Attempting to Eschew *The Handmaid's Tale*: The Interplay of Denominational Politics, Biblical Interpretations, and Women's Ordination in the Southern Baptist Convention

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In 1984 the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) passed the following resolution at its annual meeting. As this resolution proves, the gains of women in SBC church leadership have not kept pace with the advances of women in the broader American culture in the aftermath of the women's movement. This lack of symmetry is in large part the result of a conflict between progressivism and increasingly prevalent conservatism in society, politics, the broader religious landscape, and the SBC in particular. But, as a closer examination of this culture war, the history of women's ordination in American Protestantism, competing theologies, and the conservative-moderate battle in the SBC will show, though there are multiple barriers left for aspiring female ministers to hurdle, there are also promising indications that women are embracing the challenge and excelling in the ministerial domain.

Resolution No. 3--On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry

> . . .WHEREAS, The Scriptures attest to God's delegated order of authority (God the head of Christ, Christ the head of man, man the head of woman, man and woman dependent one upon the other to the glory of God) distinguishing the roles of men and women in public prayer and prophecy (I Cor. 11:2-5); and
> . . .WHEREAS, While Paul commends women and men alike in other roles of ministry and service (Titus 2:1-10), he excludes women from pastoral leadership (I Tim. 2:12) to preserve a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall (I Tim. 2:13ff). . .
> Therefore, be it *Resolved*, That we not decide concerns of Christian doctrine and practice by modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends or by emotional factors. . .and that we encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination.[1]

In 1987 the members of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, appalled and alarmed the Southern Baptist Convention by calling Nancy Hastings Sehested to the pastorate. The Shelby County Baptist Association (a local division of the Convention) swiftly demonstrated the power of the growing conservative force in Southern Baptist churches by disfellowshipping Prescott. Sehested had graduated from Union Theological Seminary in New York nine years prior to locating a Baptist congregation that was willing to call a woman pastor. Her situation typifies the struggle that aspiring women ministers face as they search for staff positions and strive for equality and recognition in Southern Baptist churches.

In the aftermath of a swift women's movement in the broader American culture, the comparatively modest advances of women as church leaders seems surprising. Acceptance of women clergy has been slow in other Protestant denominations, but the gains have been much more apparent in bodies such as the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and the United Church of Christ than in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).[2] In 1983 there were an estimated 200 ordained Southern Baptist women, whereas in the other three aforementioned denominations there were 1500, 665, and 735 ordained women respectively.[3] In fact the Southern Baptist Convention has traditionally ranked near the bottom in this category, and in 1993 women still accounted for only about 1% of the 90,000 Southern Baptists ordained for ministry.[4] Even more recent numbers demonstrate that from an estimated 40,000 Southern Baptist churches, approximately 1,160 women have been ordained, and of this small number only 65 have been called to serve churches as pastors or co-pastors.[5]

It is a more common practice for churches to hire laywomen to lead music, youth, and children's programs than to call women as ordained ministers (in pastoral or non-pastoral capacities). The issue of ordination is important, however, not only because of the recognition and authority it affords religious leaders but also because it contributes to greater gender equity within the labor market. Ordained ministers are conferred with

certain privileges by the government such as a different means of reporting income for tax purposes, exemptions from military service and jury duty, and legal protection of conversations.[6]

The slower-than-expected gain of ordained Southern Baptist women reflects the conflict between progressivism and the growing tide of conservatism in society, politics, religion in general and the Southern Baptist Convention in particular. It is the intent of this paper to provide the backdrop for and chronicle the setbacks and successes of women in Southern Baptist ministry in the midst of this culture war and to reveal the reasons for the cautious optimism of aspiring women clergy. In this paper sections on culture war, the history of women's ordination in American Protestantism, and biblical feminism will lay the foundation for succeeding parts on the conservative-moderate divide in the SBC, Southern Baptist women's ordination, and encouraging signs for future female ministers. The final section will discuss remaining obstacles and indications that prospects for women ministers in the SBC are improving.

Culture War

Women's struggle for legitimation within the Southern Baptist Convention cannot be discussed without first delineating the bitter battle between conservatives and progressives that has developed in the larger culture over the past century as the two groups have lost common ground and become opponents in a moral war.[7] For most of American history, Judeo-Christian principles defined the dominant culture that held society together. The increasing acknowledgment and tolerance of religious pluralism (meaning faiths other than Christianity, not just different denominations) over time, however, has simultaneously diversified and divided the religious scene and has eliminated the Judeo-Christian tradition as Americans' only religious foundation for relating to and understanding each other.

The rise of capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization complicated matters of morality and faith as poverty and strife between destitute laborers and wealthy business owners led to social dilemmas to which conservatives and progressives took increasingly divergent approaches.[8] And the augmenting importance of science, technology, and higher learning introduced a spirit of egalitarianism and the adoption of more progressive attitudes among the learned.[9] Along with these increasingly prevalent attitudes came social movements that greatly altered the cultural landscape such as the women's movement, sexual revolution, and women's stampede into higher education and the paid labor force. Trends that accompanied these movements reflected the evolving conceptions of the American family and of morality; the post-1950s decline in marriage, rise in non-marital fertility, and emergence of family forms that were radically different from the breadwinner-homemaker model resulted in the decline of the bourgeois, heterosexual family that was idealized as "traditional."

The result of these events was that the definition of morality became a source of public debate and supplanted religious doctrine as the breaking point between conservatives and progressives. The ideas of conservatives and progressives about morality were so divergent partly because each group saw it as deriving from a very different source; conservatives hailed morality as the timeless teachings of a transcendent being while progressives were wont to accept that the boundaries of acceptable behavior must adjust to cultural context.[10] A line began to be drawn between religious conservatives who detested the secular and liberalizing influences of higher learning, defended the capitalist economic system, and re-emphasized inherited ways of religious thinking (such as great emphasis on salvation and literal interpretation of the Bible for Christians) and progressives who welcomed advances brought by increasing technology and equalizing social movements, responded to economic disparity not only by helping the disadvantaged through philanthropy but also often by supporting New Deal programs and democratic socialism, and recognized the evolving nature of truth.

It is important to note that while the culture war models of both Robert Wuthnow and James Davison Hunter only allow for two sides to the religious and sociological battle (conservatives and what are essentially secularists or individualists), the progressive end of the spectrum is actually divided between two segments which sociologist Nancy Ammerman calls "Golden Rule Christians" and activists. Whereas evangelical Christians (most of whom could be labeled conservative, although there is some overlap with the progressive group) hold firm to biblical inerrancy, an emphasis on witnessing, and a focus on the world to come, the more moderate Golden Rule Christians have created a less dogmatic but equally valid approach to religion. They use the Bible as a daily moral guide for their lives, concentrate on building strong relationships within a small, tight-knit community, attempt to improve their world through volunteer work, and still hold to some idea of transcendence. The other segment of the progressive wing is comprised of more liberal activists who advocate social action and the search for justice.[11] Thus the religious ideas held to by both progressive groups are based less upon other-worldly matters and set biblical interpretations, a fact that no doubt perturbs conservative Christians (whose religious world centers upon salvation, eternity, and the greater uniformity of their beliefs) and contributes to a further rift between conservatives and progressives.[12]

Perhaps surprisingly, each religious denomination did not orient itself toward one end or the other of the conservative-progressive spectrum as a result of this battle. Instead, the cleavage cut across religious bodies in the second half of the twentieth century so that the conservatives of one denomination had more political, social, and religious ideas in common with conservatives of a different denomination than with the progressives of their same denominational label.[13] As a result of their newfound similarities, conservatives began to ally with each other across formerly sacred barriers on some cultural issues, and progressives did the same. Thus the moral dilemmas that became public matters during the 1970s cemented a fault line between conservatives and

progressives as people of different denominations but similar religious ideas cooperated in special interest groups to debate issues and form policy.

While progressives welcomed many of the trends and movements that attacked old ideas and prejudices, conservatives felt a clear threat to their way of life. A backlash ensued against many of the trends, and religious fundamentalists[14] led the charge. Fundamentalists, who claim that the Bible ordains the breadwinner-homemaker family model by urging wives to submit and who perceive women as biologically, psychologically, and socially more frail than men,[15] pushed a pro-family agenda that supported a hierarchical family structure with the male filling the leader and provider roles and that upheld marriage and care-taking as women's rightful responsibilities. This chauvinistic backlash (which was also promoted by fundamentalist women) extended into the church where the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s was equated with moral permissiveness, and the retaliation thus negatively impacted women's entry into ordained church leadership. So, the very social movements that created new niches for women in higher education and the labor force and reduced the emphasis on childbirth as redemptive and the sole function of womanhood ironically led to the counter-offensive that sought to undermine and limit women's abilities once again.

The fundamentalist backlash has prominently manifested itself not only in social and religious arenas but also in the political realm. In the 1960s and 1970s Billy Graham increased the exposure of evangelical Christians to the culture at large and created a bridge between conservative religion and politics as he was often seen in the company of his good friend President Richard Nixon, even though Graham did not overtly endorse Nixon during his presidential campaigns.[16] In the late 1970s the presence of an evangelical Christian in the White House (Jimmy Carter) and a grassroots recruitment of religious and political conservatives allowed leaders of a revised and reinvigorated Christian Right to tap into wellsprings of supporters who had previously voted but had otherwise remained outside the political system. Since its inception the Christian Right

has attempted to broaden its support base and thus influence by assuming different names such as Moral Majority and the current Christian Coalition, but the aim of all of these right-wing groups has been to fuse morality with political issues in an effort to tighten the boundaries of legal and acceptable behavior, especially with regard to families. The Christian Right experienced a breakthrough in political importance in the presidential elections of the 1980s as Ronald Reagan courted fundamentalists' votes in his two successful campaigns (the Christian Right has since sided with this more conservative party) and as Pat Robertson vied for the 1988 Republican nomination and left in his wake the organizational structures needed to draw upon the support of religious conservatives in later campaigns.[17]

The visibility and debatably the power of the Christian Right has increased in the 1990s because politically savvy leaders such as Ralph Reed (former executive director of the Christian Coalition) have learned to make some concessions (or at least to give the impression that they are compromising) so that their ideas appeal to a broader base of supporters. The Christian Right has viable systems for communication and fundraising, and often supporters have proven themselves more empassioned and driven by their positions than progressives on such controversial issues as abortion. And these religious conservatives have mobilized (sometimes making use of church-based groups such as the Promise Keepers) to overtake government from the top down to achieve their agenda. While the conservatives raise ire among outsiders, though, progressives are loath to counter with their own political initiatives because their mobilization techniques are simply not as effective and because even though progressives often hold to their own religious positions, they also realize the value of religious pluralism.[18] The result of these ongoing feuds is that the religious divide that has occurred in church and society over the past few decades has been cemented in the political realm. The solidified fracture in the culture at large has helped to reinforce intradenominational warfare in such religious bodies as the

SBC, and the line drawn in the sand has stunted friendly, open-minded discussion in the church about such issues as women's ordination.

History of Women's Ordination in American Protestantism

Women's ordination is indeed one of the most divisive topics for conservatives and progressives. But while the entry of women into recognized leadership roles in Baptist churches and some other Protestant bodies has been very gradual (though many denominations have experienced greater success at drawing women into their clerical ranks since the 1970s), there is precedent for allowing women to serve as ministers. In the 1840s a school in Oberlin, Ohio, admitted the first female to an American seminary. Antoinette Brown was not allowed to participate in commencement exercises in 1850 and was not recognized with the rite of ordination by the Congregational church until 1853 (another first for a woman), but her contribution to the hopes of aspiring female ministers is undeniable.[19] After Brown's pioneering example, women were occasionally ordained by the churches they served, but usually the ordaining pastor would make the disclaimer that the particular woman was a special case and a person particularly gifted by God to merit such recognition. In short, pastors were not encouraging women as a whole to seek ordination.[20]

Women's ordination was on the rise at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Ironically, this gain was in no small part due to Victorian ideas about gender roles. Industrialization had led to the definition of rigid sex roles for middle class men and women because men were no longer able to base their feelings of masculinity upon acting as a warrior or hunter (men were now relegated to the tamer confines of factories and businesses) and asserting ultimate control over their children (men's ability to pass property to their heirs had been the instrument of this control, but now fathers held less property and there were more opportunities for sons to build their own nest eggs). To feel masculine in industrial society, men became the sole breadwinners

for their families and left women to run the domestic sphere. In this private realm women were placed upon pedestals as paragons of virtue who provided a sharp contrast to the unclean world of work for their husbands. Since women were the keepers of virtue and because religion came to be viewed as an extension of the home, it was logical that they would be the force behind religion as well. Indeed, Protestant churches became dependent upon the support and eventually the leadership of women as men were few and far between in the pews on Sunday mornings. Though Protestant ministers were dismayed at this feminization of Christianity, they depended upon the attendance of women to keep their jobs.[21]

And because many women accepted their roles as guardians of morality, they felt that it was their duty to extend their virtuous influence in what they perceived to be a decaying culture. So women transgressed the boundary between public and private spheres to build such social and political forces as the temperance and suffrage movements. As a result of their pedestalization as standards of virtuosity, some women were able to take hold of leadership positions in the church and society at large, much to the chagrin of fundamentalists who claimed that women were divinely appointed to be unseen and unheard. Indeed, women's entry into the public sphere was along with industrialization and biblical debates a major cause of the rise of fundamentalism. Many people felt threatened by the aforementioned trends regarding the changing family and society. As a result, they struggled to hold onto Victorian gender roles in the midst of an evolving culture, and thus this backlash against women's arrival on the public scene was central to fundamentalism and a prime contributor to culture war.[22]

Consistent with women's foray into church leadership and higher education (one of the myriad causes and results of the disintegration of the barrier between public and private spheres), by the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, many divinity schools had come to countenance women's enrollment (though their ordination was not encouraged), and the faculty at these schools added courses that were more "suitable" for

women to the curricula.[23] By the 1920s, women had expanded their presence at Protestant divinity schools to fourteen percent, which was a seven-fold increase from the turn of the century.[24] And the big drive for women's ordination occurred after 1970; determined women filled the halls of theological schools despite the fact that professional degrees were often not formally conferred upon them.[25] Reflecting women's ever-increasing demand for opportunities to lead in the church, female enrollment in Master of Divinity programs (the professional degree generally bestowed upon aspiring ministers) grew from approximately 5 percent in 1972 to 15 percent in 1980 and 26 percent in 1989. In fact, the ratio of men to women at many Protestant divinity schools is now one to one, and some schools have more female than male students.[26] Thus women are slowly pushing up the glass ceiling in some denominations, but the issue of women's ordination remains nonetheless controversial in many Christian circles. The ranks of most denominations have not swelled with female leadership because the government cannot interfere and enforce an end to workplace sex discrimination as it has done in the secular world and because the issue strikes at the sacred root of biblical interpretation.

Two groups which correspond somewhat with the Southern Baptist Convention in terms of doctrine and intradenominational culture, namely the United Methodist Church (UMC) and the Presbyterian Church, reflect this growing acceptance of women in the clerical ranks and provide a backdrop against which to compare SBC women's advances. In the Methodist Church women broke out of the domestic sphere by becoming involved in social reform movements, acting as lay preachers, and building women's groups within the church during the nineteenth century. Margaret Newton Van Cott was licensed by the Methodist Episcopal Church to preach in 1869, but the same body revoked her privilege to preach and declined to ordain two women a decade later. (One of these women, Anna Howard Shaw, was later the first woman ordained by the Methodist Church.) Women were granted the right to preach in 1920 and the option to become ordained in 1924, but

they were not given conference membership, a privilege which would have obligated the Methodist Church to find placements for them.

Women were not conferred with full ordination rights and conference membership until 1956. Concurrent with the merger between the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren (the newly formed group was recognized as the United Methodist Church) in the late 1960s, women flooded the halls of seminaries, and this influx of female students has continued up to the present so that most Methodist seminaries enjoy either a one-to-one female to male ratio or the statistical predominance of women. By 1987 the UMC had ordained nearly 3,500 clergywomen. Because UMC bishops place ministers in congregations rather than leaving the decision of whom to call up to each individual church, UMC women have had an easier time finding placements than their SBC counterparts, and the church as a whole seems to have embraced female leadership (both in the pulpit and in the upper ranks of the denominational hierarchy) with far fewer snares than in SBC churches.[27]

In the various segments of Presbyterianism during the nineteenth century, the proper role of women in the church came under scrutiny as female temperance workers and Quaker preachers were sometimes invited to address Presbyterian congregations. Despite the fact that these women were allowed to speak in church, the first Presbyterian woman was not ordained until 1889 (and she was the only woman to be granted this recognition until many years after), and even then many within the church questioned the propriety of ordaining a woman. In the early 1900s women were elected to the diaconate for the first time in most of the Presbyterian denominations, and in 1930 the United Presbyterian Church allowed women to be ordained as elders (and as a result to become parts of governing bodies) but not as ministers. The church thus used these means and others (such as creating the lay professional role Director of Religious Education) to use the abilities of women without granting them the privileges of a ministerial title.

During 1950s and 1960s many of the Presbyterian bodies reversed their ban on female ministers, however, and approved the ordination of women clergy. Women eventually took full advantage of their newfound opportunity; between 1977 and 1987 there was an increase of 224 percent in the number of Presbyterian women who graduated from Master of Divinity programs. By 1987 the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) had ordained over 1,400 women, and in 1992 the same body affirmed through an amendment to its constitution that the Holy Spirit leads both men and women to all ministries within the church.[28] Thus both the Methodist and Presbyterian bodies executed their drive toward female ordination primarily in this century, but the recognition of female ministers in these denominations seems to have occurred more quickly and with less uproar than in the SBC.[29] Since the two groups have followed patterns of female acceptance relatively similar to the process in the SBC, though, they provide useful models against which to measure the advances and project the potential gains of Southern Baptist women in ministry.

Biblical Feminism

Culture war and the male-dominated tradition of the church are not the only obstacles to women's ordination within Christianity, however. Because Christian tenets were formed in an era of established patriarchy, certain aspects if not much of the core of the Bible can easily be interpreted in a chauvinistic manner, and this sexism provides another deeply-rooted barrier to women's legitimation. The potential for sexism begins with the creation story in the first book of the Bible. Conservatives, who tend to interpret the Bible literally, assert that man was formed in God's image whereas woman was an afterthought created from the man's rib. Thus for them Adam represents the standard of humanity, and the result is that femaleness is viewed as practically a handicap. Woman's inferiority of mind and spirit is further "proven" when Eve becomes evil's instrument for

introducing sin into the world.[30] A more careful reading of Genesis, though, reveals not only that God created both man and woman in His image (the Hebrew word for Adam actually means "human" rather than "man")[31] but also that Adam was not particularly resistant to temptation either.[32] Since man and woman were equally created in God's image, it logically follows that the entry of evil into a formerly sinless world rather than a divinely-appointed gender hierarchy is the root of sexism.[33] As Paul asserts in the New Testament, through salvation and purification in Christ there is the elimination of prejudices and barriers based upon race, ethnicity, and gender.[34]

Conservatives also point to some of Paul's other statements, namely his urgings that women "submit" to their husbands, as proof that there is a biblically-ordained gender hierarchy in which men rule women as Christ heads the church.[35] Biblical feminist Virginia Ramey Mollenkott suggests, however, that the gospel spoken by Christ and the surrounding context of Paul's letter to the Ephesians proves that there is not a significant difference between the terms "love" and "submit." In the next verse Paul commands husbands to love their wives, so if Mollenkott's theory is valid, then Paul is actually recommending mutual submission rather than the husband's dominance in the home.[36] The meaning of Pauline texts is further debatable since Paul is possibly quoting letters from the churches he addresses in his epistles when he seems to be making chauvinistic statements. In 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 there is the potential for such an explanation. Paul is outlining requirements for orderly worship (including women's silence in the church) and then erupts into an indignant accusation of the Corinthians' arrogance: "Did the word of God originate with you?" The heated statement seems out of place if it is not a response to a quotation from the Corinthians' letter.[37] The debate over whether the command for women's silence is Paul's own thought or that of the Corinthians will continue, though, because the earliest manuscripts of the Greek New Testament were not punctuated in any way and only capital letters were used.

Another substantial roadblock to women's legitimation is the predominance of male imagery in the Bible that serves to reinforce patriarchy. Among the more obvious examples, God is described using masculine pronouns and the word "Father," and the incarnate Christ is a biological male. There is no "Mother" or any other female to represent women in the heavenly hierarchy. There are some often ignored references to femaleness in the Bible, though, which show the value of female functions and by extension women themselves. The personified trait Wisdom is referred to with a female pronoun in the Old Testament, particularly in Proverbs. God is described in maternal ways in several places since exclusively male imagery cannot always transmit the idea of God's complete and omnipotent nature. He provides clothes for Adam and Eve after the fall and manna and quail for the Israelites during their wanderings in the desert before inheriting the promised land, and He is likened to a nursemaid and midwife in Isaiah 46:3-4.[38] Mary the mother of Jesus is trusted with the greatest human responsibility of any person in the Bible when she is informed that she is carrying God's child in her womb. Jesus is many times referred to as an "anthropos" (Greek word for man *or* human) rather than as an "aner" (Greek word exclusively translated as "man"). The fact that God is described using both stereotypically male and female imagery suggests that God the "Father" is a metaphor employed by biblical authors to facilitate a relationship between divinity and humans. God actually transcends gender; it is only humans with limited vocabulary and theological understanding who squeeze God into a particular gender.[39]

Some biblical feminists are able to reconcile themselves to the Bible by employing interpretive techniques that do not totally condemn the Bible to sexism. They recognize the detriment of using the Bible selectively to support any cause; before the Civil War Christians employed verses about servants and masters to justify the institution of slavery, so obviously the fact that there are verses in the Bible that seem to promote sexism does not necessarily mean that the letter of those verses is applicable in a more egalitarian society. Biblical feminists also point out that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon men

and women alike at Pentecost and that consequently both sexes were bestowed with the ability to speak in tongues and to preach.[40] (The Greek word that means "prophesy" is also commonly interpreted as "preach.")[41] And the complexities of Pauline texts (after all, the same man who suggests that wives submit to their husbands also proclaims that there is equality in Christ) may best be explained by Paul's human, personal conflict between his cultural upbringing in a patriarchal society and his belief that Christ is the Great Equalizer.[42]

There is a third Christian approach to the Bible that does not seek to explain away each sexist aspect; shunning the theological arguments of conservatives and the moderate stances of biblical feminists, the more radical theology of such feminists as Rosemary Radford Ruether accepts that much of the core of the Bible is patriarchal but points out that many liberating aspects are also present. Ruether contends that within the Bible there are two traditions; inherent in royal theology is the idea that social hierarchies are divinely ordained and thus immutable, but in prophetic theology social inequalities are the result of sin and not part of God's original plan for creation. Though the prophetic tradition permeates the Bible more, Ruether argues, the conservative or royal stance is very evident and often latched onto by Bible believers who want to maintain the status quo.[43] Jesus (particularly in the Gospel according to Luke), a king who leads by serving rather than by issuing tyrannical decrees, is representative of the prophetic tradition as He asserts the rights of the oppressed (including women) and points out the abuses of the rich and powerful. The Church, however, often ignores the social justice aspect of Jesus' message and the possibility that sin can be introduced not only by individuals but also by entire social structures.[44] Thus while some biblical feminists attempt to explain away sexist aspects of the Bible, liberation theologians such as Ruether recognize some parts of the Bible as sexist and reject them in favor of the more forward, egalitarian prophetic tradition.

The Conservative-Moderate Divide in the Southern Baptist Convention

Women's struggle for respect as church leaders has been a particularly explosive issue representative of the growing rift between moderates and conservatives in the Southern Baptist Convention (a divide that has paralleled and been reinforced by the aforementioned culture war and religious realignment along conservative-progressive lines).[45] Coinciding with increasing gender equity in the culture at large during the 1970s, many of the most influential bodies in the SBC such as Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky) and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (Winston-Salem, North Carolina) became somewhat progressive in terms of gender equality, and they in fact encouraged women in ministry by holding conferences regarding women and the church and by establishing women's centers on some campuses. In 1980 a female copastor at a church in Richmond baptized new Christians, and women were chairs of deacons at a few churches.[46] However, the beginning of a holy war came in 1979 when the conservatives launched their first offensive in a plan to overtake the SBC and managed to land their candidate, Adrian Rogers, in the SBC presidency. Rogers' bid for the presidency was successful in large part because conservative leaders had organized meetings across the country to mobilize biblical inerrantists and to encourage them to act as messengers at the annual Convention (the location of the election).[47] The president has power to appoint people to many of the leadership positions in the SBC , and prior to the conservative tidal wave most presidents chose a diverse group of Baptists to represent the varied viewpoints within the SBC.[48] However, Rogers and subsequent presidents abused their appointive powers and gradually replaced more moderate leaders with men who had conservative tendencies. The Sunday School Board and the boards of trustees at Southern Baptist seminaries were just a few of the bodies that became theologically homogeneous.

Conservatives continued their offensive to eradicate the influence of moderates in the 1980s. At the 1980 Convention, a resolution that urged SBC institutions only to hire

faculty and staff who would affirm biblical inerrancy was passed. During the same year in his address to a congregation, fundamentalist leader Paul Pressler revealed part of his political plan when he asserted that conservatives "need to go for the jugular-- we need to go for the trustees [of Southern Baptist seminaries]."[49] After forcing the inerrancy issue and overtaking many of the key positions in the SBC hierarchy, conservatives extended their agenda so that it became more social and moral in nature. Paige Patterson, who along with Pressler was the key organizer of the conservative *coup*, intimated in 1986 that conservative planks not only on theology but also on such issues as school prayer, abortion, and federal budget reduction would influence the future hiring policies of the SBC.[50]

The conservative takeover had and has great implications for women in ministry because literalists quote selective passages from the Bible which imply that God means for men to be church leaders (ministers and deacons) and for women to be church secretaries or nursery workers. "Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."[51] Inerrantists claim that arguing with such interpretations is blasphemous, and they contend that women who leave the Baptist church to serve as ministers in other denominations prove that women who seek ordination are guided by blinding ambition rather than faith and sound Baptist doctrine.

In contrast to the conservatives, moderates view the Bible thematically and holistically rather than literally and selectively. They assert that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."[52] They point out several female characters in the Old Testament such as Miriam (a prophet) and Deborah (a judge) who are faithful and vocal servants of God. They claim that even the Pauline texts which conservatives use to justify the

repression of women are taken out of their proper context; Paul is suggesting remedies for problems that particular churches are experiencing, not universal guidelines.

Most important to supporters of women in ministry, however, is their belief in Jesus as the Great Liberator of women.[53] Jesus first reveals His mission as the Messiah to a Samaritan adultress. There is an obvious balance of gender in Jesus' teaching tools; stories about women are often peppered among His parables. Women travel with Him in His band of disciples, and the resurrected Christ selects Mary to go forth and announce that He is alive.[54] Moderates say that these actions demonstrate Jesus' confidence in women since He treated women as equals during a time when other men considered them to be mere property. They assert that the Holy Spirit, not the SBC hierarchy, has the authority to decide who is and is not called into the ministry. Mary Jayne Allen, ordained minister of education at First Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, says that she views ministry as following in the steps of Jesus and becoming a servant to God and others rather than as an opportunity to assert spiritual authority over a congregation. Other female ministers echo Rev. Allen's response to the conservatives who are uncomfortable seeing women in the pulpit.[55]

Female Ministers in the Southern Baptist Convention

Before the conservative whirlwind swept through the SBC and left its oppressive mark, women were beginning to make very slow but evident advances in the leadership arena. Women's voice at the national level of the SBC began in 1868 when they first gathered during the annual Convention and raised money to support overseas mission work. Though a request to seat two female messengers at the 1885 Convention was denied (one unnamed delegate was overheard saying "I love the ladies, but I dread them worse")[56] and the SBC constitution was amended to exclude women from acting as messengers, women became an organized and recognized (though independent) voice when they established the Women's Missionary Union (WMU) in 1888. The WMU raises

funds to finance world missions, and its presence in SBC life has greatly increased since its inception.[57] Women continued their gains in the twentieth century as four women began attending classes at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1904 and as women were granted the right to act as messengers and vote at the annual Convention in 1918.[58] And the 1960s brought great victories as a woman was elected to the vice-presidency of the SBC for the first time (1963) and as SBC women broke through the ordination barrier. The occasion did not pass without controversy, but on August 9, 1964, Addie Davis was ordained by Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina.[59]

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s conservative repression has discouraged but not stifled women's efforts to serve in Southern Baptist ministry. In 1983 Nancy Hastings Sehested and thirty-two other women held a conference in Louisville, and in the course of those discussions the groundwork was laid for an organization independent of the SBC that would provide women with a network of Baptists (including both men and women) who support women in ministry. The founders of Southern Baptist Women in Ministry (SBWIM) realized the importance of helping women meet and correspond with people who understand the difficulty of finding staff positions and who encourage women in ministry even as the conservatives doubt their abilities. The establishment of SBWIM touched off a conservative reaction which led to the now infamous resolution on ordination and the role of women in ministry at the 1984 Convention. The resolution proposed that since the Bible clearly relegates women to submissive roles and because "man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall,"[60] women should not become pastors or accept any kind of church leadership role that requires them to be ordained. The motion passed with 58% of the vote.[61] Despite the SBC's disregard for women spiritual leaders, churches have local autonomy and can call women to ministerial positions and ordain them. Ironically also in 1984 Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in North Carolina opened a Women's Center, and Southern Baptist Theological

Seminary in Kentucky sponsored a conference on the changing roles of women in the church.[62]

Women were disheartened by the SBC's public attack on their rights and abilities to serve God in any capacity, but moderates were awakened to action. In 1986 they formed the Southern Baptist Alliance (SBA), a body which chair Henry Crouch hoped would be "a voice of conscience in the Convention." Though many moderates did not support the SBA because they still had hopes of regaining representation in the SBC, the SBA was the first organization to lend continuing financial support to SBWIM.[63] Nancy Hastings Sehested's call to the pastorate at Prescott Memorial Baptist Church in 1987 was a landmark in Southern Baptist women's struggles to become accepted as legitimate members of the ministerial community and showed both Baptist and non-Baptist women that there were places where they could use their God-given gifts. However, when Sehested was nominated in 1988 to deliver the sermon at the Southern Baptist Convention, the nominator was swiftly ruled out of order.[64] In 1989 moderates suffered another setback when the Foreign Missions Board denied the appointments of Greg and Katrina Pennington to the mission field when their local association pointed out that she was ordained.[65] But in 1991 moderates formed the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), a fringe organization of the SBC which welcomes women to participate in the worship services held when the CBF convenes. Some CBF churches allow their members to show their support for either the SBC or the CBF by designating to which body their tithes are sent. At First Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, most offerings are designated for the CBF.[66]

During the 1990s the conservatives augmented their ambition of placing their representatives in positions formerly held by moderates and planned to usurp total control of the SBC and its leadership boards and literature. Moderates continued to counter oppression by making adjustments. The women's resource center at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary was moved to one of the emerging moderate Baptist seminaries in

Richmond.[67] The WMU, the body founded in 1888 that had first given women a place in Southern Baptist life, outgrew its role as an auxiliary to the SBC and to the chagrin of conservatives in 1993 expanded its objectives to include taking part in social issues and building relationships with all Southern Baptist missions groups (including the CBF). Even more disturbing to conservatives was the WMU's affirmation of the giftedness of women, a statement which reversed the organization's traditional acceptance of its submissive role in Southern Baptist life.[68] The Foreign Missions Board termed the redefined WMU "adulterous," and in 1995 the SBC demonstrated its disapproval of the modernized WMU by reassigning many of the union's duties to more compliant agencies.[69]

Conservatives extended their control over the future of the SBC in 1993 when Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the mother seminary of the SBC, replaced president Roy Honeycutt (a vocal supporter of women in ministry) with the conservative R. Albert Mohler. Oddly enough, Mohler had been an adamant opponent of the 1984 resolution discouraging women from seeking ordination or becoming pastors. Some moderates speculate that Mohler is an opportunist who changed his theological stance to ascend to the presidency of the foremost Baptist seminary.[70] Mohler began a purge of faculty members who supported women in ministry by forcing newly hired faculty to sign a fundamentalist doctrinal statement and by urging the board of trustees at Southern to approve a buy-out of the contracts of over twenty moderate faculty members.[71] When many Southern students and faculty protested the force-out of some well-respected professors and one dean, Mohler told students that they had no right to protest his decisions or those of the trustees.[72] And in 1995 trustees augmented Mohler's tyrannical potential by granting him more power in general and a chokehold over the hiring process in particular.[73]

Molly Marshall was one of the victims of what could be appropriately termed a witchhunt. In 1994 Marshall, the only female theology professor at a Southern Baptist

seminary, was forced to resign under threat of heresy charges despite her tenured status.[74] Mohler claimed that Marshall was dangerous to Southern students because she did not hold conservative views on such broad topics as God and Scripture. Marshall responded to the allegation by outlining her positions on each of the issues addressed in the seminary's "Abstract of Principles" in writing, but she later asserted that Mohler's reply to her letter did not even address her theological ideas.[75] Women at Southern Seminary were vindicated the following year, however, when three women swept the top awards of the prestigious preaching contest at Southern soon after the board of trustees had proclaimed that no faculty nominees would be hired who supported women as senior pastors.[76]

Encouraging Signs

As the twentieth century winds down, the women's movement of the American culture at large has lost speed, but the gains of women in the Southern Baptist Convention are only beginning to show. Many people who are outside of the denomination or who have only attended conservative Baptist churches may not have felt the repercussions of the pioneering efforts of women in ministry yet, but the increase in the number of ordained Baptist women continues to be promising. In 1986 there were 232 women ordained to Southern Baptist ministry. By 1993 the figure had more than tripled to over 900 (including 22 active pastors and many ministers of youth, children, or education), and in 1996 the number had escalated to 1,300 ordained women, making the growth rate greater than in any other American denomination.[77] Though some churches do not ordain women as deacons, other churches require that half of their active deacons be female.[78]

Baptist Women in Ministry has continued to flourish since its inception in 1983, and the organization voted to drop the limiting modifier "Southern" in 1995 and expanded its support network to incorporate all Baptist women. BWIM has found a permanent home on the campus of Central Baptist Theological Seminary where it has established a

National Archive and Resource Center to aid and encourage its members.[79] The outreach effort of the BWIM has been a major factor in women's growing presence in the Convention through meetings on the state and national level, the highly-regarded newsletter *Folio*, and members' efforts to establish more groups that meet the needs of Baptist women in ministry. At the April 1997 BWIM Breakout Session, Tennessee supporters of women in ministry formed a committee to develop Tennessee Baptists Encouraging Women in Ministry, an organization that would provide support, training, and information for and about women in ministry.[80] Additionally, both the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Alliance of Baptists (the former Southern Baptist Alliance) champion the cause of women who feel called to serve God as ministers and employ women not only in leading worship services but also in moderating general assemblies. Newly founded moderate seminaries have hired many of the faculty members removed from their positions at Southern Baptist seminaries because of their support of women in ministry. Though some discouraged women have left the Southern Baptist Convention to become ministers in more accepting denominations, many women endeavoring to gain respect as minsters desire to remain in the Southern Baptist family and refuse to be intimidated.

The numbers reveal that women are gaining in the ranks of Southern Baptist ministry, but the personal profiles of individuals who have received the respect they rightfully deserve are even more encouraging. In the early 1980s Mary Jayne Allen was working as a secretary at Ridgedale Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, when she decided to enter the ministry. At that time Ridgedale had a small and overworked staff, and Allen was assigned many of the duties that a minister of education would have assumed. As a result she became active in the Southern Baptist Convention and state association, underwent leadership training, and met regularly with ministers of education at other churches. It was during this experience as educational coordinator for Ridgedale that she began to feel God's call to the ministry, and fueled by the support of her family

and the ministers of education with whom she had worked, Allen entered Southern Seminary in 1984. Within a brief six months of her graduation from seminary, Allen obtained a position as minister with adults at First Baptist Church in Chattanooga. She has since been ordained and promoted to minister of education. Allen describes First Baptist (a CBF church) as having an atmosphere that is "affirming of women in every role." In fact, at one point in the 1990s First Baptist had an astounding three female ministers on staff--ministers to adults, youth, and children. Although none of these positions carries the same prestige and authority as a pastor or associate pastor, the women accounted for approximately half of the ministerial staff.[81]

Dixie Petrey is another success story. When her husband retired from his position as an attorney for Aetna in the early 1990s, he asked her what she wanted to do. Petrey, who was in her mid-fifties at the time, replied that she desired to become a pastor. So, in the fall of 1992 she entered Southern, the seminary that her grandfather and father had attended. Petrey served as vice-president and president of the student government at Southern in the midst of the change from a progressive, woman-affirming atmosphere under seminary president Honeycutt to a hostile, conservative environment under Mohler. She was a vocal opponent of the trustees' decision to limit the faculty to men who denied the right of women to become pastors, and as student body president she often approached the trustees and requested that women have representation on committees. During her seminary stint Petrey served as pastor at Kent Baptist Church (an American Baptist Church) in Kent, Indiana. She made her strongest statement for women's leadership capabilities, however, when she and two other female students swept the awards for the seminary's prestigious preaching contest. The judges had only seen anonymous copies of the sermons submitted, and they did not realize that the winners were women until they heard their sermons on audiotape. The prizes for winning the contest were $200 awards, but the real victory came when the women were allowed to preach the winning sermons from the chapel pulpit. Since her graduation Petrey has

served as chaplain at the University of Tennessee Medical Center, and she is currently pastor/chaplain at Shannondale Retirement Center in Knoxville, Tennessee.[82]

Remaining Obstacles and Causes For Optimism

The progress that women ministers have made in the Southern Baptist Convention since 1980 has been encouraging, but many problems persist which prevent women from becoming accepted by the conservative-controlled Convention as church leaders called by God. The rift between conservatives and moderates is the primary barrier, and this division is the result of political and theological differences so intertwined that they are often indistinguishable. Conservatives have been phenomenally successful in their attempts to control the SBC hierarchy. They have a well-defined ideology based upon biblical inerrancy and pro-traditional family issues (conservatives are able to play very effectively upon Baptists' fears that the family is in decline), and they have productively utilized the pulpit, increasing exposure and influence in the national political forum, and a well-organized network of conservative leaders to communicate their views and mobilize support.[83]

Further, conservatives have attempted to eliminate diversity in Convention leadership and healthy debate over theological issues in the interest of control. They have mandated that any proposed resolutions must first be screened by the SBC Executive Committee, and for this reason there has been no resolution presented at the Convention which would overturn the 1984 ruling versus the ordination of women and the call of women to the pastorate.[84] Whether this need for power arises from megalomania or a genuine concern for the souls of those who do not believe in the absolute inerrancy of the Bible is indeterminable.[85] Whatever the reason, conservatives' grip on SBC politics is undeniable. This control has been proven as recently as the summer of 1998, when the SBC voted to amend the Baptist Faith and Message (the first change in thirty-five years) to emphasize that "a wife is to submit graciously to the servant leadership of her husband"

and that the wife "has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper" in domestic affairs.[86] And the surge of support among Southern Baptist men for Promise Keepers, a conservative movement that urges "sissified"[87] men to wrest control of their households from their wives, also speaks to the conservative tidal wave in SBC life. The Promise Keepers' enormous gathering on the Washington Mall in the fall of 1997 proved that the group has widespread support among not only men but also conservative women who appreciate the attempts of their husbands to develop their spirituality and to become more effective (or dictatorial) leaders.

Many Baptists are simply unwilling to question their conservative roots and the patriarchal structure of the Baptist church. Steve Clinton, former minister of students and recreation at Ridgedale Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, acknowledges this hesitation in himself. Clinton also says that he would have no qualms about working with women ministers but that he would feel uncomfortable working for a female pastor. His statements reflect a fear held by conservative men and women that allowing women to lead congregations or become ordained would cause the male-dominated structures of church, home, and society to be overturned. Clinton recalls that when he attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Fort Worth, Texas) in the mid-1980s, the women studying to become pastors were more often the targets of harassment than women in youth ministry, education, or child care programs.[88] Indeed, it is common knowledge that not only are there many more female students in non-theological curricula than divinity programs in seminaries but also that it is easier for these students to find ministerial positions.

While conservatives have waged a successful campaign to re-shape the SBC, moderates have been surprisingly unable to put together a successful counter-attack. The reasons for their fallibility are as numerous as the reasons for the conservative surge. Moderates have been unable to run a SBC presidential candidate capable of loosening the fundamentalist grip on the SBC upper eschelon. The moderate segment has not yet found

a strong leader or formed an effective, unified recruiting and organizational network to mobilize support for moderate causes within the mainstream of the SBC. Instead, moderates have tended to isolate themselves in various splinter groups such as the Alliance of Baptists or the more effective CBF. There is less agreement among moderates than among conservatives about how to make their voices heard in Southern Baptist life since the future growth and success of the CBF is an unknown factor, and many moderates desire to find their niche within the existing structures of the SBC rather than create a less-recognized fringe group such as the CBF (especially as many have seen other fringe organizations experience little success or support). Finally, many moderates are loath to utilize the questionable political tactics employed by conservatives at the national and SBC levels, so they are unable to garner the exposure or support they would need to wrest back some power from conservatives.

Despite the holy war within the SBC, however, moderates have not permanently broken off and formed their own denomination. Perhaps their inability to wage a viable counter-offensive and their relative isolation in fringe groups has prevented such a split. The future of this battle and the SBC as a whole is uncertain, but the deep-seated hostility caused by the conservative-moderate fault line and the sensitivity of the issues (biblical interpretation and the state of the family) forebode more struggle. In the SBC and on the broader American Christian front, conceptions of what religion is and how it should be practiced have become increasingly different for evangelical Christians, Ammerman's "Golden Rule Christians," and activists, and this deepening division is unlikely to be bridged. And the persistence of conservative-progressive distinctions in national politics and the culture as a whole predict a continued divide.

Though the stifling culture of the SBC has attempted to limit women's gains in the leadership arena, there is support for aspiring female ministers among moderate Baptists and in the culture at large. A 1993 poll by the Bama Research Group of Glendale, California, found that 76% of Americans accept the idea of women in the pulpit. And of

the various groups (unchurched, college graduates, Catholic, Protestant, "born again" Christians, and "evangelical" Christians) the interviewers spoke with, only the "evangelical" Christians (the category into which most conservatives fit) were uncomfortable with the thought of a female pastor.[89] The acceptance of women in ministry, even if it is only passive acceptance, perhaps predicts future victories and fewer obstacles for women called to full-time Christian service. Certainly the Protestant doctrine of priesthood of the believer creates the potential for Baptist women to interpret the Scriptures for themselves and decide their own calling rather than allowing the SBC to dictate it to them.

Women ministers in the Southern Baptist Convention still have great progress to make, but they have a presence in Southern Baptist life which cannot be ignored. The Convention underestimates their numbers and their fortitude, but they are and will be heard. They have demonstrated their commitment and their belief that God calls all kinds of people to serve Him by entering the ministry. They reach out to female ministers who have become disheartened, and they inspire the young women who also feel God's hand guiding them to the ministry. They constitute a movement that aims not to place women in high places only to prove a point but to employ their gifts for the worship of God. The history of women's strides toward legitimation within the Convention has been marred by strife, but out of dissent has arisen a more prepared and assured group of women who seek to evangelize the world.

The following resolution proves that there are in fact Southern Baptists (and not only women) who desire to improve the lot of aspiring female ministers. Pastors Marion Douglas Aldridge and J. David Waugh intended to present this resolution at the 1994 Southern Baptist Convention, but it was screened out by the Resolutions Committee before it could be voted on by the Convention as a whole. This document in many aspects mirrors the 1984 resolution that was passed by the SBC, but sections about Eve's role in the fall and the order of creation have been omitted, and a noticeable change has been made to the end:

Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women

> . . .WHEREAS, The New Testament emphasizes the equal dignity of men and women (Gal. 3:28) and that the Holy Spirit was at Pentecost divinely outpoured on men and women alike (Acts 2:17); and WHEREAS, Women as well as men prayed and prophesied in public worship services (I Cor. 11:2-16), and Priscilla joined her husband in teaching Apollos (Acts 18:26), and women fulfilled special church/service ministries as exemplified by Phoebe whose work Paul tributes as that of a deacon of the church (Rom. 16:1). . .Therefore, be it Resolved, That we not decide concerns of Christian doctrine and practice by cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical traditions or emotional factors; that we remind ourselves of the dearly bought Baptist principle of the final authority of Scripture in matters of faith and conduct, and that we both recognize and encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work, including those entailing the tradition of ordination.[90]

Endnotes

[1]Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984), p.65. The resolution passed with 58% of the vote.
[2]Since women have not yet broken into the clerical ranks in the Catholic Church, only Protestant denominations will be discussed in this paper.
[3]Sarah Frances Anders, "Women in Ministry: The Distaff of the Church in Action," *Review and Expositor*, 80 (1983), p. 435.
[4]Amanda Hiley, "Women gain ground in USA ministry roles," *Baptists Today*, 18 March 1993, p. 16.
[5]Sharon Leding Lawhon, "Leading and Planning Worship," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 31 (July 1996), p. 52 and *To Silence the Daughters of God: A brief history of women in ministry in Baptist life 1868-1996* (Kansas City: Baptist Women in Ministry, 1996), pp. 10-11.
[6]Wilburn T. Stancil, "Divergent Views and Practices of Ordination Among Southern Baptists," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 23 (July 1988), pp. 42-49. Ordination is imparted through an official ceremony in which other ordained staff or church members lay hands on and pray for the person being ordained.
[7]The terms "conservative" and "progressive" as used in this paper refer primarily to segments of the religious realm. Conservatives tend to be more fundamentalist in their beliefs (fundamentalism will be explained in a later footnote) than progressives and to ally with political conservatives when they venture into the secular world of public policy. Progressives are religious moderates and liberals (also explained in a later footnote) who tend to side with secularists and political liberals in public policy matters. Definitions drawn from the overarching themes of James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) and Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).
[8]Hunter, pp. 71-79.
[9]Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, pp. 158-160.
[10]Hunter, p. 49. To say that conservatives and progressives have divergent ideas about morality is not to say that one group has the "correct" conception of morality, although members of either group might make such a claim. And, the adjustments that progressive believers make according to evolving cultural context could vary somewhat due to the pluralistic nature of the current religious front.
[11]Nancy T. Ammerman, "Golden Rule Christianity" in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 197-212.
[12]In light of Ammerman's arguments that there is a bell curve of religious believers (a spectrum of conservative, moderate, and liberal people) rather than two easily defined groups at odds, it may be more correct and effective to think of the culture war model as conservative versus non-conservative. For the sake of ease and consistency in terminology, however, the terms "conservative" and "progressive" will continue to be used in this paper.
[13]Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*, p. 153.
[14]A more detailed description of how Southern Baptists fall along the spectrum of

religious beliefs will be discussed later in this paper, but it is necessary here to note some of the major tenets of fundamentalism. Fundamentalists reside at the extreme end of conservatism, and they generally believe in the inerrancy of the Bible as a whole and especially the literal truth of the virgin birth of Christ, Christ's resurrection, and miracles. This literalism along with the belief that humankind is in a great decline that will eventually result in the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ (an idea called dispensational premillenialism) is key in understanding fundamentalists' abhorrence of changing morality. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 3-4.

[15]Hunter, p. 122.

[16]Lowell D. Streiker and Gerald S. Strober, *Religion and the New Majority: Billy Graham, Middle America, and the Politics of the 70s* (New York: Association Press, 1972), pp. 65-77.

[17]Clyde Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers: The Religious Right in American Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 35-43.

[18]Wilcox, pp.42-84.

[19]Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 249.

[20]Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 73. Ordaining pastors tacked on such disclaimers as recently as 35 years ago in the SBC, and many likely still do so.

[21]Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), chapters 1-2.

[22]DeBerg, chapters 1-2.

[23]Cherry, p. 251. Such "suitable" coursework would include Christian education, music, and other non-pastoral tracks.

[24]Cherry, p. 251.

[25]Chaves, p. 19.

[26]Cherry, p. 253.

[27]Rosemary Skinner Keller, "Conversions and Their Consequences: Women's Ministry and Leadership in the United Methodist Tradition," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 101-124 and Catherine Wessinger, "Key Events for Women's Religious Leadership in the United States--Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 347-401.

[28]Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Ministry of Word and Sacrament: Women and Changing Understandings of Ordination," in *The Presbyterian Predicament*, eds. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville: Westminster, 1990), pp. 134-158 and Wessinger, *Key Events*, pp. 347-401.

[29]The timeline of female ordination in the SBC will be discussed in later sections of this paper.

[30]Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 155. It should be noted that the "woman as temptress" theme is not limited to Christianity. Among several other famous examples is the tale of Pandora, whose dowry

was sent to her future husband with explicit instructions not to open the box. When Epimetheus' (the bridegroom's brother) curiosity bests him, evil flies out of the box and infects the world.

[31]Jann Aldredge Clanton, "Why I Believe Southern Baptist Churches Should Ordain Women," *Baptist History and Heritage*, 23 (July 1988), p. 50.

[32]All biblical references in this paragraph are from Genesis 1-3.

[33]Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 195-196. In fact, some feminists assert that not only is gender hierarchy not ordained by God, it is one of the evils that the fall of humankind introduced.

[34]Galatians 3:28.

[35]Ephesians 5:22.

[36]Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Women, Men, and the Bible* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), p. 13.

[37]Clanton, p. 53. The quotation is from the New International Version of the Bible.

[38]Mollenkott, *Women, Men, and the Bible*, pp. 40-52.

[39]Lawhon, pp. 54-55.

[40]Acts 2:1-13.

[41]Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th edition (United Bible Societies,1983).

[42]Mollenkott, *Women, Men, and the Bible*, pp. 76-82. Paul mentions the faithfulness and helpfulness of female workers in the early church at the end of Romans.

[43]Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Conflict of Political Theologies in the Churches: Does God Take Sides in Class Struggle?" in *Churches in Struggle: Liberation Theologies and Social Change in North America*, ed. William K. Tabb (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986), pp. 18-31. Ruether explains that the royal tradition is evident in the imperial states around ancient Israel and in the Davidic monarchy.

[44]Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp. 31, 215. Ruether acknowledges that while her approach to the Bible (accepting one tradition while rejecting the other) is selective, all theologies result in a certain amount of picking and choosing.

[45]Southern Baptists fall along a continuum according to their beliefs on certain moral and theological issues. Fundamentalists and liberals constitute the extremes of the spectrum, and conservatives and moderates (the two populations most frequently found in the SBC) fall into the middle range. Generally conservatives are more fundamentalist than moderates in that they are adamantly pro-life and believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and the authority of the pastor. Moderates, the rough equivalent of Ammerman's Golden Rule Christians, do not condone abortion but recognize the individual's right to make choices. They also interpret the Bible more thematically than literally and view ministers as servants rather than executives.

[46]Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sequicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), p. 292.

[47]Walter Shurden, ed. *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993), pp. ix-x. A resolution was also adopted (but largely unheeded thereafter by conservatives) at the Convention that discouraged political maneuvering for electing SBC officials.

[48]Personal interview with Dixie Petrey, 7 Apr. 1997.
[49]Shurden, pp. x-xi.
[50]Shurden, p. xiv.
[51]I Corinthians 14:34-35, New Revised Standard Version. Inerrantists also frequently cite I Timothy 2:12-15 (verses which state that no woman should have authority over a man) and I Timothy 3:2-5 (verses which say that a bishop should be the husband of one wife, therefore implying that women cannot be clergy) as arguments versus women becoming ministers.
[52]Galatians 3:28, New Revised Standard Version.
[53]Jesus' affinity for liberating the oppressed corresponds to Ruether's idea that inequality is the result of sin rather than a mandate from God. "The Conflict of Political Theologies in the Churches," pp. 18-31.
[54]See Exodus 15:20, Judges 4:4, John 4:4-42, Luke 8:1-3, John 20:11-18. Moderates also use Genesis 1:26-28, Acts 2:1-21, Acts 18:26, and Acts 21:8-10 to promote their views.
[55]Personal interview with Mary Jayne Allen, 26 Mar. 1997. Karen Henderson (interviewed 27 Mar. 1997) and Dixie Petrey (interviewed 7 Apr. 1997) made similar statements justifying the role of women in ministry.
[56]Lawhon, p. 50.
[57]*To Silence the Daugthers of God*, p. 3.
[58]*To Silence the Daughters of God*, p. 4.
[59]Lawhon, p. 50.
[60]Southern Baptist Convention, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984), p. 65.
[61]Fletcher, p. 272. The fact that conservative women were some of the most adamant supporters of the motion shows the deep division in the Convention. The resolution currently stands. Proposals that would reverse it have been drawn up but never presented at the Convention. To add to the sting of the resolution, the Home Mission Board avowed that it would lend no missions funds to churches with women ministers.
[62]*Together. . . On the Journey: A brief history of Baptist women in ministry 1868-1993* (Louisville: Baptist Women in Ministry, 1993), p. 3.
[63]Fletcher, p. 291, and *Together*, p. 3.
[64]Fletcher, p. 293 and p. 425.
[65]*To Silence the Daughters of God*, p. 8.
[66]Interview with Allen.
[67]Some of the other moderate seminaries are located at Samford University (Birmingham, AL), Mercer University (Macon, GA), and Central Baptist Theological Seminary (formerly an American Baptist Church seminary) in Kansas City, KS.
[68]Fletcher, pp. 342-343.
[69]*Together*, pp. 4-5.
[70]Interview with Petrey.
[71]Bill J. Leonard, "Seminary Crackdown," *Christian Century*, 11 (1995), p. 501.
[72] "SBC head chastises students," *Christian Century*, 112 (1995), pp. 450-451.
[73]Leonard, p. 501.
[74]*Battle for the Minds*, Battle for the Minds, Inc., 1995. Molly Marshall is now teaching

at a moderate seminary in Kansas City, Kansas. She was scheduled to become a tenured member of the Central Seminary theology faculty in August 1997. "Molly Marshall Granted Tenure by Central Seminary Board of Directors," *Folio*, Winter 1996-1997, p. 8.
[75]"Tenured SBC woman forced to resign," *Christian Century*, 111 (1994), p. 847.
[76]Interview with Petrey. Dixie Petrey, who was one of the winners, was actually the pastor of an American Baptist Church in Kent, Indiana, at the time.
[77]Sarah Frances Anders, "SBC women in ministry near triple in 6 years," *Baptists Today*, 18 Mar. 1993, p. 16. Also, Hiley, p. 16 and *Together*, pp. 3-5. *To Silence the Daughters of God*, pp. 10-11.
[78]Mollenkott, pp. 52-53.
[79]*Together*, p. 5.
[80]Interview with Petrey.
[81]Interview with Allen.
[82]Interview with Petrey.
[83]Samuel S. Hill, "The Story Beneath the Story: Southern Baptists Since World War II" in *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination*, ed. Nancy Tatom Ammerman (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), pp. 43-44.
[84]Interview with Petrey.
[85]It should be noted that conservatives' belief in the inerrancy of the Bible precludes any overt and self-conscious discussion about the historical context of the Bible and the adjustment of biblical interpretations to include social change.
[86]"The Baptist Faith and Message," http://www.utm.edu/martinarea/fbc/bfm/18.html.
[87]Promise Keepers, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1994), p. 73. The derogatory term "sissy" (or some variant of it) is used four times in the span of one chapter.
[88]Personal interview with Steve Clinton, 13 Apr. 1997.
[89]"SBC: Ordaining Women Up to Local Churches," *Christian Century*, 110 (1993), p. 1045.
[90]Interview with Petrey.

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