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The Sacralization of Absolute Power:  
God's Power and Women's Subordination in the Southern Baptist Convention

An Honors Paper for the Department of Religion  
By Sydney Catherine Smith

Bowdoin College, 2019

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## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Bowdoin College Faculty Scholar program, for providing the grant which facilitated the summer research that made this project possible. Thanks to all of my friends who supported me throughout this long year of research, including spontaneously driving to Hillsong Church with me and always asking for the “hot Calvinism goss.” Thanks to Chelsea, for hosting me at Duke while I revised this project, and for joining me for study breaks to watch Duke softball. Thanks to Michael, for driving me to the SBC headquarters in Nashville.

To the professors who sparked my love for the study of religion at Bowdoin, Prof. Morrison, Prof. Pritchard, Prof. Sonia, Prof. Berzon, and Prof. Golovkova: thank you so much, not only for what you have taught me, but for your contagious passion for learning.

I extend my most heartfelt love and thanks to my home church, Immanuel Baptist Church in Lexington, KY. And to my brother Cullen, for his love and support at all times—including driving me to Louisville to explore The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and going to the Passion conference with me in 2015. And to my mom and dad, for their love and support, and for raising me to love learning.

Most of all, I would like to thank Professor Pritchard. I cannot express how much I appreciate the many hours you have put in to help me with this project. Our meetings over the past year have been a highlight of my Bowdoin experience, as you have challenged me to think deeply and critically about things I am passionate about. Thank you for your wisdom in guiding me through this process with which I was entirely unfamiliar and for helping me see the big picture when I get lost in the details.

## Introduction

In February 2009, the cover of TIME Magazine advertised its feature story: “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now.” This special edition magazine consisted of an analysis of several potentially world-changing innovations, and many people were likely shocked to discover “The New Calvinism” listed among them.<sup>1</sup> The article noted the neo-Calvinist emphasis on divine sovereignty and total depravity, describing the theological system as “complete with an utterly sovereign and micromanaging deity [and] sinful and puny humanity” and marveling at the stunning success of such a harsh theological system among an almost exclusively millennial audience.<sup>2</sup> Neo-Calvinism is led by passionate and charismatic individuals such as John Piper, Mark Driscoll, and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Al Mohler—men who draw huge crowds of young people with their blunt messages about absolute sovereignty, total depravity, and predestination. The neo-Calvinist movement has rapidly spread throughout the American Protestant landscape, embedding its theology into a variety of institutions, including parachurch organizations and even well-established denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

Although the emergence of neo-Calvinism is a fairly recent development, especially within the SBC, there is a long history of Calvinist influence on Baptist churches in the United States. It began in England, when Puritan separatists broke off from the Anglican church, motivated by their desire to “purify” the church from lingering Catholic tendencies. They placed a strong emphasis on the authority of scripture, declaring their intention to exclude from official church doctrine

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<sup>1</sup> Followers of this movement generally call themselves “New Calvinists,” but I use the term “neo-Calvinist” to refer to both the persons and the theology they endorse.

<sup>2</sup> David Van Biema, “10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now: The New Calvinism,” *Time*, March 12, 2009, accessed February 22, 2019, [http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779\\_1884782\\_1884760,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1884779_1884782_1884760,00.html).

“everything that was not commanded directly by Scripture.”<sup>3</sup> Several sects subsequently split off from the Puritans, including the Baptists. Baptists distinguished themselves through the practice of adult baptism by immersion, baptizing individuals “on the basis of their own personal professions of faith.”<sup>4</sup> They also relied heavily on the authority of scripture; in fact, their namesake practice of adult baptism by immersion was rooted in a desire to adhere to their interpretation of New Testament standards for baptism. Baptists were later divided into two main groups: General Baptists (who believed in general atonement—the idea that Jesus died for all of mankind, without exception) and Particular Baptists (who believed in particular, or limited, atonement—the idea that Jesus died only for the elect). The Particular Baptists adopted a Calvinist theological framework, supplementing their namesake practice of adult baptism by immersion with strong beliefs in limited atonement, perseverance of the saints, and the authority of scripture.<sup>5</sup> When Particular Baptists immigrated to America, they adopted their own confessional statement—the Philadelphia Confession. In the mid-nineteenth century, conflict over the institution of slavery drove a regional wedge between Baptists in the north and south, leading to the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845. SBC founders like John Dagg, James P. Boyce, and John A. Broadus

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<sup>3</sup> Mark A Noll, *Protestants in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 16.

The Particular Baptists adopted the First London Confession (1644) and Second London Confession (1689) as a declaration of their Calvinist identity—and thus, their distinction from other Baptists. The Philadelphia Confession was nearly identical to these traditional Particular Baptist confessions. The following excerpts are from the First London Baptist Confession (1644) and demonstrate the Particular Baptists’ Calvinist theology:

*Limited atonement*: “Christ, being consecrated, has appeared once to put away sin by the offering and sacrifice of Himself, and to this end has fully performed and suffered all those things by which God... might reconcile His elect only”; “Christ Jesus by His death did bring forth salvation and reconciliation only for the elect.”

*Perseverance of the saints*: “Those that have this precious faith wrought in them by the Spirit, can never finally nor totally fall away.”

*Total depravity and unconditional election*: “All mankind being thus fallen, and become altogether dead in sins and trespasses, and subject to the eternal wrath of the great God by transgression; yet the elect, which God has loved with an everlasting love, are redeemed, quickened, and saved, not by themselves, neither by their own works, lest any man should boast himself, but wholly and only by God of His free grace and mercy.”

The Reformed Reader, “London Baptist Confession of 1644,” accessed April 9, 2019, <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/h.htm>.

defended Calvinist theology and ensured that it was taught in the denomination's first seminary—The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>6</sup> Though Calvinist theology was highly influential during the founding of the SBC, it began to experience a decline during the early twentieth century. According to Gregory Wills, a professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Southern Baptists relinquished Calvinism in the early twentieth century due largely to the influence of pragmatism, experiential theology, and a growing emphasis on the priority of individual freedom.”<sup>7</sup> With the decline of Calvinist theology in favor of more progressive theology came the emergence of liberalism within the denomination. This trend continued until the late twentieth century when, after lying relatively dormant for quite some time, Calvinist theology finally began to make a comeback. SBC conservatives returned to Calvinist theology in an attempt to combat liberalism—and especially to counter the influence of feminism that was becoming evident in the rise of women's ordination in the denomination. But this new iteration of Calvinism marks both continuity and change. Though neo-Calvinism has retained key doctrines from its theological predecessor—including election, predestination, divine sovereignty, and the total depravity of humanity—it has evolved to appeal to a new generation of Americans.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 282-285.

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 240.

<sup>8</sup> Some of the leaders of the movement self-identify as neo-Calvinists, adherents to a neo-Calvinist theological framework. This includes John Piper, who identifies with the Reformed Baptist denomination and has embraced the label of “neo-Calvinist.” However, a significant number of the uses of this term come not from self-identification, but from external observers applying the label. Scholars identify neo-Calvinist organizations by their theological statements and affiliations, and they identify neo-Calvinists by the content of their sermons, lectures, and written publications. Though many neo-Calvinist leaders will affirm the merits of neo-Calvinist theology and align themselves with known neo-Calvinist organizations, some are often unwilling to self-identify with the epithet “neo-Calvinist” because of the stigma attached to it. In fact, anxiety surrounding “Calvinism” even drove the SBC executive committee to order a study of the “Impact of Calvinism on SBC Life” in 2007. SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (San Antonio, TX: SBC Executive Committee, 2007), 69. Thus, part of the reason that the neo-Calvinist movement has been so successful, especially in the SBC, has been its effective branding, distancing itself from the explicit label of “neo-Calvinism.”

Events like the Passion Conference attract tens of thousands of college students to hear the messages of neo-Calvinism, leading *Christianity Today* reporter Collin Hansen to refer to neo-Calvinists as “Young, Restless, and Reformed.”<sup>9</sup> Speakers at this annual event encourage students to follow God by emphasizing God’s sovereignty and glory. Their message, according to Hansen, is: “God is wonderfully, inexplicably glorious. You are not. But how amazing is it that the very God of the universe invites screwed-up people to give their lives in sold-out service to his eternal kingdom!”<sup>10</sup> According to Piper, one of the defining features of neo-Calvinism is the prevalence of “big-God theology”<sup>11</sup>—rhetoric based on the transcendent attributes of God such as omnipotence and omniscience. Millennial Christians who grew up in seeker-sensitive churches that emphasized the closeness and compassion of God (as well as the goodness of humanity) and focused on the development of a personal relationship with God are increasingly rejecting the theological leanings of their youths.<sup>12</sup> The Christianity of generation X and Y, popularized by Rick Warren in his bestselling book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, has begun to lose its appeal to the millennial generation. Instead, many young people are being drawn to a new set of divine attributes: sovereignty, sufficiency, omniscience, and omnipotence. As Collin Hansen observed, “Teenagers who grew up with buddy Jesus in youth group don’t know as much about Father...

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<sup>9</sup> Collin Hansen. *Young, Restless, and Reformed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> John Piper, “The New Calvinism and the New Community: The Doctrines of Grace and the Meaning of Race,” Richard Gaffin Lecture on Theology, Culture, and Missions, Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA, March 12, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Though there are no exact figures on how many neo-Calvinists exist in the evangelical landscape, the scale and momentum of the movement can be demonstrated through several pieces of evidence: (1) the large crowds at events like the annual Passion conferences; (2) the growth of megachurches led by neo-Calvinists like John Piper (Bethlehem Baptist—average weekly attendance of 3,950), Matt Chandler (The Village Church—average weekly attendance of 10,000), and Louie Giglio (Passion City Church—average weekly attendance of 8,000) who preach neo-Calvinist theology and emphasize the glory, majesty, and sovereignty of God; (3) the recent uptick in the number of parachurch organizations that advocate positions consistent with neo-Calvinism and whose boards are filled with prominent neo-Calvinists (The Gospel Coalition, Together for the Gospel, Sovereign Grace Ministries, and 9Marks); and (4) the fanatical followings that have materialized around figures like John Piper, making him one of the most well-known evangelical figures of the twenty-first century and propelling his ministry organization (Desiring God Ministries), church, and book sales to enormous success.



[there is] this great hunger for a genuinely God-centered, transcendence-focused understanding of who God is.”<sup>13</sup>

Owen Strachan, an associate professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, identifies this trend as a response to the perceived inadequacy of seeker-sensitive Christianity. In an interview with Collin Hansen, Strachan laments that mainstream Christian culture is often too focused on the self rather than the divine. He explains that neo-Calvinist theology offers an escape from this restrictive perspective, shifting the focus from internal to external: “It draws you into this world where God’s providence is mysterious and where God is transcendent in his glory, in his might, in his power, in his wonder, and certainly in his work of redemption in Christ Jesus.”<sup>14</sup> Strachan summarizes the appeal of the neo-Calvinist theology: “I realized that [it] was truly tackling the major challenge of our time, which was to be able to worship a God on his own terms, and not on our terms.”<sup>15</sup>

A large part of the success of the Neo-Calvinist movement has been its appeal to young people, drawing huge crowds and inspiring passionate new followers.<sup>16</sup> The Passion Conference, founded in 1997 by Atlanta megachurch pastor Louie Giglio, has become a platform through which 18-25 year-old students are introduced to neo-Calvinist theology; in 2018, the Passion Conference

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<sup>13</sup> Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, and Reformed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 21.

<sup>14</sup> Owen Strachan, “Young, Restless, Reformed in a Secular Age: On Charles Taylor,” interview with Collin Hansen, *Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary: The City of God*, podcast, April 9, 2018, <https://cpt.mbts.edu/podcast/young-restless-reformed-in-a-secular-age-on-charles-taylor/>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Though Giglio and Piper’s Passion conferences attract tens of thousands of young people each year, critics may argue that that attendees are not necessarily neo-Calvinists themselves—that they haven’t “bought in” to the theological framework that permeates the entire event. However, the appeal of the conference is still significant because of the exposure young people are getting to neo-Calvinist theology. Even if they were not attracted to the conference because of its narrowly tailored theological message, their exposure to it through sermons and songs inevitably impacts their conception of who God is. As Joshua Harris observed, “The things that nineteen-year-olds are willing to say about God in their songs is mind-boggling.” Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, and Reformed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

was held at the sold-out locations of Atlanta’s Philips Arena (capacity: 21,000) and Washington DC’s The Anthem (capacity: 6,000). Every year, the conference features well-known guest speakers (like John Piper, Francis Chan, Matt Chandler, and Steven Furtick) and concert-style musical performances from guest artists (like Hillsong, Kristian Stanfill, the David Crowder Band, and Chris Tomlin). At the Passion conference in 2000, John Piper delivered a sermon entitled “Boasting Only in the Cross” that laid out the overarching theological message of the conference, emphasizing the total depravity of humanity and the sovereignty of God. Piper told his audience, “You are creatures, not creators. God made you. He is not beholden to you. You have absolutely no rights over and against the living God; he has all rights over and against you. You have no claims on God; he may do with you as he pleases... You’re not deserving of anything good from God. You have done nothing to enrich him—who has given a gift to God that he should be repaid? Who has been his counselor that he should counsel back?... You are creatures and deserve nothing from your creator.”<sup>17</sup> It is this recognition of the vastness of the chasm between human depravity and divine sovereignty that forms the basis for the entire neo-Calvinist theological system. The type of big-God theology that is prevalent at Passion is claimed to have the potential to transform the lives of the conferences’ young attendees. Matt Chandler, a senior pastor at the Southern Baptist megachurch The Village Church, was one of the featured speakers at the 2015 Passion conference. Chandler narrated his teenage encounter with Passion and shared the story of how he was convicted by the holy spirit while he was there. Chandler reported the message he heard from God: “You are awful. You are a hypocrite. You do give yourself over to things that I despise... [But] stop looking at you and look at me. Now, look how awesome *I am*. Look how big *I am*, look

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<sup>17</sup> John Piper, “Boasting Only in the Cross,” sermon, Passion conference, Shelby Farms, TN, May 20, 2000, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/boasting-only-in-the-cross>.

how mighty *I am*. Look how sufficient *I am*. Look how gracious *I am*.”<sup>18</sup> According to Chandler, the neo-Calvinist theology of Passion made a significant impact on his life, transforming his relationship with Christianity and freeing him from doubt by encouraging him to focus on God’s glory rather than his own. It is this theological framework that motivates the worship sessions for which Passion is famous.

According to Passion founder Louie Giglio, worship is the purpose of human existence: “I exist to worship God. No, listen—not ‘that’s *one of the things* I do.’ I exist, I live, I breathe, to worship God... God doesn’t exist to worship me, I exist to worship God. God doesn’t exist for me, I exist by and for God.”<sup>19</sup> Through events like the Passion conferences, neo-Calvinists link transcendent qualities of God like omniscience and omnipotence to the imperative for humanity to worship the divine. When the conference attendees engage in corporate worship, they are emotionally primed to feel both guilt (connected with their depraved, sinful nature) and awe at the majesty of God. Songs like the Grammy-nominated “Reckless Love” were released at Passion 2018, repeating key words such as “shame,” “embarrassed,” “wretch,” and “prodigal” in reference to humanity—immediately juxtaposed with key words such as “magnify,” “exalt,” “reign,” “glory,” and “holy” used in reference to God.<sup>20</sup> The intense imagery of these songs sets up a narrative of humans as worthless sinners and God as merciful redeemer—the implicit message

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<sup>18</sup> Matt Chandler, sermon, Passion conference (session 5), Houston, TX, January 2, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRE6a9R4F-U>.

<sup>19</sup> Louie Giglio, “ANCHOR- Extravagant Worship: Part 1,” sermon, Passion City Church, Atlanta, GA, November 29, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39-Mq\\_Clpq4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39-Mq_Clpq4).

<sup>20</sup> Passion ft. Melodie Malone, “Reckless Love (Live),” January 1-3, 2018, track 4 on *Passion: Whole Heart*, Capitol Christian Music Group, Inc., 2018.

Passion ft. Sean Curran, “Almighty God (Live),” January 1-3, 2018, track 2 on *Passion: Whole Heart*, Capitol Christian Music Group, Inc., 2018.

being that the stadium full of people, identified as “prodigals and thieves,” has no alternative but to worship and “magnify” God.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to its theology being featured at hugely popular and increasingly mainstream youth conferences, neo-Calvinism thrives because its leaders have strategically pursued institutionalization—circulating theology through active and carefully-cultivated social media presences, intentionally investing in parachurch organizations, and successfully infiltrating denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention. For example, in 2005, D.A. Carson and Tim Keller founded The Gospel Coalition (TGC), an interdenominational network of neo-Calvinist churches across the globe. This organization has promoted neo-Calvinist theology through its distribution of educational materials and its sponsorship of conferences. The leadership of TGC is now organized into a council that includes influential members like Danny Akin (President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary), Russell Moore (president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC), and Mark Dever (pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church and founder of 9 Marks Ministries). In 2006, C.J. Mahaney, Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, and Al Mohler founded the Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, which has since sponsored biennial conferences featuring lectures and panels from some of the world’s most influential neo-Calvinist speakers and theologians. Though the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW)

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<sup>21</sup> The 2018 conference also featured a live performance of a song— “Ever Almighty”—which provides an example of the popular big-God theology characteristic of neo-Calvinist theology. God, a majestic and larger-than-life sovereign, has authority over everything; therefore, fear has been conquered and people no longer need to feel overwhelmed by it. This sentiment is demonstrated by the song’s bridge, which repeats: “Fear doesn’t get to sit on your throne, no you won’t share your glory.” In an interview, songwriter Kristian Stanfill explains the appeal of this conception of God: “It’s not ignoring that these things exist, it’s just refocusing on something bigger, and greater... It’s acknowledging that, yeah, you might be walking through something but, hey, we have a God who’s on our throne.”

Kristian Stanfill, “Passion: Ever Almighty (Song Story),” interview with Brooke Ligertwood, Scott Ligertwood, and Brett Younker, Passion Conferences, Inc., March 15, 2018.

is a single-issue organization focused on gender—and more recently, sexuality—its founders and current membership also include prominent neo-Calvinists.

Perhaps even more remarkable than neo-Calvinism's effective recruitment of the next generation is the fact that neo-Calvinism has successfully disseminated an elaborate and systematic theology, constructed parachurch organizations, and become thoroughly embedded into the polity of the Southern Baptist Convention. Furthermore, it radically redefined the denomination's conception and institutionalization of power. In the late twentieth century, Southern Baptist conservatives orchestrated a dramatic transformation of the denomination; though it has been described as a "resurgence" by its conservative proponents, I believe it is more accurately described as a "takeover." Though the extent of the institutional changes implemented by the conservatives is itself reason for concern, perhaps the more troubling development has been how they have downplayed the radicality of their effort to centralize denominational power and restrict women from accessing power. Neo-Calvinists—and more specifically, Southern Baptist conservatives—preach subordinationism but mask it as moderate by referring to it instead as "complementarianism." I argue that scholars have overlooked the extent of the systematic and far-reaching conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention and have thus failed to recognize its insidious aim: to acclimate followers to submission to the absolute power of church authorities and specifically, to sacralize and institute women's subordination to men. In this project, I adopt a feminist critical-historical approach, examining the ideological clashes and political moves that contributed to the conservative takeover of the SBC and the rise of "complementarianism" and the consequences for women's roles and lives within the SBC. Throughout my research, I have examined a plethora of primary materials: annual convention reports of the SBC; confessional statements, the bylaws of the SBC and various SBC entities;

newspaper articles (especially from official denominational news outlets like the *Baptist Press*); and relevant sermons, conference addresses, and panel discussions.

My research builds on existing scholarship on the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, the rise of the religious right, and analyses of gender and submission within conservative religious communities. Some existing literature, including Elizabeth Flowers' *Into the Pulpit*, examines how conservative, moderate, and liberal women all contributed to the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention. Though Flowers's work is important for recognizing the oft-overlooked role that women played during this denominational crisis, she mainly focuses on the debate over the ordination of women—not on theological concerns of submission or “complementary” gender roles. Similarly, Eileen R. Campbell-Reed's *Anatomy of a Schism* focuses its attention on the ordination of women and on the experience of Southern Baptist clergywomen. However, a narrow focus on the exclusion of women from official clergy roles distracts from the larger forces at play. Sally Dean Smith Holt's 2001 dissertation, “The SBC and the WMU: Issues of Power and Authority Relating to Organization and Structure,” also provides insight into the impact of intra-denominational politics, detailing the contributions that women made to the takeover. However, her exclusive focus on the moderate Women's Missionary Union neglects the impact of the advocacy and leadership of conservative women. Marie Griffith's book *God's Daughters*, an account of her research in the Aglow community, has the opposite problem. Focusing exclusively on conservative women, Griffith postulates that women in conservative religious communities self-report empowerment through submission.<sup>22</sup> However, this

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<sup>22</sup> Julie Ingersoll and Brenda Basher also draw on the work of Marie Griffith, weighing in on the struggle for conservative women to access power within their religious communities. Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). According to Basher, “To Christian Fundamentalist women, the restrictive religious identity they embrace improves their ability to direct the course of their lives and empowers them in their relationships with others.” Brenda Basher, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 6.

argument fails to fully contextualize competing claims within broader institutional frameworks of power—specifically men’s claims about both God’s and their own claims to power. My research seeks to provide a more comprehensive account of gender and power within conservative religious communities by examining institutional changes in light of relevant scholarly discourse as well as first-person reports of both Southern Baptist men and women about their access to various modalities of power.

Religious scholars seeking to account for the mobilization of conservative Christians in the United States argue for the centrality of *Roe v. Wade*—and the subsequent American culture war that ensued surrounding the issue of abortion—as a catalyst for conservative political resistance.<sup>23</sup> Scholars like Dallas Blanchard have tended to identify a fundamental connection between the institutionalization of the submission of women and opposition to abortion, arguing that conservatives advocate for the abolition of abortion in order to create an avenue for the institutional control of the sex lives of women.<sup>24</sup> However, this monolithic explanation fails to take into consideration a number of other factors that also significantly contributed to the movement. A focus on external political concerns like the abortion debate entirely overlooks the internal mechanisms that were crucial to the conservatives’ success. Indeed, intra-denominational political concerns and institutional changes (including a newfound acceptance of creedalism and a reversal of Baptist democratic tendencies) have been equally or exceedingly influential with respect to external political factors.

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<sup>23</sup> Michael J. McVicar, “The Religious Right in America,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. John Barton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 11.

<sup>24</sup> Dallas A. Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right in America: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (Woodbridge, CT: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 47.

However, with the issue of abortion in particular, the Southern Baptist Convention diverges from the rest of the religious right. As Randall Balmer points out, the SBC, specifically, has not always had a consistent position against abortion.<sup>25</sup> The SBC did not initially oppose abortion—even after the controversial *Roe v. Wade* decision. At the 1971 annual convention, messengers passed a resolution announcing their support for the legalization of abortion in the case of rape, incest, evidence of severe fetal deformity, or significant risk to the health of the mother.<sup>26</sup> For the next several years, unlike many of their peer Protestant denominations, SBC messengers declined to call for a constitutional amendment invalidating the *Roe v. Wade* decision at any of their annual conventions. Thus, the effect of external factors like the national abortion debate has likely been largely overstated, with the internal politics of religious groups like the SBC being largely overlooked. This same criticism applies to scholarship which argues for the centrality of concern about “family values” to the rise of the religious right and the conservative takeover of the SBC.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, approaching the conservative takeover of the SBC solely as a product of anti-abortion sentiment in the wake of *Roe v. Wade* reveals the problem with conflating the conservative takeover of the SBC with the rise of the religious right in America—treating the American evangelical community as a monolith rather recognizing its complexity and diversity.

One source that provides a comprehensive examination of both internal and external factors that contributed to the rise of the religious right is Matthew Avery Sutton’s *American Apocalypse*.

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<sup>25</sup> Randall Balmer, “The Real Origins of the Religious Right,” *Politico*, May 27, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133>.

<sup>26</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO: SBC Executive Committee, 1971).

<sup>27</sup> Such scholarship includes: William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 100-143; Seth Dowland, “Family Values and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda,” *Church History* 78, no. 3 (2009); Paulina Napierala, “The American Religious Right and James Dobson’s ‘Family Values Empire,’” *Journal of American Studies* 14 (2013), 113-138; Edward L. Queen, *In the South the Baptists are the Center of Gravity: Southern Baptists and Social Change, 1930-1980* (Philadelphia, PA: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 71.



Sutton recognizes theological factors that have motivated evangelicals to become involved in politics, specifically focusing on anxiety surrounding the impending apocalypse. According to Sutton, it was engagement in the “politics of apocalypse” that shaped the rise of American evangelicalism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, especially in the political sphere.<sup>28</sup> My research reinforces Sutton’s recognition that internal politics and doctrinal concerns of religious organizations may impact the secular political landscape beyond lobbying for “family values.” Though I examine the impact of a different theological issue than Sutton (neo-Calvinism does not have a consistent and prominent position on the end times), the overlap between our work lies in the recognition of theology as a motivating factor in the political involvement of religious individuals. Sutton notes that every aspect of fundamentalist evangelicals’ lives centers around their belief in the imminent and violent end of the world: “Apocalypticism provided radical evangelicals with a framework through which to interpret their lives, their communities, and the future, which in turn often inspired, influenced, and justified the choices they made.”<sup>29</sup> With the stakes thus elevated, they are willing to engage in relatively radical actions. Similarly, I recognize that conservative Southern Baptists have elevated the stakes of the debate about gender by injecting neo-Calvinist theology and concerns about the authority of the Bible. This has led them to embrace an absolutist stance, insisting that beliefs about gender are of “salvation-tier” importance.

In the first chapter, I lay out the historical background of the Southern Baptist Convention, examining the trends and ideological/ political tensions that contributed to the conservative takeover of the denomination. In the second chapter, I engage in a thorough examination of neo-

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

Calvinist theology and how it has been used to justify gender subordinationism—even as this imperative has been strategically veiled in order to make the movement seem more moderate. In the third chapter, I examine the institutional changes that conservatives imposed to justify their ideological claims, including the centralization of denominational power. In the fourth chapter, I engage in a close examination of women’s power in the SBC, focusing on the implications of institutionalized subordinationism and the ways that women access power within the denomination. In the fifth chapter, I address the #MeToo movement within the Southern Baptist Convention, focusing mainly on how the institutionalization of elite men’s power as absolute contributed to this culture of abuse. In the final chapter, I discuss the implications of this project for studies of gender and power, American Protestantism, and American political conceptions of power.

## Chapter 1: A Brief History of The Conservative Takeover of the SBC

During the late twentieth century, conservatives argued that the Southern Baptist Convention had always been ideologically conservative. Thus, they argued that the liberalism which had spread through the denomination during the mid-twentieth century represented a significant departure from tradition. However, the history of the SBC with respect to liberalism is more complex and multi-faceted than the conservatives would like to admit. Throughout the one and a half centuries that have elapsed since the denomination's founding, there has rarely been ideological unanimity among Southern Baptists. Both external political movements in the United States and internal developments in the SBC have led to doctrinal disputes, causing semi-regular ideological shifts within the denomination.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, Southern Baptist conservatives felt threatened by progressive trends in the United States that were being spread to the seminaries. Amidst fears of the growing influence of Darwinism and progressive theology, conservatives attempted to defend the orthodoxy of their beliefs by insisting that the denomination adopt its first official confessional statement. Fearmongering about the threat of these liberalizing trends culminated in the adoption of the 1925 *Baptist Faith & Message*. This conservative confessional statement rejected evolution, reinforced the "supernatural elements" of Christianity, and elevated the Bible as divinely-inspired and inerrant.<sup>2</sup> However, the adoption of

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<sup>1</sup> Though I acknowledge the lack of a singular ideological viewpoint across the SBC, this does not mean that ideological shifts were always dramatic and systematically executed. The denomination did not regularly swing from one ideological extreme to the other; rather, the general pattern involved progressive influences gradually making their way into the denomination, followed by a conservative attempt to restore what they considered to be doctrinal orthodoxy. It was not until the conservative takeover of the late twentieth century that an ideological shift was so systematically executed that it became embedded in the institutional infrastructure of the denomination.

<sup>2</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Memphis, TN: SBC Executive Committee, 1925), 71. The 1925 *Baptist Faith & Message* confessional statement characterized the Bible as "a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction," declaring, "It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for it matter." During the years that followed the adoption of the *Baptist Faith & Message*, there has been much debate over the meaning of this statement about scripture, which has led to clarification attempts during subsequent revisions in 1963, 1998, and 2000.

creeds and confessions often correlates more with anxiety and uncertainty—an attempt to ward off the threat of competing doctrinal positions—than with ideological unanimity. The 1925 *Baptist Faith & Message* was no different, with conservatives attempting to respond to progressive influences that had already become embedded within seminaries and threatened to spread throughout the SBC. However, the adoption of an official denomination-wide confession was not sufficient to permanently halt the spread of liberalism throughout the denomination; over the next few decades, the SBC continued its gradual shift toward liberalism. This liberal trend was triggered by a combination of a variety of factors: the desire to preserve membership and wealth gains by not alienating any particular portion of SBC membership, the continued influence of Baptist democratic tendencies, and the decline of Calvinism within the denomination.

The era immediately following World War II was prosperous for many American Protestant denominations, but none more so than the Southern Baptist Convention. Economic development and changing demographics in the rural south thrust the SBC into unprecedented expansion, leading it to become the largest, wealthiest Protestant denomination in the United States—distinctions that it retains even to this day.<sup>3</sup> During this mid-twentieth century era of relative prosperity, the denomination actively avoided controversy, declining to take controversial stances on doctrinal disputes and opening the door to the possibility of tolerating theological diversity. This was partially in an effort to preserve its gains by not alienating any of its new members, but also a result of the continued influence of centuries-old Baptist democratic tendencies like belief in the priesthood of the believer, dedication to the autonomy of the local church, and rejection of creedalism.<sup>4</sup> The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer disputes the

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 36.

<sup>4</sup> Southern Baptists consider creeds to be binding, with adherence to the creed determining whether or not a church is allowed to maintain its fellowship with the denomination. They consider confessions, on the other hand, to be

relevance of a priestly intercessor between humans and God, instead asserting that all believers share equal access to the divine; therefore, the role of a pastor is much different than that of a priest. Baptist distrust of centralized power structures is demonstrated through commitment to the autonomy of the local church. In practice, this means that no individual or institution has the power to give orders to individual churches. Leaning heavily on the “sola scriptura” tradition of the Protestant Reformation, Baptists have historically been anti-creedal, declaring, “No creed but the Bible!” The Southern Baptist Convention was set up to operate within a semi-democratic framework, with elections held for term-limited leadership positions, representatives from each church sent to an annual convention to weigh in on matters of denominational concern, and limitations placed on mechanisms of control that might enforce compliance with denominational policies. Thus, Southern Baptists have historically approached any propositions that involved centralization of power or loss of autonomy for individuals or local churches with a healthy dose of skepticism.

When The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary opened in Greenville, South Carolina in 1859, James P. Boyce led a committee to write a confessional statement for the denomination’s flagship seminary. This statement, known as the “Abstract of Principles,” was modeled after earlier Baptist confessions, most notably the Westminster Confession and the Second London Confession. Though more concise than its predecessors, the Abstract echoed the same Calvinist

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voluntary affirmations of commonly held beliefs. With their historic commitments to the maintenance of individual autonomy and local church autonomy, Southern Baptists have resisted categorizing any statements, including the *Baptist Faith & Message*, as creedal. In fact, the preamble to the original 1925 *Baptist Faith & Message* clarifies the intentions of confessions of faith: “We do not regard them as complete statements of the faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility... The sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience.” SBC Executive Committee, “Comparison of the 1925, 1963, and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” *The Baptist Faith & Message*, Southern Baptist Convention, accessed January 12, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

doctrines, establishing the seminary—and by extension, the newly established Southern Baptist denomination—as willing heirs to the Calvinist heritage of the Particular Baptists. The Abstract aligned the seminary with the doctrines of election, total depravity, divine providence, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. It endorsed a robust view of divine sovereignty, declaring, “God from eternity, decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events.”<sup>5</sup> However, the early Calvinist tendencies of the SBC were not able to endure indefinitely; in the early twentieth century, the SBC began to gradually distance itself from its Calvinist roots. This trend was hastened by increased suspicion toward creedalism and the doctrine of predestination. Southern Baptist preachers were increasingly preaching for results; thus, they adopted a seeker-sensitive approach, shifting away from the harsh theological messages of the denomination’s Calvinist beginnings. Their sermons began to emphasize God’s mercy and love rather than God’s sovereignty and wrath.<sup>6</sup> In 1911, Z. T. Cody, a Baptist theologian and graduate of Southern Seminary, wrote an article entitled, “Are Baptists Calvinists?” in the *Baptist Courier*. In this article, he examined Calvinist doctrine in light of his own denomination’s positions, concluding, “It can be very confidently affirmed that there is now no Baptist church that holds or defends the five points of Calvinism. Some of the doctrines are repugnant to our people.”<sup>7</sup> The decline of Calvinism in the SBC established an atmosphere in which liberalism could safely develop. SBC president E.Y. Mullins’s tenure as a professor at Southern Seminary and W.T. Conner’s concurrent tenure as a professor at Southwestern Baptist

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<sup>5</sup> The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Abstract of Principles, 1858,” Abstract, SBTS, accessed February 14, 2019, <http://www.sbts.edu/about/abstract/>.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 241.

<sup>7</sup> Z.T. Cody, “Are Baptists Calvinists?” *Baptist Courier*, February 16, 1911; reprinted in *Christian Union Relative to Baptist Churches*, ed. J.M. Frost (Nashville, TN: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1915).

Theological Seminary gently guided the redirection of the denomination away from its Calvinist origins.<sup>8</sup>

The burgeoning liberalism within the denomination was strongest at the six SBC seminaries, where denominational elites taught theology to the next generation of Southern Baptist pastors. In the 1930s, Jesse Weatherspoon, a professor at Southern Seminary, challenged the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the authorship of the last twenty-seven chapters of the book of Isaiah, pointing to “the distinction between the divine revelation itself and the human record of the divine revelation” as justification for his allegations of the Bible’s historical and scientific inaccuracy.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, several other professors—including Olin Binkley, Wayne Oates, Dale Moody, and T.C. Smith—ruffled conservative feathers by introducing the “progressive” historical-critical approach to biblical interpretation into their classrooms.<sup>10</sup> Though outspoken progressive professors had caused some controversy, there was not yet a concerted effort to oust them from their positions. This was largely attributable to the diplomatic leadership tactics of seminary presidents like Duke McCall, of Southern Seminary, who sought a “balance between freedom for progressive teaching and the need to keep the critics quiet.”<sup>11</sup> In order to protect Southern Seminary from criticism, McCall allowed professors to teach historical-critical interpretations of the Bible as long as they avoided teaching liberal theology. However, during the 1960s, conservative faculty members began to organize, increasingly demanding that progressive professors be excluded from their ranks. These internal pressures were

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<sup>8</sup> Brad J. Waggoner, *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue* (Nashville, B&H Academic, 2008), 38.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 315.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 342. T.C. Smith, who reportedly “rejected the historicity of many passages in the Gospels” and “questioned the account of the virgin birth of Christ,” was particularly controversial. He remained on staff at the seminary until 1958, when suspicions of his orthodoxy abounded and pressure to conform to institutional orthodoxy grew too strong.

<sup>11</sup> Duke McCall to Olin Binkley, January 25, 1952, McCall Papers, O.T. Binkley folder, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

supplemented by external pressures from skeptical Southern Baptists who feared that liberalism was “creeping” into the seminaries. Herschel Hobbs, an influential member of the SBC executive committee and host of the weekly SBC-produced radio show “The Baptist Hour,” argued that orthodoxy at the seminaries was imperative. He warned, “If we do not keep our colleges and seminaries pure our denomination is gone... What is taught in our colleges and seminaries today will be preached in our pulpits tomorrow, and will be in our church literature day after tomorrow.”<sup>12</sup> Even moderate presidents like McCall could not protect progressive faculty members from resigning out of intimidation or being fired by the more conservative board of trustees. Outrage erupted upon the 1961 release of Professor Ralph Elliott’s *The Message of Genesis*. In the book, Elliott disputed the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, interpreted Genesis’s creation stories as “not scientific treatises about the world,” and dismissed the biblical flood account as mythology similar to other ancient Mesopotamian narratives.<sup>13</sup> The book was published by Broadman Press, the trade publishing division of the SBC entity that was known at the time as the Baptist Sunday School Board. Though the six SBC seminaries should not be considered homogenous, there is evidence to suggest that Elliott’s liberal opinions were not uncommon within SBC seminaries. Several high-ranking members of seminary faculties had approved the manuscript, including Roy Honeycutt (who would later become president of Southern Seminary) and Millard Berquist (president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where Elliott served as a professor).<sup>14</sup>

In response to Elliot’s book, SBC conservatives mobilized in opposition to liberalism in seminaries and attempted to orchestrate the election of a president “committed to biblical

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<sup>12</sup> Herschel Hobbs, Letter to Ramsey Pollard, May 23, 1960, Herschel Hobbs Papers, box 21, file 5, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Elliott, *The Message of Genesis* (Bloomington, MN: Abbott Books, 1962), 22-47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.



inerrancy.”<sup>15</sup> Since every Southern Baptist member church is permitted to send at least two representatives to the annual convention, the motions, proposed resolutions, and vote tallies from each convention can be indicative of important denominational trends.<sup>16</sup> At the 1962 convention in San Francisco, one messenger made a motion to instruct the Baptist Sunday School Board to “cease from publication and printing the book, *The Message of Genesis*... which contradicts Baptist conviction.”<sup>17</sup> Conservative backlash against Elliott’s “progressive” interpretation of the Bible resulted in the unanimous adoption of motions which affirmed the “*entire* Bible as the authoritative, authentic, infallible Word of God” at this convention.<sup>18</sup> The passage of this resolution represented a key shift in strategy for the conservatives.

The rise of liberal biblical interpretation meant that conservatives were forced to defend something that they had previously taken for granted: the authority of scripture. Prior controversies, such as the question of slavery, prompted dueling biblical interpretations, but not defenses of the validity of the Bible. During the nineteenth century, the founders of Southern Seminary, along with many of its trustees and professors, defended the morality of slavery by appealing to its seeming endorsement in the Bible.<sup>19</sup> Basil Manly, Sr., who served as chairman of Southern Seminary’s board of trustees from 1859-1868, used the Genesis flood narrative to justify the continued enslavement of the descendants of Canaan, who he identified as members of the African race: “Efforts have been made at different times to civilize them... [but] from age to age

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<sup>15</sup> Toby Druin, “Groups Meet in 15 States to Push SBC President,” *Baptist Press*, May 9, 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Representatives to the annual Southern Baptist Conventions are designated as “messengers.” This identifier refers to a conference attendee with voting authority. They are sent as representatives of individual Southern Baptist churches, and they can voice concerns through motions, vote on resolutions, and vote for offices—most importantly, SBC president (with each term lasting one year, ensuring a presidential election at every annual convention).

<sup>17</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (San Francisco, CA: SBC Executive Committee, 1962), 65. The motion to instruct the Sunday School Board to do so failed. However, the entity was asked to consider the matter at their next board meeting, where they subsequently decided to discontinue the book.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>19</sup> Glen Jeanson, “Southern Baptist Attitudes Toward Slavery, 1845-1861,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 55, no.4 (Winter 1971), 519.

they have fulfilled this saying of Noah. If it not be meant of them, of what people is it meant?”<sup>20</sup> Patrick H. Mell, who served as president of the SBC from 1863-1871 and 1880-1887, similarly appealed to the general consensus about the authority of the Bible to defend slavery as a God-ordained practice: “From Ham were descended the nations that occupied the land of Canaan and those that now constitute the African or negro race. Their inheritance, according to prophecy, has been and will continue to be slavery.”<sup>21</sup> At the 1863 SBC convention, Georgia governor Joseph E. Brown described slavery as a divinely ordained institution: “We have revealed to us in the Holy Bible clear and overwhelming evidence of its establishment by Him and of His intention to perpetuate it.”<sup>22</sup>

However, in the mid-twentieth century context of liberal biblical interpretation, direct appeals to biblical passages would not suffice. Thus, conservatives were forced to pivot, focusing attention on defending the authority of the Bible. By 1963, conservative fearmongering about the potential impact of progressive influences—like those found in Elliott’s book—was so strong that it prompted the first ever revision of the Southern Baptist Convention’s confessional statement, the *Baptist Faith & Message*. Just as confessional statements and creeds often originally arise out of a desire to resolve or bury the existence of doctrinal uncertainty, revisions to these statements capture the anxieties of those who are attempting to control the narrative. Sensing pressure from liberal influences, SBC conservatives revised the *Baptist Faith & Message* to re-assert the orthodoxy of their ideological stances, especially about biblical inerrancy. In its section entitled “The Scriptures,” the 1963 revision almost exactly reiterates the 1925 statement’s contention that

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<sup>20</sup> Basil Manly, Sr., “Duties of Masters and Servants,” *Sermons on Duty* no.8, Basil Manly Manuscript Sermons and Notes, SBTS.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick H. Mell, *Slavery: A Treatise Showing That Slavery Is Neither a Moral, Political, nor Social Evil* (Penfield, GA: Benjamin Brantly, 1844), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph E. Brown, “Speech of Governor Brown in the Baptist Biennial Convention,” *Christian Index*, May 25, 1863.

the Bible “has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter” and that the Bible “is the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried.”<sup>23</sup> However, it goes further to protect the authority of the Bible, reinforcing idea of the Bible as a direct line of transmission of the Bible from God to “man.”<sup>24</sup>

Conservatives took another step toward ensuring denominational unanimity on the issue of biblical inerrancy: expulsion of dissenters from the seminaries. In his presidential address to the 1962 convention, Herschel Hobbs issued a thinly veiled warning to the seminaries and encouraged his fellow conservatives to turn the theological crisis surrounding biblical inerrancy into a conquest, purging the denomination of liberalism.<sup>25</sup> Shortly thereafter, seminary trustees unleashed a barrage of professorial dismissals of those accused of drifting too far into progressive theology, including Ted Clark (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary), Robert Soileau (New Orleans), R. C. Briggs (Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary), Harry Oliver (Southeastern), Bill Strickland (Southeastern), Denton Coker (Southeastern), and LeRoy Moore (Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary). Gregory Willis offered the following description of the environment within the seminaries at the time: “Most conservatives could only identify a few liberal professors in the seminaries, but they feared that there were many more... For every professor who became controversial there were many more whom conservative Baptists suspected

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<sup>23</sup> SBC Executive Committee, “Comparison of 1925, 1963, and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” *The Baptist Faith & Message*, Southern Baptist Convention, accessed January 12, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

<sup>24</sup> This trend continues even in subsequent revisions of the *Baptist Faith & Message*. Whereas the 1963 confessional statement declares, “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ,” the 2000 revision reads, “All scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.” This subtle revision received criticism from within the denomination for its shift toward recognition of the Bible as supremely important, even over the authority of Jesus. Russell Moore, “For the Bible Tells Me So—Have Baptists Replaced Jesus With a Book?” *The Southern Seminary Magazine* 68, no. 4 (November 2000), 6-9.

<sup>25</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (San Francisco, California: SBC Executive Committee, 1962), 81-89.

of modernism.”<sup>26</sup> Conservative strategists Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler, anxious about liberal teachings at Southern Baptist seminaries and SBC-affiliated colleges like Wake Forest University and the University of Richmond, began to sound the alarm to reverse these ideological trends.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, speakers at the annual SBC Pastors’ Conference, an informal conservative conference meant to galvanize the support of conservatives during the week leading up to the Southern Baptist Convention, continued to elevate inerrancy to a place of prominence. W. A. Criswell, the pastor of one of the largest SBC churches in the nation (First Baptist Church in Dallas, TX), responded to critics who claimed that the Bible was scientifically and historically inaccurate in a speech at the 1977 Pastors’ Conference entitled “The Infallible Word of God.” He declared, “The Bible is the Word of God, and the truth that it reveals is from eternity to eternity and from everlasting to everlasting. The marvel of the Word of God is a wonder of the world... Every word that is found in that Book as yesterday, as today, and as forever will be in accord with the latest, and the finest, and the truest scientific discoveries.”<sup>28</sup> During the opening session of the 1979 Southern Baptist Pastors’ Conference, James Robison—a conservative televangelist whose television program had been cancelled earlier that year due to his denunciation of homosexuality as “despicable” and a “perversion of the highest order”<sup>29</sup>—delivered a passionate sermon. In his address, Robison warned the audience of satanic influence on the SBC, explaining

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory Willis, “Progressive Theology and Southern Baptist Controversies of the 1950s and 1960s,” *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: Equip* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 22.

<sup>27</sup> Toby Druin, “Groups Meet in 15 States to Push SBC President,” *Baptist Press*, May 9, 1979.

<sup>28</sup> W. A. Criswell, “The Infallible Word of God,” SBC Pastors’ Conference, Kansas City, MO, June 16, 1977. W. A. Criswell Sermon Library.

<sup>29</sup> The cancellation of Robison’s television show was justified by the network as a consequence of the fairness doctrine. Because they deemed that his characterization of homosexuality as “despicable” qualified as a political statement, under the fairness doctrine, the network would have to give equal time to homosexuals to dispute his claims. The show’s cancellation sparked protest from evangelicals who supported Robison and his socially conservative views.

“Evangelist Fights Cancellation of TV Show,” *New York Times*, April 1, 1979,

<https://www.nytimes.com/1979/04/01/archives/evangelist-fights-cancellation-of-tv-show-viewers-protest.html>.

that satan had initiated an attack on scripture by infiltrating “places of instruction,” like seminaries. According to Robison, “If you tolerate any form of liberalism... any belittling of the importance of the word of God and its doctrines... you are the enemy of God.”<sup>30</sup> After stirring up the crowd by addressing the issue of inerrancy, Robison made a pitch for political action at the upcoming convention, declaring, “I believe it is imperative this year, that we elect a president... who is totally committed to the removal from this denomination any teacher, any educator, who does not believe that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible word of the living God.”<sup>31</sup> These words were indicative of the changing attitude surrounding established denominational norms, including willingness to use political tactics to attain positions of power.

The high-stakes rhetoric continued for the next several decades. In 1982, Adrian Rogers declared that if the issue of inerrancy was not settled, “I believe that it is the ultimate cancer that will destroy the organism [the SBC]... Either the word of God is infallible or it’s fallible; it is inerrant or it is errant.”<sup>32</sup> That same year, Zig Ziglar used his Pastors’ Conference podium to declare, “I believe this beautiful Bible. I believe it from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21.”<sup>33</sup> In 1987, David Miller’s address included not only the claim that Jesus was an inerrantist, but that Jesus believed in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the literalness of the book of Jonah.<sup>34</sup> That same year, former SBC president Bailey Smith raised the stakes of the debate, declaring, “If the Bible is full of fables and folklore and fairy tales and myths and mistakes, we’re on a sinking

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<sup>30</sup> James Robison, sermon, SBC Pastors’ Conference, Houston, TX, June 10, 1979, in *Going for the Jugular*, ed. Walter Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 31.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Dan Martin, “Doctrinal Unity, Program Unity Rise, Fall Together, Rogers Says,” *Baptist Press*, May 14, 1982.

<sup>33</sup> Zig Ziglar, “The Great Fellowship,” speech, SBC Pastors’ Conference, New Orleans, LA, June 14, 1982.

Archives of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

<sup>34</sup> David Miller, “The Emmanuel Factor in the Church,” speech, SBC Pastors’ Conference, St. Louis, MO, June 15, 1987. Archives of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

ship.... The issues of our faith are centered in what people think of the word of God.”<sup>35</sup> Smith had previously used his presidential address at the 1982 SBC convention to warn the audience that if they rejected the conservative position on biblical inerrancy, “we will not be able to escape the mediocrity of other mainline denominations.”<sup>36</sup>

Why did liberal biblical interpretation arouse such anxiety and why did it prompt such dramatic change in the denomination? Hobbs’s 1962 presidential address, where he identified the “emasculatation of the Bible” as one of the harmful effects of liberalism within the denomination, provides a possible clue to understanding the motivations behind this conservative rhetoric.<sup>37</sup> During this same period of controversy over biblical interpretation, women began to be ordained as Southern Baptist pastors. The trend started out slow, with Addie Davis, a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, becoming the first woman to be ordained by a Southern Baptist church in 1964. The denomination did not ordain another woman until Shirley Carter’s ordination in 1971. However, the trend hastened in the early 1970s, as half a dozen women were ordained in the year following Carter’s controversial ordination.<sup>38</sup> Supporters argued that ordination, a designation historically reserved for men, should be available to women as well. Ordained Southern Baptist women and women who had graduated from SBC seminaries and aspired to ordination put pressure on the denomination to change their policies. In 1978, the SBC Inter-Agency Council hosted a “Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations.” At this conference, Lynda Weaver-Williams, an ordained woman and doctoral student at Southern

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<sup>35</sup> Bailey Smith, “The Emmanuel Factor in the Compassion for Souls,” speech, SBC Pastors’ Conference, St. Louis, MO, June 14, 1987. Archives of the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

<sup>36</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Orleans, LA: SBC Executive Committee, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (San Francisco, CA: SBC Executive Committee, 1962), 81.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 31.

Seminary, declared, “God is making ministers of the women and girls in our churches, just as God is making ministers of the men and the boys. We hear the same call, and we are beginning to respond in the same way. You will have to decide what to do about it because God’s call is as much to you to accept women as ministers as it is to me to be a minister.”<sup>39</sup> Although there was not yet a concerted effort to prohibit women’s ordination, the ordination of women posed a threat to the conservatives, since access to the pulpit represented authority in the church—a “highly visible and potent [symbol] that historically had been limited to men, thus making women’s ordination ripe for feminist scrutiny and controversy.”<sup>40</sup>

The demands of feminists within the SBC were supplemented by feminists without who leveled criticism against patriarchal Christian institutions, arguing that they inherently position the divine in a relationship with humanity that is based on an imbalance of power. Some feminists objected to the carefully constructed masculine persona traditionally assigned to the Christian God, designed to grant legitimacy to a social order which privileges men. They argued that depictions of God as masculine and absolutely powerful set a cultural expectation for hierarchical relationships between men and women.<sup>41</sup> They noted that the authorship, compilation, and interpretation of sacred Christian texts are processes from which women have historically been excluded. They reasoned that this is because the formulation of sacred texts is a politically charged process—a struggle between competing interests over who gets to establish orthodoxy. Sacred texts are often influenced by the political concerns of those who are drawn to the authority associated with such texts. Whoever is entrusted with writing and interpreting the sacred texts of

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<sup>39</sup> Lynda Weaver-Williams, “My Call,” Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations conference, September 1978, Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations Collections, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, 1.6 (Findings Report).

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 14.

<sup>41</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

a religion is given the ability to control “divine speech,” and they can graft their own beliefs onto God by claiming to serve as divine mouthpieces. According to feminist scholar Mary Daly, the process of writing and redacting scripture can be described as a bottom-up one—the projection of society’s existing values into the theological realm by ascribing their origins to the divine. Daly writes, “The belief system becomes hardened and objectified, seeming to have an unchangeable independent existence and validity of its own. It resists social change that would rob it of its plausibility.”<sup>42</sup> Here, she reverses the timeline of Christian doctrine that persists in the popular imagination and argues that patriarchy preceded biblical teachings on gender which seemingly justify patriarchy. Feminists explained that the Bible reflects the perspective of its authors, who lived in culture in which the subjugation of women under male authority was acceptable, even expected.

Feminist biblical scholars like Phyllis Trible proposed re-interpretations of scripture, attempting to recover progressive themes from a text that had historically been used to perpetuate patriarchy. By reinterpreting the text, she sought to transform it into a “liberating” myth—rather than an “enslaving” one.<sup>43</sup> Trible’s writings were characteristic of the so-called “second wave” of feminist biblical criticism. Though Trible recognized that it was “superfluous to document patriarchy in Scripture,”<sup>44</sup> she advocated for alternative, liberating interpretations of texts despite their patriarchal origins. Acknowledging the adverse effects of patriarchal religion on women in a male-dominated society, she argued for a rereading of the Bible from a different perspective: “The hermeneutical challenge is to translate biblical faith without sexism.”<sup>45</sup> For Trible and other

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<sup>42</sup> Mary Daly, “After the Death of the Father,” in *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Phyllis Trible, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, no.1 (March 1973): 30.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*



“second wave” feminist biblical critics, the maleness of the divine was not inherently sanctioned by the text of the Bible; rather, it was a product of a specific interpretive strategy. Specifically, Tribble recognized the two creation accounts in Genesis as ripe with potential for re-interpretation. She challenged interpretations of Genesis that reinforced the subordination of women; instead, she approached the narratives from an egalitarian perspective. Reading the two side-by-side, she concluded that the woman “is not an afterthought; she is the culmination.”<sup>46</sup>

It was against this backdrop of liberal (and especially feminist) criticism of scripture that conservatives insisted that the denomination assume hardline theological and political stances. Conservatives raised the stakes of the debate and characterized the liberal and feminist positions as a threat to the very authority of the Bible as well as to the future of the denomination. Furthermore, they sought to make this contention doctrinal and to lay the foundation for the development of conservative gender ideologies that seek to construct and reinforce hierarchical gender systems.<sup>47</sup>

In recent years, conservatives have made explicit the connection between women’s power and the authority of the Bible. At the 2014 Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, a panel was convened that consisted of John Piper, Ligon Duncan, Russell Moore, and Greg Gilbert. These men, singled out as experts, were asked to weigh in on the gender debate in a panel entitled:

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<sup>46</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread* (Rochester, NY: Women’s Ordination Conference, 1983).

<sup>47</sup> Belief in the authority of scripture was a much more widely held Southern Baptist belief than conservatives cared to admit. Though conservatives accused their opponents of having a “low” view of scripture, egalitarians and biblical feminists also claimed to base their beliefs in the Bible. Several prominent moderate figures even affirmed the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, declaring the Bible to be of “infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches” and affirming that a confession of the inerrancy of scripture is “vital to a sound understanding of the whole of the Christian faith.” International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, Chicago, IL, October 26-28, 1978.

“Complementarianism: Essential or Expendable?”<sup>48</sup> Together, they came to a consensus that though belief in the doctrine does not ultimately determine salvation, rejection of it has significant consequences. Piper tied gender ideology to biblical inerrancy, arguing that rejection of the former may lead to rejection of the latter. If one doubts the God-ordained roles given to men and women, what is stopping them from doubting the entire gospel? Piper warns, “The implications, hermeneutically, for the gospel are significant. If you do the kind of gymnastics that I think you have to do in order to escape Ephesians 5, you’re going to get the gospel wrong.”<sup>49</sup> Gilbert adopted a similar slippery-slope approach, arguing that women’s subordination is essential because rejection of it leads to diminishment of the authority of the Bible. He warns, “In order to get, I think, to an egalitarian position, you have to bring into your hermeneutic some bad DNA. You have to have some principles and ideas that tend in a certain direction to corrode the authority of scriptures. And once you do that, the corrosion isn’t just going to stop.”<sup>50</sup> By linking discussion of gender roles to scriptural authority, SBC conservatives effectively raised the stakes of the debate, establishing themselves as the defenders of Christian orthodoxy. In a 2017 sermon entitled, “The Complementary Roles of Men and Women,” Southern Baptist megachurch pastor Matt Chandler defended women’s subordination by painting biblical feminists as skeptics. According to

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<sup>48</sup> I will expand upon the meaning of complementarianism in my second chapter. A suitable working definition, provided by the organizers of the panel, is: “the idea that men and women are equally dignified image bearers of God, yet were created with different roles.”

<sup>49</sup> John Piper, “Complementarianism: Essential or Expendable?” panel discussion, Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, April 13, 2012, Louisville, KY, <https://t4g.org/media/2012/05/complementarianism-essential-or-expendable-2/>.

Modern biblical commentators disagree significantly about the interpretation of Ephesians 5. It compares the relationship between husbands and wives to that between Christ and the church, saying, “Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior” (Ephesians 5:22-23). Michael David Coogan, Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and Pheme Perkins. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Greg Gilbert, “Complementarianism: Essential or Expendable?” panel discussion, Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, April 13, 2012, Louisville, KY, <https://t4g.org/media/2012/05/complementarianism-essential-or-expendable-2/>.

Chandler, “Christian feminists argue that the Bible was written by men, for men, to protect the power of men... And so, they view the Bible with a great deal of skepticism... because they question the Bible. Because they’re concerned about the authority of the Bible and what that means.”<sup>51</sup> By characterizing liberals and feminists as rejecting the authority of the sacred scriptures, conservatives have been able to effectively vilify their opponents and elevate the issues of biblical inerrancy and the submission of women to the “first tier in the realm of salvation.”<sup>52</sup>

Al Mohler, who has served as president of Southern Seminary since 1993, also places an impetus on preventing the deterioration of the authority of scripture. One of the issues which he has most consistently spoken out about is biblical authority—the issue on which he and many of his colleagues believe their entire theological frameworks hinge upon. Mohler has become synonymous with the biblical inerrantist position, so much so that in 2013, he was invited to contribute a chapter to a book which examined five popular evangelical positions on biblical authority. In his chapter entitled, “When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks,” Mohler argues for the centrality of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Warning of the loss of the institutional authority of the church, Mohler argues that evangelical Christianity cannot survive without this essential foundational doctrine.<sup>53</sup> Speaking at the 2014 T4G conference, he argues there is a significant correlation between belief in the absolute sovereignty of God and confidence in the authority of the Bible: “You show me a low view of scripture, I’ll show you a low view of God. That’s why,

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<sup>51</sup> Matt Chandler, “The Complementary Roles of Men and Women,” sermon, The Village Church, Flower Mound, TX, November 5, 2017, <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/the-complementary-roles-of-men-and-women>.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 12.

<sup>53</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick, Stephen M. Garrett, and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

ultimately, it is only those who have a high view of God who can make a coherent and compelling argument for a high view of scripture.”<sup>54</sup>

Mohler’s rhetoric surrounding inerrancy reveals an additional theological innovation in the SBC conservatives’ attempt to suppress women’s spiritual and political authority: a reworking of Calvinist understandings of divine sovereignty. Within this theological framework, biblical inerrancy is reinforced by theological absolutism. Conservatives portray their opposition to women’s ordination and their contention that women should submit to the authority of men as traditional and long-standing. However, these positions represent a dramatic transformation of the theological foundation and institutional polity of the Southern Baptist Convention. Their efforts have resulted in a denomination newly centered around theological absolutism and institutional authoritarianism, which has had immense implications for the women within it.

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<sup>54</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Importance of Inerrancy for Evangelism in Missions,” sermon, Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, April 9, 2014, <http://t4g.org/media/2014/04/the-importance-of-inerrancy-for-evangelism-in-missions/>.

## Chapter 2: Neo-Calvinism: Continuity and Change

On June 12, 1984, the one hundred and twenty seventh session of the annual Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was convened in Kansas City, Missouri. Tensions were high between factions of the denomination, but elections held on the first day of the convention already indicated an advantage for the conservatives, with conservatives Charles Stanley and Paul Pressler elected as president and member of the executive committee, respectively. On the third day, Resolution No. 3—“On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry”—was introduced. This resolution declared that women must be excluded from pastoral leadership “to preserve a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall.” It only endorsed the participation of women in ministry roles “other than pastoral function and leadership roles.”<sup>1</sup> Chaos ensued, as former president Wayne Dehoney attempted to rule the resolution unconstitutional and was silenced by the president at the time, James Draper. Messengers left their seats to defend both Dehoney and Draper. The microphones were turned off after a designated period of eight minutes of debate, which led to shouting, booing, and more chaos. Eventually, convention leaders regained control of the floor, and the resolution, which came to be known as the Kansas City Resolution, was adopted with 58% of the messengers voting to affirm it. During the years following the 1984 convention, doctrine about gender and sexuality was elevated to the same importance level as the trinity and the baptism of believers—making it “first tier in the realm of salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Kansas City, MO: SBC Executive Committee, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power since World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Flowers uses this term to demonstrate the importance that the conservatives placed on issues of gender, elevating the stakes of the debate.

The SBC's Kansas City Resolution brought national attention to the role of women in the church, and evangelical leaders across the nation were suddenly thrust into the debate. The theme of the Evangelical Theological Society's 1986 meeting in Atlanta, Georgia was "Manhood and Womanhood in Biblical and Theological Perspectives," and Wayne Grudem was invited to speak at a plenary session. He dissented from the other five speakers—all egalitarians—and at the conclusion of the ETS meeting, he invited those who agreed with his minority stance to attend a private meeting.<sup>3</sup> It was at this 1987 meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts—which included John Piper, Wayne House, Dorothy Patterson, James Borland, Susan Foh, Ken Sarles, and Mary Kassian—where the label "complementarian" was born to describe their doctrinal position. They drafted a statement, later known as the Danvers Statement, and formed an organization to institutionalize their views on gender, The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW).<sup>4</sup>

Wayne Grudem, one of the founders of the CBMW and a self-identified neo-Calvinist, has authored a number of comprehensive theological works, including four which examine gender and Christianity from a gender subordinationist perspective. In *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, Grudem makes it clear that the stakes of the gender debate are high; the authority of the Bible is in question, which he considers to be the highest imaginable stakes. He writes, "I am

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<sup>3</sup> Wayne Grudem, "Personal Reflections on the History of CBMW and the State of the Gender Debate," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 14 (2009): 12-17.

<sup>4</sup> Their invention of the label "complementarianism" to describe their position provided some rhetorical distance from the gender submission or subordinationism for which they were actually advocating. Though members of the CBMW and many SBC conservatives refer to their ideology as such, I will attempt to maintain consistency throughout the chapter by using the term "gender subordinationism" unless specifically acknowledging that an individual or group is using "complementarianism" themselves. Complementarianism restricts women to certain predetermined roles in the same way as gender subordinationism; however, it accomplishes this while simultaneously maintaining that this should be seen as consistent with equality between the genders before God. The term "complementarianism" has moderate connotations, and thus is intentionally misleading because the ideology it represents is functionally equivalent to the more controversial "gender subordinationism." It is intended to suggest equality between the genders despite their different ("complementary") roles.

convinced that if the egalitarian position prevails... no moral command of Scripture will be safe from its destructive procedures.”<sup>5</sup> Grudem identifies the acceptance of women in authoritative roles in the church as a uniquely modern innovation that emerged as a result of liberalism. He notes, “In many of these cases, the leadership of those denominations was already in the hands of liberals who did not accept the full authority of the Bible as the inerrant word of God.”<sup>6</sup> Because of his position as the chairman of the board of directors for the CBMW, Ligon Duncan was invited to write the preface for Wayne Grudem and John Piper’s 1991 anthology *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Duncan warns of the potential impact of feminism on the authority of the Bible as God’s word, declaring, “If we write off, ignore, or distort the Bible’s teaching on gender roles, then we are bound to do so with everything the Bible teaches. If we can wrest egalitarianism from the Bible, we can pervert it to say anything we wish.”<sup>7</sup> As I noted at the conclusion of chapter one, “complementarians” are still echoing this sentiment. At the 2014 Together for the Gospel conference, Ligon Duncan spoke at a session called “What Does Nashville Have to do with Danvers?”<sup>8</sup> At this session, he argued that debate about gender equality is of the utmost concern because of its relation to the issue of biblical authority, saying, “If we cave on this [gender issues], we inherently have to cave in on biblical authority, which will compromise our gospel proclamation and the life and witness of the church.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 377.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem and John Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), xi.

<sup>8</sup> The title of the session is in reference to the two landmark statements released by the CBMW: the Danvers Statement in 1987 and the Nashville Statement in 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Ligon Duncan, “What Does Nashville Have to do with Danvers?” pre-conference address, Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, April 11, 2018, <http://t4g.org/media/2018/04/what-does-nashville-have-to-do-with-danvers/>.

Though the neo-Calvinist movement has no official leadership, a few individuals have emerged as its de facto spokespeople—most notably Wayne Grudem and John Piper.<sup>10</sup> Piper is a bestselling author, revered theologian, and former senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church. Piper has been a staple at the famed Passion Conferences, appearing as a guest speaker almost every year since their founding. As a recognized authority figure within the movement, Piper was invited to deliver the 2012 Richard Gaffin lecture at the Presbyterian-affiliated Westminster Theological Seminary entitled, “The New Calvinism and the New Community.” In this address, he identified himself as a part of the “New Calvinism” and laid out twelve defining features of the movement.<sup>11</sup> According to Piper, the most important features which distinguish neo-Calvinism from its predecessor include: (1) affirmation of racial diversity and the imperative to evangelize; (2) insistence on biblical inerrancy; (3) repeated avowals of God’s maleness; (4) maintenance of eternal hierarchical relationships, including the subordination of women to men and of Jesus to God the Father. Although the first feature marks the apparent progressiveness of neo-Calvinism, this “progressiveness” disguises what is essentially an endorsement of power as male and absolute.

Neo-Calvinism distinguishes itself from many historical Christian movements, including previous iterations of Calvinism, with its embrace of racial diversity.<sup>12</sup> In his address, Piper says,

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<sup>10</sup> The designations “Calvinist” and “neo-Calvinist” were never intended to refer to the membership of a single denomination; rather, it refers to a fairly comprehensive theological system embraced by a wide array of denominations. At various times throughout history, the Reformed theology characteristic of Calvinism has made its way through several mainstream Protestant churches: the Presbyterian Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the Baptist church—including Separatist Baptists, Particular Baptists, and even Southern Baptists.

<sup>11</sup> According to Piper’s 12 features, the neo-Calvinist movement: embraces Calvinist soteriology (TULIP) rooted in biblical inerrancy, recognizes the sovereignty of God even in evil and suffering, has a “strong complementarian flavor,” is “culture-affirming” (while still opposing homosexuality and abortion), emphasizes the local church, prioritizes missions, is interdenominational (with strong Baptist tendencies), includes both charismatics and non-charismatics, retains the Puritan emphasis on piety and scholarship, produces books and other academic materials, fosters racial diversity, and is Gospel-centered. John Piper, “The New Calvinism and the New Community: The Doctrines of Grace and the Meaning of Race,” Richard Gaffin Lecture on Theology, Culture, and Missions, Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA, March 12, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> The Southern Baptist Convention has a particularly notable legacy of racism. The denomination was founded as a result of a disagreement with northern abolitionist Baptists about whether slaveholders should be allowed to serve as missionaries. All four of the founders of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary were slaveholders, with more



“The New Calvinism is international in scope, multi-ethnic in expression, and culturally diverse. There is no single geographic, racial, cultural, governing center.”<sup>13</sup> Though speculation about the origin of the categories that are referred to in the modern era as “races” has existed throughout Christian history, neo-Calvinism responds by elevating diversity as a function of its theological tenets. Neo-Calvinism’s pursuit of racial equality stems from its theological emphasis on the glory of God and commitment to seeking that glory. It is consistent with the neo-Calvinist conception of God to claim that diversity should be prized because “the glory of God in Christ will shine more brightly when Christ saves and assembles a unified worshipping people from that dazzling array of diverse peoples.”<sup>14</sup> The doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election prompt neo-Calvinists to advocate for racial harmony and reject the idea of the supremacy of any one race over another.<sup>15</sup> Piper argues, “People believe because they are ordained to eternal life, not the other way around. The election to salvation precedes the conditions of salvation... This means that God did not and does not choose people on the basis of skin color, or on racial or ethnic distinctives of any

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than fifty enslaved persons between them. After the Civil War, denominational leaders and seminary faculty continued to engage in racist rhetoric (defending slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow laws by appealing to the biological superiority of the white race) and practice (exclusion of African-Americans from Southern Baptist seminaries, opposition to the civil rights movement, and segregation of seating within churches). The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Report on Slavery and Racism in the History of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” SBTS, December 12, 2018, accessed February 11, 2019, <http://www.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Racism-and-the-Legacy-of-Slavery-Report-v3.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Though invocation of divine transcendence has been used to perpetuate racial and gender hierarchies, it has also been used to deconstruct such hierarchical systems. Neo-Calvinists appeal to the transcendent attributes of God to support their racially progressive views, arguing that the salvific act of the crucifixion is sufficient to be applied to all depraved humans, regardless of race. A number of feminist authors have similarly advanced alternative conceptions of a transcendent God—using the Bible to defend the idea that God is beyond gender. According to Phyllis Trible, the Bible does not automatically lend itself to depiction of God as male or as a father; those things originated from sexist interpretations of the Bible by men. In fact, the Bible utilizes feminine imagery to describe God, with some passages depicting God as a mother (not father) to the Israelites. She concludes that the God of the Bible transcends gender and therefore can be interpreted as defying sexism. Phyllis Trible, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, no. 1 (March 1973), 32.

Though neo-Calvinists appeal to divine transcendence to justify their rejection of racial hierarchies, they do not apply this framework to gender hierarchies (as Trible and other feminists do). Instead, they use it to perpetuate gender hierarchies, maintaining the codification of the “transcendent” category as male. I will explore the neo-Calvinist justification for the subordination of women in greater depth later in this chapter.

kind. No ethnic group can say they are chosen because of God’s preference for their physical or psychological or spiritual or cultural or intellectual qualities... God’s choice is unconditional. It’s not based on anything in us.”<sup>16</sup> In an attempt to practically apply this teaching, the Passion conferences have begun featuring more people of color—including guest speakers Priscilla Shirer and Steven Furtick, and musical performers Lecrae and Tedashii.

Though Calvinism has historically been criticized for its seeming incompatibility with evangelism, neo-Calvinists have prioritized missions. At the 2012 T4G conference, David Platt, former president of the SBC International Missions Board, presented a lecture entitled, “Divine Sovereignty: The Fuel of Death-Defying Missions.” In this address, he repeatedly emphasizes sovereignty and depravity to justify a call to evangelism, claiming that recognition of the sovereignty of God is crucial to the success of global mission work. According to Platt, passion for unreached people is driven not by a projection of the guilt of having been chosen for salvation, but by the desire to glorify God and bring his name to the ends of the earth.<sup>17</sup> John Piper makes a similar argument for mission work and evangelism. He vehemently rejects “hyper-Calvinism,” which he accuses of teaching that the gospel should only be preached to people for whom there is evidence of election.<sup>18</sup> He holds this “unbiblical” message responsible for neo-Calvinism’s anti-missional reputation, arguing instead that the beliefs of divine sovereignty and election ought to motivate evangelism. According to Piper, “If you believe in the total sovereignty of God, not just

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<sup>16</sup> John Piper, “The New Calvinism and the New Community: The Doctrines of Grace and the Meaning of Race,” Richard Gaffin Lecture on Theology, Culture, and Missions, Westminster Theological Seminary, Glenside, PA, March 12, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> David Platt, “Divine Sovereignty: The Fuel of Death-Defying Missions,” sermon, Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, Louisville, KY, April 11, 2012, <http://t4g.org/media/2012/05/divine-sovereignty-the-fuel-of-death-defying-missions-2/>.

<sup>18</sup> “Hyper-Calvinism” is typically a pejorative term, used to distance oneself from the most radical doctrines that have become associated with Calvinism. Piper employs the term to distinguish neo-Calvinism from controversial anti-missional viewpoints.

the predestining sovereignty of God—not just that he decides just a few things from the beginning, but that he decides everything... then the coming-to-Christ of a person and the bringing-to-Christ of that person by the agency of the missionary are both predestined.”<sup>19</sup> Rejecting criticisms of neo-Calvinism that single out the doctrine of predestination as a reason to not engage in evangelism, Piper argues that the theological system is compatible with missions because what appears to be human agency is ultimately predestined by God.

Piper also identifies continuities between Calvinism and neo-Calvinism, including adherence to the five-point Calvinist soteriological system, TULIP, and emphasis on the awesome power of God, especially in contrast with the depravity of humanity.<sup>20</sup> According to Calvinism, God reigns from his divine throne, dispensing rewards and punishments according to his perfect will. This conception of God as omnipotent and deserving of eternal glory is necessary to support the doctrine of election, in which some are predestined to be saved and others to be damned. Nonetheless, Calvin rejected the application of the label of “absolutism” to his theology if this meant that his theology placed God above the law: “To make God beyond law is to rob Him of the greatest part of His glory, for it destroys His rectitude and His righteousness. I detest the Doctrine... that invents for God an absolute power. For it is easier to dis sever the light of the sun

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<sup>19</sup> John Piper, “Is Calvinism Anti-Mission?” panel discussion, CROSS Student Missions conference, Louisville, KY, December 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QQT\\_z-MbSg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QQT_z-MbSg).

<sup>20</sup> The TULIP acronym encompasses a five-point theological system centered around predestination: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. Total depravity refers to the inherent sinful nature of humanity, especially in contrast with the sovereignty of God, and helplessness of humanity to attain salvation themselves. Unconditional election is the idea that God, when predetermining who would be saved, did not choose based on any foreseen merit, but just his grace. Limited atonement, the most controversial of classical Calvinism’s five points, means that Jesus’s sacrificial crucifixion was salvific for only those who were predestined to be saved, not for all of humanity. Irresistible grace means that humans are without agency in acquisition of salvation and cannot resist God’s predetermination of the eventual status of their salvation. Perseverance of the saints is the idea that once an individual has been genuinely saved, they cannot lose their salvation.

from its heat... than to separate God's power from His righteousness."<sup>21</sup> Feminist scholar Anna Case-Winters notes that, for Calvin, "God's 'domination and control' of creatures has a positive character; it is personal and particular care exercised on our behalf by a good and loving 'Father.'"<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Case-Winters insists, "Domination and control exercised benevolently are still domination and control."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, neo-Calvinists make a point of God not being accountable to any law. According to Grudem, "God is not constrained by anything external to himself and that he is free to do whatever he wishes to do. There is no person or force that can ever dictate to God what he should do. He is under no authority or external restraint."<sup>24</sup> For neo-Calvinists, the efficacy of the entire system hinges on a view of divine power as absolute. God does not share power; God is unanswerable and unaccountable to humans. As Grudem adds, "He is the Creator; we are the creatures, and ultimately have no basis from which to accuse him of unfairness or injustice."<sup>25</sup>

Neo-Calvinists have also escalated the implications of the doctrine of total depravity by representing the vast chasm which separates divine sovereignty and depraved humanity as prompting legitimate divine hatred and wrath. Prominent leaders of the movement have spoken about God's hatred for humanity because of humanity's sinful nature. At the 2011 Passion conference, David Platt told his audience, "God doesn't hate sinners—he *abhors* them. He destroys them... Our sin is not outside of us. It is a part of us. It is the core of who we are in this world. We are sinners with a deep sinful nature, and a holy God who is dead set against sin is also dead set

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<sup>21</sup> John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J.K.S. Reid (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. 1961), 179.

<sup>22</sup> Anna Case-Winters, *God's Power* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2000), 216.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 683.

against sinners. And his holy hatred and holy wrath is due us.”<sup>26</sup> Mark Driscoll, a self-identified neo-Calvinist and former megachurch pastor at Mars Hill Church, echoes this argument that the innately depraved nature of humanity provokes God’s hatred of not only sin, but sinners: “God hates you... God is sick of you. God is frustrated with you. God is wearied by you. God has suffered long enough with you. He doesn’t think you’re cute, he doesn’t think it’s funny, he doesn’t think your excuse is meritorious [sic]. He doesn’t care if you compare yourself to someone worse than you—he hates them too. God hates, right now, personally, objectively, hates some of you.”<sup>27</sup>

Another way in which neo-Calvinism diverges from Calvinism is its view of scripture; the systematic theology of neo-Calvinism proclaims not only the absolute authority of God, but also the absolute authority of scripture. Traditionally, Calvinists have recognized the authority of the Bible, but neo-Calvinists have extended this doctrine, arguing for biblical inerrancy. Inerrantists’ insistence on the absolute authority and infallibility of the Bible represents a departure from the teachings of John Calvin, whose biblical commentaries identified errors made by the original authors of the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> The “sola scriptura” tradition claimed by early Calvinists substantively differs from the modern biblical inerrancy movement of neo-Calvinism. The doctrine of “sola scriptura” was a rejection of the power claimed by the church to decide doctrinal matters—a recognition of the autonomy possessed by individual Christians to come to their own doctrinal conclusions through their own interpretations of scripture. However, the neo-Calvinist innovation of “biblical inerrancy” essentially replaces the absolute authority of the Roman

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<sup>26</sup> David Platt, “Radical,” sermon, Passion conference, Atlanta, GA, January 3, 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhiHSf\\_L6\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhiHSf_L6_E).

<sup>27</sup> Mark Driscoll, “The Wrath of God,” sermon, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, October 9, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uSml8m8ZAdk>.

<sup>28</sup> In reference to an apparent mistranslation from the Septuagint in Hebrews 11:21, Calvin writes, “In this there is no danger, provided readers are ever brought back to the pure and original text of Scripture. But, in reality, the difference is but little.” John Calvin, “Commentary on Hebrews,” Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed April 25, 2019, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom44.xvii.vii.html#xvii.vii-p32>.

Catholic church with the absolute authority of scripture. Kevin DeYoung, chairman of the board of The Gospel Coalition and a professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary, gave an address on inerrancy at the 2014 T4G conference, declaring, “Scripture, because it is the breathed-out word of God, possesses the same authority as the God-man Jesus Christ. Submission to the scriptures is submission to God. Rebellion against the scriptures is rebellion against God. The Bible can no more fall or fail or falter than God himself can fall or fail or falter.” Thus, he concludes, “Scripture must be inerrant because scripture is the word of God and God is inerrant”<sup>29</sup>

Neo-Calvinists have used this innovative approach to biblical authority to reinforce a patriarchal hierarchical system, endorsing a conception of God as inherently masculine. Conservative interpretations of the Bible reinforce the legitimacy of the patriarchal status quo of society not only through narratives which ascribe the origin of socially constructed hierarchical systems to the divine, but also through insistence on the maintenance of the Bible’s exclusive use of masculine language. The masculine-centric language of the Bible seals the ancient patriarchal biases of its original authors. At the 2002 Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, messengers passed a resolution denouncing Today’s New International Version (TNIV), a new translation of the Bible that erased gender-specific language in an attempt to foster the inclusion of women.<sup>30</sup> At the 2011 Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix, Arizona, messengers passed a resolution in response to the publishing of a similar translation: the 2011 New International

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<sup>29</sup> Kevin DeYoung, “Never Spoke a Man Like This Before: Inerrancy, Evangelism, and Christ’s Unbreakable Bible,” sermon, Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference, Louisville, KY, April 9, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1mg8hCekn4>.

<sup>30</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO: SBC Executive Committee, 2002), 76.

Version (NIV).<sup>31</sup> Southern Baptists were not the only Christians who rejected these translations, objecting to their revision of biblical text in favor of gender-inclusive language. In 2011, the CBMW published a report criticizing the use of gender-neutral language in the new NIV translation of the Bible. Wayne Grudem, the primary author of this report, bemoans the implications that this language shift may have for the gender-role debate. Such passionate conservative responses to gender-neutral Bible translations make one thing clear: when masculine-centric language is erased from the Bible, the patriarchal system which it supports is deprived of some credibility. Thus, literal interpretations of the Bible (including preservation of its gender-specific language) foster support for gender subordinationism. In 2009, a study examined the relationship between a masculine image of God and one's political views, concluding that the perception of God as inherently masculine is likely to affect other aspects of one's worldview. Specifically, those who strongly associate God with masculinity and refer to him with the pronouns "he/him/his" are more likely to subscribe to conservative gender ideologies.<sup>32</sup>

Insistence on divine masculinity has led to a related effort to protect the "masculine" character of Christianity and reverse liberal efforts to "feminize" it.<sup>33</sup> John Piper supplements his

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<sup>31</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Phoenix, AZ: SBC Executive Committee, 2011), 100.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew L. Whitehead, "Gender Ideology and Religion: Does a Masculine Image of God Matter?" *Review of Religious Research* 54, no. 2 (June 2012), 139-156.

<sup>33</sup> Attempts by neo-Calvinists and Southern Baptist conservatives to "masculinize" Christianity are not novel strategies; rather, they are a modern iteration of a historical movement that has sought to make Christianity more masculine. One example of the response of men to the increasing "femininity" of Christianity has been the organization of exclusive fraternal orders. The nineteenth century was deemed the "golden age" of fraternalism, as Christian men across America joined fraternal orders like the Freemasons in droves. Freemasonry, in particular, "against the claims of an increasingly feminized Protestantism, provided men with both institutional solidarity and a defense of their moral autonomy." David G. Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 134.

Specifically, in the early twentieth century, those in the "muscular Christianity" movement attempted to change the popular imagination of Jesus from a peaceful, gentle, "feminine" Christ to a more "masculine" one. "[They] rejected the feminine Victorian portrait of Jesus as a slight man with a sad face, frail body, and oversized robes in favor of a muscular carpenter with black hair and a stoic heavenward gaze. This image, combining Christian commitment with a brawny physique, represented a new ideal representation of white, middle-class, male spirituality." Michelle L.

passionate soliloquies about divine sovereignty with rhetoric that emphasizes the masculinity of Christianity. Piper advocates for the maintenance of the patriarchal status quo, explaining that “God has given Christianity a masculine feel.”<sup>34</sup> This, of course, extends to neo-Calvinist claims about Jesus. Mark Driscoll, a prominent neo-Calvinist who formerly served as pastor of Mars Hill Church, has sparked immense controversy with his provocative statements about the masculine nature of Christianity. Driscoll rejects the idea of Jesus as a “wuss who took a beating and spent a lot of time putting product in his long hair.”<sup>35</sup> According to a 2009 *New York Times* profile, Driscoll claims that the mainstream church has transformed Jesus into “a Richard Simmons, hippie, queer Christ,” a “neutered and limp-wristed popular Sky Fairy of pop culture that... would never talk about sin or send anyone to hell.”<sup>36</sup> Despite the outcry over Driscoll’s language, influential pastors have continued to repeat this theme. In a 2017 sermon on the roles of men and women, Matt Chandler assured the over 10,000 people in his Southern Baptist congregation that Jesus was, in fact, male. “Here’s the deal... He is *he*, and Jesus was a man. He wasn’t gender-fluid. He was a man. He wasn’t Jessie. He didn’t come as a woman. He is a man, man, man, man. Jesus

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Robertson, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Bret E. Carroll (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2007).

Proponents of “muscular Christianity” also attempted to attract more men to their ranks by tailoring services and activities more toward the interests of men. In 1851, the first Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in America was founded in Boston, MA; this was one of several organizations that sought to masculinize Christianity by linking it to men’s athletics. Because of its perceived masculine nature, boxing was often used to organize Christian men. The Boy Scouts of America was founded in 1910, and similarly attempted to enjoin religiosity and morality with a certain conception of manhood. *Ibid.*

In the early twentieth century, American evangelists lamented the “feminization” of Christianity and responded by emphasizing a specific type of manhood in the church. Billy Sunday famously prayed, “Lord save us from off-handed, flabby-cheeked, brittle-boned, weak-kneed, thin-skinned, pliable, plastic, spineless, effeminate, ossified three-karat Christianity.” Robert F. Martin, *Hero of the Heartland: Billy Sunday and the Transformation of American Society, 1862-1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 88.

<sup>34</sup> John Piper, “‘The Frank and Manly Mr. Ryle’: The Value of a Masculine Ministry,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 17, no.1 (Spring 2012), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Molly Worthen, “Who Would Jesus Smack Down?” *New York Times*, January 6, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



of Nazareth, the man.”<sup>37</sup> Such insistence on the maleness of Jesus is based on the assumption that God would not—could not—denigrate himself by becoming incarnate in female form. The figure of Jesus is elevated as an ideal man, an example for human men to strive toward. As one gender subordinationist noted in the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, “We’ll never be perfect men on this side of eternity, we are forever united with the one perfect Man into whose image we are being conformed.”<sup>38</sup>

Feminist scholars of religion have been critical of the idea of a masculine God—especially in the mid-to-late twentieth century, when Christian feminists were encountering opposition to their egalitarian ambitions from conservative church authorities. Male leaders, in an attempt to uphold the status quo and maintain their institutional power, have repeatedly invoked the association of God with masculinity. Feminists have responded by undermining the “natural” origins of divine masculinity and exposing it as having been socially constructed. Conservatives attempted to counter the feminist influence on the denomination by criticizing feminist interpretations of the Bible, accusing them of failing to recognize the authority of the inerrant word of God. Many feminists rejected conservative interpretations of scripture by reinforcing their own commitment to the authority of the Bible and denouncing conservatives as engaging in “selective literalism.” They have argued that perceiving God as inherently masculine sets up a false equivalence between man and the divine. As Mary Daly famously observed, “If God is male, then the male is God.”<sup>39</sup> They argue that when men view themselves as being made in the image of

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<sup>37</sup> Matt Chandler, “The Complementary Roles of Men and Women,” sermon, The Village Church, Flower Mound, TX, Nov 5, 2017, <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/sermons/the-complementary-roles-of-men-and-women>.

<sup>38</sup> Brandon Smith, “Immature Manhood and the Hope of Something Better” in *Designed for Joy: How the Gospel Impacts Men and Women, Identity and Practice*, ed. Owen Strachan and Jonathan Parnell (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 127-128.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 19.

God—with women being made from the man and reflecting his glory, rather than being directly made in God’s image themselves—there is a strong tendency for men to view themselves as incarnations of God on earth. Thus, characterization of God as masculine has been used to justify the oppression of women and legitimize the hierarchical system which forces them to submit to the authority of men. As Daly summarizes, “If God in ‘his’ heaven is a father ruling ‘his’ people, then it is in the ‘nature’ of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.”<sup>40</sup> Acceptance of God into the fraternity of masculine identity serves to reinforce male domination and the systematic oppression of women. With the endorsement of the divine, the authority of men becomes even more resistant to criticism— thus, “to counter men’s authority would be to question the entire ordering of the cosmos.”<sup>41</sup>

Above and beyond the characterization of God as masculine is the characterization of God as a father—a divine patriarch. Bruce Ware, a former president of the CBMW, explains the status and authority attributed to God as a function of God’s role as a father: “His honor and authority, his position over and above his children, his greatness and place of deserved respect and obedience, all are highlighted in his supreme role as Father of his children. As Father, he should be obeyed, followed, and his word should be obeyed.”<sup>42</sup> It is these characteristics, and the assumption of absolute power which underlies them, that reinforce the absolute dependence of humanity on the divine. Ware elevates God as an ideal father who human men should desire to emulate. He argues, “[God] is the primal and perfect Father; we human fathers are those called fathers following the model of ‘the Father,’ and hence we are made to bear resemblance to his fathering.”<sup>43</sup> Ware’s

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew L. Whitehead, “Gender Ideology and Religion: Does a Masculine Image of God Matter?” *Review of Religious Research* 54, no. 2 (June 2012), 139-156.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Ware, “God as Father, God the Father, and Human Fathers,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no.1 (2017), 34.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 32.

comments about this symbolic divine patriarch imply a parallel relationship between human men and the divine father—and thus, a transference of the absolute authority of God to men. Daly laments this special relationship, noting that invocation of the authority of God ensures the legitimization of patriarchal power and functions “to legitimate the existing social, economic, and political status quo, in which women and other victimized groups are subordinate.”<sup>44</sup> Men in positions of authority claim to have a special relationship with the divine, “in whose name [women] have been informed... that they should be subordinate to their husbands, that they must be present at rituals and services in which men have all the leadership roles and in which they are degraded not only by enforced passivity but also verbally and symbolically.”<sup>45</sup> Belief in sovereign control over a world full of inequality is appealing to a group that benefits from the preservation of the status quo; emphasis on divine sovereignty justifies their claim to power and reinforces their legitimacy. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza identified the implications of such theological systems, arguing that they “reinforce the cultural patriarchal pattern of subordination, insofar as the relationship between Christ and the church clearly is not a relationship between equals, since the church-bride is totally dependent and subject to her head or bridegroom.”<sup>46</sup> Many feminist critics attempted to undermine the validity of patriarchy-affirming religious rhetoric, carefully deconstructing it so as to expose the intentions of those who invoke it: the desire to acquire and maintain power.

Neo-Calvinists offer their own specific interpretation of the Genesis creation narrative in order to support their argument that when God created men and women, he intentionally assigned men a leadership role within their families and within society. They argue that hierarchy was not

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<sup>44</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 269.

a result of the fall but was ordained by God from the beginning of time; thus, the curse following the fall of humanity did not bring an introduction of new roles, but simply distorted existing ones. Wayne Grudem cites the creation order in the Genesis 2, as well as the fact that Adam named Eve, in order to argue that God intended for men to have a leadership role within their family.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Grudem argues, “When men have governing and teaching authority over the church, they reflect something of the character of manhood in the way God intended it to function, and this is right and appropriate and pleasing to God. When women support men in these leadership positions, they reflect something of the excellence of their creation as women in the image of God, and this is right and appropriate and pleasing in God’s sight as well. In this way, the beauty of manhood and womanhood is reflected in the conduct of the church.”<sup>48</sup> Grudem not only defends the neo-Calvinist affinity for hierarchy and relationships infused with vast imbalances of power, but he characterizes hierarchical gender roles as divinely ordained and ultimately in the best interest of humanity. Referring to gender subordinationism, Grudem writes, “When we understand this biblical teaching, both men and women should be able to say in their hearts, ‘This is what God has planned, and it is beautiful and right, and I rejoice in the way he has made me and the distinct role he has given me.’”<sup>49</sup> Thus, acceptance of one’s “natural” gender role is seen as equivalent to submission to God’s authority as creator. Viewing humans as the creations of a magnificent and holy God who is sufficiently powerful to control the happenings of the universe, gender-based distinctions are thus considered to be an intentional, divinely-ordained gift. According to Courtney Reissig, a self-identified “complementarian” speaker and author, distinctions between the roles of men and women are blessed because they are divinely ordained. She explains, “Instead of seeing

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<sup>47</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2000), 461-462.

<sup>48</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 68.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 465.

our gender differences as mere cultural constructions, we must first admit that there was something great going on in the garden—a *good* design—and when our parents first fell, it was distorted... The fact that we fight against this reveals our depravity even more.”<sup>50</sup> In this way, a hierarchical view of gender roles is justified as divinely ordained.

Unsatisfied with the ideological foundation they had constructed based on the inerrancy of the Bible and the masculinity of the divine, neo-Calvinists continued to search for theological support to justify gender subordinationism. This was in response to egalitarian proponents of the “equivalence view,” who argued that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit possess equal authority, and that this relationship is eternal in nature. Thus, any submission of one member to another, including the Son submitting to the will of the Father while on earth, is merely temporary. According to one proponent of this view, “Because there was no order of subordination within the Trinity prior to the Second Person’s incarnation, there will remain no such thing after its completion. If we must talk of subordination it is only a functional or economic subordination that pertains exclusively to Christ’s role in human history.”<sup>51</sup> Early Calvinism was more aligned with this view of the trinity, with John Calvin especially stressing the full deity and equality of the members of the trinity and rejecting the idea that the deity of the Son comes from the Father.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Courtney Reissig, “My Recovery from Feminism” *Designed for Joy: How the Gospel Impacts Men and Women, Identity and Practice*, ed. Owen Strachan and Jonathan Parnell (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 123.

<sup>51</sup> Gilbert Bilezikian, “Hermeneutical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 1 (March 1997), 60.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin disagrees with those who “insist that Christ was only the instrument or minister, not the author or leader, or prince of life, as he is designated by Peter.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), book II, 17:1.

Rejecting the idea that the deity of the Son proceeds from the Father, Calvin argues, “For even though we admit that, in respect of order and gradation, the beginning of divinity is in the Father, we hold it a detestable fiction to maintain that essence is proper to the Father alone, as if he were the deifier of the Son... If they grant that the Son is God, but only in subordination to the Father, the essence which in the Father is unformed and unbegotten will in him be formed and begotten.” *Ibid.*, book I, 13:24.

Calvin rejects the idea that the “gifts of grace” could only be given to humanity through the Holy Spirit: “He is not divided according to the distribution of his gifts, but, as the Apostle assures us, however they be divided, he remains one and the same.” *Ibid.*, book I, 13:16.

Calvin was willing to accept the idea that the Son was “functionally,” or temporarily, subordinated to the Father; however, he rejected the possibility that this subordination might be eternal.<sup>53</sup>

Neo-Calvinists, on the other hand, insist on the eternal subordination of the Son.<sup>54</sup> Grudem explains, “While the persons of the Trinity are equal in all their attributes, they nonetheless differ in their relationships to the creation. The Son and Holy Spirit are equal in deity to God the Father, but they are subordinate in their roles.”<sup>55</sup> According to trinitarian subordinationism, the roles of the members of the trinity and their taxis (ordering) are not accidental; they are intentionally divinely ordained to endure for all of eternity. Grudem writes, “For all eternity the Father has been the Father, the Son has been the Son, and the Holy Spirit has been the Holy Spirit. These relationships are eternal, not something that occurred only in time.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, for Grudem, this relation of subordination is eternal.

It is perhaps not surprising that the main proponents of trinitarian subordinationism are members of the CBMW: Bruce Ware (former president of the CBMW and current professor at Southern Seminary), Wayne Grudem (CBMW co-founder and council member), and Owen Strachan (former president of the CBMW and current professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary). The doctrine of trinitarian subordinationism has also been popular at the various Southern Baptist seminaries, especially among the faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological

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<sup>53</sup> Kevin Giles, *Jesus and the Father: Modern Evangelicals Reinvent the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 39.

<sup>54</sup> Alan Padgett, “The Bible and Gender Troubles: American Evangelicals Debate Scripture and Submission,” *Dialog: Journal of Theology* 47, no. 1 (February 24, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2000), 249.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

Seminary.<sup>57</sup> Over the past few decades, the CBMW has advocated for trinitarian subordinationism in an attempt to retroactively justify their hierarchy-based gender system. As Grudem explains:

The idea of authority and submission in an interpersonal relationship did not begin with the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood in 1987. Nor did it begin with a few patriarchal men in the Old Testament. Nor did it begin with the Fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Nor did the idea of authority and submission begin with the Creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden in Genesis 1 and 2. No, the idea of authority and submission has always existed in the eternal relationship between the Father and Son in the trinity. And this means that the idea of authority and submission in interpersonal relationships *never began*—it has always existed in the eternal relationship between the Father and Son.<sup>58</sup>

This line of reasoning has immense implications for the debate about gender subordinationism, as removal of temporal constraints from the submission of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father allows for a parallel shift to the eternal for the hierarchical relationship between men and women. According to the CBMW and other neo-Calvinist “complementarians,” hierarchical social structures are so fundamental to the order of the universe that they experienced no definite beginning. By this logic, neither will they experience an end point; hierarchical gender roles are thus made to be eternal.

Gender subordinationism builds upon the foundation of trinitarian subordinationism, relying on a metaphoric relationship of submission and headship. Men are expected to lead like the authoritative and sovereign Father God, while women are expected to submit and follow the

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<sup>57</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Who’s Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009), 51-52.

<sup>58</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 429.

orders of men, just like the Son submitted to the will of the Father. Women are encouraged to model the humility and submission of Jesus, while men are to model Jesus's sacrificial leadership. Trinitarian subordinationists defend the Son's submission to the Father by emphasizing the voluntary nature of the act. According to Bruce Ware, "Not only does the Son express his absolute and unqualified allegiance to the Father in strict obedience to his every word and command, the Son does so out of a deep and abiding love for his Father... The Son's submission to the Father, and his love for the Father, are inseparable."<sup>59</sup> Likewise, "complementarians" attempt to characterize their ideology as moderate by emphasizing the parallel voluntary nature of the submission of women. Mary Daly rejects the assertion that the submission of women is voluntary: "Under Christianity the will to autonomy in women and other 'lesser beings' has been stifled in a double way: feelings of fear have been reinforced by feelings of guilt. The alleged 'voluntariness' of the imposed submission in Christian patriarchy has turned women against ourselves more deeply than ever, disguising and reinforcing the internalization process."<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the neo-Calvinist insistence on the voluntary nature of submission is at odds with their insistence that relations of submission and subordination between men and women are actually eternal.

Though there are several continuities between the theological systems of Calvinism and neo-Calvinism, neo-Calvinism's explicit insistence on God's masculinity and absolute power represents a radical departure from its predecessor. This absolutism is evident in the neo-Calvinist teachings of God's hatred of depraved humanity, the inerrancy of scripture, and the eternal nature of subordination relationships—between members of the trinity and between men and women. This theology has not been restricted to the textual production of elites, nor to a few adherents of

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<sup>59</sup> Bruce Ware, "God as Father, God the Father, and Human Fathers," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21, no.1 (2017), 37.

<sup>60</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 140.



marginal Christian churches. Rather, it has been institutionalized in the conservative takeover of the SBC and in influential parachurch organizations such as the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. This institutionalization has had profound effects on women's roles in families, churches, seminaries and the denomination of the SBC, including a particularly detrimental effect on their well-being. In the next two chapters, I detail these effects and the responses they triggered from the women they affected.

### Chapter 3: Loyalty, Denominational Politics, and Departure from Baptist Tradition

The conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention was led by an unlikely duo with an enviable combined Southern Baptist pedigree. In March of 1967, Paige Patterson was a young doctoral student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary whose father was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Beaumont, Texas—at the time, the sixth-largest Southern Baptist church in the world. Paul Pressler was a Princeton-educated Texas judge and Southern Baptist layman who had been approached by Baylor University students with complaints about liberalism in their textbooks.<sup>1</sup> The two men met for the first time at Café du Monde in New Orleans to discuss their worries about liberalism in the SBC in light of the Elliott controversy a few years prior.<sup>2</sup> Following this strategy session, the two launched a partnership that would leave a lasting impact on the SBC, rallying supporters around inerrancy and placing conservatives in high-ranking positions within the denomination. However, at the time of their initial meeting, neither Patterson nor Pressler was in a position to influence the ideological direction of the denomination. Patterson graduated with his master's degree in 1968 and his doctorate of theology in 1975, then became president of Criswell College in Dallas, TX. Throughout the 1970s, Patterson and Pressler worked at the grassroots level to organize support among increasingly anxious laypeople. In the months leading up to the 1979 convention in Houston, Patterson and Pressler organized rallies to mobilize support for the election of a president committed to biblical inerrancy. This kind of overt political behavior represented a significant divergence from denominational norms. The *Baptist Press* contrasted this new practice with established Southern Baptist tradition, where “friends of a particular nominee... contact others and urge them to vote for him,” characterizing political rallies as “new to the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Robinson, “Pressler: Conservative Resurgence Was Grassroots Movement,” *Baptist Press*, March 30, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 71.

process.”<sup>3</sup> To secure a majority that would carry their proposed motions and elect their chosen candidates, Patterson and Pressler encouraged conservative laypeople to attend the annual convention as messengers, even offering financial assistance to cover room and board.

Institutional norms were eroding and officials who had previously been expected to remain neutral were beginning to speak out. Rallies in support of particular SBC presidential candidates were becoming more common, including the annual Pastors’ Conference, which takes place annually on the Sunday and Monday before the business sessions of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>4</sup> The 1979 Pastors’ Conference was incredibly significant in terms of its breach of diplomatic institutional norms in favor of political tactics. Despite the fact that he had previously served as SBC president himself and was therefore expected to remain officially neutral, W.A. Criswell directly endorsed Adrian Rogers, a staunch conservative, for the upcoming presidential election during his address at the Pastors’ Conference.<sup>5</sup> This action was representative of the shift from diplomacy to overt political activity in the behavior of elected denominational officials, which “not only solidified popular support for Rogers but... also signaled that things had changed in the SBC.”<sup>6</sup> Speakers’ willingness to make bold political statements was supplemented by the very nature of their rhetoric, which repeatedly emphasized the centrality of the issue of inerrancy.

The SBC did not become overtly political overnight, nor did conservatives manage to put these significant changes into effect without enormous backlash from their opponents. From the beginning of the movement, moderates publicly attempted to counter the conservatives’ strategy.

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<sup>3</sup> Toby Druin, “Groups Meet in 15 States to Push SBC President,” *Baptist Press*, May 9, 1979.

<sup>4</sup> William Stone, “The Southern Baptist Convention Reformation, 1979-1990: A Social Drama” PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1993, [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6548&context=gradschool\\_disstheses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6548&context=gradschool_disstheses).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.67.

<sup>6</sup> Bill Leonard, *God’s Last and Only Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 137.

At the 1979 convention in Houston, a resolution was adopted “On Disavowing Political Activity in Selecting Officers” in response to the alleged politicking that was being done by Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson leading up to the annual SBC elections. The resolution acknowledged “numerous public reports of political-type meetings and materials for the purpose of predetermining the election of the officers of this Convention,” and urged SBC messengers and churches “to pray for guidance in the priesthood of the believer in all matters of decision and to exercise distinctly Christian actions in all deliberations.”<sup>7</sup> Pressler was accused of using convention center skyboxes as his own personal political headquarters and of appearing at the convention as an illegal messenger—falsifying his membership at a church in order to register as a messenger. The resolution decrying political activity was directed toward Pressler, a fact recognized by the presiding officer of the convention, who granted him “on the basis of personal privilege, time to respond to comments made (allegedly) concerning him during discussion and on the immediately preceding resolution [on political activity].”<sup>8</sup>

Conspicuous political activity emerged during the conservative takeover of the SBC where no such activity had existed before, mobilizing supporters and propelling conservatives to positions of power within the denomination. Though SBC leaders had historically avoided politicking, conservatives ignored long-standing official precedents of public neutrality and diplomacy, instead opting to endorse candidates and hold rallies that were openly political in nature. For instance, the SBC presidency had been a largely ceremonial position. Though past presidents had technically possessed the power to appoint their own desired candidates to

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<sup>7</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Houston, TX: SBC Executive Committee, 1979).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

committees and boards, they traditionally refrained from making ideological appointments.<sup>9</sup> Largely as a result of conservative campaign efforts, a succession of conservative presidents followed after Adrian Rogers's 1979 presidential victory, making key ideological appointments and directing the denomination in an overwhelmingly conservative direction. By their efforts, they hoped to not only influence the election of the SBC president, but also "through presidential committee appointments, try to control nomination of trustees of SBC agencies."<sup>10</sup> Pressler defended this unprecedented political strategy to a crowd gathered in Lynchburg, emphasizing the importance of "going for the jugular" and capturing trustee positions—especially on seminary boards.<sup>11</sup>

The centralization of power in the Southern Baptist Convention essentially amounted to a rejection of established denominational norms. In the early years of the Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist democratic tendencies, influenced by populism, caused the SBC to be structured in a manner intentionally resistant of hierarchy. Baptists had historically emphasized the autonomy of the local church and its independence from external influences. Thus, they were "uniquely situated to stress the liberating, individualistic aspects of both the Christian message and the politics of the new United States."<sup>12</sup> For more than a century, Southern Baptist churches had

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<sup>9</sup> According to the bylaws of the SBC constitution, the president may appoint a chief parliamentarian (who is vested with parliamentary authority to preside over parliamentary procedure), members of the committee on committees (who are responsible for nominating the members of all other special committees), members of the committee on resolutions (who control which proposed resolutions may be submitted to a vote in front of the whole convention), and members of the committee on order of business (a standing committee which fixes the order of business for the next meeting). Nominations for the executive committee and the trustee boards of any SBC entity (including the six seminaries) are recommended by the committee on nominations; members of the committee on nominations are appointed by members of the committee on committees, who are selected by the president (thus, the president, through appointments to the committee on committees, is also able to control many other important appointments). Additionally, the president serves as a member of the executive committee and on the supervisory boards of various SBC entities. SBC Executive Committee, *SBC Constitution and Bylaws* (Nashville, TN: SBC Executive Committee, 2006), <http://www.sbc.net/pdf/SBC-CharterConstitutionByLaws.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Toby Druin, "Patterson Group Seeks Long-Range Control of SBC," *Baptist Press*, April 21, 1980.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Miller, "Pressler's 'Going for the Jugular' Statement," *The Religious Herald*, September 18, 1980.

<sup>12</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Protestants in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 63.

enjoyed a significant amount of autonomy with limited oversight from denominational leadership. The annual convention, with messengers invited to represent every member church in the SBC, was intended to guarantee that decisions would be made by rank-and-file members of the denomination, not by a select few high-up leaders.<sup>13</sup> Leadership positions, where they existed, were largely ceremonial and were voted upon by the messengers at annual conventions. As a testament to its commitment to the democratic principles of freedom and autonomy, the SBC—unlike many other Protestant denominations—has never had bishops or other similar recognized authorities who organize and enforce policies. The Southern Baptist commitment to individualism and religious freedom was not merely accidental, but a result of a carefully articulated commitment to democratic values. According to the *Baptist Faith & Message*, “The church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation, members are equally responsible.”<sup>14</sup> Under the strategy of the conservatives, the executive committee gained a substantial amount of power, as did the president. Though the president was directly elected by convention messengers, conservatives exploited presidential appointment powers to control many other denominational offices and ultimately to control the direction of the denomination.

Conservatives were emboldened by their control of the presidency and other high-ranking SBC positions, leading to the passage of a series of resolutions at the annual conventions throughout the 1980s. In 1980, the first year with Adrian Rogers presiding over the convention, conservatives passed resolutions “On Abortion,” “On Homosexuality,” and “On Women”

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<sup>13</sup> Arthur E. Farnsley, *Southern Baptist Politics: Authority and Power in the Restructuring of an American Denomination* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1994), 45.

<sup>14</sup> SBC Executive Committee, “Comparison of 1925, 1963, and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” *The Baptist Faith & Message*, Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

(expressing opposition the Equal Rights Amendment).<sup>15</sup> These resolutions were concurrent with a resolution “On Doctrinal Integrity,” the last resolution of its kind, signaling the correlation between inerrancy and gender roles. The next few years saw three new resolutions about women, culminating with a resolution at the 1984 convention in Kansas City “On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry.” However, conservatives recognized the need to justify their radical new plan to centralize denominational power. The authors of what is referred to as the Kansas City Resolution stressed its strong scriptural foundation, beginning the statement with an affirmation of “the authority of Scripture in all matters of faith and practice” and including twelve direct citations from the New Testament.<sup>16</sup> They concluded by repeating their contention that the resolution was fully dependent on the authority of scripture and independent from cultural or emotional factors, suggesting “that we remind ourselves of the dearly bought Baptist principle of the final authority of Scripture in matters of faith and conduct.”<sup>17</sup> This appeal to scripture—especially as a traditional “Baptist principle” was an attempt to obfuscate the radicality of their departure from institutional norms, including a reconceptualization of the traditional Southern Baptist understanding of denominational power and commitment to democratic values. In this way, conservatives attempted to reframe the institutional changes they implemented as consistent with tradition.

Consistent with their traditional democratic tendencies, Southern Baptists had historically rejected creedalism, preferring to allow confessions to provide loose guidance without becoming restrictive. However, the conservative transformation of the denomination could not have been

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<sup>15</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO: SBC Executive Committee, 1980), 31.

<sup>16</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Kansas City, MO: SBC Executive Committee, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

possible without an effective enforcement mechanism. Conservatives eroded denominational norms in an attempt to impose their will on various SBC entities. Though resolutions were traditionally adopted at annual conventions as symbolic expressions of approval and disapproval, conservatives transformed them into binding directives. Baptist historian Walter Shurden lamented this radical shift, noting, “Such resolutions have increasingly been interpreted as ‘directives,’ centralizing all agencies around SBC actions... A new federalism accompanies the new fundamentalism in SBC life.”<sup>18</sup> The increasing power of resolutions was the first indication of the denomination’s unprecedented embrace of creedalism, but the radical shift in the attitude toward the *Baptist Faith & Message* was the most significant development. At the 1969 convention, a motion was made to direct the Sunday School Board to require everyone whose written work it distributes to sign a statement affirming the infallibility of the entire Bible; the motion similarly directed seminaries to require professors to affirm such a statement.<sup>19</sup> A substitute motion was offered—instead, calling for SBC entities to make sure that programs are consistent with the 1963 *Baptist Faith & Message*—and passed.<sup>20</sup> At the 1970 convention, the president of the Sunday School Board announced that they had begun implementation of this directive. He announced that those who were already employed by the Sunday School Board were given the opportunity to voluntarily sign the *Baptist Faith & Message*; furthermore, “all new employees whose responsibility requires theological and doctrinal fidelity” were required to sign the statement.<sup>21</sup> By

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<sup>18</sup> Walter Shurden, *Going for the Jugular* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 279.

<sup>19</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Orleans, LA: SBC Executive Committee, 1969), 59.

<sup>20</sup> A substitute motion was offered in place of the original motion as a clarification. Since the Southern Baptist Convention had recently (in 1963) adopted a statement of faith that already laid out an official position on biblical inerrancy, it was a convenient and measurable standard that employees could clearly be held to. Rather than general affirmation of the infallibility of the Bible, employees would be held to the 1963 *Baptist Faith & Message* view of scripture—“truth, without any mixture of error.”

<sup>21</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Denver, CO: SBC Executive Committee, 1970), 68.



mandating adherence to a confessional statement, the SBC demonstrated its increased willingness to use affirmation of such statements as a loyalty test.

As part of conservative efforts to centralize and control power, loyalty became important in an unprecedented way for the denomination. In order for the Southern Baptist elite to consolidate power and enact desired political changes, it was necessary for them to defend the denomination from perceived enemies—those who challenged the new conservative status quo and introduced reforms that would limit the conservatives' ability to control the trajectory of the SBC. Southern Baptist congregations that maintained strict loyalty to the SBC—using exclusively materials published by the Sunday School Board in their churches and contributing high percentages of their church's budget to the Cooperative Program<sup>22</sup>—were more likely to be rewarded with denominational power. Relying heavily on the establishment of distinct in-groups and out-groups, conservatives dismissed their moderate opponents as “disloyal. The leaders of the conservative takeover of the SBC implemented disciplinary strategies to enforce their expectation of loyalty—disfellowshipping churches that ordained women, mandating uniform agreement with creedal statements, and firing SBC employees who personally disagreed with inerrancy, gender subordinationism, or the exclusion of women from the pulpit.

When the original *Baptist Faith & Message* was adopted, there were already fears that it would develop into a creed. Thus, the document included reassurance that it was not intended to be a final or complete statement of faith—only a “[guide] in interpretation, having no authority

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<sup>22</sup> The Cooperative Program, launched by the SBC in 1925, is a denominational fund that pools resources from individual SBC-affiliated churches by collecting a certain percentage of their tithes. The fund has generated controversy over the years because of 1) the imbalance of denominational power between churches who contribute greater versus lesser percentages of their budgets to the CP; and 2) disagreement about what the money can be used for, especially if the recipient of the money is a politically controversial cause.

over the conscience.”<sup>23</sup> But in the four decades between the original and revised editions of the confessional document, power had become increasingly centralized within the denomination. On its surface, the 1963 revision reiterated the nature of the *Baptist Faith & Message* as a non-binding confession that provided “guidelines” for churches and SBC entities, with the preamble recognizing the Baptist commitment to individualism: “Baptists emphasize the soul’s competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer.” The document then pivots, explaining, “However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean that there is an absence of certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified. It is the purpose of this statement of faith and message to set forth certain teachings which we believe.”<sup>24</sup> Over the next several decades, the conservatives’ power grab led to a fundamental transformation of how the *Baptist Faith & Message* was viewed.

At the 1985 annual convention, conflict between conservatives and moderates had escalated to the point that the denomination deployed a “peace committee” to study the source of the conflict and propose a potential resolution. The deliberation of this committee culminated in 1986 with the presentation and adoption of the Glorieta Statement, signed by committee members and the presidents of all six Southern Baptist seminaries. This statement contributed even further to the centralization of denominational power; the signatories pledged to reaffirm the confessional statements of their respective seminaries, including the *Baptist Faith & Message*, and “enforce compliance by the persons signing them.”<sup>25</sup> Though the peace committee explicitly stated that the *Baptist Faith & Message* was not a creed, they recommended that it serve as a guideline by which

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<sup>23</sup> SBC Executive Committee, “Comparison of 1925, 1963, and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” *The Baptist Faith & Message*, Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (St. Louis, MO: SBC Executive Committee, 1987), 232.

all SBC agencies were to conduct their work, encouraging SBC leadership to only nominate committee members and trustees who endorsed it. This directly led to the use of the *Baptist Faith & Message* as a loyalty test; denominational employees, especially seminary professors, began to be required to affirm the statement as a condition of their employment. According to Cecil Sherman, one of the leaders of the moderate faction of the SBC, this shift toward creedalism “guttled serious theological education... [resulting in] the exodus of good teachers from our seminaries, the rape of Southeastern Seminary, the exodus of top-notch faculty members [from Southern Seminary] and the climate of fear and intimidation that now exists at places that once were free.”<sup>26</sup> The conservative takeover could not have succeeded without the key enforcement mechanism of creedalism, an unprecedented development in the Southern Baptist Convention that was introduced by conservatives to supplement their doctrinal innovations.

Moderates continued to take steps to limit the centralization of power within the denomination. At the 1981 convention in Los Angeles, a motion was made to limit the president’s appointment power. The ability of a president to make unilateral appointments to the committee on committees and seminary trustee boards was the primary mechanism by which conservatives were executing their rapid transformation of the SBC. Though the motion failed, opposed by a bloc of conservative votes, the attempt was demonstrative of moderate efforts to reverse the changes that conservatives were making to the denomination. They formed the SBC Forum to rival the conservative Pastors’ Conference and scheduled it to take place at the same time, effectively cementing the separation of messengers into polarized pre-convention groups. Speakers at the SBC Forum denounced the political activity of the conservatives, warning of its potential to damage the

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<sup>26</sup> Walter Shurden, *Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1994).

reputation and financial security of the entire denomination. They alleged that it might cause the SBC to lose its religious tax-exempt status and thus compromise the \$1.5 billion Annuity Board.<sup>27</sup>

Constant anxiety about denominational finances supports the notion that this controversy was not merely about theological issues, but political, social, and financial ones as well. Many moderates were concerned about the impact that the conservatives' politicization of the denomination might have on denominational funds. Similarly, conservatives were partially motivated by a fear that "watered-down" liberal theology within the denomination would cause an exodus of membership and, therefore, a decrease in financial resources for both the Annuity Board, Cooperative Program, and individual church budgets. As the wealthiest Protestant denomination in the United States, members of the Southern Baptist Convention have often been motivated to support certain doctrines or actions over others because of their potential financial implications. Individuals employed by SBC entities receive their compensation and benefits through funds from the Annuity Board, which enjoys tax-exempt status under the umbrella of the denomination. All cooperating SBC churches are also granted 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. According to the IRS, a church may lose its 501(c)(3) status "if a substantial part of its activities is attempting to influence legislation (commonly known as lobbying)."<sup>28</sup> Though the SBC had become a highly political entity, it did not actively lobby for any specific legislation and thus was in no real danger of losing its tax-exempt status. However, skepticism surrounding the denomination's increased politicization led to the development of independent organizations with specific political goals. Since these organizations—like the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW)—also had 501(c)(3) status, they were subject to the same restraints on political campaigning as the

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<sup>27</sup> James C. Hefley. *Truth in Crisis: Bringing the Controversy Up-To-Date*, Vol. 2 (Hannibal: Hannibal, 1987), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Internal Revenue Service, "Lobbying," Charities and Non-Profits, last modified December 13, 2018, <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying>.

SBC. However, their appearance of independence from the SBC helped to calm moderate fears about the politicization of the denomination.

Though the CBMW is a legally separate entity from the SBC, the two nonetheless maintain a very close relationship. The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC is listed as a co-sponsor of the CBMW's 2017 Nashville Statement, and the CBMW headquarters is located in Norton Hall on the campus of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. According to CBMW co-founder and former president Wayne Grudem, "CBMW has had a significant influence in the thinking of many who have gained positions of guardianship in strategic organizations in the evangelical world... CBMW has had massive downstream impact on many denominations and parachurch organizations."<sup>29</sup> Partnerships between the denomination and external entities were not entirely unprecedented in the Southern Baptist Convention. In fact, the *Baptist Faith & Message* endorses cooperation between the SBC and other associations which may have coterminous interests: "Christ's people should, as occasion requires, organize such associations and conventions as may best secure co-operation for the great objects of the kingdom of God." However, it also emphasizes the distance that the SBC should maintain from them: "Such organizations have no authority over one another or over the churches. They are voluntary and advisory bodies designed to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of our people in the most effective manner."<sup>30</sup> The SBC's relationship with the CBMW goes beyond this suggestion, which had the effect, for many years, of preventing the denomination from engaging in partnerships with political organizations.

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<sup>29</sup> Wayne Grudem, "Personal Reflections on the History of CBMW and the State of the Gender Debate." *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 16.

<sup>30</sup> SBC Executive Committee, "Comparison of 1925, 1963, and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message," *The Baptist Faith & Message*, Southern Baptist Convention, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

In 1997, the SBC once again appointed a committee to review their *Baptist Faith & Message* confessional statement; in 1998, this committee presented a report to the convention, recommending that a section on “The Family” be added. This section, recognizing the family as the God-ordained “foundational institution of human society,” describes the relationship that men and women (as husband and wife) should have with one another. It exhorts men to lead their families with authority, while women are to “submit [themselves] graciously to the servant leadership of her husband.”<sup>31</sup> This revision, littered with gender subordinationist language, was adopted by a vote of the convention’s messengers. That same year, they voted to adopt a resolution on the authority of the Bible: “We, the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention... affirm the finality, sufficiency, and exclusivity of the Christian Gospel and of biblical revelation as the sole source of saving truth.”<sup>32</sup> Re-affirmation of the inerrancy of scripture, along with warnings that egalitarianism would necessarily lead to the undermining of biblical authority, was used in an attempt to elevate the stakes of the debate and reinforce the conservative base. The influence of the CBMW was also evident in the 1998 revision of the *Baptist Faith & Message*, as CBMW co-founder Dorothy Patterson served on the committee assigned to recommend revisions. In an interview for the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Patterson was asked about the resources the committee found helpful in putting the statement together. She reported that one prominent source they consulted was John Piper and Wayne Grudem’s “complementarian” anthology, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Salt Lake City, UT: SBC Executive Committee, 1998), 61.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>33</sup> Dorothy Patterson, “Southern Baptists Lead the Way,” interview with David Wegner, *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 3.

The drama surrounding the *Baptist Faith & Message* continued into the early twenty-first century, prompting another revision in the year 2000. Perhaps more troublingly, the trend toward using affirmation of this confessional statement as a loyalty test continued. In 2001, a motion requesting that SBC institutions and seminaries not require their employees to sign the statement prompted responses from these entities, detailing their official policies on the matter. The International Mission Board (IMB), North American Mission Board (NAMB), and Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission reported their expectation that employees affirm the statement and apply its precepts to their work. The seminaries unanimously agreed with this policy, with some institutions even going further in their requirements. Midwestern Seminary reported that it requires faculty members to sign an affirmation of the *Baptist Faith & Message* upon initiation or renewal of their contract. Southeastern Seminary reported that its bylaws require all faculty members to “publicly sign” both the *Baptist Faith & Message* and the *Abstract of Principles*, a historic Southern Baptist confessional statement. All six seminaries confirmed that they require written affirmation of the document as a condition of employment.<sup>34</sup>

Despite evidence of the implementation of strategic, systematic institutional changes throughout the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention, conservatives resisted formal acknowledgment of the new political character of the denomination. In a convocation address at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Roy Honeycutt stirred up controversy by stating, “The crisis facing Southern Baptists... is political. However much the political machine may use biblical and theological smoke screens, this is the issue: Our convention is being wrenched apart by an unprecedented political crisis engineered by Dr. Patterson and Judge Pressler.”<sup>35</sup> Paige

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<sup>34</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Orleans, LA: SBC Executive Committee, 2001), 120.

<sup>35</sup> Roy Honeycutt, “To Your Tents, O Israel,” convocation address, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, August 1984.

Patterson responded by defending himself and the conservative movement, rejecting Honeycutt's characterization of the conservatives' rise to power within the denomination. He argues, "To say that we're trying to gain power implies that some other group has been in power, and it has countenanced a departure from historic Baptist beliefs in some of our institutions."<sup>36</sup> With comments like these, conservatives sought to disguise their institutional changes as merely the continuation of tradition, thus burying the radicality of these innovations. The institutionalization of neo-Calvinist conceptions of power, divine and human, dramatically eroded the democratic ethos and practices of the SBC, despite moderates' attempts to counter the conservative take-over. This process also had specific repercussions for women's efforts to access power in the SBC, a topic which I address in the next chapter.

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<sup>36</sup> James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis, Vol. 1* (Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1986), 25.



## Chapter 4: Strategic Submission and the Empowerment of Southern Baptist Women

One may assume that religious conversations surrounding the submission of women are dominated exclusively by the voices of men. However, women have been influential on both sides of the debate—advocating both for and against gender subordinationism. The notion that submission is inherently something done *to* women—that it cannot be voluntary—is an oversimplification of the issue. Many scholars have approached the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention as a conflict exclusively dominated by men, overlooking the vital role that women played in this radical transformation of the denomination.<sup>1</sup> The work of Marie Griffith and others supplied the original pushback against this feminist approach, challenging assumptions about agency and power within conservative religious communities. Though men wield significant power through the prominent roles designated to them under the religious framework of gender subordinationism, these scholars argue that this does not entirely deprive women of power. In this chapter, I will explore the influence of women on either side of the conflict over gender subordinationism, especially surrounding the conservative takeover of the SBC. First, I will examine how certain women’s organizations struggled against SBC conservatives during the

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<sup>1</sup> This does not include works like Elizabeth Flowers’s book, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II*, which chronicles the involvement of women in the Southern Baptist Convention and examines the issue of women’s ordination from the grassroots level, preserving the voices of many of the women who were involved. Though Flowers recognizes how conservative Southern Baptist women drove the “biblical womanhood” movement, her work focuses mainly on the debate over the ordination of women—not on issues of submission or the “complementary” gender roles. Nor does this include Sally Dean Smith Holt’s doctoral dissertation entitled, “The SBC and the WMU: Issues of Power and Authority Relating to Organization and Structure,” where she specifically identifies the Women’s Missionary Union as a challenger to the “fundamentalists” for denominational power during the conservative takeover of the SBC. Her in-depth sociological examination of the power dynamics between the SBC and the WMU provides an interesting perspective on one particular group of moderate and progressive women, pushing back against the denomination’s conservative shift. However, her exclusive focus on the WMU leaves two major gaps which beg analysis—not only the contributions of other moderate and progressive women who similarly challenged SBC conservatives, but the advocacy and leadership of conservative women within the innovative ideological framework of “complementarianism.” Taken alone, Holt’s thesis implies that the WMU was the sole source of power for women in the context of the takeover, which is far from the truth. Acknowledging the legitimacy of some of the arguments of both Flowers and Holt and recognizing where their examinations fall short, I argue that women exerted influence on the SBC takeover from both sides through a number of channels.

takeover, forcing the conservatives to address their concerns and, at times, change their strategy and messaging. Then, I will examine how women have contributed to these religious structures, highlighting the role certain women have played in the development of “complementarianism” and the dissemination of its rhetoric. In my examination of women within the conservative takeover, I will consider whether they were able to be empowered through submission—a concept which Marie Griffiths also addresses in the context of the members of the Women’s Aglow Fellowship. Women exerted influence during the conservative takeover of the SBC from many directions, leaving behind lasting legacies in the debate over the role of women in the church.

When conservatives first rose to power in the SBC, individual dissenters made their voices heard by reacting to specific objectionable policies, often taking a stand by publicly resigning their offices. This phenomenon occurred most frequently at the six Southern Baptist seminaries, with faculty members reacting to their academic freedoms being compromised. Conservative SBC presidents began to exercise their powers to place ideological appointees on seminary trustee boards, who in turn used new conservative majorities to attempt to alter the trajectory of their institutions. Many moderate and liberal faculty members responded by either resigning or speaking out in a way that led to their firing. As the SBC expressed an increasingly conservative gender ideology, a considerable number of moderate faculty members resigned or were fired from their positions at Southern Baptist seminaries. In 1987, in response to changes instituted by trustees to ensure faculty compliance with conservative policy, President Randall Lolley and Dean Morris Ashcraft resigned from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.<sup>2</sup> Following the contentious Kansas City resolution against the ordination of women, President Roy Honeycutt of Southern Seminary had preached a convocation address entitled “To Your Tents, O Israel,” employing

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<sup>2</sup> *New York Times*, “2 Resign Baptist Seminary in a Theology Dispute,” Oct 24, 1987, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/24/us/2-resign-baptist-seminary-in-a-theology-dispute.html>.

rhetoric of a “holy war” to encourage moderates to resist fundamentalists who had “hijacked” the denomination.<sup>3</sup> In 1992, Honeycutt resigned, taking three of his moderate allies from the board of trustees with him.<sup>4</sup> In 1994, conservative trustees at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary voted to dismiss President Russell Dilday, who had spoken out against the political tactics employed by the conservatives in their takeover.<sup>5</sup> However, seminaries were not the only SBC entities suffering from an abnormally high turnover rate as a result of conflict with conservative denominational leadership. In a closed session in 1990, the SBC executive committee announced the dismissal of the director and news editor of the Baptist Press—supposedly “in retribution for their persistence in telling both sides of the story about the struggle... between moderates and fundamentalists.”<sup>6</sup> In 1991, citing objections to his leadership style and performance, trustees of the Baptist Sunday School Board pressured the organization’s moderate president, Lloyd Elder, into retirement.<sup>7</sup> In 1992, moderate Keith Parks announced early retirement from his position as president of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB), citing differences with trustees.<sup>8</sup> Immediately following his retirement from the FMB, Parks was offered a position with the influential moderate Southern Baptist organization, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), a rival organization where many such moderate dissenters fled after coming into conflict with the Southern Baptist Convention. The active protestation of the CBF to the implementation of conservative policy in the denomination is demonstrative of the important role that organizations—not just individuals—played in the formation of a moderate counterinsurgency.

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Shurden, *Going for the Jugular* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 124.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Steinfels, “Baptists Dismiss Seminary Head in Surprise Move,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ari Goldman, “2 Southern Baptist News Chiefs are Dismissed,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> Linda Lawson, “Draper Elected SSB President,” *Baptist Press*, July 19, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> *Baptist Press*, “Keith Parks Offered Post with Cooperative Baptist Fellowship,” September 17, 1992, <http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/7251,17-Sep-1992.pdf>.

Faculty members at seminaries that affirmed the ordination of women—Southeastern and Southern—were particularly vulnerable. According to a 1986 poll, of the 232 women ordained in the denomination, 68% had graduated from one of these two institutions.<sup>9</sup> The successive tenures of a few moderate presidents had resulted in women being hired as faculty members at these seminaries, and in some cases as administrators. Dr. Diana Garland, an outspoken proponent of women’s ordination, was appointed dean of Southern Seminary’s School of Social Work in 1994 by moderate president Roy Honeycutt. However, when he retired, the seminary’s trustees replaced him with a staunch conservative: Al Mohler. Dr. Garland was left in an unfortunate position; since conservatives considered social work a “liberal” field, Mohler was skeptical of the school’s necessity from his first day as president, “[challenging] Garland to prove that social work belonged in the seminary.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Garland’s public support of women’s ordination made her even more of a target for conservatives. According to David Miller, vice chair of Southern Seminary’s board of trustees, “A person may agree to all 20 articles of the Abstract and be willing to sign the covenant renewal agreement, but if that person is pro-women in the pastorate, that person will not be hired at Southern Seminary.”<sup>11</sup> In order to renew the school’s accreditation, Garland had to make new hires for the School of Social Work to replace those who had left. However, Mohler rejected each of her recommendations, declaring them “too liberal” because they could not meet his ideological hiring requirements. Frustrated and defeated, Garland made a public statement

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012), 115.

<sup>10</sup> Katie Lauve-Moon, “The Case of Dean Diana Garland: Taking a Stand at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” *Women Leading Change* 1, no.2 (2016), 21. Though Mohler was skeptical of the importance of social work to the church, Garland was a successful advocate for the Carver School, supposedly convincing Mohler not to cut financial support provided to Carver School students.

<sup>11</sup> *Battle for the Minds*, dir. Steven Lipscomb (New York: Public Broadcasting Service, June 10, 1997). Documentary.

“regarding President Mohler’s abuse of power.”<sup>12</sup> Shortly after, Mohler asked for her resignation, citing “the irreparable breakdown of the professional trust and common vision requisite for the working relationship between the President and Dean.”<sup>13</sup> Garland resigned, joining the faculty of Baylor University<sup>14</sup> in 1997 and eventually becoming the inaugural dean of Baylor’s School of Social Work. Mohler also threatened to press charges for the dismissal of Dr. Molly Marshall, a professor at Southern Seminary and ordained minister at a rural Baptist church.<sup>15</sup> During a 1995 trustee meeting, Mohler accused her of “teaching outside our confessional document, the Abstract of Principles.”<sup>16</sup> Marshall resigned to avoid what she called a “heresy trial.” The resignations of Garland and Marshall were highly publicized events, leading to student protests, walkouts, and vigils. Motivated by the leadership of these women, students challenged Mohler at question-and-answer sessions, some refusing to shake his hand at graduation; faculty members even brought a vote of no-confidence against him.<sup>17</sup> The resignations of these female professors sparked even further protest from moderate Southern Baptists.

Since the founding of the denomination, Southern Baptist women have struggled, with mixed success, to have their voices heard. The most successful example of Southern Baptist

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<sup>12</sup> Katie Lauve-Moon, “The Case of Dean Diana Garland: Taking a Stand at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” *Women Leading Change* 1, no.2 (2016): 23.

<sup>13</sup> Diana E. Garland. “When Professional Ethics and Religious Politics Conflict.,” *Social Work and Christianity* 26, no. 1 (1999): 67.

<sup>14</sup> In 1990, Baylor University amended its charter to assert its independence and resist the conservative influence of the SBC. Though the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), Baylor’s affiliate state SBC convention, had previously selected all of the university’s trustees, the new charter stated that the BGCT could now select only 1/4 of the trustees. Baylor’s increasing independence provided a stark contrast to Southern Seminary, the institution from which Dr. Garland has just resigned. No longer expected to conduct business under strict ideological hiring restrictions, Garland excelled at Baylor, eventually becoming the namesake of the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work. “Identity Crisis,” *Baylor Magazine*, February 2005, <https://www.baylor.edu/alumni/magazine/0304/news.php?action=story&story=22168>.

<sup>15</sup> Molly Marshall, “The Messy Stuff of Ministry: Am I Alone? How to Build a Network of Support,” interview with Pam Durso, *Baptist Women in Ministry Magazine*, February 4, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> *Battle for the Minds*, dir. Steven Lipscomb (New York: Public Broadcasting Service, June 10, 1997). Documentary.

<sup>17</sup> *Recovering a Vision: The Presidency of R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*, dir. Matt McDougal (Nashville, TN: Southern Productions, 2013). Documentary.

women exerting denominational influence is the Women's Missionary Union (WMU), an auxiliary organization dating back to 1886. Sally Dean Smith Holt traces the power dynamics between the SBC and the WMU, chronicling how women have exerted influence over the denomination through this formal organization. Just after the SBC was founded, even before the existence of the WMU, male messengers to the annual convention moved to officially exclude women from their ranks. Though no women were serving as convention messengers at the time, Southern Baptist men took action in response to the increased involvement of women in other denominations. In 1885, the (exclusively male) delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention formally rebuffed women's attempts to obtain power and influence by voting to change the name of church representatives to the annual convention from "messengers" to "brethren." Women were barred from participation in the convention, as they were directly denied seats and messenger badges reserved for "brethren." This tension within the SBC about the role of women—both within the denomination and on the mission field—emerged in the midst of the formation of many "women's auxiliary" groups across the country, particularly in the south.<sup>18</sup> The potential organization of Southern Baptist women into a women's mission board threatened the male leadership of the SBC and its own international mission organization, the Foreign Mission Board (FMB).

Seeking to prevent Southern Baptist women from following the precedent set by the women of northern denominations—forming their own separate mission organization and thus significantly decreasing the budget of the denomination's standing mission organization—the

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<sup>18</sup> According to Holt, women were forming auxiliary organizations within a number of American Protestant denominations in the late nineteenth century, including the Women's Christian Temperance Union (1882), Methodist Women's Foreign Missionary Society (1869), Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Methodist Church (1879), and Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1890). These organizations differed from the Southern Baptist WMU because they were the result of women withdrawing from their denominations to do independent mission work from their own board. The Foreign Mission Board of the SBC formally asked the WMU to organize to specifically avoid this potential separation, which would result in the FMB losing a significant portion of its income.

FMB extended an invitation for the women to organize as an “auxiliary.” This led to the chartering of the Women’s Missionary Union (WMU) in 1888. Beginning in 1901, delegates to the WMU annual meeting were given SBC badges that entitled them to seats on the convention floor for the first time. This eventually led to the formal reversal of the 1885 policy change; in 1918, the SBC reinstated the word “messenger” to refer to delegates to the convention. The WMU responded by extending a formal vote of appreciation to the SBC, which Holt identifies as a strategic move to gain power under the guise of submission to the authority of men. The WMU was financially successful, and the approval they received from the SBC was driven in part by the financial support they provided to the denomination. During its organizational tenure, the WMU has collected and distributed \$2.5 billion via its Lottie Moon Christmas offering (for international missions) and Annie Armstrong Easter Offering (for domestic missions).<sup>19</sup> The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering was first collected specifically to bail out the SBC’s official domestic mission office, the Home Mission Board (HMB), because mismanagement of funds had led to serious debt. In 1885, HMB secretary Isaac Tichenor officially requested that the WMU set up a special offering to help them avoid financial bankruptcy, and the WMU responded with the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.<sup>20</sup> There was a recognizable pattern to relations between the SBC and the WMU during their early years—women “submitted” to the authority of the men of the SBC executive committee, demonstrated through their “auxiliary” status. However, this “submission” was strategic, eventually leading to the acquisition of more power for the WMU.

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<sup>19</sup> SBC Executive Committee, “SBC Entities,” *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Closer Look*, accessed March 20, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/entities/wmu.asp>.

<sup>20</sup> Sally Dean Smith Holt, “The SBC and the WMU: Issues of Power and Authority Relating to Organization and Structure,” Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2001.

Even as various SBC organizations have been incorporated into the denomination's formal hierarchy by being granted the status of SBC "entities" or "agencies," the WMU has retained its "auxiliary" status.<sup>21</sup> Male leadership of the SBC initially insisted that the WMU be chartered with this status in an effort to restrict the influence of women; however, during the conservative takeover of the denomination, the freedom that accompanied their "auxiliary" status shielded the WMU from the pressure the denomination was placing on its official entities.

The WMU has also consistently denied requests that it legally designate the SBC as its "sole member," choosing instead to retain its organizational autonomy. Official SBC entities, in order to maintain their status as such, are required to seek denominational approval at every stage of their organizational lifetimes. The SBC must approve their charter and elect their trustees; the entities themselves must make regular reports to the convention to ensure their compliance with denominational policy. These reports are included in the comprehensive annual convention reports so that they can be evaluated by denomination leadership and directives can be given to them publicly. For example, the SBC could direct Lifeway (the agency responsible for publishing and distributing denominational materials) to recall an objectionable book from its shelves or direct the seminaries to construct new buildings. SBC entities are not allowed discretion over hiring practices, nor may they appoint their own boards. The Southern Baptist Convention's status as the legal "sole member" of each of its entities is a strict mechanism of control that affords SBC executives to make decisions on behalf of the denomination. At the 2005 annual convention in

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<sup>21</sup> Though the WMU has retained its legal status as an "auxiliary" and has resisted calls for the SBC to be legally recognized as its "sole member," the WMU has voluntarily agreed to operate under the SBC entity relationship guidelines set by the executive committee in conjunction with the Great Commission council. The WMU also voluntarily submits an annual report to the convention and its president is considered an honorary member of the executive committee. However, these unofficial ties do not suggest that the SBC has any legal authority over the WMU as an entity. SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (San Antonio, TX: SBC Executive Committee, 2007), 38



Nashville, TN, the executive committee accepted a recommendation to adopt a revised charter naming the Southern Baptist Convention as its “sole member.”<sup>22</sup> According to a resolution of appreciation, the convention recognized the legal designation of the SBC as the “sole member” of the executive committee as a signal of the SBC’s ownership of and unconditional authority over its entities.<sup>23</sup>

The WMU has been designated as an “auxiliary” from the time of its inception. The preamble to its constitution renounces any claims to authority, reading, “We the women of the church connected with the SBC... disclaim all intention of independent action and organization.”<sup>24</sup> In her report to the 2008 SBC annual convention, Kaye F. Miller, president of the Women’s Missionary Union, distinguished her auxiliary organization from SBC entities whose trustees are under the influence of the SBC. “WMU is self-governing and therefore able to remain truly a grassroots organization.”<sup>25</sup> The executive board is made up of regional presidents—laypeople who are elected, not appointed, to their position. The president is elected by members at WMU’s annual meetings. The WMU is financially self-sufficient; it does not receive funding from the Cooperative Program, the national budget of the SBC.<sup>26</sup> Financial dependence on Cooperative Program funding obligates official entities to allocate their budgets in a way that the SBC approves of, but the WMU’s independence has allowed them freedom in their budgetary decisions.

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<sup>22</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: SBC Executive Committee, 2005), 153.

<sup>23</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Orlando, FL: SBC Executive Committee, 2010), 61.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine B. Allen, *A Century to Celebrate: History of the Women’s Missionary Union* (Birmingham: Women’s Missionary Union, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Indianapolis, IN: SBC Executive Committee, 2008), 236.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Denominational controversy has made the WMU particularly motivated to maintain its auxiliary status. During the conservative takeover of the SBC, conflict ensued between SBC leadership and the agencies they were directing toward specific ideological positions. When agency leaders attempted to diverge from the party line, they were replaced by more “loyal” officials. There was a significant amount of turnover within agencies, as employees resigned or were forced out for their dissenting “liberal” beliefs. However, the WMU was largely immune from this phenomenon because of their auxiliary status. Their independence from the centralized power structures of the denomination placed them in a special position where they could defend moderate dissenters who were being antagonized and forced into the periphery by the new conservative regime of the SBC. For example, in 1990, the WMU affirmed “the right of individuals, churches, and state conventions to choose other plans for cooperative missions giving,”<sup>27</sup> essentially endorsing organizations like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) that threatened the financial viability of the SBC.<sup>28</sup> The In 1993, the WMU took their support of rival organizations further, announcing a controversial expansion to work with the CBF, including assisting them with the purchase of missions materials. The FMB demanded that members of the WMU’s executive board reverse this decision, but as an auxiliary organization, the WMU was under no obligation to do so.<sup>29</sup> Shortly after, the SBC executive committee adopted a resolution, calling on the WMU to “make clear its singular cooperation with the Convention and its mission

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<sup>27</sup> Melissa Deming, “Missionary Spirit of WMU Continues,” *Baptist Press*, June 5, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship was founded in 1991 by moderate and progressive Southern Baptists in an effort to resist the conservative takeover of the SBC. Moderate and progressive Southern Baptist churches began to send funds to the CBF instead of the SBC’s Cooperative Program. The diversion of these funds threatened the financial stability of the SBC, and thus the CBF was deemed a rival to the SBC. The loyalty of those who supported the CBF, including the WMU itself, was in question.

<sup>29</sup> *The Christian Century*, “Rein in Women’s Group, Says SBC Conservatives,” *The Christian Century* 110 no.13 (April 21, 1993).

boards and its undivided commitment to the Cooperative Program, the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for foreign missions, and the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions.”<sup>30</sup>

The fact that the WMU was resisting the conservative gender ideology of the SBC by taking advantage of its auxiliary status was no secret. In response, Southern Baptist authorities began to call for the “elevation” of the WMU to agency status. However, they took care to disguise their intentions by making it seem as if the status was an honor wrongfully withheld from the WMU when it was first formed. Former SBC president Paige Patterson, one of the masterminds behind the conservative takeover of the denomination, argued that *not* allowing the WMU to have official status was tantamount to discriminating against women.<sup>31</sup> As conflict between the SBC and the WMU waxed and waned, SBC leaders proposed various strategies to undermine the autonomy of the WMU and exert control over it. In 1993, former SBC president Adrian Rogers proposed a complete takeover of the WMU. He called for an end to the “feminization” of missions and proposed that the SBC assume control over appointment of WMU leaders. “Mission promotion... should be led by pastors and the leaders of the Brotherhood, a men’s mission group.”<sup>32</sup> In 1998, he publicly suggested that the WMU be considered an agency of the SBC. At the 2006 SBC annual convention in Greensboro, North Carolina, a motion was proposed to invite the WMU to become an official entity of the SBC. After the executive committee asked the WMU to poll its executive board on the issue, WMU president Kaye Miller spoke against the motion, reporting that the WMU executive board requested that they retain their existing status.<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Houston, TX: SBC Executive Committee, 1993), 115.

<sup>31</sup> Sally Dean Smith Holt, “The SBC and the WMU: Issues of Power and Authority Relating to Organization and Structure,” PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2001.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Silk and Andrew Walsh, *One Nation, Divisible: How Regional Religious Differences Shape American Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 74.

<sup>33</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Greensboro, NC: SBC Executive Committee, 2006), 89.

motion was defeated, resulting in the maintenance of the WMU's auxiliary status. Each time the SBC offered agency status to the WMU, they rejected the offer, preferring to retain their autonomy and self-governance. Structural changes within the SBC in the twentieth century, including increased centralization and the implementation of a hierarchical power structure, led to SBC agencies essentially becoming extensions of the denominational leadership. The president's extensive appointment powers allowed him to place his ideological allies in high-up positions. The increased use of creeds as employment tests for seminary faculty, missionaries, and agency employees also contributed to the campaign for increased ideological homogenization of the denomination. The WMU's persisting identity as an autonomous organization, outside the boundaries of control of the SBC president and executive committee, allowed them to resist the denomination's attempts to control every aspect of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Holt specifically identifies the WMU as a challenger to conservative “fundamentalists” for denominational leadership.<sup>34</sup> Approaching the relationship between the SBC and the WMU from a sociological perspective, Holt examines how the WMU obtained and exerted influence within the denomination—in contrast to how “fundamentalists” obtained and used their own power, and in spite of their attempts to deprive the WMU of the power they labored to retain. Holt concludes that the battle “was not so much about theology as it was about power and the desire to determine the future course of the SBC.”<sup>35</sup> I disagree with Holt on this point, as I believe that a more comprehensive approach reveals that the conservative takeover was about both theology *and* power. Moreover, her exclusive focus on the WMU ignores the contributions of other moderate

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<sup>34</sup> Though Holt refers to SBC conservatives as “fundamentalists” in her dissertation, I do not adopt this terminology in my own work. Therefore, I leave the term in quotations to emphasize where her language diverges from my own.

<sup>35</sup> Sally Dean Smith Holt, “The SBC and the WMU: Issues of Power and Authority Relating to Organization and Structure,” PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 2001.

and progressive women, painting a picture of the WMU as the sole opposition to SBC conservatives. It ignores the contributions of conservative women on the other side of the aisle who played important roles in originating and defending the concept of “complementarianism.”

The WMU was not the only influential group of Southern Baptist women who contributed to the resistance against the conservative takeover of the SBC. In 1983, a group of Southern Baptist women, most of whom were members of the WMU, formed the Southern Baptist Women in Ministry (SBWIM) as an independent organization with no official ties to the SBC. This allowed them even more autonomy than the WMU, which they used to provide support for women who felt called to ordination. Flowers, whose work focuses on the ordination of women, highlights the SBWIM for its role as a network of ordained Southern Baptist women. The organization’s steering committee proposed that the membership of their organization include: “women with ministerial identity who were engaged in ministry in the SBC, women who had been ordained by Southern Baptist churches, and friends who are supportive of women in ministry.”<sup>36</sup> SBWIM, a group of “biblical feminists,” based their mission on a historical conception of the SBC as defenders of the powerless. Furthermore, they held that the politically-driven hierarchical power structure the conservatives had introduced to the denomination represented an entirely new innovation.<sup>37</sup> They produced a magazine called *FOLIO* that elevated the voices of women and allowed ordained women to stay connected to one another. In a time in which moderates with official ties to the SBC felt pressured to not publicly support the ordination of women, the SBWIM was willing to be outspoken on the subject.

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<sup>36</sup> Baptist Women in Ministry, “Baptist Women in Ministry: A History of the Organization,” in *The State of Women in Baptist Life*, ed. Eileen Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012), 98.

Though they supported the ordination of women and promoted the idea of women taking on leadership roles within the church, many moderate Southern Baptist organizations initially had only male leaders. However, as the conflict endured, moderate groups with mixed-gender membership appointed woman leaders, prompting further criticism from conservatives in the denomination. For example, the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), the largest regional SBC convention in Texas, publicly objected to many of the conservative moves of the national convention. This conflict between national and regional convention materialized when messengers to the national convention voted to amend the denomination's confessional statement. Clyde Glazener, president of the BGCT, described the 1998 addition to the *Baptist Faith & Message* as "Neanderthal" and accused conservatives of using the confession as a creed to get everyone to conform to their views. He complained that professors at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he received his doctorate, were required to sign the amended statement, or else be forced to resign.<sup>38</sup> The BGCT made no effort to hide their dissatisfaction with the trajectory of the denomination, even going so far in 1999 as to re-affirm the 1963 *Baptist Faith & Message*, rejecting the 1998 revision of the document and its new section on "The Family." The motion to re-affirm the old version passed overwhelmingly, sending a strong message of disapproval to the national convention. The BGCT, with its extensive budget and historically large contributions to the Cooperative Program, gambled that the SBC was unlikely to retaliate against them because of their financial contributions to the denomination. This confidence allowed them to protest throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century.<sup>39</sup> The BGCT put its beliefs into practice in 2007, when the moderate group elected Joy Fenner, their first female president on October 29.

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<sup>38</sup> Art Toalston, "Texas Baptists Counter Official Southern Baptist Stance on Marriage," *Christianity Today*, November 1, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

Fenner and her husband had been missionaries with the SBC's International Mission Board and she had served as the executive director of the Texas WMU.<sup>40</sup> Women contributed to the moderate resistance from many different sides—from all-women groups like the WMU and SBWIM to mixed-gender organizations like the BGCT.

Though women were crucial to the moderate movement that challenged the conservative takeover of the SBC, women were also crucial to the conservative movement itself. Not all Southern Baptist women sided with the progressive “biblical feminists” during the conflict. To the contrary—the endorsement of women helped to legitimize the conservative argument for gender subordinationism, especially under the new label of “complementarianism.” This phenomenon is not unique to the SBC; it can be observed through female membership in a number of religious groups, especially those that endorse hierarchical gender structures.<sup>41</sup> Mary Daly makes the argument that in order to be considered legitimate, hierarchical gender relationships must be consensual, with both the dominating and submissive parties accepting their designated roles. Anthropologist Paul van der Grijp concurs, arguing, “An asymmetrical social relationship can only continue its existence if both parties not only tolerate the social inequality, but they also have to accept it, that is: the asymmetry must be legitimized.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, the conservative takeover of the SBC needed the endorsement of at least some women to be considered legitimate. This endorsement came from a number of places—from the outspoken wives of male conservative leaders to members of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW).

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<sup>40</sup> Brent Thompson, “Wrap Up: BGCT, in Transition, Elects Woman President,” *Baptist Press*, October 31, 2007, <http://bpnews.net/26718/wrapup-bgct-in-transition-elects-woman-president>.

<sup>41</sup> Marie Griffiths writes extensively about this phenomenon in her book *God's Daughters*, documenting how members of the Women's Aglow Fellowship are empowered through submission to men (this includes symbolic submission and the invocation of submission rhetoric, even when not accompanied by any significantly submissive actions.) I will refer to Griffiths's work more later in this chapter, drawing parallels between the women of the Aglow Fellowship and the “complementarian” movement in the SBC.

<sup>42</sup> Paul van der Grijp, “Why Accept Submission? Rethinking Asymmetrical Ideology and Power,” *Dialectical Anthropology* 35 (2011), 18.

Holt's sociological analysis of the WMU identifies their submission to the SBC—along with their “auxiliary” status—as a strategic effort to gain power under the guise of deference to the power of the SBC. However, the moderate women of the WMU were not the only ones to employ this strategy; conservative women from within the “complementarian” movement were empowered through the strategic use of submission as well. The CBMW's Danvers Statement, written in 1987, includes a list of signatories and their connection to the organization. The names of council members and members of the board of directors are followed by a short description of each individual's qualifications—employment with various Christian denominations, seminary degrees, etc. Of the twenty-five council members listed, five are women; four of the women are described as “homemakers” (for some of them, this is the extent of their biographical description) and the fifth is described as a “pastor's wife.” Of the six individuals listed as the board of directors, the only woman was the board's secretary, whose first identifier was “homemaker.”<sup>43</sup> This intentional choice raises the question: what do organizations like the CBMW hope to accomplish by leaving out the credentials of women when juxtaposed with similarly qualified men? Moreover, what would motivate women to allow this erasure of their accomplishments? The answer lies in the examination of other women's organizations that exist within these patriarchal structures, like the aforementioned WMU. Under the guise of submission, the WMU was granted an initial seat at the table; eventually, they were able to use their position to exert influence within the denomination, which could not have been done without their prior acceptance of a lesser role. Similarly, women in the CBMW were eventually able to exert more influence and gain recognition for their contributions. By the time the organization released the Nashville Statement in 2017, none of the female signatories were designated as “pastor's wife” or “homemaker.” In fact, some of the

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<sup>43</sup> Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, *Danvers Statement* (Danvers, MA: CBMW, 1987), <http://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>.



same women who had been referred to as such in the Danvers Statement were referred to instead in the Nashville Statement by their professional titles.<sup>44</sup>

Dr. Dorothy Patterson was known as the “matriarch of complementarianism” for her prominent role as one of the founders of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and as an initial signatory of both the Danvers and Nashville statements. Though she was initially known among SBC conservatives for being the wife of former SBC president Paige Patterson, she made her own contribution to the conservative movement. In 1998, she was appointed to serve on the panel that produced the revised version of the *Baptist Faith & Message*. She also made significant contributions to the conservative education of Southern Baptist women, founding the inaugural women’s studies program at Southeastern Seminary and serving as a professor of women’s studies at Southwestern Seminary. Mary Mohler was another woman who was able to exert influence on the SBC from within the conservative movement. In 1997, during her husband Al Mohler’s tenure as president of Southern Seminary, Mary Mohler founded the Seminary Wives Institute to counter the “mainstream” egalitarian message that was being advocated by many women enrolled in the seminary. In 1998, Mary Mohler joined Dorothy Patterson on the seven-member committee charged with revising the *Baptist Faith & Message*. Together, the committee produced a revised edition of the confessional statement that reflected a thoroughly conservative gender ideology. She was one of the initial signatories of the Nashville Statement and spoke at the CBMW women’s conference in 2016. Without women like Patterson and Mohler, the “complementarian” movement would never have experienced such success.

Women have also exerted influence from inside the “complementarian” movement by slowly shifting its emphasis and some of its rhetoric. The inclusion of the voices of some women

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<sup>44</sup> Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, *Nashville Statement* (Nashville, TN: CBMW, 2017), <http://cbmw.org/about/nashville-statement/>.

in conservative circles, including in organizations like the CBMW, has led to the development of more toned-down ideological rhetoric. For example, in the 2015 book *Designed for Joy*, women contributors unsurprisingly depict gender subordination as “complementarianism.” In her chapter, Gloria Furman denies any God-given inequality of worth between men and women. She emphasizes, “The woman’s equal value with the man, her strength, and her intelligence are not in conflict with her unique role of voluntary submission to her husband’s leadership.” In fact, she refers to men and women as “co-heirs.”<sup>45</sup> “Complementarian” women like Furman identify submission as a noble mission for women, given to them by God not to harm them, but to protect and ultimately elevate them. In her chapter, Christina Fox empathizes with feminists and uses her own personal experience to convince them of the beauty of submission: “As a husband and wife live out their unique callings in marriage, they share in [the gospel’s] beauty. They shine a light in this dark world, pointing to Jesus and his grace.”<sup>46</sup> In contrast, the older volume *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, which includes less contributions from women, is reflective of a more explicit endorsement of gender subordinationism. In this earlier edition, more emphasis is placed on male “headship” and authority: “In the home, biblical headship is the husband’s divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christlike leadership, protection, and provision... headship includes primary leadership and that is the responsibility of the man.”<sup>47</sup> There is more emphasis placed on exclusion (women are excluded from the pastorate and certain other ministerial roles) rather than agency (women choose to submit to God and to their husbands). The latter emerged from the inclusion of female voices within the movement. To appeal to a female audience,

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<sup>45</sup> Gloria Furman, “The Nature of a Woman’s Nurture,” in *Designed for Joy*, ed. Jonathan Parnell and Owen Strachan (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 62.

<sup>46</sup> Christina Fox, “What is Submission?” in *Designed for Joy*, ed. Jonathan Parnell and Owen Strachan (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 70.

<sup>47</sup> Wayne Grudem and John Piper, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 61.

female “complementarians” recast the gender debate, painting their position as the truly progressive one and denouncing biblical feminism as contrary to the interests of women. The involvement of women in the movement is likely responsible for this shift; with women involved in the conversation, submission is seen as voluntary rather than merely as forced control rooted in inferiority.

The gender subordinationist movement is not an unchanging monolith; over the years, there have been a number of times in which conservative rhetoric has evolved in response to internal personnel changes or external events that they were forced to respond to. One such change in trajectory occurred in the wake of the SBC’s Kansas City Resolution “On the Ordination of Women.” The resolution, passed at the 1984 annual convention, bases its insistence that women cannot serve in positions of ministerial leadership on the impetus “to preserve a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall.”<sup>48</sup> In response to backlash from the evangelical community over the resolution’s seeming endorsement of the idea that women are inherently deprived, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood adopted the rhetoric of “complementarianism.” With the help of board member Dorothy Patterson, the CBMW produced the Danvers statement in 1987, which stated that “distinctions in masculine and feminine roles were ordained by God as part of the created order,” instead blaming the fall for introducing “distortions into the relationships between men and women.”<sup>49</sup>

Griffiths observes a similar attempt by men in Aglow leadership to change the rhetoric surrounding the imbalance of power in their organization. Though the Women’s Aglow Fellowship is an evangelical organization with a membership exclusive to women, the local advisory boards

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<sup>48</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Kansas City, MO: SBC Executive Committee, 1984), 65.

<sup>49</sup> Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, *Danvers Statement* (Danvers, MA: CBMW, 1987), <http://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>.

of its chapters were all made up of men. According to Griffith, the original justification for having only men serve as advisors “pertained to the scripturally based belief that women require a protective ‘covering’ from men, a doctrine closely aligned with the emphasis on female submission to male ‘headship.’”<sup>50</sup> However, in order to make their ideology seem more moderate, Aglow leaders have recently switched from an emphasis on “headship” to “balance.” Griffith cites the organization’s 1995 General Bylaws, which state a new justification for having only men serve as advisors: “Aglow International believes that male advisors bring an important balance to Aglow as a women’s ministry.”<sup>51</sup> This rhetoric, which emphasizes balance and insists that hierarchy can be compatible with notions of equality, is reminiscent of “complementarianism,” which relies on the reconceptualization of a fundamentally unequal gender hierarchical system. Women who are members of the Aglow community appeal to arguments similar to those made by “complementarian” women, insisting that submission is not inherently unequal. According to a booklet written by Eadie Goodboy, a member of the Aglow community, “Submission to our husbands does *not* make us ‘second-class citizens’ or those who are ranked ‘lower on the totem pole’ as lesser beings than the husband. As viewed by God, we have a side-by-side relationship. He looks at us as equally important, but designed to function for His glory, in his or her role.”<sup>52</sup> This is reminiscent of the softened rhetoric of “complementarianism,” which similarly justifies the submission of women by maintaining the equality in value of men and women despite the imperative for women to be subordinate to the authority of men.

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<sup>50</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 152.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Eadie V. Goodboy, *God’s Daughter: Practical Aspects of a Christian Woman’s Life, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition* (Lynnwood, WA: Aglow Publications, 1985).

Griffith contests the assumption that submission is inherently disempowering, arguing that many women in the Aglow community are able to strategically use submission to obtain power. She concludes, “While many outsiders might assume that the conservative Christian women in Aglow are merely participating in their own victimization, internalizing patriarchal ideas about female submission that confirm and increase their sense of personal inferiority, the women themselves claim the doctrine of submission leads both to freedom and to transformation, as God rewards His obedient daughters by healing their sorrows and easing their pain. Thus interpreted, the doctrine of submission becomes a means of asserting power over bad situations, including circumstances over which one may otherwise have no control.”<sup>53</sup> She notes that the existence of (mostly symbolic) advisory boards made up exclusively of men has actually benefited the women of the Aglow community. The presence of men provides legitimacy for the community in the eyes of outsiders, shielding it from being dismissed for “fostering feminism.”<sup>54</sup> Griffith also describes the stories of women who became satisfied or whose life situations were made better when they voluntarily submitted to both the will of God and of their husbands. To this end, she concludes that “personal power may be encoded in the doctrine of submission, as the women center their narratives on their own capacity to initiate personal healing and cultivate domestic harmony.”<sup>55</sup> For Griffith, such submission is active, rather than passive.

From within the ranks of the “complementarian” movement, women have also been able to strategically gain some semblance of power by exerting internal influence on it. In situations like the conservative takeover of the SBC, submission allows women to get their foot in the door; once embedded in the movement, women are able to contribute to a conversation from which they

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<sup>53</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 179.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

would otherwise be excluded. Though established with the intention of supporting conservative education and training for women, degree and certificate programs in women's studies and ministry to women have fostered the empowerment of women at each of the six Southern Baptist seminaries.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary offers a Master of Divinity degree in Ministry to Women—an 85-credit-hour program which required 70 hours of core classes, 9 hours of Ministry to Women core classes, and 6 hours of Ministry to Women electives.<sup>56</sup> Dorothy Patterson, who holds both a Master of Theology degree and a Doctorate in Ministry, was so fully committed to the survival of the burgeoning women's studies program that she taught full time for two years without pay until the seminary could fully endow the program.<sup>57</sup> Since 2000, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's Master of Arts in Christian Education program has offered a 67-credit-hour concentration in women's ministry, "designed for the person who plans to minister to women through the local church." The seminary also offers concentrations within its Master of Divinity program in Women's Ministry and Women's Studies.<sup>58</sup> These programs at Southwestern Seminary are supervised by Terri Stovall, who has authored a number of books about women's ministry, led national training workshops for women, and spoken at various Christian women's conferences. The placement of a woman in such a high position within the seminary is one example of how

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<sup>56</sup> Examples of Ministry to Women core classes and electives include: Biblical Theology of Womanhood, Counseling Women, Ministry to Teen Girls, Current Trends in Ministry to Women, and Women's Ministry in the Local Church. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Academic Catalogue, 2018-2019 (Spring Update)," Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, [http://catalog.sebts.edu/preview\\_program.php?catoid=14&pooid=2510&returnto=1422](http://catalog.sebts.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=14&pooid=2510&returnto=1422).

<sup>57</sup> Lee Weeks, "Southeastern Expands College, Adds Women's Studies Degree," *Baptist Press*, April 23, 1998.

<sup>58</sup> In addition to required credit-hours in Biblical Studies and Theological Studies, women enrolled in the Master of Divinity in Women's Ministry program take courses such as: Ministry to Women, Text Driven Communication for Women, Biblical Theology of Womanhood, Women's Issues, and Girls' Ministry. Women enrolled in Master of Divinity in Women's Studies program take courses such as: Biblical Theology of Womanhood, Women in Church History, and Women and Missions. Degrees in both Master of Divinity programs entail a total of 92-credit-hours of coursework. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Academic Catalogue, Master's Degree Concentrations," Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://catalog.swbts.edu/womens-programs/masters-degree-concentrations/>.

conservative women's studies programs have benefited women—providing them with the opportunity to attain positions of authority that they would have otherwise been excluded from. Under a conservative regime, no Southern Baptist seminary is willing to hire a woman as a dean or professor within degree programs like theology or preaching; however, they are given authority over women's studies programs, as that is considered the rightful domain of women. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary offers an 8-credit-hour undergraduate certificate and a 15-credit-hour graduate certificate in Women's Ministry, including courses such as “Biblical Womanhood,” “Lifestyle Witnessing for Women,” “Women Mentoring Women,” and “Relationship Skills for Women.”<sup>59</sup> Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary offers Ministry to Women concentrations in its Master of Divinity program and Master of Arts in Educational Leadership program, including courses like “Women in Biblical Perspective” and “Contemporary Issues for Ministry to Women.”<sup>60</sup> The existence of these programs at Southern Baptist seminaries—especially those which offer intense programs with 70+ credit-hours—helps to legitimize the educational pursuits of women. Degree offerings in areas like ministry to women, along with institutional financial support of such programs, demonstrate a recognition of the importance of women and their place within the denomination.

Several Southern Baptist seminaries also offer programs for “seminary wives.” Southwestern Seminary offers courses one night per week toward a certificate in Seminary Studies

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<sup>59</sup> New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, “Women's Ministry Certificate,” New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.nobts.edu/women/undergraduate/default.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, “2018-2019 Academic Catalog,” Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, [https://07fbc0072181791bed1-63fc6f11b2ad7905e74d76d8e23a9e05.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/2/0e7342541\\_1551986153\\_2018-2019-academic-catalog.pdf](https://07fbc0072181791bed1-63fc6f11b2ad7905e74d76d8e23a9e05.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/2/0e7342541_1551986153_2018-2019-academic-catalog.pdf).

for Student Wives.<sup>61</sup> Southern Seminary, through the Seminary Wives Institute founded by Mary Mohler, offers six-week courses for the wives of men who are students at the seminary, providing them with an opportunity to network with other wives and preparing them to serve alongside their husbands in ministry.<sup>62</sup> New Orleans Seminary offers a Ministry Wives certificate program, where women can take courses like “The Minister’s Wife,” “Public Speaking for the Minister’s Wife,” and “Biblical Womanhood” either online or on campus one night per week.<sup>63</sup> Midwestern Seminary offers a 15-credit-hour WISDOM (Wives in Seminary Developing Our Ministries) diploma, which includes courses such as “Hospitality.” The seminary’s website explains the reasoning behind offering such a diploma, saying, “When God calls a married man into full-time ministry, He also calls the man’s wife. The couple is one in marriage and one in ministry. Their roles are unique but they are a team.”<sup>64</sup> Golden Gate Seminary offers a 1-credit-hour eight-week course on “Essentials for the Minister’s Wife,” covering subjects such as biblical womanhood and hospitality in the church and the home.<sup>65</sup> These educational opportunities for minister’s wives elevate the importance of things that have traditionally been delegated to the realm of women: hospitality, counseling, and the education of young people (particularly women). The existence of

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<sup>61</sup> Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Academic Catalogue, Seminary Studies for Student Wives,” Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://catalog.swbts.edu/womens-programs/seminary-studies-for-student-wives/>.

<sup>62</sup> The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “2018-2019 Academic Catalogue,” Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2010/11/AA-333-2018-Southern-Seminary-Academic-Catalog-2018-2019-digital.pdf>.

<sup>63</sup> New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, “Course Schedules, Fall 2018,” Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.nobts.edu/women/ministry-wife-certificate/current-schedule.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Midwestern Women’s Institute: WISDOM diploma,” Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, <https://www.mbts.edu/current-students/mwi/wisdom-diploma/>.

<sup>65</sup> Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, “2018-2019 Academic Catalog,” Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, [https://07fbc0072181791bed1-63fc6f11b2ad7905e74d76d8e23a9e05.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/2/0e7342541\\_1551986153\\_2018-2019-academic-catalog.pdf](https://07fbc0072181791bed1-63fc6f11b2ad7905e74d76d8e23a9e05.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/uploaded/2/0e7342541_1551986153_2018-2019-academic-catalog.pdf).



programs that train minister's wives conveys a recognition of the importance of their invaluable role in the church.

However, there are limits to the seemingly positive effects of these developments among Southern Baptist “complementarians.” The women’s studies programs at Southern Baptist seminaries were founded by conservative women with the express purpose of combating feminism within the seminaries—an attempt to divert women students to a more “appropriate” field of study than theology and quash their ministerial ambitions. According to the website of the women’s studies program at Southeastern Seminary, the program operates under the guidelines set by the CBMW’s Danvers Statement.<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Flowers criticizes the direction of this program, lamenting, “Once the stronghold for women seeking ordination, Southeastern Seminary became the leading proponent of traditional—or what Dorothy Patterson was calling biblical—womanhood.”<sup>67</sup> The conservative character of these women-only programs is not the only limit to the programs’ efficacy and potential to empower women. The existence of women’s studies programs is used as an excuse for continuing to restrict women from certain areas of the seminaries, including preaching courses and most faculty positions. For example, Southern Seminary explicitly restricts women from registering for two courses: Christian Preaching and Preaching Practicum. Because the seminary does not endorse women’s ordination, women are expected to replace these courses with electives.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, even though women are allowed to take courses in the Master of Divinity track at Southern Seminary, this policy does not extend

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<sup>66</sup> Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, “Academic Catalogue, 2018-2019 (Spring Update),” Office of the Registrar, accessed March 31, 2019, [http://catalog.sebts.edu/preview\\_program.php?catoid=14&poid=2510&returnto=1422](http://catalog.sebts.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=14&poid=2510&returnto=1422).

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women & Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2012), 73.

<sup>68</sup> The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “2018-2019 Academic Catalog,” The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Office of the Registrar), accessed March 31, 2019, <http://www.sbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2010/11/AA-333-2018-Southern-Seminary-Academic-Catalog-2018-2019-digital.pdf>.

to faculty positions for women. According to Al Mohler, president of Southern Seminary, women are not allowed to serve as professors in the School of Theology because of the possible association with pastoral authority it would suggest: “I would like to see every teaching position in the School of Theology as tantamount to a pastor position, modeling the pastor... What concerns me is that in a school that trains pastors and has that as its central purpose, we should be very serious about modeling the role and the function of the pastor, even in our instructional faculty.”<sup>69</sup>

In light of all of this information, the question remains: Do conservative women’s studies programs at Southern Baptist seminaries empower or restrict women? These programs do provide women with educational opportunities, seeming to acknowledge the importance of the study of subjects that have traditionally been looked down upon because of their association with women. However, the importance these institutions place on women’s programs remains in question. Do these programs have all-women professors and deans because the institutions believe women are highly qualified to oversee important educational programs, or is it because the positions are seen as undesirable and unworthy of men “stooping” to serve in those roles? Though they make it seem like the former, I would argue that the latter is closer to reality. Ultimately, I believe that such programs limit the potential of women seminarians and restrict women to specific predetermined roles, specifically those of pastor’s wife and mother (or “nurturer”). Though I do not deny that these programs can provide empowerment and opportunities for certain women who are willing to operate under their restrictive premises, there are significant limits to this potential.

The notion that submission is inherently involuntary—that it is passively accepted by women rather than actively pursued—remains an oversimplification of the issue. The existence of women on all sides of the debate about gender subordinationism is demonstrative of the nuance

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<sup>69</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Oral Memoirs of R. Albert Mohler, Jr.,” interview by Barry Hankins, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/9197>.

required to understand both the motivations behind and consequences of the involvement of women in the debate. In her sociological examination of the power dynamics between the WMU and the SBC, Holt offers a convincing argument for the efficacy of moderate women's strategic attempts to gain power under the guise of submission. Griffiths expands this argument to conservative religious systems, arguing that such women may be empowered through submission. In light of these arguments, and in recognition of the influence women have had on the development of "complementarianism," I agree that there is potential for empowerment through submission. However, not all power is the same and there are limits to the power made available to women within these conservative frameworks. The differences between men and women's access to power is not only quantitative, but qualitative. Women are excluded from certain types of power—specifically subordinating power—and even when they are able to access limited power, it is much more difficult for them to access it than for men to do the same. Even Griffith recognizes the potential negative effects for women of operating within conservative religious systems. She concedes, "Perhaps the most significant and lasting impact the men make on the organization is to uphold and reinforce for the women the sense that they cannot expect to run their own organization but require protection, counsel, and supervision from male authorities."<sup>70</sup>

Though "complementarianism" provides a hypothetical framework under which women have the potential to be empowered through submission, implicit and explicit reminders of the supremacy of men overshadow this potential empowerment and remind women that they ultimately remain inferior to men. Thus, the Southern Baptist Convention's institutionalization of absolute power has led to the most insidious aspect of the conservative takeover: the perpetration and systematic cover-up of abuse.

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<sup>70</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 155.

## **Chapter 5: A Day of Reckoning for the SBC?**

The conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention drew from its neo-Calvinist affirmation of theological absolutism and subordinationism to justify its institutionalization of male authoritarian power. In doing so, it hollowed out long-standing traditions of democratic power-sharing and decision-making, giving to male leaders a protected status which renders them virtually untouchable. The vastly unequal hierarchical structure created by the SBC's embrace of gender subordinationism, marketed as "complementarianism," is an avowedly patriarchal culture. This institutional structure enables abuse, responds to abuse with institutional cover-ups, and contributes to the disenfranchisement of abuse victims. Abuse manifests itself in the church through sexual abuse, domestic violence, and abuse of power by authority figures—the root causes of which are all fundamentally intertwined. In the wake of the #MeToo movement and the revelation of sex abuse within the Roman Catholic Church, abuse within the evangelical community has also been exposed, specifically in the neo-Calvinist movement and the Southern Baptist Convention. Neo-Calvinist leaders have come under fire for abuse of power and institutional cover-up of sex abuse; specifically, the Sovereign Grace megachurch has been exposed for its systematic effort to conceal sex abuse, shield its staff from accusations of misconduct, protect its reputation, discourage victims from speaking out, and discredit victims who do make public accusations against the church. Though the "complementarian" movement began to repackage gender subordinationism into a more palatable form in the 1980s, a wave of abuse allegations in the twenty-first century drew this soft-pedaled rhetoric out even more. A new generation of Southern Baptists has arisen to fill the vacuum left by the scandalous departures of conservatives like Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler. However, it remains unclear whether their new approach is truly progressive—or whether it even represents a meaningful departure from

gender subordinationist ideology. The Southern Baptist Convention's embrace of theological absolutism has contributed to a culture of abuse and toxic masculinity, which has led to widespread public outcry against the denomination. The question then remains: will the "humiliation" of the denomination be a catalyst for legitimate denominational change? Or will the rhetoric of SBC leaders simply change to conceal the fact that the denomination's institutional structure has largely remained intact?

According to an investigation by the *Houston Chronicle*, over the past two decades, more than 700 victims have reported sexual abuse by 380 employees or volunteers of Southern Baptist churches; 220 of these offenders either pled guilty to or were convicted for their crimes.<sup>1</sup> The reality of the SBC abuse scandal is that even when abusers are caught, they have often been allowed to become repeat offenders, enabled by cover-up operations and institutional negligence. Over the past two decades, at least 35 Southern Baptist pastors and church volunteers were accused or convicted of sexual abuse and were still able to find employment at churches following their misconduct. According to the *Houston Chronicle* investigation, "Some were suspected of misconduct but were allowed to leave quietly and work elsewhere. Others had been arrested, had criminal records or even had to register as sex offenders but later found jobs at Baptist churches."<sup>2</sup> When church employees are accused of abuse, their churches often attempt to handle the matter internally, opting not to involve local authorities and not to alert the offender's future employers.<sup>3</sup> Chad Foster, a former youth pastor at Second Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, is an example of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Downen, Lise Olsen, and John Tedesco, "20 years, 700 victims: Southern Baptist Sexual Abuse Spreads as Leaders Resist Reforms," *Abuse of Faith, Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> John Tedesco, Robert Downen, and Lise Olsen, "Offend, Then Repeat: Southern Baptist Churches Hired Dozens of Leaders Previously Accused of Sex Offenses," *Abuse of Faith, Houston Chronicle*, February 12, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The Southern Baptist Convention does not publish an official record of abuse allegations against ministers. In the absence of an official SBC database of such information, the *Houston Chronicle* has compiled a searchable database of the convictions.

how the mishandling of abuse allegations enables offenders to stealthily repeat their behavior in new contexts.

Foster served as a youth pastor under senior pastor Ed Young, a former SBC president. With five campuses, a yearly budget of \$53 million, and attendance exceeding 24,000 per week, Forbes named the Houston church the “second-largest megachurch” in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Foster was fired in 2010 after his colleagues accused him of inappropriate conduct, but church leaders opted not to share the reasons for his dismissal with students or their parents. The church was also uncooperative with investigators; according to Lieutenant Philpot, assigned to investigate Foster’s case, Second Baptist “didn’t tell detectives Foster had been fired and didn’t provide information to help identify other victims.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, they failed to disclose allegations of misconduct to the Community of Faith Church in Cypress, TX, who hired Foster in 2011, where he continued to prey on youth group members. In 2013, he pled guilty to three counts of sexual assault of a child and two counts of online solicitation of a minor, crimes for which he served four years in prison. Though Second Baptist settled two civil suits filed by Foster’s victims, they released a statement denying any culpability or knowledge of the abuse, claiming, “Second Baptist Church has and will continue to strive to provide a safe, Christian environment for all employees, church members and guests that walk through the doors of our Church.”<sup>6</sup>

Though the SBC has become increasingly centralized, with the president and executive committee exerting more power and de-emphasizing local church autonomy, the denomination has failed to implement a comprehensive plan to combat its abuse problem. Instead, they have chosen

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<sup>4</sup> Jesse Bogan, “America’s Biggest Megachurches,” *Forbes Magazine*, June 26, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Lise Olsen, Robert Downen, and John Tedesco, “Preying on Teens: More Than 100 Southern Baptist Youth Pastors Convicted or Charged in Sex Crimes,” *Abuse of Faith, Houston Chronicle*, February 13, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

to defer responsibility for investigating and responding to allegations of sexual abuse to individual churches, arguing that, “Each local church is not only capable of protecting its own members, it is better motivated to do so than some far-distant, quasi-judicial ecclesiastical body.”<sup>7</sup> Though the idea of a database of church employees accused of sexual abuse has been proposed several times, the SBC has consistently rejected it. At the 2007 SBC convention in San Antonio, Texas, a messenger presented a motion requesting that the executive committee study the feasibility of the development of such a database. The executive committee tasked its bylaws workgroup with conducting this study, the results of which they announced in 2008. Citing the importance of local church autonomy, the executive committee concluded that both the compilation of a database of alleged sexual abusers and the establishment of an office to receive reports of abuse were antithetical to Baptist principles. The executive committee’s report states, “Neither the Executive Committee nor the Convention itself claims, or has a right to claim, the ecclesiastical or legal authority to take those actions which would be required to adjudicate a charge of abuse in an autonomous local congregation.”<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the committee concluded that the denomination would not use its authority to intercede and bar known offenders from employment in Southern Baptist churches: “The Southern Baptist Convention has no authority to bar individuals from ministry. Local autonomous churches and ministries determine who they will and will not employ for service.”<sup>9</sup> This declaration seems inconsistent with other denominational actions, though—as the SBC repeatedly exercised authority over local churches to enforce their policy barring women from ordination. Conservatives implemented a range of tactics to ensure that local churches complied with official

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<sup>7</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Responding to the Evil of Sexual Abuse* (Nashville, TN: SBC Executive Committee, June 2008), <http://www.sbc.net/pdf/2008reportsbc.pdf>. Committee Report.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

policies concerning the role of women in the church—disfellowshipping, resolutions at annual conventions, ideological hiring policies, etc.—but this declaration demonstrates that they are not willing to use these same tactics to adequately respond to abuse. The SBC’s sex abuse problem has been enabled by its centralization of power and authoritarian rule, since male church leaders do not answer to anyone but each other. It is not surprising that an organization based on a patriarchal theological system, which endorses a strict gender hierarchy and emphasizes the imperative for women to submit to the authority of men, would hesitate to take the necessary steps to resolve a such a problem. To effectively combat the problem of sexual abuse within its ranks, the SBC must first address the root problems: widespread cultivation and sacralization of absolute power, toxic masculinity, and gender subordinationism.

Despite initial indications that the denomination would take decisive action to investigate and resolve abuse allegations, including the appointment of a majority-women council on the matter, the executive committee did not follow through with the promises of president J.D. Greear. On February 23, 2019, the Southern Baptist Convention took a step backwards when its executive committee decided to act unilaterally on behalf of the denomination. Its bylaws workgroup released a statement in response to accusations that the denomination has mishandled allegations of abuse. They concluded that the SBC “*should not disrupt the ministries* of its churches by launching an inquiry until it has received credible information that the church has knowingly acted wrongfully” [emphasis added] in one of four ways: employing a convicted sex offender, allowing a convicted sex offender to serve in a volunteer capacity with minors, continuing to employ anyone who concealed information from law enforcement regarding sexual abuse in their church, and willfully non-complying with mandatory child abuse reporting laws.<sup>10</sup> Critics have deemed these

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<sup>10</sup> *Baptist Press*, “SBC Bylaws Workgroup Releases Sexual Abuse Response,” February 23, 2019.



standards problematic due to their “arbitrarily high standard for inquiry,” beginning with the fact that the priority of the executive committee seems to be protecting its churches at the expense of potential victims.<sup>11</sup> The committee clearly hesitates to “disrupt” any of its churches unless an incredibly high bar is met, proving that they have acted improperly. Based on these standards, they examined accusations against ten churches, including Second Baptist Church, about which they concluded that the church did not commit any violations and that “no further inquiry is warranted.”<sup>12</sup>

In 2007, Anne Marie Miller accused Mark Aderholt, a missionary employed by the SBC’s International Mission Board (IMB), of sexually assaulting her when she was sixteen years old. The IMB determined that it was “more likely than not” that Aderholt had engaged in an “inappropriate sexual relationship” with Miller, and he resigned in 2008.<sup>13</sup> However, the results of this investigation did not hinder Aderholt from acquiring future employment within the denomination—serving as an assistant pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas and as associate director and chief strategist of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. Aderholt remained employed by the denomination until 2018, when he was arrested and charged with sexual assault of a child under seventeen.

In 2017, Gareld Duane Rollins filed a lawsuit against Paul Pressler, one of the masterminds behind the conservative takeover of the SBC. The suit alleged that Pressler sexually assaulted Rollins for nearly four decades, beginning when Rollins was still a minor—just fourteen years

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<sup>11</sup> Ed Setzer, “The SBC, Abuse, and the Need for a Better Response,” *Christianity Today*, February 26, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> *Baptist Press*, “SBC Bylaws Workgroup Releases Sexual Abuse Response,” February 23, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Smith, “Southern Baptist Officials Knew of Sexual Abuse Allegations 11 Years Before Leader’s Arrest,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, July 13, 2018.

old.<sup>14</sup> In 2004, Pressler attempted to control the scandal by agreeing to pay Rollins a settlement of \$450,000; however, the scandal was made public when Pressler halted his payments in 2017. In the wake of this public allegation of abuse, two more alleged victims filed affidavits accusing Pressler of sexual abuse and harassment—alleging incidents that occurred in 1977 and 2016. In October 2018, a judge dismissed a lawsuit against Pressler that accused him of sexual abuse. The Southern Baptist Convention and Paige Patterson were also named as parties in the suit for alleged “conspiracy, fraud, and negligence.”<sup>15</sup> The suit was dismissed in October 2018—not because of a lack of evidence or the presumed innocence of Pressler, but because the state’s statute of limitations had expired. Though the statute of limitations prohibited Patterson and the SBC from being held legally responsible for their alleged role in the cover-up, their inclusion in the lawsuit further contributed to the public perception of them as enablers of abuse.

In May 2018, *The Washington Post* published one sex abuse survivor’s testimony against Patterson. The woman, who later publicly identified herself as Megan Lively, alleges that she was raped in 2003 while enrolled in the master of divinity in women’s studies program at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Following the incident, she met with Patterson, who was president of the seminary. According to Lively, not only did Patterson fail to file a police report, but he encouraged her not to as well.<sup>16</sup> This allegation was officially corroborated when Lively’s student record was made available to trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2018 (Patterson moved from Southeastern Seminary to Southwestern Seminary in 2003, where he also

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<sup>14</sup> Meagan Flynn, “Houston Man’s Lawsuit Alleges Retired Judge Sexually Assaulted Him,” *Houston Chronicle*, December 27, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Bob Allen, “Judge Dismisses 5 of 8 Claims in Pressler Lawsuit, Citing Statutes of Limitations,” *Baptist News*, October 17, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Southern Baptist Leader Encouraged a Woman Not to Report Alleged Rape to Police and Told Her to Forgive Assailant, She Says,” *Washington Post*, May 22, 2018.

served as president).<sup>17</sup> In 2015, a female student at Southwestern Seminary notified Patterson that she had been raped. According to a statement by the chair of Southwestern Seminary's board of trustees, Patterson sent an email to the Chief of Campus Security in which he suggested that he would meet with the student alone in order to "break her down," perhaps to discourage her from taking legal action against her assailant.<sup>18</sup>

In a 2000 interview with the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Patterson was asked to clarify his position on domestic abuse. He boasted that he had never encouraged a victim of abuse to seek a divorce, condemning the encouragement of divorce as "always wrong counsel."<sup>19</sup> He also made a distinction between levels of abuse—distinguishing between "genuine" abuse (rare) and "less serious" abuse (more common). In cases of "less serious" abuse, Patterson said that he counseled victims to pray for their assailants, asking God to intervene in the situation, rather than authorities. Recalling a situation in which a woman in his congregation was being abused, Patterson said that he counseled her to pray; however, he cautioned her that her husband may get "more violent" upon finding out about her attempts to prompt divine intervention. Patterson concluded the account: "And he did, she came to church one morning with both eyes black... And she said, 'I hope you're happy.' And I said, 'Yes, ma'am, I am.' I said, 'I'm sorry about that, but I'm very happy.'"<sup>20</sup> Patterson was happy because the abusive husband had come to church that morning; his wife's prayers had led him to faith in Jesus. According to Patterson, submission is absolutely necessary, even in cases of abuse.

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<sup>17</sup> Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, *Statement by Kevin Ueckert, Chairman of the Board of Trustees* (Fort Worth, TX: SWBTS, June 1, 2018), <https://swbts.edu/news/releases/statement-kevin-ueckert-chairman-board-trustees>. News release.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Southern Baptist Leader Paige Patterson's Advice to Abused Women Sends Leaders Scrambling to Respond," *Washington Post*, May 2, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

In April 2018, Ed Stetzer published an editorial in *Christianity Today* that publicly called for Patterson's resignation. Acknowledging the problematic nature of the untouchable status granted to many Southern Baptist icons, Stetzer lamented, "We let our history become mythology. We turned men into heroes, and then we turned our heroes into gods."<sup>21</sup> Shortly after, Nathan Montgomery, a PhD student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was fired from his job as a catering manager on campus and had his scholarship revoked for retweeting Stetzer's article. According to Montgomery, the official explanation given for his punishment was that "public disagreement does not align with Scripture."<sup>22</sup> Over 3,000 women signed an open letter to Southwestern Seminary's board of trustees, calling on them to act decisively and remove Patterson from office, insisting, "The Southern Baptist Convention cannot allow the biblical view of leadership to be misused in such a way that a leader with an unbiblical view of authority, womanhood, and sexuality be allowed to continue in leadership."<sup>23</sup> Popular opinion continued to mount against Patterson, as prominent SBC figures such as Beth Moore, Russell Moore, Matt Chandler, and Al Mohler refused to defend him.

Though Southwestern Seminary's board of trustees officially moved Patterson to the status of president emeritus during a May 22-23 meeting, the board softened this demotion and preserved his legacy by granting him an honorary title, keeping his benefits and privileges intact. As president emeritus, Patterson would be invited to reside at the newly-constructed \$2.5 million Baptist Heritage Center as a "theologian-in-residence."<sup>24</sup> However, in light of new evidence, the executive

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<sup>21</sup> Ed Stetzer, "Paige Patterson and Doing the Right Thing for the SBC, Again," *Christianity Today*, April 30, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "Southern Baptist Leader Who Advised Abused Women Not to Divorce Doubles Down, Says He Has Nothing to Apologize For," *Washington Post*, May 4, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Kate Shellnutt, "Southern Baptist Women Launch Petition Against Paige Patterson," *Christianity Today*, May 6, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> Kate Shellnutt, "Paige Patterson Fired by Southwestern, Stripped of Retirement Benefits," *Christianity Today*, May 30, 2018.

board of the board of trustees met again on May 30, unanimously resolving to terminate Patterson's employment and revoke his invitation to reside in the Baptist Heritage Center. In an official statement on the matter, the SWBTS Board of Trustees Executive Committee said, "SWBTS denounces all abusive behavior, any behavior that enables abuse, any failure to protect the abused and any failure to safeguard those who are vulnerable to abuse."<sup>25</sup> Patterson was scheduled to give the keynote speech at the 2018 SBC convention, but he withdrew one week before the event was scheduled to take place. Expressing a desire to maintain denominational unity, he announced his decision, lamenting, "For the first time in 66 years I will not attend the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention."<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the Southern Baptist Convention, allegations of sex abuse and abuse of power have been prevalent among other neo-Calvinist churches and organizations—most notably against Sovereign Grace Ministries. In the mid-1980s, C.J. Mahaney and Larry Tomczak founded Covenant Life Church (CLC) in Montgomery County, Maryland. As the church quickly expanded, it developed into a global network of over 70 churches known as Sovereign Grace Ministries (SGM). This ministry network is connected through a common thread of neo-Calvinist theology, "complementarianism," and a commitment to global missions. Mahaney served as pastor at CLC for more than two decades until he was forced to resign due to accusations of abuse of power. Sex abuse—and the abuse of power which drove the systematic cover-up of sexual abuse at SGM—emerged from a variety of factors: gender subordinationist doctrine, neo-Calvinist theology, and skepticism of outsiders. On its website, Sovereign Grace Ministries lists the seven values that

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<sup>25</sup> Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Board of Trustees Executive Board, *Statement by the Southwestern Theological Seminary* (Fort Worth, TX: SWBTS, May 20, 2018), <https://swbts.edu/news/releases/statement-southwestern-theological-seminary>.

<sup>26</sup> Kate Shellnutt, "Patterson Withdraws from SBC Annual Meeting," *Christianity Today*, June 8, 2018.

define a church belonging to the Sovereign Grace network, including Complementarian Leadership in the Home and in the Church. “We believe it was God’s glorious plan to create men and women in His image, giving them equal dignity and value in his sight, while appointing differing and complementary roles for them within the home and the church.”<sup>27</sup> But, as we have seen, “complementary” does not really mean equality. SGM’s official statement of faith echoes this sentiment, declaring, “Women... are not permitted to teach or exercise authority over a man. Leadership in the church is male.”<sup>28</sup> The ministry network has close ties to both the SBC and parachurch organizations that preach gender subordinationism; Mahaney is the former vice-chairman of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and he recently selected Louisville, Kentucky as the site of his new church plant due to its proximity to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has worked closely with prominent SBC leadership, including co-founding the Together for the Gospel organization with Southern Seminary president Al Mohler.

SGM has developed a comprehensive infrastructure; the organization writes and produces its own music, publishes and sells its own books, and provides its own Christian education for children—including Covenant Life School, which is affiliated with Mahaney’s Montgomery County branch of SGM.<sup>29</sup> In a 146-page *Book of Church Order*, SGM lays out its principles for church discipline, insisting that the discipline of church members must be handled internally. If a church member commits a “grievous doctrinal error” or lives in “unrepentant sin,” the elders must

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<sup>27</sup> Sovereign Grace Ministries, “Our Seven Shared Values,” accessed March 1, 2019, <https://www.sovereigngrace.com/our-seven-shared-values>.

<sup>28</sup> Sovereign Grace Ministries, “The Church,” accessed March 1, 2019, <https://www.sovereigngrace.com/statement-of-faith#the-church>.

<sup>29</sup> Tiffany Stanley, “The Sex-Abuse Scandal That Devastated a Suburban Megachurch,” *Washingtonian*, February 14, 2016.

rebuke them.<sup>30</sup> If the member continues to sin, the elders must report their behavior to the church. If the sin persists, the member must be excommunicated from the church. SGM is clear about the intended consequences of the internal mechanisms of church discipline: “The goal of any disciplinary action is one of merciful reclamation and repentance. Ultimately, the process of discipline does not conclude with excommunication but should always leave room for future repentance and restoration.”<sup>31</sup> The document also details the strict and complex procedure for disciplining an elder. No charge is admitted unless it is supported by two or more witnesses, who must be determined to be credible, and there is a two-year statute of limitation on charges. Charges must be submitted in writing to the alleged offender, then to other local elders, where the Regional Judicial Review Committee must decide whether to admit the charge and call a trial. The possible trial results include the defendant being cleared of charges, private rebuke, public rebuke, removal from office, and church discipline (excommunication). These SGM procedural rules emphasize the internal mechanism for dealing with misconduct by both members and elders: “In most situations, the plaintiff and defendant should resolve the incident privately or among the local eldership.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, SGM touts its skepticism of external authorities and preference for church discipline to discredit civil and criminal suits accusing the organization of conspiring to cover up allegations of abuse. They allege that “allowing courts to second-guess pastoral guidance

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<sup>30</sup> According to The Village Church’s bylaws, “The overall policy, control, direction, and management of the ministry, operations, and finances of the Church shall be vested in the Central Elder body... Central Elders are entrusted with the governance of the Church, leading the Church from a centralized vantage point. The Central Elder board’s oversight includes, but is not limited to, teaching, protecting, leading, disciplining, equipping, and caring for the corporate Church body and its individual Members as well as the oversight of all ministry, operations and finances of the Church.” Each campus of The Village Church has both lay and vocational campus elders, and the bylaws state, “The scope of authority of those Campus Elders who are not also members of the Central Elder body is limited to the campus location at which they serve.” The responsibilities of campus elders include oversight of the membership process and oversight of church discipline. The Village Church, *Bylaws* (Flower Mound, TX: The Village Church, April 1, 2014), <https://thevillagechurch.net/about/beliefs/bylaws/>.

<sup>31</sup> Sovereign Grace Ministries, *The Book of Church Order of the Sovereign Grace Churches, 8<sup>th</sup> edition* (Louisville, KY: Sovereign Grace Ministries, December 2018), 111.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

would represent a blow to the First Amendment that would hinder, not help, families seeking spiritual direction... in dealing with the trauma related to any sin including child sexual abuse.”<sup>33</sup>

In 2011, SGM staff members began to criticize Mahaney for alleged character and leadership flaws; a former SGM board member published 600 pages of private documents and communications to this end. Mahaney announced that he was taking a leave of absence, and the SGM board of directors launched an independent investigation into Mahaney’s alleged abuse of power. In the wake of the public attention the organization was attracting, survivors began coming forward with personal experiences in which SGM officials discouraged them from reporting abuse to local authorities, instead insisting that they settle the matters internally. In one case, CLC pastors reportedly counseled the wife of a man who admitted to sexually abusing her daughter not to divorce him; furthermore, when she started dating other men while still legally married, the same pastors asked her to leave the church because of “adultery.”<sup>34</sup>

In October 2012, eleven plaintiffs filed a class-action lawsuit against SGM, Mahaney, and seven other pastors for engaging in a systematic cover-up of child sex abuse. Two months later, prosecutors indicted Nathan Morales, a former member of CLC, charging him with child sex abuse. According to a CLC investigation, between 1990 and 2007, at least five church staff members were informed of Morales’s abuse and none of them filed police reports. During the trial, former CLC pastor Grant Layman admitted that he was aware of Morales’s child molestation but failed to report it.<sup>35</sup> In 2012, SGM relocated its headquarters to Louisville, Kentucky, where Mahaney founded a new Covenant Life Church. However, the organization continued to be

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<sup>33</sup> Bobby Ross, Jr., “Sovereign Grace Ministries: Courts Shouldn’t ‘Second-Guess’ Pastoral Counseling of Sex Abuse Victims,” *Christianity Today*, January 25, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Tiffany Stanley, “The Sex-Abuse Scandal That Devastated a Suburban Megachurch,” *Washingtonian*, February 14, 2016.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



steeped in accusations of abuse and cover-up. In 2014, Mahaney withdrew from the Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference due to ongoing civil suits against SGM. He was again forced to withdraw from the T4G conference in 2018 “to keep the controversy over Sovereign Grace Churches away from the event.”<sup>36</sup>

These cases demonstrate that gender subordinationists are quick to encourage that a victim reconciles with their abuser. The SBC and SGM have been criticized because their attitudes toward abuse downplay its seriousness, suggesting to women that reconciliation is more important than their safety. They prohibit divorce and encourage victims to take advantage of the internal disciplinary mechanisms of the church rather than reporting abuse to external authorities. John Piper did so as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in 1989 through the implementation of an official policy on divorce and remarriage in the context of abuse; this policy remains valid and has been defended throughout the years as subordinationists claim that adherence to “traditional” gender roles and the submission of women protects victims. The statement condemns divorce and encourages reconciliation, even in cases where one spouse has abused the other. Only after “serious efforts have been made toward reconciliation” may couples “regard their marriages as irreparably broken.”<sup>37</sup> With positions like these, Piper, Patterson, and others have been rightfully criticized for enabling and conspiring to cover up abuse. Gender subordinationists may try to blame egalitarianism for abuse in the evangelical community, but the recent exposure of abuse within the SBC and SGM demonstrates the problematic nature of the policies implemented by conservative

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<sup>36</sup> Kate Shellnutt, “C.J. Mahaney Withdraws from T4G,” *Christianity Today*, March 7, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> John Piper, “A Statement on Divorce & Remarriage in the Life of Bethlehem Baptist Church,” *Desiring God*, May 2, 1989, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-statement-on-divorce-and-remarriage-in-the-life-of-bethlehem-baptist-church>.

subordinationist churches and denominations. When subordinationists idealize absolute power and embrace strict gender hierarchies, they create environments of toxic masculinity that enable abuse.

Like the SBC, the Roman Catholic church is also in the midst of a sex abuse scandal that has endured for decades. Close parallels can be drawn between the two groups, especially in their embrace of absolutism and the systematic exclusion of women from positions of institutional authority. In the Roman Catholic church, women are categorically excluded from the priesthood and thus, the entire hierarchical system of leadership—all the way up to the Vatican. This gender-based discrimination has contributed to the creation of an environment of toxic masculinity where the voices of men effectively drown out those of women. Additionally, the Roman Catholic church deems the highest echelon of its leadership to be literally infallible.<sup>38</sup> When power is absolute and thus not accountable, it is ripe for abuse by those who hold it. Until the eruption of scandal in the Roman Catholic church, which brought criminal charges and a significant amount of negative press, priests were revered in their respective churches because of their sacrosanct status and positions within the virtually untouchable Roman Catholic hierarchy. The simultaneous authority and trust granted to them has allowed them to get away with sex abuse; they have not been carefully monitored nor suspected of misconduct because of their presumed close ties to the divine. As a member of the Roman Catholic clergy is promoted further up the hierarchy, he becomes increasingly untouchable and increasingly immune from both suspicion and discipline. Bishops have been charged with conspiring to systematically cover-up allegations that clergy engaged in the sexual abuse of children; they are motivated by a strong desire to protect the reputation of the

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<sup>38</sup> The entirety of the leadership is not considered infallible—only the pope. However, the Roman Catholic church is very hierarchical, and this hierarchical system where leadership is concentrated is exclusively available to men. The Roman Catholic hierarchy has also actively shielded abusers from the law; though there is no doctrine proclaiming the infallibility of any Roman Catholic officials other than the pope, the church has repeatedly acted as if their leaders were above the law.

church and enabled by the power embedded in their official titles and positions within the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Members of the highest circle of Roman Catholic influence—residents of the Vatican, including the pope—have used their power to protect lower-ranking clergy and bishops, shielding them from inquiry and even from prosecution by secular authorities.<sup>39</sup> The Vatican’s lack of meaningful response to sex abuse allegations against clergy members has enabled the cover-up of these crimes, especially because the high-ranking members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy wield so much power.<sup>40</sup>

SBC conservatives similarly constructed virtually untouchable leaders and implemented innovative policies that contributed to the growing centralization of power within the denomination. Though Southern Baptists have long been critical of papal power, they have granted

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<sup>39</sup> Though the complicity of the pope has never been directly proven, there is evidence to suggest the involvement of high-level Vatican officials in the cover-ups of sexual abuse. For example, Bernard Law was forced to resign as archbishop of Boston in 2002 for his role in covering up child sex abuse perpetrated by priests under his supervision. However, he was given the role of archpriest of the Basilica of the Santa Maria Maggiore until his retirement in 2011, after which he was allowed to continue living under the protection of the Vatican until his death. Stephanie Kirchgaessner and Amanda Holpuch, “How Cardinal Disgraced in Boston Child Abuse Scandal Found a Vatican Haven,” *The Guardian*, November 6, 2015.

The pope has not been consistent about imposing harsh sentences on guilty parties, even those convicted in secular courts. In March 2019, Pope Francis rejected the resignation of Cardinal Philippe Barbarin, who was found guilty of failing to report abuse to the authorities. The Cardinal will instead step aside “for a while,” effectively avoiding any significant punishment. Elisabetta Povoledo and Aurelien Breeden, “Pope Rejects Resignation of French Cardinal Convicted of Abuse Cover-Up,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> During the First Vatican Council in 1870, the leadership of the Roman Catholic church made a significant grant of authority to the papacy, declaring the pope’s teachings to be infallible: “The Roman Pontiff is the true vicar of Christ, the head of the whole Church and the father and teacher of all Christians; and to him was committed in blessed Peter, by our lord Jesus Christ, the full power of tending, ruling, and governing the whole Church.” Pius IX, “On the Infallible Teaching Authority of the Roman Pontiff,” First Vatican Council: Session 4, 1870, <https://www.ewtn.com/library/councils/v1.htm>.

Furthermore, the First Vatican Council rejected the idea that this doctrine represented a religious innovation, instead declaring this teaching to be consistent with centuries of church tradition. They based this grant of papal authority and virtual immunity in divine revelation and the church’s founders. “We teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman Pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*... he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy.” *Ibid*.

Mario Ferrero notes the implications of the construction of untouchable offices. The doctrine of papal infallibility has reinforced the power of the church’s central authorities, allowing them to more effectively punish dissent and protect themselves from dissenters: “Infallibility means more than exemption from actual error, it means exemption from the possibility of error. That is, it does not simply uphold particular decisions as right; it rules that all such decisions could in no case and at no time be revised and pronounced wrong.” Mario Ferrero, “The Infallibility of the Pope,” *Economics of Governance* 12, no. 1 (2011): 91.

an analogous absolutism to the Bible. According to Ferrero, evangelical fundamentalists' literal interpretation of scripture is parallel to the Roman Catholic church's doctrine of papal infallibility. "Scriptural literalism is functionally analogous to papal infallibility in that they both in theory foreclose, and in practice dramatically raise the transaction costs of, future doctrinal change."<sup>41</sup> In the 1960s, Southern Baptist conservatives began to insist on the literal interpretation of the Bible, rallying around biblical inerrancy. According to the conservatives, liberal interpretations of the Bible represented doctrinal innovation—thus, it was the liberals who advocated departure from foundational Baptist beliefs. However, this absolutism, channeled through scriptural infallibility, represented a significant departure from the democratic tendencies of the system of governance that the Southern Baptist Convention's founders initially set up.

Christian feminists have consistently pointed out the dangers of religious institutions which place a premium on obedience and submission to authority, especially in tandem with the conception of God as both male and a father figure. Roman Catholic priests are literally referred to as "Father," but the symbolism permeates all levels of the church, effectively extending to all men and thus embedding authority within them. Karen Bloomquist makes a precise point: "It is not that male God-language is in itself generative of violence, but that it comes to function that way within the central power-over dictates of patriarchy."<sup>42</sup> Sheila Redmond identifies this conflation of the divine and (male) authority figures as a link between religious systems that conceive of power in this way (the Roman-Catholic church, the SBC, and the neo-Calvinist movement) and abuse: "The conception of God as a 'father' who sacrificed his son for ultimate

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<sup>41</sup> Mario Ferrero, "The Infallibility of the Pope," *Economics of Governance* 12, no. 1 (2011): 98.

<sup>42</sup> Karen Bloomquist, "Sexual Violence: Patriarchy's Offense and Defense," in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Carole Bohn and Joanne Carlson Brown (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 67.

good justifies violence against children by fathers and, furthermore, subordinates by any authority figure.”<sup>43</sup>

Feminist scholar Carole Bohn proposes the term “theology of ownership” to explain how a theology that emphasizes the supremacy of men contributes to a culture of violence and abuse. This “theology of ownership” also explains the lack of meaningful institutional response to reports of abuse, especially when those institutions are themselves controlled by men. Bohn writes, “Out of arrogance, embarrassment, ignorance, or feelings of helplessness, pastors often give the impression that violent control of women and children is a necessary part of family life and must be accepted.”<sup>44</sup> According to Bohn, violence is fundamentally about control and the maintenance of existing power dynamics. She adds, “The attribution of man’s ownership of woman to God’s intent was a way of explaining, justifying, and preserving what was already an accepted behavior. Therefore, the use of violence against women to maintain control is simply an extension of the rights of ownership.”<sup>45</sup> She builds on the work of Judith Herman, who recognizes the strategic nature of this theology. Sexual violence “is a form of terrorism by which men as a group keep women as a group frightened and submissive... Perpetrators understand intuitively that the purpose of their behavior is to put women in their place and that their behavior will be condoned by other men as long as the victim is a legitimate target.”<sup>46</sup> Theological systems that place heavy emphasis on authority and sovereignty while simultaneously conflating masculinity and divinity

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<sup>43</sup> Sheila Redmond, “Christian ‘Virtues’ and Child Sexual Abuse,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Carole Bohn and Joanne Carlson Brown (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 79.

<sup>44</sup> Carole Bohn, “Dominion to Rule,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Carole Bohn and Joanne Carlson Brown (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 107.

<sup>45</sup> Carole Bohn, “Dominion to Rule,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Carole Bohn and Joanne Carlson Brown (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 106.

<sup>46</sup> Judith Herman, *Work in Progress, Sexual Violence* (Wellesley, MA: Stone Center, 1984), 4-5.

serve to confirm the legitimacy of the patriarchy and enable abuse, especially against women, to continue unchecked.

A generation of Southern Baptist leaders have emerged to fill the vacuum left by scandalous departures of the conservative “old guard.” It seems as if they are attempting to alter the ideological direction and rhetoric of the SBC in order to ensure the viability of the denomination and usher it safely into the twenty-first century. This new generation, including prominent megachurch pastors like Matt Chandler, has marketed itself to millennials as moderate, culminating in the 2018 election of J.D. Greear as Southern Baptist Convention president. Chandler is the senior pastor of The Village Church, a multi-site Southern Baptist church in Dallas, Texas with an average weekly attendance of over 10,000.<sup>47</sup> Chandler has repeatedly demonstrated his commitment to exposing and resisting abuse of power through the changes he has implemented as a leader of the Acts 29 network and his role in rebuking pastors who have abused their power. Chandler took over the reins of Acts 29 after the downfall of co-founder Mark Driscoll—a prominent and controversial figure in the evangelical community for two decades. Driscoll formerly served as senior pastor at Mars Hill Church, a prominent advocate for the neo-Calvinist movement, and a leader of various parachurch organizations. As noted in a previous chapter, he frequently used vulgar language, curating an aggressive and hyper-masculine image to complement his ideological positions—gender subordinationism and absolute divine sovereignty. According to *The New York Times*, “Nowhere is the connection between Driscoll’s hypermasculinity and his Calvinist theology clearer than in his refusal to tolerate opposition.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> The Village Church, *Multiply: Annual Report 2018* (Flower Mound, TX: The Village Church), accessed March 1, 2019, [https://www.thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Giving/Lead%20Pastors%20-%202018%20-%20Annual%20Report%20-%20Lores%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Giving/Lead%20Pastors%20-%202018%20-%20Annual%20Report%20-%20Lores%20(1).pdf).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

In addition to presiding over the removal of Mark Driscoll, Matt Chandler has led the ministry network in a decidedly different direction. Though the organization still holds fast to gender subordinationism, Acts 29 ministries continues the practice of marketing this ideology as “complementarianism,” claiming the dignity of men and women while explicitly denying their equality of status, voice, and power. Under the leadership of Chandler, Acts 29 has officially instituted five distinctives. Though their fourth distinctive restricts the offices of elder and pastor exclusively to men, giving men “primary responsibility to lead his wife and family,” they soften this patriarchal position in an attempt to make themselves seem more moderate: “This principle of male headship should not be confused with, nor give any hint of, domineering control. Rather, it is to be the loving, tender, and nurturing care of a godly man who is himself under the kind and gentle authority of Jesus Christ.”<sup>49</sup>

Chandler has demonstrated the distinction between the new generation of neo-Calvinist/Southern Baptist leaders and the old, disgraced leaders like Mark Driscoll and Paige Patterson through taking public ownership of his church’s mistakes and—at least publicly—fighting against abuses of power. This became relevant as Chandler was called upon to tame a public relations disaster, an over-extension of the church’s disciplinary authority similar to what transpired at Mars Hill Church. The Village Church has a covenant membership system that seeks “to clarify the biblical obligations and expectations” for elders and church members and “to establish teaching and doctrinal parameters for The Village Church body.”<sup>50</sup> In order to become a member at The Village Church, individuals must affirm a written statement of beliefs and obligations. In 2015, a woman, who was a covenant member of The Village Church, initiated government proceedings in

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<sup>49</sup> Acts 29 Ministries, “Distinctives,” accessed March 4, 2019, <https://www.acts29.com/about>.

<sup>50</sup> The Village Church, *Covenant Membership* (Flower Mound, TX: The Village Church, 2017), <https://thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Covenant%20Membership%20Class/campus-sf-pastor-2017-covenant-membership-class-fall-book-web.pdf>.

an attempt to nullify her marriage to a man who had confessed to viewing and possessing child pornography. However, signing The Village Church’s covenant requires members to affirm that they will “agree to walk through the steps of marriage reconciliation at The Village Church before pursuing divorce from [their] spouse.”<sup>51</sup> Church elders rebuked her, stressing that she must seek reconciliation with her husband instead—a man who they had declared repentant and therefore undeserving of church discipline. When the woman was unwilling to return to her husband, church elders initiated an internal disciplinary process against her, resulting in revocation of her covenant membership. The resulting public controversy was masterfully handled by Matt Chandler, demonstrating the competency of the new generation of leaders in shaping rhetoric to make themselves seem moderate. Chandler offered an in-person apology to the congregation, taking responsibility for his church mishandling its disciplinary procedures. In a lengthy and humbling statement, Chandler asked for forgiveness on behalf of the church elders—for “where our counsel turned into control” and “where we failed to recognize the limit and scope of our authority.” According to Chandler, “We are free to give counsel, but that counsel is not authoritative.”<sup>52</sup> He invited members who felt like they had been wronged by the elders of The Village Church to come in and tell them about it so that the elders can own their failures.

Apologizing and taking responsibility represents a divergence from how the conservative “old guard” had responded to abuse allegations. Chandler publicly accepted responsibility for his church’s overstepping of authority while simultaneously defending its reputation: “Our only motive is to hear and to learn so that this might not ever happen again. This isn’t an opportunity for us to correct or to save face; I’m not trying to save face today, I’m trying to own sin before

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Matt Chandler, “Wanderer/ Restorer,” sermon, The Village Church, Flower Mound, TX, May 31, 2015, <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/sermons/wanderer-restorer>.



God.”<sup>53</sup> He reassured members of The Village church that they had begun to examine internally—and seek counsel externally—about where their discipline processes broke down and how they can fix their structure and practice. However, he insisted that the problem lies exclusively in improper practice and not doctrine. Refusal to recognize the link between neo-Calvinist theology, especially gender subordinationism, and toxic imbalances of power reveals ignorance about the nature of the problem. In their apology statement, The Village Church makes it clear that it is not altering its covenant membership policy—the root of the problem—but rather the practice of how it has been implemented. Bohn condemns shallow “band-aid” solutions like these because they fail to “address the underlying theology that enables and sustains a context in which violence is possible... While they call their churches to some sort of action, they do not challenge their institutions’ historic stance toward and complicity with the problem.”<sup>54</sup>

Not only does Chandler’s generation call out church leaders for abuses of power, they repudiate the practice of encouraging abused wives to stay with their husbands. Whereas Patterson advised female victims of abuse to stay with their husbands and continue to submit to them, Chandler claims that he does not preach sermons that encourage wives to submit to their husbands without warning victims of abuse that the message does not apply to them.<sup>55</sup> However, in light of the church discipline scandal at The Village Church where elders forbade a woman from seeking divorce from an admitted child pornography addict, it is difficult to reconcile Chandler’s speech with his practice.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Carole Bohn, “Dominion to Rule,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Carole Bohn and Joanne Carlson Brown (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 113.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Southern Baptist Leader Paige Patterson’s Advice to Abused Women Sends Leaders Scrambling to Respond,” *Washington Post*, May 2, 2018.

Chandler advocates for “complementarianism” and hypothetical equality for the genders while simultaneously reinforcing the problematic hierarchical traditions that ensure the continued subjugation of women. An up-and-coming leader within the Southern Baptist Convention, Chandler is not afraid to speak his mind on issues of significance to the denomination; for this, he tends to appeal not to the establishment, but to the laypeople who feel disenfranchised by the establishment. During the 2018 SBC annual meeting in Dallas, Chandler was asked for his thoughts about the state of the denomination and he responded with more criticism than was perhaps expected. Recognizing the relevancy of the #MeToo movement in the twenty-first century, he objected to the establishment’s relative silence on the issue, criticizing the invitation of Vice President Mike Pence to speak at the convention as “tone-deaf.”<sup>56</sup> In that same panel discussion at the 2018 convention, Chandler praised the election of J.D. Greear as president of the SBC. Changes in the upper echelon of denominational leadership suggest denomination-wide evolution. Greear is a moderate who boasts a radically different vision for the denomination than the trajectory on which the conservatives placed it. In a campaign video leading up to the 2018 SBC presidential election, Greear condemned the abuses of power that have plagued the SBC and advocates for the reformation of corrupt practices: “We want to have cultures in our churches, our leadership, our institutions that insist on transparency in leadership and just refuses to tolerate or turn a blind eye to abuses of power.”<sup>57</sup> He expressed his desire for a new culture in the denomination, emphasizing the need for recognition of the worth and contributions of women and people of color.<sup>58</sup> Careful

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<sup>56</sup> Matt Chandler, “9 Marks at 9: The State of the SBC 2018,” panel discussion, Southern Baptist Convention, June 11, 2018), <https://www.9marks.org/message/9marks-at-9-the-state-of-the-sbc-2018>.

<sup>57</sup> J.D. Greear, “A Time of Chastening in the SBC,” *J.D. Greear Ministries* (blog), May 25, 2018, [https://jdgreear.com/blog/w4yw\\_southern\\_baptist\\_convention](https://jdgreear.com/blog/w4yw_southern_baptist_convention).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* Greear expresses a desire to “see representation of people of color in our highest levels of leadership in a way that’s proportionate to their presence in our convention and our community.” He explains that people of color must be included in the highest levels of denominational leadership because “we need them... Our failure to listen to and honor racial minorities, and our failure to include them in top leadership roles have hindered our ability to see sin and injustice and call it out.”

to use the word “complementarianism” to describe their ideology, Greear implored the SBC to “[recognize] the gifts that God gives to the women in the church,” to empower women, and to “[honor] our sisters in Christ as equal in salvation, equal in value, and equal in spiritual giftings.” He encourages Southern Baptists “to be as committed to raising [our daughters] up in leadership and ministries as we are to our sons.”<sup>59</sup>

The new generation of SBC leadership, represented by Greear, is not only known for calling out abuse of power within corrupt churches and organizations; they are also the driving force behind calling for the removal of sex abusers from the church. According to Greear, “We need to commit to being a people who are committed to protecting the vulnerable and exposing the abuser... we need to make it absolutely clear that we’re a place that realized that God hates abuse.”<sup>60</sup> Greear became president of the SBC in the wake of several serious abuse allegations against prominent denominational leaders, so his campaign was and his presidency is focused on addressing this systematic problem. Like Chandler, he publicly sides with victims and accepts responsibility on behalf of the church and the denomination for failing them. In June 2018, Greear wrote a blog post apologizing to victims of abuse and taking ownership for the lateness of the denomination’s response: “We know our deafness has added to your suffering. For many that suffering was direct, as it put you in unsafe or abusive contexts. For others, that suffering was indirect, as we allowed a toxic culture... one in which you were not as safe and valued as you should have been.” He concludes by simply acknowledging what the SBC should have said to victims long ago: “You deserved better.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> J.D. Greear, “Better Late is Still Late: Advocating for Victims of Sexual Abuse,” *J.D. Greear Ministries* (blog), June 14, 2018, <https://jdgrear.com/blog/better-late-still-late-advocating-victims-sexual-abuse>.

With a new generation of leaders rising through the ranks, the SBC has begun to tailor its messaging in a way that is more attractive to young people and moderates. During the 2018 convention in Dallas, SBC messengers passed a resolution on abuse that distinguished them from the previous iteration of the denomination. In it, they strongly urged victims “to contact civil authorities, separate from their abusers, and seek protection, care, and support from fellow Christians and civil authorities.” They urged church members and elders “to act decisively on matters of abuse, to intervene on behalf of the abused, to ensure their safety, to report allegations of abuse to civil authorities... and to pursue church discipline against impenitent abusers.”<sup>62</sup> Though this rhetoric portrays a departure from the abuse-enabling status quo, it makes no practical changes to the problematic ideology that has contributed significantly to the denomination’s abuse problem. The resolution is a symbolic gesture of disapproval but does nothing to actually combat abuse; it does not provide for the establishment of a database of abusers, nor the investigation of allegations, nor the disfellowship of corrupt churches. This use of empty words not accompanied by significant action was also demonstrated through another resolution at the 2018 convention—one affirming the dignity and worth of women. Though it was an unprecedented move for SBC messengers to pass such a resolution, especially one so explicitly recognizing the contributions women have made to the denomination, the woman-affirming language was balanced by reminders of their subservient role. The resolution included language that has amounted to a limiting of the equality of women, strategically throwing in qualifiers like “within the biblical framework of complementary gender relationships” and “in biblically appropriate ways” at the end of statements encouraging women to be active in the church.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> SBC Executive Committee, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Dallas, TX: SBC Executive Committee, 2018), 89.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

In order to maintain their relevance within the denomination, some older figures—including some who were influential in the conservative takeover—have also adopted the strategies of the new generation. For example, Al Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, joined younger leaders in denouncing Paige Patterson in the wake of allegations made public against him. In an article entitled, “The Humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention,” Mohler acknowledges the SBC’s crisis of abuse and implores Southern Baptists to examine the factors that contributed to the problem. However, though he acknowledges that it may seem appealing to blame the ideology that he calls “complementarianism,” he also deflects responsibility for the denominational crisis away from the gender ideology imposed under the conservative regime. “The same Bible that reveals the complementarian pattern of male leadership in the home and the church also reveals God’s steadfast and unyielding concern for the abused, the threatened, the suffering, and the fearful.”<sup>64</sup> For Mohler, the ideology of gender subordinationism, dressed up as “complementarianism,” must remain in place because it is the only system which can effectively combat the “real” culture of abuse—which he and other male leaders claim is being enabled by egalitarianism. Though he passionately denounces abuse and calls for the protection of victims, especially children, he too refuses to recognize and renounce the underlying theological rationales that underwrite abuse. Similarly, Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC, weighed in with an op-ed in the *New York Times*. In it, he denounces people who use Christianity “to prey upon the weak and vulnerable.”<sup>65</sup> Though he goes further than his peers, suggesting that churches that enable or cover up abuse be disfellowshipped from the SBC, he still regards the problem as corrupt individuals

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<sup>64</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “The Humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Christianity Today*, May 23, 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Russell Moore, “Southern Baptists Face Their #MeToo Movement,” Opinion, *New York Times*, February 13, 2019.

who need to be monitored and removed from positions of influence—not a systematic problem rooted in the theology introduced by the conservatives during the takeover.

The question remains, in light of recent Southern Baptist scandals and the rise of the new generation of leadership within the denomination: just how “moderate” is the SBC becoming? Do the reforms proposed by the new leaders have the potential to enact real change, or are they just an effective public relations tool that divert attention from the problematic beliefs and institutional structures that have contributed to and continue to enable such abuse? Some say that the reforms are real and potentially permanent—that the denomination is experiencing a twenty-first century shift back to the left, reversing its earlier conservative shift. Consistent with this perspective is an alternative explanation for the ideological shifts of the late twentieth century. Liberalism was allowed to increase, relatively unchecked, in the SBC during the 1950s and 1960s because of its popularity; liberal theology was attracting lots of people and money and the SBC was growing. Though when conservatives initiated the takeover, they were unsure if their messaging was going to be successful, they ultimately experienced success amidst an American evangelical community that was beginning to flock toward the growing religious right. This timeline of denominational events implies that if change is going to come in the twenty-first century—specifically movement in a progressive direction in response to widespread abuse allegations—it may need to be sparked by a potential flight of capital or lower attendance. Right now, both baptisms and membership are decreasing across the denomination. According to the 2017 Annual Church Profile (ACP) survey, membership fell for the eleventh consecutive year, meaning that over the past eleven years, the SBC has lost 1.3 million members. The ACP also recorded a decline in number of baptisms, with 26.5% fewer than eleven years ago.<sup>66</sup> In March 2019, LifeWay (the SBC entity in charge of

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<sup>66</sup> Lisa Cannon Green, “ACP: Worship Attendance Rises, Baptisms Decline,” *Baptist Press*, June 1, 2018.

publishing and distributing church materials) announced that it would be closing all 170 of its physical bookstores in favor of an exclusively-online retail presence, a move attributed to “declining sales and financial pressures.”<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, internal splits within state conventions have exposed how dissatisfaction with the conservative trajectory of the SBC may be impacting the financial stability of the denomination. In 1998, the Texas state convention split into the moderate Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) and the conservative Southern Baptist Texas Convention (SBTC). In 2017, there were 4,270 churches affiliated with the BGCT, including over 2 million total members (representing more than 13% of the denomination).<sup>68</sup> However, the conservative takeover of the denomination prompted the BGCT, which had contributed a total of \$2.56 billion dollars to the Cooperative Program (CP), to divert less money to the CP at both the state and national levels.<sup>69</sup> Instead, the BGCT has forwarded funds to moderate organizations like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF)—with 349 churches contributing more than \$1 million to the CBF in 2017.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the conservative Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia (SBCV)

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<sup>67</sup> Kate Shellnutt, “Lifeway to Close All 170 Christian Stores,” *Christianity Today*, March 20, 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Baptist General Convention of Texas, *Annual of the 132<sup>nd</sup> Annual Session of the Baptist General Convention of Texas* (Waco, TX: Baptist General Convention of Texas, 2017), [https://texasbaptists.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/2017\\_BGCT\\_Annual\\_FINAL\\_Interactive.pdf](https://texasbaptists.s3.amazonaws.com/downloads/2017_BGCT_Annual_FINAL_Interactive.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Fewer funds are being forwarded to the CP in general since most recent revision of the *Baptist Faith & Message*. In 1999 and 2000, the BGCT forwarded \$22.4 million and \$22.9 million to the CP, respectively. However, the BGCT has not forwarded more than \$15 million since the year 2000—over the past decade, it has hovered around \$10-11 million.

Furthermore, the BGCT has forwarded a lower percentage of its CP funds to the national CP, withholding more funds at the state level. Between 2000 and 2001, the percentage of funds forwarded to the national CP (not withheld by the state BGCT convention) dropped significantly—from 32.0% in 2000 to 18.2% in 2001). The percentage has slowly increased again over the next two decades; however, in 2018, the percentage was still 25.5%, still noticeably lower than the numbers in the 30s that the BGCT had maintained from 1946-2000. In comparison, the much-more-conservative Southern Baptist Texas Convention has consistently forwarded percentages in the 50s to the national SBC, forwarding 58.5% of their total CP funds (\$15.2 million) to the national SBC CP. This is because of ideological disagreements with the conservative trajectory of the SBC.

SBC Executive Committee, “Baptist General Convention of Texas,” *CP Contributions*, Southern Baptist Convention, accessed April 26, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/cp/statecontributions/texas-bgct.asp>.

<sup>70</sup> SBTS Staff, “Southern Baptists of Texas Celebrate 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” *Baptist Press*, November 19, 2018.

split off from the moderate Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV) in 1996 over dissatisfaction with a perceived increase in “liberalism” within the state convention. Ever since, the more moderate BGAV has begun to divert a significantly lower percentage of its funds to the CP since the split; in 1996, the BGAV sent 28.8% of its total CP funds to the SBC, but in 2018, it sent only 8.8%.<sup>71</sup> If a more progressive theology brings success to the denomination, the new generation of SBC leaders will thus be legitimized by their popularity and be granted a mandate to assume the helm of denominational leadership. Thus, there may be a financial incentive to once again shift the ideology of the denomination.

Though there is some merit in this hypothesis about the future trajectory of the Southern Baptist Convention, I suspect that the new, seemingly moderate, generation of the Southern Baptist Convention does not differ substantively from its conservative predecessor. Insistence on the label “complementarianism” on the part of both neo-Calvinists and the new generation of Southern Baptists is a strategic effort to discourage checks on power by making their ideology appear more moderate. In a recent sermon entitled “The Complementary Roles of Men and Women,” Matt Chandler uses a graphic to illustrate a range of Christian ideologies from feminism (on the far left) to patriarchy (on the far right). The graphic features “complementarianism” in the middle as a moderate presence, a compromise between two extremes. He explains the patriarchal end of the spectrum as containing “misogyny and all sorts of wicked things that have occurred in churches... around the over-emphasis of male domination.”<sup>72</sup> He characterizes the feminist end of the spectrum as believing “men don’t matter, and everything that men do is evil, and that there should

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<sup>71</sup> SBC Executive Committee, “Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia,” *CP Contributions*, Southern Baptist Convention, accessed April 26, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/cp/statecontributions/virginia-sbc.asp>.

<sup>72</sup> Matt Chandler, “The Complementary Roles of Men & Women,” sermon, The Village Church, Flower Mound, TX, November 5, 2017, <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/the-complementary-roles-of-men-and-women>.



be nothing masculine in the world that is not evil and oppressive and should be snuffed out.”<sup>73</sup> According to Chandler, biblical feminism involves “an over-emphasizing of woman so that there is no distinction” while patriarchy involves an inherent suspicion of women. By setting up extremist straw men, he is able to elevate complementarianism as a levelheaded compromise, concluding, “Here’s why we think complementarianism is the space in which we all flourish. The point in complementarianism is men and women are distinct from one another but dependent upon one another.”<sup>74</sup> However, those who identify themselves as “complementarians” maintain many of the important gender-based restrictions characteristic of patriarchy. J.D. Greear, despite his insistence that the “complementary” roles of men and women are fundamentally consistent with equality of value and worth, still believes that women should be excluded from the pastorate. According to his blog, women should not teach authoritatively in the church— “either formally or functionally.” Women are additionally prohibited from teaching mixed-gender Bible studies— because they may “mimic the pastoral functions of the church”—and from occupying the “prime teaching slot” of a weekend service.<sup>75</sup>

The SBC will not solve its abuse problem without challenging the patriarchal foundation of its entire theological system. New leadership within the Southern Baptist Convention and a subsequent shift toward confessional and moderating rhetoric has created the appearance of full-scale denominational change, but these changes have been mostly at the surface level, leaving problematic theological formulae and institutional structures that justify exclusionary policies. Thus, it seems unlikely that real change will occur—not without actual reformation of belief and practice, specifically the neo-Calvinist affinity for absolute power and gender subordination and

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> J.D. Greear, “Can Women Teach in the Church?” *J.D. Greear Ministries* (blog), May 25, 2015, <https://jdgreear.com/blog/can-women-teach-in-the-church>.

the SBC male-dominated centralization of power and exclusion of women from ministerial authority.

When institutions base their conception of God on absolute sovereignty understood as an exclusively male prerogative, they sanction the subordination of women as natural and God-ordained. In her essay about sexual violence in the church, Karen Bloomquist makes a prediction that has remains relevant today in light of the sex abuse and abuse-of-power scandals prevalent in the “complementarian” community in this #MeToo era. She writes, “As the presuppositions and operating tactics of patriarchy are questioned, challenged, and begin to lose their credibility, the violence does not necessarily go away but appears in new, often more subtle expressions as defensive tactics of patriarchy.”<sup>76</sup> She made this prediction long ago, originally referring to the United Church of Christ, Roman Catholic Church, and Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, but I believe that it applies to the current Southern Baptist Convention and the neo-Calvinist movement as a whole. I argue that the rhetoric of “complementarianism,” especially within the contexts of the SBC specifically and the neo-Calvinist movement more broadly, is an example of these more subtle expressions of patriarchy that nonetheless mark its undeniably oppressive and violent character.

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<sup>76</sup> Karen Bloomquist, “Sexual Violence: Patriarchy’s Offense and Defense,” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, ed. Carole Bohn and Joanne Carlson Brown (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1989).

## Conclusion

The conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention was systematic and far-reaching, going beyond simply shifting the ideology of the denomination. Rather, conservative Southern Baptists invoked theological absolutism to counter the perceived crisis of authority triggered by women's ordination and progressive biblical interpretation. This theological absolutism became institutionalized, transforming the way that Southern Baptists conceptualized the power of God, the Bible, and male church authorities. Conservatives adopted the systematic theology of neo-Calvinism—a departure from the historic democratic tendencies of the SBC—along with its conception of God's power as an eternally subordinating power. This new understanding of the nature of power has been transferred to male church leaders, who have increasingly been considered above the law as well. Though conservatives would undoubtedly deny that church leaders possess *absolute* authority tantamount to that of the divine, the constant parallels drawn between (male) authority figures and God facilitates this transfer of authority. Conservatives have attempted to minimize the radicality of this transformation by organizing engaging conferences and energizing concerts to attract young people, showcasing their racial progressivism, and insisting that their gender theology is moderate—not gender subordinationism but “complementarianism.”

This project highlights the need to carefully examine the various dimensions of women's power, especially when analyzing the submission of women in conservative religious communities. According to the second-wave feminist understanding of the power structure in such communities, power is the sole possession of men, who use it to dominate women. From this perspective, women passively accept their own oppression. However, scholars like Marie Griffith and Saba Mahmood, through their research on the Aglow community and the Egyptian mosque

movement, respectively, have attempted to valorize women's submission through the lens of a particular theory of power.<sup>1</sup> Griffith and Mahmood attempt to recast submission as empowering by deconstructing the idea of power as an inherently one-sided force, wielded by some to the detriment of others. Instead, they highlight how women manage to turn the power they have to their own advantage. However, such efforts tend to downplay the oppressive patriarchal structures that produce persistent asymmetries between men and women. If women are not able to access the same type of power as men, or they have to work significantly harder to access and use power, are they truly being empowered? My research takes a more comprehensive approach—recognizing the self-reported empowerment of some women in spite of oppressive patriarchal structures while not losing sight of the dangerous consequences of institutional structures based on absolute power.

Furthermore, examination of the institutional changes ushered in by the conservative takeover of the SBC reveals the necessity of rethinking the relationship between religion and politics in the United States. Religion and politics should not be considered wholly distinct entities; rather, they have a mutually influential relationship, with external political factors prompting ideological rifts within religious communities and theological concerns prompting religious people to exert influence on the political system. The conservative takeover of the SBC was not in response to a single political issue, like abortion or “family values.” It was the more complicated product of both external and internal factors—though the internal factors like women's ordination, liberal interpretations of scripture, and biblical feminism have not been taken seriously by scholarly examinations of the movement. Moreover, I believe that the conservative takeover of the SBC went further than merely demonstrating the extent of the relationship between two separate

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<sup>1</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); Saba Mahmood, “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (May 2001), 202-236.

spheres: the religious and the political. Conservatives engaged in overt politicization of the denomination, establishing the SBC as a political entity in its own right. Thus, the politicization of the SBC highlights the problem with continuing to presume the very distinction between “religion” and “politics.”

Specifically, examination of the relationship between religion and politics in America leads me to speculate on the potential effects of the religious institutionalization of theological notions of power. Might the Southern Baptist Convention’s institutionalization of a neo-Calvinist conception of power contribute to what some see as a trend toward a portion of the American electorate becoming acclimated to anti-democratic and authoritarian politics? By adopting a theological structure based on vastly imbalanced power structures, the SBC has elevated authority figures to a position in which they are not answerable to their subordinates. Though theological concerns are generally textually based, which causes them to be more relevant to religious elites than to laypeople, neo-Calvinist theology made a significant contribution to the conservative takeover of the SBC because conservatives institutionalized it, creating a culture around the sacralization of absolute power. Looking more broadly at the neo-Calvinist movement as a whole, my research suggests that its young people are generally becoming comfortable with evocations of absolutism. Especially at events like the annual Passion conferences, young people are internalizing messages about power through the characterization of divine and biblical authority as fundamentally benign. What might be the broader political implications of this sacralization of absolute power and its institutionalization as male authoritarianism?

As a number of scholars of American politics have observed, the United States is experiencing a rise in authoritarianism. Authoritarianism in the modern American political landscape manifests itself as intolerance—especially toward racial minorities, immigrants,

women, and LGBT individuals. Two scholars of modern American politics, Hetherington and Weiler, explain the connection between authoritarianism and intolerance as follows: “Since the more authoritarian view the social order as fragile and under attack, they tend to feel negatively about, behave aggressively toward, and be intolerant of those whom they perceive violate time-honored norms or fail to adhere to established social conventions.”<sup>2</sup> The normalization of authoritarian tendencies in American politics has led to increased intolerance and ideological polarization. Furthermore, there is increased support for “strongman” political figures, who resist the checks and balances of the traditional democratic system.

During the 2016 election, President Trump received the endorsement of many prominent Southern Baptists, including Jerry Falwell, Jr., and neo-Calvinists, including Wayne Grudem. After assuming the presidency, Trump has maintained close ties to the SBC, with nearly one-third of his evangelical advisory board affiliated with the denomination.<sup>3</sup> His leadership style has rightfully been characterized as “authoritarian,” prompted by his characterization of the media as the “enemy of the people,” willingness to execute his will via executive orders and declaration of “national emergencies,” and refusal to recognize the legitimacy of the legislative and judicial branches of government when they challenge his policies.<sup>4</sup> It is worth considering that religious trends may have a substantial effect on the political realm—that the promotion of theological

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<sup>2</sup> Marc J. Hetherington and Jonathan D. Weiler, *Authoritarianism & Polarization in American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Members of Trump’s evangelical advisory board include: Richard Land (former president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the SBC), Jerry Falwell, Jr. (pastor of 24,000-member Southern Baptist church in Virginia and president of SBC-affiliated Liberty University), Ronnie Floyd (former SBC president), Jordan Easley (chair of Southern Baptists’ Young Leaders Advisory Council), Jack Graham (former SBC president), and Frank Page (president and CEO of SBC executive committee, former SBC president). Kate Shellnutt and Sarah Eekhoff-Zylstra, “Who’s Who of Trump’s ‘Tremendous’ Faith Advisors,” *Christianity Today*, June 22, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Chait, “Conservatives Can’t Distinguish Between Democratic Reform and Authoritarianism,” *New York Magazine*, The National Interest, March 29, 2019.

absolutism in influential denominations like the SBC may have contributed to a the rise of such authoritarianism in American politics.

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