



# SBAOC Weekly Update

## NEWS & PRAYER REQUESTS

*If you have any news, prayer requests, or events that you would like to have included in this update, please call us at 785-456-8513 or email the information to [spurgeonassociation@gmail.com](mailto:spurgeonassociation@gmail.com).*

### ON THE OTHER HAND: THE DECLINE OF CONFESSIONS

WHEN W. B. JOHNSON GAVE HIS ADDRESS to the public subsequent to the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845, he included an idiosyncratic statement that has fueled the anti-confessional theories of Baptist identity of the twentieth century. Johnson, clearly on this issue out of harmony with his brethren in the South, stated, "We have constructed for our basis no new creed; acting in this matter upon a Baptist aversion for all creeds but the Bible." Though Johnson sought to have his particular resistance to creeds adopted in several instances, those who followed his views were in a vast minority.<sup>1</sup> Johnson saw no scriptural command for creeds, he feared that theology by tradition would supplant the authority of Christ, and he believed that the Bible itself was so infinitely superior to any human condensation of its teachings that desire for a creed was absurd.

More immediately responsible for contemporary resistance to confessions as a tool of definition is the lingering legacy of E. Y. Mullins. Although Mullins wrote a systematic theology and spent his life discussing Christian doctrine and Baptist doctrine, his blows against what he called the a priori method of so-called Protestant Scholasticism fostered in his doctrinal progeny an ambiguous, if not negative, attitude to confessions.

Mullins maintained some elements of that tradition and encouraged the use of confessions and creeds within a limited context. The limitations came, however, not from his immediate orthodox Baptist context but from influences present in his New England experience from 1895 to 1899.

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#### PURPOSE STATEMENT:

We unite as an association of Southern Baptist churches in order to manifest the glory of God above all. We purpose to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. We covenant to strengthen and support one another, motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

*"If there is no church... should you not commence one?" C. H. Spurgeon*

## COMMENTS ON OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

We unite as an association of Southern Baptist churches in order to manifest the glory of God above all. We purpose to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. We covenant to strengthen and support one another, motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.

*"Ah! If we did but love Christ better, my brothers and sisters, if we lived nearer to the cross, if we knew more of the value of his blood, if we wept like him over Jerusalem, if we felt more what it was for souls to perish, and what it was for men to be saved—if we did but rejoice with Christ in the prospect of his seeing the travail of his soul, and being abundantly satisfied—if we did but delight more in the divine decree, that the kingdoms of this world shall be given to Christ, I am sure we would all of us find more ways and more means for sending forth the gospel of Christ."*

*CH Spurgeon,  
Sermon #190, pg. 207*

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The great Baptist proponent of the "New Theology," William Newton Clarke, served as pastor in Newton Center, Massachusetts, from 1869-1880. Mullins was there fifteen years later. While Mullins did not advocate Clarke's modernistic approach to Scripture, his affinity for the dynamic of human experience and the mitigation of established definitions in doctrinal development was similar to the methodology of Clarke.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, New England Baptists under the influence of Francis Wayland exhibited a wavering attitude toward confessions. While Wayland argued that Baptists had maintained "invariably the truth of their early confessions," they did it while not "one in ten thousand of our members ever heard of their existence." Both Baptist ecclesiology and the authority of Scripture in the life of each individual precluded the possibility of established creeds. He contended, unlike the previous generation under the influence of Isaac Backus, that the absence of such an "established creed is in itself the cause of our unity."<sup>3</sup>

Mullins reflected the ambivalent confluence of these two streams of thought, the Southern tradition and the New England tradition. He still admitted that creeds "help rather than hinder," especially as a tool to educate us "to unity of faith and practice" and "as means of propagating the faith." In addition, he believed that a group united by confession "must judge when an individual or group within the larger body has departed from the common view sufficiently to warrant separation."<sup>4</sup>

For an individual to insist on his right to remain within a group after "radical and hopeless divergence of belief has arisen" is no less a tyranny than forcing the beliefs of a group on an individual. Mullins was willing to enforce this idea practically, as indicated in his speech to the 1923 Southern Baptist Convention. After listing a number of simple doctrinal affirmations, Mullins stated, "We believe that adherence to the above truths and facts is a necessary condition of service for teachers in our Baptist schools."<sup>5</sup>

Mullins crystallized all of these points in an article entitled "Baptists and Creeds."<sup>6</sup> Because of objections on the part of some (most vigorously from his own faculty member, W. O. Carver) to the adoption of a convention-wide confession of faith, Mullins was forced to justify this action. Mullins dismisses four fallacies concerning creeds and answered four reasons for opposing a restatement of beliefs. On three occasions in the short article he answered the misimpression that creeds oppose Baptist views of liberty. He believed that some interpreted liberty as license and others misapplied liberty as "an exaggerated individualism." Mullins spoke of the "group right of self-protection." As Baptists are trustees of certain truths "they have an inalienable right to conserve and propagate those truths unmolested by others inside the

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## UPCOMING CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Springfield Bible Conference—  
October 11-13. Faith Bible  
Church, Springfield, IL. Theme:  
The Glory of Christ. Speakers:  
Phil Johnson, Thomas Schreiner,  
Curt Daniel. Faithbibleonline.net

**2019 KNCSB Annual Meeting—**  
October 14 & 15. Parkview  
Baptist Church, 803 W. 18th St.,  
Lexington, NE 68850. For more  
information contact Peg Davis at  
pdavis@knscsb.org.

**Reformation Weekend  
Conference—**October 25-27.  
Trinity Baptist Church, Wamego,  
KS. The SBAOC annual business  
meeting will be held on  
Saturday, October 26.

**Southeast Founders  
Conference—**December 5-7.  
Grace Baptist Church, Cape  
Coral, FL. Speakers: Tom Ascol,  
Jared Longshore, Tom Nettles,  
Tom Hicks. Theme: Law &  
Gospel.



Check out the  
"SBFYC Official"  
YouTube channel to  
watch the 2019  
sessions.



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denomination who oppose those truths." Mullins believed that the adoption of a new confession-and by this he had in mind the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message-would correct some "deadly tendencies at work-deadly." A confession would help "clear the atmosphere and learn where we are drifting."

On the other hand, his language to describe the dangers of creeds can be picturesque and compelling. Despite his call for adherence to truths as a necessary condition of service, Mullins was in print as saying that "as soon as [creeds] become binding they become divisive" and "inevitably lead to mischief in the church."<sup>7</sup> He speaks of creeds as becoming "stereotyped and formal" and used as "death masks for defunct religion" or "lashes to chastise others." A creed without life "becomes a chain to bind, not wings on which the soul may fly." Nothing is more distasteful than the idea of a barren intellectualism, void of life, where creeds may become "whips to coerce men into uniformity of belief by carnally-minded champions of the faith."

Mullins encouraged a tentative and mediating approach toward confessions by creating a false dichotomy. Baptists are not creed-makers he said, because "the Scriptures are a sufficient revelation of his will."<sup>9</sup>

The sufficiency of Scripture is not the only spiritual reality to which creeds may be antagonistic. Drawing on the personalism of Borden Parker Bowne, Mullins always harbored in his bosom the suspicion that commitment to propositional truth stood as a rival to one's awareness of the personal activity of God in the world. "They," creeds, that is, "become barriers to the free development of personality in religion," Mullins feared, when the propagation of them takes the place of the personal dimension of the God/man relationship.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of recognizing their strengths, Mullins' warnings about the possible killing effects of creeds overwhelmed his attempts to present a balance. When he defended the use of confessions, or even creeds, he did so sincerely but seemingly as a foil, a contrast enhancing his own objections. His heightened emphasis on the superiority of experience to creed, his clear warnings about the dangers of creeds, and the vivid images he evoked in speaking of their oppressive use tended to neutralize their advantages as instruments of education, definition, and discipline. Some of his warnings, though warranted if a genuine danger were present, were overstated and treated the worst possible scenario as the most possible scenario. Mullins' powerful influence succeeded in softening, if not dissolving, the more consistent Baptist approach as represented by J.P. Boyce's approach to the use of creeds.<sup>11</sup>

That this particular aspect of Mullins's view of confessions has multiplied in strength may be seen in Frank Mauldin's treatment of the Baptist view of "Personal Truth." Mauldin asserts that a radical dichotomy exists between the

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"personal truth" of entering into the life of the living God and any supposed propositional truths of Scripture. "Truth is someone real, not something true," writes Mauldin. He considers the emphasis on scriptural truths stated as propositions, especially as doctrines of Calvinism, as a declension from the genius of Baptist life. In an unusual observation he makes about decline among American Baptists he pinpoints doctrinal unity as a sign of decline.

The Regular and the Separate Baptists of Virginia unite around similar orthodox propositions. They deny that their confession usurps individual freedom, yet they affirm that it contains the essential truths of the gospel, and that the doctrine of salvation by Christ and by free unmerited grace alone ought to be believed by every Christian. Then they add, "upon these terms we are united." The reality of persons in relation within the life-world of the gospel does not unite Virginia Baptists. In a most unbaptistic way doctrines do. The declension, although momentary, is obvious.<sup>12</sup>

Attention to propositional truth as a unifying factor among Baptists consistently ranks as an evidence of decline for Baptists in Mauldin's treatment. Although Mauldin justly, and with abundant precedence on Baptist thought, emphasizes God's immediate action in the life of the believer and insists that true knowledge must transcend mere intellectual assent, he labors to create the same false dichotomy as Mullins did in his worst moments. The mass of Baptist witness affirms the interdependence of propositional truth from Scripture and a relational knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Mauldin takes as a paradigm some of the extreme statements of John Smyth, the General Baptist, and Paul Hobson, the almost-mystical Particular Baptist, and employs highly selective quotations from other Baptist leaders of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He even discusses John Brine and John Gill and sees both of them as tragic figures that held to some aspects of the "personal truth" but allowed rationalism to corrupt their consistent Baptist flawed in that "in the interplay of the

Spirit of God and the scriptures in the individual believer, what the Spirit secures is not 'the truth as it is in Jesus' but a revelation that consists of evangelical truths in the form of statements."<sup>13</sup>

Mauldin takes seriously the Mullinsean conviction that creeds "become barriers to the free development of personality in religion" and "a chain to bind, not wings on which the soul may fly." One may warrantably wonder why precise information and unadulterated truth imposes hindrances on the development of personality, unless one desires freedom to develop apart from the guidance of truth. Can our obedience to God be truly personal and filled with respect for His holiness if it takes no regard for His commandments? Can our praise to Him be acceptable if it is not formed by His truthful revelation of His character? Should we be like those against whom Paul wrote whose regulations were mere human commands and doctrines (Colossians 2:22, 23). Or do we show love to God and restore the image of God in human personality and really grasp "the truth as it is in Jesus" when our thinking, talking, walking, worshipping and witnessing follows the pattern of sound words and protects the deposit of truth (2 Timothy 1:8-14)?

Notes:

1 For a concise and informative discussion of Johnson's views and influences, see Greg Wills, "Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in Mark Dever, *Polity: A Collection of Historic Baptist Documents*, (Washington DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 31-33. For a recent brief presentation of Johnson as normative for Baptist views of confessions see Doug Weaver in "Baptist Bits" in the *The Baptist Studies Bulletin*, January, 2002.

2 William Newton Clarke, *What Shall We Think of Christianity?* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 52. This book comes from the content of the Levering Lectures delivered at Johns Hopkins University in 1899. Though Mullins maintained the assertions of theological conservatism, his discussion of the development of Scripture as it relates to Christian doctrine is remarkably

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like that of Clarke. In lecture two entitled "The Christian Doctrine" Clarke stated, "Doctrine was no such formal, external thing as to take up something merely because it had been said, even though it were by the Lord himself. No, doctrine grew up in the experience of Christian living. It was the Christian truth as learned by the Christian people; and both elements, the truth and the experience, were essential to the producing of it. Any thought that did not take root in this vital soil, and take root to stay and live, did not come to form a part of the Christian doctrine" (52, 53).

3 Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*, ed. John H. Hinton (London: J. Heaton and Son, 1861), 1-4.

4 E. Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs*, (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1925 [ninth printing 1962] first copyright 1912 by Baptist World Publishing Company), 8. Also see *Freedom and Authority in Religion*, 301, 302.

5 Baker, *Sourcebook*, 205. Baker took the document from the *Annual* of the Southern Baptist Convention of 1925. This quote comes from a statement on "Science and Religion" made by Mullins at the 1923 convention and adopted at that time. By vote of the convention it was added to the articles of faith adopted in 1925 at Memphis.

6 E. Y. Mullins, "Baptists and Creeds" in *Axioms of Religion*, comp. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. , ed. Timothy and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 186-191. This article appears in a manuscript notebook in the Mullins Collection in the James P. Boyce Centennial Library at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

7 E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, (Philadelphia: the Griffith & Rowland Press, 1908), 143.

8 *Ibid.*, 9, 10.

9 *Axioms*, 146.

10 *Freedom and Authority*, 302.

11 Boyce strongly defends the use of a "Creed" by Baptist in his *Three Changes in Theological Institutions*, (Greenville, SC: C. J. Elford's book and Job Press, 1856), 33-44. After

giving his defense Boyce concludes, "It is, therefore, gentlemen, in perfect consistency with the position of Baptists, as well as of Bible Christians, that the test of doctrine I have suggested to you, should be adopted. It is based upon principles and practices sanctioned by the authority of Scripture, and by the usage of our people" (44). B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and president during much of Mullins's tenure at Southern, shared the convictions of Boyce on creeds. In his exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16, Carroll contended, "The modern cry: 'Less creed and more liberty,' is a degeneration from the vertebrate to the jellyfish, and means less unity and less morality, and it means more heresy. Definitive truth does not create heresy -it only exposes and corrects. Shut off the creed and the Christian world would fill up with heresy unsuspected and uncorrected, but none the less deadly" (*Colossians, Ephesians, Hebrews in An Interpretation of the English Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973 {reprint of 1948 Broadman Press edition}], 140). Carroll observed that denominational institutions were "passing into the hands of infidels and semi-infidels" due to the "absence of definite articles of faith to be subscribed by either teacher or trustees." ("Safeguards of the Seminary" in *The Baptist Standard*, January 13, 1910).

12 Frank Louis Mauldin, *The Classic Baptist Heritage of Personal Truth*, (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 1999), Xiv, 113. Although Mauldin's emphasis on the reality of God's action in the life of the believer and the necessity of knowledge being personal rather than merely intellectual assent catches the spirit of a portion of the historic Baptist witness, he labors to create a false dichotomy. The mass of Baptist witness affirms the interdependence of propositional truth from Scripture and a relational knowledge of Jesus Christ. Mauldin takes as a paradigm some of the extreme statements of John Smyth and Paul Hobson and employs highly selective quotations from other Baptist leaders of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

13 *Ibid.*, 105.

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## PRAYER MEETINGS FOR SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND REVIVAL

- Fellowship Baptist Church in Onaga, Kansas—5:00 pm on Sundays
- Trinity Baptist Church in Wamego, Kansas—8:00 pm on Saturdays

*The Spurgeon Baptist Association of Churches is an association of Southern Baptist Churches that are united to manifest the glory of God above all. We set out to do this by seeking spiritual awakening and revival by intense prayer and earnest obedience to Scripture. As an association of churches we are bound in mutual covenant to strengthen and support one another - motivated and guided by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture - by facilitating faithful preaching of the Word of God, proclaiming the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ to all, making and gathering disciples, planting churches and coordinating unified missions efforts.*

*We are a non-geographic association seeking to include any like-minded body of believers so that together we might better fulfill the great commission of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Our intent is to lean on His instruction and not our imaginations so that He is honored in all that we do. We welcome churches who adhere to the confessions of faith accepted by Southern Baptists throughout their history, including, but not limited to, the Second London Confession (1689) and the Baptist Faith and Message.*



Baptist Association of Churches