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David T. Morgan. *The New Crusades, the New Holy Land: Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1969-1991.* Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996. xv + 246 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8173-0804-9.

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In 1979, a group of fundamentalist men led by Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler, one a theologian and the other a lawyer and conservative district judge, set out to "win back" (as they saw it) control of the largest Protestant organization in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Earlier attempts by less well-connected fundamentalists in the early 1970s had failed. But momentum towards the effort in the 1980s was building as the conservative resurgence in America at large blossomed, culminating in the election of Ronald Reagan just as the conservative takeover of the SBC won its first successes. In the 1960s and 1970s, in the minds of the Southern Baptist fundamentalists, "the United States began to abandon ... its Judeo-Christian heritage," while SBC leaders "particularly those who held high-paying jobs in Nashville as employees of the Convention, seemed to compromise with the 'liberalism' that was gaining momentum in the country" (p. 13). Early efforts by less well-connected men failed due to "a scarcity of funds and followers," Morgan explains. But these earlier efforts did succeed in formulating a strategy for ultimate victory: place the right men in the presidency of the SBC, and then use the power of the presidency to appoint only men and women affiliated with the fundamentalist faction to the boards of trustees of the SBC seminaries and to the various agencies of the denomination.

Beginning in 1979, Patterson and Pressler, the two Texans who served as the theologian and strategist of the movement, put into action their plan to purge the SBC of liberalism. They estimated that in ten years, fundamentalists would have the majority on all seminary trustee boards and denominational agencies. A battle for control of the SBC ensued, gaining increasingly interested press coverage with each successive pitched battle at the annual convention. The annual meetings, attended by as many as 30,000 or 40,000 messengers from thousands of local churches, turned into political brawls, complete with Pressler and Patterson sitting in "sky boxes" above convention floors directing nitty-gritty political machinations. Patterson, ironically, denied that he led any fundamentalist "party," while Pressler claimed that "he had no agenda for the SBC and had never had one. He, too, declared that there was no organization, only 'communication' between like-minded people" (p. 69). Despite these absurdly self-serving disavowals, the fundamentalists pursued their political program relentlessly, and by 1991 had won a complete victory. By 1990, moderates, who had run the convention for a generation prior to 1979, stood on the "outside looking in, while those who had been largely excluded from the decision-making process–the fundamentalists–were in a dominant position" (p. 170). The fundamentalists refused to cut the older moderates in on the new deal, insisting that they now controlled who could join in the game.

The fundamentalists portrayed themselves as the saviors of Southern Baptist conservative evangelism. They argued that theological modernism and political liberalism were weaning Southern Baptists away from their historical insistence on biblical inerrancy and upright orthodoxy. The fundamentalists demonized men such as Foy Valentine, long-time head of the Christian Life Commission of the SBC. Valentine endorsed the civil rights movement in the 1960s and refused to come out against *Roe V. Wade* in 1973. For the fundamentalists, men such as Valentine symbolized the capitulation of the SBC hierarchy to the false god of political and theological liberalism (in the nineteenth century, SBC leaders had waged a similar rhetorical war against northern Baptists, whom they saw as carriers of "Yankee faith," which also stood for theological, racial, and political liberalism). The "moderates" (whom the most polite fundamentalists referred to as "liberals" but other conservatives called "rats" and "skunks") responded that the fundamentalists were leaders of an Inquisition.

The convention now stands firmly in control of men who swear by the completely inerrant nature of the Bible "in all areas of reality" (including the literal Genesis account of the origin of the world), who castigate all liberalism whether theological or political, and who con-

duct severe tests of fundamentalist political correctness for job candidates for seminary professorships or denominational posts. The moderates in this controversy, who once swore loyalty to the SBC, were forced into a quasi-denominational "Cooperative Baptist Fellowship." The colleges of the SBC, owned by state conventions rather than by the national SBC, are increasingly choosing to cut themselves off from any official relationship with Southern Baptist organizations. "Since the fundamentalists abhorred genuine critical inquiry," Morgan writes, "they sought control of the seminaries and colleges to quash it" (p. 132).

The grotesquely fascinating story of the political bloodbath in the SBC in the 1980s has been told elsewhere, but nowhere in as much detail and attempted objectivity as in David Morgan's *The New Crusades*. Most other scholars of the controversy (such as Ellen Rosenberg and Nancy Ammerman) have offered sociological explanations of the conflict. David Morgan briefly considers these potential explanations, but places his primary emphasis on the ideological/theological struggle for control. The fundamentalists meant what they said, Morgan argues: they wanted to put the SBC back in the hands of biblical inerrantists. Morgan also shows that "biblical inerrancy" is a meaningless theological term, since fundamentalists are forced to admit that only the "original autographs" of the Bible, which of course no longer exist, are truly inerrant. Thus, the word "inerrancy" has served as a political slogan, designed to rally the fundamentalist forces and "smoke out" skeptics who express the slightest deviance from biblical literalism. The moderates also meant what they said: they sought to allow for some limited theological diversity among local churches who would cooperate for the cause of missions. The moderates, however, lacked any clear political leadership, and could not, by the very nature of being moderates, fight with the single-mindedness of will which the fundamentalists demonstrated. Throughout this book, the moderates seem dazed by the sheer spunk of the conservatives. "'What we're doing here is basically returning the Southern Baptist Convention to the people,"' Pressler is quoted as saying. If there was "'detrimental fallout in some areas,"' he continued, then that was a "'small price to pay"' (p. 128). This "small price" included destroying the reputations and careers of men who had given their lives to SBC work.

Morgan has interviewed all the major players and carefully lays out their positions. While sometimes stopping to note ironies and incongruities in the statements he records, most of the work is devoted simply to telling the story in a careful and straightforward style. Morgan's account is so fair that he occasionally avoids the obvious implications of his own evidence. Morgan's account, for example, repeatedly demonstrates that the fundamentalists did not in fact abide by their own words. They claimed to eschew politics, but built a political machine with an effective and exclusivist patronage system. They also demanded allegiance to Reaganite conservatism among SBC appointees. At one point, Morgan suggests that the connection between the New Right and the SBC fundamentalists was tenuous, but this is unconvincing. They stacked a rather pathetic "Peace Commission" committee with men who claimed to be non-aligned but were in fact supporters of the fundamentalists. They fired two well-respected journalists from the highly regarded Baptist Press agency for not providing a fundamentalist slant on their news coverage. They supported men such as Bailey Smith, pastor of a huge church in Oklahoma City, who loudly proclaimed that God does not hear the prayers of Jews. They waved the word 'inerrancy' as a sword of battle but fought viciously with moderates who were themselves conservative biblical literalists but who disapproved of the political program of the fundamentalists. They secretly tape-recorded conversations, placed spies in Southern Baptist agencies, and engaged in parliamentary trickery to advance their cause. Morgan connects these issues together with this epitaph to the political side of his story:

In the beginning, the rallying cry of Southern Baptist fundamentalist crusaders was biblical inerrancy, but in just a few years it became obvious that non-fundamentalist Southern Baptists could incur the disapproval of the new fundamentalist leaders in ways other than rejecting inerrancy. They could do it just as quickly by being pro-choice on the abortion issue, by advocating that women be ordained as deacons and ministers, by failing to report the news in a way that flattered fundamentalist efforts, and by not supporting the right-wing political agenda of the incumbent Republican presidents (p. 168).

Thus, even those who *were* biblical inerrantists could be called liberal, simply "because they were inclined to be flexible on social and political issues and did not applaud the entire fundamentalist agenda" (p. 168).

Nancy Ammerman's edited volume *Southern Baptists Observed* should also be consulted by readers who seek broader historical and sociological explanations for the controversy. But Morgan's book will be essential reading for those who want a clear, lavishly detailed, blow-by-blow (literally) account. Morgan's prose, while serviceably clear, occasionally descends into hyperbole, as

when he compares the SBC to the ancient Egyptian god Orisis and employs other overwrought metaphors. As a piece of interpretive history, Morgan's book is limited, concerned mostly with internal denominational controversies. The reader sometimes wants more connection with the broader implications of how this particular piece fits into the larger puzzle of the conservative resurgence and triumph in American politics and culture since 1968. He offers only a brief allusion to events such as the consternation of southern conservatives caused by the civil rights and women's movements together with Supreme Court decisions banning prayer in schools and upholding abortion rights. Obviously, the reaction to the changes sweeping the South and the nation since World War Two are key factors in the rousing of conservatism in American politics and religion. Only since World War Two, in effect, has it been necessary for southern conservatives to wage a culture war. Morgan's real concern, however, is to detail the particular story of the SBC takeover in an accurate and interesting way, and he succeeds in this aim. This book should stand as the definitive account of the specifics of the political in fighting leading to the transformation of the SBC from 1979 to 1991. Historians of American religion will be in his debt for this detailed account.

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