

Newman, Mark. *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995*, Religion and American Culture. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2001. Pp. xii, 292. \$39.95, cloth.

In *Getting Right With God*, Mark Newman argues that Southern Baptists entered the second half of the Twentieth Century comfortable in the belief that segregation did not violate their core commitments to scriptural authority and evangelism, or their secular values of public education and law and order. Most Southern Baptists, he argues, were moderate segregationists while two smaller groups, progressives and radical segregationists, fell outside the mainstream. Progressives saw racism as unbiblical and helped undermine the religious justifications for segregation. Radical segregationists, on the other hand, proved more dedicated to Jim Crow than to the Baptists' core commitments. In the end, Newman gives a good overview of the Southern Baptists response to desegregation, offering a wide-ranging survey of Convention literature, and concludes that Baptists lagged behind other denominations and behind federal law, but did eventually abandon their commitment to segregation when it conflicted with the core commitments.

Getting Right With God represents a significant re-working of Mark Newman's dissertation of the same title, and it must have been a daunting task given that his dissertation ran nearly 900 pages. Nevertheless, he has preserved the interpretative thrust of that dissertation, though clearly not the level of detailed explanation. Newman divides the Baptist post-war encounter with race into roughly three stages. From the end of World War II until the *Brown* decision, Baptists generally argued that African Americans ought to have equal opportunities within a segregated society. From 1954 until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Baptist leaders urged acceptance of the *Brown* decision based on their commitments to the public education and law and order, but also refrained from strong statements in the face of segregationist pressure. After 1964, the Civil Rights act and continuing racial violence "led a growing number of Southern Baptists to accept the end of legal discrimination" (22–30, quote from p. 30).

Newman prioritizes Baptist dedication to the public schools and to law and order, arguing that these concerns, not theological considerations, eventually brought most Southern Baptists to accept desegregation. In this view, Baptists saw efforts by various state legislatures to avoid desegregating the schools as both a threat to public schools—especially when closing the public schools or offering public funds to private schools were contemplated—and a threat to law and order. Newman does note, however, that the concern for law and order could also be used to criticize the direct action within the civil rights movement as Baptist leaders argued it violated the law and disrupted public order. Newman notes that both individual and regional factors contributed to the diversity of the Baptist response to desegregation, while Newman correctly arguing that within any demographic grouping—whether by educational level, gender, or geography—individual Baptists responded to desegregation in a variety of ways for a variety of personal reasons.

Newman surveyed an enormous amount of material, primarily Southern Baptist Convention annuals and State convention annuals, state newspapers, and the publications of the Christian Life Commission and various state level commissions. As a result, his work represents largely the views of state newspaper editors and state leaders. He emphasizes the middle range of Southern Baptists and his sources are well suited for this.

Nevertheless, these sources privilege certain voices. Notably, Newman's analysis rests, overwhelmingly, on the writings of men. While it would be unfair to suggest that Newman cited no women or youth, given his claim that "among Southern Baptists, college and seminary students and BSUs [Baptist Student Unions] consistently proved to be the most progressive elements during the civil rights era" and that "throughout the civil rights era, Southern Baptist educational materials for the young, published by the Sunday School Board and the WMU [Woman's Missionary Union] addressed race relations much more frequently and forcefully than those directed at adults" (p. 162) it is worth noting his minimal attention to women authors and literature for youth and children. It is also worth noting that he does not cite the Foreign Mission Board's publication, *The Commission*, even in Chapter 8: "'The Great Commission': Evangelism at Home and Abroad." Additionally, while the overt organization of the twelve chapters certainly makes sense, the execution is sometimes weaker. For example, a considerable amount of chapter 7: "Law and Order" is about public school desegregation, raising the question as to why it was not included, instead, in chapter 6: "Public School Desegregation." Such organizational decisions lead parts of the book to be unnecessarily repetitive.

In the end, Mark Newman's *Getting Right With God* is a useful survey of the Southern Baptist response to racial change in the South after World War II. It is wide-ranging, and it does sacrifice some depth in the interest of breadth. Newman amassed a substantial amount of evidence and traces very well the diversity of experiences Southern Baptists had with racial changes. He focuses on the "middle" of the convention, that portion that was neither notably progressive on racial issues, nor radical segregationists. He shows, effectively, how their core commitments to evangelism, scriptural authority, public education and law and order, led Baptists to abandoned segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. He relies heavily on state newspaper editors and effectively demonstrates that "the cumulative effect of the editors' endeavors was to encourage Baptists to adjust to desegregation" (p. 31). As a survey of a denominations encounter with race after World War II, *Getting Right With God* fits well with Joel Alvis' study of Presbyterians, *Religion and Race* and Peter Murray's study of Methodists, *The Crucible of Race*. Newman's work is also an interesting counterpart to the reviewer's own work, *Getting Right With God*, which focuses primarily on the progressive Baptist encounter with race during the same era.

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