

Michael E. Williams Sr. *Isaac Taylor Tichenor: The Creation of the Baptist New South*. Religion and American Culture Series. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005. Pp. xi, 240. \$42.50. Cloth.

The memory of Isaac Taylor Tichenor (1825–1902) no doubt has significantly dimmed for most contemporary Southern Baptists. Hence, Michael Williams's biography, which builds on his 1993 doctoral dissertation at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, furnishes valuable information and insight about a chief contributor to the shaping of the Southern Baptist Convention during its formative years in the second half of the nineteenth century. Williams, a professor of history and dean at Dallas Baptist University, competently puts forward the fruits of his research, much of which was conducted in archival collections at several libraries. Since the last biographical account of Tichenor was a short work written by his son-in-law, J .S. Dill, almost a century ago (1908), Williams's monograph represents a welcome and substantial upgrade.

Williams covers well the impressive range of positions that Tichenor held during a long and distinguished career: evangelist, pastor, denominational leader, Civil War chaplain, mining executive, college president, and corresponding secretary of the SBC's Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board). He begins by tracing Tichenor's early years in Nelson County, Kentucky, where the future SBC leader was thoroughly steeped in a missionary Baptist tradition that resisted both Campbellism and the anti-missions posture of preachers like John Taylor and Daniel Parker. Eventually the young Tichenor was licensed to the gospel ministry and, in 1847, answered a call to go to Mississippi to serve the Indian Mission Association. He subsequently served a church in Columbus, Mississippi, from 1848 to 1850, when he moved to a brief stint as a pastor in Hendersonville, Kentucky. By late 1851, Tichenor accepted an invitation to lead First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, where he blossomed as a preacher and cultivated an intense interest in cooperative denominational mission support. Williams asserts that the Montgomery pastorate "fully transformed Tichenor into a southerner" (29); this comment may leave the reader wondering what exactly the years in Kentucky did for the young minister's cultural identity.

Chapter two on Tichenor's service as a Confederate chaplain reveals an unusual feature of his résumé. In addition to the typical duties of the military chaplaincy, Tichenor actually engaged in combat at the bloody battle of Shiloh (Tennessee) in 1862. He wounded or killed some enemy troops and, in the process, earned the title "The Fighting Chaplain." Although he returned to FBC, Montgomery in 1863, Tichenor remained a stalwart supporter of the Confederacy's unsuccessful quest for independence. After the war, he showed sympathy for a "Lost Cause" theology that echoed from many southern pulpits. Williams rightly contends that Tichenor's actions and attitudes during the Civil War and Reconstruction demonstrate that he was a product of his culture.

The bulk of Williams's book (chapters three through eight) deals with Tichenor's activities during the last third of the nineteenth century. He resigned his Montgomery pastorate in 1868 to join a group of men who bought control of a mining company in Montevallo, Alabama. Williams interprets this step as a sign of Tichenor's vision for a "New South" that needed to emerge economically. The author also suggests that Tichenor's abrupt career shift betrayed an unfortunate spirit of materialism. At the same time, Tichenor continued to accept church and denominational responsibilities.

Tichenor's New South perspective and business background paved the way for him to become president of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama (later Auburn University) in 1872. As Williams shows, Tichenor was an educational innovator who blended a New South model of education with "the existing liberal arts religious college structure" (82). Furthermore, he proposed constructive reforms of Alabama's entire higher education system. In his discussion of the Auburn years, Williams carefully weighs both the strengths and weaknesses of Tichenor's presidency.

The homiletical, business, and administrative skills that Tichenor sharpened in earlier professional contexts set the stage for his leadership of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta (1882–1899), which constituted the true capstone of his career. In this post, he (1) stabilized the shaky financial and institutional status of the HMB; (2) targeted strategic mission fields like New Orleans and Texas; (3) battled with Henry Lyman Morehouse of the American Baptist Home Mission Society over turf issues in a way that aggravated sectionalism; (4) exuded an optimistic vision for cooperative efforts by Southern Baptists that helped to forge denominational identity and confidence; and (5) assisted in laying the foundation for both the Sunday School Board and the Cooperative Program. Thus it is with some justification that Williams refers to Tichenor's life and work as a "microcosm" of the SBC (203).

While this volume rescues Tichenor from historical neglect (even oblivion) and convincingly illuminates his vital role in the Southern Baptist story, it nonetheless falls short of being a truly definitive biography for two primary reasons. First, Williams gives short shrift to Tichenor's standing as a theologian; in fact, doctrinal considerations appear almost as an afterthought to cultural analysis. Williams at least twice labels Tichenor as a "moderate Calvinist" (45 and 151), but it is not clear how these beliefs really affected his approach to church or denominational life. Instead, Tichenor ultimately comes across as culture-bound and program-oriented ecclesiastical bureaucrat in the mold of those who ran SBC agencies in the 1950s. That assessment might not accurately reflect who Tichenor really was, but Williams does not give the reader much to consider regarding Tichenor's theology.

Second, Williams makes it difficult to get a real handle on Tichenor as a man. For example, little is said about family dynamics, even though the SBC patriarch was married four times and tragically endured the death of each wife. Indeed, at the end of the first chapter Williams reports that Tichenor first became a widower with two young daughters in 1860; although he was married to his first wife for seven years, there is no previous reference to her in Williams's narrative until the brief recounting of her death. Later marriages are likewise treated in a cursory manner. It might be that the available research materials lack data on Tichenor's family life; all the same, Williams conveys the impression that Tichenor's personality and relationships with people are not especially pertinent for understanding his part in helping to create the Baptist New South. Given the merits of this engaging biography, Williams's virtual inattention to theological and family matters is especially regrettable.

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