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Gregory A. Smith

Baptist Bible College, greg@liberty.edu

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Baptist Ministerial Education in the United States, 1850-1950

Gregory A. Smith

The study of ministerial education is important because, as Harrison (1959) observes, “the training of the pastor is the strongest single determinant in the affairs of the local church” (p. 203). Therefore, to understand the development of ministerial education among Baptists is to gain insight into the past, present, and future of both individual Baptist congregations and the larger organizations (conventions, fellowships, associations) with which they identify. Many authors have attempted to record and appraise the history of higher education among specific groups of Baptists. Few, however, have focused particularly on the training of Baptist ministers, and even fewer have done so across a broad spectrum of Baptist associations. This paper seeks to address this need, giving special attention to a period of intense activity in Baptist higher education, from 1850 to 1950. The study is limited to institutions located in the United States.

As might be supposed, there are certain difficulties inherent in the undertaking of such a study, not the least of which is the diverse character of the people called Baptists. Leonard (1997) explains: “Baptists are an unruly lot. Their theology, polity, and overall diversity create the possibility, if not the probability, for continued debate, controversy, and division. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Baptist response to education” (p. 367). A second obstacle to the research is the sheer breadth of the subject matter; quite literally, it could occupy a lifetime of study.

Method

The research was drawn primarily from secondary sources. Numerous monographs, journal articles, and reference sources—published over a period of nearly 180 years—were examined. Special attention was given to documents written around 1950, which provide insights from participant observers at the conclusion of the period under consideration. Though it was not deemed feasible to examine a large amount of the extensive primary literature available (e.g., periodical articles, personal records, organizational documents,

meeting minutes), a small number of significant sources were consulted.

Historical Background

Most scholars agree that the earliest Baptist activities in the United States date to the late 1630s (Torbet, 1963, pp. 202-203). However, Baptists did not found any institutions of higher education until 1765, when the College of Rhode Island (later known as Brown University) was established. The history of Baptist higher education, however, may be said to have begun somewhat prior to this. Indeed, in 1755, Baptists of Charleston, South Carolina created a fund to help young ministers obtain ministerial training. Cornett (1958b) considers this the first organized effort in support of education among Baptists in the South (p. 388).

The eighteenth century was a period of great religious upheaval in America. In the 1730s and 1790s, two revivals (known as the Great Awakenings) swept across the country, bringing numerous professions of faith in their wake. As a result of the First Great Awakening, Baptists, who had previously been persecuted in most of the colonies, experienced unprecedented growth (Gaustad, 1987, p. 64; Torbet, 1963, p. 220). The Second Great Awakening brought as a consequence the founding of numerous religious colleges (McBeth, 1976, p. 115). Thus the revivals of the 1700s created a climate that would favor the cause of higher education among Baptists.

In 1814, a national organization of American Baptists came into existence. Known as the Triennial Convention because of its custom of meeting every three years, the union centered on the purpose of carrying out foreign missionary work (Gaustad, 1987, p. 65; Torbet, 1963, pp. 249-250). The Triennial Convention might have played a vital role in furthering higher education among Baptists had its unity been preserved. However, debate over a slavery-related issue led to a split between North and South in 1845

(Gaustad, 1987, p. 65). Nationwide Baptist unity has never since been reestablished.

Baptists faced several obstacles in their attempts to become more involved in higher education. First, their diversity limited their ability to cooperate in educational ventures. As Potts (1988) observes, constituents who differed on various points of doctrine and practice—some relating particularly to education—were unlikely to pool their resources on behalf of higher education (p. 79). The social standing of Baptists constituted a second obstacle, as McBeth (1976) explains: “In a time when higher learning was largely the province of the aristocracy, most Baptists came from those levels of society which did not automatically assume that a college education was either available or appropriate for them” (p. 114).

Godbold (1944) explains that

four factors were involved in the ‘strength’ of a denomination to project colleges: first, a conviction among leaders as to the importance of education; second, a sufficiently large membership; third, denominational organization; and fourth, wealth. Where there was a marked deficiency in one or more of these factors the prospects for the founding of colleges were not good. (p. 76)

He goes on to note that Baptists were slow to establish colleges because “there was no widespread conviction as to the importance of education, little wealth, and no effective denominational organization. . . . Baptists did not build colleges until there came the development and proper co-ordination of the four factors necessary for success” (pp. 76-77).

Early nineteenth century America was not hostile toward church-affiliated colleges. In fact, affiliation with some form of organized religion was the norm at the time (De Jong, 1990, pp. 42-44; Marsden, 1992; Rudolph, 1962/1990, pp. 68-85). So the educational and sociological climate was favorable to the founding of denominational institutions. The political climate was positive as well. In 1819, the Supreme Court handed down its decision in the Dartmouth College case. At issue was the right of the state of New Hampshire to control the affairs of Dartmouth, for which it had provided funding. When the verdict was read, it was ruled that Dartmouth remained a private institution even though it had received state aid. In essence, this

ruling confirmed the autonomy of the colleges, and many denominational institutions were founded in the decades to follow (Rudolph, 1962/1990, pp. 210-211). Baptist schools founded in the 1820s included Columbian College in Washington, DC (1821), the Furman Academy and Theological Institution in South Carolina (1825), and The Newton Theological Institution in Massachusetts (1826).

Still, Baptists as a whole were not agreed on the necessity of establishing institutions of higher learning. Many opted to provide financial assistance to their ministry candidates while they attended the schools of other denominations (Pierce, 1943, p. xi). Others favored the apprenticeship model of pastoral training, denying altogether the need for colleges (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997, pp. 379-380). Baptists’ reluctance to participate in higher education often resulted in the perpetuation of an uneducated ministry. One author claims that toward the end of the eighteenth century, Baptist ministers in the South were entirely devoid of college training (Cornett, 1958b, p. 388). Regardless of the accuracy of this claim, it is clear that many Baptists shared a deep-seated antagonism toward ministerial education (McBeth, 1976, pp. 113-114, 117-118).

Undoubtedly much of this resistance can be attributed to the view, prevalent among Baptists, that the proper qualification for ministry was a divine calling rather than any human achievement—educational or otherwise—on the part of the minister (Godbold, 1944, p. 17). This conviction probably engendered a rather widespread opposition to formal ministerial training. Nevertheless, there were some Baptist leaders who sought to balance the reality of divine appointment with the duty of human preparation. One such leader was Jonathan Going, an influential Massachusetts pastor who recognized the vital connection between missionary endeavor and ministerial education. In 1819, Going (1819/1976) made the following case for the establishment of a ministry training institution in New England:

Though it is the prerogative of God to call men to this high office, it is your province, as workers together with him, to receive them, to contribute to their improvement, and to promote their usefulness. That the literary and theological education of the sons of Zion, who are called to take her by the hand, is an important object, we hope none of you will doubt; and that the

gratuitous education of the indigent among them, is the duty of Christians, ought not to be disputed.

You will perceive that our design is not *to make ministers*, but only to recognize those whom God has designed for this work, and to contribute to their greater usefulness. We should most sincerely deprecate a *graceless ministry*: nor do we wish that *merely* pious men should engage in it. We only wish to encourage those who give evidence to the churches of which they are members, that God designs them for this work, by giving them talents, which, with due cultivation, would make them useful in it. (p. 186)

Going was not alone in his promotional work. In fact, there arose in the early nineteenth century an informal group of “educational persuaders,” men who advocated the cause of Baptist higher education “through the denominational press, traveling agencies, pulpit, and platform” (Potts, 1988, p. 79). They faced a hard road in their attempts to convince their fellow Baptists of the urgent need for organized support of education (Potts, 1988, p. 132). Yet their cause was not in vain. Going’s sentiments found support among Baptists in his region, and the plan he had issued came to fruition in 1826 when The Newton Theological Institution was chartered (Pierce, 1943, pp. xi-xii).

It seems rather obvious that the need for an educated clergy was one of the strongest arguments for the founding of Baptist colleges. Indeed, Godbold (1944) asserts that the missionary movement of the early nineteenth century (which depended on the availability of competent ministry personnel) was a major force in overcoming Southern Baptist resistance to involvement in higher education (pp. 18-19, 48-49). Yet scholars disagree on the importance of the ministry education motive in the nineteenth-century Baptist institutions. Potts (1988) concludes that early Baptist educational institutions were not necessarily centered on training men for the ministry. Rather, in his view, their purpose was sometimes stated in terms of producing leaders who would elevate the cultural and educational level of the nation by making a difference in their local communities (pp. 192, 195, 241-242). He states:

Baptist colleges were constantly concerned with their relationship to society in general and made significant contributions to the growth of American

culture. They helped to disseminate a strong faith in education, provided secondary and higher education for thousands who otherwise might not have sought or obtained it, upgraded local culture in many areas, and established a pattern of institutional distribution which gave rural as well as urban areas a substantial share of American cultural resources. (p. 332)

There were, in reality, many factors that contributed to make the idea of founding a college attractive to a church. Godbold (1944) discusses 10 such motivations: the education of ministers; the intrinsic link between religion and education; the democratization of education; a sense of obligation to society; the desire to increase denominational loyalty; the extension of denominational influence; competition with other denominations; evangelistic concerns; the desire to foster regional progress; and the increasing strength of their denominations (pp. 46-77).

How important, then, was the pastoral education motivation in the origin of Baptist institutions of higher learning? It is the position of the author that the education of ministers was a major motivating factor in the founding of most Baptist colleges. However, as Slaght (1974) notes, with the progress of time many institutions came to emphasize the liberal arts more than theological training, and as a consequence, new ministry training centers had to be established (p. 91).

In spite of the fact that the nineteenth-century colleges enriched the churches with their graduates (both ministers and laypersons), the colleges were not able to rely exclusively on the churches for their financial support. Rather, as Potts (1988) observes, Baptist colleges of the period were characterized by alliances forged with their local communities more so than with their denomination (pp. 12, 76-78). Indeed, “lack of endowment at almost all Baptist colleges prior to 1861 tied them closely to dependable local support” (p. 317). Denominational ties were local or regional rather than national (Leonard, 1997, pp. 371-372), for there was at that time no organizational structure which would guarantee the denomination’s support of the colleges.

In the light of the above, it is understandable why nineteenth-century Baptist colleges were not characterized by sectarianism to the degree that later became the norm (Potts, 1988, pp. 244-248). They

perceived themselves as agencies of common good, and thus both supported state-sponsored education and sought state assistance for themselves (p. 195).

In summary, Baptist colleges struggled to gain stability in the decades leading up to 1850. McBeth (1976) describes a pattern often repeated in the life of these schools:

A small beginning, several moves before a permanent location is found, temporary experimentation with the manual labor plan, and uncertainty as to the relation of classical and theological studies within the school—these tended to form a fairly constant pattern repeated . . . as Baptists struggled to develop higher education in the South. (p. 124)

Setbacks and hindrances notwithstanding, important progress had been made by the start of the Civil War, when over two dozen Baptist-affiliated colleges were in existence (Potts, 1988, p. 133).

Educational and Political Context

Having examined briefly the history of Baptist ministerial education up to 1850, the educational and political milieu of the following century may be described. Baptist colleges did not emerge or develop in a vacuum, insulated from national trends by virtue of the character or degree of their religious connections. On the contrary, they were subject to the same demographic, educational, and political trends as their contemporaries.

In his analysis of Baptist higher education, Rogers (1987) concludes that the denomination's colleges, universities, and seminaries have not operated in isolation from the cultural trends of the last 200 years (p. 683). Rather, both conceptually and practically, their educational products and processes have been influenced by the educational philosophies prevalent in American society. In his view, at least four broad movements have impacted the shape of Baptist higher education: the liberal arts emphasis, progressivism, behaviorism, and humanism (pp. 683-687).

One of the most significant political events to influence higher education between 1850 and 1950 was the Morrill Act (Morrill Act, 1862/1997). Passed by

Congress in 1862, this legislative act marked a turning point for the American college. Several changes occurred in its wake. First, the government assumed greater financial involvement in higher education, and hence, began to exercise more control over it. Second, higher education was increasingly made accessible to the whole of society. Third, colleges underwent a paradigm shift from a classical curriculum to an emphasis on practical, vocational training (De Jong, 1990, pp. 44-45; Marsden, 1992, pp. 14, 20; Rudolph, 1962/1990, pp. 247-263). These changes all had a significant impact on the development of the American university system.

The Civil War (1861-1865) also influenced the course of higher education. Social changes that followed the War (including the need for rebuilding, westward expansion, and industrialization in competition with other countries) contributed to promote the founding of numerous universities and colleges (Rudolph, 1962/1990, pp. 241-247). Denominational schools were not unaffected. Perhaps one of the most direct consequences of the War was the need to provide educational opportunities to the liberated slaves who had previously been denied them. However, at almost every level of the nation's educational system, blacks were not readily integrated into the existing schools. Rather, numerous educational institutions were founded for the purpose of educating them. Among Baptists, most work of this type was done under the auspices of the American Baptist Home Mission Society ("Educational Work," 1889/1993; Slaght, 1974, pp. 86-91). By 1889, some 20 black Baptist colleges and academies were already in existence, though some had not yet been incorporated ("Educational Work," 1889/1993, pp. 37-43).

Another change that occurred between 1850 and 1950 was a shift toward making theological education more practical. Michaelsen (1956) describes the trend:

The tendency for theological education to become increasingly pragmatic . . . has increased in our period. Ministerial education, like education in general, has moved away from the classical pattern toward a greater emphasis on practical arts and vocational training. An obvious evidence of this shift is seen in the gradual de-emphasis of classical language study. Some seminaries have dropped requirements in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. Some still cling to one or two of these but many demand

no great proficiency in any language except English (p. 274)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there arose in American higher education the issue of standardization. Many academic standards were established through the work of accrediting agencies. While liberal arts colleges sought accreditation through the regional agency serving their area, specialized schools often sought alternative or additional means of accreditation. In the case of theological seminaries, standardization was achieved through participation in the American Association of Theological Schools, which succeeded the Conference of Theological Seminaries in 1936. Over the decades, the AATS (currently known as the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada) contributed to establishing and elevating the academic credibility of seminaries of various denominational stripes (Niebuhr, Williams, & Gustafson, 1957, p. 26).

As 1950 approached, higher education in America was about to undergo dramatic changes, influenced both by a changing social conception of college education and by the activities of the federal government (De Jong, 1990, pp. 46-47; G.I. Bill, 1944/1997). In the aftermath of World War II, thousands of GIs (and others) flocked to the nation's universities and, to a lesser degree, its colleges. Enrollment levels skyrocketed across the country. Higher education was coming to be seen as a right of American citizenship rather than as a privilege reserved for a minor segment of society. Such was the educational and political context in which Baptist higher education matured and developed.

Leaders in Baptist Higher Education

No social movement can succeed apart from the influence of capable leaders. This axiom was certainly true of the educational movement launched among Baptists toward the middle of the nineteenth century. It is therefore fitting to seek to understand the contributions of a few pioneers in Baptist higher education.

Perhaps the most visible Baptist college leader in the mid-1800s was Francis Wayland, president of Brown College. Wayland is recognized outside of Baptist

literature as a visionary thinker. He was an early advocate of reforming the classical curriculum to suit the needs of a nation increasingly dependent on science and industry (Rudolph, 1962/1990, pp. 237-240). He perceived the institutions of his day to be grossly inadequate and incapable of sustaining national progress (Wayland, 1842/1969; 1855). Historians diverge, however, on the question of how much he influenced higher education in general, and the Baptist movement in particular.

Potts (1988) disagrees with Wayland's assessment of the antebellum collegiate system (pp. 316-332). First, he states that Wayland's emphasis on vocational education was not consistent with the need of many communities in his day, where classical education provided the teachers and other cultural leaders needed to bring about progress (pp. 316-317). Second, he notes the poor reception that Wayland's writings received among Baptist leaders of his day (pp. 317-318). Third, he points out that, contrary to the title of Wayland's 1854 address, since the American people were not sure what they wanted from the American college, they could hardly be demanding it (p. 318). Fourth, he questions the viability of Wayland's application of economic theory to the realm of higher education (p. 331).

Wayland's judgment appears more appropriate to the post-Civil War college (Potts, 1988, p. 316). His observations seem to have been more descriptive of institutions outside his own denomination, and, not surprisingly, they were better received in non-Baptist circles (p. 319). Potts suggests that there was less dissatisfaction with the existing college than Wayland supposed (p. 326), and greater propensity to change than he perceived (pp. 325, 332).

Wayland made a strong case for reforming higher education by increasing its practical and vocational value. As a committed Baptist, and as the president of the nation's oldest Baptist institution, Wayland might have lent strong support to the cause of theological education among Baptists. However, this was not the case for at least two reasons.

First, as Mohler (1995) notes, "Wayland was convinced that theological seminaries were inclined to produce sterile, passionless, and overly intellectual graduates who had little power in the pulpit" (p. 40). He alleged that "the tendency of seminaries is to become

schools for theological and philological learning and elegant literature, rather than schools to make preachers of the Gospel. With every year the general tendency is in this direction as I think I have observed” (p. 40).

Second, Potts (1988) suggests that Wayland’s views of educational reform were not heartily received among Baptists:

Reactions in the Baptist press to Wayland’s critique and reform proposals suggest that he did not adequately articulate the concerns or identify the problems of higher education within his own denomination. . . . Wayland did not inspire a reform movement in Baptist higher education based on his views of collegiate defects and the remedies required to correct them. (pp. 317-318)

In summary, Francis Wayland is judged to be an enigmatic character. Though a Baptist by conviction and an avid supporter of higher education, he had relatively little influence on the shape of Baptist colleges and seminaries in his day. A sharp critic of the traditional curriculum, his radical views were better received—and perhaps justifiably so—by the higher education community as a whole than by his fellow Baptists. It is possible that Wayland’s greatest contribution to Baptist higher education may not have been his influence on the movement as such, but rather on the many young lives he touched while president of Brown. Patterson (1994) explains: “Respected as an administrator, a teacher and an author, Wayland touched thousands of students with his innovative ideas, intellectual breadth and passion for analysis, combined with a personal interest in them” (p. 284).

One of the Brown students who came under the influence of Francis Wayland was James Petigru Boyce (Mohler, 1995, pp. 39-42; Wamble, 1958, p. 184). Boyce would eventually become the first president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a central figure in nineteenth-century Baptist ministerial education. His plan for theological education, presented several years before the founding of Southern Seminary, bore the title, “Three Changes in Theological Institutions” (Hinson, 1985, p. 28). The three philosophical distinctions Boyce proposed were designed to ensure the accessibility, academic quality, and doctrinal integrity of Baptist theological education (Hinson, 1985, pp. 28-29; Mohler, 1995, pp. 44-50).

First, he judged that ministry candidates should not be required to pursue a classical (college) education before attending seminary. This position guaranteed the accessibility of theological training to all who acknowledged a calling to ministry, regardless of their educational background. Second, he proposed an elective curriculum characterized by academic excellence. This distinction ensured that those who had studied the classics in college would find intellectual stimulus in the seminary. Third, he purposed to require faculty to sign an “Abstract of Principles.” Subscription to this doctrinal statement would presumably preserve doctrinal orthodoxy over time.

Wamble (1958) summarizes Boyce’s contribution to Baptist theological education: “Regarded as the founding father of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary although the idea of a central seminary did not originate with him, Boyce was the strongest [Southern Baptist] advocate of theological education from 1856 on” (p. 184). He wielded great influence as president of Southern Seminary until his death in 1888 (Leonard, 1994, p. 63).

A third great proponent of Baptist education was Augustus Hopkins Strong, perhaps best known for his *Systematic Theology* (Wacker, 1994, p. 262). Strong emerged as a respected educational leader early in his career, assuming the presidency of Rochester Theological Seminary at the age of 36 (Pointer, 1993, p. 2). He served in this capacity for 40 years. Wacker (1994) observes that “from about 1885 to 1910 Strong reigned as the most influential Northern Baptist and one of the most influential conservative Protestant theologians in the United States” (p. 262).

In the late 1880s John D. Rockefeller demonstrated a willingness to underwrite the founding of a new Baptist college (Rudolph, 1962/1990, pp. 349-352). Sensing the strategic importance of this opportunity, Strong penned *The Church and the University* (1889), arguing in it that New York City was the ideal location for such an institution. Though his plan failed to secure Rockefeller’s support (the new institution opened in Chicago in 1892), Strong argued very convincingly for the necessity of Baptist involvement in higher education. He lamented the lack of a truly Christian university—an institution uniting both culture and spirituality—in America (pp. 10-11, 15-16, 18). Presuming educational activity to be the duty of the Christian church (p. 12), he criticized the Baptist

movement sharply for its inattentiveness to the cause of education (pp. 20-27).

Strong wrote fervently about the importance of Baptist involvement in higher learning:

The Christian church has no business to let this [University] instruction drift into the hands of skeptics, has no business to give it over to the state, but is bound by the most solemn obligations to take possession of it in the name of Christ and to make it the means of proclaiming his truth and his glory. (p. 12)

He proposed that Baptists take the lead to establish a Christian university:

The only remedy and exit from this godless philosophy, which threatens to swamp our schools and our pulpits as well, is the making of Christ the centre and end of university instruction. And that means the establishment of a University that is truly Christian. (pp. 15-16)

He noted Baptists' past failure to respond adequately to the need:

Let the humiliating comparison between what Baptists have done for higher education, and what other denominations have done, provoke us to a godly jealousy. . . . Denominations one seventh of our numbers do double our work,—in other words, in proportion to their numbers, do fourteen times as much as we do. (pp. 22-23)

Wayland, Boyce, and Strong represent a cadre of Baptist leaders who, between 1850 and 1950, sought to increase their denomination's awareness of the value of higher education. Not only did they seek to improve the academic credibility of Baptist ministers in their generation, they set a worthy example of concern for Christian ministry and scholarship that should be imitated for generations to come.

New Ministry-Training Institutions

As time progressed, many Baptist colleges took a growing interest in preparing students for fields of work other than the gospel ministry. The incorporation of non-traditional content into the college curriculum

furthered this trend. As the mission of Baptist schools grew less specific, theological and ministerial training tended to fade gradually to the background. Over time it became apparent that new institutions were needed that would remain focused on pastoral education. Many theological seminaries were founded in response to this need. Slaght (1974) describes the emergence of seminaries among Northern Baptists:

The story of nineteenth-century American Baptist theological seminaries is found intertwined in the account of the birth and growth of the colleges. Basic elements in the various institutions were the same: the desire for an educated clergy, the founding of a school to meet that need, the sacrifice of dedicated supporters, the division of interest between liberal arts and theology, the greater support for the former, and the eventual breaking away of the theological school to form a separate institution. (p. 91)

The seminaries faced the same kinds of administrative and academic difficulties that the colleges had encountered in previous generations. They were able to overcome these challenges by accumulating endowment, by securing the support of their constituencies, and by elevating standards in connection with pursuit of accreditation. By 1950, the seminaries serving the Northern and Southern Conventions had definitively demonstrated their worth to the Baptist denomination by producing a significant percentage of the community's ministers.

The seminary was not the only institutional type to appear in the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, toward the end of the 1800s there emerged in the United States and Canada a new kind of ministerial training institution, the Bible institute. Bible institutes rose out of the context of the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, which reached its apex between 1900 and 1930 (Library of Congress, 1997, p. 2113). While modernists were willing to accommodate their religious practices to naturalistic and humanistic views (particularly the theory of evolution), fundamentalists stood for the literal interpretation of the Bible, and consequently maintained their belief in the supernatural, emphasizing divine creation (Collins, 1983, pp. 223-224; Marsden, 1991, pp. 345-346). Most American denominations, including Baptists, experienced conflict and division as a direct or indirect result of the controversy.

Educational institutions, especially seminaries, were often the primary site of conflict (Slaght, 1974, pp. 105-109). As a result of the debate over modernism, the educational work of both the Northern and Southern conventions would forever be changed. Northern Baptists who could not tolerate “liberal” views in the existing seminaries responded by founding several “conservative” institutions (pp. 109-116). In 1923, some chose to secede from the Convention completely, forming a new association known as the Baptist Bible Union. Though the Union passed off the scene within just six years, it spawned, directly or indirectly, the four largest separatist Baptist groups in North America, which in turn founded their own educational institutions (Bartlett, 1972, pp. i, 1-6).

Leonard discusses the impact of the controversy on the Southern Baptist Convention: “Unlike other denominations, Southern Baptists were not polarized by fundamentalist debate. They were not unaffected, however” (p. 378). In fact, the controversy resulted in the issue of the denomination’s first confession of faith in 1925 (p. 378). More recently, in the 1980s, Southern Baptist seminaries have undergone the scrutiny of the Convention’s conservative majority. The outcome has not been decided entirely, but it is certain that modernism and fundamentalism have been two powerful forces in the development of Baptist higher education in the twentieth century (Hinson, 1985, pp. 33-34).

Bible institutes were commonly founded in response to dissatisfaction with institutions that were perceived to be straying from their mission of producing theologically sound ministers. While the Bible institutes did not generally possess the academic rigor of the seminaries, they were able to draw students because of their conservative theological stance (Hartshorne & Froyd, 1945, p. 117). In time, many Bible institutes elevated their standards and became Bible colleges. Eagen (1981) summarizes the distinctive character of these institutions:

The Bible college movement represents a pietistic reaction to secularism, a theistic reaction to humanism and agnosticism, a Biblio-centric reaction to naturalism and rationalism, a resurgence of spiritual dynamic in Protestantism, a restoration of Biblical authority and direction in education, and a return to the central concern of Christian education; that is, the fulfillment of Christ’s Great Commission . . . (p. 35)

From their inception, the Bible institutes and colleges had a single focus—that of training men and women for involvement in Christian ministries, including the pastorate. Mostert (1975) comments:

That the Bible college should be a part of the pastoral preparation scene is natural in view of its chief purpose—that of preparing students for Christian ministries. We find, therefore, that the preponderance of Bible colleges have pastoral preparation as one of their chief objectives and that they include in their curriculum both terminal and pre-seminary programs in this field. (p. 7)

The Bible college movement grew rapidly following its humble beginnings in the 1880s. By 1970, there were 183 such institutions operating in the United States (Eagen, 1981, pp. 43-44, 60), at least 32 of which maintained Baptist affiliation (Witmer, 1962, pp. 40, 54). The movement’s greatest expansion occurred between 1931 and 1960, when 132 schools were founded which would survive until at least 1970 (Eagen, 1981, p. 60). As Eagen notes, “the peak of this period, the World War II period of 1941-1950, was a period when all types of institutions of higher education expanded in number and size” (p. 43). Thus the growth of the movement may be explained by forces affecting both the religious and educational realms.

Summary of the Period

Between 1850 and 1950, many Baptist institutions experienced tensions in governance. Potts (1988) observes that “the transition from denominationally affiliated community enterprise to state denominational college . . . began for some institutions as early as the 1840’s . . .” (p. 247). In other words, Baptist colleges which had relied on community support early in their history began to look to their local associations and state conventions for direction and sustenance.

Northern and Southern Baptist colleges have historically differed in their mode of governance, as McBeth (1976, pp. 124-125) observes. Southern Baptist schools tended to be founded by official Baptist groups at the local or state level; in fact, such associations were often formed for the specific purpose of promoting higher education. As a result, Southern schools generally remained accountable to Baptist congregations and retained their identity as Baptist

institutions. Northern Baptist schools, on the other hand, were typically founded and funded by an interested society, and were commonly governed by self-perpetuating boards. Their relation to the denomination was unofficial. This loose religious connection made it possible for some Northern colleges to abandon their Baptist heritage and become non-sectarian institutions. Examples of early Northern Baptist schools that no longer maintain Baptist affiliation include Brown University, Colby College, Colgate University, the University of Rochester, George Washington University, and Bucknell University (Slaght, 1974, pp. 67-73).

Southern institutions faced a different kind of governance challenge. In an effort to recruit students and secure funding, many state conventions encouraged their constituencies to take “moral ownership” of the schools they operated. Understandably, those who chose to support a given college or seminary often expected to see their theological and philosophical views reinforced by the institution. As a result, many supporters not only assumed ownership of the school’s financial welfare, but also attempted to seize control of its curriculum and administration.

Frequently, the actions of professors or administrators collided with the expectations of a segment of the constituency. If the differences of opinion were perceived by the constituency to be sufficiently wide, there existed the potential for major conflict. Hinson (1985) comments on the controversial history of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary:

If the founding fathers imagined the education of ministers would lead them down a rosy path, they soon got over the illusion. Almost from the beginning, the churches for which the seminary has sought to equip diverse ministers for their many tasks have, at times, cast a wary and suspicious eye in its direction, and more than once, they have taken its faculty to the woodshed. (p. 30)

This example demonstrates that church affiliation was to many Baptist colleges both an asset and a liability.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, many Baptist institutions participated in the nationwide trend of standardization. This movement sought to establish objective criteria by which institutions could be

compared and evaluated. Standardization was often accompanied by accreditation, which consisted of certifying the quality of an institution’s work. Between 1910 and 1927, most colleges affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention underwent standardization. During this period, 15 institutions—beginning with the University of Richmond—obtained accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. By the 1950s, 24 of the 29 Southern Baptist schools were members of their respective regional accrediting agencies (Johnson, 1955, pp. 41-42).

Many Baptist seminaries submitted to standardization procedures at about the same time as the liberal arts colleges. The primary agency that assumed responsibility for promoting standardization at the seminary level was the American Association of Theological Seminaries (Niebuhr, Williams, & Gustafson, 1957). Most Bible colleges operated without standardization and accreditation until much later than the liberal arts colleges or seminaries. The American Association of Bible Colleges was founded in 1947 to meet this need (Mostert, 1986, pp. 13-21).

Baptists were slow to recognize the value of higher education, as has been noted already. However, history shows that a tremendous educational impetus characterized Baptist work between 1850 and 1950. McBeth (1976) comments:

This elevation of educational commitment to the level of missions is a surprising development for a denomination which was once apathetic, and quite often outright opposed, to education. Over the years a considerable transformation has occurred whereby those who formerly opposed schools now sponsor them. (p. 113)

The overwhelming educational progress made during this century of change was in part a result of the promotional efforts of two official bodies: the Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Board of Education of the Northern Baptists. The Education Commission operated semi-officially for over 35 years until it was formally incorporated in 1951 (Deweese, 1994, p. 111). Though the agency’s work was somewhat sporadic during its early years, Cornett (1958a) credits it with stirring “the educational conscience of Southern Baptists” during the problematic Depression years (pp. 392-393). The

American Baptists attempted several times to establish a national educational agency, beginning in 1867. These efforts culminated in the creation of the Board of Education in 1912 (Slaght, 1974, pp. 98-103). The Board concerned itself with improving numerous aspects of American Baptist education, including curriculum, public relations, recruitment, fundraising, investment, and student life (p. 103).

The ministerial education emphasis that has emerged since 1850 has altered many Baptists' conception of pastoral ministry. In the early and middle 1800s, Baptists generally agreed that the proper qualification for ministry was a divine calling. Francis Wayland held this view, stating that

God calls men to the ministry by bestowing upon them suitable endowments, and an earnest desire to use them for His service. Of these thus called, some may not be by nature adapted to the prosecution of a particular course of study. . . . But does not every man require the improvement of his mind in order to preach the Gospel? I think he does. (Mohler, 1995, p. 41)

Mohler (1995) elaborates on Wayland's view of pastoral training:

Wayland . . . is in many ways best described as a pragmatist in terms of ministerial education. . . . Indeed he felt that men who had received the benefit of a classical education . . . could and should extend their study through the formal academic programs of a theological seminary. Nevertheless, Wayland was insistent that based upon Baptist conviction, the ministry should be seen as open to all those whom God had called into the service of His church, regardless of their academic preparation. (p. 40)

Thus, in the early days of Baptist expansion, education was regarded as profitable but not essential.

Over the course of a century, education has come to be recognized by many as a credential for ministry. A 1945 study of theological education in the Northern Baptist Convention included the following statement:

Here we . . . are compelled to face squarely the issue of whether competence is to be regarded as a factor in the choice of the ministry as a calling. . . .

There is no doubt of the fact that in addition to spiritual qualifications the churches need and demand intellectual qualifications. The church needs the best in order that God may be served with mind as well as soul. But the churches are not getting the best minds. (Hartshorne & Froyd, 1945, p. 157)

This statement reflects the unresolved tension between vocation and education. It is the view of the author that supernatural calling is the *sine qua non* of ministry; however, given contemporary society's regard for education, it is expedient for most ministry candidates to seek some kind of formal ministerial preparation. Only in exceptional cases should ministers avoid the pursuit of pastoral training. Vocation constitutes a divine credential, which is most essential; education is a human credential, which is important.

Baptist higher education has served numerous purposes over the course of its history (Godbold, 1944, pp. 46-77; Leonard, 1997, pp. 376-377). There is some controversy as to whether ministerial training has been its primary purpose. The author subscribes to the view that ministerial education was the primary motivation for the founding of most Baptist institutions of higher learning, but that this mission was often forgotten or consciously abandoned as the decades passed.

An institution's overarching purpose is not necessarily revealed by its mission statement, but is perhaps best defined in terms of what its educational programs enable its graduates to do. Given this assumption, it is fitting to inquire concerning the outcomes of Baptist higher education around 1950. In the 1955-1956 school year, there were 51 Southern Baptist colleges, seminaries, and Bible schools in the United States. These institutions enrolled a total of 61,404 students, of which 13,326 (21.7%) were in training for ministry or missionary work (Cornett, 1958b, p. 390). Thus it is fair to say that the preparation of ministers was not the primary concern of Baptist higher education as a whole; nevertheless, the training of clergy and missionary personnel ranked as one of several important purposes. The *Baptist Campus Directory*, published in 1945 by the Board of Education of the Northern Baptist Convention, appears to corroborate this conclusion. According to this volume, the 49 affiliated schools (including 5 academies, 26 colleges, 6 universities, and 12 seminaries) sought to fulfill a variety of distinctive purposes. While many were

engaged directly in the preparation of ministers, it would not be accurate to say that pastoral education was the driving force behind the whole movement.

It seems appropriate to inquire concerning the effectiveness of Baptist institutions that had chosen to focus primarily on ministerial education. Lundquist (1960) found that Baptist seminaries of the 1950s placed a higher emphasis on imparting preaching skills to their students than did contemporary institutions of other denominations (p. 312). In particular, Baptists stressed the areas of “sermon structure, delivery, the nature of preaching, interpretation of Scripture, developmental materials and style” (p. 323). Lacking was significant emphasis on the speech aspects of preaching (p. 322), as well as creativity in the teaching and evaluation of preaching skills (pp. 325-327).

Baptist theological education did demonstrate some weaknesses during this period, as evidenced by studies conducted by the Northern Baptist Convention in 1912 and 1944. The first study confirmed, as was suspected, that the Convention’s higher educational efforts were inferior, both in terms of quantity and quality (Slaght, 1974, p. 102). Indeed, the denomination’s ratio of college students to church membership was remarkably lower than that of other religious groups, and only four of its institutions could be characterized as academically excellent. According to the second study, many students approaching graduation from Northern Baptist Convention seminaries perceived themselves as unprepared to enter the ministry. Areas of particular concern centered around three significant areas, in descending order of importance: practical training, liberal arts education, and theological preparation (Hartshorne & Froyd, 1945, p. 144).

Trends in Baptist Higher Education since 1950

Ministerial education has exerted a subtle but profound influence on the Baptist denomination over the course of the twentieth century. Finke (1994) explains:

Once noted for their small rural churches and poorly trained clergy, churches of the Southern Baptist Convention now resemble their mainline counterparts. In fact, the average Southern Baptist church is larger than those in the mainline and the clergy increasingly hold degrees from an accredited

seminary. Over the past few decades the local churches have undergone a dramatic change in size and leadership. (p. 3)

The elevation of educational standards among Southern Baptist ministers is directly related to the progress of educational institutions sponsored by the denomination. However, while the notion of an educated ministry might appear to be overwhelmingly positive, Finke disagrees. He argues that seminary training has swayed the beliefs and attitudes of its students away from orthodoxy (p. 13); that professional education has increased the incidence of incompatibility between church and pastor (pp. 13-14); and that an emphasis on vocational education has led to the abandonment of the bivocational model of ministry, discouraging the founding of new churches (p. 14).

Given the force of these arguments, it is not difficult to understand why some Baptists are not fully convinced of the value of higher education. Leonard (1997) notes that “many Baptists continue to live in two worlds, at once committed to and suspicious of higher education and its impact on Christian faith. That tension illustrates something of the Baptist contribution to education” (p. 369). Nevertheless, “despite lingering suspicions that education in some way threatens spirituality, few denominations in America have committed so large a proportion of their resources to this cause as have Southern Baptists” (McBeth, 1976, p. 113). It is the view of this author that the fact that ministerial education has led to negative consequences in some instances does not signify that it ought to be abandoned. On the contrary, it should be preserved and refined.

Baptists of today face the ongoing challenge of promoting their higher education programs. As noted by Cornett (1958b) some 40 years ago, there exists a “perennial problem of increasing the degree to which the Baptist population understands the vital role of the Christian college” (p. 390). Gangel (1981) echoes a similar sentiment:

The absolute importance of Christian higher education to the church of Jesus Christ in the late twentieth century cannot be overemphasized. *The church desperately needs the Christian college*, though too often it forgets that need amidst its other problems and pressures. (p. 341)

Thus it appears that there will always be a need for Baptist institutions to rally for the support of their denominational constituency.

Baptist educational institutions will continue to face numerous challenges. Issues in twentieth-century Baptist higher education have included the use of confessional statements to ensure doctrinal integrity of faculty; the relation of the curriculum to evolutionary theory; the balance between academic freedom and responsibility; the relation of institutions to their sponsoring bodies; and the tension between theological education and vocational training (Leonard, 1997, pp. 378-382; Rogers, 1987, pp. 687-688). Some of these controversies remain unresolved. And even if they were to be resolved, it is certain that conflicts will continue to rise between faculty, administrators, students, denominational leaders, local communities, and government agencies.

Baptists have a duty to keep higher education a high priority. In so doing they will not only provide for the development of spiritual leaders, but will also encourage the integration of Christian faith and scholarship. De Jong (1990) explains:

Historically, the church has been involved in higher education and this involvement must continue. Higher education is the chief marketplace where worldviews, values, and ideas are discussed, shaped, and appropriated. Silence from the church within the chief marketplace of ideas is an abdication of responsibility. (p. 88)

The Future of Research on Baptist Higher Education

All things considered, the story of Baptist higher education is a fascinating one. It is a tapestry, a fabric composed of the choices of individuals and institutions that dared to make a difference in their communities, in their denomination, in their country, in their world. It is a story worth preserving for the education and inspiration of future generations of Baptists.

The field of Baptist higher education offers much potential for continued research. There is a particular need for historical studies that encompass more than a single segment of the denomination. The issue of education as a credential for ministry needs to be researched from both historical and ideological points

of view. The role of the Bible college in pastoral training needs to be explored. And the issue of academic freedom in Baptist institutions merits continued research.

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