

Book Review

Robert O'Brien, Ed., *Stand with Christ: Why Missionaries Can't Sign the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message* (Smyth and Helwys, 2002): 156 pp..

This collection features twelve articles from figures familiar from the Baptist left (e.g., David R. Currie, James M. Dunn, and Charles Wade), all protesting the use of the 2000 BFM as an instrument of doctrinal accountability for International Mission Board missionaries. It also includes a foreward by moderate historian Walter Shurden and an afterward by CBF missions leader Keith Parks.

The tone and spirit of most of the articles is strident and alarmist. Few of the articles dare to deal directly with the content of the BFM itself, preferring instead to treat the confession as a straw man. In fact, from reading this book, one might be led to wonder whether the BFM 2000 has been completely and fairly digested by some of the authors. For example, in John D. Pierce's article he makes this statement: "Although the BFM2000 identifies only the office of 'senior pastor,' a relatively new term in most Baptist churches, as being off limits to women, the document has been applied more broadly" (26). The only problem is that the term "senior pastor" does not appear in the BFM 2000. Maybe this is a minor point. What Pierce, no doubt, is referring to is the line in article VI "The Church" that reads: "While both men and woman are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by scripture." His misquotation, however, gives evidence of a lack of familiarity, not only with the letter of the BFM text, but also with the spirit of the biblical texts which undergird it. In this case, that means those texts that argue not for the gender of the "senior pastor" but for the biblical role of the "elder," the "overseer," and the "pastor-teacher."

The only article that attempts to mount something more closely approaching a valid theological examination and challenge to the BFM 2000 is the one by former Southwestern President Russell H. Dilday, titled "A Serious Look at the Baptist Faith and Mission Revisions" (33-54). Dilday outlines twelve "troubling factors" in the 2000 revision of the BFM, including standard moderate protests concerning the article on scripture, the role of women, and the use of the confession as a creedal standard. In fact, those three complaints are the ones heard most often throughout the various essays. Dilday also criticizes the BFM 2000's reflection of reformed theology in what he calls "The trend toward 'five-point' Calvinism and the attendant mistrust of personal Christian experience" (factor five) and "The trend shifting Baptist identity from its Anabaptist, Free Church tradition to a reformed evangelical identity" (factor six). One wonders, however, how Dilday can characterize as a recent innovation the influence of the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura* among Baptist Christians and its attendant demand of scriptural authority over tradition, reason, and experience.

Throughout these articles, there appears the standard moderate mistrust of doctrinal accountability in deference to practical concerns. Keith Parks makes this clear in his "Afterward of Warning": "Originally, Baptists with a great variety of beliefs came together to cooperate around the cause of missions.... Some 'Ultra-Conservative

Resurgence' leaders argued with me that doctrine, not missions, was the unifying force.... They have now redefined the Southern Baptist Convention and have made doctrine its controlling force." (151). Might it be the case, however, that it is Parks and his allies who are reflecting a revisionist view of Baptist history that minimizes doctrine and maximizes "cooperation" in missions?

What is most striking about this collection of essays that purports to be an explanation of why missionaries cannot sign the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000, however, is the relative paucity of input from actual missionaries in the field. The truth is that there has not been a mass exodus of missionaries leaving the field in protest at the imposition of this doctrinal standard of accountability, nor has there been an uproar among Baptist Christians in other cultures where these missionaries serve. These articles make it plain that this has occurred much to the consternation of the stateside moderate protesters. The closest we come to actual missionary input in these articles are two essays from missiologist Earl Martin who quotes a few email correspondences and anecdotal information from a handful of missionaries and national Baptists.

Martin's reflection on his own missionary service as not firmly rooted in doctrine, however, seem to prove why the current move toward doctrinal accountability is an appropriate corrective to past Southern Baptist mission efforts. For example, in his article "What Makes Missionaries Sign?" Martin, drawing on his experience as a teacher at the former Ruschlikon Seminary, makes the following confession:

In the theological environment of European Baptists, I learned to deal with a rather significant doctrinal difference that pertains to standard Southern Baptist dogma. The traditional stance with regard to the finality of a believer's salvation is expressed sometime in the phrase, once saved—always saved. It is also spoken of as 'the eternal security of the believer.' It may be found in Article V of BFM2000. However, the majority of Baptists in Europe, east or west, hold to the contrary doctrine described by the words, fall from grace. It means a believer may 'unbelieve' and become lost again. In my teaching of evangelism, it became clear to me that I had to make room for healthy discussion of both points of view.... I could not force my understanding on them (142).

Later, Martin says, "Missionaries must have an attitude of deference toward national Christians, their faith, their way of doing evangelism, and their way of doing church" (142). He describes his stance on this matter approvingly as a model to be followed. What Martin fails to convey, unbelievably, is that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is not merely "Southern Baptist dogma" but one of the cardinal Biblical doctrines reclaimed during the Reformation in Europe! Missionaries are not called upon to ignore the plain reaching of scripture in the name of cultural sensitivity. They are to proclaim the truth of the gospel, regardless of the cultural setting! For this reason, missionaries must be thoroughly grounded in what they believe and why they believe it before they go out to teach others.

Stand With Christ was obviously a quickly put together volume designed to inflame popular moderate sentiments against the Southern Baptist Convention in general and the International Mission Board, in particular. After reading the volume, however, it appears that a more appropriate subtitle for the work might be: *Why a few missionaries are unwilling to sign the BFM 2000 and the political capital that moderate leaders are trying to make out of it in their ongoing attempt to disparage the renewal movement within the SBC*. In the opinion of this reviewer, however, the book has the opposite of its intended impact. It supports the wisdom of doctrinal standards in missionary appointment.

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