

And the Answer is, “Yes!”

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The other night I dreamed I was on the witness stand of the sixteenth-century Roman Inquisition. One of the Inquisitors General asked me, “Do you believe that Southern Baptist conservative theology is shaped by cultural considerations, or do you believe that Southern Baptist conservative cultural engagement is a product of theology.” I answered, “Yes,” then awoke before learning whether or not I would be burned at the stake.¹

Of the three articles I have been asked to consider, Russell Moore’s is the most direct and sustained critique of *Uneasy in Babylon*, so I will spend the bulk of my space here engaging him. Moore thinks the central thesis of the book is that for Southern Baptist conservatives, inerrancy and other theological matters are subservient to cultural considerations. He wrote, “Thus, for Hankins, the ‘culture war’ activism of SBC conservatives is not the result of their theological convictions. Instead, the ‘culture war’ informs and propels the theological convictions.” Greg Wills says something very similar in the opening paragraph of his piece. He writes, “In *Uneasy in Babylon*, Barry Hankins argues that the conservatives who orchestrated the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1979 sought principally to save America from the advance of secularist culture. They promoted inerrancy and orthodox theology as a means to this end.”

The Importance of Theology

It does not surprise me that in this postmodern age others could read my book differently than I would read it or

differently than I wrote it. Perspective informs how we read texts. Moreover, my book is about how Southern Baptist conservatives relate to American culture. It is possible that in attending primarily to matters of culture I could give the appearance that theological renewal is subservient to efforts to reform society. This was not, however, my intent in writing *Uneasy in Babylon*. Rather than attempting to show that theology is subservient to culture war, I intended to argue that the two are so closely related that a failure to understand one is a failure to understand the other. What Moore and Wills have done is set in opposition the two parts of my interpretation of Southern Baptist conservatives. I do not see these two as oppositional.

Apparently, for many Southern Baptist conservatives, one must decide if the conservative movement was theological, political, cultural, or something else. I believe that all of these work together in a symbiotic relationship. During the SBC Controversy (1979-1995), conservatives claimed that their concerns were purely theological, while moderates charged that the conservative movement was about power politics and the desire to control the denomination. Both sides were being reductionistic in their own ways. In *Uneasy in Babylon* I attempted to avoid the moderate reductionistic argument that says conservatives were not really concerned about theology. I believe conservatives are very concerned about theology. If one were to ask me what is most important to Southern Baptist conservatives, my answer would be, theology. In

fact, I believe they are too concerned about theology and that sometimes their theological concerns override considerations of how we should treat human beings. Specifically, I mean here the efforts to oust from seminaries and denominational agencies Bible-believing Christians who love Jesus but differ with conservatives on the role of women in ministry.

On the other hand, I also believe that cultural considerations are bound up with the theological concerns and often drive and shape theology even as the theology drives and shapes cultural engagement. This is why on page 10 of the introduction to *Uneasy in Babylon*, after having spelled out the importance of culture for SBC conservatives, I write, "This is not to deny that theology played a major role in the SBC conservative movement." I then ask, "[W]hy did these leaders decide that theology was so important, and why did so many Southern Baptists agree that if the theology of the denomination were not narrowed and more clearly defined, the denomination would lose its ability to function as an instrument of God in this world?" My answer is that conservative leaders became convinced that America in general and the South in particular is in the throes of a cultural crisis "that necessitated a warlike struggle against the forces that were hostile to evangelical faith." I am quick to add, however, "This does not mean that they only took over the SBC so they could more effectively join the culture war. Rather, it is to say that theological warfare and cultural warfare are in this case related."²

The Importance of Culture

The point is that cultural concerns highlighted the need to fix the theology of the denomination. Part of my reasoning here

has to do with my first book *God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism*.³ The irascible Norris and other fundamentalists of his ilk from the first half of the twentieth century leveled the same charges of liberalism against the moderate SBC that Southern Baptist conservatives did later. Norris and the earlier critics could not win the denomination, however, largely because the vast majority of Southern Baptists just could not see what the fuss was about. Both the denomination and the southern Zion in which it operated seemed safely orthodox. One might argue, as Wills seems to in his essay, that later in the century there was finally enough liberalism to alarm rank and file Southern Baptists, whereas there had not been in Norris's day. But how are rank-and-file people of any theological stripe convinced of the need for action? It is usually by issues that touch them in their everyday lives, issues that seem to affect the culture around them. As George Marsden has argued with regard to the fundamentalist movement of the early twentieth century, World War I convinced normal everyday orthodox Protestants that modernist theology had cultural implications and was therefore a menace to be defeated. When fundamentalist preachers and theologians made the connection between modernist theology and a militaristic German nation that had presumably started an awful war that resulted in Germany's defeat, people began to believe that if the theology of their denominations went over to modernism, the same thing that happened in Germany could happen in America. This transformed the early fundamentalist-modernist controversy from a preachers' fight into a cultural crusade.⁴

If one wants to believe that even in the

absence of the prayer in schools decisions of the sixties and the abortion controversy of the seventies average Southern Baptists would still have been motivated to support the conservative resurgence, then one is dealing in “what-if” questions that can never be answered. The facts of recent history are that the Supreme Court did render these decisions, and it seems reasonable to suggest that these and other such cultural changes signaled that all was not well in Zion, heightening in many people’s minds the need for change at the theological level. This is not just a plausible assumption. Rather, I have presented evidence from conservatives themselves citing the importance of cultural issues and their connection to theology. For example, Al Mohler has said that to their dying day moderates will underestimate the importance of the abortion issue. He argues that while average Baptists may not be able to tell exactly when inerrancy is being compromised, if they find out that a professor at a seminary is pro-choice on abortion or gay affirmative, they become alarmed pretty quickly and conclude there is something theologically amiss. As he puts it, “It is not that conservatives were intentionally reductionistic. . . , but the abortion issue signaled to them a larger problem.” Moreover, Mohler even says that the abortion issue was very important in alerting him to the theological problems at Southern Seminary when he was a student there. Being so convinced that some of his professors were wrong on abortion led him to reevaluate their theology.⁵ By way of analogy, Timothy George tells how theologian Karl Barth began to question his liberal professors’ theology when they came out in support of Kaiser Wilhelm’s militaristic policies during World War I. Their stance on pub-

lic issues signaled to Barth that something was wrong with their thinking at a more fundamental level.

The Relationship between Theology and Culture

Clearly, concern over abortion sent some conservatives back to the theological drawing board. If one wants to argue that theology drives the concern over abortion, that is fine, but this does not mean that a cultural issue like abortion does not drive theology as well. It can work both ways; there is no need to make this an either/or proposition. It seems plausible to argue that the same cultural concerns over abortion, prayer in schools, homosexuality, and other similar matters that helped sweep Ronald Reagan into office in 1980, also played a role in Adrian Rogers’s election to the SBC presidency in 1979 and the success of the conservative movement thereafter. Cultural issues alerted conservative leaders to the need for theological renewal and piqued grassroots interest in what the conservative leaders were saying about the moderate capitulation to secular culture, a capitulation that conservatives believed was rooted in insipid theology.

Moore reads my book to mean that “biblical inerrancy is important for Baptist conservatives ultimately *because* of the culture war” (Moore’s words, his emphasis). I would not read *Uneasy in Babylon* that way, and I am certain that is not the way I wrote it. To take up Moore’s brief analogy to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, I believe that theological concerns were central to Martin Luther’s protest against the medieval Catholic Church. Nevertheless, it was the public issue of indulgences that brought him into the open with his theological

ideas. While the sale of indulgences is certainly a theological issue, just as abortion is, it was the cultural component, the public sale of indulgences in Luther's own territory, that precipitated his public response. So, too, with SBC conservatives. While abortion and the other issues I have covered in *Uneasy in Babylon* are theological in one sense, the public and cultural impact of these issues heightened the perceived need to shore up the theology of the denomination, and the cultural component also helped convince rank-and-file Southern Baptists that something needed to be done.

Moore takes issue with my argument that the cultural component is the glue that holds the conservative movement together. He writes, "Hankins is also wrong to see the 'culture wars' as the axis of cohesion among conservatives since the resurgence." Here we have a real disagreement because I do, in fact, say something very much like this, although tentatively. In the last paragraph of *Uneasy in Babylon* I write, "Finally, it appears, at least to this author, that at this early stage in the interpretation of the SBC conservative movement, the cultural program is the glue that is holding conservatives together."⁶ I go on to suggest that inerrancy served this purpose during the controversy. "The battle for inerrancy is won, however, and still revivalist preachers such as Adrian Rogers, Calvinist theologians such as Al Mohler and Timothy George, pietistic expositors such as Paige Patterson, and public activists like Land continue to live together in relative harmony."⁷

My reasoning here is largely a process of elimination. Calvinism certainly cannot be the glue of the conservative movement. The movement is divided over this issue with Calvinists and non-Calvinists unified

by other things. Theological issues such as salvation by faith alone, original sin, baptism, and the Lord's Supper are clearly not enough as most moderates believe the same things as conservatives on these issues. Likewise, inerrancy, while a requirement, is not sufficient. Timothy Weber, one of the first new inerrantists hired at Southern Seminary in 1993, was told in 1995 that he would not have been hired then. This is because Mohler had become president and had stipulated that in addition to one's views of scripture, new faculty had to adhere to specific positions on abortion, homosexuality, and women in ministry—what I call cultural issues without denying that they are also theological. Inerrancy was no longer enough. As things stand today, one must be an inerrantist, but even if one claims that mantle, he or she cannot be pro-choice, gay affirmative, or even believe that women can be ordained, and remain within the Southern Baptist conservative movement in any official capacity. Given that these issues are cultural, at least to a large extent, it seems plausible to say that along with inerrancy, specific public stands on certain cultural issues are what all conservatives have in common—i.e., the glue that holds the movement together.

Moore and most conservatives want to trumpet the new confessional identity of Southern Baptists, but they know they dare not touch a purely theological issue like Calvinism in their confession because it would divide the movement. By contrast, they are safe discussing public and highly contentious cultural issues having to do with gender and sexuality. Why must there be unity on the role of women in marriage and ministry but not on the doctrine of election? My answer is,

because such issues have huge cultural implications. By contrast, it makes little difference for the cultural or even denominational program of the conservative movement whether one is a Calvinist like Al Mohler or decidedly non-Calvinist like Rogers or Paige Patterson. In this way, therefore, the cultural crisis over abortion, homosexuality, and gender helps shape many of the theological concerns of the SBC conservative movement, including what positions are requirements for inclusion in the movement.

Beyond this line of argument and whether it is plausible and coherent, there is another important reason to argue for the importance of cultural issues in the theological program of SBC conservatives. Simply put, the evidence suggests this. Moore argues that theology is paramount for conservatives. I agree. But, he fails to grapple with the question of why and how theology became so important. *Uneasy in Babylon* actually started in 1997 as an article on the church-state views of SBC conservatives. The question that intrigued me was, why do conservatives take such different positions on church-state issues than do moderates? I had heard all the moderate speculation as to why this was so: Conservatives have sold their birthright; they have forgotten their roots; they have become theocratic Reconstructionists, etc. None of those answers was very satisfying, so I traveled to places like Nashville, Louisville, Wake Forest, and Memphis and asked conservatives what they believed and why. When I did this, they began to tell me about how cultural concerns like abortion and school prayer alerted them to theological problems.

I did the same thing for the next three summers, including when the SBC revised the Baptist Faith and Message in 2000. On

that issue Moore writes, "Hankins is correct that the national media has focused predominately on the cultural aspects of, say, the Baptist Faith and Message revisions of 2000. But the theological clarity achieved in the updated confession of faith was not limited to what Hankins would define as 'culture war' issues." This seems to imply that the national media is responsible for highlighting the cultural implications of the confession and that perhaps I get my information from the media. The fact is I attended the 2000 Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Orlando and witnessed almost no debate on the gender section of the new confession. My read on this is that moderates knew conservatives are completely unified on this matter and that the changes of 2000 were merely a corollary to the submission statement that had been added to the confession in 1998. Knowing they had no chance to turn back the conservative tide on the gender issue, moderates used all their guns (and microphone time) debating whether scripture is to be interpreted through Christ or the other way around. On this almost purely theological issue, which has little immediate cultural cash value, moderates believed they might be able to win some conservative hearts and minds, but not on the much more public and culturally important issues of gender.

Moreover, when I interviewed key conservatives about the 1998 submission statement, Richard Land, Al Mohler, and Dorothy Patterson all said that the cultural crisis of our time necessitated a response on issues concerning family and gender. Mohler said the same thing to Larry King on CNN. As Land and Mohler both pointed out, confessions of faith are almost always written in response to crises of one kind or another. By contrast, there is no

compelling reason that Southern Baptists need to clarify what the denomination's stance is on Calvinism. The hot issues are partly theological, but the reason they are hot is often because of the crisis they precipitate within American culture. As Mohler told King with regard to the submission statement, "[I]n adding this statement, Southern Baptists are responding to what we see as a real crisis in the culture over the family."⁸ This is not to say all changes in the 1998 and 2000 confessions are influenced by culture, but some clearly are.

Oddly, one page after implying that my cultural argument misses the gist of the Baptist Faith and Message changes of 1998 and 2000, Moore himself writes, "The 'culture war' served as a warning to Southern Baptists that they were not winning the 'Bold Mission Thrust.' While conservatives saw the evangelistic task imperiled by a secularizing culture, they also saw the moderate denominational elite following the culture at some disturbing points." If a reviewer posed this as a restatement of part of the thesis of *Uneasy in Babylon*, I would agree wholeheartedly. A few lines later, Moore says that most conservatives would "agree with much of the way in which Hankins describes the resurgence's approach to issues such as abortion, gender roles, religious liberty, and race. But, they would want to maintain that these fronts were not primarily 'culture war' battles, but a theological clash of visions. . . . The culture raised the issues, but Baptist conservatism sought to answer them within the context of its own confessional and conversionist theological worldview." I have no problem with this statement except that it is puzzling that twice in this paragraph Moore says most Baptist conservatives would agree with my central

argument, yet in much of the rest of his essay argues that I get it wrong. To say that conservatives employ their theology within the context of a perceived culture war, one need only read Mohler's essay found elsewhere in this volume. Moore seems to think that I took the culture war model into my work and used it to interpret conservatives. The actual case is the opposite. Conservatives told me they were fighting a culture war and that it was theological at its core. I never denied that this was the case and in fact believe that the failure of moderates to take conservative theology seriously contributed to the monumental collapse of the moderate SBC.

Further compounding the confusion over what the thesis of *Uneasy in Babylon* actually is, just a few pages after having the majority of SBC conservatives agreeing with my interpretation, Moore writes, "Contrary to Hankins's thesis, conservatives did not rally Southern Baptists around inerrancy in order to fight a battle against abortion, the sexual revolution, feminism, or any other cultural phenomenon." Let me say again, this is not my thesis. Moore then writes, "Instead these issues crystallized the debate over larger theological and missiological questions of biblical authority, the Great Commission, and the prophetic role of the church in protecting those the culture deems not worthy of life." This is my thesis. For example, in chapter six, "No One Has Been Shot Yet: Southern Baptists and the Abortion Controversy," I contend that abortion was a much more important issue during the controversy than many believed. This is neither a supposition nor interpretative conclusion on my part. Rather, as discussed above in this essay, key SBC conservatives told me abortion was more important to them than moderates realized. I then reiterate that

during the controversy conservatives argued that their movement was primarily about theology while the moderates charged that conservatives just wanted political control. I then write, “The right-wing movement was not just theological, however, and it was not just about denominational control. In many ways it was a response to culture and, therefore, could not avoid the central cultural issue of our time.”⁹ These words were chosen carefully, which is why I say the movement was “in many ways” a response to culture. This is quite different than saying that SBC conservatives rallied around inerrancy “in order to fight a battle against abortion, the sexual revolution, feminism, or any other cultural phenomenon.” If Moore wants to take issue with my argument that culture influenced the theology of the conservative movement, that is fine. But, he cannot do this because, as shown above, he says the same thing himself. Moreover, key conservative leaders have said that cultural issues like abortion were very important in alerting them to the need for theological renewal.

Late in his essay Moore quotes from the introduction to *Uneasy in Babylon*, where I say that inerrancy “was an effective tool in the hands of SBC conservatives as they attempted to convince rank-and-file Southern Baptists that their moderate leaders and denominational employees were too liberal.”¹⁰ He follows with this charge, “Because, for Hankins, the rhetorical use of inerrancy was a means to an end in the ‘culture war’ agenda, the conservatives used a ‘slippery slope’ argument that the denial of inerrancy would lead to other grave theological errors.” Here again, we see Moore putting into mutually exclusive opposition things that need not be oppositional. Can anyone doubt that SBC conser-

vatives used the inerrancy issue to charge moderates with liberalism—i.e., that inerrancy was “an effective tool”? This does not mean, however, that inerrancy was merely a tool or that conservatives are insincere or less interested in inerrancy than they claim. What I actually wrote about conservatives and inerrancy was, “For nearly all SBC conservatives, inerrancy was and is the central issue of evangelicalism.”¹¹ It is truly mystifying that Moore has read my book to mean that theology and inerrancy are merely means to an end in the culture war. The way I would read it is to say that theology and inerrancy are primary for conservatives, *and* they employ these in their culture war efforts. At the same time, certain features of American culture help clarify what parts of theology most need emphasis at this time in history.

Cultural Differences between Conservatives, Moderates, and Northern Evangelicals

The oppositional way that Moore reads *Uneasy in Babylon* (and Wills also, to the extent that his essay mentions the book) is instructive as to the differences between SBC conservatives and the moderates who formerly controlled the denomination. Moderates were in many ways “at ease in Zion.” This is partly generational. The post-World War II leaders had been reared in a South that was relatively intact and still very supportive of evangelical Protestantism. They were not accustomed to seeing their faith and their culture in opposition to each other. Key conservatives sojourned for a time outside the South, read Francis Schaeffer and Carl Henry, and began to see the South as much like the rest of America—that is, as a secular and secularizing culture that is often hostile to the faith.

The fact that these conservative leaders came of age intellectually at the very time that the South was becoming more secular made the transition seem all the more stark.

What we have are at least three different ways of relating to culture. First is the “at ease in Zion” model of early-to-mid twentieth-century moderates. Second is the highly oppositional and confrontational model of SBC conservatives. Third is a typical northern evangelical response to culture that might be called “at ease with being uneasy.” The latter can be seen clearly in the example of Timothy Weber that is covered in chapter three of *Uneasy in Babylon*. Having been reared in California with an undergraduate degree from UCLA, then having attended graduate school at the University of Chicago, one of the bastions of theological liberalism, Weber arrived in Louisville at Southern Seminary and found more cultural support for religion than he had ever seen. Yet, this was the very seminary and culture that conservatives believed was on the brink of a total sell out to liberalism. As Moore puts it, “[T]hey feared Nashville [meaning the SBC] was slouching toward Gomorrah.” How is it that Weber saw more cultural support for evangelical religion than he had ever seen before, while Moore sees Robert Bork’s proverbial Gomorrah?¹²

As Weber sees it, evangelicals outside the South have grown accustomed to being outsiders, of having the culture at odds with their faith. Southerners, by contrast, were experiencing for the first time the sort of cultural turn away from religion that northerners experienced in the early part of the twentieth century. If one is accustomed to cultural support for religion and gets just the opposite, the effect is much more dramatic than if one gets exactly what he or she has been taught to expect.

Mohler has said something very much like this when discussing his childhood move from central Florida to south Florida, from a relatively intact southern culture to a highly diverse and secularizing one. In conjunction with his geographic relocation, he began to read Schaeffer and Henry and found that what they had written about northern culture turning hostile to faith in the early twentieth century seemed very applicable to the South in the latter half of the century. I do not want to make too much of this, giving the impression that SBC conservatives are disoriented or even shocked by the cultural changes they see around them. While I do suggest at the end of *Uneasy in Babylon* that conservatives probably over-interpret cultural hostility to evangelical Protestantism, especially in the South, for the most part they are rational, intellectually serious cultural interpreters, not hysterical prophets of doom. Still, many evangelicals who were reared in the North or West notice more vestiges of religion in southern culture than conservatives seem to see.

On an impressionistic level, I can corroborate Weber’s take on the South. I was reared in Michigan in the holiness Free Methodist denomination. Neither I nor any of my Christian friends expected or even desired that the wider culture buttress our faith. To use just one example, in my thirteen years of public school I can recall only one class that had prayer. A fifth-grade teacher, whom I did not have, led her class in the Lord’s Prayer every morning (or perhaps it was just once a week, I do not remember). I recall thinking, “How odd for a school to engage in worship.” In recent years I have wondered how different my perspective might have been had I been reared believing that public schools were suppose to reflect biblical faith but that

mine had ceased to do so. As things were in my area of the country, I never experienced the stoppage of prayer in schools after the prayer decisions of 1962 and 1963, because our schools never had it in the first place. Obviously, this is not true for all the North or Midwest. After all, those prayer decisions came out of New York state, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, but most areas of the country, especially outside the South, had no religious exercises in the public schools even before those decisions. The practice has always been more prominent in the South, so the decisions were more alarming there. In one sense, the fact that my schools were secular, and that I never expected them to be anything else, was a good thing in that it clarified what the role of evangelical Christians should be within a secular culture. We were to be salt and light, take a prophetic stand, and consider seriously what the Great Commission meant as far as our bearing witness to “the world” (and that is what we called our culture). We never expected the institutions of our society to take up these biblical tasks.

This seems to be why Mohler, in his essay in this volume, gives us a nice overview of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. That controversy in the North produced American Protestant fundamentalism as it became clear that modernist (liberal) theology had significant cultural implications. Militant fundamentalists responded in various ways, most withdrawing from mainline denominations, and some attempting even to withdraw from culture. Around mid-century, some orthodox leaders who opposed the militant separatism of fundamentalism attempted to reengage the culture as neo-evangelicals. This neo-evangelical approach to culture, especially in the form of Schaeffer and Henry, later

influenced some of the key leaders of the SBC conservative movement. It is as if conservatives retained from their moderate Southern Baptist upbringing the sense that they have responsibility for their culture, something neither Weber nor I grew up believing, then grafted into that sense of responsibility a confrontational form of cultural engagement taught by neo-evangelicals who came of age as the North was secularizing in much the same way the South did a half century later. The first step in confronting culture was to shore up the theological base, but this does not mean that theology is merely a cover for culture war activity. Rather, it means that cultural engagement and theological renewal cannot be separated. It is interesting at this point that Moore, unlike me, seems to think the two can be separated, that theological renewal and culture war are two vastly different things, theology being much more important. It seems to me that key SBC conservatives believe that theological renewal necessitates cultural engagement, and cultural crisis necessitates theological renewal. You cannot have one without the other.

The Necessary Connection between Cultural Concerns and Theological Renewal

Any attempt to forge a more faithful theology without reference to culture would defy the very definition and purpose of theology. Evangelical theology is primarily an attempt to articulate biblical truth in the context of the culture of our time, using language that speaks to our generation and perhaps those to come. By contrast, the modernist theological project, as I understand it, was about adjusting theology to changes in culture so that the theology would retain its relevance. Eigh-

teenth-century thinker Jonathan Edwards, perhaps the greatest of all evangelical theologians in American history, read and understood Newton and Locke and wrote much of his theology to speak to cultural and intellectual needs created by early modernity. His theology was not a cover for his cultural engagement. Rather, his theology was a piece with his cultural concerns. Likewise, Southern Baptist conservatives, far from attempting to create theology in a vacuum, and far from wanting to adjust theology to fit their culture, seek theological renewal in the context of what they perceive to be the modern and postmodern cultural crisis of our time. They believe that the culture often, but not always, calls into necessity a rearticulation of biblical truth in a way that speaks to the needs of our time.

This is where Wills's article is helpful. He attempts to show the extent to which SBC moderates in the seminaries gave too much away to modernism, a theological movement that had as its central thrust the attempt to reconcile Protestant theology with modern science and higher criticism. The modernist way of forging theology in the context of new intellectual forces was quite different from Edwards and other evangelicals who came later, and some SBC moderates seemed to follow the modernist model. I do not read Wills to be arguing that moderates were wrong in forging a theology in response to these forces, only that their theology compromised biblical truths. Conservatives must grapple with many of the same issues, but they seek to do so in a way that is more faithful to scripture. What we cannot tell from Wills's article is just how pervasive the sell out to modernism was among moderates. Against his examples are the witnesses of those like Weber, who said that when he

arrived at Southern Seminary he found very few true liberals of the University of Chicago type. Even some who liked to boast of their liberalism struck Weber as very unusual, for unlike his professors at Chicago they loved Jesus and revered the Bible. Weber, David Gushee, and Carey Newman are orthodox evangelicals by almost any standard, but they could not negotiate successfully the type of conservatism that swept Southern Seminary. One wonders how many moderates before them were equally orthodox, as opposed to those who really had become so enamored with modern theological trends that they compromised biblical authority.

Will we ever know how many of those pressured out of the SBC seminaries were truly the type of liberals that Wills identifies in his essay? This question notwithstanding, Wills has made a start at a very interesting and important historical question: How pervasive was theological liberalism in the SBC prior to the conservative takeover/resurgence. He quotes University of North Texas professor Joe Barnhart as saying in the 1970s that liberalism was winning in SBC seminaries, but this strikes me more as wishful thinking on Barnhart's part than as a serious scholarly conclusion.

The difficulty in answering the question of liberal pervasiveness will be compounded by the lack of consensus over just what constitutes real theological liberalism. Is one a liberal if he or she utilizes the tools of modern scholarship such as higher criticism of scriptural texts, or only if one ends up denying fundamental truths after having employed those tools? Evangelical historian Mark Noll has attempted to stake out a position of "believing criticism," where orthodox scholars retain presuppositions about the Bible as the word of God, then employ the tools of higher criticism

within the context of such faithful pre-commitments.¹³ Early twentieth century Baptist theologian Augustus H. Strong may have had something like this in mind when he charged that the problem with modernists was not that they used higher criticism of scripture, but that this was all they used.¹⁴ He seemed to be saying that modernists often forgot that orthodox Protestantism had certain theological presuppositions that could not be discovered inductively. That being the case, the problem was not the methods of higher criticism, but rather the modernist belief that no presuppositions were needed for biblical scholarship.

A historian like Wills may be well suited to help us on this issue of the real theological state of the SBC prior to the conservative resurgence, but the acceptance of his work in the community of historians will be hampered to the extent that he is perceived as a partisan of the conservative movement. It may be another generation before SBC conservative scholars will be taken seriously when analyzing their own movement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, and to sum up, given that Southern Baptist conservatives began to come to grips with the transformation of the South only in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it is little wonder that they have a tendency to see things in oppositional terms. While there may well be advantages to this, the danger is to misinterpret things that are not intended to be oppositional. This is precisely what I believe Moore has done with *Uneasy in Babylon*, but I am willing to let readers be the judge of who reads the book more accurately—him or me. Finally, as to the question of whether culture drives theol-

ogy or theology drives cultural engagement, my answer is still “Yes!”

ENDNOTES

¹I would like to thank Tom Schreiner and *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* for the opportunity to respond to critiques of *Uneasy in Babylon*.

²Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002) 10.

³*God's Rascal: J. Frank Norris and the Beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

⁴George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 141.

⁵*Uneasy in Babylon*, 44

⁶*Ibid.*, 276.

⁷*Ibid.*, 276-277.

⁸Quoted in *ibid.*, 229.

⁹*Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 38.

¹²See Robert Bork, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah* (New York: Regan Books, 1996).

¹³Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 163 and throughout.

¹⁴Grant Wacker, *Augustus H. Strong and the Dilemma of Historical Consciousness* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985) 108.