

Neanderthals Chasing Bigfoot?

**The State of the Gender Debate in the
Southern Baptist Convention**

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The Center for Theological Research
May 2008

White Paper 24
Published by the Center for Theological Research
at www.BaptistTheology.org

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This article is reprinted from the Fall 2007 issue of the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Vol. 12 no. 2. The journal is available online at www.cbmw.org/journal

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Neanderthals Chasing Bigfoot? The State of the Gender Debate in the Southern Baptist Convention

At the annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) in November 1999, messengers overwhelmingly supported a motion to affirm the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message. This effort was in opposition to the recently amended 1998 version of the same document by the national Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The 1998 SBC revision contained a new article entitled “The Family” and advocated among other things that “a wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband” (see Eph 5:22). Commenting after the BGCT vote, Fort Worth pastor and then president of the BGCT, Clyde Glazener, said that the 1998 article on the family was “Neanderthal.”¹

The amendment, adopted officially in June 1998, also drew criticism from those outside the Baptist community and had been the subject of discussion in several media venues since the announcement of its proposed adoption in May of the same year.²

After the statement’s adoption, the story continued to make headlines even in a southern California regional paper, Santa Clarita’s *The Signal*. Columnist John Boston wrote an opinion piece satirizing the actions of the Southern Baptist Convention, stating that he has “yet to meet a woman who ‘submits graciously.’”³ Boston opined,

Is there actually a woman out there who could be so completely—and graciously—submissive that you could just reach out and pass your hand through the light vesper of her essence? If there is, they ought to issue postcards. . . . They ought to capture one of these rare Baptist ladies as if she were the North American yeti. After all. A graciously submitting woman is a rare and legendary entity indeed.⁴

When it comes to seeking the biblical teaching about the complementary differences between men and women, are Southern Baptists really antiquarians pursuing myth and legend? On the eve of the tenth anniversary of the 1998 amendment on the family—the precursor to the fully revised 2000 Baptist Faith and Message—it seems appropriate to consider the state of the gender debate in the Southern Baptist Convention. Are Southern Baptists Neanderthals chasing Bigfoot?

¹Art Toalston, “Texas Baptist convention counters SBC stance on marriage & family,” *Baptist Press*, 9 November 1999 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=1586>. Glazener is pastor of the Gambrell Street Baptist Church, which is located adjacent to the Southern Baptist Convention’s Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

²Herb Hollinger, “Baptist Faith and Message proposal calls marriage relationship God’s,” *Baptist Press*, 8 May 1998 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=2049>.

³John Boston, “Nessie, Bigfoot & Submissive Ladies,” *The Signal*, 9 September 1998 [accessed 1 September 2007]. Online: http://www.the-signal.com/?module=displaystory&story_id=50414&format=html.

⁴*Ibid.*

A Beginning in the Bull City

No date can mark officially the beginning of the gender debate in the SBC, but August 9, 1964, certainly qualifies as one for consideration. On this day, the Watts Street Baptist Church ordained Addie Davis to the ministry in Durham, North Carolina. While other denominations had already embraced and commended the ordination of women, the SBC had yet to do so. Despite this pioneer effort, Davis never found a church in the South that would hire her, and eventually she moved to the North.⁵ Davis's ordination, while hardly causing a shift in momentum, did cause Southern Baptists to join a larger conversation regarding gender roles among other religious groups.

As a result, between 1964 and 1998 many conferences, books, debates, and resolutions appeared supporting both sides of the gender debate; and soon the conversation spread to the seminaries and agencies of the convention. Nancy Ammerman explains,

During the 1970s, however, people in Southern Baptist schools and agencies began to catch on to the trend. Schools realized that women were coming to them to be educated for the ministry. Instead of enrolling in religious education and music programs, women were enrolling as religion majors and in Master of Divinity programs.⁶

Some of these women experienced difficulty after graduation when their home churches would not ordain them. Increasingly, as a female student would recognize this, she found that “a growing number of churches, especially surrounding college and seminary campuses, would acknowledge her call and grant her official recognition.⁷ By 1972, the Christ Temple Baptist Church had ordained Druecillar Fordham, and she “became the first Southern Baptist woman pastor and its first African American ordained woman.”⁸ In 1975, there were an estimated thirteen women ordained to the ministry in the SBC, but only Fordham served in the office of pastor.⁹ The majority of the women ordained in the SBC served in chaplaincy and institutional roles. Consequently, not until the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s did the gender conversation and resultant events generate more intense debate in the convention, its agencies, and in individual churches.

Practical Outweighs Theological

As early as 1979, Leon McBeth, then a professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, recognized the growing urgency of the gender debate in his Broadman publication, *Women in Baptist Life*. McBeth states,

⁵Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Baptist Battles* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1995), 91.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., 92.

⁸Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso, *The State of Women in Baptist Life-2005* (Atlanta, GA: Baptist Women in Ministry, 2006), 3. Christ Temple, an ABC-USA church, affiliated with the cooperating Southern Baptist Metro New York Baptist Association in 1972.

⁹Sarah Frances Anders, “Woman’s Role in the Southern Baptist Convention and Its Churches as Compared with Selected Other Denominations,” *Review and Expositor* 72 (Winter 1975): 33. Anders states, “There is only one woman pastor of a SB church, and that New York Church has dual affiliation with the ABC and the SBC.”

With multitudes of women in our churches, colleges, and seminaries who profess a sense of call and who have undeniable gifts, the issue of Southern Baptist women in ministry assumes a new perspective. It is no longer merely a dull debate over historical precedents or a theoretical discussion of ancient texts, but a pressing practical problem. Has God called these women? If he has, dare we impede their efforts to serve? Surrounded by pressing needs, how can we refuse the aid of people who appear capable and qualified? It may well be that *these practical concerns will outweigh more theoretical arguments* in shaping the ultimate decisions of Southern Baptist about the role of women [italics added].¹⁰

By using the term “theoretical,” McBeth clearly has in mind doctrinal or theological discussions and arguments.¹¹ McBeth’s words proved accurate as the ensuing conversation in the convention favored the “practical concerns” over the “more theoretical” and theological. The advance of an egalitarian position regarding gender roles gained momentum in the early 1980s, not on the basis of a reasoned and researched biblical exposition but rather in response to individual testimony and cultural trends.¹²

Perhaps the greatest single event that fanned the flames of the SBC egalitarian movement was, ironically, a resolution that attempted to curtail it. At the 1984 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, messengers adopted the resolution, “On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry.”¹³ The resolution affirmed “equal dignity of men and women” and stated that the “Scriptures are not intended to stifle the creative contribution of men and women as co-workers in many roles of church service.”¹⁴ In addition, the growing trend of letting practical perspectives outweigh the theological was categorically addressed by stating, “That we not decide concerns of Christians [*sic*] doctrine and practice by modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends or by emotional factors; that we remind ourselves of the dearly bought Baptist principle of the final authority of Scripture in matters of faith and conduct.”¹⁵ In this case, the resolution had in mind:

- (1) The scriptural principle “that women are not in public worship to assume the role of authority over men. . . (1 Cor 14:33–36),”¹⁶ and
- (2) The scriptural principle that Paul “excludes women from pastoral leadership (1 Tim 2:12) to preserve a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall (1 Tim 2:13ff).”¹⁷

¹⁰Leon McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 186.

¹¹As a result, the subtitle for this section employs the phrase “practical outweighs theological” not as a direct quote of McBeth, but a derivation based on the outcome of the predictive nature of his quote.

¹²One example of the push for egalitarianism came with the publication of a newsletter, entitled *Folio*, in 1982 designed especially for Southern Baptist women ministers. Ammerman (*Baptist Battles*, 92) records, “In that same year, an informal gathering of ‘Women in Ministry’ preceded the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. They organized and continued to offer a program each year after that for crowds that varied from 200 to 500 or more.” *Folio* would become the newsletter of the organization Baptist Women in Ministry.

¹³“SBC Resolution: June 1984-Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry,” [accessed 31 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1088>.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

Overall, the resolution intended to “encourage the service of women in all aspects of church life and work other than pastoral functions and leadership roles entailing ordination.”¹⁸ This stated purpose of what had historically been the majority position in the SBC caused quite a stir in various sectors of the convention and on a few seminary campuses.¹⁹

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, was one of those seminaries. The 1994 volume, *Servant Songs*, tells the story of the seminary during these years and the chapter entitled “Women at Southeastern” reveals much about the “practical outweighs theological” egalitarian climate during the 1980s.²⁰ Donna M. Forrester, who wrote the chapter, served at Southeastern Seminary as a graduate fellow assisting Dick Hester in the basic pastoral care classes. She wrote,

Two hours of class time and two hours of group time each week gave me the opportunity to be a consistent presence as a woman in ministry, and gave some students an experience they had never before encountered

I had many conversations with students who reported to me that their opinions about women had changed to a more open and accepting stance because of the women they had encountered at Southeastern.²¹

Forrester recounted the events of 1984 when offered a job as the first chaplain at Southeastern Seminary, an event that occurred after the SBC messengers adopted the 1984 resolution on women in ministry. In time she requested that the location of her office reside in the student center so that the chaplain would be seen as a “‘normal’ person for ‘normal’ people.”²² These efforts to familiarize the student body with the function of a female chaplain undoubtedly succeeded with many students. Forrester’s visible role likely was persuasive for the student who disliked the idea of a female pastor only because he had never seen one. While Forrester became a point of contention for the active conservatives in the convention, she noted that “the most vulnerable target for them was Professor Elizabeth Barnes, who taught theology. . . . Elizabeth was not a tenured faculty member . . . and therefore was quite vulnerable.”²³ Forrester, commenting about Barnes’s election as a faculty member, stated, “We were all elated, but we were aware, as was Dr. Barnes, that she would never receive tenure at Southeastern.”²⁴

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s egalitarian shift began as early as 1973 with the arrival of a new student by the name of Molly Marshall. After receiving a Master of

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Will D. Campbell, “On silencing our finest,” *Christianity and Crisis* 45, no. 14 (September 16, 1985): 341, states in reaction to the 1984 resolution, “There are today almost 60,000 students involved in some theological degree program. Twenty-five percent of them are women. Where will they go?” Campbell goes on to quote seminary professor Kenneth Chafin saying, “The best students I have at Southern Seminary are women. They’ve got better minds and better backgrounds. They are better at preparing sermons than anyone else I have in the class. . . . Until the pulpits of this land begin to deal with that, we are wasting not just half our gifts, we are wasting probably 60 percent of our gifts.” Also, Ammerman (*Baptist Battles*, 92) records that The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary held a conference on the role of women during the fall of 1984 and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary held a similar event during the spring of 1985.

²⁰Thomas A. Bland, ed., *Servant Songs* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994).

²¹Donna M. Forrester, “Women at Southeastern Seminary,” in *Servant Songs*, 189.

²²Ibid., 193.

²³Ibid., 196.

²⁴Ibid.

Divinity degree, Marshall set out serving in local churches. Pamela Durso recorded that “[w]hile serving at Pulaski Heights, Marshall ‘figured out that it had to get better at the seminary—meaning a new understanding and advocacy for women in ministry—before it would get better in the churches.’”²⁵ In 1979, Marshall enrolled in the doctoral program at Southern Seminary and eventually wrote her dissertation on religious pluralism.²⁶ Durso stated, “As Marshall neared the completion of the doctoral program, St. Matthews Baptist Church in Louisville ordained her to the gospel ministry on May 11, 1983. A few weeks later, she became the pastor of Jordan Baptist Church, a small, rural church in Sanders, Kentucky.”²⁷ In 1984, Southern’s president, Roy Honeycutt, offered Marshall a teaching position and in 1988, she was promoted to Associate Dean of the School of Theology.

Marshall obviously believed that women could serve as pastors, but she went further by laying out a strategic plan for the advancement of an egalitarian agenda for women in the Southern Baptist Convention. In her article “‘When Keeping Silent No Longer Will Do’: A Theological Agenda for the Contemporary Church,” Marshall employed the “practical outweighs theological” methodology in four points:

- (1) The first thing would be to include women regularly in worship leadership.
- (2) The Church must also give attention to its use of gender-specific language.
- (3) Another area of concern is the selection of hymns for worship. [Marshall desired the use of hymns with inclusive language.]
- (4) A final suggestion for moving the Church toward the future God is preparing for and with us is to start study groups for those interested in combining a “feminist consciousness and serious consideration of the biblical witness with the story of God’s presence in the lives of women and men.”²⁸

Marshall’s advocacy for women pastors from the classrooms of Southern Seminary is just one example of the growing egalitarian voice in the 1980s.²⁹

Even after the 1984 SBC resolution, the “practical outweighs theological” methodology still ruled the day for the egalitarians working outside the seminaries in the convention.

²⁵Pamela Durso, “Molly Marshall: A Woman of Faith and Courage,” in *Ministry Stories* (Valley Forge, PA: The Ministers Council of the ABC-USA), 2 [accessed 28 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.ministerscouncil.com/Ministry%20Stories/documents/MollyMarshallArticle.pdf>.

²⁶Marshall’s dissertation was published in the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion dissertation series as *No Salvation Outside the Church? A Critical Inquiry* (Lewiston: E. Mellen, 1993).

²⁷Durso, “Molly Marshall,” 3.

²⁸Molly Marshall-Green, “‘When Keeping Silent No Longer Will Do’: A Theological Agenda for the Contemporary Church,” *Review and Expositor* (Winter 1986): 31–32.

²⁹See also Roger L. Omanson, “The Role of Women in the New Testament Church,” *Review and Expositor* (Winter 1986): 15–25. Omanson states, “Only through a selective reading of the New Testament can one use Scripture to deny women leadership in the church. . . . Only 1 Timothy 2:11–15 forbids women to teach men or have authority over men in the context of worship. That prohibition though, had local and temporary significance.” Omanson goes on to use the following analogy, “When a parent tells a five-year-old ‘never’ to cross the street alone, another adult recognizes that such a command does not apply directly to him or her. But that adult will be reminded to exercise caution when crossing a busy street. So 1 Timothy 2:11–15 reminds the church today that teachers of false doctrines—male or female—should not be given places of leadership. It is a distortion of the text to make it a prohibition against women leaders in all times and all places.”

Ammerman documented that “in February, 1985, an entire issue of *The Student*, the official Baptist student magazine, was devoted to women in ministry. Ordained (and unordained) women ministers told their stories.”³⁰ T.B. Maston, a professor at Southwestern Seminary, stated in one of the articles,

There is an increasing number of young people, including many young women, who are responding to what they interpret to be the call of God to some type of full-time Christian service. . . . [T]his may be a logical time for our churches and denomination to reexamine and reevaluate our usual ordination procedure. . . . I personally do not believe it would violate the spirit of the New Testament to have such a service of dedication for any child of God who has a unique call to perform a distinctive type of ministry for the Lord and the church.³¹

Ron Sisk, an employee of the SBC’s Christian Life Commission, provided a status report on women in the SBC stating,

The leadership role of women in Southern Baptist life is nevertheless changing and seems likely to continue to do so. That change is at least partly related to changes in American society as a whole. . . . The theological debate about the propriety of ordaining women continues. Nonetheless, more and more Southern Baptists are interpreting the Bible and the leadership of the Holy Spirit in ways leading to significant new opportunities of Christian service for Southern Baptist women.³²

However, despite the fanfare, publications, and influence in the seminaries, the majority of the local churches of the SBC did not share the same views as the egalitarians and did not support their advocacy for the “practical outweighs theological” approach. As the organized conservative movement increasingly informed the churches of the goings-on at the seminaries and other agencies, the churches called things to a halt.

Applying the Brakes

By the time the new millennium arrived, the SBC had experienced a major course correction from the ground up. A grassroots movement of churches called for a return to theological orthodoxy in all of the convention’s agencies, especially the seminaries. This resulted in many changes in leadership and a revised confession of faith. One aspect of the theological reformation the churches addressed in the new confession was the nature of gender roles in the

³⁰Ammerman, *Baptist Battles*, 92–93.

³¹T.B. Maston, “When God Calls . . .,” *The Student* 64, no. 8 (Feb 1985): 37. Also, Meredith Moore, a minister of Christian education, shares in “To Be or Not to Be Ordained,” 45, “When I began my preparation for the ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1959, the possibility of ordination never occurred to me . . . For the next fourteen years, I lived out my calling as a campus minister. . . . When I came to my present position, I was confronted anew with a decision about ordination. With the encouragement of my pastor and church, I came to see the importance of taking this step. . . . The ordination was a celebration that both affirmed the validity of my previous ministry as an unordained person and gave expression to my continued commitment to service within the church.”

³²Ron Sisk, “Women in the SBC: A Status Report,” *The Student* 64, no. 8 (Feb 1985): 45.

church and home. On June 19, 2000, the current president of Southern Seminary, R. Albert Mohler, Jr., spoke of this change in a *New York Times* opinion piece,

Southern Baptists are off the scale of political incorrectness. Why do they insist on traditional roles for women, denounce abortion and homosexuality, and evangelize to people of all religious backgrounds? The answer is that as the culture moves steadily away from a biblical morality, our 16 million members and 41,000 churches are *applying the brakes*. . . . Our conservatism comes from our members and remains dominant through their determination. . . . Arguments over women in the pastorate and order in the Christian home . . . are not well understood by outside observers. For the vast majority of Southern Baptists, these issues are settled by the word of God [italics added].³³

What events served to apply the theological brakes, which led to the reestablishment of biblical complementarianism in the convention's agencies and seminaries?

The efforts of the organized conservative leaders that began in 1979 led to the transformation of several trustee boards by the early 1990s. For Southeastern Seminary, the result was a trustee board that worked to replace entirely the seminary's leadership, and by 1992 Paige Patterson served as president. Patterson's reputation as a noted complementarian and a leader in the conservative effort preceded his arrival; and, as a result, he was welcomed with the resignations of many of the faculty. While this presented a variety of difficulties at first, it provided a unique opportunity for what would become one of the greatest miracle stories in theological education. Over the next eleven years, Patterson would not only rebuild a world-class faculty, he would see the student enrollment return and climb from 580 to almost 2500 students.³⁴

During this time, Southeastern Seminary also pioneered the first Women's Studies program at a Southern Baptist seminary.³⁵ The president's wife and Southeastern professor in women's studies, Dorothy Patterson, helped design degree programs to prepare women "for Christian leadership positions other than the pastorate," such as church staff and denominational positions that develop women-to-women ministries, including missionary and evangelistic work, and teaching ministries that address "the practical, moral, and spiritual needs of women."³⁶ The seminary's catalog indicated that these courses were taught from the perspective of the Danvers Statement-CBMW's official statement of beliefs on biblical manhood and womanhood.³⁷ The complementarian trajectory set by Paige Patterson has continued with the administration of Southeastern's current president. In 2004, the Board of Trustees of Southeastern Seminary affirmed officially the Danvers Statement, establishing Southeastern as the only Southern Baptist seminary to adopt formally a complementarian position.³⁸

³³R. Albert Mohler, "Against an Immoral Tide," *New York Times*, 19 June 2000 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=F60E1EFB3D550C7A8DDDAF0894D8404482>.

³⁴See Paige Patterson, "What Athens Has To Do With Jerusalem: How to Tighten Greek and Hebrew Requirements and Triple Your M.Div. Enrollment at the Same Time," *Faith and Mission* 17 (Fall 1999): 54–68.

³⁵For the seminaries, the implementation of biblical complementarianism meant employing female professors in any discipline except in the schools of theology where pastors were trained. The new Women's Studies programs, which were in some cases included in the seminary's school of theology, were an obvious exception.

³⁶Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, *1998–1999 Catalog* (Wake Forest, NC: SEBTS, 1998), 51.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 51, 153.

³⁸Jason Hall, "Trustees vote to affirm Danvers and Chicago Statements," *Olive Press*, 26 April 2004 [accessed 9 September 2007]. Online: <http://www.sebts.edu/olivepressonline/index.cfm?PgType=2&ArticleID=>

For Southern Seminary, the work of the conservative resurgence also brought a new trustee board and, as a result, a new president in 1993. When R. Albert Mohler Jr. became President, Molly Marshall served as Associate Dean in the School of Theology. Mohler worked graciously from the outset to implement the stated views of the convention at large. During this process, Marshall “recognized she could not win this battle” and on December 31, 1994, she resigned from service at the seminary.³⁹ Like Southeastern, Southern Seminary experienced a remarkable revival of conservative theology and student enrollment after an initial period of faculty and student transition.

Throughout Mohler’s fourteen-year administration, Southern Seminary also pioneered efforts to establish a complementarian foundation. In 1995, Southern’s Board of Trustees took action “to hire only faculty members who are opposed to the ordination of women as pastors.”⁴⁰ Soon thereafter Mohler stated, “In addressing contested issues of manhood and womanhood in biblical perspective, I have found great encouragement and faithful substance in the Danvers Statement.”⁴¹ Currently, Southern has several Women’s Programs including the Seminary Wives Institute led by the president’s wife, Mary K. Mohler, and the Women’s Ministry Institute designed “to equip women in the local church to reach women with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to disciple and train women in God’s Word.”⁴² In addition, the offices of The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood currently reside on the campus of Southern Seminary.

Aside from the transformation of two Southern Baptist seminaries,⁴³ the convention at-large responded to the rise of egalitarianism by amending its confessional statement, the Baptist Faith and Message. Mentioned previously, the first change came in 1998 with the addition of Article XVIII, “The Family.” During their report to the convention in June, the seven-person study committee provided a commentary on the new article to explain the purpose behind the recommended addition. They stated that,

Doctrine and practice, whether in the home or the church, are not to be determined according to modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends or according to personal emotional whims; rather, Scripture is to be the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct.⁴⁴

248&Archive=1. The article states, “Southeastern Seminary wants to be crystal clear,” [Southeastern President Daniel] Akin said, “as to where it stands on the Word of God and the Biblical roles of men and women in the home and the church. Our trustees and administration believe the formal adoption of these two statements strengthens and affirms our convictions and commitments on these crucial doctrines.” Current information on Southeastern Seminary’s programs for women is available from <http://www.sebts.edu/ws/>.

³⁹Durso, “Molly Marshall,” 5.

⁴⁰“Southern Seminary stands firm,” *CMBW News* 1, no.1 (August 1995): 1.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²Current information on Southern Seminary’s programs for women is available from http://www.sbts.edu/academics/Womens_Programs.aspx. Southern Seminary currently has a director for women’s programs and a distinguished professor of women’s studies in the School of Leadership and Church Ministry.

⁴³New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary did not have the pronounced conflict of Southern or Southeastern and “was the first Southern Baptist school to offer formal, specialized theological education in the area of women’s ministry.” New Orleans’ president, Charles S. Kelley, and his wife and director of women’s ministry programs, Rhonda H. Kelley, are noted complementarians and have instituted several degree programs for women. See <http://www.nobts.edu/WomensMinistry/Default.html>.

⁴⁴“Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee,” in *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Executive Committee, 1998), 81.

Following the adoption of Article XVIII, newly elected president of the SBC, Paige Patterson, explained that a new statement on the family was necessary because “Southern Baptists simply came to the place where we felt that even a social order unsympathetic to biblical concerns had to admit that something had gone badly wrong and that whatever the prevailing wisdom of the day, it was clearly a failure.”⁴⁵

Two years later, the SBC adopted a revised version of their statement of faith. The Baptist Faith and Message 2000, in addition to containing the 1998 article on the family, amended Article VI “The Church.” A new sentence was added that clarified the convention’s position on women in leadership, “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”⁴⁶ Adrian Rogers, chairman of the study committee that brought the recommendation, explained that the addition of this statement was a simple recognition of the position the convention articulated when it adopted the 1984 resolution on the ordination of women.⁴⁷ When the SBC enabled the seminaries to change and acted further to articulate their views of the biblical roles of men and women in the church and home in their confessional statement, they were “applying the brakes” and stopping the advance of egalitarianism in their denomination.

The Golden Age?

The ramifications of both the progress in the seminaries in the 1990s and the revisions to the Baptist Faith and Message are still running their course. By no means should one think that the gender debate is over or that the work to establish a common understanding of the biblical roles for men and women is accomplished. However, great strides have been made. When the presidents of the six SBC seminaries met for their annual retreat in November 2002, they granted an interview with the *Florida Baptist Witness*.⁴⁸ Answering a variety of questions related to the work of the seminaries, the presidents were optimistic especially as it concerned the “unparalleled growth in the number of women’s programs and women students.”⁴⁹ Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler states,

All of the seminary campuses have been significantly affected by a change in the approach towards preparing women for ministry. . . . We have as many women studying and as much as a percentage of women studying on our campuses as ever before. But they’re coming knowing where we stand, appreciating where we stand, sharing our beliefs as based in the Scripture, understanding the importance

⁴⁵“Paige Patterson speaks out,” in *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 7. This issue also contains an extensive interview with study committee member, Dorothy Patterson, 1, 3–7. For a theological examination of the statement, see Peter R. Schemm, Jr., “Was Article XVIII Really Necessary? A Theological Defense of the Complementarian View of Gender Roles,” in *Here I Stand: Essays in Honor of Dr. Paige Patterson*, eds. Stephen Prescott, N. Allen Moseley, and David Alan Black (Yorba Linda, CA: Davidson, 2000), 68–85.

⁴⁶The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 is available from <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>.

⁴⁷Herb Hollinger, “BF&M study has 1925, 1963 elements; no new articles,” *Baptist Press*, 18 May 2000 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=5850>.

⁴⁸Joni B. Hannigan, “SBC seminary presidents optimistic for a ‘golden age’ in theological education,” *Baptist Press*, 7 January 2003 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=14985>.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

of those beliefs and ready to go out and do what God has called them to do as directed by Scripture. And that is a beautiful thing.⁵⁰

When comparing the state of the seminaries to the predictions that the conservative resurgence would only lead the seminaries into a “state of ruin” or a “dark age,” the presidents affirmed that a decade of reform has only resulted in a new “golden age of theological education.”⁵¹

While the years since the revision to the Baptist Faith and Message have certainly been remarkable in terms of the progress made on and overall health of the seminary campuses, history has yet to determine if the “golden age” that arrived with the millennium will continue beyond its initial decade. Will the achievements for complementarianism in the gender debate be enough to ensure a similar future of optimism? At least one SBC agency still finds itself engaged in the debate.

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary saw the outworking of the reestablishment of complementarianism later than Southern or Southeastern. Perhaps because Southwestern Seminary was considered more conservative than the others during the key years of the conservative resurgence, reforms in the areas of gender roles came later. Southwestern did have professors and administrators who espoused egalitarianism in the 1980s. For example, Leon McBeth, professor of church history, writes,

I feel very deeply that the time has come for a moratorium of men making authoritative pronouncements about women. You must do your own speaking. You must define your own roles . . . you must determine if God is calling you and if so, to what: and *you* and only you can determine your response to God’s call.⁵²

However, in the 1990s, Southwestern’s Board of Trustees hired a new president who supported the conservative movement in the Southern Baptist Convention.

While Kenneth Hemphill did much to refocus the seminary on confessional orthodoxy, the issues of the gender debate were largely left untouched when compared to the simultaneous battles at Southeastern Seminary and Southern Seminary. However, when the article on the family was adopted in 1998, Hemphill sent the revised document to the academic deans and after an October faculty meeting where the statement on the family was discussed, Hemphill said,

Southwestern is a confessional institution. . . . As a matter of conviction and conscience, as an SBC institution, we gladly teach according and not contrary to the Baptist Faith and Message. We are under the patronage, general direction and

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²H. Leon McBeth, “Perspectives on Women in Baptist Life” *Baptist History and Heritage* (July 1987): 10. An example of the presence of egalitarianism can be seen in the doctoral dissertation of current SBC President Frank Page. Page completed his doctor of philosophy in Christian ethics at Southwestern with his dissertation, “Toward a Biblical Ethic of Women in Ministry,” which advocated views that he would later describe as “extreme,” going so far as encouraging women to serve as pastors. In 2006, Page would say that his dissertation was an attempt “to push what [he] had been taught into a biblically acceptable format.” Page stated that his dissertation “reflected the work of an ‘immature theologian,’” and that he “changed and recanted those rather extreme views.” Throughout his thirty years in ministry, Page affirmed that his views have been “very consistent with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.” See James A. Smith, Sr., “Frank Page discusses SBC theological issues,” *Baptist Press*, 31 July 2006 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=23710>.

control of the SBC which established the Baptist Faith and Message and amended it in 1998.

Employment at the seminary has for decades been based on a faculty member's signing the Baptist Faith and Message and teaching with and not contrary to the statement of faith. Our faculty manual specifies that when a faculty member can no longer subscribe to the seminary's articles of faith, he or she would voluntarily sever relations with the institution. We are going to do the right thing the right way.⁵³

The faculty meeting then was closed to Hemphill and other administrators so the faculty could "continue the discussion among themselves."⁵⁴

In the year prior to the adoption of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, the Baptist General Convention of Texas appointed a Seminary Study Committee to "examine the financial resources, theological positions, and philosophies of the Southern Baptist and BGCT supported seminaries."⁵⁵ As a part of this study, the committee sent a questionnaire to each seminary with several of the questions focusing on gender issues. Southwestern responded to the question,

Would female faculty members be allowed to teach in the following areas? A. Theology, B. Old Testament, C. New Testament, D. Church History, E. Preaching, F. Pastoral Ministry, G. Christian Education, H. Music

with the following,

Women would be allowed to teach in any of the areas indicated, depending upon the circumstances. We have a substantive cadre of female faculty: [list of 8 professors, 1 of whom taught in the school of theology].⁵⁶

In response to the question,

Does the seminary encourage/discourage female students from pursuing certain ministry positions? If so, which positions?

Southwestern responded,

Women are encouraged to pursue God's calling [*sic*] their lives. Women are also encouraged to be mindful of the call of local churches on their vocations. Most Southern Baptist churches believe that the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by scripture.⁵⁷

⁵³Art Toalston, "Southwestern faculty begin signing SBC statement with family amendment," *Baptist Press*, 15 October 1998 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=2583>.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵"BGCT Seminary Study Committee Report," 13 September 2000, 2 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.baptiststandard.com/2000/pdf/studycomm.PDF>.

⁵⁶Ibid., SWBTS 4.

⁵⁷Ibid., SWBTS 8.

As a result of the revision of the Baptist Faith and Message, Southwestern apparently had begun slowly to implement the changes requested by the convention, but not to the exhaustive degree of Southern or Southeastern. A female professor still taught in the school of theology, but students were prompted to consider the recently affirmed beliefs of the churches, specifically the revision to Article VI, “The Church.”

In 2003, the Board of Trustees elected Paige Patterson as president.⁵⁸ In an effort to ensure that Southwestern’s policies and practices were in line with the positions adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, Patterson continued to uphold the confessional standard of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.⁵⁹ Just as he did at Southeastern, Patterson began degree programs in Women’s Studies, and his wife, the only professor teaching in the school of theology, has the position of Professor of Theology in Women’s Studies, and teaches female students.⁶⁰

Taking measures to implement the biblical teaching of the roles of men and women in church and home has characterized Patterson’s early administration at Southwestern Seminary. In October 2006, the trustees approved a 23-hour concentration in homemaking as a part of the seminary’s undergraduate program. The course offerings in homemaking drew considerable attention in the media as Patterson explained to a Fox News correspondent that, “If a woman chooses to stay home, and she chooses to devote her full energies to her husband and to her children and to the development of her home then that is noble and not ignoble.”⁶¹ The homemaking concentration represented a return to classes first offered by Southwestern’s Women’s Training School, as early as the 1909–10 academic year.⁶² As Patterson also told Fox News, “Society will do better when the home is placed in a prominent position, and I do believe that any society is endangered whenever the home is not given the importance that it has in its biblical context.”⁶³

The current situation at Southwestern Seminary is one example demonstrating that the gender debate in the Southern Baptist Convention has not yet ended. As SBC agencies continue to implement the complementarian position of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, there will

⁵⁸Leadership from Southeastern Seminary and Southern Seminary converged in this transition. Leaving Southeastern for Southwestern in 2003, Patterson was preceded by the arrival of Craig Blaising from Southern who started as executive vice president and provost in 2002.

⁵⁹Since 1994 Southwestern has had two female professors teaching in the School of Theology. One was an associate professor of church history who resigned in 2004 to teach at another institution. The other was an assistant professor of Old Testament language who resigned in 2006 after accepting a teaching position at another university. Widely reported allegations that she was fired failed to note that she was told simply that she would not receive tenure. See Paige Patterson, “To the Editor: A Female Professor Let Go by a Seminary,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11 May 2007 [accessed 12 September 2007]. Online: <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v53/i36/36a05503.htm>.

⁶⁰Current information on Southwestern Seminary’s programs for women is available from <http://www.swbts.edu/womensprograms>. In addition to the president’s wife serving as professor of theology in women’s studies, Southwestern Seminary currently has a dean of women’s programs who serves as a part of the School of Educational Ministries.

⁶¹“Homemaking is Noble,” Patterson says on Fox News,” 13 August 2007 [accessed 10 September 2007]. Online: <http://www.swbts.edu/pressreleases/story.cfm?id=61190B2E-15C5-E47C-F9DD95D614158528>.

⁶²Southwestern’s Roberts Library has preserved the 1909–1910 academic catalog, which states that classes were offered in “Domestic Science” including instruction in cooking, housekeeping, and sewing. In addition, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted the resolution in 1987, “On Honor for Full-Time Homemakers,” June 1987 [accessed 30 August 2007]. Online: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=533>.

⁶³“Homemaking is Noble,” 13 August 2007. In addition, Southwestern also requires a 3-hour course on the Christian Home where biblical complementarianism is taught.

certainly be further conflict and conversation. The “golden age” of theological education, which began with the new millennium, has the opportunity to extend into its second decade if the churches continue to provide their support. As one seminary president said, speaking in general to all Southern Baptists during the 2002 interview with the *Florida Baptist Witness*, “You have faithfully fought to salvage our seminaries for biblical truth; now faithfully enable us to continue to do what you want us to do.”⁶⁴

The Best Defense

At times, imagining a day when the gender debate is over and the faithful teaching of the biblical roles of manhood and womanhood abounds in the SBC agencies and churches seems impossible. In fact, even with all of the progress of the last two decades, one wonders if what is confessed by many is also consistently practiced. To be sure, the Southern Baptist Convention has very few women pastors and likely will never have many.⁶⁵ However, anyone desiring to gauge the success of SBC complementarians in the gender debate need only look at the lack of male presence in most churches and the difficulty churches have in finding men who understand that the debate is still undecided. In fact, as far as the debate concerns SBC churches and homes, many might conclude that an egalitarian view, at least in terms of function, is gaining ground. Russell D. Moore thinks the situation is worse than that in the broader evangelical community. Moore states in his 2006 article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* that,

Complementarianism must be about more than isolating gender as a concern. . . . [W]e must remember that complementarian Christianity is collapsing around us because we have not addressed the root causes behind egalitarianism in the first place. . . . After all, complementarian churches are just as captive to the consumerist drive of American culture as egalitarians, if not more so. . . . Egalitarians are winning the evangelical gender debate, not because their arguments are stronger, but because, in some sense we are all egalitarians now. The complementarian response must be more than reaction.⁶⁶

In short, the best defense for the continued implementation of biblical complementarianism is a good offense.

What, then, is the current state of the gender debate in the Southern Baptist Convention? In many churches there are difficult situations in which the pastors, largely conservative in their theology, have led their churches to cooperate with other SBC churches over the last twenty-five years to steer the SBC back to confessional orthodoxy. This includes their active support of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 including its statements on the roles of men and women. However, to date, these churches, while embracing the confessional complementarianism,

⁶⁴Hannigan, “SBC seminary presidents.”

⁶⁵Interestingly, most other Baptist groups do not have high percentages either. Campbell-Reed and Durso note in *Assessing Attitudes About Women in Baptist Life-2006* (Atlanta, GA: Baptist Women in Ministry, 2007), 1, “At best, 6.2 % of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) churches and 9.1% of American Baptist Churches, USA (ABC-USA) churches are pastored by women.”

⁶⁶Russell D. Moore, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians are Winning the Gender Debate,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49, no. 3 (2006): 572, 576.

largely have done little to consider what that means beyond the boundaries of a woman serving as pastor.

In an age of increasingly militant feminism, curbed and confined masculinity, and general confusion as to the day-to-day functions and roles of men and women in society, the churches must come to see that the price of maintaining confessional orthodoxy is vigilance. A defensive or passive reaction to the cultural influence on our churches and homes is no longer an option. With regard to the gender debate, this means that the churches must work through and apply that which they have claimed as biblical. So while there is large agreement that women cannot function biblically in the role of a pastor, church members should ask their pastor how 1 Timothy 2 applies to their Sunday School class, to authoritative deacon bodies, or to other areas in which there is gender confusion. In these areas many have yet to stake their ground.

As in any debate, the ground that one fails to claim will be claimed by the opposition; while many churches affirm the complementarity of their confession, they have quietly given up the front of practical application in the lives of their church members. Often the otherwise conservative pastors return to the “practical outweighs theological” training they received in seminary before the changes in the 1990s. The irony of this is that the changes in the agencies were brought about by a grassroots movement of the churches; now that the agencies have returned, the churches have begun calling pastors who have received the training the churches worked so hard to reestablish.⁶⁷

Finally, for those seeking to find biblical teaching about the complementary differences between men and women in SBC agencies and in many SBC churches, the state of the gender debate is favorable. Whether this favor still exists for the agencies and churches of the future remains to be seen. The time has come for Southern Baptists to establish whether or not they desire to be thorough-going complementarians or return to the “practical outweighs theological” methodology of the egalitarians. The brakes have been applied, but the next generation of Southern Baptist families and churches are asking, “Where do we go from here?”

Are Southern Baptists ancient Neanderthals chasing a mythical Bigfoot? After surveying the past and present of the debate over the complementary differences between the roles of men and women, a fair-minded person should agree that the only thing modern-day Southern Baptists have been chasing is a living and active Bible.

⁶⁷An interesting commentary on the unique relationship between the churches and the seminaries is found in Hannigan, “SBC seminary presidents.”



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