

# The Authority of the Bible for Baptists

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## Introduction

**I**nasmuch as the authority of the Christian Scriptures is a topic important to and cherished by Baptists throughout the world, one should approach its discussion with cautious reverence and humble acknowledgment that it will be difficult to give adequate expression to this subject on behalf of more than forty million Baptists in more than 150,000 congregations and some 187 unions or conventions.

In the previous pre-conversations between representatives of the Baptist World Alliance and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, including the Synodical Commission for Inter-Church Affairs, conducted 22-24 October 1994, in Istanbul, the author presented his paper on "Major Emphases in Baptist Theology."<sup>1</sup> The paper briefly discussed the canon of the Old and the New Testaments, the divine inspiration of the Bible, biblical interpretation, the preservation, translation, and perspicuity of the Bible, its

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<sup>1</sup> Since published in slightly revised form in *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 37 (Summer 1995): 36-46.

truthfulness/dependability, and its authority, based on the assumption that most of these convictions about the Holy Scriptures are shared by most Christians throughout the world.

Now in this setting the author proposes to discuss in a more exclusive sense and in a more detailed manner the authority of the Bible among Baptists and to do so in the context of the more distinctive features of Baptist understandings and applications of biblical authority. The paper will consist of three subdivisions: the authority of the Bible according to Baptist confessions of faith, the authority of the Bible according to representative Baptist theologians, and the authority of the Bible in Baptist piety and practice.

### The Authority of the Bible according to Baptist Confessions of Faith

**T**wo practices have been characteristic of Baptist confessions of faith: the inclusion of lists of pertinent biblical texts in connection with the various articles of the confessions, and the inclusion of a specific article concerning the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments in the confessions themselves. Together these practices serve to emphasize the importance of the Bible for Baptists and the authority of the Bible among Baptists. Moreover, during recent years numerous articles have been written, especially in the Southern Baptist Convention (USA), about the treatment of biblical authority in Baptist confessions of faith.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>R. E. Glaze Jr, "Southern Baptists and the Scriptures," *Theological Educator* 1 (October 1970) 8-14, James Leo Garrett Jr, "Biblical Infallibility and Inerrancy according to Baptist Confessions," *Search* 3 (Fall 1972) 42-45, *ibid*, "Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought," *Baptist History and Heritage* 13 (July 1978) 41-49, esp 41-43, *ibid*, "Biblical Authority according to Baptist Confessions of Faith," *Review and Expositor* 76 (Winter 1979) 43-54, esp 43-45, William L. Hendricks, "Scripture A Southern Baptist Perspective," *Review and Expositor* 79 (Spring 1982) 245-57, esp 245-49, William L. Lumpkin, "The Bible in Early Baptist Confessions of Faith," *Baptist History and Heritage* 19 (July 1984) 33-41, esp 36-39, William R. Estep Jr, "The Bible in Confessions," *SBC Today* 5 (April 1987) 6-7, 10-11, *ibid*, "Baptists and Authority The Bible, Confessions, and Conscience in the Development of Baptist Identity," *Review and Expositor* (Fall 1987) 599-615, esp 603-12, *ibid*, "The Nature and Use of Biblical Authority in Baptist Confessions of Faith, 1610-1963," *Baptist History and Heritage* 22 (October 1987) 3-16, Garrett, "The Teaching of Recent Southern Baptist Theologians on the Bible," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy*, 1987 (Nashville, TN Broadman Press, 1987), 290-91, 294-96, 298, 303-4

## Citations of Biblical Passages

**B**y means of citation of specific passages in the Old and the New Testaments in connection with their various articles, certain Baptist confessions have testified to the higher or primary authority of the Holy Scriptures.<sup>3</sup> This practice had existed among Swiss Anabaptists,<sup>4</sup> Austrian Anabaptists,<sup>5</sup> (Dutch) Mennonites,<sup>6</sup> and English Separatist Puritans.<sup>7</sup> Although the earliest confessions framed by the parties of John Smyth and of Thomas Helwys in Amsterdam contained no biblical citations,<sup>8</sup> by 1611 the Helwys party adopted the practice,<sup>9</sup> and by 1612–1614 the Smyth party, following the death of Smyth in August 1612, did likewise.<sup>10</sup> From the 1640s through the 1670s the confessions of faith framed and adopted by Baptists in England, whether Particular Baptists or General Baptists, uniformly followed the practice of the inclusion of biblical citations with the various articles.<sup>11</sup> Three of these confessions inserted the biblical citations in the margin to the side of each article.<sup>12</sup> But no biblical citations were included in “A Short Confession of a Brief Narrative of Faith” (1691),<sup>13</sup> framed by Particular Baptists in Somersetshire who sympathized with Thomas Collier’s move to embrace the General Baptists, or in “Articles of

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is taken, with corrections, from the author’s “Biblical Authority according to Baptist Confessions of Faith,” 43–44.

<sup>4</sup> “Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God concerning Seven Articles” (1527), in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 23–31. Only a few New Testament texts were cited.

<sup>5</sup> “Discipline of the Believers: How a Christian Is to Live” (1527), in Lumpkin, 32–35.

<sup>6</sup> The so-called Waterland Confession (1580), written by John de Rys and Lubbert Gerrits, in Lumpkin, 44–66. On the contrary, the practice did not prevail in the so-called Dordrecht Confession (1632), in Lumpkin, 67–78.

<sup>7</sup> “A True Confession...” (1596), in Lumpkin, 82–97.

<sup>8</sup> “Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles by John Smyth” (1609) and “A Short Confession of Faith” (1610), in Lumpkin, 100–13.

<sup>9</sup> “A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland,” in Lumpkin, 116–23. This confession consisted of 27 articles.

<sup>10</sup> “Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion,” in Lumpkin, 124–42. Dependent on the Waterland Confession, this confession in its final form in English contained 100 articles.

<sup>11</sup> These included: “The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations” (1615), adopted by General Baptists in the Midlands; “The True-Gospel Faith Declared according to the Scripture” (1654), an anti-Quaker General Baptist confession in London; the so-called Midland (Particular Baptist) Association (1655); the so-called Somerset (Particular Baptist) Association Confession (1656); and the so-called Standard Confession, framed and adopted by the General Assembly of General Baptists (1660). For the texts, see Lumpkin, 171–235.

<sup>12</sup> These were: the so-called London Confession of Seven Particular Baptist Churches (1644), the so-called Second or Assembly Confession of Particular Baptists (1677, 1689); and “An Orthodox Creed...” adopted by General Baptists in the Midlands (1678). For the texts, see Lumpkin, 144–71, 235–334.

<sup>13</sup> In Lumpkin, 334–39.

Religion" (1770),<sup>14</sup> drawn up by the New Connexion of General Baptists, a product of the Evangelical Revival. When the Philadelphia Baptist Association in colonial America adopted the Second London Confession of Particular Baptists in 1742 and added to it new articles on psalm-singing and the laying-on-of-hands, it retained the biblical citations of the older document as footnotes and included biblical citations with the two new articles.<sup>15</sup> However, other Baptists in colonial America and the later United States did not follow the practices of the Philadelphia Confession but instead almost uniformly omitted biblical citations until the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

Whereas Baptist confessions within the British Commonwealth nations have seemingly followed the pattern of having no biblical citations,<sup>17</sup> in Continental Europe at least ten Baptist unions have carefully prepared and affixed numerous biblical citations to their confessions of

<sup>14</sup>In *ibid.*, 340–44

<sup>15</sup>*A Confession of Faith Adopted by the Baptist Association, Met at Philadelphia, September 25, 1742* (Philadelphia: Anderson and Meehan, n.d., Nashville: Historical Commission, Southern Baptist Convention, microfilm, 479)

<sup>16</sup>See "Articles of Faith, Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association" (1777), "Terms of Union between the Elkhorn [Regular] and South Kentucky, or Separate Associations" (1801), "Principles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association" (1816), the New Hampshire "Declaration of Faith" (1833), "Doctrinal Statement of the American Baptist Association" (1905), the so called Confession of Faith of the Fundamental Fellowship of the Northern Baptist Convention (1921), "Articles of Faith Put Forth by the Baptist Bible Union of America" (1923), which, however, did include biblical citations in its eighteenth, or final, article on last things, "Doctrinal Statement of the North American Baptist Association" (now Baptist Missionary Association of America) (1950), in Lumpkin, 355–57, 359, 358, 361–67, 378–79, 382–84, 385–89, 379–81 "A Treatise of the Faith and Practices of the Original Free Will Baptists (1834, 1948) and both statements of the "Baptist Faith and Message" of the Southern Baptist Convention (1925, 1963) did contain biblical citations, see Lumpkin, 369, and *Annual, Southern Baptist Convention* (1963), 269–81. Although James Edward Carter, "The Southern Baptist Convention and Its Confessions of Faith," 1845–1945 (Th.D. diss. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964), included in his study those statements which, having doctrinal significance, were not intended to be full orbed confessions of faith [i.e., "Pronouncement on Christian Union and Denominational Efficiency" (1914), "Fraternal Address of Southern Baptists" (1919), "Report on Interdenominational Relations" (1938), "Reply to the World Council of Churches" (1940), and "Statement of Principles" (1945, 1946)], only one of these five, "Fraternal Address of Southern Baptists," addressed to European Baptists, is included in the present study, because the other four do not use biblical citations. "Fraternal Address of Southern Baptists," in which article two deals with "The Word of God" and whose eight articles contain biblical references, was never formally adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, although the committee that framed it had been appointed by the convention.


<sup>17</sup>See "Doctrinal Basis of the New Zealand Baptist Union" (1881), "Doctrinal Basis of the Baptist Union of Victoria" (1888) together with that union's "Principles and Ideals of the Baptist Faith", and "A Confession of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec" (1925), in Lumpkin, 416, 417–20, 421

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faith<sup>18</sup> while some unions have not.<sup>19</sup>

Although there has been little or no effort made to study the hermeneutical principles employed or implied in these biblical citations, it is difficult to overestimate the significance of these citations for the cherished Baptist principle of the supreme authority of the Holy Scriptures. Confessions of faith are valid only insofar as they conform to and do not violate the Scriptures.

### **The Seventeenth-Century English Confessions**

 f the four confessions of faith by the earliest General Baptists in Amsterdam, only one contained a specific article concerning the Bible. John Smyth's "Confession of Faith in XX Articles" (1609) contained no such article.<sup>20</sup> "A Short Confession of Faith" (1610), consisting of 38 articles, none of which addressed the Scriptures as the subject, did affirm that "through the power and instruction of the Holy Scriptures" is believed "that there is only one God, who is a Spirit," and that "This only God in the Holy Scriptures" is manifested and revealed in Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, being three, and nevertheless but one God."<sup>21</sup> Thomas Helwys' "A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam in Holland" (1611) specified in the twenty-third of its 27 articles:

That the scriptures off the Old and New Testaments are written for our instruction, 2 Tim. 3:16 & that wee ought to search them for they testifie off Christ, Io. 5:39. And therefore to be used withall reverence, as conteyning the Holie Word off God, which onelic is our direction in al thinges whatsoever.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See "Confession of Faith of the Federation of French Baptist Churches" (1879); "The Confession of Faith of the Finnish Baptist Union [Finnish-speaking]" (1891); "Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists [USSR]" (1913); "Confession of Faith and Ecclesiastical Principles of the Evangelical Association of French-Speaking Baptists Churches" (1924); "Confession of Faith of the Baptist Churches in Poland" (1930); "Confessions of Faith of the Yugoslavian Baptist Churches" (c. 1948); "Statutes of the Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (Dissidents) [USSR]" (1965); "Confessions of Faith of the Hungarian Baptist Church" (1967); "Confession of Faith of the Romanian Baptist Churches" (1974); and "Confession of Faith" (1977), jointly framed by Baptist unions in the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, Austria, and Switzerland, in G. Keith Parker, *Baptists in Europe: History and Confessions of Faith* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 124-33, 106-9, 154-58, 137-44, 173-84, 204-15, 259-66, 188-99, 218-30, 57-76.

<sup>19</sup> See "Swedish Baptist Confessions of Faith" (1861); "Confession of Faith of the Dutch Baptist Churches" (1900-1910?); and "A Declaration of the Baptist Faith and Order" of the Norwegian Baptist Union (1963), in Parker, 100-102, 88-89, 97-98.

<sup>20</sup> Lumpkin, 100-101.

<sup>21</sup> Articles 1 and 2, in Lumpkin, 102, 103.

<sup>22</sup> Lumpkin, 122.

The detailed "Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion" (1612–1614) contained no specific article about the Scriptures despite its numerous biblical citations within its 100 articles.<sup>23</sup>

General Baptist confessions framed in England between 1651 and 1660 continued the pattern of both inclusion and non-inclusion of an article about the Bible. "The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations" (1651) contained a warning against preaching, teaching, or practicing any doctrine as if "in the name of Jesus Christ" when it is not "heard or read of in the record of God, which was given by inspiration of the holy Ghost." "[S]uch teachers are lyable to the curse of God, howsoever, countenanced by men."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, no article concerning the Bible is to be found in "The True Gospel-Faith" (1654),<sup>25</sup> but "The Standard Confession" (1660) in the twenty-third of its 25 articles declared:

That the holy Scriptures is the rule whereby Saints both in matters of Faith, and conversation [i.e., conduct] are to be regulated, they being able to make men wise unto salvation, through Faith in Christ Jesus, profitable for Doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, 2 Tim. 3:15, 16, 17; John 20:31; Isa. 8:20.<sup>26</sup>

Particular Baptist confessions produced between 1644 and 1656 exhibit the same pattern of inclusion and non-inclusion. The so-called First London Confession (1644) contained two articles relative to the Scriptures, one as to the Bible's function as "rule" over tradition and the other in reference to the Christological content of the Bible.

The Rule of this Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties, is not mans inventions, opinions, devices, lawes, constitutions, or traditions

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 124–42. This confession teaches on the one hand (article 60) that those who are not yet new creatures "have need of the scriptures" to "instruct," "comfort," and stimulate them to "repentance" and on the other hand (article 61) that the new creature "needed not the outward scriptures" for support and help since he/she has the three witnesses (Father, Word, Holy Spirit). But (article 62) the new creature will indeed use the Scriptures "for the gaining and supporting of others" and (article 63) "can do nothing against the law or scriptures." See Lumpkin, 135–36.

<sup>24</sup> Article 46, in Lumpkin, 182.

<sup>25</sup> Lumpkin, 192–95.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 232.

unwritten whatsoever, but onely the word of God contained in the Canonickall Scriptures.

In this written Word God hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath thought needful for us to know, beleeeve, and acknowledge, touching the Nature and Office of Christ, in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen to the praise of God.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1646 revision of the 1644 document the first of these articles is completely rewritten and the second is omitted. The former reads as follows:

The rule of this Knowledge, Faith, Obedience, concerning the worship of God, in which is contained the whole duty of man, is (not men's laws, or unwritten traditions, but) only the word of God contained in the holy Scriptures; in which is plainly recorded whatsoever is needful for us to know, believe, and practice; which are the only rule of holiness and obedience for all saints, at all times, in all places to be observed. Col. 2:23; Matt. 15:6, 9; John 5:39; 2 Tim. 3:15, 16, 17; Isa. 8:20; Gal. 1:8, 9; Acts 3:22, 23.<sup>28</sup>

The Midland Association Confession (1655) included a statement that expressed the revelatory-salvific, the inspirational-equipping, and the judicial aspects of the Scriptures.

We profess and believe the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testament, to be the word and revealed mind of God, which are able to make men wise unto Salvation, through faith and love which is in Christ Jesus; and that they are given by inspiration of God, serving to furnish the man of God for every good work; and by them we are (in the strength of Christ) to try all things whatsoever are brought to us, under the pretense of truth. 2 Tim. 3:15–17; Isa. 8:20.<sup>29</sup>

The Somerset Confession (1656), however, had no specific article concerning the Bible.<sup>30</sup>

The ecclesiastical and political conditions facing both Particular Baptists and General Baptists in England after the

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<sup>27</sup> Articles 7–8, in Lumpkin, 158.

<sup>28</sup> Article 8, in *A Confession of Faith of Seven Congregations or Churches of Christ in London, Which Are Commonly (but Unjustly) Called Anabaptists* (London: John Hancock, 1646; reprint, Rochester, NY: Backus Book Publishers, 1981), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Article 3, in Lumpkin, 198.

<sup>30</sup> Lumpkin, 203–16.

restoration of the Stuart monarchy and the reestablishment of Anglicanism in 1660 made their likeness to Presbyterians and Congregationalists as fellow Dissenters a topic that needed to be expressed. Hence each body of Baptists adopted a confession of faith by slightly revising the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), which had been framed and adopted by the Westminster Assembly and which had been altered by the Congregationalists to become their Savoy Confession (1658).<sup>31</sup> The Westminster's ten-part chapter (or article) on "the Holy Scripture," which was the first chapter in that confession,<sup>32</sup> became the basis for an initial chapter (or article) on "the Holy Scriptures" in the Second London Confession of Particular Baptists (1677).<sup>33</sup> Five of these ten parts are particularly relevant to the subject under investigation. In the first part the Second London added an initial sentence not found in the Westminster: "The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience." Then the Second London proceeded with the wording of the Westminster:

Although the light of Nature, and the works of Creation and Providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom and power of God, as to leave men unexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and His will, which is necessary unto Salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that His will unto his Church; and afterward for the better preserving, and propagating of the Truth, and for the more sure Establishment and Comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan, and of the World, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of Gods revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.<sup>34</sup>

Part four grounds biblical authority in the divine authorship of the Scriptures and its being "the Word of God:"

**"The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving Knowledge, Faith, and Obedience."**

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 235–37.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877), 3:600–606.

<sup>33</sup> Lumpkin, 248–52.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 248–49.



The Authority of the Holy Scripture for which it ought to be believed dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth it self) the Author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.<sup>35</sup>

Part five, while allowing for Church testimony to the Scriptures, for their exalted and salvific content and style, and for the agreement of the parts thereof, declared:

...yet, notwithstanding; our full perswasion, and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our Hearts.<sup>36</sup>

The Bible as the sufficient repository of truth relative to human salvation is affirmed in part six:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own Glory, Mans Salvation, Faith and Life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the Holy Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new Revelation of the Spirit, or traditions of men.<sup>37</sup>

The doctrine of *suprema Scriptura* was affirmed in the tenth part. The text added by the framers of the Second London is indicated in italics in the following passage:

The supream judge by which all controversies of Religion are to be determined, and all Decrees of Councils, opinions of ancient Writers, Doctrines of men, and private Spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the *Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit, unto which Scripture so delivered, our faith is finally resolved.*<sup>38</sup>

The General Baptists, especially Thomas Monck, who adapted the Westminster Confession so as to become the Orthodox Creed (1678) chose not to utilize the lengthy ten-part Westminster chapter (or article) concerning the Scriptures as the first article of their new document. Instead,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 252. The final words of part ten in the Westminster were: "Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." Schaff, 3:606.

they composed a briefer statement as article 37, a condensed text of which is now quoted:

The authority of the holy scripture dependeth not upon the authority of any man, but only upon the authority of God, who hath delivered and revealed his mind therein unto us, and containeth all things necessary for salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the christian faith, or be thought requisite to salvation. Neither ought we...to depend upon, hearken to, or regard the pretended immediate inspirations, dreams, or prophetic predictions, by or from any person whatsoever, lest we be deluded by them. Nor yet do we believe, that the works of creation, nor the law written in the heart, viz. natural religion,...or the light within man, as such, is sufficient to inform man of Christ the mediator, or of the way to salvation, or eternal life by him; but the holy scriptures are necessary to instruct all men into the way of salvation, and eternal life...And no decrees of popes, or councils, or writings of any person whatsoever, are of equal authority with the sacred scriptures.<sup>39</sup>

### The American Confessions

**I**n colonial America the Philadelphia Confession (1742) retained the initial ten-part article on “the Holy Scriptures” which had been included in the Second London Confession.<sup>40</sup> Subsequent confessions of faith contained relatively concise articles about the Scriptures.<sup>41</sup> The articles of the Kehukee Primitive Baptist Association (1777) affirmed:

We believe that Almighty God has made known His mind and will to the children of men in His word[,] which word we believe to be of divine authority, and contains all things necessary to be made known for the salvation of men and

<sup>39</sup> Lumpkin, 324–25

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 349

<sup>41</sup> Articles of faith adopted by Baptist bodies in the United States will be treated comprehensively, thus, this review will not be confined to those Baptist bodies which are members of the Baptist World Alliance

women. The same is comprehended or contained in the Books of the Old and New Testaments as are commonly received.<sup>42</sup>

The first article in the Terms of Union between the Elkhorn and South Kentucky, or Separate [Baptist] Association (1801) asserted: "That the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the infallible word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in the Principles of Faith of the Sandy Creek [Separate Baptist] Association (1816) one reads: "That the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, and only rule of faith and practice."<sup>44</sup>

Of major significance in Baptist confessional history was the newly constructed first article in the New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833):

We believe [that] the Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired, and is a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction; that it has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter; that it reveals the principles by which God will judge us; and therefore is, and shall remain to the end of the world, the true centre of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and opinions should be tried.<sup>45</sup>

Later Baptist confessions during the nineteenth century made relatively brief statements about the Bible. The Treatise of the Faith and Practices of the Original Free Will Baptists (1834; revised 1948) declared that the Scriptures:

are the Old and the New Testaments; they were written by holy men, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and are God's revealed word to man. They are a sufficient and infallible rule and guide to Salvation and all Christian worship and service.<sup>46</sup>

The Abstract of Principles of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1858), in its first article, declared: "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and are the only sufficient, certain and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and

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<sup>42</sup> Article 2, in *ibid.*, 355.

<sup>43</sup> In *ibid.*, 359.

<sup>44</sup> Article 2, in *ibid.*, 358.

<sup>45</sup> In *ibid.*, 361–62.

<sup>46</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 369.

obedience.”<sup>47</sup> Such language, taken from the Second London and the Philadelphia confessions, did involve the use of the word “authoritative” rather than the word “infallible.”<sup>48</sup>

Twentieth-century Baptist confessions framed in the United States reflect controversy concerning the Bible, especially regarding its mode of inspiration and the nature of its inerrancy. The Doctrinal Statement of the American Baptist [Landmark] Association (1905) declared, “We believe in the infallible verbal inspiration of the whole Bible.”<sup>49</sup> The Goodchild Confession, adopted by the Fundamental Fellowship of the Northern Baptist Convention in 1921, affirmed: “We believe that the Bible is God’s word, that it was written by men divinely inspired, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.”<sup>50</sup> The Articles of Faith Put Forth by the Baptist Bible Union of America (1923) began with a paraphrase of the first article of the New Hampshire Confession and then added two explanatory statements. The first declared that the Bible “does not contain and convey the word of God, but IS the very Word of God.” According to the second statement, biblical inspiration means “that the books of the Bible were written by holy men of old, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, in such a definite way that their writings were supernaturally inspired and free from error, as no other writings have ever been or ever will be inspired.”<sup>51</sup> In the Statement of the Baptist Faith and Message adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925, the first article of the New Hampshire Confession was adopted, but with the term “opinions” changed to “religious opinions.”<sup>52</sup> The brief affirmation adopted by the Northern Baptist Convention in 1946 asserted the New Testament to be “a divinely inspired record and therefore a trustworthy, authoritative and all-sufficient rule of our faith and practice.”<sup>53</sup> The Doctrinal Statement of the North American Baptist Association<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In Robert A. Baker, *A Baptist Source Book With Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 137–38.

<sup>48</sup> Garrett, “Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought, 43, *ibid.*,” “Biblical Authority according to Baptist Confessions of Faith,” 46–47.

<sup>49</sup> Article 1, in Lumpkin, 378.

<sup>50</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 383.

<sup>51</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 385.

<sup>52</sup> In Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), 393.

<sup>53</sup> Northern Baptist Convention, *Yearbook*, 1946, 97.

<sup>54</sup> Now the Baptist Missionary Association of America.

(1950) affirmed the “infallibility and plenary verbal inspiration of the Scriptures.”<sup>55</sup> The Statement of the Baptist Faith and Message adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1963 added one sentence to the first article of its 1925 predecessor: “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.”<sup>56</sup> In 1988 the Baptist Missionary Association of America affirmed the following in a new Doctrinal Statement:

The Scriptures are God’s inerrant revelation, complete in the Old and New Testaments, written by divinely inspired men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Those men wrote not in words of human wisdom but in words taught by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13).

The Scriptures provide the standard for the believer’s faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16–17), reveal the principles by which God will judge all (Heb. 4:12; John 12:48), and express the true basis of Christian fellowship (Gal. 1:8–9; 2 John 9–11).<sup>57</sup>

### The British Commonwealth Confessions

**A**ccording to the Doctrinal Basis of the New Zealand Baptist Union (1882), the union affirmed the “inspiration of the Bible and its authority in all matters of faith and practice.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, the Doctrinal Basis of the Baptist Union of Victoria (1888) in Australia declared the “Divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Scriptures or the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>59</sup> Likewise, the Confession of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (1925) asserted the “Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and their absolute supremacy and sufficiency in matters of faith and practice.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Article 2, in Lumpkin, 380.

<sup>56</sup> In *ibid.*, 1969 ed., 393.

<sup>57</sup> Baptist Missionary Association of America, *Yearbook*, 1988, 35.

<sup>58</sup> Article 1, in Lumpkin, 416.

<sup>59</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 417.

<sup>60</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 421.

## The Continental European Confessions

**I**n Continental Europe, Baptist confessions during the nineteenth century were concise but explicit concerning the Holy Scriptures. As early as 1861 the Baptist Union of Sweden declared in its confession: "We believe that the Holy Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament (the commonly so-called Apocryphal books excepted) are inspired by God and constitute the one perfect rule for our Christian faith and practice."<sup>61</sup> In 1879 the Federation of French Baptist Churches stated in its confession: "We believe that the canonical scriptures of the Old and the New Testament are the Word of God and must be the only and infallible rule of faith and Christian life by which we shall be judged, and the only foundation stone from which shall spring all tradition, all doctrine and all religious practice."<sup>62</sup> In 1891 the Finnish Baptist Union (Finnish-speaking) affirmed in the first article of its confession:

We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament (except the so-called Apocrypha) are inspired by God or have come to being under the influence of the Holy Spirit, thus forming a source from which we get all our knowledge about God and about the redemption of man through faith in Jesus Christ; and that they are the only directive and guideline of our faith and life.<sup>63</sup>

Early in the present century, the Confession of Faith of the Dutch Baptist Churches declared as its preamble: "The church accepts as its only foundation the revealed Truth of God as contained in Holy Scriptures or the Bible, the content of which it accepts as the infallible Word of God."<sup>64</sup>

Twentieth-century Continental confessions generally refer to the Bible in greater detail. Such was characteristic of the Confession of Faith and Ecclesiastical Principles of the Evangelical Association of French-Speaking Baptist Churches (1924):

We believe that the canonical writings of the

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<sup>61</sup> Article 1, in Parker, 100-101

<sup>62</sup> Article 2, in *ibid*, 126 Not on the continent but framed during the same epoch was the Basis of Doctrine of the Baptist Union of Ireland (1888), which affirmed "the inspiration and all-sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures." *Ibid*, 49

<sup>63</sup> Article 1, in *ibid*, 106

<sup>64</sup> In *ibid*, 88

**"The Holy Scriptures are the norm for the religious and social life of Baptists. They alone, pure and unaltered, serve as the stable footing and signpost in all the different questions of life."**

Old and New Testaments are the Word that God directs toward us and constitute the only and infallible rules of faith and Christian life and the only touchstone by which every doctrine, every tradition and every religious and ecclesiastical system as well as every method of Christian action are to be tested.

We believe that the Holy Scripture is a providential document and that the Holy Spirit presided in sovereign manner at its origin and at the formation of the biblical collection. We believe that He has Himself assured therein the perfect teaching and the entire historic truth, despite the imperfection of the human instruments who, by His divine inspiration and under His control, have contributed toward communicating to us the divine oracles.

We believe that the Holy Scriptures reveal to us all that we must know in the spiritual realm. We believe that they need not be modified or completed by any other revelation in the course of the present dispensation.<sup>65</sup>

The Confession of Faith of the Baptist Churches in Poland (1930) asserted:

We believe that the holy books of the Old and New Testaments are truly inspired by the Holy Spirit. They contain God's authentic revelation for mankind and are the only accurate source of information about God. Also they include principles and norms of proper faith and conduct.<sup>66</sup>

In the Confession of Faith of the Yugoslavian Baptist Churches (c. 1948) one reads: "Baptists take their stance solely on biblical principles, whether dealing with questions of faith or those concerning social life." Moreover, "The Holy Scriptures are the norm for the religious and social life of Baptists. They alone, pure and unaltered, serve as the stable footing and signpost in all the different questions of life."<sup>67</sup>

In A Declaration of the Baptist Faith and Order (1963) Norwegian Baptists asserted:

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<sup>65</sup> Article 2, in *ibid.*, 137-38.

<sup>66</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 173.

<sup>67</sup> Article 1, preamble and subsection 1, in *ibid.*, 205.

Baptists believe that the Bible is the revealed word of God, and regard it as normative for faith, doctrine and life.

Baptists have no written creed other than the Bible, but they affirm the content of the ecumenical symbols (the Nicene and Apostolic creeds).<sup>68</sup>

After some interconfessional debate in Norway concerning the Bible in 1966, the Norwegian Baptist Pastors' Conference adopted a fivefold statement, four parts of which are as follows:

1. We believe that the Bible is God's inspired word, given to us as a historical document. It is the final content of God's revelation; it speaks of a divine creation, gives us the law and the prophetic word and leads us to Jesus Christ and the apostolic time.
2. We believe that the center of God's revelation is Jesus Christ. In him the Scripture has its highest authority and on him it must be tested.
3. We believe however that only a formal confession of the Bible is not enough. A true understanding of the Bible also includes a true understanding of the great truths of salvation. As an example we mention the Scripture's view of Jesus Christ who is God who became flesh, who died and arose for our salvation.
4. We believe that the Holy Spirit is the Word's life principle. The Word and the Spirit cannot be separated. The Spirit's testimony is Jesus Christ and as the Scripture says, "he [the Spirit] shall take from me and proclaim for you."<sup>69</sup>

The Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists (USSR) (1966) declared:

We believe that all canonical books of the Old and New Testament as represented in the entire Bible, or the Holy Scripture (excluding the Apocrypha), are inspired by the Holy Spirit and given by the Lord, as indispensable, the only and

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<sup>68</sup> Article 1, sub-sections 1 and 2, in *ibid.*, 97.

<sup>69</sup> In *ibid.*, 256-57.



completely sufficient source of knowledge about God, our redemption, and His will concerning our faith and life.<sup>70</sup>

Among the “Fundamental Principles of Evangelical Christians and Baptists” (Dissidents, USSR) (date uncertain), as reported by G. P. Vins, is the following:

The Holy Scripture (the Bible) is the only rule and guide in all matters and all questions concerning faith and life. From this it follows that preaching the Gospel of witnessing to Christ is the chief task and fundamental calling of the Church.<sup>71</sup>

The Confession of Faith of the Hungarian Baptist Church (1967) was somewhat detailed:

We believe that the Holy Scripture (39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament) is God’s revealed Word. This work, written by divinely inspired men, was put together by the Church under the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The providence of God has saved the Holy Scripture—both in its origin and in its transmission—from all essential errors. In its details and its totality the Holy Scripture reveals to us the most perfect divine truths. Out of it we get to know God, the way to eternal life, and those principles by which God will judge mankind. The Holy Scriptures—in its context and its explanation in the light of the Holy Spirit—is an unmistakable and satisfactory regulator of the Christian life, our supreme counselor in all things of daily life, and the most perfect touch-stone by which we may test every human tradition, teaching and exercise.<sup>72</sup>

The Confession of Faith of the Romanian Baptist Churches (1974) offered a similar affirmation:

We believe and affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are the written word of God, a godly revelation to mankind, the unmistakable source of the awareness of God.

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<sup>70</sup> Article 2, in *ibid.*, 154.

<sup>71</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 170.

<sup>72</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 188–89.

The Bible—the word of God written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—is the only rule and norm of faith and behavior in this life.

In religious matters, the Bible is the only authority; it is sufficient for our teaching and there is no need for support from tradition.<sup>73</sup>

Much more detailed and more reflective of academic biblical studies was the confession jointly framed by Baptists in the two Germanies, Austria, and Switzerland in 1977:

Jesus Christ is God's Word in person to us men. In his life and work God has revealed himself comprehensively and definitely for the salvation of men. The resurrected and exalted Christ becomes present reality for us in the power of the Holy Spirit. He makes the proclamation of the gospel, which is accomplished through men, the word of God for us.

In the New Testament we hear the first witnesses to Jesus Christ. The Christian community is grounded in their testimony. That testimony cannot be expanded or superseded by any subsequent Christian proclamation or teaching. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the authors of the New Testament have borne witness to God's salvation that has appeared in Christ. This constitutes the authority and the normative character of the New Testament for the life and teaching of the church. It is the written word of God.

The Old Testament bears witness to us of God's dealings with his people Israel and of God's will for all mankind. The Christian community understands the Old Testament from the perspective of God's revelation in Christ and sees it as pointing toward that revelation; for Christ is the goal and the end of the law. The New Testament bears witness to us of God's saving work in Christ for all mankind and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The gospel of the crucified, risen and coming Lord Jesus Christ is the center of the New Testament and hence of the entirety of the Holy Scripture.

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<sup>73</sup> Article 1, in *ibid.*, 218.

**"The historical interpretation of Scripture takes into account the working of the Holy Spirit, both in originating and expounding the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments."**

The Bible is God's word in human language. Therefore its books bear the signs of the times in which they originated. Their language, their patterns of thought, and their literary forms are bound to the times and places whence they come. Therefore the historical understanding of Holy Scripture is an obligation of the Christian church and its theology, in their listening to the word of God. The historical interpretation of Scripture takes into account the working of the Holy Spirit, both in originating and expounding the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible lives, because God speaks through it.<sup>74</sup>

### **The Authority of the Bible according to Representative Baptist Theologians Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Early Nineteenth Centuries**

**E**nglish Baptist theologians of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries were not confronted with the challenges of biblical criticism, the biological and geological sciences, or confrontation with non-Christian religions as they affirmed the authority of the Scriptures. Rather they confronted the Roman Catholic and non-Puritan Anglican claims. John Smyth (c. 1570–1612) affirmed, "The holy Scriptures viz, the Originalls Hebrew & Greek are given by Divine Inspiration & in their first donation were without error most perfect & therefore Canonically."<sup>75</sup> "In addition to the Bible as a source of doctrinal authority, Smyth taught," contrary to later Baptists, "that regenerate persons receive direct inward revelation from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit without biblical mediation and that for the regenerate such revelation from the Trinity makes the Bible less than essential."<sup>76</sup> John

<sup>74</sup> Part 1, article 6, in *ibid.*, 62–64. The confessions of faith of Baptist unions and conventions in Latin America, Asia, and Africa are not included in this study because as yet there is no collection of such confessions.

<sup>75</sup> "The Differences of the Churches of the Separation [*sic*]" (1608), in *The Works of John Smyth, Fellow of Christ's College, 1594–1598*, ed. W. T. Whitley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 1:279.

<sup>76</sup> Garrett, "Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought," 41, based on "Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion," articles 44, 61, 62, in Lumpkin, 131–32, 135–36. See John H. Watson, "Baptists and the Bible, As Seen in Three Eminent Baptists," *Foundations* 16 (July–September 1973): 241–42.

Gill (1697–1771), a learned Baptist who wrote both a systematic theology<sup>77</sup> and a commentary on the entire Bible,<sup>78</sup> did not treat the doctrine of the Bible in his systematic theology. The Particular Baptist church which he served as pastor declared in its confession of faith, “We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice.”<sup>79</sup> In the Preface to his biblical commentary Gill set out a thirteen-part statement about the Bible, which we may summarize as follows: (1) The subject matter of the Scriptures could have come from none other than God. (2) The Scriptures are coherent and noncontradictory despite the numerous human authors. (3) The “wonderful [life-changing] effects” of the Scriptures show their divine origin. (4) Biblical miracles confirm the genuineness and inspiration of the Scriptures. (5) The authority-bearing nature of the Scriptures is evidence of their divine inspiration. (6) The Scriptures have a more sublime style than other writings. (7) The Scriptures are perspicuous. (8) The longterm preservation of the Scriptures is evidence of their inspiration. (9) Divine judgments on those who have tried to destroy the Scriptures is evidence of their divine authority. (10) The antiquity of the biblical books is evidence of their authority. (11) Biblical inspiration is total, even for content that is not from God or not true. (12) Biblical inspiration included “words” as well as “matter.” (13) Each biblical book is authentic.<sup>80</sup> Garrett recorded the following:

Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) argued for the necessity of an historical “revelation from God” beyond the “light of nature.” Granting the existence of degrees of inspiration but insisting that the Scriptures must be reckoned either as “the Word of God” or as “mere imposture,” Fuller pointed to the “*truth*,” “*consistency*,” “*perfection*,” “*pungency*,” and “*utility*” of the Scriptures, which are essentially Christocentric.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989).

<sup>78</sup> *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* 9 vols. (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989).

<sup>79</sup> “A Brief Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Reverend and Learned John Gill, D. D.,” in Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament*, 1 xxxiv.

<sup>80</sup> Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament*, 1 v–viii.

<sup>81</sup> Garrett, “Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought,” 44, based on Fuller, “Letters on Systematic Divinity,” nos. 5–7, in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, reprint from 3d London ed., rev. Joseph Belcher (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1845; Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 1 695–704.

## Nineteenth Century

**N**ineteenth-century Baptist theologians in the United States addressed the authority of the Bible in a context where biblical criticism, Christian experience, and the biological and geological sciences were becoming major influences. For John Leadley Dagg (1794–1884), the Bible is “the perfect source of religious knowledge, and the infallible standard of religious truth.” The biblical writers, were “the instruments chosen, fitted, and employed by God,” but “God himself is the author of the Bible....A full conviction that the Bible is the word of God, is necessary to give us confidence in its teachings, and respect for its decisions.” The authority of the Bible is “*supreme*,” “*independent*,” and “*immediate*.”<sup>82</sup>

“Ezekiel Gilman Robinson (1815–1894), writing in 1871 or 1872, declined to espouse one of the contemporary theories of biblical inspiration...or to attempt ‘to distinguish between the Divine and the human in any given [biblical] message.’” He “did differentiate the two works of the Holy Spirit: ‘the original communication or revelation of the thoughts of God’ and the ‘Divine superintendence...which secured accuracy in the record of the revelation.’” Robinson “offered detailed evidence for the inspiration of each of the testaments, acknowledging various objections advanced by historical-critical studies.”<sup>83</sup> Writing in 1877, Alvah Hovey (1820–1903) “advanced a fivefold argument in defense of ‘*dynamical inspiration*’ of the Bible, based on the trustworthiness of the New Testament books as being written by apostles or near apostolic authors; the proof of infallibility of Jesus’ teaching by means of his moral character, doctrines, fulfilled predictions, and miracles; Jesus’ promise to the apostles of inspiration by the Holy Spirit; the endorsement of the divine inspiration of the Old Testament by Jesus and the apostles; and the unique character of the inspiration of apostles and prophets.” Thus, for Hovey, “divine inspiration guarantees infallibility of teaching.”<sup>84</sup> James Madison

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 44, based on Dagg, *Manual of Theology: First Part, A Treatise on Christian Doctrine* (Charleston, SC: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858; Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1982), 21, 39–40, 25, 40–41.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 44, based on Robinson, *Christian Theology* (Rochester, NY: E. R. Andrews, 1894), 33–45. This posthumously published volume consisted mostly of materials printed by Robinson for his students during 1871–1872.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 44–45, based on Hovey, *Manual of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1877), 45–81.

Pendleton (1811–1891) “argued for the necessity of a divine revelation and offered practical evidences for the Bible as ‘the word of God.’”<sup>85</sup>

Augustus Hopkins Strong (1836–1921), an influential Baptist theologian, “the earliest form of whose well-known *Systematic Theology* was issued in 1886, elaborated in detail in the 1907 edition, in a manner akin to that of both Hovey and Robinson, a doctrine of the Scriptures as ‘a revelation from God.’” He not only cited miracles and fulfilled prophecy but also employed “the trustworthiness of the self-evidencing dates and authorships of ‘biblical books,’ the ‘credibility’ of the biblical writers, the ‘supernatural character’ of biblical teaching, and the beneficent and widespread expansion of biblical truth during post-apostolic history.” Strong embraced somewhat reluctantly the “Dynamical theory” of inspiration, “which he qualified by refusing to make it verbal and by denying that ‘inerrancy’ included ‘things not essential to the main purpose of Scriptures.’” For Strong, the Bible “is more authoritative than ‘individual reason or the creeds of the church’ and bows only to the ‘ultimate authority’ of Christ himself.”<sup>86</sup> With Elias Henry Johnson (1841–1906) and William Newton Clarke (1841–1912), Christian experience, or the “Christian consciousness,” was introduced into the question of authority. Johnson, writing in 1891, “identified the sources for systematic theology as four: the Bible, the Christian church (both its ‘consciousness’ and its creeds), man as created in God’s image (both his ‘moral constitution’ and ‘the laws of human thought’), and the created universe.” As Garrett recorded:

Johnson located “Christian consciousness” within intuition but was unclear as to how intuition is to be related to man’s moral constitution. Christian consciousness “would be unimpeachable, if...unimpaired” by sin. “The New Testament, on the contrary, is unfalsified by sin” and hence is “intrinsically of highest authority.” Yet... these two sources of authority have historically “proven

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 45, based on Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines A Compendium of Theology* (Philadelphia American Baptist Publication Society, 1878), 23–41

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 45, based on Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols Ibid, (Philadelphia Judson Press, 1907), 111–41, 145–222

**"The inspiration of the Bible does not prove its excellence, but its excellence proves its inspiration."**

to be in accord."<sup>87</sup>

Johnson favored the dynamical theory of inspiration and defined biblical authority in a twofold manner: first, "to those who accept the claims of the Scriptures in their own behalf, they infallibly express what it was the will of God to declare;" and second, "when we recognize, without being able to separate, elements divine and human, we see that the use of a medium available for ancient peoples requires an historical and critical, because reverent, study, in order to its correct interpretation."<sup>88</sup> Clarke represented Baptist liberalism in his reinterpretation of authority. He "differentiated God's revelation as 'self-manifestation' from both Christian experience and the Scriptures and defined Christian experience as both 'individual and collective'":

The Bible records "a progressive revelation of God" and "releases us from all obligation to maintain its complete inerrancy, in the sense of freedom from all inaccuracy and incorrectness of statement." It is marked by different degrees of quality in its diverse parts. "Primarily men are inspired, not writings." Yet there is "a *high exceptional quality in the contents*" of biblical books.... "The inspiration of the Bible does not prove its excellence, but its excellence proves its inspiration."<sup>89</sup>

"The inspiration of the Bible is not the ground of its authority, so much as its authority is the evidence of its inspiration."<sup>90</sup>

### Twentieth Century

**B**aptist theologians of the twentieth century explicated biblical authority in a widening context.

Edgar Young Mullins (1860–1928), writing in 1917, gave considerable emphasis to Christian experience in his entire system, understood the Bible as the "record" of historical revelation that

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 45, based on Johnson, *An Outline of Systematic Theology*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1891), 23–24, 27–34.

<sup>88</sup> Johnson, *An Outline of Systematic Theology*, 45–48, 42–45.

<sup>89</sup> Garrett, "Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought," 45–46, based on Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology*, 15th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 9, 12–26, 31–34, 35, 40, 26, 44.

<sup>90</sup> Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology*, 46.

reaches its peak in Jesus Christ, and, de-emphasizing theories of biblical inspiration, stressed the "success" of the Bible's claims "in the experiences of Christians of the past and present."<sup>91</sup>

Walter Thomas Conner (1877–1952), writing in 1924, continued Mullins'[s] interest in Christian experience but made it less central to theology. Theories of biblical inspiration were [likewise] bypassed by Conner. Instead, he elaborated...the nature of the Bible as "the record" of a "special" and "progressive" revelation which is centered in Jesus Christ, and he explicated the Bible's authority as that of a holy and sovereign God, that of grace and truth, and that which "does not interfere with the freedom of man."<sup>92</sup>

In 1936 Conner wrote that "the Bible was itself 'the product of revelation' and today has 'revelation value for us'...."<sup>93</sup> James McKee Adams (1886–1945), though defining the various modern theories of biblical inspiration, placed more emphasis on the "results" of that inspiration:

We know that the writers themselves were not concerned about the *theories* of inspiration, but laid great stress on the *results* of inspiration. *How* the Spirit expressed the will of God to men, was one thing; *what was the will of God* thus expressed, was another.

Thus the inspired Bible is characterized by its unity, authority, sufficiency, widening influence, and finality.<sup>94</sup> "Our unchanging criterion," wrote William Richardson White (1892–1977), "is divine revelation," the "inspired record" of which is the Bible. That revelation "is both fixed and static," and the Bible is "a spiritual book" to be interpreted in a "spiritual" church by "spiritual" standards.<sup>95</sup> In 1947 Henry Cook (1886–1970) declared:

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<sup>91</sup> Garrett, "Sources of Authority in Baptist Thought," 46, based on Mullins, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Roger Williams, 1917), chs 1, 3, 5, 6 passim

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, based on Conner, *A System of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1924), chs 2–4 passim

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 46, based on Conner, *Revelation and God: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1936), 78–80

<sup>94</sup> *Our Bible* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1937), 33–40

<sup>95</sup> *Baptist Distinctives* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1946), 13, 16, 17–18



**"Illumination  
is the Holy  
Spirit's work  
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mind with  
spiritual  
understanding  
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man might  
grasp the  
revealed  
truth."**

It is this emphasis on the supremacy of the New Testament in all matters of the Church's faith and practice that constitutes the basis of the Baptist position.... [Indeed,] on the essential things Baptists are quite convinced that the Scripture speaks with no uncertain sound.... It is impossible to see how we can go behind the New Testament for our understanding of the mind and will of Christ for His people.

Developing the idea that tradition must be secondary, Cook insisted that for Baptists "the testimony of Scripture is final in its authority, and they are content to leave the Scripture to do its own work and bear its own witness." On biblical inspiration Cook insisted that as a denomination Baptists "have always declined to commit themselves to any specific theory of Inspiration" for they "unite in accepting the fact, but they differ as to the method." Cook concluded: "Loyalty to the New Testament is for Baptists the *sine qua non* of a rightly grounded faith."<sup>96</sup> John Clyde Turner (1878–1974) rejected "mechanical" inspiration as being identical with "plenary, verbal" inspiration and affirmed "dynamical" inspiration. "The Bible is a sufficient guide in all things religious," revealing "the way of salvation" and "God's plan for his church." It "is not a book of rules, but of principles."<sup>97</sup> Ralph Edward Knudsen (1897–?) affirmed both "general" and "special" revelation, after stating that the "Bible presents no doctrine of revelation, but is rather the record of God's acts in history" and after asserting that revelation is redemptive in purpose, not strictly informational. Knudsen favored the dynamic theory of biblical inspiration rather than the verbal or plenary theories and concluded that the Bible is infallible in its saving message, not in "grammar, or style, or science, or even history." The authority of the Bible is harmonizable with that of Christ and of the church.<sup>98</sup>

According to Herschel Harold Hobbs (1907–95), revelation is both general and special and the special is progressive until completed in Jesus Christ.<sup>99</sup> "Illumination is the Holy Spirit's work as he enlightens the human mind with spiritual

<sup>96</sup> *What Baptists Stand For* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1947), 13–14, 16–20, 21, 22

<sup>97</sup> *These Things We Believe* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1956), 10

<sup>98</sup> *Theology in the New Testament: A Basis for Christian Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1964), 19–22, 27, 35–39, 43, 44–46

<sup>99</sup> *What Baptists Believe* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1964), 62–63

understanding in order that man might grasp the revealed truth.”<sup>100</sup> Hobbs rejected both the intuitionist and the universal Christian theories of biblical inspiration and asserted that both the verbal and the dynamic theories were acceptable among Southern Baptists (USA).<sup>101</sup> The Bible is unitary and “divine in its contents” and “unique in its survival.”<sup>102</sup> As a “book of religion” the Bible speaks of redemption, judgment, and duty.<sup>103</sup> The Bible is “our one sufficient and authoritative rule of faith and practice. The Bible does not contain the word of God. It is the written Word of God.”<sup>104</sup> The Bible “is infallible as a book of religion,” for the Scriptures “do what they are designed to do.”<sup>105</sup> Supported by an extensive manuscript tradition and by archaeological discoveries, the Bible is historically trustworthy, scientifically true, and experimentally confirmed.<sup>106</sup> Wallie Amos Criswell (1909–?), who emphasized the unity and diversity of the Bible,<sup>107</sup> its confirmation by archaeology,<sup>108</sup> and its preservation, despite ancient persecutions and modern rationalism,<sup>109</sup> strongly defended both the inspiration and the inerrancy of the Scriptures. But some ambiguity pertains to the precise theory of inspiration embraced by Criswell. In 1965 “he clearly rejected the ‘*rational* or radical’, the ‘*fractional* or partial,’ and ‘the *mechanical*’ theories and espoused what he described as ‘a *dynamic, plenary, verbal, supernatural*’ theory.”<sup>110</sup> But Criswell’s language in 1969 was that of the mechanical dictation theory:

On the original parchment every sentence, word, line, mark, point, pen stroke, jot, and tittle were put there by inspiration of God. There is no question of anything else.... This is called the verbal theory of inspiration, which is vehemently denied by many modern theologians.... But I am insisting upon, and presenting, no theory except

<sup>100</sup> *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), 21

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–22

<sup>102</sup> *Fundamentals of Our Faith* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1960), 3–5

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, 25–27

<sup>104</sup> *What Baptists Believe*, 61

<sup>105</sup> *The Baptist Faith and Message*, 29. In interpreting the 1963 Statement of the Baptist Faith and Message (SBC), Hobbs ascribed infallibility only to the autographs. *Ibid.*, 28

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29, *Fundamentals of Our Faith*, 9–13

<sup>107</sup> *The Bible for Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1965), 31–33

<sup>108</sup> *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True* (Nashville: Broadman press, 1969), 37–43

<sup>109</sup> *The Bible for Today's World*, 109–19

<sup>110</sup> Garrett, “The Teaching of Recent Southern Baptist Theologians on the Bible,” 299, based on *The Bible for Today's World*, 47–53

that which is found in the Bible.<sup>111</sup>

Criswell also claimed the authority of Jesus himself for this theory.<sup>112</sup> In the *Criswell Study Bible* Leighton Paige Patterson (1942–) asserted, “Historically the Church has given unmistakable testimony to the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible.... This does not mean that the entire Bible was dictated word by word.”<sup>113</sup>

The Bible’s authority is sustained by Jesus’ “reverence for” and obedience toward the Old Testament,<sup>114</sup> and its infallibility extends to all matters historical and scientific.<sup>115</sup>

William Wilson Stevens (1914–1978) declined to opt for one of the theories of biblical inspiration but insisted that “only men can be inspired, not things:”

The Bible is a vital, living authority, not a mechanical one. It is the authority for the revelation of God in Christ, final in all matters of Christian belief and practical living. It is the objective truth that saves the Christian from subjectivism.<sup>116</sup>

According to Dallas M. Roark (1931–), the authority of the Bible ranks above that of the Inner Light, conscience, religious experience, reason, and the church, but must be coordinated with the authority of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>117</sup> William Boyd Hunt (1916–) wrote:

Illumination...is the contemporary dimension of God’s redemptive self-disclosure. God acts today through the Holy Spirit with men to enable them to receive the message which he would give to them through the Scriptures.

Hence illumination “centers in the church,” it “reminds us that the Bible is a given...for the Christian community today,” it “forces us to take seriously Christian tradition and history,” and it makes clear that the Bible is not “a static

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<sup>111</sup> *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True*, 26. On the contrary, L. Russell Bush III, “W. A. Criswell,” in Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 458, has concluded, “...Criswell was never guilty of actually holding a mechanical dictation theory of inspiration, nor did his understanding of verbal inspiration come anywhere close to a theory of verbal revelation as being the source of every word in Scripture.”

<sup>112</sup> *Why I Preach That the Bible Is Literally True*, 19.

<sup>113</sup> (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979), xix.

<sup>114</sup> *The Bible for Today’s World*, 76–82.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–26.

<sup>116</sup> *Doctrines of the Christian Religion* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 30–33.

<sup>117</sup> *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 52–72.

book” but depends on “the abiding work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>118</sup>

Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry (1913–), in his monumental six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority*,<sup>119</sup> set forth and explicated fifteen theses concerning biblical revelation:

1. Revelation is a divinely initiated activity, God’s free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality.
2. Divine revelation is given for human benefit, offering us privileged communion with our Creator in the kingdom of God.
3. Divine revelation does not completely erase God’s transcendent mystery, inasmuch as God the Revealer transcends his own revelation.
4. The very fact of disclosure by the one living God assures the comprehensive unity of divine revelation.
5. Not only the occurrence of divine revelation, but also its very nature, content, and variety are exclusively God’s determination.
6. God’s revelation is uniquely personal both in content and form.
7. God reveals himself not only universally in the history of the cosmos and of the nations, but also redemptively within this external history in unique saving acts.
8. The climax of God’s special revelation is Jesus of Nazareth, the personal incarnation of God in the flesh; in Jesus Christ the source and content of revelation converge and coincide.
9. The mediating agent in all divine revelation is the Eternal Logos—preexistent, incarnate, and now glorified.
10. God’s revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form.
11. The Bible is the reservoir and conduit of divine truth.
12. The Holy Spirit superintends the communication of divine revelation, first, by inspiring the prophetic-

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<sup>118</sup> “What Is Inspiration?,” in Wayne E. Ward and Joseph F. Green, eds., *Is the Bible a Human Book?* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), 122–23.

<sup>119</sup> (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976–1983).

apostolic writings, and second, by illuminating and interpreting the scripturally given Word of God.

13. As bestower of spiritual life the Holy Spirit enables individuals to appropriate God's revelation savingly, and thereby attests the redemptive power of the revealed truth of God in the personal experience of reborn sinners.
14. The church approximates the kingdom of God in miniature; as such she is to mirror to each successive generation the power and joy of the appropriated realities of divine revelation.
15. The self-manifesting God will unveil his glory in a crowning revelation of power and judgment; in this disclosure at the consummation of the ages, God will vindicate righteousness and justice, finally subdue and subordinate evil, and bring into being a new heaven and earth.<sup>120</sup>

In Dale Moody (1915–1992) one finds an espousal of both special and general revelation and a concept of authority that embraces Christ, the Spirit, and Scriptures.<sup>121</sup> He declared:

A biblical view of inspiration must be broad enough to include the truth in all the historical theories and adequate for a constructive theology in dialogue with the sacred writings of other world religions, the contribution of great systems of philosophy, and the discoveries of modern science.<sup>122</sup>

According to Bruce Milne (1940–), the “ultimate source of authority...is God himself, as he is made known to us through the words of the Bible.” Although biblical authority does not disallow the inward testimony of the Spirit, such authority is reenforced both by Jesus’ attitudes and actions toward the Old Testament and by the apostles’ view of the Old Testament and their own claim to be authoritative interpreters of Jesus. Milne did not espouse a particular theory of biblical inspiration but affirmed biblical infallibility/inerrancy as “a corollary of divine inspiration.”<sup>123</sup> For

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 7–16.

<sup>121</sup> *The Word of Truth: A Summary of Christian Doctrine Based on Biblical Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 38–42, 57–62, 47–52.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>123</sup> *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 18, 33–34, 29–33, 36–39, 41–45.

Millard John Erickson (1932–), a verbal theory of inspiration suffices, in which the major emphasis is placed on “the didactic material” in the Bible and a secondary emphasis is placed on the biblical “phenomena.” Erickson applied the same twofold method of the didactic and the phenomenal to biblical inerrancy with the result that he favored “moderate harmonization.”<sup>124</sup> For Jesse Morris Ashcraft (1922–), “the Bible is and will remain the primary source of knowledge for the faith of Christians. As long as it is read under the guidance of the Spirit and in the fellowship of believers, it will be the Word of God to them....” Ashcraft interpreted *sola Scriptura* in the sense of *suprema Scriptura* and insisted that the doctrine of authority cannot be reduced to a theory of biblical inspiration. Indeed, “the final authority is God,” and religious authority necessarily involves “encounter with God.”<sup>125</sup> John Moore Lewis (1921–) restated the case for fulfillment of prophecy and biblical miracles as evidences of biblical authority. “The authority of the Bible arises out of the authority of Christ to whom it bears an inerrant witness.” Its authority “resides in its power of persuasion,” not in any “power of external coercion.” “The Bible seldom calls attention to itself,” except to give assurance “that it comes from God,” and “never presents itself to be the object of faith.” The Christian Faith and Belief states:

The New Testament stands on a higher plane than the Old. It is God’s final authority of revelation and redemption. It is the fulfillment and completion of the Old Testament.<sup>126</sup>

Stanley J. Grenz (1950–) interpreted the doctrine of the Scriptures as a subdivision of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. “Because the Bible is the Spirit’s book, its purpose is instrumental to his mission.” Moreover, “we ought not to apply any one theory [of inspiration] to the entire Bible.” The Spirit’s work of illumination is extended by Grenz to include the process of the production of the biblical canon. The Bible is derivative revelation, functional revelation, and mediate revelation. The Bible is not only the constitution for the Christian church but also the sustenance for Christian piety. Biblical inerrancy should be interpreted in

**“The authority of the Bible arises out of the authority of Christ to whom it bears an inerrant witness.”**

<sup>124</sup> *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983–1985), 207–10, 214, 215, 222–25, 229–33.

<sup>125</sup> *Christian Faith and Beliefs* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), 84–85, 86–87, 87, 85, 87.

<sup>126</sup> *Revelation, Inspiration, Scripture*, Layman’s Library of Christian Doctrine (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 127, 135–41, 141, 144, 154.

**"What  
authoritative  
role do the  
Scriptures of  
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the context of diverse biblical genre, of "the Bible's own stated purpose," and of what the Bible reckons as "error," so as to conclude that it is "totally trustworthy."<sup>127</sup> For Wayne Arden Grudem (1948–) the authority of the Bible is explained by the assumption that it is inerrant, and then the Bible is presented as clear, necessary, and sufficient.<sup>128</sup>

Although there have been differences concerning the mode of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and concerning the nature of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, there has been common agreement among Baptist theologians as to *suprema Scriptura* (if not *sola Scriptura*) as to the fact of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and as to the trustworthiness and reliability of the Scriptures.

**The Authority of the Bible in  
Baptist Piety and Practice**

**N**ot only does the authority of the Bible for Baptists need to be exhibited in the Baptist confessions of faith and in the writings of Baptist theologians, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the piety and the practice (i.e., living and activities) of the people called Baptists. Yet the documentation of the latter is far more difficult. What authoritative role do the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments have in the life of the average Baptist Christian?

We must begin to answer this question by going beyond the average Baptist to those who have had unique involvements with the Bible. First, certain Baptists have been involved in the translation of the Bible from its original languages into various modern languages. William Carey (1761–1834), the pioneer Baptist missionary to India, engaged in prodigious efforts to translate the Bible into the numerous languages of India. His work has been summarized as follows:

Bengali, Oriya, Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit and Assamese—whole Bibles.

Panjabi New Testament and Old Testament up to Ezek. xxvi.

Pashto and Kashmiri New Testaments, and Old

<sup>127</sup> *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 495, 499, 505, 516–17, 506–10, 522–24.

<sup>128</sup> *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Leicester, U.K.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 73–138.

Testaments up to 2 Kings.

Telugu and Konkani New Testaments, and Pentateuchs.

Eighteen other New Testaments, and Five one-or-more Gospels.<sup>129</sup>

Adoniram Judson translated the New Testament into Burmese in 1834–1835.<sup>130</sup> Certain Baptist scholars in the United States, notably Edgar Johnson Goodspeed (1871–1962),<sup>131</sup> Helen Barrett Montgomery (1861–1934)<sup>132</sup> and Charles Bray Williams (1869–1952),<sup>133</sup> have published their own translations of the New Testament. Robert G. Bratcher was a principal translator of the New Testament portion of the *Good News Bible* (Today's English Version).<sup>134</sup> The Australian Baptist missionary, L. A. (Tony) Cupit, was the chief translator of the Kyaka Enga New Testament (1973), Mapusiya Kolo was the chief translator of the Sau Enga Testament (1976), and Kolo was also the chief translator of the abridged Kyaka Enga Bible (1982), all in Papua New Guinea. In Irian Jaya (Indonesia), Australian Baptist missionaries collaborated with missionaries from three interdenominational societies to produce the Dani New Testament, and Brian Smith, a New Zealand Baptist, served during the 1970s on a committee to revise the Bengal Bible in India.<sup>135</sup> Baptists have participated in Bible translation in the Spanish, Portuguese, and Chinese languages.<sup>136</sup>

In addition to translation of the Bible, Baptists have also been active in the distribution of copies of the Bible in the vernacular. Nineteenth-century colporteurs traveled to sell Bibles at minimal cost so that families would be able to possess a copy of the Bible. Baptist publishing houses, notably in Rio de Janeiro (for Portuguese), in El Paso (for Spanish), and in Hong Kong (for Chinese), have printed Bibles.

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<sup>129</sup> S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey, D.D., Fellow of Linnaean Society* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 410.

<sup>130</sup> Paul Ellingworth, "Bible Translations (Modern Versions)," in J. D. Douglas, ed., *New 20th Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 96.

<sup>131</sup> *The New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923).

<sup>132</sup> *Centenary Translation of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1924).

<sup>133</sup> *The New Testament in the Language of the People* (Boston: B. Humphries, 1937; Chicago: Moody Press, 1972).

<sup>134</sup> Bratcher, "Good News for Modern Man," *The Bible Translator* 17 (October, 1966): 159.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with L. A. (Tony) Cupit, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 May 1996.

<sup>136</sup> Ellingworth, 83, 85, 89.



"During the twentieth century the Sunday School has been the most widely used structure for Bible teaching and study."

Missionaries have often given away portions or copies of the Bible in the context of their witness to non-Christians. Baptist churches sometimes present their new members with copies of the Bible, and Bibles are generally given to individuals being ordained to the pastoral ministry.

Third, Baptist scholars have written commentaries on various books of the two testaments, sometimes as volumes within a series and sometimes as monographs. In the English language, one commentary on the New Testament<sup>137</sup> and one complete biblical commentary<sup>138</sup>—both by Baptist authors—have been published, and a third is in process.<sup>139</sup> A single-authored, word-focused commentary on the entire New Testament was issued by a Baptist.<sup>140</sup> British Baptists have had various biblical scholars in their ranks during the twentieth century.<sup>141</sup>

Fourth, as we move to the congregational level, we must recognize that Bible study by church members is normally a major aspect of Baptist church life. During the twentieth century the Sunday School has been the most widely used structure for Bible teaching and study. Under Robert Raikes (1735–1811), an Anglican layman in Gloucester, England, Sunday School began as a didactic parachurch ministry to poor children.<sup>142</sup> Sunday School was eventually institutionalized as a church teaching ministry by various Protestant denominations, especially by the Northern Baptists (now American Baptist Churches, U.S.A.) and the Southern Baptists in the United States. It was expanded from a children-only constituency so as to embrace all ages—from infants and young children who had not made any confession of faith to the oldest church members. A vast publishing enterprise was necessary to provide curricular materials, the training of many lay teachers became essential, and the

<sup>137</sup> *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Alvah Hovey, 7 vols (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1881–1890)

<sup>138</sup> *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, 12 vols (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969–1972)

<sup>139</sup> *The New American Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery and E. Ray Clendenen, 20 vols (Nashville: Broadman Press, in process)

<sup>140</sup> Archibald Thomas Robertson (1863–1934), *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1933)

<sup>141</sup> For example, Henry Wheeler Robinson (1872–1945), Theodore Henry Robinson (1881–1964), Harold Henry Rowley (1890–1969), Terrot Reaveley Glover (1869–1943), George Raymond Beasley Murray (1916–), and Ronald Ernest Clements (1929–)

<sup>142</sup> J. L. Seymour, "Sunday School Movement," in Daniel G. Reid, ed., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 1146–47

Sunday School, having enlisted non-Christians as well as church members, became the source of new converts. The significance of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention may be seen from statements made by two Southern Baptist leaders. In 1941, John Richard Sampey (1863–1946) wrote, “The Sunday School Board is our people’s university in the teaching of religion.”<sup>143</sup> In 1987, Harry Leon McBeth (1931–) asserted, “No Southern Baptist, from the cradle to the grave, escapes the influence of the Sunday School Board.”<sup>144</sup> In other Baptist unions and conventions, Bible study is conducted in different settings, and today new patterns of Bible study—in homes, by women only, by youth, etc.—are being utilized.

Fifth, the Bible has special significance for the Baptist pulpit. Worship services in Baptist churches have characteristically been dominated by the sermon, and the sermon is expected to be properly “biblical.” In this respect, Baptists may continue to be heirs of the Reformed and Puritan heritage after nearly four centuries. The voice is important to the preacher, and the ear is essential to the hearers. A textbook on homiletics by a nineteenth-century Baptist proved to be a classic,<sup>145</sup> and instruction concerning preaching is integral to the curricula of Baptist theological seminaries. The types of sermons in Baptist churches range from the strictly expository to the topical, so that the extent of biblical content will vary, yet the lack of biblical preaching can lead a Baptist congregation to terminate the ministry of its pastor.

Sixth, the Bible has a role in public worship in many Baptist congregations. Although it is true that for some Baptist churches the only public reading of the Scriptures in worship is the preacher’s reading aloud of his sermon text or texts, for others the reading of a biblical text, often by members of the congregation, is a regular aspect of congregational worship.

Seventh, the Bible is basic to the prayer life of the Baptist

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<sup>143</sup> “The Sunday School Board and the Seminaries,” in Prince E. Burroughs, *Fifty Fruitful Years, 1891–1941: The Story of the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1941), 308.

<sup>144</sup> *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 440.

<sup>145</sup> John Albert Broadus (1827–1895), *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1870); *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, rev. Jesse Burton Weatherspoon (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944); rev. Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979)

congregation. This has been especially true of the midweek meeting of Baptist churches for congregational prayer. Not only might biblical texts be read during such prayer meetings, but Baptists also often seek biblical examples of or teaching about prayer as the guide for contemporary praying.<sup>146</sup>

Eighth, the Bible is of special significance in both Baptist weddings and funerals. Pastors who officiate in weddings frequently read biblical passages relative to Christian marriage (for example, Eph. 5:22–33) or to Christian love (for example, 1 Cor. 13). The reading of the Scriptures is normally a major segment within Baptist funeral services. The texts employed may be selected from an extensive catena of biblical texts, but texts such as 1 Corinthians 15:12–58, John 14:1–3, and Romans 8:28–39 are frequently used. Funeral services, especially in Latin America and elsewhere, may be the occasion for evangelistic preaching to non-Christians.

Ninth, Baptist families are encouraged to maintain regular, preferably daily, family devotions, during which time there is both prayer and the reading of a passage from the Bible. The pressures of modern urban life and the competition of television make the maintenance of such devotions quite difficult for many.<sup>147</sup>

Tenth, Baptist church members are also encouraged to maintain some form of personal devotional reading of the Bible, preferably on a daily basis. Various suggested courses of Bible reading, with a passage earmarked for each day, are prepared for the assistance of the individual Christian. The use of modern devotional books is also emphasized.

Eleventh, while facing present-day ethical issues, Baptists are prone to first search for either specific biblical teaching relative to the issue, or, if such is not to be found, to seek the biblical principles most relative to the issue.<sup>148</sup> Baptists find it difficult to justify any moral stance that violates the clear teaching of the Scriptures.

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<sup>146</sup> Charles William Deweese (1944–), *Prayer in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 92–93. Deweese also warned against the usurpation by Bible study or by a sermon of the time needed for prayer in the so called “prayer meeting,” 100.

<sup>147</sup> Claude L. Howe Jr. (1928–), “Family Worship in Baptist Life,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 17 (January 1982): 46–53.

<sup>148</sup> For an example of hermeneutic for ethics, see Thomas Bufford Maston (1897–1988) with William M. Tillman Jr., *The Bible and Family Relations* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1983), 17–34.

Twelfth, Baptists are taught to familiarize themselves with those biblical (especially New Testament) texts which directly address the question as to how a human being can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ—what Baptists often call “being saved” or “being born again.” The knowledge of such texts should be available as a resource to Baptists, since they are encouraged to offer personal testimony to their faith in Jesus Christ with the prayerful expectation that their friends, acquaintances, or family members may become Christians.

Thirteenth, the Bible is often emphasized, read and made the source of sermon texts during revival or evangelical campaigns in which Baptists unite with Christians of other denominations (or confessions) to bear a united witness to Jesus Christ.

Fourteenth, the Bible provides for Baptists the mandate of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to preach the gospel to all humankind. From William Carey’s famous *Enquiry*,<sup>149</sup> in which he contended that the Great Commission of Jesus (John 20:21b; Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16, Luke 24:45–49; Acts 1:8) was still an obligation upon Christians at the end of the eighteenth century, until the present, Baptists have sought to obey and implement the Great Commission. Much of the Baptist denominational structure beyond the local congregation has been erected for the sake of the missionary mandate. Baptist scholars have sought to answer the modern critical arguments against the dominical origin of Matthew 28:18–20.<sup>150</sup> Baptists are also mindful of the eschatological dimension of the missionary mandate: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world (*en hole te oikoumene*) as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14, NIV).

This study has demonstrated two major points. First, this article investigated the testimony of the Baptist confessions of faith and of representative Baptist theologians. These testimonies asserted that the Bible is the supreme authority for

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<sup>149</sup> *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen*, facsimile ed. London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1942), chap. 1 passim.

<sup>150</sup> G. R. Beasley Murray (1916–), *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 77–92.

Baptists, subject only to the triune God, thus ranking above church, tradition, experience, reason, or any other source. The Bible serves as the final arbiter relative to Christian doctrine and Christian ethics. Second, the Bible is of major importance in virtually every aspect of the piety and practice of Baptists.

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