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by Honoring, Preserving and Affirming a Treasured
and Threatened Heritage.

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Baptist Pavement, Baptist Potholes, and a P.S. Concerning Baptist Freedom

on the occasion of receiving the Whitsitt Baptist
Courage Award in Houston, TX on July 2, 2009

By Walter B. Shurden
Minister-at-Large
of Mercer University



I became a Christian when I was eighteen years old and a first year college student. My church background was sparse indeed. Because my parents were active in the Second Baptist Church of Greenville, MS, I ended up in that local congregation as a new Christian. If my parents had been Presbyterians or Methodists or Pentecostals, I would have probably ended up there. And today I would probably be defending the Presbyterian or Methodist or Pentecostal vision of the Christian faith. But I ended up as a Baptist. I am not numbered among those Baptists who could NEVER be a member of another Christian denomination, but I am a Baptist who is very, very glad to be a Baptist.

I am both enthusiastically ecumenical, unapologetically denominational, and a committed Baptist. I gladly follow the traditional Baptist vision of Christianity. But since Claude L. Howe, Jr. introduced me to "The History of Baptists" in 1959 during my second year of seminary, I have also attempted to be

keenly aware of our denominational weaknesses. I choose to celebrate here what I call "Baptist Pavement" or "Baptist Strengths," while knowing well and trying hard to avoid some "Baptist Potholes" or "Baptist Weaknesses."¹ Let me enumerate for a few minutes what I mean by Baptist Pavement and Baptist Potholes.

Our emphasis on **personal religious experience**, so absolutely essential to vital and dynamic religion of any kind, can become, if we are not careful, *spiritual narcissism*. The faith is not all about me; God so loved the *world*. The Baptist strength? A personal and transformative experience with the Holy in life. The Baptist weakness? A tendency toward "me-ism" or spiritual narcissism. In spite of the potential pothole, I celebrate the Baptist pavement, the role of personal experience in matters of faith.²

Our emphasis on **biblical authority**, so necessary to the renewal of the church in any age, can become, if we are not careful, a *slouchy primitivism*.

We cannot jump over 2000 years of Christian history and blissfully sail into the biblical world. I learned in my first church history course in my first semester of seminary that much of what I had been taught to be Bible was not Bible at all. It had come from the accretions of Christian tradition. I also learned that much that was good in the Christian tradition came from the Catholics, the Orthodox, the Lutherans, the Methodists, the Charismatics, and hosts of others. The Baptist strength? Biblical authority! The Baptist weakness? A tendency to ignore 2,000 years of the Christian tradition. In spite of the potential pothole, I celebrate the Baptist commitment to biblical authority.

Our emphasis on **believer's baptism by immersion**, designed to lead us to a **believers' church**, is an idea critical for a spiritual community. But it can, if we are not careful, lead us to an *ugly*

See "Baptist Pavement," page 4.

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Walter B. Shurden (pictured with his wife, Kay)

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RECOLLECTIONS *of* WALTER B. SHURDEN

*By Dr. John M. Finley, Senior Minister
First Baptist Church, Savannah, Georgia*

Others will remember Walter B. Shurden's contributions to the larger denominational family as a reflection of his life as a Baptist pastor, Church historian, and denominational statesman. Yet, what I most cherish are the memories of him as a Christian educator and classroom teacher.

From 1979-1982, I served as Buddy's teaching fellow at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and in the course of those four years I witnessed his influence upon literally hundreds of young seminarians. There was no more popular professor on campus and the students flocked to his classes. I can see him still, standing behind the lectern, or better yet, sitting on the edge of the desk, expounding on various aspects of Church history. Of course, Shurden was never quite content to leave his students with a set of lecture notes on the Reformation; instead, he wanted students to think about what kept Martin Luther up late at night, and by extension, what kept all of them and their church members up past midnight. That to say, Buddy's lectures always focused on the real stuff of the human drama which often formed the history of the Church.

The early-1980's were also the days of the emerging "conservative resurgence" in Southern Baptist life, and

consequently, students were very interested in the differing views of what it meant to be a Baptist. Buddy would later leave his mark as one of the pre-eminent expositors of the Baptist identity through his many books and articles. Yet, almost all of the ideas he published in subsequent years had been honed in the classroom before his many students.

Across all of these years, Buddy Shurden has taught his students to be proud of their Baptist heritage, but also to watch out for its blind spots. He taught us all to be grounded in our particular family of the larger Christian Church, but also to be world Baptists and world Christians. I still remember the day in October, 1981, when a student came running into the room and shocked the class with the news that President Anwar Sadat had been assassinated in Egypt. Buddy nearly wept that day, and all the rest of us got the message that it was possible for a Baptist from Greenwood, Mississippi to have a heart that was breaking for the world.

Congratulations, Buddy, on this signal honor which is being bestowed upon you by the members of the Whitsitt Baptist Heritage Society. And best wishes from a generation of students who remain much in your debt.

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Baptist Pavement

Continued from page 1

tribalism. We are not the only ones God has. I don't know of any Baptist at this General Assembly who believes that we are. And I don't know of any Baptist anywhere who believes that the concept of a regenerate church has guaranteed Baptists a regenerate church. We know better. Likewise, simply because a non-Baptist group does not espouse the idea of a regenerate church does not mean that his or her church will not be composed of devout Christians. We know better than that, and we would do well, therefore, to reexamine, as our friend John Tyler has urged us, our view of baptism by immersion as a litmus test for membership in our churches.³ The Baptist strength? The sincere reach for a genuinely converted and obedient spiritual community. The Baptist weakness? The tendency toward an arrogant tribalism. In spite of the potential pothole, I gladly stand on the Baptist pavement of the goal and purpose in the practice of believer's baptism by immersion.

Our emphasis on **local church autonomy**, so absolutely critical for a local body of believers desiring to live in obedience under Christ alone, can, if we are not careful, lead to a *tragic isolationism*. Except for a few extremists in our history, local church self-rule never meant for Baptists a refusal to acknowledge believers in other communities as sincere Christians, nor did it mean that Baptists were to remain aloof from other Baptists or other Christians. The Baptist strength? A local group of believers seeking to live under the authority of the Living Christ as expressed in the Bible. The weakness? A tendency toward isolationism and self-righteousness. In spite of the potential pothole, I feel ecclesiological secure on the Baptist pavement, the idea of the independence of local churches. And by the way, one may see today, and throughout Christian history, churches

of a hierarchical nature retreating to forms of congregationalism when threatened by their parent bodies!

Our emphasis on **freedom of conscience**, so indispensable for the whole human race, can, if we are not careful, morph into a kind of *theological relativism*. Freedom of conscience, for Baptists, never meant that one idea is as good as another; rather it has meant for Baptists that every idea has

the right of access to the marketplace of debate. The Baptist strength? An unfettered conscience! The Baptist weakness? It can lead to the false conclusion that one idea is as good as another. In spite of the potential pothole, I am a cheerleader for the Baptist conviction of freedom of conscience.

Our emphasis on **the separation of church and state**, so helpful for the health of both religion and government, can, if we are not careful, wiggle into a *quack quietism* that sees no role for religious influence on the broader public life. The Baptist strength? Free religion in a free state! The Baptist weakness? The temptation to interpret "separation" in a way that Baptists never meant and that barbers away our religious voice in the public square. In spite of the potential pothole, I celebrate and advocate the Baptist stand on separation of religion and government.

Our emphasis on the **priesthood of all believers**, so fundamental and basic to the revitalization of the Christian laity and to the mission of the church, can, if we are not careful, lead to a *sloppy egalitarianism*. We need leaders, not simply facilitators. Those of us in CBF, maybe more than other Baptists, need to remember that every Christian does not have the gift of leadership. The Baptist strength? A vital laity! The Baptist weakness? A potentially enervated clergy. In spite of the potential pothole, I celebrate the Baptist idea of believers' priesthood.

Our emphasis on **God's grace**, so critical for our salvation, can, if we are not careful, undercut the role of discipleship and the need for human effort. Martin Luther notwithstanding, the book of James is still gratefully in the New Testament canon. And so is the Sermon on the Mount. God's work is not God's alone. The Baptist strength? An unequivocal stress on God's grace! The Baptist weakness? A tendency to minimize human effort. In spite of the potential pothole, I celebrate the Baptist emphasis on God's grace.

Our emphasis on **world missions**, so central to the propagation of the gospel and of the mission of the church, can, if we are not careful, instill a truncated sense of evangelism. Human beings need social justice as well as personal forgiveness. The Baptist strength? Telling the old, old story in a way that causes the individual soul to seek a haven of rest! The Baptist weakness? Telling the old, old story without healing/helping/empowering/restructuring. In spite of the potential weakness, I still celebrate William Carey and Adoniram Judson and the Baptist stress on world missions.

Certainly more could be said about Baptist pavement, solid Baptist convictions, and Baptist potholes, potential Baptist weaknesses, but I have said enough to make my point. I need only repeat: Baptists have potential potholes that we must not forget and that we must avoid. But we also have some

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really thick and solid convictions beneath our feet, some solid pavement that we need constantly to fortify and to give thanks for.

For good reason, I have become identified over the last several decades with the “Freedom” side of the Baptist tradition, though I am grateful that some have noticed that I also stressed responsibility.⁴ I remain, as of this moment, unrepentant, unapologetic, and somewhat intractable about my emphasis on freedom. I am aware, of course, that there is an “authority” side to the freedom argument, but I have been and remain convinced that the freedom side of the argument is more Baptist, more biblical, and more humane than the “authority” point of view. At the center of my being there is something about being Baptist, as I understand it, that is both freeing and fulfilling. What is that?

It is the principle of **voluntarism**. The principle of **freedom**. The principle of human choice. Richard Rohr, the Franciscan priest who directs the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, is correct I think when he says that “the primal freedom is the freedom to be the self, the freedom to live in the truth despite all circumstances.”⁵ And I think that the highest form of freedom and the perfect act of freedom is the freedom to give myself away to God and God’s Kingdom as I understand that reality.

I know, as all moderate Baptists know, that there is such a thing as “sorry freedom.” Barack Obama reminded us of it in his autobiography.⁶ And no one needs to lecture us that genuine freedom is the freedom to do as you ought, not simply the freedom to do as you wish.⁷ But the pothole of “sorry freedom” should never keep us from being trumpeters for genuine freedom.”

As I interpret the fundamentalist-moderate controversy within the SBC, it was the “freedom” issue which was at stake. The Bible was not at stake. Fisher Humphreys is certainly correct when he says that both fundamentalists and moderates came out of the denominational inferno with the Bible safely tucked under their arms,⁸ though the fundamentalists were also waving a fiery new edition of *The Baptist Faith and Message*. And it must be said again and again that we were not simply arguing over the amount of desk overhang or who would have the office with the corner windows. It grieves me to this day that sincere and honest people do not recognize that something far more valuable than institutions was at stake. For my generation of moderate Baptists to forget that freedom was the issue would be a hideous betrayal. For the generations that come after my generation to forget that freedom was the issue will be an

enormous tragedy for them and for the Baptist vision itself.

But what I really want to say today more than anything else is that the “freedom” issue is so, So, SO much more than an umbrella for Baptist distinctives, which is the way that I have used it. And maybe this is what my generation needs to learn and the younger generation, if they will fix on it, can wisely teach us. It is doubtless something that African American Baptists can teach us white Baptists, if we can only listen. They can teach us that the issues of “freedom” play against the backdrop of bigger and more painful issues than the ones moderate Baptists have known.

Years ago when I was a yearling professor at Carson-Newman College, I became involved as a faculty sponsor of Alpha Chi, an academic honor society. On one occasion I went to Jackson State College, a predominantly African American college in Jackson, Mississippi, to help establish an Alpha Chi chapter. On the night of the inaugural meeting the audience sang James Weldon Johnson’s famous

**Freedom of conscience is, I believe,
God’s will for creation. Freedom
is far, far more than a Baptist or
Christian or American thing.**

hymn, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, commonly known as the Negro National Anthem. I was embarrassed. I did not know the words. More importantly, I did not know the music. I, and every other white Baptist who cherishes freedom, have a responsibility to learn the words and the music, and we will need to learn to sing that glorious song with as much sway and celebration as do African American Baptists. And both of us, white and black Baptists, will have to learn freedom songs of all the people of color of the world; indeed, we will have to learn the freedom songs with ALL people of the world, whatever their color, whatever their faith, whatever their native land.

Freedom of conscience is, I believe, God’s will for creation. Freedom is far, far more than a Baptist or Christian or American thing. Could we bring to the witness stand Neda of Iran, the beautiful young lady who was shot like a deer on the streets of Tehran because she protested for the freedom for her vote to count? And what about liberation and freedom for the person who pulled the trigger that slaughtered her in front of the entire world? That gunman needs to be set free as much, maybe more, than Neda.

I repeat: freedom is so, So, SO much bigger than Baptist fights.

The freedom to eat and not to starve.

The freedom to drink pure water.

The freedom to earn a respectable wage.

The freedom to get my child health for her sickness.

The freedom to be addressed with dignity.

See “Baptist Pavement,” page 6.

Baptist Pavement

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Some of you have heard me say this before, but it is important to me and so I need to say it again: being a Christian means taking seriously what Jesus of Nazareth took seriously. Being a Christian is not about signing a creed. That's easy church. It's not about identification with institutions. That too easily becomes idolatrous church. And it is not about denominational distinctives. That may sidetrack us from Christ's church.

What did Jesus take seriously? What Jesus took seriously was not believer's baptism by immersion, congregational church government, the priesthood of all believers, or the symbolic view of the ordinances. I hope you know me well enough to know that I do not intend in any way to trivialize those issues, only to say that those issues contain the seeds of freedom within our Baptist tradition that blossom into much larger issues in our world.

Jesus, so it appears to me, took freedom very seriously. He took seriously the freedom to be included rather than excluded, the freedom to be appreciated rather than exploited, the freedom to share rather than to hoard, the freedom to live on less so that others could live on more, the freedom to love rather than hate, and the freedom to anchor your life in and under God's reign.

It is much easier to be a Baptist than it is to take Jesus seriously.

I, and maybe some of you, have walked much closer to the Baptist ideals than to the Jesus ideals. I never, Never, NEVER want moderate Baptists to forget or to minimize the Baptist ideals of freedom. I want very, Very, VERY much for moderate Baptists to embrace the Jesus ideals of freedom. Not only our Baptist institutions but our Baptist souls depend on it.

(Endnotes)

¹ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Life and Faith of the Baptists* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1946) 139-151. Robinson did a similar presentation on the strength and weaknesses of the Baptists in his little book. Robinson's *Appendix 1* is also related to Baptist strengths and weaknesses.

² The best exposition that I know of concerning the role of personal experience in the life of Baptists is the brilliant little booklet by William E. Hull, *The Meaning of the Baptist Experience* (Atlanta: Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2008). While he did not have in mind the idea of personal experience in religion, William Sloane Coffin made something of the Baptist point on individual faith when he said, "So all over the world, people are asserting the particular over and against the universal. It's something we simply have to accept, for people cannot be asked to serve a greater whole until they have been acknowledged as individually significant."

The Baptist emphasis on personal and individual faith never minimized the "greater whole" of the church. See his *The Heart is a Little to the Left* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999) 70.

³ John R. Tyler, *Baptism: We've Got It right . . . and Wrong* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2003). John Tyler, one of our most biblically and theologically literate lay persons, has written a challenging book on this issue that deserves study by every local congregation of Baptists.

⁴ Fisher Humphreys, *The Way We Were* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2002, revised edition) 116.

⁵ Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999) 108.

⁶ Barack Obama, *Dreams From My Father* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995) 134.

⁷ William Sloane Coffin, *The Heart is a Little to the Left*, 70. No white minister in the United States showed more courage in the face of unjust authority in the latter part of the twentieth century than did Coffin. Yet no person knew better that "small freedom" sought freedom for itself while "big freedom" sought freedom to serve the larger good.

⁸ Fisher Humphreys, *The Way We Were*, 112. **W**

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TOMMY DOUGLAS: BAPTIST CHAMPION OF FREEDOM

By Bruce Gourley



From John Smyth, Thomas Helwys and Roger Williams to Martin Luther King, Jr., the Baptist legacy of freedom is a path well known to many within and without the Baptist community. The early generations of Baptists crafted a central narrative that fleshed out the scope and breadth of individual liberty that served as the heartbeat of their faith, a freedom rooted in the belief that the human soul, as a creation of God, is inviolable by creeds, priests, and institutions.

In England John Smyth proclaimed that scriptural baptism was reserved for consenting believers (hence infant baptism was invalid) and Christian community was comprised of persons of voluntary faith (rather than institutional decree), while Thomas Helwys died in prison arguing that the king had no authority over the conscience and insisting upon religious liberty for all and separation of church and state. In America, Roger Williams' commitment to individual liberty began with the conscience and extended into the realm of human personhood. Devoted to the causes of religious liberty and separation of church and state, Williams' insistence upon freedom found further expression in democratic governance and basic human rights. Native Americans, Williams' argued, were persons created by God and thus endowed with individual liberties to be honored by the settlers. For Williams, human rights in respect to Native Americans took the form of honest and fair treatment in matters of trade and compacts, as well as freedom from forced conversion to Christianity.¹

Over the next three centuries, Baptists maintained a firm commitment to the narrative of freedom of conscience as expressed in voluntary faith, religious liberty, and separation of church and state. The broader concept of individual liberties, however, frequently eluded the Baptist witness within the United States. While often welcoming Native Americans and African Americans into their churches and proclaiming their spiritual equality, many Baptists did not incorporate their heritage of liberty beyond spiritual matters and into the realm of liberties inherent with personhood.

In America, the task of fleshing out Roger Williams' championing of basic human rights fell to African American Baptists of the 1950s and 1960s. A minority not allowed the same freedoms as majority white Americans, African Americans from colonial days to the mid-twentieth century lived in a world that prohibited their full participation in society and government, and thus denied their full humanity.

Black Baptist minister and activist Martin Luther King, Jr. became the central figure in a peaceful but forceful crusade to secure the same freedoms for African Americans as those enjoyed by white Americans.²

The Baptist narrative of freedom, of course, did not end with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Early twenty-first century Baptists in much of the world still suffer for their faith, while humanity at large is yet plagued with widespread persecution and suffering along fault lines that include race, ethnicity, economic status, and gender. Meanwhile, within the modern Baptist family, freedom is too often constrained by the dividing walls of race, gender, and creed. Furthermore, some contemporary Baptists, including theological fundamentalists and Bapto-Catholics, systematically deny the Baptist heritage of freedom of conscience by re-subverting individual faith to the authority of creeds, priests, and institutions. In so doing, however, fundamentalists and Bapto-Catholics largely gloss over four centuries of Baptist witness in order to grasp an ecclesial model in which appointed theological guardians dispense faith and enforce adherence.³

Yet despite internal shortcomings of and even recent resistance (from some quarters) to the Baptist freedom commitment, the concept of voluntary, uncoerced faith and an evolving, larger construct of basic human rights advocacy has continuously resided within the marrow of Baptists since the seventeenth century.

Within a North American context, one particular Canadian Baptist little-known to Americans played a pivotal role in the twentieth century freedom march and crafted a legacy that resonates in the twenty-first century. In 1986 the man who would later be voted as the "Greatest Canadian of All Time" died.⁴ By American standards, Thomas Clement "Tommy" Douglas (born 1904) remains an unknown entity, although his legacy is spoken of with almost universal admiration in his native land.

A Baptist pastor-turned politician, Douglas became the Premier of Saskatchewan in 1944, devoting his political career to the advancement of basic human rights. In 1947, Douglas led his province to pass the Saskatchewan Bill of

See "Tommy Douglas," page 8.

Tommy Douglas

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Rights, the first general law prohibiting discrimination in Canada. The bill was divided into two main categories, “fundamental freedoms” and “equality rights.” The former protected freedom of conscience, opinion and religion; freedom of expression; peaceable assembly and association; and protected against arbitrary arrest and detention. The latter section prohibited discrimination in employment, occupations and business, property, accommodation and services, and professional associations and unions. The Saskatchewan Bill of Rights preceded the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and served as a forerunner of the Canadian Bill of Human Rights.

Yet Douglas’ contribution to liberty and human rights is only part of his remarkable story. For Douglas, human rights included equal access to basic health care services. Beginning during the years of the Great Depression, he worked incessantly to provide universal health coverage first in Saskatchewan and then throughout Canada. Prior to Douglas, health care in Canada was riddled with inequities, with only the wealthy having full access to medical treatment. In 1947 Douglas led the Saskatchewan to provide universal hospital coverage, and in 1962 universal medical coverage, both provided for by taxation. In 1968, the entire nation followed suit. Forty years later, at a time when the United States struggled with the shortcomings of rationed free market health care, 91 percent of Canadians polled viewed their health care system as preferable to that of America.⁵

What led a Baptist pastor of the early twentieth century to pursue a career in politics and a lifetime devoted to liberty and human rights? Several Douglas biographies have examined Douglas’s life and career, all of which present various angles to the primary theme outlined by Doris French Shackleton in her 1975 volume, *Tommy Douglas*. Douglas, Shackleton maintains, was a Baptist preacher whose love and concern for humanity led him to champion human liberty and rights through the socialist party.⁶

Some details of Douglas’ Baptist journey as broadly sketched by his biographers bear brief mention. The Scottish-born Douglas moved to Canada at the age of six, during which time he almost lost his leg to a disease because his family could not pay for treatment. Only by the good graces of a doctor, who offered his medical services for free, was Douglas’ leg saved. As a teenager, Douglas’ efforts to learn a trade clashed with his calling to ministry. The ministerial calling winning out, Douglas enrolled at Baptists’ Brandon College in 1924 at the age of nineteen. At college he was introduced to the Social Gospel, and took the theology of the movement to heart as he pastored rural churches in Canada and then earned a Masters degree in Sociology from McMasters University

and worked on a Ph.D. in Sociology (never completed) at the University of Chicago. Working among Depression-era hobo camps as a social activist, Douglas became discouraged by the inaction of the Socialist Party. Determined to put his Baptist Social Gospel convictions into action, Douglas turned to politics, and was elected to the Canadian House of Commons in 1935.⁷

Demonstrating his political abilities, Douglas soon became the leader of the Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) of Saskatchewan, and in 1944 led the party to legislative triumph under the slogan of “Humanity First.” Premier Douglas then formed the first democratic socialist government in North America and enacted the provincial Bill of Rights that reflected his Baptist freedom heritage. Fiscally responsible, Douglas’ CCF paid off government debt inherited from the Liberal party and generated a surplus, allowing him to fully pursue his commitment to the Social Gospel in the form of universal Medicare, despite charges of communism from some conservative quarters. Introducing Medicare legislation in 1961, Douglas retired from the CCF (but not from politics) and his successor oversaw the enactment of Douglas’ dream the following year. Thus, Tommy Douglas is considered the father of Medicare.⁸

Douglas’ Baptist legacy, in short, echoed Roger Williams’ seventeenth-century advocacy of individual liberty predicated upon humans as God’s special creation and expressed in freedom of conscience and personhood. While Walter Rauschenbusch in America of the twentieth century provided a systematic theological foundation for inherent human rights via the Social Gospel, Tommy Douglas put Rauschenbusch’s principles into widespread action. As America at large struggled with human inequalities inherent in a racist culture, Tommy Douglas led ethnically-diverse Canadians to include basic health care as a human right. Long before the so-called “pro-life” movement that fixated on the “rights” of the unborn while largely ignoring the plight of the poor, oppressed, and dying, Tommy Douglas championed a holistic pro-life philosophy and implemented programs to ensure quality of life for all Canadian citizens.

In short, Tommy Douglas’ accomplishments, an expression of his Baptist convictions, indicate that the “Greatest Canadian of All Time” should also be considered an important figure in the four-century narrative of the Baptist freedom march on behalf of individual persons everywhere.

(Endnotes)

¹ See Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1999).

² See John A. Kirk, *Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights*

Movement: Controversies and Debates (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillian, 2007) for a review of scholarly analysis of Martin Luther King Jr.'s contribution to the Civil Rights movement.

³ Charles Bellinger of Wabash College maintains a comprehensive Bibliography of Fundamentalism, available online at <http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/article2.aspx?id=10506> (accessed October 8, 2009). A preference for doctrinal purity over personal liberties is a theme common throughout all religious expressions of fundamentalism, and is well-documented in Martin E. Marty and A. Scott Appleby's *Fundamentalism Project*, contained in five extensive volumes (see <http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Complete/Series/FP.html> online; accessed October 8, 2009). "Bapto-Catholics" trace their roots to the 1997 document, "Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America," available online at <http://www.divinity.duke.edu/docs/faculty/freeman/ReenvisioningBaptistIdentity.pdf> (accessed October 8, 2009). Historian Walter B. Shurden offers a counter-response to the anti-individual liberty theme of the Manifesto, "The Baptist Identity and the Baptist Manifesto," available online at <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/shurden/Baptist%20Manifesto.htm> (accessed October 8, 2009). A recent dissertation, Cameron H. Jorgenson's *Bapto-Catholicism: Recovering Tradition and Reconsidering the Baptist Identity* (Baylor University, 2008; online at https://beardocs.baylor.edu/bitstream/2104/5239/1/Cameron_Jorgenson_PhD.pdf, accessed October 8, 2009) provides a summary of the movement thus far from a friendly perspective.

⁴ See "Tommy Douglas: The Greatest of Them All," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, undated; available online at <http://www.cbc.ca/greatest/> (accessed October 6, 2009).

⁵ For a brief survey of Douglas' contributions to Canadian health care, see Shelley McKellar, "Canadian Medicine: Doctors and Discoveries" (Center for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University, 2001), online at http://www.mta.ca/about_canada/study_guide/doctors/delivery.html (accessed October 6, 2009). For more information regarding Canadian's preference for their health care system, see http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20080629/poll_us_canada_080629/20080629?hub=Politics (accessed October 6, 2009).

⁶ See Doris French Shackleton, *Tommy Douglas* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1975). The remaining biographies focused on Douglas personally are: Thomas H. and Ian McLeod,

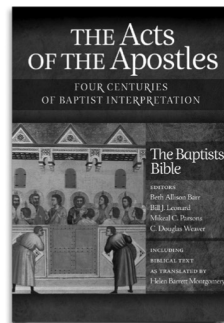
Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1987); **Dave Margoshes**, *Tommy Douglas: Building the New Society* (Montreal: XYZ Pub., 1999); Walter Stewart, *The Life and Political Times of Tommy Douglas* (Toronto: McArthur, 2003). In addition, Thomas Clement Douglas in *The Making of a Socialist: The Recollections of T. C. Douglas* (ed. By Lewis H. Thomas. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1982), is a compilation of 1958 transcribed interviews with Douglas.

⁷ Shackleton, 18-51; Margoshes, 32-63.

⁸ See "Tommy Douglas, Canada's Father of Medicare," Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, July 22, 1962; available online at http://archives.cbc.ca/health/health_care_system/topics/90/ (accessed October 6, 2009). **W**

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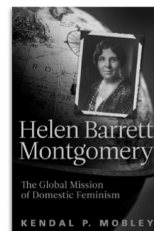
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BELIEVERS' CHURCH

By Doug Weaver



Most Baptists will tell you that they do not have a recognizable founder like Martin Luther or John Calvin or John Wesley. The earliest Baptist church was formed 400 years ago in 1609 because the first Baptists believed that a fresh start was necessary. They said that no human founder of a church had proved faithful. No succession from a church founder had produced a pure body of Christ. All so-called Christian churches were corrupted because they did not fully follow the model for a true church outlined in the New Testament. The Puritans had claimed that they were purifying the Church of England and completing the Reformation, but they had failed, primarily in their retention of infant baptism. Consequently, when Englishman John Smyth organized the first Baptist church in Amsterdam, Holland, the search for a pure church, a true church that embodied the New Testament blueprint, was the underlying motive for leaving Puritan Separatism. Smyth wanted to establish *the* New Testament church and he believed that believer's baptism was the link to the genuine New Testament believers' church model.

Let's stop there and let me tell you the story of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys with a bit more detail. Draw on your Baptist Identity class for a moment. The Christian journey of John Smyth revealed a constant and restless search for the New Testament church. He was a child of the Protestant Reformation. He grew up in the Church of England and was ordained as an Anglican minister in 1594. He soon became a Puritan within the Anglican Church hoping to purify the church from its Catholic excesses. In 1606 he became a Separatist Puritan, the most radical branch of Puritans who decided that the Anglican Church couldn't be reformed so the creation of independent nonconforming churches was necessary. Many Separatists, in an environment of harassment and persecution from King James, fled to Holland.

Like other Separatist pastors, Smyth affirmed the idea of the "gathered church," a body of professing believers which was bound together in a voluntary covenant of faith and obedience. Unlike some Separatists, this "gathered church" followed congregational polity. Governing authority belonged to the members of the congregation because they were participants in the covenant. The test of a regenerate church membership was a visible faith. Smyth (and other Separatists) wanted a regenerate church to model itself after the New Testament church.

However, Smyth soon decided that his church did not yet model a New Testament congregation. The issue was infant baptism. Traditionally, Separatists had discussed

the validity of baptism in the so-called "false" Church of England, but had not abandoned their infant baptism, in part, because they did not want be associated with the "rebaptism" of the Anabaptists, the most maligned group of the Reformation. Separatists also followed the line of thinking that said children were brought into the church's covenant with God because of the faith of the parents.

Smyth's search for the true church led him to the conclusion that there was no biblical basis for infant baptism. For the church to be genuine, infants must be excluded from membership because they were incapable of expressing faith and repentance, the conditions of obedience in God's spiritual covenant with the church. Baptism of believers—those old enough to profess their faith voluntarily—was the New Testament method of constituting a church. The New Testament Church, then, was a believers' church. Smyth put it this way in a short confession of faith: "the church is a company of the faithful, baptized after confession of sin and faith, endowed with the power of Christ."

Having concluded that no genuine New Testament church existed, in 1609 Smyth disbanded his own congregation of about 40 persons, baptized himself by pouring, and then baptized his fellow believers into a new believers' church – what is acknowledged as the first Baptist church in history. Smyth, according to some critics, was now John the Se-Baptist!

The Baptist story started with John Smyth, but it quickly shifted to Thomas Helwys. He was a wealthy layperson in Smyth's congregation who most likely funded the group's journey from England to Amsterdam. Not long as this first Baptist church had formed, Helwys led a split of ten persons from Smyth's congregation after Smyth pushed the larger congregation to affiliate with the Mennonites. Smyth had decided that baptizing himself was a mistake after learning more about the Mennonites. They appeared to be a true "believers' church" formed on the basis of believer's baptism. Smyth thus opted for the principle of "succession," that is, if a genuine believers' church existed, then baptism should be received from it. Thomas Helwys strongly opposed the necessity of succession to validate the existence of a genuine church—he pointed to the example of the un-baptized John the Baptist who preached the necessity of New Testament believer's baptism for repentance. According to Helwys, Smyth's opting for ministerial succession was a reversion to Jewish ceremonialism. Succession was an Old Testament practice not binding upon New Testament believers. Helwys

insisted that the creation of a New Testament church was dependent only upon faithfulness to biblical instructions.

In 1612, Helwys and his small group returned to England and established the first Baptist church on English soil at Spitalfield outside London. In a confessional statement, Helwys wrote in words similar to Smyth, that the “church of Christ is a company of the faithful people separated from the world by the Word and Spirit of God being knitted unto the Lord and one unto another by Baptism upon their confession of the faith.” In England, the young congregation emphasized many features that have for four centuries continued to describe a believers’ church identity for most Baptists.

1. The church must be faithful to the Scriptures and the Spirit of God.
2. A church should be a believers’ church which necessarily excluded infants from membership
3. Membership in a Believers’ church was based on personal confession of faith and believer’s baptism. Like Smyth, Helwys wrote that members should be received “by baptism upon the confession of faith and sins” because this was the “primitive institution” of the New Testament church.
4. The believers’ church is characterized by the independence of each local church from other religious figures or bodies. Helwys said it this way: because “each church has Christ” “no church ought to challenge any prerogative over any other.”
5. The believers’ church has congregational church governance. Believers are knitted to God and to each other as a company of the faithful and thus called to be separate from worldly ways.
6. While the believers’ church is a community of believers’ knitted together, at the same time it must also have religious liberty for all persons. Each person must be able to read the Bible and is free to follow God according to the dictates of his or her conscience under the Lordship of Christ.

No doubt that these earliest Baptists believe that they embodied the one faith and one baptism of Ephesians 4.

In the decades and centuries after Smyth and Helwys, Baptists continued to emphasize these elements of a believers’ church. They always tried to root their ecclesiology in the Scripture. So, Baptists turned to Acts 2:42ff to emphasize that baptism came after confession of sin. They also noted that the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 was baptized after he believed. Thus, they confidently preached that infants were not a part of the church. Infants couldn’t freely believe.

Baptists also rooted their congregationalism and their local church independence in the Scriptures. Congregational polity was tied to I Peter 3’s focus on the priesthood of all

believers. If everyone was a priest, then surely they were equal and had a voice in the affairs of the church. Baptists also didn’t find any leadership hierarchy in the New Testament. They didn’t find it in the letter of Philippians when Paul addressed the letter to ministers and deacons and they didn’t find any hierarchy in the Corinthian church where spiritual gifts were flying everywhere.

Save for a little while your evaluation of whether these Baptists interpreted the New Testament in ways you find acceptable. It is easy to pick at some of the proof texts. And of course it is easy for us to pick at anyone who too confidently identifies their group with the one faith, one baptism and one Lord focus of Ephesians 4. So, try to focus for now on the fact that Baptists contended a believers’ church was characterized by freedom rooted in Scripture. Each believer had to freely confess sin and confess belief

**Believers are knitted to God
and to each other as a company
of the faithful and thus called
to be separate from worldly ways.**

in Christ, each believer had to be baptized to signify that belief and each church was free to govern its affairs as it believed God’s Word and Spirit were leading them.

This freedom to be a believers’ church – free from state control and free from ecclesiastical hierarchy—did not mean, however, that a believers’ church always believed the same thing as another believers’ church or implemented their beliefs in the same way.

Actually it might be better to talk about the Baptist distinctive of believers’ churches.

Think about these examples that all occurred in the first several decades of Baptist life in the 17th century. Most believers’ churches began insisting that believer’s baptism by immersion was the biblical method of establishing a church and it was the only proper method of baptism. They argued that baptism had to be done by immersion because they translated the biblical word *baptizo* as dipped. And the baptismal imagery of death, burial and resurrection in Romans 6 pointed to immersion. From reading Hebrews 6, some, though not all, believers’ churches insisted that the church adopt laying on of hands after baptism as a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. Some, though not all, believers’

See “Believers’ Church,” page 12.

Believers' Church

Continued from page 11

churches insisted that footwashing was a church ordinance because of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet in John 13. Some believers' churches, thought not all, insisted that singing was appropriate for believers to do as long as the words of the songs were from the Bible. But, some thought that the singing of women defied the biblical injunction for women to keep silent in the church. Some believers'

should not be surprising. For the Baptist believers' church is rooted in freedom. Think about that. It is actually a bit more in line with what you New Testament exegetes out there have already been thinking, right? You surely have been saying to yourself, well, there was no New Testament church, there were New Testament churches.

Ah, but is the freedom at the heart of Baptist believers'

[Mullins] asserted that the Church was a spiritual community of individual believers that were bonded together by a common personal experience of God's salvific grace, a common commitment to the Bible as the sole authority for religious faith and practice, and a common commitment to the Lordship of Christ.

churches, though never a majority, said that the Trinity was not in the Scriptures. Some believers' churches were Arminian; some were Calvinist; and some were mixed.

In subsequent centuries, some Baptist believers' churches began to advocate sending missionaries to foreign lands; some believers' churches said that missions was an insult to God who had also predestined certain people to heaven; some believers' churches said that mission boards were nowhere to be found in the Bible and therefore should not be considered a part of the church's work.

One of my favorite stories comes from the mid-17th century and involves the believers' church known as the Seventh Day Baptists. They believed that Christians were to worship on the Sabbath, which is our Saturday. According to these believers, where in the Bible did it say to cease following the Ten Commandment that said to honor and keep the Sabbath?

So, these Sabbath Baptists would work on Sunday, infuriating other Baptists. If they attended the Sunday service, they refused to take communion. One church leader had enough and said to the Sabbath Baptists, "Do you follow Moses or do you follow Christ?" The Sabbath Baptists were no doubt insulted. Their leader responded that the Sunday Christians were treating the Ten Commandments as "a stink in their nostrils." If you are going to be a believers' church, then go ahead and believe it all, they said.

We could go on and on with examples. The diversity of Baptist believers' churches was and is bewildering. But it

churches just too messy and chaotic? Is freedom the stink coming from Baptist nostrils? Some say so. Some say we should put a cap on the freedom by demanding a common creed that goes beyond an affirmation of biblical authority to insisting upon certain interpretations of the Bible. If you want a believers' church rather than believers' churches some insist upon a hierarchy of leaders or want an authoritative teaching office to make sure freedom isn't abused. Some say that freedom in Baptist believers' churches has far too long focused on individual freedom and soul competency and that freedom is communal but not individual. Community is in; the individual is out.

E. Y. Mullins, the influential Baptist theologian of the 20th century, acknowledged the dangers of freedom but he said freedom was at the heart of being a believers' church and thus at the heart of being a Baptist Christian. Freedom was necessary for an individual to respond directly to God's offer of grace for salvation. Conversion could not be forced or accepted by proxy. Freedom was the DNA of soul competency. Freedom was also necessary for each congregation to respond directly to God because history had shown that state sponsored religion and established clergy persecuted dissenters for failing to accept the beliefs of the ruling majority. Baptist believers' churches should use their freedom to cooperate with other Christians, but the cooperation must be rooted in freedom, not coercion or compulsion.

Mullins knew that Baptists weren't all the same; he

knew that freedom meant diversity but he thought that genuine belief impelled persons to be part of the spiritual community Scripture called the Body of Christ. He asserted that the Church was a spiritual community of individual believers that were bonded together by a common personal experience of God's salvific grace, a common commitment to the Bible as the sole authority for religious faith and practice, and a common commitment to the Lordship of Christ.

Like Baptists pioneers before him, Mullins tried to balance the potential excess of individual freedom by arguing for local church autonomy, a historic Baptist identity marker. This was his way of saying what Thomas Helwys and John Smyth said: believers are in covenant to God individually and knit together in covenant with each other. It was "individual in community." This combination is what he considered to be the example of New Testament faith.

So how does the believers' church allow for freedom but acknowledge that freedom can be abused? Each church allowed all believers to have a voice, to voice the dissent of individual conscience but then the congregation as a whole functioned as a Baptist bishop and judged whether the dissent was accepted, meaning, was it biblically sound? The dissent must not be silenced nor the conscience stifled because Christian identity was ultimately eschatological. Mullins followed early Baptists like Thomas Helwys and John Clarke and Isaac Backus, if you remember those names from Baptist identity, who declared that "Only God was Lord of the Conscience" and thus the individual believer must be free to follow conscience this side of heaven because at the Last Judgment, it was going to be only the believer standing face to face with God. State sponsored established churches and church hierarchies clearly would not be there to help, but not even a good local church could assist at that point either. If you believed in a Last Judgment described in the New Testament, the Baptist tradition declared, you best preserve individual freedom, no matter how risky it might be to an orderly church life.

Ecclesiology was tied to eschatology. Freedom for the individual AND freedom for the group worked together. Some folks today seem to say it is all community and no individual. It is almost if, based on the amount of time spent on the topic, that Communal Ecclesiology has replaced Christology or the Trinity as the focus of Christianity. But the early Baptists said the Christian life—the life of the Church—was both personal and communal.

Personal: It was Luke 15. There is joy in heaven when one sinner repents.\ Communal: Jesus fed the 5000.

Personal: It is Galatians 2 when Paul said, "I have been crucified in Christ; it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."

Communal: It is Phil. 2 where Paul says you plural to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

Personal: It is Phil. 4 when Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"

Communal: It is I Cor. 12, "For in the one Spirit we were baptized into one body. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

It is not either/or but both/and – personal and communal. It was necessary tension. It was eschatological eschatology. If that is like stink to your nostrils, then being Baptist can be pretty discomfoting.

The next time you tell someone about Baptists as a believers' church? Admit that Baptists are a messy lot and talk about believers' churches. Admit the flawed attempts at being church as you find them. You'll find some. But, at least for me, at their best, amid their diversity, Baptists reveal a common individual faith commitment in Christ, a common attachment to the Body of Christ, a common authority in the Scriptures, and a common commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord, the only Lord for the individual conscience and the only Lord for the church.

Note: The original version of this sermon was first preached at G.W. Truett Theological Seminary, March 17, 2009. W

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A REVIEW OF W.H. WHITSITT: *THE MAN AND THE CONTROVERSY*

By James H. Slatton
Mercer University Press, 2009

The story of how this book came to be written is a fascinating story in itself and gives hope to all students of history that they might be as fortunate as Jim Slatton! While pastor of River Road Church in Richmond, Virginia, Slatton had a conversation with a woman who was planning to join the church and she related that she was the granddaughter of William Whitsitt, namesake of this journal. No doubt with rapidly beating heart, Slatton learned that Etta Nachman still possessed the diaries of Whitsitt that spanned most of his career at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as professor and then as the president who resigned under fire because of his views that Baptists were born in 1641 rather than with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. Nachman also had letters written by Whitsitt to his wife, Florence Wallace, over an eight-year period, along with an unpublished biographical portrait of Whitsitt written by his daughter.

The diaries (sixteen volumes) and other materials, covering 1885 to 1899 (though unfortunately entries are sparse between 1888-1896), were subsequently donated to the Virginia Baptist Historical Society, located on the campus of the University of Richmond, where Whitsitt ironically went to teach after leaving the seminary. Almost taking a cue from a Dan Brown-like novel, Whitsitt had instructed that the diaries be kept from public view for 100 years. Mrs. Nachman, however, gave Slatton access to them and now, 100 years after Whitsitt left Southern Seminary, we have the result of his research efforts: an in-depth biography of William Whitsitt which reveals many details about Whitsitt the man, his views of the “Whitsitt conflict” and other captivating tidbits about well-known Southern Baptists of that day.

Whitsitt the professor delivered an articulate professorial inaugural address in 1872 about Baptist principles (printed in *The Whitsitt Journal*, Fall 2005) but these newly recovered primary sources reveal that Whitsitt’s early years as a professor included significant doubts about the anti-intellectual aspects of Baptist life and the value of maintaining a Baptist identity. Whitsitt questioned the practice of “closed communion” and was leery of the temperance movement. He acknowledged that immersion was “apostolic” but noted that footwashing was as well. Baptists, he believed, were not consistent. Whitsitt’s denominational misgivings dissipated, however. As the seminary’s president, he revealed a deep commitment to Baptist identity in lieu of threats to the seminary.

Perhaps the most fascinating “find” in the diaries is the candid, satirical, and even strongly critical view presented of Whitsitt’s seminary colleagues and others. Whitsitt didn’t like the way John Broadus and James P. Boyce handled the Crawford “Toy” affair (Toy’s higher biblical criticism was deemed dangerous). Whitsitt noted ironically that “Broadus was almost on the side of Toy in his theological opinions” (82). He kindly noted that Broadus was a “masterly orator” but looked like a “scarecrow” (121-122). It was not a compliment!

Whitsitt was pointedly critical of Boyce on more than one occasion. Whitsitt said that Boyce was a “dunderhead” (117) and at times “preposterous” (114). According to Whitsitt, Boyce as seminary president used to complain about how much work he had to do. Whitsitt conjectured that Boyce did not pay him what other professors were being paid because 1) he had not pursued the courtship of Boyce’s daughter and 2) because he was not one of the seminary’s original professors who had “borne the burdens of the entire day” (118). Whitsitt’s cutting wit also was leveled in the private diary at other figures like colleague F. H. Kerfoot, who was interested in the “faith cure” divine healing movement, a movement Whitsitt likened to “rabies” (125). Should people today be upset with Whitsitt? Well, I suppose you can. But this was his private diary.... and I have now added “dunderhead” to my academic vocabulary!!

As a scholarly author, ironically, Whitsitt was not overly successful. He planned to work on a history of Baptists but never completed it (though Slatton believes Whitsitt realized his views of Baptist origins were too volatile to make a history feasible). He wrote an extensive biography of Mormon leader, Sidney Rigdon, but never found a publisher. An examination of the origin of the Disciples of Christ was published, but disliked by reviewers of that denomination.

Whitsitt’s claim to fame was his *A Question in Baptist History* in which he refuted through primary source research that Baptists could trace their origins before 1641 (the beginning of Baptist life being the “recovery” of believer’s baptism by immersion). Slatton re-traces the history of Whitsitt’s claim which first appeared anonymously in the journal, the *Independent* (1880) and then in article form in *Johnson’s Universal Cyclopedia* (1893). Three years later (the delay is interesting yet unexplained – perhaps it took awhile for the article to be discovered) in March 1896—two months

before Whitsitt was elected president of the seminary—he was attacked by the pastor of First Baptist Church, Rhode Island, for the encyclopedia articles.

That summer, the book *A Question in Baptist History* was published, and the war of words was on (note that Charles T. Dearing of Louisville published the volume because the American Baptist Publication Society didn't want to become involved in the conflict). Whitsitt was criticized, not simply for his opinions about Baptist origins, but because he wrote anonymously in a "pedobaptist weekly" "posing as if he were not Baptist" and then for writing articles in an encyclopedia published by a Roman Catholic press. Whitsitt's anonymity, of course, revealed his awareness of the volatility of his views in a Baptist culture dominated by the intolerant "we are THE New Testament church" perspective of Landmarkism. To his opponents, Whitsitt's anonymity and silence were only warnings of greater heresies to be revealed—his sins had been found out! History was not simply the issue; Whitsitt was now the issue.

Slatton gives a fascinating "blow by blow" account of the "Whitsitt Conflict." He consults the secondary literature that notes the regional differences in the conflict (East Coast Baptists were more progressive and pro-Whitsitt). He follows the scholarship of Rufus Weaver and Rosalie Beck that highlights the role of Baptist journalism in exacerbating the conflict. Over 100 Baptist weeklies were in circulation in 1896 and their editorials often commanded more serious attention than the local pastor's sermon.

Slatton's account is rich in detailing the actions and complaints of Whitsitt's opponents—John T. Christian, John H. Spencer and especially the unethical journalism of T. T. Eaton's son who published attacks anonymously—and the responses of state conventions and the SBC. Whitsitt maintained support from the national SBC and seminary trustees for three years. Still, the sniping never stopped. The intricacies of the tension between Whitsitt and his arch nemesis, T. T. Eaton, are a picture of doctrinal/historical issues which can't be extricated from personality issues, personal ambition and jealousy. Eaton's desire to oust Whitsitt from the seminary presidency was fueled by his Landmark ideology, but also his jealousy at not being elected to the post himself. Eaton was not only the editor of the 'attack-dog' *Western Recorder*, but also Whitsitt's pastor. Whitsitt caused a stir when he transferred his church membership from Eaton's Walnut Street Baptist Church to a friendlier congregation during the heated conflict.

Whitsitt's manner during the controversy, given his caution about publishing his views in the first place and his desire to keep his job and maintain the health of the seminary, was not surprising. He chose "deliberate silence" "to saw wood and say nothing" (180). Whitsitt's diary reflections about his colleagues during and after the conflict more accurately portrayed his feelings. He said that colleagues from the beginning were split in their support even though they had

formally affirmed him after the conflict erupted. Whitsitt bluntly concluded that supporter A. T. Robertson deserted him at the peak of the crisis.

Soon after Whitsitt resigned—because he believed the seminary faculty wanted him to—he regretted the action. But, it was too late and the seminary trustees who supported him ultimately accepted the resignation (several months later) to "save" the seminary and avoid denominational schism. Whitsitt's opponents wanted F. H. Kerfoot as the new president but failed. Landmarkism won a battle, but didn't win a war. Whitsitt, interestingly, never spoke about Baptist origins after leaving the seminary. He had been burned more than he cared.

Throughout the book, Slatton highlights certain points in italics. Often these points reflect Slatton's conviction that the Whitsitt story is still relevant and sheds light on the more recent Southern Baptist past. For example, Slatton notes that the *Religious Herald* of Virginia "insightfully" criticized the introduction of the Whitsitt conflict into SBC convention affairs: "We do not propose to let the Southern Baptist Convention settle any question of doctrine or history for us. *It is utterly incapable of exercising the functions of a church court. To subvert its real purpose is to number its days of usefulness*" (220). Slatton, heavily involved on the moderate side of the recent "Southern Baptist controversy," tellingly declared what writing the Whitsitt biography did for him and what it would most likely do for other moderates who read his account: "For those who experienced the moderate-fundamentalist controversy among twentieth century Southern Baptists, the story of the Whitsitt controversy, told in detail, evokes a haunting sense of déjà vu" (323).

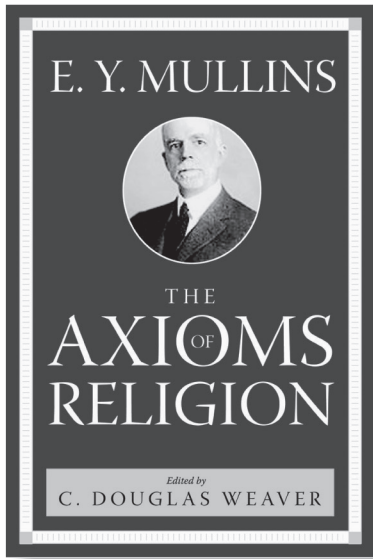
James Slatton has provided Baptists an excellent biography of a signal figure in Baptist life at the end of the twentieth century, an era so pivotal in the development of a Southern Baptist psyche. His portrait of Whitsitt is of a leader who held firm to convictions, yet whose courage did not always come easy. In the end, studied "deliberate silence" and institutional commitment did not spare Whitsitt the wrath of those who disliked his views and in the process made him the enemy of Baptist identity. The tragic irony is loud and clear.

Future scholars will now undoubtedly want to scour the archives to see what else can be learned about figures in this saga—Broadus, Boyce—that have eluded traditional histories of Baptists. One glitch in this biography should be noted for those who want to do scholarly follow-up. Production malfunction resulted in an inaccurate index. Readers who want an accurate index can request a pdf file from Mercer University Press who will gladly provide it.

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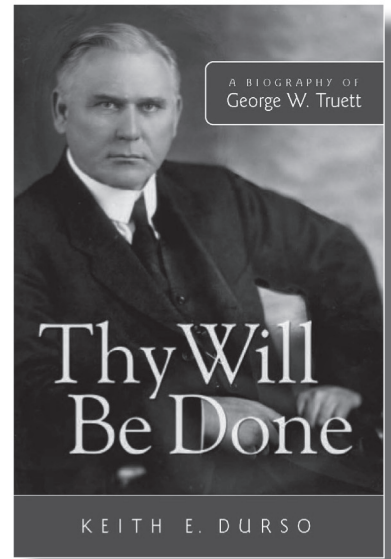
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