978), 61.

[49] Ibid., 51. Maston wrote dozens of articles for state convention newspapers on race and other social concerns during the 1930s and 1940s.

[50] Jase Jones, "To Race Relations," in *An Approach to Christian Ethics: The Life, Contributions, and Thought of T.B. Maston*, ed. William Pinson (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 62-63.

[51] T.B. Maston, "Baptists, Social Christianity, and American Culture," *Review and Expositor*, 61 (Winter 1964), 521-531. See T.B. Maston, "Biblical Teachings and Race Relations," *Review and Expositor*, 56 (July 1959), 233-242

on race in 1946. *"Of One:" A Study of Christian Principles and Race Relations* was a clarion call for racial equality based on the biblical principles that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34) and the example of Jesus' acceptance of the Samaritans who were typically considered to be racially inferior by the Jewish religious leaders of his day.[52]

In this groundbreaking book, Maston set out Christian principles that were applicable to contemporary race relations. He asserted that spiritual equality involved social equality. Because race was a moral issue, Maston contended that the moral forces of society (i.e. churches) should take the lead in its solution. He wrote, "It is the church's business to be in the vanguard of the moral forces of society. It will be a tragedy of tragedies for the churches of Christ to surrender their moral leadership to some social agency, political party, or labor organization."[53]

According to one historian, the book *"Of One"* was "disagreed with by many and ignored by many more." In a letter to Maston, a fellow Southern Baptist wrote that the book "is not Christian or American!...and if that is what you teach in the Seminary, and elsewhere, you should not be allowed to teach, or instruct. I never want one of my children to become indoctrinated with such nonsense!"[54] This letter was mild compared to the hundreds of pieces of hate mail that Maston received later in his career. However, "*Of One*" did have a positive impact on some Southern Baptists, particularly women who were involved in some of the progressive ministries of the Woman's Missionary Union.[55]

Unlike many Southern Baptist progressives, T.B. Maston worked to cure long-standing social ills, particularly racism, through his involvement with various civil rights

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[52] Storey, 119-121.
[53] T.B. Maston, *"Of One" A Study of Christian Principles and Race Relations* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, 1946), 8-9.
[54] Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership*, 120-121.
[55] Moore, *His Heart is Black*, 54.

organizations. As early as the mid 1940s Maston was an active member in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League, and the Southern Regional Council. Maston was not merely a dues-paying member but actually served on the Executive Board of Forth Worth's branch of the Urban League for several years.[56] Maston understood that individual cooperation with such organizations was not enough to affect social change. Group effort was needed. So in 1946, Maston made a public plea for Southern Baptist pastors and lay persons to join these interracial civil rights organizations to help curb racial prejudice and to promote social equality.[57]

Maston's activism made him a target for bitter verbal abuse from prominent fundamentalists.[58] The hate mail continued to arrive and Maston was dubbed a "nigger lover" and a "communist" by many of his fellow Southern Baptists.[59] Despite the disparaging criticism, Maston's work and efforts helped lead the developing moderate leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention to push through a resolution in 1954 that affirmed the Brown v. Board of Education decision of the United States Supreme Court—striking down the doctrine of "separate but equal"—as being consistent with both constitutional and Christian principles.[60] Unfortunately, this progressive resolution did not translate into changed behavior among the millions of Southern Baptists residing deep in the Baptist Southland.[61]

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[56] Newman, *Getting Right With God,* 55-56. Henlee Barnette, professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville was another well-known ethicist working to change Southern Baptist views on segregation and civil rights. Barnette wrote extensively on the subject of race and marched with Martin Luther King Jr.
[57] Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership,* 134-135.
[58] Joe Edward Barnhart, *The Southern Baptist Holy War* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1986), 73.
[59] Pinson, "The Life and Contributions of T.B. Maston," 17.
[60] Alan Scot Willis, *All According to God's Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race, 1945-1970* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), 161.
[61] Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent*, 50-51.

Five years after the landmark Brown decision, Maston authored two more books on race: *The Bible and Race* and *Segregation and Desegregation*. In both books, Maston set forth what he believed to be a biblical mandate for breaking down walls of racial division in the society and the church.[62] Read widely by thousands of Southern Baptists and carefully studied by groups like the Woman's Missionary Union, these books offered calm advice for Southern Baptists struggling with racial issues in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[63]

In the *Bible and Race*, Maston challenged segregationists on biblical grounds, debunking popular biblical misinterpretations used to justify slavery and revived to justify segregation (e.g., the story of Noah and Ham). While taking on the segregationists claims, Maston also appealed to the evangelistic impulse of Baptists. He stressed that the gospel must be shared with all people regardless of race and that segregation stood in the way of achieving that goal.[64] Although his progressive views on race were not acceptable to many Southern Baptists captive to the Jim Crow status quo, Maston's strong biblical basis helped to silence his critics.[65] In his careful examination of biblical teachings on human relations, Maston provided seven principles that he urged Southern Baptists to adopt:

1. All nations of men are a single family and have a common origin.
2. Man was created in the image of God and therefore every human is of infinite worth.
3. Jesus Christ died for redemption of every man regardless of race or nationality.

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[62] Bill J. Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 192.
[63] Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership,* 132-133.
[64] Farley, "Advocate for Living God's Word," 31.
[65] Walker L. Knight, cited in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination*, ed. Nancy Ammerman (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 171.

4. Believers of all races are in the family of God, brothers and sisters together.
5. The Christian religion either abolishes or transcends human barriers which tend to set group against group.
6. The power of the gospel is such as to enable Christians to overcome racial prejudice.
7. God is no respecter of persons.[66]

The Issue of Interracial Marriage

The greatest fear in the South and among Southern Baptists concerning integration and "social equality" was the "amalgamation of the races." The possibility of interracial marriage horrified many Southern Baptists who still clung to a belief in the purity of the white race. Segregationists resorted to their typical method of proof-texting the Bible to oppose interracial marriage. Unfortunately, Southern Baptist progressives wrote little about interracial marriage. Instead, they looked to T.B. Maston to address such a difficult subject. According to Foy Valentine, executive director of the SBC's Christian Life Commission, Maston was "the best man in the country to do it."[67]

In many editorials published in state convention newspapers, most notably *The Baptist Standard*, Maston adamantly argued that prohibitions regarding intermarriage in the Old Testament could not be used to support arguments against contemporary interracial marriage. He emphasized that the Bible did not contain a direct, authoritative word for or against interracial marriages. Thus, Southern Baptists who sought "divine approval" for their dogmatic opposition to

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[66] Norman Alexander Yance, "Southern Baptists and Social Action: A Historical Interpretation of the Christian Life Commission and its Denominational Role," (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1973), 233-234.
[67] Willis, *All According to God's Plan*, 25-30.

interracial marriage had misinterpreted Scripture.[68] Maston once remarked that "if people were not so prejudiced, and hence could think straight they would realize how unfounded are most of the fears regarding intermarriage."[69]

The Attitude of Churches Toward Integration

Like other major denominations, the Southern Baptist Convention voiced support for the landmark 1954 Brown decision and passed numerous resolutions regarding race relations during the 1950s and 1960s. However, many local congregations kept their silence on this divisive issue. For racial progressives like Maston, silence was unacceptable. Maston stated that "the church cannot perform God's prophetic function in a community unless the prophetic voice is in the pulpit and the prophetic spirit is in the pew." In his view, Southern Baptists who remained silent on the issue of race and integration lost the ability to speak prophetically to society. Maston placed the responsibility for ethical race relations squarely on the shoulders of the church.[70]

> If the church will not dare to be the church in the fullest possible sense, if it will not take seriously the Christian ethic, applying its principles to race and other areas of life, then it will lose its own soul. Without the Christian ethic the Christian church becomes an empty shell, a corpse that has lost the power to give life because the life principle no longer resides in it.[71]

Maston understood that it was difficult for many Southern Baptists to apply biblical principles regarding race.

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[68] T.B. Maston, "Interracial Marriage," *The Baptist Standard*, 14 June 1969, 19.
[69] Willis, *All According to God's Plan*, 25-30.
[70] Willis, *All According to God's Plan*, 25-30.
[71] Maston, *Christianity and World Issues*, 94-95.

Many Southern Baptists lived in areas plagued by severe racial tension where there was immense pressure to conform to the norms of white society. Nonetheless, Maston firmly believed that racial prejudices "could be overcome through the power of God." In one editorial, Maston encouraged young Baptist women to "ask our heavenly Father to give us the wisdom to know what we should do and the faith and courage to do it and to do it in the right spirit."[72]

Maston declared that "in a time of crisis or potential crisis pastors should be willing to stand up and be counted."[73] He encouraged Southern Baptists to open up their local association and state convention meetings to members of all Baptist churches regardless of race. According to Maston, "the more we open all our meetings to those of other racial groups the more we realize that we as well as they are blessed by our meeting together."[74] Maston hoped that Southern Baptists would take giant steps forward in their attitudes toward and relations with African-American Baptists. He promoted fellowship between and white and black pastors, white and black youth groups, and white and black women's organizations. He argued that Southern Baptist congregations must revise their membership policies so to have an open-door invitation towards all races. He often asked, "How can any church claim to be 'the church of God,' the church where Christ is head, if it does not open its doors for worship to all and its membership to all men and women of life, faith, and order."[75] Integration was the goal and Maston knew such a lofty goal could never be fully realized until blacks were accepted into the life of the church on the same basis as white members.

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[72] Willis, *All According to God's Plan*, 25-30.
[73] T.B. Maston, "The Role of a Pastor in a Community Facing Desegregation," *The Baptist Standard*, 19 July 1961, 8.
[74] T.B. Maston, "The Association and Race Issue," *The Baptist Standard*, 24 September 1969, 19.
[75] Maston, *The Conscience of a* Christian, 117-118. See T.B. Maston, "Churches and Race Relations," *The Baptist Standard*, 7 August 1968, 8.

The Influence of T.B. Maston Upon Southern Baptist Leaders and Institutions

Following World War II, a small number of Southern Baptist leaders, labeled the "progressive elite" by Andrew Manis, began to exert a real and effective influence on Southern Baptists. Members of the "progressive elite" challenged the racial and social attitudes of many in the Baptist Southland. These Southern Baptist progressives played a significant role in challenging Baptist acceptance of Southern cultural mores.[76]

As the leading ethicist in Southern Baptist life, Maston was clearly part of the "progressive elite." These progressive leaders could be found in virtually every southern state. Numerous prominent progressive leaders made their home in Texas, including A.C. Miller, Foy Valentine, Jimmy Allen, James Dunn, and of course T.B. Maston. Some progressives like Blake Smith, pastor of University Baptist Church in Austin, Texas were theologically liberal, but Maston and others were committed to traditional conservative theology.

The influence of the "progressive elite" was most strongly felt through the work of the Christian Life Commissions of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT).[77] Through her reports, resolutions, initiatives, and countless pamphlets and other publications, the Christian Life Commissions attempted to change the hearts and minds of Southern Baptists on racial injustice and a host of other social issues. The Christian Life Commissions represented a lighthouse for Southern Baptists on the issue of race relations and served as the apex of Southern Baptist expression in Christian ethics.[78]

T. B. Maston played an important role in the formation of the Christian Life Commissions of both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He

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[76] Newman, *All According to God's Plan*, 65-70.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Maston, "Baptists, Social Christianity, and American Culture," 529-530.

has been credited as the person most directly responsible for the founding of the Christian Life Commission of Texas and in making Texas Baptists aware of the social application of the gospel.[79]

In 1949, a three-man committee consisting of Maston, A.C. Miller, and William R. White (President of Baylor University) met to study ways in which Texas Baptists could most effectively confront social problems such as race relations, gambling, communism, and persistent threats of war. At the 1949 annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the three men issued a report which courageously declared "that an outstanding weakness of organized Christianity has been and is its failure to apply consistently the moral ideals and principles of the Christian gospel to all of life."[80]

Out of this trio evolved the Committee of Seven with Maston serving as chairman. The following year, this committee recommended to the BGCT the establishment of an agency designed to give denominational attention to social Christianity. Although the purpose of this new agency was to address social issues, Maston purposefully avoided including the word *social* in its name**.** The overriding reason for this, according to Maston, "was the prejudice of many Southern Baptists toward the so-called 'social gospel.'" Prominent Texas Baptists such as David Gardner, editor of the influential *Baptist Standard* and W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Dallas, were on record as strong opponents of the Social Service Commission of the SBC and essentially any form of social activism. In their view, the one and only mission of the church was to evangelize the masses. As a result, Maston's Committee

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[79] David Stricklin, "An Interpretive History of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1950-1977" (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 1981), 72.
[80] Ibid, 1-10.

of Seven chose to name the new agency the Christian Life Commission.[81]

Without a doubt, T.B. Maston made an indelible imprint on the Texas Christian Life Commission. More than any other individual, Maston was instrumental in defining the character of the commission. He was a member of the original three-man committee, chairman of the Committee of Seven, and the commission's longest serving board member.[82] During this time, he helped to shape the policies of the Texas CLC toward responsible scholarship in developing a series of widely distributed pamphlets that guided Texas Baptists in applying Christianity to virtually every aspect of life. An examination of the history of the Texas Christian Life Commission demonstrates that the commission adopted Maston's approach to biblical ethics. Like Maston, the Texas CLC consistently advocated moderation and gradualism when seeking to affect social change. It is evident that Maston's vision of social Christianity as well as his methodology for approaching social concerns found institutional expression in the Texas CLC.[83]

Both the Christian Life Commission of the SBC and Texas have been disproportionately dependent upon persons trained by Maston. In the Christian Life Commission's (SBC) first thirty years of existence, it had thirty professional Baptist ethicists serve as full-time employees. Of the thirty, seventeen were heavily influenced by the thought of Maston. Twelve of these ethicists studied with him and the other five studied with his students, C.W. Scudder and William Pinson. In fact, Maston's first doctoral student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary was Foy Valentine who later served as

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[81] Storey, *Texas Baptist Leadership*, 135-138.
[82] Stricklin, "An Interpretive History," 5-12. Maston served on the board of the Texas CLC for a total of sixteen years; 1951-1955, 1957-1962, 1964-1966, and 1976-1977.
[83] Ibid, 265-268.

the Executive Secretary of the SBC's Christian Life Commission for twenty-seven years (1960-1987).[84]

In Texas, three of the first four directors of the Christian Life Commission were ethicists who received their doctoral degrees at Southwestern Seminary under the tutelage of T.B. Maston: Foy Valentine (1953-1960), Jimmy Allen (1960-1968), and James Dunn (1968-1980). Of the three Maston-trained directors, two left the Texas Christian Life Commission to run other national organizations funded by the Southern Baptist Convention that dealt exclusively with ethics and religious liberty issues. Valentine left the Texas CLC in 1960 to lead the SBC's Christian Life Commission and Dunn left in 1980 to run the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a position he held for twenty years. Like Dunn and Valentine, Jimmy Allen left the Texas CLC and moved on to an influential denominational position. Allen served as President of both the Baptist General Convention of Texas (1970-1971) and the Southern Baptist Convention (1978-1979). In 1980, he became President of the Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.[85]

During his four-decade long teaching career at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, T.B. Maston taught around 10,000 seminarians. Several thousand of Maston's students took three or more of his courses.[86] Many of his students served in high-ranking denominational roles. During the years 1977-1978, three of the top elected officials to the Southern Baptist Convention—Jimmy Allen, Olan Runnels, and Lee Porter—were former students of Maston. Also during this period, four of the six presidents of SBC seminaries were former students: William Pinson, Russell Dilday, Milton Ferguson, and Randall Lolley. Many of Maston's students

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[84] James Dunn, "Through Graduates," in *An Approach to Christian Ethics: The Life, Contributions, and Thought of T.B. Maston*, ed. William Pinson Jr. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 91-96.
[85] Stricklin, "An Interpretive History," 265-268.
[86] Don McGregor, "The Teacher," *Baptist Standard*, 22 May 1963, 9-10.

became professors and taught in virtually every field of study at the six Southern Baptist seminaries.[87]

Forty-nine doctoral students at Southwestern Seminary received their Th.D. in Christian Ethics under T.B. Maston.[88] Almost all of Maston's doctoral graduates have served as pastors, denominational workers, professors, or administrators in higher education. This influential list of ethicists includes forty-seven pastors, twenty-one denominational executives, fifteen seminary professors, fifteen college professors, thirteen missionaries, four government officials, and two military chaplains. High ranking denominational executives among Maston's doctoral graduates include two seminary presidents, two college presidents, four presidents of state Baptist conventions, two-vice presidents, and one president of the Southern Baptist Convention. All but two of Maston's doctoral graduates remained active Southern Baptists.[89] The impact Maston made on the Southern Baptist Convention and on the spiritual lives of young ministers and others preparing for church-related vocations was immeasurable.

In addition to teaching, T.B. Maston shaped Christian ethics and social concern among Southern Baptists by his writing. With twenty-seven published books, ten of which were written after his retirement in 1963, Maston's writing ministry was extraordinarily prolific and fruitful. At least five of his books have been translated into other languages including

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[87] Randall Lolley, "To Seminary Education," in *An Approach to Christian Ethics: The Life, Contributions, and Thought of T.B. Maston*, ed. William Pinson Jr. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 43-46.

[88] Dunn, "Through Graduates," 92-93. Of the 49 doctoral graduates, 48 were men. Marguerite Woodruff was Maston's lone female doctoral graduate. Woodruff was the first woman to earn a doctorate in a Baptist theological institution. She later chaired the sociology department at Mercer University.

[89] Ibid.

Arabic, Chinese, German, Indonesian, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish.[90]

Maston chose not to simply write for other academics. His target audience was the layperson. Although he could have written for a much larger Christian audience, Maston chose to aim most of his published works at Southern Baptists in order to effect social change. Early in his ministry, Maston recognized the need for written materials which Southern Baptist churches and their members could use to consider and to confront the prevailing social issues of the day. He understood the power of the pen. While Maston could teach 100 students in a classroom, he could get his message across to well over 100,000 Southern Baptists with a one-page article published in the state Baptist newspapers.[91] Utilizing the Baptist state newspapers, Maston wrote regular columns and articles to explain to the laity in clear terms the challenges of the Gospel. He also exerted influence by writing over 275 publications for the Baptist Sunday School Board. Maston's Sunday School lessons were read and studied by tens of thousands of Southern Baptist men, women, and children. The Southern Baptist faithful regularly used literature written by T.B. Maston during Sunday night Training Union Bible studies and on Wednesday nights at Woman's Missionary Union meetings.[92] The impact of these and Maston's other books across more than five decades was, without question, significant.

Conclusion

Bill Moyers, former aide to President Lyndon B. Johnson and internationally known journalist who studied with T.B. Maston once said, "When I'm asked to define Christian

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[90] Keith Wills, "Through Writing," in *An Approach to Christian Ethics: The Life, Contributions, and Thought of T.B. Maston*, ed. William Pinson Jr. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 80.
[91] Ibid, 81-83.
[92] Ibid, 82-84. See also Don McGregor, "T.B. Maston's Unique Contribution," *Baptist Standard*, 20 April 1966, 8.

ethics, my best answer is Tom Maston. What the Old Testament prophets taught, he lived. He showed us that the theatre of Christian ethics is not the pulpit, the classroom or the counselor's corner, but all of life."[93] William Pinson, another former Maston student, added "Frequently, he served as a conscience for Southern Baptists troubling us regarding our racism, materialism, and provincialism."[94]

T.B. Maston was clearly a pioneering progressive on selected social issues for Southern Baptists. As early as 1927, Maston challenged the racial orthodoxy of the South. Based on the biblical premise that "God is no respecter of persons," Maston urged Southern Baptists to accept the gospel truth that all races are equal. Consequently, he contended that spiritual equality involves social equality and churches should take the lead in integrating themselves and opposing racial discrimination.

As a voice for freedom of conscience and religious liberty, Maston continued the Southern Baptist emphasis on the principle of separation of church and state. His focus on religious liberty helped to keep Southern Baptists thinking about what their cherished principle meant. For example, he argued for a progressive application of church-state separation in his opposition toward

The impact of T.B. Maston upon Southern Baptist life is best seen in his influence upon subsequent Southern Baptist leaders and institutions. T.B. Maston was an integral player in the formation of the Christian Life Commissions of both the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas. In the 1960s and 1970s, when moderates dominated Southern Baptist life, the Christian Life Commission of the SBC followed in the footsteps of Maston's progressive social ethic. Foy Valentine, the leader of the SBC CLC, was deeply influenced to his former professor, T.B. Maston. From its inception, the Texas CLC has articulated some progressive

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[93] Dunn, *The Christian and the State*, 29.
[94] Pinson, *Texas Baptist Contributions to Ethics,* 18.

social views that were first voiced by T.B. Maston. James Dunn, who led the Texas CLC from 1968-1980 and who then went on to promote religious liberty for the Baptist Joint Committee in the 1980s has acknowledged his indebtedness to the teachings of T.B. Maston.[95] When students of Southern Baptist history analyze leading figures of the 1970s and 1980s, the names of Maston's students are everywhere to be found. In addition to Foy Valentine and James Dunn, the list includes, but is not limited to, Jimmy Allen, Randall Lolley, and William Pinson.[96]

In 1979, then president of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, William Pinson said "few men have been as widely known or as deeply loved as T.B. Maston. Few have blended ethics and evangelism, scholarship and pietism, a conservative theological outlook and a progressive social concern as well as he."[97] At the dawn of the 21st century, however, Pinson's words are likely no longer true. Many, and perhaps most, Baptists in the South have forgotten the contributions and impact of T.B. Maston upon Southern Baptist life in the 20th century. His progressive social ethic combined with a traditional evangelistic orthodoxy, is now seen as a

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[95] Oral Memoirs of James Milton Dunn, Waco, 1974, Baylor University Institute of Oral History, 1-5.

[96] Dunn, "Through Graduates," 94-95. Throughout his ministry, Jimmy Allen served in various roles: Executive Director of the Texas Christian Life Commission, Executive Director of the Radio and Television Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, President of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the pastor of the First Baptist Church of San Antonio, Texas. Randall Lolley served as President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1974 to 1988. William Pinson served as the President of Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary (1977-1982) and as the Executive Director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (1983-2000).

[97] Pinson, *Texas Baptist Contributions to Ethics,* 17-19. Maston protégé, Jimmy Allen, demonstrated what his teacher taught: a strong evangelistic ministry (500 baptized his first year) and a strong social ministry while the pastor of First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas. Joe Trull, interview by author, 27 April 2007, Waco, Texas.

position that is inherently contradictory. It is time once again for Baptists to review the contributions of T. B. Maston as they reflect upon the meaning of Baptist identity.

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

J.M. DAWSON INSTITUTE OF CHURCH-STATE STUDIES

Ain't Nobody But Jesus Gonna Tell Me What To Believe: James Dunn's Defense of Soul Freedom and the Separation of Church and State in the Southern Baptist Convention Controversy

A Term Paper Submitted to

Dr. Barry Hankins

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for *Religion and Politics*

J.M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies

By

Aaron Weaver

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"Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." This famous phrase characterizes the ministry of Baptists such as Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams, John Leland and others. In the last half of the twentieth century, James Dunn's name has been added by many Baptists to the list of freedom-protectors. Dunn is known for his leadership as Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, an organization of multiple Baptist bodies that deals with religious liberty issues. He has been described by his friend, Grady Cothen, as a "church going, Christ honoring, evil bashing, separation of church and state enthusiast."[98] Chet Edwards, a U. S. representative from central Texas once said, "[James Dunn is] the Rosa Parks of the religious liberty issue."[99]

Dunn's defense of religious liberty and the separation of church and state became one of the pivotal issues in the fundamentalist takeover/conservative resurgence of the Southern Baptist Convention during the 1980s.[100] The story of the conflict has been told before, especially the transformation of theological seminaries and denominational agencies into havens of conservative/fundamentalist theology.[101] This paper

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[98] Grady Cothen and James Dunn, *Soul Freedom: Baptist Battle Cry* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 2000), vii.

[99] John Finley, "Interview with James Dunn," *The Whitsitt Journal*, 6 (Spring 2000), 3.

[100] Conservatives refer to their victory in the Southern Baptist conflict as the "conservative resurgence." Moderates, their opponents, call the conflict a "fundamentalist takeover." In this paper, both conservative and fundamentalist will be used. Fundamentalist will be used more often, however, because Dunn viewed his opponents in this light and because the author is in sympathy with Dunn's view of church-state relations. Moreover, the use of fundamentalist is compatible with the "control versus freedom" aspect of the conflict that this paper employs from the writings of Walter Shurden. See, Walter Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies That Have Shaped Southern Baptists* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1995), 83-118.

[101] Different definitions of fundamentalism exist. Fundamentalism developed as a reaction to liberalism/modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Adherents vowed to fight for the "fundamentals" of the faith. Typically this included a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible,

seeks to examine the role of James Dunn and how his vision of religious liberty—a vision rooted in the concept of voluntary uncoerced faith/soul freedom and usually considered by his supporters as the traditional view of the twentieth century with deep roots in the Baptist heritage—was replaced by a Religious Right perspective that was comfortable with accommodation from the government.

Fundamentalist leader Paul Pressler, one of Dunn's fiercest critics, commented that Dunn's liberal views were out of step with the views of the "average Southern Baptist." He added,

> Had someone less outspoken, more conciliatory, and less confrontational held his office, something could have possibly been worked out which would have preserved Southern Baptist participation in the Baptist Joint Committee. With James Dunn there, the result was inevitable.[102]

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miracles, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the virgin birth. Fundamentalists emphasized the importance of beliefs—doctrinal orthodoxy—and accountability usually through the use of creeds. Fundamentalism also refers to an attitude of no compromise and no toleration of dissent. In contrast to conservatives who often have similar doctrinal convictions but are willing to find unity of mission amidst diversity, fundamentalists adopt a "my way or no way" attitude toward cooperation. Or as some say it, the only way to cooperate with a fundamentalist is to obey him. For much of the twentieth century, militant fundamentalists were also independent from denominations. In the context of the Southern Baptist conflict, moderates argued that their opponents were fundamentalists for their insistence upon inerrancy, creedal conformity and allegiance to the political agenda of the "takeover" leaders. For information on the definition of fundamentalism, see Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 768-770. See also Nancy T. Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 3-6.

[102] Judge Paul Pressler, *A Hill On Which To Die: One Southern Baptist's Journey* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 259.

Pressler was, ironically, partially correct. Research will reveal that Dunn was colorfully and bluntly confrontational, and his opponents clearly considered him to be liberal. Ultimately, however, Southern Baptist fundamentalists would not have preserved a relationship with the perspective of Dunn that was embodied in the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Research will demonstrate that Dunn's focus on soul freedom was incompatible with the fundamentalists' focus on government favored religion, civil religion and theological control expressed through creedalism. One way of understanding the Southern Baptist conflict is "freedom versus control."[103] Dunn's firm affirmation of uncoerced faith, at least, is evidence that soul freedom was a threat to fundamentalist control.

The Ministry of James Dunn in Historical Context

Southern Baptist Convention Controversy. The history of Southern Baptists is replete with controversy. Baptist historian Walter Shurden wrote a book on Southern Baptists and conflict and entitled it, "Not a Silent People."[104] Nothing compares, however, to the havoc wreaked by the "holy war" called the "fundamentalist/moderate controversy" (or the "conservative resurgence" by the victorious group). Tremors of a religious earthquake occurred in the 1960s with the Elliott controversy. Ralph Elliott, a professor of Old Testament at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggested in his book, *The Message of Genesis*, that Genesis 1-11 was theological rather than literal history.[105] Some Southern Baptists branded Elliott a liberal who did not believe the Bible and chastised the Sunday School Board of the SBC for

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[103] Shurden, *Not a Silent People*, 87, 109.
[104] Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies That Have Shaped Southern Baptists* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1995).
[105] Ralph H. Elliott, *The Message of Genesis: A Theological Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961).

publishing his book. Elliott was eventually fired for insubordination because he refused to promise that he would not seek another publisher. The convention's response to the Elliott affair was the adoption of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message confessional statement. The confession, however, did not impact convention affairs any time soon nor make a dent in the anti-creedal tradition of Southern Baptists.

Theological tension, despite a significant flare-up in 1970 over some interpretations in the new Broadman Bible Commentary series, seemed relatively rare for two decades. Actually, the critics of Elliott began developing a network of persons who were convinced that seminaries and other denominational agencies harbored liberals who needed to be removed. The most visible group of critics was the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship that was formed in 1973. Most Baptists across the convention thought that the historic love for cooperative missions would hold theological infighting in check. The convention was gearing up for "Bold Mission Thrust" in the late 1970s, a missionary strategy to share the gospel with the whole world by the year 2000. Infighting erupted, however, and conflict soon dominated Southern Baptist life.

The remake or takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention officially began in 1979 with the election of Adrian Rogers, a Memphis pastor, as convention president. A political strategy to elect a series of convention presidents committed to biblical inerrancy was devised by Paige Patterson of Criswell Biblical Institute in Dallas and Paul Pressler, a judge from Houston, Texas. According to the plan, the convention presidents used their appointive powers to select committees that ultimately changed trustee boards of SBC institutions into havens of conservative, orthodox, inerrantist theology. While many of the presidential elections were close, the plan was remarkably successful. By 1990, the "inerrancy movement" was in control of the SBC. Leaders trumpeted a new reformation in religious history; they believed they had successfully purified the denominational leadership of liberalism and reaffirmed historic Baptist conservative

theology.[106] While the convention still contained "dissenters," these Baptists were barred from leadership roles unless they affirmed the "conservative resurgence" and its theological parameters.

Baptists opposed to this "resurgence" did not see the conflict as conservative versus liberal. Fundamentalist versus moderate was more accurate. While theological differences were present, moderates viewed the conflict as a political power struggle. The real issue was "control versus freedom." Conservatives were really fundamentalists because they demanded doctrinal conformity—as they defined it—and they allowed no dissent. Throughout the controversy, moderates unsuccessfully warned of a "galloping creedalism" overwhelming the non-creedal legacy of Southern Baptists. Moderates also asserted that the charges of liberalism in Baptist seminaries and denominational agencies were absurd. They repeatedly affirmed the centrality of biblical authority, but they resisted inerrancy as dogmatism and objected to the increasing political connotation of the word – its use was becoming a creedal litmus test for "Baptist orthodoxy." In contrast, moderates attempted to affirm what they considered the heart of the Baptist heritage: the authority of the Bible for religious faith and practice, soul competency, personal religious experience, the priesthood of believers, religious liberty and the separation of church and state, local church autonomy, anti-creedalism, and unity in missions and evangelism amidst some theological diversity.

One aspect of this Southern Baptist conflict was the ministry of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and its controversial Executive Director, James Dunn. He was branded a liberal with a view of church-state separation out of

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[106] Note the title of Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000).

step with the direction of the "conservative resurgence."[107] Freedom versus control was embodied in the controversy that swirled around his leadership.

James Dunn: A Biographical Overview. Texas born and bred, James Milton Dunn was raised in Fort Worth where he faithfully attended Evans Baptist Church. Dunn began his educational journey in the Forth Worth public school system where he played in his high school's eighty member symphony orchestra. After a stint at Texas Christian University, Dunn transferred to Texas Wesleyan University where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. His thirteen-year educational experience at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary began in 1953, where he received both a Bachelor of Divinity and Doctor of Theology degree. While writing his dissertation on J.M. Dawson (whom he later succeeded at the Baptist Joint Committee for Public Affairs), Dunn had the opportunity to study under T.B. Maston, the prominent Southern Baptist ethicist,[108] and was drawn toward the concerns of "applied Christianity." Dunn finished his long educational journey at the London School of Economics and Political Science where through post-doctoral study his Th.D. was changed to a Ph.D.

At the age of nineteen, James Dunn surrendered to the ministry. From 1954-1961, he served Texas Baptist Churches in several ministerial roles (including one four-year pastorate). Before assuming his duties as Associate Director of the

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[107] Numerous surveys of the Southern Baptist controversy have been written from both the conservative and moderate perspectives. Prominent studies from the conservative perspective include Jerry Sutton's *The Baptist Reformation* and James Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis*, 4 Vols. (Hannibal, Missouri: Hannibal Books, 1986-1989). For the moderate perspective, see See Shurden, *Not a Silent People,* and Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990).

[108] Maston taught Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1922 to 1963.

Christian Life Commission of Texas Baptists in 1966, Dunn was the Baptist Student Union (BSU) Director and an instructor of religion at West Texas State University. Through his experiences as pastor, BSU Director, and as an instructor of religion, he developed a deep commitment to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

After serving as Associate Director of the Christian Life Commission of Texas Baptists (CLC), Dunn replaced Jimmy Allen as Executive Director, a position he held for a dozen years (1968-1980). As Executive Director, Dunn gave focus to issues such as race relations, drug and alcohol abuse, the threat of liberalized gambling laws, juvenile justice, prison reform, workers' compensation for farm workers and world hunger relief. Dunn's aggressive efforts on controversial issues were often met with resistance. He noted, "In some areas - gambling, liquor, and pornography - this agency has been hard-line conservative....in others - concern for victims of a rotten welfare system and for bilingual education - we have been wild-eyed liberals." It was with the CLC where Dunn first clashed with fellow Texans Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler, two of his chief adversaries in the Southern Baptist denominational conflict of the 1980s. During his tenure at the CLC, Dunn involved the organization more deeply in the political process than had his predecessor, Jimmy Allen. As a result, the CLC began to regularly offer informed testimony before state legislative committees and they were often sought out by legislators as knowledgeable sources on public issues. In 1981, Dunn left Texas to become the Executive-Director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.[109]

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[109] For biographical data see John Finley, "Interview with James M. Dunn," *The Whitsitt Journal* 6 (Spring 2004): 3. John Newport, "A Texas Bred, Spirit-Led Baptist," *James Dunn: Champion for Religious Liberty*, ed. J. Brent Walker (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1999), 19-24. Toby Druin, "Dunn – Off to Washington," *Baptist Standard*, 31 December 1980, 4.

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. In the spirit of John Locke's statement that "Baptists were the first propounders of absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty," Southern Baptists helped establish an organization founded by the principal Baptist groups (Southern, Northern, and National Baptists) in the United States whose task would be to monitor and lobby for separation of church and state, foster religious liberty, and promote the free exercise of religion.[110] Since the doors of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJC) swung open, there have been only five Executive Directors: J.M. Dawson (1946-1953), C. Emanuel Carlson (1954-1971), James E. Wood, Jr. (1972-1980), James Dunn (1981-1999), and J. Brent Walker (2000 - Present).[111]

As the first Executive Director, J. M. Dawson led the BJC in its opposition against several instances of government inference in religion: tax support for private and religious schools, diplomatic relations with the Vatican, and government aid to sectarian hospitals. One of Dawson's greatest achievements was his role in establishing "Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State" (now known as Americans United for Separation of Church and State). Dawson hoped that POAU would effectively speak to the larger Protestant community on the issues of religious liberty and separation of church and state.[112]

Under Executive Director Emanuel Carlson, the BJC was able to expand its constituency to nine diverse Baptist bodies. While continuing to face the same issues that Dawson encountered, Carlson led the opposition against a constitutional amendment declaring America a Christian nation, a measure to make Good Friday a legal holiday, and a proposed question on the 1960 census asking citizens to identify their religion. The

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[110] Pam Parry, *On Guard for Religious Liberty: Six Decades of the Baptist Joint Committee* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1996), 1-2.
[111] Ibid., 1-2. The BJC dates its origins to 1936 when the Southern Baptist Convention developed the Committee on Public Relations under the leadership of Rufus Weaver.
[112] Ibid., 11-14.

BJC also voiced its support for two highly controversial Supreme Court decisions: Engel v. Vitale (1962), which barred government prescribed prayer in public schools, and Abington v. Schempp and Murray v. Curlett (1963) which ruled that it was unconstitutional to require public school children to read the Bible and recite the Lord's Prayer.[113]

Like his predecessors, James Wood continued to oppose diplomatic relations with the Vatican, government funding of religious schools, and support for universal religious freedom. However, Wood's BJC faced new issues including the expansion of IRS regulations related to churches, the CIA's use of missionaries for intelligence gathering, the nuclear arms race, and abortion. During his eight-year tenure, Wood was criticized for addressing social issues outside of the mission of the BJC. Consequently, messengers at the 1976 Southern Baptist Convention passed two motions in order to clarify the distinct roles of the BJC and the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. These motions maintained that the role of the CLC would be to only address moral and social concerns while the BJC would deal exclusively with religious liberty.[114]

When James Dunn was chosen to replace James Wood as Executive Director of the BJC, he faced the immediate challenge of a new President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, who had a radically different philosophy of church-state separation than President Jimmy Carter. Unlike Reagan, Carter represented a traditional Baptist view of church-state separation (i.e. against government interference in religion, diplomatic relations with the Vatican, government-mandated school prayer and federal funding of parochial schools).[115] Dunn recalled, "Seeing Mr. Carter pack his bags and head back to Georgia as Marilyn and I were unpacking ours here in Washington was not a comforting sight. Losing Mr. Carter

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[113] Ibid., 14-17.
[114] Ibid., 18-20.
[115] Grady Cothen, *What Happened to the SBC? A Memoir of the Controversy* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1993), 355.

caused me to whimper about him not being here anymore. He was my friend and a strong supporter of church-state separation."[116]

On his first day on the job, Dunn promised an "aggressive, broad-based" approach to government relations by the BJC.[117] He promised to "applaud and support" initiatives of the Reagan administration regarding church-state separation and human rights, while also pledging to "push for change where change is needed," and to be critical when government policy runs counter to historic Baptist positions. Dunn emphatically declared that "the responsibility of this agency to bear Christian witness to questions of public policy - specifically religious freedom - is so consistent and so overwhelming and so overriding, that the relative difference in the way we relate to one administration or the other is not very important."[118]

James Dunn and the Southern Baptist Convention

Abortion. One of the earliest criticisms of James Dunn by his Southern Baptist opponents was his refusal to repudiate a pro-choice position on abortion. In 1973, the BJC voted not to join the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights.[119] Dunn's predecessor, James Wood, went on record in his official capacity as Executive Director of the BJC in support of a woman's right to choose. However, Wood is the only Executive Director in the history of the BJC to espouse such a view. When James Dunn became Executive Director in 1980,

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[116] Michael Smith, "A Texan Goes to Washington," *James Dunn: Champion for Religious Liberty*, ed. J. Brent Walker (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1999), 33.
[117] "Executive Promises 'Aggressive Approach,'" *Report from the Capital*, 35, 10 (Nov-Dec 1980): 4-5.
[118] "Dunn 'realistic but hopeful' on Church-State relations," *The Religious Herald*, 12 February 1981, 9.
[119] Dorothy Cherry Schleicher, *A History and Analysis of the Role of the Baptist Joint Committee, 1972 - Present* (M.A. thesis, Baylor University, 1993), 94.

he redirected the efforts of the BJC to focus solely on religious liberty issues. This decision angered fundamentalists who demanded that he repudiate Wood's position and take a strong stand against abortion. Adding to fundamentalist consternation was the fact that Dunn had an agreement with the BJC's search committee that the BJC would not publicly fight the abortion issue. Dunn concurred that the assignment for ethical concerns such as abortion rested elsewhere.[120]

In 1983, Dunn further angered fundamentalists when he voiced a stinging rebuke of President Reagan's social agenda.[121] Dunn bemoaned that "the complex issue of abortion is reduced to the simple cry of 'infanticide' by Mr. Reagan, who would redress 'a great national wrong' in the name of civil religion, making it virtually impossible for mothers to make their own decisions in this very private, very religious matter." Dunn's criticism of President Reagan and his reference to mothers making their own choices sounded like a pro-choice position to conservatives. In recent years, Paige Patterson has claimed that abortion was the key issue that led to the Southern Baptist Convention's defunding of the BJC in 1991. Whatever the case, Dunn's reticence about his personal view of abortion and his refusal to publicly embrace a pro-life position was enough to convince fundamentalists that he would never promote their social-political agenda.[122]

People for the American Way. Dunn also came under fire by fundamentalists in the Southern Baptist Convention for his involvement on the twenty-eight member board of "People for the American Way" (PFAW). PFAW was founded by Norman Lear, Barbara Jordan, and a group of distinguished business, religious, and political leaders in 1981 to counter the

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[120] Parry, *On Guard for Religious Liberty*, 20.
[121] Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 44.
[122] Ibid., 191. Hefley notes that conservatives were upset with the BJC about abortion. See James Hefley, *Truth in Crisis*, Vol. 1, 174.

growing clout and divisive message of right-wing televangelists such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Jimmy Swaggart. Shortly before the creation of PFAW, the board of the BJC passed an official policy statement on the imminent dangers of civil religion (i.e., religious nationalism). This statement stressed the concern and fear that "the current activities of the Religious Right may pose a more dangerous threat to the American principle of church-state separation than any previous similar movement." It called on all Baptists to be pro-active and to work together with other concerned citizens, regardless of their religious faith or lack thereof, and to counter the political agenda of the Religious Right. Describing why he chose to serve on the board of PFAW Dunn said,

> The board brought together church leaders and corporate leaders who care about religious liberty and sat them down together on the same board. That had not been true anywhere else….I am convinced that it was proper for me to know what they were doing and to participate in the activities of People for the American Way, as a citizen concerned about First Amendment issues, relating to them in the same coalition way that we relate to all the other major factors on religious liberty issues on the Washington scene."[123]

While some Baptists like Dunn viewed PFAW as a broad-based national education group for First Amendment rights, many fundamentalists within the SBC viewed PFAW as "pornographic smut peddlers, homosexual activists, and baby-killing abortionists."[124] In its defense, PFAW had never taken a position or written a paper on the issues of pornography, homosexuality or abortion. Dunn argued that the strong Roman Catholic presence on PFAW's board is evidence "that we have

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[123] "Dunn Defends Himself, BJCPA," *Baptist Standard*, 6 June 1984, 10-11.
[124] Dan Martin, "Controversial Board Post Declined by James Dunn," *Baptist Standard*, 2 February 1984, 3.

not been involved in those myths of overheated rhetoric that have been injected into the criticism of PFAW."[125]

Those who wished to see James Dunn fired from his position as Executive Director of the BJC began to wage a non-stop smear campaign against him focusing on his involvement with PFAW. Paige Patterson described Dunn's involvement with PFAW as, "it's like putting Sodom together with Jerusalem." Even after Dunn resigned from the PFAW board, editor of the popular *Southern Baptist Advocate*, Russell Kaemmerling, publicly questioned whether Dunn was still sympathetic with the "pornographic smut peddlers, homosexual activists and baby-killing abortionists who make up People for the American Way."[126] Dunn's opponents played the all too familiar game of guilt-by-association. They associated him with the famous television producer and one of the founders of PFAW, Norman Lear. Dunn countered,

> The fact that Norman Lear is associated is irrelevant, it's not his. It does not belong to him. Father (Theodore) Hesburgh (President of Notre Dame) also is on the board and that doesn't make me a Catholic. The late Ruth Carter Stapleton was also on the board and that didn't make me a charismatic.[127]

Dunn lamented this "guilt by association with someone (Norman Lear) with whom I disagree on several things while agreeing passionately with him on religious liberty as essential

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[125] "Dunn Defends Himself, BJCPA," *Baptist Standard*, 10-11.

[126] Dan Martin, "Dunn quits PAW Post; Criticism Continues," *Baptist Standard*, 5 December 1984, 3. Paul Pressler was also upset with Dunn's participation with PFAW. See James Hefley, *Truth in Crisis*, Vol. 4, 73. Research conducted for Nancy Ammerman's book, *Baptist Battles*, suggested that two-thirds of SBC clergy read the *Southern Baptist Advocate*. See Mark Wingfield, "Texas Trustee of IMB Sent to Prison," *Baptist Standard*, 6 August 2001, 2.

[127] Ibid. Norman Lear was the producer of the controversial satire, "All in the Family."

to the American Way" and argued that in actuality the smear campaign against him largely rested on his strong opposition to the Reagan prayer amendment."[128]

The campaign of smear and harassment against Dunn was partially successful. In late 1982, messengers to the Kansas-Nebraska Convention adopted a resolution stating that unless the BJC and Dunn "adopted a public posture on national issues more consistent with current state resolutions of the SBC" then the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention should "begin the process of severing the relationship that now exists between our denomination and the BJC."[129] The Alabama State Baptist Convention followed suit in 1983 when they passed a resolution asking that funding of the BJC be withdrawn because of Dunn's participation in PFAW. However, the SBC Executive Committee rejected this request in a unanimous decision.[130]

Despite these harsh indictments, Dunn did not blame the convention messengers for the resolutions. He said, "A great many of the pastors, I know, respect, and believe to be honorable. That makes this situation all the more tragic – that someone could mislead them into a conspiratorial war of words." "It is entirely unacceptable to be forced to engage in a defensive debate after the public hanging," Dunn retorted. In fact, Dunn was never once contacted by the SBC's resolutions committee to check the facts, allow a response or "at least (give a) warning (to) the Christian brother who has offended you." According to Dunn, "the sudden appearance of similar resolutions across the Southern Baptist Convention with identical phrases and flaws of factual error suggest a smear campaign aimed at me and the Baptist Joint Committee."[131]

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[128] Craig Bird, "Kansas-Nebraska Resolution Puzzles, Disturbs James Dunn," *The Religious Herald*, 16 December 1982, 15.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Cothen, *What Happened to the SBC,* 183.
[131] Craig Bird, "Dunn Says Action Part of Smear Campaign," *Baptist Standard*, 1 December 1982, 5.

In an attempt to quash the controversy, Dunn declined to serve a second three-year term on the board of directors of PFAW. He said, "I've got enough to do on religious liberty concerns without wasting time with people who are bothered about my being part of it (PFAW)."[132] Nonetheless, this action did not pacify his critics who suggested that the only way to quiet the criticism would be for Dunn to resign. Dunn noted that the attacks on himself and the BJC have "required a great deal of forbearance and forgiveness on our part." He also stressed that all agencies within the SBC should take note and realize that such attacks "may be instructive to all our agencies if we recognize the challenge to the precious right of free association, if we identify the tactics of those with a personal and political agenda attempting to use Southern Baptists, and if we determine to know the facts and not be misled by distortion and untruth." Dunn stressed that leaving the board of the PFAW did not signal a retreat from working with groups with different levels of disagreement. He never stopped emphasizing that Christians should work with "many people with whom we do not agree on everything….I believe in the long haul it is terribly important that we continue to work in the real world."[133]

Prayer Amendment. Dunn angered Southern Baptist fundamentalists the most when he opposed President Reagan's Constitutional Prayer Amendment in 1982. Since the infamous Supreme Court decisions of 1962 and 1963, many Americans including the President himself were under the false impression that God had been kicked out of public schools.[134] Naturally,

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[132] "Fire Dunn," *Southern Baptist Journal* 12, 2 (May/June 1984): 11.
[133] "Dunn quits PAW Post; Criticism Continues," *Baptist Standard*, 3.
[134] Ronald Wilson Reagan, "Address at an Ecumenical Prayer Breakfast," (speech given at Reunion Arena following the enactment of the Equal Access bill of 1984, Dallas, Texas). "In 1962, the Supreme Court in the New York prayer case banned the...saying of prayers. In 1963, the Court banned the reading of the Bible in our public schools. From that point on, the courts pushed the meaning of the ruling ever outward, so that now our children are not allowed voluntary prayer..."

President Reagan's attempt to remedy the matter by amending the United States Constitution was deemed highly controversial. Even more controversial for Dunn's opponents was his vituperative attack of President Reagan's viewpoint.

In the spirit of freedom loving Baptists past and present, Dunn immediately condemned President Reagan's attempt to rewrite the Constitution. With blunt flair, Dunn exclaimed, "It is despicable demagoguery for the President to play petty politics with prayer. He knows that the Supreme Court never banned prayer in schools. It can't. Real prayer is always free." Dunn also accused Reagan of being "deliberatively dishonest" by joining ranks with those who have misinterpreted the Supreme Court's decisions.[135] Despite these misunderstandings, Reagan knew better, according to Dunn. "He knows that the court in those prayer rulings affirmed and encouraged studies about religion in public school classrooms. What the court has done is protect religious liberty."[136]

Dunn stressed that mandatory or supervised prayer is antithetical to the Baptist tradition. Reagan's prayer amendment amounted to nothing more than state-sanctioned prayer. Dunn colorfully proclaimed, "You hear it called 'putting God in schools.' It is as if the Divine could be dumped into a wheelbarrow and carted out. The charge that everything went wrong because they threw prayer out of schools is patent poppycock."[137] He further argued that "to make public prayer a political football is to deny the meaning of prayer." Pointing out that politicians continuously make reference to the misnomer that God has been expelled from the classroom, Dunn announced, "The God whom I worship and serve has a perfect

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[135] Derek Davis, "Baptist Approaches to Presidential Politics and Church-State Issues," *Baptist History and Heritage* 32, 1 (January 1997): 28-39. James Hefley gives his conservative account of Dunn, the BJC, and the Reagan prayer amendment. See James Hefley, *Truth in Crisis*, Vol. 1, 91, 174-175.

[136] Cothen, *What Happened to the SBC,* 353-356.

[137] Larry Chesser, "Establishing Religious Beliefs A Threat to Liberty," *Report from the Capital* 36, 10 (November-December 1981): 16.

attendance record, never absent or even tardy."[138] According to Dunn, Reagan's attempts to politicize prayer in order to capture votes constituted a grave and serious sin.[139]

Implementation of Reagan's prayer amendment would ultimately place decision-making power about prayer in schools in the hands of state legislatures and local school districts. Dunn questioned whether in an increasingly pluralistic society citizens (even fundamentalists) would really want to turn the regulation of religious exercise over to statehouses and local school boards in diverse states such as Utah, Hawaii, Alabama, and New York.[140] Rebuking as simplistic the fundamentalist perspective that many of America's problems stemmed from the Supreme Court's 1962 and 1963 prayer/Bible reading decisions, as well as the proposal that these problems could be remedied through an amendment to the Constitution, Dunn reminded listeners that "school prayer" has not brought idealistic Islam to Iran, churchgoing to England, religious toleration to Belgium, sexual morality to Sweden, freedom of thought to Spain, or peace to Northern Ireland.[141]

Theologically, Dunn opposed Reagan's prayer amendment because it trivialized the sacred nature of prayer.[142] In the BJC's monthly publication, *Report from the Capital*, Dunn asserted that the amendment would actually secularize prayer. Prayer—the most intimate and inner expression of religion—would be forced to "do a civil duty, to tote the values of a common culture" of a national "pop religion" rather than be voluntarily directed toward God. Dunn believed such a watered-down school prayer written and approved by government officials was a testimony of "lowest common

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[138] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 38, 3 (March 1983): 15.
[139] Larry Chesser, "BJCPA's Dunn Challenges Reagan on Public School Prayer Amendment," *Report from the Capital*, 37, 6 (June 1982): 8.
[140] Ibid.
[141] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital,* 37, 4 (April 1982): 15.
[142] "The Politics of Prayer," *Time*, 9 August 1982, 39.

denominator religion" and thus a threat to authentic religion. He warned, "School 'praying' can work like a flu shot. An inoculation of diluted deism can make some children immune, or at least resistant, to real religion."[143]

Unfortunately, the messengers at the 1982 New Orleans meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention followed President Reagan's lead and adopted a resolution in support of his proposed prayer amendment.[144] This marked the first time that the BJC and the SBC took different positions on a religious liberty issue. Dunn referred to the SBC's passage of the prayer resolution as an "incredible contradiction of our Baptist heritage."[145] While Dunn and the BJC frantically worked to inform its constituents and clarify the issues, fundamentalists enthusiastically embraced the resolution. Only two years before, in 1980, the Convention passed a resolution entitled "On Voluntary Prayer in Public Schools" which pointed out that the Supreme Court "has not held that it is illegal for any individual to pray or read his or her Bible in public schools" and adamantly opposed attempts "either by law or other means to circumvent the Supreme Court's decisions forbidding government authored or sponsored religious exercises in public schools." The 1980 resolution also pointed out that these Supreme Court decisions never forbade and even affirmed the right to voluntary prayer. However, many Baptists, including Dunn, saw the 1982 SBC Resolution as an attempt to do exactly

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[143] Dunn, *Report*, (April 1982), 15.

[144] Cothen, *What Happened to the SBC,* 353-356. Paul Pressler and Norris Sydnor, chairman of the SBC Resolutions Committee, had previously assured the Convention that the prayer amendment would not be pushed during the 1982 New Orleans meeting. Instead, both men planned to work for the passage of the amendment but would not ask the convention to endorse it. (Baptist Press, 10 May 1982).

[145] David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, The New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1996), 109.

what the previous resolution forbade – circumvent the Supreme Courts decisions.[146]

Under sharp criticism from Dunn, SBC leaders defended their resolution in support of Reagan's amendment. In contrast to Dunn's position, they argued that the government would not regulate the prayers being said in school.[147] However, Dunn pointed to a White House document that had been prepared by the Department of Justice which emphatically declared that under Reagan's proposed prayer amendment, "states and communities would be free to select prayers of their own choosing. They would choose prayers that have already been written or they could compose their own prayers." The document further elaborated that "if groups of people are to be permitted to pray, someone must have the power to determine the content of such prayers."[148]

This document clearly supported Dunn's original contention that the amendment would lead to government approved written prayers. As a result, Dunn stated that the 1982 SBC resolution was factually incorrect because it guaranteed that Reagan's prayer amendment would not lead to government written prayers. From Dunn's perspective, the thin veil had been removed from Reagan's amendment and his intentions of mandatory government-written prayer had been exposed.[149]

Less than a month after the 1982 Convention in New Orleans, an aide to President Reagan, Morton Blackwell, revealed that Religious Right leader Edward McAteer had received encouragement and support from the White House to push for a resolution endorsing the prayer amendment at the New Orleans Convention. In an interview with Baptist Press, Blackwell reluctantly admitted that he and McAteer met regularly and consulted one another before the New Orleans

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[146] Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 146-147.

[147] Davis, "Baptist Approaches to Presidential Politics," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 28-39.

[148] "Baptist Church-State Leader Hails New Poll on Required School Prayer," *Report from the Capital* 38, 1 (January 1983): 8.

[149] Ibid.

meeting. During the debate on the prayer resolution, McAteer never spoke. However, he played a vital role in ensuring that it passed through the Resolutions Committee by frequently advising committee chairman, Norris W. Sydnor.[150] According to Dunn, a White House staffer boasted that he had written the 1982 resolution. This blatant illustration of secular politics infiltrating the Southern Baptist Convention further disgusted Dunn.[151]

In 1983, the messengers at the Pittsburgh meeting of the SBC rejected the 1982 position when they adopted a resolution which urged Baptists to "express their confidence in the United States Constitution, and particularly in the First Amendment, as adequate and sufficient guarantees to protect these freedoms (free exercise and no establishment of religion)."[152] While some fundamentalists remained furious with Dunn, he rallied behind the 1983 resolution. Between the years 1964 and 1983, the SBC had passed nine resolutions in support of the 1962 and 1963 Supreme Court rulings. Subsequently, nine state conventions explicitly or implicitly repudiated the erroneous 1982 SBC resolution. Dunn, consequently, proclaimed that the 1982 resolution was an aberration of Baptist identity.[153] He exhorted that "one resolution by one meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, incidentally opposite the position of three

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[150] Cothen, *What Happened to the SBC,* 353-356. Southern Baptist Ed McAteer was the founder of the Religious Roundtable, a group that mobilized evangelicals for conservative political causes. He has often been referred to as the "Father of the Religious Right." He is also known for persuading Jerry Falwell to get involved in politics and for introducing Ronald Reagan to Christian activists in 1980 at a conference sponsored by his organization.

[151] Bill Moyers, *God and Politics: The Battle for the Bible* (Princeton, N.J.: Films for the Humanities, 1994), videocassette.

[152] Walter Shurden and Randy Shepley, ed., *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1996), 110-111.

[153] Ibid. The nine state conventions who explicitly or implicitly repudiated the erroneous 1982 SBC resolution included Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

previous conventions, does not immediately and automatically supersede the established, ordered ways of doing Baptist business." Despite the attack against Baptist freedom, Dunn remained committed to authentic voluntary prayer. "Any prayer that is prayer is voluntary. But any time it is prayer forced upon people, it is religious ritual and not prayer."[154]

Defunding of the Baptist Joint Committee. As Southern Baptist fundamentalists implemented their "conservative resurgence" they asserted that Dunn was unresponsive to the obvious concerns of rank and file Southern Baptists. Despite the fact that the BJC represented multiple Baptist bodies, Southern Baptists carried the financial weight of the organization and resurgence leaders wanted more accountability for their conservative political concerns.[155] In 1982, fundamentalist architect Paige Patterson told a reporter that something would be done to silence James Dunn.[156] First Baptist Church, Wichita, Texas, took the lead in calling for the defunding of the BJC in the fall of 1982 when they passed a resolution demanding "that all monies be withdrawn from support of the Baptist Joint Committee and the contractual relationships be duly terminated."[157] Patterson referred to this resolution as "the shot heard round the world." He charged, "We are totally at the mercy of what Dunn and his staff happen to think. Once Baptists understand that fully, even the moderates will not put up with that."[158] The next year messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention passed a

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[154] Davis, "Baptist Approaches to Presidential Politics," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 28-39.
[155] James Hefley, *Truth in Crisis*, Vol. 2, 131-138. For Paul Pressler's view of the battle with the BJC and James Dunn, see Judge Paul Pressler, *A Hill On Which to Die*, 253-262.
[156] Cothen, *What Happened to the SBC,* 353-356.
[157] Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 108. "Defund BJC's James Dunn," *Southern Baptist Journal* 11, 5 (June 1983): 7.
[158] Beth Spring, "James Dunn is the Focus of a Southern Baptist Controversy," *Christianity Today*, 16 March 1984, 44.

resolution requesting that the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee withdraw all funding from the BJC.[159] That request was denied a few months later by the Executive Committee in February, 1984.[160]

At the 1984 Kansas City meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, the fundamentalists launched their first big push to withdraw all financial support from the BJC. A messenger from W.A. Criswell's church, First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, moved that the SBC withdraw all funding from the BJC ($411,436 for 1984-1985 budget).[161] The motion failed, however, 51.65% to 48.35%.[162] Meanwhile, Dunn addressed the attempts to defund the BJC in his monthly column. While stressing the unique "jointness" of the BJC—an organization of nine different Baptist bodies—Dunn pointed out that about the only cooperative ministry that Baptists throughout America participate in is the work of the BJC. Dunn asserted that since seventy-five cents of every Baptist dollar is given through the SBC, "it is not terribly out of line for Southern Baptists to supply the lion's share of funding. May bigness of spirit exceed bigness of budget."[163] When such diverse groups as Seventh Day Baptists, National Baptists, and Southern Baptists work together on common concerns, "it gives a different kind of clout and a different kind of credibility."[164]

At the 1985 Atlanta meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, another resolution was offered to ask that the convention withdraw funding from the BJC and establish an exclusively Southern Baptist religious liberty alternative in

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[159] "Alabamans Ask BJCPA Be Defunded," *Baptist Standard*, 23 November 1983, 11.
[160] Dan Martin, "Committee Refuses to Deny Funds to BJC," *Baptist Standard*, 29 February 1984, 4.
[161] Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 109.
[162] James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis,* Vol. 1, 106.
[163] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 39, 4 (May 1984): 15.
[164] E.C. Roehlkepartain, "Fundamentalists threaten religious liberty watchdog," *Christian Century*, 5 November 1986, 980.

Washington D.C.. The motion was referred to the Executive Committee (by a 55.6% to 44.3% vote) who created a seven-member "special fact-finding committee" to study the relationship of the SBC to the BJC.[165]

Dunn welcomed the fact-finding committee's investigation. He bluntly declared, "We welcome the opportunity to help you get the facts...not opinions." One of the committee members was the notorious fundamentalist architect, Paul Pressler. During a meeting between Dunn, his staff, and the fact-finding committee, Pressler attacked Dunn for his past remarks about President Reagan. At one point he scolded Dunn, "You know we could change the executive director and that might solve all of our problems."[166] Towards the end of the investigation, Dunn's BJC and the fact-finding committee reached a compromise. As a result, SBC representation on the BJC's fifty-four member board increased from fifteen to eighteen representatives. In an effort to maintain the "jointness" of the BJC, it was decided that no denomination should have more than one-third of the members on the board.[167]

At the same time that the special fact-finding committee was investigating the BJC, the fundamentalist members of the SBC Public Affairs Committee (PAC) began to push for a merger with the SBC's Christian Life Commission for handling "legislative and governmental issues" in Washington D.C. Their most controversial course of action occurred in 1987

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[165] Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 109.

[166] Cothen, *What Happened to the SBC,* 356.

[167] Dan Martin, "BJCPA approves plan to revise representation on committee; amount of budget support a factor," *Report from the Capital* 41, 10 (November-December 1986): 8. Dan Martin, "Panel Asks SBC-BJCPA Ties Be Retained," *Baptist Standard*, 27 May 1987, 4. On May 12, 1987 while speaking to a group of pastors, Pressler said "I also pledge if the bylaw is adopted to do everything I can to keep a motion from being made to defund the BJC. And if, unfortunately, there is a motion to defund the BJC – if the bylaw is passed – I will do everything I can to defeat the motion." See Morgan, *The New Crusades*, 110.

when they publicly endorsed Robert Bork as Supreme Court Justice. Dunn condemned this unprecedented action.[168] According to Dunn, during the entire history of the BJC, "it has never endorsed candidates, dealt with personalities or approved or opposed individuals under consideration for public office."[169] Moreover, in a "back door" attempt to strip the BJC of its funds, the PAC laid claim to the SBC's $448,400 allocation that had always gone directly to the BJC. Instead, the PAC claimed that the money had to be first channeled through the PAC before going to the BJC.[170]

In late 1987, the PAC and the CLC of the Southern Baptist Convention met to consider a possible merger.[171] Even though the program statement of the PAC indicated that the staff of the BJC was to function as the staff of the PAC, Dunn was neither invited nor informed of the meeting. Dunn reiterated,

Once again, those with a loaded political agenda have demonstrated their willingness to defy the repeated action of the SBC in its national gatherings as messengers have repeatedly voted to continue support for the budget and program of the BJCPA. In 1984, 1986, and again in 1987, the SBC resoundingly reaffirmed its support for the BJCPA, its work, its historical program assignment and its jointness with other Baptists."[172]

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[168] The SBC related to the BJC through the PAC; PAC consisted of the SBC members on BJC board. Dan Martin and Mark Kelly, "Public Affairs Panel Urges Bork Confirmation," *Baptist Standard*, 2 September 1987, 3. Marv Knox, "PAC, AIDS Crisis Drew States' Attention," *Baptist Standard*, 2 December 1987, 5.

[169] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 42, 9 (October 1987): 15.

[170] Dan Martin and Mark Kelly, "Dispute Arises Over 'Public Affairs' Funds," *Baptist Standard*, 2 September 1987, 5. Toby Druin, "PAC Funds, Non-SBC Exhibit Studies Ordered," *Baptist Standard*, 30 September 1987, 3.

[171] Marv Knox, "Officers Explore Merger of PAC, CLC," *Baptist Standard*, 23 December 1987, 3.

[172] "Baker, Elder, Dunn Criticize Proposal," *Baptist Standard*, 6 January 1988, 13.

He noted that whatever the motives or intentions of the fundamentalists might be, "they would redefine politically the work of this fifty-one year old BJC. They would destroy the 'jointness' of the BJC. And they would part from the Baptist way in church-state relations. So we care about the Southern Baptist battle."[173]

Since 1984, the fundamentalist leaders had made many efforts to shift the responsibilities of church-state matters to the CLC of the SBC and withdraw financial support from the BJC. All along the way Dunn said that he was rarely if ever given the opportunity to face his accusers. They were not interested in facts or fairness. At the 1990 New Orleans meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, the fundamentalists were finally able to drastically cut budget support for the BJC from $391,000 to $50,000. "When the largest Baptist body in the nation, historic champions of religious freedom, officially and blatantly turns to accommodation rather than separation, and civil religion rather than prophetic witness, it is alarming," lamented Dunn.[174]

On June 4, 1991, the Southern Baptist Convention officially dissolved all financial ties with the BJC and effectively ended a fifty-five year relationship. The defunding was complete.[175] In subsequent years, until his retirement, Dunn successfully found funding sources for the BJC. The religious liberty watchdog continues its ministry today with the support of fourteen different Baptist groups.

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[173] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 43, 1 (January 1988): 15.

[174] "BJC approved largest budget; Dunn cites threat to liberty," *Baptist Standard*, 16 October 1991, 5.

[175] "SBC cuts BJCPA ties," *Christian Century*, 10 July 1991, 680.

Theoretical Foundations: James Dunn's View of Separation of Church and State

Religious Right. James Dunn was no friend of the Religious Right. His Baptist opponents considered him a liberal for his view of the separation of church and state which they felt was out of step with their "conservative resurgence." Dunn, however, always believed that he shared many basic beliefs with these "political fundamentalists." In 1994, he still declared, "As a born-again Baptist who still preaches revival meetings and believes the Bible, as a sinner saved by grace who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, I share many of their cares." Dunn denounced, for example, the threats of "godlessness" and "hollow humanism" and he acknowledged "extremists" on the Left who despised any reference to moral and spiritual convictions in the public arena.[176]

At the same time, Dunn vehemently opposed the accommodationist perspective of church-state separation. Dunn felt that the Religious Right, which obviously included the fundamentalist leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention, had a blatant contempt for the First Amendment and a terrible misunderstanding of religious freedom. He identified several examples of misguided government favoritism toward religion such as government sponsored prayer, state-approved religious exercise ("perverting authentic religion"), vouchers, tuition tax credits ("regressive elitist educational policy which assures government intrusion into private and parochial education"), and the appointment of a United States ambassador to the Vatican.[177] Only on the last point regarding an ambassador to the Vatican did the Religious Right concur with Dunn.

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[176] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 49, 9 (September 20, 1994): 3. James M. Dunn, "Religion and Politics: A Proper Mix," *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 13, 2 (Summer 1986): 156.

[177] "Religion's proper role in politics permeates 1984 Presidential campaign," *Report from the Capital*, 39, 9 (October 1984): 8. James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 40, 1 (January 1985): 15.

Consequently, according to Dunn, America was witnessing the attempt "to collapse the distinction between mixing politics and religion (which is inevitable) and merging Church and State (which is inexcusable)."[178] This unhealthy mixing of religion and politics had numerous flaws and the Religious Right had expertise in all three areas: 1) making political doctrine a test of faith, 2) identifying political platforms with biblical ethics, 3) practicing a politics of personal destruction.[179]

Dunn believed that the call for vouchers was an unhealthy mix of religion and politics in the realm of public education. He often lambasted school choice (vouchers) as "slick subterfuge" and "unfair, unconstitutional, undemocratic, and unhealthy for public education."[180] Time and time again, Dunn refused to "vouch for vouchers." He adamantly declared that voucher schemes were at the very least: unpredictable, unfair, unconstitutional, unworthy, unthrifty, undemocratic, unjust, unethical, unprincipled, uncalled-for, uneconomical, unsuccessful, unsympathetic to freedom, unworkable, untruthful, unsustainable, un-American, unfaithful, and un-Christian.[181]

Dunn's attack upon vouchers often included a criticism not only of the Religious Right but also the Roman Catholic Church. He considered Roman Catholicism to be one of the most important threats to contemporary religious freedom because of the millions of dollars spent (past and present) to obtain public monies for parochial schools.[182] Dunn's real concern with Catholicism, however, was the assignment of an American ambassador to the Vatican. Despite the religio-

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[178] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 39, 9 (October 1984): 15.
[179] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 49, 7 (July 12, 1994): 3.
[180] "Dunn denounces voucher plan," *Christian Century*, 4 (December 1985): 1114.
[181] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 51, 3 (March 19, 1996): 3.
[182] Grady Cothen, *The New SBC: Fundamentalism's Impact on the SBC* (Macon, Georgia: Smyth and Helwys, 1995), 98.

political nature of the Vatican, Dunn consistently opposed any government sponsored favoritism toward any religion. Like his predecessors, Dunn passionately argued that sending a diplomatic representative to the Holy See constituted the recognition of one religion over all others. According to Dunn, a diplomatic relationship

allowing the United States to influence the political positions of the Holy See reflects an arrogant and blatantly volatile posture. The very idea that we would enter this

relationship announcing in advance that we intend to attempt to shape the political position of the Roman Catholic Church is contrary to everything we mean by separation of church and state.[183]

Ultimately, the unhealthy mixing of religion and politics practiced by the Religious Right, according to Dunn, was a veiled attempt at establishing a theocratic Christian America. Consequently, Dunn frequently lambasted the attempt to call America a Christian nation. He cited Roger Williams' battle with the "Holy Commonwealth" of colonial Puritanism and even cited conservative Billy Graham's criticism "that a wedding between religious fundamentalism and the political right" would result in politicians manipulating religious concerns for their own benefit. In typical picturesque language, Dunn elaborated "well, the wedding bells rang and the honeymoon is over."[184] Dunn was especially concerned that the focus on a Christian America meant more intrusion into private matters. Consequently, he disagreed with the political priorities of the Religious Right. According to Dunn, the Religious Right thinks "that pornography, abortion, (mandated) prayer, and arms to Taiwan are the great moral issues of the day, rather than pursuit of peace, stewardship of creation, and justice for women

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[183] Larry Chesser, "Bid to influence Vatican draws criticism from Dunn," *The Religious Herald*, 15 February 1984, 5.

[184] James M. Dunn, "Church and State in Contemporary United States: A Wall of Separation?", *Baptist History and Heritage*, 33 (Winter 1998): 36.

and blacks. Those are the moral issues."[185] Such efforts Dunn said, "sound more like Calvin's Geneva than the United States of America."[186]

Dunn's Baptist opponents clearly believed that America had abandoned its religious roots and were moving headlong into a secular "naked public square." Dunn's response was diametrically opposed to the vision of the Religious Right: "We had rather have a 'naked public square' than one cosmetically covered with cutflower Christianity. We choose a bare town hall to which we bring our own most deeply held beliefs. We do prefer the naked public square to one in which government meddles in religion."[187]

Civil Religion. The misguided focus of the Religious Right on the notion of a Christian America resulted in an insidious form of civil religion. According to Dunn, civil religion was the mixing of traditional religion with national life until the two became indistinguishable.[188] He asserted that "the identification of the United States as peculiarly God's People is a dangerous form of idolatry – nationalatry, the misplaced worship of a nation, giving the country allegiance that God alone deserves."[189] Dunn elaborated, "This idolatrous religion depends upon patriotic fervor to be its Holy Spirit, Adam Smith

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[185] Allen D. Hertzke, "Representing God in Washington: Religious lobbies and Congressional policy-making," *This World*, 20 (Winter 1988): 67-91. Dunn also said, "One tires of surface babble touting "traditional values." Churches cannot possibly be true to their own nature…without affirming peace, justice, honesty, integrity in the government, compassion for those in need and freedom to espouse those values." See James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 41,1 (January 1986): 15.
[186] "Dunn: Baptists ignorant of Church-State heritage," *The Religious Herald*, 5 March 1981, 7.
[187] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 41, 5 (May 1986): 15.
[188] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 43, 10 (November-December 1988): 15.
[189] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 38, 2 (February 1983): 15.

its prophet, and television and movie actors to be its priests and missionaries."[190] Before the 1988 Presidential election, Dunn cautioned both candidates to be cautious of using "God talk" to manipulate people. The language of faith should not be used for secular purposes.[191]

While Dunn railed against civil religion and the unhealthy mixing of politics and faith, he still advocated responsible citizenship. However, Dunn cited "the dogmatist Carl Henry" to note that "equally devout individuals may disagree over the best program for achieving common goals."[192] Dunn affirmed that the demands of conscience must address public policy decisions but emphasized that there was not a simple plan to implement the proper mix of politics and religion. Whatever mixing of politics and religion exists, it should always be tested by "the highest public good, limited by the bounds of reasons and persuasion, and expressed with the humble awareness that one just might be mistaken."[193] One thing Dunn was certain about--the Religious Right-SBC leadership did not discern the dangers of civil religion.

In contrast to the accommodationist perspective of the Religious Right that catered to civil religion and the government favoritism inherent in the idea of a Christian America, Dunn consistently championed full religious liberty and the Jeffersonian wall of separation of church and state. In an interview in 2000, Dunn added a new phrase to the vocabulary of church-state separation—barbed wire fence—but it still reflected the thrust of his entire career: "Whether we have a high and impregnable wall, a wall with doors in it, a zone, or just a barbed wire fence, we still need to keep Church and State separate."[194]

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[190] Dunn, *A Proper Mix,* 156.
[191] Dunn, "Report," (November-December 1988), 15.
[192] Dunn, *A Proper Mix*, 153-154.
[193] Ibid.
[194] John Finley, "Interview with James Dunn," *The Whitsitt Journal*, 5.

The Theological Foundation of James Dunn's Perspective

Reflecting on the career of James Dunn, Daniel Vestal, Coordinator of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, said it was difficult to determine whether Dunn's greatest contribution was his work in the public and political arena or in local Baptist congregations. Vestal correctly noted that Dunn loved the local church and preaching the Bible.[195]

Soul Freedom. Dunn's view of religious liberty and separation of church and state was especially rooted in his understanding of soul freedom. What prominent early twentieth century Southern Baptists, E.Y. Mullins and G.W. Truett, referred to as "soul competency," James Dunn referred to as "soul freedom." Soul freedom, the key distinctive of Baptists and their greatest contribution to understanding the Christian faith, is simply the freedom, ability, and responsibility of each person to respond to God for herself or himself. Soul freedom implies the ability to have a personal relationship to Christ and the capacity to deal directly with God without a human mediator such as a priest or bishop.[196]

For religious faith to be authentic, Dunn believed, it must be free and cannot be coerced.[197] He cited E.Y. Mullins who declared that to deny a person direct access to God "is

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[195] Daniel Vestal, "The Ministry of James Dunn," *The Whitsitt Journal*, 7 (Fall 2000): 5. Throughout his career, Dunn promoted a biblical ethic of social justice and concern for the poor. He often quoted T.B. Maston, the subject of his doctoral dissertation, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jim Wallis, and Martin Luther King Jr.

[196] James M. Dunn and Grady C. Cothen, *Soul Freedom: Baptist Battle Cry*, 63-65. Dunn's views on soul freedom have been consistent throughout his career. Thus, this recent source accurately reflects long held beliefs and is cited in this research paper.

[197] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 42, 2 (February 1987): 15. James M. Dunn, "Separating church, state good for both," *Report from the Capital*, 50, 11 (November 14, 1995): 2.

nothing less than tyranny."[198] "If there is one tie that binds us Baptists together," Dunn affirmed, "it is our conviction that one comes to Jesus Christ freely or one does not really come to Jesus Christ…One accepts the Christian faith voluntarily or not authentically."[199] According to Dunn, soul freedom was synonymous with voluntarism. In typical colloquial fare, Dunn summarized: "For religious devotion to be worth a hoot it has to be voluntary."[200]

Soul freedom also placed a heavy emphasis upon the competence of the individual. Authentic faith is rooted in voluntary personal experience. Dunn liked to say, "We sing I know whom I have believed, not I know what I believe."[201] At the same time, Dunn refuted the criticism of his Baptist opponents that soul freedom led to a hyper individualistic lone-ranger Christianity. Dunn contended that the desire for Christian community presupposed voluntary faith. Without individual autonomy, authentic community was impossible.[202]

Dunn believed that soul freedom was based on a biblical view of persons. In the creation account of Adam and Eve, God called the first humans "Imago Dei" (Genesis 1:26-27) which presupposes freedom. Regardless of how one reads the Creation account, it clearly suggests that all humans are mortal beings, capable of responding to God. Dunn liked to say, "All human beings are response-able, responsible and free."[203]

Other Scriptures also affirmed voluntary faith, according to Dunn. Jesus' call to follow him requires a free personal

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[198] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 43, 4 (April 1988): 15.
[199] Ibid.
[200] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 41, 5 (May 1986): 15.
[201] "Baptist Stubborn Award: Response of James M. Dunn on receipt of the Whitsitt Society Baptist Courage Award June 29, 2000," *The Whitsitt Journal* 7 (Fall 2000): 4-5.
[202] Ibid.
[203] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 42, 1 (January 1987): 15. James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 46, 12 (November/December 1991): 15.

decision. The invocation, "whosoever will," (Revelation 2:17) necessitates soul freedom. Because there is only one mediator—Jesus Christ—between God and humankind (1 Timothy 2:5), the individual believer cannot be hindered by any human intermediary.[204]

Soul freedom, then, is the cornerstone that precedes and demands religious liberty and the separation of church and state for all persons in the political arena. Genuine faith cannot be coerced by the government. Early Christians believed that government was ordained by God (Romans 13) but could also be used for evil purposes (Revelation 13). Government coerced faith was met by the civil disobedience of Jesus' disciples. In Acts, Peter told government officials who wanted to silence the Gospel, "we ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). Dunn denied the charge from the Religious Right that soul freedom and a separation of church and state demanded a withdrawal of Christians from the government. Clearly, Jesus preached, "render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).[205] Dunn noted that the first century Christians "were too busy running from the Roman Senate to consider running for it, but they did know the difference between church and state."[206]

The Baptist Heritage. Dunn championed soul freedom as the basis of genuine Baptist identity and fundamental to 400 years of the Baptist heritage. He charged Baptist fundamentalists with abandoning the historic Baptist insistence upon radical religious liberty for all persons in favor of government favoritism of religion. Dunn often pointed to early Baptist leaders who rooted their religious freedom in the

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[204] Ibid.
[205] Ibid. James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 45, 8 (September 1990): 15.
[206] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 46, 12 (November/December 1991): 15.

sovereignty of God. These Baptist "saints" such as Thomas Helwys, Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, and John Leland all displayed a deep commitment to soul freedom.[207] Roger Williams referred to a "haven for the cause of conscience" to ensure a healthy distance between the institutions of religion and government.[208] In "The Rights of Conscience Inalienable" (1791), moreover, John Leland wrote, "Let every man speak freely without fear, maintain principles that he believes, worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God or twenty Gods; and let government protect him in doing so."[209]

Dunn declared that Roger Williams, Walter Rauschenbusch and Martin Luther King, Jr. "perhaps more than any other American religious leaders have been used of God to change history by focusing on freedom." These three Baptist preachers "completely sold out to a faith voluntary and obedient, gave this country the world's first experiment in total religious liberty (Williams in Rhode Island), the theological base for a social and economic revolution (Rauschenbush and the social gospel), and the nation's change of heart about racial justice (King and the civil rights movement).[210] To summarize the essence of the Baptist identity, Dunn quoted fellow Texas Baptist and leading Baptist pulpiteer of the Twentieth century, G.W. Truett, who hailed the competency of the soul as "the keystone truth of all Baptists." Out of this cardinal bedrock principle, all of our Baptist principles emerge.[211]

Baptist Distinctives. Dunn loved to articulate key Baptist distinctives. His understanding of historic Baptist distinctives led him to question whether fundamentalist Baptists

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[207] James M. Dunn, "Church and State in Contemporary United States: A Wall of Separation?," *Baptist History & Heritage*, 33 (Winter 1998): 31-42.
[208] Dunn, A Wall of Separation?, *Baptist History and Heritage*, 31-42.
[209] Ibid.
[210] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 39, 3 (March 1984): 15.
[211] Dunn, *Report*, (April 1988), 15.

were genuinely Baptist. At minimum, these leaders had distorted and endangered the Baptist witness. While noting that a belief in the separation of church and state did not make a person a Baptist, he stressed that "it is hard to believe that one could be a Baptist and not cling tenaciously to that baptistic doctrine." He questioned, "how else do we protect and defend those seminal beliefs in freedom of conscience, the priesthood of all believers, the right of private interpretation of Scripture, real religious liberty for all believers, as well as those who refuse to believe, a free church in a free state?" Dunn believed that without the protections of a separation of church and state, the integrity of authentic evangelism and an unhindered mission to share the gospel with the world could not be insured.[212]

Oxymoron: Baptist Creedalism. Dunn adamantly opposed creedalism because of its threat to soul freedom and religious liberty. He noted that creeds were inappropriate prescriptions for what you must believe while confessions were voluntary descriptions of what a person does believe.[213] Dunn did not believe that long confessional statements were helpful because they often functioned as creeds. The only confession that Christians needed, Dunn maintained, was the early Christian affirmation that Jesus Christ is Lord.[214] Baptists throughout their heritage, Dunn exclaimed, relied on the authority of the Bible and the right of each person to interpret it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, creeds hindered free access to Scripture and coerced believers into an

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[212] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 42, 5 (May 1987): 15. Dunn, *Report*, (November/December 1991), 15. Dunn also said, "Baptists who are Baptists still believe in the separation of church and state." See James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 41, 1 (January 1986): 15. See also James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 40, 4 (April 1985): 15.

[213] James Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 39, 3 (March 1984): 15. Dunn, *Soul Freedom*, 83-84.

[214] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 49, 4 (April 19, 1994): 3.

artificial conformity of belief. Since Baptists lack catechistic tests for believers, Dunn argued that "repentance and faith, a personal experience of God's grace – not intellectual assent to arguments – saves." Creeds do not save; an individual's voluntary faith in God's grace does. Dunn believed that creedalism led to legalism and in Galatians 5:12, he indignantly noted, Paul suggested radical surgery for the legalist who could not live without a rulebook religion.[215]

According to Dunn, the penchant for creeds increased as America became more pluralistic. Rather than impose creedal statements as his Baptist opponents were advocating, Dunn said the biblical response to pluralism was to be faithful to one's identity and values while living with and respecting people who hold other views. "The complexities of our pluralistic society demand a greater dependence upon the Bible, a deeper reliance upon faith and more fervent prayer than simpler times may have called for."[216]

Throughout his career, Dunn asserted that dissent, not creedalism, was basic to the Baptist witness. Dissent was integral to soul freedom; dissent on the basis of individual conscience was an expression of "loyalty to the absolute authority of Jesus Christ." In 1987, while still battling creedal fundamentalists, Dunn declared,

> The humble acknowledgement that the competency of the individual *before God* leaves much room for human error. One may be so "bulldogmatic" that freedom is denied to self and others. However sound in doctrine, if one absolutizes theology then it becomes Lord and violates the Lordship of Jesus Christ. A genuine Baptist

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[215] Ibid.

[216] "Baptists face challenge, Dunn tells ABC board," *Report from the Capital*, 50, 11 (November 28, 1995): 2.

> dissenter expects others to be just as free. Baptists are dissenters, so far. Thank heavens![217]

Concluding Thoughts

Prominent television journalist Bill Moyers commented about James Dunn, "Who would have thought that one of the most effective advocates of religious freedom in our time would grow up on the east side of a Texas cowtown, sound like a horse-trader, and dress like a trail-driver?"[218] Indeed, James Dunn is one of the most colorful figures in recent Baptist history. He spoke about important theological issues with down-home language in a way that any person could understand "in their innards."[219] At the same time, persons opposed to his viewpoint on church-state relations felt like his rhetoric was unnecessarily "bombastic"[220] and his personality, unfortunately, too confrontational. Did James Dunn's rhetoric hinder him in the defense of religious liberty in the Southern Baptist conflict? Perhaps. However, his language not only reflected who he was, but was also necessary to fight a vicious threat against a precious Baptist distinctive. He did not remain silent or capitulate when conscience was at stake, but he was stubbornly courageous. In 2000, upon receiving an award for his contributions to Baptist life, Dunn was still firing away:

> I'll be jiggered if a batch of neo-pharisaical, power-mad politicians, frazzling fundamentalists, trapped in a truncated theology were going to redefine religious liberty. Those limited lights were not about to destroy the witness of J. M. Dawson, take over the Baptist Joint

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[217] James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 42, 2 (February 1987): 15.
[218] Bill Moyer in J. Brent Walker, ed., *James Dunn: Champion for Religious Liberty*, xiii.
[219] James Dunn, "Baptist Stubborn Award," *The Whitsitt Journal*, 7 (Fall 2000): 4.
[220] Pressler, *A Hill On Which To Die*, 254.

Committee, and water down what it means to be a Baptist.[221]

Dunn believed deeply that the fundamentalist leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention was implementing the political agenda of the Religious Right. Their accomodationist perspective on church-state issues and their desire for favoritism from the government led them into a civil religion and a distorted belief in America as a Christian nation. Dunn questioned whether the new SBC was genuinely Baptist. The Baptist heritage of a free church in a free state embodied in Baptist heroes like Roger Williams and John Leland was being undermined and discarded.

Dunn never tired of affirming soul freedom as the key distinctive of the Baptist tradition. God alone was Lord of the individual conscience. Consequently, authentic faith must be free and uncoerced. Religious liberty in the political realm was rooted in the sacred regard for the individual. Dunn's focus on soul freedom led him to boldly assert, "Ain't nobody but Jesus gonna tell me what to believe."[222] Southern Baptist leaders with their rigid emphasis on the authority of the pastor and conformity to a creed were threatened by Dunn's declaration of freedom.[223] They believed he and others like him advocated a

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[221] In 2000, Dunn received the annual Courage Award, renamed for him the Baptist Stubborn Award, from the William H. Whitsitt Baptist Historical Society. See James Dunn, "Baptist Stubborn Award," 1.

[222] James M. Dunn, *Soul Freedom*, 82. Dunn often gave his "creed" this way: "Ain't nobody going to tell me what to believe." See James M. Dunn, "Reflections," *Report from the Capital*, 49, 4 (April 19, 1994): 3. Oliver Thomas, one of Dunn's colleagues at the BJC, noted that Dunn summed up three centuries of Baptist theology with "Ain't nobody gonna tell me what to believe!" See Oliver Thomas, "A Chihuahua Who Thinks He's a German Shepherd," *James Dunn: Champion for Religious Liberty*, 60.

[223] A resolution was passed at the annual meeting of the SBC in June 1988 that said the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer "can be used to justify the undermining of pastoral authority in the local church" and "has been used to justify wrongly the attitude that a Christian may believe whatever he so chooses and still be considered a loyal Southern Baptist." That November

lone-ranger Christianity which allowed a person to believe anything he or she wanted to believe. Dunn, however, always rooted soul freedom in the authority of the Scripture. Each individual believer was competent to interpret the Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and each individual believer was expected to participate in the life of the local church. Dunn, himself, has frequently preached in local churches.

In the context of the Southern Baptist controversy, Dunn's sole reliance upon Jesus as witnessed and experienced in the Scriptures was the response of a devout gadfly to the specter of the conformity of fundamentalist control. Consequently, Dunn never ceased fighting for freedom. Persons who disliked his vision of church-state were often offended; persons who supported his traditional vision appreciated his stubbornness. Whatever the case, most people probably agreed with a Texas oil executive who declared, "I'd rather have been wrestling with the angel than to see James Dunn walk in the door of my office."[224] Indeed, eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

Texas Baptists countered the SBC with a resolution that affirmed the priesthood of the believer. The ideas of the priesthood of the believer and soul freedom were interchangeable for Southern Baptists. See H. Leon McBeth, *A Sourcebook for Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 522.

[224] Quoted in *The Whitsitt Journal*, 6 (Spring 2000), 4.