

**SERVICE IS NOT SLAVERY: A REVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE  
ON WOMEN IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION**

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In 1976, the well-behaved (according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*) Laurel Thatcher Ulrich made history when she wrote that “Well behaved women seldom make history.” The sentence and a multitude of variations have found their way onto t-shirts, coffee mugs, and bumper stickers around the English speaking world. Then again, by the measures of her religious context, Ulrich was not all that well-behaved. Ulrich was the quilting mother of five who happened to also be an outspoken supporter of the feminist movement. A feminist Mormon is something of an oxymoron, yet her soft-spoken manner and dedication to her husband and children fit with what she was religiously expected to be as a woman, even if a career that eventually led to her winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1991 and being named one of 19 distinguished professors at Harvard University in 2006 did not.<sup>1</sup>

The Southern Baptist women appearing in several recent historical and ethnographic works have much in common with Ulrich. They were dedicated to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and its ideals, but much of what they did in dedication to the SBC broke the molds of what “proper” Southern Baptist women were supposed to be. They also break the molds of the general public perception of Southern Baptist women. Recent news about Southern Baptist women enrolling in a program in homemaking that is restricted to women only at the SBC’s largest seminary might suggest that they embrace highly traditional roles and ideals and would shun independent thought. A recent *Los Angeles Times* article remarked that the attitude at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) was that “Men make decisions. Women make dinner” and quoted a 19-year-old homemaking student as saying, “It really doesn’t matter what I think.”<sup>2</sup> Those who study American religion, however, should look a bit deeper, since, as the recent literature published about Southern Baptist women shows, throughout the history of the SBC, women have (of course) thought for themselves and acted independently. All sorts of Southern Baptist women have earned accusations of not being well-behaved at some point. If Ulrich’s observation holds true, perhaps that is why they made history.

Mercer University Press recently published a collection of the writings of Charlotte Digges “Lottie” Moon edited by Keith Harper.<sup>3</sup> As a Southern Baptist himself and a professor at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Harper would have already been somewhat familiar with Moon before taking on this project. Moon is the most famous Southern Baptist missionary

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Wilson, “A Well-Behaved Scholar Makes History: How a Quiet Professor Became an Unlikely Hero for Feminists,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 29 (24 March 2006): A12.

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Simon, “They Love to Do Their Homework,” *Los Angeles Times* 11 October 2007, A-1.

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte Digges “Lottie” Moon, *Send the Light: Lottie Moon’s Letters and Other Writings*, ed. Keith Harper (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002).

who has ever lived, though she is little known outside the SBC. An annual offering each Christmas in honor of Moon is one of the main sources of funding for the international missions activities of the SBC.

More biographies of Moon have appeared than of any other Southern Baptist figure, but no book published about Moon prior to *Send the Light* has been intended for a scholarly audience or published by an academic press.<sup>4</sup> Harper's effort to provide a collection of primary source material on Moon accessible outside the multiple archives that house her letters and various publications was therefore long overdue. Moon's biographers have presented her in lights ranging from a highly traditional Southern lady with typical Southern concerns, as in Claude Rhea's *Lottie Moon Cook Book*, which describes Moon as "a true homemaker,"<sup>5</sup> to a radical who tried to break free of traditional roles for women, as in Ann Kilner Hughes' *Lady of Courage*, playing up Moon's educational pursuits.<sup>6</sup> *Send the Light* gives readers an opportunity to read what Moon herself had to say and to form their own opinions about the degree to which she conformed to the ideals for Southern Baptist women.

Moon's work as a missionary in northern China will make *Send the Light* useful for a broad range of researchers. Those looking for information about the early history of the SBC's approach to foreign missions will find a wealth of it in its pages. When Moon was in China, the SBC did not yet have established policies with regard to single female missionaries, and local churches put little emphasis on foreign missions. Her letters show part of the process of working out those policies and her consistent urging that Southern Baptists in the United States would show more interest in foreign missions reveal how much has changed since her lifetime.

Few would accuse the SBC churches of indifference to foreign missions today. Researchers interested in interdenominational relations on foreign mission fields will find Moon's perspective on the conflicts that arose when Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists all attempted to win converts in the same areas informative. Those wanting sources on the interaction between China and the West in the nineteenth century will want to take a look at Moon's experiences, particularly the way both her attitudes and those of the Chinese people she encountered changed over time.

There are numerous ways Moon's writings might interest scholars of women's history. She struggled to convince Chinese parents not to bind their daughters' feet, to allow them to attend school, and to remain single in cases where marriage seemed undesirable. Moreover, Moon struggled to navigate the minefield of the expectations her own culture and denomination had for her because of her gender, when, in reality, she felt that much of what she ought to do

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<sup>4</sup> See Catherine B. Allen, *The New Lottie Moon Story* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980); Janet Benge and Geoff Benge, *Lottie Moon: Giving Her All for China* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 2001); Cathy Butler, *The Story of Lottie Moon* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 2004); Ann Kilner Hughes, *Lady of Courage: The Story of Lottie Moon* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1987); Dave Jackson and Neta Jackson, *Drawn by a China Moon* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2000); Una Roberts Lawrence, *Lottie Moon* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1927); Helen A. Monsell, *Her Own Way: The Story of Lottie Moon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958); Jerry Rankin, *A Journey of Faith and Sacrifice: Retracing the Steps of Lottie Moon* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1996); Claude Rhea, *Lottie Moon Cook Book: Recipes Used by Lottie Moon 1875–1912* (Waco: Word Books, 1969); and Cara Lynn Vogel, *The Lottie and Annie Upside Down Book* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Rhea, *Lottie Moon Cook Book*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Hughes, *Lady of Courage*.

contradicted those expectations. It is likely that feminist scholars would take particular interest in the fact that Moon found herself more or less acting as a pastor, yet seemingly maintained the belief that she should not be one. Her regular preaching to mixed audiences marks her as one of those women who did not quite behave.

Yet, as Harper would argue, Moon is worthy of study in her own right outside the broader categories into which she fits. Her contribution to the history of the SBC and the ways in which reality affirms and contradicts her legend among Southern Baptists are among a multitude of reasons modern scholarship would do well to examine Moon herself. What was Moon's theological perspective? Was she a traditional Southern Baptist, or have Southern Baptists made her into something she never was? Does the picture of Moon as a homemaker fit her, or does the picture of Moon as the radical who was one of the first women in the South to earn a Masters degree fit her better? Harper has done a great service in providing the first step to more extensive scholarship on the best-known Southern Baptist missionary. He has also provided a resource for churches and professors seeking ways to teach congregants and seminary students more about the namesake of the SBC's largest fundraising campaign. Church members and seminary students alike will probably welcome the opportunity to find out the story behind the legend.

Though Harper's work will likely find a broad audience, many within his audience will wish he had done a bit more to make them familiar with the life and legacy of Lottie Moon. Harper's introduction indicates he never intended to write a biography of her, and refers those who want more information to a book long out of print, Catherine B. Allen's *The New Lottie Moon Story*. While Allen's biography of Moon is readily available through online book sellers like Amazon.com and through the majority of libraries' interlibrary loan services, most readers will expect a more extensive introduction to who Moon was and the ways she lives on in Southern Baptist memory to appear in *Send the Light* itself. Harper does provide a brief historical contextualization, however, and one that hits many of the high points. Readers might also have benefitted from more extensive annotation, especially with regard to the things that are distinctive to Moon's Southern Baptist heritage, but this would have been contrary to Harper's goal to "present Moon in her own words with minimal editorial intrusion."<sup>7</sup> All in all, scholars reading *The New Lottie Moon Story* alongside *Send the Light* will get a very good idea of who Moon really was. For a somewhat briefer introduction, but still more exhaustive than Harper's, one might also consult Allen's article on Moon in the October 1993 issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*.<sup>8</sup>

After the publication of *Send the Light*, it was only natural that Harper follow up with a collection of the writings of the second most famous Southern Baptist denominational worker and the namesake of the second largest of the SBC's fundraising campaigns, Annie Walker Armstrong.<sup>9</sup> While Armstrong may not have received quite as much attention as Moon, she has still been the subject of numerous biographies and plays for denominational consumption,

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<sup>7</sup> Harper, editor's introduction to *Send the Light*, by Moon, xi.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine B. Allen, "The Legacy of Lottie Moon," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 17, no. 4 (October 1993): 146–152.

<sup>9</sup> Annie Walker Armstrong, *Rescue the Perishing: Selected Correspondence of Annie W. Armstrong*, ed. Keith Harper (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004).

though none for academic purposes.<sup>10</sup> As with Moon, Southern Baptist literature has painted a number of different pictures of Armstrong ranging from the submissive character in Elizabeth Marshall Evans' *Annie Armstrong* who firmly believed that "It was sheerest nonsense to claim that women could do men's work,"<sup>11</sup> to the free spirit in the play by Eva Brown Lloyd, *Annie, Herald of Home Missions*, who vowed, "I know it sounds funny to all of you, but I'm going to show you! I'm going to do *something* in a few years that no woman has ever done, just to show you I can!"<sup>12</sup> The truth, for which Harper's selections provide evidence in *Rescue the Perishing*, is that Armstrong was a paradox who somehow embodied both the submissive woman and the independent thinker.

A range of scholars will find Armstrong's letters useful as sources. They should be especially grateful to Harper for sorting through the voluminous possibilities to provide a manageable sample that covers the major themes of Armstrong's life and work, since it is a severe understatement to say that Armstrong was a prolific writer, and the archival collections that hold her correspondence are daunting for even the most dedicated scholar. Those interested in learning more about the ways the SBC in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries engaged in and supported domestic as well as international missions will have Armstrong's extensive correspondence with various denominational officials, including J. M. Frost, T. P. Bell, I. T. Tichenor and R. J. Willingham.

Students of women's history will see how Armstrong chose to handle her religion's expectations of what her gender should mean for her activities. They will find that she refused to speak before audiences that included men from a sincere and persistent belief that women should not do this while simultaneously pushing women to take more responsibility for themselves and the church, and resenting those who, in her opinion, over-emphasized the idea she herself affirmed, that women should operate in a different sphere than men. The ways in which Armstrong and the organization she helped to form, the Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), shaped the SBC and the various reasons some supported the move to begin educating women at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) while Armstrong did not will also be of interest to those interested in the history of gender. Armstrong had broad connections with a number of other women's organizations and therefore demonstrates the interrelationship between various nineteenth century women's groups, including various other Baptist women's organizations and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Armstrong's correspondence dealing with her work with the Woman's Convention of the National Baptist Convention, a black Baptist denomination, will add to scholarship on race relations in the American South.

Armstrong is worthy of study in her own right as much as Moon, of course, and the letters Harper selected show the complexity of her character and the paradoxes of her seemingly

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<sup>10</sup> See Cathy Butler, *The Story of Annie Armstrong* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 2004); Jacqueline Durham, *Miss Strong Arm: The Story of Annie Armstrong* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966); Elizabeth Marshall Evans, *Annie Armstrong*, ed. Nan F. Weeks (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1963); Hermoine Danelly Jackson, *What's Left of a Life?* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union [ca. 1973]); Eva Brown Lloyd, *Annie, Herald of Home Missions: A Dramatization of Annie Armstrong's Life and Work* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980); Bobbie Sorrill, *Annie Armstrong: Dreamer in Action* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984); Vogel, *The Lottie and Annie Upside Down Book*; and Jimmye Winter, *Miss Annie's Secret: The Story of Annie Armstrong* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Evans, *Annie Armstrong*, 107.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd, *Annie, Herald of Home Missions*, 20.

contradictory ideas. Armstrong's multitude of interpersonal conflicts reveals her human side, one rarely addressed in the hagiography published by denominational presses. Armstrong, it seems, was not universally well-behaved. She struggled with Fannie Heck, the WMU president, over what Armstrong's responsibilities as Corresponding Secretary ought to be, and the battle she fought over the formation of the Woman's Missionary Union Training School (WMUTS) at SBTS ended in her resignation. While at times Armstrong appears petty in these conflicts, her passion and her genuine sense of personal injury also come through. In addition, the correspondence provides hints of the ways in which Armstrong left a permanent legacy in the SBC, one not yet fully traced. One hopes that this publication will provoke more interest in Armstrong and a greater understanding of the formation of Southern Baptist culture and programs. She is a compelling figure who deserves to be rescued from scholarly obscurity, and Harper is to be commended for taking a step toward making Armstrong better known in mainstream religious history. Southern Baptists who have heard her name all their lives will also be interested in *Rescue the Perishing*, and the book is likely to be useful to the same audiences within the denomination as those reading Moon's writings in *Send the Light*, for the same reasons outlined above.

While the strengths of *Rescue the Perishing* are the same as those of *Send the Light*, the two books also share common weaknesses. Harper provides a limited biographical sketch of Armstrong and a brief overview of the history of the organization she founded, the WMU. He refers those unfamiliar with these subjects to books that are long out of print, yet relatively easy to obtain: Bobbie Sorrill's *Annie Armstrong: Dreamer in Action* and Catherine B. Allen's *A Century to Celebrate: History of Woman's Missionary Union*, both published over two decades ago.<sup>13</sup> While scholars less familiar with Southern Baptist history will wish Harper had provided a more in-depth introduction and more extensive annotation, the sources he directs readers to consult will provide a good background for those who need more. For a good overview of the history of the WMU that goes beyond Allen's now-dated *A Century to Celebrate*, some reading *Rescue the Perishing* will want to consult Paul Harvey's chapter on the subject in *Women and Twentieth Century Protestantism*.<sup>14</sup>

One of the most intriguing sections in *Rescue the Perishing* is the one dealing with Armstrong's objections to the establishment of WMUTS at SBTS, though she was in favor of the idea that the WMU should provide some sort of education and training for women wanting to engage in missions. Armstrong felt so strongly about the issue that she decided "to sever my connection with the Woman's Missionary Union[,] . . . the Presidency of the Woman's Baptist Home Mission Society of Maryland which I have held for nearly twenty-four years, and that of the Society of Eutaw Place Church which office I have also held for years." The reason was that she had determined never "in any way, shape or form to have anything whatever to do in Mission Work as conducted by Southern Baptists. . . ."<sup>15</sup> T. Laine Scales wrote about this episode and the

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<sup>13</sup> See Catherine B. Allen, *A Century to Celebrate: History of Woman's Missionary Union* (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1987) and Sorrill, *Annie Armstrong*.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Harvey, "Saints but Not Subordinates: The Woman's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention," In *Women and Twentieth Century Protestantism*, ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 4–24.

<sup>15</sup> Annie Armstrong to R. J. Willingham, 16 June 1905, in *Rescue the Perishing*, 306.

early history of WMUTS in *All that Fits a Woman: Training Southern Baptist Women for Charity and Mission, 1907–1926*.<sup>16</sup>

Like Harper, Scales has personal connections to the SBC. She graduated from SBTS in 1986 with a degree in social work. Scales sets out to demonstrate that women at WMUTS challenged the roles established for their gender in a way that still let them be thought of as well-behaved. Her work in tracing the early years of women's education at SBTS and showing the ways WMUTS fits into a broader historical framework are valuable contributions to the understanding of Southern Baptist women. She argues convincingly that Southern Baptist women complicate the narrative of women's history in the United States, because theirs is not a northern white woman's story. Her interaction with secondary literature shows that there is a historiographical bias against women in the South in scholarship dealing with women's higher education. Southern white women were not the same as their northern counterparts, and the gradual change in ideals about women's roles in the South is reflective of Southern culture. Yet Scales points out that even though one may view trends in the South, the idea that there was a typical "Southern Lady" is as mistaken as the idea that there was a typical American woman.

Scales' presentation is marked by an underlying feminist viewpoint. She believes that current ideas about women articulated in the SBC are evidence that "many Southern Baptist women still find themselves severely limited by a denominational culture that does not recognize their ability for and calling to types of ministry that lie outside rigidly defined definitions of woman's place. . . ." <sup>17</sup> Scales believes that in telling the story of the first women to attend Southern Baptist seminaries, she will explain the experiences of today's Southern Baptist women, and why they are different than women in other denominations. Her perspective allows the book to fit naturally within the broader field of women's studies.

Those familiar with Baptist history may not need to read much of the opening chapters of *All That Fits a Woman*, but for those who are not, Scales provides an excellent overview of the early history of Baptists in general, the SBC, and the WMU and its educational efforts. The most valuable findings are in the book's larger effort to provide a larger context for WMUTS within American history. She addresses the WMU's place within the women's movement, including their opposition to feminism. WMUTS was one way Southern Baptists socialized women into gender roles. Scales frequently compares WMUTS to other women's schools of the same period, such as Mt. Holyoke, showing the ways that Southern Baptist women's experiences were similar to and different from those of other women. One difference was that the WMUTS students usually found their male SBTS counterparts welcoming rather than hostile. The separate curriculum for women, however, made SBTS a typical example of a coeducational school of the era, and the curriculum was similar to other Baptist schools with the same purpose. Not unexpectedly, women at SBTS had the most in common with women at another Southern Baptist seminary with a similar program (the Baptist Woman's Missionary Training School at SWBTS).

In showing the ways WMUTS fits into the wider framework of early twentieth century history, Scales also details the ways in which the WMUTS experience changed over time. In a manner that mirrors the historical shift in American courtship rituals, WMUTS women gradually replaced visits from men in the parlor with going out on dates. While women of the 1920s

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<sup>16</sup> T. Laine Scales, *All That Fits a Woman: Training Southern Baptist Women for Charity and Mission, 1907–1926* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

questioned the established cultural norms in a wide variety of ways, WMUTS women questioned the school rules about dating and fashion. Unlike their northern counterparts, they had little success in bringing change to WMUTS. Scales also places the work the WMUTS women did within the historical context of the Charity and Settlement Movements, showing the ways the Baptist Settlement established by WMUTS was similar to others in methodology but did so in a uniquely Southern Baptist way, focusing on conversion rather than societal reform and restricting their efforts to women and children.

One chapter in *All That Fits a Woman* is dedicated to the lives of alumnae of WMUTS after leaving the school. This chapter provides some of the most compelling material in the book, as the use of the diaries and other writings of the alumnae themselves add dimension to the overall story Scales tells. This chapter, like the others, attempts to provide a historical context for the work WMUTS graduates did. Scales believes the Training School women should serve as inspiration for today's Southern Baptist women, since they demonstrate that it is possible to change ideas about gender roles, even in the SBC. The Epilogue of *All That Fits a Woman* would not be particularly encouraging in that regard, however. WMUTS became the Carver School of Church Social Work, which was dissolved in 1996. According to Scales, this was because SBTS president R. Albert Mohler Jr. "believed that the arena of service for Christian women should be limited."<sup>18</sup> She also asserts that women do not generally study preaching in Southern Baptist seminaries "since they will have no chance of being employed by Southern Baptist churches."<sup>19</sup> She concludes that women will find places of service in the Alliance of Baptists or the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, but it would still appear from her presentation that the SBC is not a place where women should bother attempting to push the boundaries of gender roles. With regard to the argument that WMUTS aids in the understanding of the experiences of Southern Baptist women today, however, Scales is convincing, contending that WMUTS aided in creating a distinctive culture for women in Southern Baptist Seminaries. The first female students at SBTS had more freedom than WMUTS students would have in later years, because with the development of a separate women's curriculum, classes they enrolled in formerly were closed to women. Though at the time of the publication of *All That Fits a Woman* it was not yet the case, recent developments in SBC seminary curricula to segregate course enrollment by gender, primarily over concerns about women preaching, support her argument that the experiences of women at WMUTS are in some sense a mirror for those of modern women in the SBC.<sup>20</sup>

*All That Fits a Woman* has some weaknesses. At times, Scales' efforts at contextualization are distracting and offer little to the book's overall argument. Often she spends several pages discussing other schools without connecting the material to WMUTS. She also

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>20</sup> Though at the time *All That Fits a Woman* was published it was not the case in SBC seminaries that contemporary students found classes restricted on the basis of gender, this is currently true at some SBC schools. The homemaking concentration mentioned earlier in this essay is merely one example. The catalog at SWBTS, for instance, indicates that female students should take "The Expository Communication of Biblical Truth," a class restricted to women only, rather than "Expository Preaching." See Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, "Catalog," [http://www.swbts.edu/catalog/page.cfm?id=32&open=3\\_area](http://www.swbts.edu/catalog/page.cfm?id=32&open=3_area) (accessed 4 September 2008). This is a relatively recent development, since "The Expository Communication of Biblical Truth" was first offered in 2005, and prior to that time women pursuing M.Div. degrees regularly enrolled in "Expository Preaching" in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree.

sometimes reveals biases in her presentation of historical fact, as with her interpretation of why Armstrong opposed WMUTS being located at SBTS. Armstrong herself argued that locating the school at a seminary would cause women to take up preaching, since preaching was what seminaries taught men to do, and she was vehemently opposed to women preaching. Scales focuses on the other arguments Armstrong made, such as her feeling that the undertaking suffered from poor planning and that jokes in Baptist newspapers about how the school would help seminary students find wives offended her. Scales believes that Armstrong's "public statements [about women preaching] . . . masked her personal pique" about not being consulted before the plan was in place.<sup>21</sup> Given Armstrong's attitudes toward women addressing mixed audiences, it seems unlikely that her discussion of the possibility that women would preach if they were trained at a seminary was merely a ruse.<sup>22</sup> As for the claim that the reason women do not tend to study preaching in Southern Baptist seminaries is that they are unable to find employment as ministers, there are many complex theological and sociological reasons for the choices Southern Baptist women make. For more on that, see the discussion of Susan M. Shaw's *God Speaks to Us, Too* below. Scales' assertions about contemporary phenomena sometimes suffer from oversimplifying.

Overall, *All That Fits a Woman* makes a valuable contribution to American religious history. The book will be a useful resource for scholars of women's history, the history of higher education, and the history of religion in the United States. The historical background and context Scales offers make it accessible even to those who know nothing about Southern Baptists, while giving enough new information to those who are very familiar with them that even those who specialize in Baptist studies will benefit from reading it. This is a difficult balance to achieve, and Scales should be commended for her efforts.

Like Harper and Scales, the editors and all of the authors of *Courage and Hope: The Stories of Ten Baptist Women Ministers* are intimately familiar with the Southern Baptist world, making it possible for them to compile a book on a somewhat obscure topic: the lives of female Baptist ministers who, with the exception of Ella Pearson Mitchell (who is in the American Baptist Convention) all are or were affiliated in some way with the SBC.<sup>23</sup> The book includes autobiographical accounts of Elizabeth Smith Bellinger, Carolyn Weatherford Crumpler, Sue Fitzgerald, Ida Mae Hays, Margaret B. Hess, and Molly T. Marshall. The editors are also the authors of the book's chapter on Addie Davis, and three other biographies appear to bring the total number of women profiled to ten: Catherine B. Allen's biography of Alma Hunt, Keith E. Durso's biography of Ella Pearson Mitchell, and John Pierce's biography of Ruby Welsh Wilkins. Even most Southern Baptists probably would not know the names of any of these women, though several are well known among those who study women in Baptist history, especially Davis, as the first female Southern Baptist to be ordained in 1964; Marshall, as the tenured professor forced out of SBTS after Mohler became president of the institution in 1994

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<sup>21</sup> Scales, *All That Fits a Woman*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> See Armstrong, Baltimore, Maryland, to R. J. Willingham, 27 April 1905, 269; idem, Baltimore, Maryland, to J. M. Frost, 4 October 1905, 275-277; and idem, Baltimore, Maryland, to J. M. Frost, 9 October 1905, 283; all in *Rescue the Perishing*. See also Sorrill, *Annie Armstrong*, 108, 115, 160, 165-69, 190, 204-05, and 217.

<sup>23</sup> Pamela R. Durso and Keith E. Durso, eds., *Courage and Hope: The Stories of Ten Baptist Women Ministers* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005).

and accused her of being in noncompliance with the seminary's Articles of Faith due to "feminist theology;"<sup>24</sup> and Hunt, Executive Director of Woman's Missionary Union (WMU), 1948–1974.

Pamela R. Durso set out to publish a collection of stories about female ministers from Southern Baptist backgrounds in order to encourage other women in similar situations. The book fulfills that purpose, at least to the degree that Southern Baptist women seeking unorthodox careers in the church will probably find the stories familiar and feel less alone in their struggles. Paul Harvey has written about the ways in which Southern Baptist women have been left unprepared for the degree of resistance they tend to encounter when expressing a desire to enter the ministry,<sup>25</sup> and the accounts of female ministers in *Courage and Hope* seem united around a common theme of showing how they met unexpected obstacles to fulfilling their sense of calling. Davis' experience with members of an ordination council who affirmed her conservative theology while saying they would not recommend her for ordination because she was female, Crumpler's inability to enroll in the School of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary because she was female, and Hays' unceremonious termination from the International Mission Board after her Brazilian church decided to have a surprise ordination service for her shortly before her retirement all reinforce the theme of the problems women never expected to encounter. Yet, true to Harvey's observation, the authors insist that they had no reason to expect such difficulties. "I am a product of the system in which I was raised," Bellinger writes.<sup>26</sup>

Many felt forced out of Southern Baptist life, since they were unable to find pastoral positions in Southern Baptist churches. One gets the impression that the authors attempted a kind of catharsis in writing these stories, and there are hints of sadness throughout the book, particularly in the often evocative language in Allen's biography of Hunt and Marshall's frequently sarcastic phrasing in her account of her own experiences ("One of the regular camp hymns was 'Wherever He Leads I'll Go.' It never occurred to me that I was disqualified from following simply because I was a girl or that I could not fully actualize this heartfelt decision").<sup>27</sup> Of all the stories in the book, Marshall's is the most difficult to read, since at so many points it practically drips with the pain she clearly still feels about her uneasy relationship with the SBC.

Though the SBC has officially chosen a path that leads away from women's ordination, as evidenced by the language inserted into the denomination's "Baptist Faith and Message" in 2000 to assert that "the office of pastor is limited to men," professors in Southern Baptist seminaries would probably still find *Courage and Hope* a book worthy of discussion in the classroom. Questions of who may be ordained are deserving of exploration, and there should be room for disagreement on the issue, but ministers in training would find more good than harm in seeing it as a human matter as well as an intellectual exercise. The Dursos have published an account of women's ordination in the SBC that renders completely dispassionate attitudes impossible. Even those who oppose women's ordination will be likely to acknowledge that often the women who sought it encountered people who treated them in a manner outside the bounds

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<sup>24</sup> See "Tenured SBC Woman Forced to Resign—Molly Marshall; Southern Baptist Convention," *Christian Century* 21 September 1994.

<sup>25</sup> See Paul Harvey, "Saints but Not Subordinates."

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Smith Bellinger, "I Listened to the Story and I Believed," in *Courage and Hope*, 41.

<sup>27</sup> Molly T. Marshall, "God Does Indeed Call to Ministry Whom God Will, Gender Notwithstanding," in *Courage and Hope*, 122.

of the Christian ethics they professed. Knowing how to disagree is a skill pastors and other church workers will undoubtedly find beneficial, and discussion of *Courage and Hope* would be an excellent springboard for beginning to teach that skill to seminary students.

These stories may also serve as case studies for scholars interested in primary sources on the topic of women's ordination among Southern Baptists in the twentieth century. As a resource for scholars, however, *Courage and Hope* is likely to be a disappointment unless one is already very familiar with Southern Baptists. The brief historical overview of Baptist women in England and America and Baptist attitudes toward ordination in general in the introductory chapter is the editors' only nod toward providing context for the stories that appear in the other chapters. Even this overview fails to fully explain the nature of the debate among Baptists over women's ordination. While the editors mention that "opponents and proponents for women in ministry continue to offer proof texts for their positions on the issue,"<sup>28</sup> they do not engage either argument.

The book progresses under the assumption that the proponents of women in ministry are correct, as one would expect given its stated purpose. Those less familiar with the discussions of the issue will find it difficult to understand either the grounds for resistance or the belief in the biblical support of women in ministry based upon the book's inadequate contextualization. In other places, those without a strong background in Baptist theology and practice will be left scratching their heads, with unexplained references to "the Baptist age of accountability" and growing up in "Sunday School, Sunbeams, then Girls' Auxiliary (GAs), [and] Training Union" or listening to stories about Lottie Moon.<sup>29</sup> Limited explanation is offered for the "days of turmoil" that resulted in the formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.<sup>30</sup> References to events that were once widely reported in the *Baptist Press*, such as Crumpler's comments on *The Total Woman* at the interdenominational Christian Action Council and Marshall's resignation from SBTS, are presumed well known enough not to need rehearsal, as Marshall herself indicates: "This departure has been well chronicled in other places, so I will not offer an *apologia* here."<sup>31</sup> More extensive information offered in the endnotes for references like these would make the book much more useful to scholars. While it is not a fair criticism of the authors that they did not make the book useful to mainstream scholarship, since providing such a book was not their goal, if they publish another edition they might find a broader audience for it by providing more extensive annotation.

Those looking for other sources to read alongside *Courage and Hope*, fortunately, should be able to find them. Scholars unfamiliar with Baptists, as well as those intimately acquainted with them, will find Susan M. Shaw's *God Speaks to Us, Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home & Society* an excellent resource for understanding contemporary women in the

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<sup>28</sup>Durso and Durso, *Courage and Hope*, 14.

<sup>29</sup>Elizabeth Smith Bellinger, "I Listened to the Story and I Believed," 32; Crumpler, "Yes, Lord," 43; and Margaret (Meg) B. Hess, "When I Am Preaching, I Know in My Bones that I am Doing What I Was Born to Do," 100, all in *Courage and Hope*.

<sup>30</sup>Elizabeth Smith Bellinger, "I Listened to the Story and I Believed," in *Courage and Hope*, 40.

<sup>31</sup>Marshall, "God Does Indeed Call," in *Courage and Hope*, 127.

SBC.<sup>32</sup> Shaw has provided an ethnographic study of Southern Baptist women similar to Marla Frederick's ethnography of black Baptist women in North Carolina in *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*.<sup>33</sup> Like Frederick, Shaw has a personal background within the group she is studying, but she is far from uncritical in her examination of what her subjects say. Shaw has given voice to a wide range of Southern Baptist women, from the conservative Dorothy Patterson, the wife of Paige Patterson, president of SWBTS and a staunch advocate of the homemaking classes described in the introduction to this essay, to the liberal April Baker, the lesbian co-pastor of Nashville's Glendale Baptist Church. Her subjects are as well known as Sheri Klouda<sup>34</sup> or as obscure as Shaw's own grandmother, Dorothy Shaw. She has managed to achieve some racial diversity as well, probably with about the same percentages as in the racial makeup of most Southern Baptist churches.

Shaw's approach is unapologetically subjective, but she attempts to present her material respectfully. As she says in her introduction, "I hope to be tender . . . I've tried to be kind. After all, as one of my participants put it, 'These are my people.'"<sup>35</sup> She claims to be an outside observer who has inside information, given that she now finds a home in the United Church of Christ. Though Southern Baptists are Shaw's "people," she has a lot to say about why she thinks many of them are misguided, and frequently reminds her readers that she is a feminist, so she views much of the SBC as oppressive to women.

A major strength of *God Speaks to Us, Too* is the way in which Shaw is careful to provide the historical background necessary for understanding her topic. Unlike *Courage and Hope*, readers of *God Speaks to Us, Too*, regardless of their knowledge of the SBC, will not be confused by Shaw's references to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Acteens, or sword drills, since she explains all of such references in detail. She refers to this common language as a sort of "code," which she sets out to demystify and steers scholars away from common mistakes like referring to the SBC as the "Southern Baptist Church" (there is no such institution, she explains).

Shaw does not take historical background for granted, and explains what Molly Marshall did not in *Courage and Hope* about the circumstances surrounding her resignation from SBTS. She is careful to be accurate in her presentation of history as well. Unlike Scales, Shaw has no qualms with portraying Annie Armstrong as she appears, a woman who embraced the idea that men and women should operate in separate spheres. In addition, Shaw accounts for and explains the theological context for the views the various women in the book express. She argues that the main theme of her presentation is the Baptist doctrine of "soul competency—the notion of a free soul that stands alone before God and is therefore competent and responsible for its own decisions without the need for any other mediator—and how this . . . [shapes] the identities of

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<sup>32</sup>Susan M. Shaw, *God Speaks to Us, Too: Southern Baptist Women on Church, Home & Society* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

<sup>33</sup>Marla Frederick, *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>34</sup>Klouda became nationally known, particularly in the academic world, due to recent controversies surrounding her dismissal from SWBTS. See Thomas Bartlett, "I Suffer Not a Woman to Teach," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 13 April 2007, A10. She was also the subject of extensive discussion on Southern Baptist blogs over the past two years.

<sup>35</sup>Shaw, *God Speaks to Us, Too*, x.

Southern Baptist women.”<sup>36</sup> Southern Baptist women, then, should be understood as people who make their own choices and have their own ideas, even when their choices are to submit to their husbands or their ideas are that women should have limited roles. In presenting Southern Baptist women in this way, Shaw shows that the public perception of women in the SBC as meek and dependent upon men is incorrect. She set out to explain the contradictory nature of Southern Baptist women, in her words, “both submissive wives and self-actualized agents.”<sup>37</sup>

The universal belief in soul competency means that in spite of how different the women she interviewed might seem, they have much in common, and this sets them apart from other Protestants. A conservative in the SBC is likely to believe in more basic theological concepts shared with a liberal in the SBC than with a conservative in some other Protestant denomination. Baptists, she contends, do not fit easily into the evangelical world. Another of the main strengths in *God Speaks to Us, Too* is the degree to which Shaw takes theological commitments seriously. The first chapter details the things her subjects believe about the divine and their relationship to it and the way they developed those beliefs, while the second demonstrates a universally high regard for the Bible. Unlike *Courage and Hope*, *God Speaks to Us, Too* provides explanations of the various verses cited to bolster different viewpoints about gender roles in the church.

Elsewhere in the book, the place of the church as the main venue for social interaction and the formation of significant relationships is a common theme despite where the women fall along the spectrum from liberal to conservative. Almost all of the women had childhood experiences with the WMU’s organizations for girls which shaped the way they viewed themselves and the possibilities for them as women. For many, these foundational experiences meant they would break out of traditional gender roles, since the missions education offered in these organizations encouraged them to listen for God’s calling and to answer it, whatever it might be. They felt that the SBC in general gave them different messages than they had heard as little girls, but their sense of Baptist identity was so deeply ingrained as children that they later found it difficult, if not impossible, to leave the Southern Baptist world.

Most of the women interviewed, like most of the women in the SBC, are Southerners. Shaw argues that their Southern culture influences their thoughts and behaviors as much as their theology, and writes in detail about the Southern hospitality she experienced while conducting her research. She also writes about the lingering racial stereotypes present in many of the women’s attitudes. The women are not, she argues, intentionally racist; they believe racism is wrong and in spite of the cultural context of the South, particularly for the older women interviewed about their childhoods, there was a consistent belief that soul competency extends to everyone regardless of color. Still, the SBC expects other races to assimilate into traditionally white congregations. Shaw interviews some women who have done that, and found their religious commitments more important to them than their racial identity.

Women often behave as typical housewives, serving dinner and caring for their children while their husbands go off to work, but they also believe they have the right to have their own ideas, and are not afraid to exercise their right to express them to their husbands. Shaw argues that women often control their husbands through manipulation, providing an outward show of submission while in reality they are the ones leading the men. They seem well-behaved, but things are not always as they seem. Ultimately, she makes a case that all Southern Baptist

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 15.

women are feminists of a sort, if not the kind most people would recognize, though they would not be likely to characterize themselves as such. To Shaw, family relationships in the SBC reflect both Southern culture and a belief in soul competency.

Though it is clear that Shaw has a lot of affection for her subjects, particularly the ones she has known for a lifetime, she does occasionally portray the attitudes of more conservative women as nonsensical. For example, in writing about her mother's baptism, she describes the way it related to the belief that John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the same way, then says that John probably did not immerse Jesus, but that "historical facts were apparently no longer relevant."<sup>38</sup> This does not account for the fact that most in the SBC do believe their baptisms are true to a historical situation, and that it is this belief that is the basis for baptism by immersion. Yet her respect for her subjects also prevents her from stating all of the facts. In her careful description of Marshall's experiences with the president of SBTS, she names him (Al Mohler). When dealing with Klouda's dismissal from SWBTS, however, Shaw glosses over the fact that Klouda's antagonist was SWBTS president Paige Patterson, never naming the "seminary president" who, according to Klouda, assured her of job security before deciding not to renew her contract. Elsewhere Shaw writes about the hospitality of Paige and Dorothy Patterson during her research, so it is likely she felt uncomfortable writing critically about them by name. Overall, however, the strengths of the book far outweigh its weaknesses.

*God Speaks to Us, Too* is not just a book for scholars, though it is an important contribution to the fields of women's- and religious studies. It is both surprisingly comprehensive and meticulously accurate. Compelling and accessible enough to be read by ordinary Southern Baptists as well, the book is likely to find a broad audience. Graduate seminars studying women's religious history and WMU chapters alike are equally likely to find it worthy of reading together. A wide range of Southern Baptist women will see themselves in its pages. Discussion of *God Speaks to Us, Too* in conjunction with *Between Sundays* would be an excellent way to examine how women of different races but similar religious commitments approach life, while reading the book alongside R. Marie Griffith's *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission*<sup>39</sup> would provide an opportunity to explore how many women find "power in submission," a phrase both authors use to describe conservative women's attitudes toward gender roles.

The five books reviewed in this essay were all written from the perspective of current or former Southern Baptists. Those providing secondary literature for the fields of women's and religious studies are from the perspective of women with ties to the SBC who advocate full gender egalitarianism. While one hopes that in the future, the voices of more conservative female scholars might join in the discussion of the history Southern Baptist women, as Shaw points out, it is unlikely, since studying women is viewed with suspicion among conservatives.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps well-behaved women seldom *write* history, either. Another perspective that would be helpful would be that of those who have no ties, past or present, to the SBC, similar to what Alan Scot Willis did for the history of Southern Baptist missions in *All According to God's Plan: Southern*

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>39</sup>R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>40</sup>Shaw, *God Speaks to Us, Too*, 13–14.

*Baptist Missions and Race, 1945–1970.*<sup>41</sup> Those interested in a male perspective look forward to what Keith Harper’s future writings about Moon and Armstrong. The history of Southern Baptist women—well behaved or not—offers rich opportunities for a greater understanding of women’s religious history as a whole.

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<sup>41</sup>Alan Scot Willis, *All According to God’s Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race, 1945–1970* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005).