

Book Review

David S. Dockery and Roger B. Duke, *John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Academic, 2008): 260 pp..

This collection of biographical essays on the life of the influential Southern Baptist pastor and theologian John Albert Broadus (1827-1895) is in the new series “Studies in Baptist Life and Thought” (ed. Michael A. G. Haykin). The ten essays, including contributions from Timothy George and Tom Nettles, provide an overview of Broadus’ life and his contributions as a scholar and churchman. Indeed, he was a man who had a profound impact on those of his generation and beyond.

Born in Culpepper County, Virginia, Broadus was converted and called to preach just before he matriculated at the University of Virginia where he excelled in the classics. Broadus even married his Greek professor’s daughter! After graduation, he served as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charlottesville from 1851-1859, while also teaching Greek and Latin at his *alma mater*. In the midst of this service he also spent two years as Chaplain at the University of Virginia.

Broadus left Charlottesville after much soul-searching to accept an invitation to join the fledgling faculty of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, South Carolina. The outbreak of war from 1861-1865 meant that the new seminary’s classes were suspended. During this time, Broadus had many occasions to preach to Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. With the South’s economy in shambles after the war, Broadus was also influential in the decision to relocate the school to Louisville, Kentucky. Broadus is said to have famously uttered, “the Seminary may die, but we’ll die first.”

During his days as a seminary professor, Broadus emerged as formidable scholar in both New Testament and homiletics. He spent twenty years writing his *Matthew Commentary* in the *American Commentary* series (published in 1886). He also began to write his lectures on preaching as he taught his first post-war class on homiletics to a solitary blind student. Those lectures would be published in 1870 as the classic *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, a work still in use in some evangelical seminary courses on preaching. Broadus also became the father-in-law and colleague of A. T. Robertson who would become the best known Southern Baptist New Testament scholar of all time. One mark of the esteem Broadus held in his day is the fact he was invited to deliver the influential Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale Divinity School in January of 1889. Interestingly, those lectures were never published and Broadus’ notes have only recently been discovered (see the essay by Mark A. Overstreet in this collection, “Now I am Found: The Recovery of the ‘Lost’ Yale Lectures and Broadus’ Legacy of Engaging Exposition” pp. 156-175). At the death of his long time friend and colleague James P. Boyce, Broadus was appointed the second president of his beloved seminary in May 1889. He held this position until his death in 1895. Indeed, Broadus was a Southern Baptist titan, as evidenced by the fact that his name supplies the “Broad-” in the name of Southern Baptist publisher “Broadman” press (the “-man” comes from Basil Manly, Jr.).

The essays in this collection provide an excellent summary and analysis of Broadus' life and legacy. This fills a current gap, since there is not a modern, authoritative biography of Broadus. Many of the writers claim Broadus as an evangelical conservative, orthodox standard-bearer. Several make mention of his concurrence with the dismissal of Crawford Toy—a fellow University of Virginia man whom he had baptized in Charlottesville—from the faculty of Southern Seminary. Toy had been a one-time suitor of another convert under Broadus, the missionary heroine Charlotte “Lottie” Moon. His theology, however, had moved in decidedly liberal direction after study in Germany. Toy left Southern for Harvard where he eventually abandoned evangelical Christianity altogether and became a Unitarian. In the concluding essay, James Patterson approvingly cites A. T. Robertson’s description of Broadus’ theology as “progressive conservatism” (p. 241). Patterson comments: “For Broadus, biblical and theological fidelity required some clear boundary markers as safeguards against heresy; he would not have supported the doctrinal pluralism that began to find a home in some Southern Baptist institutions by the mid-twentieth century” (p. 241). Thus, it is subtly claimed that Broadus would have supported “conservative resurgence” of 1979-1990 in the SBC.

One wonders, however, if some of the seeds of moderate drift and compromise in Southern Baptist life and in its seminary education, in particular, were not anticipated by Broadus’ desire to be conversant with German higher criticism. David Dockery notes that Broadus “demonstrated an awareness and conservative openness to European critical scholarship, but he was not willing unreservedly to subject Holy Scripture to the antisupernatural biases of much of the German critical approaches” (p. 37). One wonders, however, what influence higher criticism exerted on Broadus. Richard Melick’s essay (“New Wine in Broadus Wineskins” pp. 97-121) offers a survey of Broadus’ New Testament scholarship, noting—among other things—his embrace of the Westcott-Hort view on text criticism. This would be taken even further by A. T. Robertson. The moderate Baptist tendency has long been to speak piously in public and critically in private. How, for example, could Broadus not know of Toy’s embrace of Pentateuchal source criticism and Darwinism? One might well ask, “How progressive was Broadus’ conservatism?”

Beyond his embrace of the critical scholarship of his day, several writers point to the fact that Broadus demurred from the strict Calvinism held by some of his Baptist contemporaries and colleagues, like Boyce. Dockery draws a parallel between E. Y. Mullins’ reshaping of Boyce’s Calvinism and the “Broadus-Robertson tradition,” concluding, “so Broadus to some degree and Robertson even more, moved to a more Amyraldian type of soteriology” (p. 43). Did this too provide a seed for doctrinal compromise that would come to full bloom in subsequent generations? Did Broadus-Robertson give us Frank Stagg and Dale Moody? This helpful collection of essays raises but does not fully investigate these questions, but it does provide a stimulating introduction for understanding the life of Broadus and his “living legacy.”

Jeffrey T. Riddle, Charlottesville, Virginia