

## Walter Thomas (W.T.) Conner (1877–1952) Biography

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**CONNER, WALTER THOMAS** (1877–1952). Walter Thomas (W. T.) Conner, Southern Baptist theologian and professor, son of Philip Orlander and Frances Jane (Monk) Conner, was born at Center (now Rowell), Arkansas, on January 19, 1877. The family moved to the West Texas community of Tebo (now Tye), eight miles west of Abilene, when Walter was fifteen. Because of straitened finances Conner's attendance at the academy of Simmons College (now Hardin-Simmons University) and Baylor University was intermittent. He received an A.B. degree from Baylor in 1906; in 1908 he received both a Th.B. from Baylor Theological Seminary (which chartered in March 1908 as Southwestern Baptist Theological

Seminary) and an A.M. degree from Baylor University. In order to prepare for a teaching post at Southwestern, Conner matriculated at Rochester Theological Seminary in 1908; he received a B.D. degree there in 1910. He studied at the University of Chicago and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Louisville, Kentucky, where he received his Th.D. degree in 1916. His thesis was on "Pragmatism and Theology." Baylor University awarded Conner an honorary D.D. degree in 1920. When Southern Baptist Theological Seminary began to award the Ph.D. degree instead of the Th.D., Conner availed himself to the opportunity of upgrading his Th.D. to Ph.D. status with an additional thesis on the topic "The Idea of Incarnation in the Gospel of John" in 1931.

Conner was pastor of several churches. He was ordained by Harmony Baptist Church, Caps, Texas, in 1899, where he was serving as pastor. He served as pastor at Baptist churches at Eagle Lake, Rock Island, East Bernard, Blum, Rio Vista, Godley, and Handley. While a student at Rochester, he served as pastor of the Baptist church in Wheatville, New York. He was the first pastor of Seminary Hill Baptist Church (now Gambrell Street Baptist Church) in Fort Worth. In the Southern Baptist Convention, Conner often lectured at conferences and assemblies and spoke at state and national conventions. The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board utilized him as a counselor and advisor in selecting missionary candidates.

Conner's enduring legacy to Southern Baptist life lies in his thirty-nine-year teaching career at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He joined Southwestern in 1910, when the school moved from Waco to Seminary Hill (now in Fort Worth). In the classroom he endeavored to make theology practical rather than speculative; in the faculty his recommendations for prospective teachers were tantamount to administrative approval; and in the administration his long tenure provided continuity from the first president to the third. Systematic theology was Conner's main responsibility, and he soon distinguished himself as the preeminent Southern Baptist theologian during the 1930s and 1940s. As a theologian he was at home among both laymen and scholars. His lectures and books were written with the layman in mind, but they display an underlying academic depth and extensive knowledge of his field. His theology reflects the influence of three former professors: Benajah H. Carroll<sup>qv</sup> of Baylor, A. H. Strong of Rochester, and E. Y. Mullins of Louisville. But Conner's theology still displays his own acumen; his theological works reflect a biblical rather than systematic approach. Conner's complete theological system is best expressed in his works *Revelation and God* (1936) and *The Gospel of Redemption* (1945). He wrote fifteen books and numerous articles for professional journals and other periodicals. He was a member of the Southwestern Society of Biblical Study and Research, and in 1946 he delivered the Wilkinson Lectures at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, Chicago.

Conner married Blanche E. Horne, a Baylor University classmate, on June 4, 1907; they had six children. Conner died on May 26, 1952, and was buried in Mount Olivet Cemetery, Fort Worth.

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