ADVANCING PROGRESSIVE ORTHODOXY: WILLIAM OWEN CARVER AND THE RECONCILIATION OF PROGRESS AND SOUTHERN BAPTIST TRADITION

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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One of the most important debates among scholars of southern religion concerns the reaction of white southern evangelical Protestantism to the modernizing influences that prevailed outside the region from the end of the nineteenth century to well into the twentieth century. William Owen Carver (1868-1954), longtime professor of Missions and Comparative Religion at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, lived his professional life between two worlds: the conservatism of southern denominationalism and the liberalism of mainstream Protestant thought and practice. Carver responded with guarded optimism to important theological issues such as ecumenism, liberalism, evolution, and the social gospel, and he challenged Southern

Baptists to incorporate the best of modern thought into Southern Baptist theology. Carver endured several major controversies throughout his career, but he always managed to silence his critics. His career shows how challenging the reconciliation of progress and Southern Baptist tradition can be.

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INTRODUCTION

A few weeks after the United States launched its campaign to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq in 2003, the American news media investigated a "second invasion" of American missionaries armed with food, clothing, medical supplies, and the Christian gospel. To understand the theological and political ramifications of missionary presence in a war-torn Muslim country, reporters turned to a prominent Southern Baptist leader, R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (SBTS), the flagship seminary of the nation's largest Protestant denomination.

Time magazine's Broward Liston asked Mohler, the "reigning intellectual of the evangelical movement in the U.S.," to explain how Christian missionaries viewed the assignment that critics called a destabilizing force for the country. Mohler suggested that media fears were overblown. He reminded Liston that evangelical missionaries offered humanitarian aid as well as the message of salvation; the media should not be surprised that Christians feel obligated to share their beliefs. "The Christian has to look at Iraq and see persons desperately in need of the gospel," he said. "Compelled by the love and

command of Christ, the Christian will seek to take that gospel in loving and sensitive, but very direct, ways to the people of Iraq."[1]

Terry Gross of National Public Radio (NPR) interviewed Mohler on the popular program "Fresh Air" a few weeks later. Gross raised the concern that Christian evangelism might make the war in Iraq a conflict between two religions rather than an American-led effort to remove a dictator. Mohler argued that the Christian opportunity to evangelize was evidence of religious freedom, a key to any effective democracy. He assured Gross that he did not believe in conversion by force or legislation and articulated the Christian claim that ultimate salvation rests in Christianity.[2] In the second half of the program Gross interviewed Charles Kimball, a Baptist professor of religion at the Wake Forest University Divinity School in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Kimball, author of a recent book titled When Religion Becomes Evil, feared that Iraqis would view proselytizing as Christian imperialism and discouraged efforts other than humanitarian aid. Obviously intrigued that Kimball and Mohler shared the same alma mater (SBTS) and denominational heritage but disagreed on the evangelical claim that Christianity holds the only way to salvation, Gross asked Kimball about his personal journey away

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[1] Broward Liston, "Interview: Missionary Work in Iraq," *Time*, April 15, 2003, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,443800,00.html.

[2] Albert Mohler, interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air,* NPR, May 5, 2003, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1250236.

from conservative Christianity.[3] Mohler and Kimball presented an interesting contrast for viewers. CNN hosted a debate between the two Baptists to illustrate that "the Christian world was divided" over missionary efforts in Iraq.[4]

The American media fascination with Southern Baptists grew at the end of the twentieth century when theologically and politically conservative denominational leaders made the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) a prominent platform for the "culture wars" debate. The denominational boycott of the Walt Disney Company to protest the company's alleged support of homosexuality brought national attention in 1996, for example, and, in 2000 Larry King held a roundtable discussion on women pastors the day Southern Baptists formalized a doctrinal statement forbidding the practice.[5] When Wally Amos Criswell, the famous pastor of the huge First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, died in 2002, NPR's Robert Seigel interviewed the director of the Criswell Foundation and aired a portion of Criswell's 1988 vitriolic sermon against liberalism to the annual

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[3] Charles Kimball, interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, NPR, May 5, 2003, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1250234.

[4] Albert Mohler and Charles Kimball, interview by Fredricka Whitfield, *CNN Live Saturday*, CNN, May 10, 2003, http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0305/10/cst.11.html.

[5] *Larry King Live*, CNN, June 14, 2000 http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0006/14/lkl.00.html.

gathering of Southern Baptist pastors.[6] In the sermon Criswell blamed the downward spiral of membership in many Christian denominations, and the retarded growth of Southern Baptists, on "half-infidel, liberal pastor[s]." "It's the curse—the fetid breath of liberalism—that is destroying us as it has all the other old mainline denominations," he cried from the pulpit.[7]

The majority of Southern Baptists have always been more theologically and socially conservative than adherents of mainline American denominations, but the denomination's leadership did not always reflect this conservatism. In the last two decades of the twentieth century a group of talented, disenchanted, self-described Reformers led the SBC to remove any hint of theological liberalism from its many agencies, particularly the seminaries.[8]

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[6] Gloria Cowen, interview by Robert Seigel, *All Things Considered*, NPR, January 10, 2002, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1136151.

[7] W. A. Criswell, "The Curse of Liberalism," June 13, 1988, http://www.wacriswell.org/index.cfm/FuseAction/Search.Transcripts/sermon/1222.cfm

[8] For information on the SBC controversy see the following: Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990); Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Southern Baptists Observed: Multiple Perspectives on a Changing Denomination* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993); Ralph H. Elliott, *The "Genesis Controversy" and Continuity in Southern Baptist Chaos: A Eulogy for a Great Tradition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1992); Arthur Emery Farnsley II, *Southern Baptist Politics: Authority and Power in the Restructuring of an American Denomination* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002); Bill Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the*

In their quest to rid the denomination of liberals, the architects of conservative reform challenged a thesis first presented by C. Vann Woodward in 1951 and echoed by the majority of southern historians since him, that Southern Baptists were hardly affected by the northern intellectual trends of liberalism, ecumenism, and the social gospel.[9] In 1966 Samuel S. Hill Jr. argued that southern religion was characterized by adherence to the Bible and the conversion of individuals. "Few question the literal accuracy of the Bible on matters of geography and history," he wrote, "no less than on matters of faith."[10] One year later Rufus B. Spain issued a similar conclusion in his study of

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Southern Baptist Convention (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Erdmans, 1990); David T. Morgan, *The New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996); Paul Pressler, *A Hill on Which to Die: One Southern Baptist's Journey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999); Walter B. Shurden and Randy Shepley, eds., *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996); Walter B. Shurden, ed., *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1993), Oran Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

[9] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 450.

[10] Samuel S. Hill Jr., *Southern Churches in Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), 90; See also Samuel S. Hill Jr., *The South and North in American Religion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980); Samuel S. Hill Jr., *Southern Churches in Crisis Revisited* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999); and Samuel S. Hill Jr., "Southern Religion and the Southern Religious," in *Autobiographical Reflections in Southern Religious History*, John Boles, ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001); For an interpretive essay on Hill as historian, see Ted Ownby, "'Ethos Without Ethic': Samuel S. Hill and Southern Religious History," in *Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*, ed. Glenn Feldman, 247-259 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

Southern Baptist social attitudes from 1865 to 1900. Southern Baptists, he argued, "defended the status quo." "Their attitudes toward political, social, economic, and other problems of Southern society coincided with the prevailing attitudes of Southerners in general."[11] In a similar study John Lee Eighmy argued that Southern Baptists participated in a southern form of the social gospel, but his final assessment suggested the denomination was captive to southern culture.[12]

Other scholars of southern religion have shown that Southern Baptists were not monolithic in theology or lacking social conscience. Wayne Flynt argues that white Baptists willingly participated in social reform in Birmingham, Alabama during the Progressive Era and suggests that a liberal intellectual tradition was present in the denomination throughout the twentieth century.[13] Keith Harper says that Southern Baptists institutionalized "social Christianity" through ventures such as mountain mission

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[11] Rufus Spain, *At Ease in Zion: A Social History of Southern Baptists, 1865-1900* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 213.

[12] John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

[13] Wayne Flynt, "Dissent in Zion: Alabama Baptists and Social Issues," *Journal of Southern History* 35 (October 1969): 523-542; Wayne Flynt, "Southern Baptists and Reform," *Baptist History and Heritage* 7 (1972): 211-224; Wayne Flynt, "'Not an Island Unto Itself': Southern Baptists and the New Theological Trends (Liberalism, Ecumenism, and the Social Gospel), 1890-1940," *American Baptist Historical Quarterly* 22 (April 2003): 158-179; Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998).

schools and orphanages.[14] David Stricklin has shown that a vocal cadre of activists in the SBC lobbied for more liberal positions on issues such as race relations, women's ordination, and social justice in the twentieth century.[15]

By the end of the twentieth century historians had fully discovered what many conservative denominational leaders knew all along: A significant number of progressive or liberal Southern Baptists existed in the SBC throughout the twentieth century.[16] Because the dissemination of non-traditional ideas came mainly from professors in seminaries, the schools became battlefields in the denominational controversy. The conservative activists contended that Southern Baptist seminary professors violated their allegiance to the denomination by espousing theological beliefs contrary to those held by ordinary Southern Baptists. Modernity came to the South early in the twentieth century, they claimed, and many theologians substituted enlightened individualism in place of the

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[14] Keith Harper, The *Quality of Mercy: Southern Baptists and Social Christianity, 1890-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996).

[15] David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999).

[16] See, for example, John Jesse Carey, *Carlyle Marney: A Pilgrim's Progress* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1980); William E. Ellis, *"A Man of Books and a Man of the People": E. Y. Mullins and the Crisis of Southern Baptist Leadership* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985); Randal L. Hall, *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001); Alan Scot Willis, *All According to God's Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race, 1975-1970* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

Bible as the authority for faith and practice. Conservative activists used “inerrancy”—the belief that the Bible is without error and plainly defines doctrine and morals—as the doctrinal test for professors and eventually replaced all nonconformists. They successfully transformed the SBC into a powerful voice for conservative American values, and the campaign ranks as one of the most interesting events in American church history.

If historians and SBC conservative activists are correct in their assertion that a form of theological liberalism sneaked into the Baptist intelligentsia in the twentieth century, how did the affected leaders see themselves in relationship to their more theologically conservative constituency? What challenges did progressive-minded seminary professors pose to Southern Baptists? How were these uncommon Baptists able to achieve professional success and wide acclaim in a denomination where the majority articulated its faith with a more conservative nuance?

One important way to answer these questions is through biography, the study of a single person through time. William Owen Carver (1868-1954) was an ordinary son of Southern Baptists who became, in the denomination’s eyes, the intellectual architect of foreign missions and one of the brightest minds at the flagship seminary in Louisville. A graduate of two Southern Baptist institutions, Richmond College and SBTS, Carver served the denomination as the seminary’s professor of missions and comparative religions for over four decades and remained an active participant in the denomination

until his death. He was a prolific author of books and articles, managing editor of the seminary's theological journal, Review & Expositor, and frequent editorialist for convention periodicals. A seminary building, denominational library, and Baptist school of social work carry his name today.[17]

Southern Baptist conservative leaders consider Carver one of the intellectuals who steered the denomination away from strict doctrinal uniformity in the first half of the twentieth century. "Under the influence of liberalism and its historical idealism," Baptist historian Greg Wills writes, "Carver abandoned the traditional basis of Baptist identity and sought to attach the principle of freedom to that of participation in cooperative missions as the sole bases of Baptist denominational identity."[18] In his memoir, written

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[17] For articles and books on Carver in denominational publications, see the following: *Baptist History and Heritage* 3 (July 1968); David W. Daily, "Between Province and World: Comparative Religion in the Missionary Apologetic of William Owen Carver," *Baptist History and Heritage* 32 (January 1997): 48-60; Helen E. Falls, "William Owen Carver: Advocate for the Biblical Mandate to Live God's Word in Missions," *Baptist History and Heritage* 31 (January 1996): 23-30; John N. Jonsson, ed., *God's Glory in Missions: In Appreciation of W. O. Carver* (Louisville: John M. Jonsson, 1985); John N. Jonsson, "W. O. Carver," in *Baptist Theologians*, Timothy George and David Dockery, eds. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990); For seminary doctoral dissertations on Carver, see the following: Alan Gordon Bean, "'A Fine Spiritual Imperialism': The Idea of World Christianity in the Thought of William Owen Carver," (doctoral dissertation, SBTS, 1994); Curtis Ray Ellis, "The Missionary Philosophy of William Owen Carver," (doctoral dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1968); Robert Vernon Forehand, "A Study of Religion and Culture as Reflected in the Thought and Career of William Owen Carver," (doctoral dissertation, SBTS, 1972); William Cheney Smith Jr., "A Critical Investigation of the Ecclesiological Thought of William Owen Carver," (doctoral dissertation, SBTS, 1962).

just before his death, Carver denied ever being "a rebel, a revolutionary, or a 'progressive.'"[19] He was never a cause célèbre, but, judged by the late-twentieth-century definition of Southern Baptist orthodoxy, he was anathema. He sought "truth rather than authority," an admission of liberalism in the eyes of conservative critics.[20] Carver considered his beliefs "progressive orthodoxy." His career illustrates how free-thinking denominational stalwarts interacted with their more conservative constituency as they sought to orient the denomination to the modern world.

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[18] Gregory A. Wills, "Who are the True Baptists? The Conservative Resurgence and the Influence of Moderate Views of Baptist Identity," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9 (Spring 2005): 26.

[19] William Owen Carver, *Out of His Treasure: Unfinished Memoirs* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1956), 62.

[20] Ibid., 61.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM TENNESSEE TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

On a sultry July afternoon in 1905, the first quinquennial Baptist World Congress held its last session in London, England. Nearly three thousand Baptist leaders from around the world convened for the week-long meeting to discuss Baptist practices, missionary work, social issues, higher education, and similar topics of interest. In the last session, speakers from Lutterworth, Georgia, and Michigan read papers on the topic of "Baptists and Literature." Reflecting Baptist debates worldwide, the session focused not so narrowly on literature as more broadly on education and learning within sacred communities. The first paper discussed the relationship of Baptists to the secular press while the last two spoke to the role of denominational literature in the religious education of the Baptist constituency. In response to these papers, William Owen Carver, Professor of Missions and Comparative Religion at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, suggested another topic for discussion: "Baptists making use of the Literature they already have."[1]

"For a long while in America there was a charge—we are not wholly free from it yet—that Baptists were boorish, unlearned and ignorant men," he said. Carver argued that the growth of Baptist literature had been hindered by its lack of use and interest.

[1] *The Baptist World Congress: Authorised Record of Proceedings* (London: Baptist Union Publication Department, 1905), 294.

Some preachers found education an unnecessary aspect of the ministry and enjoyed the fact that they could successfully minister without ever reading books. He believed the negative disposition toward education ought to change. "God will use our highest powers, and we must instill the idea that He never intended us to put a premium on narrowness," he said. "Let us lay ourselves out to put Baptists high among the world's thinkers and teachers."[2]

A denominational educator rallying colleagues against the anti-intellectual posture of the populace who filled classrooms and pews is not surprising. What made his comment unique was his posture as an uncommon evangelical minister who transcended his religious background and denominational geography to become a progressive voice among Southern Baptists.

Sometime after his eightieth birthday, W. O. Carver began the arduous task of writing a narrative of his life experiences. The memoirist began his autobiography at a predictable place—the day of his birth. As an act of self-interpretation he placed that day in the context of the most significant event of his country's history, the American Civil War. "I was born in the home of my Carver grandparents, April 10, 1868," he wrote, "three years and one day after Lee's surrender at Appomattox."[3] Quoting Robert Penn Warren in his award-winning book on the Civil War in American memory, David Blight declares at the outset, "'Somewhere in their bones' . . . most Americans have a

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[2] Ibid., 295.

[3] William Owen Carver, *Out of His Treasure: Unfinished Memoirs* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1956), 1.

storehouse of 'lessons' drawn from the Civil War."[4] Carver issued the most important lesson from his storehouse: "life is always under tension" and "progress is achieved by adjustment among tensions."[5] He understood the Civil War as a symbol of his life's journey.

Carver was continually reminded of war's devastation each time he looked at the empty sleeve of his ex-Confederate soldier and father, Alexander Jefferson Carver. Born March 5, 1842, A. J. Carver descended from a long line of Carvers who settled in Pennsylvania from Hertfordshire, England beginning in 1682. W. O. Carver assumed his father's family "must have been impartial between Federalists and Republicans," since his father's first and middle names reflected the political tensions of the early nineteenth century.[6] Concerning the crisis of the 1860s, however, Alexander Jefferson exhibited a singular allegiance.

The Carver home by the time of the Civil War was near the estate of Andrew Jackson in Wilson County, Tennessee, a state known for its military volunteerism. During the Mexican-American war, the Secretary of War requested 2,800 soldiers from Tennessee and 30,000 offered their services, a response that earned Tennessee the nickname "Volunteer State."[7] Although the state was the last of the eleven Confederate

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[4] David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

[5] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 1.

[6]Ibid., 3.

[7] *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998), s.v. "Mexican War."

states to secede from the Union, it had the second largest white population and sent more men to battle than any other Confederate state. Clearly a state with divided loyalties, 31,000 Tennesseans fought for the Union, more than those who fought for the Union from all other Confederate states combined.[8]

A. J. Carver served four full years in the 45th Tennessee Infantry as color bearer of the regiment. "No braver, truer, better soldier than Alex Carver ever trod shoe leather," a soldier-friend remarked some thirty years after the war.[9] His bravery, unfortunately, did not shield him from harm. After being wounded in three battles, A. J. lost his arm in a battle at Jonesboro near Atlanta and left it in Georgia's soil. He described the incident to a reporter in 1927. "In the midst of the hardest fighting, our Colonel ordered a charge and as I was color bearer, I had to go among the first. Shortly after we started, shrapnel broke loose and a piece of it hit me in the arm, making amputation necessary."[10] After a tumultuous fight against exhaustion and gangrene, Alexander found rest in a home in Penfield, Georgia and was cared for by the family of William Owen Chaney. In gratitude for the help he received, he named his first-born son William Owen.[11]

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[8] "James L. McDonough, "Tennessee and the Civil War," in *Tennessee History: The Land, the People, and the Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

[9] *The Baptist Argus*, December 22, 1898.

[10] "Beloved Baptist Layman Happy at Age of Eighty-Five Years Gives Story of Some Interesting Experiences and Hopes," *Tennessee Baptist and Reflector*, July 21, 1927.

[11] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 3. For information and correspondence related to A. J. Carver, especially his death in 1930, see C. M. Thompson, Jr. to W. O. Carver, April 3, 1930; C. W. Durden to W. O. Carver, June 7, 1929; Walnut Street Baptist Church bulletin, April 6, 1930; undated newspaper photograph, all in Box 17, Folder 33, William Owen Carver Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited as Carver Papers).

After the war, A. J. returned to his Tennessee home, married his sweetheart, and returned to the life of a farmer. When William Owen was born on April 10, 1868, the family lived on a fifty-seven-acre farm in Wilson County. A Tennessee farm of that size was slightly above the majority of farms in 1870. Twenty-four percent of the total number of farms consisted of fifty to ninety-nine acres and the largest percentage of farms (thirty-six percent) were from twenty to forty-nine acres.[12] While sharecroppers, tenant farmers, newly emancipated slaves, and others without land suffered the most after the Civil War, life for small farmers with modest tracts of land was not easy. During the financial crisis of 1873, Carver remembered shortages of food and the pain it caused his parents. One day, after milking the family cow, his mother, Mrs. Addie Carver spilled the pail of milk climbing over a fence. "She wept," W. O. remembered, "and it stabbed my heart."[13] Although the family struggled during the years of Reconstruction, they managed to enlarge their land holdings and business dealings over time.

The Carver family cultivated their religious faith as carefully as they tended the land. Grandfather Carver's friends knew him as a stalwart Baptist. "To have preserved an iota of the faith once delivered he would have allowed a fire of hickory bark to have been built on his back," one friend stated.[14] Alexander Carver followed in his father's footsteps and served as deacon and superintendent of the Sunday School of their rural country church. At the age of eleven, W. O. Carver professed faith in Christ and became

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[12] For census data for 1870, see <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/census/>

[13] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 9.

[14] *The Baptist Argus*, December 22, 1893.

a member of the New Hope Baptist Church near his hometown. Even before then, he knew he would live his life as a minister, the first of his family to do so.[15]

His life, however, would unfold within a changing South. Carver would not spend his life on the farm; his education would take him far beyond the walls of Wilson County, Tennessee. "Our parents were most concerned for our religion and morals and, after that, for our education," he stated in his memoirs.[16] Indeed, the Carvers went to great lengths to see that their son received the best possible education. Because the town did not have a high school, Alexander hired a tutor and made other efforts to provide for his son's education. The time quickly came for young Carver to choose a college, a decision that would forever change his life.

At the age of eighteen, Carver began classes at Richmond College, a Baptist school in Richmond, Virginia begun in 1830.[17] Ministers who pursued a college education were few in the South. Paul Harvey states that in the 1880s in Tennessee only "about forty of the six hundred Baptist ministers . . . received anything beyond a few years of schooling."[18] Carver embarked on new territory for his family and his vocation. The decision to attend Richmond College was a momentous one because the city of Richmond stood in many ways on the outer edge of the South. Virginia was the most

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[15] W. J. McGlothlin, "Rev. William Owen Carver, M.A., Th.D.," *The Seminary Magazine* 12 (November 1898): 57.

[16] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 14.

[17] For a history of Richmond College, now the University of Richmond, see Reuben E. Alley, *History of the University of Richmond, 1830-1971* (Charlottesville, 1977).

[18] Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 143.

urban of the southern states, enjoyed the highest per capita wealth in the region in 1880, and later would lead the South in the value of its manufactured goods. Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy, was a bustling city that boasted the first electric streetcar system in the nation in 1887.[19] The city did not forget its Confederate roots, but became, in the words of one historian, "the eternal city of Southern dreams."[20] The city was the gathering place for the first reunion of Confederate veterans in 1875 and boasted the erection of the first statue of Stonewall Jackson that same year.[21]

For rural southerners, the city was a foreign place. "Millions of men, women, and children were born, lived, and died without every being exposed to the influence of growing urbanization," Gilbert Fite points out in his study of southern agriculture.[22] At the turn of the century, for example, eighty-two percent of all southerners resided in rural areas, a fact that would only change dramatically with the onslaught of industrialization caused by World War II. The ways in which an urban environment would challenge a rural teenager from Tennessee are numerous, but for Carver the most important change was the religious environment. The Baptist faith he found in Richmond was quite different from the faith of his youth.

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[19] Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 186. See also Samuel Claude Shepherd, *Avenues of Faith: Shaping the Urban Religious Culture of Richmond, Virginia, 1900-1929* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

[20] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 18.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1984), 30.

Baptists in Tennessee during the second half of the nineteenth century were shaped immeasurably by Rev. James R. Graves (1820-1893), editor of *The Baptist & Reflector* at the time of Carver's enrollment in Richmond College. A Vermont native born into a Congregational family, Graves became a Baptist at the age of 15, was ordained a Baptist minister in 1842 and moved to Nashville in 1845. He began his prolific career as editor of the *Tennessee Baptist* in 1848 and used the newspaper to popularize the divisive doctrinal theory of Landmarkism. Proponents of Landmarkism believed that Baptist churches could be traced back to the era of the New Testament and that this unbroken succession of true churches was the only valid Christian institution in existence. Organizations other than local congregations, they argued, were a liability to true Christian faith, so they placed exclusive emphasis on the value of individual congregations. Baptisms administered by other pseudo-denominations, furthermore, could not be recognized as valid and were deemed "alien immersions." As a newspaperman with staunch religious views, Graves was highly successful. In 1859, the *Tennessee Baptist* boasted a circulation of 13,000 and was the most widely circulated denominational newspaper in the Southwest.[23]

Calling Graves the "high priest of my orthodoxy" before attending college, Carver noted in his memoirs that Graves authored the first doctrinal book he ever read and that the *Tennessee Baptist* was the only religious weekly periodical that came into his family's home.[24] For his first sermons, Carver simply read from the pulpit one of the

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[23] Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 88-91; for an overview of religion in Tennessee, see David E. Harrell, Jr., "Tennessee," in *Religion in the Southern States: A Historical Study*, ed. Samuel S. Hill, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 289-312.

many sermons by Graves published in the newspaper.[25] Virginia offered a different religious context. Graves claimed in 1880 that Virginia's *Religious Herald* was the only Baptist paper in the South that rejected Landmarkism.[26] The rejection of Landmarkism was just one difference between the two papers and Baptist cultures.

A sample comparison of the content of the Tennessee and Virginia Baptist newspapers helps reveal the religious ethos of both states. In March 1888, Virginia's *Religious Herald* keynoted articles and sermons on Christ's resurrection, the "duties and responsibilities of young laymen," a sermon from a Baptist pastor in New York, and several articles dealing with the role of women in church life. Illustrations gleaned from discoveries at the British Museum and phrases such as "if autumn, clothed in her transfiguration robes, dies into winter shrouded with its snows" graced the pages of the *Religious Herald*.[27] The Tennessee Baptist newspaper, *The Baptist & Reflector*, reflected a slightly different understanding of Christianity. Sermons on "Justification by Faith," "Adoption," and "The Commandments of the Lord" filled the front pages for March 1888. The Tennessee paper, known for its editorial warfare, was less formal in tone, more doctrinal in content, and contained more debates over correct beliefs than did the Virginia paper. Where rural Tennessee Baptists characterized faith in terms of orthodoxy

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[24] See also W. O. Carver to T. A. Patterson, September 24, 1940, Box 10, Folder 4, Carver Papers.

[25] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 25, 37.

[26] Albert W. Wardin Jr., *Tennessee Baptists: A Comprehensive History, 1779-1999* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1999), 250. See also Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 89. The charge is not correct. Several state papers opposed Landmarkism

[27] *Religious Herald,* 1 March 1888.

and proper belief, Baptists in Richmond employed terms such as "respectability" and progress and rejected theological views that impinged on these principles. W. O. Carver was baptized into Virginia's urban religious climate soon after enrolling in Richmond College.

With the goal of becoming a minister, Carver entered college in the early stages of ministerial professionalization. "From the 1890s to the 1920s," Paul Harvey states, "when a new generation of ministers reached adulthood, denominational modernizers spread the gospel of pastoring as a vocation rather than calling."[28] In the 1880s, Baptists who favored ministry as a profession increasingly saw ministers as intellectual leaders. Burton J. Bledstein describes the mid-Victorian era professional as "a self-governing individual exercising his trained judgment in an open society."[29] Professional culture must be transferred through teaching, and the teacher who influenced Carver the most at Richmond College was Professor Herbert H. Harris.

After forty long hours of travel, W. O. Carver arrived unexpected at the gates of Richmond College early one Sunday morning in the fall of 1886. He feverishly rang the bell at the college entrance in order to wake a sleeping servant, only to be pleasantly interrupted by a distinguished middle-age man sporting a top hat and cane. Prof. H. H. Harris invited the young student to the Sunday School class he taught and began a

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[28] Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, 138.

[29] Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 87.

career-shaping relationship with Carver.[30] Having graduated from Richmond College in 1856 and the University of Virginia in 1860, Harris enrolled as a student in January, 1862 at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary but was interrupted a month later by his second enlistment in the Confederate army.[31] The second tour led him all the way to Appomattox, reporting directly to General Robert E. Lee. He later recalled to students that when the message of surrender came, he simply "turned over with his face downward, and buried his face in his hands and wept."[32] Harris' war credentials easily garnered respect from students, many of whom, like Carver, were sons of former soldiers.

After the war, Harris joined other alumni in urging the Baptist General Association to reopen Richmond College despite damage resulting from the war and occupation of federal troops. In 1866, the Board of Trustees agreed to reopen the school under the direction of three faculty members, Crawford Toy, H. H. Harris, and Bennet Puryear. The trustees invited Harris to teach Greek and German, and he chaired the department of Greek from 1866 to 1895. He taught other courses from time to time as needed, including Moral Philosophy, his specialty outside the field of languages. Students affectionately called him Socrates, or "Old Soc," because he modeled the ancient sage's breadth of knowledge and pedagogical style.[33]

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[30] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 26; W. O. Carver, "As a Teacher" (Tribute to H. H. Harris), *The Seminary Magazine* (March 1897): 280.

[31] Woodford B. Hackley, *Faces on the Wall: Brief Sketches of the Men and Women whose Portraits and Busts were on the Campus of the University of Richmond in 1955* (Richmond: Virginia Baptist Historical Society, 1955), 42.

[32] W. O. Carver, "Memorial to H. Herbert Harris," no date, Box 1, Folder 23, Carver Papers.

[33] Hackley, *Faces on the Wall*, 43; Alley, *History of the University of Richmond*, 47-48.

Harris became Carver's college mentor, the only professor about whom Carver reflected in detail following his years in Richmond. Carver was intrigued by Harris' ability to grasp several fields of study. "He preferred scientific study, and could he have chosen, would have taught physics, or, next to that, pure mathematics, or philosophy," he recalled after Harris' death, pointing out that Harris had little choice in the courses he taught. "So it was that he taught us Greek, that was his business; but he taught us everything, that was his necessity." Carver attributed his own love of learning to Harris: "One of the most valuable lessons that at least one student got from him was a great desire for general information and longing to know something—and something of importance—about every branch of knowledge."[34]

Harris influenced Carver as much or more on Sunday as on the other days of the week. Beginning with his first introduction to Harris, Carver enjoyed and benefited from the Sunday Bible study lessons presented at Grace Street Baptist Church in Richmond. "I learned to love my Bible in the chamber of my mother. I learned to study it at the feet of Dr. Harris," he recalled.[35] Sunday after Sunday Carver would gather with others to hear the professor expound on Scripture and impress their young minds with his mastery of the original languages. From time to time he would offer Bible classes at the college with no credit given to the students and no compensation paid to the teacher. Harris was the perfect professorial match for a devout, young farm boy from Tennessee, and Richmond College allowed the intellectual exchange to flow freely.

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[34] Carver, "As a Teacher," 282-283.

[35] Ibid., 282.

Seeking to integrate himself fully into student culture, Carver served as editor and then business manager of the combined student newspaper and literary magazine, the *Richmond College Messenger*. These positions joined well his leadership role as the president of the Mu Sigma Rho literary society. He contributed two notable pieces to the student magazine, "America's Influence on the World," and "Woman in Ancient Myth and Legend."[36] The latter article, actually a speech manuscript, garnered lavish praise from his peers and foretold the uncommon attention Carver would give women for the rest of his career. "He showed that to each hero there was a heroine, and that every great deed, every grand achievement, every battle, and every victory was done, accomplished, fought, and won by the encouragement of women," the editorialist wrote in the *Messenger*.[37] The student magazine allowed ambitious students the opportunity to display their literary skills and encouraged their mastery of the written word.

Carver graduated from the school of Greek at Richmond College in 1890 and again in 1891 with a Master of Arts degree. The decision to attend the prestigious school of his denomination was a fortuitous one, he recalled much later. "I needed the change of environment and outlook," he noted, because "change of environment enables us to transcend our provincialisms."[38] The high priest of his orthodoxy, J. R. Graves, was intellectually defrocked by his experience at Richmond. The cosmopolitan atmosphere of the grand southern city, along with the instruction and enlightenment of H. H. Harris,

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[36] W. O. Carver, "America's Influence on the World," 13 (November 1887): 2-6; "W. O. Carver, "Woman in Ancient Myth and Legend," 17 (June 1891): 15-20.

[37] "Oratorical Contest," *Richmond College Messenger*, 17 (May 1891): 30-31.

[38] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 25.

encouraged Carver to replace intellectual isolation with curiosity and exploration. He would take this outlook to another state and educational institution, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

The Southern Baptist Convention began its seminary in Greenville, South Carolina in 1859, fourteen years after the founding of the SBC. When organized Baptists split in 1845 over the issue of slavery and denominational control, Northern Baptists took with them ministerial training centers such as Rochester Theological Seminary in New York state and New Theological Institution near Boston. Even before the founding of the SBC, some Baptist leaders in the South rallied for a central educational institution for ministers, but they enjoyed little success. Landmark Baptist leaders like J. R. Graves opposed the creation of such an institution, fearing that a seminary might overpower the authority of local churches. Baptists in South Carolina, however, under the leadership of James P. Boyce of Furman University, led the way in 1856 by offering the theological education funds used at Furman for the creation of a seminary in Greenville. Classes began at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall of 1859 with four professors and twenty-six students.[39]

As chairman of the faculty and founder of the seminary, James Boyce had the dubious distinction of leading the new institution through its first significant crisis, the Civil War. Although he was proslavery, Boyce believed that secession from the Union would cause more harm than good. He ran for the South Carolina legislature in opposition to secession but was overwhelmingly defeated by a candidate of the opposite

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[39] William A. Mueller, *A History of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), 15.

persuasion. Secession fervor in South Carolina could not be contained and easily found its way into denominational politics. When the Southern Baptist Convention met in Savannah, Georgia in 1861 and messengers passed resolutions in favor of the Confederacy, Boyce opposed the action and claimed that religious organizations should not meddle in politics. Religious leaders, however, had every right to serve as public servants, and Boyce eventually served in the South Carolina legislature during the war.[40]

The war came and took with it Boyce's dream of a seminary in Greenville. Only seven students enrolled in the fall of 1865. Broadus taught homiletics to only one student, and he was blind. The chaos and destruction of war, along with the fact that the school had not yet invested significant funds in buildings, allowed its founders, trustees, and supporters the opportunity to relocate the fledgling seminary to a more central geographical location and act as an olive branch toward the denomination's more conservative Landmark constituency. Several cities competed for the distinction of being the seminary's home, but the trustees chose Louisville, Kentucky for its size, together with the fact that several wealthy men had come under Boyce's influence. Classes began in the new location in 1877 with eighty-nine students enrolled.[41]

W. O. Carver enrolled at the seminary in the fall of 1891, and he fit well the stereotype of a neophyte minister. He was committed to Christian ministry, eager to compare his personal beliefs to those of students and professors, and poor. Graduation from Richmond College provided him with a diploma and three-hundred-dollars worth of

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[40] Ibid., 33-37. See also, W. O. Carver, "The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the Growing of the Denomination," *The Review and Expositor* 43 (April 1946): 131-149.

[41] Ibid., 39, 45.

debt. He preached at various places in the summer of 1891 and looked forward to taking a position as an assistant to a prominent pastor, J. P. Gillian, in Wilson county. Gillian saw promise in the young preacher and proposed the idea of accepting pastoral responsibility for twice as many churches as he could serve, with the understanding that the minister-in-training would serve as an associate in his absence. With that course in mind, Carver attended the Tennessee Baptist Convention meeting, but when talk turned toward fundraising for students to attend the seminary, he found himself in the right place at the right time. During the discussion, Carver rose to speak on behalf of all students who could not afford to attend the Louisville school, and in turn became the group's first recipient of charitable funds for education. With only seconds to consider whether he would attend the session that had commenced two weeks prior, Carver accepted the invitation and made plans to arrive in Louisville as soon as possible.[42]

During that semester, Carver formally committed himself to ministry by receiving ordination on Christmas Day, 1891 from the Baptist Church in New Hope, Tennessee, his family's home church and the church where he served as pastor briefly while in seminary. The church gladly ordained him to the ministry. "Bro. Carver, though young, is already an able preacher, sound in doctrine, and very pious—a Baptist, 'through and through,'" declared the church's secretary in the Baptist state paper.[43]

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[42] W. O. Carver, "Recollections and Information from other Sources Concerning the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary," (Louisville: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Library, 1954), 5 (unpublished manuscript).

[43] *Baptist and Reflector,* 21 January 1892*;* see also "1891 Correspondence," Box 4, Folder 3, Carver Papers.

When Carver enrolled in 1891 the seminary was well on its way to becoming the largest theological institution in the United States. Carver quickly understood that the seminary faculty held high expectations for students. James Boyce had died in 1888, and John Broadus took his place as president of the school. Trained at the University of Virginia, Broadus was an original faculty member of the seminary, popular personality in the denomination, and perhaps the best known Southern Baptist outside the South.[44] Basil Many, Jr., also an original faculty member, taught Old Testament the year of Carver's enrollment. Professor John R. Sampey, known by students by the unflattering biblical title of Assyrian King Tiglath-Pileser, taught Old Testament and Hebrew and served as the institution's librarian. William H. Whitsitt, a Nashville native and graduate of both Union University in Jackson, Tennessee and SBTS, was the only faculty member who received formal theological training in Germany. Whitsitt taught Polemic Theology and Church history, and he sought to incorporate the study of non-Baptist denominations as well as world religions in his courses.[45] F. H. Kerfoot taught theology; Charles Dargan taught homiletics; A. T. Robertson taught New Testament.

Before long, Carver distinguished himself as an impressive student with uncommon academic ability. In Old Testament Hebrew—the most dreaded course for students—he performed exceptionally well. On one exercise, the professor, James R. Sampey, simply marked his paper with "very good" in Hebrew, while on another he joked about his messy inclusion of Hebrew vowels: "This exercise seems to have been so easy that the writer fell asleep," he said. Carver established himself early on as a

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[44] Mueller, *History,* 63;

[45] Carver, "Recollections," 18.

student with fresh ideas and interpretations of scripture. On an assignment interpreting a section of Isaiah, Sampey wrote, "As to certain details, I am inclined to take issue with the views expressed in this paper, but judged as a whole it seems to me one of the best exercises I have ever received."[46] He gained a reputation as the only student ever to receive a perfect score on one of Sampey's exams.[47] He soon proved that he could deal intelligently with all theological subjects, though some of his philosophical formulations did not sit well with his peers and professors. While working on the theory of Christ's atonement, he wrote in his diary that he had "arrived at a theory that seems to me better than anything I have ever seen to be in harmony with all the facts." To the response of the professor who said that his theory was plausible but had no scripture to warrant its claims, Carver simply said, "I think he is mistaken."[48]

Although Carver challenged some theses presented to him in classes, overall he remained cautious concerning new currents of theology. He sought awareness of theological trends and read widely in all sources, but his student writings suggest he followed the example of his professors by remaining within the bounds of orthodoxy expressed by his southern brethren. Arguing the necessity of preachers learning the Bible's original languages, he wrote, "going beyond the English into the Hebrew is getting a long way nearer the source of inspiration."[49] In another article, he reacted to one contemporary belief that the Christian Bible was simply an outgrowth of Buddhist

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[46] "Class Notes—Hebrew Exercises," Box 11, Folder 3, Carver Papers.

[47] Diary entry for January 5, 1892, Box 11, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

[48] Diary entries for March 9, March 24, 1892, Box 11, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

[49] W. O. Carver, "Homiletical Department," *Seminary Magazine* 6 (January 1893): 235.

sacred texts. "Our Bible," he wrote, "is soon found to have no real rival in lofty conceptions, unity of plan, breadth of purpose and proof of genuineness." Speaking out against "a growing 'liberalism' which wants to admit all claimants to inspiration on the same basis," he suggested that true reason always rests on the side of Christianity's theory of revelation.[50]

Just as his core theological beliefs remained the same, the orientation toward Victorian respectability learned in Richmond did not leave Carver in his new Louisville environment. He began to differentiate those who lived lives of respectability from those who did not. Referring to a family who had relatives in his church, Carver described them as "good but ordinary people."[51] His first hayride was ruined by the improper behavior of the participants, whom he was promised would be a "small select crowd." "The crowd was not small," he recorded, "and if judged by the amount of hugging and hallooing, mixing and mingling that was carried on it was not at all select."[52] He perceptively noticed those who did attain levels of respectability. Following an after-supper discussion of Macbeth and Bible subjects with a new friend, William J. McGlothlin, Carver declared McGlothlin "one of the most cultured and brilliant men in the seminary."[53] Judging from the number of diary entries that record meetings of the campus Shakespeare Club, Carver and some of his seminary friends spent nearly as much

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[50] W. O. Carver, "Some Thoughts on Inspiration," *Seminary Magazine* 7 (Jan 1894): 228-233.

[51] Diary entry for January 2, 1892, Box 11, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

[52] Diary entry for June 9, 1892, Box 11, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

[53] Diary entry for February 20, 1892, Box 11, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

time reading and discussing Hamlet, Julius Caesar, King Lear, and other plays as they did on seminary courses.

W. O. Carver's penchant for respectability, however, did not squelch his evangelicalism. He spent time preaching to school-aged girls, hoping "the truth may help these wild girls," and visited the city jail to "tell the simple story of Jesus' love" to the men there.[54] Carver frequently spoke to churches about missionary work and, on one occasion, "got them all to crying" for the heathen in foreign lands.[55] Making the evangelical message public, he even preached from the seminary's "Gospel Wagon" frequently parked on a street corner.[56] Concerned with the care of orphans, Carver visited the local Orphan's Home and was pleased with the care the fifty-nine children received there.[57] The young seminary student took his evangelical ministry seriously and often recorded in his diary the number of conversions that took place under his supervision.[58]

Unfortunately, economic difficulties interrupted Carver's seminary career in 1893. He became one of a nation of victims of the economic crisis that developed during that year. The depression that set upon the United States was the worst in the nation's history up to that time and has only been surpassed by the Great Depression of the

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[54] Diary entries for January 10, April 10, 1892, Box 11, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

[55] Diary entry for March 4, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[56] Diary entry for August 20, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[57] Diary entry for May 8, 1892, Box 11, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

[58] For an example, see diary entry for September 30, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

twentieth century. The South and West experienced the brunt of the crisis. Of the 158 national banks that closed their doors, 153 served those regions.[59] Cottton's price of 8.4 cents per pound in 1892 was nearly cut in half just two years later. The entire decade of the 1890s was a difficult one for the South, affecting the region's economic, political, and social conditions. Carver set out in the summer of 1893 to raise money for the seminary's endowment, but local pastors soon advised him that his efforts were useless.[60] Not long after, he realized his own economic status was in danger, and he began looking for a full-time job.

In August, Carver accepted a teaching position at Boscobel College in Nashville. Founded in 1889 as the Nashville Baptist Female College, Boscobel was one of several female colleges operated by Tennessee Baptists.[61] The dean of the school included in his salary the cost of tuition and board for Carver's younger sister Ann.[62] Not long after taking the position, some professors at the seminary offered to loan him enough funds to return to school.[63] Carver unsuccessfully tried to find someone to replace him as professor because he did not want to leave the school in mid-term. Quite chagrined that he was not at the seminary on its opening day, he decided to make the best of the

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[59] William J. Cooper Jr. and Thomas E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1996), 488.

[60] Diary entries for July 12, 17, 19, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[61] Wardin, *Tennessee Baptists*, 251.

[62] Diary entry for August 21, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[63] Diary entry for September 29, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

situation. "I think that while it protracts my preparation it will be decided benefit to me," he surmised.[64]

The time spent at Boscobel was indeed beneficial to Carver. He taught Philosophy, Latin, Greek, German and Psychology at the college, served bi-monthly as pastor of a church, and preached one Sunday a month at the Confederate Soldiers' Home. He found teaching a welcome challenge. Reflecting on the end of his second semester, he remarked, "Taking charge of a class of young ladies is no easy matter for a young man."[65] He learned that his methods of teaching differed from what the students previously had received. Despite the opinions of a few unsatisfied students, he thought his first year a successful one and considered whether teaching might be his life's vocation.

In addition to a busy teaching schedule, Carver informally continued his seminary studies and achieved recognition for his work. He continued to read the Bible in Hebrew and Greek and prepared the paper entitled "Some Thoughts on Inspiration," for the seminary's student magazine. The University of Chicago's theological journal, *The Biblical World*, listed the article as a noteworthy contribution to scholarly literature in its March 1894 issue. Only one other article from *The Seminary Magazine* that year received this recognition.[66] In the fall of 1893, he traveled to Chicago for the World's Fair after "months of thought, talk, and dreaming" of the magnificent gathering. No evidence exists that he attended the World's Parliament of Religions, but while in

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[64] Diary entry for October 16, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[65] Diary entry for June 6, 1894, Box 11, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

[66] *The Biblical World,* March 1894.

Chicago he heard the famous evangelist D. L. Moody preach twice and was disappointed by his messages. At the University of Chicago, the grand Baptist school of the North, he was surprised to see so many female students.[67]

After several months of contemplation and offers of assistance from faculty members, along with the realization that Boscobel College was in dire straits financially, Carver returned to school in January 1895. In his final diary entry for 1894, he wrote the words he had longed to write since the summer of 1893: "I am now here as a student again."[68] He graduated that semester with the Master of Theology degree, one of thirteen recipients. As customary, each full graduate delivered an address and Carver spoke on "Some Observations on Organization."[69] Just a few days after receiving his diploma, the president of Richmond College, Frederick W. Boatwright, sent him a letter offering a teaching position in the college. "I wish you were going to teach instead of preach!" he said. "No man who has gone out from the college has a warmer place in our hearts."[70] He considered the letter for a while, but declined the informal offer, taking instead an offer from the faculty of the seminary to become tutor in New Testament for the next academic year. Although the position did not pay much, only $150, Carver relished the idea of staying at the seminary to work on a doctorate in theology.

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[67] Diary Entries for October 20 and 26, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[68] Diary entry for December 31, 1894, Box 11, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

[69] *Catalogue of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1895-1896* (Louisville: The Seminary Press, 1896), 23.

[70] Diary entry for June 4, 1895, Box 11, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

One other reason compelled him to stay near Louisville—Alice Hughes Shepard. "I called on Miss Shepard a little while yesterday and have an engagement to drive with her this afternoon. Thereby may hang a tale," he wrote in his diary. Indeed it was a tale, "a tale of love and joy. I told Alice of my love for her and she gave herself to me."[71] Evidently nervous about his proposal of marriage, he believed he "made a miserable out of telling her." Alice hesitated in her response, fearing she would not be a suitable companion for Carver. Over the next several months, the two discussed their relationship frequently, making certain they were well fit for marriage. They would share vows at the altar on December 29, 1897. Significant events occurred in Carver's life during the time of their engagement.

By January 1896, Carver had chosen his dissertation topic, "Gentile Opinion of the Jews in the First Century," a topic that he believed had not received much scholarly attention. While working on the dissertation and tutoring students in New Testament, he continued serving as a pastor, spoke often to various congregations and religious groups, and received many job offers from colleges and churches. The most interesting invitation came from Los Angeles, California, geographically a foreign field. Carver immediately replied that he could not move at that time, but did discuss the offer with a professor who quickly gave him several reasons why it was a bad idea. "He is rather against it," he wrote, "but every reason he urges against going is really a strong reason for going as it seems to me. He makes it out a hard field. But are we not to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ?"[72] Concerned that he would not base a decision on fear or

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[71] Diary entry for June 6, 1895, Box 11, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

selfish reluctance, Carver turned down the offer and continued work on his dissertation. Throughout these crucial years, the idea of vocation weighed heavily on his mind.

In his discussion of the culture of professionalism in American society, Burton Bledstein shows how mid-nineteenth-century middle-class professionals became obsessed with purpose in vocation. "The ideal young man," he says, "exhibited self-commitment, preparation, and endurance—all unified by a knowledgeable conception of his purpose."[73] Carver fits this model of the culture of professionalism well, especially for someone of limited financial means. All through his seminary career, he struggled to discover his purpose in life and often lamented that he had not accomplished as much as he had hoped. On his twenty-seventh birthday he somberly reflected in his diary on how quickly life was fading away. "I am still in swaddling bound only beginning to walk. How soon my life shall have been spent. And how little I shall accomplish!" he wrote.[74] One year later his feeling had not changed. "I am beginning to feel that my life is slipping away from me and that in it I am doing almost nothing," he wrote in despair. Carver struggled to determine the type of vocation he should pursue. "I want to go to the place to which God has appointed me," he declared, "but about this I am all at sea."[75]

The choice of three specific vocations—pastor, teacher, and missionary—weighed heavily on his mind. Carver came of age during the early years of what historians call the

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[72] Diary entry for January 23, 1896, Box 11, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[73] Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism*, 266.

[74] Diary entry for April 10, 1895, Box 11, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

[75] Diary entry for April 10, 1896, Box 11, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

"heyday of modern missions," 1880-1930.[76] He clearly sensed he would be a part of the growing wave of young missionaries sent to foreign lands. After attending a missionary prayer meeting in 1893, he was "threatened with nervous prostration" about what he considered a divine call to serve as a missionary.[77] "I wish so much that my way was clear to go to some foreign field," he wrote a week later, "But I do not know whether I may ever go."[78] Many of his friends knew of his desire to be a missionary and encouraged him to pursue the vocation. "I have never told you what I would love to see you be and do. But I shall tell you now," William J. McGlothlin wrote in 1894. "For a long time I have prayed that God would send you into China," he said.[79] In a lengthy diary entry the same year, Carver continued to struggle with whether he should pursue the mission field. He wrote that as a boy he felt he would live out his days overseas but did not know for certain if that was the best course. "If G[od] shall open the way and let me have some assurance of his will I shall be glad to labor in foreign fields," he promised.[80]

At the same time he dreamed of taking Christianity to the heathen, Carver relished the thought of being either a preacher or teacher on domestic soil. After a request in 1894 to consider a call as pastor of a church, Carver debated with himself whether God was

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[76] William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1.

[77] Diary entry for January 26, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[78] Diary entry for February 1, 1893, Box 11, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[79] William J. McGlotlin to W. O. Carver, May 6, 1894, Box 4, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[80] Diary entry for July 4, 1894, Box 11, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

trying to tell him that he ought to live his life as a pastor. He ended that debate favoring the pastorate over the lectern.[81] Teaching won its share of diary duels, but with one stipulation. After several friends commented to him that the classroom should be his office, Carver wrote, "I shall never consent to be a teacher unless it should sometime seem that God point the way for me to teach theology."[82] This dream came true in the spring of 1896.

On April 21 Carver, due to receive his doctorate at the end of that term, recorded that the faculty unanimously elected him an assistant instructor. The dream was nearly lost two days earlier when one professor voted against his election for fear that having two professors from Tennessee would upset the seminary's constituency. Some students soon opposed Carver's election because they thought he was too young to assume the role. Carver shared their fear. "But, oh, to undertake to teach in such a school and such subjects—God and his word," he wrote in his diary. "If I am called to instruct bishops—Oh how difficult—how weighty."[83] By the beginning of his first term as professor, both Carver and the seminary students had gotten used to the idea. "In spite of Bro. Carver's appointment . . . he still remains 'one of the boys' in his genial bearing to the students. We predict for Bro. Carver a bright future," wrote the editor of the student newspaper.[84]

As Assistant Instructor in New Testament Interpretation and Homiletics, Carver taught several classes his first academic year. Like any first-year faculty member, he

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[81] Diary entry for February 20, 1894, Box 11, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

[82] Diary entry for January 12, 1894, Box 11, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

[83] Diary entries for April 19, 21, May 10, 1896.

[84] *The Seminary Magazine*, October 1896.

struggled to find his niche within his circle of colleagues and build a good rapport with students. Just as he began to settle into his work, things rapidly changed due to the death of faculty member H. H. Harris. Harris had left Richmond College in 1895 to take a position at the seminary, and Carver was more than pleased to be on faculty with his first academic mentor. The first endowed lecture series began that year with Harris delivering three lectures on the topic of Christian Missions. He subsequently introduced the study of Missions into the seminary curriculum by offering regular and graduate classes in the field. According to Carver's recollection, Harris was the first to invite speakers outside the seminary for the monthly Missionary Day.[85] Rather than hire a faculty replacement, each professor took a share of Harris's teaching load. The school's trustees decided that Carver would permanently take the History and Missions course. For the 1898-1899 academic year Carver taught "History of Modern Missions" along with his other courses.

During that year the faculty suffered yet another break-up, this time due to the forced resignation of seminary president William H. Whitsitt. Whitsitt, a graduate of SBTS when it was located in Greenville, began his teaching tenure at the seminary in 1872 and became president in 1895. Though Carver did not consider Whitsitt's teaching ability to be superb, he and other students affectionately referred to the professor as "Uncle Billy." Carver appreciated the professor's respect for the less refined among them. "Brethren," Carver recalled him saying, "The Lord is always going to look after the plain people. The Episcopalians were eminently respectable; and the Lord raised up the Methodists and the Baptists to look after the common people. And now, Brethren, the Methodists and Baptists are getting to be eminently respectable: look out for the

[85] Carver, "H. Herbert Harris," 15-16.

Salvation Army."[86] At the end of the nineteenth century Whitsitt was caught in a crossfire between the canons of historical research and intellectual integrity on one side and the common, received tradition of Southern Baptists on the other.

One of Whitsitt's scholarly interests was the history of Baptists, and in 1879, he wrote to his fiancée that he would have to travel overseas to collect the materials necessary to undertake the project "in a scientific spirit." For many Baptists, particularly those who held the treasured Landmark beliefs, the historical question of the origins of Baptists was an unnecessary one: Baptists had been around since Christianity's beginning. Whitsitt acknowledged the dangers of researching sacred history but believed that reason would win out. "What if I should pass athwart the settled convictions and arouse the prejudices of my people? There is no great danger of that: for they love the truth and the majority of them will listen with respect to one who likewise loves it and displays the simple facts . . . People are amenable to reason, and nobody wants to believe what is erroneous," he wrote.[87] After two months of research in the British Museum and Oxford and Cambridge University libraries, he felt confident that he knew the beginnings of Baptist history.

Whitsitt discovered that seventeenth-century British Baptists, as English refugees in Holland under the leadership of John Smyth, were not at first immersionists but sprinkled new believers during the baptismal rite. He claimed that British Baptists

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[86] Carver, "Recollections," 18.

[87] W. O. Carver, "William Heth Whitsitt: The Seminary's Martyr," *The Review and Expositor* (get info): 456-457.

"invented immersion" in 1641.[88] Whitsitt published his findings anonymously in the New York *Independent* in 1880 and reported the same in his opening address to the seminary the same year. By then he experienced a change of mind concerning the denomination's reaction to his findings. In 1890, he wrote in his diary, "I am casting about to begin writing a work on American Baptist History. . . . Baptist History is a department in which 'the wise man concealeth knowledge.' It is likely I shall not be able to publish the work while I live . . . [but] after my death, when I shall be out of reach of bigots and fools."[89] He did refrain from writing a comprehensive book, but in 1893 he published an article on the subject in *Johnson's Universal Cyclopedia* and included a statement that Rogers Williams, the founder of the first Baptist church in North America, was probably sprinkled and not immersed. That assertion, along with the use of the word "invented" to describe the introduction of immersion by English Baptists, angered his opponents who quickly deemed him a traitor to the faith.

Opponents sparred in the state denominational newspapers over the professor's claims for more than three years. Whitsitt's main opponent, T. T. Eaton, pastor of the Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville and editor of the Kentucky state paper, the *Western Recorder*, wrote constantly. Widely known as a proponent of conservative orthodoxy, Eaton added a masthead to the weekly newspaper that read, "Contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints."[90] Eaton and others asked for the professor's voluntary resignation. Whitsitt eventually responded to opponents by

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[88] Ibid., 465.

[89] Ibid., 459.

[90] Ibid., 463.

writing a book entitled *A Question in Baptist History*. The day after its publication, Carver wrote in his diary that he had read half of it and "it seems to me to be conclusive."[91] Eaton reached another conclusion and spent at least six issues of the *Western Recorder* dissecting its parts.

As the controversy dragged on, so did the charges against the professor and some pastors led churches that threatened to withdraw support from the seminary. The following church resolution adopted unanimously serves as example:

> Whereas W. H. Whitsitt, D.D., President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary of Louisville, KY pretends to say that he has made a new and great discovery, which we consider to be greatly detrimental, and highly prejudicial to the Baptist Churches of the world. And Whereas; he clandestinely carried to our enemies said discovery and has given into their hands for publication against his brethren without consulting them or any of the great minds of our denomination . . . Therefore: Resolved: That we charge him with bringing shame, humiliation, and disgrace upon our denomination, and if the published statements in refutation of his discovery are true, then he is certainly a great traitor to a great cause . . . if he fails to set himself right in this matter, that we pray the Trustees of said Seminary to remove him . . . and if they fail to do this . . . we will withhold our influence, patronage, and aid . . . until he is removed and his place filled with a genuine Baptist.[92]

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[91] Diary entry for September 18, 1896

[92] Resolution found in T. T. Eaton Papers, Reel 8, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited as Eaton Papers).

For many Whitsitt supporters, the central issue of the controversy was academic freedom. At the Long Run Association meeting of churches in Louisville in the fall of 1896, John R. Sampey defended his colleague and spoke about the freedom necessary for academic research.[93] In 1899, Richmond College professor S. C. Mitchell wrote one of T. T. Eaton's colleagues arguing that the acceptance of Whitsitt's resignation would be an "irreparable calamity" and that "intellectual liberty is to the Seminary what virtue is to a woman."[94] In reply to Mitchell, Eaton argued that "freedom of speech and research" was not the issue. Eaton understood the controversy in terms of Whitsitt's character and "lack of loyalty to the denomination."[95] The two sides would obviously never be able to agree. In the end, Whitsitt gave in to the opposition, authored his resignation letter in July 1898 and submitted it the trustees at their meeting in May 1899.[96] After resigning from the seminary, Whitsitt joined the faculty of Richmond College as a professor in the School of Philosophy. Shortly thereafter, evidently to alleviate the concerns of the school's patrons, the Richmond College Board of Trustees passed a resolution promising that all Bible teachers must fully accept the Bible as the infallible word of God.[97] Whitsitt taught there for eight years and upon his death was buried in the famous Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond.

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[93] Mueller, *History*, 161.

[94] S.C. Mitchell to W. H. Felix, January 19, 1899, Eaton Papers, Reel 8.

[95] T. T. Eaton to S. C. Mitchell, January 21, 1899, Eaton Papers, Reel 8.

[96] For a full account of the controversy, see Mueller, *History*, 155-178.

[97] Alley, *History of the University of Richmond*, 107.

W. O. Carver supported his former professor, though certainly not as vocally as the senior members of the faculty. Carver joined six other professors and signed an open letter from the faculty to Southern Baptists. The letter assured friends of the seminary that they too cared about orthodoxy and understood their "responsibility to the constituency." They argued that Whitsitt had been misunderstood and appealed for an end to "acrimonious discussion" that hindered their teaching duties.[98] In his personal correspondence, Carver was not quite so bold. To a pastor who demanded to know whether Carver was a supporter of the alleged heretic, he replied, "I can think of no good that could come by my answering [your questions] whatever my answers might be."[99] In 1896, when Carver attended a gathering of Baptists in Tennessee and was called upon to speak on behalf of the seminary, he spoke "briefly and without reference to the Whitsitt matter."[100]

Carver's response to opponents in the Whitsitt controversy reflects his guarded approach to doctrinal disputes as well as his position as a young faculty member struggling to begin a career. The strong voices of seasoned colleagues like John R. Sampey allowed Carver to echo their opinions from the sidelines.[101] The Whitsitt

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[98] Mueller, *History*, 163-164.

[99] W. O. Carver to T. C. Mahan, July 23, 1898, Box 4, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

[100] Diary entry for July 17, 1896.

[101] Carver did record in his diary the following note on July 31, 1896: "I have written an article on the Whitsitt Controversy and shall send it to the [Tennesse Baptist and Reflector] to be published, if at all, under a pseudonym. I am a little doubtful of the propriety of this step but have felt inspired to do it. [Editor] Folk may not publish it. If not all right." A diary entry for August 22 reads: "Folk published my article and I hope it

controversy became the classroom in which denominational opponents taught Carver the rules of engagement as well as the consequences of defeat. Later in life, Carver deemed Whitsitt the seminary's first martyr. "In his defeat," he wrote to Whitsitt's daughter in 1953, "he was actually gaining his greatest victory. . . . [he was a] martyr to the principle of truth in history and to freedom to teach the truth."[102] The controversy made a lasting impression.

The appointment of a new seminary president was crucial for settling the storm that raged for the last three years of the nineteenth century. The trustees chose Edgar Young Mullins to succeed Whitsitt as the fourth president of the seminary. Born in Mississippi and educated at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas and SBTS, E. Y. Mullins served as pastor of Newton Centre Baptist Church in Boston, Massachusetts during the years of the Whitsitt controversy. Affiliation with a northern Baptist church ordinarily created suspicion among Southern Baptists, but in Mullins case the geographical distance became his ticket to success; the trustees strategically chose a presidential successor who had been outside the mainstream denominational circle during the fight.

With Whitsitt gone, F. H. Kerfoot resigned, and Mullins aboard, the faculty reevaluated its teaching responsibilities and developed a plan that had positive, career-shaping results for Carver. He began his career in 1896 as assistant instructor of New Testament Interpretation and Homiletics and moved quickly to the rank of assistant

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may do some good." My research, however, did not reveal this article or an anonymous article that could be attributed to Carver during the month of August.

[102] W. O. Carver to Mrs. H. G. Whitehead, December 1, 1953, Box 10, Folder 45, Carver Papers. See also, W. O. Carver, "William Heth Whitsitt: The Seminary's Martyr."

professor of the same fields.[103] The year Mullins came on board, the faculty gave the controversial history courses to the more cautious William J. McGlothlin and assigned Polemics to Carver, "quite overlooking that this was a field especially inviting criticism," Carver reflected later.[104] He did not care for Polemics and proposed dropping the "School of Polemical Theology," replacing it with a Department of Comparative Religion and Missions. The faculty and trustees accepted his proposal and named him Professor and Chair of that department for the 1900-1901 academic year.[105]

Carver's proposal for a new Department of Comparative Religion and Missions did not come as a surprise to anyone. For several years he had expressed interest in the critical study of other religions and the missionary practices of his own religion. As a doctoral student in 1895 he published an article in two parts titled "The Attitude of Christianity Toward Other Religions," in which he issued a response to the popular view favoring a union of all the world's religions into one common faith. Using the Bible as the basis for his argument, he argued that Christianity was by definition intolerant of other religions and that knowledge of other faiths was helpful as evangelicals sought to convert the heathen.[106] In his inaugural address, which could have been on any theological topic, he chose to speak on "Missions and the Kingdom of Heaven." He had

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[103] *Catalogue of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, Thirty-Eighth Session, 1896-97* (Louisville: Chas. T. Dearing, 1897).

[104] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 66.

[105] *Catalogue of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1900-1901* (Louisville: The Seminary Press, 1901).

[106] William Owen Carver, "The Attitude of Christianity Toward Other Religions" *The Seminary Magazine* (December 1894): 132-140; William Owen Carver, "The Attitude of Christianity Toward Other Religions" *The Seminary Magazine* (January 1895): 180-187.

recently taken up the lone missions course left by the deceased H. H. Harris and felt that all his courses were missiological at heart.[107]

Ever since the death of Harris in 1897, Carver had been working toward developing a Department of Comparative Religion and Missions while he taught in other areas. In September 1898 Carver sent a questionnaire to seminaries across the United States to "find out how extensively the subject of Missions is now taught in our theological schools." He received replies from several schools, including Yale, Lane, Crozer, Rochester, Princeton, and Harvard.[108] The replies confirmed what he suspected. Schools, for the most part, did not give the subject a distinct place in the theological curriculum, but chose to teach Missions across the curriculum and offer special lectures and meetings from time to time. "In only two or three schools is successful prosecution of mission study required for graduation," Carver said in disappointment.[109] With the faculty realignment, Carver had the chance to make missiology, the academic study of missions, a central part of the curriculum at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The creation of a Department of Comparative Religion and Missions was a considerable development in American theological education at that time. According to the only scholar who has studied the development of the study of Missions in theological education in any depth, Carver's chair of missions was the second chair of its type in the United States and the oldest remaining chair today. Olav Guttorm Myklebust found that

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[107] "Missions and the Kingdom of Heaven," Box 1, Folder 25, Carver Papers.

[108] 1898 Correspondence files, Box 4, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

[109] "Missions and the Kingdom of Heaven," Box 1, Folder 25, Carver Papers.

Cumberland University in Tennessee created the first full professorship in 1884.[110] An exhaustive report presented to the World Missionary Conference in 1910 stated that full professorships were at that time only established at Omaha Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Episcopal Theological Seminary (Cambridge, Massachusetts) and Yale University Divinity School. The same report concluded that a third of the theological institutions in the United States did not include missions in their curriculum.[111] The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was unique in its early emphasis on missions as a permanent part of the curriculum.

As described in the 1901-1902 catalogue, the course in Comparative Religion and Missions sought to "outline the proper attitude and apologetic of Christianity toward the various systems of philosophy and the religions of the world." Believing that Christianity was the "final religion of man," Carver designed the course to help maintain this thesis "against ethnic faiths and religions that seek to compete with its universality."[112] While Carver at this point in his career did not leave much room for arguments that challenged Christianity as the only true religion, he did broaden the horizons of his constituency by introducing the missionary methods of other denominations and challenging the popular

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[110] Olav Guttorm Myklebust, *The Study of Missions in Theological Education: An Historical Inquiry into the Place of World Evangelisation in Western Protestant Ministerial Training with Particular Reference to Alexander Duff's Chair of Evangelistic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oslo: Egede Instituttet, 1955), 371. Myklebust's research revises W. O. Carver's claim that the chair of Missions at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was the first in the United States. See W. O. Carver, *The Course of Christian Missions*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1939), 312.

[111] Ibid., 372-373.

[112] *Catalogue of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1900-1901* (Louisville: The Seminary Press, 1901).

belief of premillenialism, which argued that missionary activity would usher in the final reign of God.[113] And whereas Landmark Baptists like J. R. Graves believed that the kingdom of God consisted exclusively of Baptist churches, Carver suggested through his courses that Baptists were only part of God's kingdom.

W. O. Carver's appointment as Chair of the Department of Comparative Religion and Missions brought all of his life experiences, education, and life passions into full concert. Teaching Missions and Comparative Religion allowed him to retain the fervent evangelical faith of his forbears, balancing it with sincere intellectual curiosity and the culture of professionalism. W. J. McGlothlin, who had previously urged him to live his life as a missionary to China, told Carver that his role as a teacher of missions was crucial to the missionary enterprise. "In missions you are not only to instruct but to inspire and enthuse," he said. "You have a matchless opportunity to influence the heart of our denomination in its most vital directions. You do not need to go to the foreign field to work in missions."[114] Although the denomination's Foreign Mission Board asked him to serve as a missionary to Italy just a few years after his appointment as Chair of Missions, he declined the offer and continued to teach in the same department for his entire career.

In addition to building a new academic department, Carver worked to establish his reputation as a scholar in the first decade of the twentieth century. His first published book was a history of New Salem Baptist Church, a church he served as pastor on the

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[113] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 67; "Missions and the Kingdom of Heaven," Box 1, Folder 25, Carver Papers.

[114] William J. McGlothlin to W. O. Carver, November 5, 1901, Box 4, Folder 19, Carver Papers.

weekends from 1896 to 1907.[115] In 1907, he published a series of lectures entitled *Baptist Opportunity*, which outlined a challenge to Baptists to redefine their convictions for the twentieth century, and two years later he published as a book his lectures for the history of missions course he regularly taught.[116] The manuscript that became his most widely published book, *Missions in the Plan of the Ages*, was completed in 1909. Dedicated to his mother, his "first teacher in the Bible and in Missions," Carver wrote the book while on a sabbatical in Europe. Arguing that "not all the work of Biblical criticism can rob the Bible of its missionary character," he outlined his belief that Christian scripture has at its very core a missionary message.[117]

Carver's exposition of the Bible through the lens of Christian expansion quickly earned him some status among peers outside the denomination. In 1910, the World Missionary Conference met in Edinburgh, Scotland, a meeting church historians consider a crucial moment in the history of Protestant missions and the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement.[118] The published conference proceedings the same year include a two-hundred-and-fifteen page bibliography of notable works on missions. For the category "The Bible of Missions"—one that certainly could have warranted several pages

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[115]Carver, Out of His Treasure, 41; W. O. Carver, *History of New Salem Baptist Church, Nelson County, Kentucky, 1801-1901* (Cox's Creek, KY.: The Church, 1901).

[116] W. O. Carver, *Baptist Opportunity* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907); W. O. Carver, *A Syllabus of Lectures on the Outlines of the History of Christian Missions* (Louisville: Baptist World Pub. Co., 1909).

[117] W. O. Carver, *Missions in the Plan of the Ages: Bible Studies in Missions* (New York: Revell, 1909), 1, 7; Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 109-110.

[118] Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2000), 269-294.

of entries—the editors chose to include works by thirteen authors, including W. O. Carver's recently published book, *Missions in the Plan of the Ages*. Of the thirteen authors, Carver was the only writer from the American South.[119] In addition to this, in a previously published international encyclopedia of missions, only one of the sixty-nine authors whose place of residence is identified was from the South.[120] As a southerner, W. O. Carver was virtually alone in his academic field.

From the farm, by way of the academy, influenced by the social and cultural outer edges of the South, William Owen Carver entered the twentieth century with the education and experience necessary for active leadership in what was quickly becoming the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. From his home in rural Tennessee he learned to love the South's common religious population. At Richmond College he enjoyed a classical education that instilled a love for learning. At the denomination's seminary he became acquainted with the wide world of religious scholarship and experienced firsthand the contours of denominational politics and doctrinal controversy. The formation of a new academic department that focused on the worldwide expansion of Christianity and the faith's relationship to other religions placed Carver in a position to interpret the controversial modernizing influences of the twentieth century to Southern Baptists.

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[119] *World Missionary Conference, 1910, Report of Commission VI: The Home Base of Missions* (Edinburgh and London, 1910), 359-360.

[120] Dwight, Henry Otis, et al, editors, *The Encyclopedia of Missions: Descriptive, Historical, Biographical, Statistical*, 2nd ed. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1904), xiii.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHALLENGE OF OUTSIDERS

"Whenever we meet a real problem in the work some how our thoughts turn to you," wrote Julia Allen of the Georgia Baptist Woman's Missionary Union to W. O. Carver in 1927. "I come to you for your judgment . . . believing you are in a position to understand all sides of the question and knowing you will give me your opinion." Serving as the college secretary for the state organization, Allen was continually "faced with the necessity of taking a definite stand about Inter-denominational matters." The dilemma at hand concerned the popular Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM), an internationally recognized agency that recruited future missionary personnel from college campuses. Allen had recently attended a state SVM conference "as a sympathetic visitor" and concluded that the organization was a positive force for foreign missions, despite the fact that "it may at times disappoint or startle us." The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) had long been startled by the SVM, and Allen reminded Carver that the denomination had withdrawn its support from the movement over the past few years. To further complicate matters, Georgia Baptist schools did not affiliate with the SVM because the denomination had its own student missionary organization. Should she encourage Baptist students to affiliate with an

extra-denominational organization shunned by her own denomination or solely support the SBC's adopted version that carried the official stamp of approval?[1]

The problem of relating to persons outside the Southern Baptist fold vexed denominational leaders during the first half of the twentieth century and challenged traditional assumptions of denominational exceptionalism and Christian identity. Two issues—"alien immersion" and the modern ecumenical movement—presented Southern Baptists with a choice to broaden their tent or a prod to reaffirm their sectarian identity.

W. O. Carver's first controversy concerning the relationship of Baptists to outsiders came as the result of a paper titled "Baptist Opportunity," presented to a Baptist pastor's conference in December 1906 and expanded for publication as a book one year later.[2] Carver perceived the world situation in the early twentieth century as an unparalleled age of individualism and freedom, one that could easily benefit from core Baptist doctrines. The potential for Baptists worldwide to affect religious conditions was ripe, he thought. With the establishment of the Baptist World Congress, which held its first international meeting in 1905, Baptists were "no longer a mere multitude of local organizations" but a unified body "speaking the same doctrinal language."[3] Since Baptists coupled the essential doctrines of Christianity with an insistence on individual freedom before God, Carver believed Baptists could articulate a worldwide Christian message that would attract adherents, even if the newcomers did not adopt the Baptist

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[1] Julia Allen to W. O. Carver, February 15, 1927, Box 6, Folder 28, Carver Papers. A reply from Carver is not found in the correspondence files.

[2] W. O. Carver, *Baptist Opportunity* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907).

[3] Ibid., 53.

name. “We must be more concerned for the facts of faith and their conscious acceptance than for forms and names,” he argued. “One loves and honors the name *Baptist*, but it is by no means essential for another Christian to assume this name in order to be in doctrinal and vital agreement with those who bear this name.”[4]

Many Baptists, he admitted, would never relinquish their title or join the growing movement toward the denominational union of all Protestants. Organic church union would never work. But some local churches could join forces in “proper, practical, and spiritual union,” and Carver pointed to a recent event in Baltimore, Maryland to illustrate his point. Ministers from the Disciples of Christ and Baptist denominations in Maryland had met to discuss the doctrines and practices of their churches. Local churches had agreed to continue the fraternal exchange of ideas, and, Carver surmised, “If two such local bodies should by this means coalesce there is no superior authority to prohibit or hinder on either side.”[5] Union of local churches could potentially occur.

Reverend T. T. Eaton, editor of the influential *Western Recorder* newspaper located in Louisville, Kentucky, quickly challenged Carver’s closing remarks concerning the Baltimore events. “You presented this matter of union with the Campbellites as a part of a Baptist opportunity . . . [and] said more about that than about anything else,” he charged. In his speech, Carver had also suggested that Baptist newspaper editors ignored the events in Maryland, a statement Eaton refuted while claiming no knowledge of the specific events.[6] Eaton certainly did not appreciate the seminary professor’s assertion

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[4] Ibid., 68.

[5] Ibid., 71.

that he, the editor of a prominent newspaper, lacked journalistic integrity. "Persons dwelling in crystalline habitations should exhibit moderate caution in regard to the magnitude and the direction of the missiles that they project," he warned Carver.[7]

Through numerous letters Eaton and Carver debated the journalist's honor and the theologian's orthodoxy. Carver argued that his remark concerning the union of Baptists and Disciples in Maryland was simply an illustration, an addendum to the larger argument. Eaton understood the message differently, solicited the opinion of others, and presented the evidence to Carver. "'I heard Dr. Carver's paper . . . and noted what he said about the movement in Virginia and Baltimore toward a union of the Baptists and the Disciples. From what he said I got the impression that he considered that movement a part of the present Baptist Opportunity. (Signed) R. E. Reed.'"[8] Carver curtailed an elaborate doctrinal debate concerning the reception of Disciples into Baptist churches with a simple statement: "I may say in general I see no reason for treating immersed Christians coming from the Cambellites differently from those from other non-Baptist bodies, Lutheran for example. I would deal with each case on its merits."[9]

Carver believed the affair was overblown and knew the *Western Recorder* was not the safest place for exchanging theological ideas. While the protracted correspondence and resulting editorials had not been very damaging to his reputation, it did affect his opinion of Eaton. "He is known to be a shifting and unfair antagonist," he recorded in his

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[6] T. T. Eaton to W. O. Carver, December 31, 1906, Box 4, Folder 38, Carver Papers.

[7] T. T. Eaton to W. O. Carver, January 5, 1907, Box 4, Folder 38, Carver Papers.

[8] T. T. Eaton to W. O. Carver, January 28, 1907, Box 4, Folder 43, Carver Papers.

[9] (quoted in) T. T. Eaton to W. O. Carver, January 12, 1907, Box 4, Folder 43, Carver Papers.

diary: "I want . . . to terminate a profitless controversy."[10] The profitless controversy did illustrate one important point: Southern Baptists took seriously their denominational identity and found suspicious any leader who advocated its dilution.

The suspicion incited by Carver's remarks concerning the "Baptist Opportunity" probably had more to do with the issue of "alien immersion" than the formal union of Baptists and Disciples. Alien immersion is a derogatory term many Southern Baptists, influenced by the Landmark movement of the nineteenth century, used to describe a baptism performed by a non-Baptist minister. Most Southern Baptists would not recognize the baptism of other denominations and required prospective members to undergo proper baptism under the auspices of a Baptist church. The famed Landmark leader J. R. Graves, for example, required his own mother to be baptized again to become a member of his church, since the administrator at her first baptism was less than orthodox. [11] This exclusionary attitude ensured that all members of Baptist churches received the initiatory rite in credible form and fashion. Ministers and churches that acknowledged a previous baptism but did not require another immersion were deemed alien immersionists.

Shortly before Carver presented and published his speech on the present Baptist opportunity, an Arkansan newspaper, the *Baptist Flag*, (formerly known as the *Landmark Baptist*), charged Carver with the crime. "Dr. W. O. Carver . . . is an avowed alien immersionist," the article read. "Let young men who anticipate attending that theological

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[10] Diary entry for January 15, 1907, Box 11, Carver Papers.

[11] H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 454.

school make a note of it, and prepare themselves against his pernicious teaching. May the Lord save us from our theological schools. . . . Dr. Carver himself needs a teacher. Why, a backwoods preacher knows better."[12] A friend from Texarkana, Texas sent Carver the article that left the Texan in complete shock. "I thought that I knew you and that I knew your father and father-in-law and I can not yet believe that you believe in Alien immersion," he wrote.[13]

Around the same time, a religious newspaper editor from Tennessee had a similar reaction to a statement by Carver on baptism and suggested that the professor was too lax in his view of the ordinance. "Will you please cite me to the scriptures on which you rely as justifying alien immersion?" he demanded.[14] Carver reminded his inquisitor that the New Testament writers did not anticipate the proliferation of Christian denominations and did not speak directly to the dilemma of accepting or rejecting baptism administered by various branches of the Christian faith. Carver argued that Baptists ought to "accept [those persons who] have been immersed with the proper apprehension of the ordinance and reject [those who] have misapprehended it," in order to "[follow] the spirit of the Word in a matter about which there is no specific instruction."[15]

Carver issued an elaborate response to the alien immersion question two years later to J. M. Phillips of Lebanon, Tennessee when the area's district association of

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[12] Clipping from the *Baptist Flag* found attached to J. B. Fletcher to W. O. Carver, January 18, 1906, Box 4, Folder 39.

[13] J. B. Fletcher to W. O. Carver, January 18, 1906, Box 4, Folder 39, Carver Papers.

[14] E. L. Wesson to W. O. Carver, January 4, 1906, Box 4, Folder 40c, Carver Papers.

[15] W. O. Carver to E. L. Wesson, January 5, 1906, Box 4, Folder 40c., Carver Papers.

churches issued the ultimate challenge—the withdrawal of support from the seminary. Writing to Carver, who was at the time on sabbatical in Europe, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Edgar Young Mullins explained that Phillips had been appointed chairman of a committee to explore the issue of alien immersion, and he had asked in particular about the views of Carver. "I replied in the usual vein," Mullins wrote, "telling him how our professors regard the matter, and in general that we considered it a point on which liberty was granted to all Baptists." Mullins encouraged Carver not to worry about the exchange.[16]

Carver did not heed his president's advice, took the matter seriously, wrote a letter to Phillips before receiving one from him, and penned a copy of the detailed letter in his diary. Though he admitted that he thought an association should not burden itself with assessing the orthodoxy of the seminary, Carver was happy to know that the association did take "a real interest in the seminary" and was willing to explain in full his opinion of alien immersion. Calling the issue neither a "legitimate test of orthodoxy nor ground of contention among Baptist people," he said the Baptists who accept alien immersion were a "respectable and honorable" minority of the denomination, and that a sympathetic seminary professor should not cause alarm. Baptists had accepted alien immersions as a general practice until the beginning of the nineteenth century or so when John R. Graves and others popularized the exclusivist position. As for his own opinion, Carver stated that he stood "squarely against rebaptisms" that some Baptists required because the administrator of the baptism was not "a certain exclusive human authority with certain specific qualifications." "That the vote of a local body is required, and that

[16] E. Y. Mullins to W. O. Carver, September 17, 1907, Box 4, Folder 41, Carver Papers.

the administrator must be a regularly ordained Baptist minister, are not sustained by any clear teaching of God's word," he wrote.[17]

Concerning the acceptance of persons baptized by other denominations, Carver argued that three Baptist principles were involved: 1) "individual, personal responsibility to God"; 2) "the spiritual nature of all religious service"; and 3) "strict conformity to type and order." The first two transcend the third, he said, so that "immersion for the expression of a living trust in the risen Lord . . . would claim admittance into our fellowship." As for the third principle, "the spirit rules beyond the letter," and he himself could never ask anyone to submit to a "second baptism." Carver called the act "a solemn farce that [is] sacrilegious." Baptists who rejected alien immersions, he said, sought a "definite, fallible" rule for baptisms, and Carver believed the spirit of the New Testament called for instruction on a case-by-case basis.[18]

As a part-time pastor of a church, Carver had been in situations that caused him to consider the issue from a practical standpoint. During one pastorate, he recalled much later to an inquirer, two people who had been baptized outside the Baptist faith wanted to join the church, but since the church had formally voted against acknowledging alien immersions sometime before he became pastor, he told the prospective members that he was unwilling to cause controversy, despite the fact that he "would not . . . have objected to receiving either of these two, knowing fully their experience and their conviction." In the same church he performed the baptism of a woman who had "been immersed by the

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[17] Diary entry for May 22, 1907 (letter is dated January 15, 1908) Box 11, Carver Papers.

[18] Ibid.

Campbellites," but that was not a rebaptism, since the candidate "repudiated her previous act."[19]

The possibility of performing a sacrilegious rebaptism certainly outweighed the threat of receiving a member who had not received baptism from a Baptist church. The Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, ironically led by T. T. Eaton, gave into pressure and performed a rebaptism in the first decade of the twentieth century. The church allowed a ministerial candidate to join the church and subsequently ordained him knowing that his baptismal credentials would be suspect to some Baptists. J. N. Hall, editor of a small Baptist newspaper in western Kentucky, ignited a controversy that damaged the church's reputation and caused the loss of subscriptions to the *Western Recorder*, the paper edited by Eaton. To quell the controversy, Eaton arranged the baptism, though his death prohibited him from performing the act. Some members of the church asked Carver, who, even more ironically, joined the church shortly after the incident, his opinion of the situation. Carver told the leaders that if he had been a member of the church at the time, he would have spoken out against rebaptism: "I suggested that it would have been all right provided the administrators said 'I baptize you, my brother, in the name of Dr. J. N. Hall, the *Baptist Flag* [newspaper], and a bunch of contentious brethren in western Kentucky'".[20]

For Carver, the alien immersion issue was benign, though he witnessed in colorful episodes how ferocious it could be. In 1909, he observed firsthand the divisiveness

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[19] W. O. Carver to John R. Gilpin, October 13, 1937, Box 7, Folder 25, Carver Papers.

[20] W. O. Carver, "Some Experiences in the Matter of Alien Immersion among Kentucky Baptists," n.d., Box 2, Folder 95, Carver Papers.

caused by the issue at an associational meeting in Kentucky. A group of pastors introduced a resolution "putting the body on record against 'alien immersions' in lieu of 'scriptural baptisms' and instructing the state [board] not to employ in any capacity any one who believes in alien immersion," he recorded in his diary. Carver entered the meeting in the midst of the "rough brutality of spirit, the bull-dozing intolerance, [and] the hurrah tactics," the worst assembly of hostility he had ever witnessed. The debate was noxious. "Believers in alien immersions were challenged and dared to speak and then cut off by gag rule and utterly refused a hearing. I wanted to speak but was ruled out by the previous question under contradictory rulings by the chair," he lamented. To make matters worse, he recalled that the leader of the fight had recently attended a religious meeting in Georgetown, Kentucky and encouraged the reception of three "Campbellites" for church membership without "re-baptism."[21] Such contradictory actions baffled Carver.

Carver enjoyed a more fraternal debate on the subject a few months later with J. B. Moody, dean of the theological department of a small college in Martin, Tennessee. Moody published an article in the Tennessee *Baptist & Reflector* newspaper calling the issue of alien immersion a "test of fellowship" among Baptists, one that could be tolerated for only a short time. Carver penned a reply and sent it to Moody. Similar to other responses concerning the issue, he argued that alien immersion should not be a serious issue. The answer to the problem rested on the "fundamental Baptist principle" which Carver assumed he and Moody held in common: "the immediate responsibility to his Lord as an individual." "Baptists are free before God and . . . within limits we can

[21] Diary entry for June 23, 1909, Box 11, Carver Papers.

allow for each other's vagaries of judgment and conscience," Carver wrote. Moody returned Carver's unpublished article with replies of his own written in the margins. Over Carver's statement that "those who accept these baptisms are as much bound by conscience and are conscientiously obeying the Lord," Moody wrote, "We must be both conscientious and scriptural." Over another line, he wrote, "No one believes alien baptism is scriptural."[22]

Obviously, the two parties could not be easily reconciled. For many Southern Baptists, the issue of receiving members from other denominations struck their doctrinal core, and the thought of sending future pastors to a seminary that considered the issue secondary stirred indignation. George H. Crutcher, corresponding secretary for the Louisiana Baptist Convention, explained his position to Carver in 1915. While he assured Carver that he had better things to do than incite controversy, he made clear the relationship of the seminary to its constituency. "I have always and shall ever regard the fact that the Seminary . . . is the property of Southern Baptists," he declared, and " . . . I have no sympathy in the world with the idea of one of our professors holding the view of Alien Immersion, or being color blind on that question, in their class room work."[23]

Carver seemed surprised by Crutcher's statement. "You can hardly have thought through the significance of your words," he replied. "Would you demand that every professor in the Seminary make a point of denouncing all such irregular immersions as in no case baptisms?" Carver said the topic did not present itself very often, only about six times in his twenty years of teaching. But if a professor did believe in alien immersion,

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[22] W. O. Carver to J. B. Moody, November 10, 1909, Box 4, Folder 58, Carver Papers.

[23] G. H. Crutcher to W. O. Carver, March 16, 1915, Box 5, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

that should not be cause for concern since several Baptist churches in Louisville believed in the practice and had been home to faculty members for decades. Furthermore, if the issue held that much importance, it should be included into the institution's confession of faith, a document that all faculty members signed. Crutcher refused to name an offending professor in his correspondence, so Carver supplied his own, probably assuming that Crutcher desired an admission of guilt before accusation. "Dr. Mullins made the statement [to a group in Mississippi] that I am openly an alien immersionist," he wrote, and then explained his position. He simply stated that he had never, as a pastor, accepted an alien immersion, and he was currently a member of a Baptist church that would likely never be so bold. On the other hand, he could not honestly speak in favor of "re-baptizing" a professed Christian who could testify to a religious experience that included baptism, and would rather accept the candidate into a Baptist church based on his valid testimony.[24]

Crutcher denied hearing Dr. Mullins' statement concerning the seminary's popular faculty member but heard enough from Carver's reply to render a strong opinion. "Beloved, it is my judgment that, since you hold the views you hold upon this question, that you will render the greatest service to the Seminary that you could render by volunteerily [sic.] retiring from the faculty and taking up some line of Christian activity where your views sould [sic.] be a matter of concern only to your local congregation. . . . we are nearing a time when Southern Baptist are going to insist that men who hold positions of denominational trust shall be in accord with the majority of the denomination." While he promised no harm, Crutcher continued his blunt assessement.

[24] W. O. Carver to G. H. Crutcher, March 20, 1915, Box 5, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

"If you can succeed in keeping [your views] out of the papers . . . it may be years before the war will come on you."[25] The words stung. "He is a poor ass but I shall try to remember also that he is a servant of the Lord," Carver reflected to himself in his diary.[26] Carver suggested to Crutcher that if he wanted alien immersion to be a test of orthodoxy, he should direct his request to the seminary's trustees, but not before reading some books on Baptist history.[27] He assumed Crutcher would soon launch a campaign to remove him, but Crutcher said Louisiana Baptists had "too many big meetings to hold down here" to waste time "discussing baptism with an Alien immersionist."[28] Once again Carver escaped serious controversy for what he considered a minor theological matter.

Other denominational leaders did not fare so well. Mississippi Baptists tacked the alien immersion issue in 1914. One pastor, Robert H. Russell, wrote Carver to inform him that some leaders had recently accused seminary president E. Y. Mullins of "talking two different ways on alien immersion," and that he and two other professors, including Carver, were unwilling for the public to know their true positions. "I am writing to you for a clear statement of your own view, a statement that even a fool can understand," he pleaded.[29] In what by now had become his default reply, Carver suggested that his detractors contact the trustees and expose his heresy and cowardice.[30] "I am determined

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[25] G. H. Crutcher to W. O. Carver, March 23, 1015, Box 5, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

[26] Diary entry for March 26, 1915, Carver Papers.

[27] W. O. Carver to G. H. Crutcher, April 5, 1915, Box 5, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

[28] G. H. Crutcher to W. O. Carver, April 13, 1915, Box 5, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

[29] Robert H. Russell to W. O. Carver, August 31, 1914, Box 5, Folder 16,Carver Papers.

no longer to remain silent under the mean or misguided assaults that are being made on me where the opportunity offers dignified and Christian response," he recorded in his diary.[31]

H. W. Provence, a theology professor at Mississippi College, a Baptist school located in Clinton, Mississippi, relayed his unfortunate experience with the alien immersion issue in 1914. In his course in Christian Doctrine, a student asserted that "valid baptism required a qualified administrator," in other words, a properly ordained minister of a Baptist church. Provence informed the student that no Baptist confession of faith affirmed that statement; the Bible did not speak to the issue; and if the student's theory were true, no person "can be sure that he has been properly baptized." Furthermore, the majority of Baptists in the world did not agree with the student and Baptists allowed for freedom of conscience concerning a matter like baptism.

A group of incensed students wrote to pastors who served as college trustees and other influential leaders, including the editor of the state Baptist newspaper and informed them that an avowed alien immersionist taught ministerial students at Mississippi College. Thinking it wise to clarify his views, Provence distributed a statement to the class that outlined the two divergent opinions of baptism and advised pastors "to conform to the general practice of the Baptists of the state." The statement, he announced, would take the place of classroom discussion on the topic. "You see," he stated to Carver, "I

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[30] W. O. Carver to Robert H. Russell, September 4, 1914, Box 5, Folder 16, Carver Papers. See also correspondence with Victor Masters, September 3, 6, 10, 12, 1939, Box 6, Folder 44, Carver Papers; diary entry for September 2 and 3, 1929, Carver Papers.

[31] Diary entry for September 2, 1914, Carver Papers.

was doing my best to meet the wishes of the Landmark brethren. But all to no purpose." The editor of the state newspaper informed him that "Baptists of the state would insist on having their view taught as the only correct one." To stem the tide of controversy, the trustees transferred the problematic professor to the Department of Philosophy. Provence's detractors never rested their case since they believed that no alien immersionist should be on the faculty of a Baptist college no matter what discipline he taught. The professor chose to make the best of his new situation, even though, he concluded to Carver, "my attitude toward the state has been considerably changed."[32]

Arkansas Baptists came close to preventing one of their own, John L. Riffey, from appointment as a missionary by the denomination's Foreign Mission Board in 1935 over the same issue. Carver spoke to Board representatives and explained Riffey's position on baptism, so that he, and other future like-minded candidates, would not be rejected for their minority view. "I hope that you will not have to be a martyr in order that Southern Baptists may learn a new lesson," Carver wrote.[33] The alarmed Arkansas Baptist leaders lost that battle; the board appointed Riffey missionary to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil later that year.[34]

Throughout his career, the alien immersion issue reappeared in various quarters of the denomination, and Carver repeated his arguments time and again to inquirers. In

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[32] Ibid.; See also Webb Brame to W. O. Carver, May 29, 1914, Box 5, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[33] W. O. Carver to John L. Riffey, August 1, 1935, Box 8, Folder 12, Carver Papers; see also diary entry for July 21, 1935, Carver Papers.

[34] Meeting Minutes, Foreign Mission Board, October 16, 1935, Accession no. 2446, International Mission Board Archives, Richmond, Virginia, <htttp://archives.imb.org/solomon.asp>

1938, a minister from Oklahoma, like generations of correspondents before him, heard rumors that a professor at the seminary advocated alien immersion and wrote Carver in disbelief. Carver provided his typical reply, admitting that "in the South the preponderant practice is against the recognition of baptisms administered by other than Baptist churches." This time, his argument for free expression in the seminary positioned the institution as an international training center, not just a school for Southern Baptists. "Outside the South [alien immersion] is not an issue among Baptists . . . If we are to be a Seminary for the entire denomination, throughout the world, we cannot afford to demand that every member of our Faculty shall be an anti-alien immersionist." [35]

Not every seminary president held Carver's view on the subject. President John R. Sampey called Carver into his office in the spring of 1937 to discuss charges made by Tennessee Baptists that faculty member Harold Tribble had advocated alien immersion in a recent public lecture. Despite the fact that "Tribble did rather go out of his way to invite trouble," Carver recorded in his diary that he told the president he would "defend Tribble's right to his views and expression." Sampey responded that Tribble should leave the subject to the theology department and not make claims out of his field. Carver responded that the professor in charge of theology "avoids or evades the alien immersion issue and that students often ask for opinions." Sampey was not convinced and suggested an option that troubled Carver: "[Sampey] thinks that the only official teaching in the [seminary] should be on the anti-alien immersion side because '7 to1' [Southern] Baptists are on that side," Carver recorded in his diary. "I cannot agree with this."[36]

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[35] W. O. Carver to R. H. Dills, March 7, 1938, Box 7, Folder 14, Carver Papers.

Carver believed that Baptist freedom of conscience should inform and decide the issue. Baptists should simply agree to disagree and not be locked into theological conformity by a plebiscite, whether official or estimated. In a 1902 article on the baptismal controversy, he wrote, "There is a tendency toward freedom and toleration in these matters, on which there is room for difference, with no necessary strain on the bonds of fellowship."[37] In 1937, in a tense discussion with an inquisitor, he recorded in his diary, "I was quite firm with him and he with me. I told him I was ready to stand for 'the freedom of the Gospel' to the limit."[38] While Carver never considered himself an alien immersionist, he certainly kept that door to outsiders open and encouraged Southern Baptists to worry less about doctrinal form and more about spiritual experience.

Carver's greatest influence on this issue was with his students. In 1937, he recorded in his diary that he had heard from former student Walter Johnson recently and was reminded of the first time they met: "[He] came to my office before he took any of my classes to correct me in my 'alien immersion' heresy and now is one of our truly liberal, but sound young pastors."[39] Johnson's seminary career helped move him from heresy hunting to significant status as one of the most progressive Southern Baptists on the issues of ecumenism, race, and class.[40] The alien immersion issue held potential for

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[36] Diary entry for March 27, 1935, Carver Papers.

[37] W. O. Carver, "Present Status of the Baptismal Controversy," *The Christian Index*, February 6, 1902 (also found in Box 2, Folder 70, Carver Papers).

[38] Diary entry for December 4, 1937, Carver Papers.

[39] Diary entry for July 28, 1937, Carver Papers.

[40] David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 29-39.

opening the arms of the denomination to outsiders, and Carver, when pressed about the matter, used the opportunity to battle the denomination's tendency toward sectarianism. For him, the argument for accepting alien immersions, or at least recognizing the rights of some Southern Baptists to accept them, was one influenced by Baptist history, tradition, and the principle of religious freedom.

The twentieth century ecumenical movement presented a more formidable challenge for Southern Baptist relations to outsiders. Ever since the fracture of Christianity deepened in sixteenth-century Germany, many Christian leaders had sought to bring the various parts back into a whole.[41] Not until the twentieth century, however, did a comprehensive, lasting movement toward Christian reunification begin.

Baptist historians like to point out that an early call for ecumenism came in 1899 from an unlikely leader, Rev. T. T. Eaton, the Southern Baptist pastor and newspaper editor who successfully led the campaign against William H. Whitsitt at SBTS during the same period. Eaton proposed a meeting of denominational representatives to discuss doctrinal differences and persuaded the Southern Baptist Convention to adopt a resolution at its 1890 meeting in favor of the plan. Only one reply came from his correspondence to other denominations concerning the resolution that sought "progress . .

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[41] For a comprehensive history of ecumenism, see Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, editors, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967) and Ans Joachim van der Brent, *Historical Dictionary of Ecumenical Christianity* (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1994). For the role of American churches, see Samuel McCrea Cavert, *The American Churches in the Ecumenical Movement, 1900-1968* (New York: Association Press, 1968).

. toward true Christian union."[42] Eaton concluded that other denominations must consider Baptist views "narrow," "illiberal," and unimportant.[43]

A more significant and influential call for ecumenism came in 1910 and was directly related to the Christian missionary enterprise, particularly in Africa and Asia. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland was not the first international gathering for world missions; others had been held in London in 1878 and 1888 and in New York in 1900. But the Edinburgh conference was the first conference to limit attendance to officially recognized delegates of missionary organizations. The Conference also instituted a Continuation Committee to unify its members and explore joint missionary efforts. The International Missionary Council also was formally constituted in 1921 to continue the Edinburgh dream.

Several important developments shaped the ecumenical movement between the Edinburgh conference and the creation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, the movement's culminating event. In 1908, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America became the first national council of churches, and by 1910 thirty-one denominations representing nearly all of American Protestants had joined the council. The World Conference on Faith and Order met in 1927 in Lausanne, Switzerland and in 1937 in Edinburgh, Scotland to consider the doctrinal agreements and differences

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[42] Glenn A. Igleheart, "Ecumenical Concerns among Southern Baptists," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 17 (Spring 1980): 50; See also, Timothy George, "Southern Baptist Relations with Other Protestants," *Baptist History and Heritage* 25 (July 1990): 24-31; Raymond O. Ryland, "Southern Baptist Convention (U.S.A.)," in *Baptist Relations with Other Christians*, ed. James Leo Garrett, 67-82 (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974); E. Roberts-Thomson, *With Hands Outstretched: Baptists and the Ecumenical Movement* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1962).

[43] Ryland, "Southern Baptist Convention," 69.

between Christians. The Universal Christian Council on Life and Work met in 1925 in Stockholm, Sweden and in 1937 in Oxford, England to consider how churches could work together to combat social evils through the application of Christian social ethics. In 1937, the Life and Work and Faith and Order groups decided to join forces and met a year later in Utrecht, Holland to draft a constitution for a new World Council of Churches. The Second World War stalled progress for a decade, but in 1948 in Amsterdam, three hundred and fifty-one delegates from one hundred forty-seven denominations representing forty-four countries met to sign the constitution and climb the high ecumenical peak.

The ecumenical events of the first half of the twentieth century were certainly not what T. T. Eaton had envisioned in 1890. Had he lived to witness the events, he would have certainly criticized such thoroughgoing ecumenical efforts that blurred denominational lines and flirted with the organic union of Christians worldwide. Southern Baptists never seriously entertained the idea of joining the ecumenical movement and became one of the largest denominations to witness the revolution from the sidelines. But the SBC did act favorably toward the movement before World War I in several interesting ways. After 1893, the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC held membership in the interdenominational Foreign Mission Conference of North America, though the agency eventually began to suspect the group's motives and withdrew. In 1910, the SBC formed a committee to respond positively to the Episcopal Church's call for a World Conference on Faith and Order. In 1914, the Convention published a "Pronouncement on Christian Union and Denominational Efficiency," an irenic statement that included both positive and negative sentiments toward ecumenism.

A few years later, during World War I, moderation toward ecumenism gave way to disenchantment when Southern Baptist leaders opposed a U. S. War Department policy that sought to curb denominationalism by streamlining the way it assigned chaplains. Baptists had previously been allowed to send ministers with no military training to serve Baptist soldiers. The new policy mandated that all Protestant chaplains be channeled through a central agency such as the Young Men's Christian Association. The War Department exempted Roman Catholic priests and Jewish rabbis from the new system, giving them the same free reign all denominations had previously enjoyed, and Southern Baptists cried foul. In 1919, SBC president James G. Gambrell delivered a presidential address (the first presidential address of the convention's history) that criticized the new policy and articulated the anti-ecumenical position the SBC would hold for another half century. The messengers at the convention wholeheartedly endorsed the address that suggested the SBC refuse to be a part of any organization with "a leadership which we cannot appoint or dismiss, but to which we must in some degree surrender our autonomy."[44] There is a certain irony in the fact that events related to World War I ushered in an age of hostility or at least apathy toward ecumenism. Historian George Tindall argues that the "war to end all wars" expanded the South's horizons. "[As a result of the war] sectionalism had retreated before nationalism and an even wider vision of international co-operation," he writes.[45]

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[44] Quoted in Igleheart, "Ecumenical Concerns," 53.

[45] George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 69.

The opposite was true for Southern Baptists and ecumenism. In her anthropological study of Southern Baptists, Ellen M. Rosenberg refers to the denomination as "the problem child of American Protestantism" because of its obstinate refusal to join the ecumenical movement.[46] In his interpretive history of the movement, longtime ecumenical leader Samuel McCrea Cavert lamented the fact that important denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention and theologically conservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, refused to participate. "These vacant chairs in the ecumenical household are so significant," he wrote, "as to call for sober reflection."[47] While Southern Baptist resistance to ecumenism has garnered significant attention and understandable disdain from critics, the denomination stayed faithful to its conviction that ultimate religious authority is found in the local church.

For most Southern Baptists, ecumenism posed a formidable threat, and the decision to resist was an easy one. Others, like W. O. Carver, experienced a lifelong struggle because of their desire to embrace equally the competing ideologies of local church autonomy, religious individualism, and the worldwide unity of all Christians. He did stand squarely with Southern Baptists against the organic union of denominations.

In 1908, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America held its inaugural meeting and thirty-three denominations joined the interdenominational group. This type of union was unprecedented in the United States. Carver recognized the

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[46] Ellen M. Rosenberg, *The Southern Baptists: A Subculture in Transition* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 149.

[47] Samuel McCrea Cavert, *On the Road to Christian Unity: An Appraisal of the Ecumenical Movement* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 94.

importance of the inaugural meeting of the Federal Council but interpreted its meaning in negative terms. He recorded his thoughts in his diary:

> I am more and more convinced that Baptists are facing a great crisis. There is a spirit and a concerted movement toward formal union of Protestant churches that will leave the Baptists in serious situation. By all means let us be left isolated and abused rather than prove unfaithful to our Lord. [B]ut we must be able to justify our course, whatever it is, on the basis of fundamental, essential religious principles. Our great fight is to be along the lines of personal liberty in the interpretation of the ordinances and freedom in the matter of church polity. The old arguments for either the ordinances or the church polity will no longer satisfy. We must either make it apparent that these are essential to the underlying truths and to the successful development of the Kingdom of God or else we must place them in the category of the non-essentials which must be no bar to Church fellowship. I think that the former must be the outcome but somebody ought to be speedily working at this and especially do we need emphasis on the fact that the only outward and organic union that is really desireable or that can be permanent is that which grows out of essential unity of faith. We cannot reach an abiding of a workable union by the process of ignoring differences unless these differences are first seen to be matters of indifference.[48]

Not all Baptists in the United States had the same reaction. The Northern Baptist Convention and the National Baptist Convention (African American) both joined the Federal Council.

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[48] Diary entry for December 13, 1908, Carver Papers.

Carver's difficulty with church union stemmed less from a fear of corruption by non-Baptist denominations than a fear of Baptists losing their core doctrines of religious liberty and freedom. Like all Southern Baptists, Carver argued that "the fundamental Baptist principle [was] regenerate individualism. God's relations with man are essentially and thoroughly personal and hence individual." The primacy of individualism, he reasoned in 1904, should be the Baptist message. "When we Baptists get a grip firmly on this principle and forsake its every violation we shall be free for service and ready to teach Christianity's freedom to our fellow Christians and to the heathen that sit in darkness."[49] Shortly after recording his fears for Protestantism resulting from the Federal Council, he seemed sure the Baptist idea had potential: "So far as the world wants religion at all today ours is the religion that, when understood, men do want."[50] Most Southern Baptists would have agreed.

As the ecumenical movement developed during the first half of the twentieth century, Carver and the majority of Southern Baptists parted ways in their assessment and response to the movement. If organic church union could be avoided, Carver reasoned, the positive benefits from association with other Christians could be beneficial to all participants. Most Southern Baptists disagreed. The official response of the Convention to ecumenical endeavors became increasingly negative, and Southern Baptists became less interested in interjecting their core beliefs into the worldwide dialogue.

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[49] William Owen Carver, "The Individual, The Unit: This is the Fundamental Baptist Polity," *Baptist Argus*, May 12, 1904.

[50] W. O. Carver, "Being a Baptist," *Baptist Argus*, January 16, 1908; see also, for this time period, W. O. Carver, "Is Our Religion Personal?" *Baptist World*, November 25, 1909.

The way in which some Southern Baptist leaders decried the movement for denominational union went too far in Carver's opinion. In 1918 J. F. Love, Foreign Mission Board secretary, wrote a caustic book against the union movement. After reading a portion of the book, Carver noted in his diary that he would decline an invitation to write a review of it. "[Love contends] vigorously for a policy of exclusiveness of the most extreme type that looks toward making of so. Baptists an isolated sect," he wrote. "Love's book is a serious disappointment in that it is very reactionary, very unfair and an appeal to ignorance and prejudice."[51] Carver published his opinion in an unsigned editorial in *The Baptist World*, a progressive newspaper with extensive connections to SBTS. He said that Love falsely grouped all efforts of Christian cooperation into an unidentified "Union Movement" and went overboard with his negativity. "It would be a pity if Southern Baptists should commit themselves to insistence on becoming . . . an exclusive, isolated body," Carver wrote.[52] In another unsigned editorial the following month, Carver continued his suggestion that critics of ecumenism should get their facts straight and cited recent correspondence with a missionary vigorously opposed to cooperation on the mission field. "We asked him to define just what efforts and organizations he was opposing," he wrote, "[and] to our surprise and his chagrin we found him unable correctly to name a single one of the things against which he had a just complaint."[53]

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[51] Diary entries for April 19, 20, 22, 1918, Carver Papers.

[52] W. O. Carver, "Some Observations Concerning the 'Union Movement,'" *Baptist World* April 25, 1918 (Carver acknowledged authorship of the editorial in diary entry for April 22, 1918).

Articulating a mediating position on the divisive issue was a challenge. The problems surrounding the creation of the Baptist Student Missionary Movement, following the model of the internationally recognized Student Volunteers for Foreign Missions (SVM), serves as a good example of the competing visions of ecumenism among Southern Baptists. The SVM began in 1886 as a student conference in Hermon, Massachusetts spearheaded by evangelist Dwight L. Moody. One hundred students committed themselves to foreign mission work, and Robert P. Wilder, in light of the conference's success, traveled widely the next year gathering similar commitments from one thousand students who signed the simple pledge, "It is my purpose, if God permit, to become a foreign missionary." In 1888, the missionary statesmen John R. Mott and Robert E. Speer became administrators of the ecumenical endeavor and promoted worldwide the SVM's famous watchword, "the evangelization of the world in this generation."[54]

W. O. Carver attended the Fourth International Convention of the SVM in Toronto, Canada in 1902 and wrote his impressions of the meeting in the *Baptist Argus* newspaper, predecessor to the *Baptist World*. He spoke highly of the gathering that included students from three hundred and fifty-seven colleges and universities and over one hundred theological and medical schools. At the end of the meeting, over one hundred volunteers stood before the crowd, named their prospective mission fields, and

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[53] W. O. Carver, "The *Biblical Recorder*, Dr. Love and Ourselves," *Baptist World,* May 23, 1918 (photocopy with Carver's initials underneath the title found in Box 1, Folder 56, Carver Papers).

[54] See C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979).

described in a sentence or two their reason for going. “It was a thrilling experience to see and hear them,” he reported.[55]

The success of the SVM attracted the attention of Southern Baptists all along, but, in the words of one denominational historian, “aloofness from ecumenical organizations . . . made their own effort necessary.”[56] On January 1, 1915, Charles T. Ball, Professor of Comparative Religion and Missions at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Forth Worth, Texas and secretary of a new organization called the Baptist Student Missionary Movement invited Carver to become a member of the organization’s executive committee and enclosed in his correspondence the movement’s constitution. Ball had grand plans for the movement, saying “this movement is not to be sectional but is meant to cover North America, and there is no reason why it should not serve the Baptists of the world in the coming years.”[57] The movement’s purpose was similar to the SVM: the development of student interest in missions; the publication of materials to support missions; and the responsibility of connecting student volunteers with a mission organization and field. Anticipating the possible critique that the movement would duplicate the mission of the SVM, the description stated that the movement “does not intend to interfere with or take the place of any other organization. It wishes well and desires the success of all worthy enterprises which have for their object the giving of a

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[55] W. O. Carver, “Students’ Volunteer Convention,” *Baptist Argus*, March 13, 1902.

[56] Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman, 1994), 123.

[57] Charles T. Ball to W. O. Carver, January 1, 1915, Box 5, Folder 21, Carver Papers.

full gospel to a lost world."[58] In other words, the movement wished the SVM the best of luck with denominations other than Baptists. But Southern Baptists from then on would take matters into their own hands.

Carver had reservations about the new Southern Baptist enterprise. He confided in his diary, "I am uncertain what is the wise course as [the movement] will be interpreted as designed, as quite likely it is designed, to lessen the influence among Baptists of the [Student Volunteer] Movement. It is, purposely or not, part of a general movement among certain So. Bapt. Leaders to cut off our people from all connection with other Christians, a movement with which I have no sympathy."[59] In a reply to a correspondent three months later, he softened his tone, and seemed convinced that Charles Ball did not intend the movement to be antagonistic to the SVM. Since the movement sought to promote missions and articulate Baptist principles to the world, it could be a helpful organization if "kept from cultivation of the spirit of narrow exclusiveness."[60]

Carver joined the Executive Committee with guarded optimism. Other denominational leaders were not as hopeful. Edwin M. Poteat, president of Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, copied Carver on his correspondence with SBTS president E. Y. Mullins concerning Ball's new group. After reminding Mullins that the SVM had been working for twenty-five years with nearly the exact purpose, he concluded, "It seems to me unnecessary for us to attempt to parallel that work." Poteat agreed that some Baptist schools refused to cooperate with the SVM, but it seemed "more

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[58] Ibid., (enclosure).

[59] Diary entry for January 4, 1915, Carver Papers.

[60] W. O. Carver to W. R. Cullom, April 3, 1915, Box 5, Folder 22, 1915.

in the line of progress" to spend the energy persuading the indifferent rather than introducing an entirely new organization to schools that were "happy in their relations with the Student Volunteer Movement." Poteat was convinced that his view did not contradict the "the general attitude . . . [of the] Convention on the subject of Union Work." He simply wanted to keep Southern Baptists from retreating from the world.[61]

Some leaders were indifferent to the movement because it challenged other departments of the convention. In late 1916, T. B. Ray, secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, explained his position to Carver since Ball was convinced that Ray did not sympathize with his efforts. "I will say to you quite candidly," he wrote, "that I believe if this Movement can be made a nation wide affair, it will prove to be a great blessing, but if it is going to be only for the South, then I see absolutely no reason for it."[62] Ray was concerned that the new movement would compete with the Educational Department of the Foreign Mission Board, and he had grown weary of competing agencies such as the Y.M.C.A and the SVM. "We feel we should keep our [own] touch with the students," he confessed.[63]

Before long Northern Baptist leaders spoke their opposition to the movement, proving that Ball's desire for a strong organization of all North American Baptists could not be realized. Leaders of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society wrote Ball and

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[61] E. M. Poteat to E. Y. Mullins, January 3, 1917, Box 5, Folder 41, Carver Papers. See also W. J. McGlothlin to W. O. Carver, November 24, 1919. For information on the Poteat family, see Randall L. Hall, *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

[62] T. B. Ray to W. O. Carver, December 21, 1916, Box 5, Folder 33, Carver Papers.

[63] T. B. Ray to W. O. Carver, January 13, 1917, Box 5, Folder 41, Carver Papers.

included a statement from its board concerning the new venture. Urging him not to misunderstand their statement, Home Secretary John Y. Aitchison reminded Ball that Baptists "are facing an unusual world situation, one which calls for cooperative movements among Christian bodies." Northern Baptists shared E. M. Poteat's reservations concerning the start of a new organization that would directly overlap the responsibilities of existing groups. The northern society's executive committee warned Ball that they could not participate in the movement if he refused to cooperate with other organizations, and they demanded equal representation on boards and committees.[64] Ball took their reflections as a statement of control. Northern Baptists, he wrote to Carver, "[request] that the Movement either not work in the North or work under certain restrictions and plans outlined by themselves."[65] Ball considered the movement a cooperative venture but refused to allow officers of missionary organizations on its "committees of control."[66] Northern Baptist leaders told Carver that the movement was clearly the result of "sectionalism," and Carver in turn relayed to Ball that "we cannot hope to have a North American Movement without the North."[67] Ball continued to ignore Carver's advice. The student missionary movement soon lost momentum and morphed into the Southern Baptist Student Union in 1920. In the same year, ironically, Ball became the executive secretary of the American Baptist Student Union and

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[64] J. Y. Aitchison to Charles T. Ball, November 5, 1917, Box 5, Folder 37, Carver Papers.

[65] Charles T. Ball to W. O. Carver, October 23, 1918, Box 5, Folder 44, Carver Papers.

[66] Charles T. Ball to W. O. Carver, February 20, 1918, Box 5, Folder 44, Carver Papers.

[67] W. O. Carver to Charles T. Ball, April 19, 1918, Box 5, Folder 43, Carver Papers.

eventually became the first president of the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, founded in 1925 as a response to liberalism in the American Baptist Convention.[68]

Carver never intended for the Baptist Student Missionary Movement to take the place of the popular SVM, which he supported wholeheartedly, and the SVM considered Carver one of its few allies among Southern Baptists.[69] In 1927, the General Council of the SVM invited Carver to serve on an advisory committee to help plan the group's quadrennial convention. "Your long and sympathetic touch with the Movement and your full understanding of the modern missionary enterprise will make your services to us invaluable," wrote associate secretary Jesse R. Wilson, a former Carver student.[70] Carver agreed to serve, but reminded Wilson that "the Southern Baptist official attitude toward the S.V.M. is not all you and I would wish and I do not desire for any special favor to be shown to me. You know full well that I am deeply interested and sympathetically concerned for the work and progress of the Movement."[71] Wilson was often tempted to leave Southern Baptists alone because of the "more or less formal and official attitude against full and free cooperation with any interdenominational organization," but he admitted that the SVM "cannot afford to lose touch with this great denomination." The few leaders, such as Carver, who "help us maintain at least an unofficial contact with the

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[68] McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 594.

[69] See W. O. Carver, "The Student Volunteer Conference at Northfield," *Baptist World*, January 17, 1918.

[70] Jesse R. Wilson to W. O. Carver, January 21, 1927, Archives of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, Manuscript Group No. 42, Yale Divinity School Library Special Collections, New Haven, Connecticut (hereafter cited as Archives of the SVM).

[71] W. O. Carver to Jesse R. Wilson, January 27, 1927, Archives of the SVM.

denomination," provided the SVM's only hope.[72] Carver agreed. "The Movement should cultivate all the willing and open part of So. Baptists," no matter how small that part might be.

An event in 1927 illustrates the tenuous nature of the relationship between Southern Baptists and the SVM. General Secretary Robert P. Wilder wrote Carver for help with a problem at Carson Newman College in Tennessee. The college's SVM chapter had recently disbanded because the movement had "considerable red-tape connected with it" and did not satisfy students. One student leader had shared her concerns with the head of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, and he had advised the group to sever its relations with the SVM, an action the FMB had taken a few years prior.[73] Wilder hoped Carver could help restore the relationship between the SVM and Carson Newman College. "I regret more than I can say that there has been a rather strong sentiment among some of our Southern Baptists against college students aligning themselves with any 'interdenominational' movements," Carver replied apologetically.[74]

Carver's correspondence with Carson Newman President Oscar E. Laws elucidated the problem. "Some of us at the College have gotten the idea that the student volunteer movement has developed into a social service program, having lost its note of evangelism," the president noted. "The last Convention our students went to they were heartbroken and came back without any messages to stir them, or enthuse them."[75]

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[72] Jesse R. Wilson to W. O. Carver, February 3, 1927, Archives of the SVM.

[73] Robert P. Wilder to W. O. Carver, April 18, 1927, Archives of the SVM.

[74]W. O. Carver to Robert P. Wilder, May 1, 1927, Archives of the SVM.

Carver admitted to Laws that the last convention was less than exemplary and promised that the next one would be more in line with Southern Baptist sentiment.[76] Secretary Wilder had entrusted him to dispel "their wrong views of our Movement and of the coming Quadrennial Convention" from Baptist students and professors.[77] Carver encouraged attendance at the meeting, though he himself could not attend; it was the first SVM convention he had missed in thirty years.[78]

Carver's commitment to expanding the ecumenical horizons of Southern Baptists led him to interesting places and positions. In 1939, he chaired a Commission for the Baptist World Congress meeting in Atlanta, Georgia concerning the Life and Work Conference held in Oxford and the Faith and Order Conference held in Edinburgh, both in 1937, and had the dubious task of interpreting the findings of a questionnaire sent to members of the commission. The meetings were important milestones in the ecumenical movement, and the leadership of the Baptist World Congress thought it would be helpful to explore Baptist reactions to the conferences and chose Carver to guide that effort.

Carver had given the conferences publicity in important publications and urged Southern Baptist representation. In the *Pastor's Periscope*, a quarterly publication of the SBC's Sunday School Board sent to all Baptist pastors, he proclaimed that Baptists had a duty to articulate to the world their understanding of the church and that Southern Baptists, the largest body of the Baptist family, were "under deepest obligation to . . . the

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[75] Oscar E. Laws to W. O. Carver, May 18, 1927, Archives of the SVM.

[76] W.O. Carver to Robert P. Wilder, May 21, 1927, Archives of the SVM.

[77] Robert P. Wilder to W. O. Carver, May 25, 1927, Archives of the SVM.

[78] W. O. Carver to Jesse R. Wilson, December 2, 1927, Archives of the SVM.

Christian brotherhood, to the world." The principles of "democracy, voluntariness and ecclesiastical independence" were at stake.[79] In the following issue of the magazine, he announced that Southern Baptists would have four attendees, John R. Sampey, President of SBTS and the SBC president that year, Jesse D. Franks, pastor in Columbus, Mississippi, and their wives.[80] The convention had originally chosen, upon the suggestion of Carver, George Truett of Texas, the current president of the Baptist World Alliance, but he was unable to attend. "They would like me to go," Carver, recorded in his diary, "but that is out of the question."[81]

John Sampey wrote Carver while in London between the meetings at Oxford and Edinburgh. Sampey was not very impressed with the Life and Work Conference at Oxford because it seemed to be in the hands of the "Archbishops, Patriarchs, and Bishops," at the expense of the "Free Churches." "My general attitude has been to make what contribution I could to improve the report of the section on Church and State, of which I was a member, and not to oppose the adoption of any report because there were certain features in it that I did not like," he wrote. "I had opportunity to state the Southern Baptist position briefly and clearly." Since the Life and Work Conference dealt with the practical necessity of denominational cooperation, Sampey felt that "[Southern Baptists] can cooperate with our Pedobaptist brethren." The upcoming Faith and Order Conference

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[79] W. O. Carver, "Facts and Factors in History Making," *Pastor's Periscope* (May 1937): 20.

[80] W. O. Carver, "Facts and Factors in History Making," *Pastor's Periscope* (July 1937): 19. See also Jesse D. Franks to W. O. Carver, "May 28, 1937, Box 7, Folder 21, Carver Papers.

[81] Diary entry for June 4, 1937, Carver Papers.

in Edingburgh, since it dealt with doctrinal unity, was another matter. "We accept the New Testament as our sole authoritative guide," he said, while the "Orthodox Church and all the Established Churches" gave tradition equal value. "I do not look forward with much pleasure to the work in Edinburgh."[82] Carver was pleased with Sampey's representation of Southern Baptists and wrote that Sampey "gave the Baptist witness as it has probably not been given heretofore in such meetings . . . [his statement] more than justifies Southern Baptist representation in both these Conferences."[83]

When General Secretary James H. Rushbrooke of the Baptist World Alliance asked Carver to chair the commission to study Baptist responses to the conferences, he accepted the task knowing that a comprehensive study and questionnaire would take a considerable amount of time.[84] Summarizing the attitudes of Baptists around the world would be challenging, to say the least, and Southern Baptists had recently made a pronouncement against ecumenism with which he disagreed, making the matter even more delicate. At the SBC's 1938 annual meeting, messengers unanimously adopted a report that issued a stern warning to all Christians that "man-made union" was fraught with danger and encouraged a return to the "simple teaching of the Scriptures." Although the report did encourage the cooperation of Christians for the "moral and social uplift of

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[82] John R. Sampey to W. O. Carver, August 1, 1937, Box 8, Folder 24, Carver Papers. See also John R. Sampey, "The Oxford Conference," *Christian Index*, March 24, 1938.

[83] W. O. Carver, "Facts and Factors in History Making," *Pastor's Periscope* (November 1937): 17.

[84] J. H. Rushbrooke to W. O. Carver, October 14, 1937, Box 22, Folder 15, Carver Papers; see also diary entry for October 12, 1937.

humanity," the abrasive language concerning union colored its fraternal intent.[85] Writing to Lesley L. Gwaltney, editor of *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper, Carver expressed his discontent: "The [statement] is not altogether pleasing to me. It is too exclusive and too much open to non-Baptist charges of Pharisaism and of dogmatism."[86]

Carver drafted an eighteen-item questionnaire on "The Reports and Findings of the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences" and sent it to more than seventy leaders around the globe. The detailed questions asked for responses concerning specific declarations of both conferences as well as opinions concerning Baptist attitudes toward spiritual and organic union. Carver also sent a draft of his summary to participants for comments.

The few available extant copies of responses only allow a glimpse at the various attitudes and opinions of Baptist leaders, but they are instructive nonetheless. L. R. Scarborough, president of the SBC that year, returned his questionnaire with a note reminding Carver that he agreed with the report on denominational union presented in Richmond, and he focused on his defiance of church union in his responses. He hoped that God would give Baptists "unswerving loyalty to fundamentals" in the situation "forced on us by a group of Christians with whom we are not in agreement."[87] Kathleen Mallory, executive secretary of the WMU admitted that she had not read the full reports of the two conferences and referred to SBC pronouncements and articles in

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[85] C. Dewitt Matthews, "Co-operation with Other Denominations," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadmand Press, 1958), 321.

[86] W. O. Carver to L. L. Gwaltney, February 10, 1939, Box 7, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

[87] L. R. Scarborough to W. O. Carver, August 3, 1938, Box 22, Folder 16, Carver Papers. See also L. R. Scarborough to W. O. Carver, April 1, 1939, Box 22, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

denominational literature as answers to nearly every question. To Carver's question concerning whether "Baptists generally experience the sense of spiritual unity and fellowship with 'all the saints,'" she answered yes and noted recent events where Southern Baptists invited and heard speakers from outside the denomination.[88] A native pastor from Budapest, Hungary responded that Baptists should never compromise their fundamental principle of "free churches in a free state." After all, he said, "This is what I learned in Louisville [at SBTS]."[89]

The pastor of the First Baptist Church of Ottawa, Canada expressed his concern that Baptist participation in international conferences seemed awkward since "the very dignitaries who represented certain state churches at Oxford returned home to engage in active persecution of Baptists and other minority groups."[90] A Baptist leader in Oslo, Norway wrote Carver that church union for Baptists in his country would be "nothing but suicide," urged cooperation of Baptists through the Baptist World Alliance, and suggested they "not mix up too much with sacramentarian and state Churches."[91] An African American pastor in Dallas, Texas wrote that "we stand in a very weak position to talk about world unification" when the various Baptist bodies in the United States could not form a healthy union. He used his own situation to prove an important point: "I as a Baptist minister, pastor a church six blocks from the Baptist Church of which Dr. Truitt

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[88] Kathleen Mallory to W. O. Carver, September 14, 1938, Box 7, Folder 36, Carver Papers.

[89] Imre Somogy to W. O. Carver, October 15, 1938, Box 22, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

[90] Stuart Ivison to W. O. Carver, March 3, 1939, Box 22, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[91] O. J. Odie to W. O. Carver, April 3, 1939, Box 22, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[sic], President of the Baptist World Alliance, is minister, but I can not enter his pulpit as a fellow minister purely because of race." [92]

Carver summarized all of the responses and presented his report to the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Atlanta, Georgia in the summer of 1939. In his introductory remarks he stated that the responses to the questionnaire showed "very many Baptists" uninterested in ecumenical endeavors; a considerable number "emotionally" opposed to "formal relations with other denominations"; "vigorous sentiment favorable" to participation with other Christians on practical matters and concerns; and absolutely no Baptist who thought ecclesiastical union was advisable. As for specific items, he conveyed in the body of the report, almost all respondents agreed that both conferences helped promote good feeling among denominations, but they were mixed in their estimation of the possible dangers of the conferences. Carver suggested that those who feared "liberal leadership" based their assumptions on false information. Neither did respondents express unanimity on the proposed World Council of Churches. Carver believed that Baptists who vigorously opposed the Council should grant freedom to those Baptists who planned to participate. Overall, the responses to the questionnaire proved that Baptists held diverse opinions, although most answers gravitated toward strong skepticism about ecumenical endeavors and an emphasis on preserving Baptist identity.[93]

Carver used his introductory remarks to argue a more open position toward ecumenism than the official report suggested. He admitted that the "traditional position

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[92] M. H. Jackson to W. O. Carver, March 31, 1939, Box 22, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[93] Baptist World Alliance, *Sixth Baptist World Congress, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A., July 22-28, 1939* (Atlanta: Baptist World Alliance, 1939), 126-138.

and attitude of Baptist exclusiveness" was justifiable, considering that Baptists had once been a vigorously persecuted minority. But he argued that present religious conditions suggested that Baptists ought to participate fully in Christian efforts with other denominations and forget the bugbear of organic union. Baptists could, in his opinion, hold their tenacious grip to freedom while participating in ecumenical endeavors. "Is not the time at hand when Baptists must rethink . . . our course, whether it shall be to walk alone in denominational segregation or in free fellowship and cooperation?" he asked.[94]

For each of the three commission reports at the meeting, one respondent rose to convey his reaction. Professor Edwin E. Aubrey of Chicago, Illinois spoke to Carver's report. Aubrey praised the Oxford Conference, took issue with Carver's report and the conservatism it conveyed, and pointed out that the "common task" of Christians—applying Christian principles to the world situation—was at the heart of the conference and should have awakened Baptists worldwide. "It is no adequate disclaimer to say that our task is the saving of souls and not the reformation of society," he said. "[H]uman life cannot be redeemed except in the midst of its actual concrete decisions. . . . Men see eye to eye not by gazing into each other's orbs but by looking at a common object. Oxford stood for that common concern."[95] When describing the commission report to a correspondent a year later, Carver reminded the correspondent that the report did not necessarily reflect the chairman's views and encouraged him to read Aubrey's response.

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[94] Ibid.,137.

[95] Ibid., 138.

"I may say that personally I am in further agreement with Dr. Aubrey than I am with the report which it was my duty to present," he confessed.[96]

Of all the Baptists that he queried for the commission report, Carver was probably frustrated the most with representatives from his own denomination. The president of Mississippi College, Dotson M. Nelson, was the only member of the commission to disapprove of Carver's report. "My position is that Baptists should have nothing to do with these unionizing movements," Nelson wrote summarily and suggested that Carver simply report the SBC statement adopted in Richmond in 1938.[97] Carver reminded Nelson that the report was on behalf of all Baptists, not just Southern Baptists, and turned Nelson's observation about Southern Baptist conservatism into an indictment. "I think you are quite right in your diagnosis of the attitude of Southern Baptists," he wrote. "I think we might go further and say that the large majority of them have no disposition even to know about Christians of other denominations, and that some of them are happiest when they know least about Baptists in other parts of the world."[98]

The disappointment Carver felt because of Southern Baptist provincialism was highlighted when the SBC refused an invitation to join the World Council of Churches. Carver, more than any other Southern Baptist leader, had significant reason for frustration. In January 1938, in Washington, D.C., an electoral conference was held to

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[96] W. O. Carver to W. A. Visser 't Hooft, April 12, 1940, Box 24, Folder 57, Carver Papers. See also W. O. Carver to L. Hodgson, May 17, 1940, Box 24, Folder 58, Carver Papers and W. O. Carver to Carleton W. Atwater, April 20, 1939, Box 7, Folder 2, Carver Papers.

[97] D. M. Nelson to W. O. Carver, June 7, 1939, Box 22, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[98] W. O. Carver to D. M. Nelson, June 10, 1939, Box 22, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

determine American representatives to the May 1938 meeting in Holland to draft a constitution for the World Council of Churches. As president of the SBC, John Sampey appointed Jesse Franks, his companion at the Oxford and Edinburgh meetings, to represent Southern Baptists. Franks had only a few days notice of the meeting and did not know what to expect. When the conference decided that Southern Baptists should have their own representative at the Holland meeting, Franks nominated Carver without his knowledge or consent. Franks sent Carver a short telegram alerting him of his election to a committee of ten persons to represent the United States at the historic conference. The telegram helped clarify a brief article in the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, announcing him as one ten distinguished representatives. Carver did not even know an electoral conference was being held. A letter from Franks the next day told the whole story. "It would be nothing short of tragical for Southern Baptists to be left out," Franks pleaded. "[We] need to be in on the 'ground floor' of this world movement."[99]

Less than a week later, a Louisville *Courier-Journal* article detailing Carver's appointment led to problems that took him several weeks to resolve. The writer incorrectly described the World Council as "a recent movement to unite all branches of Christianity into one unit."[100] Victor Masters, conservative editor of the *Western Recorder* and a Carver antagonist, wrote the professor immediately: "There have been a number who have been calling us up on the telephone asking us about [the article], and we are expecting to have a good many letters from our people within the next few

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[99] Western Union telegram to W. O. Carver, January 11, 1938, Box 2, Folder 21, Carver Papers; J. D. Franks to W. O. Carver, January 12, 1938, Box 2, Folder 21, Carver Papers.

[100] "Courier Journal Article on Dr. Carver's Appointment," *Western Recorder*, January 27, 1938, Box 24, Folder 61, Carver Papers.

days."[101] At a weekly pastor's conference that day in Louisville, Carver explained the "inept and misleading article" to the satisfaction of those present.[102] The pastor of one important church in town sent Carver a letter commending him for his appointment. "Yesterday's announcement gave me a real satisfaction in an anticipated assurance of the insight and prophetic value of our deliverance on the questions involved," he wrote.[103]

Just a day after receiving word of his appointment, Carver decided to decline the invitation and recorded several reasons for the decision in his diary. "First and sufficient," he wrote, "is that I cannot take the chance of being away from Alice so long [due to her health]. . . . Then the fact that [Southern] Baptists would not—most of them—wish to be represented, although I would regard it a great opportunity for a needed witness to [New Testament] Christianity. The opposition of Dr. Sampey as Pres. of both Convention & Seminary. He is, after all, a provincial sectarian Baptist although with many larger sympathies & ideas & still growing. The cost of the trip plays a part [too]."[104] The four reasons cited by Carver each weighed heavily on his mind throughout the ordeal. The second and third reasons had professional implications. If Carver accepted the invitation, he would do so against the wishes of President Sampey, who had voiced his negative opinion on the matter the day Carver received the telegram from

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[101] Victor Masters to W. O. Carver, January 17, 1938, Box 7, Folder 36, Carver Papers.

[102] Diary entry for January 17, 1938, Carver Papers.

[103] Charles Letcher Graham to W. O. Carver, January 18, 1938, Box 7, Folder 26, Carver Papers.

[104] Diary entry for January 12, 1938, Carver Papers.

Franks.[105] Writing to the general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance about his decision, Carver said, "Even if I were in [a] position to accept, there would be rather serious opposition by Southern Baptists to participation in that Conference."[106] Writing to the American Baptist representative to the meeting, Kenneth S. Latourette of Yale University, Carver said he would have "braved the objections of Southern Baptists" and accepted the assignment, but he declined because of Alice's failing health.[107] The objections would have been numerous.

Victor Masters clearly expressed his opposition to Southern Baptist representation at the conference. Carver fulfilled Masters' request for an article explaining his position on the matter, detailed the purpose of the conference, and promised readers that participation in the framing of the constitution of the World Council of Churches did not automatically commit denominations to the organization. "It is important that all types of evangelical churches be represented," he wrote, "where it will be possible for their convictions and view-points to be reckoned with. That is why it seems to some of us that Southern Baptists ought to be glad to have a spokesman there."[108] In the same edition (published a few pages before Carver's article), Masters weighed in on the issue, stating that "many Baptists . . . will be unable to follow Dr. Carver's thought . . ." He cited the

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[105] Diary entry for January 11, 1938, Carver Papers.

[106] W. O. Carver to J. H. Rushbrooke, January 27, 1938, Box 22, Folder 16, Carver Papers. See also W. O. Carver to J. D. Franks, January 22, 1938, Box 7, Folder 21 and J. D. Franks to W. O. Carver, January 25, 1938, Box 7, Folder 21, Carver Papers.

[107] W. O. Carver to Kenneth Latourette, March 23, 1938, Box 7, Folder 34, Carver Papers.

[108] W. O. Carver, "Concerning the Proposed World Christian Council," *Western Recorder*, January 27, 1938.

Convention's 1919 statement as summary of the SBC's "attitude toward participancy in councils and organizations created today in the name of religious inclusivism." Southern Baptists had no business being in Holland in the spring.[109]

The electoral conference elected Ahva Bond, a Seventh Day Baptist who taught at Alfred University in New York, as alternate in case Carver could not attend. A Southern Baptist substitute for Carver could probably have been arranged with the committee, but Carver knew that Southern Baptist defiance would never allow the denomination to be represented. The fact that Southern Baptists refused to participate in what might prove to be the most important ecumenical organization in Christian history angered Carver. "I deplore the fact that Southern Baptists will not be represented and that most of our leaders have very slight appreciation of this opportunity and responsibility," he wrote to Bond.[110] Carver also expressed his discontent to J. H. Rushbrooke, writing, "There is no provincialism more hurtful than ecclesiastical provincialism because of the interests of the Kingdom of God which are involved."[111] In another letter to Rushbrooke, he wrote that the worst part about the whole situation was that "no Southern denomination is to be represented," and "there seemed nothing that I could do to bring about representation."[112] He sent a strong message to the Baptist newspaper in North Carolina: "I do not think the general Southern Baptist attitude of declining to recognize the corporate existence of any

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[109](Unsigned editorial), "Dr. Carver on Proposed World Council of Religion," *Western Recorder*, January 27, 1938.

[110] W. O. Carver to A. J. C. Bond, March 23, 1938, Box 9, Folder 4, Carver Papers.

[111] W. O. Carver to J. H. Rushbrooke, March 29, 1938, Box 8, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

[112] W. O. Carver to J. H. Rushbrooke, April 23, 1938, Box 8, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

followers of Christ other than Baptists takes sufficient account of the passionate longing of our Lord for unity of all followers."[113]

In 1940 at its annual meeting, the SBC declined an invitation to join the World Council of Churches. The statement did not pass unanimously, and W. O. Carver stood in the middle of dissent. The convention had formed a committee, chaired by George Truett, in 1939 to consider the invitation and articulate a response. One member of the committee, John H. Buchanan, pastor of Southside Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, wrote Carver, who was not a member of the committee, for his opinion of the situation. Buchanan admitted that the committee would almost certainly decline the invitation but considered himself part of "a considerable group . . . in the South who feel that we ought to accept the invitation."[114] To the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, he admitted that "as Baptists we are going to lose rather than gain by our denominational isolation."[115]

Buchanan wrote Carver intermittently for the next year updating him on the committee's progress. At the first meeting, Buchanan was one of only two members who vocalized a view in favor of accepting the invitation, and his peers were astonished. He at least hoped that at the 1940 convention a full discussion would take place "in order that the Christian world may know that we do have a considerable group in our Baptist

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[113] W. O. Carver to *Biblical Recorder*, February 19, 1938, Box 9, Folder 3, Carver Papers.

[114] John H. Buchanan to W. O. Carver, June 22, 1939, Box 7, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

[115] John H. Buchanan to Ellis A. Fuller, February 23, 1940, John H. Buchanan Papers, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee (hereafter cited as Buchanan Papers).

leadership of the South who would accept their invitation."[116] A few months later Buchanan stood alone in his consideration of the invitation, so he requested that the final report "state that there were a considerable number of our brethren who were in favor of entering into the World Council with reservations to protect our own conscience and convictions."[117]

Buchanan defiantly stated that he could not sign one early committee draft. Some on the committee, according to Buchanan, wanted to use the response to attack the doctrines of other groups and lecture them on the proper formulation of divine truth.[118] Carver agreed and called the early draft "too apologetic [defensive] and too assertive."[119] John R. Sampey, also on the committee, wrote a draft and presented it in a faculty meeting at SBTS. Carver described it as "a courteous, isolationist document," and he and other faculty members "urged some modification and won out." "We are to try to frame a report—letter—which the Convention will adopt and still leave us in spiritual fellowship with the evangelical people of Christ," he recorded in his diary.[120]

Part of the problem with the early drafts, according to Buchanan and Carver, dealt with Southern Baptist refusal to understand that the main goal of the World Council was not an organic union of all churches. "It has all along seemed to me not only unfraternal, but strategically weakening to our position to assume that the profession of the

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[116] John Buchanan to W. O. Carver, September 1, 1939, Box 9, Folder 6, Carver Papers.

[117] John Buchanan to W. O. Carver, February 6, 1940, Box 9, Folder 6, Carver Papers.

[118] John Buchanan to W. O. Carver, February 15, 1940, Box 9, Folder 6, Carver Papers.

[119] W. O. Carver to John Buchanan, April 4, 1940, Buchanan Papers.

[120] Diary entry for January 27, 1940, Carver Papers.

provisional council is at least evasive if not actually intentionally deceptive," Carver concluded.[121] And even if the Council moved toward the embrace of organic union, Buchanan reasoned, "I think we have sufficient intelligence in the Southern Baptist Convention not to be swallowed up unawares by other communions."[122]

The cordial statement that declined the invitation stated that the Convention, made up of autonomous churches, had no authority to accept the invitation. The protesting minority did not shrink into the shadows, making their opposition known through speeches, a standing vote, and signatures on a written statement of dissent. One newspaper reported that sixty-five messengers voted against the report.[123] Carver stood in protest of the vote on the platform of the convention hall and planned to sign the statement, but he found himself in a precarious situation. During the lunch hour before the session, a former trustee of SBTS suggested to Carver that the interests of the seminary would be compromised if Carver signed the statement. Carver then consulted three other friends who concurred that Carver's signature would mean trouble, so he removed his name. After returning home, he wrote several likeminded friends explaining his actions. "It was a distinct grief to me to withdraw my name," he admitted. "I hope that you know I did stand (and on the platform) with the protesting minority."[124] Most of the replies to his correspondence indicate that his colleagues thought the removal of his name was a wise choice.

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[121]W. O. Carver to John Buchanan, February 12, 1940, Buchanan Papers.

[122] John H. Buchanan to W. R. White, February 27, 1940, Buchanan Papers.

[123] "Reflections on the Convention in Baltimore," *The Alabama Baptist*, June 27, 1940.

[124] W. O. Carver to E. F. Campbell, July 8, 1940, Box 24, Folder 59, Carver Papers.

The interpretations of the event by the progressive minority were diverse. "It seems to me . . . that we miss our opportunity by dilly dallying and delaying," wrote one frustrated pastor who thought his like-minded brethren should organize their efforts better. "By and by, when we do come round, we come tagging in at the rear and have thus lost our opportunity to give leadership to these pioneering movements."[125] Some saw hope in the protest, the beginning of a brighter future. "Many of us have been silent long enough. . . . Eventually the convention will turn to the more liberal positions," wrote another pastor.[126] One pastor removed his name from the document because he thought the action would be too controversial. "Some time those of us who think we have a liberal outlook on life can be very narrow and dogmatic in contending for our liberality," he lamented to Carver.[127] The dissenters were certainly not a unified group.

In one editorial, Carver interpreted the refusal to join the World Council of Churches as "a sad blunder." He argued that the question was not one of orthodoxy. "Those of us who feel we should accept membership in the World Council are just as orthodox in our theological view as are those who oppose it," he wrote, and named the central beliefs that all shared. Southern Baptists missed their greatest opportunity to voice their faith and chose, instead, to say to the world, "We have the truth and we propose to keep it." He blasted the familiar argument that the SBC could not join the Council because it had no ecclesiastical authority. That the Convention could not join on behalf of

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[125] James M. Shelburne to W. O. Carver, July 11, 1940, Box 24, Folder 59, Carver Papers.

[126] George D. Heaton to W. O. Carver, July 12, 1940, Box 24, Folder 59, Carver Papers.

[127] John A. Davidson to W. O. Carver, July 13, Box 9, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

individual churches was true; but if an organization could take churches into millions of dollars of debt, it could certainly act as an agent of cooperation in the World Council. To those who thought joining the council would force Southern Baptists to compromise their doctrinal positions, Carver responded that the only thing Southern Baptists would be expected to give up would be "our selfishness, our complacency and our unholy ambition and conceit that makes us feel we can save the world by ourselves alone."[128]

Carver found some alleviation for the frustration caused by missed opportunities to articulate the Baptist interpretation of Christianity to the world through his work on the American Theological Committee, especially in its consultation with the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order. Shortly after the 1937 Edinburgh meeting, members of the Faith and Order Movement appointed three commissions to study the topics of Church, Ways of Worship, and Intercommunion. The Commission on the Church, led by R. Newton Flew of England, decided to consult with the American Theological Committee for help with the study of American denominations. The Committee chose Carver to represent Baptists, along with the help of two collaborators, Park Anderson of the Southern Baptist Biblical Institute in New Orleans, and Walter Conner of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Except for Benjamin Lacy of the Union Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) in Richmond, Virginia, Carver and his collaborators were the only southerners of the twenty participants.[129]

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[128] W. O. Carver, "Southern Baptists and the World Council of Churches," Box 24, Folder 60, Carver Papers. This manuscript does not report if it was published, nor does it include W. O. Carver's signature, though it is most likely Carver was the author.

The finished product, a collection of papers entitled *The Nature of the Church*, published primarily for delegates to the 1952 World Conference on Faith and Order, provided eleven denominational statements, with Carver as the author of the Baptist position. The papers were responses to a questionnaire on the meaning of the church, and Carver began his paper by stating that the vocabulary of the questionnaire posed a problem for his denomination. "Baptists (especially Southern Baptists) usually do not use the term 'Church' to signify organised Christianity as a whole," he wrote.[130] He stated that Baptists strive to reproduce "New Testament doctrine and practice and only accept members who can testify to a profession of faith in Jesus Christ." He explained the Baptist position on immersion, the principle of voluntarism, the necessity of separation of church and state, the use of "confessions of faith" rather than creeds, and other Baptist essentials. "The distinctive contribution of Baptists to 'the Church Universal' is to be found in their insistence on the individual soul in relation to God, without human mediation or parent, priest, church, or sacrament, and in the conception of the entire ecclesiastical autonomy of the church," he said in his concluding remarks.[131]

Carver enjoyed the years spent on the Theological Committee, because it offered an opportunity to discuss with leaders of other denominations the fundamentals of Christian faith. After one long meeting, he concluded in his diary, "It is extremely

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[129] Floyd W. Tomkins to W. O. Carver, May 4, 1939, Box 22, Folder 4, Carver Papers. This letter includes a full list of participants.

[130] W.O. Carver, "Baptist Churches," in *The Nature of the Church: Papers Presented to the Theological Commission Appointed by the Continuation Committee of the World Conference on Faith and Order*, ed. R. Newton Flew, 289 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952).

[131] Ibid., 297.

interesting studying the denominational mind types and seeing the origin and developmental influences of their interpretations of the church."[132] The meetings proved to Carver that Christian leaders, by and large, were ignorant of Baptist positions. After another meeting, he wrote, "I found again that few of them know, or understood, or properly respect the Baptist, and especially the Anabaptist, positions and significance."[133] Ignorance usually turned into derision and the feeling of contempt could only be eradicated by open communication. Carver's work on the American Theological Committee allowed him to pursue a lifelong dream: the articulation of Baptist principles to Christianity's world leaders.

Ecumenism, in Carver's mind, equaled progress in worldwide Christian relations, and he believed that Southern Baptists could benefit from exposure to the significant ecumenical developments of the twentieth century. He knew that he held a minority opinion and that he and the majority of Southern Baptists differed on one important theological point: the universal church. Landmarkism and the late nineteenth-century Whitsitt controversy shaped Southern Baptist belief that the true church was the local Baptist church. "It may almost be said to be the official Southern Baptist program to speak of the church only as indicating the local organization," he concluded in 1951.[134] Carver, on the other hand, believed in the universal church, or the "spiritual body of Christ." In this understanding, the Christian church "is not organized, [and] has not

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[132] Diary entry for November 21, 1942, Carver Papers.

[133] Diary entry for July 16, 1943, Carver Papers.

[134] W. O. Carver, "A Church: The Church," *Review and Expositor* 48 (April 1951): 149.

human head or headship."[135] Carver explained this position in what he considered his major scholarly contribution, a commentary on the New Testament letter to the Ephesians, a work he waited until retirement to complete. *Ephesians* emphasized the spiritual church, and Carver believed that a study of the book would help Southern Baptists become more open to ecumenical involvement.[136]

Carver spent his career encouraging ecumenical relations but experienced more failure than success. The progressive orthodoxy he articulated was overpowered by the conservatism of Southern Baptists and his desire for peace over controversy. On at least two occasions, he wrote on invitations to join ecumenical organizations that he "declined on acct. of attitude of So. Bapt. Convention toward Federal Council."[137] Any progress in ecumenical endeavors would be incremental at best, and Carver accepted that fact. The progressive pastor Blake Smith wrote Carver in 1944 complaining that Southern Baptists were too narrow in their thinking. "The world is too big and the task is too gigantic for a sectarian church," he wrote. "Have we not limited Christian community to our own denomination?"[138] Carver's response illustrates well how he understood his role in the challenge of outsiders:

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[135] W. O. Carver, *The Glory of God in the Christian Calling: A Study of the Ephesian Epistle* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1949), 31.

[136] See W.O. Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 119-126 and W. O. Carver to Maurice Blanchard, September 11, 1953, Box 10, Folder 45, Carver Papers.

[137] H. W. Hicks to W. O. Carver, March 3, 1917, Box 5, Folder 39, Carver Papers; Fred B. Smith to W. O. Carver, March 7, 1917, Box 5, Folder 41, Carver Papers.

[138] Blake Smith to W. O. Carver, January 18, 1944, Box 10, Folder 29, Carver Papers.

I am sure you know that I have done what seemed to be my best all along the way to help overcome the provincialism and the exclusiveness of our Baptist people. I know how we came by that attitude through many experiences of our history in this modern world. It has never seemed to me wise to break the fellowship—or to over-strain it—with my own people, in the interest of a wider fellowship, which we ought by all means to seek and to receive through the Holy Spirit. I have had a number of suffering hours in behalf of our folks. Yet in the Christian family they are my people specially.[139]

[139] W. O. Carver to Blake Smith, January 22, 1944, Box 10, Folder 29, Carver Papers.

CHAPTER THREE

INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGES: EVOLUTION AND THEOLOGICAL LIBERALISM

"I have been a critic of current trends, trying to help our brethren think their way through the complex movements of our generations." – W. O. Carver[1]

When Don Norman enrolled in W. O. Carver's 1934 Christianity and Current Thought course at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he probably knew the professor's reputation for challenging students to tackle the most difficult and controversial theological problems of the day. Carver informed all students of this fact when he distributed a religious questionnaire on the first day of class. The first part of the questionnaire asked students to describe their conversion experience and history of church membership. The second part concerned the effect of high school and college education on the student's religious beliefs and practices. In the final section, Carver asked students to reveal any questions about religion they wanted to discuss during the term. In his seventeen-page narrative response, Norman listed several topics: the humanity of Jesus; the importance of millennial theories; the location of heaven and hell; Southern Baptist cooperation with other Christians; and the relationship of biological

[1] W. O. Carver to Hight C. Moore, November 11, 1940, Box 9, Folder 46, Carver Papers.

evolution and the Genesis account of creation. For all these complex questions, he hoped the course would enable him to arrive "at a sane conclusion" of his own.[2]

Carver's summary of student responses suggests that Norman's classmates had similar concerns. The top two "intellectual problems faced in the past" reported by the class were the reality of God and the efficacy of prayer, and the two most reported "problems awaiting solution in [the] class" dealt with the eternal damnation of morally upright humans who had never heard of Christianity and the challenge of evolution.[3] One student wanted to find out whether belief in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ was necessary to be a Christian and sought proof that the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament did not contain "as many fallacies as the English translations."[4] To one student who wanted to discuss the merits of Augustinianism, Pelagianism, Determinism, Barthianism, Mysticism, and other technical subjects, Carver suggested that they meet together outside of class.[5] Some students found Carver's questionnaire more troubling than the intellectual problems it solicited. One confident student remarked that he had "very little trouble taking Christianity at face value" even though he did not understand all aspects of the faith.[6] Another student reported no intellectual problems but did wonder

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[2]Don Norman, "An Introductory Paper in Christianity and Current Thought," unpublished ms., Box 23, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[3] "Digest of Christian Experience of C. & C. T. Class, 1934-35," Box 23, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[4] John Charles Yelton, "Christianity and Current Thought," Box 23, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[5] Don J. Milam, "Some Phases of My Religious Experience," Box 23, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

why at least seven of his dedicated parishioners continually refused his invitation to salvation.[7]

The classroom was a safe place for the free exchange of ideas, and Carver's pedagogical goal, he revealed in one mid-career interview, was "to make the student think." The courses he taught demanded lecture presentations much of the time, he admitted, but his preferred style of teaching was Socratic because he could use "a series of questions . . . to lead the student to discover the truth."[8] Because of his voluminous writings in denominational publications and speaking engagements to scores of Southern Baptist audiences each year, the professor's classroom extended far beyond the seminary campus. And his characterization of the relationship of Christianity to modern thought often caused chagrin among his most vocal students. Two particular issues, biological evolution and theological liberalism, prompted Southern Baptist skepticism about twentieth-century scientific and theological thought and shaped Carver's articulation of progressive orthodoxy in the SBC.

Historians have traditionally considered the South the nation's most anti-evolutionist region. C. Vann Woodward, surprisingly, left the topic of Darwinian evolution out of his now-classic *Origins of the New South,* but countless historians since Woodward have added the controversial theory of origins to his formidable list of scientific and social movements and trends that withered in intellectually shallow

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[6] R. C. Miller, response to Christianity and Current Thought questionnaire, Box 23, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[7] J. W. Wells, "Christianity and Current Thought," Box 23, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[8] "William Owen Carver: An Interview," *The Baptist World*, October 24, 1918.

southern soil.[9] The rural South certainly became a vocal arena for anti-evolutionism in the twentieth century, and the divisive Scopes Trial in 1925 was broadcast to the world from Tennessee, the Bible Belt's buckle. But the South's militant reaction to evolution can be attributed in part to the growing embrace of science by the region's educated minority. The anti-evolutionist fears were warranted, some recent historians of science point out, because high school and college professors did affirm Darwinian claims.[10]

The most vigorous proponent of biological evolution among Southern Baptists was William Louis Poteat, president of Wake Forest College in North Carolina from 1905 to 1927. As professor of natural history and biology before assuming the presidency of his alma mater, Poteat found credible the concepts of evolution and agreed with scientists that the earth was much older than once believed. Poteat became a leader of the small circle of scientists in the South and was elected the first president of the North Carolina Academy of Science in 1902.[11] His belief in evolutionary theory did not shake his faith in religion, and he professed that science and religion complemented one another in the search for God. As college professor and president, he assured students that their Baptist faith could be strengthened and not destroyed by science, but most Southern

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[9] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); see Monroe Lee Billington, *The American South: A Brief History* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 301-302; Carl N Degler, *Place over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 23.

[10] Ronald L. Numbers and Lester D. Stephens, "Darwinism in the American South," in *Disseminating Darwinism: The Role of Place, Race, Religion, and Gender*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and John Stenhouse, 123-144 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[11] Randal L. Hall, *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 33.

Baptists considered his assertions radical. When the anti-evolution mania reached a crescendo after World War I, Poteat did not back down against opponents and subsequently earned a notorious reputation as "the most thoroughgoing Southern Baptist evolutionist in the 1920s."[12]

During the same decade that North Carolina Baptists publicly scrutinized Poteat for his views on evolution, W. O. Carver articulated a mediating position on the issue at Southern Seminary. In 1921 the Baptist Pastors' Conference in Louisville invited Carver to address the relationship of the biblical account of creation and science. Anti-evolutionist crusader William Jennings Bryan had recently delivered a spirited address in Louisville, and Carver reminded the audience that his remarks were not necessarily in response to Bryan's "special agitation." Carver and Bryan may have had differing approaches to the evolution conflict, but they shared a special interest in science's effect on the faith of high school and college students. Carver suggested that a detailed study of the Genesis account of creation—along with the intelligent, sympathetic, non-dogmatic guidance of parents, teachers, and ministers—could steer young minds away from "the abyss of unbelief."[13]

Carver identified several characteristics of the creation story to illustrate his belief that the Genesis account should be read as a theological rather than as a scientific text. The story's brevity convinced him that creation was not a major topic in the Hebrew

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[12] James J. Thompson, Jr., *Tried as by Fire: Southern Baptists and the Religious Controversies of the 1920s* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982), 120. See also George E. Webb, *The Evolution Controversy in America* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 71.

[13] W. O. Carver, "Characteristics of the Creation Story in Genesis," *Western Recorder*, October 13, 1921.

Bible and should not be expected to contain an outline of geology, zoology, biology, botany, or other related fields. The account's moral quality was unlike any other creation narrative and impressed the reader with its spiritual essence. The story was a work of art which had as its purpose an explanation for the beginning of humankind rather than a detailed look at the entire universe. Carver identified the creation story as theologically "accurate" but urged the audience to dismiss the notion that Genesis was scientifically accurate. Theological revelation and scientific observation lead to different forms of truth, and both took place in an atmosphere of discovery. "No revelation of God becomes actual until it is the experience of a man," he said, further defining Scripture as a work of art that beckons interpretation.[14] No benefit could come from comparing the story to present-day scientific theories.

Carver considered himself "an interested onlooker" in the "long warfare . . . among scientists over the origin of species" and declared that he had no "vital interest at stake" in the conflict. He portrayed himself as disinterested in scientific study while at the same time especially supportive of technical investigation. In a cocksure tone that probably resonated well with the audience, he challenged scientists to continue their pursuit of knowledge. "Let the geologist bring his study to the strata, the formations, the variations, and set forth as many ages as he will," he dared.[15] No theory of origins could overturn the fact that God created the world and its inhabitants. Pastors in Louisville and readers of the *Western Recorder* found the seminary professor who taught courses in reconciling modern thought with Christianity a much different personage than William

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

Louis Poteat or William Jennings Bryan. Carver was neither a divisive advocate of evolution nor a derisive combatant of anti-evolution. He sought a middle way that displayed confidence in God's creative power but still respected the inquisitiveness of humankind. A diary entry reflecting his objective for a new sermon dealing with the topic captures this sentiment: "[I want] to make the right use of the Bible Story of Creation while leaving ourselves quite free for scientific studies of cosmic history."[16]

Carver's public address and subsequent newspaper article garnered significant praise and no major criticism. One correspondent, describing herself as "just a plain woman from the masses," thanked Carver for stating so eloquently that reason and revelation went hand in hand. Her longtime association with college students and "preacher boys" had convinced her that college professors spent too little time discussing possible solutions to questions of science and faith, and she appreciated Carver's reasoned thoughts.[17] Samuel P. Brooks, president of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, wrote that he had held the same views for twenty-five years and appreciated Carver's eloquent expression of the issues. At the time of his letter Brooks was in the swell of an evolution controversy of his own. Baylor sociology professor Grove S. Dow had published a textbook that contained positive statements on evolution and raised the ire of fiery fundamentalists J. Frank Norris, Thomas T. Martin, and a few Baptist newspaper editors.[18] Brooks was jealous of Carver's escape from controversy and wondered how

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[16] Diary entry for June 19, 1927, Carver Papers.

[17] Mrs. Walter E. Wilkins to W. O. Carver, October 18, 1921, Box 5, Folder 62, Carver Papers.

the professor was able to think for himself under "the shadow of the [Western] Recorder." "At the rate some of the critics are going after me now I may have to get the receipt by which you are able to live at all," he quipped.[19]

Carver would not escape criticism so easily as the tempestuous 1920s unfolded. In 1926 he published in the *Review & Expositor* a six-page review of three books that sought to "introduce the theory of Evolution . . . into the fellowship of the Christian faith." In a diary entry he described the review as his "moderating and mediating" view of the issue.[20] He began the essay, titled "Christianizing Evolution," with a strong disclaimer: "Please let no one be alarmed or angered by the heading for this review article." Carver used the term "Fundamentalist" to describe those persons who would certainly consider the authors of the three books more dangerous than "open infidels" and juxtaposed Fundamentalists with "Modernists" who ridiculed the faith claims of Christianity. Both groups hindered the intellectual journey of leaders, such as himself, who believed that "Christianity can recognize no truth as foreign to its interest and no sphere outside its realm." Carver critiqued one author for his lack of emphasis on sin, praised the second author for his "maturity, breadth of vision, [and] "security of faith," and appreciated the third author's bold statement that the modern world needed to consider the positive aspects of Christianity.[21]

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[18] S. P. Brooks to W. O. Carver, December 28, 1921, Box 5, Folder 58, Carver Papers; for the Baylor controversy, see John Davies, "Science and the Sacred: The Evolution Controversy at Baylor, 1920-1929," *East Texas Historical Association* 29 (Fall 1991): 41-53.

[19] S. P. Brooks to W. O. Carver, December 12, 1921, Box 5, Folder 58, Carver Papers.

[20] Diary entry for December 16, 1925, Carver Papers.

John W. Porter and T. T. Martin, editors of the conservative *American Baptist* based in Memphis, Tennessee, were "disappointed and grieved" at some of Carver's statements and considered "Christianizing Evolution" a contradiction in terms. Believing that "every known theory of evolution inevitably leads to the land of free love," the editors chastened Carver for his unwillingness to plainly state his views on the controversial subject. For Porter and Martin, evolution challenged the very heart of Christian faith: the inspiration of Scripture. Carver argued that the natural world acted as a revelation from God, a role that only Scripture could fill, according to the editors. They commended Carver for some of his statements but deemed his review "a plea for a middle ground" between Christians and "Theistic evolutionists," one that was an "iridescent dream, an impossible objective, and an automatic contradiction."[22]

Another book review published by Carver that same year elicited more criticism, this time from the book's author, Joseph Judson Taylor, a Southern Baptist pastor from Jasper, Alabama. Taylor, a pacifist during World War I who had been fired from a previous pastorate for his anti-war views, wrote *The Evolution Theory: Plain Words for Plain Folks* as a part of his campaign to rid schools of the evolution menace.[23] Carver's estimation of the book was almost entirely negative, and he considered the author's diatribe against evolutionary theories shallow and unconvincing. "[Taylor] . . . absolves himself from all obligations seriously to consider problems that are actually troubling the

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[21] W. O. Carver, "Christianizing Evolution," *Review and Expositor* 23 (Winter 1926): 82-87.

[22] Newspaper clipping, found in Box 23, Folder 35, Carver Papers.

[23] See Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 346-348.

mind today," he wrote. With a hint of sarcasm he concluded that the book was brilliant, entertaining, "highly satisfactory to the eager Fundamentalists, irritating to the evolutionists and of little value to troubled souls."[24]

One prominent pastor from St. Louis wrote Carver commending him for his honest opinion of the book despite the fact that its author was an influential Southern Baptist. Too many reviewers, he said, "burst out into peons of praise" simply because the author and reviewer were members of the same denomination.[25] J. J. Taylor also recognized the importance of denominational identity and could not believe a Southern seminary professor would write about a fellow Southern Baptist in such a way.

The correspondence between Taylor and Carver concerning the review had a cordial beginning but quickly escalated into a heated controversy through letters that Carver identified in his diary as "full of mean and insinuating digs."[26] One friend, convinced that some Southern seminary faculty members were "full cousins to evolutionists," encouraged Taylor to "make [Carver] come out in the clear and show his true colors."[27] Taylor suspected the same but never directly accused Carver of evolutionary heresy. He did inform Carver of a rumor circulating that accused the professor of playing to the sentiments of William Louis Poteat and Samuel P. Brooks, both members of the seminary's board of trustees, in order to gain the office of seminary

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[24] W. O. Carver, Review of *The Evolutionary Theory: Plain Words for Plain Folks*, Review & Expositor 23 (Summer 1926): 476-477.

[25] Ryland Knight to W. O. Carver, October 23, 1926, Box 6, Folder 24, Carver Papers.

[26] Diary entry for November 22, 1926, Carver Papers.

[27] Unnamed correspondent to J. J. Taylor, October 22, 1926, Box 6, Folder 26, Carver Papers.

president after the retirement of E. Y. Mullins.[28] Taylor did not believe the rumor but decided that Carver's negative review stemmed from a serious case of theological hubris. Taylor eventually suggested that Carver's review implied his agreement with evolution and challenged Carver to state his position clearly and publicly. Carver rejected the challenge since it "would open for you to ask twenty more questions just as unfair and just as calculated to arouse groundless suspicion."[29]

The public debate over the review took place in the Missouri Baptist newspaper, *The Word and Way*. Taylor proclaimed that Carver had "an exaggerated idea of [his] own superiority," accused him of not reading the book in its entirety, and insinuated that the professor was a closet theistic evolutionist. In his response, Carver reiterated his negative impressions of the book and suggested that books written to discredit popular scientific or theological positions ought to "recognize the strength of an opposing position" in order to make the response more convincing. In other words, Taylor failed to take the convincing parts of evolutionary theory seriously, which limited the book's usefulness. As for the attack on Carver's personal credentials as a theologian in a denominational seminary, he reminded readers that for three decades he had taught students in accordance with the institution's articles of faith.[30]

The inordinate amount of anxiety stimulated by Carver's review of Taylor's book was due in part to a burgeoning movement toward formal doctrinal expression in the Southern Baptist Convention during the 1920s. Fundamentalist leaders J. Frank Norris of

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[28] J. J. Taylor to W. O. Carver, November 17, 1926, Box 6, Folder 26, Carver Papers.

[29] W. O. Carver to J. J. Taylor, December 4, 1926, Box 6, Folder 26, Carver Papers.

[30] Newspaper clippings found in Box 2, Folder 141, Carver Papers.

Fort Worth and William Bell Riley of Minneapolis, both graduates of Southern seminary, attracted an enormous amount of attention when they criticized Southern Baptists for their toleration of evolution and theological liberalism in denominational colleges and seminaries, especially at Southern seminary. During 1924 and 1925, President E. Y. Mullins, a quintessential theological moderate, led the denomination in its response to conservative agitators by chairing a committee to write a "Statement of Baptist Faith and Message." The majority of the committee was unfriendly to the harsh conservatism of fundamentalist leaders; only one committee member was strongly anti-evolutionist.[31] While the committee worked to draft the SBC's first doctrinal statement, other denominational leaders debated whether or not a formal statement of faith was a positive move for a denomination that had existed for eighty years without one. Some Southern Baptists agreed with John E. White, president of Anderson College in South Carolina, who believed that the adoption of a statement equaled "a new conception of Baptist ecclesiasticism" and would make Southern Baptists a creedal denomination by subverting the time-honored tradition of having "no creed but the Bible."[32] Most Southern Baptists agreed with Charles T. Alexander of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, who reasoned that Southern Baptist strength resided in "a general substantial agreement in the great cardinal doctrines

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[31] John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*, With revised introduction, conclusion, and bibliography by Samuel S. Hill (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 129.

[32] John E. White, "A Baptist Aversion to All Creeds," *Western Recorder*, March 19, 1925.

of a New Testament faith" and that "Modernism in its mildest form" had no place in the convention's institutions.[33]

W. O. Carver thought a Southern Baptist doctrinal statement would do more harm than good and found himself in opposition to his seminary president. When Mullins called the faculty together to discuss a draft of the statement, Carver recorded in his diary, "I am wholly opposed to their making such (or any) creed." Since Mullins and the committee thought it was the best way to silence fundamentalist opposition, Carver decided not to campaign against the effort but made certain that Mullins knew he thought it was "improper and dangerous for the Convention to undertake any such work."[34] When the convention met in 1925 to adopt the faith statement, Carver was disgusted and called the meeting "the worst I ever attended from the standpoint of things it should be and seek."[35] The "Creed discussion," along with financial issues, was "crushing the life out of the Convention."[36]

Carver provided his candid opinion of the issue through two book reviews published in the *Review & Expositor* shortly after the adoption of the *Baptist Faith and Message*. He reviewed favorably Francis Greenwood Peabody's *The Church of the Spirit* because it emphasized "the primacy of the spiritual in our religion." His commendation of the book and critique of Southern Baptists was unrelenting: "Now that our Southern

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[33] Charles T. Alexander, "Why a New Statement of Faith by Southern Baptists?" *Western Recorder*, December 4, 1924.

[34] Diary entry for December 20, 1924, Carver Papers.

[35] Diary entry for May 17, 1925, Carver Papers.

[36] Diary entry for May 15, 1925, Carver Papers.

Baptist Convention has fallen into the snare of creed making, I could wish that every one of the leaders who are responsible for this defection from our principles would give this volume a careful study." These leaders would never read it, he surmised, since they discredited the author's writings without ever reading them. After providing a summary of the book's contents, Carver, describing himself as "a sincere and convinced conservative," chided his readers yet again: "And the sooner the Fundamentalists learn that the Liberals really have some contribution to make to vitalizing our religion the sooner they may hope to recapture some of the influence and some of the values they are . . . jeopardizing by . . . vehemently asserting that the entire movement is of the devil and to be damned unreservedly."[37]

In his review of James Priceman's *Chaos and a Creed*, Carver praised the author for writing a book that could be of great benefit to the many people he knew who struggled to maintain their faith in "this most confused and confusing era." Although he failed to provide a summary of the book, he commended the author, an avowed theistic evolutionist and heretic to Southern Baptists, for making "Jesus Christ . . . the dominating personality and force." Standard creeds failed to begin with Christ, according to Carver, and, he mistakenly predicted that no creed would gain respect among "modern Christian souls." Southern Baptists, in particular, betrayed their longstanding conviction of emphasis on Jesus Christ with the recent creed. "Efforts were made, and failed," he wrote, "to induce the committee recently setting up a 'faith and message' document to

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[37] W. O. Carver, review of *The Church of the Spirit: A Brief Survey of the Spiritual Tradition in Christianity*, by Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Review & Expositor* 22 (Summer 1925): 368-370.

begin with [Jesus]. If we begin with Him we shall never be able to wander far into the wilderness of uncertainties."[38]

Walter Binns, a pastor in Moultrie, Georgia, wrote Carver after reading the two reviews and thanked him for the eloquent expression of the convictions they both shared. Binns acknowledged that Carver's strong language would soon turn the conservative canons toward Southern seminary, but he welcomed the fight. Mullins' placation of the Fundamentalists made him look like he was "trying to ride two horses that were going in opposite directions," Binns noted, and he figured the fundamentalist leaders would continue to expose the moderate leaders' contradictions. The solution was obvious to Binns: The "very respectable minority in the Convention" who opposed "any kind of creedal statement" needed a spokesman.[39]

Carver also issued a public word against the faith statement in a newspaper editorial. He argued that Baptists, like first-century Christians, had no creed because they scrutinized each individual's profession of faith. "We seek to preserve the individuality, the vitality, and the fervor of experience," he said, "by thus allowing each man to have his own experience and his own statement of it." Likewise, local Baptist churches should deal with heresy; any other solution violated Southern Baptist history, principles, and practice. Carver suspected that creed advocates sought to invade the rights of individuals and churches in an effort that expressed distrust rather than faith.[40]

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[38] W. O. Carver, Review of *Chaos and a Creed*, by James Priceman, *Review & Expositor* 22 (Summer 1925): 373-375.

[39] Walter P. Binns to W. O. Carver, July 13, 1925, Box 6, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

Moderates opposed to the 1925 *Baptist Faith and Message* had their fears confirmed at the next year's annual convention when conservatives, disappointed that the faith statement did not specifically discredit evolution, successfully turned the issue into a test of theological conformity. The president of the convention, George W. McDaniel, closed his presidential address with a pronouncement against evolution, and M. E. Dodd, hoping to prevent acrimonious discussion, followed the rousing speech with a motion to make McDaniel's statement the official sentiment of the convention. On the last day of the convention, conservatives, led by S. E. Tull, enjoyed the final word when they successfully passed a resolution that requested employees of all SBC agencies to declare their acceptance of McDaniel's anti-evolution statement.[41]

Of the 1926 convention, Carver noted in his diary that the "air [was] tense with anxiety" concerning the evolution issue. He noted McDaniel's address and Dodd's motion and recorded that he did not approve the action, did not vote for the motion, but lamented that there was "no use to kick."[42] His immediate response to the Tull resolution was reticence; he did not think the resolution would "make trouble."[43] When the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth quickly adopted the McDaniel statement as part of the faith statement that all faculty members must sign his attitude changed, and he began considering the professional ramifications it had for him: " . . . my

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[40] W. O. Carver, "The Baptist, His Creed, and His Fellowship," *The Christian Index*, May 7, 1925.

[41] Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 129; David W. Downs, "The McDaniel Statement: Evolution and the Signing-Up Issue," *Viewpoints: Georgia Baptist History* 10 (1986): 19-26.

[42] Diary entries for May 11, 12, 1926, Carver Papers.

[43] Diary entry for May 15, 1926, Carver Papers.

birthright of freedom in Christ is not to be taken away and Alice and the children agree," he wrote in his diary. "I think our Faculty will stand ready."[44] One likeminded professor at Southwestern Seminary, William W. Barnes, wrote Carver saying the inclusion of a scientific statement in the school's creed placed some of the faculty "in a very embarrassing position." Barnes openly taught students that a person could be an evolutionist, an anti-evolutionist, or plead ignorance on the matter and still be a Christian. Barnes interpreted the development as "a gesture toward the ultra-conservatives" and was conflicted about remaining part of the faculty.[45]

The next few months were tense for Southern Seminary faculty as President Mullins sought to address the issue without compromising the intellectual and academic integrity of the institution. Mullins was particularly concerned that Carver was quickly gaining a reputation among key individuals as an outspoken opponent of the evolution statement. Rev. J. G. Davis of Marietta, Georgia wrote Mullins to tell him that Carver was quite vocal at a recent ministers' conference, and Davis wanted to know Carver's official statement on the issue. Carver replied to Davis and outlined his concerns. Carver felt that the Convention had no right to ask longstanding employees of SBC agencies and schools, who had not been charged with wrongdoing, "to sign fresh contracts based on resolutions adopted in a popular convention." A large number of the five hundred twenty-eight foreign missionaries employed by the SBC, regardless of their agreement with the issue, would consider the act "an offensive injustice." A Convention-drafted creed violated Baptist principles, in his opinion, and the McDaniel-Tull resolution should have

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[44] Diary entry for May 18, 1926, Carver Papers.

[45] William W. Barnes to W. O. Carver, June 2, 1926, Box 6, Folder 22, Carver Papers.

been ruled out of order. As for doctrinal correctness, Carver approved of Southern Seminary's doctrinal statement that every professor signed and said it was "needless to be seeking to add new articles." The relationship of faith and science and the challenge of evolution were not issues that required Convention attention, and Carver deemed the whole fiasco an attempt to placate "extreme agitators."[46]

Mullins objected to Carver's outspoken opposition to the McDaniel statement and chided him accordingly. "[Mullins] evidently dislikes for me—or any of us—to speak our mind," he recorded in his diary. The president, hoping to head off the opposition, drafted a statement for publication to mediate the crisis as quickly as possible, but Carver thought the statement evaded the issue and would only provoke conservatives. Carver advised Mullins to "say nothing and wait for fresh fighting to be forced by others."[47] Some of Carver's closest friends disagreed with him. Byron Dement, former Southern Seminary faculty member and then president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, advocated "signing up," and Carver considered him "absolutely lacking in appreciation of the issues involved."[48] By the end of the year, the matter reached its apex. A special faculty meeting was called to determine the faculty position if seminary trustees demanded they sign the statement. By this time, Mullins had moved closer to Carver's position, though Carver still criticized the administrator's last-minute show of fortitude: "[He] now wants to fight for our rights—If only he had done so 10 years, 5 years, 2 years, 1 yr. ago! He does not now see that he played a compromising role for all these

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[46] W. O. Carver to J. G. Davis, June 3, 1926, Box 6, Folder 23, Carver Papers.

[47] Diary entry for June 1, 1926, Carver Papers.

[48] Diary entry for June 4, 1926, Carver Papers.

years."[49] By early 1927, the trustees decided not to demand faculty accession to the evolution statement, and Mullins successfully stalled any effort by McDaniel and others to force the issue.[50] Mullins led the seminary to the edge of the hill but was able to drawback from disaster.

Throughout the ordeal Carver repeatedly argued that his opposition to a signed, anti-evolution statement rested on his understanding of Baptist principles and academic freedom. Without doubt, he did believe that the *Baptist Faith & Message* and subsequent anti-evolution resolution were creedal statements that assumed a relationship of distrust and disharmony between convention employees and their Baptist constituency. The developments played into the hands of "extreme agitators," and the majority should not relinquish its control of the denomination. Seminary professors, furthermore, should never be asked to advocate one position on a controversial matter. Baptists stood for freedom of conscience on theological non-essentials. "Extreme agitators" may have stimulated the evolution discussion for Southern Baptists, but Carver seems to have underestimated the majority's fear of evolution. Most Southern Baptists could not agree with Carver that a person could be a full-fledged evolutionist and Christian at the same time.

Carver became a special case for conservatives because of his unwillingness to present a clear, public explanation of his views on the subject of evolution. "Somehow

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[49] Diary entry for December 6, 1926, Carver Papers.

[50] See the following diary entries: January 11, January 12, March 19, June 19, December 13, 1927; March 9, 1927; March 13, March 14, March 19, 1928, Carver Papers. For an account of the controversy from Mullins' point of view, see Ellis, *"A Man of Books and a Man of the People": E.Y. Mullins and the Crisis of Moderate Southern Baptist Leadership* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 197-208.

you manage to keep me guessing," R. K. Maiden, editor of the *Word and Way* wrote to Carver. "Some things I read from your pen seem to warrant the conclusion that you are not in any sense an evolutionist," he confided, "[but then] I read other things that put me in doubt."[51] Reflecting on this correspondence decades later in his memoir, Carver wrote that he replied to Maiden and said he "knew little of just how God produced and carries on his creation" and described himself as a believer in "*emergent* evolution." Carver's confusing reply served its purpose. "I heard no more from him," he wrote.[52]

The evolution controversy, creation of a denominational faith statement, and move toward doctrinal uniformity in the SBC in the 1920s took place within the framework of a larger debate concerning the threat of theological liberalism, simply referred to by many contemporaries as "modernism." "Liberalism" is a broad term often used to describe a plethora of movements that challenged traditional orthodoxy, so the word begs definition. Theologian Gary Dorrien provides a helpful description: "The essential idea of liberal theology is that all claims to truth, in theology as in other disciplines, must be made on the basis of reason and experience, not by an appeal to external authority."[53] C. Vann Woodward had a similar definition in mind when he wrote, "Modernism and liberalized theology were rejected, or ignored [in the South], in

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[51] R. K. Maiden to W. O. Carver, July 13, 1927, Box 6, Folder 33, Carver Papers. [Next time in Nashville, I need to make certain a reply to Maiden is not in the files]. See also C. P. Stealey to W. O. Carver, December 10, 1927, Box 6, Folder 33, Carver Papers.

[52] William Owen Carver, *Out of His Treasure: Unfinished Memoirs* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1956), 75; For a similar treatment of evolution, see William Owen Carver, *The Re-Discovery of the Spirit* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1934), 47-51.

[53] Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 1.

favor of 'the old-time religion.'"[54] At the heart of the "old-time religion" lay the Bible, and most Southern Baptists equated the defense of their external, religious authority with the defense of religion itself. If judged by the rejection of external authority in formulating claims of truth, W. O. Carver cannot be classified as a theological liberal. But the Woodwardian description of virulent, southern religiosity does not describe the deeply southern professor either. Carver lived intellectually and professionally in the dangerously amorphous theological middle ground.

Carver exhibited a special fondness for practitioners of liberal Christianity, including Harry Emerson Fosdick, the famous pastor/theologian of New York's Riverside Church and Union Theological Seminary.[55] Fosdick, whom Dorrien describes as the "symbol of American liberal Protestantism" for the 1920s and 1930s, embodied for many Southern Baptists all that was wrong with the modern mind.[56] In 1922, for example, J. J. Taylor declared "Fosdick's Gospel" much different from his own. Fosdick's denial of the virgin birth of Jesus, the "inerrancy of the Scriptures," and the imminent return of Jesus put the famous pastor out of God's favor: "His savior is merely a peasant Jew born out of wedlock . . . , [and] his bible is a book replete with fables and falsehoods," Taylor asserted.[57]

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[54] C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 451-452.

[55] Carver's estimation of Shailer Mathews, the popular Dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School, serves as another example. See W. O. Carver, Review of *The Faith of Modernism*, by Shailer Mathews, *Review & Expositor* 22 (Spring 1925): 253-261 and, for contrast, a book note of the same in the *Western Recorder*, November 27, 1924.

[56] Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 357.

Carver read Fosdick much differently and defended the famous preacher's work in the *Review & Expositor*. When he read Fosdick's popular book, *The Modern Use of the Bible*, he remarked in his diary that the author was "dead earnest in his Christianity."[58] In his published review of the book, Carver said Fosdick "had assumed the leadership of Modernism," and the book represented the author's positions well. Fosdick's strength, he suggested, was his "personal loyalty to Jesus Christ," but he critiqued Fosdick for dismissing conservative positions too easily and truncating elaborate theological problems. Despite Fosdick's opposition to "dogmatic [and] denominational Christianity," Carver praised the book for the window it provided into the author's soul. "Are there any who are unwilling for Dr. Fosdick to stand thus in the company of the reverent before our Lord?" he concluded.[59] One pastor from Portsmouth, Virginia said the review was "worth more to me than the annual subscription to the magazine," and he wished all of the men in his pastor's conference—a heterogeneous mix of persons "advanced," "ultra conservative," and "progressive conservative"—would read the review.[60] When one of Fosdick's main detractors, I. M. Haldeman, pastor of the First Baptist Church of New York, wrote a book critiquing *The Modern Use of the Bible*, Carver reviewed Haldeman's work with an equally critical eye. Carver deplored the fact that some people preferred to read a "vigorous exposition of Dr. Fosdick's teaching" rather than Fosdick himself and suggested to readers that Fosdick would never take

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[57] J. J. Taylor, "Dr. Harry Fosdick's Gospel," *Western Recorder*, October 5, 1922.

[58] Diary entry for January 7, 1925, Carver Papers.

[59] W. O. Carver, Review of *The Modern Use of the Bible*, by Harry Emerson Fosdick, *Review & Expositor* 22 (Spring 1925): 253-261.

[60] J. Elwood Welsh to W. O. Carver, April 6, 1925, Box 6, Folder 21, Carver Papers.

Haldeman seriously because of his "very curious reasoning and some very farfetched interpretation of scriptures."[61]

Carver's personal correspondence also reveals a similar commendation of Fosdick. One friend, Everett Gill of the Foreign Mission Board, asked him whether he thought Fosdick was a Unitarian since Fosdick seemed to discount the Trinity. Carver responded that he felt Fosdick should be classed somewhere in between since the famous preacher attributed to Jesus "far more than conceivable human qualities" but did not believe in the traditional explanation of the godhead.[62] When Ivy L. Lee of New York wrote Carver for his opinion of Fosdick, Carver responded that he considered him "profoundly devoted to Jesus Christ" and successful in "rendering an enormous service to great numbers of people," though he did consider some of the liberal insights "seriously defective," a problem resulting, in part, from the misrepresentations of his teachings.[63]

Carver's near-approval of liberal theology in the divisive 1920s is also illustrated by his strong critique of liberalism's famous opponent, J. Gresham Machen of Princeton Seminary. Machen published *Christianity and Liberalism* in 1923, and the book quickly became a conservative manifesto. The book served as a response to the perceived radicalism of Fosdick and argued that liberal Christianity was not Christianity at all but another form of religion. Carver's review of the book challenged Machen's central claims

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[61] W. O. Carver, Review of *Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick's Book:* The Modern Use of the Bible*: A Review by I. M. Haldeman*, by I. M. Haldeman, *Review & Expositor* 22 (Fall 1925): 514-515.

[62] Everett Gill to W. O. Carver, November 4, 1926, Box 6, Folder 23, Carver Papers; W. O. Carver to Everett Gill, June 23, 1926, Box 6, Folder 23, Carver Papers.

[63] W. O. Carver to Ivy L. Lee, April 29, 1925, Box 6, Folder 19, Carver Papers.

about Christianity.[64] Carver agreed with Machen that some forms of liberalism were indeed foreign to historic Christianity, but he also called foreign the "legalistic, externally dogmatic" versions of the faith that were "as far from the Christianity of the Christ as were the legalistic interpretations of Judaism foreign to the Judaism of the Man of Nazareth." As for Machen, Carver thought his interpretation of Christianity was too "external and too dependent on formal logic" and lacked an emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Machen was overly pessimistic and dangerously doctrinaire. Machen's ultimate failure, according to Carver, was his neglect of Christianity's social task. Machen's "pathetic" treatment of the issue was disheartening, and Carver declared "there is no essential conflict between orthodoxy and the social task." In other words, the thoroughly orthodox interpretation of Christianity that Machen offered was of little use to the world.[65]

Carver's own writings provide no convincing evidence that he ever held a truly liberal position on any point of theology, though some statements pointed suspiciously in that direction. His unpublished manuscript titled "If Religion Be Outgrown" serves as a good example. In 1924, J. F. Love of the Foreign Mission Board (FMB) asked Carver to enter a contest sponsored by the FMB that offered $1,000 for the best book manuscript "for use among men and women who have lost faith in religion in various and all countries."[66] Carver's one hundred fifty-seven page submission argued that civilizations "outgrow" or abandon the religion of their ancestors if the religion fails to accommodate

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[64] For his own estimation of the review, see diary entry for May 10, 1924, Carver Papers.

[65] W. O. Carver, Review of *Christianity and Liberalism*, by J. Gresham Machen, *Review & Expositor* 21 (Fall 1924): 344-349.

[66] Diary entry for June 7, 1924, Carver Papers.

the civilization's intellectual and social development. The "comprehensive aim of religion," he wrote, was "enabling a man, then a group, then all men to locate and adjust themselves in the world in which they live."[67] Organized religion could be outgrown and discarded, but the spirituality of humans would always remain. Since "religion" was universal, he reasoned, the possibility existed for one religion, if it spoke to humanity's basic needs and refrained from too much "otherworldliness," to be a worldwide religion. Christianity—the religion that offered the best interpretation of God, clearest understanding of the world, the only redemption of humanity, the highest ethical ideals and system, the "surest grounds for progress," and equality for women, children, and lower classes—had the best chance of becoming a worldwide religion.[68]

The contest organizers considered Carver's manuscript the best received, but they felt, most likely because of its length and scholarly tone, that it did not fit exactly what they hoped to publish, so they cancelled the contest and reopened a similar one a few years later. Carver received a summary of the committee's responses concerning his submission, along with a personal letter from a committee member, and both documents show that the committee had some concern for Carver's theology. "I think the author is sound, but at times he sounds a bit modernistic," wrote one. Another suggested that Carver needed to "stress 'immortality'" more and "make the evangelistic appeal slightly more personal and pointed."[69] One member recalled that the committee thought Carver's manuscript was the best but did remember some discussion that "the future life" was not

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[67] W. O. Carver, "If Religion Be Outgrown," unpublished ms., Box 3, Carver Papers.

[68] Ibid., 100-119.

[69] J. F. Love to W. O. Carver, November 6, 1926, Box 6, Folder 24, Carver Papers.

emphasized enough and the manuscript would have been strengthened had "Christ come into the discussion earlier."[70]

Some of Carver's assertions in the manuscript did likely startle committee members. Carver's statement that "theology must not be authoritative dogma but vitalizing experience" certainly carried the scent of modernism.[71] His belief that "no religion . . . that is primarily concerned in saving traditions and creeds, or that accepts and propagates antagonisms with the best elements of culture, can at all hope to cope with the present situation and to function as the religion of mankind" probably raised more than a few eyebrows since, to most Southern Baptists, those statements would have "sounded a bit modernistic." But in the end, the committee considered the professor sufficiently orthodox.

Guardians of Southern Baptist orthodoxy found Carver problematic more for his languid response to theological liberalism and his defense of left-leaning denominational theologians than for any liberal views he may have held. A protracted controversy resulting from a book review published in 1914 proves how forceful the issue could be. In the April 1914 issue of the *Review & Expositor* over ninety books received either a short notice or a full review, with Carver reviewing over a third of the books. One book enjoyed by far the longest review of the whole issue, five times the length of a typical review. For nearly six pages, Carver critiqued the famous American writer Winston Churchill's 1913 novel, *The Inside of the Cup*.

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[70] Mrs. W. C. James to W. O. Carver, December 30, 1927, Box 6, Folder 29, Carver Papers.

[71] Carver, "If Religion Be Outgrown," 16.

Winston Churchill can best be described as a successful novelist turned politician and social prophet. Rallying around the political ideals of Progressivism, Churchill ran successfully in 1902 for the New Hampshire state legislature and unsuccessfully twice thereafter for the state's governorship. Religiously, Churchill, a life-long Episcopalian, determined early in his youth that religion could not answer the most pressing questions about the world. But by 1910 he had come to the conclusion that political and economic reforms could not cure the evils of contemporary society either, and he returned to religion. "From then on," his biographer states, "Churchill devoted most of his time to preaching the new faith, a faith that would allow mankind to survive in an industrial world by inaugurating a utopia of social cooperation."[72] Churchill, in *The Inside of the Cup,* tells the story of a rector who, when faced with the task of pastoring a high-class church in a downtrodden area, converts from orthodox Episcopalianism to liberal, social Christianity.[73]

Carver's lengthy review of *The Inside of the Cup* contained both praise and blame. Carver said, "I think that the author has acquired a remarkable familiarity with the modern situation in society and a quite unusual understanding of the relation of the

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[72] Robert W. Schneider, *Novelist to a Generation: The Life and Thought of Winston Churchill* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976), 169.

[73] Ibid., 172; See also, Eric Steinbaugh, *Winston Churchill: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985); Winston Churchill, "The Modern Quest for a Religion" *Century* 87 (1913): 169-174; and Ferenc Morton Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1982), 71.

Church to the intellectual and social situation of the present."[74] On the other hand, Carver chided Churchill for his useless "antagonisms to some of the facts of Christianity," which had no bearing on the book's thesis, and for occasional interpretations of scripture in which "he misses both words and meaning." In conclusion, though, Carver suggested the book to his readers. "It needs to be read with discrimination," he warned, "but so does everything that is worth reading."[75]

At least one of Carver's readers used discrimination in his reading and was shocked by the review. O.L. Hailey, pastor of Corsicana Baptist Church in Texas, fired off a letter to the Texas *Baptist Standard* because, he said, "When I read [the review], I could scarcely believe my eyes."[76] In the review Carver expressed dismay over Churchill's "useless antagonisms." Carver discussed in one full page of the review Churchill's "groundless and violent opposition . . . to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Jesus." He stated there was no purpose to the author's attack because in the grand scheme of things Jesus being born of a virgin had no consequence. "As a dogma I would, perhaps, care no more for the Virgin Birth than would Mr. Churchill. As an explanation and a proof of the divinity of the Lord it is both insufficient and needless," he said. Carver pointed out that the virgin birth was "purely a question of fact." He stated that it was true that the story was omitted from Matthew's Gospel and that evidence clearly showed it "had been wrought into the text" in Luke and clearly did not mean much to

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[74] W.O. Carver, Review of *The Inside of the Cup*, by Winston Churchill, *Review and Expositor* 11 (April 1914): 290-291.

[75] Ibid., 295.

[76] *Baptist Standard*, May 21, 1914.

first-century Christians. "There is no reason for being unduly agitated over it one way or the other," Carver concluded. But then in the review, as if he anticipated the other position, he stated that the virgin birth tradition came into being because it was true and described the tradition as one with "fitness and beauty."[77]

In his response to the review, which covered more than a full page in the *Baptist Standard*, Hailey stated that he was concerned not with Carver's estimate of the book but with "some things he says for himself in his review." Baptists, he said, must be aware of the views of professors who teach in institutions that ordinary laypersons had sacrificed financially to build. Carver had touched one of the "vital issues of the hour" and taken "the wrong side of it." Hailey included the section of the review dealing with the virgin birth, so readers could judge for themselves. "He has appeared to assume the position of those higher critics," Hailey charged, "who reject whatever of the Bible does not suit their theory as inspired." "My suggestion to him is that a little reflection on his part would have saved him from making such a statement." Further challenging the intelligence of Carver he said, "[He] accepts the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, but on wholly insufficient reasons, reasons which will not satisfy the thoughtful, whether Christian or infidel."[78] Hailey hoped that Carver had written thoughtlessly and challenged him to respond with his true position, a challenge that received a speedy response.

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[77] W.O. Carver, Review of *The Inside of the Cup*, 293-294.

[78] *Baptist Standard*, May 21, 1914.

Carver's reply, published one week later, described Hailey's charge against him as a "nervous emotional exclamation," supposing that Hailey was so excited he could not see clearly as he wrote his diatribe. Carver, using as much print space as Hailey had been awarded the week before, stated the matter simply: "It is not sufficient that I hold the same position with Dr. Hailey. I must also accept his process of reaching this conviction, or be held up for warning as a dangerous teacher." Carver stated that he believed in the virgin birth as "history, not as dogma" and the purpose of that section of the review was to suggest a line of reasoning to Churchill that would be acceptable to him and others like him, rather than argue in a way that would "have absolutely no weight with them."[79]

The following week's edition of Missouri's newspaper, *The Word and Way*, proved that Hailey was not alone in his dissatisfaction with Carver. Rather than attribute the review to an unfortunate lapse in rational thinking like Hailey had done, the author of the article surmised "there was a deliberate purpose to make his review the occasion for showing his divergence from the views of his honorable forebears and more conservative contemporaries." Not only were the editors disappointed that Carver relegated the doctrine to a lowly position, but they were "struck with the nonchalance with which the position [was] struck off." They wondered in print what type of education "the preacher boys" were receiving from someone who failed to defend a vital doctrine from the attack of a Unitarian.[80]

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[79] *Baptist Standard,* May 28, 1914

[80] *The Word and Way,* June 4, 1914.

Carver replied to *The Word and Way*, published three weeks after the charge of heresy, in basically the same manner he responded to the *Baptist Standard*. This time, however, he blamed the dispute not simply on editorial overexcitement, but feared that the editor of the newspaper "took his cue from someone else and approached what I had written looking for error" because the charge came two months after the review appeared. He affirmed the virgin birth stating again that he believed in it as "history, not dogma" and assured the editors that he "believed the Word and followed the Way."[81]

The editors of Oklahoma's *Baptist Messenger* did not wait quite as long after the review was published to register their comparatively short but poignant heresy charge. Their readers were already familiar with the editorial position concerning *The Inside of the Cup*, since six weeks before they published their own review. They said the book was written by a spiritually "blind man" to "unsettle the faith of thousands," would "appeal mightily to the followers of liberalism," and frustrated the truth of Christ.[82] Unfortunately, now they had a fellow Baptist to deal with who had a different opinion of the book. Baptists have reason to be proud of their seminary in Louisville, the editors said, since it has always been the "bulwark of orthodoxy." But they grieved "to catch a note from some of its professors now and then" that was out of step with its orthodox tradition. Space did not allow them to print a brief extract, but the offense was so serious in the small slice of the review that it needed no context. "Now we do not claim

[81] *The Word and Way,* June 25, 1914.

[82] *The Baptist Messenger,* April 15, 1914.

scholorship [sic], but we do possess common sense and ability to weigh credence, and we believe that the drift of the times call loudly for a sounding of the alarm."[83]

Carver stated in his reply to their charge that he was quite surprised at their method and condemned them for taking his words completely out of context. "Now, frankly, Bro. Stealey," Carver said, "had you read my review in full when you wrote that editorial? Do you think that you gave me a fair representation before your readers?" "I may not have come at it in the same way you would have done but I was aiming at the same end you would have sought, I think," he exclaimed. Carver then suggested to Stealey that he publish the pertinent part of the letter, a favor granted by him three weeks later.[84]

One Baptist, G.W. Hyde of Missouri, chose to take his reservations concerning Carver's theology straight to the top. In a letter to seminary president E.Y. Mullins, Hyde stated that he believed, like Mullins, in "liberty of expression;" but when a teacher goes over the limit into the "confines of error I think he should be advised, even warned and rebuked if necessary." Referring to the Crawford Toy theological controversy of 1879, which ended with Toy's resignation, Hyde said that Drs. Boyce and Broadus "tried hard to save him," suggesting that Mullins do the same for Carver.[85] Mullins replied saying that he regretted the controversy, but felt that Carver had been, to a certain extent,

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[83] *Baptist Messenger*, May 27, 1914.

[84] W.O. Carver to C.P. Stealey, June 5, 1914, Carver Papers, *Baptist Messenger*, June 17, 1914.

[85] G.W.Hyde to E.Y. Mullins, June 9, 1914, Mullins Papers;; For a concise summary of the Toy controversy, see Martin Marty, *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984), 304.

misunderstood. "It is very difficult to avoid misunderstanding and misconceptions in doctrinal matters," he said to Hyde in conclusion.[86] On the same day that Hyde wrote Mullins, W.C. Bitting of Missouri wrote in favor of Carver: "Evidently the battle is still on and I think must be fought to the finish." The opponents in the battle, he reasoned, were the "intelligent and unintelligent elements" in the denomination.[87]

W. O. Carver received a similar letter the same week from Bitting praising Carver's "brave true words" and assuring him that the battle between the "intelligent and ignorant hearts" of the denomination would one day end.[88] W. J. Williamson, also from Missouri, wrote Carver to express his disgust concerning the attack: "I am glad . . . that all of us do not have to see things through the eyes of any individual. In other words, I am glad I am Baptist."[89] E. B. Atwood of the Baptist Convention of New Mexico, in a letter to Carver, called Hailey's attack a "pitiful and meaningless whine," agreed with Carver's position, and felt that Carver was more than a match for his critics.[90] Obviously, Carver was not alone in his theological position and had many allies, one of whom most importantly was E.Y. Mullins.

When Mullins first learned of the controversy, he sent a copy of one of the newspaper articles to Carver who was lecturing at a retreat center in Pelham, Alabama.

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[86] E.Y. Mullins to G.W Hyde, June 19, 1914, Mullins Papers.

[87] W.C. Bitting to E.Y. Mullins, June 9, 1914, Mullins Papers.

[88] W. C. Bitting to W. O. Carver, June 12, 1914, Carver Papers.

[89] W. J. Williamson to W.O. Carver, June 30, 1914, Carver Papers.

[90] E.B. Atwood to W.O. Carver, August 24, 1914, Carver Papers.

Carver replied to Mullins, assured him that he knew about the charges and informed him that he was taking the necessary steps to refute the unfortunate claims. "I do not want to take the matter too lightly nor to ignore responsibility for criticism," he said. Mullins replied to Carver that he was sorry the brethren could not grasp the difference between "formal doctrinal statements and a defensive or apologetic statement of a great matter. But some of them do not seem to have capacity for this." Mullins reported that he did not see anything else in the state papers about the matter and reasoned that Hailey must have been satisfied with Carver's response.[91]

Indeed, Hailey was assuaged by Carver's response, but surprised that he had responded so strongly. Hailey replied in the *Baptist Standard* to Carver's rebuttal: "It had not occurred to me that any man in public position should be unwilling to have his public utterances criticised." Hailey noted that his reply would be the last because he had no desire to continue the discussion. He basically decided that if Carver said he believed in the virgin birth, that was all that mattered, and he would trust Carver to keep his word.[92] The editor of *The Word and Way* ended the matter by stating his disagreement with Carver's reply. Without intending to press the matter further, he concluded, "To dogmatize where dogmatism is allowable is better than concession where concession is not required."[93] The editor of the *Baptist Messenger* stated of Carver's reply to the charge that his "method will not be helpful or meet with the approval of a vast number of

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[91] E.Y. Mullins to W. O. Carver, June 19, 1914, Mullins Papers.

[92] *Baptist Standard,* June 11, 1914.

[93] *The Word and Way,* June 25, 1914.

Bible Baptists." Besides, the method was difficult to understand. Stealy said, "It is better to stick to simple language and methods, and when we make our meaning clear to the unlettered, the learned will appreciate it all the more." The review, in his estimation, looked questionable and "the good Doctor should write for the average man." He apologized for any unfortunate feelings his articles may have caused, and, in effect, considered the matter over.[94] The matter had become, for all the newspaper editors, the sounding of a false alarm.

Nearly three decades after the book review controversy, W. O. Carver suffered through the most emotionally draining controversy of his career. For most conservative leaders, the only thing worse than refusing to indict a proponent of theological liberalism was defending a liberal, especially if the offender were a fellow Southern Baptist. The July 1941 of *Review & Expositor* carried an article entitled "The New Theological Frontier for Southern Baptists" by Das Kelly Barnett, a doctoral student at Southern Seminary. Barnett was one of two master's degree graduates chosen to deliver a commencement address, and the article was an expanded version of his speech. As managing editor, Carver held responsibility for the journal's contents, and Barnett's article added a load of stress to his part-time duty.

In the article, Barnett excoriated Southern Baptists for adhering to an antiquated theology devoid of any significant social concern. Describing current Southern Baptist theology as "provincial, dogmatic, apocalyptic, and institutional," Barnett considered

[94] *Baptist Messenger,* June 17, 1914.

himself part of a minority group seeking to "revitalize the traditional theology."[95] The South was undergoing radical change due to increased industrialization, he reported, and poor whites and blacks suffered inhumane treatment at the hands of their economically superior oppressors. Southern Christianity ought to speak to these issues, he reasoned, and discontinue its subservience "to a social order that feared change."[96] To buttress his arguments, Barnett quoted progressive heroes such as William Louis Poteat, Reinhold Niebuhr, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Harry Emerson Fosdick, persons that conservatives certainly did not consider a part of their theological frontier.

The controversy began in the *Western Recorder* in September, and one of the most outspoken critics was Rev. L. E. Barton of Jasper, Alabama. Barton outlined his grievances to Carver in a series of personal correspondence. He took issue with Barnett's use of modernist theologians, such as Fosdick, to critique Southern Baptist theology. Barton denied that Southern Baptists neglected the application of the gospel to society's problems and assured Carver that he had always preached that "Christ is Lord of the whole life." But the main problem with Barnett was his view of Scripture, Barton said. Barnett, underscoring the fact that history determines theology, had written that "[God] did not entrust his revelation to a book but to a historical process," a statement Barton understood as a blatant denial of the inspiration of the Bible. Barnett's theology, Barton concluded, substituted "historical process" for Scripture as its base. One theologically wayward student was not his main concern; the orthodoxy of the seminary was at stake:

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[95] Das Kelly Barnett, "The New Theological Frontier for Southern Baptists," *Review & Expositor* 38 (Summer 1941): 264.

[96] Ibid., 272.

"My only purpose has been that it shall remain on the rock of Scripture where the founders placed it and express the faith of Southern Baptists in the Word of God."[97]

As soon as the public debate began, Carver recorded in his diary, Seminary President John R. Sampey called an "emergency" faculty meeting where he denounced Carver for "betraying his confidence" and damaging the seminary's reputation. Describing Sampey as "bitter and excited," the "grieved and angered" managing editor offered to write an editorial for the next issue of the journal to assume sole responsibility for the article.[98] The next day, through a telegram, Sampey apologized to Carver for his harsh tone and asked Carver to read the letter to the faculty. The faculty accepted the apology, but Carver still considered the episode a "deep breach."[99] At a faculty meeting the following week Carver apologized for being a "possible liability to the Seminary" and embarrassment to President Sampey, and he suggested that his elimination from the faculty might be the best solution.[100] The faculty disagreed.

In October Carver published statements concerning the controversy in *Review and Expositor* and the *Western Recorder*. To readers of the theological journal he acknowledged "exclusive responsibility" and urged critics not to hold the seminary responsible. He admitted that Barnett's piece suffered from "immaturities and infelicities of expression" and regretted that some parts were not refined during the editorial process. Despite these dismissive remarks, Carver considered the article orthodox and safe for

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[97] L. E. Barton to W. O. Carver, December 4, 1941, Box 24, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[98] Diary entry for September 24, 1941, Carver Papers.

[99] Diary entry for September 25, 1941, Carver Papers.

[100] Diary entry for October 4, 1941, Carver Papers.

Southern Baptist consumption, and he appreciated its prophetic intent.[101] For the *Western Recorder,* Carver outlined the process of publication in the theological journal and pointed out that the editors had limited amount of time for discussion since the July issue had to be prepared during the hectic summer months. He considered the anxiety caused by the article needless but understandable and regretted the difficulty it caused. Because Barnett did not question "the full inspiration of the Scriptures," the deity of Christ, or the "fatal depravity of humanity," he could not agree with the modernism charge. He agreed that theology, as Barnett defined it, must speak to the rapidly changing social situation of the South. "The 'theology' which recognized slavery, the liquor traffic, [and] the repression of women is not the theology needed for this era," Carver pointed out.[102]

The same issue of the *Western Recorder* also published statements from President Sampey and the seminary faculty. The faculty statement clarified how they chose student commencement speakers and suggested that they did not know Barnett's subject prior to his address. The published article, they said, did challenge the Southern Baptist status quo, but that in itself did not warrant its rejection. The editors of the *Review & Expositor* encouraged the publication of new ideas, and "Baptists ought not to find such freedom of expression foreign to their spirit."[103] President Sampey's brief paragraph sought to vindicate Carver's reputation as an "honored colleague," and the president characterized

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[101] W. O. Carver, "Frontiers," *Review & Expositor* 38 (Fall 1941): 77.

[102] W. O. Carver, "Concerning an Article in the Review and Expositor," *Western Recorder* October 9, 1941.

[103] "A Statement by the Seminary Faculty," *Western Recorder*, October 9, 1941.

the issue as a "slip" from the professor who "helps his pupils to face difficulties and retain their faith . . . without the least sacrifice of intellectual honesty."[104]

The most vocal critics in the Barnett controversy considered talk of academic freedom, the intellectual pursuit of truth, and the Southern Baptist response to social conditions simply a diversion from the central issue: the defense of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Minneapolis fundamentalist William Bell Riley, for example, wrote that Southern seminary was following the lead of northern seminaries by trading orthodoxy for modernism, resulting in "spiritual dearth, mission depression, and church destruction." Carver, in Riley's opinion, showed "ardent advocacy" for the article, and the faculty statement proved "more than the admission of the camel's nose." For Riley, the episode was more important than the famous Whitsitt controversy since Barnett challenged "whether the Bible is true for all time and all circumstances, and adequate to all conceivable ages."[105] O. W. Taylor, editor of the Tennessee *Baptist and Reflector*, wrote Carver and took issue with Barnett's substitution of so-called "historical process" for God's revelation through the Bible, and he resented the derision of "accepted and proved Biblical interpretations held by Baptists through the centuries."[106] John Freeman, executive secretary of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, wrote Carver that his involvement in the controversy stemmed from his desire "to hold Baptist forces true to

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[104] "A Word from President Sampey," *Western Recorder*, October 9, 1941.

[105] William B. Riley, "Professor Carver's Defense of Barnett," *Western Recorder*, October 30, 1941; For information on Riley, see William Vance Trollinger, Jr, *God's empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

[106] O. W. Taylor to W. O. Carver, November 21, 1941, Box 10, Folder 32, Carver Papers.

our historic faith."[107] Seminary professors have a crucial role in the process, he wrote in a published editorial, and "Southern Baptists have a right to expect that the employees of any agency or institution . . . shall be loyal to their fundamental beliefs."[108]

After enduring several months of attacks against him in the *Western Recorder*, Carver decided to issue the ultimate challenge to Victor Masters, editor and fellow member of Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville. In a phone conversation, Carver told Masters he was considering taking the heresy charge to the church deacons, so they could decide once and for all if Carver were unorthodox. "[The] idea evidently disturbed him much—he asked 3 times—in threatening ways—for me not to do it," Carver reported in his diary.[109] Carver waited a few months, evidently to see if the controversy would subside, and finally wrote the chairman of deacons asking for a trial, since the by-laws of the church charged the deacons with the "maintenance of faith and order." Carver challenged the officiating body to determine whether or not he was heretical and discipline him if necessary. A committee of five deacons met and confirmed Carver's orthodoxy with "full & most fraternal assurance."[110] The negative articles in the *Western Recorder* ceased.[111]

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[107] John D. Freeman to W. O. Carver, December 20, 1941, Box 9, Folder 21, Carver Papers.

[108] John D. Freeman, "Is the Attack Unfortunate," newspaper clipping found in Box 24, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[109] Diary entry for December 6, 1941, Carver Papers. See also W. O. Carver to V. I. Masters, December 5, 1941, Box 9, Folder 44, Carver Papers.

[110] W. O. Carver to W. T. Chapin, February 28, 1942, Box 9, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

[111] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 71.

Das Kelly Barnett resigned his position as faculty fellow at Southern seminary because of the negative publicity the school endured as a result of his article. Carver offered him no advice concerning the resignation and considered his resignation a mistake on the part of faculty and administration for letting the crisis get out of hand.[112] Barnett confirmed his own orthodoxy, as well as that of his professors, and felt that if critics would give a sympathetic reading to his article, they would find no theological threat. In a written response, the faculty affirmed Barnett's character and theology.[113] Barnett remained a student at the seminary and in 1943 passed his doctor of theology examinations, according to Carver, with "a fine showing."[114]

In late 1945, the Barnett controversy resurfaced between W. O. Carver and John R. Sampey, and Carver received the most painful letter ever written by critic or friend. A pulpit committee had questioned Sampey on Barnett's orthodoxy, since Barnett had allegedly made some troubling statements in an interview. In the course of a conversation with Carver, Sampey told Carver that he, as editor-in-chief, commanded Carver not to publish the controversial article in 1941, but Carver disobeyed the presidential order. Completely shocked by this accusation, Carver tried unsuccessfully to convince Sampey that they did not discuss the article until after publication and concluded that Sampey's rage was due to his advanced age.[115] Three months later Sampey penned a vicious letter to Carver. "I have rested under a false imputation for

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[112] Diary entries for October 29, October 30, 1941, Carver Papers.

[113] Both statements are found in Box 22, Folder 8, Carver Papers.

[114] Diary entry for April 28, 1943.

[115] Diary entry for December 8, 1945, Carver Papers.

nearly five years," he began. Having forgotten that Carver offered to resign over the issue, Sampey blamed the professor for not providing even the slightest apology, deemed his actions a betrayal, and wrote to officially withdraw his own apology given five years earlier. He blamed Carver for supporting men with liberal views in the denomination, all of whom sought to "change the theology of Baptists." Anticipating that his life would soon be over, Sampey wrote in disgust, "I cannot longer be perfectly honest with myself and you without revealing to you my conviction that our friendship is at an end."[116]

Carver read Sampey's letter with complete disbelief.[117] He replied to Sampey and called his former seminary president's indignation a "unique tragedy in the long history of my personal friendships and official relations." He suggested that their memories and interpretation of the controversy did not agree and that he would never knowingly support a true theological heretic. Carver could not believe that different views of a situation could ignite such personal enmity, and he signed the letter "with profound sadness."[118] Sampey was easily persuaded by Carver's reply and renewed their friendship.[119]

Four years before his death, Carver wrote a three-page statement concerning Sampey's outburst to clarify the situation should anyone ever raise the issue again. In this statement, written specifically for inclusion with his personal correspondence dealing

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[116] John R. Sampey to W. O. Carver, March 20, 1946, Box 10, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[117] Diary entry for March 21, 1946, Carver Papers. See also "A Statement," January 21, 1950, Box 20, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[118] W. O. Carver to J. R. Sampey, March 22, 1946, Box 10, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[119] See diary entries for March 21, 26, 1946. Carver Papers.

with the Barnett controversy, he wrote that all of his colleagues regarded the 1946 incident a result of Sampey's "senility" and temper.[120] Despite the fact that Sampey and Carver suffered no long-term breach of friendship, the episode illustrates how emotionally trying theological controversy could be.

One important challenge faced by advocates of progressive orthodoxy in the SBC was finding a safe outlet for the articulation of their minority theological views. The *Baptist Argus* newspaper, and its successor, the *Baptist World*, served the purpose well in the early decades of the twentieth century, and progressive leaders sought in vain during the 1930s and 40s to create a similar, longstanding publication. In 1935, H. W. Provence of Greenville, South Carolina wrote Carver and others concerning the establishment of a progressive, weekly newspaper. Calling it the *Christian Clarion*, Provence promised the paper to be an "independent, constructive, Southwide religious journal." The current state denominational papers could not adequately cover news from outside their respective states, and Provence hoped the new paper would "keep its readers in touch with the spirit of modern Christianity" and "interpret the social bearing of the gospel without weakening the emphasis upon the fundamental importance of the individual."[121] On paper, the plan was simple. One progressive leader from each state would serve as editor. Executives of denominational agencies could not fill the position, since "self appointed denominational censors" prevented them from speaking freely.[122] Provence felt sure that "thousands of [Southern Baptist] thoughtful preachers and laymen" would welcome the new weekly.

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[120] W. O. Carver, "A Statement," January 21, 1950, Box 10, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[121] Flyer found in Box 8, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

Carver felt the denomination needed a progressive paper but confided to his diary that he did not think Provence's plan would succeed.[123] Carver agreed to serve as the editor from Kentucky, offered to purchase one hundred dollars worth of stock, and collaborated with Provence in selecting the other state editors. Provence successfully secured a board of trustees and formidable list of contributing editors for the paper, but he was quickly discouraged by the challenge of raising enough capital for the project. In May 1936 he wrote Carver discouraged that he had overestimated the progressive interests of Southern Baptists. Provence had sent letters to two hundred pastors asking them to help him raise $20,000, a challenge he thought they would easily meet. Despite enclosing a paid reply envelope, a large majority of the pastors failed to reply and fewer than a dozen indicated their willingness to support the new venture.[124] Carver encouraged Provence not to surrender the idea or give into "the inertia of conservatism," but he saw no hope for the enterprise since the circle of "forward-looking" men was so small.[125]

Later that year W. R. Cullom of Wake Forest College wrote Carver with a similar idea. Disillusioned with the "growing narrowness" of Southern Baptist leaders toward ecumenism and other important issues, Cullom believed the "liberal minded amongst us" needed an outlet for theological expression. Though certainly not radical in their theology, he told Carver, a distinct minority of leaders in the denomination were faithful

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[122] H. W. Provence to W. O. Carver, November 28, 1935, Box 8, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[123] Diary entry for October 30, 1935, Carver Papers.

[124] H. W. Provence to W. O. Carver, May 2, 1936, Box 8, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

[125] W. O. Carver to H. W. Provence, May 15, 1936, Box 8, Folder 11, Carver Papers (first quote); H. W. Provence to W. O. Carver, June 4, 1936, Box 8, Folder 11, Carver Papers (second quote).

to the Bible and Jesus without discounting the value of modern thought.[126] Carver was surprised to hear that Cullom was not invited to be a part of Provence's plan, relayed Provence's experience with the project to Cullom, and expressed to Cullom that a newspaper of that sort was sorely needed but difficult to create and sustain.[127] Cullom dropped the idea in 1936, revisited it again eight years later, and wrote Carver another letter seeking advice.[128] Carver mentioned again the difficulty of financing the project and added that the "traditional conservative element" would violently oppose the paper. If the paper were to survive, he told Cullom, older leaders like themselves would have to enroll the younger generation of leaders in the project. "Old men who dream dreams have to link up with and stand behind young men who see visions," he wrote.[129]

Carver's longstanding desire for a progressive publication and theory that an intergenerational project might have lasting effect explains his courageous participation in Das Kelly Barnett's short-lived progressive journal, *Christian Frontiers*. In the fall of 1945, Barnett, then pastor of the Baptist Church of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, informed Carver that he and a group of likeminded Baptists in the state had secured enough funding to publish a monthly journal for two years. The journal would discuss "the marginal areas which confront Southern Baptists," issues such as historical criticism of the Bible, ecumenism, race relations, international ethics, and pastoral psychiatry. Barnett invited Carver to serve on the Board of Directors and contribute articles from time to

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[126] W. R. Cullom to W. O. Carver, November 21, 1936, Box 7, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[127] W. O. Carver to W. R. Cullom, November 30, 1936, Box 7, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[128] W. R. Cullom to W. O. Carver, August 23, 1944, Box 9, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[129] W. O. Carver to W. R. Cullom, September 18, 1944, Box 9, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

time. “Always those of us who have sought to escape from the narrow and barren confines of an authoritarian system have looked to you for leadership and guidance,” he wrote.[130] Carver agreed to serve on the board but admitted that some friends would criticize him for doing so. Despite the risk, he supported the journal wholeheartedly.[131]

Barnett added Carver to the journal’s seven member “Southwide Advisory Council” and appreciated the advice and submissions offered by his former professor. Carver thought the inaugural issue mediocre and offered a severe critique of one article, calling it “superficial in its thinking, stupid in its conception, vicious in its interpretation of Scripture, [and] pagan in its conception of Jesus.”[132] In a future issue Carver published an article on the person of Jesus Christ that presented a more traditional view. Barnett thanked Carver for helping articulate the belief of all the editors that “Jesus is the Son of God, not the son of David, a human Messiah.”[133]

The journal lasted only three years before collapsing from the lack of funding needed for a publication that sought freedom from denominational coffers and control. By then, in January 1949, William W. Finlator was editor-in-chief and Barnett, who

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[130] Das Kelley Barnett to W. O. Carver, October 30, 1945, Box 9, Folder 1, Carver Papers.

[131] W. O. Carver to D. K. Barnett, November 1, 1945, Box 9, Folder 1, Carver Papers. For examples of criticism, see H. C. Goerner to W. O. Carver, July 23, 1949, Box 9, Folder 26, Carver Papers; Diary entries for May 19, August 30, October 4, 1949, Carver Papers; and John R. Sampey to W. O. Carver, March 20, 1946, Box 10, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[132] W. O. Carver to Das Kelley Barnett, February 14, 1946, Box 9, Folder 1, Carver Papers.

[133] Das Kelley Barnett to W. O. Carver, April 30, 1956, Box 9, Folder 1, Carver Papers; W. O. Carver, “What Think Ye of the Christ?” *Christian Frontiers* 1 (June 1946): 183-190.

contributed an article on Communism for the journal's last issue, was a professor of sociology at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia.[134] The editors lamented the early death of their progressive monthly journal and hoped for "the resurrection of a nobler and a finer successor."[135] In the words of historian John Lee Eighmy, "*Christian Frontiers* was a short-lived example of the presence of a liberal minority in open rebellion against conservatism, social inaction, and isolationism."[136] Barnett eventually left the denomination altogether for the more socially active Protestant Episcopal Church, despite Carver's earlier warning to him that no denomination "can be wholly satisfactory to any individual who is alive and conscious of his own individuality."[137]

Instead of seeking a non-denominational outlet for the expression of progressive orthodoxy, W. O. Carver offered his uncensored views for a few years through a denominational publication that reached the desk of every pastor in the SBC. In 1937, the SBC's publishing institution, the Sunday School Board, began a quarterly publication, the *Pastor's Periscope*, mailed to pastors to provide notices and reviews of new books, suggestions for sermons, and other helpful advice. The editors asked Carver to write a column under the title "Facts and Factors in History Making." For the first few years of

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[134] For information on Finlator, see G. McLeod Bryan, *Dissenter in the Baptist Southland :Fifty Years in the Career of William Wallace Finlator* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985).

[135] *Christian Frontiers* 2 (January 1949): 285.

[136] John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, 156. See also, David Stricklin, A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press), 46-47.

[137] W. O. Carver to Das Kelley Barnett, September 4, 1946, Box 9, Folder 1, Carver Papers.

publication he enjoyed complete freedom to publish his own commentary on world events, and eventually the editors added a subtitle to the column that read, "Dr. Carver expresses himself frankly on vital matters." Carver used the column to address topics such as the relationship between church and state, the ecumenical movement, the social application of the gospel, foreign policy matters, and denominational developments. To one interested reader he admitted that many pastors probably disagreed with his opinions, and he enjoyed the "absolute freedom" given to him by the Sunday School Board.[138]

The opportunity to speak directly to the denomination's pastors only lasted a few years as a result of a change in editorial staff and new direction for the quarterly magazine. Despite the fact that the editors considered Carver a "past master at *telling* the folks without creating undesirable *controversy*," they curbed his freedom in 1940 by sending back articles they deemed potentially controversial.[139] In one returned article criticizing President Franklin D. Roosevelt for his willingness to campaign for a third presidential term, Carver called Roosevelt a "mild mannered, plausible dictator" and argued that the president ended the United States' "century and a half tradition against perpetuating personal power." The editor's returned Carver's article, titled "Goodbye to the Constitution," because it was "likely to divide and disturb our Baptist people in their church and Bible work."[140]

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[138] W. O. Carver to Louie D. Newton, March 23, 1939, Box 8, Folder 5, Carver Papers.

[139] George W. Card to W. O. Carver, August 17, 1940, Box 9, Folder 9, Carver Papers; George W. Card to W. O. Carver, January 7, 1940, Box 9, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[140] W. O. Carver, "Goodbye to the Constitution," Box 1, Folder 105, Carver Papers; Hight C. Moore to W. O. Carver, November 5, 1940, Box 9, Folder 46, Carver Papers.

When Carver realized that the editors would no longer grant him full freedom, he decided to end the editorials. Referring to his tenure with the magazine as "a very pleasing, and somewhat surprising, experience," he pointed out that the subtitle could no longer be used since he was no longer able to "express himself frankly."[141] Since freedom of expression was the only reason he took the job in the first place, he decided that his contribution needed to end. "I have profound belief in the value and necessity of conserving and continuing our tradition," he wrote, "but it is my conviction that we are not at all deficient . . . transmitters of our great tradition." What Southern Baptists really needed, he argued, was uncensored commentary on important issues and perhaps some criticism from time to time.[142] No progressive Southern Baptist successfully found a long-term medium for their uncommon message.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the majority of Southern Baptists simplified the complex intellectual challenges of evolution and theological liberalism by viewing the twin threats as diametrically opposed to Scripture, the foundation of their faith. W. O. Carver embraced a less certain and more positive position, identified the middle ground between the conservatism of his denomination and the modernism of the twentieth century, and endured several crises and controversies as a result. Despite gaining only modest victories for progressive orthodoxy throughout his career, Carver remained hopeful that the denomination was moving in the right direction, albeit slowly. "I have seen a number of crises in the now more than sixty years of my

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[141] W. O. Carver to George W. Card, October 25, 1940, Box 9, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[142] W. O. Carver to Hight C. Moore, November 11, 1940, Box 9, Folder 46, Carver Papers.

observation and of some measure of participation in the life of our denomination," he wrote in 1949: "In every case heretofore the crisis issued in larger freedom and more intelligent understanding of our gospel and of our responsibility in it."[143] That conclusion, perhaps, was more a tribute to Carver's fierce denominational loyalty and optimistic spirit than an accurate analysis either of the denomination's past or its future.

[143] W. O. Carver to Maxfield Garrott, June 10, 1949, Box 9, Folder 23, Carver Papers.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHALLENGING SOCIAL VISION OF CHRISTIANITY

"We Southerners, for the most part, seek to evade issues and escape problems."
W. O. Carver[1]

During the first decade of the twentieth century, while William Owen Carver steadily built his career as an influential seminary professor in the field of Christian missions at Southern seminary, a younger Carver pursued a similar calling in China. David June Carver, fourteen years younger than William Owen, wrote his brother in 1907 to update him on his progress as a teacher among the Chinese. David was not a missionary; he thought the Baptist enterprise was a shallow representation of true Christianity. Having "cast off" the "dogma of religious teaching," David believed "a life of service is the true life." He believed solely in the "life power of Christianity," despite the disappointment such belief brought to his theologically orthodox older brother.[2]

David, who considered himself a Baptist, contended that the denomination focused too much attention on the transmission of doctrine to the neglect of social service. "If we would set our selves to uplifting humanity and teaching Christianity, instead of promulgating Baptist doctrine," he argued, "the world would be a great deal

[1]W. O. Carver to James Carver, August 25, 1934, Box 17, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

[2] David June Carver to W. O. Carver, February 24, 1907, Box 4, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

better off." The Baptist goal of sending missionaries to every non-Christian land, as opposed to focusing on a particular location with significant social needs, would render their mission work meaningless over time. "The world will become nondenominational long before it will become Baptist," he predicted, and Baptists should reconsider their missional strategy.[3] David praised the culture of the foreign land and favored the tolerant and easygoing personality of the Chinese to the "acrimony and vituperation" of the Baptist and Campbellite preachers in his home state of Tennessee; he concluded that "the Chinese are far more open to the Truth than would be these preachers were they still heathen."[4] He considered his educational work in China "distinctly and fundamentally Christian" even though he articulated the mission much differently from the denomination of his birth.[5]

David spent only a few years in China before deciding to apply his convictions about Christian social concern to rural Tennessee. In 1912 he became the principal of the Jefferson county high school where only one-tenth of all school-aged children were enrolled.[6] He enjoyed traversing the county encouraging parents to educate their sons and daughters. "The middle class here are charming; the few wealthy do not refuse our society; and the poor, as they express it, are 'proud' to have us come to see them," he wrote. The overall lack of "community spirit and social consciousness" and lack of funds

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[3] Ibid.

[4] David June Carver to W. O. Carver, March 14, 1909, Box 4, Folder 56, Carver Papers.

[5] David June Carver to W. O. Carver, March 8, 1911, Box 4, Folder 69, Carver Papers.

[6] David June Carver to W. O. Carver, June 6, 1912, Box 4, Folder 76, Carver Papers.

for public education made the job difficult, but he was content with his teaching.[7] After one year of service, David chose "to engage in educational work in the South and aim vocationally and avocationally to follow and further the teaching of Jesus."[8] He would eventually earn a doctorate in psychology from the Johns Hopkins University.[9]

The Carver brothers differed in their assessment and acceptance of Christian orthodoxy, but they shared a conviction concerning the social application of Christian principles. Both brothers sought vocations that would allow them to practice the teachings of Jesus, but the older brother chose the more difficult path of encouraging a constituency of conservative, heaven-bound, southern evangelicals to fulfill Christianity's social mission on earth.

The longstanding debate among historians concerning the social application of Christianity by the South's white religious adherents shows few signs of abatement.[10] For decades scholars have questioned whether or not the northern-born Social Gospel, with its emphasis on reducing the negative effects of urbanization and industrialization, ever made it below the Mason-Dixon line. Recent scholarship arguing that the "Social Gospel" was not a unified movement but a term used to describe a loosely connected network of likeminded individuals, and that the Social Gospel's most popular advocate,

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[7] David June Carver to W. O. Carver, August 12, 1912, Box 4, Folder 76, Carver Papers.

[8] David June Carver to W. O. Carver, August 22, 1913, Box 5, Folder 1, Carver Papers.

[9] See David June Carver, "The Immediate Psychological Effects of Tobacco Smoking," (doctoral dissertation, The Johns Hopkins University, 1920).

[10] For an historiographical overview, see Stephen R. Prescott, "The Social Gospel and the American South: An Historiographical Appraisal," 33-50, in Christopher H. Evans, ed., *Perspectives on the Social Gospel: Papers from the Inaugural Social Gospel Conference at Colgate Rochester Divinity School* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1999).

Walter Rauschenbusch, "was primarily a pastor whose goal was nothing short of preaching for the conversion of America" complicates the historical debate.[11]

The broader, and perhaps more relevant, task for historians has been to understand the differences and similarities in the religious expressions of northern and southern white protestants over time. As the intellectual movements of theological liberalism, ecumenism, and the Social Gospel found homes in many northern seminaries and universities during the second half of the nineteenth century, the majority of northern Christians tended to incorporate elements of each into their theological vocabulary, one result being an emphasis on the corporate nature of Christian experience and mission. On the other hand, white southern denominations, especially the Southern Baptist Convention, rallied around the "old time religion" of individual conversion, doctrinal purity, and individual ethics. The consensus opinion of current historians, therefore, is hardly different from a 1916 observation on the differences between Northern and Southern Baptists. "[I]t may be said that the Northern Baptist lays the stress upon religious deeds, the Southern Baptist upon religious beliefs."[12]

W. O. Carver's actions related to the social aspects of Christianity tend to confuse, rather than clarify, the historical debate surrounding the nature of southern religious beliefs and deeds. Carver's positive use of the term "social gospel," forceful

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[11] Christopher H. Evans, *The Kingdom is Always but Coming: A Life of Walter Rauschenbusch* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), xxv.

[12] Edward B. Pollard, "The Northern and Southern Baptists," *The Baptist World,* August, 17, 1916; For a historical treatment of the differences between the two groups, see Samuel S. Hill, Jr. and Robert G. Torbet, *Baptists North and South* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1964).

critique of strict "other-worldly" Christianity, uncommon support for Southern Baptist women as agents of social change, negative assessment of New Deal liberalism, and status-quo stance on race relations prove how unpredictable an uncommon evangelical could be on the social application of religious faith.

At the same time most Southern Baptists perceived a dangerous dichotomy between the "social gospel" and one focused solely on individual conversion, Carver reassured his constituency that the two could be one and the same. In 1936, for example, Carver helped secure the famous Japanese Christian social reformer Toyohiko Kagawa for a seminary lecture series, to the dismay of some Southern Baptists. Kagawa, referred to by historians as the "St. Francis of Japan," spent over a decade living among the poor in the slums of Kobe, Japan, studied poverty relief techniques at Princeton University for two years, and served as a union organizer and advocate for universal Japanese male suffrage. His writings argued for the application of Christian principles to society, made him a popular subject for Christian periodicals in the 1920s and 1930s, and resulted in a busy speaking tour in the United States.[13]

Victor Masters, editor of the *Western Recorder,* criticized seminary leaders for inviting Kagawa, and Carver recorded his frustration with Masters in his diary: "He shows that his real animus is his belief that K[agawa] is an exponent of the 'Social Gospel,' but [he] charges 'modernistic views.'" The fact that Masters received his information on Kagawa from the fundamentalist *Sunday School Times* doubled Carver's

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[13] Robert Schildgen, "How Race Mattered: Kagawa Toyohiko in the United States," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 5 (1996): 227-253.

frustration.[14] The following day Carver called Masters and enjoyed a "thoroughly friendly but quite frank talk." The editor suggested that Southern Baptists needed to know the dangers of Kagawa's views but admitted to the professor that he had read none of the author's books or consulted anyone who had. "Such is the ethic of 'champions of orthodoxy'!" Carver concluded in his diary.[15] Several weeks later at the Walnut Street Baptist Church, Masters stopped Carver in the hall to discuss the Japanese visitor. Carver suggested that Masters had taken the attitude of the Pharisees and presented unfounded charges against a prophet of God.[16] Evidently convinced he had misjudged and misrepresented the Japanese visitor, Masters published a "friendly and praiseful" editorial on Kagawa, resulting in a phone call of thanks from Carver.[17]

Carver also praised Kagawa's five-day lecture stop in Louisville, calling the speaker a "tremendous influence . . . for the practical interpretation of that Gospel as comprehensive of the whole life of man."[18] He sent word to J. Henry Carpenter, Executive Secretary of the National Kagawa Coordinating Advisory Committee in Brooklyn, New York that the visit was successful and received a favorable reply. Since they both agreed that Kagawa's main contribution was "the synthesis . . . between the

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[14] Diary entry for November 29, 1935, Carver diaries.

[15] Diary entry for November 30, 1935, Carver diaries.

[16] Diary entry for January 12, 1936, Carver diares.

[17] Diary entry for January 30, 1936, Carver diaries; see also Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 69.

[18] W. O. Carver, "Kagawa in the Gay Lectures," Box 1, Folder 20, Carver Papers.

social gospel and . . . evangelistic Christianity," Carpenter invited Carver to represent the southern states at the advisory committee's next meeting.[19]

The fact that social gospel rhetoric had only limited influence on the vocabulary of Southern Baptists frustrated Carver. After a 1934 alumni address on "The Challenge of the Social Gospel," he remarked that such speeches were heard only "once in a blue moon."[20] After delivering a powerful sermon on the "application of the Gospel to social conditions and the social order," a preacher friend confided to Carver that the sermon was the first he had ever given on the topic and considered his reluctance to preach such homilies a sin.[21] In an opposite experience, Carver's own pastor returned from a vacation one year determined to preach only the "Book and the Blood, to avoid politics and social questions, and to emphasize rebirth and heaven." The Sunday School lesson that Carver taught to a class before hearing the sermon took the exact opposite approach.[22] On another Sunday, after presenting a lesson to his class concerning the Sermon on the Mount, Carver found that the leading men in his class did not accept Jesus' teachings "applicable to society and especially to international relations today," to which he responded in his diary, "Alas!"[23] He lamented to one progressive Baptist leader

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[19] J. Henry Carpenter to W. O. Carver, March 31, 1936, Box 23, Folder 57, Carver Papers. For other examples of letters in defense of Kagawa see W. O. Carver to John Dodds, April 9, 1936, Box 23, Folder 57; W. O. Carver to G. B Snoddy, April 3, 1937, Box 8, Folder 29, Carver Papers.

[20] Diary entry for May 2, 1933, Carver diaries.

[21] Diary entry for August 19, 1937, Carver diaries.

[22] Diary entry for September 11, 1938, Carver diaries.

[23] Diary entry for November 10, 1942, Carver diaries.

in 1936 that the "majority of our brethren are not accessible to reason on [the subject of the Social Gospel]."[24] To another, he wrote "Most Southern Baptists, like too many other Christians, resist 'The Social Gospel' because we prefer the easier way of religion which does not make [many] demands on us."[25]

As massive, planned "revivals" gained popularity among Baptists during the 1940s, Carver felt that the evangelistic programs might bring more failure than success. He provided one strong warning to a colleague in Louisiana who was in charge of such a crusade: "We need bold and courageously to keep before the people that a church is not chiefly an immigration agency to enroll those who wish to go to Heaven when they leave the earth; [they are] recruiting centers for those who are redeemed by the atonement of the Christ and are enrolling in his campaign to proclaim the reign and the realm of God in all the earth."[26] In his diary he recorded his thoughts concerning a city-wide revival organized by cooperating churches. The preacher, a member of his own church, exhorted a "simple" gospel bereft of "ethical content and demand," a classic Southern Baptist weakness.[27] Carver issued a cogent statement against Southern Baptist revivalism in his memoirs: "'Winning souls' and 'saving souls' will contribute to our mathematics but may entirely fail or very superficially succeed in winning personalities and in saving lives."

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[24] W. O. Carver to E. McNeill Poteat, April 21, 1936, Box 8, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

[25] W. O. Carver to Henry Alford Porter, March 20, 1943, Box 10, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

[26] W. O. Carver to M. E. Dodd, December 15, 1944, Box 21, Folder 14, Carver Papers.

[27] Diary entry for October 10, 1948, Carver diaries.

The increasingly popular type of evangelism espoused by Southern Baptists beginning in the 1940s, in his mind, neglected "personal and social righteousness."[28]

When a Southern Baptist leader did articulate what he considered a holistic message of salvation, Carver quickly recognized it as such. When McNiell Poteat rallied the Convention to support a new Social Service Commission, Carver proclaimed to his daughter, "We shall come round to a sense of social responsibility yet."[29] The denominational leader he most admired was John Benjamin Lawrence of the Home Mission Board, even though he and Lawrence completely disagreed on ecumenism, another of Carver's important progressive commitments. One friend from Texas reported to Carver that Lawrence "advocated the social gospel in a very forceful presentation" at the annual convention, an address the *Western Recorder* refused to publish.[30] Carver replied that few Baptists could present an address of the type better than Lawrence. He surmised that Lawrence would not be attacked for his views because he gained "the confidence of the anti-social-gospel 'watch-dogs'" as a result of his equally strong anti-ecumenical statements and "ecclesiastical isolation."[31] When Lawrence sent Carver a new volume of published sermons on social responsibility, the professor responded with praise: "I do not know of any Southern Baptist who is presenting the individual and the

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[28] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 56.

[29] W. O. Carver to Ruth Gardner, May 20, 1936, Box 17, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

[30] E. B. Atwood to W. O. Carver, November 14, 1941, Box 8, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

[31] W. O. Carver to E. B. Atwood, November 17, 1941, Box 8, Folder 42, Carver Papers; for an example of Carver's critique of Lawrence on ecumenism, see W. O. Carver to J. B. Lawrence, March 22, 1943, Box 9, Folder 37, Carver Papers.

social Gospel in proper combination and balance with more force and clarity than you are doing."[32]

Carver's defense of Southern Baptist social gospel advocates is equally important for understanding his convictions on the topic. The best example concerns the controversy surrounding an article published by Das Kelley Barnett in the *Review and Expositor* in 1941. Most of Barnett's detractors attacked his heretical views concerning the authority of the Bible, but at least one pointed out that the wayward student was obsessed with the social gospel. Layman M. C. Wilkinson, who believed that the "Church has no place mixing up with matters of the world," wondered whether Carver taught his students "social work" or the "commission as Jesus gave it to His Church for a lost world?"[33] Carver did not ignore the charge and fully explained his position. Arguing that the message of Christianity was both social and personal, he pointed out the irony of Wilkinson's diatribe. One hundred years earlier, he wrote, Barnett would have been considered a heretic if he had suggested Christianity overturn a social order that included slavery and the liquor traffic. In the current debate, Wilkinson considered Barnett a heretic because he suggested that Christianity speak to the "oppression of the poor and underprivileged" members of society. "It seems to me," Carver concluded, "that the

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[32] W. O. Carver to J. B. Lawrence, March 27, 1943, Box 9, Folder 37, Carver Papers; for examples of Lawrence's views on the social gospel, see J. B. Lawrence, *The Peril of Bread* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1943); and J. B. Lawrence, *Taking Christ Seriously: Home Missions in Principle, Practice, and Program* (Atlanta: Home Mission Board, 1936) .

[33] M. C. Wilkinson to W. O. Carver, October 25, 1941, Box 10, Folder 39, Carver Papers; See also M. C. Wilkinson to W. O. Carver, October 11, 1941, Box 10, Folder 39, Carver Papers.

outcry against the 'social gospel' is being used to maintain an unholy status quo in a social order which has in it many unrighteous claims."[34]

The most formidable obstacle hindering a Southern Baptist vision of social concern, according to Carver, was popular belief in premillennial dispensationalism, a term more easily explained than defined.[35] End-of-time scenarios and elaborate explanations of apocalyptic portions of the New Testament had been a significant topic of debate throughout the history of Christianity, but in the United States, after the Civil War, a new interpretive outline for understanding the "eschaton," or last days, gained popularity. All eschatological theories contain an explanation of the millennium, or one-thousand year peaceful and prosperous reign of Christ described in the New Testament book of Revelation. Before the Civil War most evangelical Protestants, who experienced waves of revival and extensive periods of social reform, were optimistic that their generation would usher in the millennium, and they believed the return of Christ would follow the period of peace; they were "postmillennialists." During this same period, a group of Christians led by the New England Baptist preacher William Miller, rejected the belief that society was quickly being christianized and adopted an interpretive scheme from England that emphasized the return of Christ before ("pre") the millennium.

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[34] W. O. Carver to M. C. Wilkinson, October 14, 1941, Box 10, Folder 39, Carver Papers.

[35] Three crucial works for understanding the growth of premillennial dispensationalism are Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970); Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillenialism, 1875-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); and Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

As the Civil War personified pessimism for evangelicals and crippled the postmillennial vision, a new type of premillennialism, fashioned by the Englishman John Nelson Darby, gained a significant foothold in American religious thought and practice. Darby suggested that the Bible outlined several periods of time, or dispensations, through which the history of the world would unfold. Darby's literal interpretation of the Bible and fascination with apocalyptic imagery presumed that God employed a separate but equal historical plan for Jews and Christians, one that would include a cataclysmic finale in the Middle East. New Testament prophecies, moreover, suggested the "rapture" of all Christians shortly before the introduction of the evil Antichrist. Premillennial dispensationalists differed from other popular historical millennialists because they refused, for the most part, to set an ultimate date for the rapture, though they often debated world events as signposts pointing toward the end.

In the twentieth century, dispensationalism spread rapidly through evangelical ranks by way of prophecy conferences, Bible institutes, and the *Scofield Reference Bible*. At prophecy conferences, ministers and laymen would hear a prophecy expert explain the intricate system of biblical interpretation and view elaborate charts illustrating the past, present, and future dispensations. Bible colleges, such as the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, made dispensation teaching an integral part of its training of ministers and, especially, laymen. Founders of Bible institutes scoffed at the scholarship of leading American theologians and established schools in response to the increased adoption of theological liberalism by mainline seminaries. The founders did not attempt to replicate the American theological seminary but sought to establish schools where students could simply gain Bible training for church leadership, and as one historian has shown,

"Students . . . were taught the tenets of dispensationalism and tested to make sure they knew them by heart."[36] The *Scofield Reference Bible*, arguably the first important book published by the American Branch of Oxford University Press, explained dispensationalism to more than a million Americans between its publication in 1909 and the beginning of World War II. In this annotated edition of the Bible, the author, Cyrus I. Scofield, explained premillenial dispensationalism through footnotes that noted Scriptural references to the seven dispensations of history.[37]

W. O. Carver was never convinced of dispensationalist claims and considered them a professional nuisance. He first heard of the interpretive scheme as a young, seminary student in 1892 and was unimpressed. He recorded in his diary that he went one Sunday to hear a preacher whose sermon concerned "the purpose of God in the dispensation," which was full of references to God's historical epochs. "It may be all very well, but I don't know anything about it," he wrote. "He tried to make a missionary application of it but I think made a signal failure."[38] As a professor he found students who embraced the theory a problem in the classroom. On one occasion he recorded in his diary that his Christianity and Current Thought class closed the third academic quarter with a "rather unsatisfactory lesson because so many questions arose from the

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[36] David Harrington Watt, "The Private Hopes of American Fundamentalists and Evangelicals, 1925-1975," *Religion and American Culture* 1 (Summer 1991): 155-175.

[37] Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Story of* The Scofield Reference Bible, *1909-1959* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); see also David A. Rausch, *Arno C. Gaebelein, 1861-1945: Irenic Fundamentalist and Scholar* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983); Arno Gaebelein was one of seven consulting editors who assisted Scofield with the massive project.

[38] Diary entry for April 17, 1892, Carver diaries.

premillennialists in the class."[39] In another course he complained that he wasted valuable time on a millennialist student who insisted that a certain portion of the book of Matthew dealt exclusively with Jews. "What a hard time our Christ has in reaching the world through us with all our notions and theories and concepts," he concluded.[40]

Excitement surrounding the end of time was also evident among fellow parishioners at Carver's local Baptist church. The professor found especially challenging those Sunday School lessons he taught that explored prophetic themes. On one occasion he complained in his diary that the Southern Baptist curriculum writers titled a lesson "The Coming of Our Lord," when in fact the text under discussion did not warrant such declaration. "I think I made in part at least the right impression," he wrote, "but it isn't easy to help people (or even to get them) on the right line when 'the eschatological address' (what a misnomer!) is under consideration."[41]

One of Carver's main points of disagreement with premillennialism concerned the role of the Jews in history. Carver's contention did not stem from anti-Semitism or a lack of interest in the theological heritage of Judaism or its relationship to Christianity. Carver chose for his doctoral dissertation topic the relationship of Jews to Christianity, and at one point in his career he served as treasurer for an ecumenical, female educational society that encouraged Christians to study Jewish history and customs.[42] The prospect

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[39] Diary entry for February 21, 1929, Carver diaries.

[40] Diary entry for November 26, 1930, Carver diaries.

[41] Diary entry for March 5, 1944, Carver diaries.

of the re-establishment of a Jewish state, beginning with the famous Balfour Declaration of Great Britain during the first World War, excited premillennialists, who considered the event a key prophetic development, and disappointed Carver, who considered the movement a great political and theological mistake. To one correspondent seeking literature dealing with "premillennial fanaticism," Carver argued that the Zionist movement was an attempt to "satisfy the spiritual hunger with the stones of political ambitions" and described the promise of a Jewish state "a most serious blunder."[43]

Ten years before the creation of a Jewish state after World War II, Carver published his prophetic thoughts on the matter in *The Pastor's Periscope*. He argued that the British Government promised "an impossible pair of obligations" to Palestinians and Jews but also blamed Jews for failing to admit "they rightly constitute any problem within any nation." He suggested that the Roosevelt administration incorrectly believed the Zionist claim that a Jewish state would transform Palestine into a land of religious freedom.[44] Knowing that his statements could be interpreted as anti-semitic, he sent a copy of the article to Rabbi Joseph Rauch of Louisville. "I hope that my fundamental convictions and sympathies may in no way be so misunderstood as to aggravate this very serious matter," he wrote.[45] The rabbi respectfully replied that he did not understand

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[42]W. O. Carver, "Gentile Opinions of the Jews in the First Century," (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1896); W. O. Carver, "A Reading Room for Jews," Box 23, Folder 90, Carver Papers.

[43] W. O. Carver to J. W. Morgan, March 7, 1930, Box 7, Folder 36, Carver Papers; see also W. O. Carver to Carl Hermann Voss, February 7, 1944, Box 10, Folder 34, Carver Papers

[44] W. O. Carver, "Fact and Factors in History Making," *The Pastor's Periscope* (November 1938): 17-18.

Carver's reasoning. "The sins and short-comings of ours do not justify the treatment that has so often been given us," he concluded. "Perhaps one solution to [the "Jewish question"] will be reached when others will view us as they would like to be viewed themselves."[46] Carver was grieved that Rauch misinterpreted the spirit of his article and hoped to discuss the issue in person. He did not explain in his reply what he meant by Jews accepting responsibility for the "unending Jewish problem" but clearly expressed his belief that the Jews should not be given a state in Palestine.[47]

The principle disagreement Carver had with premillennial dispensationalism concerned the interpretation of Scripture, especially the apocalyptic portions of the Bible. For dispensationalists, prophetic utterances needed to be categorized, deciphered, and placed on a timeline of events. For Carver, prophecy had a completely different purpose. In his most successful book, *Missions in the Plan of the Ages*, he argued that the book of Revelation was far from what dispensationalists made it out to be: "We must keep in mind that its purpose never is to present a scheme of detailed history to be wrought out. The end of all true prophecy, predictive and declarative, is the same, to serve the moral and spiritual ends of the kingdom of God."[48] To one correspondent wanting Carver to help him understand the prophecies of Zechariah, he responded that "the function of a prophet is to interpret past and current history in the terms of God's revelation through

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[45] W. O. Carver to Joseph Rauch, January 4, 1939, Box 8, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

[46] Joseph Rauch to W. O. Carver, January 13, 1939, Box 8, Folder 12, Carver Papers.

[47] W. O. Carver to Joseph Rauch, January 23, 1939, Box 8, Folder 12, Carver Papers; For another example of Carver's anti-Zionism, see W. O. Carver to Henry A. Atkinson, November 10, 1943, Box 8, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

[48] W. O. Carver, *Missions in the Plan of the Ages*, 261.

the prophet. . . . It is not his business to write detailed history beforehand."[49] No room for agreement could be found between Carver and dispensationalist interpreters of the Bible.

Carver considered the popularity of the *Scofield Reference Bible* a curse rather than a blessing. To one correspondent, he plainly stated that he "deplored that the dispensational millennialism has gotten such an extensive hold on our Southern Baptist pastors," and he blamed Sunday School Board marketing and sale of the Scofield Bible for the problem. "Schofield [sic.] is not nearly so extreme and absurd as some of the chart makers and apostles of millennialism," he wrote, "but he is all the more plausible."[50] To a Virginia pastor who pleaded with Carver to write something to cure the "slipshod thinking" of Baptists, the professor replied that eschatology was too far from his major academic work to spend time writing a book. He suggested one solution: "If we could some way get our ministers . . . to abandon the use of the Schofield [sic.] Bible and to forget it, a long step forward would be made."[51] When a pastor in Tennessee, who left a pastorate in Kansas City because of "the rabid Scofield worshippers," wrote Carver to complain about Southern Baptist bookstores pedaling the reference Bible, Carver replied that they shared a common concern. "It is doing untold harm," he concluded. The pastor

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[49] W. O. Carver to C. D. Hise, May 4, 1939, Box 7, Folder 29, Carver Papers; See also W. O. Carver to M. P. Hunt, November 29, 1939, Box 7, Folder 29, Carver Papers.

[50] W. O. Carver to F. V. McFatridge, October 2, 1940, Box 9, Folder 40, Carver Papers; For an example of a pastor "reared with a Scofield Bible," see James A. Adams to W. O. Carver, September 10, 1940, Box 8, Folder 41, Carver Papers.

[51] W. O. Carver to E. H. Puryear, October 9, 1942, Box 10, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

identified the only solution: "Most of your former students will help guide the people, I am sure."[52]

Carver resisted the temptation to write a book on eschatology, but, in 1940, after deciding that dispensationalism might cripple the already-limited social consciousness of Southern Baptists, he penned an editorial attacking the theology and published it in his opinion section of the magazine sent to all pastors, *The Pastor's Periscope*.[53] Dispensational theology's worst effect, he reasoned, was the "denaturing of the gospel of its ethical content and passion." [54] Playing off a Moody Bible Institute pamphlet recently distributed to pastors across the country, he titled his editorial "Campaign Against Taking Jesus Christ Seriously." "I write this paragraph with much hesitation, but under a compelling sense of must," he began. Throughout the history of Christianity, and especially at the present, Jesus' followers sinned by ignoring the teachings of their Master, especially those found in the Sermon on the Mount. Dispensationalists argued that Jesus' strong words concerning social righteousness were only a foretelling of what would come and did not accept the teachings as commandments for daily living on earth. Carver charged that these interpreters "reconstruct" the Bible to suit their purposes and

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[52] W. Morris Ford to W. O. Carver, January 17, 1942, Box 9, Folder 21, Carver Papers; W. O. Carver to Morris Ford, January 19, 1942, Box 9, Folder 21, Carver Papers; see also W. O. Carver to James H. Allen, June 26, 1940, Box 8, Folder 41, Carver Papers.

[53] For his own reflections on the controversy, see W. O. Carver to James E. Tull, November 2, 1951, Box 21, Folder 3, Carver Papers; Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 76-79; and W. O. Carver to H. B. Cross, April 6, 1936, Box 7, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[54] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 76.

claimed their "mechanically constructed scheme" constituted a test of faith. Carver warned readers to listen to Jesus, not the fanciful teachings of the dispensational crowd.[55]

Carver was reluctant to issue his strong plea against dispensationalism; he knew his remarks would cause tension throughout the South. "[I]t is not an easy thing for me . . . to express convictions which I know to run contrary to cherished attitudes of beloved brethren," he remarked to one friend.[56] To another friend he wrote that he would rather not launch a debate, but he feared too many Baptists "are missing the real meaning of the first coming of our Lord."[57]

Readers who appreciated Carver's stern warning quickly wrote to convey their thanks. One pastor, Charles Bell of Anniston, Alabama, agreed with his former professor and believed strongly that the "legalistic, fatalistic, dispensationalism which judges everyman's orthodoxy" contributed to the South's backwardness. "Our people are saturated with a pessimism that is shocking," he wrote, "and the average church is just not doing much to spread the Kingdom of Love."[58]

Carver elaborated on the theme in his opinion section of the *Review & Expositor* two months later in an article titled "Millennial Pentecostalism." He suggested "good and

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[55] W. O. Carver, "Facts and Factors in History Making," *The Pastor's Periscope* (February 1940): 3-4.

[56] W. O. Carver to K. O. White, May 22, 1940, Box 10, Folder 39, Carver Papers.

[57] W. O. Carver to Charles E. Wauford, July 3, 1940, Box 10, Folder 35, Carver Papers.

[58] Charles Bell to W. O. Carver, March 12, 1940, Box 9, Folder 2, Carver Papers; For other examples, see Harvey T. Whaley to W. O. Carver, March 29, 1940, Box 10, Folder 39; J. L. Clegg to W. O. Carver, March 5, 1940, Box 9, Folder 11; Josef Nordenhaug to W. O. Carver, March 6, 1940, Box 10, Folder 2; Walton R. Cole to W. O. Carver, March 7, 1940, Box 9, Folder 11, Carver Papers.

devout men" were obsessed with millennialism and leading their congregations away from Jesus' true message. Millennial fanaticism advocated "a counsel of pessimism," the worst kind of theological heresy. "All this wouldn't matter if it didn't matter so much," he opined, and argued that the movement "teaches people not to take seriously the ethical and moral teaching and challenge of Jesus."[59] The editor of *The Alabama Baptist*, L. L. Gwaltney, was so impressed with Carver's article that he published a copy of it as quickly as possible.[60] Letters of appreciation reached Carver quickly, and other newspaper editors requested permission to reprint the article.[61]

Critics of Carver also wasted little time responding to the professor, though they did use more paper and ink. Rev. S. J. Gardner read a reprint of "Millennial Pentecostalism" in South Carolina's Baptist newspaper and found Carver's message revolting. "Why should I be persuaded to renounce my faith [in millennialism] . . . just because a 'Doctor' of the seminary dares not to concur with the literal teachings of Jesus?" he wrote in disgust. Gardner lectured Carver on the uselessness of "a social gospel program," "the octopus [sic.] of modernism," and traitorous "vain philosophers."[62] Carver offered an insincere apology to Gardner for "opposing the

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[59] W. O. Carver, "Life Factors and Tendencies," *Review & Expositor* (April 1940): 192-195.

[60] L. L. Gwaltney to W. O. Carver, April 6, 1940, Box 7, Folder 26, Carver Papers; W. O. Carver, "Millennial Pentecostalism," *The Alabama Baptist*, April 6, 1940.

[61] For example, see L. F. Maynard to W. O. Carver, April 6, 1940, Box 9, Folder 44; A. B. Creel to W. O. Carver, April 29, 1940, Box 9, Folder 15; J. M. Burnett to W. O. Carver, April 16, 1940, Box 9, Folder 6; James Chapman to W. O. Carver, May 14, 1940, Box 20, Folder 6; R. T. Marsh to W. O. Carver, May 8, 1940, Box 9, Folder 44;

[62] S. J. Gardner to W. O. Carver, May 2, 1940, Box 9, Folder 24, Carver Papers.

scheme of history into which you fit your Gospel," adding that he hoped his message would help steer some believers away from the errors of dispensationalism.[63] Joseph Field of Amarillo, Texas sent Carver a copy of a letter he wrote to the editor of the Texas Baptist state paper expressing his concern "for the audacity [manifested] in printing such an article." Field suggested that half of all Texas Baptist pastors, as premillennialists, would be offended by the article, since Carver labeled them "unbelievers, hypocrites, and blasphemers."[64]

The *Western Recorder* newspaper became the forum for public debate over Carver's views when he published a long, negative review of a dispensationalist book titled *Into the Clouds* by Arthur I. Brown. Carver acknowledged that the book was by far the best work of its type, combining detailed research, earnest writing, and critical thinking. The many Christians who appreciated eschatological treatises and approved of dispensational theory could find no better volume. Carver, on the other hand, disagreed completely with the book's thesis and charged the author with "misinterpretation and juggling of the Scriptures." The book contained "numberless errors," but Carver focused on one, the interpretation of a key passage in the book of Acts often used to demonstrate God's use of dispensational periods in history. "I know of no worse perversion of Scripture teaching than the use made of this passage," he wrote. Carver then suggested that the "fundamental error" of the theory lay in a false understanding of biblical prophecy and an overly pessimistic view of the human situation.[65]

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[63] W. O. Carver to S. J. Gardner, May 6, 1940, Box 9, Folder 24, Carver Papers.

[64] Joseph W. Field to F. M. McConnell, May 31, 1940, Box 9, Folder 40, Carver Papers.

Many readers of the *Western Recorder* disagreed with Carver's estimation of the book, and some quickly issued their rebuttals. Jonathan J. Robinson, of Louisville, characterized Carver's definition of prophecy as unscriptural. Prophets predicted the future, he wrote, plain and simple. Robinson admitted that dispensational theory was relatively new to Christians, a result of its neglect in the Middle Ages and Reformation periods of church history. "Its acceptance may require the reversing of what we have been holding and teaching for years," he retorted, though he was confident that Bible-believing Baptists would have no difficulty accepting scriptural teaching: "Let us hope that stalwart and faithful members of Baptist churches in the South . . . will re-examine this great subject . . ."[66] Maryland pastor L. A. Daniel reported his disbelief that a professor of Carver's distinction would utter such unkind words toward the many Southern Baptist premillennial advocates. Carver's "unjustifiable and un-Christlike" criticism could not match the plain teaching of Scripture.[67]

The same week L. A. Daniel published his critique of Carver's review, famed Northern Baptist fundamentalist leader William Bell Riley of Minneapolis issued a tirade against Carver's anti-dispensational view contained in his recent article, "A Campaign Against Taking Jesus Christ Seriously." Riley had received a copy of the article from a Southern Baptist pastor during a two-week series of special evangelistic meetings. The article, in addition to Carver's recent, unbiblical attack on premillennialism in the *Western Recorder*, was discouraging to Southern Seminary graduates, himself included,

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[65] W. O. Carver, "Into the Clouds," *Western Recorder*, April 25, 1940.

[66] Jonathan J. Robinson, "This Present Evil Age," *Western Recorder*, May 9, 1940.

[67] L. A. Daniel, "Maryland Pastor Replies to Dr. Carver's Article," *Western Recorder*, May 16, 1940.

and did not bode well for the institution. Riley listed seven criticisms, most of which dealt with Carver's inadequate interpretation of scripture. Carver's "near approach to modernism," Riley suggested, consisted of his positive treatment of the social gospel. To Riley, there was "no such a thing as a 'social gospel,'" only social results from regenerate individuals. He challenged Carver to debate the issue publicly in any magazine he chose. "There is one subject on which I stand unshaken and unafraid, and that is the authority, integrity, and inspiration of God's Word," he concluded.[68]

The debate continued for a few months with Carver and his critics exchanging heated words. Carver responded to Robinson's critique with a list of nine objections, most of which pointed to Robinson's "artificial and superficial use of God's word."[69] Robinson replied stating that "seminary professors easily assume tone of papal authority . . . instead of producing Bible authority in support of their position." Carver, he reasoned, did not "accept the real teaching of God's Word" and relied on a "false optimism" that ignored the frightening situation of the world. After all, Adolf Hitler might be the "wild beast" spoken of in the book of Revelation, and "a swift fulfillment of the prophecies" could be imminent.[70]

In his reply to Riley, Carver clearly expressed his view that dispensationalism robbed Christianity of its social intent. Carver agreed that "God's will is not now being done on earth," but he refused to use that fact as an excuse for ignoring Jesus' plea to

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[68] W. R. Riley, "Professor Carver on the Second Coming," *Western Recorder*, May 16, 1940.

[69] W. O. Carver, "This Present Evil Age," *Western Recorder*, May 23, 1940.

[70] Jonathan J. Robinson, "This Present Evil Age," *Western Recorder*, May 30, 1940.

introduce Christian principles into society. "[They] comfort themselves by saying that God's plan does not provide for God's will being done now," he wrote. "I think we ought to believe that Jesus actually meant us to 'do these words of His' here and now, not postpone them to some future age and condition." Carver included the now-familiar diatribe against the dispensational interpretation of Scripture, but the main point of his response concerned the social vision of their shared faith.[71] The next reply from Riley and Carver's subsequent rejoinder repeated the original claims of each and yielded no resolution of the debate. The two religious leaders still could not agree on the veracity and merits of premillennial dispensationalism.[72]

In his memoirs, written shortly before his death, Carver suggested that the dispensational controversy gave "offense to more good brethren" than any other theological dispute in which he engaged.[73] *Western Recorder* editor Victor Masters knew from the beginning that the piece would upset many readers. "[W]e both know that the theme on which you write is controversial among Baptists, and may easily . . . become inflammatory," he wrote, as soon as he received the review.[74] The tone of the personal correspondence he received made the published editorials seem civil by comparison. Rev. L. H. Roseman, a pastor from Arkansas, sent what Carver described in

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[71] W. O. Carver, "What is My Offense?" *Western Recorder*, May 30, 1940.

[72] W. B. Riley, "Dr. Riley's Answer to Dr. Carver," *Western Recorder*, June 20, 1940; W. O. Carver, "Dr. Riley's Continued Confusion," *Western Recorder*, July 4, 1940.

[73] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 76.

[74] Victor Masters to W. O. Carver, April 19, 1940, Box 9, Folder 4, Carver Papers.

his diary as "a red hot letter of protest and denunciation."[75] Roseman recommended that Carver spend a week in the woods with only a Bible and Concordance and study the subject, though the private study might supplant his cherished non-biblical views.[76] Another correspondent conveyed his surprise that Carver was so intolerant and wondered if old age was taking its toll on the professor.[77] Carver wrote his daughter Ruth that some brethren were "giving him fits" concerning the millennium and that one correspondent in particular was so full of venom that he could not discuss the issue with him.[78] Amazed at one pastor's furious letter, Carver replied, "I really wonder what you are going to do in the final judgment [if God is not willing] to accept your call for his wrath to be visited on me."[79]

For Carver, an overemphasis on the return of Christ had the potential to steer ordinary Southern Baptists away from their Christian responsibility on earth. While a student in Carver's course on Christian missions at Southern seminary, the progressive pastor Carlyle Marney, under the term "Second Coming?" recorded in his class notes, "First Coming not Complete."[80] Marney understood precisely the thrust of Carver's

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[75] Diary entry for April 30, 1940, Box 10, Folder 14, Carver Papers.

[76] L. H. Roseman to W. O. Carver, April 30, 1940, Box 10, Folder 14, Carver Papers.

[77] Mrs. J. H. Dew to W. O. Carver, June 17, 1940, Box 9, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

[78] W. O. Carver to Ruth Gardner, September 22, 1940, Box 20, Folder 6, Carver Papers.

[79] W. O. Carver to William F. Price, September 21, 1940, Box 10, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

[80] Class notes, Missions 51 folder, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Series, Carlyle Marney Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

millennial theology. Carver challenged Southern Baptists to complete the first coming of Christ through active engagement with society's problems and needs.

Carver's interest in Christianity's social vision also helps explain his uncommon support for Southern Baptist women. Early in his career he demonstrated a strong interest in women's education, partly a result of the two years he spent on the faculty of the Boscobel Women's College near Nashville, Tennessee. In 1897 he published an article titled "Some Thoughts Concerning the Education of Our Women" for Tennessee's *Baptist and Reflector* newspaper. He chided his state and region for not wholeheartedly supporting women's education while at the same time adequately endowing men's institutions. Although he thought women and men did not need the same types of education, should not attend classes together, and that women's education should "rob them of none of their true womanhood," he did believe that women should be afforded the same educational opportunities as men.[81]

His opportunity to be a critical leader for Southern Baptist women came in the first decade of the twentieth century and involved the creation of the Woman's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville. In 1902 Southern Seminary trustees voted to allow women to attend classes and take exams, without official course credit, at the Seminary; and in 1904, a small group of Baptist women rented a home near the seminary for women students. That same year Elsie Fuller, a local Baptist woman enamored with the women's program at the Moody Bible Institute, contributed a six-hundred-dollar honorarium for Carver to teach a class especially for women. At Fuller's

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[81] W. O. Carver, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Education of Our Women," *Baptist and Reflector*, March 11, 1897.

request, Carver spent a week one summer at the Moody Institute studying their methods.[82] The course, named Practical Work, introduced fourteen married and sixteen unmarried women to the basic forms of missionary service.[83] A separate course of instruction designed especially for women had finally begun.

These crucial events led to the founding of the WMU Training School in 1907, an institution one historian calls "one of the most important results of WMU leadership's brush with the social gospel."[84] Maud Reynolds McLure acted as principal for the school's first sixteen years, took over Carver's Practical Work course, and constructed a curriculum that would balance the individual and social aspects of missionary work. Students in their first year studied "Christ's Methods in Winning Souls," and then turned in their second year to "Relief Problems, Settlement and Welfare Work."[85] Less prone to spend time debating terse theological doctrines than their male colleagues, and more inclined to articulate Christian mission in terms of charitable service and practical

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[82] W. O. Carver, "Recollections and Information from Other Sources Concerning the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary," 120.

[83] T. Laine Scales, *"All that Fits a Woman": Training Southern Baptist Women for Charity and Mission, 1907-1926* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000), 114; George A. Carver, "Carver School of Missions and Social Work," *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman, 1958): 236-242; see also W. O. Carver, "Founder's Day Program at Woman's Missionary Union Training School, October 2, 1935," Box 1, Folder 4, Carver Papers.

[84] Carol Crawford Holcomb, "Mothering the South: The Influence of Gender and the Social Gospel on the Social Views of the Leadership of Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to Southern Baptist Convention, 1888-1930," (PhD diss., Baylor University, 1999), 179.

[85] Scales, *"All That Fits a Woman,"* 123.

mission work, Baptist women graduates personified Christian social concern in their communities.

As the key seminary faculty member involved with the Training School, Carver made an impression on all the students through his missions courses. While most of the ladies had dreams of becoming missionaries in a foreign land, Carver tried to instill in them a vision of Christian service that emphasized ministry to the South's poor and destitute as well as to those in far-away countries. Velma McConnell, for example, ministered to the South's poor while awaiting appointment to the Foreign Mission Board. In 1937, she wrote Carver from St. Louis, Missouri while working as director of a ten-week Vacation Bible School in "an underprivileged area." She related to Carver the difficulty of the work and considered it preparation for future ministry: "I don't believe that I will encounter on the foreign field more difficult tasks [than] those facing me here in this community where juvenile delinquency as well as adult crime are highest in the city."[86] Carver replied with congratulations: "Surely this is genuine mission work and is to be highly evaluated as such." He reminded her that "It is much more than just a clinic in preparation for other work. It is an actual part of your high calling in Christ Jesus."[87] McConnell soon left Missouri for work in rural Kentucky. Her assignment was a three-week Bible school in the mountains, a mission that required patience and consternation. "It requires being all things to all men," she said, "living in homes where sanitation is unknown, walking from ten to fifteen miles a day at times, eating food that has been

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[86] Velma McConnell to W. O. Carver, July 7, 1937, Box 7, Folder 40, Carver Papers.

[87] W. O. Carver to Velma McConnell, July 30, 1937, Carver Papers.

exposed to flies for hours and other similar things."[88] McConnell always gave Carver credit for shaping her career, though he never completely convinced her that ministering to her poor region equaled service overseas.[89]

The most visible example of Carver's support for Baptist women came in 1913 when he delivered the first formal report of the WMU to the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting. The WMU, an "auxiliary" organization to the SBC, won the right to present a report to the convention in the same way as the Home and Foreign Mission Boards (though women were not allowed to deliver the report) and chose Carver to be the organization's male spokesperson. "It is the desire of our Union that you be our honored representative," Kathleeen Mallory wrote to Carver. "We have always felt that in you we have a real friend and it will give us great joy to have you do this for us."[90] "The report was heard with appreciation and no protest," Carver recalled later.[91]

In a 1941 commencement address to Training School graduates, Carver cogently presented his thoughts on the role of women in Christianity, an address one female denominational leader has described as "the 'Emancipation Proclamation" of Baptist women.[92] In his address, entitled "Christ's Gift to Women and His Gift to the Human Race," Carver argued that most people ignore the fact that Jesus' attitude toward women

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[88] Velma McConnell to W. O. Carver, May 14, 1938, Box 7, Folder 40, Carver Papers.

[89] For more information on McConnell, see Mark R. Wilson, "To Represent Them on the Foreign Field: Velma McConnell's (Un)eventful Missionary Journey," *American Baptist Quarterly* (June 2005).

[90] Kathleen Mallory to W. O. Carver, April 25, 1913, Box 5, Folder 4, Carver Papers.

[91] W. O. Carver, "Reminiscent and Prophetic," Box 1, Folder 34, Carver Papers.

[92] Catherine Allen, "Concerns Beyond Feminism," in *God's Glory in Missions*, ed. John N. Jonsson (Louisville: John N. Jonsson, 1985), 46.

was exceptionally positive. No other founder of a major religion came close to honoring women as the founder of Christianity: "He treated women simply as human beings and with only such reference to their sex as circumstances made natural and inevitable. For the first time in human history men and women . . . were put on a basis of equality in worth, in grace, in privilege."[93] Carver was no militant feminist, however, since he believed that Jesus' example also contained a strong dose of humility and suffering. "The oppressed and suppressed elements of society were not taught or encouraged [by Jesus or subsequent Christian teaching] to go forth crusading for rights," he wrote. In the social order, Christians should be leaven and not dynamite. In the Southern Baptist Convention, an institution wrought with "characteristic conservatism and caution," women have been bound by the "shackles of cherished—if unholy—traditions." Carver did not suggest solutions to the predicament of Southern Baptist women; he simply encouraged the Training School graduates to go out into the world "called, trained, and commissioned." Carver was no Abraham Lincoln or Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but for Southern Baptist women who had heard more than a few sermons on womanly submission, he proclaimed emancipation.

Because Carver remained a faculty confidante of the Training School and supporter of Baptist women throughout his career, the WMU in 1952 changed the name of the Training School to the Carver School of Missions and Social Work. "How shall I speak of this day?" Carver wrote in his diary after attending a ceremony surrounding the first class day of the renamed school. "[T]he exercises turned out to be a sort of Carver

[93] W. O. Carver, "God's Gift to Women and His Gift of Women to the Human Race," *Review and Expositor* (July 1941): 252 (first quote); 254 (second quote); 255 (third quote); 260-261 (fourth quote); 262 (fifth quote).

laudation," he wrote, "with me being given credit for more than I can deserve."[94] Later that year, after receiving a letter from a school supporter commending the name change, he remarked in his diary, "I am about to become a myth while still living."[95] Southern Baptist women bestowed on Carver a lasting symbol of gratitude for a career's worth of companionship and affirmation.

Despite his defense of a social gospel vision among Southern Baptists, his brave assault on dispensationalism, and his nurturing support for socially-minded Baptist women, Carver's reformism had limits. He did not wholeheartedly support President Franklin D. Roosevelt's massive long-term plan to pull the country out of economic depression during the 1930s. Most middle-class Southern Baptist leaders, like the majority of middle-class Americans, did support FDR's attempts to curb the effects of the nation's worst economic crisis. In 1935 Roosevelt sent letters to over one-hundred thousand clergymen requesting their opinion on the economic conditions of their communities. One historian studying the responses of all Alabama clergymen concluded that nearly eighty percent supported the president and his governmental programs.[96] Southern pastors who opposed FDR usually cited his repeal of prohibition, Sunday desecration, or the slaughter of livestock or plowing under cotton. Carver's opposition rose to the level of a broader protest against governmental centralization and tendencies

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[94] Diary entry for September 21, 1953, Carver diaries.

[95] Diary entry for December 25, 1953, Carver diaries.

[96] Monroe Billington, "The Alabama Clergy and the New Deal," *The Alabama Review* 32 (July 1979): 214-225; See also Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 360-398.

toward autocracy, a criticism usually leveled by the most socially, politically, and economically conservative religious leaders.

Carver did equivocate about FDR and the New Deal. In a 1937 article in *The Pastor's Periscope*, Carver applauded the New Deal's "effort to shift the emphasis from property rights to personal rights . . . along lines proposed and promoted by the Christian gospel." He provided a positive assessment of economic changes and lamented that "so few preachers . . . champion the principles of social justice, economic righteousness and human brotherhood." But the New Deal needed "Christianizing," because it lacked "religious motivation" and "ethical emphases," despite its emphasis on the fair distribution of material goods as a practical employment of Christian principles.[97]

Other comments by Carver contain a negative assessment of the New Deal, and, especially, a perception of FDR as an authoritarian president. Historian Monroe Billington concluded that the majority of the respondents to the clergy letter "took a pragmatic rather than an ideological stand upon the role of government in the individual American's life."[98] Carver's response to the clergy letter could hardly be more different. The president's letter requested that ministers "tell me where you feel our government can better serve our people," and Carver thought the query a bit naïve. The clergy letter, he suggested, was written in a way that almost guaranteed approval from ministers. Carver praised FDR's "principle of neighborliness" and believed that some of the more

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[97] W. O. Carver, "The New Deal and the Churches," *The Pastor's Periscope* (August 1937): 20.

[98] Billington, "The Alabama Clergy and the New Deal," 225.

important legislative changes would contribute to a "better social order." But he then quickly turned his letter into a four-page critique of an autocrat.

Carver felt that the Roosevelt administration was too paternalistic and referred to itself as "the Government," rather than the "administration" of the government. A strong, central government was a compromise of American democratic ideals, and Carver considered this a damaging shift in ideology. Roosevelt's belief that the National Administration was responsible for the welfare of the people tended "to pauperize great numbers in their thinking, in their spirit, and in their expectations." But Carver did recognize the complexity of the issue: "It [is] difficult to maintain balance between seeing that people [are] not left in want [and at the same time] avoiding undermining their sense of individual responsibility." Carver deplored Roosevelt's "evasion . . . subversion . . . [and] defiance" of the Constitution, and he thought the president's "militaristic spirit" would ruin the United States' "role in peaceable and honorable relations" with members of the international community.[99] Carver's response to the clergy letter was definitely an uncommon one that mingled advocacy of social justice with fears of excessive governmental power.

Carver had published an elaborate version of similarly critical thoughts in *The Review and Expositor* a few months before Roosevelt sent his query. Appalled that the administration had convinced Americans that "some one else shall do their thinking and make provision for their welfare," Carver suggested that the attitude of "nobody is going to shoot Santa Claus" would destroy the American democratic tradition. The

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[99] W. O. Carver to Franklin D. Roosevelt, October 15, 1935, Box 8, Folder 19, Carver Papers.

empowerment of central government devastated the rights of states, another key to American democracy, and the fiscal policy of going into debt to get rich was folly. He identified religion as the only solution to such folly but made only vague suggestions concerning religion's role in sustaining democracy.[100]

Carver's distrust of Roosevelt and skepticism concerning the president's intentions seems to have colored his view of the administration's response to the tumultuous 1930s. In an unpublished article, he wrote that Roosevelt "never wished to be a constitutional ruler" and described him as a "mild mannered, plausible dictator."[101] Carver hoped that FDR would suffer defeat in the 1944 election and was greatly disappointed when his victory was announced.[102] After voting against FDR, he recorded in his diary that there was little chance the president could live through another four year term. Truman as president would "prove a calamity," he wrote, and Roosevelt had done enough damage: "R's influence has certainly promoted the moral and ethical decline in the U. S. which is so distressing and ominous."[103] Upon hearing of Roosevelt's death, Carver agreed with most Americans that FDR was "one of the most remarkable men of American history." But he also agreed with an observation about a "tragic lack of integrity at the core of his being."[104]

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[100] W. O. Carver, "Has Our Democracy Failed?" *Review and Expositor* (July 1935): 306-310.

[101] W. O. Carver, "Goodbye to the Constitution," Box 1, Folder 105, Carver Papers.

[102] W. O. Carver to P. B. Samuels, November 9, 1944, Box 10, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

[103] Diary entry for November 7, 1944, Carver diaries.

[104] Diary entry for April 12, 1945, Carver diaries.

Similar to his guarded view of New Deal measures and negative critique of Roosevelt, Carver was not nearly so convinced as other progressive, religious leaders that race relations was a social issue that needed direct, immediate attention. Slavery led to the birth of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, and its members—like the white, southern culture surrounding it—struggled to solve the problem of black freedom after the Civil War. Carver, the son of a proud, confederate veteran, adopted the popular "lost cause" mentality that attracted many of his contemporaries.[105] Addressing a crowd at Cave Hill cemetery in Louisville during a Confederate Memorial Day service in 1925, he described the "virtues, the chivalries, the heroisms, the spiritual nobilities of character in the men and women . . . who sat among the ashes of their hopes, the debris of their fortunes, the graves of their dead, [and] the destitution of their material condition." The South may have lost the war, he argued, but its soldiers had fought bravely, "free from the debaucheries of warfare," and accepted defeat with honor and grace. As for the freedmen, Southerners may not have demonstrated "the full ideal of human brotherhood," but they acted far better toward blacks than would be expected, especially by assisting their religious and educational developments. Carver suggested that the "two races have managed marvelously to live together" as a result of southern courage and fortitude.[106]

Carver's praise for confederate heroism matched his pessimism about the freedman's potential for success. Although he excoriated the rabid, racist commentary of Thomas Dixon, the author of the widely popular novel, *The Clansman*, published in

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[105] For background on the "lost cause," see Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

[106] W. O. Carver, "Permanent Victories of the Confederacy," Box 1, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

1905, Carver suggested that Dixon's "wicked and sordid agitation of questions" might spur Christian interest in the "complicated and delicate condition" of blacks. Carver agreed that many freedmen had the capacity for social success, but he was unsure whether the majority of blacks had the same God-given ability.[107]

Carver's detailed essay on "Negroes" for the 1924 international *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* included a generous mix of scholarly analysis and white, race pride. Compared to the "native condition" of Africa, blacks in America fared better physically and spiritually, even in the inhumane conditions of slavery. The grant of suffrage after emancipation had been a "political and social blunder," and national politicians were unconcerned with the final outcome of citizenship for blacks. Caste custom and race prejudice were inevitable solutions for social strife, and both whites and blacks developed "race pride and an increasing determination to develop within racial lines." Carver included shocking statistics: Negro homes were in destitute condition; Negro death rates were fifty percent higher than whites. He concluded condescendingly that the "docility" and numbers of Negro workers counted as their highest attribute.[108]

One liability of coexisting races at different stages of development, according to Carver, was the problem of morality: "The civil and criminal laws of the United States are designed for the stage of civilization reached by the white race or for the restraint of the Negro race within limits approved by the white race from their own, and not from the Negroes', standpoint." Most blacks failed to understand this fact, Carver reasoned, and

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[107] W. O. Carver, Review of *The Negro Cities of the North*, by Charities Publication Committee, *The Baptist Review and Expositor* (April 1906): 324-325.

[108] W. O. Carver, "Negroes," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner's, 1924).

mistakenly claimed that whites simply wanted to control their daily lives. The high proportion of black crime in the United States proved that the race was still in a "backward stage of the road from savagery to Christian civilization." His estimate of potential success for the black race had not changed from nearly two decades earlier: "[T]oo many of the leaders have been men of mixed race for us to be able yet to affirm that the Negro has shown capacity for . . . the ideals of Christian culture." [109]

Carver's traditional views concerning Reconstruction, African Americans as a separate race, and the need for integration, did not prohibit him from deploring virulent racism and recognizing windows of equality, however small. He critiqued seminary president John Sampey in his diary when Sampey, faced with a decision to allow African Americans attending a conference to eat in the seminary cafeteria, sided with those "who have the deep South feeling about the Negroes."[110] When Gordon Offutt, the first African American graduate of Southern Seminary before the school's official integration in 1950, earned a master's degree in 1944, Carver recorded in his diary that Offutt did so "with real skill" despite the fact that the president would not allow him to participate in the all-white commencement ceremony.[111] Offutt became the first black student to apply for the doctor of theology degree, and Carver participated in his doctoral exam in 1949. He recorded that Offutt performed well, "considering the fact that he was not permitted to sit in classes but had to do all his work by private instruction."[112] For the doctoral degree,

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[109] Ibid.

[110] Diary entries for February 22, February 23, 1938, Carver diaries.

[111] Diary entry for May 4, 1944, Carver diaries.

Offutt did receive his diploma, with his family watching from a seat alongside students, and the seminary president acknowledged, without explanation, that the commencement was "a history-making event."[113]

Carver worked cooperatively with black Christians and commended others for similar interracial activities. He participated in interracial programs, preached in black Baptist churches, and taught Sunday School lessons on race relations.[114] In 1948 he recorded in his diary that he attended a fine meeting where he heard an address by Marshall L. Shepard, the preacher who "prayed Cotton Ed Smith out of the Democratic Convention . . . and 10,000 Negroes into the Democratic Party."[115] When he received a letter stating that no African Americans could speak on any program at the Baptist encampment in Ridgecrest, North Carolina, his only response was "Shame!!"[116] In 1937, he listened to Roosevelt's first Supreme Court nominee, Hugo Black, discuss his controversial membership in the Ku Klux Klan and concluded, "He is a small man."[117]

In his study of Southern Baptists and segregation, Mark Newman suggests that the vast majority of clergy and laypeople assumed "African-American inferiority" and "favored Jim Crow [laws]."[118] For Carver, segregation was an unfortunate necessity

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[112] Diary entry for January 13, 1949, Carver diaries.

[113] Diary entry for September 10, 1948, Carver diaries.

[114] Diary entries for November 5, 1928; September 30, 1934; December 4, 1932, Carver diaries.

[115] Diary entry for January 11, 1948, Carver diaries.

[116] Diary entry for May 23, 1947, Carver diaries.

[117] Diary entry for October 31, 1937, Carver diaries.

rather than a favored system of social control. As early as 1939 the faculty of Southern Seminary discussed the desegregation of the school. "Ultimately our doors will be open to [African Americans] but not yet. . . . There are many problems to be considered," he recorded in his diary.[119] In 1945 some ladies of the Training School wanted to allow three black women to audit selected classes. Carver noted that since Kentucky law forbade "mixing races," they would have to work around the law by providing separate studies for the women.[120]

The best example of Carver's contradictory, or at least non-committal, view on racial equality came in response to a Southern Baptist woman in the middle of a crusade against Southern Baptist injustice, who sent the professor a manuscript "packed with T. N. T." Marjorie Moore witnessed an event at the Baptist retreat center at Ridgecrest, North Carolina that dismayed her. In 1944 some white, Southern Baptist missionaries to Africa brought as their guests to the Baptist encampment some black, African Christian workers. Upon arrival, the guests were asked to speak to the assembly on Baptist work in Nigeria, but their hosts soon discovered that the encampment had an official rule against Negroes eating in the dining hall. For Marjorie Moore, the sin of Southern Baptist racism was obvious. Southern Baptists sent missionaries to Africa but could not dine with their converts on domestic, denominational soil.[121]

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[118] Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 8, 18.

[119] Diary entry for December 18, 1939, Carver diaries.

[120] Diary entry for September 6, 1945, Carver diaries.

[121] "Ridgecrest Dilemma," Box 2, Folder 83, Carver Papers.

Carver agreed with Moore that the event was unfortunate, but he did not share the urgency of her concern. “Southern Baptists, as well as other Southerners, need to face the disgrace of a situation which made possible the embarrassment at Ridgecrest,” he replied. The African guests should have been served without question: “Unless we can eat with them we ought not to invite them.” But at the end of his reply to Moore, the prophet’s voice withered. “Still,” he concluded, “we can make entirely too much ado over our willingness to be equal with our Negro brethren.”[122]The majority of Southern Baptists would have agreed.

William Owen Carver’s convictions, concerns, and actions related to Christianity’s social challenge adds complexity to the historical debate concerning the South’s appropriation of the northern-born Social Gospel. His positive appropriation of social gospel rhetoric and crusade against a school of biblical interpretation that could potentially cripple the fledgling Southern Baptist social vision suggest that he was critically concerned about issues related to social justice. His willingness to help Southern Baptist women find a significant place in the denomination reflected his progressive inclinations. But his reservations about the New Deal and refusal to consider segregation as a first priority for the social application of Christianity suggests that in some ways he was hardly different from his conservative contemporaries, a denominational leader ensnared by “cultural captivity.” W. O. Carver helped lay the groundwork of biblical interpretation and faithful balance between the social gospel and individual conversion, but Southern Baptists would have to wait a while longer for a

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[122] W. O. Carver to Marjorie Moore, November 10, 1944, November 10, 1944, Carver Papers.

generation of denominational prophets who challenged the status quo concerning the equality of women and African Americans.

CHAPTER FIVE

A MEMBER OF THE "UNWASHED THRONG"

In January 1953, Southern Seminary professor Vernon Stanfield asked W. O. Carver to deliver the following year's prestigious Founder's Day address on the life of William H. Whitsitt, the infamous seminary president forced to resign in 1899 for challenging the Landmark belief of Baptist origins.[1] Carver welcomed the invitation, spent twelve months studying Whitsitt's life and legacy, and delivered, just a few months before his death, an address that became a perfect capstone to his long career. Carver was a young faculty member during the Whitsitt controversy and stayed near the shore of the deep, dangerous debate that nearly drowned the denomination. But he reminded students and denominational leaders throughout his career that Whitsitt was a crucial figure in the history of Southern Baptist theological education.

In 1913 Carver and Whitsitt's widow planned to co-author a biography, an opportunity to narrate "the freedom and growth of Baptist people and Baptist principles."[2] Nine years later they aborted the project. William Whitsitt had requested that his diaries and personal papers be closed to researchers for fifty years after his death, and Carver refused to write a biography without the necessary sources.[3] Whitsitt's

[1] Diary entry for January 19, 1953, Carver diaries.

[2] W. O. Carver to Florence W. Whitsitt, April 22, 1913, Box 5, Folder 10, Carver Papers.

daughter, Mary Whitsitt Whitehead, considered his decision fortuitous, since the biography might have "brought down the wrath of some of the brethren upon your head."[4] When he revisited the topic in 1953 the diaries were still closed to researchers, so he asked Whitehead to read the entries related to the period of controversy. Whitsitt never left the denomination, and Carver wanted to know how the former president felt about the acceptance of his resignation from the seminary. Whitehead found no related diary entries but reported her memory of the situation. "I never got the idea [that he] had a feeling of [repudiation] by the Baptist denomination in general," she wrote. "[But] he must have been disappointed that his loved denomination furnished such a horde of followers of that vindictive leadership."[5] After twelve months of research in the sources available to him, Carver concluded in his diary that Whitsitt found himself "at home even [though] not happy in the S. Bap. Ch. [Southern Baptist Church]."[6]

The audience for the 1954 Founder's Day celebration surely noticed a connection between speaker and subject. Carver, a lifelong advocate of "progressive orthodoxy" for Southern Baptists, interpreted to a new generation the achievements of William Whitsitt, whom he described as the "seminary's first martyr" for academic freedom in theological education. The legacy of Whitsitt's noble resignation, Carver believed, was a seminary

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[3] See W. O. Carver to Norman Maring, February 9, 1953, Box 10, Folder 46 and W. O. Carver to September 11, 1953, Box 10, Folder 45, Carver Papers.

[4] Mary Whitsitt Whitehead to W. O. Carver, April 13, 1922, Box 6, Folder 5, Carver Papers.

[5] Mary Whitsitt Whitehead to W. O. Carver, December 28, 1953, Box 10, Folder 45, Carver Papers.

[6] Diary entry for January 1, 1954, Carver diaries.

culture that allowed freedom of thought and intellectual exploration.[7] Carver spent his career challenging stagnant orthodoxy and obscurantism with the threat of full-blown controversy always present, and his admirers often placed the professor in line with the late-nineteenth-century martyr. After recalling to Carver his fondness for Whitsitt, the progressive pastor W. C. Bitting, for example, acknowledged the same qualities in Carver. "I admire your own bravery," he wrote in 1913, "[and your acting] in a constructive way as not to break with your environment."[8]

Carver was convinced that Whitsitt paved the way for progressive minds to flourish in the denomination, but his own career proved that the road was never smooth. He titled one chapter of his memoirs "My 'Heresies' and Controversies," a testimony to the frustration he caused and endured. Given that Carver never rested long from a doctrinal dispute and often found Southern Baptists lacking respect for his progressive notions, his statement that Whitsitt was "at home, though not happy" among Southern Baptists applies equally to himself. Considering the level of discomfort he experienced as a progressive in a conservative denomination, why did Carver remain a Southern Baptist seminary professor his entire career? Carver may have held professionally dangerous opinions concerning ecumenism, liberalism, biblical interpretation, and the social gospel, but he and Southern Baptists agreed on topics that seemed to matter more at that time in the denomination's history.

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[7] See W. O. Carver to W. T. Whitsett, October 4, 1929, Box 6, Folder 46; W. O. Carver to Norman Maring, February 9, 1953, Box 10, Folder 46, Carver Papers; Diary entry for May 1, 1935, Carver diaries.

[8] W. C. Bitting to W. O. Carver, March 5, 1913, Box 5, Folder 2, Carver Papers.

Carver's pivotal role as advocate for, and theoretician of foreign missions situated the progressive professor in the center of the evangelical denomination and provided enough credibility to overcome suspicion of theological waywardness. Slavery may have been the issue that divided Northern and Southern Baptists in 1845, but the missionary enterprise was the context of the rift. The southern Baptist insistence on the right not to exclude slaveholders as missionaries led to the divorce that preceded the Civil War, and at their first meeting in Augusta, Georgia, Southern Baptists established mission boards that began work immediately.[9]

Carver's choice of missions as the topic of his inaugural address to the seminary and desire to hold the first chair of missions established the pattern, and he would devote his life to the academic side of the foreign enterprise. In 1903 he argued that missions was the key to Baptist progress. "The healthy denominational spirit, the sense of unity and oneness, the sense of fellowship and brotherhood, the solidarity of our denomination owes its existence to missions," he wrote.[10] The statement seems overly positive considering the fact that Southern Baptists did not demonstrate a "healthy denominational spirit" during the Whitsitt controversy, which occurred just a few years prior to Carver's article. But for Carver, disharmony proved the point: Significant controversy only occurred when Southern Baptists lost their missionary focus.

In another early article, one in which Carver could be mistaken for a country preacher rather than a distinguished seminary professor, he praised the church he served

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[9]McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 381; Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 161-177; Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 43-73; Cauthen, et al., *Advance*, 19-24. .

[10] W. O. Carver, "Why Baptists Grow," *The Baptist Argus*, June 25, 1903.

as part-time pastor for its significant mission's support. When he began preaching two Sundays per month at the New Salem Baptist Church in Nelson, Kentucky, the congregation only gave $160 per month to aid denominational missions. After eight years of "long cooperation," the members more than doubled their contributions and paid the salary of one foreign missionary. The church now gave "twice as much to extending the kingdom as for its own support." He credited the church's Woman's Missionary Union for the phenomenal increase and offered the church's success story as a model for others.[11]

In nearly every denominational publication Carver regularly contributed articles encouraging support for foreign missions. In 1922 and 1923 he traveled the world to visit Southern Baptist mission outposts and published a seventeen-month travelogue in the main missionary publication *Home and Foreign Fields*.[12] The seminary provided a year-long sabbatical for Carver, along with his wife and three children, to study and observe missionary work in action. Beginning in South America Carver reported on Baptist progress in vivid detail, capturing both the beauty of the Andes mountains and the poverty of Rio de Janeiro. He described winding mountain railways, barely navigable rivers, and the light of the tropical sun. In a summary article reflecting on his South American experience as a whole, he concluded that after experiencing centuries of backwardness, the continent's countries were taking an economic turn for the better. "The

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[11] W. O. Carver, "A Country Church's Zeal," *The Foreign Mission Journal* (August 1904).

[12] The articles, titled "On the Trail of Twentieth Century Apostles," ran monthly from August 1922 to January 1924 in the publication *Home and Foreign Fields*.

greatest danger now," he wrote, "is that . . . progress may . . . occupy the minds of men while their souls are left to dwarf and shrivel." Southern Baptists could help cure sick souls.[13]

After traversing Europe with stops in every major country, Carver left his family back in Louisville and departed for the Far East. From the vantage point of a rickshaw he saw innumerable Japanese schools and shrines. Japan's focus on education provided Baptist missionaries a tremendous opportunity to build and run schools for children, but the religious context of Buddhism was disheartening. "No wholesome American would ever dream of choosing it as a home land," he decided.[14] Touring the vast mission field of China took several months, and Carver detailed for readers the challenges facing missionaries in the "soul-crowded" country.[15]

After visiting sixteen nations and hundreds of Southern Baptist missionaries, Carver ended the travelogue with a summary of his impressions. The professor gave high marks to Southern Baptist missionaries, but the annual budget of two million dollars, he determined, was only half the funds needed for overall institutional success. He noted two dangers facing the mission work: monetary support and "sectarian exclusiveness." Carver seemed to think that Baptist missionaries should cooperate more, when possible, with other Christian missionaries. "In guarding the forms of healthful teachings as to faith

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[13]"W. O. Carver, "'Trailing Twentieth Century Apostles': 'Looking Back on South America," *Home and Foreign Fields* (January 1923): 8.

[14] W. O. Carver, "'On the Trail of Twentieth Century Apostles': Greeting the Sunrise with the Gospel," *Home and Foreign Fields* (June 1923): 6.

[15] W. O. Carver, "On the Trail of Twentieth Century Apostles: The Largest 'Mission' of Southern Baptists," *Home and Foreign Fields* (October 1923): 316.

and practice . . . we are constantly facing the danger of seeming bigoted and sectarian," he wrote.[16] The opportunity to effuse foreign cultures with the message of Christianity was too urgent to be sidetracked by the snare of doctrinal conformity.

Any Southern Baptist who feared that Carver was willing to sacrifice the traditional message of Christianity on the altar of ecumenism or liberalism became convinced of his orthodox mettle when he led the conservative Southern Baptist response to the most formidable challenge that faced the missionary enterprise in the twentieth century. In 1930, John D. Rockefeller Jr., benefactor of Northern Baptists, called together a group of laymen to study foreign mission work. The project, known as the "Laymen's Inquiry," hired the Institute for Social and Religious Research to gather data from important mission countries such as India, Burma, Japan, and China. A fifteen-member Commission of Appraisal visited the areas for a firsthand look at mission work and produced a seven-volume report of their findings. The more accessible version of the report, titled *Re-thinking Missions*, was published in 1932.[17]

The chairman of the commission, William Ernest Hocking, a Harvard philosophy professor and Congregationalist layman, became the chief spokesman associated with the Laymen's Report, and his liberal positions overshadowed the more traditional assumptions of evangelical denominations. Hocking argued that the age of militaristic

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[16] W. O. Carver, "On the Trail of Twentieth Century Apostles: Impressions at the End of the Trail," *Home and Foreign Fields* (January 24): 13.

[17] William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 158; William E. Hocking, *Re-thinking Missions: A Laymen's Inquiry after One Hundred Years* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1932).

Christianity had passed; missionaries ought to respect, and not denigrate other religions and see themselves as "ambassadors" of Christian goodwill rather than Westerners looking for converts. Missionaries should be trained in modern social research methods and be prepared to combat intelligently issues of poverty and subsistence. The missionaries he found on the field were ill-equipped for the ambassador model, and he felt that a smaller and smarter Christian force would be more appropriate for the world's situation.[18]

The Laymen's Inquiry was not the only voice in the 1930s calling for a radical change in missionary ideology. Two weeks before the release of *Re-thinking Missions*, the most famous missionary of the era and recent winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, Pearl S. Buck, presented a speech on the subject to two thousand Presbyterian women in New York City. In her speech, titled "Is There a Case for Foreign Missions?" she left the audience speechless with her notion that the program of missions was woefully out of date and that the insistence of the superiority of Christianity over other world religions was unnecessary. For at least a decade Buck believed that the supernatural elements of Christianity were mere superstition, and she especially disliked the notion that God would send non-Christians to hell. Similar to Hocking, she called for a new message.[19] "I am weary unto death with this incessant preaching," she wrote in 1932. "Let us cease our

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[18] Ibid., 162.

[19] Grant Wacker, "The Waning of the Missionary Impulse: The Case of Pearl S. Buck," in *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History*, eds. Daniel H. Bays and Grant Wacker, 196 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

talk for a time and cut off our talkers, and try to express our religion in terms of living service."[20]

The charges laid against traditional missionary ideology ushered in an intensive debate among mission stakeholders, especially northern Presbyterians. Presbyterian missionary statesman Robert Speer issued a polite rebuttal. He suggested that the report had some significant warnings worth heeding, but, in the end, critics such as Hocking rested their case on flawed theology. The tradition of Christian exclusivity and belief that Christ would ultimately rule the world brought honor and not shame. The fundamentalist J. Gresham Machen, who had recently formed a new seminary out of protest against liberalism at Princeton Divinity School, considered the Laymen's Report a direct attack on the Christian religion and criticized Speer's moderate response. Southern Presbyterians considered the document a "monumental folly" and suggested an alternate title, "Rejecting Missions and Crucifying Our Lord Afresh."[21] As historian William Hutchsion notes, "The question of Christian finality—whether Christianity is one version of divine truth or is ultimately the only version—was the do-or-die issue in this debate."[22]

Carver, who always warned Southern Baptists against unjustly characterizing every new theological movement as liberal, found few positive contributions inside the Laymen's Report. The Atlanta Ministers Conference asked him to explain the publication. To see if his negative assessment was warranted, he sent a letter to W. R.

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[20] Pearl S. Buck, quoted in Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 146.

[21] Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993), 93.

[22] Hutchison, *Errand to the World*, 170.

Cullom of Wake Forest University, the only Southern Baptist that he knew was invited to hear firsthand the commission's appraisal. Carver concluded that the report "does not favor further efforts to propagate what we know as the historical evangelical Gospel," and he wanted to know if hearing the original presentation would have changed his mind.[23] Cullom concurred that the report would not "satisfy evangelical Christians," but he encouraged Carver to help Southern Baptists cultivate a sympathetic and appreciative attitude.[24] Carver agreed with Cullom that the report had some helpful information for evangelical Christians but giving it a "judicial estimate" was difficult. "As a whole the report is a humanistic rather than a Christian document," he wrote. "It proposes practically to do away with what we understand as evangelism." Still, he promised Cullom, he would seek "to salvage the benefits without approving the essential error."[25]

Carver encouraged denominational leaders to publish some helpful commentary on the issue for Southern Baptists, so that they would not fall into the trap of simply denouncing the document as un-Christian without gaining some benefit from the research and reflection.[26] He found the leadership reticent to evaluate the report and was infuriated by their unwillingness to pay attention to a significant historical movement. "[I]t is a fundamental error to seek to protect our people from important thought currents and

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[23] W. O. Carver to W. R. Cullom, December 12, 1932, Box 9, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[24] W. R. Cullom to W. O. Carver, December 14, 1932 and W. R. Cullom to W. O. Carver, December 15, Box 9, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[25] W. O. Carver to W. R. Cullom, December 17, 1932, Box 9, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[26] W. O. Carver to Charles E. Maddry, January 18, 1933, Box 7, Folder 38, Carver Papers.

practical movements, and all the more so when we regard these as containing elements of danger," he wrote to the executive secretary of the Sunday School Board. "It may be very well that our responsible leaders are entirely right in assuming that Southern Baptists are not sufficiently alive . . . for interest in even major movements in the religious world. If so, it is a pity."[27]

Carver published his thoughts on the Laymen's Report in the *Review and Expositor*. In January 1933 he wrote a short book review of *Re-thinking Missions* and in April he issued a seventeen-page study of the document. The published findings were voluminous, he admitted, filled with statements both traditionally evangelical and undeniably liberal. One of his main contentions was that the Commission consisted of scholars, for the most part, rather than of active advocates for foreign missions. The "findings," or statistical analyses of the mission fields, were not new, according to Carver, and the whole report could have been written without ever leaving New York. The pseudo-scientific report showed an extreme bias toward non-Christian religions and painted a positive portrait of world religions that was utterly false. "The dark facts of heathenism and the defects and failures of the non-Christian religions are studiously ignored," he wrote. The commissioners ignored Christianity's claim of eternal life, gave scant recognition to the Bible, and showed little concern for the person of Jesus. They suggested that missionaries "substitute for the Christian Gospel a humanitarian,

[27] W. O. Carver to I. J. Van Ness, March 18, 1933, Box 8, Folder 31, Carver Papers.

humanistic program" based on theism. "This challenge Evangelical Christianity will be compelled to reject," he said assuredly.[28]

Carver's friends appreciated his stern but compassionate evaluation. "It strikes the nail on the head," one correspondent wrote; "too bad the nail wasn't on the heads of the commissioners!"[29] When the article was reprinted for wide distribution, one pastor requested ten copies. "I doubt if you recognize the very valuable service you are rendering to the denomination by your conservative, yet forward-looking attitude," he wrote.[30] Because his review clearly argued for traditional, evangelical missionary ideology, he was disturbed when one newspaper editor reported that a few Baptist brethren interpreted Carver's positive remarks as evidence that he advocated the entire document. Carver assured him that his view had never changed.[31] Two years later a Florida pastor used Carver's "exposé of the theology of *Re-Thinking Missions*" to defend the professor against some critics. "If I recall correctly," he wrote, "you showed yourself to be anything but a Modernist."[32]

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[28] W. O. Carver, "'Rethinking Missions': A Study of the Report of the Commission of Appraisal of the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry," *Review and Expositor* 30 (April 1933): 113-130; See also his review of *Sons*, by Pearl S. Buck, in *Review and Expositor* 30 (April 1933): 201-202; Review of *The Finality of Jesus Christ*, by Robert E. Speer, in *Review and Expositor* 30 (July 1933): 334-336. See the following for a good example of Carver's unpublished view of the report: W. O. Carver to John C. Slemp, January 12, 1933, Box 8, Folder 27, Carver Papers.

[29] John Slemp to W. O. Carver, April 7, 1933, Box 8, Folder 27, Carver Papers.

[30] Ryland Knight to W. O. Carver, April 22, 1933, Box 7, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[31] W. O. Carver to Z. T. Cody, May 4, 1933, Box 7, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[32] A. Lincoln Shute to W. O. Carver, July 24, 1935, Box 8, Folder 27, Carver Papers.

Carver's negative assessment of liberal Protestantism's revision of the missionary message and his willingness to articulate a progressive orthodoxy for Southern Baptists came into conflict when he invited Rufus Jones, a Quaker scholar from Pennsylvania's Haverford College and a member of the Laymen's Commission, to deliver the distinguished Norton Lectures at Southern Seminary.[33] Carver acknowledged Jones' recent, strenuous work on the Commission but hoped the professor would have enough energy and time to visit Southern seminary.[34] Jones agreed to present a series of lectures on "The Unique Significance of Personality," his effort to deal with the scientific and psychological "difficulties of our time."[35]

As the lecture date approached and the national debate concerning the Laymen's Report intensified, the faculty decided that Jones' campus visit could ignite controversy, and they cancelled the Norton lectures. Six weeks before Jones was to arrive, Carver wrote him "a very embarrassing letter." Carver explained that the seminary constituency was thoroughly evangelical, and the faculty considered the Laymen's Report "the most serious assault on evangelical Christianity" in the history of Protestantism. In Carver's own mind, the Report sought to "substitute Christian Missions with a Humanistic program," and the faculty would be hypocritical if they brought Jones as lecturer.[36]

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[33] For an interpretation of this episode from the perspective of Rufus Jones, see Stephen W. Angell, "Rufus Jones and the Laymen's Foreign Mission Inquiry: How a Quaker Helped to Shape Modern Ecumenism," *Quaker Theology* 2 (Autumn 2000): 167-209 (http://quaker.org/quest/issue3-6.html)

[34] W. O. Carver to Rufus M. Jones, October 11, 1932, Box 7, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[35] Rufus M. Jones to W. O. Carver, October 14, 1932, Box 7, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

Jones understood Carver's predicament and felt they had made the right decision but for the wrong reasons. Jones suggested that Carver misunderstood the Laymen's Report, which was "far removed from a humanistic standpoint as one could imagine." Furthermore, he had just lectured to Southern Baptists in Virginia, and they welcomed his message without any fear.[37] Carver replied saying they would have to agree to disagree over their interpretation of the report. In a handwritten postscript he acknowledged to Jones that he disagreed with the faculty's decision to cancel the lectures but could not "dissociate myself from my colleagues."[38] Jones agreed; they would have "to wait for the calm verdict of the next ten years."[39]

During the same year Carver sent critical letters to the editor of the *Christian Century* and the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Laymen's Inquiry. He leveled the same type of criticism against the liberal, protestant magazine that he had received from conservative Southern Baptists all his career. Editorials in the *Christian Century* both favored and critiqued the Laymen's Report, and Carver was tired of their duplicity. "I venture to ask whether the time has not come," he wrote, "for you to take up a definite attitude which you are prepared to support."[40] To his letter of criticism, the chairman of the executive committee of the Laymen's Inquiry responded that leaders

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[36] W. O. Carver to Rufus M. Jones, February 14, 1933, Box 7, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[37] Rufus J. Jones to W. O. Carver, February 17, 1933, Box 7, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[38] W. O. Carver to Rufus M. Jones, March 7, 1933, Box 7, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[39] Rufus M. Jones to W. O. Carver, March 11, 1933, Box 7, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[40] W. O. Carver to editor of the *Christian Century*, October 18, 1933, Box 7, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

such as Carver had "misunderstood, misquoted, and vilified" the Report. Carver could hardly find any common ground between himself and advocates of the document.

In the same year the Laymen's Report was made public, a perceptive graduate student studying at the Biblical Seminary in New York, realizing that the ideology of missions was under close scrutiny by scholars across the nation, sought to incorporate the views of leading thinkers in his thesis titled "Nationalism and Neo-Islam as Related to Modern Missions." Carver, as "an authority in the field of missions," received a form letter from Theodore Essebaggers requesting his thoughts on the nature of the Christian message as it related to the "changing mind of the Near East Moslem," resulting from increased nationalism. Essebaggers wanted to know what aspects of the Christian message ought to be stressed and whether Christianity had a unique message.[41]

Carver provided a traditional, evangelical response with some emphasis on the social significance of Christianity. The essential Christian message, he wrote, "should continue to be God's interest in lost men and His loving offer of redemption through His Son whom He sent to save the world." But missionaries should also stress "the social ideal of Jesus Christ—the Kingdom of God on earth," since the message was one of progress. Muslims already agreed that Jesus was a good teacher, he pointed out, but there "should be no comparison with the notion that He is only another prophet along with Mohammed."[42] Carver was late responding to Essebaggers' query, so his thoughts were

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[41] Theodore Essebaggers to W. O. Carver, March 2, 1932, Box 7, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

[42] W. O. Carver to Theodore Essebaggers, April 18, 1932, Box 7, Folder 16, Carver Papers.

not recorded. The thesis suggests that Carver was the only southerner to receive the request that was sent to notable figures such as John R. Mott and Robert Speer. Essebaggers noted that he received both conservative and liberal responses.[43] Carver's orthodox response was no surprise.

One piece of evidence from Carver's files suggests that he was guilty of the same kind of duplicity that he alleged in the Laymen's Report. In 1938, C. W. Spikes, a Baptist deacon from Cleveland, Ohio who wanted to study world religions, queried Carver for suggested readings.[44] After two months of study he struggled with the traditional Christian belief that adherents of other religions would suffer for eternity in hell. "I am a strong Southern Baptist but I have tried to be . . . unbiased," he wrote. He asked Carver to tell him what he thought was "in store for the followers of Judaism and the so call [sic.] heathen religions of the world."[45] "I do not think that our Scripture teaching or our theological interpretation, when properly understood," Carver replied, "require us to believe in the ultimate loss of all who are not personal believers in the Christ incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth." He described Christ as "eternal, cosmic and within all history," though he did still believe that Christians should share the historic faith. "Their need and our obligation are not at all lessened by the universality of the Gace

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[43] Theodore Essebaggers, "Nationalism and Neo-Islam as Related to Modern Missions," (thesis, Biblical Seminary in New York, 1932), 122.

[44] C. W. Spikes to W. O. Carver, March 1, 1938 and W. O. Carver to C. W. Spikes, March 4, 1938, Box 8, Folder 29, Carver Papers.

[45] W. O. Carver to C. W. Spikes, May 22, 1938, Box 8, Folder 29, Carver Papers.

[sic.] of God available to all who may find Him in the midst of the darkness of heathenism," he concluded.[46]

Carver's unorthodox response to Spikes seems contradictory to other statements he issued. In 1941 one reader of Carver's monthly editorial column in the Foreign Mission Board periodical, *The Commission*, wrote the editor complaining that a recent comment from Carver on the validity of world religions sounded more like Hocking in *Re-thinking Missions* than a Southern Baptist seminary professor.[47] Carver wrote the reader to clear up the misconception: "I have no sympathy with the idea advanced in some quarters that all the religions are ways to God."[48]

Carver may have held an indefinite opinion on the eternal destiny of sincere, religious adherents of non-Christian religions, but he never let the question overshadow his conviction that Southern Baptists needed to participate wholeheartedly in the foreign mission enterprise. Missions provided the necessary adhesive for a denomination comprised of autonomous congregations, and Carver spent a considerable amount of time advocating institutional growth and efficiency, further proof on an ingrained denominational identity. Carver emphasized the Baptist principles of autonomy and individualism for issues related to biblical interpretation and doctrinal conformity, but he criticized Baptist individualism for lack of support for the mission cause. In one article he blamed "autonomy" for "poor progress in the development of a denominational

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[46] W. O. Carver to Charles W. Spikes, May 24, 1938, Box 8, Folder 9, Carver Papers.

[47] L. A. Lovegren to the Editor, June 3, 1941 and Charles E. Maddry to W. O. Carver, June 9, 1941, Box 9, Folder 39, Carver Papers.

[48] W. O. Carver to L. A. Lovegren, June 12, 1941, Box 9, Folder 39, Carver Papers.

consciousness" and issued harsh criticism of the denomination that had "poorly learned how to work together." Of the four million members of Southern Baptist churches, only a quarter supported the mission programs. "How can we expect a thorough-going missionary program unless we have a genuinely missionary denomination?" he chided readers. An "attitude of world-mindedness" was the only cure for the provincially southern denomination.[49] The 1932 article was reprinted in several newspapers and solidified for Carver a reputation as denominational critic.[50]

Carver's disappointment with Southern Baptist missions support had been festering for some time. In the late 1920s and early 1930s the denomination's debt was steadily rising. For eight years many agencies could only pay the interest on their loans, and from 1920 to 1933 mission funds declined below 1917 totals.[51] In 1930 Carver wrote in the denomination's mission magazine that Southern Baptists were only "slightly respected" by other denominations and should reconsider calling themselves a "missionary people."[52] In 1932 he recorded in his diary that he addressed the subject to an enthusiastic pastor's conference that encouraged him to circulate his criticism widely.

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[49] W. O. Carver, "An Integrated Program of Missionary Education for Churches, Colleges, and Seminaries," *The Review and Expositor* (January 1932): 76-85.

[50] For two responses to the article, see Mrs. Lidie T. Smith to W. O. Carver, March 18, 1932, Box 8, Folder 29; Joshua Levering to W. O. Carver, March 8, 1932, Box 7, Folder 34, Carver Papers.

[51] Albert McClellan, "Denominational Allocation and Distribution of Cooperative Program Money," *Baptist History and Heritage* 21 (Winter 1986): 19.

[52] W. O. Carver, "Looking Ahead with Southern Baptist Missions," *Home and Foreign Fields* (January 1930): 22-23.

"I am not deceived by this enthusiasm into thinking I am Moses to lead out of the wilderness," he wrote. "I am only one voice and crying in a very deep wilderness."[53]

Carver held an unpopular opinion of the denomination's ambitious financial reorganization plan, the Cooperative Program, and believed an overemphasis on centralization would debilitate the SBC and its missionary program. In 1919 Southern Baptists unified their finances through a popular effort to raise seventy-five million dollars over the course of five years. Before the ambitious "Seventy-Five Million Campaign," churches and individuals sent funds to individual agencies through a "society system" that encouraged the competitive solicitation of gifts. To increase giving and facilitate denominational centralization, leaders suggested that all gifts be funneled through a general fund to all Convention entities according to an apportionment assigned by a central committee. As the campaign closed in 1925, total giving reached only fifty-eight million dollars, partly due to the agricultural depression experienced after World War I. The denomination failed its fiscal goal but achieved centralization, a result that some scholars have deemed the apex of denominational incorporation.[54]

Denominational executives instituted the Cooperative Program in 1925 as a permanent solution to the haphazard funding methods that preceded the Seventy-Five

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[53] Diary entry for March 28, 1932, Carver diaries.

[54] Ellen G. Harris, "'Incorporating our Baptist Zion': The Southern Baptist Convention, 1880-1920," <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/harris/sbc/entry.html>; For information on the Cooperative Program, see Albert McClellan, "The Origin and Development of the SBC Cooperative Program," *Baptist History and Heritage* 10 (Spring 1975): 69-78; Timothy George, "The Southern Baptist Cooperative Program: Heritage and Challenge," *Baptist History and Heritage* 20 (Spring 1985): 4-13; Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope*, 55; Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 403-405.

Million Campaign. The Cooperative Program sought to balance the necessities of Baptist individualism and corporate efficiency through a system whereby the major entities would "cooperate" with one another and support all agencies at once. The state conventions were essential to the new paradigm. Churches and individuals would "cooperate" with state conventions by forwarding a percentage of their receipts, and state conventions would cooperate with the SBC by sending a percentage of its total receipts to the Cooperative Program Committee for disbursement among the agencies. SBC executives encouraged state convention leaders to forward along fifty percent of their total receipts, but state leaders, seeking to address the needs of their own states first, were reluctant to submit so high a percentage of revenue. SBC agencies and seminaries, therefore, were dependent on the goodwill of state secretaries.

In 1927 a convention committee, stating that state secretaries had already decided apportionment percentages, denied Carver's request for an increase in funds to the seminary and alienated the popular professor. The Cooperative Program struggled for several years to solicit wholehearted support, and Carver blamed the state secretaries. In 1929 he sent a form letter to all eighteen state secretaries outlining his concerns. He charged the secretaries with undermining the SBC's national interests through extra-budget appeals for money and stingy allocation of funds for work outside the region. Only four cents of every dollar made it to the foreign mission field, he argued, a serious indictment of any "missionary" denomination. State secretaries did not exhibit a "Convention consciousness," he wrote, and they should reconsider their actions.[55]

Southern Baptists individualism, Carver surmised, would never allow the centralized Cooperative Program to flourish. “The budget idea and the co-operative plan . . . require a degree of information, conviction and development to which relatively few of our Southern Baptist people have attained,” he argued in one article. “We ought to frankly admit that the average Southern Baptist cannot see a budget and a program.”[56] Carver plainly stated his position to Charles Maddry, the Executive Director of the North Carolina Baptist Convention and soon-to-be head of the Foreign Mission Board, in 1932. “I am profoundly convinced that we shall not improve our situation until we have reverted to democratic ways,” he wrote. “Our Southern Baptist psychology simply refuses to respond to efficient, centralized administration.”[57] Maddry agreed with the premise but only saw increased centralization as the solution, so Carver made his case plain: “I am convinced that we must at once leave the people free to choose their own methods, trust them to make their own response and encourage them with the highest appreciation.”[58]

When denominational leaders continued to espouse an ideology of centralization, Carver blamed them for the fiscal difficulties of the 1930s. “Our Southern Baptist

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[55] W. O. Carver to State Secretaries, March 18, 1929, Box 6, Folder 42, Carver Papers; See also W. O. Carver to State Secretaries, April 22, 1929, Box 6, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

[56] W. O. Carver, “The Co-Operative Budget and the Convention Interests,” *Western Recorder*, March 18, 1926.

[57] W. O. Carver to Charles E. Maddry, April 9, 1932, Box 7, Folder 38, Carver Papers.

[58] W. O. Carver to Charles E. Maddry, April 20, 1932, Box 7, Folder 38, Carver Papers; See also W. O. Carver to Austin Crouch February 29, 1931, Box 7, Folder 13; W. O. Carver to Wade H. Bryant, April 14, 1932, Box 7, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

engineers seem hell-bent on continuing to run their broken down machinery until it carries our work into complete bankruptcy," he wrote one colleague.[59] To another he complained, "Whether our engineers agree or not, the whole machinery will be broken down within another twelve months. It is only a group of rattles now, and a piece of hindering junk."[60] The denomination's uncommon son could not bear to see the Southern Baptist Convention limp along and not realize its full potential.[61]

Carver appreciated some bureaucratic developments in the denomination and made his own contribution to the institutionalization of the SBC through his involvement with the Southern Baptist Historical Society. In 1921 the convention established a committee to preserve and promote Baptist history, but the committee dissolved after a dozen fruitless years. In 1936 Rufus Weaver, executive director of the District of Columbia Convention, convinced the SBC's Executive Committee to revive the organization, and they elected Carver, without his knowledge or consent, to lead the society. "[Weaver] got a [committee] appointed on Bapt. Hist. & he made me [chairman]—of which I am sorry," Carver recorded in his diary. "I will try to help."[62] The Historical Society gained official status in 1938, and Carver served as president for

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[59] W. O. Carver to C. S. Gardner, March 17, 1933, Box 7, Folder 23, Carver Papers.

[60] W. O. Carver to T. B. Ray, February 17, 1931, Box 8, Folder 14, Carver Papers.

[61] See W. O. Carver to Bro. Powell, January 13, 1927, Box 6, Folder 33; W. O. Carver to Norman W. Cox, February 5, 1927, Box 6, Folder 28; W. O. Carver to L. L. Gwaltney, February 28, 1931, Box 7, Folder 26; W. O. Carver to Z. T. Cody, April 13, 1931, Box 7, Folder 13; W. O. Carver to W. W. Barnes, May 5, 1933, Box 7. Folder 3; W.O. Carver to Elton Johnson, June 13, 1933, Box 7, Folder 30;

[62] Diary entry for December 13, 1936, Carver diaries.

fifteen years. Advocating the research, study, and interpretation of Baptist history served well his progressive orthodoxy, and he encouraged the denomination to preserve its heritage. “One of the most deplorable facts about Southern Baptists,” he wrote to potential supporters, “is the widespread indifference to our history.”[63] Serious historical study could steer the denomination away from provincialism and obscurantism and accurately transmit to future generations the success and failures of the past.

The seminary classroom provided an opportunity to interact with future ministers, missionaries, and SBC executives, and contributed to Carver’s Southern Baptist identity. Yale University professor Harlan P. Beach envied Carver’s opportunity to teach “the largest number of theological students in any educational institution,” and Carver instructed students from a wide range of theological and social environments.[64] Both fundamentalists and progressive Baptists considered the professor a mentor. Fundamentalist J. Frank Norris provided ebullient praise. “Every sermon that I preach, every article that I write . . . every brick in my new church building . . . is largely affected by your life and example,” he wrote.[65] J. Martin England, a fierce proponent of racial justice, had the same respect for Carver. “The influence of your life and teaching was the strongest steadying force, I think, in the whole seminary, and at a time when I needed it desperately,” he wrote from his Burmese mission post.[66]

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[63] W. O. Carver to unnamed recipient, October 25, 1948, Box 20, Folder 14, Carver Papers.

[64] Harlan P. Beach to W. O. Carver, December 9, 1908, Box 4, Folder 49, Carver Papers.

[65] J. Frank Norris to W. O. Carver, January 11, 1908, Box 4, Folder 52, Carver Papers.

Carver believed many of his students and protégées held bright hope for the future of Southern Baptists. When his daughter Dorothy, a missionary to Japan, converted a bright, young Japanese girl, Akiko Endo, to Christianity, Carver became her adopted American father and facilitated her theological education at the WMU Training School. Endo's family disowned her for denouncing their Buddhist faith, and Carver considered her an important addition to the Southern Baptist classroom.[67] During the same year Endo prepared to study in Louisville, Hugo Culpepper, one of Carver's most successful missionary students, wrote his mentor on the way to China. "The foundation for my whole life work has been given its distinctive impression under your guiding hand," he wrote. "Whatever contribution might be made through my life here . . . will largely be the projection of yourself in China through me."[68] Carver cherished his role as seminary professor and found fulfillment in contributing to the lives of progressive, fundamentalist, missionary, and newly converted Southern Baptists.

Carver also found agreement with Southern Baptists on the topic of religious freedom, and his defense of the separation of church and state provided him a great deal of credibility in the denomination. For most of the twentieth century Southern Baptists

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[66] J. Martin England to W. O. Carver, September 1, 1936, Box 7, Folder 16, Carver Papers. England is a central figure in David Stricklin's history of Southern Baptist liberals, *A Genealogy of Dissent*; see also Andrew S. Chancey, "'A Demonstration Plot for the Kingdom of God': The Establishment and Early Years of Koinonia Farm," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75 (2): 321-353.

[67] Akiko Endo to W.O. Carver, February 25, 1938, Box 7, Folder 16; See also correspondence from W. O. Carver to Kathleen Mallory, Box 9, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

[68] Hugo Culpepper to W. O. Carver, September 21, 1940, Box 9, Folder 14, Carver Papers.

boasted of their intimate connection to the great American experiment with religious liberty. Many eighteenth-century Baptists refused to pay taxes to state churches and advocated religious dissent. The American desire for freedom, they argued, should include the religious sphere. As the famous Baptist John Leland put it, "Government had no more to do with the religious opinions of men than it has with the principles of mathematics.[69] Baptists joined other dissenters in Virginia to create a disestablishment model that the founders adopted for the entire nation. When President Thomas Jefferson made famous the metaphor "wall of separation between church and state" to describe the Constitution's establishment clause, he did so in a letter to Baptists.[70] Southern Baptists continued the tradition of support for religious liberty and began a Public Relations Committee in 1936 to monitor and assess governmental policies affecting church-state relations.

Carver supported the strict separation of church and state and considered the American experiment worth exporting abroad and defending at home. American Protestantism came closer to first-century Christianity than any other movement, he wrote in the denomination's mission magazine, and Southern Baptists should incorporate religious freedom into their mission to Catholic countries in Europe.[71] When the United

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[69] Quoted in Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 207-208.

[70] Daniel L. Dreisbach, "'Sowing Useful Truths and Principles": The Danbury Baptists, Thomas Jefferson, and 'Wall of Separation,'" *Journal of Church and State* 39 (Summer 1997): 455-501.

[71] W. O. Carver, "Missions to Catholic Countries in Europe," *Home and Foreign Fields* (October 1925): 8.

States Supreme Court ruled in 1940 that Jehovah's Witnesses schoolchildren could be punished for not saluting the American flag—an act Witnesses considered idolatrous—Carver agreed with the lone dissenting justice and described the ruling as a "fatal decree." "Jehovah's Witnesses are mistaken—they may even be ignorant and foolish in thinking that saluting the flag is 'worshipping an image,'" he admitted in the *Review and Expositor*. "Yet they do think so; and their ignorant notion deserves respect and protection."[72] Even the most radical religious sects deserved Constitutional protection.

The separation of church and state did not mean a total divorce of the two entities. Late in life Carver worried that the emphasis on separation may have dimmed Baptist interest in public affairs. "[Our] insistence on institutional separation must not mean individual indifference," he reminded one correspondent.[73] He worried that public education had become pagan and encouraged the academic study of religion in public schools. If teachers would avoid sectarianism and dogmatism, he wrote to interested correspondents, religion classes could help correct public education's tendency toward paganism.[74]

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[72] W. O. Carver, "Life Factors and Tendencies," *Review and Expositor* (July 1940): 313; For information on the Supreme Court decision, *Minersville School District v. Gobitis* (1940), and the Court's reversal of the decision three years later, see Shawn Francis Peters, *Judging Jehovah's Witnesses: Religious Persecution and the Dawn of the Rights Revolution* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2000).

[73] W. O. Carver to George W. Paschal, April 24, 1950, Box 21, Folder 2, Carver Papers.

[74] W. O. Carver to Ada A. Brooks, March 29, 1941, Box 9, Folder 5; W. O. Carver to Julia David, April 5, 1943, Box 9, Folder 16; W. O. Carver to W. N. Long, April 7, 1943, Box 9, Folder 39, Carver Papers.

Carver put his reputation on the line in the 1940s when he led Baptist public opposition to the transportation of Catholic schoolchildren on public school buses in Louisville. In 1940 the Kentucky Legislature passed an act allowing free bus transportation to students attending private schools, and the Baptist Pastors' Conference of Louisville asked Carver to chair a study committee. Carver wrote a resolution claiming the act breached the separation of church and state, and he quickly realized the debate would be heated. "Had a certain . . . Catholic to call me for a blessing out and a scurrilous tirade against Baptists and the seminary," he recorded in his diary.[75]

Two years later the Pastor's Conference issued a similar resolution, and Carver sent a copy to the governor and Court of Appeals. "Church schools exist primarily for the training of children and youth in and for specific religious ideas and functions, not for citizenship in the commonwealth and nation," the statement argued. The pastors opposed "even a relatively small violation of the principle [of separation of church and state]."[76] Governor Keen Johnson appreciated the Conference's position but worried that the issue was being cast to the public as anti-Catholicism. He reminded Carver that the Kentucky Court of Appeals was reviewing the law and hoped for an imminent decision.[77] A Commissioner for the Court of Appeals chided Carver for seeking to influence a court's decision and considered his correspondence improper.[78]

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[75] Diary entry for March 7, 1940, Carver diaries.

[76] W. O. Carver to Governor Keen Johnson, et al., n.d., Box 2, Folder 86, Carver Papers.

[77] Keen Johnson to W. O. Carver, May 6, 1942, Box 7, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[78]Osso W. Stanley to W. O. Carver, April 23, 1942, Box 10, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

The Baptist position seemed rigid and petty to other interested parties in Kentucky, especially the editors of the Louisville paper. Kentucky's Catholic population was tiny, and not even one thousand schoolchildren benefited from bus transportation. Catholics certainly did not have the political power to convince the legislature to pass the law, but rather, "the only spirit that could have inspired the law was a spirit of neighborliness and decency." The Baptist pastors' refusal to allow Catholic children to ride buses that passed them each day invited "bigotry and Ku Kluxery," an un-American tactic similar to that of Adolf Hitler. "Is it right in wartime to make such a fuss as is proposed over so small a number of sons and daughters of loyal, patriotic, taxpaying Kentucky families?" the editors asked.[79]

Carver provided readers an explanation and concession. The editors' plea for Baptists to mute their dissent because of the war was unreasonable, he argued, because the public used the war to plead for everything from "Splash's bath soap to ignoring the Constitution and forgetting the struggles of our history." Using public school funds for parochial schools, even if only to transport a small number of students, "opens the way for sectarian schools to be maintained at public expense." Carver would support a fund established specifically for the transportation of children, for health and safety reasons, to private or public schools. Tax money would serve children of parochial schools, but for the expressed purpose of saving their bodies from traffic rather than educating their minds. To any group—Baptist, Catholic, Protestant, or atheist—he offered a stern message: "You have entire legal and fundamental right to your views and their

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[79] Newspaper clipping, Box 10, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

expression; but keep your hands off of government administration and out of the government's pockets."[80]

Some readers felt Carver's alternative plan for transporting parochial schoolchildren was a ridiculous concession. One editor, Elmer E. Rogers, at the Scottish Rite News Bureau followed the story closely and published articles on the debate. The News Bureau affirmed the pastors' position, and Rogers considered Carver's alternative plan a complete reversal of his position. The use of public funds, despite any special designation, to transport children to private schools violated the separation of church and state and the constitution of Kentucky.[81] Carver appreciated the response but considered, "with so much socialism already in operation," a transportation fund created "as a measure of public safety and general public welfare" a viable solution, one that would curb the rising Roman Catholic desire to use public funds for their schools.[82]

Supporters of the law considered Carver an intolerant, anti-Catholic Southern Baptist. The superintendent of the Franklin County Board of Education informed Carver that parochial schoolchildren had always been allowed to ride their county's buses. "Isn't your stand . . . intolerance of the narrowest and meanest kind—one religious group persecuting the children of another group?" he asked the professor. Louisville clergy were "wasting a lot of effort, money and time trying to keep some little child from riding

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[80] Newspaper clipping, Box 22, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

[81] Elmer E. Rogers to W. O. Carver, May 9, 1942, Box 10, Folder 14, Carver Papers.

[82] W. O. Carver to Elmer E. Rogers, May 11, 1942, Box 10, Folder 14, Carver Papers; Newspaper clippings from the Scottish Rite News Bureau can be found in Box 22, Folder 42, Carver papers.

a school bus."[83] One angry citizen described herself as a "blind Baptist" before converting to Catholicism, an enigma considering she was educated "in the South where Protestism [sic.]—(prejudice), poverty and ignorance predominate." She found Carver's discrimination against children appalling.[84] Another female, Catholic correspondent and her Baptist husband prayed that God would forgive the professor for his unmerciful attitude toward children.[85] One note, signed by "A. Pagan," offered Carver a revised version of a popular saying of Jesus: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, unless they are Catholic Children, for such is the Kingdom of Heaven."[86] A letter from "An UnAmerican" suggested that Carver "take a tip from Hitler" and have sewn on the clothing of Catholic schoolchildren the following message: "I AM a Catholic—I must walk—I must not ride with the other children."[87]

The opposition's willingness to turn his argument for church/state separation into a campaign against Catholic schoolchildren frustrated Carver. One correspondent could only see the issue in terms of equality and Christian love. "Don't the Catholic people pay taxes the same as other people?" she asked. "Doesn't your own religion teach love for your neighbors, and the breaking down of racial prejudice?" She could hardly believe that Carver would "prefer them to walk and some . . . be hit by automobiles [sic.] and killed

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[83] Roy True to W. O. Carver, April 22, 1942, Box 22, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

[84] E. M. K. to W. O. Carver, April 27, 1942, Box 22, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

[85] Mrs. C. C. A. to W. O. Carver, May 8, 1942, Box 22, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

[87] Both letters in Box 22, Folder 42, Carver Papers.

or crippled for life just because they're Catholics."[88] The issue had nothing to do with "the principle of loving one's neighbor," he replied, and he outlined the Catholic and American Protestant views on the relationship of church and state.[89]

Carver offended Catholics in Louisville again in 1947 when he suggested that the Roman Catholic Church was using the United States to curb the power of the Soviet Union in Europe. Americans had two totalitarian enemies, he argued, the Soviet Union and the Roman Catholic Church. "The church professes an exclusive possession of religious truth, supreme power for salvation, and inherent right to teach man and to control society," he wrote. "She expects the United States to go to war with Russia to save Europe from communism."[90]

The *Courier-Journal* published an edited version of the article under the title "Pope Wants U. S. to Fight His Battle, Baptist Says," and the editor of *The Record*, the publication of the archdiocese of Louisville, issued a response titled "The Church and Dr. Carver." Carver's claims were imaginary, undocumented, and puzzling, he wrote. "We wonder . . . how infuriating to the millions of Catholic men who fought for [American] democracy [it must be] to have their church misrepresented and attacked in this

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[88] Mrs. Gilbert Hubbuch to W. O. Carver, May 11, 1942, Box 9, Folder 32, Carver Papers.

[89] W. O. Carver to Mrs. Gilbert Hubbuch, May 11, 1942, Box 9, Folder 32, Carver Papers.

[90] W. O. Carver, "America in a Triangle of Threat to the World," *The Tie* (July 1947): 10-11.

manner."[91] Carver received letters similar to the ones written in response to the busing controversy. "Your preaching of hate, and vilification of the Pope, repudiates your claim as one of Christ's followers," one correspondent charged.[92] Carver and Catholics would never agree.

Carver's support for Southern Baptist missions, denominational growth, and the separation of church and state contributed to a Southern Baptist identity that balanced in the minds of some skeptics his progressive orthodoxy. His willingness to reside intellectually in two different worlds did have consequences, however. Like William H. Whitsitt, Carver may have been "home," but he was not always "happy" with his demanding career as a progressive seminary professor in a conservative denomination.

He recorded some of his frustration in his diary. One bright student came to Carver in 1919 complaining of the "lack of modern ideas" at Southern seminary. He suggested the student consider Yale University, University of Chicago, or Union Theological Seminary in New York. "He is one of a coterie of dissatisfied men," Carver reflected. "The morale has gone down among the students much in the last two months."[93] In 1937, after hearing a new faculty member's inaugural address, he reflected on the seminary's Abstract of Principles, a list of doctrinal statements all faculty members signed. "The Article which he signed—as we all did—are true in a real sense," he admitted, "but several of them are unrealistic in form and at least two of them are

[91] Newspaper clipping, Box 22, Folder 43, Carver Papers.

[92] George E. Van Gieson to W. O. Carver, n.d., Box 22, Folder 43, Carver Papers.

[93] Diary entry for March 12, 1919, Carver diaries.

unacceptable if taken as [the author] intended them."[94] Carver would never have uttered his criticism of the oldest Southern Baptist statement of faith, so he chose to record his frustration privately. In 1942, after hearing an SBC president deliver an address on Christian Unity that encouraged denominational isolation, Carver wrote that "the unconscious obscurantism of [Southern] Baptists is tragic."[95]

Because Southern Baptists claimed no ecclesiastical hierarchy, churches often called on seminary professors to settle their disputes, another source of frustration for Carver. One Kentuckian, for example, wrote Carver for "the rules of the Baptist church." Church members had recently fired a pastor, and the correspondent wanted to know if the deacons had the right "to lock the door and prohibit him from preaching."[96] In 1929 he provided, "with some reluctance but in good conscience," an affidavit concerning the discipline of Baptist church members in a lawsuit resulting from a church dispute in Kentucky.[97] The daughter of the pastor involved wrote Carver a scathing letter: "You came into our home last spring; you ate my father's food; you preached in my father's pulpit, and at the first opportunity which you had, you returned his hospitality with a thrust in the back." Carver sided with the "unsaved church-members" in the dispute, she

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[94] Diary entry for September 21, 1937, Carver diaries.

[95] Diary entry for May 16, 1942, Carver diaries.

[96] R. J. McCracken to W. O. Carver, November 10, 1930, Box 7, Folder 37, Carver Papers.

[97] Diary entry for July 22, 1929, Carver diaries.

argued, and wrongly convinced the Methodist Court Commissioner that seminary professors knew more about church polity than Baptist preachers.[98]

Carver found writing books for Southern Baptists a wearisome venture. When he submitted a manuscript entitled "Why They Wrote the New Testament" to the Sunday School Board for publication as a study book in churches, he received a negative referee's report that left him "puzzled as well as distressed."[99] The reader suggested that Carver needed to stress the inspiration of the Scriptures more thoroughly and directly.[100] Knowing that the book might cause trouble, Carver had already asked several graduate students to evaluate the manuscript's emphasis on inspiration, and they approved. But he knew the denominational publisher had a more stringent test. "These chapters set out an interpretation of revelation and inspiration, and of canon making," he wrote to one correspondent, "which does not plumb the lines of traditional dogmatism." "Our Editor does not wish to arouse any questions, however much they might lead to enlightenment and better understanding. You know it is dangerous to tamper with our traditions even though you may magnify them by larger interpretation."[101] Southern Baptist readers were hard to please.

A demanding speaking schedule and the pressures of denominational life strained Carver's relationship with his wife and children, and he considered himself less than a

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[98] Martha Clapp to W. O. Carver, January 19, 1930, Box 7, Folder 13, Carver Papers.

[99] W. O. Carver to P. E. Burroughs, October 14, 1942, Box 9, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

[100] Clifton J. Allen to P. E. Burroughs, October 8, 1942, Box 9, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

[101] W. O. Carver to Eugene Exam, August 31, 1942, Box 9, Folder 41, Carver Papers.

perfect husband and father. He and Alice produced six children; two followed their father's ministerial footsteps and served as missionaries.[102] Diary entries and personal correspondence suggests that Carver found intimacy with his children, especially his sons, a challenge. In 1919 his son William wrote an anguished letter to Alice. Carver read the letter aloud to her since she was not feeling well, and he could scarcely believe its content. "The dear boy told how sadly I have failed him as a father for two years when he has been fighting his young man battles," Carver recorded in his diary. "It is to me a crushing and inexplicable thing that I am unable to get on confidential terms with my boys and that I fail in the most intimate relations of my life. I cannot despair and give up. How can I succeed?"[103]

Fifteen years later William reported marriage difficulties to his parents, and Carver held himself responsible. "How can I have been so poor a father?" he wondered.[104] Carver continually blamed himself for William's problems and regretted not organizing his own life more effectively. In 1939 he reflected on the situation in his diary. "How much of a failure I have been in the relations I most needed to succeed. I am too small a personality for all the responsibilities I have assumed. . . . I have wanted to do right and to do good, but have taken too much for granted and not thought through my duties and privileges."[105]

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[102] The names of the children, in order of their birth, are as follows: Ruth; William Owen Jr.; James Edward; George Alexander; Dorothy Sheppard; and Alice Hughes.

[103] Diary entry for September 2, 1919, Carver diaries.

[104] Diary entry for February 9, 1934, Carver diaries.

In 1923 Carver received a painful letter from his son James while in Asia on his tour of the mission field. James apologized to Carver for not writing more often and explained his reluctance to correspond with him. "We [James and William] are both, I think a little afraid of you," he wrote. "It isn't exactly fear, but a sort of lack of understanding which is hard to put into words . . . I know other people confide in you but I always felt sort of tongue tied—a little as though you might not understand exactly how I felt."[106] Several years later James reassured Carver that he had not failed as a father. "That I was so long in coming to any sort of understanding of you is reason for humility in me and not you," he wrote.[107]

Carver's love for his children was clearly evident when he and Alice lost their firstborn child, Ruth, in 1941. Suffering was no stranger to Ruth. In 1926 she had given birth to a still-born son, and her father longed to comfort her. "How we long to be with them and to hold the dear little girl's hand as she walks through the valley of the shadow," he recorded in his diary.[108] Fifteen years later he held her hand through the ultimate valley. Ruth suffered from heart disease most of her adult life, and her condition worsened throughout 1940.[109] On New Year's Day, 1941, Carver recorded that he and Alice spent the day at her side and acknowledged that the end was near. "I spent some

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[105] Diary entry for November 19, 1939, Carver diaries.

[106] James Carver to W. O. Carver, July 24, 1923, Box 6, Folder 6, Carver Papers.

[107] James Carver to W. O. Carver, January 5, 1935, Box 17, Folder 7, Carver Papers.

[108] Diary entry for January 31, 1926, Carver diaries; See also Norfleet Gardner to W. O. Carver, February 2, 1926, Box 6, Folder 24, Carver Papers.

[109] Norfleet Gardner to Maxfield Garrot, et al., February 11, 1941, Box 17, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

time at [Ruth's] side, rubbed her hand, talked with her . . . At the end I spent several minutes again and I prayed and she gave a fervent 3-fold 'Amen.'" Realizing that Ruth might continue in a semi-conscious state for several days, W. O. and Alice returned to Louisville to await the dreaded news.

After Ruth's death one week later, Carver blamed himself for not being at her side when she took her last breath. "[I'm] trying . . . to triumph over the loneliness and over the fear that I was not fully faithful in not returning to be with the Precious Daughter these last days," he wrote sorrowfully. "My hands are very full, too full it may be."[110] After hearing of Ruth's last hours from a friend, he lamented again that the two were miles apart when she died. "I grieve that I could not have been with her myself," he recorded, "even if it would have crushed my heart."[111] The sight of Ruth in the casket forced grief to its limit. "The dear face showed the marks of suffering, but also showed the character," he recalled. "It was hard to turn away, as finally I did, as I must."[112]

A foreboding sense of failure concerning his familial responsibilities haunted Carver. Alice wrote a biography of their daughter Ruth, and the manuscript revived his guilt when he read it. "I can never feel quite free from the conviction that I could have done more for her if I had been less reticent," he confided to his diary. "I have a sense of

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[110] Diary entry for January 8, 1941, Carver diaries.

[111] Diary entry for January 10, 1941, Carver diaries.

[112] Diary entry for January 9, 1941, Carver diaries; See also W.O. Carver to George Carver, January 12, 1941 and W. O. Carver to Maxfield Garrot, January 15, 1941, Box 17, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

failing in many ways all my loved ones—most of all my Beloved wife."[113] No evidence suggests that W. O. and Alice experienced any serious problems in fifty-six years of marriage. Just a few days before his death, he recorded in his diary that both he and Alice had recently suffered illness. "Alice seems better," he wrote, "I hope not from mere sheer willpower to take care of me."

Neither personal challenges nor the burdens of denominational life outweighed Carver's allegiance to Southern Baptists. He remained a faculty member of the denomination's flagship seminary his entire career, despite attractive invitations from other institutions. In 1920 he recorded in his diary, "I hardly know what God means by allowing the brethren to offer me 3 big positions in 3 months."[114] He turned down all three invitations. In 1926 H. C. Wayman, president of William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri, wrote Carver concerning the presidency of the Kansas City Theological Seminary. He hoped Carver would consider leading the seminary to become a "progressive theological school in the Middle West," but Carver refused to leave Louisville.[115] One year later a search committee for the Foreign Mission Board asked him to consider an administrative position with the agency, but he felt Southern Seminary should be his place of retirement.[116]

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[113] Diary entry for January 7, 1949, Carver diaries; Alice Shepard Carver, *Ruth (Ruth Carver Gardner)* (Nashville: Broadman, 1941).

[114] Diary entry for March 31, 1920, Carver diaries.

[115] H. C. Wayman to W. O. Carver, August 26, 1926, Box 6, Folder 27; See also A. J. Haggett to W. O. Carver, September 11, 1926, Box 6, Folder 23; W. O. Carver to A. J. Haggett, September 16, 1926, Box 6, Folder 23, Carver Papers.

At the end of his life Carver admitted that his Southern Baptist identity prevented him from making a significant contribution to theological scholarship. Even though his academic sub-discipline was missiology, he considered his greatest work a commentary on the book of Ephesians, *The Glory of God in the Christian Calling*, published by the denomination in 1949. In his memoirs he complained that the book received little attention "beyond Southern Baptist ranks," despite favorable reviews in a few significant publications such as the *Christian Century*. "This is a usual experience of Southern writers and especially of Southern Baptists at the hands of readers and writers beyond our section," he wrote.[117]

Why would a successful academician and motivated professional remain in a denomination that did not share so many of his theological convictions and concerns? Why did Carver not leave Southern Baptists, whom he described as a "denomination of the 'unwashed throng'"?[118]

The eighty-five year old professor provided the answer himself when he stood at the lectern on January 12, 1954 and suggested that William Heth Whitsitt was the "seminary's martyr." "The big day came," he recorded in his diary, "with very cold but bright weather."[119] Carver suggested to the audience that Whitsitt, the sixth professor and third president of SBTS, needed vindication since "no man . . . ever received so little

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[116] W. O. Carver to Solon B. Cousins, Box 6, Folder 28, Carver Papers.

[117] Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 121.

[118] W. O. Carver to J. L. Boyd, November 2, 1951, Box 21, Folder 3, Carver Papers.

[119] Diary entry for January 12, 1954, Carver diaries.

recognition for so great service."[120] He explained Whitsitt's background, education, and love for Southern Baptists. He told of the professor's pursuit of Baptist history in the British Museum and the university libraries of Oxford and Cambridge and his claim that modern Baptists began in seventeenth-century Europe rather than in the first century. He described denominational politics related to Whitsitt's ascension to the presidency: "The denomination was at just this time in the midst of one of the periodic agitations as between conservative literalistic biblicism and rigid simplicity on the one hand and progressive denominationalism and spiritual freedom in institutional life on the other."

He refused to "detail the sad story" of the controversy that lasted two years and ended with the president's resignation. He preferred a broad interpretation of the event, "the meaning of the conflict and its outcome for the denomination."[121]

> "Whitsitt was deeply convinced that he represented . . . the right of research and freedom of expression of convictions arrived at by genuine and sincere investigation [and the] advancement of scholarship, the spiritual quality of Southern Baptists . . . Thus he accepted martyrdom for principle and claimed the right out of love for the truth and for his 'beloved denomination' in the hope that thereby his witness would further the growth of liberty of research and freedom of expression."[122]

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[120] W. O. Carver, "William Heth Whitsitt: The Seminary's Martyr," 449.

[121] Diary entry for January 12, 1954, Carver diaries.

[122] W. O. Carver, "William Heth Whitsitt," 466, 467.

Carver, pleased with the address and its reception, sent a copy of the manuscript to Whitsitt's daughter: "You will see the high position which I assigned him—the creative leadership of Southern Baptists."[123]

Carver remained Southern Baptist in order to offer his own intellectual contribution to the denomination of his birth. "I have seen a number of crises in the now more than sixty years of my observation," he wrote in 1949, "[and each] crisis issued in larger freedom and more intelligent understanding."[124] Carver saw hope for Southern Baptists. He embodied Whitsitt's prophetic voice in his own career but did not suffer the same fate. "Dr. Carver was considered a liberal by many in the Convention," one former student recalled. "He once remarked to me that the Southern Baptist Convention needed to be told many things, but that he did not want to be a martyr."[125] The Whitsitt controversy opened the way for leaders such as Carver to challenge denominational tradition without getting terminated or paralyzed by discouragement. He may not have always been happy, as a result, but he was at home. At the denomination's flagship seminary, articulating a progressive orthodoxy for the "unwashed throng," he was at home.

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[123] W. O. Carver to Mrs. H. G. Whitehead, January 13, 1954, Box 10, Folder 47, Carver Papers.

[124] W. O. Carver to Maxfield Garrott, June 10, 1949, Box 9, Folder 23, Carver Papers.

[125] Inman Johnson, *Of Parsons and Profs* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), 55.

CONCLUSION

W. O. Carver lived between the two Reconstructions of the South.[1] He was born April 10, 1868, three years after the Confederacy's surrender at the Appomattox Courthouse, and he died May 24, 1954, one week after the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racially segregated educational facilities were unconstitutional. Historian Paul Harvey calls the period from Civil War to civil rights "God's long century," a century in which complex white and black religious cultures struggled to define southern community.[2] Already in the midst of economic change brought on by the New Deal and World War II, the South's distinctiveness suffered a fatal blow by the desegregation mandate. The region Carver called home would never be the same.

White religious racism suffered the same extinction as *de jure* segregation, but theological conservatives found a similar outlet for divine frustration in the culture wars that began in the 1970s. The struggle for SBC denominational control lasted from 1979 to 1991, and crowds of Baptist spectators witnessed "conservatives" and "moderates"

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[1] C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, 3rd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 168-178, 241-262.

[2] Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 4; See also Andrew Manis, *Southern Civil Religions in Conflict*: *Civil Rights and the Culture Wars* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2002).

claw their way through a controversy that ended in moderate defeat. By the end of the twentieth century Southern Baptist conservative leaders secured the denomination as a platform for conservative American values. Abortion, homosexuality, and a renewed, sanctified male patriarchy serve as rallying points for the denomination's sixteen million members.

Carver dealt with conservative activists during the first half of the twentieth century, and he reflected on their presence in the SBC shortly before his death:

> Being all but unanimously conservative, and loyal to the historical and scriptural fundamentals of Christianity, Southern Baptists make an inviting field for the capital "F" [fundamentalist] agitators. It is impossible openly to resist them and escape suspicion of heresy. That Southern Baptists have been able to resist these onslaughts and maintain, on the whole, steady advance in the way of progressive orthodoxy is a tribute to sane leadership, expanding education, the poise and patience of the Southern Seminary and, after a time, of the younger seminaries.[3]

Whether or not Carver would consider SBC conservative activists "capital 'F' agitators" is debatable. But we can be sure that if late-twentieth-century Southern Baptist conservatives had launched their campaign during Carver's lifetime, they would have excoriated him as a dangerous liberal.

Conservatives considered the reconciliation of progress and denominational orthodoxy a mild form of liberalism, and they rallied Southern Baptists to choose leaders who espoused a firm belief in biblical inerrancy without compromise. Carver was no inerrantist. In 1933 Charles Trumbull, fundamentalist editor of the *Sunday School Times*

[3] W. O. Carver, *Out of His Treasure*, 83.

and organizer of the World's Christian Fundamentals Association, posed the question to the popular professor.[4] Trumbull disagreed with some statements concerning the New Testament and Christian exclusivity in Carver's book *Course of Christian Missions*. After a few rounds of correspondence Trumbull summed up his query in one sentence: "Do you believe in the verbal inspiration of the original Scriptures—that the Bible in the original, autograph manuscripts was as inerrant and infallible in its every word as the person and character of God himself?"[5] Thinking that their conversation had gone far enough, Carver ignored Trumbull's question, prompting the editor to issue a similar letter nearly five months later. "I have asked you only one question," he wrote, and requested a response.[6] Carver refused. "I do not see any good to be accomplished by discussing a purely hypothetical question phrased in terms which if taken at their usual and etymological value have no intelligible meaning," he replied.[7] Carver found no use for inerrancy.

Carver's eschewal of inerrancy did not equal anti-biblicism. When he retired from the faculty of Southern Seminary in 1943, he delivered an address entitled "How I Use My Bible." He called the address his "swan song," a fitting way to conclude nearly fifty years of teaching. He considered the "word of God" in subjective rather than objective

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[4] For information on Trumbull, see Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23-26, 55, 94, 96-97.

[5] Charles G. Trumbull to W. O. Carver, June 8, 1933, Box 8, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[6] Charles G. Trumbull to W. O. Carver, October 30, 1933, Box 8, Folder 30, Carver Papers.

[7] W. O. Carver to Charles G. Trumbull, November 2, 1933, Box 8, Folder 30, Carver Papers. See also 1942 correspondence between Carver and Edwards E. Elliot, Box 9, Folder 19, Carver Papers.

terms. “We must recognize,” he said, “that ‘the word of God’ in the scriptures never means primarily and specifically the Bible, or any section of the Bible.” He considered scripture the “chief medium” of God’s revelation, one that became the Word of God when pious individuals sought its truth. The interpretive experience was key. “It is because I have such a profound and sacred conviction of the eternal and unchanging Word of God within the scriptures,” he said, “that I feel not only free but under obligation to interpret scriptures with liberty.”[8]

Historian Paul Harvey and conservative leaders agree that the SBC struggle was a debate between the ideologies of religious autonomy/liberty and authority. “In some ways,” Harvey writes, “the struggle replays a classic debate between philosophical liberalism and communalist conservatism.”[9] Moderates argued that Southern Baptists should rally around the ideals of freedom of conscience and individual autonomy instead of the rationalist, obscurantist, fundamentalist belief of biblical inerrancy. Carver helped shaped the “moderate” heritage that conservatives despised, and his influence within the denomination helped keep conservatives at bay until late in the twentieth century.

Southern Baptist conservatives had little time during the controversy to reevaluate the theology of past denominational giants, but they did manage to overthrow Carver’s institutional legacies. In 1994 conservative leaders restructured the denomination’s agencies and eliminated the Southern Baptist Historical Commission and Historical Society, the organization Carver began in the 1930s. In 1996 President Albert Mohler led Southern Seminary trustees to close the Carver School of Missions and Social Work, the

[8] W. O. Carver, “How I Use My Bible,” Box 1, Folder 17, Carver Papers.

[9] Harvey, *Freedom’s Coming*, 246.

only accredited, seminary-based school of social work in the nation. Social work, Mohler argued, was not part of the seminary's mission.[10] In 2004 Southern Baptists ended their relationship with the allegedly liberal Baptist World Alliance, an international Baptist organization that Carver supported his entire career. He would have a difficult time recognizing the SBC today.

If judged by the staunch conservatism of Southern Baptists in the twenty-first century, Carver's advocacy of progressive orthodoxy in the SBC was an utter failure. Southern Baptists are convinced that ecumenism, liberalism, gender equality, and the social service vision of Christianity are incompatible with orthodoxy, and they faithfully articulate their mission in terms of souls saved and doctrines defended.

Carver represented a level of leadership in the SBC during the first half of the twentieth century that was neither liberal nor fundamentalist. He was a free-thinking Baptist deeply committed to his denomination, anxious to pass along the best of modern thought, yet unwilling to blindly subscribe to every new fad. He did not suffer professional martyrdom for any progressive ideal but gently prodded Southern Baptists to see beyond the narrow confines of conservatism and join the dangerous, modern theological world. His career shows how challenging the reconciliation of progress and Southern Baptist tradition can be.

[10] Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 84; See also Scales, *All that Fits a Woman*, 255.

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