

ABSTRACT

Until Vision and Ethos Reunite:
Christian Higher Education's Struggle for Academic Faithfulness

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Fundamentalist/modernist controversies at Southern Methodist University, Baylor University and Rhodes College illustrate the consequences of a truth/value split that ultimately created an epistemological crisis across American college campuses during the first half of the 20th century. Such controversies were the result of a vision of truth that held that faith and knowledge had little to do with each other. All three institutions grappled with a *vision* for academic faithfulness and relied on *ethos* consisting of piety to bolster their fledgling Christian identity.

Until Vision and Ethos Reunite:
Christian Higher Education's Struggle for Academic Faithfulness

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To Erin, who gives me hope for the reunion of all things

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Breaking in Two

“The world broke in two in 1922 or thereabouts,” proclaimed novelist Willa Cather.¹ This observation is helpful in imagining what was really happening in the United States during the “Roaring Twenties.” References to 1920’s American life conjure up visions of flappers, jazz and speakeasies. On a more fundamental level, however, the United States was going through a painful redefinition of truth in the broadest, most philosophical, understanding of the term.

There are countless ways to trace the history of the modern refinement of truth. Historian Julie Reuben’s account of this transformation is most helpful for my purpose as she traces the transformation as it was manifested in the cultural practices, symbols and was woven into the very structure of higher learning. Reuben begins her account in 1884 as Harvard is about to adopt a new seal. The new symbol contained the Latin word for truth, *Veritas*, at its center and placed *Christo et Ecclesiae* (for Christ and Church) on the perimeter of the seal. By 1936 *Veritas* was the only Latin word found on the seal. The transformation that took place within the Harvard Crest between 1884 and 1936 represents a series of reforms that swept not only Harvard, but the American academy at large during this period.

¹ Lynn Dumenil and Eric Foner, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*, (New York, New York: Macmillan, 1995) 6.

Among these reforms were seemingly innocuous changes such as: the introduction of the elective system, the elimination of compulsory chapel attendance, and the growth of scientific laboratories on campus. Few reformers intended to unleash a revolution that would mean war between science and religion, and the decline of the traditional classical college and the rise of the modern research university. Pairing truth and religion on a college seal seemed most appropriate to the western 19th century mind. Reuben points out that at this time “the term *truth* encompassed all ‘correct’ knowledge: religious doctrines, common sense beliefs, and scientific theories were all judged by the same cognitive standards.”²

By 1930 “truth was stranger than it used to be.”³ Intellectuals no longer believed that truth could help humanity make moral, spiritual or cognitive judgments. Instead, most scholars began to clearly distinguish “facts” and “values.” Truth, according to these scholars, could only be found through empirical methods and could only be associated with verifiable information, scientific knowledge and “facts” that were now considered binding on everyone. Values, on the other hand, became associated with individual choices, personal preferences, subjective feelings. All of which now took a back seat to “facts”⁴

The newly formed chasm between facts and values led Protestant colleges to ask: “What is the connection between faith and knowledge?” Douglas Sloan, in his monograph, *Faith and Knowledge*, shares the story of Protestant colleges’ 20th century

². Julie Rueben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality*, (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.

³. This phrase is borrowed from Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton who wrote a monograph bearing this title. Their work discusses the “strange” postmodern overhaul of truth.

⁴. Reuben, 4.

struggle to relate the two. Sloan asserts that Protestant colleges had to relate faith and knowledge to each other if the Christian college was going to legitimate its own place within the academic landscape. In reality, the stakes were even higher as the role of the Christian college within the collegiate world would ultimately inform Christianity's place within modern culture at large. The role of faith in culture was a question of particular interest to many 20th century academics as modern thought began to redefine truth as data known only through empirical and quantitative means. Thus leaving anything that involved "values, meaning, purpose, and qualities to be regarded as essentially having little to do with knowledge, except as they can be reduced to more basic and more real material and mechanistic entities."⁵

What Do We Do With Modernity?

There were three major responses to the fact-value split. The first response fully embraced a mechanistic view of the universe and a scientific epistemological approach.

These are thinkers and groups espousing variations of scientific naturalism. Some thinkers, like H.L. Menken or Bertrand Russell, were purists who embraced a fully mechanistic worldview and attempted to adopt a purely scientific epistemology, while others attempted to remain committed to some value from a non-scientific source in addition to their appeal to scientific knowing. The latter stance was an attempt to avoid the immoral consequences of living according to an amoral scientific authority.⁶

⁵. Douglas Sloan Quoting Huston Smith. *Faith and knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), ix.

⁶. Sloan, vii-ix. Complete atheism combined with social Darwinian view of the world is a pure form this worldview, while atheism with secular humanistic bent illustrates the moderate form of the modern worldview.

A second response was some brand of anti-modernism, which attempted to seek shelter from or actively resist modern forms of thought. The most notable form of anti-modernism within Protestantism was Christian fundamentalism, a movement which constructs meaning through a literal interpretation of scripture and seeks separation from those who do not share their beliefs.

George Marsden describes fundamentalism as “militantly anti-modernist Protestant evangelicalism.”⁷ Historian David Bebbington has described evangelicalism, apart from fundamentalism, as being characterized by biblicism, conversionism, crucicentrism and activism. Biblicism refers to the belief that the bible is the ultimate authority in all matters of life and faith. Fundamentalism is often marked by a biblicism that gives Scripture historical or scientific authority, thus denying modern methods of gaining scientific and historical knowledge. Conversionism is the belief that a Christian must experience a personal conversion moment where they accept God’s grace and are forgiven of their sins. This forgiveness of sins is only made possible by Christ’s death on the cross, thus placing the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ found in the gospels at the center of evangelical theology. Finally, activism describes the strong evangelical desire to take up moral social causes and to spread the gospel.⁸ Fundamentalism is a subset of evangelicalism, which adheres to the same Christo-centric theology as evangelicalism, but denies modern epistemology out of a concern for preserving the

⁷. George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

⁸. Barry Hankins, *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism: A Documentary Reader*, (New York, New York: New York University Press, 2008) 1-2.

supernatural fundamentals of the faith and deems it necessary to either separate from or stand in opposition to modernity.

The modern Christian fundamentalist movement made its first national appearance when *The Fundamentals* were published in twelve volumes between 1910 and 1915. Southern California oil millionaire Lyman Stewart funded and promoted the project and touted it as a “testimony to the truth” as written by “the best and most loyal Bible teachers in the world.” Stewart’s vast resources allowed for the free distribution of three million individual volumes. The public response was not what they had hoped. Neither religious periodicals nor theological journals took much notice, but the long term effect was greater. The long term impact was such that the publication became the symbolic catalyst for the “fundamentalist” movement of the 1920’s. “In retrospect, the volumes retain some usefulness in tracing the outlines of the emerging movement. They represent the movement at a moderate and transitional stage before it was reshaped and pushed to extremes by the intense heat of controversy.”⁹

The final response to modernity was a compromise between full denial and full embrace of modernity. Instead of attempting to rely solely on a spiritual/scriptural basis of knowledge, as fundamentalists did, or solely on a scientific basis as secularists such as Mencken did, the third way divided truth into, to use the title of Sloan’s work, “*Faith and Knowledge*.” Those who constructed this two-realm theory of truth said that the knowledge could be determined through reason and empiricism, while faith could be

⁹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 4.

grounded in “feeling, ethical action, communal convention, folk tradition, or unfathomable mystical experience.”¹⁰

Dividing truth into two realms served to support religious life in the face of modernity’s perceived war on Western religiosity. While this philosophical jockeying “represented a resistance against the modern mind-set, it justified and perpetuated the basic dualism that is the hallmark of the modern world: the split between subject and object, fact and value, theory and practice, self and other, science and the humanities, and so on, including, of course, the deep abyss between faith and knowledge.”¹¹

There is, of course, a great imbalance between the foundations for *knowledge* and *faith*. Knowledge, with its observable and verifiable underpinning, has a far more legitimate foundation than faith, which relies on feelings and clues that cannot be reproduced for others. This observation has not been lost on society. Consequently, the realm of faith was constantly on the defensive and often met with some variation of derision, neglect or pacified as quaint.¹²

The Fundamentalist-Modernist Fights

This thesis will address controversies related to three major disputes between fundamentalists and modernists. The first dispute, discussed in chapter two, chronicles a controversy at Southern Methodist University. This spectacle called into question the institution’s religious identity when Old Testament Professor, John A. Rice, published a monograph exploring the consequences of higher criticism. Chapter three shares the

¹⁰. Ibid, ix.

¹¹. Ibid, ix.

¹². Ibid, ix.

story of Baylor University's professor of Sociology, Samuel Grove Dow, who made a passing reference to the evolution of humanity in a textbook of his own. Finally, Chapter four follows Rhodes College as they placed their own president on trial based on rumors that he espoused modernist views of scripture.

These episodes would create moments when institutional leaders were compelled to deliberate over their institution's identity. These institutions and their leadership were faced with the challenge of establishing a compelling Christian vision that recognized knowledge as whole, rather than separating faith and reason. These chapters explore the possible success or failure of their efforts. Each story explores the respective institution's religious identity and offers unique insight into the discernment process of university leaders and their views about the relationship between faith and knowledge. In each vignette, fundamentalists, who viewed education negatively as a liberalizing agent and required the faithful to strengthen their convictions and protect themselves against new ideas, were defeated. Fundamentalists had hoped that Christians would react by digging deeply into the trenches of a traditional worldview. Instead, the leaders of each college and university desired to occupy a position within the cultural "midstream."

I will argue that perhaps in every case the institutions failed to resolve the issue. In the case of Rhodes and SMU, the fundamentals of faith were also ultimately abandoned. Baylor would keep its religious identity, or at least its piety (with help from its cloistered location in Waco, Texas) until modernity would give way to a postmodern trend, which allowed the university to announce its intention to be "a top tier Christian research institution." Its Christian identity was maintained over time, but only due to the fact that a strong ethos- a set of moral actions or Christian practices- served to preserve

Christian identity in the absence of a Christian vision for the integration of faith and knowledge.

What do these three vignettes tell us about the nature of fidelity and secularization? What manner of signs and artifacts are strewn about the histories of Protestant colleges and universities? The accounts at all three of these institutions confirm Robert Benne's findings that three components of a Christian tradition must be present in order to maintain a Christian identity. First, the Christian college must have a compelling *vision* or an articulate account of reality where *all* knowledge can be organized, interpreted, and critiqued. This paradigm gives a comprehensive account of reality that does not allow for the fact/value split that became so important for the modern method of knowing. Secondly, the Christian college must have an *ethos* or patterns of moral action that are lived out in the life of the university. This kind of activity is often found in campus chapel services or prayer at symbolically important events, but this can include any activity that captures the heart and turns one's affections towards Christ. Thirdly, Benne explains that the Christian college or university must have people who possess both vision and ethos and bring these to bear on the ideals and life of the university.¹³

The stories that follow occurred in the 1920's and early 1930's. These were perhaps some of the darkest days for faith. At the time liberal Protestants were busy modernizing and constructing their two spheres. Fundamentalists were fighting for the legitimacy of the spiritual, but were unable to accept the scientific. Neither camp was

¹³. Robert Benne, *Quality With Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Press, 2001), 11-18.

able to construct a compelling vision of unified and comprehensive truth complex enough to encompass both faith and knowledge.

Meanwhile, the academy had been rapidly changing as traditional church teachings were giving way to a method of knowing that demanded empirical evidence in order to satisfy the modern criteria for truth. As this trend gained momentum in the late 19th and early 20th century the faith based academy was caught completely unaware.¹⁴ The result was a number of controversies between the modernists and fundamentalists at faith-based institutions. This thesis tells the story of three of these conflicts. In many ways, it serves to provide case studies of the larger trends identified by Reuben, Marsden and Sloan. While Reuben, Marsden, and Sloan illustrate their narrative with examples from elite colleges and universities, they do not spend much time talking about developments at faith-based institutions in the south.

Historical Context

Before discussing the events of each chapter, it will help to first set the historical context. The United States was a nation that had always enjoyed a thoroughly homogenous Protestant establishment. This establishment, however, was always in tension with another ideal represented by the progressive catch-phrase “non-sectarian.” The idea of non-sectarianism in the United States is as old as the nation itself. Founders, such as Thomas Jefferson, were determined that the new republic would not have an established religion. This ideal was realized in the new republic in that no one sect of Christianity was deemed the state religion. Prior to 1820, however, the entire nation was

¹⁴ George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 317.

largely Christian and mostly Protestant with a small, marginalized sects of religious minorities such as Catholics, Jews, Quakers, etc. The progressive sentiment behind religious non-establishment drove some of America's colleges to sever denominational ties or at least find a least common denominator among all Christian sects and anchor its identity and cultural practice in a Christianity that was palatable to all. Consequently, American colleges spent their early years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century finding the center of the religious zeitgeist rather than sharpening and nuancing their denominational or Christian character. No one seemed to notice the drift until religious conservatives took up arms in the aftermath of World War I.¹⁵

The consequences of a Protestant default setting were such that the academy was strong in Christian *ethos*, but weak in faithful *vision*. A critical mass of America's educational leadership honored their faith in the moral action found on their campuses. They prayed at community events, required students to attend religious services and adhere to a high moral code. In short, the distinguishing Christian elements were found in the extracurricular. Vision, on the other hand, is generally found in the curriculum where faith is a viable template for constructing knowledge. In an environment where protestant Christianity ruled the day, there seemed no urgency to attempt the challenging task of placing the academic within a strong Christian vision. After all, there was no perceived counter-narrative on the cultural horizon and the task of knowing exactly how to place pagan learning within the Christian academy is as old as the academy itself and the challenge still poses great difficulties today.¹⁶

¹⁵. Ibid, 317.

¹⁶. Ibid, 317. Benne, 11-18.

The first Great War raised awareness for a new urgency among America's conservative Protestants. The international conflict gave rise to resurgence of the Puritan imagery of the United States as the city on a hill with a contractual obligation to maintain its Christian commitment and doctrinal orthodoxy in order to realize its blessed reward. This calling was combined with a new disdain for all things German, including their liberal brand of theology, which had been infiltrating the academy for years. This milieu recruited Christians in the pews, pulpit and podium to organize a response to the drift that had been occurring for decades. Unfortunately, the academy had been preoccupied with fashioning various non-sectarian identities, pietistic practices and ethos rather than honing their denominational and Christian visions for faithful teaching and learning. Many of the theological tasks that were taken up pertained to accommodating modern convictions and methodologies in ways that would ultimately undermine traditional Christian belief. Consequently, the forces of modernity and Christian fundamentalism mounted and came to a head in the 1920's.¹⁷

Fundamentalist forces were undoubtedly spurred on by the emotionally jarring experience of the breakdown of the Victorian worldview. The Victorian world had been unraveling for some time, but the post war environment suddenly brought its demise to the forefront of American life. A worldview that, according to Lynn Duminil, valued "hierarchy, order and a single standard of culture, morality and values"¹⁸ began crashing down. In its place arose a culture that embraced women's suffrage and sexuality, both of which seemed to be lethal for the family and the nation. The newly created youth culture

¹⁷. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 317.

¹⁸. Dumenil and Foner, 6.

with its taste for jazz and dancing only made matters worse. All of this must have seemingly come out of nowhere for many who were experiencing it first-hand. Now, however, we can see how the rise of a mechanistic worldview would naturally lend itself to materialistic behavior. We also know such extravagance was enabled by the economic growth driven by the efficiency obtained through the unilateral application of the scientific method.¹⁹

Once organized, Christian fundamentalism sought to attack the core of the modern menace, but foreign forms of atheism such as Bolshevism and fear of all things German subsided as time separated the American people from World War I. Materialism was too elusive to combat and domestic Atheists were hard to find. The real enemy (and fundamentalism was always looking for an enemy) were often plentiful in academia. It was there that Protestants often conceded traditional church teaching to scientific critique and the scientific study of scripture.²⁰

This critique centered upon two issues. The first was evolution and the Biblical story of creation. This battle played out most famously in the *Tennessee v. Scopes* trial of 1925, commonly known as “the Scopes Monkey Trial.” The second battle was over higher criticism and frequently took place in church related colleges.

Evolution

Christians and secularists began debating over evolution at least as early the publication of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, but the debate was largely relegated to the academy, where academics debated the degree to which God was involved in the natural

¹⁹. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 318.

²⁰. Ibid, 318.

world. The evolution/creation debate did not infiltrate the popular culture until the 1920's. Why did this take almost forty years? Conservative Christians outside of academia had been aware of Darwinism for years but it was not a major concern for most Christians until it infiltrated their children's education. Most Christians merely dismissed evolution as false and then ignored the theory until progressive era educational policies took hold and made high school education available and even mandatory. This took an especially long time in the rural south and did not occur completely until the 1920's.²¹

The Scopes Trial pitted Christian politician and biblical literalist, William Jennings Bryan against agnostic Chicago lawyer, Clarence Darrow. Bryan was the prosecutor in a hearing that was to determine whether or not Dayton, Tennessee high school science teacher, John T. Scopes, was guilty of teaching evolution (a theory outlawed in the Tennessee school curriculum). Darrow was charged with defending Scopes. While the case was technically about Scopes alleged crime, the trial served as a public forum for the debate between science and religion.²²

Historian Edward Larson traces the origins of the creation verses evolution controversy to Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, but he also offers a helpful commentary that explains why the controversy took sixty-five years to climax during the summer of 1925 in a hot, crowded courtroom in Dayton, Tennessee. Christians and agnostics began debating evolution shortly after Darwin published his study on natural

²¹. Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*. (New York, New York: Basic Books, 2008) 23.

²². Ibid, 23.

selection. However, the debate was mostly relegated to the academy, where intellectuals pondered the degree to which God was involved in the natural world.²³

Once alerted to the danger that evolution posed to their children's education, conservative Christians of various sects began to organize an anti-evolution crusade. Their activism grew within the larger umbrella of the fundamentalist movement, a faction of Christianity that began as a response to theological modernism rather than to political or educational developments within society.²⁴

William Jennings Bryan used his celebrity as a politician to rally fundamentalists to the anti-evolution cause. He traveled the nation speaking fervently against the theory. His criticism of evolution involved three main points. First, evolution, he claimed, simply lacked scientific proof. Second, teaching the theory to students undermined their religious faith and social values. Third, and most important, Bryan asserted that America's Bible believing majority should control the content of public school instruction. This crusade suited Bryan exceptionally well because it was not only congruent with his theological convictions, but also his political platform. Anti-evolution was a reform movement that favored populism. Bryan was a true champion of the populist movement. He even earned the name "The Great Commoner." Bryan's commitment to biblical literalism combined with his populist convictions drove him to campaign passionately against Darwinism. He was so successful that he has been credited with stirring up enough public sentiment that multiple southern states passed

²³. Ibid, 23.

²⁴. Ibid, 23.

resolutions in the early 20th century outlawing the theory from being taught in their respective public schools.²⁵

The Scopes trial had many dramatic points, but the climax came when Clarence Darrow called Bryan to the witness stand, where he proceeded to question Bryan on the feasibility of biblical events such as Jonah being swallowed by a whale, Noah and the flood, and a six day creation. When questioned, Bryan stood his ground as a literalist for the most part, but Darrow's well-crafted questions were too much for him and eventually, Bryan was left on the witness stand sputtering that he did not have answers for Darrow's questions. After the trial, Darrow gave an honest assessment of his accomplishments when he admitted: "I made up my mind to show the country what an ignoramus he was and I succeeded."²⁶

The verdict declared declared that Scopes was guilty. The immediate reactions to the outcome of the trial left both sides claiming victory. Bryan and company claimed legal victory, while Darrow and his team claimed an ideological triumph given his ability to show Bryan's ignorance. The general public would interpret the spectacle for decades with help of a myriad of media outlets. While the trial is still open for interpretation today, one common reading was that the trial exposed Bryan's lack of intelligence and Darrow's "mean spirit."²⁷

Scientists critiqued religion most directly through Darwin's theory of biological evolution. Fundamentalists made this their primary enemy because from their

²⁵. Ibid, 23.

²⁶. Ibid, 190.

²⁷. Ibid, 202.

perspective evolution was the lifeblood of the modern menace in two ways. First, Darwinism relied directly on materialistic and mechanistic view of reality. Such views were a direct threat to any worldview that espoused the spiritual. Secondly, evolution sought to undermine the authority of scripture, which was the very basis for the spiritual worldview. Marsden observes that “Most conservative Protestants saw the culture of the United States as implicitly Christian, resting on a moral foundation derived from the Bible. If the Bible’s authority was undermined, as the Darwinist account of human origins seemed to them to do, then the very survival of American civilization was at stake.”²⁸

Fundamentalists were pleased at the populist appeal of the anti-evolutionist movement. Ironically, these conservative Christians did not shy from more modern populist ideals.²⁹ At the popular level everyone seemed to understand that any theory that argued that humans came from apes called human dignity into question. Such sentiment was especially pervasive in the South where the anti-evolution movement was taken up by many southerners in an effort to show some measure of devotion to the United States after time had begun to heal the wounds of civil conflict. Southern patriotism, however, was still displayed with some anger towards their northern neighbors. Southerners also held deeply that the nation was in a Covenant with God that

²⁸. Ibid, 318.

²⁹. The Evidence that fundamentalists accepted the fact value split was their willingness to adopt modern forms while eschewing modern values which they felt was the essence of modernity. Technology was seen as a fact of modernity. It could be used without consequence because it was value free. Evolution, on the other hand, was seen as a dangerous value. The facts could be harnessed and utilized, but the values had to be shunned.

required fidelity to God and scripture. This required the south to fight against northern liberalism, which threatened America's covenant with God.³⁰

Fundamentalist forces had marshaled enough support to ban the teaching of evolution in five southern states in the 1920's, and universities were dismissing faculty for teaching on the topic. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) organized itself in opposition to these dismissals. At the end of 1923 AAUP president, Joseph V. Denny, spoke out against a dozen or so dismissals, two at state universities. He declared that fundamentalism is the most sinister force that has yet attacked freedom of teaching. In 1925 the AAUP declared that fundamentalism was "un-American." The opposition "attempted to control learning by popular vote, rather than relying on the leadership of qualified experts."³¹ The AAUP was in congruence with The Association of American Colleges which declared "the thing America needs more than anything else from American colleges and universities is the type of leader who understands that the first requisite...is not the desire to know what the people want, but...to help people want what they ought to have."³² Marsden ties the comments together to construct the overall picture: "The age of the expert was dawning."³³

The Question remained: what would the experts include in their curriculum? William Jennings Bryan astutely raised the question this way: "If the Bible cannot be defended in these schools then it should not be attacked"³⁴ In other words, if the Christian

³⁰. Larson, 318.

³¹. Ibid, 325.

³². Ibid, 325.

³³. Ibid, 325.

³⁴. Ibid, 326.

account of creation was to be excluded from public education then what would replace it? Bryan, called the allegedly value neutral “materialistic doctrine” of evolution a “sham.” He seemed to be awakening to the myth neutrality and realized that it was undoubtedly fair to object to the use of tax revenue to underwrite “materialistic doctrine.”³⁵

According to William Allen White “Bryan was always right in the diagnoses, but wrong in the prescription.”³⁶ Liberal Protestants attempted to intervene and allow for evolution to explain the interworking of the natural world that was superseded by a spiritual world where God guided the universe. Fundamentalists would have nothing to do with this compromise and turned what should have been a carefully nuanced discussion into an oversimplified debate where everyone must choose a side: evolution or creation? Again Marsden is there to help us make sense of it all: “What might have been raised as a serious point of national educational policy was represented in such a narrow way that only true believers would be convinced by the argument.”³⁷

Just as Thomas Jefferson was convinced that it was wrong to privilege Anglicanism in the public curriculum it could be said that it is wrong to teach agnosticism. Bryan, and the fundamentalist movement would be beaten by another Jeffersonian principle- the rule of the people. Walter Lippmann illustrated this point in his publication “Dialogue on Olympus.” In Lippmann’s fanciful work Socrates quizzed Bryan and Jefferson on their foundational assumptions on mount Olympus. Socrates determined that the populist principles held by both men assumed that popular rule would promote the rule of reason. Jefferson maintained that reason was a fixed entity that

³⁵. Ibid, 326.

³⁶. Ibid, 326.

³⁷. Ibid, 327.

would undoubtedly be discovered by a free people. Lipmann's fictional Socrates pointed out, however, that reason or truth was changing so fast in the modern era that the masses could not possibly follow it. Lippmann eventually reasoned that unbiased experts would be required to set the educational curriculum-experts who asserted their authority by appealing to the verifiable and quantifiable scientific method. Thus the experts and the entire nation turned back to the hope that science would uncover a unified truth that could be agreed upon by all.

Higher Criticism

Higher criticism emerged around 1670 when Baruch Spinoza began to challenge the dominant perspective on scripture. It was not novel, during the mid-seventeenth century, to assert that Moses was not the author of most of the Torah. However, Spinoza was the first to argue that the question of authorship mattered deeply. Spinoza postulated that if scripture, like other natural works, was subject to questions of authorship then scripture could also be subject to the same kind of scrutiny applied to other natural works. This allowed Spinoza to criticize the church for venerating scripture rather than the message of scripture.³⁸ By the nineteenth century, higher criticism became known as a method of analyzing scripture through studying its literary structure that seeks to determine the historic roots, the dates and the authorship of the many books within the Bible. The method has been traditionally associated with the German academy and especially connected to the German biblical scholar, Julius Wellhausen. Brought to America by scholars trained in Germany, higher criticism quickly became associated with

³⁸. Steven Nadler, "Baruch Spinoza", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2012, Accessed 4/24/2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2012/entries/spinoza/>.

disbelief. Many of the movement's most influential minds did not believe in miracles and sought to expose historical and scientific inaccuracies as well as inconsistencies in scripture, making it difficult to hold to traditional understanding that the Bible is the inerrant word of God.³⁹

Historian William R. Glass explains three basic Christian responses to Higher Criticism. The unorthodox response asserted that the Bible was unreliable, and only scientifically verifiable biblical events and concepts were in fact true. This response closely resembles the *Pluralist* position as it sacrifices many of its convictions to opposing worldviews.⁴⁰

The moderate response found a way to accept some of the evidence brought forth by higher criticism. Moderates admitted that the Bible may be unreliable at some points of historical or scientific fact, but still adhered to a mostly orthodox understanding of the Christian scriptures. They maintained their personal experience and faith, which allowed them to stay true to a great deal of orthodoxy. According to Glass, "The believer was no longer under the compulsion to find his security in biblical proof texts. He could accept the conclusions of the biblical scholars with relative equanimity and appropriate the results of other scientific disciplines without great difficulty because his faith was validated by the inward testimony of the heart."⁴¹ The moderate response sought to do

³⁹. George Reid, "Biblical Criticism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Accessed 4/24/2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04491c.htm>. Canon Dyson Hague, "The History of the Higher Criticism", Accessed 5/13/2013, <http://user.xmission.com/~fidelis/volume1/chapter1/hague.php>, 2005.

⁴⁰. William Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950*, (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2001), 3.

⁴¹. Ibid, 3.

the difficult work inherent to the inclusivist position. The struggle to examine and distinguish what is essential and what is marginal to one's faith is daunting work.

The third response was the fundamentalist response, which completely discounted Higher Criticism and continued to adhere to pre-modern, literal biblical interpretations.⁴² *The Fundamentals*, a multi-volume set which went on to become the founding document of the fundamentalist movement, responded to higher criticism by stating that:

If we have any prejudice, we would rather be prejudiced against rationalism. If we have any bias, it must be against a teaching which unsteadies the heart and unsettles faith. Even at the expense of being thought behind the times, we prefer to stand with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in receiving the Scriptures as the Word of God, without objection and without a doubt.⁴³

Ultimately, the infighting within Protestantism would paralyze the movement. Liberal Protestants succeeded in keeping the spread of materialism in check until the 1920's when the rise of fundamentalism became so strong that the liberal wing had to mobilize against the conservatives. The bearers of the secular scientific worldview simply carried on as Protestants fought amongst themselves.

Pietism

To the degree that liberal Protestantism continued to carry any religious mantle, their religiosity was reduced to "religious sentiment and practical morality."⁴⁴ In academia, remnants of any homage to the divine were relegated to two forms. The first

⁴² Ibid, 3.

⁴³ Hague, 2005.

⁴⁴ Marsden, *The Soul of The American University*, 410.

was religious platitudes uttered in a private sense or at least in separation from intellectual life. The second was public service to society, which could be affirmed by any humanist, Christian or secular.⁴⁵

The first form, ironically, was shared by both liberal and fundamentalist institutions. The Pietist movement predates modernity, but it would be an important element in the Christian response to modernity. The movement was a conscientious reaction to the moral decay in Europe perpetuated by the Thirty Years' War. Pietists had observed the religious conflict and violence stemming from theological differences. Consequently, Pietism hoped to return to a golden age of Christianity, free from old animosities. In its early stages, Pietism emphasized practical Christianity rather than theology and increased focus on scripture and right living. In simple terms, Pietists sought to simplify the Christian life so as to have less to quarrel over. By the twentieth century liberal and conservative Christians alike had taken on elements of Pietism and employed that form of Christianity that relied less on theology during the days when the intellectual world was hostile to theology. Behind this entire project was a utopian vision that still hoped to eliminate religious conflict. If science and the scientific study of religion, the modernists reasoned, could critique Christianity and parse out the subjective from the factual then all public discourse could agree on what is true. Science, in other words, could help humanity determine what was essential and peripheral to Christian faith.⁴⁶ James Burtchaell points out that Pietism's influence within Christian

⁴⁵ Ibid, 410.

⁴⁶ Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Press, 1978), 21-28. James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Press, 1998), 842.

higher education would eventually cause the institution to “succumb to the view that worship and moral behavior were to be defining acts of a Christian academic fellowship. Later, worship and moral behavior were easily set aside because no one could imagine they had anything to do with learning.”⁴⁷ And ultimately, “the credibility vacuum created by pietism came naturally to be filled by rationalism, which proffered a more peaceable life by refusing to discuss anything beyond what could be resolved consensually by appeal to empirical evidence”⁴⁸

The relegation of religion to the outskirts of the academy had been in process since the 18th century when moral philosophy dethroned theology as the curriculum for undergraduate capstone courses across the nation. This crucial change in higher education indicated that Christianity was no longer at the center of the university. Philosophy had won the heart of the university for the time being, but would only act as a placeholder as philosophy turned into reason and reason morphed into empiricism. By the mid twentieth century this transformation was all but complete and science was king of the research university. Religion was relegated largely to university divinity schools, seminaries, and “religious studies” departments, where it, too, was studied scientifically.⁴⁹ Protestant Christianity enjoyed such a thoroughly established position in the United States throughout the course of this transformation that the idea that higher education and the larger culture might be in the process of secularization was unthinkable. In this way cultural religiosity was the perfect anesthetic to deaden the pain.

⁴⁷. Burtchaell, 842.

⁴⁸. Ibid, 841.

⁴⁹ D.G. Hart, *The University Gets Religion: Religious Studies in American Higher Education*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) 2.

In 1920's America, however, higher education still maintained pockets of Christians committed the spiritual core of their faith. This was especially true in the American south. Before the divine was disenfranchised in the academy there were multiple theological battles that both demonstrate and add texture to the overarching narrative shared above.

CHAPTER TWO

Southern Methodist University and John Rice

The Bible “must be judged in the light of its purpose,” claimed Dr. John Andrew Rice, Professor of Old Testament Studies at Southern Methodist University. He went on to declare that “should errors in history, science, philosophy, or in any other field of inquiry be found, they need not disturb us. The infallibility of our inspired book depends not upon these,” but upon the ability of scripture “to bring God and men into such satisfying relations with each other.”¹ Rice’s confession may have affirmed the authority of scripture, but his words were enough to ignite a controversy over biblical interpretation at Southern Methodist University. At the center of the controversy was fundamentalist John Frank Norris, Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, who berated Rice through his newspaper, *The Searchlight*. The ensuing conflict would test Southern Methodist University’s ability to navigate religious controversy, while remaining within the bounds of both religious dogma and burgeoning intellectual creed.²

The controversy pitted an intellectual community that was rapidly accepting a more critical view of scripture against a small group of fundamentalist Christians both within and outside of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS). These arch-conservatives stood in bold opposition to many trends throughout the 20th century. Most

¹ John Andrew Rice, *The Old Testament in Life Today*, (New York, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), xxxi.

² Barry Hankins, *God’s Rascal: J Frank Norris and the beginnings of Southern Fundamentalism*, (Louisville, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 44.

importantly for Rice, was the fundamentalist's refusal to entertain the idea that the Bible was not divinely inspired.

Southern Fundamentalists

Modernist views came to the more progressive North before they trickled to the rural, conservative South. Many southerners held pre-modern views of scripture that would become fundamentalist in nature once the catalyst called modernity was introduced. As long as orthodoxy ruled the day there was simply no need for a reactionary fundamentalist uprising. Men like J. Frank Norris imported fundamentalism to the South from the North in hopes to preempt modernism before it could strike in the South.³

Historian William Glass argues that fundamentalists were "strangers in Zion" in his volume by the same name. In other words, although southern religion and the culture in general were conservative, fundamentalists were unable to infiltrate the heart of southern society.

Glass suggests two reasons for this surprising phenomenon. First, separation from those who do not share your beliefs is an essential tenet of early 20th century fundamentalism. As fundamentalists left liberalizing denominations, mainstream Protestants began to distance themselves from fundamentalism, thus relegating fundamentalists to society's fringes. Secondly, Fundamentalists often cooperated across denominational lines both within and outside of the South. This made southern

³. Hankins, *God's Rascal*, 25.

Protestants suspicious of fundamentalists as cooperation across denominational lines gave rise to questions about one's loyalty to their denomination.⁴

A denominational history of Texas Methodism suggests that "Texas Methodists, for all their frontier innovativeness, were too conservative to be profoundly affected [by fundamentalism] either way. They saw both fundamentalism and modernism as extremes of thought and action which were foreign to them. They preferred the middle path."⁵ In order for any religious movement to gain broad acceptance it must be palatable and agreeable to the masses. Fundamentalists were so conservative that they adopted extreme rhetoric and were excessive in their separation from mainstream society.

Fundamentalism, however, was still evident in the South. It spread through itinerant preaching, which advocated new doctrines and raised concerns about the culture.⁶ In 1919 A. C. Gaebelein, an itinerant preacher, claimed that "so many calls have come from the state of Texas that we could have spent six months there."⁷ The highpoint of southern fundamentalism was in the 1920's and 30's. During these years "a theologically liberal faction of ministers, administrators, and seminary professors began taking a more prominent role influencing policy and ascending to leadership positions within the bureaucracy and educational institutions in the largest southern denominations."⁸ According to an anonymous contributor to the *Southern Methodist*

⁴ Glass, xvii.

⁵ Vernon, et. al., *The Methodist Excitement in Texas: A History*, (Dallas, Texas: Texas United Methodist Historical Society), 214.

⁶ Glass, xviii.

⁷ Glass, 58.

⁸ Glass, xvii.

liberalism had infiltrated the Methodist Episcopal Church, South because teachers in Southern Methodist schools have been educated in the North “where rationalism is unblushingly propagated.”⁹

Vanderbilt Secularizes, SMU is Founded

Southern Methodist University was founded in 1911 in response to events at Vanderbilt University. By the 1890’s Vanderbilt was losing its Methodist distinction. In response, conservative Methodist, Warren Candler, proposed a resolution requiring that the university give preference to Methodist candidates, assuming that all other qualifications were equal. The resolution was anathema to Chancellor James Hampton Kirkland, who sought the financial backing necessary to create an elite university. Northern donors at that time overwhelmingly supported “non-sectarian” universities. A bitter dispute broke out between the Southern Methodist General Conference and the university over the religious identity of the university.

One might think that the difference between a generally Christian university and a Methodist one might be negligible. However, George Marsden argues that committed Methodists were perhaps more right to be concerned than even they knew. History would proceed to demonstrate that “non-sectarian” was merely a way station on the road to total secularization for scores of universities, including Vanderbilt. By 1914 the controversy led all the way to the Tennessee Supreme court, which ruled that the Methodist Church would lose all ownership of the university. Seven years after Vanderbilt lost its religious identity SMU would become embroiled in a conflict that

⁹ Vernon, et. al., 69.

brought its own Christian identity into question.¹⁰ One Methodist clergymen closed his letter requesting John Rice's resignation with the claim that "Vanderbilt University would never have been lost by the church, if certain men had been eliminated from the university at the proper time." He added the rhetorical question: "Shall history be repeated at SMU?"¹¹

Rice and His Work

John A. Rice joined the Old Testament department in Southern Methodist University in 1919. The southern sect of the Methodist Church had created few Old Testament scholars at the time, but Southern Methodist University recruited Rice, who, at the time, was serving as a pastor in South Carolina. One SMU publication defending Rice reasoned that SMU could have looked to the northern faction of the Methodist Church for an Old Testament scholar, but that was less than ideal given concerns that a northern clergymen might not be able to adapt to Southern Methodism. Evidently, significant differences existed between the northern and southern factions of the Methodist Church¹²

A few months after Rice began his work in the School of Theology his book, *The Old Testament in the Life of Today*, was issued from the MacMillan Company Press. Rice's extensive work represented a lifetime's worth of study and accepted and discussed scripture through the lens of higher criticism. Rice disclosed four goals in the book's forward. The first was to help his readers recognize the evolution of the text throughout

¹⁰ George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 278-279.

¹¹ W.F. Bryan, "Dr. John A Rice Should Resign from the Faculty of Southern Methodist University," undated.

¹² Author unknown, *A Plain Statement of the Facts*, (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University, May, 1921) 3.

the course of the Old Testament and understand the meaning of the text as a whole. Second, Rice desired to help his audience think in terms of books and actors rather than verses and chapters. Rice also desired to help the lay person understand the context in which the books of the Old Testament were written. Finally, Rice wanted to come to the aid of those who were troubled by a scientific understanding of the Bible and help them realize that the scripture did not have to be inerrant to be authoritative.¹³

The Methodist Milieu

John Wesley was a Pietist who helped clarify the vision of his church, the Church of England. His legacy was the founding of the Methodist Church. As was the Pietist pattern, second generation Pietists had little knowledge of tradition in the aftermath of Pietist simplification efforts. Burtchaell points out that to Pietist successors “this reformed presentation [of the Christian faith] is wondrously clear, preciously simple, and cogent because [it] is so easily comprehended. But they are easily misled. They grasp the ‘point,’ but not the ‘all.’”¹⁴

Perhaps this inability to grasp the “all” deserves at least partial blame for the lackluster response to the question: what is a Methodist college? In 1893, this question was placed before the University Senate.¹⁵ Their reply was that an institution of higher education must meet the necessary academic standards for granting baccalaureate degrees and must also accept the church’s support. The Methodist penchant for ambiguity would

¹³ John, A Rice, vii-viii.

¹⁴ Burtchaell, 840.

¹⁵ The senate is an elected body of professionals in higher education who determine which schools, colleges, universities, and theological schools meet the criteria for listing as institutions affiliated with The United Methodist Church.

continue to define Methodist higher education as a whole, leading one scholar to observe that “the Methodists have demonstrated a prodigious capacity to ask themselves what they are about and to reply to their own query in a vocabulary as indistinct as possible.”¹⁶

By the twentieth century this tendency toward the nebulous allowed the more liberal branch of Methodism to accept the optimistic Christian theology prevalent in nineteenth century liberalism. These theologians emphasized a loving God more than a judgmental Deity and saw Christianity as a template for moral living more than a place for redemption from sin. Fundamentalism, on the other hand emphasized right beliefs. Fundamentalists thought that accepting the following five Christian doctrines was *fundamental* to calling oneself a Christian: the inerrancy of the Bible; the divinity of Christ; the virgin birth; the substitutionary theory of atonement; the bodily resurrection of Christ. Methodism, however, was not entirely “liberal” in its theology. The clergy were generally more liberal than the laity, but some southern clergy joined the fundamentalist movement.¹⁷

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South was a vast denomination in the 1920’s and a variety of responses to the fundamentalist/modernist controversies of the 20th century could certainly be found within their ranks. However, the mainstream response in the 1920’s was a conservative desire to be unaffected by the controversy and maintain orthodoxy.

¹⁶ Burtchaell, 274-275.

¹⁷ Lewis Howard Grimes, *A History of the Perkins School of Theology*, (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1993), 40-41. Charles Yrigoyen Jr., Susan E. Warrick, *Historical Dictionary of Methodism*, (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 136.

An examination of the theological stances of three leaders within Texas Methodism will impart a better understanding of the Methodist theological milieu. The first important leader is Lewis Stuckey, a leading preacher in the Northwest Texas Conference. Stuckey represented the most conservative wing of Methodism, but he eschewed the fundamentalist label at a time when some southerners took on the identity with great pride. In 1925 Stuckey sponsored legislation in the Northwest Texas Conference that denied conference funds to any educational institution whose president failed to certify to the conference the theological orthodoxy of his faculty. The oath read: “All the teachers of our institutions, within my knowledge, believe without mental reservation, equivocation, or without interpretation other than that of the accepted standards of our Methodist Church in the inspiration of both the Old and New Testaments, and in every statement of the Apostles Creed.”¹⁸ Stuckey claimed that his statement was an attack on modernism, but he refused to call himself or his efforts fundamentalist. Stuckey maintained that “in some denominations the Fundamentalist had grown quite strong, but in the Southern Methodist Church, he is practically unknown.”¹⁹

Bishop Edwin D. Mouzon, leader of the General Conference of the MECS, represented a different constituent within the Methodist community. Mouzon actively fought against fundamentalism. He reaffirmed traditional Methodism and renounced fundamentalism as “calvanistic” in his monograph, *The Fundamentals of Methodism*.

¹⁸. Vernon, et. al, 214.

¹⁹. Ibid, 214.

Mouzon was frequently targeted as clandestine modernist, but he always remained within the mainstream of the Methodist church.²⁰

Charles C. Selecman represented the majority position within the church better than any of our previous archetypes. Selecman was a staunch theological conservative and his orthodoxy was never challenged even when he served as president of SMU from 1923 to 1938, but he refused to sign Stuckley's oath. On the other hand, Selecman, to Mouzon's disappointment, removed some of SMU's allegedly modernist professors. Selecman's attitude regarding modernism and fundamentalism was that "the world...will never be saved by either of them."²¹ Although the different positions held by these three men illustrate the variance within the Methodist church, each of these leaders was at most only just to the left or right of center. These stances led historian, Walter Vernon, to declare that Texas Methodism was generally moderate among its pastors, leaders and congregations. To the degree that modernity had marched to the South, Texas Methodists had not fully grappled with the consequences of the modern conception of truth. The Methodist holding pattern might have been a political maneuver for a hesitant leadership in a new world determined to force the church to choose between agnosticism and denial of the "facts."²²

SMU's Identity

In keeping with the conservative theological identity of the MECS, Southern Methodist University was a devoutly Christian school if one equated piety with a vibrant

²⁰ Ibid, 214.

²¹ Ibid, 215.

²² Vernon, et. al, 215.

Christian identity. Revivals were held on campus and chapel was required. Students were even required to attend Sunday worship at points in the university's history. Generally, the church expected all of SMU to be Christian in nature. As Kenneth Pope put it, "SMU was not only a Methodist 'owned' University, it was a Methodist 'run' University." Pope added that in this conservative milieu "Conferences made pronouncements on the affairs of [their] educational institutions."²³

On the other hand, since the founding of the western university, intellectuals struggled to make their faith preeminent in their scholarship. How could a scholar ignore the importance of pagan learning? The question "what is the relationship between sacred and secular thought?" was still unsettled by the 20th century, as it is today. The most practical way to answer the question was to take secular learning and place it in a Christian atmosphere.²⁴ This was the tactic Methodists employed when they founded Vanderbilt. Unfortunately for the Methodists, when Vanderbilt secularized and they lost control of their university, they founded SMU without reevaluating their strategy. Methodists shunned a Calvinistic tradition that would have given them the theological space to baptize the secular learning by declaring all truth as God's. Abraham Kuyper's famous words "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence, of which Christ, who is sovereign overall, does not cry: 'It is Mine'"²⁵ would have been helpful, but such a perspective was understandably far from the Methodist mind, given the historic Methodist Arminianism.

²³. Grimes, 41.

²⁴. George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 35.

²⁵. Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 4.

Fundamentalists Attack Rice

In light of the moderate southern Methodist temperament some assert that the largest controversy to rock SMU would not have occurred had it not been for one fundamentalist in particular, who stood beyond the bounds of Methodism.²⁶ Rather, the controversy came because of one of the most recognizable names in southern fundamentalism, J. Frank Norris. The fiery pastor of Fort Worth's First Baptist Church was openly fond of controversy and wrote in an editorial in *The Searchlight*, that "Every now and then I'll pick a scrap with them [the Fort Worth community] to clarify the atmosphere and to keep things from growing stale too long. Sometimes it will be a Mayor for breakfast, an Editor for dinner, a Federal Judge for supper, and some preachers in between meals."²⁷ Norris's controversial nature went beyond words. The clergyman shot and killed a man in his church office. When the case went to trial the jury ultimately ruled that it was in self-defense. Norris was also indicted for arson and perjury and was tried for the burning his own church. Again, he was acquitted.²⁸

Norris quoted Rice's work in his newspaper as saying "It seems probable that prophecy was taken over from the Canaanites in Palestine." Norris responded claiming that: "I thought that prophecy came from God and not from the Canaanites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Gergashites, the Hivites, or any other ites [sic.]. They spoke from the oracles of Jehovah and not from the traditions of the

²⁶ Grimes, 41.

²⁷ J. Frank Norris, "Notes by the Pastor," *The Searchlight*, (Fort Worth, Texas) August 24, 1923. Quoted in Newman, *Texas Baptists and the Evolution Controversy, 1920-1929* (Unpublished Thesis, 1954), 1.

²⁸ Hankins, 7.

surrounding pagans.”²⁹ Norris’s opinions on Rice and higher criticism are summed up in excellent color as he proclaimed: “The more I read what Jesus said, the more suspicious I become of the higher critics. If they studied the Master more and less in Chicago University, where they got the forty-second echo of some beer-guzzling German professor of rationalism, they would be preaching to the great multitudes of people and not empty wood-yards.”³⁰ Norris’s point in connecting higher criticism to “beer-guzzling German professors” is more than a rhetorical flourish. In addition to connecting higher criticism to those who sin as they consume alcohol, Norris is also connecting modern biblical interpretation to German culture on the heels of World War I. During and after the war anything associated with Germany was deplorable. Higher criticism had two marks against it: Not only did it offer a view of scripture that opened the canon to human error, but it was also developed in German universities.³¹

Norris laid out other critiques of Rice’s monograph. For example, Norris quoted Rice as saying “the Bible cannot survive as a fixed rule of faith and practice, for which it was never intended.”³² Norris responded to Rice’s words by quoting Isaiah 40:8 “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand forever.”³³ Norris fixated on Rice’s words: “the Bible cannot survive.” However, the text appears in the midst of a discussion of the Torah as it existed in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. At that time, “the Law” was exactly that: a book of rules that were extremely binding. Rice

²⁹. John Frank Norris *The Searchlight*, (Fort Worth, Texas), May 12, 1921.

³⁰. Ibid.

³¹. Vernon et. al, 212.

³². Norris, May 12, 1921.

³³. Ibid.

criticized this use of the Torah and took aim at his contemporaries at the same time, proclaiming that:

There are those now, even in Protestantism, who, like the scribes of old, insist upon what they call the literal interpretation of the Bible. They do not seem to realize that they are seeking to enforce ideas Christ came to explode. The Bible cannot survive as a fixed rule of faith and practice for which it was never intended. It is rather the world's greatest book of religious experience on whose pages, inspired because inspiring, we meet God face to face and find rest unto our souls.³⁴

Rice's attempt to redefine scripture as a book of spiritual truth that relies on experience rather than factual accuracy for its value is an important point. If you can bracket the rhetoric you can see that Norris and Rice are actually dialogue partners attempting to discern the nature of truth. Rice asserted that certain truths can be discerned through logic, reason and science, while other truths exist on a spiritual level and cannot be touched by modern methods of knowing but instead can only be experienced. Norris, on the other hand, denied the power of modern knowing and claimed that the spiritual supersedes all scientific knowledge. Unfortunately, for faith-based higher education, neither argument would relate faith to knowledge.

Rice also had some outspoken critics in the Methodist community. W. E. Hawkins, Jr., a Methodist evangelist, issued a pamphlet refuting Rice's work. Hawkins declared that "The Bible is a complete Book. Every question of interpretation can be settled within its own pages. Its Light shines directly from within and does not depend upon rays from without. The Bible is its own interpreter."³⁵ Hawkins words not only exposed his view of scripture, but also undermined the need for seminary training of any kind. Hawkins's

³⁴. Rice, 134-135.

³⁵. W.E. Hawkins, June 17, 1921.

anti-intellectualism had a long tradition within the Methodist church. The denomination did not promote an educated clergy prior to Vanderbilt's founding in 1873. Even after the university began serving the church, one Methodist minister claimed that circuit riding in Texas "develop[ed] a young preacher faster than the 'Vanderbilt.'"³⁶

Rice and His Allies Respond

Rice responded to his critics by releasing a statement affirming the inspiration of God's word along with the doctrines of atonement through Christ, sanctification and justification through faith. Rice thought that the same work that gave ammunition to his detractors also served to vindicate him. At the end of his statement he quoted his own closing remarks in *The Old Testament in the Life Today* where he wrote:

This marvelous collection of booklets, more than half poetry, mostly anonymous, seeks no defense, shuns no attack, asks only that we test the pledge it brings of God's saving and satisfying touch upon the human spirit, and venture upon its promise of a world redeemed through Jesus Christ our Lord in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.³⁷

Rice again asserted that spiritual knowledge is legitimate and does not need to be verified through modern means. A mere assertion, however, would not be enough to convince the academy of the legitimacy of faith.

Many in the larger Methodist community rallied to Rice's defense. One group of students defended him, saying that Dr. Rice had brought scripture to life for them and strengthened their faith.³⁸ A group of ten Methodist clergy added their own petition in

³⁶ Mary Martha Hosford Thomas, *Southern Methodist University: Founding and Early Years*, (Dallas, Texas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1974), 13.

³⁷ John A. Rice, *Certainty in Christian Fundamentals*, Undated.

³⁸ Author Unknown, *Student Petition*, undated.

support of Rice to the mix.³⁹ A faculty statement defending Rice was also signed by at least six professors. These faculty members insisted that Rice's faith was consistent with that of the Methodist Church and that the administration at SMU should "say very frankly to our constituency that the university is conducting a theological seminary upon the recognized principles of the modern historical method of biblical interpretation, always in conformity with Methodist and Christian fundamentals."⁴⁰ Even the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees seemed to support Rice. On October, 4 1921 the board issued a statement criticizing Rice's detractors, claiming that they "feared that some of Dr. Rice's over-zealous critics reveal a lack of robustness in their own faith when they seek to suppress freedom of thought and speech in matters pertaining to the Bible."⁴¹

Although the Executive Committee supported Rice in its statement, the board members accepted Rice's resignation seven days after releasing their statement. Although Rice resigned he did not renounce any conclusions drawn in his monograph. Instead, he reported that he felt his resignation was in the best interest of the university.⁴²

It is not clear why the administration and the Executive Committee agreed to Rice's resignation given that neither contingent desired that Rice should lose his position over such a controversy. Perhaps the university's leadership merely yielded to a noisy, but small fundamentalist element in Texas Methodism. It is certainly conceivable that J. Frank Norris and the cacophony he caused from his *Searchlight* contributed to the sense that this squeaky wheel of fundamentalism required some grease. Perhaps the

³⁹. Author Unknown, *Petition from Methodist Clergy*, Ozona, Texas, October 20, 1921.

⁴⁰. Grimes, 43-44.

⁴¹. Ibid, 44.

⁴². Ibid, 44.

administration thought that Rice's resignation was necessary in order resolve the controversy once and for all in order to maintain neutrality in the midst of the fundamentalist/modernist conflict.⁴³

The administration was sympathetic to Rice and issued him a generous severance package. They authorized that Rice be paid his salary for the remainder of the calendar year, and that he be compensated for the \$8,000 he had spent in building his home in Dallas, less \$100 per month rent during the time he resided there. Bishop Mouzon displayed his support for Rice by offering him a pastorate position in Oklahoma and Rice accepted.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most astonishing development through the controversy was the contradiction between the broad support for Rice among students, faculty, and clergy, and the fact that Rice was compelled to resign, an act that seemingly signaled that a fundamentalist view of the Bible would reign supreme at SMU. However, this was not the whole story. W.E. Hawkins Jr., the Methodist minister who had aligned himself with Norris, was involuntarily relocated in 1927, thus signaling that moderation would reign supreme within the Methodist Church for the time being. By the 1930's, however, the tide of modernism overtook mainstream Methodism and the Evangelical Methodist Church was formed, claiming that they were "an old-fashioned John Wesley Methodist church, free from fanaticism and modernism"⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid, 44.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 44.

⁴⁵ Vernon, et, al., 218.

President Lee Cuts Religious Ties

Umphrey Lee was named President in November of 1938, but did not take the helm until early the following year. Lee was ordained, and served in the pastoral ministry, but according to Herbert Gambrell, long-time member of the History Department, Lee “was not a preacher dubbed educator but an educational statesman.” Thanks in large part to Lee’s administrative prowess the campus underwent a massive transformation during his administration. At the beginning of his presidency SMU was essentially a liberal arts college with other schools attached. Dancing was still prohibited, and the Methodist church was still in control. Lee’s educational statesmanship began to change this so that by 1951 he could report to the Board of Trustees, “What has happened is that we have a University on our hands.” Lee did not want to remove SMU’s ties to the church, but he understood that changes were necessary in order to create a university.⁴⁶ As James Burtchaell has pointed out regarding many secularizing colleges and universities:

Religion’s move to the academic periphery was not so much the work of godless intellectuals as of pious educators who, since the onset of pietism, had seen religion as embodied so uniquely in the personal profession of faith that it could not be seen to have a stake in social learning. The radical disjunction between divine knowledge and human knowledge...[led universities to unintentionally] sequester religious piety and secular learning.⁴⁷

Umphrey Lee’s educational accomplishments were not the only developments adding to SMU’s happy spirit. In 1945 Lee reported to the Board of Trustees that all debts connected to the operating expenses of the university had been paid. Before the

⁴⁷. Grimes, 64-65.

⁴⁷. Burtchaell, 842.

close of Lee's presidency, twenty new buildings stood on the campus and the endowment, while still inadequate, at least had increased.⁴⁸

Through it all, Umphrey Lee earned the approval of the SMU community. English professor, John W. Bowyer, spoke to Lee's sterling reputation in the alumni magazine in December 1938 when he stated that "The city of Dallas is pleased, the alumni are pleased, the student body are jubilant, and the faculty, who should know more about the university than anyone else and probably do, constantly reveal their satisfaction and their hope for the future."⁴⁹ Upon Lee's death in 1958 the *Dallas Times Herald* wrote:

A great and good man is gone. A community, a state and a nation suffered inestimable loss. Dr. Lee was one of the most beloved citizens of Texas. The popularity of Dr. Lee, his skill as an administrator, his charm of personality, his broad tolerance and hard work were important factors in winning for SMU the goodwill and support, not only of Dallas residents of all faiths, but of public-spirited citizens of all Texas and other states.⁵⁰

While accolades are sometimes dispensed with little merit behind them, it is unlikely that praises of this variety would have been chosen for a leader who had kept the church close to the heart of the university. Furthermore, the statements make it clear that majority of Lee's stakeholders were pleased with the developments. One could give Lee total credit for guiding SMU away from the faith, but that credit would be given in error. He could not have altered the identity of SMU had the university community not been so happy to follow him.

⁴⁸. Grimes, 65.

⁴⁹. Quoted by Grimes, 65.

⁵⁰. Quoted by Grimes, 65.

As is often the case in American higher education, the cost of converting a college to a university was paid in dollars exchanged for religious identity. Consequently, the Methodist Church not only lost control of the university, but even the church's influence began to wane as the years passed. Grimes asserts that "it was not so much that Lee wanted to preside over the secularization of SMU; rather, as he developed an educational institution in a secular world, the control, and finally the influence, of the church tended to lessen."⁵¹ Examples of secularization included a reduction in compulsory chapel to once a month, which eventually led to no compulsory chapel at all. In short, the ethos which gave the institution its Christian life support was stripped from the university. Lee compensated for SMU's secularization by allocating more money and resources to university religious activities and personnel. In 1949, for example, Lee secured a chaplain for the university to direct its religious affairs. The spiritual was recognized on campus, but the familiar modern pattern was followed: through specialization and fragmentation the divine was removed as a central identifying marker of the university and relegated to the fringes.⁵²

Underlying all of this was the need to remove the spiritual from public sphere and to affirm, as SMU currently does in the last bullet point on the "facts" page of their website, that while the university was, "founded in 1911 by what is now The United Methodist Church... The University is nonsectarian in its teaching and committed to freedom of inquiry."⁵³

⁵¹. Grimes, 65.

⁵². Ibid, 65

⁵³. "SMU Facts," Accessed 5/13/2013, <http://www.smu.edu/aboutsmu/facts>.

Conclusion

The conservative desire to be unaffected by both “fanaticism” and “modernism” that characterized Methodism in the midst of the Rice controversy was not sustainable. Avoiding the reality of the fact value dichotomy would not help the Christian academy relate faith and knowledge and would only delay secularization. Rice’s ability to relativize Christian beliefs and allow scripture to be authoritative in the “life today” was appreciated by Christians who sought to determine the fundamentals and peripherals of their faith, but it failed to resolve the deeper epistemological issues. Unfortunately for the Christian academy neither Hawkins’s nor Norris’s efforts to defend against liberalizing trends only rendered the Christian college irrelevant. Rice’s efforts, on the other hand, fell short of offering a compelling vision for how spiritual knowledge can be known. He makes the right assertion, but the scope of his work was not concerned with the underlying question: How can truth be known? The consequences for SMU would be a disengagement from its religious identity.

CHAPTER THREE

Baylor University and Samuel Dow

“What kind of being was primitive man?” Asked Dr. Samuel Grove Dow, professor of Sociology, in his textbook entitled *Introduction to the Principles of Sociology*. He went on to answer his own question stating, “we have come to the conclusion that he was a squat, ugly, somewhat stooped, powerful being, half human, half animal, who sought refuge from the wild beasts first in the trees and later in the caves, and that he was about halfway between anthropoid ape and modern man.”¹ This was the extent of Dow’s Darwinian rhetoric in a compilation of 500 pages published in 1920. However, it was enough to ignite a series of evolution controversies at Baylor University, where Dow taught. At the center of every controversy was fundamentalist J. Frank Norris, Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, who berated numerous Baylor faculty members for the remainder of the decade from his newspaper, *The Searchlight*. The ensuing conflict pitted an intellectual community that was rapidly accepting evolution as truth against a fundamentalist contingent of the Baptist Church. Baylor’s ability to remain within the bounds of both religious dogma and burgeoning intellectual creed would be tested throughout a series of evolution scandals scattered throughout the 1920’s.

¹. Samuel Grove Dow, *Introduction to the Principles of Sociology* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1920), 210-211.

Baylor's Beginnings

Baylor University was chartered in 1845 when Anson Jones, president of the Republic of Texas, signed the founding document. The institution was initially located in Independence Texas, before it relocated to Waco, Texas in 1886. The creation of the university was undertaken in response to a call from the Texas Baptist Educational Society, an organization that existed to foster specifically religious education. There was no question that the newly minted college was Christian, and the early curriculum required courses in Greek, Latin, literature, history, science and mathematics. Any teaching concerning scripture was given mostly on Sundays at local Independence churches. Baylor only required theological training for those students pursuing vocational ministry.²

In a sense, Baylor's religious identity was relegated to the periphery of the institution. A Christian vision was not brought to bear on the curriculum, but a strong ethos was present in the life of the university from the beginning of its history. Religious identity was so central to the Independence community and so central to the lives of most of Baylor's students that the absence of Christianity from the curriculum did not matter. After all, the religious identity was strongly affirmed in the extra-curricular. Chapel attendance was compulsory every weekday as was Sunday school and church service attendance every Sabbath. Like most colleges of its time period, a strong moral code was in place, but Baylor's code of conduct was anchored in its strong Christian beliefs. Baylor's strong religious commitment was also found in its 1856 *Baylor Catalogue* which stated that:

² Donald D. Schmeltkopf, "A Christian University in the Baptist Tradition: History of a Vision," *The Baptist and Christian Character of Baylor*, (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2003), 1-2.

One great object of the Faculty will ever be to imbue the minds and hearts of young men with a high sense of honor, integrity, and moral excellence. While nothing of a denominational character is taught, very special attention is paid to the Bible recitation and to the Sabbath School instruction; and every student is required to attend public worship at such a place as his parent or guardian may designate.

For all of its religious edicts, Baylor seemed ill equipped to deal with twentieth century world where faith was attacked and pushed to the peripheral by the belief that only the empirical can be known and only the materialistic can be discussed in public.

Evolution

One of the most powerful agents employed by those purporting a mechanistic worldview was Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). This groundbreaking theory depicted how species change over time and sent shockwaves through the American heartland, compelling some Christians to re-imagine Genesis in such a way that reconciled the two texts, while pushing others to cling to a literal interpretation of the Bible. At a more fundamental level, Darwinism buttressed an already growing optimism that the empirical method could help us develop an absolutely certain epistemology- one to end all disputes. Darwinism had already helped us understand the detailed origins of the beings inhabiting our universe. What else might science uncover? As science pulled back the veil on the mysterious rationalism swooped in on the spiritual. The Genesis account of an all-powerful God speaking the world into existence and creating a man from dust was now displaced by a purely naturalistic process. The result was a series of evolution battles that were fought for the control of various institutions. The controversy

that enveloped Baylor University in the early twenties and roared for at least the entire decade was a local chapter in a national narrative.³

Norris vs. Baylor

While Samuel Dow was in the process of publishing his monograph, J. Frank Norris refused to support a fund raising effort for world missions by the Southern Baptist Convention called the Seventy-five Million Campaign. Initially Norris pledged that his church would give \$100,000 over five years. However, the timing was poor as First Baptist's budget was tight after expanding their auditorium. Consequently, Norris began to evade his commitment, claiming that the SBC was trying to coerce the church into opening its coffers to the SBC. Although the SBC claimed that they were "quite willing for them [First Baptist of Fort Worth] to cooperate their way, just so they cooperate and do their best for the campaign," Norris was not willing to cooperate even though the SBC was willing to let him alter his initial promise. Norris lashed out at the SBC, speaking for his church that "we will not put a dollar into any school or system where evolution is taught and we will not put a dollar into any board that refuses to open its financial books to any and all contributors."⁴ While Norris certainly had strong convictions regarding the evils of Darwin's theory, the evolution controversy at Baylor began almost accidentally. As Norris was collecting ammunition for his barrage against the Southern Baptist Convention he casually fired off a sentence pointed at Baylor's faculty publications.⁵

³. Kimberly Marinucci, "God, Darwin, and Loyalty in America: The University of Tennessee and the Great Professor Trial of 1923," *History of Intellectual Culture* 1, no. 1 (2001): 1.

⁴. Newman quoting J. Frank Norris, 17.

⁵. Newman, 6-17.

Dr. Dow did not share Norris's love for scandal; rather he was sensitive to the criticism and ultimately resigned after much conflict, stating that:

The people of the South do not yet understand the term "evolution." When you say evolution they immediately think of monkey. It will be twenty-five years before they thresh the thing out in this part of the country. And though I would like to stay and help enlighten the people, I can't afford to remain in this position and have my life ruined by such unjust criticisms as have been heaped upon me... I can't afford to be hampered in my work by two or three muck-rakers who know nothing about the great principles of sociology and care less.⁶

Dow knew that America was in a period of transition during the 1920's. The scientific critique of religion seemed unstoppable in the face of a fact/value dichotomy that championed the sciences for their ability to verify truth empirically. Evolution, in the minds of modernists, could be observed in nature. The Divine was not observable. What was the Christian academy to do? Baylor attempted to stay within the bounds of the conservative Baptist environment. The institution undoubtedly desired to maintain its strong Christian character and ties to the Baptist Church. This desire, however, would be difficult to hold in tension with the theory of evolution which was gaining gospel status among intellectuals.

As the scandal unfolded it became apparent that Dow was not the only professor in question. Baylor science professors Ora Clare Bradbury and Lula Pace openly admitted that they taught evolution, but did so from a theistic perspective, stating that:

The first three chapters of Genesis state historical or literal facts. These facts are stated in allegorical or figurative language. The word "day" is used to express a period of time which may be of indefinite length. The fall of man is recorded as having taken place in the Garden of Eden. This is a historical fact. The manner in which he disobeyed God is expressed symbolically, that is by eating forbidden fruit.

1. ⁶ "Dow Resigns as a Result of Attacks on Text," *The Lariat*, (Waco, Texas) December 10, 1921,

Bradbury and Pace struggled to reconcile faith and knowledge in way that allowed both to speak to each other. Norris, unsurprisingly, was not interested in reconciliation of any sort. In spite of stating that he was going to withhold his “opinion till more evidence is in hand” he couldn’t help but declare only three short paragraphs later that he was “of the decided opinion that one cannot be an Evolutionist of any sort without setting aside the Bible with its whole plan of salvation for mankind.”⁷ Norris was far from the only stakeholder in Baylor University who objected to the justification given by the faculty. Britton Ross, a Baptist pastor, wrote to President Brooks that he had “talked to a great many people [and] that many are not satisfied with the explanation given as to the position held by Drs. Pace and Bradbury.”⁸ Eventually, Bradbury resigned in the spring of 1923.⁹

Texas State Representative, J.T. Stroder, added his voice to the controversy by calling for the resignation of more Baylor faculty. In March of 1923 Stroder sent Brooks a letter stating:

I have noticed that Dr. Bradbury has resigned as in accord with the will of the [Baptist General] ‘Convention.’ Also the ‘Convention’ denounced those evil theories and desired that Baylor clean out in toto. If it is possible as Baptists all over Texas want Dr. Pace and Dr. Sendan to resign also. So our great school will no longer be reproached with that German Rationalism which infests so many of our great schools.”¹⁰

The letter was inscribed on official letterhead, subtly, yet not so subtly, indicating that he was making the request from his office as a government official. That a state

⁷ J. Frank Norris, *The Searchlight*, December 8, 1922.

⁸ Britton Ross, Letters to Samuel Palmer Brooks, February 13, 1923

⁹ “New Personnel Works on Zoology Teaching Staff” (Waco, Texas) *The Lariat*, October, 3 1923, 1.

¹⁰ J.T. Stroder, Letters to Samuel Palmer Brooks, March 3, 1923

representative could ask for the resignation of professor at a private school over an issue of religious curriculum was indicative of the powerful anti-Darwinian sentiment and pervasive fundamentalist response present in 1920's Texas.

Evidently there was some confusion about the ruling of the Convention. Baylor's President, Samuel Palmer Brooks, relayed the story in an issue of *The Baylor Bulletin*, remarking the ways in which Baptist officials attempted to lay the evolution controversy to rest at an official meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas in November of 1922. Brooks quoted the BGCT's report at length, stating that "in no single instance have we found a teacher who accepted as a fact the Darwinian theory, nor in any way taught it as such. When referred to or taught, it is done only that the student may be acquainted with the facts of the theory. And thus enable him to come to the proper conclusions with reference to its value."¹¹ The BGCT stated further "that the University has never been fundamentally wrong in the person of any of its teachers." Before Baylor could be given a clean bill of health Brooks had to vigorously denounce evolution. Brooks declared publicly that Dow's monograph had "some errors of judgment, some half-baked statements."¹²

Brooks's retelling of the events that unfolded at the convention neglected to mention that Baptist pastor Jesse Yelvington came to his feet and passionately said "I hate to do it, I have wept over it and prayed over it. I know it means I am cutting my own head off but for the sake of Jesus Christ and His cause, I feel that I have to do it. There is evolution in Baylor. The Darwinian theory of evolution has been continually defended

¹¹ Samuel Palmer Brooks, *Concerning Evolution in Baylor University* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1923), 4.

¹² Ibid, 3.

by professor Seindon.”¹³ After the dramatics of the convention Yelvington sent Brooks a letter that was just as heartfelt as his public oration. In the days that followed his dramatic accusation Yelvington expressed his deep regret for having to speak out against Baylor and its President. He claimed to be a close friend of Brooks and loved his alma mater a great deal as well, but maintained that his conscience would let him do nothing else. Norris was certainly thrilled as he published an excerpt from Yelvington’s speech in large text in *The Searchlight*. These words of indictment coming from someone who, in spite of his deep affection for Baylor and Brooks, had spoken out of more anguish than of triumph must have seemed damning indeed. In Yelvington’s letter to Brooks he confided that he “had to bring something that [he] knew personally that...Sendon had been seeking to force his views of evolution, that there was no hell, that our missionaries were dealing unjustly with native workers and other half-baked theories on young... students.”¹⁴

Baylor and Brooks had many friends who were undoubtedly crucial in allowing Brooks and his professors to weather the storm. Letters addressed to Brooks poured in daily, many of which expressed support for the institution and its president. In one letter from T.C. Gardener, General Secretary for the Baptist General Convention, encouraged Brooks by saying that, taking in the spectacle of the convention, Brooks “certainly [had] the confidence of Texas as few other men.”¹⁵ The support of influential Baptists like Gardener ultimately allowed both Brooks and Baylor to survive the controversy.

¹³ J. Frank Norris Quoting Jesse Yelvington, *The Searchlight*, November, 24 1922.

¹⁴ Jesse Yelvington, Letter to Samuel Palmer Brooks, November 25, 1922.

¹⁵ T.C. Gardener, Letters to Samuel Palmer Brooks, November 25, 1922.

As rationalistic construction of reality threatened to displace the Divine, society splintered into groups of fundamentalists and modernists. The ensuing conflict between the two factions at Baylor resulted in a conflict that needed to be successfully negotiated to save Baylor's Baptist ties. As Brooks mediated the war between fundamentalist clergy and a moderate faculty, he denounced evolution at times to stay within the Baptist position. This careful navigation allowed Baylor to adopt an intellectually sound position essential to obtain respect from the academic community, while holding to the Christian tradition. Competing forces required Baylor to struggle to maintain its Baptist convictions without yielding to fundamentalism. Ultimately, the clash would leave Baylor, to the chagrin of Norris and company, within the bounds of the Baptist Church.

Baylor's Response

Baylor weathered the fundamentalist/modernist storm with its religious identity intact, but its religious identity continued to exist in the co-curricular just as it began. By 1938 the *Baylor Bulletin* indicated that Baylor had developed a more nuanced rationale for its Christian co-curricular by stating:

For nearly one hundred years... the institution has kept its doors open to ambitious student life around the world. While it is owned and controlled by the Baptists of Texas it is maintained for the benefit of all mankind. It is not carried on in order that the dogmas of the denomination maybe proclaimed, but that therein may be taught with fervor and flavor all things properly embodied in the curriculum of a great university.

...No university can be great whatever may be its assets, whatever may be its scholastic achievements, that does not develop within its own life a pure, radiant institutional soul. "It is the spirit giveth life the flesh profiteth nothing.

The thing of superlative importance about any university is its atmosphere. At least 60% of all college culture is atmospheric. What is Taught is not as important as the atmosphere in which it is taught. The atmosphere of Baylor University like the atmosphere of the earth, it is a mixture of life-giving components. Is calm with culture, warm with human sympathy, electric with

inspiration, vibrant with intellectual health, and dynamic with the ideals of the Christian religion.

The highest purpose of Baylor University is to develop men and women of Christian culture and character. Throughout its history of nearly 100 years, it has accepted the high responsibility of training the youth of the land for service to church and state. It breathes at all times the spirit of its motto, “Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana.”¹⁶

Baylor had emerged from the controversial 1920’s miraculously unchanged. The institution still defined itself as nonsectarian, but with a Christian identity “that was “pure” and “radiant,” yet relegated to the “atmosphere” rather than impacting the central curriculum.¹⁷

How is it possible for Baylor to emerge from such controversies with its soul intact? One account claims that Baylor credits the “guiding providential hand of God” and the “broad consensus among the people of Baylor and its supporters on all major issues” for the fidelity of the university. Baptists, however, have always struggled to build a basic consensus on scriptural interpretation. The Baptist tradition rests on the doctrine that each saint has the ability to interpret the scriptures for themselves. Consequently, there is little agreement among Baptists as to what constitutes Christian scholarship or what the Baptists. This has led Historian James Tunstead Burtchaell to observe that Baptists, “have been slow to admit and to develop a shared tradition of inquiry and discourse that would bring the light of their faith to bear in a critical yet distinctively Christian fashion upon the public culture and the various intellectual principles.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Quoted by Schmeltekopf, *The Baptist and Christian Character of Baylor*, 6.

¹⁷ Ibid, 6-7.

¹⁸ Burtchaell, 438.

The question remains: how was this much consensus present in an intensely individualistic Baptist community? While specifics in theology failed to unite and mobilize Baptists, the one common element among Baptists everywhere was their emphasis on piety. This was enough to sustain an institution in the cloistered Bible belt of the southern United States, until the cultural upheavals of the 1960's would undo the cultural homogeneity enjoyed by Baptists for decades.

Baptist piety stayed the course, however. Dancing, drinking and premarital sex were forbidden on campus and efforts to enforce some sort of Christian outlook usually related to similar sorts of moral rules. In the late 1970's Baylor President Abner McCall banned Planned Parenthood from Baylor's campus and in 1980 McCall's successor, Herbert Reynolds, was also a strong Pietist who saw faith and learning as coexisting, but not integrated. And his strong pietism compelled him to attempt to prohibit one Baylor student from graduating after she, posed for *Playboy* magazine.¹⁹

A vision for the integration of faith and learning beyond pietism came to Baylor in 1995 with the inauguration of Robert Sloan as the university's thirteenth president. Sloan believed that what happened in Jerusalem had a great deal to do with the business of Athens. In 2002 his administration initiated a strategic plan that announced Baylor's intention "to enter the top tier of American Universities while reaffirming and deepening [Baylor's] distinctive Christian mission."²⁰ Sloan's provost, Donald Schmeltekopf, who would carry out much of the new vision, declared that in order to deepen Baylor's faith

¹⁹ Hunter Baker, "The Struggle for Baylor's Soul," *The Baylor Project: Taking Christian Education to the Next Level*, Ed. Barry Hankins and Donald Schmeltekopf (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 114.

²⁰ Baylor 2012, 2.

commitment neither “bland value-talk,” nor “a so-called Christian environment, as important as that is” would distinguish Baylor. Instead, his vision was “the real and expressed belief that the university community...sees its work and its understanding of the world in relation to God.”²¹

²¹. Quoted by Hunter Baker, 114.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rhodes College and Charles Diehl

“You will hear that I am not sound in the Faith, but I am,” Charles E. Diehl, President of Rhodes College, confided in his treasurer, William S. Lacy in 1923. It should not have surprised Diehl when his faith was publicly questioned in a trial eight years later. The trial proved to be a fierce battle between fundamentalist and liberal Protestant forces for control of the western Tennessee college. The episode would ultimately cause Rhodes to deliberate over its institutional identity, compelling the college’s leadership to ponder whether or not it is possible to maintain convictions while avoiding fundamentalism and modernism. Leaders would have to maintain their reputation as an intellectually sound college if the institution were to continue gaining prestige. Rhodes’s ability to weigh these competing objectives became crystallized in the heresy spectacle of 1931.¹

Rhodes’s Beginnings: What’s in a Name?

Today, Rhodes College occupies a 100 acre wooded campus in the heart of historic Memphis. The college has had many names in its more than 150 year existence. In 1848, the state’s Masonic Grand Lodge donated the property to develop the Masonic University of Tennessee, the original Rhodes predecessor. Located in Clarksville, Tennessee, the college would go on to change its name twice more before control of the

¹Author Unkown, *The Official Report of the Hearing of the Charges preferred By Eleven Presbyterian Ministers Against President Charles E. Diehl Held on Tuesday, February 3rd, 1931 By the Board of Directors of Southwester* 18 no. 2 (1931): 37.

institution was passed from the Masonic Lodge to the Presbyterian Synod of Nashville. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the Presbyterian Church determined that the college should operate as its lead educational institution for a large geographic region that was then termed the Southwest. The college changed its name again in 1875 and became known as Southwestern Presbyterian University (SPU). In 1917, the college's most influential president to date, Charles Diehl, moved SPU to Memphis and shortened its name to Southwestern. In 1945, the official college name became Southwestern at Memphis. Finally on July 1, 1984, the college adopted its current name, Rhodes College, in honor of Peyton Nalle Rhodes, President from 1949-1965.²

Rhodes College has not only wrestled to find its proper name, but also to find its identity as a Christian college within the Presbyterian tradition that balances institutional excellence with Christian convictions. Throughout its history, Rhodes has publicly expressed its desire to maintain a Christian identity without adopting the fundamentalism that hindered the intellectual credibility of an institution.

President Diehl

Charles Edward Diehl was born in West Virginia in 1875 and graduated from Johns Hopkins University before attending Princeton theological seminary. This trained minister would go on to pastor multiple churches and teach Bible and Hebrew part time at Rhodes before receiving his appointment as the President of the college in 1917.³

². Author Unknown, Rhodes College Catalogue, 2004-2005, 7. While Rhodes college has had many names before bearing its current one, I intend to use its present name throughout this chapter to avoid confusion.

³. Perre Magness, "Southwestern Head's Faith Doubted," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, (Memphis, Tennessee), April 2, 1998.

Diehl assumed his role as president just as the institution was entering into great financial turmoil. America's entry into World War I meant massive attrition: only 33 of the 119 students reenrolled in September following America's April declaration of war. Diehl responded brilliantly by securing an Army training Corp, which increased the enrollment for the 1918-1919 school year to 181 students, the largest incoming class of Rhodes's history at that time. Diehl also succeeded in moving the college from Clarksville, Tennessee to Memphis. This was another strategic, but difficult move given the financial state of the college.⁴

A Vision for Christian Education

In 1927 Diehl published a booklet entitled *The Denominational College* in which he laid out his vision for Christian higher education. He stated that the aim of the Christian college should be "the laying of a strong moral emphasis and the production of a high type of Christian character."⁵ Diehl went on to clarify what he meant by Christian as "the acceptance of the sovereignty of Jesus Christ over mind and heart and life, a personal devotion to Him, and the honest desire to imitate him and do His will." Diehl declared "the distinguishing feature of the Christian college is that it includes Christianity in its working program, not so much in the studies pursued as in its spirit and atmosphere" Diehl was also aware of the relativizing effect of higher education on the beliefs of students, arguing that "many a boy has gone altogether wrong during his freshman year because he has been caught in a new world of thinking from which God

⁴. Waller Raymond Cooper, *Southwestern at Memphis* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1949) 102-104.

⁵. Charles E. Diehl, "The Denominational College" *Southwestern Bulletin*, (Memphis, Tennessee: December, 1927): 4.

has been left out.”⁶ Diehl was aware of the secularizing trends in society and was bent on guarding against them. He spoke of the French influence which created an environment where skepticism became a “badge of respectability” and where “the religious aim was supplanted by the modern God of efficiency.” Diehl defended the denominational college saying that it is “worth all of its costs and that it was never more necessary than now. With secularism at full tide, with the multiplied complexities of our modern life...with the gospel of service preached in many quarters in a way almost to exclude the gospel of manhood”⁷

Diehl was critical of colleges that were not “genuinely honest and educationally sincere,” and he claimed that to consider these institutions to be Christian colleges was “a sheer misuse of terms, and by that token alone many denominational colleges are not Christian.” Ironically four years later Diehl’s opposition would accuse him of inciting Rhodes to become exactly that sort of denominational college, an accusation that would never leave the minds of many fundamentalist Christians.⁸

In spite of his Christian rhetoric, Diehl closed the college’s Divinity School as one of his first acts as college president. The divinity school was in decline due to students terminating their enrollment and entering the military to serve in World War I. Shortly after closing the Divinity School Diehl announced a new special emphasis on excellence in the sciences. We can imagine that this was troubling to some who perceived science as an opposition to faith. Also under Diehl’s leadership the word “Presbyterian” was

⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁷ Ibid, 4,11, 14.

⁸ Ibid, 13.

dropped from Southwestern Presbyterian University when the college moved to Memphis in 1925. Were these actions taken in an intentional effort to usher Rhodes down the path toward secularization? We cannot know for sure what Diehl was thinking, but these changes were a prelude to the crescendo that was the heresy trial of 1931. Diehl's actions indicated to Rhodes's stakeholders that the college's Presbyterian identity was in decline.⁹

“Without Chart or Compass”

Although President Diehl's effective leadership in the midst of trial won many allies in the Rhodes community, not all of his constituents were pleased. Dr. W.S. Lacy was one such constituent. Lacy was the college's secretary, but he aspired to teach Bible at Rhodes. Lacy was passed over for the position, however, and he began to raise questions regarding Diehl's suitability for leadership.¹⁰ Lacy resigned from his secretary position and wrote Diehl telling him that the reason for his resignation was that “a number of your statements of belief are irreconcilable with the standards of our Church.”¹¹ Lacy began meeting with Presbyterian ministers to discuss Diehl's theological beliefs and financial management.¹²

On October 10, 1930 eleven Presbyterian ministers submitted a petition to the board of directors claiming that Diehl was a poor administrator and financial manager and that he was “unsound in the faith.” Being unsound in the faith included a failure to

⁹ Stephen Haynes, *A City, a Church and a College*. Unpublished Chapter.

¹⁰ Magness, “Charles Diehl's Faith Stood the Test.”

¹¹ *The Official Report*, 37.

¹² *Ibid*, 29.

adhere to scriptural orthodoxy and also allowing dances to occur where female students wore “very scant shorts which barley reached below the hips.”¹³ While accusations of administrative incompetence and financial mismanagement were raised they were difficult to prove given that Rhodes was in the best financial state it had seen in decades. Consequently, the doctrinal issues were at the heart of the accusations put forward by the petitioners who accused Diehl of proclaiming openly that he did not believe in the first part of Genesis, the imprecatory Psalms, or that God told Joshua to kill all of the Canaanites.¹⁴

Diehl’s refusal to interpret the Bible literally was unacceptable for Lacy and his fellow prosecutors. The letter read to the board on February 3rd, the day of Diehl’s heresy trial declared that:

Such views are utterly subversive to everything for which we as a church stand. If we are to suit the current notions of accepted ethical standards in this age or entertain doubts because present day “theories” of science or criticism fail to conform to the plain and evident teachings of God’s word, we will soon be without chart or compass, resulting in the church becoming a derelict, fit only to be destroyed as a menace to wise investigators who sail by a fixed standard.¹⁵

Ironically, the fundamentalists’ rejection of modernity used the language of modernity to prove their anti-relativist agenda. A later section of the same letter to the board reads:

Unless something is *proven*, beyond the shadow of a doubt, we have no moral right to teach it as a fact or teach according to it inferentially as a likely “theory” leading to the truth where it runs counter to the plain statements of God’s word. It is for matuerer [sic] minds to examine all “theories” in the laboratories. Until a theory becomes a proven fact the professor has no right to confuse immature minds with it. And if a “theory” which contravenes God’s word is brought to younger minds, thereby altering the faith with which they came to college, it is a

¹³. Author Unknown, “Co-eds Resent Accusation of Local Pastor,” *The Sou’wester* (Memphis, Tennessee) Feb. 13, 1931.

¹⁴. *The Official Report*, 11. Imprecatory Psalms are pleas to God asking him to curse your enemies.

¹⁵. *Ibid*, 7.

crime. And for such a thing to happen in a church supported school, it is a crime unspeakable. Our only excuse, as a church, for being in the business of educating youth is to teach them what is known in the field of learning and to give them a reason for the faith that is in them. If in our school the faith given these young people is marred, we are faithless to our trust. If teachers cannot be found who will teach what is known, we can at least have the honor to close our doors. But such a suggestion is an aspersion on scholarship.¹⁶

The statement read before the board demonstrates the essential problem with the fundamentalist movement: an acceptance that knowledge was fragmented in such a way that facts could be known with total certainty, but that values that could not be known with full credibility. That fundamentalists placed “God’s word” in the realm of facts would not help them. In order for faith to take its rightful place at the center for the Christian university Christians had to demonstrate that knowledge is whole and that faith is intertwined in any epistemological act. Instead, Lacy assumed in his argument that there are “facts” or things that can be “proven beyond a shadow of a doubt.” Even more remarkable, Lacy employs the same argument that would nearly destroy the Christian academy. By the 1960’s, religion would be mostly pacified in the academy because modernists would turn petitioner’s own argument against them, proclaiming that because faith could not be “proven beyond a shadow of a doubt” then it had no place in the academy. The petitioners’ single minded insistence that scripture must be read literally identified them as members of a fundamentalist movement desperately striving to counteract the perceived effects of theological modernism and its relativizing effects.

Modernist or Moderate?

While Diehl’s accusers argued that he was a poor administrator and financial manager, the essential accusation plaguing his presidency was theological modernism.

¹⁶. Ibid, 7.

When questioned about his theological beliefs Diehl attempted to nuance his statements in front of members of the Rhodes Board, the media and a number of his accusers. On February 3rd, 1931 he refuted the accusations of the conservative clergy. When questioned about his theological views Diehl, rather than stating that he did not believe in the imprecatory Psalms, maintained that he did not believe those particular psalms were “Christian in Spirit.” Diehl went on to testify that he did not believe Genesis was a scientific treatise. With regard to the Canaanites, Diehl said he was doubtful that God really meant Joshua to kill them all.¹⁷ Diehl’s articulation of his Christian faith could be construed as an attempt to “trim his sails” to fit the current prevailing wind and ultimately hold his faith in tension with modern realities.

The legitimacy of Diehl’s particular beliefs will not be judged here, but two possible underlying assumptions behind Diehl’s beliefs should be brought to light. If Diehl was a modernist, then the college president probably accepted, in a more subtle way, the same fact/value split that plagued modernists and fundamentalists alike. In this case Diehl’s moral qualms with certain passages was an effort to fit the passages to his (and the current) moral views. In this interpretation of Diehl’s statements he seems to think that the Bible should not challenge his moral knowledge at times. If Diehl accepted the same fact/value split as his fundamentalist foes then he also believed that truth was fragmented and as such he placed the Bible in the realm of “values.” Scripture, now demoted to this lesser category of knowledge, was forced to submit to other forms of knowledge.

If Diehl was a moderate Christian, then perhaps he allowed the overall spirit of scripture to interpret and even supersede particular passages within scripture, but still

¹⁷. Ibid, 11-12.

affirmed the value of scripture and faith as legitimate knowledge. Diehl seems to be applying this method of knowing when he proclaimed that the imprecator Psalms were not “Christian in spirit.” Where on the theological spectrum Diehl actually fell at the time is uncertain. What is more certain is that both the fundamentalist wing (represented by Lacy) and the moderate wing (represented by Diehl’s “Christian in spirit” hermeneutic) would fall to the dualistic view represented in the notion that Diehl may have been rendering scripture as second class knowledge by refusing to allow scripture to have authority over his moral knowledge.

Diehl’s actions and theological views placed Southwestern at odds with the Presbyterian community at Memphis. W.S. Lacy testified that “not one of our Presbyterian pastors in Memphis holds [Diehl’s] views or would stand for them.”¹⁸ Perhaps this is because Diehl also made occasional statements from the pulpit indicating that he was less than orthodox in his theology. On one occasion Diehl preached from Micah 6:8, which reads: “What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (NIV), Diehl concluded that this passage contained the “core tenets of a universal religion.”¹⁹ Diehl’s insinuation that Micah 6:8 should open up the doors to some form of inclusive religious beliefs must have been alarming to most congregations. Given this evidence in addition to Diehl’s beliefs that Genesis was not a scientific treatise, and that he doubted that God really meant Joshua to

¹⁸. Ibid, 7.

¹⁹. Quoted by Haynes, *A City, a Church and a College*. Unpublished Chapter.

kill all of the Canaanites certainly established Diehl as a modernist as his accusers proclaimed.²⁰

Setting a Course and Trimming the Sails

Diehl was not acting alone in moving Rhodes toward a modernist position. Rhodes board of directors supported Diehl, who would have been powerless otherwise. The board dismissed the charges against Diehl declaring in their official response to the charges by reminding Diehl's accusers of some of the fine print surrounding their accusations. First, any accusations concerning heresy were ultimately the business of the Synod of which Diehl was a member. Secondly, the board declared that the college did not require its president to submit to any particular belief statement at the time Diehl took office, nor did the board require one at the time of the heresy trial. The board did disclose that Diehl requested to have a discussion about his theological beliefs in 1917, when he assumed the role of president, because he knew even then that some questioned his faith. The board asserted that the conversation at the outset of Diehl's presidency was just as satisfactory as the day of his heresy trial.²¹ It would appear, however, that a board that was truly interested in the orthodoxy of its Princeton Seminary trained leader would request Diehl to discuss the theological issues in greater detail. After all, Diehl's one phrase answers to complex questions such as: the meaning and use of Genesis, biblical genocide and mean spirited Psalms seems mysteriously short coming from a man trained in one of the nation's finest seminaries. Further detail in the discussion undertaken on

²⁰. Stephen Haynes, "Religion at Rhodes: Is there A Future in The Past?." *Southwestern Today*, Winter, 2009, 37.

²¹. *The Official Report*, 33.

that Tuesday in February of 1931 would have helped the board to determine the earlier question: was their president a moderate or a modernist?

Nevertheless, the board did not probe further, thus leaving us to question the degree of theological concern present within Rhodes governing body. In a rousing call to move beyond the heresy question the board declared that “the battle today is not the struggle in the eddies, but a mighty conflict in the midstream. It does not have to do with petty differences of sects, but with the life of religion itself. It is a war between atheism and materialism on the one hand and religion on the other. Civilization itself is at stake.”²² The board desired to remain within the realm of the established religious zeitgeist. Thus their call was to the non-sectarianism still in vogue in 1931. Diehl, himself, asserted that religious education was the default setting of his society when he described Rhodes as “a Christian college, a standard college of higher education.”²³ Unfortunately, for Rhodes religious identity, as the zeitgeist changed from non-sectarianism to secularism Rhodes would track accordingly.

The consequences of the 1931 Heresy Trial were such that Rhodes would cease to identify with the conservative wing of the Presbyterian Church. While it cannot be said that Rhodes was ever closely aligned with this conservative faction, both sides of the Presbyterian Church were present at Rhodes and were at times battling for control of the institution with the heresy trial as a final battle. The Diehl affair was an attempt by the

²². Ibid, 36.

²³. Quoted by Hanes, *Religion at Rhodes: Is there A future in the Past?*, 37.

fundamentalist wing of the church that was rebuffed, Rhodes then resided solidly in the moderate wing of a denomination that would become increasingly liberal.²⁴

Genuineness or Excellence

Genuineness and Excellence had long been used as visionary terms in the language of Rhodes. Excellence meant striving for academic distinction that is present at all educational institutions to some degree. Genuineness was a reference to fidelity to the religious roots that were still present in some forms, but not necessarily vibrant. It seemed that as has often proven to be the case in higher education these two goals were not mutually exclusive, but were at odds with one another.²⁵

In the midst of the late 1960's, genuineness began to wane as chapel became no longer mandatory. As late as 1969 four courses in Bible or Theology were still required to graduate. The following year, however, that ceased to be a requirement. The closest semblance of that requirement was that "religion" was an option to fulfill a humanities requirement. The change in curriculum was closely aligned with other liberal arts institutions at that time. The pursuit of excellence often results in an alignment with peer institutions with little regard for faith-based distinctions. However, by the end of the 1970's the financial benefits that came from being in compliance with the guidelines for eligibility for the Bellingrath-Morse Trust resulted in a reversal of religion's role in the curriculum. The substantial financial benefit of this trust required the institution to

²⁴ Ibid, 37.

²⁵ Ibid, 37.

require a two-year “sound and comprehensible course in the Holy Bible.” Christian education was restored to an extent.²⁶

As early as the 1970’s the stated purpose of the university was “to educate students to lead lives of genuineness and excellence.”²⁷ However, as Stephen Haynes points out in *Religion at Rhodes*, balancing genuineness with excellence can be difficult. Staying in the cultural mainstream did not always mean fighting for Christianity against atheism and materialism. As the cultural mainstream changed so did Rhodes.

As late as 1985, Rhodes College stated ten characteristics of a Christian college. A few explicitly Christian characteristics included “opportunities for Christian worship” and “courses in Bible and religion.” More equivocal criteria, on the other hand, included “Demonstration of Social Concern” and “displaying Concern for Students.” The latter characteristics conveniently overlap with the cultural midstream. According to Ringenberger a major mark of secularization is the movement from *explicit* statements about the Christian nature of the institution become more *equivocal*. In other words, institutional distinctives often begin to describe Christian goals in *sociological* terms rather than *theological*, which is especially true of Rhodes.²⁸ Perhaps the most meaningful indicator of the vibrancy of religion at a given campus is the role religion plays in the lives of students. From its earliest days Rhodes had a thriving religious life. In 1931 the student newspaper reported that a “survey of the graduates of Southwestern has shown that the chapel service is considered to be a positive influence in the religious

²⁶. Haynes, *Religion and Rhodes*, 37.

²⁷. Author Unkown, “Background on the Development of: Rhodes Mission Statement, Rhodes Purpose Statement, Rhodes Commitment Statement” Undated.

²⁸. William Ringenberger, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1984) 120-121.

life of the students of the college.” The student author goes on to praise the study claiming, “It is an inspiring thing to gather the whole school together in the morning to start the day off with a word of prayer.” The evangelical influence present at Rhodes in 1931 is evident when the author asserts:

When a prayer is read from a slip of paper the appeal is lost. Prayers were not meant to be recited like poetry or to be read like philosophic papers- they were meant to be heart to heart talks with the Creator. We feel sure that a great majority of students would rather hear a chapel leader stumble through an extemporaneous prayer than to hear the smooth flow of English from the lips of a man written or memorized his message. It is not the prayer itself but the emotion behind the prayer that makes it.²⁹

Rhodes student body had had an evangelical bent. The emphasis on heart-felt emotion identifies that a portion of the student body held a faith that was evangelical in nature.

Rhodes maintained regular opportunities for worship through the 1980s although they were no longer mandatory like they were thirty years prior. By 1980 Rhodes had hired Robert Norfleet to serve as a part time chaplain to coordinate religious activities. When interviewed in April 1980 by the periodical *Southwestern Today*, he maintained that student participation in religious activities was at an all-time high since the 1960's, that on a given Sunday about 150-200 students could be found attending the Presbyterian church across the street from campus and that about 30 percent of student body considered themselves Presbyterian. However, the mere fact that *Southwestern Today* found it necessary to interview Chaplain Norfleet for an article entitled “Church Influence Still Strong,” implies that there was a perception among Rhodes’ friends and alumni that the religious environment of Rhodes was less than robust.³⁰

²⁹. Author Unknown, “Prayer in Chapel,” *Sou'wester*, (Memphis, Tennessee), April 2, 1931, 2.

³⁰. Author Unknown, “Church Influence Still Strong,” *Southwestern Today*, (Memphis Tennessee,) April 1980.

Religion continued to play a role at Rhodes as the college entered the 21st century. In 1999 a student voiced his concern in an issue of the *Sou'wester* that the required “Life: Then and Now” course was an impediment to student’s spiritual lives. This particular class requires students to weigh questions of meaning and purpose in light of Western religion and history. The course was the first in a sequence of four religion courses that were required at the time for all Rhodes students, all of which use a great deal of higher criticism. The concerned student claimed:

The introductory ‘Life’ course can lead to a stronger faith in certain instances.... However, these testing winds can also winnow away at weak, or growing, faith by failing to replace it with anything that improves the value system of the individual. With the introductory Life courses, it doesn’t feel okay to disagree; faith and intellectualism are not allowed to coexist in the truest sense.³¹

Dr. Steve Haynes, the Director of the Life program, maintains that such views do not align with the Rhodes’s religious educational tradition, which has never been intended that its Bible classes serve as a “Sunday school away from home.” Haynes goes on to recount that in the 1920’s Rhodes offered a “History of Religion” course, a “Psychology of Religion” and “Christianity and Social Problems” course in the 1930’s and a “Comparative Religion” class in the 40’s. Thus Rhodes has had a long tradition of exposing to students religious education but not in a way that is necessarily aimed toward or away from enhancing a student’s spiritual growth.³² When a professor was asked to comment on the “Life” class as recently as 2008 she claimed that “Nobody in our department is trying to improve or not improve a student’s spiritual life. It may be years after you graduate that some of these things start coming back to you and you...see the

³¹. Author Unknown, “Life Courses, Faith, And The Academy,” *Sou'wester*, November 11, 1998, 3.

³². Haynes, “Religion at Rhodes,” 38.

truth of them. Then the light dawns.” You’re being pushed to think for yourself. What do you value? What do you think is meaningful in the world?”³³

In a section of the 2002-2003 Academic Catalogue entitled “educational ideals” Rhodes clearly states that it is a “church-related” college.³⁴ However, Rhodes goes on to explain that its Christian commitment and Church relationship are “more than assent to a set of vague values or sentimental emotions.” Instead, Rhodes asserts that a proper view of “existence and reality” is “based upon faith in God as creator, sustainer, and redeemer of life.” The college catalogue state further that Rhode’s recognizes “that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and that truth is God’s self-revelation” and that “they are dedicated to the spiritual growth of students, a special witness to the Christian faith, and a community that nurtures lives of faith and service.”³⁵ While the “educational ideals” subsection of the Rhodes College Academic Catalogue do not explicitly mention the person of Jesus Christ, this is still a strong indicator that as late by 2003 Rhodes was attempting to recapture its faith-based identity. This initiative fit Ringenberger’s primary criteria for a Christian college that an institution’s personnel must “believe that the central act of history is the supreme revelation of God to humanity through Jesus Christ.”³⁶

This resurgence of Christian vision in Rhodes’s official publications coincided with an initiative led by Stephen Haynes in 1995 to develop The Rhodes Consultation on

³³. “Life Courses, Faith, And The Academy, 3.

³⁴. The term “church related college” is frequently used to describe an institution’s organizational relationship to a church, but does not necessarily indicate anything about the role that religion plays in the life of the campus, academic or otherwise.

³⁵. Rhodes College Catalogue, 2001-2002, 9 .

³⁶. Ringenberger, 27.

The Future of the Church Related College. The Consultation sought to bring faculty from across the nation together to discuss issues of faith and the potential benefits of a Christian presence in higher education. The Consultation appeared to be aimed at colleges and universities that had a residual relationship with the Christian church, but had since left much of their distinctiveness by the way side. The general question posed at conferences held by The Consultation was “how can faculty reengage with their Christian faith in their respective scholarship at Church related colleges?” At The Consultation’s peak of success in 2003, the initiative boasted 90 different participants at 90 different institutions.

When interviewed about the reason for the increase in the creation of the Consultation and other initiatives like it across the United States during the 1990’s Haynes replied:

Postmodernism has pretty successfully discredited the myth of objectivity that was crucial to the self-perception of academics for so long. In the ‘60’s and ‘70s, the price of legitimacy in the academy was often to downplay religious identity and to embrace value-free inquiry. But with the arrival of postmodernism in the academy and advocacy in the classroom, teachers are freer to ask, “why not talk about faith issues?”³⁷

In 2004, however, the Consultation began to decline and the “educational ideals” section was omitted from the 2003-2004 Academic Catalogue all together and the only remaining statement of strong Christian commitment was relegated to the description on the Rhodes Department of Biblical Studies which read “The college has a covenant relationship with the Synod of Living Waters (Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Kentucky). Rhodes, as a church-related college whose primary mission is to educate,

³⁷ Stephen Haynes, Interview by Tracy Schier, *Stephen Haynes on Church-Related Higher Education*, February 21, 2002.

guarantees freedom of inquiry for faculty and students. The College, without pressing for acceptance, maintains a climate in which the Christian faith is nurtured.”³⁸ However, in 2006 the department of biblical studies was reduced to a sub department under the Religious Studies Department. When the catalogue was adjusted to reflect this change no strong statement of Christian commitment remained in the catalogue. A commitment was no longer made to nurture the “spiritual growth of students” as evidenced by the omission of this statement from the catalogue and by Hayne’s testimony that “nobody in our department is trying to improve or not improve a student’s spiritual life.”³⁹

As of 2011 the last vestige of Church relatedness aside from the Covenant with the Presbyterian Synod was a ministerial grant that was offered to the children of PCUSA ministers and a brief faith statement under the topic of spiritual life at Rhodes.⁴⁰ Regardless of the Institution’s motivations it is clear that Rhodes Christian identity has been fitfully retreating into the background. As a result Rhodes has become an elite, educationally excellent institution that their gothic architecture and position within the top fifty liberal arts colleges as ranked by the U.S. News and World Report would suggest.

Currently, at the foreground of Rhodes vision is its aspiration “to graduate students with a life-long passion for learning, a compassion for others, and the ability to translate academic study and personal concern into effective leadership and action in their communities and the world.” Rhodes reaches for these goals using four strategic imperatives which are: student access, learning, engagement and inspiration. All of which

³⁸ Author Unknown, 2003-2004 Rhodes Academic Catalogue.

³⁹ Life Courses, Faith, And The Academy,” 3. Rhodes Catalogue, 2001-2002

⁴⁰. Author Unknown, Rhodes College Catalogue, 2011-2012, 20-21 .

are excellent, humanistic goals that are equivocal to Christianity and place them within the cultural “mainstream” that the Rhodes leadership have desired since their fateful allegiance to intellectual relevance in 1931. The promise lies on a well-worn path where, striving for excellence does not always appear to be compatible with the Christian vision. An institution’s ability to be both academically excellent and spiritually vibrant depends on the institutions ability to relate faith and scholarship in a way that acknowledges the holistic nature of truth.

At its best, Rhodes Christian identity can be characterized by Robert Benne as an “Intentionally Pluralist” institution. This term describes a college with Christian heritage preserved as a mere shadow in the form of a liberal arts curriculum. Rhodes declares that they “encourage diversity of thought and respect for religious differences, while remaining deeply rooted in the biblical witness and Christian commitment to service.”⁴¹ Their self- description matches Benne’s criteria for an intentionally pluralist institution that assures the Christian tradition a voice within an ongoing conversation.⁴²

The notion of Christian commitment to service was reiterated in 2008 when the Rhodes College chaplain testified that the primary way Rhodes lives out its religious identity was through community service. This purely sociological rather than theological expression of Christianity is a feeble religious display. According to Ringenberger’s taxonomy, Rhodes is a “Generally Religious” institution, which he defines as an institution that “may provide opportunities for students to develop a worldview, while a secular institution usually does not. The forum where ultimate questions are being asked

⁴¹. Author Unknown, Rhodes College Catalogue, 2011-2012, 38.

⁴². Benne, 49.

is usually friendly to all faiths and beliefs. However, the curriculum if it exists at all is usually not as strong as Christian institutions.”⁴³

Rhodes does, however, expose its students to Christianity through ‘The Life: Then and Now’ course exposes students to the Bible using modern criticism and strives to allow students to choose for themselves what they will do. Rhodes embraces all faiths as evidenced by the inclusion of Muslim Student Association, the Catholic Student Association, the Community of Rhodes Episcopalians, and the Rhodes Atheist Fellowship. Currently, it is not a place where one goes to become grounded in the Christian intellectual tradition as much as it is a forum that exposes students to numerous traditions and are asked to reflect and choose for themselves.

⁴³ Ringenberger, 139.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The story of the struggles to successfully integrate faith and knowledge at SMU, Baylor, and Rhodes illustrates the challenge Christian leaders faced when trying to articulate a compelling vision that would acknowledge the holistic nature of knowledge. At SMU John Rice attempted to navigate the fact/value split and asserted that Christians did not need to fear science and the scientific study of religion because such study could not negate spiritual human experience. J. Frank Norris seemed to argue that science was irrelevant and should be ignored at least when it contradicted scripture. Unfortunately for the Christian academy both Rice's and Norris's efforts to defend the faith relied on a two tiered understanding of truth. Such a dichotomy would only render the Christian college and ultimately faith itself irrelevant.

Baylor's bout with evolution tested the university's ability to reconcile science and scripture, fact and value. The administration allowed science to critique scripture just enough to offer the empirical method the respect it demanded from any modern university, while maintaining an orthodox view of scripture. This balance meant adhering to theistic evolution.¹ Consequently, truth remained fragmented, the institution remained pious, and faith and learning remained separate. In sum, little changed at the university until Baylor 2012, the strategic plan to engage faith in the classroom and in academic scholarship, was unveiled in 1992.

¹ Theistic evolution may have many merits. This is not judged here. However, hedging faith and science so that truth can remain fragmented is ill advised.

It is unclear whether or not Rhodes College's president, Charles Diehl, was allowing the overall spirit of scripture to critique specific areas of the Old Testament or if he was allowing science to shape his understanding of the Bible. His opponents seemed to think the latter was the case. Regardless, his fundamentalist detractors still hoped that empirical knowledge would affirm scripture. Their dream was never realized in the academy and Rhodes' Christian identity was ushered to the outskirts of the institution in small measures. The postmodern movement would inspire some at Rhodes to rekindle their faith-based identity, to date that effort has been unsuccessful.

Overall, the failure to develop a coherent *vision* and *ethos* in many Christian institutions such as these led to the undoing of Christian higher education on a massive scale. As Marsden illustrates so well in his work, *The Soul of the American University*, Protestant institutions were so thoroughly entrenched in the dominant narrative that they had little sense of *vision* for their institutions. There seemed to be no need to articulate a strong Christian vision since there was no established counter narrative to distinguish one's vision against. Consequently, institutions like SMU, Baylor, and Rhodes did not have the vibrant Christian theological paradigm necessary to maintain faith.

In the aftermath of the demise of Protestant Christian education in the mainstream academy, Christian higher education was banished from the mainstream. In classic fundamentalist fashion, Christian academics took refuge in small evangelical colleges across the United States. These evangelical colleges emphasized personal piety and foreign evangelicalism, but initially the professors made few efforts to relate faith to knowledge. Instead, both faith and knowledge were kept in their own lock box where

one rarely spoke to the other.² As this study illustrates, Christianity ultimately ceased to occupy a central point in SMU and Rhodes' respective identities.

In an effort to relate faith to knowledge in hope of preserving their respective faith traditions and their relevance as institutions of higher learning Rhodes and SMU took the more liberal fork in the road. SMU adopted the standard university model and Rhodes took on the prestigious liberal arts college form. This approach earned them relevance, but failed to preserve their faith-based tradition. Other groups tried the fundamentalist option, but that meant receding into the shadows of the academic world.³ Baylor's held closely to its pietist roots and it helped sustain the university until postmodernism offered a new path.

Affection: How Pious Action Preserves Religious Identity

How did piety preserve Baylor's Christian identity? James K.A. Smith has aided Christian education by raising and answering the piety question previously posed. In his work, *Desiring the Kingdom*, he shows the importance of the affective in education.⁴ He argues that we are not thinking beings as much as we are loving beings. While we do act out of what we believe, the degree to which agency is informed by our loves is grossly underestimated by the western mind. Our being is pre-cognitive. Smith spells out the consequences of his thesis for higher education this way:

² Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Mission of the Christian College at the End of the Twentieth Century," *Educating for Shalom* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Press, 2004) 28-29. Wolterstorff admits that this picture seems dramatic and that there were a few lonely faculty who opposed a fundamentalist pattern that sheltered students from ideas that were deemed hostile to faith, but he asserts that this was the case.

³ Ibid, 28-29.

⁴ Smith actually raises the stakes appropriately by referring to this process as *formation* rather than *learning* or *education*. He calls it a "formative rather than an informative project."

Distinctly Christian education would not be primarily a matter of dropping the right kinds of ideas into eager and willing mind receptacles; rather it would become a matter of thinking about how a Christian education shapes us, forms us, molds us to be certain kinds of people whose hearts and passions and desires are aimed at the kingdom of God. And that will require sustained attention to the practices that effect such transformation.⁵

Smith's core claim is that all human practices, whether they occupy our traditional, problematic categories of "secular" or "sacred," are actually "liturgies." In the words of David Foster Wallace, "There is no such thing as not worshipping."⁶ And it is these worship practices that "shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world." Smith goes on to emphasize the importance of practices; he calls liturgies, and their power to form human persons.⁷

In this way, Smith overcomes a deep overreliance on rationalism, thus refocusing Christian education's vision as one that affirms knowing as deeply pre-cognitive and thus allowing Christian educators to unite faith and knowledge. In effect, Smith recovers the value of pietism for Christian education by allowing us to see that the educational consequences of ethos are so powerful that they must be called formational rather than merely educational. Furthermore, Smith fuses vision and ethos in a way that explains the interplay between and strengthens both.

Burtchaell reminds us that in a pre-Reformational world learning itself was considered an act of piety.⁸ Smith not only recovers learning as an action that takes us by

⁵. Smith, 18-19.

⁶. David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*, (New York, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 99.

⁷. Smith, 25.

⁸. Burtchaell, 842.

the heart, but opens us to the reality that all human action orders and reorders our orientation to the world. Finally, Smith's work helps us understand how ethos or a set of Christian practices can sustain a Christian identity as it did in the case of Baylor University, but failed to do at Rhodes and SMU. On the other hand, his discussion of Christian practices calls for Christian colleges to critically evaluate their ethos to determine its value as a formational force. In a surprising turn of events from the cognitive revolution chronicled at the beginning of this work, Smith compellingly places reason as subordinate to the affections, effectively placing Christian vision and ethos at the center of a truly powerful and vibrant learning experience that deserves the name formation rather than education. Thus is the transformative power of Christian education when vision and ethos unite.

The Limits of Piety

Pietism, in many circles, however, is not considered a compelling spiritual tradition upon which to build a university. Historian, James Tunestead Burtchaell defines the Pietist movement as one that "propounded the primacy of spirit over letter, commitment over institution, affect over intellect, laity over clergy, [and] invisible church over visible."⁹ Baylor's pious emphasis on invisible church over visible and commitment over institution has caused one observer to compare Baylor to Notre Dame. In contrast to Notre Dame Baylor has relatively few religious objects, images and chapels on its campus. Perhaps Baylor's emphasis on laity over clergy is a clue as to why Baylor's signature statue depicts its lay founder and name sake in full judicial garb, while Father

⁹ Burtchaell, 839.

Sorin graces Notre Dame's entrance in full religious regalia.¹⁰ Finally, the Pietist tendency to champion affect over intellect is perhaps the reason Baylor preserved, but compartmentalized faith identity.

Intellectual Response to Piety

In response to pietists penchant for affect over intellect and out of a desire for intellect rigor, Christian educators eventually began to construct a vision of Christian higher education that sought to move beyond piety and displayed some potential for emerging from the fringes and making an impact on the mainstream. Christian educators called this the “integration of faith and learning.” The harbingers of such a movement felt the need to issue harsh wake up calls. Or at least historian Mark Noll did when he claimed in his important work, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994), that “the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.”¹¹ Arthur Holmes offered one of the earliest visions for a relevant vision of Christian education when he published *The Idea of a Christian College* in 1975. Holmes argued that a college is religiously distinctive when it refuses to compartmentalize religion. Instead, Christian perspectives can generate a worldview large enough to give meaning to all of the disciplines. Finally, Christian scholars were seeking to make their faith relevant to knowledge.¹²

¹⁰ David Solomon, “Resisting Secularization: What Baylor and Notre Dame can Learn from Each Other,” *New Oxford Review*, 1995, 5-6.

¹¹ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Press, 1995), 3.

¹² Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of A Christian College*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Press, 1987), 9-10.

These late 20th century efforts to develop a vibrant vision for Christian education took extremely cognitive forms, however. In their work entitled *the Future of Christian Higher Education* (1999), David S. Dockery and David P. Gushee argued that Christian colleges are “called to be great Commandment schools. The first commandment requires that we love God with our minds.”¹³ The cognitive vision of education became even more evident as Dockery and Gushee held up the following T.S. Eliot declaration as the ideal: “the purpose of a Christian education would not be merely to make men and women pious Christians: a system which aimed too rigidly at the end alone would become only an obscurantist. A Christian education must primarily teach people to think in Christian categories.” Dockery goes on to proclaim that “learning to think Christianly impacts our homes, our businesses, our health agencies, our schools, our social structures, our recreation and, yes, our churches too. To love God with our minds means that we think differently about the way we live and love, the way we worship and serve, the way we work and earn our livelihood, and the way we learn and teach.”¹⁴ Dockery and Gushee’s points are undoubtedly chosen because they correct the late 20th century tendency among faith-based institutions to pursue a Christian education where *ethos* was held tightly while *vision* was left by the wayside.

¹³ David S. Dockery and David P. Gushee, *The Future of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 9.

¹⁴ Ibid, 10.

Recovering Academic Faithfulness and the Postmodern Moment

In 2002 the authors of *Baylor 2012*, were undoubtedly inspired by intellectuals like Noll and Holmes when they penned the university's ambitious ten year strategic plan. With a dash of drama they wrote:

It is a legacy of modern thought to believe that the pathway divides between uncompromised pursuit of intellectual excellence and intense faithfulness to the Christian tradition. Many universities and colleges, founded in the 18th and 19th centuries by devout men and women for the service of the church and the world in the name of Christ, later turned down the secular fork of the imaginary path. Accepting the same premise in a divided way, many Christian colleges have chosen insularity and self-protective intellectual mediocrity as the way to preserve their Christian vitality. But the idea that faith and learning are mutually exclusive has a weaker grip today than it had during most of the last century and Baylor believes that that fork in the path is indeed a figment of the modern imagination.¹⁵

What would allow an institution to make such a bold declaration? Given the thorough establishment of non-belief within the mid-twentieth century academic milieu what allowed an institution to declare that the division between faith and vision was weakening and announce its intent to recover a bold vision for academic faithfulness and a desire to be a nationally recognized university?

By 1997, George Marsden contended that “mainstream American higher education should be more open to explicit discussion of the relationship between faith and learning.”¹⁶ Marsden argued further that even though there may be little agreement among scholars on issues of faith, all should participate in a discussion that gives each party a seat at the table. There are two major objections to the presence of the faith-based

¹⁵ Author Unknown, “Baylor 2012 Imperatives”. *Baylor University*, Accessed November 9, 2011, <http://www.baylor.edu/about/vision/index.php?id=62631>

¹⁶ George Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession*. (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

perspective within the public academic sphere. The modern presupposition contends that there is a significant difference between supernatural and non-supernatural ideas. The latter is allowed, but the former is not. The post-modern objection maintains that since most faith-based scholarship in the West is Christian and because the Christianity has been the most privileged of all narratives and the most oppressive then it does not deserve to have a voice in the academic conversation.¹⁷

However, 20th century human experience has taught us that the unilateral application of enlightenment ideals is not a utopian formula. Indeed, we can know beyond those things that can be empirically verified and many academics agree that “the idea of scientific objectivity as an obtainable standard for the larger questions in life is passé.” This negates the modernist opposition to Christian scholarship, but what about the postmodern? Justification for such scholarship lies within this movement itself. For the majority of the twentieth century religion was almost never present in spite of the compelling nature of religious presuppositions. By the 1990’s, however, unique perspectives brought to bear on the academic world by gender, race, class or any other subset of humanity with its own unique meta-narrative were receiving a warm welcome in the academy. If the postmodern movement is really serious about taking the call to diversity and multiculturalism seriously then even Christianity’s most ardent detractors must admit that censoring the Christian narrative is a violation of their own mantra. Especially given that many of the voices within Christianity have accepted the rules of civil discourse that are so rightfully prized by postmodern sentiments.¹⁸

¹⁷. Ibid, 3-4.

¹⁸. Ibid, 26, 31-36.

Thus the door was opening for Christian colleges and universities to enter the mainstream as Marsden was sending such sentiments into the academic world in 1997. Through his writing he was both recognizing the trends as they were and was also perpetuating an openness to Christian scholarship. The result of such trends would help Baylor traverse this newly open space. That is exactly what the university did in 2002 when it announced that the new vision for the future, Baylor 2012, divulged Baylor's intent to be a "top tier Christian research university."

The same trend inspired Stephen Haynes to attempt to revitalize Christian identity at Rhodes and similar "church-related" colleges through the Rhodes Consultation, but he was unsuccessful. Revitalizing Christian identity is undoubtedly more difficult when piety has not propped up the ethos of an institution and preserved a critical mass the Christian identity.

Like the lifespan of any other institution some periods in history have been more favorable than others for Christian higher education. Modernity, with its strict enforcement of public and private truth, facilitated the demise of countless faith-based institutions like SMU and Rhodes. Postmodernity, with its recognition that all viewpoints are views from a point, is far more hospitable to those faith-based colleges and universities who had the ethos to weather modernity's storm.

What will the future hold? No one can know, but Stephen Haynes offers at least one particular caution for Baylor University or any other college that declares that its intention is to be a "top tier Christian research university" or some other mixture of Christian and "excellent." In a 2002 interview, immediately following his testimony that

Postmodernity had opened the door for faith-based higher education, Haynes was asked

“Do you see any obstacles to the current momentum?” He replied:

I would say that there is always the pursuit of notoriety. There is such a dedication to getting on ‘lists’ – best schools, top ten or twenty this or that, most selective, and so on – that it can become all consuming. Not only is the pursuit of being regarded as excellent not the same as being excellent, but schools often end up looking very much alike. The pursuit of recognition can easily become an obstacle to genuine church-relatedness.¹⁹

¹⁹ Haynes, Interview by Tracy Schier, *Stephen Haynes on Church-Related Higher Education* , February 21, 2002.

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