

Emmanuel McCall, *When All God's Children Get Together: A Memoir of Baptists and Race*, Mercer Church Resources. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007. Pp. 145. \$18.00. Paperback.

Reverend Emmanuel McCall was the first African-American involved in significant denominational service in the Southern Baptist Convention. Current (well-informed) African-American denominational servants in Southern Baptist life look to him as a trailblazer. Hopefully, many others will be made aware of his significance in his short book *When All God's Children Get Together: A Memoir of Race and Baptists*.

McCall tells the story of racial progress among Baptists (both Southern Baptist and National Baptist) in the South. It is fully McCall's story written from his own "interpretive point of view" (preface). While acknowledging this personal lens, McCall does a good job telling the story he wants to tell – covering the nearly forty years between 1957 and 1995. I note this because Emmanuel McCall's relationship with the Southern Baptist Convention was drastically different when this memoir was published in 2007. He has spent his later years of ministry serving and providing leadership within the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a fellowship of Baptists that has repudiated the theological direction of the SBC. However, the tone of the book is celebratory and appreciative of the progress achieved in Baptist life during the designated time frame. His doxological language notes "God did miraculous things through events, persons, and organizations to change the SBC" (xi).

Immediately, the opening pages tell a story as one can view over twenty photographs that track McCall's journey and exposure in Baptist life. Then McCall recounts his life-narrative in twelve pages covering 1953 through 1993. The pages jump from episode to episode very quickly, like one of the four gospels. This is not a problem since his aim is to describe, specifically, his work regarding reconciliation in the SBC. One thing is obvious; McCall is clearly a Baptist in association, heritage, and life's work. Not only a Baptist, but also he is a pioneering Baptist in that his 1968 appointment to the Home Mission Board (now NAMB) was a first for an African-American in SBC agency life. Historically, it is interesting that his "election was official" one month after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. While McCall does not mention this historical marker, one cannot help being curious about the broader societal context at the time of his appointment.

Chapters three through six offer a brief historical section in which McCall wants to provide context for his more personal interpretive chapters that will follow. In order to understand his racial perspectives, McCall traces a history of "racial perspectives" beginning with European colonists and the slave trade. He then discusses the modern missions movement, evangelical awakening in the American colonies, and the various forms of Christianity that emerged among slaves due to the interaction between slaves and gospel-preaching whites. In a few pages, he provides a helpful overview of the supposed "curse of Ham" that was often used by the religious to justify slavery, segregation, and attitudes of racial superiority.

The efforts of Baptists are set in the context of the broader societal shift regarding issues of race. He notes, "Southern Baptists did not change attitudes about race out of a vacuum; rather, changing times led to changing racial attitudes" (45). A strength of the fifth chapter is McCall's balance when describing the setting. He of course notes the racism but also recognizes the "number" of white Baptist that paid great costs due to their preaching about "equality, justice, the nature of godly love, brotherhood, and the Kingdom of God." (48)

The remainder of the book is the personal reflection of McCall on a variety of events, people, and documents. Throughout the chapters various primary source documents are provided. For example, one will find the 1947 SBC resolution, “The Charter of Principles on Race Relations,” the 1968 “Statement Concerning the Crisis in Our Nation,” and the 1995 “SBC Resolution on Racial Reconciliation.” Certain SBC agencies are highlighted as being especially helpful in the progress of racial progress – notably the Women’s Missionary Union, Home Mission Board, and Christian Life Commission. Since the book was published in 2007, personally, I think it would have been informative if McCall had provided at least some personal reflection on the results of the 1995 statement, although I realize it falls beyond his designated time frame.

This brief book will be helpful to readers that may not know the organizational steps that have been taken by the SBC in its journey of racial reconciliation. Additionally, this book mentions little-known Baptists and churches that, in their own way, contributed to the advancement of unity in SBC life.

In order to be a good Baptist, I will offer one critique. In areas where partnerships or cooperative ministries have dissolved between Southern Baptists and National Baptists, it would have been helpful if McCall had noted that theological differences (rather than any retreat in racial progress) often led to these circumstances. For example, I know personally the ending of the long-term educational partnership in running the American Baptist College in Nashville was due to theological incompatibility that emerged after the Conservative Resurgence in the SBC.

From a technical standpoint, the editing process at Mercer did overlook a number of typos and grammatical mistakes. Fortunately, these errors do not distract from the book.

Emmanuel McCall is to be commended for his efforts in SBC life to bring about racial reconciliation. Although his affiliation is now with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (serving recently as its moderator), he stills desires to be an agent of reconciliation. This is commendable. He takes the final chapter to share a few current personal challenges in congregational life and globally (in the Baptist World Alliance, where he served as a vice-president) where he is hoping for reconciliation among diverse Baptists.

As a black denominational employee of a SBC agency, I am particularly appreciative of Dr. McCall’s efforts and hope that others will join him in celebrating the work of God among Southern Baptists. This book would be a good supplemental or optional text in a Baptist History or American Christianity class. I agree with Dr. McCall – it is good when all God’s children get together.

Kevin L. Smith
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary