a good place to visit
but
a better place to belong

THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

From the time that I entered Bob Jones University to prepare for the ministry, I have heard and read a proverbial adage repeated uncountable times that "a *mission* for God begins with a *man* and becomes a *movement*." Who first said this, I have no idea and cannot accord proper credit; however, I have found the saying used in secular material enough to believe it probably originated well outside of Christianity and was 'borrowed' by some long ago preacher. Some preachers or writers have used this proverb in an encouraging way to show that small beginnings can become great accomplishments. Others have added another phrase: "which then ends as a *monument*." Their intent is to show that what begins well must eventually and will inevitably lose its zeal and its purpose of existence. What a man with a vision on a mission started becomes the rather elaborate 'tombstone' of the founder. It seems to me that one other step requires inclusion in this axiom. Surely, someone other than me has written of this additional stair tread of the downward stairway long ago. It fits so well that I must assume that I also read or heard it.

"A work begun by a *man* soon becomes a *movement*
that eventually becomes a *machine*
that ends its existence as a *monument*."

this and that

Editor and Staff

Jerald L. Manley   Gary Roland
Dorothy Gundersen   J. Alan Wolf

A NATION AT WAR

When the war to liberate Iraq started, I was in Michigan with the Highland Hills Baptist Church and Pastor Jason Filler. (I enjoyed the time with these folks and their shepherd—in spite of the satanic opposition the church has experienced in recent months and days.) Returning to Pensacola, I had opportunity to spend some time in the Atlanta airport. Listening to the conversations of those around and those drifting by, I was saddened to hear more concern expressed over messed up vacation plans than over the potential loss of service personnel lives. It seemed that the mood of America is more reflective of a war of inconvenience than of a battle to free a people from a brutal regime.

Babylon (in my view geographical Babylon and philosophical—religious, political, and economical—Babylon) holds a key

---

this and that

role in the times of the end, as does Jerusalem. It is a matter of record that Saddam Hussein has felt that it is his destiny to rebuild the city of Babylon and reestablish a Babylonian empire. It is the biblical record that the city will be rebuilt and that a Nimrod philosophy will dominate the world during the Tribulation. The one world government is clearly on the way.

If I were president, I do not know that I would do or could do anything vastly differently than what he has done. Yet, there are mixed emotions within as I watch events unfold. Every step taken could be a step toward that world-encompassing kingdom of the anti-Christ. I am thankful that my only presidential responsibility is to pray for the man who occupies the office and for the nation that he leads. That is task enough for me and some terms have been easier to pray for than have others. The first president that my mother taught me to pray for was FDR; because of that instruction, I remember quite well the day when Harry S Truman was thrust into the presidency and asked for the prayers of the nation.

America, her military forces, and her President surely need our prayers in the dark days that lie ahead—just as she did in those of WW II.

This publication is mailed to you on purpose. Someone who knows of you believed that you would profit by receiving and reading it. If you do not agree, we will remove your name from the next possible mailing. We have no desire to intrude or offend.

Phone: 850-944-5545
Fax: 850-944-9822
E-mail: JERALD.L.MANLEY@GTE.NET

—Pastor Manley

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

In one sense, the time might be right. Appearance—perhaps not reality—indicates that (1) the Willow Creek style progressives of the BBFI are now a dominant faction in that group; (2) Southwide has a majority or near majority of Contemporary Christian Music churches; (3) the WBF likewise contains many purpose driven churches and (4) the IBFI likely has churches walking the same path—all of those purpose-driven-willow-creek-contemporary churches would be quite as comfortable in fellowship with each other or, for that matter, with their fellow contemporary purpose-driven-willow-creek-contemporary counterparts in the SBC as are the pastors Falwell (Lynchburg) and Ramsey (Fort Worth) who led their churches in that journey. That old poet Burns was right when he wrote that birds of a feather are quite comfortable in flocking together.

If this purposed amalgamative blend were actually to brew, I think that the coalition would require a dictator with powers just short of execution to keep it glued together. Overcoming the existing networks (four sets of 'mighty men,' schools, publications, mission agencies, churches, evangelists, boards of directors, officers, etc.) represented by the four groups mentioned in Hamm's article would require a tidal wave. I doubt the *Beach Boys* (no disrespect meant, but I could not avoid the pun) riding those ripples with Dr. John Rawlings at *Surf City* can really catch a ride on that one, but who knows? Maybe they will 'hang ten.'

Should the Trumpet Call not yet have sounded, we will see, as has been said, what we will see come September 2004.   —Pastor Manley

Reprint permission always granted; acknowledgment appreciated.

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

I use the word "Machine" in the sense that it was used in the Chicago area when I pastored there in the days of Richard J. Daley. The Democratic Party of Cook County Illinois, the Chicago city government, and the government of Cook County were so inexorably interwoven that the union was commonly described in print and conversation as "the Machine." All who read or heard that term knew exactly the entity that was the subject of the discussion. "The Machine" determined policy and practice in and around Chicago. "The Machine," in boyhood Indiana language, 'ruled the roost.' Nothing prospered without the permission of "the Machine." Loyalty to "the Machine" was rewarded with openhanded largess; disloyalty was disciplined with heavy-handed punishment, and both were dispensed with luxuriant display and lavish publicity. Indeed, much, if not most, of what "the Machine" achieved was good for the city of Chicago.

The citizenry accepted "the Machine" solely because of its advantages. It is a recognized fact that the city and county during those years were among the most effective in the nation at delivering services to the people. If the city of Chicago and the Cook County governments were then a collectively, well-oiled mechanism, it was solely because many palms were well greased. The graft, corruption, and excessive financial costs were accepted as the necessary cost of having the benefits of efficient, effective government.

The residents of Chicago and Cook County knew that the city and the county were unquestionably, openly run by a political "Machine"; but, because of the personal benefit of the efficiency of the control exercised and/or the personal fear of the severity of the discipline applied, the majority of the citizenry willingly chose to ignore or to tolerate the price paid.

"The Machine" and Mayor Daley were so co-joined that oft times his name was used in the place of the term "the Machine." In one particular Presidential elec-

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

tion, the open secret, months before the election, was that Mayor Daley had the votes "in his hip pocket" to carry the state for John Kennedy and he did. While Mayor Daley was not the absolute sole dictator of "the Machine," he was far more than a titular head of the political organization and the mayor of Chicago. In the same way that the people endured "the Machine" because of its benefits, "the Machine" used Mayor Daley because of his talents. He ran "the Machine" because "the Machine" needed his abilities to perpetuate its own existence. A Machine does not exist without the leadership abilities of a person like Mayor Daley. Yet, the "Mayor Daley" of any "Machine," political or otherwise, is never in a thoroughly secured position. Potential replacements are always gathered near his door hoping for his endorsement and waiting for his demise.

Through a series of interesting events, it was my privilege, while pastoring in Cook County, to become acquainted with several of the members of that famous "Machine." I found them markedly to be personally likeable, accessible, courteous, and benevolent and I found that their agendas, aspirations, and ambitions were always just as self-evident. I write this article with that experience in mind.

My objective is to fix my sights on the target, as Dr. Bob Jones Sr. instructed me to do and to fire at that target. I can still hear his chuckle as he said that it was not the responsibility of the preacher if somebody walked between the preacher and the target. I have a principle in my sights, not a particular person, or a precise group of people. If a principle is true, then it applies to any individual and to all groups and would apply to those individuals and groups at any stage in their evolutionary journey from the beginning with a man and a call to the ending with a machine waiting to become a monument, an expensive tombstone.

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

World Baptist Fellowship, Independent Baptist Fellowship International, and Baptist Bible Fellowship International to participate. These four groups include the majority of independent Baptist churches in America.

Not every Baptist will be happy about the idea but that is a personal choice. Dr. Rawlings has cast the vision ... it will be interesting to see who responds and what God does with them. I plan to be there!

In a related article titled "Three Fellowships Planning To Combine" (overlooking the Independent Baptist Fellowship International), Dr. R. L Hymers, Jr. writes:

Dr. Rawlings gave the tentative name for the newly combined group as "World Baptist Fellowship." It would have the BBFI structure, the WBF name, and hopefully some of the Southwide-style preaching! The proposed "World Baptist Fellowship" would have a huge membership—and a great potential for evangelism.

Billy Hamm's analogy, in the light of his choice of title and the apparent immediate refutation of the saying in his first sentence, prompts me to comment that the waves that are 'made by mighty men' always lack the wisdom, power, purpose, and authority of the God Who rules the waters. Unity among the brethren is a pleasant goal; one to be encouraged when scriptural unity is the intended goal. Unity urged upon God's people for any other purpose—size, power, influence, ambitions, prestige—is biblical treason. The motives are yet to be exposed or explained in this endeavor. It would be impertinent for anyone to attribute any.

The pertinent question for Dr. Rawlings, as the public instigator, to answer is exactly how far does he intend to follow the pattern of the man (Dr. Jerry Falwell) who identifies Dr. Rawlings as his mentor. Would Dr. Rawlings desire to complete the merger by petitioning the Southern Baptist Convention for admission—in the case of many of the churches, it would be for readmission?

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

and Culture" (sub-heading of article announcing the BBFI midwinter meeting, page 7, January 15, 2003)—Huntington Beach, California apparently just prior to the BBFI meeting and where Tribune writer Billy Hamm reports in BBFI News under the title "Mighty Men Making Waves," an interesting proposition was 'floated.' The entire article is available on line at BBFI News www.bbfi.org/news. An excerpt follows:

There is a saying, "God makes waves, men only ride them" but this month in California, there were some waves generated by men that will affect independent Baptists for some time to come. It is typical of Baptists and amoebas to divide on a regular basis so last week it came as "counter-cultural" from Dr. John Rawlings that independent Baptists come together as brethren to see what can be done to reach this lost world. Imagine such a thing!

This year he challenged state and national leaders from his heart to reverse the trend of splitting and to reach out to men of other independent Baptist groups. He proposed some common meetings for preaching and fellowship where men could share their burdens and ideas. He even dared to forecast a "coming together" of many independent Baptists for the formation of a larger group.

He invited such leaders as: Bill Monroe, Florence Baptist Temple in Florence SC; David Bouler, Highland Park Baptist Church, Chattanooga, TN; Tom Messer, Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL; Dino Pedrone, New Testament Baptist Church, Miami, FL; Gary Coleman, Lavon Drive Baptist Church, Garland, TX; Willie Weaver, Worth Baptist Church, Fort Worth, TX; and David Bryant, President of Arlington Baptist College, Arlington, Texas. They and others came to listen and participate in the discussion.

Based on their responses, a meeting was proposed for September, 2004, to be hosted by Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga with an invitation to pastors in Southwide Baptist Fellowship,

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

THE JOURNEY FROM A VISION TO A TOMBSTONE

I enjoy reading. Time given to a good book is one of life's better investments and among life's most pleasurable moments. There is a joy immeasurable in dropping back in time and sharing an hour or so with saints long home such as Bunyan, Flavel, Watson, Spurgeon, Pendleton, Carroll, Trapp, Poole, Gill, Newell, Warfield, Rice, Jones, Havner, and multiplied others, all members of a cherished company of good, godly men. We do not always see eye to eye, these men and I; but as iron sharpeneth iron, so these men always sharpen my countenance—though my iron is much inferior to theirs. Most of my favorite books have lively records of my conversations with the authors scribbled in the margins. Where I agree, I am quick to congratulate the writers on the good judgment their thinking shows. When I disagree, I am firm in my resolve to correct the error in the reasoning that their 'ill-chosen' words display. My arguments must be somewhat successful, because not one of these men has yet disagreed with me on the need for the purposed correction to his work nor has any disputed my suggestions. What a joy it will be to sit down in the kingdom to have fellowship with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, these men, and others who walked with the KING while laboring in obscurity in the kingdom of heaven as we talk of the things of the kingdom of God. How little insight I fear I will be able to contribute.

It is true that I have developed a firm preference for the companionship of those older writers. I never fail to learn from every visit into their company. Every meal with them is a treasured pleasure. They never set an empty table. One finds the cream plentifully homogenized in their milk and more meat is always laid on the table than one can comfortably digest in a single feeding. The honey is pure; the bread is fresh; the butter is smooth,

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

and the water is sweet. The fragrance of the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley always fills the room.

These men of earlier times had no goal of becoming the leading "best-selling author," of living on the contractual fees from publishers, or of spending the lucrative royalties from film producers; they wrote for a singular purpose—to convey truth to others. The same motivation was true of the old writers of hymns and gospel songs—their concern was for the ministering opportunity, not with anticipation of income or for the prospect of suing over copyright infringement. They wrote to express truth, not to gain an audience. They also wrote *spiritual* music, not worldly, carnal ditties.

The majority of the contemporary writers, in my view, are interested in marketability rather than in ministry. Salability determines the choice of the content and designs the style of the presentation of their productions. As do the contemporary politicians, the contemporary Christian composer of Christian fiction and the Contemporary Christian Music 'songwriter' of crossover crooning seek their direction and receive their inspiration from 'focus groups' and polls. I am certain that the writers, composers, publishers, performers, and merchandisers would all disagree with that 'judgment' and dismiss my complaint either as ignorance on my part or as a trivial difference in methodology—and, that brings me to the subject of this article.

THE CONSEQUENCES FLOWING
WHEN METHODOLOGY SUPERSEDES THEOLOGY

In the course of my weekly reading (a habit begun in first grade), not long ago, I spent some time scanning the lead articles of two widely circulated publications written by the presidents of two national Baptist Fellowships. The men have vastly different backgrounds in education and are certainly widely divergent in associations.

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

such a collection of interconnected relationships that their continued existence is a mutual co-dependency.

Every network began as a fellowship. Deterioration starts the very day that any permanent, *structured* organization of the fellowship is introduced, because the very act of instituting such *structured* organization is extra-biblical. The only *structured* organization for fellowship exampled in Scripture is the local New Testament church. Restoration of a fellowship after its transformational descent into the configuration of a 'Fellowship,' 'convention,' 'denomination,' or a 'network' would require the destruction of the evolved entity it had become, and thus is more impossible than improbable, more unthinkable than unlikely.

The LORD Jesus founded the church not 'the denomination,' 'the' convention, 'the' network, 'the' council, 'the' agency, 'the' association, or 'the' fellowship. All of these man-devised movements are doomed to fail. Among all the gatherings on earth, only the local church always remains first generation. If faithful men convey to faithful men who will convey to faithful men, a local church would continue as a first generation until the LORD Jesus returns. When men, even *mighty men, men of renown*, seek to improve the efficiency, the influence, or the popularity of the body that the LORD Jesus founded, their efforts, however sincere, are counterproductive. The entrance of a church into exterior organization unfailingly leads to extra-church loyalties that will eventuate the death of the church.

Isaiah 19:9
"and they that weave networks shall be confounded."

addendum

As this article was in its final preparation, my attention was drawn to a recent meeting held (according to the Baptist Bible Tribune) where "Surf City Offers History

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

by their forefathers and set about to enjoy the fruits of the victory.

Participants in the generations that follow forget the battles, neglect the victories, and rapidly become like those against whom the first and second generations engaged in combat.

The fervor of first purpose and the firmness of original intent forming any 'Fellowship for fellowship' rarely survive the first and second generations. Moreover, formed 'Fellowships' seldom remain as 'Fellowships for fellowship' beyond the second generation. As the distance in time lengthens from the original commitment of the founders of the 'Fellowship' and their principled reason for existence that created the fellowship of the 'Fellowship,' the bonds of fellowship are replaced with a strengthened, more binding connection creating a capital 'F' Fellowship. From the institution of those created 'bonds,' the perpetuation of the now designed 'Fellowship' becomes more important than the causes that originally produced the fellowship of the 'Fellowship.' The 'Fellowship' becomes the cause, not the fellowship. The rise of the 'Fellowship' always produces a directly proportional decline in the fellowship.

It does not take many years for a 'fellowship' of preachers to become a 'Fellowship' of loyalists leading inevitably to a 'convention' (when the 'fellowship' of equals progresses to a defined organization of churches, boards, publishers, and schools with elected, appointed, or assumed collective leadership), which soon develops into a 'denomination' (when the leadership of the Fellowship develops specialized materials, programs, and connecting activities that attract and bind the membership to a specific creedal confession). The network is the final stage in which various similarly minded individuals, churches, fellowships, conventions, denominations, and diverse ancillary organizations have become entwined in

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

Both men, to my knowledge, have character above reproach and both men, I believe, love the Lord. What I write is not a personal attack upon either. A fellow at my rank could not throw mud high enough to strike men of their stature anyway. I do intend to comment upon the theme expressed by these two men, because I believe it reflects a subtle shift in philosophy within both Fellowships and reveals the widespread nature of that same transition among Baptists in general.

While neither man knew what the other was writing and though each touched upon areas not visited by the other, the underlying premises of the two articles were starkly identical. I doubt that the two have ever met, much less have ever had any communication on the content of their writings—and that is what fascinated me about the similarity of the content. Had these articles not been published concurrently, I would have wondered if the follower had read the leader.

The similarities in thinking seem obvious. Both men spoke of fellowship needs: (1) the need for adjustment in the strength of the leadership position to control the direction and the action of the fellowship, (2) the need for reaching out to "other" Baptists for growth, (3) the need to keep the local, regional and national meetings focused away from division over methodology on non-divisive issues, and (4) the need for 'unity' but 'not uniformity.' Two conclusions appear immediately obvious to me.

First, both presidents are clearly under pressure to maintain or to increase the 'membership' of their respective Fellowships, because both the leadership and the 'follow-ship' have accepted the unscriptural premise that a decrease in size is evidence of loss or failure. Since Dr. Elmer Towns wrote his "Ten Largest Sunday Schools" and Dr. John Rice established the "200 Hundred Baptisms" standard, the battle-cry of Baptist preachers has been 'numerical growth validates both blessing and obedience.'

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

(Continued from page 7)

The emphasis on "how many" is the natural human interpretation of the slogan used in the 1940-1950 era: "Win the lost at any cost." The originators of the catchy motto no doubt intended the term "cost" to include the sacrifice of time, effort, and money in the pursuit of the lost wherever they might be found; however, their proselytes soon used the phrase to justify involvement with Dr. Billy Graham's cooperation with liberals in his evangelistic campaigns, participation with Dr. Jerry Falwell and the Mormons, Catholics, Jews, Charismatics, and others in his Moral Majority. Now this generation uses the concept conveyed in the saying to justify incorporating the music and activities of the world within the churches and ministries.

While Gideon and his shrinking army is often the subject of sermons, the practical application of the passage is seldom made. In his sermons on Gideon, Dr. Bob Sr. would say that size was not the evidence of the rightness of any activity or agency; and add that sometimes the very presence of numerical size was, in fact, proof only of the presence of a mixed multitude and of the preacher's compromise. He often declared that there were never *too few* for God to work with, but sometimes there were indeed *too many*.

It is equally obvious that both Fellowships have members that are not fully aboard the good ships in question. Quite apparently, the leadership and the membership are not in full fellowship within the Fellowship; there would be no need for such admonitions otherwise. When presidents state that disagreements need to be barred from the messages and banned from the meetings, no interpreter is needed to decipher the history of that declaration. When presidents decree that 'the president' *will have* veto over all aspects of the content of national meetings, the implications of previous discussions and disagreements are obvious. When presidents remind potential speakers of the need to avoid introducing per-

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

(Continued from page 16)

Fellowship in a fellowship is a result of being in one accord.
  Participation in a network is the consequence of being in compliance.
Fellowships are horizontal in structure.
  Networks have structured vertical rankings.
Fellowships are voluntary associations built upon doctrine.
  Networks are organized relationships held under discipline.
Fellowships are free.
  Networks have dues—either financial or obligatory.
Fellowships convey a mutual respect for all.
  Networks contrive a metered status to all.
Fellowships have equality bottom to top.
  Networks have dictatorship top to bottom.
Fellowships regard not the size of ministries.
  Networks defer to the ministries of size.
Fellowships focus on commonality of the cause.
  Networks focus on contribution to the cause.
Fellowships have agreement of purpose and direction.
  Networks require agreement of purpose and direction.
Fellowships are drawn together by the presence of concord.
  Networks are held together by the pressure of conformity.

There is an observable pattern to the evolution of a fellowship into a network.

THE CYCLE OF A FELLOWSHIP

Participants in the first generation of a fellowship are activists who develop an *affinity* for each other because they are allies in the same battle.

Participants in the second generation *align* together because of respect for the first generation's battle scars and to continue the fight.

Participants in the third generation *affiliate* with each other because they relish in the victories achieved

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

structure, and agenda (which three are always considered in a network to be inseparable) and with the expected reaction of all other participants being the concurrent discrediting of every challenger, even if he be the least potent potential opponent. However, those deemed by the network to be loyalists* are the recipients of habitual vindication and continued promotion, regardless of moral peccadilloes or ethical failures.

*The proclaimed loyalty of an individual person, church, or grouping of individuals or churches to any network (whether within conventions, associations, fellowships, boards, agencies, etc.) is always expected and accepted by the other participants in that network, especially by the appointed or assumed leadership of the network; but the expression of loyalty is never considered of high value or noteworthy when it is articulated merely in terms of agreement, cooperation, opportunities of exposure, endorsement, or even defense from attacks. Loyalty to the network will be esteemed and rewarded solely to the extent that it is measurable in the form of a contribution that is, directly or indirectly, monetary in nature and that significantly advances the network; but, even then, only when such contribution is delivered with the evident profession of unquestioning approval of the actions of the network. A single question conveying any degree of dissent, disagreement, or lack of understanding with any position, stated or implied, or action, proposed or accomplished, of the network is considered a traitorous betrayal. This simple demonstration of an existence as an independent *self-other-than-the-network* is judged as a hostile attack and produces overwhelming reprisals that are consistent with the perceived threat to the network. This is necessary because a network views every other entity as subservient to the network; and the recognition or acceptance of the equality of any other entity, therefore, must be disputed, denied, and contested by the network for the network to maintain exclusivity of the claim upon the loyalty of the membership.

The *chief qualities* that distinguish and separate a network from a fellowship are those of the most simple and elementary nature. Some of these are expressible in the following terms:

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

sonal preferences, peripheral issues, and discussions of methodology into the Fellowship, an experienced reader knows where the discord lies among the brethren.

I wish these men well, but both should be reminded that two will walk in fellowship within a Fellowship only as far as they are in agreement with the Fellowship. The need to call for a return of fellowship in any Fellowship is full testimony to the presence of dissension. Pleading for a revisiting of kindness and graciousness in dealing with one another and declaring the end of potshots in preaching provides those of us not present at the meetings with a transcript, paraphrased and unauthorized, but amply sufficient. A veteran of previous battlefields would recognize in the language of the articles a warm invitation for opposing views to find another Fellowship—all with Christian charity, of course.

In a strange twist of providence, I read these particular articles only days after a time of sorting through my collection of five decades of Baptist publications. In the course of that enterprise, I had read materials written many years ago published by these two Fellowships. The reasons for existence, the principles of organization, the declarations of practices, and the affirmations of foundation for the Fellowships as given then as demanding perpetual adherence and the denunciation of every degree of deviation as compromise are one hundred and eighty degrees from these recent articles. That which was deemed by leadership 'then' to be worth not only resolutions and declarations but also the very fight to create the Fellowships is the same issue the presidents 'now' identify as a cause of division within the Fellowships. It would be interesting to have the two presidents confronted with the opportunity to reconcile 'then' with 'now' and to see those efforts in print. In one case, it would be the same man who was 'then' and who is 'now.' The amount of wear and tear on convictions, practices,

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

and vision that continued power produces is measurable. History shows that reformers soon require reformation.

Of course, the historic pattern of growth for Baptist fellowships, associations, and conventions is that of multiplying through division; in that sense, these Fellowships are following rich precedent. A chart of the Baptist 'family,' such as that in Dr. Wardin's book, <u>Atlas of Baptist History</u>, is needed to keep the genealogy straight.

It requires no prophet's vision to know that the two Fellowships addressed by their presidents in those articles have recently divided in principle, are presently divided in spirit, and shall soon divide in rank again. Where there were two, there will be three, then four, and perhaps five or six. As we wait for the LORD Jesus to return, Baptists will have more branches added to the family tree.

Their announced intentions may reflect noble goals for these men to project upon their Fellowships—accord and courtesy—but, in their attempt to reach the righteous objectives, both men, in my view, have taken a step that neither man believes he has taken. It is my belief, that as they continue the pathway now entered, these men will, at the very least, continue their Fellowships in the same direction toward compromise and apostasy that the Fellowships followed that they (or their predecessors) left to found the present Fellowships. Both of the Fellowships that these men lead came into existence through the battlefield—resisting authoritative control, the changing of previous positions and affirmations, and the injection of new methodologies. To this observer, it appears that both Fellowships (or their current leadership) have forgotten their own histories and are now in the process of repeating those chronicles.

Most intriguingly, these men, known for strong convictions, are insisting that methodology should not be considered as suitable material for public Fellowship discussion. It is amazing to consider all that is labeled as merely

---

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

'network': a net being a device used to cover so as to enclose or to separate individual or collected entities for the purpose of ensnaring, maintaining, retaining, and expanding a predetermined composition.

The term 'network,' therefore, adequately and accurately, describes a religious consortium since that entity, indeed, is a purposeful 'grouping' for communication and commerce.

The simplest *practical characterization* of a religious network is a relationship of institutions and/or individuals characterized and co-joined by a commonality of ambition (the advancement of a rigidly defined mutual agenda or goal) that is linked to a real or perceived bond of indebtedness, protection, and/or well being.

The *functional evidence* of the existence and the irrefutable confirmation of the presence of a religious network is the reality of a recognizable, systematic employment of "reward and punishment" techniques dedicated to the maintenance and the perpetuity of the relationship of affiliated institutions and/or individuals. The rewards are distributed through the honorary conferral of public recognition and the complimentary bestowal of implied rank in elevated arenas of participation. Punishments are dispensed (1) in the constraint that compels an exclusionary allegiance from the affiliates *and* (2) in the cooperative, collective expected response (a) to any alleged deviation by any affiliate from a total adherence to the prescribed agenda or (b) to an apparent participation by any related link in a proscribed activity.

The response to every perceived defection from this network relationship is the immediate vilification describing as treacherous any who should question or disagree with the network leadership,

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

tenuous and completely flexible, except in the one connecting termination. Each additional filament supplies a legitimate desire and serves a proper need; however, by the multiplication of links the web acquires a growing ability to possess all those who enter the web.

Having studied history's unvarying record of the inevitable decline of Baptist Fellowships and observing the pattern first hand for fifty years, I have observed a simple reality present in them all. As the movement begins to change into the Machine, it is time for men to 'abandon the ship.' Remaining within to lead a reformation is a waste of time and the cause of great grief. Every Fellowship is destined to self-destruction. When the Machinery of the structural network begins to spin its web, it is time to leave.

THE ZENITH OF ORGANIZATION

Entering the English language about 1560, the term 'network' originally described "a fabric or structure of chords or wires that cross at regular intervals and are knotted or secured at the crossings." (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Inc., Springfield, Massachusetts) The word gradually evolved in use to denote any large group of interconnected entities bound together in a shared purpose, such as intersecting roads, interconnected businesses, interrelated communication organizations, and, more recently, an interfacing of computers, and, by extension, the linkage of associated individuals or agencies. As the word became associated with enterprises involving communication and commerce, a secondary aspect of the definition was required. This type of network necessitates a centralized command and control capitol with its inherent hierarchy of supervisory personnel. However, the original purpose of the word to describe an entity that exists in the form and fashion of a net is preserved in every usage of the word

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

'methodology' by the contemporary generation of Baptist preachers. Of course, previous generations of Baptists used the term 'practices' for what are now labeled 'methods.' Our Baptist forefathers considered practices so vital to the life and health of Baptist churches that their battle cry became a Baptist distinctive: The Bible is the sole and final authority for all matters of faith and practice.

Actually, the message and the method are inseparable because the method either delivers the message in its purity and truth or it defiles the message by adding to the message or subtracting from the message even as it delivers the message. The separation of Dr. Bob Jones Sr., Dr. John R. Rice, Dr. Noel Smith, and a worthy number of past leaders in both of these Fellowships from the ministry of Dr. Billy Graham was a separation based entirely upon the methodology of Dr. Graham in his cooperative evangelism. That record is established beyond debate in that Dr. Jones, Dr. Rice, and Dr. Smith (as examples) did not challenge the preaching of the Gospel by Dr. Graham; they rejected his alignment with apostates. The doctrinal deviations of Dr. Graham were not revealed until long after the death of all three men. They opposed his methods.

To categorize debate over methodology as a trivial pursuit is disingenuous and dangerous. Methodology is far more than personal preferences. The use of the music style of Elvis, Madonna, the Beach Boys, or Snoop Doggy Dogg in a Baptist church is as much compromise as was the use of by Dr. Graham of liberal ministers as chairmen, sponsors, and leaders of prayer. The words spoken by these men in his crusades were typically inoffensive (usually generic, kind, and a little syrupy), but the medium (the men themselves) of delivery was a reproach. The Contemporary Christian Music typically is generic in words, syrupy (romantic and sensual) in style, has less biblical content than the prayers of Nels Ferre

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

or the other liberals on Graham's platforms, and as much biblical spirituality as any of those apostates had. Compromise of methods was worth the battle then and is still unacceptable today.

A Fellowship begins with the selection of a president to moderate the meetings. As the membership or attendance in a fellowship increases, so does the power assumed or delegated to the leader until he becomes a ruler.

THE END OF FELLOWSHIP
COMES AT THE START OF ORGANIZATION

Centralization of control is the natural progression of every humanly instituted organization. There are no exceptions recorded in history or observable in contemporary experience. Fellowships of Baptists are not able to avoid this inevitable pattern. Therefore, it is an unpleasant fact that every Baptist fellowship will cease being a fellowship and eventually become an organization.

In the process of time, the simple gathering of like-minded brethren, through sincere and quite natural motivation, becomes increasingly organized. The progression of developing 'ministries' to meet the needs of the organization creates an ever-expanding interlocking network of agencies—all of which cooperate to continue the existence of the fellowship. The addition of each new outreach produces the pressure on the members of the Fellowship to give allegiance and to participate fully lest the new enterprise fail and reflect on the 'testimony of the fellowship.' In the process of time, this developing, enveloping network takes on the attributes of a spider's web; and once attracted, those entangled are forever attached.

Attached that is, until somehow there arises within the fellowship a desire to return to the original vision and purpose. By the time the issue reaches the floor, the fellowship has acquired a rather substantial structure. When this dissatisfaction is vocalized, it always causes a stir among the

The Rise and Fall of Baptist Empires

brethren. The unrest creates a tension. In response to the resistance of some, other members wish to draw the net even more tightly. All the while, the leadership is convinced that they are fulfilling the original goals and insist increasingly more strongly on loyalty to the Fellowship, which loyalty they are able to define only as obedience and following. Loyalty to that entrenched hierarchy becomes the pathway to the positional advancement of any member and the means to the structural advancement of the fellowship. Organizational expansion is the roadway to the destruction of any fellowship.

Perhaps, the clearest indication of the transition from a fellowship to the creation of a networked Machine is the gradual but steady shifting of the thinking and, consequently the vocabulary, from looking at others in the light of conformity to Scripture to seeing them in the context of identity "with us." The language begins to become expressions of "us" and "them." The descriptive label, "our," is attached to schools, mission agencies or boards, publishers, and other ministries. A composite listing is developed, whether in printed form or unwritten, that marks those churches, institutions, and preachers that are "with us" and a similar delineation is compiled of those that are "with them."

This shift is subtle and is a matter of perception as much as of reality. The best comparison is the difference between viewing others as 'co-laborers' and seeing them as 'sub-contractors.' A fellowship is always built upon the premise of co-laboring, but the networked Machine sees only sub-contractors. The co-laborer is worthy of encouragement and support; the sub-contractor requires both enrollment and supervision. The individual member of such an entity finds himself in an ever-decreasing circle of exterior fellowship, since he is increasingly mindful of the responsibility to walk only with approved, fellow-participants.

The first silken threads of any web are extremely