

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

LASTING LESSONS AND LEGACY INFLUENCES: CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP  
CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUTHERN BAPTISTS  
WHO OVERCAME JIM CROW

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Aabram G. Marsh

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2022

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## ABSTRACT

The legacy of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement was the social change its protests inspired. However, its leadership and moral compass were set by Christian theologians and ministers. These leaders moved the nation to recognize the humanity of African-Americans, demonize the sin of racism, and motivate their fellow Americans to oppose Jim Crow segregation. The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to examine and identify the Christian leadership characteristics of influential legacy leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Further, this study evaluated applying their lasting lessons and relevant principles for present-day Christian leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization. These transformational leaders stood out from their fellow Southern Baptist congregants by openly promoting their theological convictions that every human being is made in the image of God. This grounded theory research examined contemporary Christian leaders' ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics, which are necessary to combat injustice. This study identified leadership qualities for analysis and applicability by assessing the transferability of these traits displayed by select Southern Baptist Convention leaders who promoted racial desegregation during the Civil Rights Era. This resulted in developing an emerging theory identified as the Ethically Courageous Christian and associated Christian Leadership Characteristics.

*Keywords:* Christian leadership, ethical leadership, evangelical theology, the image of God, moral courage, Southern Baptist Convention, and transformational leadership.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Letitia, and my children, Gabriel and Leila. They are the most important people in my world, and I am so grateful to be called a husband and father to them all. Accordingly, their tireless support and encouragement enabled me to persevere and accomplish this tremendous undertaking over the past three years.

From the outset, it was Letitia who encouraged me to pursue a doctorate in education through Liberty University after we both retired from military service in Northern Virginia. My wife always knew of my lifelong ambition to earn a doctoral degree. Similarly, she understood my strong faith and passion for leadership. Accordingly, her wise counsel suggested I consider this degree program in Christian Leadership, as it is uniquely suited for me to earn a respected terminal degree in a subject matter compatible to my core beliefs.

Likewise, Gabriel and Leila kept me perpetually motivated to embody the very education and leadership principles that continue to instill upon them. With every course and assignment I completed, I worked consistently to do my best and finish strong, just as I have encouraged them. Similarly, they remained been my biggest cheerleaders. They continuously checked on my progress when I worked late on a project and wished me a good night before going to bed. Likewise, they pulled me away for a needed break to watch a movie when I would have otherwise labored in my office on another essay. They are the best children a father could have ever wished.

Lastly, I dedicate this research to my parents, William and Teresita. My parents wanted me to attain my highest academic potential. More importantly, they imbued me with a sense of service and a desire to learn. Their many lessons, shared by word and deed from their respective experiences, conveyed a perpetual sense that any achievement is possible through perseverance.

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First and foremost, I must give all honor to our heavenly father and his blessed son, Jesus Christ. Without their providence and blessings, I would not be able to take this educational journey. Furthermore, your Holy Spirit helped navigate me to pursue a doctoral degree in Christian Leadership through Liberty University when I was convinced that I would earn a doctorate in history elsewhere. This degree serves as living proof that the Trinity has the final say in guiding our goals and endeavors to benefit the kingdom.

Thank you to the ten Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated church leaders who granted me precious time from their respective busy schedules to sit for an interview as part of this research. Your insights and comments were essential in helping me discover the Christian Leadership Characteristics described in this text. Furthermore, your shared wisdom enabled the generation of this emerging theory that was birthed in this study, titled the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model. Your efforts will allow present-day Christian leaders to learn from the example of legacy leaders to reverse racial polarization and combat injustice.

Finally, I sincerely acknowledge gratitude to all of my professors in Liberty University's Rawlings School of Divinity. Little did I know at the time, but each of you helped inspire me to pursue this topic for research. Every assignment and lesson guided me to this study. Additionally, a special thank you goes to my dissertation committee for your direction and encouragement throughout the writing of this document. To Dr. Gary Bredfeldt and Dr. Troy Temple, your steadfast inspiration and dedicated efforts to support your students is truly remarkable.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT)

Christian Life Commission (CLC)

Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS)

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS)

United States (U.S.)

## CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

### Introduction

Throughout United States history, Christians led by God's Holy Spirit positively reformed their communities and the nation. From the spiritual revivals of the Great Awakening during the colonial period to the abolitionists of the antebellum era fighting against the evils of the vicious institution of human slavery, these leaders revolutionized seemingly impervious societal structures. These devoted believers exemplified these ideals:

Christ-followers are to be publicly engaged because transformation occurs as individuals within communities live out the good news of the kingdom. Christ was a public figure who impacted the world with the words of life that he spoke, the quality of life that he lived, and the acts of service and compassion that he performed. (Pettit, 2016, p. 31)

Christian leaders labored to transform the nation's moral conscience towards the humane treatment and acceptance of fellow human beings. For example, many abolitionists who fought to end slavery also worked to have these fundamental human rights codified in law after the Civil War with the passage of three constitutional amendments. Despite their valiant efforts, legalized segregation was reinstituted within the former Confederacy to disenfranchise the African-American population, subject them to ruthless violence, and relegate them into a formal state of racial apartheid called *Jim Crow* segregation for nearly a century.

Although viewed as a political or social movement, the Civil Rights Era that overthrew the brutality of Jim Crow segregation was arguably a national spiritual revival. The religious leaders of this crusade ended legalized discrimination in the U.S. by leveraging the strengths of their faith and exemplifying the doctrine of the image of God. Their ethical leadership and moral courage, often in the face of personal peril, unified citizens and illustrated through their works and words that as Jesus Christ is the true image of God, all of humanity are also God's reflection.

Christian leaders can help reverse contemporary societal polarization and combat injustice by examining the legacy of transformational leadership and moral virtue of the theologians and ministers of the Civil Rights Era. The positive model of these visionaries galvanized global support by providing the framework for countless efforts to defeat other forms of institutional discrimination. They employed theological doctrines that "asserted the sacredness of the human personality, attacked segregation as sin and advocated nonviolent strategies against Jim Crow that required both courage and conscience" (Dickerson, 2005, p. 219).

This qualitative grounded theory study examined and identified the leadership characteristics of Southern Baptist Convention leaders (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) who supported desegregation. These Christian leaders faced hostility, personal risks, and professional disassociation from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and their communities. These visionaries played a significant role in transforming the SBC's theology to support integration and, eventually, racial equality. They encouraged other Southerners to reject institutional racial discrimination. Through the words and deeds of their transformational leadership, they inspired fellow Southern Baptists to live up to their stated image of God beliefs.

This research hypothesizes that the efforts of these transformational leaders of the SBC defeated the organization's original racially-biased interpretation of Scripture used to justify racial discrimination and segregation (Southern Baptist Convention, 1995; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). These Christian leaders labored to transform their fellow Southerners' moral conscience towards the humane treatment and acceptance of fellow human beings. Their efforts led to a conversion in conscience and belief of the American South's largest and most influential religious organization.



The research examined the leadership traits of select Christian leaders in opposition to the SBC's approach to Jim Crow segregation. Further, this study interviewed pastors and theologians affiliated with the SBC to examine themes related to moral courage and ethical leadership for forming into a core concept theory. The research identified distinctive ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage lessons applicable for present-day leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and inspire Christians to combat injustice.

The introduction to this study describes the theological, historical, theoretical, and sociological context of Christian ministers and intellectuals' efforts to counter and challenge institutional racial segregation and discrimination throughout the Jim Crow Era. This chapter presents this subject within the context of the problem faced explicitly by five transformational SBC leaders during a period in which the organization and most of its members openly supported Jim Crow segregation. This is followed by the purpose statement, research questions, assumptions, delimitations, and key term definitions. Next, an explanation of this study's significance reveals that this research attempts to enrich an area of knowledge, the subject of the response of Southern Christians to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, which has been relatively untouched in recent decades. The introduction concludes by summarizing the methodology and design for this research.

### **Background of the Problem**

Religious intellectuals inspired the Civil Rights Era's strategic approach to nonviolent civil disobedience. They framed the movements' major themes of the sacredness of humanity, the sin of racial segregation, and moral acceptance of protest. These scholars and ministers drew upon theological doctrines, to include the image of God and beloved community, which transformed how Christians could no longer blithely accept the dehumanization and systemic

oppressive nature of Jim Crow. Moreover, within the framework of the doctrine of the image of God, these theologians clearly articulated how God's Word upheld universal humanity and condemned the sin of discrimination. These scholars and educators believed that "Christianity ought to be color blind and desegregated" (Savage, 2007, p. 786).

### **Theological Context**

From its inception at the 1845 Triennial Convention, the SBC relied upon Christian fundamentalists' theology to rationalize racial segregation upon the hermeneutics of their slaveholding forbearers (Morrison, 2018). For example, they believed that promoting racial 'mingling' and intermarriage violated biblical teaching because it "undermined the God-ordained separation of the races" (Leonard, 1999). Such racially-biased interpretations of Scripture remained foundational in the justification and support of Jim Crow segregation, which violently overthrew the interracial period of Reconstruction after the U.S. Civil War and continued throughout the end of the Civil Rights Movement.

Transformational religious leaders joined forces and leveraged their God-ordained strengths to influence political leaders and American citizens to overturn inhumane Jim Crow laws that legalized segregation throughout the U.S. According to Hughes (2009), this success came from the groundwork of their theological foundation, which contained two crucial theological underpinnings. First, the doctrine of the image of God describes the holiness of all human life. The second is the teaching of the *beloved community*, which sought for believers to bring the Kingdom of God on earth through love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

*Imago Dei*, or the *image of God*, describes the holiness of all human life. This concept is drawn from the Bible. The term is first found in the story of the creation of Man when God said:

Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures

that crawl on the earth." So, God created man in his image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female. (*Christian Standard Bible*, 2017, Gen 1:26-27).

It has since been deeply ingrained in various social science disciplines ranging from anthropology to sociology and from ethics to theology. In particular, the doctrine of the image of God has been invoked in religious and secular debates to define and justify human dignity (Lusting, 2017). The applicability of this doctrine to the selected transformational leaders' theological approach is central to this research.

The core basis of this principle is that all of humanity bears the image of God; therefore, all human beings are equal representatives of Him on earth. Accordingly, every life is sacred because all of humanity takes His image (Wenham & Hubbard, 2014). This perspective justifies the belief that God equally values all people regardless of their background, opinions, or physical condition. Consequently, this serves as the ultimate moral basis to encourage societies "to respect and protect the dignity and life of all human beings" (Kilner, 2018, p. 6).

Hamilton (1990) wrote that the doctrine of the image of God applies to every human being because "all of humanity is related to God" (Hamilton, 1990, p. 120). Moreover, it "affirm[s] Jesus as the perfect standard to which Christians are called to conform" (Lusting, 2017, p. 318). These foundational elements serve as the biblical basis establishing the understanding that human dignity can neither be taken nor given because the "image of God is all-inclusive and in no way qualified to exclude anyone" (Cunningham et al., 1984, p. 213).

Since all of humanity bears the image of God and Christ equally values all of humanity, this democratizes the belief that all people are the children of God. Moreover, although God allows humans to rule over other people, they are to do so justly. Lusting (2017) explains that the doctrine of the image of God has been invoked in religious and secular debates to define and

justify human rights. Therefore, this recognition of humanity's sacredness lay at the core of the scriptural basis for Christians combatting the virulent racism of Jim Crow segregation.

According to Dorrien (2018) and Dickerson (2005), the theological basis for the U.S. Civil Rights Movement began with scholars like Benjamin Mays and Howard Thurman as early as the 1920s and 1930s. Although many ascribe the theological idea of the *beloved community* to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., this concept was shaped by his mentor, Howard Thurman (Hughes, 2009). The idea of the beloved community outlined in Thurman's 1949 book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, proposed that faith provided the source to seek universal fellowship. This was influential in transforming the theological approaches of other religious leaders by advancing the "interrelatedness of all life, the primacy of religious experience, personality-centered Christianity, the moral order of the universe, the love, power, and justice of God, the dignity and worth of human personality, and the social nature of human existence" (Fluker, 1990, p. 36-37).

### **Historical Context**

Gradually, after the U.S. Civil War, as ex-Confederates regained their civic privileges, they worked extensively to wrest control of local and state governments by overthrowing the "biracial state governments and erect[ing] strict racial codes to exclude African-Americans from politics" (Ward, 2008, p. 9). Simultaneously, their ideological sympathizers launched an onslaught of violence and terrorist acts against African-American citizens to disenfranchise them of their rights and freedoms throughout the South. Jim Crow segregation codified the complete marginalization of African-Americans under stringent laws codified by the Supreme Court's *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case in 1896 to formalize racial apartheid (Franklin & Moss, 2000).

Rehwaldt-Alexander (2004) indicated that governments and vigilantes throughout the former Confederacy viciously enforced this system of discrimination through legal manipulation

and economic disparities for the next half of a century. Combined with this institutional racism was a corresponding wave of violent repression and terror. Most of the violent acts occurred after the Ku Klux Klan was reestablished in 1915. For instance, according to Franklin and Moss (2000), in 1919 alone, over 70 African Americans were recorded as lynched, and at least 10 were soldiers still wearing their uniforms.

Despite the inhumane treatment and prejudice, African-Americans and their supporters continued to combat these evils to regain their rights as full citizens. However, it would not be until the conclusion of the Civil Rights Era, over one hundred years after the end of the American Civil War, that they would defeat the brutal and oppressive system of legal segregation and again be re-enfranchised throughout the former states of the Confederacy.

During this era, the guidance of religious leaders unified citizens across the country. It inspired the nation to reckon with the evils of Jim Crow segregation throughout the American South. Their tenacity and conviction provided the moral compass to the movement that transformed U.S. society and changed the entire world. They revealed that all human beings bear the image of God, are equally valued by Him, and deserve human dignity.

According to Ward (2008), many Southern political and religious leaders actively plotted strategies to counter the impending U.S. Civil Rights Movement as early as the New Deal in the 1930s and continued throughout the next several decades under the plan of *massive resistance*. This was their organized approach to maintain the institution of racial segregation and discrimination while "replac[ing] reactionary racism with a language of constitutional conservatism" (Ward, 2008, p. ii). Taylor's (2016) interview of four historians on the response of evangelicals to the Civil Rights Movement reveals that overall, most Southerners acquiesced or actively supported racial discrimination. Phillips (2013) supports this assessment by explaining

that the Southern Baptists' "strategy of categorizing segregation as merely a 'social' problem rather than a moral one meant that pastors...could utilize social, typically conservative, arguments in order to maintain the status quo" (Phillips, 2013, p. 11).

Roach's 2009 dissertation titled *The Southern Baptist Convention and Civil Rights, 1954-1995* delivers an overview of the body's transition from supporting Jim Crow segregation to its public mea culpa in 1995, which apologized for its role in defending the racial prejudice throughout most of its history. Manis (1987 and 1999) wrote a book and an essay explaining the initial arguments of Southern Baptists to combat the U.S. Civil Rights Movement during its early beginnings because "its goal of integration symbolized an absolute threat" (Manis, 1999). Stephens' (2016) article details how evangelicals' opposition reached a crescendo at the high watermark of the U.S. Civil Rights Era during the passage and immediate aftermath of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Finally, in 2018, the SBTS published the *Report on Slavery and Racism in the History of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, a comprehensive history acknowledging its legacy in perpetuating "the horrifying realities of American slavery, Jim Crow segregation, racism, and even the avowal of white racial supremacy" (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

King's memoir, *Why We Can't Wait* (1964), attributed the Civil Rights Movement's success to the strategy of exercising nonviolent direct action and peaceful civil disobedience, which frustrated the attempts to quell boycotts and protests. Most notable to this research is his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which provides a moral and spiritual argument to convince other religious leaders to support the movement and defeat the sin of segregation.

According to Feagin (1989), Americans of all races and religions rallied to support activists participating in waves of protests from the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956 to the

Greensboro, North Carolina lunch counter sit-ins in 1960, and to the demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. However, Franklin and Moss (2000) detailed state-sponsored and mob violence led by staunch segregationists combating these protests. However, this terrorism galvanized the resolve of American demonstrators fighting for equality and liberty and woke the nation's leaders and citizens to act against this form of racial apartheid.

### **Theoretical Context**

The Christian leaders described in this study helped lead the SBC and their communities through a period of great discord, not unlike today. They labored to transform the nation's moral conscience towards the humane treatment and equal acceptance of all human beings. In the face of hostility and sacrifice, they helped lead a fight against discrimination of their fellow Americans in defying their peers' prevailing views.

To inspire change within the SBC, they had to transform from its racially biased theology, and this required an appeal to the body's core beliefs. According to David Bebbington, the four main attributes of evangelical religion are "conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism" (Bebbington, 1989, p. 4). The SBC subscribes to this evangelical religious theology, and any change to its members' approach to racial equality required biblical applicability, local and congregational transformation of theological understanding to racism, and appeal to the individual repentance of the sin of racial bias (Roach, 2009).

The lasting impact of these select Christian leaders was the SBC's switch towards the equal treatment of African-Americans and its wholesale conversion to accept them in the image of God. Thus, this study's guiding theory is Bernard Bass' *transformational leadership* concept, which supports the premise that these leaders stimulated the SBC's change from its prevailing theological approach to eventually promote racial equality by inspiring believers to set aside self-

interests and live up to their image of God beliefs. In doing so, these leaders showed ethical leadership and moral courage in the face of the hostility of their denomination to promote racial equality, support civil rights leaders, publish works endorsing desegregation, or contest racially-biased interpretations of Scripture.

Religious intellectuals like Richard Niebuhr and Howard Thurman wrote about Christian ethics. The subject has since been applied to leadership theory and multiple other disciplines. Accordingly, ethical leadership emphasizes demonstrated moral conduct and promotes correspondingly honorable behavior in interpersonal relationships (Brown & Trevino, 2006).

Frunza (2017) expanded on the concepts of religious ethics to define ethical leadership in a global context. Accordingly, individuals embody ethical leadership not only in their professions but also in their entire life experiences. Another study by Demirtas and Akdogan (2014) found that ethical leaders are role models, and their efforts directly influence perceptions of a moral organizational climate. Similarly, Hansen et al. (2015) conducted a study that further validated this premise and assessed how individuals develop their ethical climate perceptions.

Zhu et al. (2016) tested a model to examine leaders' moral identity to predict ethical leadership. The researchers found that ethical leadership influenced their subordinates' moral attentiveness, which strongly correlated to their moral identity. Another study assessed the comparison between ethical leadership and whistleblowing. It discovered that "moral courage plays a critical role in predicting the degree to which an employee may have the intent to report wrongdoing" (Cheng et al., 2017, p. 125).

Research such as these validates the assessment that the identified select leaders of the SBC were not situationally ethical. Moreover, their behaviors are products of the heart and soul.



Consequently, their moral courage amid personal risks eventually influenced the transformation of the SBC's stance on racial discrimination, and their example applies to today's leaders.

### **Sociological Context**

Various influential Christian fundamentalists' rationalized racial segregation upon the hermeneutics of their slaveholding forbearers. Bill Leonard (1999) published an article detailing that these individuals "linked biblical inerrancy to social and cultural practice...[and] used the Bible to defend the holding of slaves" (p. 65). This racially-biased theological belief continued into the Jim Crow Era. Dupont (2015) further explained that a consequence of this legacy was that by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in most U.S. Southern states, Protestants defended racial hierarchy, which colored their theology. Harvey (2011) explained that Christian teachings throughout the former Confederacy codified racial prejudice in the culture's fabric. This prevailing racially-biased interpretation of the Bible provided the theological rationale for legalized racial oppression.

Evans' (2009) essay evaluated how evangelical Christian theology transformed from opposing civil rights protests to eventually pushing for social justice by African-Americans. In a second article, he detailed the moderation approach of Billy Graham on the racial and social changes and its effect on influencing the future of the evangelical movement (Evans, 2015).

Phillips' dissertation (2013) is a thoroughly researched analysis of three Southern Baptist theologians' efforts to support the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. This study details how Will Campbell, Thomas Maston, and Henlee Barnett promoted racial equality amid the reluctance of the broader community of Southern Protestants who collectively desired to maintain the status quo of Jim Crow segregation. The writing explains how these religious intellectuals based their collective understanding of the racial bias on the Bible, church history, and societal norms.

One of the individuals covered in this earlier work, Thomas Maston, was the focus of another dissertation by Morrison (2018). This research argued that Maston's writings, leadership, and theological framework were integral to influencing the future change of the SBC's stance on race relations. The author also asserts that Maston's works may provide a blueprint for racial reconciliation within the church today.

Southern Baptist leaders supportive of ending racial segregation were motivated by the belief that Jesus valued all of humanity. Based upon the doctrine of the image of God, they followed Christ's example by convincing other Christians and their Southern society to care for the disenfranchised in the case of Jesus Christ. However, despite their appeal to biblical principles, Christian ethics, and love of humanity, this approach was not initially supported by most of their fellow Southern believers. During massive resistance, the latter subscribed to segregation founded upon the belief in racial superiority (Dickerson, 2005).

### **Researcher' Relationship to the Problem**

The U.S. is undergoing its most significant political and social divisions since at least the 1960s (Pierre, 2018). There is increasing polarization between many Americas on topics ranging from economics to politics and environment to religion. Comparisons of generational, political, ethnic, gender, and religious groups reveal various issues in which different segments reflect strong disagreements.

Individuals are divided in their opinions, but they are also increasingly vitriolic in describing their opponents. This fragmentation and hardening of perspectives prevent open dialogue and demonize others who share different viewpoints. Such refusal to communicate further inoculates each group from alternative views, increases the distortion of opposing ideas, and hastens the cycle of social division. Various factors are resulting from "spiritual, social, and

cultural shifts" are sources of the ongoing division and hardening of perspectives (Barna Group, 2018).

Christians are not impervious to the ongoing polarization in U.S. society, and this cultural and political schism has profound implications for churches and their leaders. Cox and Jones (2017) found significant differences in the political ideology between Christians' primary demographics. Additionally, sizable increases in Americans who no longer identify as Christians can be attributed to increased skepticism of religion, political party alignment of denominations, and church leaders' revelations of wrongdoing and scandals.

The fragmentation of perspectives of the various segments of society and within Christian denominations is one cause for concern. However, the contempt and falsehoods spread amongst like-minded populations seeking to discredit opposing opinions and groups are even more damaging. The fearmongering and hatred of people of different political views, cultures, ethnicities, and religions increases social divisions by casting the non-dominant segments as 'others.' The result is that these people are segregated, disenfranchised, and discriminated against. Therefore, reversing the polarization of contemporary U.S. society requires similar involvement at every level. This includes church leaders motivating their congregations, national leaders to address issues of injustice, and individual Christians reflecting compassion for others through the lens of the image of God.

This concern regarding current societal fragmentation grew from a desire to study and discover how leaders responded to that period's social divisions during the Civil Rights Era. In particular, the researcher sought to learn how the leaders of SBC transformed the world's largest Baptist denomination to transition from its original theology based upon a racially-biased interpretation of Scripture to its eventual stance supporting racial equality (Pennington, 2016).

Surprisingly, contrary to the vast historiography on African-American civil rights leaders, examination of literature related to their Southern Baptist counterparts' actions uncovered limited scholarly and primary sources. Moreover, the research on the segregationists who promoted institutional racial discrimination through their massive resistance strategy discovered equally minuscule recent literature.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Most Americans can recite the names of the most famous Christian leaders of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rev. Ralph Abernathy. However, the identities of the other religious counterparts who risked their safety and disassociation from their denomination and communities to support racial equality are largely unknown. These influential Christian leaders' efforts were essential to motivating members of their faith to recognize the humanity of African-Americans, demonize the sin of segregation, and transform the hearts of their Christian brethren against the brutal inhumanity of Jim Crow.

Hence, there is relatively little research on transformational leaders of the SBC. At least four recent dissertations were written about SBC reformers' efforts on race relations (Morrison, 2018; Pennington, 2016; Phillips, 2013; and Rehwaladt-Alexander, 2004). Phillips (2013) highlighted this gap in research by stating, "there is still very little ethical analysis of white, southern Christians and their responses to the Civil Rights Movement" (p. 9).

The consequence is that the prevailing literature provides a limited and one-dimensional perspective of the nuance of Southern Baptists' conscience and perspectives on the perpetuation of Jim Crow segregation throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, due to the limited historiography, Southern Baptists and the broader demographic of Southerners are often caricatured as a monolithic bloc universally committed to preserving racial segregation.

However, the available research indicates that this group had sharp divisions battling for their community's soul and society (Chappell, 1992).

This study extends existing knowledge and assumes the premise that the efforts of select prominent ethical leaders of the SBC transformed the body's prevailing theology to promote racial equality eventually and challenged other Southern Baptists to live up to their image of God beliefs. They did so by defying Southern society's prevailing views to openly promote racial equality, support civil rights leaders, and publish works to endorse racial desegregation or contest racially-biased interpretations of Scripture.

The literature review in Chapter Two provides the reader with background on relevant research necessary to understand how the leaders of the SBC transitioned their denomination from its original theology. Their efforts led to a conversion in conscience and belief of the American South's largest and most influential religious organization and its members that eventually enabled most Southerners to reject the institution of Jim Crow segregation. This examination of literature surveys the significant arguments that white Protestant leaders employed to transform their fellow Southerners' moral conscience towards the humane treatment and acceptance of fellow African-American citizens by ending the perpetuation of Jim Crow segregation throughout the states of the former Confederacy.

This grounded theory study examines and identifies these transformational leaders' ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage. The research surveyed pastors and theologians affiliated with the SBC. The study identified distinctive leadership characteristics applicable for present-day leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization by addressing and inspiring Christians to combat injustice.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to examine and identify the Christian leadership characteristics of influential legacy leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Further, this study evaluated applying their lasting lessons and relevant principles for present-day Christian leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, what effect did the advocacy of select Christian leaders have on the eventual transformation of the SBC's theology away from the racially biased interpretations of Scripture used to justify Jim Crow segregation?

**RQ2.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how have contemporary Southern Baptist congregants challenged racial prejudice and lived up to their stated image of God beliefs?

**RQ3.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how well are current efforts to improve racial equality and race relations within the SBC succeeding?

**RQ4.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how are these select Christian leaders' leadership characteristics and moral courage applicable to contemporary leaders seeking to reverse today's polarization by addressing injustice issues?

### **Assumptions and Delimitations**

#### **Research Assumptions**

This grounded theory study examines the ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage of transformational leaders of the SBC who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Further, this study seeks to assess the applicability of relevant principles and characteristics for present-day leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization by inspiring fellow Christians to combat injustice. The assumptions of the study included the following:

1. The advocacy of select transformational Christian leaders was essential for the eventual

transformation of the SBC's theology away from the racially biased interpretations of Scripture used to justify Jim Crow segregation.

2. The advocacy of select transformational Christian leaders to challenge racial prejudice and live up to their stated image of God beliefs motivated members of their faith to recognize African-Americans' humanity, demonize the sin of racism, and transform race relations within the SBC.
3. The ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage of select transformational Christian leaders apply to present-day leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization by inspiring fellow Christians to combat injustice.

### **Delimitations of the Research Design**

This grounded theory research examined Christian leadership characteristics necessary to reverse current polarization and combat injustice. This study identified these qualities for analysis and applicability by assessing the transferability of efforts of select SBC leaders who promoted racial desegregation during the Civil Rights Era. These reformers motivated other Southern Baptist congregants to challenge existing racial prejudices and live up to their stated image of God beliefs.

The transformational leaders identified from this earlier period stood out from their fellow Southern Baptist congregants by openly promoting their theological convictions that every human being is made in the image of God. Accordingly, this research recognizes that the views and perspectives of the contemporary pastors and theologians interviewed for this study may not fully represent the opinions and viewpoints of the majority of the SBC or its membership. Likewise, the delimitations of the study included the following:

1. This research is delimited to religious leaders affiliated with the SBC who may discuss their ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage within the denomination.
2. Accordingly, the individuals selected for this study are also delimited to leaders with adequate backgrounds and knowledge to address race relations within the SBC.
3. Further, this research is delimited to participants with experience or currently serving in the following capacities: church pastors, leaders who oversaw SBC-sponsored

ministries, faculty members of any of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries, or members of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

### Definition of Terms

1. *Civil Rights Era*: Period commencing with the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, through the U.S. Congress passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and concluding with the integration of public institutions and facilities into the 1970s (Hall, 2007). During this era, millions of Americans conducted peaceful protests to bring attention to their fellow citizens, the dehumanization of Jim Crow segregation. It can be likened to one of the nation's religious revivals, akin to the "Third Great Awakening" (Chappell, 2002, p. 584).
2. *Desegregation*: The practice of the "removal of barriers, legal or social, that have served injustices based on one's race." (Morrison, 2018, p. 10).
3. *Ethical Leadership*: The leadership style consistently emphasizes truthful, virtuous, and honest behaviors (Demirtas & Akdogan, 2014). Characterized as individuals who willfully faced hostility, personal risks, and professional disassociation from their denomination to openly promote racial equality, support civil rights leaders, publish works endorsing desegregation, or contest racially-biased interpretations of Scripture.
4. *Evangelical Theology*: Approach attributed to David Bebbington that is based upon four elements: conversion—"life-changing religious experience," biblicism—"Bible as ultimate religious authority," activism—"sharing the faith," and crucicentrism—Christ-focus (Roach, 2009, p. 3).
5. *Image of God*: Describes the holiness of all human life. The core basis is that all of humanity bears God's image, and therefore all human beings are equal representatives of Him on earth. It serves as the ultimate moral basis to encourage societies "to respect and protect the dignity and life of all human beings" (Kilner, 2018, p. 6).
6. *Jim Crow Era*: Period beginning at the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and lasting until the end of the Civil Rights Era. This age was known for defeating the interracial democracy of the post-U.S. Civil War period throughout the former Confederate states through rhetoric, violence, and laws to formally institute pervasive racial segregation discrimination throughout social and cultural life (Ward, 2008).
7. *Jim Crow Segregation*: A form of racial apartheid instituted mainly throughout the U.S. South defended by social order, police enforcement, and vigilante violence. State-sponsored, race-based laws separated all public facilities and institutions (i.e., restaurants, restrooms, buses, and schools). It established a "color line" that required state and local governments to maintain two systems of public establishments that African-American and white citizens could use (Franklin & Moss, 2000, p. 290).



8. *Massive Resistance*: Organized Southern political and social movement beginning during the middle of the New Deal in 1936 and lasting throughout the U.S. Civil Rights Era. The purpose of this effort was to maintain the racially segregated social order and prevent civil/human rights reform through strategies ranging from racially biased theological interpretations, voter suppression, propaganda, rhetoric, and violence (Ward, 2008).
9. *Moral Courage*: This concept is understood as an ethical crisis faced when "there is no place of security, no guarantee of safety, no certainty of refuge" (Prickett, 1958). Further, Osswald et al. (2010) indicated exercising moral courage comes at considerable personal risk and without direct reward.
10. *Racism*: The ethnocentrically biased belief that one's racial or cultural group is unique and, therefore, superior to another (Valencia, 2008).
11. *Racial Inequality*: The combination of individual, social, and structural discriminatory and segregation practices designed to inhibit racial parity and equal opportunity (Rehwaladt-Alexander, 2004).
12. *Segregationist*: Defenders the status quo racially discriminatory social order of the former Confederate states who willingly fought to prevent racial integration and civil/human rights (Chappell, 1992).
13. *Transformational Leadership*: Style of leadership inspiring and influencing followers' achievement through intellect and charisma to transcend self-interest and achieve organizational goals. (Bass, 1990).

### **Significance of the Study**

Throughout U.S. history, Christian leaders committed to the well-being of others and acted in the face of personal peril to assault injustice. The guidance of religious leaders like these influential leaders of the SBC helped their congregations and society to reckon with the evils of Jim Crow segregation throughout the states of the former Confederacy. They labored to transform the nation's moral conscience towards the humane treatment and acceptance of fellow human beings. In doing so, these religious leaders joined forces and leveraged their God-ordained strengths to influence political leaders and American citizens to overturn unjust laws that legalized segregation throughout the U.S. Their ethical leadership and moral courage helped

inspire a movement that transformed U.S. society and changed the world. They revealed that all human beings bear the image of God and are equally valued by Him.

This movement to end racial segregation in the U.S. was led by religious leaders who rightfully cast this as a moral imperative for the nation and could be interpreted as one of the nation's dominant religious revivals akin to the First and Second Great Awakenings (Chappell, 2002). Therefore, it was not merely a political or social movement. It was a spiritual crusade that recognized the Southern society's and denominations' collaboration with the sinfulness of Jim Crow segregation. It consequently sought to reestablish the essential freedom of human dignity as commonly understood under the doctrine of the image of God and the "all were one in Jesus Christ" (Moore, 2006, p. 106).

Segregationists fought to maintain institutionalized racial discrimination throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a strategy of massive resistance. Their efforts were not merely for political or cultural aims. The segregationists' approach also proved theologically potent because:

Racism is not only sinful and heretical in its denial of the equal dignity of all God's children...In place of God...[it] substitutes an idol that leaves its devotees untroubled by massive injustice and unaware that they are not worshipping the true and living God of love and justice (Nilson, 2010, p. 88).

The illustration of these transformational leaders of the SBC during the period of massive resistance reveals how Christian leaders and followers of an earlier period of national debate worked on healing societal divisions caused by the dehumanizing treatment of some of its citizens. The appeal of these exemplary Christian leaders to this study is that they stood and spoke against acts of violence and brutality in efforts to evoke a moral and ethical public outcry that "every single violation of this limit, be it based on national, racial or ideological grounds is here condemned" (Wenham & Hubbard, 2014, p. 194). Consequently, this study assesses how

their example of ethical leadership and moral courage may apply to today's evangelical Christian leaders seeking to heal polarization by standing against injustice.

### **Summary of the Design**

#### **Research Population**

This study aims to interview approximately 10-12 religious leaders that have been associated with the SBC, any of the Southern Baptist theological seminaries, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), or a Southern Baptist church. More specifically, the participants were deemed knowledgeable to address matters of race relations within the denomination. Further, they discussed ethical leadership and moral courage regarding race relations within the SBC.

#### **Research Sample(s) and Sampling Technique**

This study reviewed relevant literature by select transformational leaders of the SBC (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) to assess ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics during their efforts to advise Christian leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, publish works to support racial equality, or contest racially-biased interpretations of Scripture. The research collected and analyzed publicly available qualitative documents to examine and evaluate the grounded theory of their transformational leadership legacy.

Moreover, this study incorporated discussions of pastors and theologians affiliated with the SBC to examine familiar themes related to moral courage and ethical leadership for formation into a core concept theory. The individuals asked to participate in this study were selected due to their association with the SBC, any of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries, the ERLC, or any Southern Baptist church.

The researcher reviewed the websites for the SBC's ERLC and all six Southern Baptist theological seminaries to help identify and vet the initial participants for this study. Additional interviewees were thoughtfully selected to be part of this grounded study analysis employing the exponential discriminative snowball sampling methodology (Boise State University, n.d.; Dudovskiy, n.d.). Accordingly, the analyst requested selected interviewees to nominate subsequent individuals for recruitment as potential participants in the study until the objective research population was reached.

This research purposefully strove for the diversity of the interviewees' worldviews and backgrounds. Accordingly, this study solicited at least two African-American, Asian-American, or Hispanic members affiliated with the SBC to assess perceptions of people of color within the denomination. At least two women were sought for inclusion as interviewees. A diverse interview panel was necessary to assess the applicability of the proposed grounded theory research model for a more culturally, and gender-diverse congregation of Southern Baptists.

### **Methodological Design**

The methodology of this qualitative grounded theory study examined the theological and theoretical frameworks for understanding the ethical leadership and moral courage of select Christian leaders in opposition to the SBC's approach to Jim Crow segregation. Further, this study exercised a key instrument of qualitative analysis (the interview) to survey pastors and theologians affiliated with the SBC. The research identified distinctive ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage lessons applicable for present-day leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and inspire Christians to combat injustice.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide the reader with background on relevant research necessary to understand how the leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) transitioned their denomination from its original theology. Southern Christians drew upon this racially-biased interpretation of Scripture to support and defend racial segregation and discrimination to its eventual stance supporting racial integration. The Christian leaders who helped reverse racial apartheid in the United States and combat institutionalized injustice allied with African-American and interfaith theologians and ministers to articulate a theological framework that led to a conversion in conscience and beliefs of the American South's largest and most influential religious organization. This examination of literature surveys the significant arguments that white Protestant leaders employed to transform their fellow Southerners' moral conscience towards the humane treatment and acceptance of fellow human beings by ending the perpetuation of Jim Crow segregation towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Accordingly, the structure of this literature review is designed to assist in this analysis as it is divided into five sections: 1) Theological Framework, 2) Theoretical Framework, 3) Related Literature, 4) Rationale for Study, and 5) Research Profile.

### **Theological Framework**

From the arrival of the first Europeans to North America, Christians led spiritual revivals to improve their communities and collective society to inspire and reform the moral conscience of their fellow citizens. Arguably, the most recent spiritual revival in the U.S. occurred during the Civil Rights Movement. Led primarily by Christian theologians and ministers, this crusade to combat racial segregation and dismantle the institutionalized

discrimination of Jim Crow was undergirded by a framework of biblical concepts.

Christian leaders' efforts provided moral and ethical reasoning for ending racial apartheid in the American South. It was also essential because the institution of Jim Crow was constructed based upon a racially-biased interpretation of Scripture that was perpetuated to justify and promote the institution of human chattel slavery. Thus, it was vital that during the Civil Rights Movement, prominent leaders of the SBC actively counter the body's prevailing racially discriminatory theology and challenge other Southern Baptists to live up to their image of God beliefs. These leaders defied Southern society's prevailing views to openly promote racial equality, support civil rights leaders, and publish works to endorse racial desegregation.

The beliefs and teachings of the Christian faith provided the moral compass and ethical basis for civil rights leaders and allies to combat the evils of Jim Crow. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the theological framework of critical aspects of their approach as part of this literature review. Doing so requires an assessment of the literature supporting fundamental religious doctrines underpinning the Civil Rights Movement. Consequently, the first subsection evaluates relevant writings of the doctrine of the image of God and its foundational basis, affirming that African-Americans are equally created and loved by the Creator. The following subsection assesses the theological concept of the beloved community, which Christian leaders promoted to contest the brutal institutionalized racism and discrimination system in the former Confederacy. The final subsection reviews relevant texts and Scriptures, interpreting the theological approach to the leadership concept of moral courage.

### **Image of God**

*Imago Dei*, or the *image of God*, describes the holiness of all human life. The core basis of this principle is that all of humanity bears God's image, and therefore all human beings are

equal representatives of Him on earth. This doctrine has been invoked in religious and secular debates to define and justify the idea of human dignity. It serves as the ultimate moral basis to encourage societies "to respect and protect the dignity and life of all human beings" (Kilner, 2018, p. 6). The concept of *imago Dei* is first found in this passage from the *Book of Genesis*:

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So, God created mankind in his own image; in the image of God, he created them; male and female, he created them. (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Genesis 1:26-27).

However, there are minimal references to God's image or likeness in the Bible beyond this reference. For instance, it is introduced in Genesis and not addressed in the rest of the Old Testament. However, the New Testament more clearly expounds upon the image of God with references in James 3:9; 1 Corinthians 11:7; 2 Corinthians 4:4; and Colossians 1:15 and 3:10. In doing so, it "affirm[s] Jesus as the perfect standard to which Christians are called to conform" (Lusting, 2017, p. 318). The conclusion is that since all of humanity bears the image of God and because Christ equally valued all of humanity as the children of God, Christians are expected to everyone and not just those who look like, worship with, or agree with them.

Despite this fact, humans have misconstrued the doctrine of God's image to justify the oppression of other people, commit atrocities against societies and cultures, and destroy the environment and eradicate animal populations. These misinterpretations occurred due to two flawed reasons for the image of God. The first is that "human rationality is seen as a reflection of the wisdom of God," and the second is that "humanity resembles God in its exercise of power and dominion over other creation" (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2019). Consequently, although God made all of humanity in His likeness, "man has persistently hesitated to apply the Christian ethic of love and brotherhood to his social situations" (Dickerson, 2005). The result is that

societies conflated favorable aspects of their humanity and God's image to detract from others to oppress and destroy them (Kilner, 2018).

Over time, intellectuals from Thomas Aquinas to John Calvin and Benjamin Mays to Thomas Maston defined the doctrine of God's image as the democratizing principle that all people are equally representative of God. Accordingly, the tradition of God's image applies to every human being because "all of humanity is related to God" (Hamilton, 1990, p. 120). This understanding inspired the "biblically-based notion that all people have a special status by virtue of their creation in God's image" (Kilner, 2018, p. 6). This served as the moral and ethical basis to encourage Christians and secular leaders to support human rights efforts and combat the evils of oppression of other people because everyone bears the same likeness.

According to Kilner (2018), the New Testament defines the theological basis to assert that "the image of God is the standard of who people are created to be—embodied in the person of Christ" (p. 134). As a result, humanity requires restoration. This "renewal in God's image entails a more intimate connection with God through Christ and an increasingly actual reflection of God in Christ, to God's glory" (Kilner, 2018, p. xi). The reason for this is that the exact image of God is Jesus Christ. However, the inherent nature of the sin of Man precludes "growing ever closer to the standard God established for humanity" (Kilner, 2018, p. 62). Consequently, Pettit (2016) notes that it is only through love with action and displays of love to one another that Christians reflect the image of God to the world around them.

With a renewed understanding of God's image in the example of Jesus, Christians may follow the consummate leader and teacher. This is because Christ illustrates that spiritual growth comes through continuous connection with other believers. Accordingly, Pettit (2016) stated:



We were created in the image of God to experience a vibrant relationship with our triune Creator God and to experience authentic relationships in community with one another (p. 39).

Jesus valued all of humanity, and leaders following Christ's example should motivate their followers to care for the oppressed and disenfranchised. Consequently, Lowe and Lowe (2018) state that Christians would continually grow and improve to reflect the heart of Jesus, and "the ultimate outcome...is individual and corporate transformation into the image of Christ" (p. 186).

### **Beloved Community**

Arguably, the nation's most recent spiritual revival occurred during the Civil Rights Movement. This era's religious leaders ended legalized segregation in the U.S. by leveraging their diversity of faith backgrounds and exemplifying God's image. However, the theological and spiritual foundation for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s originated from the early 20th-century Christian education concepts, theories, and practices implemented and commissioned by religious scholars.

Religious intellectuals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century set the stage for the future by contemplating and publishing the theological outline, which laid the foundation for understanding that humanity was formed in God's image, a core doctrine of the Christian faith. It democratizes the belief of the faithful that all people are equally valued as children of God. Accordingly, this foundational element serves as the biblical basis to establish the understanding that human dignity can neither be taken nor given because the "image of God is all-inclusive and in no way qualified to exclude anyone" (Cunningham et al., 1984, p. 213).

These intellectuals based their reasoning upon the Bible and early church history. They argued that despite the doctrine of the image of God, "man has persistently hesitated to apply the Christian ethic of love and brotherhood to his social situations" (Dickerson, 2005, p. 230).

However, these scholars believed that "Christianity ought to be color blind and desegregated" (Savage, 2007, p. 786). Accordingly, one such theologian, Benjamin Mays, said, "Segregation based on color or race is a wicked thing because it penalizes a person for being what God had made him and for conditions over which he has no control" (Savage, 2007, p. 793). The direct correlation to this interpretation is that every human being bears the image of God.

This recognition of humanity's sacredness served as the scriptural basis for Christians combatting Jim Crow segregation's virulent racism. The intellectual core for this drew from scholars like Mays, who came of age in the 1930s and 1940s after attaining academic positions at major universities and theological institutions throughout the nation. They also were pioneers who devoted the first serious scholarship to studying Christianity in the context of the black American church. Moreover, through their religious and intellectual studies combined interactions with international human rights activists from A. Philip Randolph to Mahatma Gandhi, they "theologized their direct-action techniques, and developed a praxis for a religiously based assault upon segregation" (Dickerson, 2005, p. 219).

Leading African-American theologians gathered in 1931 for the "Yale Seminar on the Negro Church" (Dickerson, 2005). The conferees discussed religious, educational, economic, and social topics. They concluded with an approach for the African-American church and its leaders to uphold the principles of Jesus Christ in addressing their countrymen's plight under the oppression of segregation.

These leading intellectuals found the violence and dehumanization of Jim Crow segregation contrary to all Christians' principles. As a result, they promoted a robust theological basis to undergird the Civil Rights Movement. Consequently, African-Americans in the South and their white allies largely viewed the era as an opportunity for the nation to uphold its tenets

of pluralism and justice for its citizenry, freedom for all, and harmony for humanity (Manis, 1999). Thus, a consensus evolved that articulated the doctrine of God's image and the ideal of the beloved community. These two concepts were intertwined in the following theological approach to combatting racial prejudice and oppression:

Segregation was a sin, and those who practiced and perpetrated it deliberately ruptured God-ordained relationships within the human family. Since God created humankind in the Lord's image, racists could find no authoritative justification for their pernicious ideology in the teachings of Jesus and other Scriptures. Moreover, Christians were obligated to oppose Jim Crow because it contradicted the Word and Will of God (Dickerson, 2005, p. 233).

Many ascribe the theological ideal of the *beloved community* to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. However, this concept was shaped partially by his Methodist advisors at Boston University. His mentor, Howard Thurman, formed most of King's perspective of the topic. Thurman was a religious intellectual and scholar of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who developed the Civil Rights Movement's doctrinal underpinnings. As Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University, he was also the first African-American to hold a deanship at a predominantly white university (Hughes, 2009).

Out of his experiences, Thurman proposed that faith provided the source to seek universal fellowship. More specifically, his teachings advanced the following themes:

The interrelatedness of all life, the primacy of religious experience, personality-centered Christianity, the moral order of the universe, the love, power, and justice of God, the dignity and worth of human personality, and the social nature of human existence (Fluker, 1990, p. 36-37).

This perspective influenced the outlook of King and other Civil Rights leaders. In his 1949 book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman outlined themes that informed King's conceptualization of the beloved community. In particular, he wrote:

The religion of Jesus says to the disinherited: Love your enemy. Take the initiative in seeking ways by which you can have the experience of a common sharing of mutual worth and value. It may be hazardous, but you must do it (Thurman, 1949, p. 100).

## **Moral Courage**

The term *moral courage* is not explicitly expressed in the Bible. However, this concept's fundamental values are elemental to many characters of the Bible. This is because, amid ethical crises faced by these various individuals, moral courage was required when "there [was] no place of security, no guarantee of safety, no certainty of refuge" (Prickett, 1958). Osswald et al. (2010) indicated that exercising moral courage comes at considerable personal risk and without direct reward. However, their faith in God enabled these individuals to harness their passion for taking a principled stand against an apparent injustice.

### ***Examples of Moral Courage in the Old Testament***

As written in the *Book of Joshua*, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord, your God will be with you wherever you go" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Joshua 1:9). Likewise, biblical characters of strong moral fortitude understood that paying the price for their actions was not about a short-term gain. Instead, because of their convictions, they were comforted that facing the injustice was worth the cost because they entrusted the outcome to their faith in God (Thrall et al., 1999).

One example of moral courage in the face of personal risk was the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as described in the *Book of Daniel, Chapter 3*. During their exile to Babylon, three young Hebrew men were committed to execution by fire for their unwillingness to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar's image. The three men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were previously favored by the king by accepting appointments to high positions in his government. However, obeying their religious beliefs and facing capital punishment for

refusing the order to worship the idol showed moral courage. Yet, an angel protected them from injury, and King Nebuchadnezzar released them and elevated them to even higher positions.

According to Collins and Collins (1993) commentary on Daniel, the imposition of the death penalty for such an act was unlikely directed against Jews in particular, but to demand service of subjects to the king. The ethical challenge faced by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was typical of Jews. As part of the diaspora, they were compelled to comply with the worship of the society they resided. However, the most courageous part of the story is found in verse 17, in which the three men proclaim, "the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Luke 4:18). Like the earlier passage from Joshua, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego indicated that they need to answer only to the God they serve. Therefore, they needed to remain faithful and not reconsider the moral courage of their stance due to the threat of the king or the fiery furnace because they were fully confident that their God was more powerful and would deliver them.

Another illustration of moral courage is that of Queen Esther. As told in the *Book of Esther*, during the Hebrews' exile to Persia, Esther, the Jewish queen, thwarted the king's advisor, Haman, plan to have all the Jews murdered. After Esther's uncle, Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, Haman planned to kill Mordecai and all Jews in the kingdom. Mordecai discovered Haman's plot and convinced Esther to appeal to the king to save them. At significant personal risk, she exerted moral courage to convince King Ahasuerus that his advisor was going to kill the Jews. Consequently, King Ahasuerus had Haman executed and gave his position to Mordecai.

In a commentary on Esther by Linafelt et al. (1999), Haman's eventual animosity towards Mordecai continually dishonoring him by refusing to bow down before him. Since Mordecai did not disclose his Jewish faith, Haman was initially perplexed about why he would not show the

proper respect. After discovering that Mordecai did not bow because he was Jewish and interpreted such an act as idolatry, this transgression incensed Haman to such a degree that Haman congered a plot to destroy all of Mordecai's people throughout the kingdom. Likewise, just as Mordecai did not proclaim his Jewish faith, neither did Esther. However, when made aware of the pending genocide of her people, Esther mustered the courage to risk her own life by disobeying the prohibition of going before the king unsummoned, announcing her own Jewish identity, and hatching a plan to make the king reverse the decree calling for "destruction of the Jews" (Linafelt et al., 1999, p. 226).

### ***The Moral Courage of Jesus Christ***

Throughout his ministry, Jesus "addressed how the poor, women, the marginalized, the oppressed, and prisoners were treated" (Cross, 2014, p. 205). In doing so, he further upset his culture's social order by disobeying religious customs to associate with and heal the sinful and disenfranchised. Jesus' public actions set him at odds with the religious leaders of his day and therefore experienced "all phases of malice, hate, and prejudice" from the authorities and their followers (Prickett, 1958).

When he went to the temple of his hometown of Nazareth, he read a scroll from the prophet Isaiah and indicated that he was fulfilling the Scriptures. The words he stated were:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Luke 4:18)

Green (1997) dissects this inaugural address of Jesus' ministry by explaining that this revelation of purpose was directed to those people "relegated to positions outside the boundaries of God's people" (p. 235). This showed that his ministry to the disenfranchised pushed the limits beyond pre-existing religious and social limitations. Jesus made it clear that all people he

encountered were God's children and, therefore, worthy of experiencing salvation and inclusion. Consequently, with this proclamation of this stance to stand up for righteousness amid intimidation and maltreatment, Jesus Christ revealed the precursor for moral courage that he exemplified throughout his ministry.

The book by Sumner (2015) indicates that the righteous anger of Jesus against others' mistreatment reveals that evil is not permissible. However, the moral outrage of Jesus was also more than just fury with wrongdoing, and it was combined with God's moral authority, which is transcendent, principled, and commanding. From the place of this righteous indignation, Jesus was able to exemplify the virtue of moral courage on various occasions. These include when he denounced the religious leaders for their hypocrisy (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Matthew 23), healed the blind man on the Sabbath (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, John 6), and threw out the moneychangers and merchants who were extorting Jews at the temple in Jerusalem (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Matthew 21:12).

Therefore, Jesus' example reveals that Christians exemplify his righteous anger to exert moral courage to act in ethically challenging situations. They are not to be, in the words of one author, "irascible men and women—people who sinned by being angerless in their emotions" (Sumner, 2015, p. 139). What makes them sinful is not their lack of zeal but rather their inaction and their willful tolerance of dishonesty and complicity with injustice.

The theological framework described reveals that Christian leaders possess the Scriptural foundation necessary to exercise the moral courage to lead to positive change within the broader society. In turn, they must embody the example of Jesus to boldly stand against injustices and personify the gospel's teachings to love and respect for all. With this awareness, they can reap

the tremendous opportunities to advance solutions to improve their communities and reach new generations with the more reflective gospel of Christ's teachings' inclusivity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Christians have followed their faith and convictions to fight against injustices. These believers showed a willingness to sacrifice to stand against injustice and support those who could not protect themselves. Through their virtue and bravery, they performed acts of moral courage that reflected the principle that "Christ-followers are to be publicly engaged because transformation occurs as individuals within communities live out the good news of the kingdom" (Pettit, 2016, p. 31).

Jesus Christ was focused on interconnected relationships with others that required personal sacrifice. Consequently, Christians mirroring his example are challenged to:

Pay the price because suffering tests and proves our character...for the best kind of influence—the kind that enables us to love, teach the truth, and create a better world for those all around us. (Thrall et al., 1999, p. 135)

Morally courageous leaders attuned to the spirit of Christ possess the vision and inspiration to be the examples for their organizations and communities. Moreover, they are best suited to serve as moral examples to help heal social divisions. They can teach others to overcome their prejudices and encourage them to reflect Christ's example by supporting efforts to defeat injustice. Their collective efforts to personify the gospel's teachings to love and respect all people further encourage others to reverse any trends in societal polarization.

To better understand the essential nature of concepts like moral courage and ethical conduct to facilitate leaders' transformational outcomes, it is necessary to assess these concepts' foundational elements. Accordingly, this literature review analyzes the theoretical framework of moral courage and ethical leadership and the transformational leadership theory. The first



subsection defines moral courage and reviews literature about the risks and benefits of leaders exercising moral courage. The following subsection examines works related to ethical leadership. The last subsection assesses the transformational leadership theory and identifies how many moral and ethical leaders embody their characteristics.

## **Moral Courage**

Mark Twain once said, "It is curious-curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare" (Kamanthe, 2016). One reason for this contrast could be that physical courage acts are often singular events of individual bravery or strength. In contrast, moral courage is usually exemplified by the continued display of character while withstanding prolonged persecution. Moral courage distinguishes the individual's resolve to overcome the risks associated with crises and hostility inherent to ethical and transformational leadership.

Conventional perceptions of 'acts of courage' are typically interpreted as a feat of physical courage. Typical imagery might be a firefighter dashing into a burning building to rescue a child, a soldier throwing his body on a grenade to save the lives of his squad, or a lifeguard racing into crashing waves to save a drowning surfer. On the corollary, examples of moral courage may resemble citizens protesting to change unjust laws, military officers disobeying immoral orders to harm defenseless civilians, or pastors addressing uncomfortable yet spiritually relevant issues within their church. These virtuous exploits may not result in immediate physical harm (although it sometimes does) but are no less daunting.

## ***What is Moral Courage?***

Moral courage is derived from the German word *zivilcourage* (Osswald et al., 2012). Osswald et al. (2012) interpreted this concept as "situations which demand morally courageous intervention, instances of injustices happen, human rights are violated, [and] persons are treated

unfairly " (p. 392). Such bravery in the face of unfavorable odds is also defined as "not the absence of fear, but the overcoming of fear" (Osthoorn, 2007 (p. 273).

The consequences of moral courage acts are arguably more enduring and consequential than physical courage. Skitka (2012) reveals whereas both acts of courage require an individual to defend another, moral courage is exceptional. It demands the person to protect another guided by ethical principles and ethical convictions. For instance, when an organization or society's guidelines and attitudes are unjust or discriminatory, only human agency willing to stand for the disenfranchised and combat such policies and beliefs can alter the unfairness. The ethical dilemmas fraught on such occasions, reflect a need for moral action (Sekerka et al., 2009).

### ***Risks and Benefits of Moral Courage***

Despite the potential long-term communal benefits of morally courageous deeds, they are more costly to the actors. Osswald et al., 2010 indicates this is primarily due to the associated prohibitive social costs to the individuals involved. For instance, an individual who survives an act of physical bravery can usually expect immediate praise and affirmation for their gallantry. Yet, for someone exerting moral courage, they are more likely to be "insulted, excluded, or even prosecuted" for their actions (Osswald et al., 2012, p. 394).

Skitka (2012) asserts that peer pressure and the desire to conform to group norms is extreme, and that strong moral convictions alone are rarely sufficient to prevent them from following majority opinion. Therefore, it is not uncommon for well-meaning people to willfully disregard blatant untruths or overlook discriminatory and hostile exploits committed upon an unfavored segment of the population. Hence, due to the dynamics of influence, many individuals may not openly confront the ethical challenges and questionable behaviors they witness.

Given the extreme risks to individuals who perform morally courageous acts, Robert Kennedy candidly declared:

Moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or high intelligence. Yet, it is an essential, vital quality for those seeking to change a world that yields most painfully to vary. Each time a person stands up for an idea, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, (s)he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance. (Skitka, 2012, p. 1)

People take principled stands despite the risks because a violation of ethical norms sparks deep-seated anger. According to Osswald et al., (2012), this resentment is generally manifested in a provocation of moral outrage emanating from the abuse of human rights values. Hence, when individuals possess an ethical challenge to injustice, they are less likely to feel constrained by the existing imbalance of power and willing to challenge the authorities (Skitka, 2012).

Through defending others, morally courageous individuals defy group norms to correct perceived wrongs. Because the results of such acts are not immediately known, morally courageous people must show perseverance to transform the unethical situation. Since more effort is required than outrage to achieve the aims, combining ethical leadership with moral courage is essential to resolve the injustice and transform society's perpetuation of such values.

### **Ethical Leadership**

Leadership is not an individual sport. It is done for and with a team of other individuals. Consequently, leaders are not born with the skills to motivate others, nor can they develop their skills in isolation. Similarly, ethical leadership is a learned behavior. This type of leadership includes "personal integrity, honesty, kindness, fairness, and moral judgment by trusting in personal strength" (Mabey et al., 2015, p. 762). Thus, the integrity and character that these leaders practice are taught and exercised routinely as part of a team and a community.

Leadership is an inherently human endeavor in which "leaders and followers partner together to achieve common goals and shared vision" (Irving & Strauss, 2019, p. 1). Further, Northouse (2019) reveals a central ethical element because leaders influence other people to achieve objectives. The following further explains this approach to ethical leadership:

The essential starting point is the acuity to recognize the ethical issue in the first place...managers must have the will to address it, form a moral judgment, and ultimately proceed with a moral response. (Sekerka et al., 2009, p. 567).

Historically, leaders have existed within the culture of authoritarianism. Irving and Strauss (2019) wrote that the traditional leadership construct was considered the great man and scientific management constructs. These models extolled management control of people and processes through leaders' power combined with a standardization of procedures. Accordingly, the dominant view of leaders emerged such that it encouraged the manipulation and exploitation of followers. Per this approach, "kings, emperors, governors, fathers, and husbands exercised absolute authority and dominance over their subordinates" (Irving & Strauss, 2019, p. 81).

A favorable view of this established management approach can be ascribed to how they facilitated the transformational societal improvements resulting from the rise of industrialization. However, Raven (1993) discusses the negative consequence of this outlook is that leaders adopting this approach relied upon positional dominance through coercive power to persuade, threaten, and punish subordinates. Heifetz and Laurie (2011) revealed that adopters of this leadership style were prone to treat "subordinates like machinery that requires control" (p. 68).

### ***What is Ethical Leadership?***

Bruce Laingren, one of the American embassy hostages in Iran, once said, "human beings are like teabags. You don't know your own strength until you get into hot water" (Thrall et al., 1999, p. 110). Therefore, when ethical crises and questions of moral judgment occur, Sekerka et

al. (2009) indicated that leaders require "the strength...to face and resolve ethical challenges and confront barriers that may inhibit the ability to proceed toward the right action" (p. 566).

However, such a leader's capacity to ethically address this situation is predicated on their predisposition before the ordeal. This is the correlation of moral courage to ethical leadership. Consequently, "moral courage does not exist in a vacuum; it is linked to our core moral values and constitutes a willingness to stand up for fundamental virtues, such as honesty, fairness, fidelity, respect, integrity and responsibility" (Kamanthe, 2016).

Yasir and Mohamad (2016) revealed that for ethical leadership to be exercised, the leader must be a moral person and conduct their professional duties in a principled manner. Consequently, when an ethically challenging situation occurs, these managers appropriately address the matter despite the risks. Such preparation requires leaders to possess "the acuity to recognize the ethical issue in the first place,...the will to address it, form a moral judgment and ultimately proceed with a moral response" (Sekerka et al., 2009, p. 567).

### ***How Do Ethical Leaders Exercise Moral Courage?***

Since leadership is a human interpersonal exercise, the behaviors and values of leaders influence their followers. As a result, if moral courage is not innate to the individual, it can be taught so that individuals can model and exercise such ethical and virtuous behaviors (Osswald et al., 2012). For instance, ethical leaders interested in their followers' well-being and development also encourage their subordinates to model their own identity (Zhu et al., 2016).

Leaders' display of moral courage and ethical leadership is crucial to influencing their followers to emulate their behaviors and thus transform an organization's moral culture or society. Research by Zhu et al. (2016) revealed an association between followers' moral identity

and supervisors' ethical leadership. Another study by Cheng (2017) assessed the correlation between ethical leadership and whistleblowing.

Ethical leaders maintain a genuine concern for other members of their group. To lead effectively and achieve dramatic change, they recognize that leaders are not solely responsible for achieving their organization's goals. Instead, all parties, including followers, share this obligation. They seek to motivate their followers to care for others. This approach correlates with transformational leadership theory because it focuses on others' benefit, vice the leader. Thus, because transformational leaders are devoted to helping others, they are more likely to foster interdependent relationships to grow and develop their wider community mutually.

### **Transformational Leadership**

The managers of popular culture are forceful, results-oriented, and self-promoting individuals who drive their teams to achieve results. However, according to research by Williams (2019), "leadership that is respectful, humble, and compassionate promotes the healthy conditions for members to thrive not just survive" (p. 65). Additionally, Bass (1997) revealed that such transformational leaders serve as role models that promote their organizations' ethical behaviors and actively work to uplift their subordinates morally.

People-focused leadership styles like transformational leaders seek to motivate their followers to care for others. These transformational leaders personify a people-focus approach that seeks to "facilitate the community and the environment in which others can exercise the gifts which the Spirit gives them for the benefit of all" (Samuel, 1986, p. 27). Hence, in another study by Bass and Avolio (1990), the nature of transformational leadership is to "elevate the desires of followers for achievement and self-development, while also promoting the development of groups and organizations" (p. 22).

### ***Transformational Leadership Defined***

The great man or scientific management concepts of leadership concentrated on the belief that leadership was inherently innate or could be deduced into precise steps that could be replicated (Irving & Strauss, 2019). Principally, these models focused on controlling people and outcomes through leaders' authority or the standardization of processes. In a breakthrough discovery, James MacGregor Burns (1978) was the first to describe *transformational leadership* in his book *Leadership*. According to Burns, transformational leadership was a style that actively encouraged and promoted the subordinates to inspire them to identify improvements to their organizations. Moreover, Clayton (2016) reviewed Burns' study of great leaders and revealed that this concept also contained a moral dimension to leadership.

In the 1980s, Bernard Bass significantly expanded upon the transformational leadership theory with a string of publications beginning with his 1985 book *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations*. In this text and subsequent writings on the topic, Bass sought to discover how followers are motivated by their leaders and advanced the belief that leaders should serve as role models for their subordinates and change agents for their organizations (Clayton, 2016).

Transformational leadership promoted the delegation of authority from leaders to their followers. These leaders who inspired people through charisma and trust was contrary to earlier leadership models that promoted coercive power. Hence, transformational leadership's focus on empowering followers to pursue change was revolutionary. Research validated its effectivity by assessing only few modern organizational leaders benefited from intimidation (Bass, 1990).

### ***Transformational Leadership Concepts***

Some consider transformational leadership theory "arguably the most researched leadership concept to date" (Braun et al., 2012). It is usually described compared to transactional

leadership (Bass, 1990; Avolio et al., 1999; Bass et al., 2003). Whereas transactional leadership relates to task accomplishment, transformational leadership deals with team goal accomplishment (Clayton, 2016).

Transactional leadership is a legitimate style of management, albeit less effective than transformational leadership. It is also considered the most prevalent form of governance. In this arrangement, managers outline employees' requirements and define the type of compensation for accomplishing the tasks assigned (Bass, 1990). Bass (1997) identifies the three characteristics of transactional leaders are listed below (p. 134):

1. Contingent Reward: Rewards employees for effort, performance, and task accomplishments.
2. Active Management by Exception: Monitors performance and takes corrective action for deviations.
3. Passive Management by Exception: Acts only if failures occur or if standards are not achieved.

According to Bass (1990), "Superior leadership performance—transformational leadership—occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees" (p. 21). In essence, a transformational leader aims to inspire their followers to benefit the group beyond their immediate self-interests. The transactional leaders' method to motivate their subordinates is described in the "Four I's" listed below (Bass, 1997, p. 133):

1. Idealized Influence: Leaders with charisma who are role models that inspire followers to exert extra effort based on their values and commitment;
2. Inspirational Motivation: Leaders who enthusiastically communicated optimism and encouragement;
3. Intellectually Stimulation: Leaders who question old perspectives and encourage followers to problem solve and develop innovative solutions;
4. Individualized Consideration: Leaders who advise, coach, and show awareness of their followers' individual needs and abilities.



Since transformational leaders are actively concerned with the growth of their subordinates, extensive research validates the conclusions that their employees are more likely to deliver higher performance, and this relates to better relationships between their leaders and their management (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1990; Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1990, Bass et al., 2003; Braun et al., 2013). One reason for this is that transactional leaders focus their personnel on achieving short-term goals. However, transformational leaders seek to motivate their subordinates to improve themselves and change the organization (Bass, 1997). Consequently, Petit (2016) reveals this growth aims not short-term or an annual appraisal, but a lifelong process in which the leader and teacher are focused on the long-term benefit of their charges.

Leaders who exercise ethical behaviors and moral courage are not motivated by self-aggrandizement, power, or prestige. People who embody this leadership approach tend to devote their efforts to empowering and developing their subordinates (Irving & Strauss, 2019). Consequently, ethical leaders committed to serving others should exercise the same moral courage of Christ to address their era's challenges. Christians possess the spiritual convictions necessary from the various pressures to compromise their ethics and, therefore, "the moral courage and fortitude to literally 'go it alone' if necessary...to stand up for what they are convinced is right." (Skitka, 2012, p. 17). In doing so, they must adopt a transformational leadership approach to help lead their communities to combat societal evils for the benefit of others by upholding the values of "encourage[ing] cooperation, unity, and reconciliation," even in the face of personal peril and injustice (Irving & Strauss, 2019, p. 81).

Rather than yearn for a return to 'the good old days,' leaders embodying the spirit of Christ should look forward to the tremendous opportunities to serve others less fortunate with the gospel that is reflective of the inclusivity of Jesus. Christian ministers leading the Civil Rights

Movement and their allies convinced fellow religious leaders to transform Southern society to oppose Jim Crow segregation. Likewise, Christians of today "must practice what we preach...[people] need to see us living out [the message of Christ] in the way we lead and serve others" (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005, p. 206). This requires believers to seek commonality with others by demonstrating their faith versus complaining over ideological and cultural differences. Moreover, leaders must exercise the moral courage and ethical leadership style of Jesus Christ. As written in the *Christian Science Journal* over half a century at the start of that period's cultural revolution and the era of social polarization:

As we cannot ignore these threats, our understanding of Truth places upon us the responsibility of helping to lift the burden of fear from the heart of humanity. To do this, we must be consecrated, unselfish, pure in heart, and morally courageous. (Prickett, 1958)

### **Related Literature**

This research aims to analyze the ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage of SBC leaders in promoting racial desegregation during the Civil Rights Era. The intent is to identify distinctive lessons discovered from examining these visionaries' transformational efforts applicable to Christian leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and combat injustice. A review of available and relevant literature on this subject discovered that the unique environment and organizations that many of these individuals served influenced their actions. Hence, this section provides a survey of the following relevant aspects that informed this study: Practical Application of Christian Ethics to Racial Segregation and Reformist Leaders of the Christian Life Commission of the SBC.

### **Influential Legacy Leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention**

This grounded theory research identifies and assesses the transferability of relevant leadership characteristics of select Southern Baptist Convention leaders who promoted racial

desegregation during the Civil Rights Era. For this study to evaluate the application of their lasting lessons and relevant principles for present-day Christian leaders, it is necessary to examine how these transformational leaders stood out from their fellow Southern Baptist congregants. Accordingly, the following sections briefly describes each leader, their viewpoints, and the overall impact of their respective theological convictions.

### ***Henlee Barnette***

Henlee Hulix Barnette (1911-2004) was an accomplished academic who served both as a Christian ethicist and a professor of clinical psychology. From 1951-1977, he served on the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) staff as a professor of Christian Ethics (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, n.d.).

Barnette authored fifteen books and many more journal articles and book reviews. *Introducing Christian Ethics*, one of his most notable writings, attracted considerable attention from the Christian ethics community and served as a primer for seminarians and college students. This book differentiated itself in being one of the first to devote considerable attention (an entire chapter) to the topic of ethics and the Holy Spirit (Barnette, 1961).

Barnette's book also introduced a concept that countered more traditional evangelical and fundamentalist Christian contemporaries. Many of them preached the primacy of one's relationship with Christ through individual salvation (Davis, 2013). Accordingly, they ignored or decried Christian leaders' "social" gospel supporting the Civil Rights Movement. However, Barnette saw there to be no distinction between the two. Furthermore, he indicated that:

There is no such thing as a "personal" gospel as over against a "social" gospel. There is but one gospel which is both personal and social. Personal regeneration and social reconstruction are demanded by the gospel. The redeemed man must seek the redemption of the society in which he lives...The Christian, therefore, is called not merely to live in these areas, but to do his part in bringing them more in accord with the will and purpose of God (Barnette, 1961, p. 4).

This Christian ethical approach shaped Barnette's theological worldview, particularly addressing abuse of power, discrimination, and injustice. According to Tillman (2003), this was encapsulated in a phrase coined by Barnette, "principled-agapism" (p. 30). Individual actions are built upon their principles, relationship to God, and associations with others. As such, the spiritual formation of every Christian through their evangelism and ethical behaviors were all interdependent and communicated the heart of the individual (Tillman, 2003, p. 32).

Given these convictions and Barnette's life in the segregated South, he was one of the first Southern Baptist scholars to write about the need for other white Christians to show mutual respect to African-Americans and other racial groups in his 1948 article titled "The Challenge of Southern Cities." Barnette implored his Southern Baptist peers to treat them as full brothers and sisters under Christ. Furthermore, he foresaw the impending Civil Rights Movement, with African-Americans striving for economic and social justice. Hence, he stated that:

It is imperative that all racial groups come to understand each other and to work harmoniously for the achievement of a greater civilization. This problem of getting along with minority groups within our cities must be approached on the basis of intelligence rather than emotion, the Christian spirit rather than prejudice (Barnette, 1948, p. 427).

Barnette continued to speak and write about the immorality of racial segregation and discrimination. In 1956, he started instructing a tremendously popular course on race relations at SBTS (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). He intended to educate his seminarians on the ethical standards of Christianity regarding racism and encourage graduates to oppose segregationist policies in their churches and communities.

The most famous example of Barnette putting this conviction into action occurred in 1961 when he invited Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak at SBTS. Dr. King was greeted with a standing ovation by over 1,400 attendees. He stated that Jim Crow segregation perpetuated a

society that was "diametrically opposed to the underlying philosophy of Christianity, and democracy" (Phillips, 2013, p. 221). However, his presence on the campus caused significant animosity vented against Barnette and the administrators. As a result, over thirty Southern Baptist churches in Alabama voted to withhold funds from the seminary and pressured the institution's president to issue a public statement of regret (Manis, 1999; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). In a testament to his moral and ethical courage in the face of such conflict, Barnette's response to this tremendous cost of hundreds of dollars in donations withheld from SBTS was "money well spent" (Phillips, 2013, p. 222).

### ***Billy Graham***

Billy Graham (1918-2018) is the most well-known SBC leader identified in this study. He was undeniably the most renowned American evangelical figure of the twentieth century. His long-standing celebrity and inspirational status remained uneclipsed until his death at age 99 because although he "mingled comfortably with world leaders, [he] never lost the common touch" to relate to the millions of people he ministered (Miller, 2007, p. 42).

Arguably, of Graham's many accomplishments, his least appreciated (and researched) achievement was his role in influencing white Southerners to turn away from their support of Jim Crow segregation. Granted, he could not be classified as a civil rights activist or even a leading proponent for racial integration. Instead, Graham could be considered a gradualist who believed that race relations would improve over time. Accordingly, as a moral force for change, he exercised his stature within the prevailing Southern Baptist community and relationships with influential politicians and business leaders throughout the nation to encourage them to revise laws or policies while converting their hearts and beliefs. As he said, "I believe the heart of the problem of race is in loving our neighbor" (Tisby, 2019, p. 134-5).

It is well-known that Graham took a stand against segregated seating for attendees of his crusades. For instance, he held his first desegregated crusade in the Jim Crow South in 1953 in Chattanooga, Tennessee (Miller, 2007). However, after the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board* decision the following year, he refrained from holding any further desegregated events in the Deep South to avoid alienating his white supporters or risk conflict with other white political and religious leaders (Tisby, 2019). It was not until 1958 that Graham would risk the establishment's ire for conducting a desegregated crusade in the region. When the South Carolina governor refused to permit him from holding an integrated service on state grounds in Columbia, Graham relocated the event to a federal military base at nearby Fort Jackson (Miller, 2007).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Graham and Martin Luther King Jr. developed a close relationship. Graham's early actions to integrate his religious events gained wide praise from African-American ministers and other civil rights leaders after he responded to their criticism for the hypocrisy of abiding by racially segregated seating policies while preaching about the ungodliness of institutional racial discrimination (Kidd & Hankins, 2015; Miller, 2007). During a 16-week crusade in 1957, Graham invited King to participate in the services, giving more attention to civil rights and integration (Tisby, 2019). However, his refusal to openly support the movement for racial equality and his silence on addressing the state-sponsored violence and terrorist actions inflicted upon civil rights protestors caused King to critique white evangelical ministers like Graham in his 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (King, 1963).

Graham was neither an outspoken segregationist nor a vocal proponent for immediately ending the institution of Jim Crow discrimination. Still, he was ahead of most white evangelicals in his push for integrated religious services. For this, he was vilified by white supremacists like White Citizens Councils and domestic terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan for being

considered "a racial turncoat or sell-out" (Miller, 2007, p. 42). However, Graham proved to be a moderate who felt that his role was best to change hearts through spreading the gospel, such that individuals would reform their views of race. For this reason, it should be of little wonder why his "broad appeal, along with his nonpartisan posture...positioned him as the spiritual advisor to every sitting president from Harry Truman to Barack Obama" (Jones, 2016, p. 204).

### ***Thomas Maston***

Thomas Buford (T. B.) Maston (1897-1988) is widely considered one of the SBC's foremost Christian ethicists. He taught in the School of Religious Education at Southwestern Baptist Seminary (SWBTS) from 1922 to 1963. Throughout his tenure, he steadily upgraded the teaching of ethics at the seminary. Maston sought to educate his students and fellow Southern Baptists on the social dimension of faith (Storey, 1995). Accordingly, his years working within various SBC organizations and educating generations of Christian leaders over his long career at SWBTS that Maston's lasting impact would reverberate to the end of the twentieth century (Phillips, 2013). His former students rose into positions of influence throughout the nation to help press their fellow congregants and Southern society to eventually end Jim Crow segregation and respect the equality of African-Americans (Roach, 2009).

It would be unfair to claim that white Christians who supported Jim Crow segregation were in complete denial of the gospel of Christ or were inherently racist. However, according to Cross (2014), many were not "transformative on the issue of race" because they could not fully understand how the systematic racism of Southern society cleaved lives along racial lines (p. 147). However, Maston was acutely aware of these contradictions between the beliefs and practices of his fellow Southern Baptists and therefore sought to increase their awareness while

devising solutions to improve race relations. Accordingly, his advocacy was driven by his belief that all of humanity was equal under the eyes of God. Likewise, he stated:

To live as Christ would have us live in relation to those of other races, we must recognize the relevance of certain biblical ideals and ideas to the contemporary racial situation. Some of those ideas or ideals are that we are “of one” or from one source (Acts 17:26), that God created man in his own image (Gen. 1:26), and that Christ died for all men. (Roach, 2009, p. 110).

Maston was known for combining conservative theology in advocating for social change. He was convincing in his ability to apply the practicality of biblical principles to everyday contemporary life and in relationship to others (Phillips, 2013). As a renowned Christian ethicist, the utility of his teachings was especially beneficial in encouraging his fellow Southern Baptists to reconsider the gospel they believed concerning the institutionally racist society they existed. Maston was forever hopeful for their ability to eventually grow to support racial justice because he felt that their "spiritual maturity on the part of God's people of all races would go a long way toward finding a solution for our present problems. (Maston, 1959, p. 233).

Maston stood at the vanguard of white Christian theologians examining race relations in the U.S. (Davis, 2013). For instance, he was the first in the SBC to publish a writing exploring the "biblical and social roots of the nation's racial crisis" in 1927 (Phillips, 2013, p. 180). In the 1930s, he initiated some of the earliest courses regarding contemporary racial issues at any of the SBC's seminaries (Cameron, 2012; Davis, 2013). Maston also wrote several books, articles, and pamphlets regarding ethics and racism within the context of Christian life.

The early writings and teachings of Maston sparked a transformation amongst Southern Baptists in Texas that would ripple across the entire convention. He helped organize other like-minded religious leaders to bring about a practical understanding of Christianity. Their efforts were institutionalized in the founding of the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT)



Christian Life Commission (CLC) in 1950 to raise the awareness of ethical issues (Davis, 2013; Phillips, 2013; Stricklin, 1981). Maston and the other members of the CLC advocated for collaboration between African-American, Mexican-American, and white Baptists. Furthermore, they persuaded their fellow white Baptist congregants "to apply Christian principles to issues in their daily lives...[and] soften their segregationist policies" (Cameron, 2012, p. 37).

A true disciple of Christ, Maston practiced his ethics daily. While not considered a civil rights activist, he deliberately influenced racial reconciliation and social change (Phillips, 2013). He helped push SWBTS to desegregate in 1951, years before the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board* decision (Cameron, 2012; Phillips, 2013). Additionally, Maston supported interracial marriage in his book, *Segregation and Desegregation*, written a decade before the Supreme Court's *Loving v. Virginia* decision (Maston, 1958). The prescience of his actions on the gradual transformation of the hearts of Southern Baptists towards a more ethical and social consciousness reflects his approach to "start where people are and gradually move in the direction which they ought to go" (Davis, 2013, p. 84).

### ***Acker Miller***

Acker C. Miller (1891-1984) was a prominent Christian pastor and ethicist. After graduating from SBTS in 1917, he spent the next two and a half decades as a military chaplain, church pastor, and director of the BGCT Department of Ministry in Soldier Work (Cameron, 2012; Pennington, 2016; Storey, 1995). During his service leading the church's ministry to servicemen and women during World War II, he distinguished himself by improving race relations and social issues.

From 1944-1950, Miller headed the BGCT's Department of Interracial Cooperation (Davis, 2013; Storey, 1995). During this period, he displayed the approach that would define the

remainder of his career. Miller used his platform to write articles denouncing proclamations of racial supremacy and denouncing lynchings of African-Americans (Roach, 2009).

This organization was renamed the Christian Life Commission (CLC) in 1950 to address a broad range of social and personal issues (like alcoholism, divorce, family life, and gambling) that afflicted individuals from all walks of life and backgrounds (Stricklin, 1981). Under his leadership, the CLC sought to "convince Baptists of their social responsibilities as Christians" (Davis, 2013). To reach the public, the CLC circulated a series of pamphlets titled "The Bible Speaks...", sponsored church conferences, and published various articles and reports regarding different societal challenges (Pennington, 2016). Addressing race relations and promoting opportunities to work alongside African-American and Mexican-American Christians to resolve societal injustice issues remained centerpieces of Miller's efforts (Cameron, 2012).

In January 1953, Miller transferred to lead the SBC's Social Service Commission (also renamed Christian Life Commission). He would lead the CLC until 1960, and during this period, his role in addressing racial discrimination and segregation would define his tenure and legacy. This was predicated on his belief that everyone was created in the image of God and therefore deserved the dignity and love commensurate with being God's people (Pennington, 2016).

Most notably, after the U.S. Supreme Court rendered the *Brown v. Board* decision on school desegregation, Miller came to the forefront of the SBC. Before the SBC's 1954 Convention, he wrote a response urging the convention to comply with the court's ruling. True to Miller's core convictions, he argued that "race issues had to be met with 'Christian statesmanship' based on the theological realities that every person was valuable to God and was included in His love and plan" (Pennington, 2016, p. 112).

During the remainder of his tenure leading the CLC, Miller continued to push the SBC and its members to support racial reconciliation and desegregation. He implored Southern Baptists to approach issues of race relations as moral and theological imperative. However, Miller's persistence in making his fellow Southern Baptists aware of their complicity with the sinfulness of Jim Crow segregation caused significant rancor within the SBC. Consequently, a movement arose among member churches that sought to abolish the CLC, but it was extinguished due to its inability to garner widespread support. However, as a result of Miller's "pioneering work in race relations," he suffered "tremendous pressures" from years of persecution and provocation by other Southern Baptists and subsequently retired from the SBC's CLC in 1960 (Pennington, 2016, p. 145).

### ***Foy Valentine***

Foy Dan Valentine (1923-2006) was a pioneer Baptist ethicist. He served as the executive director of the SBC's CLC (renamed Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission after his retirement) from 1960 to 1987. Valentine was widely considered the denomination's moral voice on the topic of race relations. According to former ERLC president Richard Land, he was "on the right side of the race issue, when there were too many institutions and individuals in American life and Southern Baptist life who were on the wrong side" (Hastings, 2006).

Valentine's preeminence about race relations and religion was perhaps foretold from the outset when he earned a doctorate from SWBTS in 1949. Working under the instruction of T. B. Maston, Valentine became the first Southern Baptist seminary student to write a dissertation focused on race relations with his work titled "A Historical Study of Southern Baptists and Race Relations, 1917-1947" (DuPont, 2013; Pennington, 2016). His research assessed that whereas many Southern Baptists supported the Ku Klux Klan, lynchings, and other violence against

African-Americans from the early 1900s through the 1920s, recordings of these reactionary elements declined significantly by the 1940s (Newman, 2001). Furthermore, in this text, Valentine outlined the core belief that motivated him to help change the hearts of his fellow Southern Baptists for the next half-century. He revealed that they should adopt the "spirit and the mind of Christ in every phase of race relations" (Hastings, 2006; Pennington, 2016).

In 1953, after Acker Miller took over the SBC's CLC, Valentine was chosen as director of the BGCT's CLC. He served in this role until 1960 and continued many of the outreach efforts started by Miller, including workshops and publishing literature. Furthermore, he helped inspire the emergence of ethical thinking among Southern Baptists in this position.

Valentine was an early Southern Baptist champion of civil rights long before Southern Baptists openly embraced the concept. During the 1956-1957 Montgomery Bus Boycott, Valentine was the notable exception of national SBC leaders making public statements supporting the African-American Christian leaders directing the protests (Manis, 1999). He also observed that as schools and public institutions were becoming racially integrated, Southern Baptist churches were almost entirely segregated. Consequently, he recommended that churches and church-related colleges voluntarily integrate and refrain from supporting business and civic organizations that advocated for white supremacy (Pennington, 2016).

In this vein of white Baptist leaders addressing issues of racism, Valentine wrote an article in 1959 titled, "Preaching on Race Relations." In this piece, he declared that race relations were "the knottiest social problem faced by Christians in the world today" and the "dominant politico-ethical issue of our time" (Valentine, 1959, p. 260). Given the importance of this matter to the broader society, Valentine solicited his fellow white pastors and ministers to exert leadership in working to address the growing societal polarization and an animosity emanating

from the Southern establishment's Massive Resistance tactics to support Jim Crow segregation and fight civil rights activists. He called on them to use their pulpits and collective voices and even risk making congregants upset or uneasy to "change the current pattern of tense, bitter, antagonistic, fruitless relationships to one of positive Christian love and genuine Christian brotherhood" and work to improve the future of race relations (Valentine, 1959, p. 270).

As was the case in Texas, Valentine replaced Miller as the executive director of the SBC's CLC upon Miller's retirement from the position in 1960. Under his leadership, Valentine expanded upon Miller's efforts to advocate for racial equality even at the risk of alienating white congregants and Southern Baptist churches, decreasing financial support to the CLC. Valentine's moral courage made him committed to convincing the "denomination that racism was incompatible with the Bible...[by] appropriate[ing] conservative evangelical concepts in matters of race" (Roach, 2009, p. 62). This approach aimed to transform the hearts and minds of fellow Southern Baptists to support racial justice and equality eventually.

Valentine's staying power can be attributed to avoiding full-throated advocacy for integration (Davis, 2013). He worked within the SBC system to push his denomination to eventually accept racial reconciliation by using accommodating language that could bring consensus of Southern Baptists instead of openly advocating support of the tactics of civil rights ministers (Kidd & Hankins, 2015). While acknowledging the racism and white supremacist beliefs that fueled the resistance of many Southerners, Valentine helped to drive "Southern Baptists toward racial advance with a social gospel theology cloaked in the language of evangelical theology" (Roach, 2009, p. 89). This winning strategy was based on his Biblically irrefutable arguments to support race relations that made all, but the most resistant, white Southern Baptists reconsider the application of the gospel to ending Jim Crow segregation.

## Practical Application of Christian Ethics to Racial Segregation

Given the contemporary ethnically integrated and multi-cultural society, it is difficult for some to imagine any aspect of U.S. society in the context of a racial apartheid state. As stated in the dissertation by Pennington (2016), "Blacks now hold some of the highest-ranking positions in society...even though they were once considered to be less than fully human" (p. 1). However, before the end of the Civil Rights Era just half a century ago, across the former states of the Confederacy, strict racial codes divided the South by skin color. Codified segregationist policies not only excluded African-American citizens from voting and holding public offices; it also enforced harsh social restrictions which prevented them from attending schools, eating at restaurants, or even worshipping with their white brethren.

Initially, the SBC and the vast majority of its congregants supported the institution of Jim Crow segregation. This separation of the races was not limited to social spaces and included churches and seminaries (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). For instance, for nearly the entire first century of its existence, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) supported African-Americans' religious education as long as it remained segregated. According to The SBTS' *Racism and the Legacy of Slavery Report*:

The contradictory impulses of the doctrine of white superiority and Christian love led to the seminary's faculty to support the theological education for black Baptists but to insist on racial segregation in theological education and in other areas. (p. 54).

The demonstrations, legal challenges, and speeches of the Civil Rights Movement increasingly shed light on not only the inequalities perpetuated by systematic racial discrimination but also the ever-present threat of mob violence faced by African-Americans throughout the South (Pennington, 2016). Over time, an increasing number of moderates within the denomination became uncomfortable with the glaring contradictions of their Christian faith

with the public policies that reinforced racial prejudice. These Christians took to heart the Great Commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (*New International Version*, 1973/2011, Matthew 22:39). They were conflicted by the degradation of African-Americans and their collaboration with their society's social and political mores that endorsed Jim Crow segregation. Consequently, some even felt compelled to challenge the existing social order by embodying the example of Jesus and renouncing the benefits of their privilege and taking "the same servant posture toward racial minorities" (Phillips, 2013, p. 191).

Over time, moderates within the seminary pushed for changes to the social and cultural norms by raising the consciousness of other Southern white Christians to racial segregation. Their efforts made the institution "to rise above all racial prejudice" with the admission and graduate, Garland Offutt, in 1944, in open violation of local and state laws prohibiting the integration of schools (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018, p. 59). These theologians and religious leaders recognized that racial segregation was incongruent with Christian ethics and biblical Scriptures. Moreover, they spoke out against the sin of racism. They took the public stance of integrating their religious schools, which effectively countered many of Jim Crow segregation's social taboos. This is because seminary attendance required integrated classrooms but also involved dormitories, cafeterias, and church services.

Evans (2009) wrote an essay illustrating how evangelical Christians transformed from opposing civil rights protests to eventually pushing for social justice by African-Americans. Moderate Southern Baptists took the approach that addressing race relations was a practical matter that required Christians. With an appreciation and understanding of the ethics of Christianity, they sought to debunk prevailing false and dangerous attitudes upholding the

inferiority of African-Americans and perpetuating the *Curse of Ham* myth (Morrison, 2018; Pennington, 2016; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

Perhaps no other Christian ethicist had a more significant impact on transforming the denomination's views towards racial justice according to the doctrine of the image of God than Maston (Morrison, 2018; Pennington, 2016; Phillips, 2013). Maston viewed racial injustice as a moral issue that the church was uniquely responsible for addressing. According to Morrison (2018), "it is the church's business to be the vanguard of the moral forces of society...[but] it will be a tragedy of tragedies for churches of Christ to surrender their moral leadership" (p. 176).

Morrison (2018) and Phillips (2013) indicated that many Southern Baptists applied biblical principles to approach racial divisions as a moral concern necessitating Christian love and action under Maston's tutelage. Efforts by Christian ethicists demonstrated a motivation to challenge fellow believers for being silent on race and discrimination in Southern society. They argued that this approach not only gave the impression of acquiescence but was inherently not of Christ. Accordingly, perhaps no Southern Baptist whose moderation approach to racial and social changes affected and influenced other evangelicals than Billy Graham (Evans, 2015). He promoted integrated revivals in areas where strict segregation was enforceable by law.

Appealing to the Christian faith of their fellow Southern Baptists was not without negative consequence. According to the SBTS (2018) report, seminarians faced significant opposition from their local communities when pursuing efforts to end segregationist policies. Ward's (2008) dissertation cited an instance of white Baptists in South Carolina who were mailed threatening letters and had their Vacation Bible School for African-American children disrupted by the Ku Klux Klan who threw dynamite at them. However, Christian ethicists, like those in the



model of Maston, recognized that they would face criticism for their stance because they "saw evangelism and ethics as an intertwined relationship" (Phillips, 2013, p. 183)

### **Reformist Leaders of the Christian Life Commission**

The Christian Life Commission (CLC) of the SBC is widely viewed as the preeminent organization that propelled the denomination to transform its stance on race relations and its theological approach away from justifying racial segregation (Pennington, 2016; Roach, 2009). Led by reformist leaders over the decades of the Civil Rights Era, they challenged their fellow believers to not only embrace racial integration but, more importantly, to view African-Americans as equally representative of the image of God. However, Roach (2009) clarified that their efforts to convince other Southern Baptists of the incompatibility of racism with the Bible was eventually successful because they "appropriated conservative evangelical concepts in matters of race and apply the Bible's message of free salvation to race relations" (p. 62).

The CLC was founded in 1914 as the SBC's Social Service Commission. According to Pennington (2016), it was created to assess the evils of widespread lynching and violent terrorism committed against African-Americans. It was renamed the Christian Life Commission and has since been renamed the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (Pennington, 2016; Phillips, 2013).

It has led the charge to proactively study the SBC's approach to contemporary social ills throughout its existence. Phillips (2013) discovered that writings by the CLC advanced the reformation of attitudes on race, supported the education of African-American theologians and ministers, and increased interracial camaraderie. Southern Baptist ethicists developed an understanding of race relations based upon theological knowledge that racial prejudice and discrimination were not of Christ (Pennington, 2016). Likewise, CLC leaders argued for its

churches and members to refrain from merely reflecting the social mores of Southern society that endorsed racial segregation. Instead, the CLC appealed for them to embody the "ethical standards of Christianity" (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018, p. 65).

Pennington (2018) indicated that CLC adopted a three-prong approach to bring the issues of institutional racial discrimination to the attention of the broader Southern Baptist community with included: an objective analysis of social problems and distribution of information to churches and newspapers, emphasizing salvation as part of Christian living within human society, and involving local pastors to convey the message to their congregants. This applied Christianity approach of reformist leaders of the CLC promoted Christians' social responsibility and denounced churches supporting violent extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

During this period, the CLC and its members took very progressive stances on race issues that were often controversial. For example, the seminary endorsed the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and urged the denomination to support public schools' desegregation despite the considerable disagreement throughout the South (Pennington, 2016; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). In 1957, they used their annual report to denounce Jim Crow laws and remind Southern Baptists that race problems were "primarily moral and religious in nature rather than economic, political, or cultural" (Pennington, 2016, p. 114).

During the Civil Rights Era, Southern Baptist leaders of the CLC subscribed to the understanding that Jesus valued all of humanity. They sought to convince other white Southern Christians to care for the disenfranchised, as did Jesus Christ. In doing so, they did not subscribe to the tenets of liberal theology. Instead, they advanced "the cause of racial equality with social gospel theology packaged in the language of conservative evangelicalism" (Roach, 2009, p. 75).

In doing so, they appealed to their fellow believers' understanding of Bible truths to successfully transform the SBC to support ending Jim Crow segregation and legalized racial discrimination.

### **Rationale for Study and Gap in Literature**

During the Civil Rights Era, the direction of religious leaders unified citizens from across the country by their tireless commitment to inspiring the nation to come to reckon with the evils of Jim Crow segregation throughout the states of the former Confederacy. Their moral courage and inspiration provided the ethical foundation for the movement that transformed U.S. society. They revealed that all human beings bear the image of God and are equally valued by Him.

The preponderance of literature on this crucial period of both the history and spiritual formulation of the nation and its citizens surrounds African-American ministers and theologians. As significant as they were to the Civil Rights Movement's success, the efforts and writings of several white Southern Protestant allies were essential to transforming the hearts and minds of their fellow Southerners to reject Jim Crow segregation and embrace African-Americans as full citizens and human beings. Their moral courage advanced theological arguments supporting desegregation and racial equality during this era when most Southerners supported Jim Crow segregation based on racially biased Scripture interpretations.

Much of the literature surrounding the Jim Crow segregation and the Civil Rights Movement provides a limited and one-dimensional perspective of white Southern Protestants. They are commonly grouped into the broader demographic of Southerners as a stereotypical monolithic bloc universally committed to preserving racial segregation. However, the available research indicates that there were sharp divisions within this group that battled for their community's soul (Leonard, 1999; Phillips, 2013; Stephens, 2015; Ward, 2008).

The moral and ethical reasoning of influential Southern Baptist leaders helped their

denomination and fellow congregants to support the end of Jim Crow segregation. These leaders openly promoted racial equality, supported civil rights leaders, and published works to endorse racial desegregation. Further understanding of this necessitates a subsection to briefly describe Jim Crow segregation and the Civil Rights Movement from a historical context.

Further, in recognition that white Southern Protestants were no monolith, the following subsections examine them according to three general classifications: Christian fundamentalists, evangelical Christians, and mainline Protestants. Relevant literature assessing was reviewed to understand the varied theological, philosophical, and social approaches these groups took to addressing racial segregation during this period.

### **Historical Context**

The conclusion of the Civil War resulted in the sudden emancipation of over four million human beings after suffering under the bondage of over two and a half centuries of brutal and cruel chattel slavery. Afterward, the governments of the former Confederate states enacted Black Codes to restrict freedom and punish these people. The U.S. Congress responded by passing the Thirteenth, Fourteen, and Fifteenth Amendments and other necessary legislation to protect these Americans and guarantee their rights under the U.S. Constitution (Franklin & Moss, 2000).

This period of Reconstruction ended when former slave owners and ex-Confederates, and other sympathizers terrorized African-American citizens to disenfranchise them of their rights and freedoms. According to Franklin and Moss (2000), Jim Crow segregation codified the complete marginalization of African-Americans under state constitutions that formalized racial apartheid. This was upheld by the Supreme Court's *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case in 1896. Jim Crow would remain the South's law for over the next half of a century as a system of discrimination reinforced by legal manipulation, economic disparities, and acts of terror.

The 'classical' phase of the Civil Rights Movement is generally considered to have commenced with the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, which essentially reversed the earlier “separate but equal” judgment. The next decade would see millions of Americans conduct countless peaceful protests, sit-ins, and marches to bring attention to the consciousness of their fellow citizens, the dehumanization of Jim Crow segregation. Hall (2005) indicated that this period concluded with the U.S. Congress passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Hall, 2005).

The Civil Rights Movement success can be attributed to its leaders' novel strategy and the tactics employed by its participants. This nonviolent direct-action technique saw the employment of peaceful civil disobedience, which frustrated the attempts to quell boycotts and protests. African-American theologians are primarily attributed to devising and implementing this tactic. Stephens (2015) explained that they employed their biblical understanding to shape the movement's goals and methods to address their fellow citizens' plight.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is the best-known Christian minister to lead the Civil Rights Movement and was an early proponent of nonviolent direct action. King's 1964 bestseller, *Why We Can't Wait*, chronicles the theological, theoretical, and practical basis for employing this tactic. He addressed both elements of the interconnectedness of humanity and the need to act against inequality. This was encapsulated in his oft-quoted declaration, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality...Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly" (King, 1964, p. 76). Accordingly, he convinced fellow Christians to work together to defeat the discrimination of African-Americans in the South.

Throughout this era, African-American churches served as a space to train members on their rights and encourage participation in the movement. According to Gaines (2010), these

programs educated both churchgoers in the face of personal peril while unifying a message of humanity and moral consciousness to garner citizens' support from across the country. Moreover, these informal Christian education programs served the crucial purpose of implementing these theological frameworks into practical concepts to prepare demonstrators to exercise moral (and physical) courage in the face of brutal attacks, verbal abuse, and unjust incarcerations they would face. As a result of Christian leaders' efforts like Dr. King and the broadened ecumenical support of the Civil Rights Movement, fellow believers were spurred to marshal the "theological and institutional resources of their faith to break down the racial order" (Johnson, 2015, p. 2).

### **Christian Fundamentalists**

Christian fundamentalists' rationalized racial segregation upon the hermeneutics of their slaveholding forbearers. These individuals "linked biblical inerrancy to social and cultural practice...[and] used the Bible to defend the holding of slaves" (Leonard, 1999).

Slave owners "sought to use the church as an agency to maintain the institution of slavery. Ministers were encouraged to instruct slaves along the lines of obedience and subserviency...In the last three decades before the Civil War, the church became one of the strongest allies of the proslavery element (Franklin, 2000, p. 154).

Such religious support for slavery (and later segregation) was theologically necessary. Gjelten (2010) asserted that Christian fundamentalists offered the intellectual and moral support required to justify the social apartheid of African-Americans whose disenfranchised labor powered the South's economic system. The consequence was that by defended racial hierarchy in the segregated South, racism colored the theology of Christians (Dupont, 2015). Consequently, biblical teachings also codified racial inferiority and prejudice into the culture's fabric. Harvey (2011) indicated that this prevailing racially-biased interpretation of the Bible provided the theological rationale for validating Jim Crow and legalized racial oppression.

To these Christians, the promotion of intermarriage violated biblical teaching because it "undermined the God-ordained separation of the races" (Leonard, 1999). Therefore, the fight against racial discrimination into the 20<sup>th</sup> century was so potent because "racism is not only sinful and heretical in its denial of the equal dignity of all God's children...In place of God...[it] substitutes an idol that leaves its devotees untroubled by massive injustice and unaware that they are not worshipping the true and living God of love and justice" (Nilson, 2010, p. 88).

Fundamentalists offered the most substantial theological support for the institution of Jim Crow segregation. They based their pro-segregation argument upon a biblical defense of the institution. This theological basis was often based upon the oft-quoted yet biblically false myth of the *Curse of Ham* that originated during the antebellum period to justify the institution of slavery (Pennington, 2016; Manis, 1999; Morrison, 2018). Manis (1999) supports this assertion by detailing examples like ministers like the Texan Carey Daniel. The latter delivered sermons like *God the Original Segregator* that cited Genesis 10:32 and Acts 17:26 to falsely assert that African-Americans originated from Noah's son Ham and that people were of separate blood.

Christian fundamentalists also staunchly opposed federal government mandates that might upset the established social order reinforcing racial segregation. As such, as one influential fundamentalist stated in a letter to President Lyndon Johnson, "The theological basis on which they ask the people to accept the [Civil Rights Act] is not found in Holy Scripture...[because] the Bible did not teach the brotherhood of man" (Stephens, 2015, p. 14). Interestingly, they also intertwined the threat of racial integration with anti-Communism and governmental overreach.

### **Evangelical Christians**

Dupont (2015) indicated that Southern white evangelical Christians did not cling to segregation as firmly as the fundamentalists. Evans (2015) pointed out that evangelicals

condemned racism and took an individualistic approach to social change. Stephens (2015) further indicated that evangelicals largely viewed racism as an individual sin based upon a theological approach that championed biblical truths, personal conversion, and free-market ideas.

They began to break from the orthodoxy of Christian fundamentalists in the 1930s and 1940s when that group started its path of Massive Resistance against the initial wave of social changes that came about during the Great Depression and World War II. The consequence was that the moderate theology of evangelicals propelled them to become the most significant single representation of Southern white Christians. Although they shared the same born-again faith as fundamentalists, evangelicals were less vocal in resisting racial integration.

The best known of all evangelical Christians is Billy Graham. He was set apart not only by the popularity of his revivals. Graham was also more progressive than many Southern Christians and even his ministerial peers in that he preached the "biblical unity of the human race" (Evans, 2015, p. 477). He promoted integrated church services when most white Southerners were against them, and they were illegal in many municipalities. For instance, he was assailed by Christian fundamentalists for his integrated revivals and his writings, like *No Color Line in Heaven* (Stephens, 2015).

However, like other evangelicals, Graham was more conservative in his biblical approach to addressing Jim Crow segregation. Despite the global acclaim of the Civil Rights Movement and the theologically sound basis for its doctrines, Southern evangelical leaders often denigrated the social changes sought by its protests, denounced the movement, or refused to vocalize support to Dr. King and its other African-American Christian ministers (Evans, 2015; Manis, 1999, and Stephens, 2015). Accordingly, after the passage of the Civil Rights Bill in 1964,



Graham claimed that the solution to racism was not demonstrations or legislation but through individual repentance for their sinfulness (Stephens, 2015).

According to Manis (1999), despite their pronouncements against the sin of racism, evangelicals largely supported the institution of racial segregation and rejected the biblical premise behind the claims of Christian brotherhood. Evans (2015) further explained that their theological concept tacitly supported the South's existing racial caste system. Despite vocally condemning racial violence, they consented to support discriminatory laws and refrained from punishing white supremacists who attacked and terrorized African-Americans. Dupont (2015) revealed that although less likely to support the brutality of racial oppression under the institution of Jim Crow, white evangelicals were unwilling to support issues that were indirectly related to individual sin and morality like poverty, integration, and discrimination.

Research by Andrews et al. (2016), conducted using a representative survey of 700 adults in 1961, found that Southern white Christians who attended church were less likely to support sit-ins and other protest forms. However, support increased when church leaders used their sermons to speak about race relations. Yet progress towards ending racial discrimination was halted because of the overall lukewarm support Southern evangelicals gave to the Civil Rights Movement. Such a tepid approach to the brutality and terrorism that Southern African-Americans were subjected to under the oppression of Jim Crow segregation.

A Southerner himself who enjoyed a Baptist upbringing, President Lyndon Johnson understood the outsized moral and ethical influence of evangelicals on their respective state and local governments, as well as businesses and civic organizations. He invited 150 leading theologians and ministers of the SBC to the White House before the passage of the Civil Rights Act. During this event, President Johnson stated:

No group of Christians has a greater responsibility for civil rights than Southern Baptists. Your people are part of the power structure in many communities of our land. The leaders of states and cities and towns in your congregations and they sit there on your boards. Their attitudes are confirmed or changed by the sermons you preach, and the lessons you write, and by the examples you set (Stephens, 2015, p. 15).

The SBC provided the theological justification of slavery and Jim Crow segregation. However, it began to move away from defending racial segregation at the end of the Civil Rights Era. Yet, Southern evangelical Christians' complicity in upholding racial segregation and discrimination tainted its ministry. As a result, in 1995, the SBC issued a resolution acknowledging its central role in perpetuating slavery, Jim Crow segregation, racism, and white supremacy (Southern Baptist Convention, 1995). Subsequently, the SBTS published its report in 2018, confessing its complicity in offering the theological justification for the defense of slavery and segregation, falsely proclaiming African-Americans as inferior, and perpetuating the Lost Cause ideology (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). These and other proclamations from evangelical organizations, denominations, and individuals are efforts to confess to past transgressions' in how they theologically approached the Bible, individual sin, and repentance.

### **Mainline Protestants**

Mainline Protestants were the majority Christian segment in the U.S. at the time of the Civil Rights Movement. However, mainline Protestants were the minority population of Southern white Christians. They generally followed their denominations' progressive leanings and supported the nationwide push to end racial segregation in the American South. This group of white Southern Christians was most likely to ally with African-American Christian leaders and congregations protesting racial segregation in the South (Dupont, 2015).

Mainline Protestants in the South were primarily appalled by the racist theology purported by Christian fundamentalists. Stephens (2015) revealed that some white Christians even likened some fundamentalists' approach and their full-throated support of Jim Crow segregation to the German Nazis. Many mainline Protestants also believed that the middle ground staked by their evangelical brethren was theologically unsound. Accordingly, they decried their fellow white Christians' collective support of racial segregation because it ignored Christianity's fundamental social aspect as preached by Jesus Christ, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (*New International Version*, 1971/2013, Mark 12:31).

Mainline Christians challenged other believers who claimed to love one another African-Americans if they were denied acceptance into houses of worship or neighborhoods because of legal segregation. Stephens (2015) revealed mainline Protestants countered that the anti-government arguments of fundamentalists and evangelicals rang hollow because many of these same anti-federal supporters actively promoted governmental support for national defense, family values, public morality, and prayer in public schools.

Many white Christians mostly agree that the sin of racial segregation caused pain and suffering for countless African-Americans in the past. Increasingly, it is evident from the literature that several of these believers continue to hinder attempts to achieve racial reconciliation today. To atone for their transgressions, the SBC (1995) issued an apology for its role in promoting racial discrimination. Accordingly, Rehwaldt-Alexander (2004) notes that:

Evangelicals' resistance to the civil rights movement has tarnished its image...[and] the evangelical church's role as the final bulwark of segregation is a dark stain on its history. We must frankly acknowledge the errors of the past, recognize the debt. We owe to those who exposed the hypocrisy of the church and forsake racism as both an ideology and a political style. And we must do more. We must build a genuinely inclusive movement that embraces the full racial diversity of America (p. 114).

## The Gap in the Literature

An examination of available literature discovered that white Southern Christian allies are mostly unknown despite the pantheon of writings about the primarily African-American Christian leaders who led the Civil Rights Movement. Notwithstanding, there are significant distinctions due to the genuine dangers to their lives because of the constant threat of attack by extremists and the perilous continual endangerment to their safety faced by African-Americans leaders due to their protests. However, their white allies also faced considerable risks to their security and the threat of disassociation from their denomination and communities to support racial equality when segregation was the law of the land. Research describing their moral courage and ethical leadership has noticeably not been widely chronicled despite these white Christian leaders' critical influence. They motivated most Southerners to recognize African-Americans' humanity, demonize the sin of segregation, and transform the hearts of their Christian brethren against the brutal inhumanity of Jim Crow.

Interestingly, despite its enormous size, influence, and the number of affiliated academic institutions, there is relatively scant academic research on the SBC and the role of its leaders during the Civil Rights Movement. One recent book, *Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention*, is primarily a collection of essays from leading theologians and ministers offers suggestions on addressing the legacy of racism in the denomination but offers little insights on the contributions of legacy leaders in the fight against racial discrimination (Williams & Jones, 2017). Additionally, two other readings written by Robert Jones, CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, offer data-rich assessments of the intersection of white supremacist ideology and white Christian theology (including Southern Baptist) from slavery to today (Jones, 2016; Jones, 2020).

However, at least three recently published texts are breaking new ground to detail the roles of Southern Baptists in their fight primarily to support racial discrimination. Kidd and Hankins (2015) wrote comprehensive history titled *Baptists in America*, which unsparingly chronicles the denomination and its roles in major periods, including slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. Dupont (2013) and Hawkins (2021) wrote books to excise the part of white Southern Baptists and other Christians in Mississippi and South Carolina, respectively, to preserve Jim Crow segregation. Both books also highlight the small number of moderates within their ranks who exerted the moral courage to challenge them. Unsurprisingly, some of these individuals are also the SBC's legacy leaders highlighted in this research.

Despite these recent books, only at least six recent dissertations were written about white Southern Christian's actions on racial reconciliation during the Civil Rights Era (Morrison, 2018; Pennington, 2016; Phillips, 2013; Rehwaldt-Alexander, 2004; Roach, 2009, and Ward, 2008). Due to this absence in the intellectual analysis of white Christian leaders on this pivotal period in U.S. history, the dissertation by Phillips (2013) specifically highlighted this gap in research, stating, "there is still very little ethical analysis of white, southern Christians and their responses to the Civil Rights Movement" (p. 9).

The limited scholarship of white Christians in general and Southern Baptists is a one-dimensional caricature of all white Southerners that is both flawed and unfair. Therefore, without the nuance of expanded knowledge on their roles and efforts otherwise, the tendency is for Southern Baptists to be collectively yet inaccurately identified in the same manner as the staunch segregationists who threatened peaceful protestors. As a result, without evidence to the contrary, it is difficult for researchers to show examples of white Christians who recognize the humanity

of African-Americans and stood against the racially biased interpretations of Scripture that were used to defend racial segregation and discrimination.

### **Profile of the Current Study**

This study seeks to enrich this area of knowledge on the contributions of white Southern Christians to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, which has been relatively untouched. It expands upon the limited available literature and relevant research to identify leaders within the SBC who helped reverse their society's racial apartheid. As the South's largest and most influential religious organization, theologians and ministers within the ranks needed to take a stand to transform the theological framework necessary to change their fellow Southerners' moral conscience and Jim Crow segregation.

Despite African-American civil rights leaders' national influence and moral stature, they held little sway within the SBC or Southern political circles. As a result, they needed to ally with Southern white Christians who embodied the moral courage to dismantle the institutionalized discrimination of Jim Crow by challenging a racially discriminatory theology and challenging other Southern Baptists to live up to their image of God beliefs. These leaders defied Southern society's prevailing views to promote racial equality, support civil rights leaders, and publish works endorsing desegregation.

This research hypothesizes that examining the traits and leadership characteristics of select prominent ethical leaders of the SBC applies today. As the nation undergoes another period of polarization and cultural change, this study examines the application of the lessons of an earlier generation of Christian leaders. These reformers challenged other Southern Baptists to live up to their image of God beliefs and transformed their denomination's prevailing theology to promote racial desegregation.

Such ethical leadership and moral courage in the face of open hostility, personal risks, and professional disassociation to openly promote racial equality and address misinterpretations of Scripture is as necessary today as any time since the Civil Rights Movement. Hence, ethical leadership and moral courage are needed today to unify citizens. As in the example of these earlier visionaries, Christian leaders can help reverse contemporary societal polarization and combat injustice through their works, words, and writings, that as in the example of Jesus Christ, accept and treat one another equally in the image of God.

### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This grounded theory research examined contemporary Christian leaders' ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics necessary to reverse current polarization and combat injustice. This study identifies these qualities for analysis and applicability by assessing the transferability of efforts of select Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) leaders who promoted racial desegregation during the Civil Rights Era. These reformers motivated other Southern Baptist congregants to challenge existing racial prejudices and live up to their stated image of God beliefs. Accordingly, the structure of this research methodology of this grounded theory examination is divided into eight sections: 1) Research Design Synopsis, 2) Setting, 3) Participants, 4) Role of the Researcher, 5) Ethical Considerations, 6) Data Collection Methods and Instruments, 7) Data Analysis, and 8) Conclusion.

#### **Research Design Synopsis**

##### **The Problem**

Throughout the history of the United States, Christians led by God's Holy Spirit positively reformed their communities and the nation. More specifically, Christian leaders labored to transform the nation's moral conscience towards the humane treatment and acceptance of fellow human beings. Most recently, Christian theologians and ministers' leadership and moral compass facilitated the lasting legacy of the social and cultural changes stemming from the Civil Rights Movement. However, contrary to the vast historiography on African-American civil rights leaders, examining the literature related to their white Protestant counterparts' actions found scant scholarly or primary sources.

Interestingly, despite its enormous size, influence, and the number of affiliated academic institutions, there is little primary research on the SBC's transformational leaders and



their efforts during the Civil Rights Movement. The limited scholarship of white Christians in general and Southern Baptists is often a one-dimensional caricature that is flawed and unfair. This is because Southern Baptists and the broader demographic of white Southerners are often perceived as a monolithic bloc universally committed to preserving racial segregation. However, the SBC's reform-minded leaders defied their denomination's prevailing views to support civil rights leaders, published works promoting racial equality, or contested racially-biased interpretations of Scripture. These efforts were essential to motivating members of their faith to recognize African-Americans' humanity, demonize the sin of segregation, and transform the hearts of other Christians against Jim Crow's brutal inhumanity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to examine and identify the Christian leadership characteristics of influential legacy leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Further, this study evaluated applying their lasting lessons and relevant principles for present-day Christian leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, what effect did the advocacy of select Christian leaders have on the eventual transformation of the SBC's theology away from the racially biased interpretations of Scripture used to justify Jim Crow segregation?

**RQ2.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how have contemporary Southern Baptist congregants challenged racial prejudice and lived up to their stated image of God beliefs?

**RQ3.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how well are current efforts to improve racial equality and race relations within the SBC succeeding?

**RQ4.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how are these select Christian leaders' leadership characteristics and moral courage applicable to contemporary leaders seeking to reverse today's polarization by addressing injustice issues?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are essential for leaders and organizations to understand and employ. These approaches offer the tools and mechanisms required to assess personnel, processes, and outcomes required to manage and operate any association. Moreover, they provide the capacity for the individuals who lead, support, and observe these entities to measure, interpret, and predict outcomes.

#### ***Qualitative Method***

Grounded theory is a qualitative sociological research methodology rooted in phenomenology. This approach is called phenomenology because it is based on a philosophical perspective (Roberts, 2010). Research of this type is well suited for studies related to understanding relationships and interactions between people. Accordingly, this study focuses on exploring and understanding a topic and aims to investigate, describe, interpret, or uncover processes, events, or phenomena. Qualitative research is most useful when assessing information that is not readily tangible from numbers alone (e.g., individual beliefs and historical assessments) involving people's interactions.

Qualitative research focuses on human experiences to gain a holistic understanding of situations, events, and concepts. As such, it may be used for various forms of analysis (e.g., case studies, grounded theory, and ethnographies) to gain a more holistic understanding of multiple phenomena that cannot be determined primarily from data analysis. These assessments include observations and interviews that enable the researcher to focus on real-world situations and

analyze the subject's complexity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). In these studies, the investigator's role is integral in presenting, examining, and validating the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The advantages of the qualitative approach include concept development, problem identification, and theory evaluation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). This methodology is most suitable for this study's examination of the theological and theoretical frameworks that formed the basis for understanding select Christian leaders' ethical leadership and moral courage in opposition to the SBC's approach to Jim Crow segregation. Further, this study employed a key instrument of qualitative analysis (the interview) to survey pastors and theologians who affiliated with the SBC to identify distinctive ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage lessons that may be applicable for present-day leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization by addressing and inspiring Christians to combat injustice.

### ***Grounded Theory***

Grounded theory was first detailed in 1967 by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their seminal book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Holton & Walsh, 2017; Urquhart, 2013). Glaser and Strauss intended to enable researchers to process the "discovery of theory from data—systematically obtained and analyzed in social research" through a methodical examination of research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2017, p. 1). Therefore, the grounded theory is derived from interaction with data from multiple data collection stages, analysis, refinement, and categorization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The most powerful feature of grounded theory is that it enables the discovery and development of new approaches (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Reese, 2016; Todd, 2004; Urquhart, 2013). This is done through "engaging a phenomenon from the perspective of those living it" (Corley, 2015, p. 601). Accordingly, the investigator's iterative interaction with data results in

the discovery of concepts and theories. This is achieved through a systematic process of categorizing information and "positioning it within a theoretical model (axial coding), and then explicating a story from the interconnection of these categories (selective coding)," resulting in the development of the grounded theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 198). This methodical process is supported by the transfer of concepts and data that enables the formulation and refinement of grounded concepts (Jopke & Gerrits, 2019).

This qualitative research explores a theory derived from the analysis of visionary Southern Baptists who rejected institutional racial discrimination during the Civil Rights Era. Further, this study's grounded theory method assessed this potential concept's applicability and any distinctive ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage lessons for present-day Christian leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and combat injustice.

### **Setting**

The U.S. is undergoing its most significant political and social divisions since at least the 1960s (Pierre, 2018). There is an increasing division on topics ranging from health care to education and law enforcement to religion. Comparisons of generational, political, ethnic, gender, and religious groups reveal issues which different segments reflect strong disagreements.

This concern regarding current societal fragmentation sparked the researcher's desire to study and discover how leaders during the Civil Rights Era responded to that period's social divisions, given its similar nature to today's polarization. Contrary to the vast historiography on African-American civil rights leaders, it was a surprising discovery that examining the literature related to their Southern Baptist counterparts' actions found scant scholarly or primary sources. As a result, this research seeks to understand how the SBC's leaders transformed the world's

largest Baptist denomination to transition from its original theology based upon a racially biased interpretation of Scripture to its eventual stance supporting racial equality (Pennington, 2016).

The lack of literature on white Southern Christians' role during the Civil Rights Era inspired this study. It was the largest and most influential religious body in the American South during this period. Hence, to understand Southern society's transformation on racial segregation, it is necessary to investigate the visionary Southern Baptist leaders that inspired these changes. They were motivated to follow Christ's example by convincing other Christians and the broader Southern society to care for the disenfranchised. Further, these individuals' moral courage and ethical leadership were prominent because of the open hostility they faced from other Southerners. Accordingly, interviews of contemporary SBC-affiliated religious leaders were essential to assess the applicability of these Southern Baptist visionaries' approaches to countering today's polarization amongst the nation's citizenry.

### **Southern Baptist Visionaries**

Throughout U.S. history, Christian leaders committed to serving as a moral compass for their fellow citizens by facing personal peril to help make the nation a more perfect union. For example, during the Civil Rights Era, select religious leaders of the SBC helped their congregations and communities reckon with the evils of Jim Crow segregation throughout the states of the former Confederacy. They labored to transform southern society's moral conscience towards the humane treatment and acceptance of fellow human beings. In doing so, these religious leaders joined forces and leveraged their God-ordained strengths to influence political leaders and American citizens to overturn unjust laws that legalized segregation.

These religious visionaries recognized the Southern society's and denominations' collaboration with Jim Crow segregation's sinfulness. They influenced their leaders to end racial

segregation by casting its urgency as a moral imperative. They sought to reestablish the essential freedom of human dignity. Further, they revealed that all human beings bear the image of God and are equally valued by Him. Their example serves as exemplars for contemporary Christian leaders to emulate as they heal modern polarized society.

Throughout the Civil Rights Era, there were sharp divisions within the SBC that battled for their community's soul over their society's approach to Jim Crow segregation (Chappell, 1992; Leonard, 1999; Phillips, 2013; Stephens, 2015; Ward, 2008). For instance, this period coincided with the era of massive resistance in which Southern political and religious leaders subscribed to segregation founded upon the belief in racial superiority (Dickerson, 2005). However, select leaders of the SBC transformed their prevailing theology to promote racial equality by defying Southern society's overall views to openly encourage racial equality, support civil rights leaders, and publish works to endorse racial desegregation or contest racially-biased interpretations of Scripture.

### **Contemporary Polarization and Application for Today's Southern Baptists**

Christians are not impervious to the ongoing polarization in contemporary society. This cultural and political schism has profound implications for churches and leaders due to declining church attendance and increased apathy towards mainline and evangelical churches. Additionally, sizable increases in Americans who no longer identify as Christians can be attributed to increased skepticism of religion, political party alignment of denominations, and revelations of church leaders' wrongdoing and scandals.

The contempt and falsehoods spread by fellow Christians seeking to discredit opposing opinions and groups severely damage both the nation and its churches. Therefore, reversing the polarization of contemporary society requires involvement at every level. This includes church

leaders motivating their congregations, national leaders addressing issues of injustice, and everyone sharing compassion through the lens of the image of God.

The Christian leaders described in this study helped lead the SBC and their communities through a period of great discord, not unlike today. They labored to transform the nation's moral conscience towards the humane treatment and equal acceptance of all human beings. In the face of hostility and sacrifice, they helped lead a fight against their fellow Americans' discrimination in defying their peers' prevailing views.

The SBC subscribes to evangelical religious theology. Its leaders must appeal to the body's core theological beliefs to inspire change within the denomination. Accordingly, as in the case during the Civil Rights Era, any suggestions to address the denomination's approach to societal equality and injustice required biblical applicability, theological contextualization of discrimination and prejudice, and appeal to the individual repentance of the sin of individual and collective bias (Roach, 2009).

In recent years, the SBC has sought to atone for its transgressions by formally addressing the theologically flawed and sinful nature of the organization's original racially-biased interpretation of Scripture used to justify racial discrimination and segregation (Southern Baptist Convention, 1995; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). This study asserts that examining the moral and ethical leadership legacies of earlier Christian leaders, whose efforts and examples helped spark this transformation in the denomination, applies to today's Christian leaders in addressing the current era's societal fragmentation. Such ethical leadership and moral courage in the face of personal attacks to overcome injustice and address Scripture's misinterpretations are as necessary today as during the Civil Rights Era to help unify the body of Christ, as well as the nation.

## **Participants**

The research population sought to serve as interviewees for this grounded theory study were religious leaders affiliated with the SBC. More specifically, the participants selected for this research have experience or currently serve in the following capacities: church pastors, faculty members of any of the six Southern Baptist Theological seminaries, or members of the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC).

## **Sampling Procedure**

As a qualitative study, the purposeful sampling approach was pursued for this research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants were thoughtfully selected to be part of this grounded study analysis. The researcher solicited some potential interviewees directly. Furthermore, the individuals chosen for this research understood the problem and were suitable for achieving its purpose. The individuals asked to participate were associated with the SBC, any of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries, the ERLC, or a Southern Baptist church.

The investigator recruited church pastors for this study to identify relevant characteristics of ethical leadership and moral courage necessary for other Christian leaders to embody. The church leaders considered for inclusion resided in the analyst's locale of Northern Virginia and others throughout the United States. The investigator reviewed the websites of all six Southern Baptist theological seminaries to evaluate eligible and qualified faculty members to recruit for this study. Additional interviewees were selected for this grounded study analysis using the exponential discriminative snowball sampling methodology (Boise State University, n.d.; Dudovskiy, n.d.).

The analyst emailed potential participants to request their involvement in the interviewee identification and selection process. Upon acceptance of the invitation to



participate, the researcher asked selected interviewees to identify and provide the contact information of subsequent individuals for nomination as potential participants in the study. The investigator continued this process until the objective research population was reached.

Once all potential interviewees' names were received, the analyst submitted the complete list to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Once IRB approval was granted, the analyst emailed an invitation to the individual to request their participation in this study. Upon notification of the interviewee's acceptance of the invitation, the analyst responded via email to describe the interview process's details. This email included any required consent forms.

### **Sampling Size**

This study sought to interview approximately 10-12 members that have affiliated with the SBC. More specifically, the participants were required to be knowledgeable to address matters of race relations within the denomination. Further, they discussed ethical leadership and moral courage regarding race relations within the SBC.

In addition to various experiences within the SBC, this research strove for a diversity of the interviewees' worldview and background. Accordingly, this study solicited at least two African-American and Hispanic members of the SBC as their individual and group perceptions as people of color within the denomination. Likewise, at least two women were sought for inclusion as part of the interview group. This helps illuminate the extent and practicality of reforms to address racial reconciliation and the proposed applicability of the proposed model drawn from grounded theory research and the example of earlier leaders to a contemporary, more culturally, and gender-diverse congregation of Southern Baptists.

### Role of the Researcher

The researcher exercising grounded theory methods maintains a central role in conducting the study. Rather than approaching the subject with preconceived theory or hypothesis, the investigator employed grounded theory in order to be open to following the data to discover new concepts and explanations. Therefore, given this research's inductive nature, the analyst acted as a *noise filter* for the data, thereby collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the information amassed through their study (Jopke & Gerrits, 2019).

The investigator of this grounded theory study was attuned to this role and was suited to filter the data due to his background as an academically trained and educated historian who has taught at the university level. Further, it was this experience and inclination which spawned this study. After reading about contemporary societal polarization, it was a natural predisposition to pursue a comparable period in U.S. history to compare and learn potentially helpful techniques that today's leaders might employ to address injustice and fragmentation issues. As a result, a survey of available literature led to a discovery of parallels found during the Civil Rights Era, which corresponded to today's social divisions.

This researcher is also a born-again Christian whose examination of available literature led to a discovery that Christians consistently transformed the nation's moral conscience towards the humane treatment and acceptance of fellow human beings throughout U.S. history. From the Great Awakening during the colonial period to the abolitionists of the antebellum era fighting against the evils of the vicious institution of human slavery, these leaders revolutionized the country's societal and cultural structures. Most recently, during the Civil Rights Era, Christian leaders fought to end the legalized segregation that was reinstituted within the former Confederacy to disenfranchise the

African-American population, subject them to ruthless violence, and relegate them into a formal state of racial apartheid of Jim Crow segregation.

This study uncovered that most writings were about the African-American Christian leaders who led the Civil Rights Movement. Accordingly, the efforts of white Southern Christians are mainly unknown. Aware of this period's tumultuous nature, the researcher observed that white allies would have also faced considerable risks to their security and the threat of disassociation from their denomination and communities to support racial equality when segregation was the law of the land. Consequently, it appeared that a noticeable gap in research describing the moral courage and ethical leadership of Southern white Protestants had not been widely chronicled. They motivated the majority of Southerners to recognize African-Americans' humanity, demonize the sin of segregation, and transform the hearts of their Christian brethren against the brutal inhumanity of Jim Crow.

The analyst taught various courses on U.S. history and studied the Civil Rights Movement extensively. From this background, it was acknowledged that despite the national influence and moral stature of predominantly Christian, African-American Civil Rights leaders, they held little sway within the dominant white Southern political and religious establishments. As a result, it was understood that they needed to ally with white Southern Christian theologians and ministers who embodied the moral courage to dismantle the institutionalized discrimination of Jim Crow by challenging a racially discriminatory theology and challenging other Southern Baptists to live up to their image of God beliefs. Hence, these leaders would need to defy Southern society's prevailing views to openly promote racial equality, support Civil Rights leaders, and publish works to endorse racial desegregation.

The SBC was the most influential religious institution throughout the former Confederacy during Civil Rights Era. Its original theology was based upon a racially-biased Scriptural interpretation that supported the segregationists who promoted institutional racial discrimination by employing their massive resistance strategy. Despite this past, research about the SBC concluded that for this institution to use its immense influence to convert its congregants and broader Southern society to change its stance on racial segregation, it required transformational leaders from within the denomination. Accordingly, theologians and ministers within the ranks were needed to take a stand to transform the theological framework necessary to change their fellow Southerners' moral conscience and Jim Crow segregation.

However, the researcher's literature review discovered that limited scholarship of Southern white Christians during the Civil Rights Era exists. For instance, only six recent dissertations were written on the subject (Morrison, 2018; Pennington, 2016; Phillips, 2013; Rehwaldt-Alexander, 2004; Roach, 2009; Ward, 2008). Due to this absence of intellectual analysis, Phillips (2013) stated, "there is still very little ethical analysis of white, southern Christians and their responses to the Civil Rights Movement" (Phillips, 2013, p. 9).

Consequently, the investigator anticipates that this study will enrich this area of knowledge on the contributions of Southern white Protestants to the Civil Rights Movement, which has been relatively untouched. It expands upon the limited available literature and relevant research to identify leaders within the SBC who helped reverse their society's racial apartheid. As the South's largest and most influential religious organization, theologians and ministers were essential to transform the theological framework necessary to change their fellow Southerners' moral conscience and Jim Crow segregation.

This researcher hypothesizes that these Southern Baptist leaders' efforts defeated the organization's original racially-biased interpretation of Scripture to justify racial discrimination and segregation can be further distilled through this grounded theory research. Accordingly, this study asserts that examining these Christian leaders' moral and ethical leadership legacies expands the historiography and theological analysis of the Civil Rights Era. Moreover, it is postulated that evaluating their transformational leadership example directly correlates and applies to today's Christian leaders.

Christian leaders equipped to face of personal risks and hostility to promote racial equality and address Scripture's misinterpretations remains as indispensable today as any time since the Civil Rights Movement. Hence, they must embody ethical leadership and moral courage to unify their communities and churches. As in the example of these earlier visionaries, Christian leaders can help reverse contemporary societal polarization and combat injustice through their works, words, and writings. As in the example of Jesus Christ, accept and treat one another equally in the image of God.

In grounded theory research, the researcher is considered an instrument that is part of the study. However, the analyst was attentive to the risk of interjecting personal or confirmation bias as part of the analysis. In response, detailed notes and memos were kept that focused on the data collection and analysis phases to avoid bias. Finally, the investigator met periodically with the faculty advisor to solicit feedback and counsel that continually challenges assumptions that may affect the study's theory development and findings.

A strength is that the researcher is Christian but is not an SBC member. Therefore, the analyst is knowledgeable about central Christian concepts such as the doctrine of the image of God and ethical leadership. Hence, the investigator does not possess a solid allegiance to the

Southern Baptist denomination, which further reduced unintentional implicit bias. This background has the added advantage of improving the analyst's ability to allow the data to reveal the core concepts that resulted in theory development.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Interviews are the most common data collection method for grounded theory research. Accordingly, ethical considerations abound when researching human subjects. Therefore, this research complied with all guidelines and procedures established by the IRB.

All individuals selected to participate as interviewees for this study were provided consent forms, which outlined the study's purpose and enabled them to acknowledge participation formally. During the interview sessions, the interviewees maintained the option to decline to answer any questions.

All participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained using pseudonyms to identify each interviewee as part of the data collection and analysis process. Further, the interviewees were asked for their permission to record the interview session for the sole purpose of electronic transcription. The recordings and transcription were secured in an encrypted, password-protected file accessible only to the researcher.

During discussions with the faculty advisor, the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants were protected. Accordingly, although these conversations addressed the study's progress, any participants' identifiable information was not included.

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

This qualitative grounded theory study examined the characteristics of today's Christian leaders' ethical leadership and moral courage during a period of contemporary societal and religious polarization. The grounded theory approach is appropriate for this research as it is

inherently inductive. This investigator entered the study with a general idea of the outcome and conducted the survey prepared for more flexibility in approaching the analysis (Corley, 2015). Consequently, most hypotheses and concepts are derived from data and systematically tested throughout the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2017).

### **Grounded Theory Overview**

Grounded theory was first detailed in 1967 by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in their seminal book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Holton & Walsh, 2017; Urquhart, 2013). Glaser and Strauss intended to enable researchers to process the "discovery of theory from data—systematically obtained and analyzed in social research" through a methodical examination of research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2017, p. 1). The grounded theory is derived from interaction with data derived from multiple stages of collection, analysis, refinement, and data categorization (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

At its core, the grounded theory remains a "semi-systematic methodological approach to developing theories grounded in empirical data" (Jopke & Gerrits, 2019, p. 601). Accordingly, analysts employ this methodology to facilitate the advancement and discovery of theories based upon explanations of phenomena' occurrences through the iterative interaction of data collection, classification, and analysis; however, since the *Discovery of Grounded Theory*, the methodology and its techniques have developed and changed significantly (Corley, 2015).

Two primary approaches to the methodology evolved over the past three decades. This fracturing of grounded theory occurred because Glaser and Strauss differed their respective opinions on using grounded theory. This resulted in what is now considered the two primary grounded theory approaches. One is the perspective advanced by Glaser, which urges a return to classic grounded theory, and the other philosophy of Strauss, which embraces a more flexible

adaptation and application (Smith, 2015). Hence, the distinctions between the two grounded method approaches relate to their respective philosophical viewpoints, literature reviews, and coding processes (Alammar et al., 2019).

The Glaserian approach is considered "classical grounded theory" (Alammar et al., 2019, Holton & Walsh, 2017; Walsh et al., 2015). Glaser (1992) published *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence vs. Forcing* in response to Strauss and Corbin's earlier text. In his book, Glaser argued that Strauss and Corbin unnecessarily constrained the development of emergent theories due to their establishment of preconceived procedures and categories (Alammar et al., 2019). Another distinction is that Glaser advised against researchers conducting an extensive literature review of the subject throughout the study. Lastly, the Glaserian-approach maintained a less rigorous coding technique to permit the theory's intuitive discovery.

The Straussian approach originated from the 1990 book by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin titled, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Strauss and Corbin's text sought to help inexperienced analysts who found the unstructured nature of the earlier writings on grounded theory difficult to apply (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This Straussian philosophy advanced the grounded theory methodology by incorporating a more systematic design (Alammar et al., 2019). This method acknowledged that investigators might find literature reviews useful for coding and deriving theoretical comparisons. Additionally, the Straussian approach is more structured in that it outlines three types of coding processes (open, axial, and selective) used to create a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Based upon a preliminary literature review, it was hypothesized that the moral courage and ethical leadership of visionary Southern Baptist reformers contributed to defeating the



organization's original racially-biased Scripture interpretation used to justify racial segregation. Further, it was surmised that these characteristics may prove beneficial for contemporary Christian leaders to combat today's polarized landscape. Consequently, this research intended to take the Straussian approach to grounded theory because the researcher is allowed to hypothesize as well as "initiate an inquiry with a predetermined, yet flexible research question, which arises from a partial review of the existing literature" (Alammar et al., 2019, p. 238).

### **Collection Methods**

For grounded theory research, data is usually collected by examining interviews, observations, audio-visual material, and other documents/records (Todd, 2004). This study incorporates discussions of pastors and theologians affiliated with the SBC to examine familiar themes surrounding their moral courage and ethical leadership and determine if they may be grouped to form a core concept theory. This was a semi-structured interview in the Straussian model to allow open research questions and permit consistency (Alammar et al., 2019).

### **Instruments and Protocols**

This research's primary instrument was derived from interviews with SBC-affiliated Christian leaders who are also knowledgeable on race relations within the denomination. These individuals are also familiar with moral courage and ethical leadership. Before conducting interviews, collecting and analyzing publicly available qualitative documents related to select visionary Southern Baptist theologians and ministers was necessary. The intent was to examine and evaluate the grounded theory of their transformational leadership legacy.

### ***Document Analysis***

Document analysis involved reviewing relevant literature written about and by Henlee Barnett, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine. The intent was to

assess their respective efforts advising Christian leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, publishing works to support racial equality, or contest racially-biased interpretations of Scripture.

From the outset and throughout this research, the researcher took a cultural and historical analysis approach to discover common connections and themes found in the relevant literature collected for this study (Kusch, 2016). This assessment enabled the identification of influential legacy leaders of the SBC who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout this document evaluation process, dozens of books, articles, and dissertations were reviewed to distinguish and assess transformational leaders who stood out from their fellow Southern Baptists based upon the textual evidence of open declarations of their theological convictions that every human being is made in the image of God. This extensive literary analysis of Southern Baptist leaders resulted in Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine as representative examples for this grounded theory research to examine ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics.

This study examined relevant documents regarding influential legacy leaders of the SBC to identify the applicability of their leadership qualities for transferability for present-day Christian leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization. This analysis occurred primarily during the literature review process of this research to examine how these transformational leaders stood out from their fellow Southern Baptist congregants. The literary analysis further described each leader, their viewpoints, and the overall impact of their respective theological convictions.

The cultural and historical analysis of the literature revealed various themes and commonalities about Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine. All of them lived in the segregated South during the early twentieth century and were disturbed by the contradictions between the stated biblical beliefs of their fellow Southern

Baptists and the sinfulness of the institutionally racist society they existed. They eventually became prominent Southern Baptists who advocated for other white Christians to show mutual respect and understanding of African-Americans and other racial groups and treat them as full brothers and sisters under Christ. As moral forces for change, these men spoke and wrote about the immorality of racial segregation and discrimination and encouraged white Southerners to oppose Jim Crow segregationist policies in their churches and communities.

None of these influential legacy leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention can be classified as leading civil rights activists. Instead, they were gradualists who believed that race relations would improve over time by converting the hearts and beliefs of the prevailing Southern Baptist community. Despite working within the establishment, all withstood risks to their security and threats of disassociation from their denomination and communities to support racial equality when segregation was the law of the land. Accordingly, these men were true disciples of Christ who combined a conservative Baptist theology to advocate for social change while practicing the same ethical approach in their daily lives. Collectively, they implemented a winning strategy of working within the Southern establishment to advance Biblically irrefutable arguments to support race relations that pushed the SBC and its members to eventually support racial reconciliation and desegregation.

The literary analysis identified evidence of their leadership characteristics, support of the Civil Rights Movement, or efforts to influence racial desegregation. The result enabled the researcher to describe historical evidence of their advocacy for racial equality and desegregation. Furthermore, this literary analysis confirmed their leadership influenced the SBC and the broader Southern society to end Jim Crow segregation. This assessment served as the basis for the subsequent interviews with contemporary religious leaders affiliated with the SBC.

## ***Interviews***

The primary data collection instrument for this study was the interview. These interviews were conducted with church pastors affiliated with the SBC. Further, current theological seminary faculty and members of the ERLC (formerly Christian Life Commission) were sought for inclusion. The purpose is to examine the ethical leadership and moral courage examples of the Southern Baptist visionaries and evaluate their model to today's Christian leaders.

The interviews were conducted via an online teleconference tool suitable for the interviewee (e.g., Zoom). The sessions were single, semi-structured engagements with each individual lasting approximately 30-minutes. The intent is to collect data on the interviewee's thoughts and experiences relevant to identifying ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics applicable to Christian leaders addressing societal polarization and injustice.

## **Procedures**

Grounded theory methodology is an "iterative, inductive, and interactive process of data collection, simultaneous analysis, and emergent interpretation" (Goulding, 2005, p. 296). As with any methodology, it requires a research question. This method's primary data collection processes include theoretical sampling, coding, saturation, memoing, and theory development.

## ***Theoretical Sampling***

Data collection through sampling is integral to all forms of research as it "guides the researchers towards potential sites, respondents, observation range, and further data to be introduced into the analysis" (Jopke & Gerrits, 2019, p. 603). With grounded theory, the analyst is encouraged to allow the process of data collection and analysis to shape the subsequent theory discovery to "develop concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions, uncover variations, and identify relationships between concepts" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143). Given the

iterative nature of grounded theory, theoretical sampling should be consciously focused to permit the accumulation of data that enables further adjustments and potential exploration during the data analysis process (Jopke & Gerrits, 2019).

For this study, theoretical sampling began during document analysis and continued throughout the subsequent interviews. It served as the basis for examining select SBC leaders' ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage to assess its applicability to contemporary Christian leaders. Particular attention was paid to their theological arguments supporting desegregation and racial equality throughout the massive resistance era when most Southerners openly advocated for Jim Crow segregation based upon racially-biased interpretations of Scripture. Subsequently, the interviews with contemporary Christian leaders expanded upon the theoretical sampling by examining specific aspects of their leadership legacies to evaluate the application of their example to today's religious leaders.

### ***Coding***

Coding is a necessary data analysis procedure for grounded theory research. It forms the basis of theory development. This study followed the Straussian approach and complied with its three coding stages (open, axial, and selective) (Alammar et al., 2019; Urquhart, 2013).

Open coding starts after interviews are transcribed. It is the foundation of the grounded theory as it allows the researcher to "open up the data to all potential possibilities contained within them" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). During open coding of the data attained through interviews, various themes and concepts were revealed to assess the ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage of the select SBC leaders.

Axial coding occurs after much of the data from open coding is organized into groupings. At this point, the investigator combines subcategories of ethical leadership characteristics and

moral courage under the main categories (an axis) of data (Alammar et al., 2019). Saturation is expected to conclude axial coding when no additional information can be discovered from sampling and coding the data (Goulding, 2005). This data collected through axial coding identifies broad categories and delineates relationships between ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This information is subsequently connected with other data to define and explore more specific themes and concepts and form the basis for eventual theory development. (Alammar et al., 2019).

Theory development occurs during the selective coding phase of data collections. At this stage, the researcher sifts through the data to "develop concepts...uncover variations and identify relationships between concepts" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143). This phase focused on developing causal relationships based upon the data to create a theory of legacy of visionary leaders and their continued relevance to contemporary Christian leaders. Theory development is derived from a storyline drawn from the various concepts deduced from coding and classifying the data and results in core categories supported by subcategories of data (Alammar et al., 2019; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Goulding, 2005; and Todd, 2004). This core category reveals a theoretical significance that is "traceable back through the data" (Goulding, 2005, p. 297).

### ***Memoing***

Memoing is an essential feature throughout the entire data collection process (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Holton & Walsh, 2017). At its most basic level, writing memos helps the researcher recall and understand codes. Further, it helps to "foster the critical reflection of one's own reasoning" by offering the analyst an opportunity to revisit ideas that were evident during the conduct of interviews (Jopke & Gerrits, 2019, p. 603). Lastly, continual comparison and interaction with memos are intended to improve the investigator's open-mindedness, thus

avoiding potential confirmation bias when developing the concluding grounded theory for examining Christian leaders' ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage.

### **Data Analysis**

Grounded theory is an interactive and iterative process. This methodology's data analysis process is essential for developing, refining, and categorizing concepts for theory development.

#### **Analysis Methods**

Given the nature of this research, a comparative analysis is conducted data collection process. This is most evident in the coding, theoretical sampling, and theory development stages.

#### ***Coding***

Throughout all three grounded theory coding processes, data is expected to be iteratively reorganized. During open coding, the researcher applies codes to the data to ascribe meaning and help identify distinct categories of ethical leadership and moral courage useful during the later coding stages (Goulding, 2005; Jopke & Gerrits, 2019). This is expected to be a line-by-line analysis of words and phrases, with the subsequent efforts focused on exercising the constant comparison method to thoroughly examine the data to "further refine properties and dimensions of concepts" (Jopke & Gerrits, 2019, p. 604).

During axial coding, the investigator analyzes the various leadership characteristics to combine them under the main categories. Once core categories emerge from axial coding, the analyst exercises theoretical sampling to generate central aspects of the emerging theory or questions that influence data collection to identify causal relationships necessary for theory development and refinement of the concepts (Holton & Walsh, 2017 and Jopke & Gerrits). This effort aligned the various ideas and themes in a manner that is "refined, elaborated, and integrated, making them more suitable for building up a theory" (Alammar et al., 2019, p. 233).

The data analysis continues into selective coding by sorting memos and categories to assess how all concepts are used to support the defined theory (Holton & Walsh, 2017). During this data analysis phase, the researcher tests all ideas of ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage to ensure they are grounded in the data. The subsequent theory must fulfill the following criteria: substantive—well-defined categories, consistent—reasonable concepts, and explanatory potential—clear relationships of ideas (Jopke & Gerrits, 2019).

### ***Computer-Based Coding Software***

The use of computer-based coding software is applicable for grounded theory research. Further, this analyst utilized various computer-based coding software for this study. The interviews were conducted and recorded using the Zoom video conferencing software suite. The investigator transcribed each Zoom meeting recording via the Sonix audio/visual automated transcription software platform. The transcripts were imported into the NVivo (Mac-Release 1) software tool for qualitative analysis and coding.

However, it is notable that many grounded theory researchers may find it more suitable to use manual processes (i.e., hand-coding of transcripts, cards, or post-it notes). Accordingly, it is recorded by some ground theory investigators that "computer-aided data analysis may lead to over codifying and mechanical analysis" (Alammar et al., 2019, p. 234).

### **Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of research is determined by the reliability and validity of its data and conclusions. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), validity and reliability is not the same for qualitative and quantitative research. As a result, qualitative research "validity means that the researcher checks for accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures...[and] reliability indicates that the analyst's approach is consistent" (Creswell &



Creswell, 2018, p. 199). The data's trustworthiness is determined by assessing the qualitative research across four categories: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

### ***Credibility***

An investigator's credibility is established by taking the necessary steps to validate their conclusions' accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a grounded theory study, such credibility is garnered by complying with well-established research methods. The added rigor of data collection and analysis in the Straussian approach is why this methodology was selected. Hence, this structure to gathering data should help enhance the credibility and accuracy of this analysis.

### ***Dependability***

Dependability is essential for assessing qualitative research's analytical validity (Holton & Walsh, 2017). It would be difficult to replicate the study precisely to obtain the same results as a grounded theory analysis. However, the researcher conducts detailed documentation of the study to include the data collection and analysis processes. The intent is to reflect the gathering and processing of data and the development of the subsequent theory.

### ***Confirmability***

The confirmability of research is "affirmed through its empirical grounding in data" (Holton, & Walsh, 2017). This study ascertained Christian leadership characteristics through interviews with contemporary leaders affiliated with the SBC. Further confirmability of the grounded theory was tested throughout the coding phases to assess its applicability to current leaders seeking to reverse today's polarization by addressing injustice.

### ***Transferability***

In grounded theory research, the transferability of a theory is facilitated by the interchangeability of indicators that form the basis of the emerging concept (Bryant &

Charmaz, 2007). The scant research on white Southern Christians' contributions during the Civil Rights Era means that this study can serve as the basis for further analysis on the subject. Moreover, the iterative data analysis should enable the transferability of the understanding gleaned from assessing the traits and leadership characteristics of select transformational leaders of the SBC during this earlier period of national division to today.

### **Chapter Summary**

As the U.S. undergoes another period of polarization and cultural change, this study examines the application of the lessons of an earlier generation of Christian leaders who challenged other Southern Baptists to live up to their image of God beliefs and transformed the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) prevailing theology by promoting racial desegregation. Accordingly, this research intends to enrich an area of knowledge on white Southern Christians' contributions during the Civil Rights Era, which has been relatively untouched. Further, this research assumes that examining the traits and leadership characteristics of select ethical leaders of the SBC during this earlier period of national division is applicable today.

Given the historical nature of the subjects and the Civil Rights Movement period, this research recognizes limitations on lessons' direct transferability from one era to another. As a result, this study's grounded theory methodology seeks to show this theory's applicability by interviewing religious leaders affiliated with the SBC. The intent is to assess how the ethical leadership and moral courage of an earlier generation of Christian leaders may apply to contemporary leaders seeking to reverse today's polarization by addressing injustice issues.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

This research examined the application of the lessons of an earlier generation of Christian leaders to determine if the traits and leadership characteristics of identified legacy SBC reformers who challenged their fellow Southerners to live up to their image of God beliefs apply to today's leaders. This study employed qualitative, semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument to collect data and conduct analysis of the characteristics applicable to contemporary Christian leaders addressing societal polarization and injustice. Accordingly, the structure of this analysis of findings of this grounded theory examination is divided into five sections: 1) Compilation Protocol and Measures, 2) Demographic and Sample Data, 3) Data Analysis and Findings, and 4) Evaluation and Research Design. The chapter ends with a concise summary of the data and findings of the research.

### **Compilation Protocol and Measures**

This grounded theory study intended to examine and identify the ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage of transformational SBC leaders who opposed the SBC's approach to Jim Crow segregation. Moreover, this research sought to distill relevant principles and traits for present-day Christian leaders. The grounded theory methodology of this study exercised interviews of ten SBC-affiliated pastors and theologians to examine familiar themes related to moral courage and ethical leadership for forming a core concept theory. The format of each of these interviews was a single, 30-minute session in which the participant was asked to answer five open-ended questions necessary to explore the study's research questions.

Coding the interviews of contemporary SBC-affiliated leaders was an essential data analysis procedure for this grounded theory research. This process examined specific aspects of

Christian leadership traits. Data attained through the respective engagements enabled the revelation of various themes and concepts to be organized and categorized for eventual theory development. (Alammar et al., 2019).

### **Demographic and Sample Data**

This grounded theory study aimed to interview approximately 10-12 religious leaders. The primary qualification for each participant was that they must have been associated with the SBC, any of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), or a Southern Baptist church. Additionally, these participants were to have previous knowledge to discuss ethical leadership and moral courage regarding race relations within the SBC.

The researcher initially identified and contacted forty-four pastors and theologians that met the necessary qualifications for participation. Twenty-six individuals responded, with nine declining to participate. Seven of the remaining seventeen respondents did not reply to the follow-up inquiry to schedule an interview. As a result, ten SBC-affiliated religious leaders (five pastors and five theologians) accepted the invitation, returned the consent form, and were interviewed as part of this study.

At the interview, each participant was either a church pastor or a theological seminary professor/administrator. To maintain confidentiality, each participant was assigned an alpha-numeric code. Pastors and theologians are distinguished with the respective "PR" or "TR" prefix. Furthermore, church pastors are identified only by the state in which they reside. Additionally, the institution of the theologian is identified as affirmative if they are a faculty member of one of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries. Lastly, interviewees are identified as multicultural or white for race/ethnicity. Multicultural refers to participants who self-classify as

either Asian, Black, or Hispanic, and or/whose spouse/children classify as either Asian, Black, or Hispanic. This information was obtained from self-identification during the interview. Table 1 provides a demographic background listing of the research participants.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics Background Listing*

CODE	POSITION	LOCATION	SEMINARY FACULTY	BACKGROUND
PR1	Pastor	VA	N/A	Yes
PR2	Pastor	VA	N/A	No
PR3	Pastor	TX	N/A	Yes
PR4	Pastor	FL	N/A	Yes
PR5	Pastor	VA	N/A	Yes
TR1	Theologian	N/A	Yes	No
TR2	Theologian	N/A	Yes	No
TR3	Theologian	N/A	Yes	No
TR4	Theologian	N/A	Yes	No
TR5	Theologian	N/A	Yes	Yes

All participants possessed previous knowledge about at least one of the identified transformational leaders or race relations within the denomination, their church, or community. The church leaders interviewed had various titles, including the pastor, lead pastor, executive pastor, and bishop. Similarly, the seminary faculty served in various administrative and academic capacities, including provost, vice president, department chair, and professor. Moreover, many of the theologians possessed extensive previous experience as pastors of SBC churches. Accordingly, the individuals interviewed were accomplished leaders with solid backgrounds managing academic and church organizations.

Trends in the diversification of the SBC resulted in nearly twenty-five percent of all SBC congregations being considered predominantly multi-ethnic or another racial/ethnic group than white (Southern Baptist Convention, 2021). Hence, this research purposefully solicited interviewees with diverse worldviews and backgrounds to assess perceptions of people of color within the denomination. Accordingly, half of the participants are identified possess a multicultural background. Of these five church leaders, two are classified as African-American, one as Hispanic, one as the parent of African-American children, and another as having an Asian spouse. Accordingly, the cultural and experience diversification of the participants helped illuminate the applicability of the proposed grounded theory research model for a contemporary, more diverse congregation of Southern Baptists.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

Grounded theory is an interactive and iterative process (Goulding, 2005). Accordingly, this study employed the interview of ten SBC-affiliated pastors and theologians as its primary instrument of qualitative analysis. Furthermore, the researcher used the techniques described by Weiss (1994), suggesting practical strategies for conducting productive qualitative interviews. These methods improved interaction and yielded a collection of data obtained from participant responses, resulting in the development and identification of codes and themes. The refinement of the data analysis process resulted in developing a distinct theory of leadership characteristics applicable for present-day leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and inspire Christians to combat injustice.

Data gathered for analysis as part of this grounded theory research originated from interviews. These interviews were conducted and recorded utilizing the Zoom video teleconferencing software suite. The analyst transcribed each Zoom meeting recording via the

Sonix audio/visual automated transcription software platform. The transcripts were imported into the NVivo (Mac-Release 1) software tool for qualitative analysis and coding. All associated software files are stored in a secure hard drive to which only the researcher has access.

### **Coding**

The grounded theory methodology's primary data collection processes consist of theoretical sampling, coding, and theory development necessary for answering the research question(s). Data collection through theoretical sampling and coding shapes the subsequent theory discovery. Furthermore, coding is the central data analysis procedure for grounded theory research and forms the basis of theory development.

This research exercised the bottom-up approach to data analysis, in which "codes are suggested by the data" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 38). This grounded theory study followed the Straussian method of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Theoretical sampling served as the basis for examining the leadership characteristics of legacy SBC leaders to assess its applicability to contemporary Christian leaders. Theoretical sampling began during document analysis and continued throughout the interviews. The coding of current SBC leaders' interviews led to formulating a distinct theory of leadership characteristics applicable for Christian leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and combat injustice.

### ***Open Coding***

Open coding is the foundation of grounded theory. During this phase, "coding occurs at the word and sentence level" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 38). The intent is to apply codes of words and phrases found within the data to assign meaning and identify potential concepts and categories for the later coding stages (Goulding, 2005; Jopke & Gerrits, 2019). Data collection began with single, semi-structured interviews with each participant lasting approximately 30-minutes. The

researcher asked each participant five open-ended questions necessary to explore the study's research questions and collect data on the interviewee's thoughts and experiences. These interview questions were devised to provide answers to this study's research questions. Table 2 lists each of the five interview questions.

**Table 2**

*Interview Questions*

Number	Question
Q1	What are the most important values that you believe a Christian leader should demonstrate?
Q2	What effect did the advocacy of transformational Southern Baptist leaders (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Dan Valentine) who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement leaders have on the eventual transformation of the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) theology away from the racially biased interpretations of Scripture used to justify Jim Crow segregation?
Q3	How have contemporary Southern Baptist congregants challenged racial prejudice and lived up to their stated image of God beliefs?
Q4	How well are current efforts to improve racial equality and race relations within the Southern Baptist Convention succeeding?
Q5	How are these transformational Christian leaders' moral courage and ethical leadership characteristics applicable to contemporary leaders seeking to reverse today's polarization by addressing injustice issues?

For this study, the researcher initiated open coding immediately after completing and transcribing all interviews. Coding began with the analyst reviewing the responses of each religious leader to all the interview questions. During this process, the researcher then identified keywords and major themes associated with the interviewee's answer to each question to identify general classifications of data. Tables 3 and 4 lists the respective pastor and theologian comments to the five interview questions.



Table 3

## Pastor Interview Comments

INTERVIEWEE	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
PR1	Love; Integrity; Truth; Relationships; Humility	Share a vision; Articulate sin; Take action; Show perseverance; Willful sacrifice	Build relationships; Support church-based multicultural activities; Open communication	SBC's Undivided series discussions on racism	Compare contemporary and historical events; Converse about race; Speak the truth in love; Be courageous
PR2	Christlikeness; Compassion; Gentleness; Humility; Integrity; Love; Biblical Understanding; Conflict Management; Peacemaking; Active Engagement; Effective Communication	Awareness of sinfulness of segregation & racism; Moral courage to risk job & reputation to stand against sin	Social media's impact is both encouraging and discouraging; Honestly assess sin in heart & church; Work to make disciples from wider society	SBC is decentralized; Undivided series promoted racial reconciliation; Wisely apply the Bible; Cultivate relationships; Power of social media is strong; Pastors must speak out	Practice self-reflection; Ask God to reveal blindness; Godly courage needed; Build a relationship with Christ through prayer and bible study; Be authentic; Apply history
PR3	Demonstrate Love; Practice Servanthood; Communicate in Deed & Action	Legacy SBC leaders considered "Hall of Fame"; Leaders paid a price in support of civil rights; Shed light on racism to drive out the darkness of sin	Racial discrimination continues; SBC failing to acknowledge ongoing racism; Different standards applied to people of color for top SBC positions	Break traditions; Hire equally qualified to top positions; Teach entire church history; Encourage unity & brotherhood as equal partners	Address injustice & discrimination
PR4	Leadership stands on following biblical standards	Build upon the lessons of the past to address protests and problems in society today	Hispanic churches & members cannot be neutral to injustice; God is a just God; Preach in accordance to the times	Draw from past to reach new generations; Apply biblical lessons to today's issues; Increase inclusiveness of leadership; Increase diversity of worship	Be faithful to the Bible when answering today's issues; Awareness of societal and individual problems
PR5	Understand history; Possess vision for needed changes; Challenge status quo; Increase transparency	Legacy leaders understood the word of God; Were convicted by their biblical beliefs when faced by Southern Baptists' original support of slavery and opposition to desegregation	SBC's spiritual conviction of past mistreatment of African-Americans caused them to provide recent support to Black churches	Increased inclusion amongst younger congregants; Older congregations declining due to self-segregation; All people are hurting and want to understand where God is in addressing their issues	Heal people & break strongholds by addressing fundamental issues; Conduct prayer & study to show how Bible applies to issues; Remain hopeful; Increased communication; Give people a sense of value

Table 4

*Theologian Interview Comments*

INTERVIEWEE	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
TR1	Discernment; Conviction; Wisdom; Empathetic; Sympathetic; Consensus Building; Scriptural Knowledge	Apostle Paul personifies SBC transformational leaders; Grounded arguments in Scripture; Maintained respectable reputation	Educate themselves on issues of concern; Address differences of opinion privately initially before engaging publicly or via social media	Consider differing views and arguments; Preach & teach about challenging subjects	Leadership means not avoiding controversial issues; Be open & humble; Express your heart; Stick to convictions in face of unethical or biblical criticism
TR2	Team building; Servant leadership; Humble leaders; Human flourishing in fulfillment of the mission	W.A. Criswell's flip on segregation reflected SBC change on racism; No direct correlation from legacy leaders to 1995 resolution; SBC changed because to live out the Bible; SBC didn't celebrate legacy leaders because they were moderates	Instruct people on the entire word of God and shape conscience; Southern Baptists unable to translate preaching & teaching into biblically applicable discipleship of members; Christian leaders will be more effective by fostering local relationships	Promise Keepers pressured SBC to pursue biblical racial reconciliation; Southern Baptists moved to reject biological racism but accepted de facto segregation in church; Churches eventually developed interracial partnerships	Christian leader who characterizes the love of 1 Cor 13; Practicing biblical love requires sacrifice
TR3	Doctrinal purity & faithfulness; Theology & ethics are co-equal disciplines; Seeing everyone as created in God's image; Moral responsibility & accountability; Emphasize ethical discipleship in training leaders & congregations	Awareness that SBC's ethics did not match theology; Acknowledged personal and social aspects of the sin of racism & discrimination	Many assume that racism no longer exists because overt forms are mostly invisible; "Colorblind" language is not reflective of a biblical view of humanity; Celebrate differences; Understand fullness of being created in the image of God; Discuss racism in churches & small groups	SBC must be honest about its history of enslavement & supporting segregation; Acknowledge that racism & prejudice continues; Invest in developing underrepresented groups; Elevate young leaders into positions of authority; Teach entire history of church	Boldly speak the truth in a kind yet convicting manner that is full of grace; We must see the inherent dignity of those we both agree and disagree with
TR4	Trust in God; Reliance upon the Word of God; Love; Compassion; Sympathy; Affection; Patience; Generosity; Encouragement; Humility	Most SBC leaders did not lead well regarding racial injustice; After 1968, SBC leaders began to drop segregated policies; SBC supported Brown v. Board, but local churches & state conventions opposed desegregation with massive resistance	Pastors were successfully influencing the heart of congregants & behaviors towards racial segregation based upon their pulpit ministry & personal relationships; Congregants initially sought to exercise the Christians believe racism is over; Progress continues to be slow	SBC leaders sought to address cultural issues until moderates pushed out in 1980s; Trajectory of SBC efforts regarding racism is mixed; Younger Christians concerned with racial injustice & older safety to stand against systematic wrongs; Try to mend trust, show love, and cooperation	Trust in God and His Word; Conscience & conviction to risk reputation, position, & safety to stand against systematic wrongs; Try to mend trust, show love, and cooperation
TR5	Humility; Servant-driven, mission-focused leadership; People empowerment	Valentine helped SBC reform on racial equality but is vilified for abortion rights views; Maston & Valentine pointed SBC to see image of God in all people; SBC transformation exemplified in transition of Criswell (contact with Graham, Maston, Valentine) from segregationist to supporting integrated churches	Integrated services & programs change the tenor of conversations; Shared fellowship complicates preconceived perceptions; Pastors can help by focusing on the mission of engagement	Training union was weekly session providing lessons on leadership, ethics, & bible studies; Without regular training, congregants unable to obtain theologically sound info on contemporary issues; SBC trended towards politics; Caring for widows of pastors morphed into eldercare; Expand anti-abortion stance to support adoption and orphan children care	Church leaders must learn to address disagreements by discussing the issue in the context of biblical principles and the advancement of the gospel; Leaders must also be willing to suffer personal sacrifice if mutual understanding and compromise is impossible

### ***Axial Coding***

Axial coding occurs after open coding. Alammar et al. (2019) indicated that it is during this phase that the themes and topics identified during open coding are organized under a primary axis of data. Axial coding is complete when saturation occurs, and no further information can be discovered from the coding process (Goulding, 2005).

The researcher of this grounded research study expanded upon the ideas and phrases identified during open coding to assemble them into subcategories of comparable topics. This data was then coded into major categories of leadership characteristics. These axial codes of Christian leadership characteristics were drawn from combining relevant and similar interviewee comments during additional line-by-line examinations of each transcript and reviews of memos written during the interviews.

### ***Selective Coding***

After main categories are created from axial coding, theoretical sampling is conducted during the selective coding phase of the grounded theory research. At this point, the researcher attempts to evaluate causal relationships between the core concepts necessary to create a theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The selective coding process includes recategorizing axial codes, sorting memos, and reviewing data previously analyzed to test the evolving theory to ensure that it is grounded in data. The result is that the codes are sorted into the core elements necessary to define the subsequent approach (Urquhart, 2013).

During the selective coding phase of this grounded research study, the analyst evaluated each of the 27 Christian leadership characteristics categorized during axial coding. These characteristics were assessed to determine linkages and correlations between each code that could lead to the determination of leadership principles and an emergent theory.

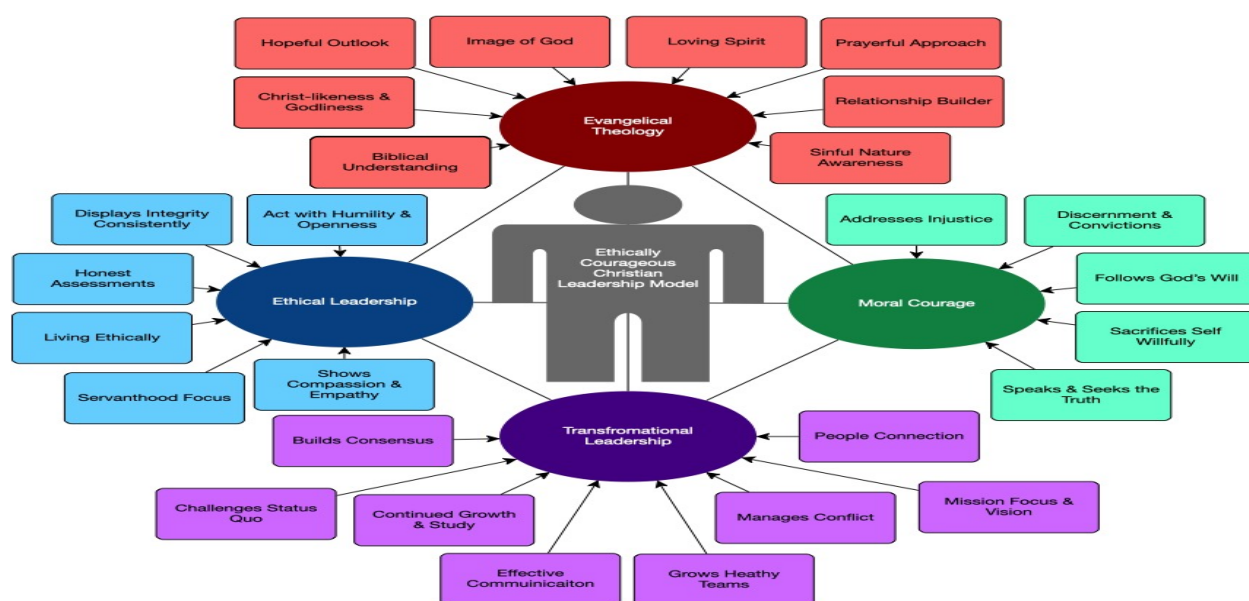
## Finding #1: Advocacy of Legacy Christian Leaders Transforming the SBC

The emergent theory of this research is that the identified SBC reformers were transformational leaders guided by a genuine evangelical theology and exercised moral courage and ethical leadership to challenge their denomination and other white Southern Christians to live up to their stated image of God beliefs. Accordingly, this study defined that the principles of evangelical theology, transformational leadership, moral courage, and ethical leadership signify the essential core elements necessary for contemporary Christian leaders to embody to reverse societal polarization and combat injustice.

This grounded theory achieved the research goal of identifying enduring leadership characteristics of legacy SBC leaders who transformed their denomination's prevailing racially-biased theology to promote desegregation. This emerging theory is identified as the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model. Figure 1 illustrates the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model and associated Christian Leadership Characteristics.

**Figure 1**

### *Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model*



The following subsections briefly describe each principle of the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model.

### ***Evangelical Theology***

The teachings and beliefs of the SBC are defined in its *Baptist Faith and Message* (Southern Baptist Convention, 2000). This statement outlines the confessions of faith of the organization and its believers and describes its beliefs regarding 18 elements of their doctrine. Accordingly, these principles can be ascribed to evangelical theology based on four factors: activism, biblicism, conversion, and a Christ-focus (Roach, 2009).

Perhaps more than any other trait, the legacy Christian leaders described in this study were equally committed to their evangelical theology. This commonality of purpose and belief motivated them to help lead the SBC and their communities from a culture of state-sponsored and socially acceptable racial segregation. Their motivation to fight against discrimination of their fellow Americans and defy their peers' prevailing views of race was fueled by their Christian beliefs regarding the humane treatment and equal acceptance of all God's people.

However, these individuals were not merely motivated to save lost souls. For these leaders to inspire change within the SBC, they had to transform from its racially-biased theology and "false interpretation of Scripture, including teachings of the so-called curse of Ham," which was used to justify the horrors of slavery and Jim Crow segregation (Williams & Jones, 2017, p. xxi). Therefore, any change to its members' approach to racial equality required an appeal to the body's core beliefs and evangelical theology. This necessitated biblical applicability, theological understanding, and understanding the sin of racial bias (Roach, 2009).

Applying the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model to these remarkable SBC leaders revealed that an evangelical theology guided them. Accordingly, they embodied

all associated Christian Leadership Characteristics aligned with the principle of evangelical theology: biblical understanding, Christ-likeness & Godliness, hopeful outlook, the image of God, loving spirit, prayerful approach, relationship builder, and sinful nature awareness. This assessment is validated by the following statements from two of the interviewees.

PR5 stated:

Those [legacy leaders] that stood up back then clearly understood the word of God. When they came to understand the interpretation of what [the Bible] was saying, they were clearly convicted in their beliefs, by the Holy Spirit, that what the SBC was doing was incorrect.

TR1 conveyed:

They tended to ground their arguments, particularly in Scripture and, more generally, theology knowing who their audience was and knowing what they valued. And if they could convince them that what they were saying was biblical or at least that it's in the realm of possibility of being biblical and that they would have to sort of investigate it on their own. But that was the best way forward.

### ***Ethical Leadership***

Demirtas and Akdogan (2014) defined ethical leadership as a leadership style consistently emphasizing truthful, virtuous, and honest behaviors. Individuals who embody ethical leadership have exhibited moral conduct and honorable behavior (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Furthermore, Mozumder (2018) found that ethical leadership supports positive organizational relationships and influences members' trust, attitudes, and behaviors.

The leaders of the SBC (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement exemplified ethical leadership. Perhaps none demonstrated this trait more than Thomas Maston. He "broadened the social awareness of two generations of Southern Baptist theologians and ministers and pushed to add ethics as a subject of instruction at tall Southern Baptist seminaries" (Williams & Jones, 2017, p. 63).

The Christian Leadership Characteristics associated with ethical leadership and the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model are representative of the legacy SBC leaders. Accordingly, each person acted with humility & openness, displayed integrity consistently, honest assessments, lived ethically, was servanthood focused, and showed compassion & empathy. Furthermore, the following statement from TR1 affirms this assessment about ethical leadership and hints at its effectiveness:

I find almost all of those individuals...were upstanding; they were respectable; they were godly. They were who your rank-and-file Baptist wanted them to be and expected them to be for the most part...Those leaders that I'd be more inclined to listen to and that I see at least some rank-and-file Baptists more willing to listen to are those who have demonstrated their fidelity and their integrity throughout their lives in their ministry.

### ***Moral Courage***

Skitka (2012) references the definition of moral courage as "a willingness to take a stand in defense of principle or conviction even when others do not (p. 3). Likewise, this behavior comes at significant personal risk and is often without any direct reward (Osswald et al., 2010). Despite the potential costs, it is often in response to an injustice or violation of ethical norms which sparks deep-seated anger to compel individuals to demonstrate moral courage in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

This research revealed that the identified select leaders of the SBC were indeed morally courageous. They willfully faced hostility, personal risks, and professional disassociation from their denomination to openly promote racial equality, support civil rights leaders, publish works endorsing desegregation, or contest racially-biased interpretations of Scripture. Consequently, their moral courage eventually influenced the transformation of the SBC's stance on racial discrimination, and their example applies to today's leaders.

The Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model identifies the following Christian Leadership Characteristics as associated with moral courage: address injustice, discernment & convictions, follow God's will, sacrifice self willfully, and speak & seek the truth. The following statements by two participants reflect the impact of morally courageous acts by Henlee Barnette and Billy Graham.

PR3 shared:

And then Henlee Barnette would bring Martin Luther King to Southern [Baptist Theological Seminary] and risk losing [school] funding, which they lost some funding [and] risk losing his job, being threatened, which he was threatened.

TR4 conveyed:

And so, when he [Billy Graham] insists on nonsegregated seating in his crusades, that's huge and wins him a lot of criticism from many white evangelical leaders, especially in the South.

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership is focused on inspiring and influencing followers' achievement to transcend self-interest and achieve organizational goals (Bass, 1990).

Accordingly, transformational leaders seek to encourage followers to benefit the group beyond their immediate self-interests. Transformational leaders can help their followers achieve these objectives by delegating authority and agency to their followers.

Arguably, these select leaders exercised transformational leadership, although this concept was not yet defined during the period of most of their respective ministries. Their actions reflect this leadership style as they motivated the SBC to change from its racially discriminatory theological approach to promote racial equality eventually. More specifically, they worked to inspire believers to set aside self-interests and live up to their image of God beliefs and support racial integration and the humane treatment of African-Americans.



The following Christian Leadership Characteristics are associated with transformational leadership according to the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model: build consensus, challenge status quo, continued growth and study, effective communication, grow healthy teams, manage conflict, mission focus and vision, and people connection. The following excerpt from the interview with TR5 reveals how Foy Valentine embodied these characteristics of transformational leadership:

That the South was so steeped in a twisted, scriptural hermeneutic that the work that was laid out for, like a Foy Valentine, on the issue of really the image of God in humanity was a deck that was stacked way against him. But he was in his leadership component, and it was in some respects, I think, his dogged determination, to continue to point people back to say, "Thus sayeth the Lord." He just continued almost incessantly repeating the same thing... Valentine was not known to be a forceful person. He was more of a quiet person basically. And so, his work behind the scenes and continuing to point people to the text and to say where this works... he kept that in front of him as the main mission, the main goal, the main point that drives. And so, then when he needed to have these conversations about race or other social issues. He would continue to tie it back to that big picture. And whether that was in smaller groups or opportunities in larger groups, it was all about that mission. I think he was able to get away with more longer because of that. And in how that served the bigger picture of Southern Baptists versus someone who had just come out guns blazing, so to speak.

## **Finding #2: Contemporary Southern Baptist Challenging Racial Prejudice**

The Christian church is afflicted by the same polarization affecting America on issues transcending generational, political, ethnic, gender, and religious boundaries. Believers, churches, and denominations are divided in their opinions, and many refuse dialogue and openly discredit others who share different viewpoints. Barna Group (2021) conducted the most extensive study of U.S. Christianity and assessed that American Christians are more divided on issues of race than their secular counterparts. More specific to the SBC, the book *Removing the Stain of Racism from the Southern Baptist Convention* includes a collection of writings from some of the denomination's leading theologians and ministers documenting individual

experiences and assessments on the SBC's legacy of racial prejudice and suggestions to achieve racial reconciliation (Williams & Jones, 2017). The writers of text collectively suggest that a reversal in the polarization of contemporary U.S. society and the SBC requires church leaders to come together to address injustice and reflect compassion through the lens of the image of God.

To better understand how these contemporary challenges are currently affecting the SBC, its churches, and its members, the researcher asked the participants interviewed for this study to identify comparisons and other significant challenges for today's leaders within the SBC to address. The analyst aimed to derive main categories from corroborating subcategories of remarks identified by at least two interviewees. However, in cases where categories are determined from a single interviewee, the themes were extraordinarily compelling and revered at least three times during the interview session. Table 5 lists the contemporary challenges faced by SBC church leaders as identified by the interviewees.

Table 5

*SBC Contemporary Challenges*

Challenges Identified	Interviewees	References	Quotations Supporting Category
COVID & Community Hurt	1	3	I've been challenged over this last year through this pandemic. The pandemic has taught me so much in how to navigate my church through this and really talk about what they really want. (P85)
Critical Race Theory	2	5	In 2019, at the meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Birmingham, the message adopted...Resolution #9, which was both a criticism of critical race theory and a...willingness to...appropriate some of the insights of critical race theory, if they hold up to biblical scrutiny.... There were many Southern Baptist whites who felt that this was adopting profound heresy. And so, over the last...two and a half years, Southern Baptists have had a lot of controversy over that resolution. But what that reflects is a difference of opinion over how things are going in terms of racial justice and racism in America. (T84)
Decreasing Membership	2	3	As you know, there have been many struggles within the denomination, and the denomination is losing the African-Americans based upon their not being willing to take the stand. (P85)
Discrimination & Lack of Diversity	4	11	[Except for SBC President] Southern Baptists have never placed a black as a leader of one of their [top] entities. Many have applied...[but] none [got] those jobs...They can begin by hiring quality, not a quota, not affirmative action....So they could change the perception by hiring qualified African-Americans and other Asians, Hispanics in the top-tier jobs because that's ultimately accepting that we're willing to follow your leadership. (P83)
Ethical Discipleship & Church Leadership Conflicts	3	5	The relationship between theology and ethics is something that's very underdeveloped in evangelicals...often pastors, when they're in the pulpit or when they're in their churches, are facing very difficult ethical decisions and are simply just not equipped to navigate them....I think that there needs to be a greater emphasis on ethical training in our schools and also ethical discipleship within our churches themselves. (TR3)
Generational Divide	2	8	Younger white southern Baptists tend to look at the whole George Floyd incident and controversy as an indication that we've still got a lot of work to do in this nation....Whereas I think many older white southern Baptists look at those as well, those were clear injustices, but those are isolated and extraordinary events, and they're not indicative of something more pernicious or pervasive. (TR4)

Challenges Identified	Interviewees	References	Quotations Supporting Category
George Floyd & Black Lives Matter Protests	4	4	And maybe we are not out there on the protest lines. We have to understand what they're protesting and what the protesters are trying to make us see. (PR4)
News & Social Media	4	7	The power of social media is very strong...I kind of really started getting on people about not reposting things that you agree with, yet it happened to be false. Just because you like it doesn't mean you need to repost it and make the situation worse on any of a range of topics that were swirling around last year. And I think many people did actually take that to heart. So, I'm encouraged about that. (PR2)
Political Alignment	1	3	Some of our approaches to cultural issues actually don't quite fit a party. So, the biblical approach sometimes is apolitical...So, what are we supposed to do with that, and how are we supposed to think about that? And some pastors are very well equipped to do that and to help their people. And some pastors are just political animals, and so they're going to pair it with what their political party says...Instead of thinking through the tough issues...through the lens of our primary mission, which is the evangelization of the world, we get lost very, very quickly. (TR5)
Segregated Churches	3	5	Blacks were not always welcome [in many SBC segregated churches]...Some of them had things like that [their church constitutions]...That constitutions that they adopted way back in the '40s, '50s, and '60s made very clear that blacks couldn't [fellowship]...Some of this happened in the '90s and 2000s. (PR3)
Slow Changes	3	5	There's a slow process and a slow molding and process, but we also have to recognize that this was a practice that was in our nation for over four hundred, of slavery. So, it's not something that you can just snap a finger and fix, and everything's magically OK now. It's a slow process. (TR3)
Spiritual Impoverishment	2	2	The command to love our neighbors as ourselves. And so, what does that mean biblically when it comes to how we relate to one another across racial or ethnic lines? So that'd be one just I think I don't think Southern Baptists, in general, have done a very good job of holding up a vision for the Ministry of the Word, whether that's preaching on Sundays or just the discipleship life of our churches...we know preaching... through the whole scriptures...and we do a lot of pragmatic stuff that people get excited about, but it's not always shaping the conscience. (TR2)

### Finding #3: Current Efforts to Improve Race Relations Within the SBC

Despite the tremendous societal challenges related to racial relations, there is a strong reason for encouragement and hopefulness. For instance, Barna (2021) reported that 64% of

practicing Christians and 44% of U.S. adults “believe churches have a major role to play in improving race relations” (p.13). Unsurprisingly, just as in earlier eras, many church leaders and their congregants across the nation continue to rise to the occasion to inspire their communities and neighbors to work to address issues of inequity, disenfranchisement, and disharmony.

According to the book, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, this transformation begins with moving past denying the history of racism in the Christian church to fully reckoning with its implications by acknowledging its complicity and actively working to eradicate inequality and prejudice (Jones, 2020). Similarly, this research seeks to offer Christian leaders the capacity to understand the necessary traits needed to protest injustice, protect the innocent, and preach love, unity, and wisdom. Consequently, to better understand how these contemporary challenges are currently affecting the SBC, its churches, and its members, the researcher asked the participants interviewed for this study to identify comparisons and other significant challenges for today’s leaders within the SBC to address.

The analyst aimed to derive main categories from corroborating subcategories of remarks identified by at least two interviewees. Through data analysis and coding, the nine recommended improvement considerations were identified by the participants. Table 6 lists the recommended improvements that SBC church leaders identified during the interviews.

Table 6

*SBC Recommended Improvements*

IMPROVEMENT CONSIDERATIONS	INTERVIEWEES	REFERENCES	QUOTATIONS SUPPORTING CATEGORY
Bible-Based Leadership	5	7	Leaders in SBC life and in local churches will have the most meaningful impact on this...biblical teaching and shaping the conscience...the teaching function and the call toward obedience that the teaching is to lead towards obedience, it's to have an outcome of faithfulness. (TR2)
Conduct Honest & Relevant Dialogue	4	12	Just like we want people to present the Christian ideas in ways that we would agree. We don't like when people caricature our faith or say things that we believe when we don't believe them. So, let's be fair and honest with other people and engage them in honest dialogue. (TR3)
Develop New Leaders	3	9	We just need to have a more diverse staff...we don't need to be on both sides of this...our goal is not to have a quota. It's not to look a certain way...it's to invest in the local communities that God has placed us. To be reflective of those communities. (TR3)
Discipleship Training & Programs	5	6	I think the North American Mission Board made some resources specific on the topic of race available. They did a series of Bible study discussions called Undivided that I thought were helpful conversations between SBC leaders of different races and that was helpful. (PR2)
Discuss Racism & Injustice	6	12	So, finding some way to sustain the conversation about race is how we continue to advance the ball forward. My concern is that...it'll be two generations before we have tough conversations again and that those racial ideas will re-entrench themselves... You hope that we don't have to see what we did last summer. We don't want some sort of thing to make a flare-up happen so that we have these conversations again. (PR1)
Diversify Social & Worship Associations	6	8	Christian leaders in general, are going to be far more effective in seeing progress and faithfulness to Christ if we lean into local relationships. So, pastor to pastor...having a meal, developing friendships among families, across racial and ethnic lines...if you can build those relationships and friendships, the issues...they get humanized...they have far more strength and wisdom from the Lord to actually figure out how to walk forward together. (TR2)
Foster Increased Church Partnerships	4	14	I thank God that I've been able to have this experience of being part of a Florida Baptist convention and being part of a Jacksonville Baptist Association where you can see the inclusivity...So, you can see that inclusion is not something that is talked about, but it's put into practice, and you can see it in the diversity of churches and people that are working within these organizations. (PR4)
Societal & Public Engagement	3	4	I'm in a location where it's black, it's white, it's mixed. And I never thought that I would be effective like I am to reach people of other ethnicities and other races. But I'm finding out more and more people...congregations want to be able to say, "We have to stop this!" (PR5)
Understand Full SBC History	7	11	I would say we're not going to live in the past, but we need to learn from the past. And there's times that we preach about things that are happening today, and we can look back in the past and teach from that. (PR4)

**Finding #4: Christian Leadership Characteristics Applicable to Today**

This qualitative grounded theory study examined and identified the Christian leadership characteristics of influential legacy leaders of the SBC applicable for present-day Christian leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization. Themes and keywords arose from reviewing the interviewees' comments and statements. Further analysis of the data coding from the transcripts of these SBC-affiliated church leaders resulted in identifying leadership characteristics applicable for present-day Christian leaders seeking to combat injustice.

The analyst derived main categories from corroborating subcategories of remarks identified by at least two interviewees. However, in cases where categories are identified from a single interviewee, the themes were extraordinarily compelling and revered at least three times during the interview session.

The data analysis and coding process yielded 27 Christian leadership characteristics exemplified by the reformers who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. These characteristics are also essential traits for contemporary Christian leaders addressing societal polarization and injustice. Table 7 lists the Christian Leadership Characteristics categories identified during this process, the number of interviewees and transcript references, and a quotation from an interviewee that supports each code.

Table 7

*Christian Leadership Characteristics*

CHARACTERISTICS	INTERVIEWEES	REFERENCES	QUOTATIONS SUPPORTING CATEGORY
Act with Humility & Openness	5	8	As a leader, you need to be open, I believe, to backtracking, repenting, acknowledging the error, and not taking the posture that you're not to be questioned, that you're the expert. You're supposed to be the expert, but you're not infallible. (TR1)
Displays Integrity Consistently	4	12	So, we have to be willing to walk out those things that we say, and that's where the idea of integrity comes in. (PR1)
Honest Assessments	2	5	We're not perfect. We can acknowledge our sin. There is grace for our failings, and that's the glory of the gospel. The glory of the good news of Christ is that we can be honest about our failings. We can be honest about our past. We don't need to sugarcoat things. (TR3)
Living Ethically	1	4	When you're asking what's the most important kind of traits or characteristics, it's pursuing godliness not only in our truth and our head in the knowledge that we have but also in our right action, which is our ethics. (TR3)
Servanthood Focus	3	5	People within organizations are more likely to flourish, according to God's good design for humanity and as his image bares when the leaders are not self-serving, when they're humble, when they're self-sacrificing, when they're servant leaders. (TR2)
Show Compassion & Empathy	5	6	And as much as the love of God and love of neighbor are the first..., I think I love, compassion, sympathy, and affection for colleagues, for the people of the church, and for the lost would be number two. (TR4)
Biblical Understanding	6	20	So, as a Christian leader, we can go through all the teachings and educational parts of leadership, but we have to be based on the Bible and follow the sound doctrine of the Bible. (PR4)
Christ-likeness & Godliness	2	11	It has to begin with their own relationship with Christ. It has to begin with their own time spent in the word and in prayer. Because otherwise, you're not going to have either the ability to see your own failings or where you need to go or the courage to carry it through. (PR2)
Hopeful Outlook	4	9	The pandemic has taught me so much in how to navigate my church through this and really talk about what they really want to be. And I can tell you it has been phenomenal. My church is healthier, my leaders are stronger, and I'm stronger. (PR5)
Image of God	3	3	I think the biggest thing is to recognize that we do have differences, and those differences reflect the glory of our God, and we can celebrate those differences. We don't need to be colorblind in that sense. (TR3)
Loving Spirit	6	15	I believe relational needs, spiritual needs, economic needs are joy, and well-being has everything to do with how we relate to God and how we relate to other people. (PR3)
Prayerful Approach	2	4	And then we've got to be praying for our congregation, praying for God to kind of open them up. For the spirit to be working them and to hear the application of Scripture that maybe they've never thought about before. (PR2)
Relationship Builder	3	11	When you can walk the mile in another person's shoes, then you can really understand what their challenges are. And I think you really start to love them even more. Because you understand what they've gone through. (PR1)
Sinful Nature Awareness	3	5	My knowledge of those who kind of led the change is that they came to a deep awareness of the sinfulness of the system of segregation, the sinfulness of racism, and said we can't. (PR2)



CHARACTERISTICS	INTERVIEWEES	REFERENCES	QUOTATIONS SUPPORTING CATEGORY
Address Injustice	1	4	We need to preach in accordance to the times. There are certain issues that sometimes happen that we have to put our two cents into it and let the congregation know that we are against this or that, and especially when it's injustice. (PR4)
Discernment & Convictions	5	12	I think following conscience has got to be fundamental to making progress here because only conscience, only the conviction that God requires you to do something, will give you a basis for risking your reputation, risking your position, risking possibly your physical safety. (TR4)
Follow God's Will	2	2	I want to know that I'm standing firm on the word of God and then just go from there. And that's where we can let the chips fall, where they may. (TR5)
Sacrifice Self Willfully	3	4	As a pastor, you do these things and not just say, "Hey, love your neighbor." But actually, go out there and show that you're willing to. Put your reputation, put your job, and in some cases, put your life on the line to fight for your brothers and sisters in Christ who don't look like you. (PR1)
Speak & Seek the Truth	3	7	We have to speak the truth, obviously in love, and then we have to walk out that truth. (PR1)
Build Consensus	1	3	I do think a leader can better balance the two of having convictions, having a goal that is fixed and that they're striving towards—but not purposefully alienating those that sit or he could otherwise win over in pursuit of that goal. So that falls under the banner of wisdom. (TR1)
Challenge Status Quo	2	2	Now I hear about pastors changing pulpits. A [black] friend of mine in Dallas...goes to a white church on one Sunday morning and the [white] pastor comes to his church. (PR5)
Continued Growth & Study	3	6	Take other times with the church body to educate and bring up race, history, or theology. Intellectually say, "let's discuss this, and I want to hear from you. (TR1)
Effective Communication	5	11	I think the greatest value that a pastor can communicate is with deed and with conversation and actions. (PR3)
Grow Healthy Teams	2	4	I think leadership in general and Christian leadership, in particular, is about building teams, structures, systems that are conducive to human flourishing and the fulfilling of the mission. (TR2)
Manage Conflict	3	8	I need to understand how these were huge divides then, and there are huge divides now in our culture. But the gospel calls for us to transcend them in Christ, not ignore them, not pretend they don't exist, not pretend they didn't exist, not to paper over them, but to truly heal them in a way that only Christ can. (PR2)
Mission Focus & Vision	3	6	The number one thing is keeping people focused on the mission and then allowing the mission to be the biggest issue and concern. If we do that, it enables us to, as leaders, to take on the role of a servant because, in the process, we're empowering others to accomplish the same goals. (TR5)
People Connection	3	4	We're going to have to be able to talk about the real issues. Keep our finger on [the pulse of] our congregation, like what's going on with our congregations, what they're feeling. (PR5)

The interviews with religious leaders and subsequent coding and data analysis process revealed 27 specific Christian Leadership Characteristics that represent these reformers and are equally beneficial for contemporary Christian leaders. Close analysis of these leadership

characteristics revealed strong associations with four core leadership principles that Christian leaders must emulate. The four principles of ethical leadership, evangelical theology, moral courage, and transformational leadership are essential for Christian leaders to reverse polarization and combat injustice. Table 8 lists the four Core Christian Leadership Principles along with the associated Christian Leadership Characteristics. These are also illustrated in Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model found earlier in this document in Figure 1.

**Table 8**

*Core Christian Leadership Principles and Characteristics*

Ethical Leadership	Evangelical Theology	Moral Courage	Transformational Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act with Humility &amp; Openness</li> <li>• Displays Integrity Consistently</li> <li>• Honest Assessments</li> <li>• Living Ethically</li> <li>• Servanthood Focus</li> <li>• Show Compassion &amp; Empathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biblical Understanding</li> <li>• Christ-likeness &amp; Godliness</li> <li>• Hopeful Outlook</li> <li>• Image of God</li> <li>• Loving Spirit</li> <li>• Prayerful Approach</li> <li>• Relationship Builder</li> <li>• Sinful Nature Awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address Injustice</li> <li>• Discernment &amp; Convictions</li> <li>• Follow God's Will</li> <li>• Sacrifice Self Willfully</li> <li>• Speak &amp; Seek the Truth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build Consensus</li> <li>• Challenge Status Quo</li> <li>• Continued Growth &amp; Study</li> <li>• Effective Communication</li> <li>• Grow Healthy Teams</li> <li>• Manage Conflict</li> <li>• Mission Focus &amp; Vision</li> <li>• People Connection</li> </ul>

This grounded theory research confirmed that the SBC reformers were transformational leaders guided by a genuine evangelical theology and exercised moral courage and ethical leadership to challenge their denomination and other white Southern Christians to live up to their stated image of God beliefs. This study defined that the principles of evangelical theology, transformational leadership, moral courage, and ethical leadership signify the essential core elements necessary for contemporary Christian leaders to embody to reverse societal polarization and combat injustice.

## **Evaluation and Research Design**

### **Research Design**

The grounded theory approach proved suitable for this research due to its concept development, problem identification, and theory evaluation of factors used to determine leadership characteristics of Christian leaders (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The limited primary research available on the SBC's transformational leaders and their efforts during the Civil Rights Movement steered the researcher to employ the grounded theory approach due to the qualitative sociological and phenomenology nature of this research topic. This research type's focus on human experiences to gain a holistic understanding of situations, events, and concepts is more suitable for a study that seeks to assess the applicability of relevant leadership principles and characteristics for present-day leaders.

This study examined and identified ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics of transformational SBC leaders who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, this method's primary instrument of qualitative analysis is the interview. Accordingly, ten SBC-affiliated pastors and theologians were interviewed, and data from these discussions were systematically processed and categorized to formulate a grounded theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Jopke & Gerrits, 2019).

### **Evaluation**

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the trustworthiness of qualitative research is determined by compliance with procedures and consistency in the research method. As such, the attention to detail that the researcher exercised throughout this study (from interviews, to coding, to theory development) was reliable and uniform throughout. Hence, this study met all four trustworthiness criteria (credibility, dependability, confirmability, and

transferability).

### ***Credibility***

This structure to gathering data is essential to enhancing the credibility and accuracy of this analysis. Therefore, given the central nature of interviews, the research population needed to be thoughtfully selected for participation in this grounded study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Accordingly, individuals chosen to serve as interviewees must have been religious leaders affiliated with the SBC and experience serving in either of the following capacities: church pastors or faculty members of any of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries. Furthermore, the interviewees must have previous knowledge about at least one of the identified transformational leaders or race relations within the denomination, their church, or community.

The analyst surveyed the faculty listings for each Southern Baptist theological seminary for theologians experienced in ethics, leadership, and church history for consideration. Church pastors recruited for this study were clergy who could identify characteristics of ethical leadership and moral courage necessary for Christian leaders. The church pastors considered for inclusion resided in the researcher's region of Northern Virginia and others throughout the United States. Communication with potential participants began with an invitation emailed to each respondent identified for involvement with this research. This recruitment letter briefly introduced the investigator, outlined the research topic, profiled the format for the interview as the primary instrument for this study, and provided the analyst's contact information.

Within a week of sending the email invitation, the investigator followed up with a phone call to each potential participant that did not respond to the initial email correspondence. The respondents that accepted the invitation were sent a follow-up email including the research

questions and the consent form. Additionally, this communication requested the potential participant for a date/time to schedule the interview.

The researcher scheduled and conducted all interviews with each participant via the Zoom video teleconference tool upon receipt of the proposed date/time. The analyst also requested receipt of the signed consent form upon the start of the interview. The investigator and participant joined the Zoom video teleconference meetings from a closed office with no other persons present. All participants submitted signed consent forms, and each interview session was recorded with the expressed consent of the interviewee.

### ***Dependability***

Throughout this grounded theory study, the researcher accumulated detailed study documentation to include the data collection and analysis processes. The intent is to reflect the gathering and processing of data and the development of the subsequent theory. Data collection began with single, semi-structured interview sessions with each individual lasting approximately 30-minutes. The analyst asked each participant five open-ended questions to explore the research questions and collect data on the interviewee's thoughts and experiences. Participants were asked follow-up questions as required to identify the leadership characteristics applicable to today's Christian leaders addressing societal polarization and injustice.

During and after each interview, the investigator wrote notes and memos to focus on the data collection and analysis phases to avoid bias. Upon completing the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews via the Sonix audio/visual transcription software platform. All transcribed files are stored in a secure hard drive which only the analyst has access to.

### ***Confirmability***

This study ascertained the ethical leadership and moral courage of Christians through interviews with contemporary SBC-affiliated leaders. Confirmability was determined through the coding phases of the grounded theory with the identification of codes and themes that led to theory development. Accordingly, this data was analyzed and resulted in the formation of a distinct approach of leadership characteristics applicable for present-day leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and inspire Christians to combat injustice.

Coding began when the researcher reviewed the transcripts and memos to analyze the data for theory development. Line-by-line coding of transcripts was conducted using the NVivo software tool. Throughout coding the data, a classification system was devised to synthesize the information to assign themes based upon the interviewee's comments and statements.

### ***Transferability***

This research confirmed that the SBC reformers were transformational leaders guided by a genuine evangelical theology and exercised moral courage and ethical leadership to challenge their denomination to live up to their stated image of God beliefs. Given the gap in research regarding white Southern Christians' contributions during the Civil Rights Era, this study can serve as the basis for further analysis on the subject. Furthermore, this study defined that the principles of evangelical theology, transformational leadership, moral courage, and ethical leadership signify the essential core elements necessary for contemporary Christian leaders to embody to reverse societal polarization and combat injustice. Therefore, this study is transferable in future assessments of Christian leaders' principles and leadership characteristics throughout history and to the present day.

### **Chapter Summary**

The data analyzed throughout the process of executing the grounded theory

methodology and interpreting the information gathered from interviews resulted in the identification of distinct leadership characteristics of legacy SBC leaders who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. This study yielded a sound theoretical approach identified as the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model. Accordingly, the SBC reformers were transformational leaders guided by a genuine evangelical theology to exercise moral courage and ethical leadership to challenge their denomination and the wider Southern society to live up to their stated image of God beliefs.

This grounded theory study began with interviewing ten SBC-affiliated religious leaders who were Southern Baptist theological seminary faculty members or pastors of a Southern Baptist church. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and the resultant data coded using the Straussian approach of open, axial, and selective coding. This process enabled theory development from the 27 Christian Leadership Characteristics that were categorized from axial coding. According to this emerging theory identified as the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model, the four principles of evangelical theology, transformational leadership, moral courage, and ethical leadership signify the essential core elements necessary for contemporary Christian leaders to embody to reverse societal polarization and combat injustice.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

### Overview

The Southern Baptist Convention's eventual transition from its racially-biased theology and support of Jim Crow segregation was inspired by reformers who challenged the denomination to live up to their stated image of God beliefs. These influential legacy SBC leaders (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) provided the moral compass to move their fellow white Southern Christians to recognize the humanity of African-Americans, demonize the sin of racism, and eventually support ending racial apartheid in the South.

Societal polarization and cultural resentments throughout the U.S. have been as prominent as ever since the Civil Rights Era. Accordingly, a new generation of Christian leaders must carry the mantle forward and step up to help heal divisions within their communities by standing against injustice. This qualitative grounded theory study sought to assist this effort by identifying distinct leadership characteristics of legacy SBC leaders who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement.

This chapter concludes this study by outlining the relevance of the research's theoretical approach identified as the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model and the associated Christian Leadership Characteristics relevant for today's Christian leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization. It begins by restating the research purpose and research questions. The chapter offers a conclusion of the research by answering each research question. Furthermore, it describes implications and applications for the study. It recommends insights on limitations and considerations for further investigation. The chapter concludes with a summary of the relevance of the entire study.



### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to examine and identify the Christian leadership characteristics of influential legacy leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Further, this study evaluated applying their lasting lessons and relevant principles for present-day Christian leaders seeking to reverse racial polarization.

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, what effect did the advocacy of select Christian leaders have on the eventual transformation of the SBC's theology away from the racially biased interpretations of Scripture used to justify Jim Crow segregation?

**RQ2.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how have contemporary Southern Baptist congregants challenged racial prejudice and lived up to their stated image of God beliefs?

**RQ3.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how well are current efforts to improve racial equality and race relations within the SBC succeeding?

**RQ4.** As perceived by religious leaders affiliated with the SBC, how are these select Christian leaders' leadership characteristics and moral courage applicable to contemporary leaders seeking to reverse today's polarization by addressing injustice issues?

### **Research Conclusions Implications, and Applications**

#### **Research Conclusions**

The analyst conducted extensive literature reviews, data analysis, and theory development to answer each research question. This grounded theory's results affirmed the study's objective to identify enduring leadership characteristics of legacy SBC leaders who transformed their denomination's prevailing racially-biased theology to promote desegregation. Furthermore, this research revealed specific traits that could prove relevant for today's Christian leaders. Most importantly, the study successfully melded these characteristics into a practical,

theoretical approach identified as the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model.

This research sought to examine the leadership characteristics of select SBC leaders to determine potential application to today's Christian leaders. This study successfully answered the four research questions and classified relevant Christian leadership characteristics into the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model. The following synthesizes the answers to each research question as revealed throughout this grounded research study.

***RQ1: What was the Effect of Select Christian Leaders on Transforming the SBC?***

The legacy SBC leaders identified in this research were born and raised in the segregated South. They were intimately aware of the strict racial divisions perpetuated by the culture of Jim Crow segregation throughout the states of the former Confederacy. Furthermore, as long-time Baptist ministers and scholars, they were knowledgeable of the SBC's theological justification of slavery and Jim Crow segregation (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). According to PR4, because all were learned men of faith, they understood the word of God and were convicted by their biblical beliefs when faced with the SBC's support of racial discrimination. Consequently, these leaders became increasingly uncomfortable by the blatant inconsistencies of their Christian faith, and the societal convention of racial prejudice and violence denigrated their fellow African-American citizens (Cross, 2014).

As stated by PR3, Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine were considered the "hall of fame" leaders who made a difference challenging the status quo. They served as the vanguard of the decades-long effort to transform their society's moral conscience to support African-Americans' humane treatment and acceptance (Davis, 2013; Phillips, 2013). However, they proved unique because they worked from within white Southern society to address racial reconciliation by raising the consciousness of other

white Southern Baptists to the sin of racial segregation.

As early as the 1930s and 1940s, they recognized the incongruence of legalized racial discrimination with biblical Scriptures. Consequently, they wrote and spoke out against many unjust laws enforced by Jim Crow segregation. Furthermore, they openly debunked the prevailing false and dangerous myths that perpetuated widespread beliefs in the inferiority and subjugation of African-Americans (Morrison, 2018; Pennington, 2016; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

The success of these visionary leaders in transforming the SBC and its congregants to support racial reconciliation eventually is owed to their application of conservative biblical theology in their life and relationships with others. They sought to address racial divisions as a moral imperative that demanded their fellow Southern Baptists to show the heart of Christ and also highlight to others the sin of supporting racial discrimination (Morrison, 2018; Phillips, 2013). The tenacity of these men of Christ revealed their ethics and moral courage to embody their belief that all of humanity bears the image of God. Furthermore, they mentored generations of other believers whose collective efforts eventually turned the tide on the SBC's transformation away from the racially biased interpretations of Scripture used to justify the perpetuation of the institution of Jim Crow racial segregation (Phillips, 2013; Roach, 2009).

***RQ2: How have Contemporary Southern Baptists Challenged Racial Prejudice?***

Societal polarization negatively affects churches throughout the U.S., with many denominations (including the SBC) reporting declining church attendance and increased apathy of remaining congregants. Many Americans report disappointment with mainline and evangelical churches due to distrust in authority, erosion of trust in organized religion, misrepresentation of facts, the spread of false news, and increased tribalism (Barna, 2018).

Accordingly, TR2 mentioned that Southern Baptists have struggled to translate preaching and teaching into biblically practical discipleship of members.

Despite these challenges, many Americans remain hopeful for the positive roles that churches can play in their communities to help address issues like race relations (Barna, 2021). Various churches throughout the nation are experiencing a tremendous resurgence in membership and fiscal viability. Many of the churches are growing by reaching out to other demographics not previously served by their congregations, motivating members to address injustice and inequity in their communities, and sharing the love of God with others.

Perhaps no recent issue other than the ongoing coronavirus epidemic has caused more discussion and introspection in churches across the country than race relations. Prominent incidents of police brutality and other acts of violence against people of color tend to bring these issues to the fore. Consequently, racial injustice has constantly remained a top topic of interest by leaders at SBC's national headquarters and state conventions. Similarly, religious leaders interviewed for this study stated local acts of racial discrimination and a failure to acknowledge the ongoing racism within communities and churches continue to cause the most conflict for congregants of differing backgrounds.

These church leaders largely agree that the divide is as much generational as it is racial, given that most SBC churches are racially homogenous. According to PR5, there is a broader acceptance of racial inclusion amongst younger congregants. Consequently, SBC churches experiencing the most significant membership decreases tend to be older and whiter. TR3 stated older congregants tend to assume that racism no longer exists because the overt forms of discrimination they recall from their youth are mostly invisible.

All the legacy SBC leaders pushed for integrated worship services when racial

segregation in the church was enforced by law. Likewise, according to PR3, some SBC churches have, up until very recently, kept the racially discriminatory language in their church constitutions. However, today racial segregation in SBC churches tends to follow local demographics and personal preference (Ladd, 2012).

Due to congregational self-segregation, TR3 suggested that church leaders regularly use their sermons and small groups to discuss issues of racism. PR1, PR2, and TR2 each recommended Christian leaders purposely expand their network to foster local relationships and friendships with individuals of other demographics and backgrounds. TR5 posited that shared fellowship complicates preconceived perceptions and opens individuals up to truly see one another as children of Christ and made in the image of God.

PR4 indicated that church leaders and members cannot remain neutral but must apply biblical lessons to understand contemporary problems. Despite the challenges of racial reconciliation, they are part of the solution to address broader societal issues resulting in polarization and fear. Furthermore, PR5 summed this up by revealing that church leaders must recognize that all people are hurting and want to know where God addresses their issues irrespective of culture, race, or ethnicity.

***RQ3: How well are the SBC's Current Efforts to Improve Race Relations Succeeding?***

Over the past few decades, the SBC has sought to atone for past transgressions by openly acknowledging their original racially-biased interpretation of Scripture used to justify legalized slavery and segregation (Jones, 2020; Southern Baptist Convention, 1995; The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018). Some of the most widely known are the SBC's 1995 *Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention* and the SBTS's 2018 *Report on Slavery and Racism in the History of the Southern*

*Baptist Theological Seminary*. Also, there have been various resolutions passed at recent SBC annual meetings, which served as "confessional statement[s] to race, racism, white supremacy, and justice issues" (Cross, 2021). One of the most contentious was the 2019 Resolution 9 (Southern Baptist Convention, 2019). TR4 described this resolution as "both a criticism of critical race theory and...a willingness to...appropriate some of the insights of critical race theory if they hold up to biblical scrutiny."

In addition to issuing official statements and reports, the leaders within the SBC took some practical efforts in recent years to increase the awareness and understanding of its leaders and congregants on matters of race. Notably, some SBC theologians and ministers published books exploring the history of racism within the denomination and working towards racial reconciliation (Cross, 2014; Williams & Jones, 2017). Moreover, the SBC's North American Missionary Board produced a top-rated video series titled *Undivided*. Throughout its two five-episode studies, nine Christian leaders participated in candid roundtable discussions about race in the church and society (North American Missionary Board, 2021). PR2 mentioned that this series was very helpful in increasing dialogue and awareness amongst members of his church.

In 2012, Fred Luter was elected as the body's first African-American president. His appointment marked a significant high point for the SBC's efforts to improve racial equality and race relations. Despite PR5 noting that a handful of churches left the denomination due to the SBC's election of an African-American president, Luter's presidency was intended to demonstrate the SBC's transformation from its legacy defending slavery and Jim Crow segregation. Additionally, to some SBC congregants, this highlighted a need for increased outreach and diversity from underrepresented races and ethnic groups due to years of declining membership (Banks, 2012; White, 2012). Accordingly, PR4 observed increased inclusivity of

leadership from state-level conventions. However, PR3 expressed disappointment that Luter was not followed by posting highly qualified members from Asian, Black, Hispanic, or other underrepresented groups to any of the SBC's top leadership positions.

Despite these different actions taken by the SBC over the past few decades, the religious leaders interviewed as part of this research revealed that their denomination's efforts to improve racial equality and race relations are mixed and, in some cases, retreating. TR4 noted that this regression on addressing cultural issues began in the 1980s. TR5 suggested that this acceleration in recent years may partially be attributed to the political alignment of the denomination. Accordingly, PR5 noted that increasing polarization and contentiousness within the ranks resulted in an exodus of African-American and Hispanic SBC churches and members.

However, all interviewees were hopeful for change within the denomination. They mutually agreed that the reversal of polarization within the U.S. and SBC requires church leaders to sustain the dialogue in addressing issues of injustice and reflect compassion for others through the lens of the image of God. Accordingly, TR1 and TR3 suggested that the denomination and its scholars and church leaders continue to put forth readable and viewable works on challenging topics like racial injustice to teach the entirety of church history and its subcultures. Furthermore, PR3 mentioned that the SBC must talk about encouraging unity and brotherhood by hiring qualified individuals from underrepresented groups to top positions, thus reflecting an appreciation for their leadership and that it "views Blacks and Hispanics as mission partners and not mission projects."

***RQ4: How Applicable are the Legacy Leaders' Leadership Characteristics to Today?***

This research confirmed the evangelical theology, ethics, moral courage, and transformational leadership traits of Henlee Barnett, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker

Miller, and Foy Valentine in their efforts to transform the SBC's stance on racial discrimination eventually. Similarities in the societal friction and polarization are found within both periods of U.S. history. Furthermore, this study affirmed the original hypothesis that the Christian leadership characteristics of these reformers apply to today's Christian leaders.

The data analysis and coding of interviews with ten pastors and theologians identified 27 Christian leadership characteristics exemplified by the legacy SBC leaders and are essential traits for contemporary Christian leaders. Evaluation of these traits resulted in their alignment into the four core Christian leadership principles, which make up the Ethically Courageous Christian Model. These principles are evangelical theology, transformational leadership, moral courage, and ethical leadership.

All religious leaders asserted that contemporary leaders should ascribe to at least one of the eight leadership characteristics of evangelical theology. As stated by PR4, "as a Christian leader, we can go through all of the teachings and educational parts of leadership, but we have to be based on the Bible and follow the sound doctrine of the Bible." Additionally, the research made evident that SBC reformers could be described as transformational leaders focusing on inspiring their denomination and its members to transcend their self-interest in the South's culture of racial segregation. TR2 revealed that this trait is equally important today in stating, "People within organizations are more likely to flourish...when the leaders are not self-serving [but] when they are self-sacrificing." Just as many legacy leaders were Christian ethicists, these truthful and honorable behaviors are equally relevant today (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Demirtas & Akdogan, 2014). TR3 tied the practice of ethics to one's pursuit of godliness as the essential trait. Lastly, the select leaders of the SBC willfully faced hostility, which reflected their moral courage. Similarly, TR4 reflected the importance of following one's moral conscience because



it is this conviction "that God requires you to do something [and] will give you a basis for risking your reputation, risking your position, [and] risking possibly your physical safety."

This grounded theory research confirmed that the select SBC reformers identified in this study were genuinely transformational leaders. An evangelical theology guided these men. They also exercised moral courage and Christian ethics to challenge their denomination and other white Southerners to live up to their stated image of God beliefs. Accordingly, this study defined the principles of evangelical theology, transformational leadership, moral courage, and ethical leadership as signifying the essential core elements necessary for all Christian leaders to emulate. These represent core traits required for today's leaders to embody in their efforts to reverse societal polarization and combat injustice.

### **Implications**

The implications of this grounded theory research are far-reaching. This is primarily due to the current dearth of available literature describing the roles of white Southern Christians during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Correspondingly, this significant gap in research reveals a meaningful and relevant aspect of the culture and history of white Southern Baptists and their leaders, which has not been widely chronicled. One effect of this study is related to the historiography of this period. As such, it immediately expands upon the knowledge of these SBC leaders who helped reverse Southern society's history of racial apartheid. This helps reveal the effects of their efforts and the trustworthiness of their theological stance, which focused on appealing to their fellow Southerners' moral conscience to convince them to erase Jim Crow segregation.

The reformers identified in this study challenged other Southern Baptists to live up to their image of God beliefs during an era of state-sponsored and socially acceptable racial

discrimination. Despite apparent improvements in racial justice due to the Civil Rights Movement, the U.S. is undergoing another period of significant political and social division and increasing polarization. Unfortunately, as in the past, the current schism affecting U.S. society is causing conflicts within the body of Christ. The implications for Christians identified in this study mirror those discovered by Barna Group (2018) which includes: distrust in authority and institutions, erosion of trust in organized religion and Scriptures, misrepresentation of facts, the spread of false news, and increased tribalism.

Increasing awareness of initiatives to address SBC cultural challenges has profound implications for the future of its churches, leaders, and members. This includes church leaders motivating their congregations, national leaders addressing issues of injustice, and individual Christians reflecting compassion through the lens of the image of God. Awareness of the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model's theoretical approach and the identified Christian Leadership Characteristics may benefit pastors, theologians, and ministers in their efforts to understand these societal issues and work to reverse polarization and injustice.

### **Applications**

There are significant applications for this grounded theory study. This grounded theory research confirmed the emerging theory that the identified SBC reformers were transformational leaders guided by a genuine evangelical theology and exercised moral courage and ethical leadership by openly promoting racial equality, supporting civil rights leaders, and publishing works that endorse racial desegregation.

The most powerful application for this research is that the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model and associated 27 Christian Leadership Characteristics may prove transferable to future assessments and studies of Christian leaders. Hence, this theory's

defined principles of evangelical theology, transformational leadership, moral courage, and ethical leadership signify the essential core elements necessary for contemporary Christian leaders to embody to reverse societal polarization and combat injustice.

This research enriches a relatively untouched area of knowledge on the contributions of white Southern Christians to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. The study bridges a noticeable gap in the literature by further validating that white Southern Protestants were no monolith. Therefore, another application may serve as the basis for further analysis regarding the theological and theoretical reasoning of influential Southern Baptist leaders that helped their denomination and fellow congregants support the end of Jim Crow segregation. This will undoubtedly expand upon the limited available literature to identify Southern Baptist Convention leaders who helped reverse their society's racial apartheid.

### **Research Limitations**

Notably, this grounded theory research fills a critical gap in white Southern Christians' contributions during the Civil Rights Era. Despite this benefit, there are some noticeable limitations to this research that must be identified. One such weakness is due to the small population of interview participants. Ten religious leaders were interviewed for this study. The participants were either faculty members or administrators of one of the six Southern Baptist theological seminaries or a pastor of an SBC-affiliated church. However, this small group cannot represent all seminary faculty members or the SBC's 47,530 cooperating churches (Southern Baptist Convention, 2021).

A similar deficiency is that the interviews were conducted solely with church leaders and theologians. Accordingly, this provides a perspective of Christian leadership from the leader's viewpoint. However, this leader-centric perspective may not fully measure the

effectiveness of the described Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model and associated Christian Leadership Characteristics. Hence, an assessment from the viewpoint of congregants could further bolster the validity of the emergent theory.

The condensed length of the interviews causes another limitation. The meetings were limited to a single, 30-minute session to accommodate the time constraints of church leaders' schedules. The information obtained from these meetings supported the intent of answering the study's research questions. However, the time limits reduced the ability to ask potential follow-up questions, which may have enriched the information content relevant to understanding more nuanced aspects of Christian leadership characteristics.

An additional handicap to this study is related to the demographic make-up of the participants. Although the researcher recruited various participants whose ethnicity or family background may classify them as multicultural, the population does not represent the rich racial and ethnic composition that makes up the SBC. Moreover, an associated limitation is gender, as the analyst was unsuccessful in recruiting any female pastors or seminary faculty for inclusion as part of the interview group as initially intended.

### **Further Research**

The literature devoted to understanding the culture and history of white Southern Baptists, especially as related to Jim Crow segregation and the Civil Rights Movement, requires more rigorous academic inquiry. The current scarcity of information surrounding white Christians during this period has depicted a one-dimensional perspective of white Southern Protestants. Accordingly, they are often inaccurately stereotyped as a monolithic bloc universally committed to preserving racial segregation. A historical examination or case study investigating

the complex roles, actions, and perspectives of white Southern Baptist leaders during Massive Resistance and the Civil Rights Era could be very impactful.

Additional research should be devoted to studying Southern Baptist leaders (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. Biographical studies of these leaders could be conducted to assess their roles in the eventual transformation of the SBC's theology away from the racially biased interpretations of Scripture used to justify Jim Crow segregation. Comparative analyses would help describe their respective roles within the larger SBC to understand better the nature of the conflict between these individuals in contrast to the more traditionalist elements which held sway over the denomination and broader Southern society.

Another helpful research topic emanating from this research would be a quantitative or mixed-method study focused on evaluating the universality of the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model and its associated Christian leadership characteristics. Such a study would incorporate a larger population of participants from a broader demographic, including congregants and others not necessary in leadership roles. The intent would be to survey a wider audience from a more comprehensive sample to generalize the model and its characteristics.

### **Chapter Summary**

This grounded theory research confirmed that the identified SBC reformers were ethical leaders with the moral courage to defy Southern society's prevailing views to promote racial equality, support civil rights leaders, and publish works endorsing desegregation. Their efforts openly defied the SBC's prevailing racially discriminatory theology. Essentially, this study proved the emerging theory asserting a genuine evangelical theology guided these legacy leaders who exercised moral courage and ethical leadership to challenge their denomination

and other white Southern Christians to live up to their stated image of God beliefs.

Furthermore, this study defined that the principles of evangelical theology, transformational leadership, moral courage, and ethical leadership signify the essential core elements necessary for contemporary Christian leaders to embody to reverse societal polarization and combat injustice. Therefore, this study is transferable in future assessments of Christian leaders' traits and leadership characteristics throughout history and to the present day.

This examination fills a gap in research regarding white Southern Christians' contributions during the Civil Rights Era and serves as the basis for further analysis on the subject. Furthermore, it contributes to the argument that ethical leadership and moral courage in the face of hostility, personal risks, and injury remain as necessary for today's Christian leaders as ever since the Civil Rights Movement. As in the example of the earlier SBC visionaries, contemporary leaders can evaluate themselves compared to the Ethically Courageous Christian Leadership Model and its associated Christian leadership characteristics to help reverse current societal polarization and combat injustice through their own works, words, and writings.

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## APPENDICIES

### Appendix A IRB Approval Letter



September 9, 2021

Aabram Marsh  
Gary Bredfeldt

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-115 Lasting Lessons & Legacy Influences: Ethical Leadership & Moral Courage Characteristics of Southern Baptists Who Overcame Jim Crow

Dear Aabram Marsh, Gary Bredfeldt,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:  
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,  
**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**

## **Appendix B Consent Form**

**Title of the Project:** Lasting Lessons and Legacy Influences: Ethical Leadership and Moral Courage Characteristics of Southern Baptists who Overcame Jim Crow

**Principal Investigator:** Aabram Marsh, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University (School of Divinity)

### **Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older. Participants should have experience currently or formerly serving as church pastors, leaders who oversaw Southern Baptist Convention-sponsored ministries, faculty members of any Southern Baptist Theological Seminaries, or members of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. Furthermore, they must have served in the capacity of religious leaders currently or previously affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Finally, the individuals selected for this study are also limited to leaders who may address race relations within the Southern Baptist Convention. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

### **What is the study about, and why is it being done?**

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study is to examine and identify the ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage of transformational leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. This grounded theory research will identify those qualities for analysis and applicability by assessing the transferability of the efforts of select Southern Baptist Convention leaders who promoted racial desegregation during the Civil Rights Era. Further, this study will examine contemporary Christian leaders' ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics, which are necessary to reverse current polarization and combat injustice.

### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in a single interview. This meeting is expected to be conducted via an online teleconference tool suitable for you (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex). The session will be a single, semi-structured engagement with only you, lasting approximately 30-minutes.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. As the nation undergoes another period of polarization and cultural change, this study intends to examine the lessons of an earlier generation of leaders who challenged other Christians to live up to their image of God beliefs and transformed their denomination's prevailing theology to promote racial desegregation. Therefore, the benefits to society of this study are its identification of distinctive ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage lessons applicable for present day-leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and inspire Christians to combat injustice. Accordingly, this research hypothesizes that examining the traits and leadership

characteristics of select prominent ethical leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention applies today. In doing so, this study seeks to enrich a relatively untouched area of knowledge on the contributions of white Southern Christians to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. In doing so, it will expand upon the limited available literature to identify Southern Baptist Convention leaders who helped reverse their society's racial apartheid.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

#### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the documents. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Aabram Marsh. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 571-529-0518 or [amarsh20@liberty.edu](mailto:amarsh20@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gary Bredfeldt, at [gjbredfeldt@liberty.edu](mailto:gjbredfeldt@liberty.edu).

#### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects*

*research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

### Appendix C Recruitment Email

*Recipient's Name,*

My name is Aabram Marsh, and I am a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University. I am writing to invite your participation in my research as part of a doctoral degree requirement. The purpose of my study is to evaluate the ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage of legacy Southern Baptist Convention leaders (e.g., Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) to evaluate the application of their example to contemporary Christian leaders.

Your participation will be limited to a single, 30-minute interview session via an online teleconference tool (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex). This interview will serve the purpose of examining the ethical leadership and moral courage examples of the Southern Baptist visionaries and compare their model to today's Christian leaders.

The intent is to collect data on your thoughts and experiences relevant to identifying the ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics applicable to today's Christian leaders addressing societal polarization and injustice. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study; however, the data will remain confidential.

To participate, please reply to this email at [REDACTED] or contact me at [REDACTED]. Upon confirmation, I will send a consent document for participation in the interview, as well as scheduling information via email.

Blessings,  
Aabram Marsh

AABRAM G. MARSH  
[REDACTED]

## **Appendix D Interview Introduction**

Hello. Thank you for your participation in this study. My name is Aabram Marsh. I am a doctoral candidate with the Liberty University School of Divinity. The title of my project is “Lasting Lessons and Legacy Influences: Ethical Leadership and Moral Courage Characteristics of Southern Baptists who Overcame Jim Crow.” At this time, I would like to share with you that this session is being recorded.

You are invited to participate in a research study. I selected you and other participants based upon your experience serving as church pastors, leaders who oversaw Southern Baptist Convention-sponsored ministries, faculty members of any Southern Baptist theological seminary, or members of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

My reasoning for pursuing this research is based upon a belief that as the nation undergoes another period of polarization and cultural change, this study intends to examine the lessons of an earlier generation of leaders who challenged other Christians to live up to their image of God beliefs and transformed their denomination's prevailing theology to promote racial desegregation. Therefore, the benefits to society of this study are its identification of distinctive ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage lessons applicable for present-day leaders seeking to reverse contemporary polarization and inspire Christians to combat injustice.

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study is to examine and identify the ethical leadership characteristics and moral courage of transformational leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement. This grounded theory research will identify those qualities for analysis and applicability by assessing the transferability of the efforts of select Southern Baptist Convention leaders who promoted racial desegregation during the Civil Rights Era. Further, this study will examine contemporary Christian leaders' ethical leadership and moral courage characteristics, which are necessary to reverse current polarization and combat injustice.

Before beginning the question-and-answer portion of the interview I would like to offer you an opportunity to make any comments that you may have.



### **Appendix E Interview Questions**

1. What are the most important values that you believe a Christian leader should demonstrate?
2. What effect did the advocacy of transformational Southern Baptist leaders (Henlee Barnette, Billy Graham, Thomas Maston, Acker Miller, and Foy Valentine) who supported desegregation during the Civil Rights Movement leaders have on the eventual transformation of the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) theology away from the racially biased interpretations of Scripture used to justify Jim Crow segregation?
3. How have contemporary Southern Baptist congregants challenged racial prejudice and lived up to their stated image of God beliefs?
4. How well are current efforts to improve racial equality and race relations within the Southern Baptist Convention succeeding?
5. How are these transformational Christian leaders' moral courage and ethical leadership characteristics applicable to contemporary leaders seeking to reverse today's polarization by addressing injustice issues?