

E. Y. Mullins— Reluctant Evangelical

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Mullins—A Theological Pivot

During the years that E. Y. Mullins was president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky (1899-1928), he was caught in the middle of the Fundamentalist-Liberal controversy. Though he wrote an article for *The Fundamentals*,¹ he grew to dislike the style, rhetoric, and confrontive spirit of many fundamentalists, calling them “big ‘F’ fundamentalists.”² Particularly disturbing to him was the public agitation of Southern Baptist J. Frank Norris, who wanted to “put the screws on everybody” by pinning his “brethren down to stereotyped statements.” Mullins was uneasy with what he perceived (probably misperceived) as a fundamentalist reliance on scholastic logic, syllogistic deduction, as a theological method. While not taking issue with the conclusions of his fellow fundamentalists, he stressed his reliance on the inductive approach with Christian experience as a major, if not the chief, source of raw data. On the other hand, the Modernists were certainly outside the parameters of his fellowship. Their profession of openness to the advances of modern science Mullins found to be untrue. They were subjectivists, anti-supernaturalists, and just as assertively dogmatic as the most “hyper-orthodox” of the Fundamentalists. Russell Dilday has accurately reflected Mullins’s perceptions in saying, “As a moderate conservative Mullins faulted both fundamentalists and liberals for their extremism which led to name calling rather than fruitful communication.”³

Today, being dead, Mullins still speaks. During the last two decades of the twentieth century, as in the first two, Mullins plays the part of the middle-man in a theological controversy among Southern Baptists. In *God’s Last and Only Hope*, Bill J. Leonard’s 1990 book on “The Controversy,” the complexities concerning Mullins are noted.

Mullins’s appeals to both Scripture and conscience, for example, have led many to identify him with their particular side in the present denominational controversy: Dr. Mullins the inerrantist, and Dr. Mullins the prophet of soul liberty. Russ Bush and Tom Nettles argue that Mullins’s theology reflects an inerrantist view of Scripture. They insist that Mullins repudiated the idea that “those holding to an authoritative Bible are in fact bibliolaters.” E. Glenn Hinson, however, suggests that while Mullins affirmed the authority of Scripture, he “was no biblicist.” Rather, “he drove in a beeline to the Baptist principle of voluntarism or soul competency as the essence of biblical religion.” Mullins himself apparently saw no contradiction in holding both doctrines simultaneously.⁴

Leonard is accurate, for none can demonstrate that Mullins did not hold both of these ideas, inerrancy and soul competency, at the same time. Leonard maintains that the theological tension embodied in Mullins was present in Southern Baptist life from the beginning. The Controversy over inerrancy fragmented the “delicate balance”⁵ formerly maintained by denominational savants.

Unfortunately, Leonard also indulges in theological anachronisms. He apparently wants his readers to agree that significant diversity was present from the beginning, which unraveled as time passed. He speaks of the “fragile coalition around which the SBC was formed” and argues for the presence of a conservative kind of “theological liberalism” as well as Calvinism and Landmarkism. Much of Leonard’s analysis is brilliant, entertaining, and tantalizing; but, the lack of precise documentation concerning the kind of diversity and precisely when certain theological options became a part of the mix creates a confusing and often misleading montage.⁶ Not, in fact, until the influence of E. Y. Mullins began to permeate the soul of Southern Baptist life was the particular scenario of diversity described by Leonard even possible.

Historians often invoke Mullins in constructing the the essential features of Baptist identity. As one of the major players in this debate, Walter Shurden has identified Mullins’s vision of Soul Competence as a compelling concept through which to interpret a Baptist kind of Christianity and believes that Mullins’s desire to relocate the center of Baptist identity and witness is in itself essentially baptistic.

Is it possible, as the *Manifesto* wishes to do, to re-envision the Baptist identity? Not only is it possible, it is necessary. Baptist life is dynamic, not static. Every generation of Baptists must seek to make the essence of Baptist life understandable to its day. Many have attempted during the four hundred years of Baptist Christianity to reinterpret the denominational identity. When in 1908 E. Y. Mullins wrote his now classic *The Axioms of Religion*, he subtitled it “A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith.” Baptists do not have an unchanging “Deposit of Truth” as the Catholics once claimed

for themselves.⁷

Mullins’s simultaneous maintenance of inerrancy and soul competence is not inherently contradictory. Either, however, can be held in such a way that the other may have a very uncomfortable life. The tension between these two ideas in Mullins’s thought makes him a pivotal figure in Southern Baptist history and an appropriate figure for Shurden to appeal to in his quest for finding an identity for Baptists in the midst of all their changes. Mullins’s extended, and often ingenious, applications of the principle of soul competence sentenced other important ideas to realms of quaint obscurity. One of these, inerrancy, has recently come back into the light and has recovered its rightful place as a formative element of Southern Baptist thought and polity. Two others, Calvinistic theology and the disciplinary use of confessions, are still rather pale but at least have been noticed.

Mullins’s Seminary Heritage

Scripture

When Mullins first entered Southern Seminary as a student in 1881, it had just endured a major theological crisis. C. H. Toy, an Old Testament professor for ten years, had resigned because of changes in his views of inspiration and, thus, the nature of Scripture. He had come to admit “discrepancies and inaccuracies” in historical, geographical, and scientific detail in the Bible. He did not think, however, that this invalidated the Bible as “historical records” and much less as expressions of religious truths. All such errors he referred to the “human condition of the writer” asserting that his lack of information or intellectual status did not “affect his spiritual truth.”⁸

John A. Broadus and James Petigru Boyce had worked closely with Toy, seeking to dissuade him from his gradual changes, hoping that he might “ultimately break away from the dominion of destructive theories.”⁹ Broadus, who had known Toy since Toy’s student days at the University of Virginia, even warned him that should he continue in such a course of study, “within twenty years he would utterly discard all belief in the supernatural as an element of Scripture.”¹⁰ Broadus knew well both the brilliance and the temperament of Toy, who engaged in a most unforgiving application of foundational assumptions. As early as 1861 Toy had had a melancholy assessment of the source of his intellectual energy.

It is very well to be under the power of good habits; but this facility of acting simply for regard to duty has sometimes seemed to me dangerous. In religious life it may disguise, I have thought, the absence of Christian emotion by its regular performance of religious duties. It is a difficult question to decide how far it is just treadmill work and how far the genuine outspeaking of earnest feeling. It has troubled me a good deal. It makes me doubt now sometimes whether my heart has ever been changed. I can only pray God to deepen my Christian feeling and strengthen the internal evidence of my calling.¹¹

Broadus’s prediction came true in much less than twenty years. After his resignation, Toy eventually taught at Harvard and adopted the Unitarianism that dominated the school at that time.

Toy was replaced by Basil Manly, Jr., whose inaugural address was entitled “Why and How to Study the Bible.” Manly eventually wrote *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration*, the result of twenty-five years of study on the issue. It was written

to demonstrate the proposition that God inspired Scripture using human authors in such a way that each expressed every essential aspect of humanity, language, literature, and culture yet so as “to keep his message free from error.”¹² Some objections to inspiration appear to arise from the text of Scripture itself such as Paul’s claim not to speak “after the Lord” in 2 Cor 11:17 and his memory lapse in 1 Cor 1:16. Manly, after providing his own treatment of the objections, quotes Hodge showing his agreement with the Princeton theologian.

Such an utterance is not inconsistent with the Apostle’s claim to inspiration. For the simple end of inspiration is to secure infallibility in the communication of truth. It does not sanctify, nor does it preclude the natural play of the intellect or of the feelings. . . . We learn that inspiration was an influence which rendered its recipients infallible, but it did not render them omniscient. They were preserved from asserting error, but they were not enabled either to know or to remember all things.¹³

John Broadus, professor of New Testament and homiletics, felt that the error-free character of Scripture was important enough to perpetuate through teaching the doctrine in a children’s catechism published in 1891. In the section entitled “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible,” Broadus produces the following question-answer dialogues.

Does the Bible contain any errors? The Bible records some things said by uninspired men that were not true; but it is true and instructive that these men said them. . . . Did the inspired writers receive *everything* by direct revelation? The inspired writers learned many things by observation or inquiry, but they were preserved by the Holy

Spirit from error, whether in learning or in writing these things. . . . Has it been proven that the inspired writers stated anything as true that was not true? No; there is no proof that the inspired writers made any mistake of any kind.¹⁴

J. B. Jeter, a revered Southern Baptist statesman and editor of *The Religious Herald* in Richmond, Virginia, was a trustee at the seminary when Toy resigned and on the committee that unanimously recommended the acceptance of his resignation. He was so exercised by this controversy that he constantly dwelt on the theme of inspiration from the culmination of the controversy in 1879 until his death in February 1880. His newspaper was in the midst of publishing articles on that issue including six by Toy himself. The stress generated by this matter probably contributed to his death. Before he died, however, he wrote a lengthy article entitled "Inspiration of the Scriptures" as a chapter in the book *Baptist Doctrines*.¹⁵

Jeter, with Toy's arguments in his mind if not before his eyes, contended that God not only revealed truth to the minds of his servants but exercised over them an influence that allowed them to communicate it "without any mistake, and in the manner best suited to secure the end of the revelation." Jeter considered it atheistic to deny that "God can inspire men to reveal his truth infallibly to the world." The manner of inspiration is such as to "preclude the possibility of error in the Scriptures." Jesus himself never considered the Scriptures as "human and fallible, as well as divine and inerrable." After affirming the inspiration and therefore the inerrable character of both the Old and New Testaments, Jeter answered various objections to that position concluding, "It is really wonderful to notice how, amid

the conflicting systems of science, philosophy and politics, the inspired writers steered their course, without falling into errors, which would have discredited their inspiration."¹⁶

When Mullins entered Southern Seminary in 1881 as a student, he entered into an atmosphere permeated with close thinking about the doctrine of inspiration and its implications for the error-free character of Scripture. The theory that infallibility related only to religious and spiritual truth was considered an innovation and as tantamount to a rejection of the supernatural. In the opinion of Mullins's teachers, it led to an unbiblical division between theology and history.

The Use of Confessions

The seminary, under Boyce's leadership, also was committed to confessional discipline. Boyce had advocated this when he first began to teach at Furman University in 1856. In his inaugural address, *Three Changes in Theological Institutions*, Boyce called for "the adoption of a declaration of doctrine to be required of those who assume the various professorships." He considered it no infringement of the rights of conscience to require teachers at a theological institution to declare their faith by signing an abstract of doctrinal principles. "No difference, however slight, no peculiar sentiment, however speculative, is here allowable. His agreement with the standard should be exact."¹⁷ No one should sign a doctrinal statement, Boyce contended who does so with mental reservation or with a private understanding with those who invest him with his position. Nor should any one enter into duties with the idea that he is at liberty to modify the truth he has been placed there to inculcate.

Boyce surmised that much of the hesitance about confessions he observed in contemporary Baptist life rose from the leaven of Campbellism and did not keep faith with Baptist history. Boyce believed that the very duties which God requires of churches “plainly suppose the application of every principle involved in the establishment of creeds.” The affirmation of one’s personal faith and the test of its existence in others require not only an affirmation of the same canon of Scripture, but requires “assent also to the particular truths which he knows to be taught therein.” For this twofold purpose, “creeds have been almost universally used . . . [b]y the Baptists of all ages.”¹⁸

Boyce does not constitute an idiosyncratic anomaly on the Baptist horizon with this position. Sixteen years earlier, a Baptist newspaper in Georgia, *The Christian Index*, had run a series of articles on the most prominent of the Baptist confessions. Introducing the articles, the author wrote:

The Baptists as a denomination, have always regarded the Bible as being amply sufficient for all the purposes of faith and practice. But knowing that many persons, holding wild and visionary notions upon religious subjects, often use the same language, and say that they too, make the Bible their standard; and knowing that their views and practices, are often misunderstood and often misrepresented, our brethren have felt it important to get up certain briefs, or compends of their faith, so that their adoption of the Bible in general terms, might not seem to be a sort of shield for heterodox opinions, and that there might be a oneness of doctrine and practice amongst themselves.¹⁹

Over a period of a few months in 1839 and 1840, articles from the confession were reprinted intermittently accompanied by short expositions. The author

recommended that the confession be adopted by Baptists “throughout the country” since these doctrines are held by the “old-fashioned Calvinistic Baptists the world over.” In doing this every association would have articles “exactly alike.”²⁰

In this atmosphere of confident confessionalism Mullins took his seminary education. That his own adherence to confessional denominational life diminished greatly in detail and precision was not due to the immediate Southern Baptist influence that he encountered. Instead, the intellectual currents of New England where he subsequently served as pastor and the Northern Baptist view of confessions modified his approach to the defense and propagation of Christian truth.²¹

Calvinism

A third major element in the theological atmosphere of Southern Seminary during the student days of Mullins was a pronounced and aggressive Calvinism. In establishing the school, Boyce sought to secure maintenance of “the principles and practices then prevalent, and still prevailing, in our Southern Zion.” For that reason he and his colleagues issued an abstract of principles in which there is “a complete exhibition of the fundamental doctrines of grace, so that in no essential particular should they speak dubiously.”²² The statement on election easily shows the clarity of its position.

Election is God’s eternal choice of some persons unto everlasting life—not because of foreseen merit in them, but of his mere mercy in Christ—in consequence of which choice they are called, justified, and glorified.²³

The necessity of this position was

broached even in Boyce's inaugural address at Furman when he lamented, "The distinctive principles of Arminianism have also been engrafted upon many of our Churches; and even some of our Ministry have not hesitated publicly to avow them."²⁴ Boyce was known as a convincing teacher and, according to a student who became prominent in denominational life, "few went through this course under him without being converted to his strong Calvinistic views."²⁵

Broadus described Calvinism as an "exalted system of Pauline truth . . . which compels a student to profound thinking" and makes him conversant with "the most inspiring and ennobling views of God and of the universe he has made."²⁶ In 1891, while on a trip to Europe, Broadus noticed that one of the five councilmen of Geneva was named Turretin. This caused him to reflect on the Latin Theology course at the seminary in which students were required to read Turretin, a reflection which evoked a significant observation. "The people who sneer at Calvinism might as well sneer at Mont Blanc," wrote Broadus. While certainly not obliged to defend all of Calvin's words or deeds, Broadus could not conceive of how anyone who "really understands the Greek of the Apostle Paul or the Latin of Calvin and Turretin" could fail to grasp that "these latter did but interpret and formulate substantially what the former teaches."²⁷

Mullins's Mild Modifications *Establishing a New Paradigm:* *Facts and Experience*

Into this theological atmosphere Mullins entered as a student in 1881, receiving his degree in 1885. After serving pastorates in Baltimore, Maryland, and Newton Center, Massachusetts, he

returned to Southern Seminary in 1899 as president and Joseph E. Brown Professor of Theology. During his 29 years as president, Mullins became a dominant force in Southern Baptist denominational life (convention president 1921-24) as well as a world-wide Baptist leader (president of the Baptist World Alliance 1923-28).

As a theologian, Mullins worked energetically to create a new theological paradigm for the defense of evangelical Christianity. Receiving Scripture primarily as the transmitter of genuine religious experience, Mullins concluded that attempts to explain "textual errors, scientific, or historical deviations from exact truth, discrepancies of various kinds" was an attempt to do more than faith required.²⁸ In religion, Scripture is "final and authoritative" but we must avoid debate on the grounds of history and criticism so that our representation of Christian faith will not be merely intellectual. Truth must be assimilated experientially, not "imposed by authority of any kind, whether pope or church or Bible."²⁹

In the process of developing that paradigm of authority uniting the subjective and objective, he ushered in a new, and to some a disturbing, kind of diversity in Southern Baptist theology.

The new construction required Mullins to contend that religion constitutes an autonomous sphere of reality. Within this sphere there are irreducible facts, some of which are historical, that is, verifiable through the methods of modern historiography. Some are trans-historical, that is, personal, moral, and experiential, but nonetheless genuine and real. The major thrust of Mullins's ministry was to demonstrate that Christianity is the only religion which does justice to all the facts, both historical and experiential.

Historical facts derive from a non-prejudicial examination of the New Testament documents. From this examination, in which Mullins interacted seriously with historical criticism of the New Testament, arises a central core of doctrines he considered as New Testament facts: the virgin birth, the deity and humanity of Christ, the vicarious propitiatory atonement, the bodily resurrection of Christ, his ascension into heaven, and his promise to return. Rejection of these facts, according to Mullins, clearly was the result of philosophical prejudice, not scientific investigation. Only by an *a priori* exclusion of the supernatural could anyone deny what the earliest documents concerning Christ taught. Mullins affirmed these facts from the earliest to the latest stages of his academic ministry and became genuinely agitated when bias of any sort blinded the minds of supposed scholars to them.

In 1925, Mullins gave a positive review to a theological book which sought to “be loyal to the best in the modern spirit and at the same time loyal to the New Testament.” The writer had not been “caught in the swirl of modernistic naturalism and revolutionized in his approach to the historical documents containing the account of the origins of Christianity.” In the end, Mullins found it highly gratifying to discover another teacher of theology “who has not lost his scientific bearings in the prevailing winds of philosophy and *a priorism* so widely current in the ranks of modernists.”³⁰

Other items go beyond the level of the purely historical, such as, the teachings of Jesus and his apostles, the necessity of regeneration, justification by imputed righteousness, the certainty and progressive nature of sanctification, the histori-

cal reality of Christ’s physical return, and the bodily resurrection of believers. Mullins firmly and consistently put these in the category of facts also. He did not accept the demarcation between “facts” and “values” which was so popular in his day. The inability of physical science to trace the antecedents and consequents of the so-called “values” did not diminish their facticity. Mullins reminded the writer that if a thing is real in itself and is grounded in the very nature of reality, it is a “fact” of great significance.

Facts are just as clearly generated in human experience as they are in “history.” In fact, Christianity greatly expands the level of experience into areas unexplored by any other religion and gives adequate venue for the most satisfying and challenging expressions of human personality imaginable. The experiences of persons like Paul, Justin Martyr, Augustine, Pascal, Bunyan and thousands of others must be viewed as facts of human history. What is sufficient to explain the nature of these experiences? Can the principle of physical science which focuses on material continuity do it? Not at all. Only the Christ of the New Testament, as the persons themselves testify, is sufficient to produce the revolutionary change of their thinking, affections, and values. Mullins condensed his argument for popular consumption in *The Fundamentals*.

Of course, this experience is convincing to the man who has it and should be to the outside observer. To the latter is presented a new spiritual cosmos, a great system with laws and forces analogous to the physical cosmos. There are not here planets revolving around a sun, but there are redeemed souls by the million [*sic*] revolving around a Saviour. There is not a law of physical gravitation acting between bodies directly as the mass and inversely as the

square of the distance, but there is a Kingdom of persons whose law of gravitation is love. There is not a physical law of the transformation of energy pervading the spiritual cosmos, but there is the law of the transfiguration of character, according to which "we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are transfigured into the same image from glory unto glory."³¹

Out of history and experience a recognizable, verifiable, and defensible order of facts emerges. From this order of facts, derived inductively, one may organize an explanation of the Christian religion. Mullins considered theology as the "systematic and scientific explanation" of the order of facts of religion:³² thus, the title of his systematic theology, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression*.

A penetrative ingenuity diffuses itself throughout the work of Mullins. He exudes genuine joy and credibility in his analysis and application of the fact of religious experience. The tenacity with which he held to its formative and apologetic power, however, had an implosive effect on his thought, isolated its apologetic relevance to his generation, and created an instability in the formation of doctrine that challenged the relevance of the "facts" he was so zealous to defend. His over-reaction to deductive thought made him treat many classic theological conclusions from the Reformation to the nineteenth century as anachronistic; his almost exclusive orientation toward experience hastened the movement toward unbounded individualism that guards the rights of private opinion at the cost of common confession.³³

Three areas in particular felt the mutatory impact of Mullins's influence. Whereas, as briefly argued above, Southern Baptists of the nineteenth century had

viewed each of these as inviolable in the interests of genuine and meaningful unity, Mullins's treatment of them diminished the feasibility of their serving any cohesive capacity. First, his method of discussing biblical inspiration created the possibility of fissure in Southern Baptist approaches to biblical inerrancy. Second, his attitude toward creeds softened the stance formerly given to confessional conformity. Third, his assertion of the axiomatic standing of human freedom led to changes in soteriology.

The Authority of the Bible

Mullins rejected both naturalistic and subjectivist views of religious authority. He characterized the subjectivists as idealists of the most pronounced sort in their view of religious freedom. They consider all external authority as the Roman Catholic type. They emphasize the likeness rather than the unlikeness of man to God; the immanence rather than the transcendence of God; man's unaided and native capacity rather than his incapacity in religion; the pedagogic rather than the redemptive aspects of salvation; and the Christian consciousness as the ultimate seat of authority in religion.³⁴ While Mullins also objected to the kind of external authority wielded by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, he did not view external authority as inconsistent with true religion.

He listed two conservative views of authority, traditional and inductive. The traditional was characteristic of "scholastic Protestantism." Strangely, Mullins chose to describe this view in its most extreme and caricatured form. According to Mullins, it begins with an abstract principle not derived from Scripture, "which conceives of the biblical writers as mere unintelligent instruments or pens used by

the Holy Spirit to dictate the truths of revelation." His view, that is, the inductive view, on the other hand "refuses to adopt any abstract or *a priori* starting point, but rather goes directly to the Bible itself for the evidence of its own inspiration."³⁵

This view sees God at work in the history as well as in the literature; recognizes a development of clarity in the unfolding revelation culminating only in the person of Jesus Christ; takes into account language and forms of speech of the culture of the writers; recognizes various literary forms which call for different principles of interpretation; sees the Bible as a religious book; and does not look for "premature revelations of science through prophets and apostles."³⁶

Mullins spoke cautiously of possible accommodation both in revelation and in the ministry of Christ. He referred to "the pedagogic adaptation of the method and means of revelation to the state of mind and degree of religious maturity of hearer and reader."³⁷ This "gradual and progressive" aspect of revelation sheds light on three perplexing biblical phenomena: an appearance of arbitrariness and vindictiveness on the part of God, low standards of morality, and overly severe punitive measures in the life of Israel. These can be understood "if we think of the Bible as the record of God's self-disclosure to a people incapable of more rapid development."³⁸ Mullins does not say if he considers these as errors or just as the beginning elements of larger truths.

This concept of progression helps one comprehend the ripening of God's purposes until the fulness of time and the coming of Christ. Christ came "as soon as the incarnation could be effective for the end in view."³⁹ It also harmonizes with what appears to be development and

growth on the part of biblical writers. Even revolutionary and epochal events such as the exodus and incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection, though the result of direct and miraculous intervention, are not anomalous to the logic of historical progression.

Christ's adoption of the language of his contemporaries "in order to instruct or refute them on the basis of their own assumptions" is a species of this principle. In doing this, however, Christ was "free from all error in his revelation to men of the mind and will of God."⁴⁰ Mullins never discussed whether prophet, apostle, or Christ actually employed error to teach spiritual truth.

Even though Mullins himself stopped short of arguing for the doctrine of inerrancy, it is extremely doubtful that he would set himself against it. Mullins described his understanding of dynamic inspiration as "plenary" yielding the writers capable of declaring "truth unmixed with error."⁴¹ And even when warning about the "needless confusion of science and religion" he adds the disclaimer that this "must not be taken to justify the sweeping assertions as to error and discrepancy so often made about the Scripture."⁴²

He did not deny inerrancy; he simply felt that the argument, which he viewed as an *a priori* approach, caused people to miss the point. A sceptic who is "unconvinced by arguments for an infallible or inerrant Bible" accuses those who believe of "bibliolatry."⁴³ Lost man needs life, not belief in a major premise in a syllogism, an ideological intrusion unrelated to the heartbeat of human life. Scripture is literature that springs from genuine discoveries of life in Christ. The life produced the literature; in turn, the literature gives life. None who have the life will

deny the literature. The Bible has withstood the withering blast of criticism because it arose in life and creates life. "Authoritative revelations of truth," preached Mullins, "are designed to become human discoveries of truth."⁴⁴ Even in Christ's ministry to his disciples, "He desired that his revelation might become their discovery."⁴⁵

Does this mean that Scripture is nothing more than human reflection on the immanence of God? Not at all. Without transcendent revelation, we would not have Christian truth. Neither can Christian experience sit in judgment on Scripture so as to reject any of its teaching. Though it has arisen from the fabric of Christian life, the true method of understanding inspiration and revelation "leaves an authoritative Scripture which Christian experience does not and cannot transcend."⁴⁶

In fine, between the traditional and the inductive views there is no difference as to the "reality of the supernatural revelation," its sufficiency for our "religious needs," and the "finality and authoritativeness of the Bible."⁴⁷

While Mullins's passion for keeping life and literature together protects from some misconceptions of the nature of saving faith, his emphasis allowed the easy development of other errors. First, his failure to engage in a defense of inerrancy created a narrow line of defense for the truth of Christianity. The doctrine of biblical inspiration should not be expounded as a sub-heading of Christian experience but as an element of the doctrine of God. A firmly argued defense of biblical infallibility providing an adequate foundation for genuine knowledge of God should precede a doctrine of experience or the use of experience as an argument for the truth

of Christianity. Mullins, in working for a paradigm more consonant with his philosophical climate, uncovered an epistemological snake pit.

Second, a focus on the subjective inevitably swallows the objective and diminishes its apparent importance. Though critical of pragmatism as a final philosophy, Mullins approved of its basic practical and experiential foundation. Asserting his view that "Christian experience transfers the *whole* [!] problem of Christian evidences to the sphere of practical life," he concluded that "In this phase of it, Christianity has a point of contact with the new philosophy of Pragmatism."⁴⁸

When the "whole" is transferred to the practical life, human consciousness becomes the final criterion of truth and pragmatic existentialism practically governs the life of the individual and the church. This happens because experiential knowledge appears to be more easily accessible than objective, outside-of-me knowledge. I immediately and intuitively "know" what my experience means to me (at least I think I do) and I do not intuitively know what objective Bible history means to me. Both the meaning and the truthfulness of the Bible recede in importance and give way to the authority of visceral sensation. "The man born blind," reasoned Mullins, "did not have to accept any theory of Christ . . . nor any special form of theism." All that was required was a suspension of speculative difficulties for the sake of one's moral, or in this case, physical, welfare. Once anointed with clay, he washed and saw; and then he progressed from saying "A man named Jesus" through "a good man" to "a prophet" and finally "he worshipped him." Such is the "experience of all who put their trust in Him."⁴⁹

If Mullins's representation of this story is legitimate as a paradigm and faith is accomplished by waiving one's speculative difficulties, then growth in faith cannot necessarily require doctrinal knowledge or intellectual coherence. Christianity becomes inexplicable and, because it does not seem to depend on rational communication, glories in irrationality.

This sort of neo-pietism potentially produces two errors. On one side, the coronation of experience as the ruling principle of the Christian world view begets apathy about the importance of doctrine in general and inerrancy in particular.

In another group, the Mullinsean atmosphere has fostered an openness to market-driven, production-oriented, sensationalistic worship services designed to produce decisions for Christ with a minimum of mental reflection. Like that blind man in Mullins's explanation, all that is initially desirable is the felt impact of a religious encounter on one's senses. Doctrinal reductionism produces an alarmingly truncated grasp of the doctrines of the gospel with a corresponding evangelistic culture that gives little attention to the nature of human depravity, the necessity and character of the new birth, and the nature and necessity of the atoning work of Christ.

Third, Mullins, in arguing that the truth of the Bible related specifically to "religious needs," was not careful enough to distinguish his view from that of C. H. Toy. It is right to clarify that the Bible is not a science textbook and was not written with a view to modern critical history. Doing this, however, without developing a biblical theology of history and science tends to fragment reality, separates religion from history, and de-unifies the God of creation from the God of redemption. This divi-

sion was one of the foundational errors of Marcion, whose bibliological spirit walks the corridors of many an evangelical mind.

The Importance of Confessions

Although Mullins wrote a systematic theology and spent his life discussing Christian doctrine and Baptist doctrine, his objections against the *a priori* method of so-called Protestant Scholasticism fostered an ambiguous, if not negative, attitude to confessions. Inferential theology fared only slightly better than biblical inerrancy. Prior to Mullins, Baptists in the South had been strongly confessional at the associational and institutional level. Mullins maintained some elements of that tradition and encouraged the use of confessions and creeds within a limited context. The limitations on the context, however, came from influences present in his New England experience from 1895 to 1899. 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.⁵⁰

In addition, the New England Baptist approach to theology had been shaped largely by Francis Wayland. 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. The absence of

such an “established creed is in itself the cause of our unity.”⁵¹

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.”⁵² 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.”⁵³

Mullins crystallized all of these points in an article entitled “Baptists and Creeds.”⁵⁴ 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

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.”⁵⁵ 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.”⁵⁶

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.”⁵⁷ The sufficiency of Scripture is not the only spiritual reality to which creeds may be antagonistic. “They become barriers to the free development of personality in religion” when the propagation of them takes the place of the personal dimension of the God-man relationship.⁵⁸

In spite of his recognizing their strengths, Mullins’s 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. Though far to the southwest another voice gave strong advocacy to the disciplinary use of confessions, Mullins's powerful influence succeeded in softening, if not dissolving, the Boyce approach to the use of creeds.⁵⁹

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 "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 truths stated as propositions of Scripture or confessionally, and 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.⁶⁰

Attention to propositional truth as a unifying factor among Baptists consistently ranks as an evidence of decline for Baptists in Mauldin's treatment. 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."

Calvinism

Though Mullins's doctrinal positions reflected some characteristically Calvinistic emphases, he hesitated to identify himself with either Calvinism or Arminianism as a system, preferring to "adhere more closely than either to the Scriptures, while retaining the truth in both systems."⁶¹ On one occasion, he tacitly congratulated the Remonstrants (first followers of James Arminius) when, in response to their "self-conscious" freedom they "urged it against the extreme Calvinism of the day." "Men knew they were free, and therefore no theory of God's decrees which ignored this fact could permanently hold its place in the doctrinal system."⁶²

Mullins's chosen approach made him more anthropocentric than theocentric and eventually eroded the substance of his lengthy attention to God's sovereignty. This occurs in spite of his prioritizing God's sovereignty as number one in his list of religious axioms: "The Holy and Loving God has a right to be sovereign."

God's sovereignty, however, must act in subserviency to man's freedom: "Any doctrine of God's sovereignty must safeguard man's freedom." He dismisses the discussion of the extent of the atonement in less than one page, affirming a universal atonement.⁶³ He does not discuss the bondage of the will, but does say that "without God's prevenient grace the will inevitably chooses evil"⁶⁴ and that men if left to themselves "would inevitably refuse salvation." God, according to Mullins, does not "fling out the possibility of salvation among men . . . and leave it for men to use or not use as they will."⁶⁵ But even more forcefully he insists that neither prevenient nor regenerating grace acts upon the will by way of compulsion, "but always in accordance with its freedom."⁶⁶ For Mullins, "human freedom" was a fact of consciousness. Free will in man "is as fundamental a truth as any other in the Gospel and must never be canceled in our doctrinal statements."⁶⁷ In order to protect that freedom, God reduces "his own action to the minimum lest he compel the will."⁶⁸ "God will not do violence to the will of man." In discussing the moral axiom of freedom, Mullins concludes with the reminder that God "respects the will" and refuses to forget that "our freedom is our inalienable gift from his gracious hands."⁶⁹

Election is true and, in fact for Mullins, is both personal [i.e., of individual persons and not just the sphere of "in Christ" or the category of "believers" or "the church"] and unconditional [i.e., not based on a foreseen response in the person elected, but rather the cause of the response]. The [unwarranted] inference drawn by some that such precise sovereignty and unbridled divine prerogative in election created an unjust imposition

on human freedom seemed to have too much of a sting in it. Mullins was careful to state, therefore, that election is not based on God's mere pleasure, or partiality, or arbitrariness. When Mullins sought to explain election on some foundation other than God's "mere pleasure," human volition devoured God's prerogatives. God saves all that he possibly can "recognizing limitations imposed upon his action by the nature of human freedom and sin."⁷⁰ We also must recognize that salvation must be accomplished within the normal flow of human history, God's purposes being incorporated by slow degrees into human character and human society.

The clear, precise, and intelligent commitment of Southern Baptists to Calvinism, with full awareness of and careful avoidance of the distinctive doctrinal errors of eighteenth century hyper-Calvinism, diminished rapidly after the time of Mullins. Preachers and teachers began to dismiss even the remnants of Calvinism remaining in Mullins. Herschel Hobbs, in his reworking of Mullins's *Axioms of Religion*, omits Mullins's clear references to election as a sovereign choice of specific individuals to salvation and substitutes instead the view of spherical or categorical election: "So God elected that all who are 'In Christ' will be saved."⁷¹ Persons are not elected, but the category of "In Christ" is sovereignly established as a parameter for election. Hobbs takes the classical Arminian stance in saying, "God's foreknowledge as to those who would or would not believe does not mean that he caused it."⁷² All that God may do in bringing sinners to salvation is to offer "every incentive." "The final choice," however, "lay with man. God in his sovereignty set the condition. Man in his free will determines the result."⁷³ Hobbs believes that he

has “sought to preserve [Mullins’s] meaning”⁷⁴ when in fact he has expanded one-half of Mullins, his zeal for human freedom, into the whole.

Walter Shurden provides another example of this phenomenon. In criticizing the *Manifesto’s* call for repression of private Bible reading and interpretation, Shurden gives a strong historical defense of Baptist commitment to a personal search of the Scripture. Shurden, while warning against “an authoritarian connectionalism in Baptist life,” affirms that he does not endorse “theological anarchy.”⁷⁵ Personal and private use of Scripture is not antithetical to but gives vitality to community life. One of Shurden’s models of Baptist probity on this issue is Obadiah Holmes.

A casual reading of Obadiah Holmes’s seventeenth-century document, “Testimony to the Church” reveals the clear sanctioning of private interpretation of Scripture, a substantial dose of healthy individualism, and a firm commitment to the local community of believers, all within the context of a theological Calvinism so strict that most Baptists today would have difficulty squeezing into it.⁷⁶

The quote evokes two observations. First, Calvinism was not seen as contradictory to individual freedoms by early Baptists. Second, Shurden views the doctrinal content, in this case Calvinism, as merely incidental to the larger issue of individual freedom, or as he prefers to call it, voluntarism. Shurden indicates on several occasions in his article that the Baptist vision transcends “theological preferences” and has no unchanging “Deposit of Truth.” He prefers to focus on “a specific *style* of faith, a distinctive *posture* of faith, a particular *attitude* toward

the issues of faith.”⁷⁷ He sees himself within a stream of Baptist identity represented, if not crystallized, by E. Y. Mullins.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Mullins represented his denominational heritage and argued for its validity as a world theologian. In his areas of most lasting influence, however, he succeeded not in perpetuating but in altering historic theological commitments of Baptists. The microcosm of diversity embodied in Mullins was not reflective of an existing condition in Southern Baptist life. Rather, he was the seminal power in the procreation of a diversity innately centrifugal. Neither his paradigm for epistemology and apologetics nor his treatment of biblical authority, confessional unity, and divine sovereignty had cohesive power. Though often scintillating, their highly individualized implications created an atmosphere in which unity could only center on function and organization, not theology. The definition of a Baptist had less and less to do with doctrine and more and more to do with the correlation of spheres of freedom. Conceived as a model for inclusiveness and broad unity in the denomination, Mullins’s theology tended to doctrinal reductionism, creating a hazy uncertainty about truth—truth that is essential to energize people in the sacred effort of propagating the gospel.

ENDNOTES

¹ E. Y. Mullins, “The Testimony of Christian Experience,” in *The Fundamentals*, 4 vols., ed. R. A. Torrey, A. C. Dixon, et al. (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917) 4:314-323. This article serves as a microcosm of Mullins’s several volumes emphasizing the apologetic

and philosophic power of Christian experience.

² Mullins in a letter to George C. McDaniel, April 30, 1926 on file in the library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary cited by Russell H. Dilday, Jr., "E. Y. Mullins: The Bible's Authority is a Living Transforming Reality," in *The Unfettered Word*, ed. Robison B. James (Waco: Word Books, 1987) 114. Other letters quoted in this paragraph were to Livingston Johnston and J. Frank Norris also cited by Dilday, 114.

³ Ibid., 116.

⁴ Bill J. Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 76. Leonard quotes Bush and Nettles in *Baptists and the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 291 and Hinson in *Are Southern Baptists Evangelicals?* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983) 137.

⁵ Leonard, 99.

⁶ His chapter on "Southern Baptist Theology" is particularly short on precision and tall on impression. For example, his conclusion appears to be summarizing theological conditions present "from the beginning of the convention" (p. 98). His fifth conclusion says, "within this delicate balance there existed [note the past tense] a wide variety of theological attitudes and interpretations with roots in Calvinist, modified Calvinist, modified Arminian, and even occasional Arminian, Landmarkist, fundamentalist, neoorthodox, evangelical, charismatic, and social gospel interpretations of Christianity" (p. 99). It is true that this kind of diversity developed within the Convention, but such

wide variety did not exist from the beginning. Most of those options, historically defined, did not even exist when the Convention was formed. Greater diversity exists now even within what Leonard calls the fundamentalist group than existed for the first 75 years of the whole of organized Convention life.

⁷ Walter B. Shurden, "The Baptist Identity and the Baptist *Manifesto*," in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 25.4 (1998) 338. This article is Shurden's friendly attempt at talking back to the authors of "Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A *Manifesto* for Baptist Communities in North America." He identifies the core value of Baptist identity as "Freedom" interpreted much in the fashion of Mullins's Soul Competence and sees himself in a stream of Baptist interpreters culminating in Mullins (p. 340).

⁸ C. H. Toy, "Letter of Resignation" *Baptist Courier* [South Carolina Baptist paper] November 27, 1879 contained in Robert A. Baker, *A Baptist Source Book* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966) 168-172.

⁹ John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893) 262.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ C. H. Toy to John A. Broadus, January 31, 1861, in John A Broadus Letter Collection in the manuscript department of the University of Virginia Library.

¹² Basil Manly, *The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration Explained and Vindicated* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1888) 30. The book is divided into three major sections: "The

Doctrine of Inspiration;" "Proofs of Inspiration;" "Objections to Inspiration." Manly, who along with Boyce was educated at Princeton under Hodge, showed throughout his extensive agreement with that school in his construction of this doctrine. He also refers frequently to James Bannerman. Those influences, however, should not create a suspicion that the doctrine is borrowed from non-Baptist sources. Manly's theology expresses what was expressed hundreds of times in theological discussions in Baptist papers throughout the nineteenth century.

¹³ Ibid., 189, 191.

¹⁴ John A. Broadus, *A Catechism of Bible Teaching* (Nashville: Sunday School of Southern Baptist Convention and Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1892) 14, 15, 16. Broadus also includes responses treating alleged discrepancies and contradictions within Scripture and alleged conflicts with history and science.

¹⁵ J. B. Jeter, "Inspiration of the Scriptures" in *Baptist Doctrines*, ed. Charles A. Jenkins (St. Louis: Chancy R. Barns, 1882) 49-69. It is notable that this entire controversy and all the writing on inspiration occurred before the famous article on "Inspiration" by Hodge and Warfield in April 1881. It is clear that, though Toy accepted the truthfulness of Scripture in religious matters, he was dismissed for not accepting the error-free nature of Scripture even in historical and scientific matters. Those who objected to Toy's views, even beyond Manly,

Boyce, and Broadus, seek to demonstrate that inspiration and thus truthfulness must extend to every aspect of the scriptural record.

¹⁶Ibid., 49, 52, 54, 69.

¹⁷J. P. Boyce, *Three Changes in Theological Institutions* (Greenville: C. J. Elford Book and Job Press, 1856) 33, 35.

¹⁸Ibid., 33, 39, 43.

¹⁹William H. Stokes, "Our Old Confession of Faith," *The Christian Index*, 7 November 1839, p. 710.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Francis Wayland, whose thought embodies the spirit of the New England Baptists through the mid-nineteenth century, or as he states "the opinions and practices of Baptists in the northern States," stated that "this very absence of any established creed is in itself the cause of our unity." He asserted this as a positive truth in deference to his trust in the clarity and inspiration of Scripture. "Here is an inspired record," he said, "allowed to be pure truth." "The nearer the opinions of men approach to its teachings, the nearer they approach to each other." Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches*, ed. John Howard Hinton (London: J. Heaton & Son, 1861) 3.

²²J. P. Boyce, "Defense of the *Abstract of Principles*" from *Western Recorder*, June 20, 1874 contained in Baker, 140.

²³From the *Abstract Of Principles*, article V, contained in Baker, 138.

²⁴Boyce, *Three Changes*, 33.

²⁵Broadus, *Memoir*, 265.

²⁶Ibid., 73.

²⁷A. T. Robertson, *Life and Letters of*

John A. Broadus (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1909) 396-397.

²⁸E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974) 10.

²⁹Ibid., 11.

³⁰E. Y. Mullins, review of *Jesus Christ and the Human Quest* by Edwin Lewis in *The Review and Expositor* 22 (January 1925) 121-123.

³¹Mullins, *Fundamentals*, 321, 322.

³²Mullins, *Christian Religion*, 2.

³³E. Glenn Hinson viewed this Mullinsean shift as quietly purposeful on Mullins's part. In 1981 he wrote, "Mullins had reinterpreted the Baptist heritage along Schleiermacherian lines in *The Axioms of Religion* published in 1908. In doing so, he attempted quietly to lay to one side the Princeton theology which had governed the thinking of his predecessors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary" ("Baptist and Evangelicals: What is the Difference?" in *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 [April, 1981] 30). My interpretation of Mullins is not novel, therefore, but merely more insistent that the direction of Baptist theology after Mullins was less Baptist than before. Its revisionism and orientation to experience, whether individual or corporate, are antagonistic to the Scripture principle, the regulative principle, that formed and sustained Baptist ideas from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

³⁴Mullins, *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (Philadelphia: The Griffith and Rowland Press, 1913) 16.

³⁵Ibid., 379.

³⁶Ibid., 380.

³⁷Ibid., 381.

³⁸Mullins, *Christian Religion*, 146.

³⁹Ibid., 147.

⁴⁰Mullins, *Freedom and Authority*, 381.

⁴¹Mullins, *Christian Religion*, 144.

⁴²Mullins, *Freedom and Authority*, 380.

⁴³Ibid., 352. Basil Manly, Jr., had discussed this accusation in a section dealing with the exclusivity of the Bible as an inspired revelation from God. Some so-called Christian thinkers treat Scripture so that "All proper distinction between the Bible and other religious books written by good men is annihilated." Then he remarks with some degree of sad wonder, "A new term of reproach, bibliolatry, is invented wherewith to stigmatize those that reverence the supreme authority of God's Word" (*The Bible Doctrine of Inspiration*, 75).

⁴⁴E. Y. Mullins, *The Life In Christ* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1917) 16.

⁴⁵Mullins, *Christian Religion*, 156.

⁴⁶Mullins, *Freedom and Authority*, 382.

⁴⁷Ibid., 382.

⁴⁸Mullins, *Fundamentals*, 322. The italics and the bracketed exclamation point are mine.

⁴⁹Ibid., 323.

⁵⁰William 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 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).

⁵¹Wayland, 1-4.

⁵²E. Y. Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs* (1912; reprint, Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1925) 8. Also see *Freedom and Authority in Religion*, 301-302.

⁵³Baker, 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.

⁵⁴E. 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.

⁵⁵E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Philadelphia: The Griffith & Rowland Press, 1908) 143.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁸Mullins, *Freedom and Authority*, 302.

⁵⁹B. H. Carroll, the founder of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and its 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." (*An Interpretation of the English Bible*, Vol. 11, *Colossians, Ephesians, Hebrews* [Nashville: Broadman, 1948; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973] 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*, 13 January 1910).

⁶⁰Frank 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. He even discusses John Brine and John Gill and sees both of them as tragic figures who held to some aspects of the "personal truth" but allowed rationalism to corrupt their consistent Baptist witness. Gill's position on the work of the Spirit, according to Mauldin, is 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" (105).

⁶¹Mullins, *Christian Religion*, vii.

⁶²Mullins, *Axioms*, 150.

⁶³Mullins, *Christian Religion*, 336, 340.

⁶⁴Mullins, *Axioms*, 84.

⁶⁵Mullins, *Baptist Beliefs*, 26.

⁶⁶Mullins, *Axioms*, 84.

⁶⁷Mullins, *Beliefs*, 26.

⁶⁸Mullins, *Christian Religion*, 349.

⁶⁹Mullins, *Axioms*, 90, 167.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 88.

⁷¹Herschel Hobbs and E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1978) 72. Hobbs purports to be doing an exegesis of Eph 1:3-13 showing how there is no conflict between sovereignty and free will. In this section he has

quoted Mullins's *Christian Religion* at the point where Mullins says "Election is not to be thought of as a bare choice of so many human units by God's action independently of man's free choice and the human means employed. God elects men to respond freely" (p. 347). It is clear from his discussion that Hobbs completely misses the thrust of Mullins's argument.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., 11.

⁷⁵Shurden, 328.

⁷⁶Ibid., 327.

⁷⁷Ibid., 338. On p. 323 Shurden focuses on Baptist World Congress addresses from 1905-1985 as defining "the essence of Baptist Christianity today." In that context, the interpreter will be allowed to "transcend national, regional, theological, and ethnic peculiarities."

⁷⁸Ibid., 322, 331, 332, 338, 340. Another striking example of Mullins's influence may be seen by comparing Mullins's treatment of the potter and the clay with that of Wayne Dehoney. After Mullins describes the scene, he concludes, "But if the clay is refractory, the vessel is marred—all of which means that God will not do violence to the will of man. His sovereignty is holy and loving; it respects human freedom. And so everywhere." Mullins, *Axioms*, 90. Wayne Dehoney employs the same biblical picture with a similar conclusion: "Herein is an awesome truth! You and I, finite beings, can thwart the purpose of the Almighty God! We can resist and rebel and cause God himself to

fail in our lives! . . . But he is subject to your will, your response, your decision!" Wayne Dehoney, *Preaching to Change Lives* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974) 120, 124. None of Mullins's concern for the efficacy of God's holy and loving sovereignty is retained; only the dominant anthropocentric concern for freedom remains.