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from (Mis)Constructed History”*

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Constructing Conservative Christian American Identity from (mis)Constructed History

Alan Scot Willis

In his “Perspectives” piece for *Church History*, David Hollinger raised two seemingly contradictory questions. Simplified, they might be stated as: “Why is there so much religion and so little secularization in the United States?” and “Why is there so much secularization and so little religion in the United States?” As Hollinger notes, these questions are ones of perspective. Compared to other Western industrialized nations, the United States is incredibly religious; yet, from within the Christian churches, especially the conservative Christian churches, America appears overwhelmingly secular.¹ Despite the fact that the United States has attained an economic prosperity in which the vast majority of the population has its material needs met, the process of secularization that political scientist Ronald Inglehart projected would accompany the emergence of such a “post-materialist” society has not, in fact, proceeded particularly far in the United States.² Indeed, religion remains a potent force, and particularly a

¹ David A. Hollinger, “The ‘Secularization’ Question and the United States in the Twentieth Century,” *Church History* (March 2001) 132-143.

² Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

politically potent force, as a substantial portion of the population identifies themselves as Christian Americans who see the nation as a Christian nation and define, at least implicitly, “good” Americans as Christians.

Conservative Christian Americans—as differentiated from American Christians—buttress their view of the nation through a particular narrative of the nation’s history; they also believe that the secularists and liberals, virtually synonymous in their view, have “revised” that history, thus undermining the nation’s moral fabric and diverting the nation from its God-given mission in the world. In early 2010, Christian Americans on the Texas State School Board fought back, by offering a “corrective” and seeking to teach the nation’s Christian heritage to the state’s students. So thoroughgoing was the rewrite that one member of the majority Republicans even chided his co-partisans by announcing “Guys, you’re rewriting history now.” And rewrite they did.

Considering the actions of the Texas State School Board, *New York Times* reporter Russell Shorto noted: “More elementally, they [Christian Conservative activists] hold that the United States was founded by devout Christians and according to biblical precepts.” He added, “When they proclaim that the United States is a “Christian nation,” they are not referring to the

percentage of the population that ticks a certain box in a survey or census but to the country's roots and the intent of the founders.”³

While identity formation is complex and multi-faceted, it is clear that a particularly conservative Christian American identity is closely tied to a specific version of American history. That version of American history was taught by churches during the Cold War years, formative years for many of the leaders of what became known as the New Christian Right. During the Cold War years, this vision of the nation's past helped highlight the conflict between Christian America and atheistic Communism. In the Culture War of later years, the same narrative helped delineate the battle of Christian Americans against the forces of liberalism and secularism.⁴

Examining the history taught by churches during the Cold War provides an insight into the culture wars and the Christian American identity. Historians—including historians of religion—have offered surprisingly few insights into how history was taught within religious institutions. As Jeremy Black argues in *Using History*, religion is “one of the most significant non-governmental spheres for the creation and presentation of historical views.” Black argues that the history

³ Russell Shorto, “How Christian Were the Founders?” *New York Times Magazine* February 11, 2010, URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/magazine/14texbooks-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1

⁴ Michael Billig, “Nationalism and Richard Rorty: the Text as a Flag for Pax Americana,” *New Left Review*.202 (1993): 73, Questia, Web, 8 Oct. 2010.

taught by religious institutions engages in two types of analysis that professional historians typically eschew: it sees divine intervention as not only legitimate causality but as the ultimate cause of the course of history, and it engages an “eschatological dimension” that compresses the timeline of history and links the past with the present and the future.⁵ The version of American history Southern Baptists taught during the Cold War years fit within these parameters. Southern Baptists taught that God was the central causal agent in history, and they clearly linked the nation’s past with its present and the future, showing America to be on a specific, divinely ordained path.

The compressed timeline and the belief in divine intervention combined with the manipulations of national and sacred symbols to form a narrative that helped Southern Baptists “make sense” of the chaos of history. The narrative itself was carefully constructed and then presented as the “True” version of American history, thus casting secular versions of American history as, necessarily, “untrue.” By defining their version of history as “True” and other versions as “untrue,” Christian Americans protect themselves from a contradiction an outsider might see: that the “Christian Heritage” narrative is just as constructed as is the secular narrative they decry.

⁵ Jeremy Black, *Using History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 40-41.

Indeed, I contend, the Christian Heritage narrative is “mis-constructed.” Historical theorist Hayden White has been accused of giving free reign to the contention that any one narrative of history is just as good as the next. This seems to be, perhaps, a misreading of White. White argued that the search for a corollary to “scientific objectivity” within the discipline was folly, and that historians constructed – he often, perhaps unfortunately, used the word “imagined” – the narratives that tied the facts of history together. The admission that historians have perspectives, and that historians construct a narrative to make sense of the chaotic facts of the past is not, however, the same as suggesting that all narratives are equally valid. Indeed, the French physicist Henri Poincare noted that “Science is built of facts the way a house is built of bricks; but an accumulation of facts is no more science than a pile of bricks is a house.” For White, narrative turns the bricks of history into houses; but no matter what kind of house is built, it still must be structurally sound.

With this in mind, we can now turn to the narrative of America’s Christian Heritage that Southern Baptists constructed and taught to the denomination’s young people during the Cold War. I will offer, first, examples of how Southern Baptists envisioned divine intervention as a causal force in history; then I will suggest some ways in which Southern Baptists merged past and present. I will then examine the manipulation of sacred and patriotic symbols, and finally

discuss the ways in which Southern Baptists hoped an understanding of the nation's Christian heritage would inspire youth help fulfill the nation's divine mission in the world.

For Southern Baptists, American history began with the Pilgrims' arrival at Plymouth, not with Jamestown. According to Norman Cox, former Secretary of the Historical Commission, and C. Aubrey Hearn, of the Sunday School Board, "few people understood that God held back the colonization of our Atlantic Seaboard until the first hour when he had a people who could come here with an open Bible in their hands."⁶ Here, Cox and Hearn implied that Pilgrims began the colonization of the Atlantic seaboard, despite the prior existence of Jamestown. Additionally, in their narrative, God's guiding hand in history was simply a fact; that such a fact was beyond documentary evidence did not concern them, though to other historians, they may appear to be imagining not merely the house, but the bricks themselves.

Southern Baptist youth, like Betty Flo Attebery, imbibed the message. In her winning oration for the 1947 Speakers' Tournament at the Ridgecrest Assembly, a Baptist retreat house, Attebery announced: "As we think of the history of our nation, time and time again we are reminded of God's constant protective care. In hours of oppressive trial we have felt the delivering power of

⁶ Norman Cox and C. Aubrey Hearn, "How to Observe Baptist Heritage Week," *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, April, 1958, 14.

his boundless grace, as at Valley Forge, Jamestown, [and] Plymouth. We somehow forget to realize that God is actually in history, that with his mighty arm he is keeping watch over his own.”⁷ In her version, not only had God had intervened as a causal agent in history, but He had clearly sided with the Americans.

God’s intervention in history was often through his use of Christian men and women to accomplish His goals. J. I. Bishop, director of the Royal Ambassadors program for teenage boys, also relied on divine causality when he wrote that Abraham Lincoln’s understanding of the wrongness of slavery “certainly must have come from the Great Emancipator of all races.”⁸ It could be difficult to determine exactly how God had instilled this idea in Lincoln, but it is clear—in Bishop’s telling—that the idea of emancipation had *originated* with God, regardless of how Lincoln came to understand that it was God’s will.

Similar ideas informed the Baptist understanding of The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. While Oklahoma pastor Max Stanfield realized that the signers of the Declaration were not religiously orthodox, he argued that the document set “forth ideals of equality and human brotherhood that only the teachings of Jesus could have produced.” John Wesley Raley,

⁷ Bettye Flo Attebery, “Christ Above All in Our Citizenship,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, January 1947, 26.

⁸ J. I. Bishop, “Life Lines... Freedom,” *Ambassador Life*, February 1951, 3.

president of Oklahoma Baptist University, agreed, calling the Declaration “poetic in prose and Christian philosophy in fact.” As a result, they believed that “the stamp of Christian philosophy undeniably and indelibly marks the beginnings of American institutions.”⁹

Baptists also saw the Constitution as a Christian document. Mrs T. G. Murphree demonstrated such thinking in the July 1960 Training Union program for Young People. She suggested that leaders explain, “Democracy is the outgrowth of the religious conviction of the sacredness of every human life. On the religious side, its highest embodiment is the Bible; on the political, the Constitution.” Murphree then recommended that leaders ask the members of the Training Union if they agreed that the United States was founded upon Christian principles, and then to ask them to “verify” their answers.¹⁰ Clearly, only affirmative answers could be verified. Here we see a stark departure from Hayden White’s vision of how history should be used. For White, history had to be open to interpretation; some sense of the chaos of the past had to remain, because only through that sense of meaninglessness could history “goad living human beings to make their lives different for themselves and their children.” Southern Baptists, however, directed their youth toward the Christian Heritage

⁹ Max Stanfield, “I Pledge Allegiance,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, July 1946, 3; John Wesley Raley, “The Dynamics of Democracy,” *Home Life* (June 1952) 24-25.

¹⁰ Mrs. T. G. Murphree, “Assembly Programs for Young People” *Baptist Training Union Magazine* (July 1960) 36.

narrative, which—they believed—gave the nation’s history its appropriate meaning, and it was that meaningfulness which would goad their children to fulfill the nation’s Christian destiny.¹¹

Imagining God’s guiding hand in American history allowed Southern Baptists to make sense of the nation’s past and use that particular past to promote Cold War patriotism. Along with the use of divine causality, Southern Baptists dramatically compressed the historical narrative to give a greater sense of meaning to it while, at the same, increasing the distortions of fact within it.

After noting that “our nation is not old” Crea Ridenour, a missionary to Columbia, compressed the historical timeline by explaining that North America had been a stretch of wilderness inhabited only by tribes of Native Americans; then the Pilgrims came ashore at Plymouth Rock, and, Ridenour told the members of the Girls’ Auxiliary, “Our nation was born.”¹² Her version of the national creation myth equated the Pilgrims landing with the founding of the “nation” not only compressed the historical timeline, but privileged Plymouth over Jamestown, which had—of course—been founded earlier.

Ridenour probably knew that more than 150 years had passed between the *Mayflower’s* landing and the actual founding of the United States, but the

¹¹ H. White, *The Content of the Form*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 72.

¹² Crea Ridenour, “Junior Girls Auxiliary: Fourth Meeting,” *World Comrades*, March 1945, 35.

eschatological dimension of history, as Jeremy Black suggested it would, tied the Pilgrim past not only to the founding of the nation, but also to the Cold War present. Perhaps no one made that point better than the prominent pastor W. A. Criswell, who told his congregation at First Baptist in Dallas, “As long as there is a strong America, the communists will not triumph. Even the Puritans went to church leading a child by one hand and carrying a musket in the other.”¹³ Criswell did not fill in the rather large blanks, but he likely did not have to, either: America was strong because it was a religious nation, and had been since the days of the Puritans.

Helen Conger also compressed the historical timeline, bringing the Pilgrims, the Constitution, the Bible, and the Cold War together in a history lesson perfectly suited for a Christian and a Chosen nation. She suggested that local leaders show a picture of the Pilgrims and explain, “Our country is beautiful because it was established by people who came to worship God.” Leaders should then continue with: “We have a wonderful heritage. The Constitution is based on the Bible. The Liberty Bell has part of a verse of Scripture on it.” Conger’s preparatory remarks for counselors showed the lesson’s explicitly Cold War context. She instructed counselors to show the

¹³ Criswell quoted in Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: NYU Press, 1997), 41. See also, Charles Wells, “What the Pilgrim Fathers Had,” *Ambassador Life*, November 1952, 19.

girls “how we can strengthen our nation from within by being Christian” so that “communism will have no chance with our people.” Conger’s lesson thus both compressed the historical timeline and blended the patriotic and religious symbols of the Pilgrims, the Constitution, the Liberty Bell, and the Bible into a single history lesson that would inspire Christian girls to defend the nation against Communist infiltration.¹⁴

In addition to traditional lessons, Baptist leaders encouraged historical games and role playing, and historically themed social events to bring history alive. By encouraging children to participate in historical lessons filled with patriotic and religious symbols, Baptist leaders hoped to impress upon their youth a sense of “oneness” with earlier generations, and they wedded the sacred and temporal histories of America.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, Thanksgiving socials offered an annual opportunity for such activities. At the socials, Baptist youth were reminded that the “stern” Pilgrims had engaged in a variety of games with Native Americans. One social, “The Pilgrims’ Progress,” began with the welcoming lines, “The *Mayflower* has landed in the New World and we greet our Indian Friends.” Baptist youth then played “build the fort” and “catch the turkey.” At the “Plymouth Rock Party”

¹⁴ Conger, “Christ the Answer to Godless Ideas,” *World Comrades*, September 1949, 20.

¹⁵ Black, *Using History*, 37.

Baptists played games like “Squanto’s Maize Planting,” using candy corn, and the “horn of plenty.”¹⁶

Southern Baptists sometimes altered the facts of history in these socials, In February of 1945, the Southern Baptist Training Union provided a carefully planned “tea party” social for Juniors, who were typically between the ages of nine and eleven. The evening’s festivities unfolded around the story of George Washington and the cherry tree, followed by the story of the Boston Tea Party, and closed with a “George Washington Tea Party.”¹⁷ Washington, of course, had not been in Boston during the Tea Party. The story, however, associated Washington—the “father of the country”—with Massachusetts, where, in the Southern Baptist narrative, the nation began. The melding of time and geography to fit the Christian Heritage narrative also influenced the decorations for various programs. When Helen Conger outlined a program on the Pilgrims and religious freedom in 1949, she recommended decorating the room by listing names of later leaders like George Washington, Patrick Henry, and Abraham Lincoln above pictures of the Pilgrims.¹⁸ In the Christian heritage

¹⁶ Joe Holbert, “*Mayflower* Masquerade,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, November 1963, 59; Florance L. Enloe, “Young People’s Fellowship: Pilgrims’ Progress,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, November 1958, 33; Louise Berge, “Plymouth Rock Party,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, November 1958, 49.

¹⁷ Mrs. Henry H. Dorris and Helen Conger, “George Washington Party for Juniors,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, (February 1945, 46-47.

¹⁸ Conger, “Christ the Answer to Godless Ideas,” *World Comrades*, September 1949, 20.

narrative, American history flowed from Plymouth, and the nation's leaders were associated with the Pilgrims, whom God had guided to New England.

Such activities compressed the historical timeline and distorted the historical narrative into one more meaningful to Southern Baptists, if less verifiable or factual. They engaged the children in enjoyable—and likely memorable—events through which they could be expected to absorb the meaning of the nation's Christian Heritage. Other lessons specifically melded the patriotic and sacred into a singular national identity.

For Baptists, religious freedom lay at the heart of American freedom. In his project for the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary in the Royal Ambassadors program, Carvel Baker noted that early American history was replete with battles for religious freedom. That mattered in the Cold War because, Carvel noted, religious freedom was being “menaced” by Communism.¹⁹ Among Southern Baptists, Roger Williams was the most celebrated hero of religious freedom. To bring Williams to life, Helen Falls, the Young People's Secretary for Kentucky, recommended that girls—dressed in costume for the Freedom Party picnic—enact a scene with Williams being put on trial for religious

¹⁹ Carvel Baker, “We Must Give Our Best To Him,” *Ambassador Life*, November 1952, 1.

freedom, a symbolic representation of William's actual tribulations in Massachusetts.²⁰

Roger Williams is widely recognized by virtually all serious historians for his fight for religious freedom, however complicated it might be. Thomas Jefferson, another Southern Baptist hero of religious freedom, presented more difficulties. The problem was not so much Jefferson's dedication to religious freedom – that can certainly be documented. The problem was making Jefferson into a Christian. Jefferson had, quite inconveniently, re-written the New Testament and purged it of one of its more important claims: the resurrection. Having left Jesus of Nazareth dead and in the tomb, Jefferson ascribed to him “every *human* excellence” but not divinity.²¹

Nevertheless, Baptists used Jefferson to promote affinity for *their* Bible. The *Baptist Training Union Magazine* for July of 1946 included a silhouette of Jefferson embossed upon the Liberty Bell, with the instructions, “Keep religious liberty alive by practicing it: read God's word daily.”²² Similarly, in the July 1945 program for eight-year-olds, the Training Union recommended placing a picture of Thomas Jefferson and Monticello alongside a Biblical map showing Egypt, the

²⁰ Helen Falls, “This Month's Programs, First Week: His to Command.” *The Window of the YWA*, February 1961, 25.

²¹ E Brooks Hollifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 2003) 166, emphasis in the original.

²² Unsigned, untitled editorial cartoon, *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, July 1946, 33.

Sinai Wilderness, and the Promised Land of Canaan, all with the goal of increasing interest in the Biblical story of Moses. This particular conflation of patriotic and religious imagery offered an extraordinary example of the melding of Biblical and national symbols in the Baptists' construction of the American historical narrative. Here America was the modern Promised Land, free of the spiritual and intellectual slavery of Communism—that “materialistic religion”—and dedicated to the greatest of all freedoms, religious liberty. And Thomas Jefferson was America's Moses.²³

While Williams and Jefferson were both people, they were also patriotic symbols. The Statue of Liberty, however, is purely symbolic. The Intermediate Training Union program for July 1957 revolved around a girl draped as the Statue of Liberty while another girl, hidden from view, reminded the Intermediates that “Christ has given his all to make America the land of the free.”²⁴ The lesson brought together patriotic symbols and divine causality, as the young people were reminded that Christ had actively worked to make the United States the land of the free.

²³ Mrs. Emmett Golden, “Consider Your Eight-Year-Olds,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, July 1945, 40; Robert Shapiro, “Christianity, Democracy, and Communism,” *The Baptist Student*, February 1954, 8.

²⁴ Sara Hine, “Assembly Program for Intermediates,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, July 1957, 34.

Following a similar theme Hilda Hall Drake, a program writer for the Woman's Missionary Union, recommended that counselors of the Young Woman's Auxiliary emphasize the responsibilities of freedom by displaying symbols of American freedom: the USA flag, the Liberty Bell, and the Christian flag, and outlining the Statue of Liberty on the cover of the program folders. Drake conflated Christianity and American freedom by noting: "Our Statute of Liberty, enlightening the world, has become a symbol of freedom" while suggesting that leaders "discuss that freedom comes by following Jesus." To conclude, Drake suggested that counselors "Pray that America will appreciate her responsibility as a Christian nation, that we should not feel free from service to all in our own country and to people in the entire world."²⁵

Drake included both the American and the Christian flags as "symbols of American freedom." In program after program, members of Southern Baptist youth organizations pledged allegiance to both flags, a practice so common as to be nearly ubiquitous at Baptist events. Pledging allegiance to a flag is an overt act of *nationalism*. The simultaneous pledging of allegiance to two flags conflates the sacred and secular into a unified nationalism which gave primacy to religious belief. Indeed, one writer, Max Stanfield, told young readers that he could pledge allegiance to the American flag because the country was founded

²⁵ Hilda Hall Drake, "Your YWA programs, First Meetings: 'Lend Me Thy Masses,'" *The Window of the YWA*, February 1949, 28-29.

by Christians, while Jerry Lambdin explained that “before one can become the best citizen on earth he must become a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.”²⁶

The Southern Baptist leadership intended to instill in the Convention’s youth both patriotism and faith. Their persistent manipulation of nationalist symbols for religious purposes and of religious symbols for nationalist purposes shows a merging of identities as Christians and Americans into a single identity as Christian Americans. So conflated were the secular and sacred that in the later 1950s that Baker James Cauthen of the Foreign Mission Board could say, without any hesitation, “America stands on a spotlighted stage with the rest of the world looking to see what we do; they will judge the gospel of Christ largely in terms of our actions and attitudes.”²⁷ His audience, the members of the Young Woman’s Auxiliary, was teenage girls enrolled in the Convention’s mission education program, but his message would have been welcomed throughout the Convention.

While Baptist leaders were certainly patriotic, they also issued dire warnings that the nation was not Christian *enough* to fulfill its God-ordained mission. Hence, while history demonstrated the nation’s Christian heritage and God’s guiding hand, America had to be *continually made* Christian; the current

²⁶ Max Stanfield, “I Pledge Allegiance,” *Training Union Magazine* July 1946, 3; J. E. Lambdin, “Christ Above All in Citizenship,” *Training Union Magazine* July 1946, 2.

²⁷ Baker James Cauthen, Program: I am the Door,” *The Window* (December 1957), 39.

generation had to provide the Christian heritage of future generations, just as prior generations had done for it. Reflecting on the demands of Christian citizenship, Mrs. Warren F. Jones, whose husband was president of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, wrote, “Our forefathers left us a rich spiritual legacy. This legacy must be replenished with each generation, even with each individual.”²⁸

Some Southern Baptist writers argued that God was sorely disappointed in his chosen nation. Ruth Boone Fusselle, a writer of programs for the Girl’s Auxiliary, noted that America had more Bibles and more churches than any other nation, but that half the population was not Christian, and many of the self-identified Christians were poor Christians indeed. Citing the false gods of communism and materialism—which were vying for the soul of America—Fusselle noted, “God’s heart must be sad as he looks to America as his nation to lead the world to the Kingdom of God.” She believed that God longed for a more Christian America.²⁹

Youth could be inspired to make the nation more Christian by understanding its Christian heritage. John L. Hill of Nashville, whose Sunday

²⁸ Howard G. McLain, “1st Intermediate Meeting: the Meaning of Christian Citizenship” *Ambassador Life*, Oct 1952, 14; Mrs. Warren F. Jones, “Building Better Programs,” *Baptist Training Union Magazine*, July 1955, 33.

²⁹ Ruth Boon Fusselle, “1st Meeting for Intermediates: A New Type of Living for Youth” *Tell*, September 1954, 26.

School lessons were broadcast on WSM radio for over 25 years, reminded youth to be constantly vigilant, because “no other young people in the world are blessed with such a glorious heritage. This fact alone carries with it the solemn responsibility to know, to cherish, to defend and to preserve our liberties.” Denominational leaders assured Baptist youth that, beyond providing financial support for missions, living a Christian life and working for the Christianization of the country were well within their power. Nancy Lou Story of Houston, Texas, got the point. In her letter to *Tell*, she explained: “Although I am only an Intermediate girl, in a city of over one million people, if my life is wholly dedicated unto God, I can surely have a part in making my community Christian.”³⁰

Baptist youth were thus offered a narrative of history that enshrined their nation as God’s chosen nation, and demanded that they defend that Christian heritage. Baptist leaders, however, were also aware that their narrative of American history faced competition from more secular narratives. Indeed – at least from the perspective of Conservative Christian Americans – the churches and Christian schools became the repositories for the Christian narrative of American history, the “True” history of the nation.

³⁰ John L. Hill, “Lord Make Us Thankful,” *The Baptist Student*, November 1950, 3; Nancy Lou Story, “My Part in Leading My Community” *Tell*, May 1956, 7.

Years later, In midst of the Culture War, The textbook, *The American Republic for Christian Schools*, proffered a question that Norman Cox and Aubrey Hearn would have easily answered: “Who, knowing the facts of our history, can doubt that the United States of America has been a thought in the mind of God from all eternity?” Cox and Hearn had known, of course, that God had held back the founding of America until the Pilgrims were ready to cross the Atlantic with open Bibles.³¹

The “True” history of the United States, preserved in the churches and Christian schools and fused into the meaning of being an “American,” has helped sustain in the United States a national religious fervor out of step with other wealthy, western societies. This helps explain why traditional Christianity remains politically potent and central to the identity of a core of conservative voters—the so-called “values voters”—for whom their Christian and American identities are synonymous.³²

As we return to the efforts of the Texas State Board of Education to rewrite the history taught in the state’s public schools we should consider the comment from *New York Times* reporter Russell Shorto that “the Christian ‘truth’ about America’s founding has long been taught in Christian schools, but not

³¹ *The American Republic for Christian Schools* quoted in Sharlet, “Through a Glass Darkly,” 36.

³² Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

beyond.”³³ He overlooked, like many historians, the way churches taught history, but that teaching was crucial to preserving the supposedly “true” narrative of American history. The churches taught and refined the Christian Heritage narrative of American history while the Christian School Movement was in its formative years. Thus the churches provided for the Christian Schools a ready-made understanding of the nation’s past to teach to Christian students.

One final thought: the Texas Board also reflected the Southern Baptists’ goal in using history to shape the nation’s future. As Southern Baptist leaders called on youth to live up to the nation’s Christian Heritage, Texas Christian Conservatives hoped to instill their version of American history in the state’s youth because, as Cynthia Dunbar noted, “The philosophy of the classroom in one generation will be the philosophy of the government in the next.”³⁴ Clearly, in Texas, conservative Christian Americans hope to instill in the next generation their philosophy of Christian Americans, in which patriotism and conservative Christianity are inseparable. Churches met with some success, indeed, but they were—as the saying goes—preaching to the choir; or, at least the children of the choir. Facing a widely diverse student body, the extent to which

³³ Shorto, “How Christian Were the Founders?” URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/magazine/14texbooks-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2.

³⁴ Dunbar quoted in Shorto, “How Christian Were the Founders?” URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/magazine/14texbooks-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2.

conservative Christian Americans on the Texas State School Board will be able to pass along their philosophy, much less their identity as Christian Americans, remains to be seen.