

The Evidences of Concern Within
the Southern Baptist Convention

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and

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This document is not exhaustive but attempts to present a portion of the concerns expressed by many members of the Conservative Baptist Network. The Southern Baptist Convention is in crisis. Conservatives must reengage.

Critical Race Theory

One of the major and most pressing issues in the Southern Baptist Convention is the subversive teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT). For an in-depth understanding of CRT, Ronnie Rogers has written an article defining CRT and the terminology used. He defines CRT as follows:

Critical Race Theory (CRT) defines race as being socially constructed rather than a natural biological function. In CRT, the concept of race was constructed by white people and serves as a mechanism for them to oppress black people and promote pervasive institutional racism in order to maintain white supremacy.

CRT is related to Cultural Marxism which is composed of a broad set of ideas that serve as instruments for a societal transformation to bring about the redistribution of power and wealth-socialism. White people need to repent of white supremacy and privilege, but black people do not need to repent. Even if a white person has never had a genuinely racist thought or he has repented of past racism, he is still a racist, white supremacist, because he is white and belongs to the majority.¹

CRT Among Southern Baptist Professors, Presidents, and Leaders

Matthew Hall

Matthew Hall, the former dean of Boyce College at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 2016-2019, as well as the former provost and senior vice president of academic administration at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) from 2019-2022, and also a former research fellow for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) from 2014-2022, was the guest of the *Coffee and Cream* podcast on July 15, 2018. In the podcast, Matthew Hall speaks to the racial reconciliation he believes is needed in the Southern Baptist Convention. Toward the end of the video Matthew Hall says the following:

¹<https://ronniewrogers.com/2020/06/understanding-the-terms-of-cultural-marxism-social-justice-a-christian-response/>.

I am a racist, okay, so if that freaks you out, if you think the worst thing somebody can call you is a racist, then you're not thinking biblically, because guess what, like, I'm gonna struggle with racism and white supremacy until the day I die and get my glorified body and in a completely renewed and sanctified mind. Because I am immersed in a culture where I benefit from racism all the time.²

On July 1, 2022, nearly four years after making the above comments, Matthew Hall was appointed provost and senior vice president of Biola University. During his tenure as an SBTS professor and an ERLC fellow, Hall referred to himself as a white supremacist and a racist, demonstrating the influence of Critical Race Theory at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Jarvis Williams

Jarvis Williams, an associate professor of New Testament interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who holds three earned degrees from Boyce College and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, participated in a panel entitled "Ethnic Harmony and the Holy Spirit" at Bethlehem College and Seminary's Pastors' Conference in 2018.³ At that event, Williams said this:

When we think about white supremacy, it's not only the overt, violent expressions that you see on the television. In Charlottesville, for example. But white supremacy is an ideological construct that believes that whiteness is superior to non-whiteness. So then, how this shows up, in part, is it shows up in curriculum. Right? I'm a seminary professor, and in theological education, you're hard-pressed to find many evangelical institutions that have a regular requirement of black and brown authors. And often, what happens is whiteness becomes the standard by which all good theology is judged. You understand what I'm saying? So that if it's right theology, it's written by a white scholar who is contextualizing that theology for white audiences. And so one of the things we see is, and hear this very, very carefully. There's racism by intent, and there's racism by consequence. You can have racism operating in a context where is [sic] there are no individual racists. And that, in part, is the way in which white supremacy works, in a socially sophisticated way. When you have whiteness as the priority and when folks work and operate in such a way with curriculum, with economics, or with policies to maintain and to posture and to privilege that whiteness and then to require those who are non-white to culturally colonize to whiteness. So then we think about reconciliation and ethnic hostility; the solution is not more black and brown faces in white spaces who colonize to whiteness. The solution is fundamentally, yes, the gospel, the cross, the resurrection, right? The

²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dwI82hKUTgI>. Reference clip starts at 49:45.

³https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ou0ycm_Bzww. Reference clip begins at 26:45.

blood of Jesus. But also dethroning white supremacy in all of the forms in which it shows up in Christian spaces, folks. Because when Jesus died to disarm those principalities and powers, one of those principalities and powers, I would argue, is white supremacy and all that it entails. So feel that tonight. White supremacy's not just violence or KKK or lynchings. It is also the belief, directly or indirectly, that whiteness is rightness, and everything has to be judged by that.

Walter Strickland

Walter Strickland, associate vice president for Kingdom Diversity Initiatives, assistant professor of systematic and contextual theology at Southeastern Theological Seminary, and associate research fellow for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, in an interview with the *New York Times* in October 2018, said about James Cone, the father of Black Liberation Theology,

Dr. Cone allowed me to see a new vista, a new space, a new avenue to allow the gospel to be made manifest. So, I sort of look at what the gospel is doing as a more broad reality now. Not that I've switched the spiritual for the physical or the social, but both.⁴

Strickland would later admit to teaching Cone's ideas, saying,

While Cone's ideas are in play, I don't mention him by name, because I don't want to put unnecessary stumbling blocks in their way... If I'm able to demonstrate that this black man in front of them has read the Bible, I gain credit with them.⁵

Danny Akin

In 2018, Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, appeared in a video produced with the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission entitled "What do White Christians Need to be Mindful of When Speaking out about Racial Reconciliation?" He stated,

White Christians need to learn, above all things, I think to be good listeners. Over the last several years, as I've tried to help build a culture for racial reconciliation and kingdom diversity, which is a core value of Southeastern Seminary, I've come to understand more and more that my perspective is not the perspective of my African-American brothers and sisters, or my Hispanic brothers and sisters, [or] my Asian brothers and sisters. They really do see life differently; they're operating out of a different paradigm, a different context that's very different than mine. And I didn't really realize that until I stopped talking and began to listen. So I think one of the things that white evangelicals, in particular, have got to do is become better listeners. In addition to that, we have got to be willing to surrender power, which is again not

⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXIJHy72le0>.

⁵<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/20/opinion/sunday/black-evangelicals-diversity.html>.

indigenous to our nature. As I often say, not only do we need to invite ethnic minorities into our room and to have a seat at the table, we even need to be willing to surrender leadership at the table if we're really going to make progress and really help our brothers and sisters understand we see them on an equal plane with ourselves.⁶

Kevin Smith

Kevin Smith, former Baptist Convention of Maryland and Delaware Executive Director and current teaching pastor of the Go Family Church Village Campus, from an audience microphone, spoke at a 9Marks event at the 2022 SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim. He said,

I think some Southern Baptists were unloving to black people beginning in 2012 with the killing of Trayvon Martin. I don't mean agree about politics or policy...I just mean giving a darn that somebody else is hurting who is supposed to be your brother or sister in Christ. And I think some Southern Baptists just bent over and became political whores with this whole Trump stuff. And if black innerrantists like Ralph West⁷ feel alienated and black innerrantists like John Onwuchekwa⁸ feel alienated and black innerrantists like Charlie Dates⁹ feel alienated; I just wonder if white brothers think this has been kind of crazy black/white stuff going on, Asian, Hispanic. Just people who aren't white feeling like they're tolerated but not really embraced.¹⁰

Mark Dever and Matt Chandler served as panelists at the event, which was also sponsored by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Dhati Lewis

Dhati Lewis, former president of the Send Network, the church planting arm of the North American Mission Board, on his podcast *Where Life Exists*, said the following:

The gospel is not simply a message for the afterlife. It has real-time, real-life applications for our day-to-day lives. We see it modeled perfectly in the life of Jesus. We know he met the spiritual needs of people, but we also know that he met emotional needs, as well. He met economic needs and also social needs. He healed the sick, challenged corruption in leaders and systems. He honored the poor and the outcasts. Wherever Jesus went, holistic restoration was taking place. The gospel is

⁶<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpo9JR6hucc>.

⁷Ralph West is pastor of Houston's The Church Without Walls, a church that left the SBC in 2020. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/december/charlie-dates-ralph-west-southern-baptist-sbc-crt.html>.

⁸John Onwuchekwa is pastor of Cornerstone Church in Atlanta, a church that left the SBC in 2020. <https://thefrontporch.org/2020/07/4-reasons-we-left-the-sbc/>.

⁹Charlie Dates pastor of Progressive Baptist Church in Chicago, a church that left the SBC in 2020. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/december/charlie-dates-ralph-west-southern-baptist-sbc-crt.html>.

¹⁰https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJh_8s-I5Bw.

not good news without spiritual redemption and restoration, but the gospel is also not good news without emotional, economic, and social restoration, as well. The good news of the kingdom is that God is establishing a new order where all things, spiritual, emotional, economic, and social, are restored to their original, sinless design. So let's take a look at the gospel using my tool that have called the Three Circles. Traditionally, this is how we share the gospel, right? We see on here: God's design. What do we mean? God created the world, and it was good. We lived in perfect relationship with God, with one another, and his creation. However: sin. Adam and Eve came in, sinned, and the whole world was put under a curse, bringing separation between us and God, and that's why we understand, and we look at brokenness. But the problem is that we only are addressing spiritual brokenness. Sin led to our spiritual brokenness. We cannot earn our salvation, but we try to anyway. We look to sex, money, power, fame, and so many other things to try to get back to God. But they only lead us further and further away. But when we learn the truth of the gospel, we learn that Jesus came to earth, died for our sins, and rose again and that if we repent and believe, then we can have access to God.

The Holy Spirit indwells in us, gives us the power to recover and pursue God's design for us, to live in perfect harmony with him. But! Do you recognize how this gospel presentation falls short? Sin caused brokenness to more than just our spiritual needs. I believe Tim Keller is spot on when he says we must neither confuse evangelism with doing justice nor separate them from one another. You see, the gospel demands the church engage holistically with our cities.¹¹

Jeffrey Bingham

Jeffrey Bingham, former dean of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and current occupant of the Jesse Hendley Chair of Biblical Theology, in a Fall 2019 class, promoted the concept of standpoint epistemology.¹² Here is what he said:

There is no objective person in this classroom. You all have prejudices, you are all predisposed, all of you are wearing a pair of spectacles and that pair of spectacles is influenced by the tradition you embrace, your family, it's influenced by the culture you come from, it's influenced by your experiences and endless other items, which is why I ultimately have no hope in private Bible reading. Uh, I can't believe I said that. But let me go ahead and say it again in case you didn't catch it the first time. Ultimately, I have no ultimate hope for private Bible reading. Now I encourage private Bible reading. I exhort you to read your Bible privately. I encourage you to practice a personal devotional time. But, ultimately, my hope is for Bible reading that is done in the community, by the community. You see I have a pair of spectacles; my prescription is this: I am a 20th, 21st century, white, male, American, trained at Dallas Theological Seminary. Now you pretty well know everything about me that

¹¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQjvWGPkMG8>. The original podcast has been made private on Youtube. This is the clip of his statement.

¹²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9quriOXoLY>. Reference clip starts at 9:49.

determines the way I read and understand certain things. I am a white male, 20th, 21st century, American, trained at Dallas Theological Seminary. That statement should tell you a lot about the prescription with which I come to the scriptures. See, you don't want me to universalize on my own, the Bible reading that I do privately. Because the Bible reading that I do privately emphasizes particular prejudices and particular predispositions.¹³

He spoke specifically to how he believed his Americanisms taint his interpretation of the Bible:

...as an American I have a particular predisposition that can, yes, help me read some of the Bible correctly, but my Americanisms can also cause me to read the Bible incorrectly if I follow them. Because there are American prejudices and predispositions that have absolutely nothing to do with the Bible. So if I'm going to read the Bible in a manner that is most accurate, I need to be able to go up to non-Americans, and I need to be able to sit down with them, and I need to be able to say "Dear brother, dear sister, can you tell me what is it about my American predispositions that may be disallowing me to see things in this text that I need to see."¹⁴

After that, he spoke about how his maleness taints his interpretation:

I am an American male. If you don't know it yet, I pray that you come to know it very, very soon, but if all you have is males reading the Scripture, you've got a very very misinterpreted Bible. I need sisters in the body of Christ who can help me read the scriptures in ways in which my maleness is preventing me from reading it.¹⁵

He then spoke to how his whiteness taints his interpretation of Scripture:

Whiteness. Are there things about whiteness that can help in Biblical interpretation? Sure, there are. But there are many things about whiteness that have been used by history past to, how should I put this, to pervert the meaning of the biblical text. To pervert it greatly and in a disastrous way. And so, I need brothers and sisters in the community of Christ who are not white that I can approach and say "Brother, sister, how is it that my whiteness is working against my understanding the meaning of the biblical text and how can your non-whiteness aid me in appreciating things that are not there."¹⁶

¹³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9quriOXoLY>.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

Resolution 9, Resolution 2, and Avoiding Dealing with Critical Race Theory

Resolution 9

During the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, Curtis Woods, who served as a professor at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, presented Resolution 9, which the Convention then adopted in the last hours of the final session of the Annual Meeting. Included in the resolution were these statements:

WHEREAS, Critical Race Theory is a set of analytical tools that explain how race has and continues to function in society, and Intersectionality is the study of how different personal characteristics overlap and inform one's experience; and

WHEREAS, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality have been appropriated by individuals with worldviews that are contrary to the Christian faith, resulting in ideologies and methods that contradict Scripture; and

WHEREAS, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality alone are insufficient to diagnose and redress the root causes of the social ills that they identify, which result from sin, yet these analytical tools can aid in evaluating a variety of human experiences; and...

RESOLVED, That Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality should only be employed as analytical tools subordinate to Scripture—not as transcendent ideological frameworks; and be it further

RESOLVED, That Southern Baptist churches and institutions repudiate the misuse of insights gained from Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and any unbiblical ideologies that can emerge from their use when absolutized as a worldview; and be it further

RESOLVED, That while we denounce the misuse of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, we do not deny that ethnic, gender, and cultural distinctions exist and are a gift from God that will give Him absolute glory when all humanity gathers around His throne in worship because of the redemption accomplished by our resurrected Lord.¹⁷

¹⁷<https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-critical-race-theory-and-Intersectionality/>.

Albert Mohler

Albert Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, on June 14, 2019, two days after the conclusion of the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, said the following on his daily podcast, *The Briefing*:

But next, we turn back to the United States. Earlier this week thousands of messengers arrived in Birmingham, Alabama, for the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention. In the course of the business conducted by America's largest protestant denomination, there were several actions taken, including significant actions including constitutional revisions in answer to the sex abuse issue. This included provisions whereby a new standing committee would be established to review charges against churches, and then the convention went on to state that it would not allow churches that discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity or in any way condone or protect sex abuse as churches in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention. That's old constitutional language, but what it means is that the Southern Baptist Convention will not allow churches that violate those norms on sex abuse and on racial discrimination to continue as churches recognized as participating in the Southern Baptist Convention. They would remove them from the Convention.

This follows an earlier constitutional action taken years ago in which the Convention established a similar norm when it came to churches that would condone in any way, homosexuality. For instance, in conducting or allowing a same sex marriage. Addressing the issue of sex abuse was the most important business before the Convention in its annual meeting this year. And the actions taken, which were adopted by vast majorities, are a very significant step forward for the denomination in dealing with this issue. As a fellowship of gospel churches, the denomination had to make very, very clear that it will not tolerate sexual abuse or racial discrimination. Those two issues were of paramount importance as the messengers met in Birmingham, and it was very important that the denomination move forward with that structural change that will allow it to deal with the situation in which a church might be accused of acting or responding inadequately in the event of sexual abuse.

The Convention recognized its responsibility, the responsibility of our churches to protect the vulnerable and also to take decisive action, the right action, when there would be any accusation of sexual abuse in any form. But the convention also gained attention for several of the resolutions that it adopted. Every year the SBC adopts resolutions, statements of conviction, and a judgment, and expressions made public by the convention every year. This year the convention adopted several resolutions, but the most controversial in floor debate was resolution number nine on Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality. The resolution presented by the committee, and eventually adopted by the convention states, "Critical Race Theory is a set of analytical tools that explain how race has and continues to function in society, and Intersectionality is the study of how different personal characteristics overlap and informs one experience, and Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality had been

appropriated by individuals with worldviews that are contrary to the Christian faith, resulting in ideologies and methods that contradict Scripture."

Later the resolution called upon Southern Baptists to "affirm Scripture as the first, last, and sufficient authority with regard to how the church seeks to redress social ills, and to reject any conduct, creeds or religious opinions, which contradict Scripture." The resolution also states that "Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality should only be employed as analytical tools subordinate to Scripture, not as transcendent ideological frameworks."

It is not fundamentally wrong to say that Intersectionality and Critical Race Theory are analytical tools. What does that mean? It means that they are tools of analysis. Of course they are. They emerged as analytical tools, but they were never merely analytical tools, and in the common discourse in the United States, and especially in public argument, and in higher education, both Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are far more than analytical tools.

Christians should understand as we do worldview analysis that we can deploy certain ideas or certain tools analytically, without adopting the entire worldview. For example, Christians can look with interest at Marxist economic analysis of a consumer society, and just to take one dimension, how a consumer society addresses itself to the seduction of children as consumers. There's some very interesting analysis that's done there, and Christians, Christian parents in particular, can look at that and understand, "Yeah, that's exactly how my children are subjected to advertising and all kinds of messaging coming from a consumer society, wanting to look to my children basically as consumers."

But at the same time, we cannot possibly separate that from understanding that that very analysis is rooted in a worldview, the worldview of Marxism, a worldview that understands the basic evil in the world, as the oppression of the worker by those who hold capital. And thus, the answer to that is a revolution that would eliminate Capitalism, that would eliminate a free market, a free market economy, and would instead, put the state in the position of creating an economically just society, and by coercion, and by state ownership, and by confiscation, in the promise that eventually there would be a Communist utopia, which of course never comes.

And we also understand that Marxism emerged as a direct response, a refutation to the biblical worldview, and the doctrine of creation was replaced with materialism, and original sin was replaced with Marxist analysis of economic oppression, and the doctrine of redemption was replaced with the promise of political revolution. You could go on and on. The Christianist eschatology, the kingdom of God, was replaced with a Marxist utopia of the perfect Communist society.

When we turn to the resolution adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, we should be thankful that it establishes very clearly, the supremacy of Christ and the gospel, and the supreme authority of Scripture. We should be thankful that the chairman of the committee stated clearly that, "Critical Race Theory and

Intersectionality should only be employed as analytical tools subordinate to Scripture, not as transcendent ideological frameworks."

But when the resolution stated that Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality have been appropriated by individuals with worldviews that are contrary to the Christian faith, the reality is that both Intersectionality and Critical Race Theory emerged from worldviews, and from thinkers who were directly contrary to the Christian faith. Indeed, you can draw an intellectual line from Marxist theory to the transformation of Marxism, especially in the middle of the 20th century in European thought, and then you can fast forward to critical legal studies as they emerged in law schools, applying the same kinds of analysis, indeed even denying rationality and objective truth and subjecting legal texts, such as laws and constitutions to that kind of analysis. We can look from critical legal studies to Critical Race Theory, emerging especially from thinkers such as Derek Bell, at the Harvard Law School, during the 1970s.

In Critical Race Theory, Derek Bell argued that the fundamental problem is white supremacy. Whereas, Marx and Engels pointed to economic oppression, he pointed to white supremacy, which he argued is embedded throughout all of western civilization in its institution and laws. And even as the traditional Marxist, especially in their representation as communists, called for a communist revolution in order to overcome that oppression, so also, even in rejecting the central logic of the civil rights movement, the critical race theorist argued for a revolutionary approach in which they called for a complete transformation of society. And it's important to note that out of Critical Race Theory, came Intersectionality, also in the context of a law school, especially through Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a professor of law at both UCLA and Columbia.

The argument of Intersectionality is that humanity is marked by oppression that is revealed in a pattern of intersecting social identities. This is a very foundational thought to identity politics. The point of Intersectionality is the more complex the intersection, the greater the oppression. In other words, an African-American lesbian is less politically powerful and thus more oppressed than even a black male. You can quickly see how all of this has been appropriated by the moral revolution, and it has become an essential tool of the sexual revolutionaries. You also have to understand that Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are now basic fundamentals of thought in higher academia in the United States and in much of Europe.

Both Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are a part of the continuing transformative Marxism, that is now so dominant in higher education and increasingly in policy. And you see this even right now in the debates among the candidates for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. Much of the structure of what they're actually arguing about comes from Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, and behind that, the critical theory or critical thought that is basically fundamental to the political left in the United States.

I did not want the resolution to say less than it said. I wanted it to say more than it said. I wanted it to acknowledge more clearly the origins of Critical Race Theory and

Intersectionality. I wanted it to state more clearly that embedded in both of those analytical tools is a praxis, that is a political extension. That's abundantly clear in the original of both Intersectionality and Critical Race Theory, it is also abundantly clear in how they function in higher education and public debate. It is true that both can be deployed as analytical tools. The problem is, as Christians understand, that analytical tools very rarely remain merely analytical tools.

Ideas, as we know, do have consequences, and one of the most lamentable consequences, but the main consequence of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality is identity politics, and identity politics can only rightly be described, as antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have to see identity politics as disastrous for the culture and nothing less than devastating for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸

The question many have asked is why Mohler spoke in clear opposition to Resolution 9 on his podcast but did not speak against it, or offer an amendment to it, on the floor at the Annual Meeting prior to the resolution's adoption.

Attempted Correction of Resolution 9

In 2021, Pastor Mike Stone, along with more than 1300 additional co-submitters, released a proposed resolution to be considered at the 2021 Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee. The proposed resolution read as follows,

WHEREAS, The Baptist Faith and Message states, "Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality..." (Article XV); and

WHEREAS, The Baptist Faith and Message states that Scripture "will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried" (Article I); and

WHEREAS, the inclusion of Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality, since the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Birmingham, Ala., has brought confusion and division among its churches by describing Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality as analytical tools that are helpful to explain how racism functions in society and how to evaluate human experiences; and

WHEREAS, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality are ideologies rooted in Neo-Marxist and postmodern worldviews, by which our civilization is being deconstructed around our families, communities, and nations, which make them

¹⁸<https://albertmohler.com/2019/06/14/briefing-6-14-19>. Reference clips starts at 17:09

incompatible with Scripture as they are characterized by worldly “philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8); and

WHEREAS, Critical Race Theory collectively designates people by their social identity groups (e.g., people of color, women, homosexuals, and transgenders) which views people “according to the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16); and

WHEREAS, Intersectionality combines gender, sex, sexuality, and a myriad of other identity-related concepts in order to allocate power, positions, revenue, and opportunities in such ways that are contrary to objective biblical standards of justice (Lev 19:15; Deut 16:19-20); and

WHEREAS, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality contradict The Baptist Faith and Message which states, “The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love” (Article III); and

WHEREAS, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality emphasize a view of humanity that fails to properly recognize the sinful nature of man, focusing upon collective guilt as opposed to the emphasis on individual responsibility in The Baptist Faith and Message, which states that all who “are capable of moral action” have “become transgressors and are under condemnation” (Article III); and

WHEREAS, the Bible instructs Christians not to separate ourselves into groups based upon ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender (Gal 3:28 and James 2:1, 9), teaching instead that all men and women are created equal in the image of God (Gen 1:25-27) and have descended from Adam and Eve, the biological progenitors of the whole human race (Acts 17:26), and are all sinners (Rom 3:23), and The Baptist Faith and Message declares that “only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God” (Article III); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the messengers to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in Nashville, Tenn., June 15-16, 2021, affirm the portion of the November 20th, 2020, statement from the Council of Seminary Presidents that states “affirmation of Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality and any version of Critical Theory is incompatible with the Baptist Faith & Message;” and be it further

RESOLVED, that we deny that any analytical tools can aid in evaluating a variety of human experiences if those analytical tools are themselves rooted in worldviews incompatible with the Word of God; and be it further

RESOLVED that we reaffirm our agreement with historic, biblically-faithful Southern Baptist condemnations of racism in any and all forms and our agreement with The Baptist Faith and Message which states “that Christ died for man;

therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love” (Article III); and be it finally

RESOLVED that we reaffirm our absolute conviction that a proper interpretation of the Holy scriptures — apart from any worldly ideology, any personal identity trait, or any lived experience — is sufficient to serve as the sole standard by which our faith and practice are to be measured.¹⁹

The Committee on Resolutions, on which current (2022) SBC President Bart Barter served, declined to bring forward this resolution, despite it being co-submitted by more than 1,300 Southern Baptists. In 2021, the Committee on Resolutions brought forward Resolution 2 instead of the originally submitted resolution with historic support.²⁰ When concerns were raised from the floor about Resolution 2 not addressing Critical Race Theory by name, James Merritt, the chairman of the 2021 Committee on Resolutions, said, “I’m going to say this bluntly and plainly. If some people were as passionate about the gospel as they were Critical Race Theory, we’d win this world to Christ tomorrow.”²¹

Kingdom Race Theology

At the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California, then-President Ed Litton, along with former President Fred Luter, and in partnership with the Urban Initiative, presented the Unify Project, which uses a claimed alternative to Critical Race Theory that Tony Evans developed called “Kingdom Race Theology.”²² Steering Council member and Executive Director of Operations for G3 Ministries Virgil Walker has written an article that critiques Kingdom Race Theology. Below is his summary of this article,

While I’ve never met Tony Evans, his work in the ministry, as far as I can observe, is exemplary and should be commended. While I disagree with his approach in this area of ministry, he has labored for decades to do what he believes will honor God.

¹⁹<https://capstonereport.com/2021/05/19/mike-stone-50-other-southern-baptists-introduce-resolution-repudiating-critical-race-theory/36057/>.

²⁰<https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-the-sufficiency-of-Scripture-for-race-and-racial-reconciliation/>.

²¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QtW1C3pbxCI>. Reference clip begins at 22:30.

²²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JrnXqFsiXo>.

In that regard, he has my utmost respect. However, the ideas that serve as the foundation of Kingdom Race Theology are dangerous and destructive. When paired with the challenges evident within the SBC, this work will take Southern Baptists in a dangerously leftward direction. KRT lacks biblical definitions of anthropology. It applies partiality to ethnic hatred—assuming that only whites (the group with power) can express racism. And while Evans distances himself from CRT, his version of Kingdom Race Theology embraces all of CRT’s problematic presuppositions. The one exception is that Evans promotes the idea that America, while filled with systemic racism, is not all bad.

Evans pays lip service to the importance of the gospel while committing his followers to the work of anti-racism (in racist systems), admonishing them that a lack of commitment in this area is akin to a violation of the “law of love.” I believe Evans to be completely sincere in his approach to this issue. However, at the age of 72, it’s essential to recognize that Evans lived during the era of Jim Crow. As a result, many of his presuppositions on these matters have been formed in experience rather than by Scripture. None of this is his fault. However, regarding racial reconciliation, I’d encourage Evans to complete the work of biblical reconciliation in his own life before writing and teaching how others should do it.²³

Departures from the Baptist Faith and Message

The Credentials Committee on the Office of Pastor

During the June 14-15, 2022, Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California, the Credentials Committee requested a delay before they could make a decision regarding disfellowshipping Saddleback Church and proposed the following,

The credentials committee recommends that the Southern Baptist Convention, during its June 14-15, 2022, annual meeting in Anaheim, California, form a study committee, the members of which shall be appointed by the president to report to the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting June 13-14, 2023 in New Orleans, Louisiana, a recommendation to provide clarity regarding the office of pastor as stated in the Baptist Faith and Message Article 6 “The Church,” given the many different offices within Baptist churches which include pastor in the title, though often with very different responsibilities and authority.”²⁴

The committee explained their reason for this request preceding the proposal, saying that,

...We are coming today asking for a studying committee to provide clarity on this matter. We feel it is very important for you to know that it is the unanimous opinion of the Credentials Committee that the majority of Southern Baptists hold to the

²³The summary and full article can be found here: <https://g3min.org/kingdom-race-theology-is-this-gods-plan-or-something-else/>.

²⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=266GFybQhc8>. Reference clip begins at 5:54.

belief that the function of lead pastor, elder, bishop, overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture and that this was the intended definition of office of pastor as stated in Article 6 of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. However, the Credentials Committee has found little information evidencing the convention's belief regarding the use of the title of pastor for staff positions with differing responsibilities and authority than that of lead pastor.²⁵

Albert Mohler from the floor spoke against this proposal, saying,

...I am a confessionalist; this is a confessional denomination; we say what we mean in specific words that are the Baptist Faith and Message. The moment we start to, of necessity, have study committees to decide what the words mean, the words mean what Southern Baptists said in the year 2000. At that time, the word pastor was used by the committee and adopted by the convention because we were told that it is the most easily understood word among Southern Baptists for pastoral teaching leadership. I have to hope we still have that much clarity and that churches that use the word pastor mean it.²⁶

Three of the men who sat on the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee, which made its report in 2000, and the authors of the book "Baptist Faith and Message," which provided commentary at the request of the said committee, Albert Mohler, Chuck Kelley, and Richard Land, wrote, "In the Baptist understanding, office and function are inseparable." They further responded, "The word pastor should be reserved for those who fulfill a pastor's function and office."²⁷

SEBTS graduate

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's college celebrated their 2022 Spring graduation, which included Erin Harding, a graduate awarded the Bachelor of Arts in Pastoral Ministry degree. Erin Harding, a female student, was given a degree that Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's commencement guide describes as follows:

The major in pastoral ministry introduces students to the knowledge and skills central to the work of pastors through classes in pastoral ministry, discipleship, counseling, and Bible exposition. The major also provides students opportunity for additional classes in biblical and theological studies beyond those of the Core Curriculum. The program is designed to begin the formation of the student's life for

²⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=266GFybQhc8>. Reference clip begins at 4:46.

²⁶Ibid. Reference clip begins at 11:52.

²⁷<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-a-statement-regarding-the-baptist-faith-message-and-the-word-pastor/>.

pastoral ministry and prepares students for continuing studies in the Master of Divinity, the standard degree for the equipping of pastors.²⁸

Many Southern Baptists expressed concern with a Southern Baptist seminary awarding a degree in pastoral ministry to a female student. After her graduation from the College at Southeastern, Erin Harding tweeted an affirmation of the salvation of a biological man who claims to be a transgendered woman.²⁹

Instances of Female Preachers

There has been a noted and steady increase of female preachers, who claim by word and action that they can preach in a service with both men and women in attendance while still affirming the Complementarian view that Scripture reserves the pastorate for qualified men alone. Beth Moore, a popular teacher and Bible study writer—formerly for Lifeway—in an April 27, 2019, Tweet replying to another woman speaker discussing her preaching engagement at a Southern Baptist church on Mother’s Day of that year, said, “I’m doing Mother’s Day too! Vicki, [sic] let’s please don’t tell anyone this.”³⁰ In 2021, Beth Moore would go on to preach at Lake Pointe Church, an SBC congregation³¹, in Rockwall, Texas.³² Moore also preached at the 2022 George W. Truett Theological Seminary National Preaching Conference on November 14-17, 2022.³³

Second Baptist Conway, Arkansas pastor and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary graduate Josh King tweeted in 2021 that his wife, Jacki, delivers “Solid. Biblical. Preaching.”³⁴ King can be heard on the Criswell College website preaching in a chapel service on October 21, 2020.³⁵

²⁸<https://www.sebts.edu/files/Commencement.pdf>, Page 12.

²⁹<https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.183/32d.42b.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/TransAffirming.jpg>.

³⁰<https://twitter.com/BethMooreLPM/status/1122134785244184576?s=20&t=LHpnF9pX8KbC3WzmXN0L6w>.

³¹<https://churches.sbc.net/church/lake-pointe-church/>.

³²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdmqyBuNSyQ>.

³³<https://www.baylor.edu/truett/index.php?id=957943>.

³⁴<https://www.christianpost.com/news/sbc-officer-criticizes-pastor-for-praising-wifes-preaching.html>.

³⁵<https://www.criswell.edu/sermons/october-21-2020-chapel-with-jacki-king/>.

Other Southern Baptist women have been preaching in chapel services as well including Katie McCoy, former assistant professor of applied theology and women's studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and current Baptist General Convention of Texas director of the women's ministry team, who spoke in chapel at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, on September 2, 2022.³⁶ Southwestern alumnus Katie Frugé, director of the Center for Cultural Engagement and the director of the Christian Life Commission, also preached in Criswell College's chapel service³⁷ and in the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor's chapel service.³⁸ In November 2022, Send Network President Vance Pitman tweeted photos of Kathy Litton, wife of past SBC president Ed Litton, preaching to church planters, noting with fire emojis that she was bringing "fire" to these pastors and church planters.³⁹ Kathy Litton also co-preached in the main worship service of Redemption Church in Saraland, Alabama.⁴⁰ These are only a few examples of the growing trend of women teaching and preaching to mixed audiences within the Southern Baptist Convention.

NAMB-funded Churches with Female Pastors

In 2020, Nate Schломann discovered five NAMB-funded church plants that had female pastors.⁴¹ NAMB claims to have extensive vetting wherein every church planter is assessed, trained, and coached through the Send Network.⁴² Southern Baptists are concerned that NAMB evidently failed to recognize and consequently funded multiple church plants which contradict the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.

³⁶<https://livestream.com/uu/chapel/videos/232762928>.

³⁷<https://www.criswell.edu/sermons/september-13-2022-chapel-with-dr-katie-fruge/>.

³⁸<https://vimeo.com/742740766>.

³⁹<https://twitter.com/vancepitman/status/1588160374280429568?s=20&t=zRhwVqWRJt1jFZ8pCgNofw>.

⁴⁰<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbYclxPyKSs>.

⁴¹<https://www.servantsandheralds.com/namb-and-sbc-egalitarianism/>.

⁴²<https://www.namb.net/send-network/church-planting/planter-pathway/>.

A notable example, the North American Mission Board included Echo Church as a residency church where aspiring church planters can be mentored for future ministry.⁴³ This was while Echo Church had multiple female pastors on staff⁴⁴ and operated an “evangelistic” alcoholic beverage brewery.⁴⁵

Saddleback Church Ordained Women Pastors

In a May 7, 2021, Facebook post, Saddleback announced the ordination of three female pastors, the first in its history, saying,

“[sic] 🎉 Yesterday was a historic night for Saddleback Church in many ways! We ordained our first three women pastors, Liz Puffer, Cynthia Petty, and Katie Edwards! We commissioned three new elders, Anthony Miller, Jeremiah Goley, and Jason Williams! And we appointed Pastor Johnny Baker as the new global leader of Celebrate Recovery!

[sic] ❤️ We’re so grateful to share this moment with you. Our best days are ahead of us!”⁴⁶

On October 24, 2022, the Associated Press wrote an article regarding the former Echo Church pastor, and new Saddleback pastor, Andy Woods, and his views concerning female pastors, writing,

Speaking with The Associated Press, Wood outlined his grand vision to build on Warren’s legacy and take Saddleback to the biggest cities in the U.S. and the world. He said he’ll encourage men and women to preach — an approach at odds with the male-leadership policies of the Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, with which Saddleback has been aligned since its inception.⁴⁷

Adam Greenway

Adam Greenway, former president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in an article originally written in 2019 for the Baptist Standard, the Baptist General Convention of Texas’

⁴³<https://web.archive.org/web/20210121185152/https://www.namb.net/send-network/church-planting/residencies/>. January 26, 2021, snapshot.

⁴⁴<https://web.archive.org/web/20210123110428/https://www.echo.church/about/leadership/>. January 23, 2021, snapshot.

⁴⁵<https://capstonereport.com/2021/02/17/beerandbible-namb-supported-church-has-its-own-beer/35597/>.

⁴⁶<https://www.facebook.com/saddlebackchurch/posts/-yesterday-was-a-historic-night-for-saddleback-church-in-many-wayswe-ordained-ou/10159190549013544/>.

⁴⁷<https://apnews.com/article/entertainment-california-christianity-rick-warren-ac084e33e9a59e5c90702429e32ee016>.

news outlet, and then reprinted in a *Baptist Press* article, described his vision for this, at the time, new presidency of SWBTS:

For some, that language [inerrancy] became politically weaponized and personally problematic. A faculty member's adherence to the ideas about biblical authority in the "Chicago Statement" and a willingness to affirm the high view of Scripture it expresses are more important than the use of the terms "inerrant" or "inerrancy"⁴⁸

Worth noting in connection to this statement is that Rev. Adam Hamilton, a popular United Methodist pastor, said concerning the debate of a split in the United Methodist Church, that the liberal group that affirms homosexuality and the LGBTQ community still can hold to a *high view of Scripture*. He further said that a high view of Scripture is taking Scripture seriously but not necessarily literally.⁴⁹ The question follows, then, if one does not claim inerrancy, how far can a professor hired by Greenway's administration wander from biblical admonitions while still claiming to hold a "high view of Scripture."

Greenway also, in a July 27, 2022, Tweet, said,

Here is the entire section from the @Lifeway BFM2K Study Guide on "Pastor." Defined as "the (not a) shepherd of the flock," the [sic] writers's complete description seems most consistent w/the "senior pastor" originalist understanding of the "office of pastor" language. #PointToPonder.⁵⁰

This occurred not long after Greenway offered an amendment to the study committee proposed by the Credentials Committee, striking "a recommendation to provide clarity regarding the office of pastor as stated in the Baptist Faith and Message Article 6 'The Church,' given the many different offices within Baptist churches which include pastor in the title, though often with very different responsibilities and authority," and including instead, "any (as) providing clarity regarding the language of the constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention article 3 section 1 subsection 1 has

⁴⁸<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/new-seminary-president-seeks-to-build-bridges-at-swbts/>.

⁴⁹<https://juicyecumenism.com/2018/08/10/adam-hamilton-high-view-of-Scripture/>.

⁵⁰<https://twitter.com/AdamGreenway/status/1552270183422726145>.

a faith and practice which closely identifies with the convention's adopted statement of faith."⁵¹

Greenway seemingly argues that the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 allows women pastors as long as they do not serve as senior pastors. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and one of the three authors of the book Greenway references, along with his co-authors, Chuck Kelley, former president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and Richard Land, former president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, released a statement saying in part, "...it is important to understand that the word pastor was chosen precisely because of its clarity among Southern Baptists. The statement carefully affirms that both men and women are gifted for service in the church, but the role of pastor is biblically defined and is to be held only by men as qualified by Scripture." Mohler, Kelley, and Land refute that there are two different kinds of pastors in a church. They conclude by making clear that the Southern Baptist Convention, not individuals—nor seminary presidents—get to define what the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 means. They wrote,

The Southern Baptist Convention has sole authority to determine how the BF&M is to be applied in its own work. Baptists believe that every local church is autonomous and has full authority over its work, but all Baptist associations, including the Southern Baptist Convention, have absolute authority to speak for themselves and to define their own membership.⁵²

On September 23, 2022, Adam Greenway offered his resignation to the Executive Committee of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Board of Trustees, on their request.⁵³

⁵¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=266GFybQhc8>. Reference clip begins at 18:25.

⁵²<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/first-person-a-statement-regarding-the-baptist-faith-message-and-the-word-pastor/>.

⁵³[https://baptistnews.com/article/southwestern-trustee-chairman-addresses-presidents-departure-seminary-may-sell-more-land/ - .Y5ugni-B1Lk](https://baptistnews.com/article/southwestern-trustee-chairman-addresses-presidents-departure-seminary-may-sell-more-land/- .Y5ugni-B1Lk).

Danny Akin

In 2015, Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, made a video in support of a group called “Openly Secular.”⁵⁴ While Akin’s words in the video are not troubling, and most would agree with them, what is troubling is the willing partnership with this group. The group claims to destigmatize secularism, but on their website is a reference guide for how Christian parents can support their child’s newfound secularism and atheism.⁵⁵ They further offer guides for clergy on ways to lead their congregation to accept the secularism and atheism of the world, which is in notable contrast to the Great Commission.⁵⁶ While standing against any kind of discrimination is virtuous and in line with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, many Southern Baptists are concerned that a seminary president would partner with a group that is not merely speaking against discrimination but actively defending secularism and atheism.

Declining Baptisms

In 2000, the year of the adoption of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, Southern Baptists reported baptizing 414,657 people.⁵⁷ In 2021, Southern Baptist reported baptizing 154,701 people.⁵⁸ In 2019, pre-COVID, Southern Baptists reported baptizing 235,748.⁵⁹ Over 21 years, Southern Baptists have averaged a decrease of more than 12,400 baptisms per year. In 2000, churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention averaged 10 baptisms each. In 2021, churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention averaged 3.2 baptisms each. That is a decrease of almost seven baptisms per church in a year. In 2000, the Southern Baptist Convention reported

⁵⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WJ-T2ZWGzk>.

⁵⁵<https://openlysecular.org/your-child-is-secular-now-what-a-guide-for-religious-parents-of-secular-children/>.

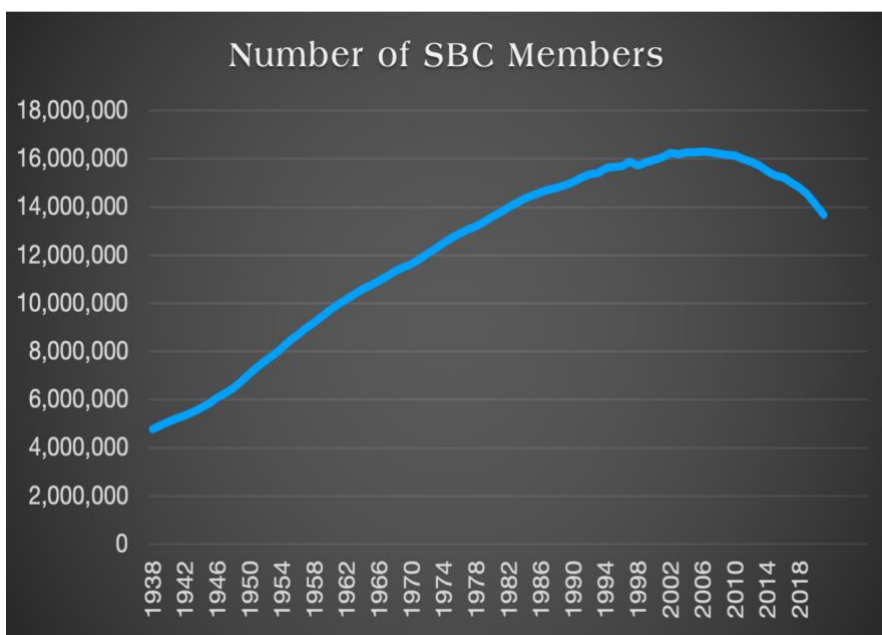
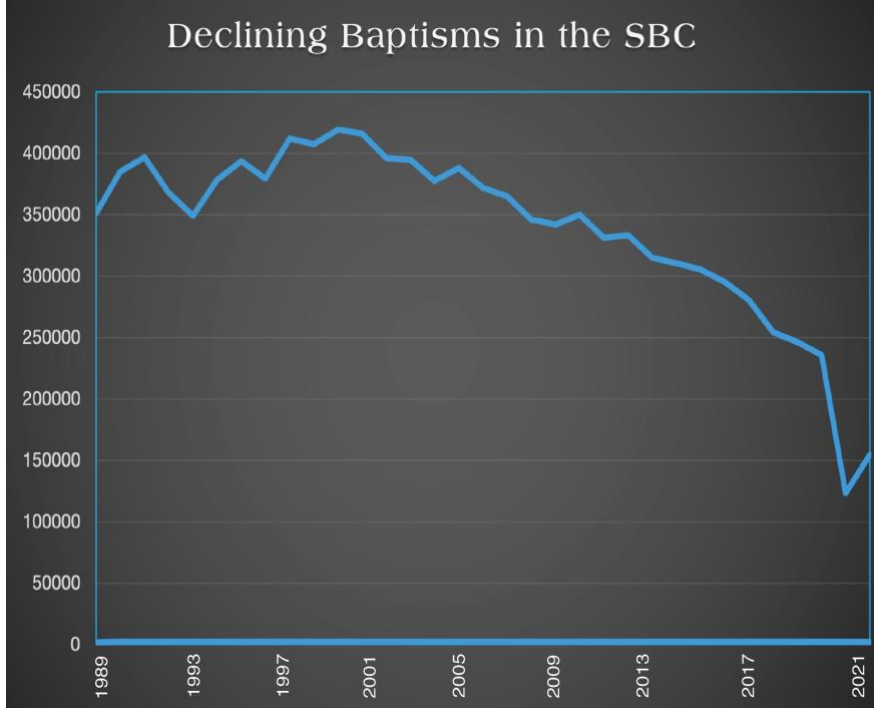
⁵⁶<https://openlysecular.org/shared-values-different-perspective-a-guide-for-clergy/>.

⁵⁷http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_2001.pdf. Page 108.

⁵⁸<https://41jmzr10f8zc229tzt2xml7e-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2022-SBC-Annual.pdf>. Page 122.

⁵⁹http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_2020.pdf. Page 64.

15,960,308 members. In 2021, there were 13,680,493 Southern Baptists. Southern Baptists across 21 years averaged losing more than 178,000 individual members per year.



Declining Cooperative Program Giving

In 2008, total Cooperative Program giving was \$548,205,099.⁶⁰ In 2020 it was \$455,553,027. In 2019 it was \$462,299,010.⁶¹ Southern Baptists saw a 17 percent decrease in Cooperative Program giving in 2020 compared to 2008. Comparing 2019 and 2008 reveals a decrease of slightly more than 15 percent compared to 2008. In 2008, state conventions received 63 percent of Cooperative Program dollars, whereas in 2019 and in 2020 state conventions took 58 percent of the Cooperative Program dollars. State conventions passed on a higher percentage of Cooperative Program giving to national Southern Baptist Convention entities in order to compensate for the decrease in total Cooperative Program giving. When the 18.74 percent⁶² inflation between 2008 and 2019 and the 20.21 percent⁶³ inflation between 2008 and 2020 is factored into these numbers, the decline becomes even more apparent.

Questions, Double Standards, and Lacking Transparency

Guidepost Investigation

The Guidepost Solutions report on its investigation into the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee's Response to Sexual Abuse Allegations and an Audit of the Procedures and Actions of the Credentials Committee were released May 15, 2022. While any act of sexual abuse should be grieved and any guilty party should be brought to justice, the report contains an alarming number of concerns.

The first is the omission of former Southern Baptist Convention President and current pastor of the Summit Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, J.D. Greear's hiring and subsequent

⁶⁰http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_2009.pdf. Page 109.

⁶¹http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_2021.pdf. Page 130.

⁶²<https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/2008?endYear=2019&amount=1>.

⁶³<https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/2008?endYear=2020&amount=1>.

investigation of Bryan Loritts. To preface, Guidepost Solutions, using the 2021 Sexual Abuse Task Force motion as a guide, defined its scope of investigation as,

Allegations of abuse by EC members, mishandling of abuse allegations by EC members between January 1st, 2000, to June 14th, 2021, allegations of mistreatment of sexual abuse victims by EC members from January 1st, 2000, to June 14th, 2021, patterns of intimidation of sexual abuse victims or advocates from January 1st, 2000, to June 14th, 2021, resistance to sexual abuse reform initiatives from January 1st, 2000, to June 14th, 2021.⁶⁴

In June 2020, Bryan Loritts, former pastor of Fellowship Church in Memphis, Tennessee, was hired as executive pastor of teaching and development at the Summit Church despite the church apparently knowing of the accusations of cover up against him.⁶⁵ The Summit Church, after receiving scrutiny for this, hired Guidepost Solutions to investigate the accusation of Bryan Loritts covering up alleged voyeurism at his previous church. Guidepost Solutions reported that Loritts himself recognized mishandling of the situation, saying,

Loritts has repeatedly acknowledged, to us and to others, that he should have acted differently when he learned what had been found on his brother-in-law's phone. He recognizes now that he should have reported Trotter to police himself on the day that Trotter's phone was discovered in Fellowship's bathroom. He recognizes now that he should have pushed the MPD to investigate even if it was initially slow to respond. He recognizes now that he should have explicitly and forcefully told Downtown not to hire Trotter. He recognizes now that he should have never invited Trotter to participate in the Kainos Conference in 2015.⁶⁶

Further, the Guidepost Solutions report said about the Summit Church,

As to Summit, while Summit was cooperative, there were opportunities to be more transparent. For instance, we found out about the Audio Recording of Loritts dated February 4th, 2010 in an interview of Unzicker but other Summit staff including Loritts failed to tell us this proactively. This is also true relative to the existence of Loritts's dated Fellowship emails. We asked Loritts why he did not advise us of the existence of both the Audio Recording and the emails the first time we spoke to him

⁶⁴https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6108172d83d55d3c9db4dd67/t/6298d31ff654dd1a9dae86bf/1654182692359/Guidepost+Solutions+Independent+Investigation+Report_.pdf. Page 17.

⁶⁵https://summitchurch.com/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Guidepost_Report-The_Summit_Church-Summary_Report-03.22.21_F.pdf. Page 14.

⁶⁶https://summitchurch.com/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Guidepost_Report-The_Summit_Church-Summary_Report-03.22.21_F.pdf. Page 19.

and he commented that a specific Summit staff member did not think the Audio Recording provided additional information.⁶⁷

The hiring of Bryan Loritts occurred during the SBC presidency of J.D. Greear, making him an ex officio member of the Executive Committee and within the scope of the Guidepost Solutions' investigation into the Executive Committee's response to Sexual Abuse. That the situation and ensuing investigation at the Summit Church appear to fall within the scope of the Guidepost Solutions report but were not mentioned raises questions among many Southern Baptists.

This omission of pertinent events is not the only issue with the Guidepost Solutions report. The Guidepost investigation found that of those included in the list created by former General Counsel Augie Boto, only "nine (9) people remain in active ministry or connected to ministry. Two (2) of those people appear to be associated with an SBC church. The remaining seven (7) appear to be associated with churches that are not SBC-affiliated."⁶⁸ This was characterized as a failure of the way in which the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee has handled sexual abuse, having only two of the 409 accused abusers still in SBC churches. In comparison, the Department of Education released the 2017-2018 Civil Rights Data Collection with a focus on sexual violence in public schools. In this document, they demonstrated that in gathering data on all 97,632 public schools they found 14,938 instances of sexual violence in the 2017-2018 school year alone.⁶⁹ Once again, sexual misconduct, abuse, and/or violence should be grieved, and justice should be served in all cases, but Southern Baptists have experienced notably fewer instances of abuse than concurrent organizations.

⁶⁷https://summitchurch.com/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Guidepost_Report-The_Summit_Church-Summary_Report-03.22.21_F.pdf. Page 19.

⁶⁸https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6108172d83d55d3c9db4dd67/t/6298d31ff654dd1a9dae86bf/1654182692359/Guidepost+Solutions+Independent+Investigation+Report_.pdf. Page 5.

⁶⁹<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/sexual-violence.pdf>. Page 5.

Found also in the report are numerous errors. *Baptist Message* editor Will Hall published an article on June 14, 2022, noting errors included in the report including misidentification of people, comments taken out of context, and what attorneys Jim Guenther and Jamie Jordan have referred to as “misstatements of fact.”⁷⁰

Additionally, the inclusion of events and individuals that a reasonable person would not consider inside the defined scope of the Guidepost Solutions investigation is another matter of concern. On page 245 of the Guidepost report is a subtle criticism of the Southern Baptist Convention’s stance on homosexuality, seen in the disfellowshipping of the DC Baptist Convention in 2018. Guidepost Solutions called the movement of processing inquiries of sexual abuse, from submission to recommendation, overly slow as it took an average of 9.6 months to complete the process. They compared this timeframe to the Convention’s disfellowshipping of the DC Baptist Convention, which was investigated for having a church in its convention that had hired a lesbian pastor. The investigation into disfellowshipping the convention started in February 2017 and was disfellowshipped in May 2018, and then officially disfellowshipped by the Convention at the 2018 Annual Meeting. This took a year and two months for them to investigate, call for a change, and officially sever ties. This inclusion is not only bizarre, as it took longer to handle the DCBC case than the average time to handle sexual abuse inquiries, but also asks the question of why Guidepost included this in their report. It neither gives pertinent information about sexual abuse in the Southern Baptist Convention nor does it prove complacency in the Credentials Committee in handling these inquiries.⁷¹

Additionally, in a June 6, 2022, Tweet by Guidepost Solutions, they announced that:

Guidepost is committed to strengthening diversity, equity and inclusion and strives to be an organization where our team can bring their authentic selves to work. We

⁷⁰<https://www.baptistmessage.com/false-claim-secretly-deleted-from-pro-gay-guideposts-report/>.

⁷¹https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6108172d83d55d3c9db4dd67/t/6298d31ff654dd1a9dae86bf/1654182692359/Guidepost+Solutions+Independent+Investigation+Report_.pdf. Page 245-46.

celebrate our collective progress toward equality for all and are proud to be an ally to our LGBTQ+ community.

Included with this tweet was an image of the Guidepost Solution's logo over the LGBTQ+ rainbow flag.⁷²

SBC Legal Representation

On February 25, 2022, Don Hinkle wrote in an article for the Missouri Baptist *Pathway* referencing Bradley Legal:

Up to \$2 million of Cooperative Program funds will be paid by the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) Executive Committee (EC) to cover legal fees of its newly-retained law firm that supports the Nashville Pride festival, the LGBTQ Bar, and is praised by the Human Rights Campaign, one of the nation's largest LGBTQ organizations." Further he goes on to say, "Bradley apparently meets all the criteria for HRC's "Corporate Social Responsibility," which would require written guidelines that prohibit the firm's "philanthropic support" of non-religious organizations that draw distinctions based on traditional sexual morality."⁷³

In a later article for *the Pathway*, Don Hinkle concluded the article by saying this,

...millions of dollars flow to firms that support a lifestyle God has called "an abomination." These firms then use our money against us. Millions of dollars are flowing from corporations like Bradley and Guidepost to LGBTQ activist organizations threatening our First Amendment rights.⁷⁴

Softening on LGBTQ

SBC Presidents Greear and Litton

In a January 27, 2019, sermon, JD Greear, then-president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said,

Jen Wilkin, who's one of our favorite Bible teachers here—and who's actually leading our Women's Conference—she said we ought to whisper about what the Bible whispers about and ought to shout about what it shouts about. The Bible appears more to whisper on sexual sin compared to its shout about materialism and religious pride.⁷⁵

⁷²<https://twitter.com/guidepostglobal/status/1533872616812978176>.

⁷³<https://mbcpathway.com/2022/02/25/lgbtq-views-of-sbcs-new-law-firm-questioned/>.

⁷⁴<https://mbcpathway.com/2022/08/09/sbcs-ec-cricket-on-hiring-pro-lgbtq-firms/>.

⁷⁵<https://jdgrear.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Copy-of-4-Romans-1-24-32-Judgment.pdf>.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mjRcqVXppM>. Reference clip begins at 52:30.

Wilkin addressed and clarified the origin and use of the "whisper" phrasing via social media, June 26, 2021. While Greear offered attribution in the sermon to Jen Wilkin at the beginning of his two-sentence point, Wilkin has since clarified that while the "God whispers" portion came from her teaching, the idea that God whispers in regard to sexual sin was Greear's own application, not something derived from Wilkin.⁷⁶

In a since-deleted sermon video, Ed Litton, the president immediately succeeding Greear, said similarly, "In the Bible, sexual sin is whispered, compared to the shout God makes about greed and judgmentalism."⁷⁷

Albert Mohler

Albert Mohler, on October 28, 2014, preached a message entitled "Aftermath: Ministering in a Post-Marriage Culture" at the 2014 Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission national conference "The Gospel, Homosexuality, and the Future of Marriage." In the message, he said this:

Now early in this controversy I felt it quite necessary, in order to make clear the Gospel, to deny anything like a sexual orientation, and speaking at an event for the National Association of Evangelicals twenty-something years ago, I made that point. I repent of that. I believe that a biblical theological understanding, a robust biblical theological understanding would point to us that human sexual effective profiles of who we are sexually is far more deeply rooted than the will if that were so easy.⁷⁸

Karen Swallow Prior

In a June 14, 2018, tweet, Karen Swallow Prior, research professor of English and Christianity and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote:

⁷⁶<https://conservativebaptistnetwork.com/2021-ministers-wives-luncheon-focuses-on-themes-of-encouragement-spiritual-maturity-steadfastness/>.

⁷⁷<https://religionnews.com/2021/06/26/new-sbc-president-ed-litton-apologizes-for-using-j-d-greear-sermon-quotes-without-credit-god-whisper-homosexuality-sin-romans/>.

⁷⁸<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iq3EiToCylQ>. Reference clip starts at 29:41.

I signed the Nashville Statement and believe all sinners can be Christians. I also endorse the ReVoice conference. This makes me a target for extremists on both sides.⁷⁹

ReVoice describes their position as follows:

Revoice exists because we want to see gay/SSA [Same-Sex Attracted] people who adhere to historic, Christian teaching about marriage and sexuality experience peace and belonging in their local faith communities. We envision a unified, faithful, and peaceful Church where these individuals are able to grow in holiness and in their knowledge of the scriptures, knowing that they are of infinite worth and value to their Creator; where transparency about one's orientation and ongoing experience creates enhanced possibilities for local churches to utilize and celebrate the unique opportunities that these individuals have to serve the Kingdom of God; and where these individuals are welcomed into the lives of spiritual families so that all can grow together in their knowledge of God and his Kingdom.⁸⁰

Prior also wrote in a 2015 *Christianity Today* article "...unlike abortion, gay marriage remains an act rooted in love."⁸¹

Pastor David Uth

2020 SBC Pastors' Conference President David Uth scheduled a problematic lineup for that year's conference. Included in the conference lineup was Hosanna Wong, a spoken word artist, as well as a female teaching pastor at her non-SBC church. David Hughes, the pastor of Church on the Glades, who is notable for having secular-type performances during the church service and having sensually themed sermon series, was also included in the program. This caused the SBC Executive Committee to allocate the space for the Pastors' Conference on the condition that changes were to be made to the program. This was because the proposed program was "sufficiently beyond the parameters of the faith and practice of Southern Baptists in accordance with the Baptist Faith and Message."⁸²

⁷⁹<https://twitter.com/ksprior/status/1007261417257435138>.

⁸⁰<https://revoice.us/about/our-mission-and-vision/>.

⁸¹<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/june-web-only/gay-marriage-abortion-and-bigger-picture.html>.

⁸²<https://baptistcourier.com/2020/03/ec-to-pastors-conference-change-program-or-lose-meeting-space/>.

First Baptist Church of Orlando, pastored by David Uth, allegedly has multiple homosexual members in good standing. One homosexual man has been a member of the church since 2019 and shared on Facebook that he attended First Baptist Orlando 2021 Christmas Eve service with his “husband.”⁸³

Plagiarism

In a June 29, 2021, YouTube video entitled “Litton and Greear: Borrowing or Plagiarism?” viewers can see a montage of Ed Litton repeating sermon material from JD Greear.⁸⁴ Following this first video, many more instances of plagiarism were found. Litton would later admit and apologize in a statement posted to his church’s website, saying, “...I am sorry for not mentioning J.D.’s generosity and ownership of these points. I should have given him credit as I shared these insights.”⁸⁵ This statement downplayed the problem of preaching someone else’s sermon and attempted to make it seem as though the mistake was merely a failure to attribute credit. This quasi-repentance would then be praised by Danny Akin in a June 26, 2021, Tweet.⁸⁶ Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary professor Malcolm Yarnell⁸⁷ likewise praised a Tweet posted by his wife which said, “This is theology in community. When did our church culture decide we have to be lone rangers? Thank you for your commitment to preach God’s Word and show His love.”⁸⁸ Many Southern Baptists felt that these actions degraded the pulpit and witness of Southern Baptists, and that before seeking additional office pastors should ensure their preaching ministry is in order.

Following Adam Greenway’s departure, the interim administration of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary removed the chapel video of then-President Greenway interviewing Ed Litton

⁸³<https://disnr.com/2022/07/20/more-openly-gay-practicing-homosexuals-discovered-as-members-in-good-standing-at-first-baptist-orlando/>.

⁸⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6PJNfbIuS4>.

⁸⁵<https://goredemption.com/pastors-statement/>.

⁸⁶<https://twitter.com/DannyAkin/status/1408811495358672897?s=20&t=EXEKY9Zxa0uUPecYbm0iCg>.

⁸⁷<https://twitter.com/MusingsOnChrist/status/1408841859720482821?s=20&t=sN8JLl9vAJd-Blh3pijBFA>.

⁸⁸<https://twitter.com/kayarnell/status/1408839437216276480>.

on the subject of plagiarism, presumably because of the problematic example it provides for their students.

Bart Barber

Bart Barber, current president of the Southern Baptist Convention, elected at the Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California in 2022, and pastor of First Baptist Church of Farmersville, Texas, in a September 20, 2021, Tweet said,

Well, now, it's BOTH, isn't it? Do you deny that Mark's gospel is Peter's account offered without attribution? The point you've just made is simply that God inspired Mark to plagiarize Peter. Which wasn't sinful. Which didn't compromise His holiness.⁸⁹

In a different Tweet on September 20, 2021, Barber said, "Mark was not bound by any such authority. He plagiarized as God inspired him to do."⁹⁰

Additionally, following Barber's election to the Southern Baptist Convention presidency, on August 8, 2022, he announced the members of the Abuse Response Implementation Task Force. In this video Barber speaks of his inclusion of Todd Benkert, which received widespread criticism, and says this:

The third Task Force member is Todd Benkert. And this is one of the folks who really generated a lot of questions online about Todd's participation. And the reason for that is there's been some conflict between Todd and Tom Buck and Jennifer Buck and a lot of people [sic] have some people said, 'how could you even think about appointing Todd Benkert?' Well, I'm going to explain to you about that. First of all, I think it's important to point out that some of the people who've contacted me with DMs and stuff like that have, who have been really kind-hearted folks who've said, "Hey, I want to give you the benefit of the doubt and, but I can't understand how you would appoint someone who leaked Jennifer Buck's draft document about her abuse⁹¹ and then covered it up." And you know, I had to reply to folks like that and say nobody is really alleging that Todd had anything to do with leaking that document. In fact, I think from what I can tell there's really broad agreement about the basic details of what happened. There's just a lot of disagreement about how to speak about what happened and I think it's a very

⁸⁹https://twitter.com/bartbarber/status/1439929157446733825?s=21&t=Aolbml3dUSLOCPyF_Ode8Q.

⁹⁰https://twitter.com/bartbarber/status/1439929730208354316?s=21&t=Aolbml3dUSLOCPyF_Ode8Q.

⁹¹<https://g3min.org/a-story-of-restorative-grace/>. Jennifer Buck's non-leaked, edited, and self-released version of said document.

unfortunate event that reveals how far trust has been eroded in two directions within the SBC. To my understanding, what happened, and this comes from both conversations I've had with Tom Buck in months past and conversations I've had with Todd Benkert in months past, and this is my understanding about what happened. Tom reached out about knowledge he had about the past activities of a deacon at Willie Rice's church. I've talked to Tom about that. He explained to me about how he handled that, and I believe Tom's telling the truth. Tom, then, he didn't tell me this on the phone, but he released to other people that someone was in possession of this draft document that his wife had written and they threatened to blackmail Tom with the release of that document and I believe Tom about that too. I hate to think that somebody in the SBC would do that, but I think that probably happened the way Tom said that it happened, and I also think that's despicable. I think that's absolutely indefensible and horrible, and, you know, understandably Tom comes out of an experience like that and he's very untrusting about what's happening in the SBC when people are trying to blackmail him because of his views and SBC life. I don't know who did that, but I believe Tom when he says that was what was put in front of him. Todd Benkert was not the guy trying to blackmail Tom. I've never heard Tom even allege that Todd was the one doing that. Todd had been uninvolved up to that point, but Tom reached out to a lot of people for help. He reached out to me for help, and I called Dwight McKissic and asked Dwight McKissic to try to get David Bumgardner not to release that story in Baptist News Global.⁹² I know that there were several survivors who were involved in trying to do that as well because I talked to them, and this was pretty late in the process. I think probably Tom would remember I'm sure when it was when they talked to me. But in the event of that Todd found someone who said he'd received that document was willing to help, but he had a condition, and the condition was that Todd had to promise not to share this person's name with Tom. Now at that point in the story, have to ask the question, Why? Why would this person not want their name to be released, to be released to Tom? You know, and I don't know. I don't know what that person is. Todd hasn't disclosed that to me either but there's some possibilities. One possibility is because they were in on it. They were a part of a plot to try to blackmail or shame Tom [and] Jennifer Buck. And I think probably just from the comments I get on Twitter, maybe a lot of people think that, but here's another possibility. Maybe they weren't in on it. But maybe just like Tom didn't trust the SBC, they didn't trust Tom because they didn't like his Twitter feed. Didn't trust his personality or whatever else, and that's the sad reality that I was talking about is I think you have a lack of trust in both directions. I've said that to Tom, that I think this is a sad example of that, where people don't trust each other. But the long and short of it is that this person reached out to Todd and said I can help you but not if you're going to release my name to Tom, and so Todd, trying to help made that promise that he was not going to reveal that name and maybe, you know, this person, maybe it's just not that they don't trust Tom. Maybe it's that they don't trust the state of the Internet and the SBC right now. Not everyone can take being hated on the Internet; some of us just eat it for breakfast and then go about our day, but not everybody's like that. Not everybody wants to be like that. So, you know, maybe

⁹²<https://baptistnews.com/article/wife-of-vocal-sbc-pastor-claims-suffering-emotional-and-verbal-abuse-was-not-grounds-for-divorce-but-for-greater-hope-in-god/- .Yyy-YC-B1Lk>.

that person was innocent, [and] was trying to help but didn't want to be drawn into the whole mess. And in the event, here's Todd's situation to try to make progress for Tom. He promised anonymity to someone else, to a source, he made that promise. Then Todd made a big mistake, Todd sinned, he did something wrong, and Todd said so: he told Tom that he received the document anonymously. Why? Todd can answer that. Tom can be a hard man to say, "no," to, maybe that's why, but really the reason doesn't matter. It was wrong for Todd to say that he didn't know the source when the truth was that he just promised not to reveal the source. There's a difference between receiving a document anonymously and receiving a document with a promise of anonymity, and so he didn't tell Tom the truth which was that he promised not to reveal the source's identity to Tom.⁹³

Barber would go on to claim that Benkert revealed the identity of the source to a third party, later found to be Guidepost Solutions, an organization that has said previously that it passes on all information to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee has yet to confirm that they have received the identity of this source.

North American Mission Board

SBC Transparency, a group that is calling for a forensic audit of the North American Mission Board, found this about NAMB,

Over the last 10 years NAMB has spent \$1.2 billion from the sacrificial mission gifts of SBC members and churches with diminishing results in evangelism and church planting. This has resulted in the [most difficult] decade in the 175-year history of the SBC in terms of decline in baptisms, missionaries on the field, new church starts, Cooperative Program mission giving, church attendance and church membership.” The group further found, “NAMB has spent tens of millions on houses for use by a few church planters. Some of these homes cost over \$500,000 and have amenities like swimming pools.” Lastly, they found, “The NAMB church planting budget has grown from \$23 million to \$75 million in 10 years, but the number of new church starts has dropped to less than half the number a decade ago.”⁹⁴

Not only has the North American Mission Board lacked transparency concerning finances, but they have also stopped disclosing how many appointed missionaries were assigned to some aspect of

⁹³<https://vimeo.com/737786840>. Reference clip starts at 11:06.

⁹⁴<https://sbctransparency.com/>.

church planting.⁹⁵ This number was reported in the SBC Annual up until 2012, but after 2012 it has not been reported since.⁹⁶

Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission

On August 21, 2020, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, with the Thomas More Society, filed an amicus brief to the United States Court of Appeals for Fifth Circuit concerning *Will McRaney v. The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention*, in support of the North American Mission Board's petition for rehearing en banc. The brief included the following:

McRaney directed a state-level body of the Southern Baptist faith tradition, an organization that supported 560 Southern Baptist churches. The primary, leading convention, or group, is the Southern Baptist Convention which is the umbrella Southern Baptist governing body over all of the various groups of churches. Within that hierarchy are several organizations, including McRaney's previous employer and defendant NAMB.⁹⁷

This statement concerned many Southern Baptists, including the Executive Director of the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, Randy Davis, who wrote in a December 2, 2020, article,

If we allow drift from this benchmark polity [Article IV of the SBC Constitution], the damage will be extremely significant and invite grave consequences. That is why the ERLC's use of the word "hierarchy" in the amicus brief is profound and must be changed. I have spoken with ERLC leaders and they genuinely regret the implication of the amicus brief they filed at the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Their explanation is that there was a very small window of opportunity to submit the brief. In other words, it was rushed. A legal brief representing Southern Baptists via the ERLC, using language in violation of our own governing documents and historic understanding of the autonomy of the local church, was filed before the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals without careful vetting or consideration of the legal precedent it might establish.⁹⁸

⁹⁵http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_2012.pdf. 185. This is the last annual that included the number of missionaries involved in church planting.

⁹⁶http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_2013.pdf. 182-184. This is the first year that did not include the number of missionaries involved in church planting.

http://media2.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/annuals/SBC_Annual_2022.pdf. 200. This is the most recent SBC annual which also did not include the number of missionaries involved in church planting.

⁹⁷<https://willmcraney.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ERLC-amicus-brief-for-NAMB-Ezell-En-Banc.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3KdJkLEs7OHSGk3V5N6wTjXNDRlBwISPONzJzO5e7ZjxqAhetL4lzvFJw>. Page 10.

⁹⁸<https://baptistandreflector.org/davis-there-is-absolutely-no-sbc-hierarchy/>.

The Conservative Baptist Network joined in these concerns stating,

This statement is not merely false as a matter of Baptist polity and ecclesiology. It is also a grave threat to Southern Baptists, illegitimately exposing all SBC churches and denominational entities – local, state and national – to needless and wrongful liability. Were this grossly irresponsible misstatement to be adopted by the courts, a person who slips and falls in a local church could potentially sue the state convention, or GuideStone Financial Resources, or every church in the entire Southern Baptist Convention.⁹⁹

The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission on December 9, 2020, issued an apology to Southern Baptists through the *Baptist Press*, specifically for the language of “hierarchy” and “umbrella organization,” as well as explaining their intentions in filing the brief. They claimed, also, that the brief was written by the lawyers at the Thomas More Society and the ERLC joined them in filing it. They stated that they should have written a brief themselves, instead of joining the public interest law firm brief.¹⁰⁰ While the apology should be recognized, the ERLC entrusted the advocacy of Southern Baptists to a Catholic organization that is unfamiliar with historic Baptist polity.

At the same time, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission had a prime opportunity to stand up for religious liberty during the COVID lockdowns, where churches across the United States were being ordered to shut down, and yet instead they argued that the shutdowns do not actually infringe upon religious liberty. Jeff Pickering wrote for the ERLC in an April 15, 2020, article,

Churches have fundamental constitutional rights to the free exercise of religion and freedom of assembly. Those rights are often augmented by federal or state laws like the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. At the same time, these rights are not absolute. Just as freedom of speech doesn’t mean you can spread defamatory lies about your neighbor, freedom of religion doesn’t mean you can spread a dangerous virus to your neighbor. The government has authority to protect public health, and that authority must be balanced with the right of religious liberty. In practice, that means that the government has a strong argument that it can temporarily limit public gatherings, including religious gatherings, during a dangerous

⁹⁹<https://conservativebaptistnetwork.com/the-conservative-baptist-network-calls-on-the-erlc-to-withdraw-its-false-brief-from-the-supreme-court/>.

¹⁰⁰<https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/erlc-issues-apology-explanation-regarding-amicus-brief/>.

pandemic. As long as the government does so uniformly—not targeting religious gatherings for special enforcement or disfavor—courts are likely to say that the government has remained within its proper bounds. But if the government targets religious gatherings while ignoring similar nonreligious gatherings, or if it goes after certain kinds of religious gatherings that pose no threat to public health—such as a drive-in church service where everyone stays in their vehicles—that is a violation of religious liberty.¹⁰¹

Many Southern Baptists felt that the ERLC did more to defend the government shutdown of autonomous churches than to defend those churches' religious liberty.

***He Gets Us*, and the North American Mission Board, and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission**

On October 12, 2022, Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, alongside Ed Stetzer, led discussion in a webinar for the *He Gets Us* organization.¹⁰² *He Gets Us* claims to be “a movement to reintroduce people to the Jesus of the Bible and his confounding love and forgiveness.”¹⁰³ *He Gets Us* writes articles to engage people with who they claim is the “biblical” Jesus. Describing this purpose they wrote, “Whether you consider yourself a Christian, a believer in another faith, a spiritual explorer, or not religious or spiritual in any way, we invite you to hear about Jesus and be inspired by his example.”¹⁰⁴ In one of those articles they describe Jesus as being “not exclusive, but radically inclusive.”¹⁰⁵ In a different article they say,

Some believe Jesus lived a perfect life. For others, that’s a stretch. Either way, as we searched for themes to share, it became apparent to us that Jesus set a high bar for himself and for others. He taught things such as: love your enemies, forgive those who’ve intentionally wronged you, and don’t judge others. Easy in theory. Tougher in practice.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹<https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/a-q-and-a-for-churches-on-government-restrictions-with-a-religious-liberty-attorney/>.

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¹⁰⁴<https://hegetsus.com/en/is-this-a-campaign-to-get-me-to-go-to-church>.

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¹⁰⁶<https://hegetsus.com/en/did-jesus-struggle-to-be-a-good-role-model>.

He Gets Us evidently does not call people to faith and repentance, and they do not advocate that Jesus certainly lived a perfect life. Ezell said that the partnership between the two groups involved NAMB connecting people to Southern Baptist churches through *He Gets Us*. The semi-satirical website *Not the Bee*, which writes about actual events that could be satire, wrote about this event to the shame of Southern Baptists.¹⁰⁷ A multitude of Southern Baptists, including the Conservative Baptist Network, shared concerns regarding this partnership.¹⁰⁸ The president of NAMB, Kevin Ezell, issued an apology saying that he “did less diligence than I should have” and that the partnership with *He Gets Us* would be severed. While the termination of the partnership and an apology should be recognized, Ezell did not condemn the movement for promoting anti-gospel and unorthodox material.¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, in 2020, the Servants Foundation, the group who created the *He Gets Us* movement gave a \$701,000 grant to the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, and an additional \$7,000 grant to the North American Mission Board.¹¹⁰ Many Southern Baptists feel this instance further illustrates a drift away from orthodox views, the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture, and conservative biblical values that have long characterized this convention of churches.

Conclusion

Adrian Rogers once said, “I’m willing to compromise about many things, but not the Word of God. So far as getting together is concerned, we don’t have to get together. The Southern Baptist Convention, as it is, does not have to survive. I don’t have to be the pastor of Bellevue Baptist

¹⁰⁷<https://notthebee.com/article/the-southern-baptist-north-american-mission-board-partners-with-he-gets-us-organization-which-teaches-that-jesus-had-anxiety-and-that-jesus-deity-doesnt-matter>.

¹⁰⁸<https://conservativebaptistnetwork.com/statement-namb-promotion-of-he-gets-us-is-reason-for-grave-concern/>.

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Church. I don't have to be loved; I don't even have to live. But I will not compromise the Word of God." Intended or not, the attack on the sufficiency of the Word of God in these evidences presented cannot be tolerated in the Southern Baptist family—a family long-characterized by a commitment to Scripture as the hallmark of its cooperative practice. Across the nation, Southern Baptists are rapidly becoming more aware of the doctrinal drift seeping into their Convention, and as they are, a common sentiment and refrain can be heard among churches small and large, rural and urban, young and old: Southern Baptists must not abandon Scripture; we must change the current direction.

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