

Editorial: History Matters

Editorial: Thomas R. Schreiner

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As believers in Jesus Christ we affirm that history matters. Our faith is a historical faith. We believe in a God who created the universe out of nothing at a certain point of time. God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees at a particular junction in history. The exodus of Israel from Egypt is not pious fiction but accurately represents what God did for his people long ago. God's covenants with Abraham and Moses are historical verities, proclaiming to us God's saving purposes in the history of salvation. Similarly, David is not a figment of Israel's imagination or a kind of mythical King Arthur. He really existed and his reign anticipated and prefigured the rule of Jesus Christ. Most important, we believe that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical figure and that the gospels accurately record what he said and did. We reject the skepticism of the Jesus Seminar, which finds little historical worth in the gospels. The Christian faith is not merely a philosophy of life or a summons to ethical behavior. It depends upon historical events. At Southern Seminary we joyfully affirm with the Church throughout the ages that Jesus was born of a virgin, ministered in Palestine, suffered, died, was buried, and raised on the third day.

We learn from the scriptures themselves, therefore, that history matters. We are not ahistorical creatures, who live in sublime isolation from those who preceded us. We are significantly influenced by our parents, grandparents, and the country in which we were born. Similarly, the history of the Church since the time of Jesus Christ and the Apostles has shaped us. Too often Protestants deny this

truth, suggesting that church history is irrelevant since we have the scriptures. Of course, the scriptures are the only authoritative rule for faith and practice, and they stand in judgment over the creeds formulated throughout the history of the church. Nonetheless, we all have much to learn from believers who have gone before us. The Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds have not been improved upon. We stand upon the shoulders of great men like Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Edwards, and Wesley, even though we would not adhere to everything they taught. To think that previous believers discovered no truth from the scriptures would reveal a lack of faith in God's providence, and would constitute an arrogance about our own abilities that would be nothing short of breathtaking.

As Baptists, we are grateful for those who have run the race before us. Some Baptists lost their lives because of their conviction that only believers should be baptized. Baptists like Isaac Backus contended for liberty of conscience, and in the United States we profit from their labors, enjoying freedom from state coercion so that we are free to worship God according to our conscience. At Southern Seminary we also live in a stream of history. The seminary would not exist without the indefatigable labors and prayers and vision of James Petigru Boyce. We think of the legacy of men like John Broadus, Basil Manly, Jr., A. T. Robertson, and time shall fail me if I continue to record those who have left to this day their imprint on Southern Seminary and Southern Baptists.

In this issue we consider the life and

ministry of E. Y. Mullins in retrospect. He served as the president of Southern Seminary from 1899-1928, president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1921-1924, and president of the Baptist World Alliance from 1924-1928. Credit goes to Mullins for the present beautiful location of Southern Seminary, and thousands of students and faculty have profited from his vision and stewardship in moving the seminary. Mullins's greatest influence, not surprisingly, was in the realm of theology. Some Baptist scholars want to claim him as an advocate for their revision of Baptist theology in the present era (see the issue of *Review and Expositor*, vol. 96 [Winter 1999]). Similarly, these same scholars object that scholars such as R. Albert Mohler, Jr. and Tom Nettles unfairly demonize Mullins and cast the blame on him for leading Baptists astray. In this issue of the journal we have included essays by Mohler, Nettles, Sean Lucas, and Greg Thornbury and Russell Moore, along with two pieces from Mullins himself. I think it will become apparent to those who *actually read* these articles that Mullins's role in the formation of Baptist theology is more complex than that suggested in *Review and Expositor*. On the one hand, Mullins's orthodoxy was such that it is doubtful that he would have saluted or embraced the liberal shift of some modern Baptists. On the other hand, those who actually read Mohler and Nettles will see that their assessment of Mullins is quite nuanced. Mullins is not merely criticized and rejected, for there is much to celebrate and embrace in his theology. And yet Mullins's emphasis on the role of experience was problematic and had some deleterious consequences in the years that followed. We do not detract from the greatness of E. Y. Mullins by noting some of the weaknesses in his theology, for we

learn from those who precede us by noting where they held firm to the faith and where they unconsciously deviated from it. The life of Mullins reminds us that history matters, our lives matter, and that we as individuals, by God's grace, can make a difference in history. At Southern Seminary we are grateful for the legacy of E. Y. Mullins, and our goal is to be faithful to the next generation, so that they will continue to carry the gospel, without compromise, to a hurting world.