



**Founders Ministries**  
Committed to Historic Baptist Principles



**Rekindling Leadership  
In America's Churches**

## FOUNDERS JOURNAL

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### MISSIONS AND CREEDS (PART 1)

#### *Tom Nettles*

A decade and a half of tensions in Southern Baptist life have called forth several historical analyses seeking to discover, communicate, and perpetuate the true genius of Southern Baptist "success." Recent works from Walter Shurden, Grady Cothen, Bill J. Leonard, and even Ralph Elliott have taken a stab at describing the change of contour in the Southern Baptist profile.<sup>[1]</sup> Much of the emphasis has been placed on the supposed diversity and theological tolerance that gave Southern Baptists warmth and power in its first several decades. According to these analyses, recent attempts at achieving a higher degree of theological unity are *ipso facto* un-baptistic.

For example, Bill Leonard views the genius of Southern Baptist organization as a "Grand Compromise" of various theological and ecclesiological options. He contends, "They hesitated to define dogma too narrowly lest they alienate large segments of the constituency, thereby increasing the possibility of fragmentation or schism."<sup>[2]</sup> The tolerance of these mid-nineteenth century Baptists of the South is pictured as broad indeed in these halcyon days of the infant denomination. In his conclusion of a chapter entitled "Southern Baptist Theology," Leonard appears to be summarizing the theological conditions present "from the beginning of the convention." His fifth conclusion states, "Within this delicate balance there existed a wide variety of theological attitudes, and interpretations with roots in Calvinist, modified Arminian, and even occasional Arminian, Landmarkist, fundamentalist, neoorthodox, evangelical, charismatic, and social gospel interpretations of Christianity."<sup>[3]</sup>

The spectrum of diversity asserted here developed eventually within the Convention, but such wide variety was not present from the beginning. Most of those options, historically defined, did not even exist when the Convention was formed. That particular spread of theological ideas stretches any confessional pattern far beyond its ability to withstand the pressure. Greater diversity exists now even within what Leonard calls the fundamentalist group than existed for the first 75 years of organized convention life.<sup>[4]</sup>

An ironic duality is created by this genre of doctrinal historiography. First, such delicacy is imputed to freedom that its life supposedly can not be sustained in the midst of a critical appraisal of theology, particularly if the appraisal concludes that two viewpoints are incompatible with an overall mission goal. Second, such elasticity is imputed to evangelism that supposedly the theological latitude demanded by freedom will make no substantial change in the overall outcome. Evangelism, so it seems, is so much at the heart of all the diverse groups that it is virtually oblivious to theological differences and surges forward scoffing at any supposed destructive incongruities.

On the one hand, the moderate<sup>[5]</sup> analysis gives the impression, mistakenly, that the effort to cut a confessional silhouette within which all aspects of the Southern Baptist face must fit contradicts the Baptist commitment to freedom. Conservatives conscientious about institutional confessional guidelines are pictured as having forsaken "such classic Baptist doctrines as soul liberty and the priesthood of all believers."<sup>[6]</sup> Gary Parker's book *Principles Worth Protecting* is advertised with the following paragraph.

Southern Baptists have historically cherished a number of theological "babies," birthed to us by our scriptures and our history. We have held a number of beloved principles close to our hearts and called them our children. Now, however, our children face genuine danger. They face the danger of living in a house controlled by new parents. Some of the new parents love other principles more than the old ones. In some cases, the parents actually despise the children they were bequeathed. As a result, our principles face threats to their survival.<sup>[7]</sup>

Among the principles stressed are liberty of conscience, priesthood of all believers, the autonomy of the local church, the nature of Scripture, separation of church and state, unity in diversity, and a chapter entitled "No Lord but Christ, No Creed but the Bible."<sup>[8]</sup> Stan Haste has written that "prevailing fundamentalists have succeeded in the systematic tearing down of what arguably are Baptists'

three most distinctive theological contributions--the priesthood of all believers, autonomy of the local church, and separation of church and state." Later he indicates that soul freedom is "unquestionably Baptists' primary theological distinctive."<sup>[9]</sup>

Conservatives do not believe that the quest for unity in the more classical theological categories violates the historic application of what Hastey calls our "primary theological distinctive." They are convinced that theology and mission are vitally connected and that theological harmony both biblically and pragmatically serves the cause of missions. Moderates present this quest as antithetical to Baptist freedoms.

On the other hand, moderate historiography minimizes the connection between theology and evangelism and functions as if that assumption of disconnectedness was shared by the framers of early SBC life. Walter Shurden summarized this tendency when he wrote, "The synthesis of the convention was missionary, not doctrinal, in nature." Bill Leonard has made steps toward a correction of this misperception with his observation that the convention's synthesis was "both missionary *and* doctrinal." He submits the idea that "most Southern Baptists perceived themselves, rightly or wrongly, as doctrinally united and theologically homogeneous."<sup>[10]</sup> But Leonard still represents the theological diversity as not hindering agreement on "the need to win souls and send out missionaries in some form or another."<sup>[11]</sup>

These treatments of Baptist history give insufficient latitude to the power of theological and even confessional commitment within denominational life, including missionary theology and practice in early Southern Baptist life.

## Creeds

### Creedless Unity

Significant diversity because of doctrinal imprecision, particularly at the institutional level, has not been deemed a strength or virtue. Baptists have rejected creedalism, and rightly so, since that word implies the elevation of a human document to the detriment of biblical authority. Moreover, a wide variety of opinion concerning the place of confessions in achieving unity is scattered throughout Baptist history. Though early New England Baptists such as John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, and Isaac Backus wrote personal confessions of faith, nineteenth-century New England Baptist leaders tended to discount the value of confessions, particularly at any point beyond the local church. "We think a creed worth nothing if it is not supported by scriptural authority," wrote Thomas Armitage. He continues, "And if the creed is founded on the word of God, we do not see why we should not rest on that word which props up the creed."<sup>[12]</sup>

Francis Wayland surmised that this very "absence of any established creed is in itself the cause of our unity." His appeal, like that of Armitage, was that the study of Scripture was superior to the learning of a confession.

If the Bible be a book designed for every individual man, and intended to be understood by every man, then the greatest amount of unity attainable among men of diversified character, will be produced by allowing every one to look at it and study it for himself. Here is an inspired record allowed to be pure truth. The nearer the opinions of men approach to its teachings, the nearer they approach to each other. Here is a solid and definite basis of unity.<sup>[13]</sup>

Two conditions informed the pristinism of Armitage and Wayland. First, Baptists enjoyed a high degree of doctrinal unity. Notice, they were not applauding the great theological diversity of Baptists, but were noting the remarkable doctrinal unity. This was seen to be the result of faithful preaching and the personal Bible study of the laity without any overarching confession serving as a governor.<sup>[14]</sup> Second, they saw confessional denominations declining, fracturing, and lacking fervency and zeal in pulpit and pew. Why should they be envied or emulated?

Both these leaders, however, underestimated the cohesive power of the New Hampshire Confession during the decades following its introduction in 1833; they also somehow managed to overlook the unitive effect of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith adopted by nearly all of the original Baptist associations, including the Warren Association in Rhode Island. The doctrinal formulations of those confessions had inspired the preaching themes of the earlier generations and had been passed to posterity. But without the strong reminders of doctrine presented by a confession, this kind of system tends toward degeneration and the heightening of personal idiosyncrasies. In his classic work *Fifty Years Among the Baptists*, David Benedict noticed this very trend and commented, "In the business of ordinations, how little scrutiny is made of candidates as to their belief in the strong points of our system, compared with ages past."<sup>[15]</sup>

In addition, the historic value of creeds, and in large part the Baptist dependence on them, was not carefully considered by Wayland and Armitage. Had there been no Nicea to ward off the Arian error, no Chalcedon to guard against the Nestorian and Eutychian misunderstandings, and no Augsburg Confession to stand by the doctrine of Justification by Faith even when threatened by death, even self-professed non-confessional Baptists would be the poorer for it. Historically, creeds define biblical truth against the subtlety of error so that believers affirm the distinctives of Christian faith as opposed to misleading, non-biblical views. Could it be possible that Wayland and Armitage were unaware of the blessings that were theirs from the confessional history of Christian polemics?

Their view also loses the pedagogic and corrective advantage of a confession. It is not necessary for each generation to reinvent the wheel. A confession helps the current generation benefit from the insights and struggles of the past. An enormously significant biblical theology is dumped in our collective laps, wrapped up as a gift inviting us to open and enjoy. It serves as a handle to help us pick up the Bible and make it our own; it projects a pattern to give the shape of what a revived and reforming church will believe, teach, and confess. Those important and beloved New England brethren seemed to overlook blessings that they themselves had received and minimized the usefulness of the "standard of sound words" which had been entrusted to them. In the subsequent period of decline, a healthy affection for the creed (or confession) would have served as a point of conviction to those who departed and as welcome ballast to a faltering and normless connection of churches.<sup>[16]</sup>

### Creed-protected Unity

In the South, the institutional affirmation of a creed, (i.e., a doctrinal formulation which highlights, conforms to, and insinuates biblical authority) was not perceived as a threat to biblical knowledge or one's submission to its teachings. Creedalism posed so little threat that J. P. Boyce, founder and first president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, did not hesitate to use the term creed. Nor did he hesitate to use such a document for "the declaration of faith and the testing of its existence in others."<sup>[17]</sup> Especially did he insist on subscription to the declaration of doctrine for the teacher of prospective ministers. The basis of this "test of faith" is Scripture, Boyce claimed, which cannot possibly err.

His [the professor's] agreement with the standard should be exact. His declaration of it should be based on no mental reservation, upon no private understanding with those who immediately invest him into office. . . . No professor should be allowed to enter upon such duties as are there undertaken, with the understanding that he is at liberty to modify the truth, which he has been placed there to inculcate. He . . . must be . . . upon every point in accordance with the truth we believe to be taught in the Scriptures.<sup>[18]</sup>

This position of Boyce, which accurately reflects the theological commitments of his Baptist constituency, lends a peculiar cast to Leonard's historical interpretation that "During the twentieth century, Southern Baptists have moved steadily, albeit reluctantly, toward creedalism, all the time insisting that it was not really happening."<sup>[19]</sup> His historical discussion of the use of confessions in the twentieth century is interesting and his conclusion is particularly striking: "If Southern Baptists ever really were a non-creedal people, they are not any longer."<sup>[20]</sup> Leonard believes the evidence points to an SBC becoming increasingly creedal.

I see the evidence in a different way. Instead of a creeping creedalism, we have witnessed an increasing number of apologies and disclaimers and nervousness about the strength of our confessional past. The kind of punctilious adherence to all the doctrines of the confession commended by Boyce, has not been publicly endorsed by a conservative leader.<sup>[21]</sup> The current concentration on the issue of inerrancy shows a selectivity in application of confessional integrity not nearly as comprehensive as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>[22]</sup>

E. Y. Mullins served as pastor in Newton Center, Massachusetts, before accepting the presidency of Southern Seminary. While there, he absorbed some of the New England reticence about creeds. His confrontation, however, with a more doctrinally strict group of Southern Baptists and, at the same time, the genuine threat of liberalism to historic Christianity made even Mullins advocate adherence to a simply-, but clearly-, stated set of doctrines. During the evolution controversy, while he was president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Mullins himself spoke publicly of the necessity of a clear declaration of pivotal Christian truths. In his 1923 presidential address Mullins unequivocally affirmed the revelatory nature and authority of Scripture, the virgin birth, the sinless miracle-working life of Christ, his vicarious atonement, his bodily resurrection and appearances, his ascension, and his second coming. Following that he stated:

We believe that adherence to the above truths and facts is a necessary condition of service for teachers in our Baptist schools. . . . Teachers in our schools should be careful to free themselves from disloyalty on this point.<sup>[23]</sup>

B. H. Carroll, founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, was committed to creeds, not just as a measure to be adopted in a crisis, but as a principle of Christian profession. Establishing Southwestern as a "permanent breakwater against this invading tide of practical infidelity," he endorsed Boyce's plan for theological education and insisted that faculty and trustee alike sign a theological statement. Rather than shy away from tests of faith Carroll welcomed them and rejoiced in them.

The modern cry: "Less creed and more liberty," is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish . . . and it means more heresy. Definitive truth does not create heresy -- it only exposes and corrects. Shut off the creed and the Christian world would fill up with heresy unsuspected and uncorrected, but none the less deadly.<sup>[24]</sup>

Later Carroll insisted that "we are entitled to no liberty in these matters." To "magnify liberty at the expense of doctrine" is a sin, according to Carroll. Throughout this discussion he affirms that the "standard [for this doctrinal statement] is the holy Scriptures" which he defends as infallible in the original manuscripts.

The founders of Southern Baptists' first two theological seminaries believed in the disciplinary use of creeds. They expected each professor to sign a statement of faith, or creed, and to believe and teach in precise agreement with it. It cannot be un-Baptistic to abide by the principles of the founders and those Baptists who first supported such schools.

J. B. Gambrell, arguably one of the most influential and perceptive Baptist statesmen ever to live, served Southern Baptist life as pastor, denominational executive, newspaper editor, college president, seminary teacher, and convention president from 1872 through 1921. His unusual article in the *Baptist Standard*, "Questions in Baptist Rights," I have used other places, but it is nonetheless appropriate here. Gambrell said, "So far as we know, Baptists stand for perfect liberty of conscience and liberty of speech. We would not deny to any one, even an infidel, the right to preach his doctrines." This freedom, however does not include the right to use a church to "propagate other and contradictory doctrines." Those who "do not preach the accepted doctrines of the Baptists, have no right in Baptist pulpits, and it is no abridgment of their rights nor any persecution to keep them out." That principle applies to schools also. When one thinks that the doctrines of the denomination are wrong or outworn he cannot claim "the right to use an institution, its money, prestige and opportunities to overthrow the faith which the institution was founded to build up." When he does so, he "passes the bounds of liberty and enters the realm of arrogant license."<sup>[25]</sup> Gambrell saw no contradiction between the Baptist principle of freedom and the application of doctrine in a disciplinary and discriminating fashion.

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### MISSIONS AND CREEDS (PART 2)

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*(Part 1 of this article appeared in [FJ 17](#) and gives a cogent explanation and defense of the proper use of creeds and confessions.)*

#### Missions

##### The Foundation

The second factor downplayed by revisionist historiography relates to the doctrinal base of SBC expansion and early missionary practice. The emphasis given to the cohesive force of missions in Southern Baptist life is important and must never be usurped by a competitive interest. The very idea of missions, however, is supported by a significant network of doctrinal assertions and is defined in terms of those doctrines.

Our generation is in particular need of some theological reinforcement. Many, even among evangelicals, are diminishing their affirmation of the utter uniqueness of the gospel message as the means by which God establishes a saving relationship with sinners. Secondary probation, annihilationism, and even universalism are making appearances within the evangelical community. A Southwestern Seminary missions professor recently advocated the idea that Christ saves in other cultures by means of other religions.<sup>[1]</sup> A former Southern professor wrote, in the context of interpreting the Great Commission, that the disciples "may have mistaken some of the instructions and commands."<sup>[2]</sup> Clark Pinnock, formerly a strong conservative as a Southern Baptist, now rejects what he calls the exclusivist view of salvation, the "view that restricts eschatological salvation to the number of confessing Christians." Instead he opts for a view which claims that "God's goodness and justice imply that God will not expect people to invoke Jesus' name who cannot possibly do so, since they are ignorant of it through no fault of their own."<sup>[3]</sup>

Those theologies affect not only the method of missions but call into question the very rationale for it. If one does not even have to be a Christian to know God and find forgiveness, or if perhaps Jesus did not tell his followers to go into all the world, the missionary enterprise can be justified only by the most obtuse reasoning. In fact, it could be seen as triumphalistic sectarian aggression, energized by an imperialistic motivation, and insensitive to the truth value of other religions.

One unusual development brought forth by the current theological milieu is that resistance to Calvinism is assumed to be a common denominator between moderates and many conservatives. Leonard, in what is an insightful, hard-hitting but gentlemanly, vigorously-presented but open-armed, article need only mention that faithfulness to original Southern Baptist doctrine would involve "Reformed theology" to score a virtual coup in the interchange.<sup>[4]</sup> Henry Smith argues strongly against Reformed theology, especially the "pernicious doctrine of limited atonement."<sup>[5]</sup> Paul Basden can be confident that Southern Baptists will not return to their Calvinistic beginnings because "Southern Baptists are committed to foreign missions" which, in his opinion, presupposes the "free choice of individuals." Belief in a "God who predetermines" will "eventually undermine missionary zeal."<sup>[6]</sup> Walter Draughon III, in outlining his perception of Dale Moody's contribution to Southern Baptist theology, attributes to him a view of the atonement which "served as a corrective to those who interpret the cross in terms more consistent with Calvinist confessional literature than with the Bible." He continues:

Moody gave Southern Baptists a real denial of limited atonement: Christ died for every human being, and every human being may experience salvation by faith in Christ. This negation of the dominance of Calvinism over the interpretation of the message of reconciliation gives Southern Baptists a theology of mission that contains the element of hope for the

salvation of the world.<sup>[7]</sup>

This phenomenon inserts another irony and a dilemma into current tensions. Some moderates contend that all theologies should be viewed as equally acceptable and non-threatening to missions, except the one which energized every man present at that original meeting which designed a structure to elicit, combine, and direct all the energies of the Southern Baptist Convention in one sacred effort for the propagation of the gospel. This group elected an articulate Calvinist, W. B. Johnson, its first president. C. D. Mallery, who had just completed a series of articles in the *Christian Index* strongly defending the tenets of Calvinism against Arminianism, was appointed corresponding secretary of the Foreign Mission Board, though he was unable to serve. J. B. Taylor, another Calvinist, took his place and served for twenty-five years. Thus, we confront the dilemma. Either we must conclude that our founders were wrong in the most distinctive aspect of their understanding of the gospel, or, if right, they were unprincipled in their action or completely imperceptive as to the connection between theology and practice. How could it be that those whose theology has such a pernicious influence on missions established a missionary organization?

### The Content

Theology, however, does not function only as a pre-mission justification for engaging in the task. It is the tool by which the task is accomplished. Sometimes Southern Baptist theological conservatism has led to expansion by drawing others into the orbit of truth with which they identify and in which they desire to participate. Next, theology has served to define the kind of person sent to be its proclaimer. Also, theology constitutes the content by which the task itself is done.

### Defines the Group

The dovetailing of conservative doctrine and mission involvement prompted the movement of Southern Baptists from a sectional to a national denomination. A group of Baptist churches in Illinois separated from American Baptists in 1907 over three issues: the toleration of ministers who denied the deity of Christ, a lack of firmness on the "full inspiration and authority of the Holy Bible as the revealed will of God," and the practice of open communion. They had no desire to assist in "planting and supporting churches that would not stand for the Old Baptist faith and practice."<sup>[8]</sup> In 1910, they united severally with the Southern Baptist Convention as churches within the Illinois Baptist State Association.

Many Arizona churches became Southern Baptist under similar circumstances. Having separated from American Baptists (i.e. Arizona Baptist Convention), the leaders of the exodus were accused of acting from "personal and petty" motivation. On the contrary, claimed the seceders, the matters were weighty and doctrinal. To continue affiliation with American Baptists would "crush the spirit and power of our churches and weaken their testimony to the authority and the inspiration of the Bible."<sup>[9]</sup> This group of Arizona churches became part of SBC life in 1928.

California was received into SBC life in 1942 so that they might be in a group who held "the fundamental doctrines of the Bible." From California, Southern Baptist work moved into the Northwest.

### Describes the Person

Early in the history of the Foreign Mission Board doctrinal screening was negligible, if present at all. Theological latitudinarianism was not the reason for this policy, or lack of policy, but the confidence that theological unanimity reigned in the Baptist Zion of the South. More than just a desire for missions in "some form or other" was expected in the doctrinal perceptions of missionaries. In 1886, N. W. Halcomb, an effective missionary several years into his service, resigned his charge because of a theological struggle over the deity of Christ. Lottie Moon engaged in personal Bible study with Halcomb in an effort to get "his feet upon a foundation that nothing can shake." She wanted to keep "the strongest man we have" from leaving, all the while admitting that if he retained the doubts expressed in his resignation letter "he cannot remain a missionary." When Matthew Yates, who served forty-two years as one of Southern Baptists' first foreign mission appointees learned that Halcomb's position on Christ's deity had been "growing more unsettled for years," he agreed fully with Halcomb's decision to resign.<sup>[10]</sup>

In 1881 a very trying stream of events demonstrated the priority of theological purity to personal affections. T. P. Bell, an attractive and talented theological student, received special encouragement to sign with the Foreign Mission Board to be "the man for China so greatly needed by us." "Will you apply or shall we extend a call?," H. A. Tupper wrote him.<sup>[11]</sup> When Bell and his friend, John Stout, both applied they were accepted enthusiastically by the board in May.

Soon after the news of their appointment was released, J. P. Boyce wrote asking Tupper if the board had examined the men on their views of inspiration. A recent candidate, a Brother Walker, had been examined on inspiration. John Stout was aware of this and offered to make his views known before the board but apparently no questions on that subject arose during the interview.<sup>[12]</sup> Tupper told Stout that the question "had never been raised with regard to himself but it would do no harm" to send him a statement of his views "to be used at my discretion." Upon receiving Boyce's urgent question, Tupper engaged in a flurry of "confidential" letter writing asking for advice of

different leaders. He also wrote Stout reminding him of his offer to provide his views, stating that it might be the wise thing to do. He asked him to confer with Bell and probably sent a similar letter to Bell. When the two responded, he issued a call for a special meeting of the Foreign Mission Board. Stout's response had been clear, Bell's somewhat confusing. The following preamble and resolution were adopted:

Whereas Rev. John Stout has candidly and courteously presented to the Board of Foreign Missions his views on Inspiration; and whereas his views do not seem to the Board to be in accord with the views commonly held by the constituency of the Southern Baptist Convention; and whereas, Brother Stout reduces the question between himself and the Board to the simple point, whether the Board will give him their consent to teach or print if thought advisable by him, these views as a missionary of our Board, therefore

1. Resolved that while the Board distinctly and emphatically disclaim the least right over the conscience or Christian liberty of any man, they have no right to consent to any missionary teaching or printing anything regarded by them as contrary to the commonly received doctrinal views of the constituency of the Southern Baptist Convention.

This along with two other commendatory resolutions was sent to Stout asking for his response. Since Bell's response was not clear, he was asked to appear before the board for examination. Stout answered the resolution quickly and, within one week, on June 24 the board was meeting again. The responses of Stout and Bell were read. Stout wrote, "The matter is settled, and I see no other course open but the withdrawal of my appointment." He further insisted that the "responsibility of formally dissolving the relation existing between me and the Board shall rest upon them." Bell wrote that he would not mind appearing before the board but saw no reason for it since he had read Stout's paper finding himself in "substantial accord with him in the views expressed and give a hearty 'Amen' thereto." He further informed them, "I shall teach the conclusions arrived at where ever I may be, if occasion arises."<sup>[13]</sup> On the basis of those responses the board was "reduced to the necessity of withdrawing their appointments of these honored and beloved brethren as missionaries to China." When Lottie Moon heard the news she was disconsolate. Not only had the promise of personnel strengthening failed, the final verdict on her possible marriage with C. H. Toy was inevitable. Tupper wrote her, "This is a dreadful disappointment. But you'll say, 'Is it not your own fault?' Now, my dearest sister, don't turn on the friend seeking your good office. I know of your love for Dr. Toy, which cannot be greater than mine."<sup>[14]</sup>

Soon after this Lottie Moon, now realizing that Toy could never come to the mission field, briefly considered moving back to the States to marry him and work along with him in academic pursuits. Lottie Moon was not quick to condemn the theological pilgrimage of others. This seems sufficiently demonstrated in her patience with Halcomb later. She, therefore, (as indicated by notations in books in her library) began studying the issues that Toy introduced to her. She concluded that the claims of Toy and God on her life conflicted and there could be no question as to the result.

### Constitutes the Message

Theology in missions was not simply a tool of personnel discrimination, but actually functioned in a positive way to sculpt and define the missionary message and method. Scriptural revelation confronted the false world views of the non-Christian. Lottie Moon functioned in this way, joining Mrs. T. P. Crawford in the use of a catechism with boys and girls in China teaching the basics of the Christian faith as a foundation for evangelism. Also, her personal work with women involved the direct teaching of Christian truth (doctrine) as a corrective to the paganism of the Chinese. She recalled the following anecdote.

Imagine the missionary with a book in her hand, sitting or standing as may be most convenient, and trying to fix the attention of the women on the most important subjects. "I have come to tell you something very important," says the lady. "You must listen well. I ask these children not to make a noise." "How old are you?" inquires someone. Answer and go on: "If it were not very important, we would not take all this trouble to come here to tell you." Audible approval. "Good people," they say, "come here to tell us a good doctrine. Listen to what they say." "Sad it is," goes on the lady, "that you all here, almost without exception, worship mud-images, and you do not know that it is a sin. We have come to tell you that it is a sin against the heavenly Father." "How many children have you?" "One," says Mrs. H. if she happens to be the speaker. "Boy or girl?" "How old is he?" "Is he married?" The missionary goes on with her talk. ("How white her hand is!" "She doesn't look more than seventeen or eighteen." "How pretty she is.") . . . "Pray don't talk," says the lady, "when I am through you may talk as much as you like." "Be quiet; don't talk," they say to each other. Silence two minutes, while the lady resumes her talk: "People cannot transmigrate, neither are they like lamps that go out, nor are they annihilated, nor does the wind blow them away, nor do they go to the temple after death to drink the soup of forgetfulness." "What! don't transmigrate?" exclaims some astonished listener. "No; after death there are but two places, a heaven of boundless happiness, a hell of endless suffering."<sup>[15]</sup>

This simple interchange is informed by a world of theological truth. The clarity of special over general revelation, the tendency of all to

suppress the truths of general revelation, the sinfulness of this ignorance, the exclusivity of Christianity in its salvific content, the reality of heaven, and the non-existence of alternate means of escaping condemnation--all these doctrinal commitments lie behind this conversation.

Years later, *The Foreign Mission Journal* carried an analysis of China, its geography, its people, its customs, its religion, and its dominance over the development of Oriental culture. The writer of the article called Lottie Moon "that Princess of the Lord, that jewel of our female missionaries [who] has laid the sweetness of her piety and the splendor of her genius and culture on the altar for God." Among the great needs of China, the writer, Dr. B. D. Gray of Hazlehurst, Mississippi, emphasized the need for "teachers of theology there. What a mighty power would such men as Hodge, Boyce and Hovey be in China. Before their orderly and masterly systems of theology heathen systems would tremble and totter."<sup>[16]</sup> Even if he was given to exaggerated language, Gray saw clearly the distinctive truthfulness of the biblical revelation as opposed to paganism and had great confidence in the compelling power of Christian truth to bring into captivity every imagination that exalts itself against Christ.

## Conclusion

A Christian should give no countenance to a system that draws a dichotomy between missions and creeds. Missionaries are not sent to present a contentless, individuated, existential encounter, but to set forth a world view built on the principles of the gospel. He or she presents the tri-une God revealed in Scripture, the absoluteness of the moral law, the sinfulness, corruption, and condemnation of all humanity, the covenant of redemption effected in the person of the God-man the Lord Jesus Christ, the necessity, perfection, and consistent righteousness, of his completed work of redemption by sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, the certainty of the judgment of all rational beings, and the necessity of repentance toward God in light of our rebellion and deserved condemnation and faith in Jesus Christ in light of the excellency and sole sufficiency of his work as redeemer. These things should be believed by the missionary and fuel his zeal. It is also the content of that which is to be believed and heartily embraced by the convert. Creeds and missions are perfectly congruent; they are neither exclusive of each other nor adiaphoristic in their relationship, but depend on each other and, in reality, are defined in terms of each other.

In addition, creedal statements must both implicitly and explicitly have missions as a guiding principle. The triune God himself is the original missionary. In his great missionary and infinite wisdom he devised a strategy by which to seek and save the lost. This good news he published promiscuously. Even to those who were not his sheep, the savior spoke clearly, fervently, and with compassion. Within every section of a confession, the tendency of truth in general to call for belief, and the purpose of Christian doctrine in particular to be a savor of life unto life or of death unto death must set a tone of infinite urgency about the importance of the doctrine taught. Henry Fish's "Scriptural Catechism" is remarkable for this feature. The *Baptist Faith and Message* appropriately includes an article on "Evangelism and Missions." These are urged on individuals and churches as their duty and privilege. This confession proposes that missionary outreach rests "upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life" as well as the explicit commands of Christ. It advocates the use of all methods "in harmony with the gospel of Christ." The content of the gospel implies missions, explicitly commands missions, and governs the methods of missions.

Another side of this coin is that missionaries and evangelists must seek to be "creedal"-in the very best sense of the term. The tenacity of their missionary zeal and the purity of the vision of the necessity and nature of conversion is roughly proportionate to the strength of their knowledge of and commitment to Christian truth. The missionary life and method of Adoniram Judson illustrates this point beautifully. Historically, some missionaries have shunned the necessity of conversion and others have embraced the religion of those to whom they were sent. Clear understanding of the faith and its coherence as a system, an unwavering commitment to its veracity, along with an ability to defend it in the face of opposition are virtual necessities (Acts 17:2-4; 18:4, 19, 25-28; 19:8). A missionary cannot escape being a creedalist.

Finally, those who believe the doctrines of grace must see the mission field as a most propitious place of following Christian calling. It was in the context of preaching to unbelievers in a culture molded by pagan values that the Apostle Paul learned experientially what he knew by revelation: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16). Thus, not only can a missionary not escape being a creedalist, a true creedalist cannot escape being a missionary. "But having the same spirit of faith according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore also we speak" (2 Cor 4:13). May God give us again the union of the believing and the speaking in our generation.

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