

**The Impact of Fundamentalist Theology  
on the 2000 Revision of the *Baptist Faith  
and Message***

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**Presented by**

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## Dedication:

This lecture is dedicated to those faithful Baptists upon whose shoulders I stand. Their zeal to protect the individual's freedom to stand directly before God, without the interference of creeds, authorities, or other man-made instruments. I would like to thank the heroes of my heritage of faith who instilled in me the courage to live up to my convictions, while allowing others the freedom to disagree and defend their own decisions and opinions.

Our freedom to stand before God is a privilege and a great responsibility. The ancients sought earnestly to gain the ear of their gods, while *Yahweh* sought out a people who would accept the call and demands of faith. It was astounding to the ancient world that the Creator might truly be interested in mere humanity. It was also understood to be a great responsibility to stand before the Almighty. In Christ Jesus, we have been given this privileged charge.

In Christ Jesus, God created flesh to live among us and offer His own life in sacrifice to God, that He might plead our case before Himself. We have been granted access to the throne of heaven! While the privilege is immense, the responsibility is just as grand. It was faithful Baptists who taught me what it means to stand before God with no mediator to come between. It was Baptist heroes who taught me to have the courage of my theological convictions and stand upon them in the face of opposition and conflict. It was my Baptist forbearers who taught me to respect other persons with their differing convictions, even protecting their right to hold views conflicting with my own.

Such a stance threatens a Fundamentalist mindset. This is the history and heritage of the faith I was entrusted. It is not always a popular stance. It is not always an easy course to pursue, but faith is not about taking the easy road. Faith is accepting the call to follow Jesus. Jesus' steps led to a cross, bearing the brunt of the Fundamentalist mindset among some of the Pharisees of First Century Judaism. It was my Baptist heritage which taught me the words and meaning of the old hymn, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? Oh, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me."

To those Baptists who held aloft their cross, preaching their understanding of the Gospel of Christ Jesus in the face of opposition, to those Baptists who taught me what it means to have the courage of one's convictions, to those Baptists who showed me how to respect the right of another to disagree, to those Baptists who accepted living with uncertainties while following Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Savior, I dedicate this lecture. It is from them that I am learning what it means to hold fast to my convictions, be open to new ideas, and allow others the right to disagree. I stand in their debt, and hopefully in the same course of faith in Christ Jesus.

*In His service,  
Christopher B. Harbin  
Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil – August 2004*

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# ***The Impact of Fundamentalist Theology on the 2000 Revision of the Baptist Faith and Message***

## ***Introductory Note:***

It is indeed a great honor for me to be here with you. It was an honor to have served as a member of the faculty of the Seminário Teológico Batista do Rio Grande do Sul from 1997 through 2002. Renewing fellowship with the seminary community and participating in your lives once again through this inaugural lecture is for me an unexpected blessing and privilege from our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Pr. Eliseu contacted me about speaking, I did not realize that we were discussing the inaugural lecture. When he suggested tonight's theme, I was a little uncertain as to whether I could set aside my personal experience of being fired by the International Mission Board over these very topics in order to deal appropriately with the theme. Only you will be able to judge how well I have accomplished that, but it is to that end that I have prepared the following presentation. I trust it will be of benefit to you as faculty, student body, administration, and community at large.

Thank you again for this honor you have afforded me. May all we do here tonight, and elsewhere as well, bring honor to Jesus Christ, the only Lord worthy of our allegiance and service.

## ***Theological Characteristics of Baptist Fundamentalism***

To deal appropriately with the topic, we must address some of the basic characteristics of Fundamentalism among Baptists<sup>1</sup> and its related theology. We cannot go into much detail for lack of time, but we will touch on some of the major themes that underlie the positions of fundamentalism. Understanding the roles of these major themes will give direction to a better understanding of how fundamentalism looks and relates to specific issues.

We begin with a reminder that fundamentalism is not the same as conservative theology. It is a philosophical mindset, rather than a theological position or set of positions. There are those who would hold to the same basic positions as fundamentalists, but do not exhibit those factors that would make them fundamentalists. Fundamentalism places certain tenets ahead of faith in Christ. Alleging to protect the Bible, they have defended a theory about the Bible. Inerrancy theory issues have ruled over the Bible they have pledged to protect and uphold. They have arrived at a point of bibliolatry, in which it is more important what one says about the Bible than what the Bible actually says. By contrast, David Hull's words present an appropriate response: "We can teach the wonderful,

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<sup>1</sup> There are other faces of fundamentalism among Baptists, but this lecture will limit itself to the larger strand of fundamentalism within the Southern Baptist Convention in the USA.

authoritative truth of the Bible, but never elevate it above the Lordship of Christ as our supreme authority.”<sup>2</sup>

Fundamentalism is NOT a theology. It is a philosophy. We will focus on a social science definition that points us in a general direction. Fundamentalism is, then:

*the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, ierrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity.*<sup>3</sup>

We will deal with these themes of fundamentalism, though our focus will be on their implications in the realm of theology and their practical application. As Boschen notes in his paper, this definition depends upon linking all of these points: irrefutable truth claims, concept of foundational opposition, historical framework for implementation, and privileged status for adherents. These points can be found in varying degrees among a more general population. In Fundamentalism, they are a tightly packaged deal.

Fundamentalism among Southern Baptists has entered from its margins, mainly by those who were not part of the convention. Southern Baptists were somewhat influenced by the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy within the Northern Baptist Convention from about 1900-1950, which brought about the division of that convention. From within Southern Baptist ranks, there are roots of fundamentalism at least as far back as the early 1900's with J. Frank Norris at First Baptist Church of Fort Worth.<sup>4</sup> Some Fundamentalists entered Southern Baptist ranks as they began to see a possibility for them to use the structure of the SBC to advance their cause. Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson led a group to take control of the Southern Baptist Convention under the banner of Biblical inerrancy.<sup>5</sup> They fired seminary professors they deemed dangerous, calling into question the salvation of anyone who would not ascribe to a specific view of inerrancy. More recently, Jerry Falwell's comments at the [celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the takeover](#) of the SBC are telling. "I was not a Southern Baptist when you guys hijacked it, but I joined soon after."<sup>6</sup>

## **Stress on Faith as Believing Truths (Propositional Faith):**

### ***Defining Points:***

Perhaps one of the clearest defining points of fundamentalism is its stress upon the body of beliefs to which one should subscribe. We will call this emphasis propositional faith, as it stresses the set of belief statements related to faith. Historically, this was the aim of the fundamentalist movement—a

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<sup>2</sup> Hull.

<sup>3</sup> Altenmeyer, Bob and Bruce Hunsberger, as quoted in Timothy L. Boschen, *Fundamentalism, Authoritarianism, and Radical Evil*. June 2004, paper written in sabbatical study at Oxford University.

<sup>4</sup> Merritt, p. 15-16, 23-25, Gourley, p. 47-50, and McBeth, 135, 165-171, 422-425, .

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see Merritt, 25, 40-42 and Gourley, 51-70.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry Falwell, quoted in DeVane, [http://www.abpnews.com/news/news\\_detail.cfm?NEWS\\_ID=64](http://www.abpnews.com/news/news_detail.cfm?NEWS_ID=64).

“return” to the core set beliefs in popular doctrine and theology. While the label given was that of core beliefs, the specific set of doctrinal issues was not necessarily central so much as it was that those beliefs perceived to be under attack. One will note that the movement focused its energy upon one’s set of accepted beliefs, which is at heart a propositional understanding of faith.

Christian faith obviously includes statements of truth. The Bible’s focus, however, is on one’s relationship to Christ Jesus as Lord. Fundamentalism defends the propositional aspects of faith as defining faith’s very nature. Each individual must subscribe to a specific set of doctrinal statements. While fundamentalists would not deny relationship to Christ, their definitions of faith elevate “correct” belief as co-equal to personal faith in Christ.

A defining phrase for fundamentalism would be “these things we believe.” It tends to focus on truths about God, Jesus Christ, the gospel, the inerrancy of the Bible, and the leadership’s inerrant discourse about the Bible<sup>7</sup>. It stresses believing things—concepts—whereas the Baptist emphasis stressed believing (trusting) Christ Jesus. No longer is stress given to relating and submitting to God in Christ—the relational aspects of faith—in its place, one accepts doctrinal opinions. In Cothen’s words, “The emphasis on a vital personal relationship to Christ has shifted to intellectual assent to a body of theological and social propositions and acceptable actions.”<sup>8</sup>

In response to this harsh definition of inerrant truth claims, William S. Coffin, a Northern Baptist, sums up the basic problem: “Why am I so hard on fundamentalist preachers? Because it is right to be stabbed by doubt ... it is wrong to be clearer than clarity warrants, to write off intellectual and moral ambiguities simply because you haven’t the security to live with uncertainty.”<sup>9</sup>

Al Mohler, current president of Southern Seminary, clarified the fundamentalist insecurity with uncertainty and the free exchange of ideas by classifying the historic Baptist distinctive of soul freedom as having become an “autonomous individualism,” which now “infects” the convention.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Implications:***

The tendency in this propositional concept of faith is to view doctrine and doctrinal formulation as naturally static. This fact arises out of a form of Calvinism stressing faith as believing the correct statements, rather than as trusting God in surrender and commitment. This does not rule out relational aspects of faith, but places them in submission to the doctrinal formulae. Faith tends to be reduced to truths for cognitive acceptance, tending toward legalism. Believing the correct things becomes the defining norm for salvation, cooperation, and unity.

Many Southern Baptist fundamentalists have quoted Amos 3:3 as establishing a necessary foundation for Christian unity: “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (KJV) Their misinterpretation of this text has been used to defend the perspective that there must be doctrinal agreement behind any

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<sup>7</sup> Boschen, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Cothen, 3. Grady Cothen was pastor of FBC Birmingham, AL, President of Oklahoma Baptist University, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and the Sunday School Board, SBC.

<sup>9</sup> William Sloane Coffin, *Credo*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. Quoted in *Baptists Today*, August 2004, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Mohler in Hull, quoting from Ellsworth.

unity and cooperation. Amos, however, spoke of agreement to travel together or meeting as being the necessary beginning of a journey.

Fundamentalism is always distrustful of other Christians, due to requiring doctrinal agreement. The pattern has been set toward detailing one's doctrinal positions as the basis for ministry cooperation. This is a natural outcome of defending a faith that is essentially propositional. If one's beliefs are the essential ingredient for one's faith system, it becomes necessary to accept only those who hold those same beliefs. Propositional faith tends toward an all-or-nothing approach to agreement—it is creedal and stresses conformity.

Fundamentalism generally sets out its beliefs in an authoritative document that must become the criterion of faith, teaching, and preaching. This is not a statement of beliefs, but a creed. Acceptance of the creed is necessary for fellowship and ministry. While much is made of the inerrancy of the Bible, it is the acceptance of the fundamentalist's inerrant discourse that truly matters.

The import of Draper's words appears lost in fundamentalist circles:

*"The power of Christian fellowship still astounds the world. Black and white, red and yellow, young and old, rich and poor, liberal and conservative, men and women, radical and conventional. All kinds of people and backgrounds . . . together . . . all together in harmony with Christ! People, who disagree without being disagreeable, in Christ together! Beautiful! The world stands amazed, and our evangelism and service for Christ is propelled by our fellowship."<sup>11</sup>*

Rather than working for the kind of unity promoted by Draper, Fundamentalism works toward the fragmentation of the body. While this is not its intentional aim, it is the natural result of its stress on propositional faith. It classes people as those who accept its propositional faith claims and those who do not. This creates an "us against them" mentality, which divides rather than unites the body of Christ. Since its faith claims are understood as the definitive claims of Christian truth, the tendency is to categorize those who do not hold with them as not being Christians.<sup>12</sup> Such has been the attitude of fundamentalist leaders such as W. A. Criswell, Paul Pressler, Morris Chapman, and Paige Patterson, who would desire definitions of belief to determine Baptist identity.<sup>13</sup>

Since this issue of defined statements of truth is so important to Fundamentalism, it generates a drive for control over the beliefs of others. This has generated unprecedented oversight among trustee boards in convention life, at times interfering with the operation of a denominational agency to ensure conformity to a predefined set of beliefs.<sup>14</sup> Prior to the takeover, missionary appointees wrote out their doctrinal beliefs. As a result of the takeover, they must subscribe to the 2000 revision of the Baptist Faith and Message to assure conformity.

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<sup>11</sup> Draper, 15-16. Ellipses reflect Draper's original punctuation.

<sup>12</sup> See comments on page 8.

<sup>13</sup> Merritt, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Merritt, 63-65, quoting a letter from Ron Wilson to the chair of Foreign Mission Board trustees in 1991.

## **A *Priori* of Inerrancy Theory (Security in Definite Truth):**

### ***Defining Points:***

Inerrancy is the concept that the Bible is exempt of error. There are many variations of defining the concept, ranging from speaking to the theological intent of a Biblical passage to including all relevant and “extraneous” details in the text that would pertain to science or history. This is a concept that is external to the Bible. It arises out of human logic, not the Bible’s witness to itself. Baptists have always referred to the authority of Scripture as a foundational element of faith. Inerrancy theory says that the Bible is God’s authoritative word *if* it meets certain standards. Prior to the fundamentalist movement, Southern Baptists considered it sufficient to accept the Bible as trustworthy and authoritative. Inerrancy adds a new dimension.

The concept of inerrancy becomes the *a priori* for fundamentalist understanding of the Bible. This is fundamentalism’s foundational point for determining the Bible’s very validity as God’s Word. As such, this concept is non-negotiable. It is perhaps the single most sacred item in fundamentalist faith.

Definitions of inerrancy among Southern Baptist Fundamentalists have focused on the original manuscripts, not the Biblical text as we know it. For many this is the determining factor of whether an individual is liberal or conservative. The labels tended to reflect the whole of one’s theology, but they are limited to one’s stance on this one theory about the Bible. One who would allow for the possibility of any kind of error in an original document is classed as a liberal by this standard,<sup>15</sup> and therefore, a heretic.

In detailing the certainty of truth claims, there is an element in which Fundamentalist assertions are deemed inerrant in an even greater sense than the inspiration of the Biblical text.<sup>16</sup> Definite truth claims require inerrant interpretations and inerrant expositions for validation. The inerrancy of a text is of little import if its interpretation does not carry the same level of authority. In a propositional faith system, this inerrant discourse is absolutely essential.

### ***Implications:***

For fundamentalist theology, any undermining of inerrancy destroys the basis for faith. Since faith is essentially propositional, faith’s statements of and foundations for truth must be inviolable. If concerns over the accuracy of Biblical statements arise, all of one’s faith is brought into question, if not destroyed. Likewise, the leadership promoting a set of beliefs must be beyond criticism, since their interpretations and influence are faith system mechanisms. Because Fundamentalist faith centers on accepting a set of truth statements, it is often an all-or-nothing proposition. Inerrancy becomes the foundational concept upon which fundamentalism depends, the interpretational positions of leaders a close second.

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Pressler in Merritt, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Boschen, p. 36.

While specific inerrancy language did not change much in the Baptist Faith and Message revision, the concept of definite statements of truth shines through. An underlying assumption of inerrancy is that truth has been clearly defined. This is not simply that definite truth exists, but that doctrinal truth has been clearly apprehended. There is little room for a discussion of truth, since it is deemed to be revealed plainly. Here enters the inerrant discourse of fundamentalism. The leadership's pronouncements are deemed above critique. The leadership speaks as inerrantly as the text it purports to follow and uphold.

## **Verbal-Plenary theory of Inspiration (Less human participation):**

### ***Defining Points:***

The definition of inspiration as being bound to a verbal-plenary theory is a consistent theme of fundamentalist theology. It has often served as one of the higher points of defining orthodoxy for the fundamentalist. The theory determines that since God is truthful, all that God has spoken is unqualified truth. Therefore, for the Bible to be inspired by God, it must be exempt from any and every class of error. Since the copies in existence contain errors, the theory is generally applied only to the non-extant original documents.

In fundamentalist theology, this defining theory often becomes the *a priori* of accepting the Bible. It is both the litmus test for defining whether one believes the Bible, as well as the determination of whether the Bible is indeed God's Word.

This theory of inspiration goes back to Enlightenment philosophy, with its emphasis on unbiased writing, especially as concerned with the writing of history. This concept pervaded fundamentalist thought, causing them to use this 1800's ideal standard for historiography as an appropriate model for dealing with the historical passages of Biblical witness. Verbal-plenary theories of inspiration stress the Divine action in the drafting of Biblical text, downplaying any human participatory role. The theories do not generally deal with the oral transmission aspects of Biblical documents, their historical development, or the communal processes involved in textual development, transmission, and preservation.

### ***Implications:***

Since inerrancy as *a priori* depends on the verbal-plenary theory of inspiration, it is also the lens by which the theory is interpreted. This lends toward an appreciation of the Bible as a "flat" text. By "flat," we refer to the whole of the Bible in its individual parts to reflect the same levels of authenticity, inspiration, doctrinal development, and clarity. From this perspective, the concept of a Biblical text's development or gradual doctrinal progression is essentially ruled out.

As a byproduct of the Verbal-Plenary theory of inspiration, the process of revising,<sup>17</sup> transmitting, accepting, and canonizing the Biblical texts is ignored. Luke's comments on researching the facts of

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<sup>17</sup> *i.e.* We know different editions of Revelation that circulated, as well as several variations of Daniel. (AUNE, cxxxvi and GOLDINGAY, xxv, xxx-xxxii).

which he writes<sup>18</sup> are ignored as well as Jeremiah's re-editing the book of his prophecy.<sup>19</sup> While there are at least glosses in the text of Genesis that come from a period long after Moses, the theory does not deal with the transmission of narratives and details up to textual redaction, nor with possible changes in the text after an original scripting of those narratives.<sup>20</sup> Other theories of inspiration can account for these issues, but the Verbal-Plenary theory generally just ignores them.

Another implication of this theory of inspiration is the fact that it tends to treat the whole of the Bible as reflecting the same level of inspiration. All Biblical text is deemed to have been spoken word for word by God, and therefore, all is equally inspired. This perspective ignores the ancient debates around the acceptance of certain books in the canon, a debate which reflects an understanding that different texts that were included carried differing levels of authority. It also ignores the variations in doctrine that appear in different passages. Some texts speak of multiple gods as existing and exerting influence in the world.<sup>21</sup> Other passages proclaim *Yahweh* to be the sole God.<sup>22</sup> Hebrews speaks of God speaking more clearly through Jesus than through the prophets of earlier times<sup>23</sup>—a reflection of varied levels of inspiration and clarity of God's message.

## **Tendency for polarization on issues (drive for “The Christian Response”):**

### ***Defining Points:***

Since fundamentalist theology views faith as the acceptance of a set of beliefs, its focus is on defined truth.<sup>24</sup> That has implications for the character of faith, for theories of inspiration, and Biblical interpretation, including the way that decisions are made in response to moral and ethical issues. In any system that portrays important interpretations in black-and-white terms, the tendency is to offer simple, direct answers to what others may consider complex issues. For fundamentalism, that generally means offering “The Christian Response.” This perspective fits in well with the popular desire for sound-byte theology, as issues are dealt with in simple, if not simplistic terms.

Writing in 1935, Henri Bergson declared that such leadership is not “baffled by contradictions because he denies their existence.”<sup>25</sup> The fundamentalist completely disregards contrary voices, not allowing them a hearing, for the truth is deemed as crystallized. The stance on definitive truth carries over into the manner in which issues of application of theology and belief are carried out. One must simply follow the party line. As Draper writes, “He simply writes [opposing views] off as sinister and heretical.”<sup>26</sup>

For many fundamentalists, the largest issues on the public radar are abortion, homosexuality, women's issues, inerrancy, and the historicity of Biblical narratives. Normally these issues are

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<sup>18</sup> Luke 1:1-4.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremiah 36.

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 14:14 uses the phrase “as far as Dan,” at a point prior to the birth of Dan, generations before the land was settled and divided among the tribes.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 31,35; Exodus 12:12; 15:11; Deut 3:24.

<sup>22</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 19:15-19.

<sup>23</sup> Hebrew 1:1-4.

<sup>24</sup> Cothen, 5, 22, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Henri Bergson in Reynolds.

<sup>26</sup> Draper, 40. ??

settled with a yes or no kind of response. Attempts by others to address the complexity of a topic before giving an answer are viewed as non-Christian responses to settled issues. Declaring homosexuality no more sinful than cheating on one's taxes is viewed as less than "the Christian response."<sup>27</sup>

### ***Implications:***

Fundamentalism tends to polarize people, classifying them into neat categories on the basis of an oversimplification of issues. If there is "one Christian response" to an issue, disagreement is decidedly heretical. In the early years of the takeover in the Southern Baptist Convention, seminary professors were sent surveys to answer "Yes or No" to a series of doctrinal questions. Any surveys not returned were assumed to reflect negative responses. The implications of the trend include the drawing of battle lines by simple litmus tests of orthodoxy and heresy.

For many, politics has become part of the holy ground of the fundamentalist movement. As the issues are deemed as "black and white," a political solution is understood to be a palpable reality. By electing the right candidate, the correct answer can be easily defined and pushed forward in the political arena. Truth is definite. The correct Christian position is clearly defined. All one needs, then is an appropriate platform from which to enforce the appropriate position. Since it is undoubtedly the Christian position, one is simply extending God's will into the public sphere—the inerrant discourse of God's truth.<sup>28</sup>

In July 2004, [Jerry Falwell](#) discussed another Christian's political perspective, telling him that if he voted for anyone other than George Bush he was not an evangelical Christian.<sup>29</sup> Falwell could only see a handful of moral issues as determinant for one's political vote. Falwell's perspective highlights a specific set of issues that not only become battleground for "yes or no" answers, but are the all-determining issues of one's faith. For Falwell, these all-determining issues concern abortion and sexuality. Privately, he may deal with other issues, but in the public sphere, these issues are all-determining.

## **Stress on Enemy Definition (heightened emphasis on spiritual warfare):**

### ***Defining Points:***

The enemy is a major focus of fundamentalism. By nature, fundamentalism is reactionary to changes in a society or in denominational theology.<sup>30</sup> Any reactionary movement needs an enemy against whom to react. Fundamentalism has viewed all opposition to its efforts as satanic in origin. Those who disagree are viewed not simply as heretics, but actively opposing God's will. With this perspective of demonizing opposition, spiritual warfare is given much more prominence than it received in traditional mainstream circles. If all evil originates with Satan and the discourse of the fundamentalist leadership is effectively inerrant, any opposition is demonic.

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<sup>27</sup> In the next section on enemy definition (p. 8), this will be touched on further.

<sup>28</sup> Boschen, 24, 31, 36-37 and Thomas Graves in Cothen, p. 50.

<sup>29</sup> Allen, [http://www.baptists4ethics.com/article\\_detail.cfm?AID=4470](http://www.baptists4ethics.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=4470).

<sup>30</sup> Cothen, 17.

The Bible is full of references to the satanic, the demonic, false gods, and such. Rarely, however, are these the primary focus of Biblical discussion. While the Bible generally deals with them as asides to the real issues, fundamentalism tends to highlight the enemy. This tactic tends to externalize spiritual battle and draws the battle lines more clearly. There is less stress on the human responsibility in spirituality, just as there is less stress on the human choice in issues of salvation. As the battle lines are more definite, persons become secondary in the battle for advancing God's will.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Implications:***

Greater stress on enemy theology downplays human responsibility in spiritual warfare, as in any other aspect of life. Emphasizing enemy theology depersonalizes those deemed to be acting counter to the aims and perspectives of fundamentalism. Emphasizing enemy theology adds to antagonistic language and action in addressing the world. The character of evangelism changes from loving the lost into God's reign to rescuing them from the clutches of the enemy.

Due to the character of extreme predestination views within SBC fundamentalist theology, the understanding of evangelism's goal is also different. Fundamentalism stresses a more fatalistic concept of God's sovereignty, whereby preaching the gospel does not worry over the quality and acceptability of one's words. All that matters is that the gospel is announced. The elect will come as they are impelled by God to come to the truth.<sup>32</sup> Those who do not respond simply were not meant to be saved.

For Fundamentalism among Baptists, the enemy has been categorized as the "liberal." J. Frank Norris called anyone who would not agree with him a liberal. W. A. Criswell determined in regard any who would not sign his creedal statement, "there are plenty of other places where the infidels can teach."<sup>33</sup> Dissenting voices are viewed not merely as heretical, but non-Christian. They must be expelled, as they are the enemy.

Morris Chapman, addressing the SBC in June 2004, commented on the implications of pursuing the path of oppositional character.

*A mistake of some fundamentalists movements in the past has been the belief of the adherents that to be right with doctrine is to be right with the Lord. True righteousness was too easily discarded in favor of a type of dogmatism that was stifling and demoralizing to other Christians. In other words, right doctrine was equated to righteous living. They are not one and the same.*

*Contemporary shibboleths are employed to exclude people. It is the sin of Pharaism when good people, whose theology and ministry are above reproach, are slandered, discredited, or ostracized simply because they refuse to blindly follow*

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<sup>31</sup> Boschen, 35.

<sup>32</sup> Conversation with Phil Templin, 1993, in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico regarding the nature of church planting: "Church planting is simply gathering the elect." Phil currently serves as regional leader for the IMB in the Caribbean.

<sup>33</sup> W. A. Criswell, quoted in Reynolds.

*particular political posturing. Innuendos, unfounded rumors, sly winks and nods are as deadly as an assassin's bullet, and usually as ungodly.*<sup>34</sup>

Chapman's comments could be interpreted to allow for slander when one's theology and ministry is in question. By qualifying innuendo and unfounded rumor as being only "usually" ungodly, he makes room for a "Godly" use of lies, rumors, and slander. Effectively, he has reintroduced his "Pharisaic sin" as legitimate in the battle against heresy—he justifies it when used "to defend God!"

## **Dependence on Tradition (*a priori* of cultural theology):**

### ***Defining Points:***

Since fundamentalism is a reactionary movement to insecurity<sup>35</sup> stemming from societal change and perceived heresy, it is also very dependent upon a traditional theology. When one is confronted with a differing interpretation of those doctrines upon which one has built a faith system, the initial response is to reject the new perspective outright. In order to evaluate something new adequately, one must be secure apart from one's beliefs.

With great societal change, one must often answer new challenges and questions to one's system of belief. In response to such a scenario, fundamentalism generally relies very heavily on received theological tradition in a seemingly desperate struggle for security.<sup>36</sup> This dependence on cultural theology can be seen in the polarization on issues, in which responses from ages past are given in a new context with a new set of questions. One of the forces propelling the insecurity issues underlying Fundamentalism is the societal paradigm shifts in recent generations as society in North America has shifted through its Industrial paradigm into a new Informational paradigm. Rather than focusing on making things, this new paradigm has stressed making meaning.<sup>37</sup> If it is true that we are seeing one more societal paradigm arising, there is a corresponding increase of anxiety as the church struggles to validate faith apart from the structures and answers of an agricultural and an industrial age.

Often theology and a definition of correct theology is based more on one's received tradition than from serious Biblical or theological study. This may often reflect a fear of losing one's faith in the face of questions for which one's tradition has no answers. A new societal paradigm replaces the structure of faith based on industrial models with scientific truth as its ultimate quest. In today's society, that paradigm lacks validity, yet our structures of faith are built upon that paradigm.

In our new paradigm clash, the body of Christ must diligently seek new answers, or somehow refashion its received tradition. The Fundamentalist response is generally an attempt to rewrite history in search for a safer harbor to which one may return.<sup>38</sup> The tradition history to which one

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<sup>34</sup> Chapman, Morris. "The Fundamentals of Cooperating Conservatives: Report to the Southern Baptist Convention, June 15, 2004." in Merrell, p. 2, emphasis original.

<sup>35</sup> Sandeen in Boschen, 27.

<sup>36</sup> Boschen, 40, 42, and 64.

<sup>37</sup> Dale, 17-19.

<sup>38</sup> Boschen, 13, 64.

points may never have actually existed. Even as a projected past, it is sufficient to engender a foundational security.

***Implications:***

The impulse to hold to one's traditional beliefs can encourage the rewriting of history, skewing history to encourage one's preferred views. A common theme in the speech of Fundamentalists within the SBC is a "return to our conservative roots." To stress this concept, they have spoken of their effort as the "conservative resurgence." In order to substantiate their position that the movement is a return to historic Southern Baptist roots, they retell Baptist history with a focus on individuals who have stood for doctrine in keeping with their views, or reinterpreted the words of others to fit their parameters.

While stressing individuals and actions that promote their concept, counterpoints have been ignored. They have entirely overlooked the work and impact of Lottie Moon, a heralded single female missionary to China. Lottie was strategic in advancing the role of women in missions, effective in her outreach not only among women and children, but among men as well. Southern Baptists use her name for their major missions offering every year, but currently ignore the basics of her life story.

Fundamentalists point to some of the writings of E. Y. Mullins as a great figure in Baptist history, who promoted their understanding of Scripture. They ignore the fact that Mullins' contribution to Baptist life was that he held Southern Baptists united in the face of a fundamentalist controversy in his day. He leaned toward some of the cherished beliefs of Fundamentalists, but he spoke against the revisionist history of his day, countering the insistence that Baptists had their origin in John the Baptist, tracing a specific development into current times.<sup>39</sup>

In referring to their "conservative roots," they look to isolated individuals or to popular theology, not taking into account that Southern Baptists had no doctrinal statement from its formation in 1845 until 1925, nor that the 1925 statement skirted issues of theology important to Fundamentalist leaders. The roots they point to are generally on the fringe of convention history, rather than the main body. As a case in point, the Baptist General Association of Virginia's name suggests its position and response to the controversy over whether Jesus' death was limited to the elect, or whether it was a general atonement made available to all. The Baptist General Convention of Texas was formed in the same light. This position of holding to general atonement was a position in direct opposition to the more Calvinistic theology of so-called Particular Baptists, a closer representation of today's Fundamentalist roots.

***Fundamentalist Impact on the Baptist Faith and Message 2000:***

In keeping with the themes of theology among Baptist Fundamentalism, I will attempt to deal with the specific changes in the Baptist Faith and Message in accordance with the overall themes. For a

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<sup>39</sup> McBeth, 147.

detailed study of the two versions, I would refer one to the side-by-side comparison of the 1963 and the 2000 versions with commentary as prepared by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.<sup>40</sup> The commentary does not address all the changes and their implications, but it is a good start. Further analysis can be found in articles by Russell Dilday<sup>41</sup> and David Hull.<sup>42</sup>

## Impact of Propositional Faith:

The 2000 revision stresses a propositional definition of faith—accepting a set of doctrinal beliefs—over trusting and depending upon God in a living relationship. This can be seen in the manner the text highlights references to knowledge, doctrinal accountability, and truth. The statement on doctrinal accountability emphasizes the concept that doctrinal guidelines must be defined in much narrower parameters than in the 1963 statement.

The 2000 statement redefines the Bible as God’s revelation in opposition to 1963 understanding that the Bible is a record of God’s revelation. The difference is a change from a stress on the events of revelation behind the text and a new focus on the words of the text. The text is more static, and therefore more definite as a truth statement. A possible interpretation of the 2000 statement on this point is that the Bible is the whole of God’s revelation.

Removing language to the effect that Jesus Christ is the criterion for appropriate Biblical interpretation, the statement in effect replaces Jesus as the guide to Biblical interpretation. Since the 2000 calls itself an “instrument of doctrinal accountability” and a “guide to interpretation,” it controls orthodox interpretation of the Bible.

The 2000 statement stresses God as being “all-knowing,” thus entering into debate over the character of God’s knowledge and issues of whether God cares to know all future events and possibilities. The Bible is clear on God having knowledge at least of the broad strokes of the future, but does not stress detailed knowledge of the future the revision reflects.

Sometimes, the changes are subtle. At one point, “committed to His teachings” was changed to “following His commands.” This reinterprets Jesus’ instructions as detailed orders for strict legalistic observance. Without downplaying Jesus’ lordship, “teachings” more readily included the relational aspect of Jesus calling the disciples “friends,”<sup>43</sup> stressing life based on a relationship with Christ Jesus as Lord. In contrast, “commands” counters the relational aspect and personal relationship to the stance of the blind servant following a scripted set of rules. The summary “command” in John 15 is love. This is an open-ended relational stance to be lived out in contrast to a set of rules. Rules denote specific truth statements, while teaching denotes applying instruction to life.

In describing salvation, the 2000 revision stresses the term justification as one of the essential aspects or stages of salvation. This stress adds to a legal understanding of salvation. Justification is God’s declaring our innocence before divine law. The 1963 statement referred to salvation with a stress on

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<sup>40</sup> [www.bgct.org/bfm/bfmcomp.pdf](http://www.bgct.org/bfm/bfmcomp.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Dilday’s article is published in O’Brien, as well as available online: [http://www.baptiststandard.com/2001/4\\_30/pages/dilday.html](http://www.baptiststandard.com/2001/4_30/pages/dilday.html).

<sup>42</sup> David Hull, <http://www.fbcknox.org/worship/text%20sermons/BFMresponse.html>.

<sup>43</sup> John 15:12-17.

its relational character as a process. There is not much change in wording, but there is an emphasis on the concept of justification.

Sanctification is deemed to lead one towards “spiritual maturity,” whereas the 1963 statement established a longer range goal of perfection. Spiritual perfection establishes the sanctification process as extending beyond death, whereas maturity could be attained on this side of eternity.

One change in the text altered a reading that stressed a shared responsibility among the church members as regards authority and decision-making.<sup>44</sup> The text was changed to refocus the responsibility of all members in regard to accountability to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This change has the effect of releasing the membership from the decision-making process within the local church.

On evangelism and missions, the revision adds “The Lord Jesus has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations.” While this is certainly true, this is perhaps the weakest Biblical expression of the commandment. Matthew’s version has Jesus commanding the discipling of the nations—which requires a much greater investment and a deeper understanding of the command. Preaching the gospel can be defined as a simple announcement of the message, with no further investment of energy needed. This follows strict versions of predestination theology, in which evangelism is reduced to gathering those whom God has already determined will be saved. This is the overall perspective within the revision document. It is sufficient to announce the gospel, for when the elect hear the message they will answer positively. In this same section, a phrase that called for “personal effort and all other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ,” was replaced with “verbal witness undergirded with a Christian lifestyle and other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.” This relaxes human effort and responsibility in evangelism and missions. It is from this perspective that statements have been made classifying Islam as an evil religion, or declaring that God does not hear the prayer of a Jew.<sup>45</sup> The understanding is that we have no part in convincing or making the gospel presentation acceptable. We simply announce the “magical formula” of salvation.

The statement on education reverts to the 1925 language that linked Christianity to Enlightenment philosophy. The wording is different from the 1925 version, but the import is very similar. Stress is placed on the acquisition and thirst for knowledge, rather than the 1963 stress on education as a means for witness and benevolence.

## **Impact of Inerrancy and Verbal-Plenary theory of Inspiration:**

The revision adds the qualification, “Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.” This phrase qualifies the character of the Bible as being authored by God and having “truth, without mixture of error, for its matter.” This sets the cart before the horse, as now the Bible is understood to be that word of God only through the lens of inerrancy theory. This actually results in a qualified acceptance of the Bible as God’s word. It is trustworthy only as it meets these criteria. The theories of inerrancy and inspiration become effectively more important than the Bible they purport to describe. It is the “inerrant discourse” that is truly given primacy. This revision is an “instrument for doctrinal accountability.” It therefore has more authority than the Bible itself.

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<sup>44</sup> Hull.

<sup>45</sup> Bailey Smith, 1980, address to the Southern Baptist Convention.

There is not much language in the revision regarding inerrancy theory. There is great application of the theory as regards the nature of the revised document. The document's creedal use makes its own language inerrant as regards acceptable Baptist theology. This text becomes the inerrant discourse and effective lens for all Biblical interpretation. In effect, the inerrancy theory has been expanded in this document. As Jerry Rankin wrote to missionaries, Don and Angie Finley, "To say it is a 'man-made document' is to belittle the divinely-led process of local churches and denominations seeking and determining God's will collectively."<sup>46</sup>

In 1980, the SBC passed resolution 16, demanding that only those who hold to inerrancy, the infallibility of the original manuscripts should be in the employ of the denominational agencies.<sup>47</sup> This set the stage for the way the Baptist Faith and Message has been and is being applied in Baptist circles. As in other places, missionaries in Brazil were fired or forced to resign for not bowing to the demands to sign the document. They were classed as heretics and liberals for not accepting the inerrant discourse of this document.

### **Impact of Issue Polarization:**

In the statement on the social order, language was introduced that highlights sexual sins, while ignoring others. Along with this emphasis on sexual sin, there is a slight ease of personal responsibility for helping the needy, using the more corporate "we" in place of a more personal pronoun. Included here is also a statement highlighting the sanctity of life, with specific language to oppose abortion and euthanasia. While the corporate "we" is used in reference to meeting social needs, the phrase "every Christian" is maintained in relation to working for the correction of society, government, and industry as regards principles of righteousness, truth, and love.

The revised statement on original sin breaks a long sentence into two, adding the word "Therefore" between the phrases. At first glance, this seems to make no difference other than to shorten the sentence for clarity. The extra term, however, has the force of blaming our sinfulness upon the action of the first human being. In essence, the revision says that we sin because the first human sinned. Without that first sin, we would not have become sinners. This is a very big difference in theology. The 1963 version spoke of an inherited inclination toward sin, but left guilt with us as we act upon that inclination. The 2000 revision states that we act upon an inclination because of the first sin. Sin is therefore, no longer our fault, but the fault of the first sinner.

This change of perspective on original sin calls for a strong Calvinistic redefinition of Baptist faith. It places stress on God's sovereignty while decreasing human responsibility and free will. Discussion of issues regarding the application of faith dwell mainly on questions of free will and the responsibility of the individual to make moral judgments. When these two characteristics of faith are withdrawn, issues can be defined as crystal clear, indisputably classed as right and wrong.

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<sup>46</sup> Jerry Rankin, "Letter to Don and Angie Finley." 13 January 2003. quoted in full: [www.mainstreambaptists.org/finley.htm](http://www.mainstreambaptists.org/finley.htm).

<sup>47</sup> Hull.

## Impact of Enemy Definition:

Language on election changes its appreciation from “a glorious display of God’s sovereign goodness” to “the glorious display”. This means that election becomes the sole display of God’s goodness, rather than one among others. If election is the display of God’s sovereign goodness, it is intrinsically good that God has chosen the elect to spend eternity in heaven. The underlying fact is that it is then good that God condemned the non-elect to hell. Absent man’s free will, condemnation to hell is completely God’s sovereign action. The implication of this double-predestination formula is that condemnation of the non-elect is good. This lends itself not only to enemy definition, but the actions of militant opposition to those deemed to espouse heresy. The revision encourages the kind of false accusations to which Morris Chapman referred in his address to the SBC in June of 2004.<sup>48</sup>

The statement on war did not undergo much change, other than the addition of one sentence that has an undertone of expecting God’s intervention in the world order to institute a reign of peace. It is not clear what the sentence specifically means, but it would appear somewhat out of character in the section unless it refers to Christ’s messianic reign.

The revision does not spell out all the details of the Fundamentalist leadership’s doctrine, but it clarifies some of the major differences in what the current leadership believes and what Baptists in the past accepted as their common ground of faith. Rather than being a document that was written to draw Baptists together, this revision was designed to distinguish those who would tow the party line and those who would hold to the positions of Baptists in years past—this document is revisionist in character.

The narrowing of doctrinal definitions was intended to exclude those outside the theological parameters of the fundamentalist camp. The 1963 version was written to bind all Baptists together under an umbrella statement that was broad enough for the great majority of Baptists to accept. The revision narrows acceptable doctrine considerably.

The preamble makes this document an “instrument of doctrinal accountability,” giving it the force of a creed. It has then been used limit the ministry of those outside its parameters. It has been held over missionaries, seminary professors, denominational employees, curriculum writers, news media, and volunteers serving alongside IMB missionaries.

Those who oppose the revision and direction of the Fundamentalist leadership become the enemy. They are to be silenced and cast out of Baptist life by whatever means necessary. For a movement such as Fundamentalism to succeed, it needs an enemy. Adolf Hitler’s words on the matter are pertinent: “The masses ... want a simple doctrine and an enemy, preferably just one enemy ... truth is irrelevant; emotional appeals are better than intellectual arguments.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Chapman in Merrell, *loc. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Adolf Hitler, quoted in Reynolds.

## Impact of Dependence on Tradition:

The section on the Lord's Day relaxes the understanding of the celebration. Rather than keeping the Lord's Day separated for worship, devotion, and refraining from worldly amusements, it determines that it should include worship practices. One's conscience is to be one's guide for determining how to commemorate the day. Rather than returning to the Bible for authority, this revision is founded on the influence of societal change—a developing tradition.

In reference to Christ's death offering salvation, the 1963 did not enter into discussion of theories regarding explanations for Jesus' death. It noted that Jesus effected our salvation through His death and resurrection. Its language limited itself to defending that Jesus' death effected expiation. The 2000 revision inserts the term "substitutionary" to explain Jesus' death, limiting itself to one of several Biblical images or explanations of the way in which Jesus' death effected our redemption.<sup>50</sup> This is also a throwback to popular theology, rather than serious Biblical study. Tradition here is the primary interpreter, replacing careful analysis.

The revised statement stresses a distinction between the genders, describing that distinction as part of the goodness of God's creation. That statement is no problem by itself. It is in tandem with further comments in following segments of the document, however that problems arise in an attempt to exclude women from ministry, especially from serving as pastors. The basis for this interpretation comes from an a priori of traditional practice which then seeks justification through proof-text interpretation. The inerrant discourse of Fundamentalist tradition is the true basis for the definition.

The revision places women of equal worth before God, but in subjection to their husbands. "She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation." In the same breath a wife is given equal status and a position of subservience, negating equality of status.

The revision also adds, "There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord." This is at first glance a very coherent statement in relation to the 1963 version. Since faith is being defined as the acceptance of a set of beliefs, however, this phrase has a very different character than what we might expect. In the revision, salvation is a question of legal standing before God and faith is the acceptance of a set of doctrinal beliefs. The logical implication is that Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, and Daniel were not saved, as they did not know the name Jesus Christ.<sup>51</sup> The 1963 version would agree that there is no competing means of salvation apart from the Gospel and work of Jesus Christ. It would not demand the use of a formulaic statement for salvation ("You must repeat the words: Jesus Christ is Lord"), but state the necessity to lay one's life in dependence upon God in the manner which Jesus taught. The New Testament stress would be on understanding the message Jesus proclaimed, rather than the repetition of a formula to effect salvation. The

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<sup>50</sup> For more explanation of these issues, see Baillie, *God Was in Christ: An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement*. London: Faber and Faber, 1961. p. 171-189, and Gerhard Barth, "*Ele Morreu por Nós*": *A Compreensão da Morte de Jesus Cristo no Novo Testamento*. São Leopoldo, RS: Editora Sinodal, 1997.

<sup>51</sup> An interpretation of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3 is used to substantiate any claim that they may have come to know of Christ between the crucifixion and resurrection, however, this conflicts with other passages stating that one faces judgment immediately upon death, as well as the texts speaking of Enoch and Elijah being "taken" by God.

difference in the statements lies in the definition of faith. When faith is accepting truth claims, the difference is enormous.

Denominational leaders have insisted that the changes in the revision were not substantial. They have expected Baptist not to pay close attention to this document. “While there have not been major changes to the document, the statement regarding the family in 1998 and other changes in 2000 have been appropriate responses to contemporary issues and challenges that have emerged in the last 38 years since the 1963 statement was adopted.”<sup>52</sup> Reading the document as a theologian, I see very significant and major changes in terms of doctrine and in terms of intent. The revision of 2000 is much more than a revision. It is a new direction and a new directive for Southern Baptists. A summary statement of common faith has been transformed into an “instrument of doctrinal accountability”—a means of forcing conformity.

## ***Conclusion:***

Fundamentalism changed the application of the Baptist Faith and Message statement from being a consensus of opinions held by Baptists to a definition of Baptist orthodoxy. The forces of propositional faith definitions both directed the revision process and guided the application of the document, transforming it into a creed—a binding statement of orthodox belief, in words of the 2000 preamble, “an instrument of doctrinal accountability.” While the revision efforts did not make some of the more sweeping changes that might have been expected by the fundamentalist leadership environment, it set forth the basis for emphasizing doctrinal conformity, a propositional character of faith, the underlying factors that contribute to inerrancy theology, and established the foundation for giving a leadership structure the authority to dictate what the individual must believe.

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<sup>52</sup> Jerry Rankin. “Letter to IMB Missionaries.” January 2002, quoted in full by John Merritt, *The Betrayal... of Southern Baptist Missionaries by Southern Baptist Leaders, 1979-2004*. pp. 207-208.

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