

Chapter One

Baptist Identity and Christian Higher Education

Donald D. Schmeltekopf
Dianna M. Vitanza

I

The first Baptist institution of higher education established in America was Rhode Island College, founded in 1764. Rhode Island was a logical place to locate the institution, for in the mid-eighteenth century this American colony had more Baptists than any other, largely because the tradition of religious liberty advanced by Roger Williams was attractive to Baptists and because they were not particularly welcomed in the other New England colonies. At this early date Baptists were also not yet that numerous in the middle and southern colonies. While Baptists in general were ambivalent about the need for education, even for their clergy, they nevertheless wanted their *own* institution rather than relying on Harvard. Experience had taught them that “you could send a Baptist to Harvard but you could not get one out.”¹ In 1804, Rhode Island College became known as Brown University, named after a prominent family in Providence.

Even though the number of Baptists in Rhode Island was diminishing and the number of Baptists in the middle colonies was growing rapidly, Brown remained the only Baptist institution of higher education in America until 1819, when the increase of Baptists in the middle colonies led to an ambitious effort to create a Baptist school in Washington, D.C., called Columbian College. Luther Rice was one of the major movers behind the plan for the institution, which proposed a combination of classical education, legal and medical courses, and advanced work in theological studies. Property was purchased, a large building constructed, a president and a faculty hired, and students recruited, but the school soon had serious financial difficulties, and,

in spite of his best efforts, Rice was unable to save the institution for Baptists. The federal government rescued the school from collapse, granting its founding charter in 1821, and in 1904, by an Act of Congress, Columbian became George Washington University, severing all ties with Baptists. Both before and after the fading of Columbian College, Brown remained of enormous influence in training Baptist leaders from both the North and the South.² For example, southern educational leaders such as John A. Broadus, James Huckins, William B. Johnson, Jonathan Maxcy, and J. B. White all had the benefit of a Brown education.

In the South the earliest schools operated by Baptists were academies, usually small schools designed to give children the basics of grammar, arithmetic, literature, and the Bible. Academies flourished throughout the South, numbering in the hundreds, from about 1800 until the beginning of the public high school movement a century later. The movement to establish institutions of higher education, inspired in part by a desire for an educated clergy, began in 1825 with the founding of Furman University, named after Richard Furman, a distinguished pastor and Baptist leader in South Carolina. Known initially as the Furman Academy and Theological Institution at Edgefield, South Carolina, it was moved to Greenville in 1851, its permanent location, after interim moves to High Hills of the Santee and Winnsboro. In 1859 the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary opened on the Furman campus, but relocated to Louisville, Kentucky, in 1877.

During the nineteenth century, over thirty Baptist colleges and universities were founded in the southern and border states under the auspices of state Baptist organizations and with the encouragement and support of local communities. The most notable of these today include Union University, established in Jackson, Tennessee, chartered originally as Jackson Male Academy in 1825; Georgetown College, founded in 1829 by the Kentucky Baptist Education Society in Georgetown, Kentucky; the University of Richmond, formerly the Virginia Baptist Seminary and later Richmond College, established in 1832 by the Virginia Baptist Education Society in Richmond, Virginia; Mercer University, formerly Mercer Institute, founded in 1833 by Georgia Baptists at Penfield, Georgia, and later relocated to Macon; Wake Forest University, chartered also in 1833 by North Carolina Baptists, established first as Wake Forest Institute and then as Wake Forest College in the town of Wake Forest, North Carolina, and after 1956 relocated to Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Judson College, an all-female institution, founded in 1838 as Judson Female Institute in Marion, Alabama; Samford University, established in 1841 initially as a male college, also in Marion, and in 1877 relocated to Howard College in Birmingham, Alabama; Baylor University, established in 1845 by Texas Baptists at Independence, Texas, and later divided and relo-

cated as Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas; William Jewell College, chartered by Missouri Baptists in Liberty, Missouri, in 1849; Mississippi College, founded in 1826 by local citizens in the area of Clinton, Mississippi, then transferred to the Presbyterians, and then given over to Mississippi Baptists in 1850; Carson-Newman College, established in 1851 in Jefferson City, Tennessee; Stetson University, chartered as DeLand Academy by Florida Baptists in 1883 in the community of DeLand, Florida; and Ouachita Baptist University, established first as Ouachita College in 1886 by Arkansas Baptists in Arkadelphia, Arkansas.

Other regional Baptist colleges chartered in the South or border states in the nineteenth century include: Chowan College (1848), Mars Hill College (1856), Campbell University (1887), Meredith College (1891), and Wingate University (1897), all in North Carolina; Hannibal-LaGrange College (1858) and Southwest Missouri Baptist University (1878) in Missouri; Averett College (1859) and Virginia Interment College (1884) in Virginia; Blue Mountain College (1873) in Mississippi; Shorter College (1877) in Georgia; Cumberland College (1888) in Kentucky; Howard Payne University (1890), Hardin-Simmons University (1891), and Dallas Baptist University, first established as Decatur Baptist College (1898), in Texas; and North Greenville College (1892) in South Carolina. Approximately twenty additional Baptist colleges and universities were chartered in this same region of the country in the twentieth century.³

In addition to these colleges and universities in the South, Baptist institutions of higher education were also founded in the North and the Midwest. However, these have largely lost their association with their Baptist origins. The first Baptist college to receive a charter in the nineteenth century was Colby College (1813) in Waterville, Maine. Because there were few Baptists in Maine at this time, most of the support for Colby came from local business leaders who believed that the college would serve the public good. The first president of Colby, Jeremiah Chaplin, came to the post from being the pastor of the Baptist church in Danvers, Massachusetts. His task was to build a Baptist "literary and theological institution"⁴ on the banks of the Kennebec River. His greatest challenge, however, was gaining the support of Baptists. "About the only Baptist support Chaplin could count on," according to David B. Potts, "was that of a small body of laymen and ministers who favored ministerial education."⁵

Chaplin was also influential in the founding of another Baptist school, Colgate University, in 1819 in Hamilton, New York. Chaplin had written a widely circulated letter on behalf of the Boston Baptist Association in 1816 urging the establishment of several regional Baptist seminaries. Hamilton was a Baptist stronghold, so the initiative took hold there. Baptists in Hamilton

met and decided “to found an institution devoted exclusively to ministerial training,”⁶ which became Colgate. The Baptist Education Society of the State of New York, organized in 1819, was given control of Colgate and thereby was able “to provide the Baptists of New York and neighboring states with their first formal institution for training ministers.”⁷

Because Baptists in the North, Midwest, and West tended to be organized as societies rather than as associations characteristic of Baptists in the South, Baptist connections with the establishment of colleges and universities in these regions were generally at the local level. Such small groups of Baptists were instrumental in the founding of the following schools: in Ohio, Denison University (1831) in Granville; in Michigan, Kalamazoo College (1833) in Kalamazoo and Hillsdale College (1844, founded by Free Will Baptists) in Hillsdale; in Indiana, Franklin College (1834) in Franklin; in Pennsylvania, Bucknell University (1846) in Lewisburg and Temple University (1888) in Philadelphia; in New York, the University of Rochester (1850) in Rochester and Vassar College (1861) in Poughkeepsie; in Maine, Bates College (1855) in Lewiston; in Oregon, Linfield College (1858) in McMinnville; in West Virginia, Alderson Broaddus College (1871) in Philippi; and in South Dakota, the University of Sioux Falls (1883) in Sioux Falls.⁸

The prestige of Baptist higher education was substantially enhanced by the establishment of the University of Chicago in 1891. Not only was this new institution located in an urban area in one of the nation’s leading cities, its mission was to provide needed graduate education in addition to an excellent undergraduate program. Furthermore, the already existing Baptist seminary in Chicago was annexed as the divinity school to offer theological education as well. The nation’s wealthiest Baptist, John D. Rockefeller, was recruited to be the principal underwriter of the university, giving \$20 million in the first twelve years. Control of the university was in the hands of Baptists as evidenced by the fact that the founding documents required that the president be a Baptist and that two-thirds of the board be Baptists. However, the education provided by the new university was to be nondenominational. As William Rainey Harper, the first president of Chicago, stated, “. . . it is clear, that in all departments, save the theological, there can be no such thing as denominational spirit or instruction . . . [B]y the grace of God [we] shall be Christian in tone, in influence and in work.”⁹

A final category of Baptist schools founded in the nineteenth century was established to provide education for members of ethnic communities. One of the oldest of these is Ottawa University in Ottawa, Kansas, established in 1865 by the American Baptist Churches USA to serve Native Americans in the area. American Baptists also founded, in 1865, Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia. Virginia Union was one of many schools established

after the Civil War intended to serve the educational needs of the freed black slaves and their progeny. Other Baptist schools in this category include Shaw University (1865) in Raleigh, North Carolina; Morehouse College (1867) and Spelman College (1881), both in Atlanta, Georgia; Benedict College (1870) in Columbia, South Carolina; and Florida Memorial College (1879) in Miami, Florida. In addition, a Swedish Baptist college, Bethel, was established in 1871 in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

This brief survey of the origins of Baptist higher education in America reveals three important points. First, beginning in 1764 with Rhode Island College, or Brown University, and extending through the nineteenth century, over fifty Baptist colleges and universities were established throughout the United States, including some west of the Mississippi River. Others were founded but did not survive, primarily owing either to financial difficulties, the cataclysmic effects of the Civil War, or both.

Second, the pattern of development of Baptist schools tended to be different in the North, Midwest, and West compared to the South. While the role of local constituencies was important everywhere, such groups or individuals, often wealthy, were clearly more determinative for institutional founding and development in the North, Midwest, and West than in the South. Vassar College serves as an example. Under the influence of Milo Jewett, organizer of Judson Female Institute, now Judson College, in Marion, Alabama, Matthew Vassar, from a wealthy brewery family in Poughkeepsie, determined to build a first-class college for women in New York State. Vassar intended that the college would be Baptist “but . . . not . . . denominational in its . . . management,”¹⁰ and he contributed over seven hundred thousand dollars to help the school get off the ground. By contrast, Baptist colleges in the South tended to be founded under the auspices of a Baptist association or state convention rather than through the efforts of individuals. Wake Forest University serves as an example. In 1832 the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina purchased land in Wake County and in 1833 appointed a board of forty trustees for the development of a specifically Baptist institution. The board named the first president, Samuel Wait, and provided for the means “to raise money to equip the school properly.”¹¹

The third point to be drawn from a review of the origins of Baptist higher education is that in the South the bonds or connections with the Baptist denomination played a much more important role in the founding of institutions and remain much stronger today than is the case in the North, Midwest, and West. Excluding those institutions with an ethnic identity, the self-reported information in the *2004 Higher Education Directory* for the colleges and universities with Baptist beginnings surveyed here reveals that in the South about 84 percent have maintained ties with Baptists and only 16

percent (in actual numbers, five) of the colleges and universities have severed this relationship. Almost the opposite is true in the North, Midwest, and West, where 75 percent of the institutions have severed their ties with Baptists. Several factors account for this dramatic difference, one of which is the strong sense of connection between the Baptist organizations and their educational institutions advocated in the early 1800s by influential Baptists in the South, such as Richard Furman, for many years the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina. As state conventions were established in the South, they came to sponsor Baptist colleges, providing both funds and a measure of control through the appointment of trustees. On the other hand, as Leon McBeth writes, "Colleges among Northern Baptists . . . tended to be sponsored by independent educational societies [and individuals] not organically connected to the denomination."¹²

In addition, regional bonds of a sociopolitical type came actively into play in the South to help forge strong connections among Baptist institutions. The formation of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in 1845, though it was in response to the issue of slavery, encouraged cooperation among and within Baptist institutions. According to William Brackney, the SBC was "the first comprehensive Baptist organization." Brackney argues that, beyond the issue of slavery, "As a region, the South had peculiar social needs and expectations. Southerners in general preferred more centralized organizational styles that promoted a variety of programs . . .,"¹³ including not only missions but also education. One important consequence that emerged out of this ethos in the South was the pattern of control of Baptist schools by associations or conventions, specifically through the power of appointment of institutional trustees.

Finally, a word needs to be said about the purpose of Baptist institutions of higher education and the level of support among Baptists in the nineteenth century, especially in the South, that is perhaps not apparent in a simple historical survey. The first Baptist college in the South, Furman, was established by the Baptist State Convention of South Carolina for the purpose of promoting "religious education," the "education of indigent, pious young men, designed for the gospel ministry."¹⁴ Many other early Baptist schools were organized with this same motive in mind. Along with this purpose, however, there was another: the dissemination of "useful knowledge." Baptists wanted to raise the educational level of the citizens of the various states. As America expanded westward, the higher education movement spread with it, and Baptists were as active as any denomination in building colleges along the way. In fact, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, Baptists, according to James T. Burtchaell, "had more students enrolled in their seminaries than

either of the two ‘educated’ denominations [Congregationalists and Presbyterians] had in theirs, and more—many more—in their colleges and academies than the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists.”¹⁵

Baptists, however, were nevertheless definitely of a mixed mind about education. They saw ample evidence of people who, in their judgment, were educated but spiritually indifferent and unaffected. The clergy of the Church of England and its Episcopal descendants in America were considered a prime example. How could they not understand, in all their purported education, that the only true basis for church membership is in the baptism of the regenerate individual, a Spirit-caused confession of faith freely and knowingly given before the congregation? The problem with human learning is, as some Baptists expressed it, “There ain’t no Holy Ghost in it.”¹⁶ This linguistically crude formulation should not disguise a persistent and important question for Baptists—indeed, for all of Christian higher education—and one that remains to this day: does human learning enrich or tend to drive out genuine faith? This is very much the underlying question that informs this book and the conference that occasioned it.

Perhaps Baptists face a particularly difficult task in addressing this issue because they are not a monolithic church but a denomination of independent congregations. Furthermore, beginning in the eighteenth century, Baptists in America were divided into a bewildering variety of expressions: General, Particular, Regular, Separate, Free Will, Six-Principle, Landmark, Liberty, Primitive, Progressive, Reformed, Seventh Day, Missionary, Two Seed in the Spirit, and others. The Baptist gift for schism continues today, under the labels of Southern Baptist, American Baptist, Baptist General Conference, General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, National Baptist, and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. In addition, there are various modes in Baptist life: moderate, mainstream, conservative, fundamentalist, charismatic, nonaligned, seeker, and traditional. Thus, when we pose the question about the future of Baptist higher education, it seems altogether appropriate, given the plethora of Baptist expressions and experiences, both historically and today, to ask first: what is a Baptist? In other words, while the title of this book, *The Future of Baptist Higher Education*, might appear to assume a common understanding of the meaning of the word “Baptist,” we believe that assumption is not justified, that there is, in fact, not an informed and shared consensus today about what it means to be a Baptist. Some clarification of this matter is essential if we are to achieve any consensus in our thinking about Baptist higher education.

II

The issue of Baptist identity is not new, of course.¹⁷ At several points in their history, beginning in England in the seventeenth century, Baptists have felt the need, usually because of theological controversies in their midst, to affirm in clear and unmistakable terms who they are as Christians. The earliest confessions of faith—for example, *A Short Confession in Twenty Articles*, 1609, by John Smyth, and *The London Confession of 1644*—occurred within the context of disputes between the General and the Particular Baptists over the atonement, whether it was unlimited—“General”—in the Arminian tradition, or limited—“Particular”—in the Calvinist tradition.¹⁸

In America, the earliest important statement of faith was the Philadelphia Confession of 1742, promulgated by the Philadelphia Association, the first Baptist association in America. This confession came to be the model of subsequent Baptist confessions of faith in this country. The Philadelphia Confession affirmed the “Holy Scriptures” as “. . . given by the inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life.” It affirmed God as Holy Trinity in “the Father, the Word (or Son), and Holy Spirit.” It acknowledged the creation by God of all things, “visible or invisible,” as well as Divine Providence. It declared that humans are made “after the image of God” and possess “natural liberty” but that “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation.” The Philadelphia Confession also dealt with doctrinal disputes, such as issues surrounding atonement (“Once saved, always saved?” “Are infants who die of the elect?”), “religious worship,” and the keeping of the Sabbath holy as “unto the Lord.”¹⁹ According to McBeth, the Philadelphia Confession “fixed for generations the doctrinal character of Baptists in this country . . .,”²⁰ including in the South.

The next major confessional statement by Baptists in America was the New Hampshire Confession of 1833. The background for this statement of faith was the growing sense among New Hampshire Baptists that there was a softening of the theological position “of Calvinistic Baptists in the New Hampshire area . . . by the rise of the Free Will Baptists.” Many in New England, especially among the growing middle class, were far more comfortable with the message of free will and general atonement than the “rigid theological system of some Calvinistic Baptists.” Thus, the Baptist Convention of New Hampshire determined that a restatement of the faith was needed, one that would reaffirm its Calvinistic teachings but “in very moderate tones.”²¹ For example, while article four of the Confession states that “salvation of sinners is wholly of grace,” article six declares that “the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the Gospel . . . and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth except his own voluntary refusal to submit to the

Lord Jesus Christ.” Article eight reads, “That election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, sanctifies, and saves sinners; that being perfectly consistent with the free agency of man.”²² Though written to address theological issues present in the Northeast, the New Hampshire Confession was eventually to have significant influence in the South.

Questions of Baptist identity entered another critical phase in the early 1900s with the attacks of J. Frank Norris of Fort Worth, the outspoken leader of the Fundamentalist movement in the South. Norris developed strongly conservative views while a student at Baylor University and at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. After he became a pastor, he soon launched crusades against gambling and drinking, along with the teaching of evolution in Baptist colleges and progressive views of Scripture in Baptist seminaries. Norris was a biblical literalist of the most rigid kind. Because his repeated attacks on the SBC drew wide attention, the convention voted in 1924 to issue a doctrinal statement of belief. The statement came to be known as the Baptist Faith and Message of 1925, formulated by a committee chaired by E. Y. Mullins, president of Southern Baptist Seminary and a renowned Baptist statesman. This 1925 statement of Baptist belief was based substantially on the New Hampshire Confession of 1833.²³ In 1963, a second Baptist Faith and Message was adopted by the SBC, this time to deal with the controversy surrounding an issue from the left, the publication of Ralph H. Elliott’s book *The Message of Genesis*, in which he gave a theological interpretation of Genesis in contrast to a literal historical reading.

Through a review of these and other confessions of faith, as well as additional sources of Baptist life, what do we learn about Baptist identity? What do we learn about the content of the faith as confessed by Baptists? First, we must address the issue of authority. That is, what is the one true foundation for defining the beliefs held by Baptists? Throughout their history, Baptists have uniformly given one consistent answer: Scripture. The underlying authority for what Baptists confess about the Christian faith is not to be found in the church, apostolic succession, or tradition, but in the Bible: the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is seen in all Baptist statements of faith as the “truth and final authority” for Christian faith and practice. Yes, Baptists have disagreed over the problem of *interpretation* of the Bible, especially as it relates to the question of the “infallibility” of Scripture, but they nevertheless all go back to the Bible as the starting point for understanding the Christian faith. Because of this strong emphasis on the authority of Scripture, some have accused Baptists of “bibliolatry,” of worshiping the Bible instead of the One Triune God. Primarily to check this potential heresy in Baptist life, the Baptist Faith and Message of 1963 declared, “The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ.”

On the basis of Scripture, then, the Baptists have from time to time spelled out for the world and for themselves the content of their beliefs. These may be conveniently summarized in the following way, organized substantially around the doctrines outlined by McBeth in *The Baptist Heritage*.²⁴

(1) The Holy Trinity.²⁵ Clearly the central affirmation of Baptist confessions is the belief in one God, who is revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptist statements about God generally agree with those of all orthodox Christians. God is the creator of the world and all creatures therein, including humans, whom he made in his own image. Christ is the eternal Son of God and is both fully human and fully divine. His death on the cross “made provision for the redemption of men from sin.” He was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is now exalted with the Father. The Holy Spirit, “proceeding from the Father and the Son,”²⁶ is the presence of the Triune God in the world, who convicts of sin, effects regeneration, comforts believers, grants spiritual gifts, and “enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.”²⁷

(2) Human beings. Baptists affirm, with Christians everywhere, that all human beings are created in God’s image and thus are made for communion with him and with one another. In the beginning humans were in “a state of holiness,”²⁸ innocent of sin, and “left to the liberty of their own will.”²⁹ However, “[b]y his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race.” All human beings are now “inclined toward sin, and as soon as they are capable of moral action become transgressors and are under condemnation.” Only by God’s grace can humans be brought back into proper fellowship with God and with one another. Moreover, “[t]he sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created [human beings] in His own image, and in that Christ died for [them]; therefore every [human being] possesses dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.”³⁰

(3) Atonement. Baptists believe that salvation is an act of God’s grace that involves the regeneration, or rebirth, of the sinner, who, through God’s grace, is set apart for God’s service. While Baptists generally hold common views on salvation and sanctification, other aspects of the doctrine of atonement have long divided Baptists. Did Jesus die for all, and will whoever believes in him be saved? Or, is salvation possible *only* through God’s initiative (“before the foundation of the world”—Eph. 1:4), hence must the believer be of the elect? The first view historically implied that the saved can “fall from grace,” while the second held that an individual “can neither totally nor finally fall from the state of grace.”³¹

(4) The church. Baptists have consistently agreed that the church “is a company of Baptized believers, that it must observe the gospel ordinances, preach the gospel, and discipline its members.” Infants cannot become mem-

bers of the church, nor should they receive baptism. Baptists have acknowledged a distinction between the universal church, the Body of Christ of all the ages, and the local congregation made up of “visible saints.”³² While Baptists disagree on how churches should relate to one another, they agree that the local congregation “is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”³³

(5) The ministry. The ministry of local Baptist churches has been seen under the order of two offices: pastors and the deacons (elders). The responsibilities of pastors have included preaching, teaching, administering the ordinances, and providing leadership in worship, witness, and church discipline. Deacons take care of the sick and needy in the congregation, as well as assist in church discipline and leadership.

(6) Baptism. All Baptist confessions deal with baptism, which is taken to mean “the immersion of a believer in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” Furthermore, baptism is seen as “an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus.”³⁴

(7) Communion. Baptists everywhere see the Lord’s Supper—the taking of the bread and the fruit of the vine—as a “perpetual remembrance” recalling the death of Christ, as well as the confirmation of the faith of the believers, the promise of the believers’ obedience to Christ, and the “bond and pledge of their communion with Him and with each other.”³⁵ The frequency of communion varies by local congregation, although in early Baptist services it was held almost every Sunday. The main dispute surrounding the ordinance has been the issue of “closed communion,” limiting participation only to believers baptized by immersion, or “open communion,” permitting participation to all professing Christians, regardless of mode of baptism.

(8) Religious liberty. From the very beginning, Baptists have affirmed religious liberty and separation of church and state. This position was grounded not only in the political environment of the early Baptists, but also in their reading of Scripture and their understanding of the Christian experience itself—“the Freeness of Salvation” and its correlate, believer’s baptism. The “blessings of salvation are made free to all by the gospel . . . and . . . nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth except his own voluntary refusal. . . .”³⁶ The precondition of this accountability of each individual before God is the uncoerced conscience. The gospel of Christ cannot be imposed upon anyone, whether by church or state. Therefore, “[a] free church in a free state is the Christian ideal, and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all [persons] and the right to

form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.”³⁷

(9) The social order. Civil authority is ordained by God to serve the commonweal, “and to this end hath armed . . . [rulers] with the power of the sword, for defense and encouragement of them that do good, and for the punishment of evil doers.”³⁸ Every Christian should provide for those in need, and “should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness.” In the pursuit of these ends, Christians should be prepared to work with others of good will, never compromising their loyalty to Christ.³⁹

(10) Kingdom of God. Baptists are alike with other Christians in affirming God’s “general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King.” Moreover, “[t]he full consummation of the kingdom awaits the return of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.”⁴⁰

This list is not, of course, a complete set of doctrines that Baptists have affirmed. For example, the Philadelphia Confession of 1742 contains thirty-four “chapters” or doctrinal teachings. In addition to these ten, other affirmations included in the Confession concern the law of God, religious worship and the Sabbath day, lawful oaths and vows, marriage, communion of saints, and the Last Judgment. Moreover, it is important to note, as does the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message, that Baptist confessions reflect a “consensus of opinion of some Baptist body,” and are not intended in any way to override the saving gospel of Jesus Christ or the teachings of the Old and New Testaments. In fact, “any group of Baptists, large or small, have [*sic*] the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so,” as long as such statements are “drawn from Scriptures, and are not . . . used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life.”⁴¹

At the same time, even though Baptists maintain the right to draw up statements of faith, their confessions are not generally statements about “Baptist distinctives,” but rather about the essentials of Christian belief. As Leon McBeth has written, “Patiently refuting false charges, Baptists often used confessions not to proclaim ‘Baptist distinctives’ but instead to show how similar Baptists were to other orthodox Christians.”⁴² Thus, what these various confessions make clear about Baptist identity is that Baptists are first and foremost *orthodox Christians*. That is, Baptists join with other true believers across the world and across the ages in worshiping and serving the one God, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptists share with other Christians the belief in God the Father as creator, God the Son as redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit as preserver. Baptists share with other Christians the belief that all

human beings are created in God's image, that all human beings are sinners and in need of forgiveness and the saving grace of the gospel of Christ, that true believers find fellowship and instruction in the gathered church, that Scripture is authoritative for faith and practice, and that God's sovereignty is over all things.

The major Baptist distinctive—though it is not, in fact, unique to Baptists—is believer's baptism. Baptists hold, in contrast to many Christian traditions, that genuine faith requires a personal, individual, and voluntary commitment. Thus, one cannot be born into the Christian faith. To become a Christian requires a second birth that the individual freely embraces. Therefore, Baptists have consistently rejected any kind of human interference between the individual and God, even parental interference such as that involved in infant baptism, and “every form of religion by proxy.” As Mullins asserts, “Religion is a personal matter between the soul and God.”⁴³ The insistence of Baptists on this point arises out of their understanding of the salvation experience as described in Scripture, and from this principle of the voluntary response of the believer to God flow all the other Baptist “distinctives,” including the priesthood of all believers, democracy in the local congregation, and separation of church and state. Being made in God's image, we humans have the capacity for God, and he in turn can communicate with us, which he has done preeminently in Christ.⁴⁴

III

What, then, does this summary of Baptist belief—the content of the faith as confessed by Baptists—have to do with higher education? When we modify the term “higher education” by the word “Baptist,” what difference does it make? Does the longstanding suspicion on the part of some Baptists that human learning tends to drive out genuine faith have an element of truth? Or is there available to Baptists a “philosophy of higher education” that arises out of their own tradition? Is there a view of Baptist higher education that is informed by the essential elements of Baptist belief but that still provides an intellectually persuasive account of the world about us and of the role of humanity in that world, one that speaks with genuine relevance to the culture in which we live today?

Ironically, one of the main obstacles to a Baptist “philosophy of higher education” is the dominance in our contemporary culture of a value that is also inherent in the Baptist ethos itself, the value of individualism. In contemporary society most people chart their lives not primarily in relation to communal bonds or for the common good, but to serve the interests—both utilitarian and emotive—of the private self. With respect to Baptist belief, the

importance of the individual responsibility to acknowledge and develop one's own personal relationship with God sometimes gets translated into a highly personalized version of the Christian faith. Since Baptists are not creedal and since religion is a personal matter, this thinking goes, individual Baptists should have wide latitude to believe what they choose to believe. Added to this obstacle is another, the secularization of contemporary culture, one aspect of which is the fragmentation of human experience. This secularization and fragmentation mean that religion and various elements of life—including education—are too often manifestly independent of each other. And for Baptists, these two dominant and related themes of contemporary culture, individualism and secularism, have tended to produce a conception of Christian higher education that, on the one hand, separates human learning from genuine faith, and, on the other hand, limits the religious aspect of this educational task to the development of moral character and godly piety. Such a view usually gets expressed in Baptist circles, as well as in others, as a “college education in a Christian environment.”

This view conspicuously ignores any intellectual engagement with the defining beliefs of our Baptist identity reflected through almost four centuries of Baptist confessions of faith. While it is true that religion is a personal matter, it is also true that Baptists have always shared a more or less common core of beliefs, a “consensus of opinion” about the truths of the faith drawn from Scripture. When Baptist identity is seen in this light, it is clear that we can offer a philosophy of Baptist higher education that is far richer and substantially more significant intellectually than one that promotes merely education in a Christian environment. With Anselm we can declare, “I believe in order to understand,” and we can ground a Baptist philosophy of higher education in the foundational belief that the truths of the Christian faith have the capacity to clarify reality.

Both secular learning and Christian learning embody genuine aspects of knowledge. Secular learning, however, excludes any consideration of God in the world whereas the subject matter of Christian higher education, elegantly described by John Henry Newman, is threefold: God, nature, and human beings. The first of these areas of knowledge, the knowledge of God as “Holy Trinity,” should be an important element within the curriculum of every Baptist institution of higher education. This is not a matter of catechesis. It is rather an opening of the intellect through courses in biblical, religious, philosophical, and other relevant studies to the activity of God, in creation, redemption, and preservation on the one hand, and to the relational character of God on the other.

The implications of this knowledge of God are numerous for our proper understanding of the other two areas of learning: nature and human beings.

For example, with regard to the latter, one of the core beliefs of Baptists and Christians everywhere is that God made human beings in his own image. Our knowledge of God—grounded in Scripture—reveals that God is personal and relational. Because we are made in the image of God, we not only have the capacity for fellowship with God, but we are also, by our very nature, relational beings. This truth about ourselves is fundamental to understanding who we are as humans. In addition, the *imago dei* view of human nature provides a lasting foundation for our moral understanding of others. Christ died for all people, and all people, regardless of circumstances or station in life, are made in the image of God. Thus, all people are to be treated with respect and compassion. This knowledge about the nature of human beings is immensely relevant to the enterprise of Christian higher education. It implies that Baptist colleges and universities, both in our academic programs and campus life, should seek ways to nurture mutual respect among students, faculty, and administration and also within communities beyond the campus and to encourage the formation of communal bonds. In addition, this knowledge of human beings frames our moral understanding of all the professions as being primarily informed by the call to service on behalf of others.

At the same time, our understanding of human beings also includes an acknowledgment, as our defining beliefs remind us, that all human beings are sinners. All are “inclined toward sin, and as soon as they are capable of moral action become transgressors.” The ramifications of this understanding of the human self for Christian higher education are virtually too numerous to count. For example, the study of political science at a Baptist institution can consider the fact that the tradition of constitutional government with its system of checks and balances and the notion of “a government of laws, not of men” are based on the belief that no one can be trusted with too much power, since all are sinners. Similarly, disciplines that prepare students for the “helping professions,” such as psychology or social work, can consider the effect of sin and guilt on human beings and their behavior. Thus, while students must be prepared to use traditional therapy effectively to treat psychological disorders, they can also be prepared to understand that the confession of sin before God and others is a proper response to spiritual and moral brokenness, to the restoration of internal peace and communal bonds.

The doctrine of *imago dei* also instructs us about the relative value of human life in contrast to all other forms of life, both sentient and nonsentient, and encourages the proper understanding of and an appropriate human relationship with the third area of learning: nature. Only humans are made in God’s image, and this fact separates human beings from animal or vegetative life. However, our “dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth” is to be understood as our God-given

obligation of stewardship, not the power to abuse and use improperly. At a Baptist institution of higher learning this understanding of the proper relationship of human beings to the natural world should influence the way in which we approach the study of the sciences and the environment.

As these and other considerations suggest, the basic relevance for higher education of the defining beliefs of Baptists, as orthodox Christians, is that they form a *Weltanschauung*, a comprehensive worldview, grounded in a trustworthy and accepted set of teachings about God, the universe, humans, the social order, history, the church, salvation, the kingdom of God, and the like, teachings that serve as lenses through which we see all things. One can arrive at similar or competing positions from other perspectives, to be sure, and in this respect Baptist higher education is a contested form of learning.⁴⁵ It is not, after all, the only epistemological narrative available. But it is the narrative, formed out of the biblical witness, that has been affirmed by Baptists and other orthodox Christians for centuries. And it is a coherent narrative.

The coherence of the Christian narrative provides for an additional and central consideration for our understanding of Baptist higher education: the connectedness of knowledge. The connectedness of knowledge within a Baptist college or university depends on the presence and interrelationship of all the major areas of learning, God, nature, and human beings. If the first is not present, in particular the acknowledgment and exploration of the One Triune God, the whole structure of knowledge is incomplete and impaired. Of course, this is surely a contested vision of knowledge and truth. But so are all other visions. As Stephen Evans points out, we in the academy can no longer pretend that the university is a place where only objective reason is exhibited. Regardless of who we are, our “basic values and convictions . . . shape the way we function as scholars,” although this will be less the case in some areas of inquiry than others. This statement does not mean that the quest for truth is reduced to political or ideological agendas. Rather, Evans declares, “we must reconceive the quest for truth as a pluralistic conversation, where no party to the conversation can claim to represent ‘pure reason.’”⁴⁶

Within this context we offer a final component of Baptist higher education born out of Baptist identity, the affirmation of religious liberty and its relationship to academic freedom. The central distinctive of Baptists within the orthodox Christian community is and has been its belief that genuine faith requires a personal and voluntary commitment. One of the conditions for this expression of faith is that it must be uncoerced; it is a willful and personal response to God’s grace. From this implicit freedom of the individual before God, Baptists have professed that “God alone is the Lord of the conscience.” This freedom before God implies the freedom of Baptists to express responsible dissent within the church body, not as a means of dividing the

congregation, but as an attempt to strengthen the community. Accordingly, Baptist colleges and universities must affirm the secular counterpart to the Baptist notion of responsible dissent—namely, academic freedom within the community of mutually accountable scholars. Thus, the Baptist affirmation of academic freedom is not a concession to a secular academy but a reflection of our own theological convictions as Baptists.

While the foregoing attempt to outline some basic elements of a Baptist philosophy of higher education is incomplete, our purpose here is a modest one: to be suggestive of what the content of Baptist identity might mean within the context of higher education. At a minimum, we hope we have offered conceptual avenues by which we can understand why human learning need not drive out faith, as well as embrace Anselm's claim that true belief clarifies reality. Moreover, as the various essays in this book demonstrate, a vital philosophy of Baptist higher education needs to incorporate *both* faithful learning and godly piety, knowledge and character. And such a mission requires that we continue to nourish our relationship to Baptist churches and bodies, as well as the larger Christian community.

IV

As this introduction has demonstrated, the history of higher education in America records a continuous decline in the number and influence of educational institutions that identify themselves as Baptist and Christian. The causes for this phenomenon of secularization are as varied as the institutions that have experienced it—Harvard, Yale, Brown, the University of Chicago, and some would include Furman and Wake Forest. Against the background of this history of secularization, the essays in this collection explore many of the critical issues facing Baptist institutions of higher education today.

Baptist colleges and universities, if they are to survive as religiously affiliated institutions, must have a strong sense of identity and a commitment to their missions. Establishing such an identity and mission is made more difficult in Baptist life by the fragmented nature of the denomination. The divisions among moderate, conservative, and fundamentalist Baptist bodies with decidedly different views on theological, biblical, and social issues complicate not only the question of Baptist identity but also the question of sustained support for educational institutions.

The essays in part 1 offer four models for Baptist higher education that can help Baptist colleges and universities develop a stronger and more authentically Baptist religious identity. David Gushee focuses on “the conversation about Christian higher education that has been occurring outside the Baptist world” and undertakes the enormous task of proposing a “normative intellectual vision and theological identity of Baptist universities.” William Hull and

Bill Leonard both look to Baptist denominational history for the resources that can guide the future of Baptist higher education. Hull argues that the future of Baptist colleges and universities “must be grounded in a shared vision of what it means to be Baptist that is embraced both by our schools and by a critical mass of our churches.” Similarly, Leonard argues that in the past, controversies among Baptists in the South were moderated by the “cultural hegemony that Baptists maintained inside southern culture,” a hegemony grounded in a consensus regarding what it meant to be a Baptist. Although this early consensus has been lost, Leonard suggests that the ideals held by early Baptists can help to reestablish a distinctive identity for Baptist colleges and universities today. And in the final essay of this section David Dockery argues that Baptist identity can be enriched through more intentional efforts to “carry on the great Christian intellectual tradition, and to develop a theology of Baptist higher education.”

Related to the issue of religious identity facing Baptist institutions is the problem of responding to the continuing pressures to abandon core religious principles in an effort to strengthen academic reputation and to compete with publicly supported institutions for the best students and faculty. The essays in part 2 address these issues. Richard Franklin examines the generation of students called Millennials, the cohort of students born between 1982 and 2002 who will fill our institutions until 2024, and argues that if our Baptist colleges and universities are going to be successful in attracting these students and meeting their needs, we have much work to do. In the second essay Larry Lyon examines relevant data about sixteen national universities that maintain a serious religious identification to “assess empirically” if it is possible for a university to achieve a strong academic reputation while maintaining its religious identity.

If Baptist colleges and universities are successful in developing a strong religious identity, in maintaining a strong academic reputation, and in attracting well-qualified faculty and students, they still must confront the problem of how best to maintain the financial and spiritual support of their sponsoring bodies, of Baptist churches, and of an increasingly diverse and needy population. Thus, the essays in part 3 focus on the relationships between Baptist institutions of higher education and those external constituencies on which the institutions depend. James C. Denison examines the question of whether or not Christian education is a “justifiable mission” of the church or “peripheral to the mission of the church.” Albert Reyes surveys the current diverse population of potential students and asks if Baptist colleges and universities will be accountable to “provide Christian higher education to the next generation of Baptists” and wonders whether or not

this educational experience will be readily “available and accessible to our sons and daughters thirty-five years from now.”

Similarly, Denton Lotz explores the effect that the events of September 11, 2001, have had and will continue to have on our students in the twenty-first century and raises the question of whether or not religious institutions can help students to prepare to live in a post-9/11 world. Daniel Vestal and R. Kirby Godsey both address the question of accountability of Baptist institutions of higher education to their sponsoring bodies “within the context of a changed and changing denominational reality,” but they suggest quite different models for what they believe the relationship of accountability ought to be. Thomas Corts, in the final essay of part 3, explores the dilemma facing Baptist institutions of higher education that see themselves as “in the world, but not of this world” but that also recognize that if they are to survive, they must engage the secular culture that threatens their existence.

A final critical issue facing Baptist institutions of higher education today that these essays address is the challenge of charting a course into the future that will ensure their survival as strong academic and religious institutions. Both of the essays in part 4 by Martin Marty and Curtis Freeman provide synthetic reflections about the future of Baptist higher education. Marty and Freeman each argue against the assumption underlying many of the essays in the collection that secularization represents a threat to religion, and they propose alternative visions for the future of Baptist higher education.

Though the following essays point out serious and persistent problems facing Baptist colleges and universities, they also offer hope that these problems can be addressed, and that with hard work and a sense of mission we can be optimistic about the future of Baptist institutions of higher learning.