



CHRIST AS THE CORNER-STONE
Journalism of *The Alabama Baptist* in Its First 175 Years, 1843-2018

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From the beginning, *The Alabama Baptist*'s priority has been clear. It was right there in a slogan below the nameplate of Volume 1, Number 1, dated Saturday, February 4, 1843: “‘Jesus Chrstit himself being the Chief Corner-Stone.’ — Ephesians 1, 20.” (The Corner-Stone is what’s important, not the typo.)

That first issue of the state Baptist newspaper was published at Marion, Alabama. Like subsequent issues, it provided information that helped and inspired Baptists to unite in advancing Christ’s work and to be faithful disciples. Articles and sections included “Christian Obedience,” “God Answers Prayer, but Not Always in Our Way,” “Godliness is Profitable,” “The Error of the Mere Moralist,” “The Infidel Silenced,” “Baptist State Convention,” “Report of the Committee on Foreign Missions,” “Alabama Baptist Bible Society,” “Judson Female Institute,” “Poetical Department,” “The Origin of Camp Meetings,” “Cheerfulness in a Wife,” “Consequences of Gambling,” and “Always Cause for Thankfulness.”

A letter to the editors, signed only “X.Y.Z.,” congratulated them and “our brethren throughout the State.” The letter said:

A new era in the history of Alabama Baptists is beginning to dawn. The blessings of a religious paper are to be diffused among our families and churches. . . . Missionary intelligence will be more generally diffused. . . . The Temperance Cause will be promoted. . . . The Bible Society will be furnished with the means of supplying the destitute with the word of life. . . . May we all feel that it [the paper] is intimately identified with our interest and prosperity; and may it long live, a blessing to our Churches and the world.¹

One hundred seventy-five years later, the newspaper also has provided perhaps the best and most detailed source of historical information about Baptists’ work, successes and struggles through the years. Its archives are a fertile source for historians.

But the misspelling of “Christ” in handset type was not the only mistake in the front-page slogan. The Scripture citation was also wrong — a second reminder that journalism (not unlike the daily Christian life) is done on the fly, is imperfect, and is subject to ongoing correction. The Bible verse is actually Ephesians 2:20. Somebody had noticed both errors and fixed them by June 3, the date of the next available issue in archives.

Errors large and small occur in journalism despite editors’ best efforts. They correct mistakes, backpedal or apologize when necessary, and move on. As editors come and go and circumstances change, news coverage and editors’ opinions evolve. They try not to lose sight of their larger purpose.

About this paper. This is a journalistic history of *The Alabama Baptist*, but journalism cannot be separated from people (owners, editors, readers) and events (both religious and secular). Therefore, this paper will overlap with general histories of the paper. But it is not intended to be comprehensive. Rather, it provides facts and observations drawn by selected readings from 175 years of published materials, mostly in the pages of *The Alabama Baptist*

¹ X.Y.Z., “Communications,” *The Alabama Baptist*, February 4, 1843, p. 2

itself. Many of the selections were made to coincide with significant events, such as transitions between editors and major state and world news.²

THE NEWSPAPER'S MISSION

Through the years, *The Alabama Baptist* has described its mission as serving and unifying the Baptists of Alabama and facilitating their work for Christ.

In the first issue, an editorial addressed the question of why a new religious newspaper was needed. The United States had at least 700,000 Baptists but only fifteen weekly papers, the editorial said; eleven of those papers were north of the Potomac River. Therefore, there simply were not enough newspapers, and “besides, we want a paper in Alabama.” The editorial continued:

We want something originating at *home*, which shall come to all our firesides, bringing the expression of brotherly love, making known our necessities, ministering comfort, announcing our successes, binding us all together in one great brotherhood, concentrating our energies, and aiding to direct them into channels of usefulness. No one measure can be proposed, which would so powerfully advance the intelligence and piety, the honor and usefulness of the five or six thousand Baptist families in Alabama, as the introduction into each one of them, of a good religious paper.³

“It is hard to say which needs a clean religious paper the more, a country home where church privileges are few, or a city home where a daily flood of putrid matter pours in from manifold presses,” L.O. Dawson, associate editor, wrote early in 1905. The paper must be “bright, readable, virile, wide-awake, progressive, conservative, pure, sound ... It must have in it all the elements of uplifting leadership.” “[A] thousand correspondents” must help families “know the progress of the kingdom, be informed of how the battle goes, and know what great things are being undertaken, calling for their co-operation.” Through the paper, the world would judge both the editor and the churches. Dawson set a goal of circulating to twelve thousand homes by the end of 1905.⁴

After being acquired by the state Baptist convention in 1919, the newspaper declared its aim to be “the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering unto the building up of the body of Christ.” Secular news, when published, would be interpreted from a religious perspective. As the property of Alabama Baptist people, the paper would serve the denomination by “expressing and interpreting” Baptist life. The paper would be “distinctively Baptist” but constructive and fraternal, with its motto being “Speaking the truth in love.” But it was to be not just a mouthpiece for denominational boards but a forum for discussion. Dissenting voices would not be excluded, but destructive views and destructive authors were not welcome. The article concluded:

With the co-operation of the pastors, the field workers of the Board, the good women of the State and the other Baptist forces, the editor gives the best that is in him for a paper worthy of a great Baptist brotherhood. Brethren it is ours. Let us all get behind the enterprise and make it go.⁵

² Each source note below will give the writer's name or initials if available. Dates and page numbers are from *The Alabama Baptist* unless another source is named; when the paper was not being published under that flag, the then-current name is provided. When an editorial is unsigned, the assumption here is that it was written by the person who was the chief editor at the time.

³ “The New Paper,” February 4, 1843, p. 2

⁴ L.O. Dawson, “Once Again — Who Makes the Paper!,” January 4, 1905, p. 8

⁵ “Foreword,” January 23, 1919, p. 1

In an article that appeared amid other reports from state Baptist convention entities, editor Hudson Baggett described the newspaper in 1994 (just before his death) as “a voice and an echo.” It spoke to issues, programs, projects, accomplishments and experiences; it echoed many people’s opinions through its letters to the editor.⁶

A few months later, Baggett’s successor, Bob Terry, discussed the relevance of John 8:31-32 to Baptist journalism. That Scripture appeared at the top of each issue of the paper: “If ye continue in my word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Terry connected it with personal responsibility, priesthood of believers and soul competency. “The state Baptist paper helps us live out these principles in tangible ways,” he wrote. Baptists believe in “spiritual democracy,” but they need “a common base of information,” lest the uninformed become dependent on the informed. Shared information shapes vision and motivation. All active resident families of a church need the state Baptist paper; it “is not a luxury to be included for members if money is left in the church budget after everything else is funded.”⁷

The newspaper’s mission statement in 2018 is on its website:

The Alabama Baptist has its readers’ Christian walk in mind, seeking to empower them to live out discipleship in their personal, professional and church life. It aims to equip them with resources and information — and to do that with competence, compassion, fairness and dependability as a news source.⁸

SUPPORTING BAPTISTS — INDIVIDUALLY, COLLECTIVELY, SPIRITUALLY, IN PRACTICAL WAYS

The Alabama Baptist has sought through the years to serve pastors, churches, the denomination, affiliated organizations and readers. A 1917 editorial declared: “*The Alabama Baptist* is not going to be a mere appendage of the organized work, but purposes to be a Baptist newspaper.” It served Baptist institutions but had an “obligation to the men and women who take it and pay for it.” It would show them why being a Baptist was worthwhile and make “the Baptist spirit” part of daily life.⁹ At a 1927 meeting of the Executive Committee and promotional agencies in Nashville, Tennessee, “it was unanimously decided that the greatest task before Baptists today is to get the State Baptist papers in the homes of our Baptist people. ... In Alabama, about one in six or seven of our people ever see an *Alabama Baptist*. We cannot make progress as long as conditions like this exist.”¹⁰

Former missionary Martha Hagood laid out the challenges facing an editor when she congratulated Hudson Baggett on his selection as editor in 1966. In a letter to the editor, she wrote that she did not know of a state Baptist convention post that carried more influence than editor of *The Alabama Baptist*. The editor must “work for all of us, speak for all of us and as the occasion arises challenge all of us,” she wrote. “... I think that our convention needs a statesman, a prophet, an interpreter of history. ... My prayers will be with you for inevitably if you bring to this position both conviction and dedication there will be dark hours.”¹¹

⁶ Hudson Baggett, “‘The Alabama Baptist’ Newspaper: A Voice and an Echo,” November 17, 1994, p. 15

⁷ Bob Terry, “You Shall Know the Truth,” August 10, 1995, p. 2

⁸ <http://www.thealabamabaptist.org/our-story/#mission>

⁹ “The Paper’s Aim for 1917,” January 3, 1917, p. 6

¹⁰ D.F. Green, “Importance of *The Alabama Baptist*,” July 21, 1927, p. 4

¹¹ Martha Hagood, “Missionary Challenges Editor,” June 23, 1966, p. 3

Preachers' pay. The paper took up for pastors who were being paid meagerly by their churches. A 1905 editorial by Frank Willis Barnett implored churches to pay pastors' salaries before Christmas so that they could make their loved ones happy. Pastors were paid modestly, "and yet many of them would starve before they would make any outcry."¹² Eleven years later, Barnett's paper was still commenting on preachers' pay and saying they should not have to ask for ministerial discounts:

Not only are churches negligent in properly remunerating their pastors, but many here in Alabama beat them out of what they promise to pay them. If we cared to publish the names of the various churches which have called new preachers and in this way got rid of the old ones and the salaries they owed them, there would be a rumpus. ... Let the churches pay the preachers and then they can pay us.¹³

In an editorial about late-1960s inflation, Hudson Baggett noted that "if a pastor or staff member has not received a substantial raise in the last three years, his salary has actually been cut because of the cost of living increase." (He also said his own family income had "increased little in three years.")¹⁴ He returned to the theme a few weeks later, saying that most pastors and staff cared more about serving the Lord than about pay. "A pastor or staff member, however, can be just as dedicated on a generous salary as he can on one that is not generous. In fact, he may be more dedicated since his morale is apt to be higher. ... Many finance committees would recommend higher salaries if they were encouraged to do so by church members."¹⁵

Time management. In 1925, editor L.L. Gwaltney described the challenges many editors and pastors faced about how to use their time:

The editor of this paper often feels himself caught in such a conflict [of duties]. If he follows the habit of twenty years, formed while in the pastorate, of spending the morning in reading, study, meditation, there come [sic] the imperative call of the office and its duties. If he spends his time wholly in the office he feels that he shall soon become too stale in his thinking to edit this paper or do anything else worth while.

The editorial said that "probably every serious pastor" faces similar conflicts between study and mingling with his flock. But "whatever else a pastor does or does not, if he fails in his pulpit, he will sooner or later fail every where." Lay people face a conflict between giving money and rendering Christian service, though stewardship demands both, Gwaltney wrote. The editorial's conclusion was that the conflict was apparent but not real — that a person must decide what takes precedence at a particular time. "Let the public servant discover what his duty for the moment is, do it, and let those who think otherwise 'think' all they please."¹⁶

Visiting, preaching, serving the flock. Editors of *The Alabama Baptist* were not only journalists. Many or most were also preachers. The paper itself gave them a platform to influence many, but they often got to be editors because they were already leaders.

On March 27, 1919, L.L. Gwaltney divided an editorial into three parts, addressed respectively to the brethren in the country, in the cities and scattered abroad. "We believe we know you," he said — essentially to all of them. He noted that those in the country labored under

¹² "Pay Your Pastor," December 6, 1905, p. 8

¹³ "We Want Preachers to Get the Paper," January 3, 1917, p. 6

¹⁴ "Inflation Comes Home," July 10, 1969, p. 2

¹⁵ "Pastor and Staff Salaries," August 14, 1969, p. 2

¹⁶ "Conflicting Duties," January 1, 1925, p. 3

adverse conditions: bad roads, long trips, “the unorganized condition of the work brought about by influenza and other causes.” But he said the rural areas had provided most ministers and others taking leadership positions in cities. “Your inbred and sturdy qualities flow as a guided [sic] stream into all our economic, social and religious life.” The brethren in the cities, he said, “have a weekly contact and touch with your people,” an organization, and many people who have been taught to “look on giving as an act of worship”; consequently, these urban brethren had greater possibilities and responsibilities. Those scattered abroad need not wage “a guerilla warfare,” meaning they were not alone. There was a need for “concerted, organized, cooperative action” in order for all Alabama Baptists to succeed.¹⁷

Gwaltney planned a five-week “whirlwind tour of Alabama” in 1935 and enlisted five brethren to write the editorials while he was gone. Readers would see what others were thinking, and he would have time “to do some work in the field.”¹⁸ Gwaltney wrote later that year that he was surprised when the state convention elected him president.¹⁹ At his retirement as editor, Gwaltney said that he had written more than eight million words for the paper, but his writing had taken not one-tenth of his time because he had too many other duties, including work for the denomination, work for temperance, travel to churches and associations, helping pastors relocate, keeping up the circulation of the paper, and answering letters. “I have said elsewhere in my writings that the two things which bore most heavily on my heart during nearly one-third of a century were keeping up the circulation of the *Alabama Baptist* and helping pastors, whose joys were my joys and whose sorrows were also my sorrows.”²⁰

Historian Wayne Flynt wrote that “[t]he dominant Alabama Baptist figure between 1950 and his death in 1965 was Leon Macon,” the editor of *The Baptist* who served twice as president of the state convention and became the chief national spokesman for the state convention. Flynt said Macon eclipsed two executive secretaries, A. Hamilton Reid and George Bagley.²¹ Macon was convention president in 1963 when the new Alabama Baptist Building was dedicated on Southern Boulevard at Narrow Lane Road in Montgomery in 1963. The “very commodious and substantial” building cost \$700,000 and would have 58,256 square feet after completion of the fourth-floor interior. “Baptists can be exceedingly glad that this building was so well built for a structure of this type needs to stand for hundreds of years without major repair,” Macon said in an editorial.²²

When Hudson Baggett became editor in 1966, he wrote that he wanted to “challenge the thinking” of Baptists and others, and he acknowledged a responsibility to the denomination. “He [the editor] should not be guilty of biting the hand that feeds him, so to speak, but at the same time he should not be a mere denominational parrot reflecting only the ideas of someone else.” He said he could not promise to please everyone or not to make mistakes, but he would seek divine guidance and try first to please God.²³

¹⁷ “To Our Brethren,” March 27, 1919, p. 3

¹⁸ “Note by the Editor,” March 28, 1935, p. 3

¹⁹ L.L. Gwaltney, “The Troy Convention,” November 21, 1935, p. 3

²⁰ “‘What I Have Written, I Have Written,’ ” June 29, 1950, p. 3

²¹ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998, p. 495

²² “Baptist Building to Be Dedicated,” April 25, 1963, p. 3

²³ “The Robe of Responsibility,” June 9, 1966, p. 3

Dancing and theaters. The paper sought to steer people away from threats to their spiritual and physical well-being, which at times included dancing, theater-going and alcoholic beverages. *The Alabama Baptist* reprinted an article in 1846 titled “Miss Beecher on Dancing,” and the author wrote that in her fifteen years’ experience with “the care of young ladies,” she had

never known any case where learning this art, and following the amusement, did not have a bad effect, either on the habits, the intellect, the feelings, or the health. Those young ladies who are brought up with less exciting recreations, are uniformly likely to be the most contented and most useful, while those who enter the path to which the diversion leads, acquire a relish and desire for high excitement, which make the more steady and quiet pursuits and enjoyments of home comparatively tasteless.

The principle involved here was “Lead us not into temptation,” Miss Beecher wrote.²⁴

“The theatre is the vestibule of the brothel,” editor Frank Willis Barnett declared in 1905, and Christians who go there are encouraging the “disorderly lives” of actors. He cited an account of actresses displaying “brazen immodesty” on a train.²⁵

“Now the average picture show is filled with immoral suggestion,” editor L.L. Gwaltney wrote in 1921. “The ‘sex lure’ makes its appeal to both boys and girls, whereas arson, robbery and murder are constantly presented to the impressionable minds of boys by those who play the role of professional criminals.”²⁶

Temperance. On January 30, 1919 — the day after the U.S. Secretary of State certified the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment prohibiting the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors — *The Alabama Baptist* commented that it was the culmination of an effort involving many people, including “a few strong editors of religious papers.”

Not only has the greatest moral victory of the age been won, but the lesson has been burned into us that the moral forces of this country when agreed on the end and united in effort can accomplish anything they please, can destroy any public evil and enthrone any public good. Men must no more make light of public movements that start with preachers and churches.²⁷

Sixteen years later, editor L.L. Gwaltney lamented the consequences of the prohibition amendment’s repeal. Arrests for drunkenness and driving while intoxicated were mounting, while cities such as Chicago had “turned into a veritable bacchanalia. . . . Wide open saloons have already appeared in wet states, while, in the meantime, drug stores, and filling stations, cafes and hotels are bartering liquors.”²⁸ Another editorial looked toward a referendum in February or March on whether to repeal the Alabama dry law. The wets would say that repeal would do away with bootlegging and that the state needed tax money from liquor. Drys should prepare to refute these arguments — and pay their poll taxes and vote.²⁹

Rural communities “saved this state from being soused in legalized liquors,” Gwaltney wrote after the referendum. Cities contained “many of the best people in the world,” but “so much of the human slum of the earth.” In Alabama, “Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile are the sorest and foulest of the bad spots. . . . [W]ere it not for the new and unspoiled rural life that

²⁴ “Miss Beecher on Dancing,” reprinted from *Domestic Economy* in *The Alabama Baptist*, February 18, 1846, p. 1

²⁵ “Theater-going,” December 6, 1905, p. 8

²⁶ “Has *The Birmingham News* repented?,” August 18, 1921, p. 3

²⁷ C.A.S., “The Amendment,” January 30, 1919, p. 3

²⁸ “A Year of Repeal,” January 3, 1935, p. 3

²⁹ “The Referendum Will Be Called,” January 3, 1935, p. 3

flows into the cities they would all soon become so unspeakably corrupt, they would destroy themselves.”³⁰ He said the wets, having been “decidedly out-voted” statewide, were exhibiting poor sportsmanship by calling for “local option,” which would permit localities to go wet.³¹ Gwaltney said he had wanted Judge H.L. Anderton of Birmingham to be president of the state Baptist convention, which elected Gwaltney instead. Anderton had been campaign manager for the Alabama Temperance Alliance and had given up his law practice for two months for the campaign leading up to the referendum. “Certain daily papers” had “apparently, tried to leave the impression” that the convention had repudiated Anderton because he had led the dry fight. “[T]here can be no possible difference between Anderton and the editor of this paper with reference to the dry cause in Alabama since both went to their limit to keep the state dry.”³²

In 1963, George C. Wallace, who was in his first year as Governor of Alabama, sent a telegram to the Alabama Baptist State Convention and editor Leon Macon as its president. The telegram, printed in *The Alabama Baptist*, noted that Wallace had “kept a written pledge made to you that no alcoholic beverages would be served in the executive mansion during my administration.” Wallace asked for prayers and moral support and said the 823,000 Alabama Baptists “contribute so greatly to the wonderful Christian society that we have in our state.”³³

Jots and tittles, jolts and tensions. The paper provided guidance for readers on theological and practical questions — and how to reconcile the theological with the practical.³⁴ In 1880, reader T.M. Henley from Bibb County asked editor E.T. Winkler to explain the mandate in 1 Timothy 3 that a bishop or deacon be the husband of one wife. Winkler found no basis for the belief that “none but married men should be bishops and deacons” or that a church officer cannot have a second marriage. Rather, the restriction was against “polygamy, concubinage, and re-marriage while the former, illegally divorced partner was still living.” He added that the Roman Catholic interpretation that a priest’s “wife” is the church and the priest should be celibate “is too absurd to require an answer.”³⁵

Gwaltney was in no hurry to publish a statement of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1925. His editorial said the paper would print it “as soon as there is space. But no Baptist is bound by it except as one voluntarily agrees, it has no value except as a religious document which re-emphasizes certain great Baptist doctrines.” In summarizing the position of those who wanted no statement adopted, the editorial said: “Southern Baptists are already united on fundamentals. And that they should differ in minor matters which is quite in accord with their right and tradition should cause no wonder since there is not a Baptist congregation in the land but does the same thing.”³⁶ Later, Gwaltney wrote: “A Baptist is a man who believes some things for himself, and he claims the right to so believe without getting permission from anybody. But if a real Baptist he ought to grant all others to believe some things for themselves without putting them to the trouble of getting permission from him.”³⁷

³⁰ “The Godless Cities,” March 7, 1935, p. 3

³¹ “Poor Sportsmanship of the Wets,” March 7, 1935, p. 3

³² L.L. Gwaltney, “The Troy Convention,” November 21, 1935, p. 3

³³ “Telegram from Governor George C. Wallace,” November 28, 1963, p. 2

³⁴ “Conflicting Duties,” January 1, 1925, p. 3

³⁵ “‘Husband of One Wife,’ ” May 27, 1850, p. 2

³⁶ “Thoughts on the Convention,” May 28, 1925, p. 3

³⁷ “The Evil of Dogmatism,” August 4, 1927, p. 3

Hudson Baggett said he wanted to be relevant to the life of the day, inspirational and supportive: “Any discerning person knows that it is not the jots and tittles of theology that bother most people, but the jolts and tensions of daily existence.”³⁸ Similarly but twenty-eight years later, Baggett said it was easy to sympathize with a person if one knew his whole story. “Yet, we don’t have to know the full story, circumstances, life history, and whether they are worthy of our sympathy in order to have a spirit of goodwill toward those who suffer misfortune.” He cited the Good Samaritan’s help to a stranger.³⁹ In illustrating that life is complicated, Baggett wrote that he had done a poor job of putting together a wagon for his children. Do-it-yourself projects are not always simple, he observed, and “some of us had better stick to such simple things as trying to explain the Trinity.” He warned against oversimplifying the gospel but said many things about it are simple. “Jesus clothed profound ideas with simple words. Furthermore, there is not virtue in having a reputation of being ‘deep’ because commonly that means hard to understand.”⁴⁰

In 1955, Leon Macon gave credit to *The Birmingham News* for trying, in a series of articles, to familiarize Alabamians with different religious groups, but said he wished its article on Baptists had been written by a Southern Baptist instead of a man who was evidently a member of the American Baptist Convention. Macon said the writer, William Lippard, mistakenly referred to a local church field as a “parrish [sic].” Lippard had asserted that only extreme fundamentalists regarded the Bible as literal or infallible in every detail, but “most Southern Baptists would fall under his term of ‘fundamentalists’ for they do believe the Bible to be completely infallible,” Macon wrote. Lippard had referred to progressive and liberal Baptists and said that a minority did not believe in the virgin birth. Macon doubted both claims. “We have heard that we have some liberal Baptists, whatever that means, but we have not known them personally in the Southern Baptist work. ... To my knowledge [the virgin birth] is an accepted belief among all Southern Baptists.”⁴¹

Later that year, the president’s address at the state Baptist convention cited “symptoms of moral and spiritual decay.” The president was Henry Lyon of Highland Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. He listed seven symptoms: divorce, strong drink, gambling, juvenile delinquency, indifferent trial jurors, a need for “men of Christian character in public office,” and threats to religious liberty.⁴²

Leon Macon wrote a decade later about men and women “fraternizing to the limit”⁴³ — an apparent euphemism for something that Hudson Baggett called by its more familiar name: sex. Baggett wrote that pornographers were providing “one of the most destructive kinds of sex education,” which was hard to counter because “some people have such strong reactions against any mention of sex” in schools and churches.⁴⁴ Sure enough, readers reacted, saying that sex education belongs in the home; that sex education outside a moral context will just give children ideas early in life; and that animals do not have to be taught sex, so neither should Christians.

³⁸ “*The Alabama Baptist: Dreams and Difficulties*,” July 28, 1966, p. 2

³⁹ “On Sympathizing with Others,” November 17, 1994, p. 2

⁴⁰ “Nothing Is Simple,” March 10, 1966, p. 3

⁴¹ “What Is a Baptist,” January 20, 1955, p. 3

⁴² Henry Lyon, “President’s Address,” December 1, 1955, p. 4

⁴³ “Things Not Generally Known,” April 1, 1965, p. 3

⁴⁴ “Sex Education: Smut Style,” August 14, 1969, p. 2

Baggett replied that his editorial had been “a complaint against complete silence on the subject” and agreed that lack of “a moral and Christian framework” would be dangerous.⁴⁵

In 2013, editor Bob Terry found himself in what he called “a social media storm like nothing I have experienced before in my years as editor of a state Baptist paper.” The storm was about an editorial regarding the words of the hymn “In Christ Alone.” The issue was whether Terry had gone against the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement in the Crucifixion. Two weeks after the editorial appeared, Terry wrote another one that apologized “for writing in a manner that allowed some readers to conclude that I denied such a basic biblical doctrine ... I do not deny that belief, as an examination of my editorials over the years will clearly show. ... I will attempt to be more careful and more clear ...”⁴⁶

Women. In 1973 when the state Baptist convention was preparing to convene again at Salem near Greensboro — the site of its founding one hundred fifty years earlier — Baggett mused about the role of women. He said that although no women took part in that first convention, some of the fifteen men there were representing seven women’s missionary societies. Baggett continued:

Women have been and are prominent in promoting Baptist work in our state and throughout the world. Things have changed since 1823. It is not out of order today for women to provide leadership in the churches and denomination openly and without apology. ... My prediction is that there will be more women present next week at Old Salem than men.

He cited “individual dignity” and “Paul’s idea that in Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, male nor female, etc.”⁴⁷

Denominational controversies. In 1979, Harold Lindsell, editor emeritus of *Christianity Today* and president of the Faith and Message Fellowship, called on liberals to leave the Southern Baptist Convention.⁴⁸ Baggett editorialized that this statement typified the “efforts to distort, discredit and destroy” that accelerated before each year’s SBC meeting. The Alabama editor defended seminaries and colleges and said most pastors and church members “are Bible believers in a conservative sense. They may not be able to pass a theological examination given by Dr. Lindsell, but they have an unwavering belief in the Bible as the reliable word of God. What more can one ask? What constitutes a ‘liberal’ or ‘conservative’? Who is the judge?” A Baptist principle is that individuals are free “to interpret the Bible under the leadership of God’s spirit,” Baggett wrote. “Speaking for myself, there are some liberals I don’t want Southern Baptists to lose”: those who are liberal in giving and liberal in spirit.

Southern Baptists cannot afford to spend valuable time “nit-picking” about trivial matters. This kind of thing is a witness for Christianity in reverse. It turns people off. Why wouldn’t it? Most Southern Baptists are conservative theologically and highly regard the Bible. We should not listen to those who try to tell us otherwise.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ “Sex Education in Public Schools Called Dangerous by Writers,” August 21, 1969, p. 3

⁴⁶ Bob Terry, “Why Disagree about the Words of a Hymn?,” August 8, 2013, <http://www.thealabamabaptist.org/why-disagree-about-the-words-of-a-hymn/>; Bob Allen, “Editorial Ignites Atonement Debate,” Baptist News Global, August 16, 2013, <https://baptistnews.com/article/state-paper-editorial-ignites-atonement-debate/#.WmOm75M-dN0>; Bob Terry, “Looking Back at the Aug. 8 Editorial,” August 22, 2013, <http://www.thealabamabaptist.org/looking-back-at-the-aug-8-editorial/>

⁴⁷ “Why No Women at Salem?,” November 8, 1973, p. 2

⁴⁸ “‘Liberals’ Urged to Leave SBC Churches,” May 31, 1979, p. 1

⁴⁹ “Attempts to Discredit,” May 31, 1979, p. 2

In early 1992, *Alabama Baptist* writer Mark Baggett offered ten predictions about Southern Baptist life in the 1990s. They included blurring of denominational lines and diminishing of denominational loyalties; “extreme factions” of the SBC growing further from the center while a tentative consensus slowly began to form; the SBC and its agencies becoming more active officially in secular political issues, especially abortion and school choice; strong attention to missions in Eastern Europe (recently liberated from communism) while missions elsewhere became more “maverick” and less institutional or denominational; and an emphasis on “witnessing to friends, family members, and co-workers” rather than “confrontational witnessing to strangers.”⁵⁰

In an editorial in the same issue, Hudson Baggett said the looseness of Southern Baptists’ organization might intensify because of conflicts. But Southern Baptists had also modeled cooperation, and that cooperative spirit had recently been tested. The Cooperative Program, which funded the denomination’s institutions and agencies, “is now seriously being threatened.” He predicted greater scrutiny by givers of how their money was being used and an increase in designated funds. Splinterings had always occurred and were the origins of “many fine Baptist churches,” he noted. “But we hope that leaders will be wise enough and spiritual enough to realize the need of openness, freedom, and a willingness to tolerate opinions that differ from their own. Through the years, Southern Baptists have resisted creeds, dictatorial-type leadership and lock-step mind sets.”⁵¹

Binding the spirit broken. “The holier worship which [Jesus] deigns to bless / Restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken, / And feeds the widow and the fatherless!” So wrote John Greenleaf Whittier.⁵² *The Alabama Baptist* has been both facilitator and receiver of this holier worship.

Bob Terry and his wife, the former Eleanor Ruth Foster, were injured in a taxi collision in Durban, South Africa, in July 1998 while attending a Baptist World Alliance meeting. She died nine days later after returning to Birmingham on a medical jet. Bob Terry shared his grief with readers: “You can imagine the darkness when the love and joy of your heart seems to be dying.”⁵³ But he said “the unmerited grace of God’s people” had reminded him, through prayers and kindnesses and messages, that God loved him.⁵⁴

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Terry again told readers that God was faithful:

Sometimes we may wonder where Jesus is when tragedy strikes. . . . He stands beside us sharing our sorrow and helping us carry our burdens. . . . Whether it is a massive disaster like the events of Sept. 11 or a personal tragedy through which we pass one at a time, know God is present and God cares for you.⁵⁵

After the massive damage of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Terry wrote that people looking for God would “find Him in the gentle whispers of Baptists and other Christian volunteers serving a hot

⁵⁰ Mark Baggett, “Pieces of the Puzzle: *The Alabama Baptist* Offers 10 Predictions about Southern Baptist Life in the 1990s in an Attempt to Fit the Pieces of the Future Together,” January 9, 1992, p. 1

⁵¹ Hudson Baggett, “What’s Ahead for Baptists?,” January 9, 1992, p. 2

⁵² <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/worship-14/>

⁵³ Bob Terry, “Light in the Present Darkness,” July 23, 1998, p. 2

⁵⁴ Bob Terry, “Living by Unmerited Grace,” July 30, 1998, p. 2

⁵⁵ Bob Terry, “In the Midst of Tragedy,” September 20, 2001, p. 2

meal or pulling sawed up limbs from homes.”⁵⁶ In 2011 after tornadoes devastated Alabama, Terry commented that Alabama Baptist people demonstrated “love in action” by ministering to the “homeless, hungry and hurting.” They showed that “more can be accomplished when Baptists work together than when each church ministers in its own name.”⁵⁷ In covering each of these tragedies — 9/11, Katrina and the tornadoes — *The Alabama Baptist* ran multiple stories about who was hurting and how Baptists were helping and could help with emergency provisions, healing and rebuilding.⁵⁸

DECADE TO DECADE, EDITOR TO EDITOR, UNDER DIFFERENT FLAGS

The editor’s job is multifaceted — a point that outgoing editor Samuel Henderson made as he praised D. Shaver, the incoming editor of *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, in 1866:

As a theologian, he is learned and profound, fully at home in any branch of the sacred science. As a writer, he is chaste, flexible, lucid — combining those singular qualities of style and matter which charm while they instruct, which are alike adapted to improve the mind and purify the heart. While he is a dedicated Baptist, he is also a devoted Christian ... [H]e will never sink the Christian in the Baptist.⁵⁹

The nineteenth century. At its founding in 1843, *The Alabama Baptist* was being edited by an association of brethren, who were “corresponding with several distinguished brethren” as prospects for sole editor, according to an editorial in the first issue. The editorial went on to note that some religious papers had failed, blaming this outcome on poor management rather than any fault of the churches or “the indifference or the parsimony of the brethren.”⁶⁰ But another article on the same page said the paper’s survival depended on “united effort.”⁶¹ *The Alabama Baptist* was to cover “Christian Education, General Morality, and Practical Piety,” making it “a valuable Family Paper,” according to a “Prospectus” in the same issue.⁶² The four “brethren” in this association actually included one woman, Julia Tarrant Barron. The men were Milo Parker Jewett, James H. Devotie and Edwin Davis “E.D.” King.⁶³

The Alabama Baptist later changed its name to *Alabama Baptist Advocate*. When *The Western Recorder*, a Baptist paper in New Orleans, failed, the Marion paper obtained its subscription list and its name became *South Western Baptist*. It was “the only Baptist paper published between the Chattahoochee and the Rio Grande.”⁶⁴ In 1850, the first issue under the *South Western Baptist* flag (which later was sometimes hyphenated) said that God in his providence had given the paper “the honorable distinction ... to be the organ for the Baptists of the South West. ... We have no objection to being called an Alabama Baptist so far as concerns

⁵⁶ Bob Terry, “Finding God in Hurricane Katrina,” September 8, 2005, p. 2

⁵⁷ Bob Terry, “Love in Action,” May 5, 2011

⁵⁸ Bob Terry, “In the Midst of Tragedy,” September 20, 2001, p. 2

⁵⁹ Samuel Henderson, “Valedictory,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, December 20, 1866, p. 3

⁶⁰ “Editor of the Baptist,” February 4, 1843, p. 2

⁶¹ “Can the *Alabama Baptist* Be Sustained?,” February 4, 1843, p. 2

⁶² “Prospectus,” February 4, 1843, p. 3

⁶³ *The Alabama Baptist* with Elizabeth Wells and Grace Thornton, *The Alabama Baptist: Celebrating 175 Years of Informing, Inspiring and Connecting Baptists*, Birmingham: *The Alabama Baptist*, 2017, p. 147

⁶⁴ “Eighty-Three Years — Fiftieth Anniversary,” April 10, 1919, p. 1

our person; but as relates to our efforts and our toils, circumscribe us not within the narrow limits of a State or two.”⁶⁵

The last stand-alone issue of *South Western Baptist* was issued April 16, 1865, at the end of the Civil War. Nine months later, editor Samuel Henderson told what had happened in *The Christian Index* of Atlanta, announcing the union of the two papers. On April 18, 1865, the Union army placed Henderson (who had been a Confederate sympathizer) “under bond of twenty thousand dollars to issue no more papers.” In the summer, he was relieved of the bond and permitted to resume publication of the paper at his discretion. But the near-suspension of mail facilities and the country’s financial condition made it imprudent or impossible. Henderson felt a “duty to look around and see what could be done.” Merging with *The Christian Index*, with offices in Atlanta, was the solution. Henderson reached agreement with *The Index*, which had recently been purchased by J.J. Toon, but the deal was subject to approval by the Alabama Baptist Convention. The convention endorsed the plan unanimously at its meeting in Marion. “The opinion prevailed, that we had better have one good, large, ably edited and well printed sheet, than to launch two or more such enterprises upon the hazards of a not very promising future.”⁶⁶ A 1935 article added the detail that Henderson “was arrested and put in the Tuskegee jail in 1865 by the military dictatorship of the Federal Government in Washington.” Later, he was released on the bond with orders not to publish the paper.⁶⁷

By the end of 1866, Henderson was gone. In the December 20 issue, he wrote that “[m]y connection with the *Index and Baptist*, as one of its editors, closes with the present issue.” He said the connection was only temporary; the main purpose had been achieved; and “a brother, every way qualified in hand and heart to meet every reasonable demand of such a paper, has been employed by the enterprising proprietor.” Henderson had long favored fewer but more efficient religious newspapers, and his association with *The Index* had been “one honest effort in this direction.” But living 140 miles from the printer, having limited access to other papers, and working regularly as a pastor, he had “labored under great embarrassments during the entire year” — perhaps a reference to typographical errors that had vexed him. Henderson said he had “sought to inculcate such views of divine truth as were adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the denomination. I have written nothing which I did not, and do not now believe to be according to the oracles of God.” He closed with a quotation from 2 Maccabees 15:38: “ ‘And if I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired; but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto.’ ”⁶⁸

Henderson did not stay gone. The January 13, 1870, issue announced two new corresponding editors in Alabama: J.J.D. Renfroe in Talladega and Samuel Henderson in Fayetteville.⁶⁹ In the next issue, Renfroe introduced himself. He noted that the Alabama Baptist Convention had adopted the paper “as the organ of its enterprises, and pledged its support,” and it was now necessary “that Alabama Baptists will learn to *feel that it is their paper*.”⁷⁰ A week later, Henderson appealed to “my old friends in Alabama, whose contributions so often enriched

⁶⁵ “New Title,” *South Western Baptist*, July 31, 1850, p. 2

⁶⁶ Samuel Henderson, “To the Patrons and Friends of the *South-Western Baptist*,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, January 6, 1866, p. 7

⁶⁷ Hopson Owen Murfee, “*The Alabama Baptist Centennial*,” November 7, 1935, p. 1

⁶⁸ Samuel Henderson, “Valedictory,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, December 20, 1866, p. 3

⁶⁹ “Reinforcement,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, January 13, 1870, 1866, p. 3

⁷⁰ J.J.D. Renfroe, “Our Humble Bow,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, January 20, 1870, p. 10

the columns of our old State paper, in former days, to return to their positions, repolish their rusty pens, and devote them once more to the only service worthy of their agency.” Henderson wrote that he was isolated in a country retreat and able to take “very few papers,” so his occasional contributions would be restricted “to a very narrow compass.”⁷¹

When the Bethlehem Baptist Association met in Georgiana, Alabama, in September 1873, John D. Beck represented *The Christian Index*, whose inside-page nameplate incorporated (in smaller type) both *The South-Western Baptist* of Alabama and *The Christian Herald* of Tennessee. A Brother Boykin told Beck that he had not said enough about the Alabama paper, and that Boykin “was canvassing for that paper first, and if that failed, he would go heart and hand for *The Index*, as it was the next best to a home paper. I [Beck] stated, and experience has taught its truth, that a brother who will not subscribe to *The Index*, will not subscribe to the home paper, *as it is our home paper at this time*. He said he favored a home paper and would do all he could to see one established, but at the same time, he would subscribe to and read *The Index*. Beck’s article was printed on the Alabama Department page of *The Index*.⁷² In December 1873, *The Christian Index* said it was seeking “to meet all the needs and wants of the entire denomination,” and “we confidently anticipate additions to our lists until we shall have at least one hundred thousand readers.”⁷³

But a new “Vol. 1, No. 1” of *The Alabama Baptist* was issued later that month in Marion, Alabama, with E.T. Winkler as editor and E.B. Teague and J.J.D. Renfroe as associates. The lead editorial stated that the newspaper “has been pronounced by the late State Convention to be an imperative necessity.” Out-of-state newspapers would not suffice. “The intimate association we [Alabama Baptists] need, cannot be established, until we have an organ taken in all parts of the State, and linking our vast membership together in every section from the mountains to the Gulf.”⁷⁴ Volume 1, Number 2 did not appear until three months later, on March 24, 1874. The first editorial on Page 2 began with this paragraph:

We take great pleasure in greeting our brethren again, at the close of the interval devoted to correspondence and preparation. The object for which so many counsels and labors have been expended, and so many prayers have been made by earnest spirits, has been effected. The appearance of our second number indicates that sufficient guarantees of success have been given by our people. *The Alabama Baptist* takes its place to-day among the established journals of the Denomination.⁷⁵

Later, the owners gave the paper to the convention, which moved it to Selma.⁷⁶ The state Baptist convention’s ownership of *The Alabama Baptist* became a “perplexing question” at annual meetings in the 1870s. “Controversy had grown warmer and warmer” by 1878, according to Major J.G. Harris, an editor of the paper. “There seemed to be a desire on the part of some to get into the editorial chair. Jealousies and heartburnings were seen cropping out, even some bitterness.” The eventual solution was to transfer editorial and business management of the paper to E.T. Winkler and J.L. West, conditional on the paper’s continuing support of Alabama

⁷¹ Samuel Henderson, “Good Morning, Brethren!” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, January 27, 1870, p. 14

⁷² John D. Beck, “Bethlehem Baptist Association,” *The Christian Index*, October 23, 1873, p. 1

⁷³ “To Our Readers,” *The Christian Index*, December 11, 1873, p. 1

⁷⁴ “Our State Paper,” December 23, 1873, p. 2

⁷⁵ “We take great pleasure . . .,” March 24, 1874, p. 2

⁷⁶ “Eighty-Three Years — Fiftieth Anniversary,” April 10, 1919, p. 1

Baptists' principles, influences and interests, and with the understanding that the convention would have the right of refusal to buy the paper back.⁷⁷

At the end of April 1881, editors E.T. Winkler and J.J.D. Renfroe said goodbye to readers, and W.C. Cleveland and Jno. L. West introduced themselves as successors. "All who have contributed to this undertaking gratefully rejoice to-day that the *Alabama Baptist* has aided the missionary work throughout the State," Winkler wrote.⁷⁸ Renfroe expressed satisfaction in a feeling that he had contributed "to the establishment of this useful agency" and that now the paper was "fully planted and equipped for its mission." "[F]or the first time in several years, I can give myself to pastoral and ministerial work, unencumbered by any general interest, further than such obligation as that which every pastor owes to all general interests."⁷⁹ Cleveland and West said they hoped their paper would "continue to command the respect and deserve the support of the entire denomination in Alabama." And they said that the paper now had enough subscribers to reduce the subscription price to two dollars a year.⁸⁰

Cleveland's involvement continued until March 1884, when West noted that "Dr. Cleveland's connection with this paper closed with its last issue." West said Cleveland had assumed the work three years earlier "at my earnest solicitation," and his retirement was "a source of deep regret. . . . Others may wield a readier, more versatile pen, but there is not a wiser, safer man in the State, nor a more influential one. . . . [H]e believes he can do better service in another sphere. I am glad to say that he retains his affection for the enterprise that he has served so faithfully, and will do what he can to give interest to its columns and to increase its usefulness."⁸¹

On June 4, 1885, West notified readers that he had sold *The Alabama Baptist* to Major John G. Harris of Livingston for three thousand dollars. In compliance with the terms of his 1878 purchase of the paper from the Alabama Baptist Convention, West was giving the convention an opportunity to buy the paper back for the same price. His health had been declining, and he was "almost an invalid." He had "honestly, earnestly, prayerfully done my best for the paper and for the denomination." Harris would be publishing the paper from Selma until October 1, and West would supervise its publication and do as much work as his health would permit.⁸² Just below West's announcement was a note from Harris, who said he had been West's partner "in the conduct of the paper" since January, "and I never expect to find his superior in true nobility." Harris promised that "[n]o efforts will be spared to keep the paper up to the present standard, and if possible improvements will be made."⁸³

Frank Willis Barnett. At the beginning of 1902, the *Baptist Evangel* of Birmingham and the *Baptist Herald* of Florida were consolidated with *The Southern Baptist* and *The Alabama Baptist* by editor and owner Frank Willis Barnett as an "organ for the Baptist State Convention." The initial nameplate said *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*. Barnett wrote that he had started "an illustrated, modern, aggressive Baptist paper." The paper would "be true to all denominational interests, promote every forward movement, advocate every right reform,

⁷⁷ J.G. Harris, "History of *The Alabama Baptist*, 1835-1927," January 27, 1927, p. 8

⁷⁸ E.T. Winkler, "Valedictory," April 28, 1881, p. 2

⁷⁹ J.J.D. Renfroe, "Retirement," April 28, 1881, p. 2

⁸⁰ W.C. Cleveland and Jno. L. West, "Announcement," April 28, 1881, p. 2

⁸¹ Jno. L. West, "Dr. Cleveland's connection . . .," March 20, 1884, p. 2

⁸² Jno. L. West, "Sale of *The Alabama Baptist*," June 4, 1885, p. 2

⁸³ Jno. G. Harris, "It is indeed . . .," June 4, 1885, p. 2

conducted in each department along aggressive lines.”⁸⁴ Willis urged the brethren to use the old name, *Alabama Baptist*, when writing and talking about the paper, although he was using the longer name for “business reasons.” He expressed high regard for Major John G. Harris, “who lays down his editorial work after so many years of fruitful labor.” The newspaper would have offices in both Birmingham and Montgomery — the latter at Dexter Avenue and South Perry Street next door to the State Board of Missions. Associate editors would be John V. Dickinson in Birmingham and S.M. Provence in Montgomery.⁸⁵

“My what a year it has been!” Barnett wrote in the last issue of 1918 — a year of stress, sorrow, victory and peace. “During the past twelve months I have not spared myself but have worked night and day for my country and for my denomination. I can truly say it has been the best year’s work I have ever done ...” He thanked those who had “rallied” to support the paper financially.⁸⁶

The convention buys the newspaper. Barnett published the issue of January 1, 1919, but a few days later the Alabama Baptist Convention bought the paper from him for three thousand dollars.⁸⁷ The committee overseeing the paper included D.C. Cooper of Oxford, J.E. Dillard of Birmingham and L.O. Dawson of Tuscaloosa.⁸⁸ Denominational leader W.F. Yarbrough wrote that he had agreed to serve as temporary editor because “financial and other considerations” made it impracticable to hire a full-time editor. The staff included an office secretary who handled circulation, the mailing list and bookkeeping; an associate editor to be announced later who was in charge of news, proofreading and makeup; “a departmental staff of writers”; and “a corps of contributing editors selected from our strongest men in all parts of the State.” He set a goal of adding ten thousand subscribers in 1919.⁸⁹

“[M]any contributed articles will never see the light” because the paper must maintain “[c]ertain standards in making a first-class denominational paper,” another article said. Lucrative medical advertisements would no longer be accepted in the convictions that Baptists would rather make up a deficit “than have their paper give its endorsement to every nostrum which seeks the public patronage.” No one in the newspaper office was “competent to censor” medical ads.⁹⁰

Outgoing editor Barnett reflected on his seventeen years as editor. He said other duties, including being associate editor of *The Birmingham Age-Herald* and “working for the various war activities,” had kept him from devoting the necessary time to *The Alabama Baptist*. He had bought the paper from Major J.G. Harris “to operate and hold in the interest of the Baptists of Alabama, and I feel sure that my friends will credit me with having put it unselfishly behind the organized work.” Holding the newspaper was “a sacred trust,” Barnett wrote, but now it was time to “give others a chance to make it more useful.” He wrote that he had paid five dollars for

⁸⁴ Frank Willis Barnett, “Believing there is a place ...” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, January 17, 1902, p. 1

⁸⁵ Frank Willis Barnett, “We feel that we would be unappreciative ...,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, January 17, 1902, p. 8

⁸⁶ Frank Willis Barnett, “The Last Paper of the Year,” December 18, 1918, p. 1

⁸⁷ Avery Hamilton Reid, *Baptists in Alabama: Their Organization and Witness*, Montgomery: The Alabama Baptist State Convention, 1967, p. 234

⁸⁸ “The New *Alabama Baptist*,” January 23, 1919, p. 5

⁸⁹ “Salutation,” January 23, 1919, p. 3

⁹⁰ “Foreword,” January 23, 1919, p. 1

a three-year subscription to become “the first subscriber under the new regime.” He called on others to sign up because “[i]t takes money to run even a religious paper.”⁹¹

Two months later, Yarbrough wrote that his duties as secretary of the State Mission Board were “more than enough for one man.” Thus, the committee in charge of the paper had elected Leslie Lee Gwaltney as editor. He was to take charge after April 1. Yarbrough said that in his two months at the helm, the newspaper had added about a thousand subscribers.⁹²

L.L. Gwaltney, who was forty-three when he took charge of *The Alabama Baptist*, grew up in Virginia and came to Alabama in 1908 as pastor at Prattville. He later served churches at Greenville and Elmore, and he was pastor at Florence when he accepted the editor’s job.⁹³ He published *The Tennessee Valley Baptist* while in Florence, and he was associate editor of *The Alabama Baptist* from 1914 to 1916.⁹⁴

When he became the top editor in 1919, Gwaltney wrote that the convention’s committee had made it clear that his “whole time” belonged to the Baptists of Alabama, except that he could “hold two or three meetings during the year” as long as the paper did not suffer. “The pastorate with its joys and sorrows we are more or less familiar with,” he wrote, “but in this unknown land we devoutly pray for the pillow [sic] of cloud by day and fire by night.” He reserved the right to edit all submissions in accord with the best interest of the denomination. “Our plans at this writing are not mature except to say we will try to visit some church or churches every Sunday, to make up the paper in the weeks and to follow the programme of the Convention giving every interest its place and time with an equalized emphasis.”⁹⁵

Gwaltney was editor for thirty-one years, a longer unbroken span than any other leader of the state’s Baptists — although W.B. Crumpton’s service totaled thirty-four years. The paper reported that Gwaltney had taken on the job of “building up a paper which was pitifully small and poor,” increasing the subscription list of three thousand to more than 45,000. He made the paper financially sound and earned a modest profit every year, even during the Depression. The result was “a tidy reserve” against any lean years that might come. He traveled more than 300,000 miles and visited every associational meeting regularly while writing eight books. In early June 1950, the newspaper’s board of directors announced that Gwaltney had resigned effective July 1.⁹⁶

Gwaltney, seventy-four, wrote that he was joyously and gratefully yielding “to a younger man [Leon Macon, forty-two] with broad shoulders, a deft hand and an alert mind. He sees and correctly resolves situations before the most of us ever get ready to look for them.” Regarding himself, Gwaltney wrote that doctors could “find no trouble with any vital organ ... [b]ut his eyes are not good and he is very tired, mortally tired, and wants a rest.”⁹⁷

In his goodbye editorial three weeks later, Gwaltney said everything he had written was “at least for a good intent and purpose. Never once have I ever allowed personal feeling, or ill

⁹¹ Frank Willis Barnett, “A Parting Word,” January 23, 1919, p. 3

⁹² “Rev. L.L. Gwaltney, Editor,” March 30, 1919, p. 3

⁹³ “Dr. L.L. Gwaltney Passes,” November 17, 1955, p. 3

⁹⁴ *The Alabama Baptist* with Elizabeth Wells and Grace Thornton, *The Alabama Baptist: Celebrating 175 Years of Informing, Inspiring and Connecting Baptists*, Birmingham: *The Alabama Baptist*, 2017, p. 147

⁹⁵ L.L. Gwaltney, “A Foreword,” April 3, 1919, p. 3

⁹⁶ “Paper Changes Editors First Time in 31 Years,” June 8, 1950, p. 4

⁹⁷ L.L. Gwaltney, “The Editor Retires,” June 8, 1950, p. 3

will or any other ignoble attitude to enter into anything that has been written on this page.” He had received the greatest number of “commendable echoes” from two columns about current events: “Focal Points” and “The War Last Week.” “Focal Points” was written “mainly for the thousands of people who see the *Alabama Baptist* each week and who have few other sources from which to get information.” The other column was about World War II.⁹⁸ Gwaltney became editor emeritus. His contributions in that role included a history of a family of ministers in Alabama and Virginia.⁹⁹ He died November 10, 1955, after a brief illness.¹⁰⁰

Leon Macon. The new editor would be Leon Macon, a native of Whatley in Clarke County who had been a pastor in Bay Minette, Athens, Atmore and (most recently) Bessemer, as well as West Point, Mississippi. Macon was a member of the Radio Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.¹⁰¹

Macon’s first editorial page contained eight articles, noticeably more numerous and shorter than on a typical Gwaltney editorial page. In the first article, Macon said he recalled “Elisha’s experience” — referring to the biblical prophet who succeeded the prophet Elijah. Like Elisha, he said, he had prayed “for a double portion of our predecessor’s spirit.” He added: “The high policies of the paper will continue; the loyalty to Christ and his program will be kept; the strong support of all of our denominational causes will remain; and the personal services of the editor will be available to all, as before.”¹⁰²

Macon died November 15, 1965, at age fifty-seven while still editor of *The Alabama Baptist*. He had had a brief illness, according to the newspaper’s obituary. “An able and effective preacher, Dr. Macon was called upon to speak on many significant occasions. . . . Dr. Macon’s contagious spirit, his love of people, and his winsome personality endeared him to members of the churches which he served as pastor and to thousands of people who have known him as editor of *The Alabama Baptist*.”¹⁰³

“How we live and not how we die is our best demonstration of faith,” Macon declared in an editorial published in the same issue that announced his death.¹⁰⁴ In another editorial, he said that the human body is precious to the Lord, but “the body is not to be depended on as a tabernacle for the person.” The “Social Gospel” was wrong to emphasize the needs of the flesh and prolonging physical life on earth, he said. “The resurrection of the body is a redemptive act the same as the redemption of the soul,” even though some people rejected the idea of a physical resurrection because they did not understand it.¹⁰⁵ Another Macon editorial warned against humanism — the idea that “man is the center of all existence” — saying that physical truth and divine revelation are two different things.¹⁰⁶

Letters published after Macon’s death described him, during his fifteen years as editor, as a large and athletic man with big heart and a strong mind, who made a “transition from good health to an accepted sick condition”; “one of the most deeply spiritual editors” of Baptist

⁹⁸ “What I Have Written, I Have Written,” June 29, 1950, p. 3

⁹⁹ L.L. Gwaltney, “The Dickinson Brothers,” January 20, 1955, p. 5

¹⁰⁰ “Dr. L.L. Gwaltney passes,” Nov. 17, 1955, p. 3

¹⁰¹ “Paper Changes Editors First Time in 31 Years,” June 8, 1950, p. 4

¹⁰² “As We Begin,” July 6, 1950, p. 3

¹⁰³ “Dr. Leon Macon Passes,” November 18, 1965, p. 3

¹⁰⁴ “Living or Existing,” November 25, 1965, p. 3

¹⁰⁵ “The Body,” November 25, 1965, p. 3

¹⁰⁶ “Beyond the Atom,” November 25, 1965, p. 3

newspapers; a man who expressed convictions that some people might not share, but who was held in such high esteem that a person who disagreed would re-evaluate the issue; one who stood against error and ignorance; a self-made man; a defender of religious liberty based on separation of church and state; one who saw the need for a Baptist college in Mobile and supported its development; a preacher who valued content over delivery and possessed “a burning desire to present the Bible in a fresh, accurate, and practical way”; and “an ardent believer in missions.” “As a writer he was forthright and prolific,” wrote Henry Hoffman, deacon chairman at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Homewood. “In his books and editorials he could with equal facility describe the handiwork of God’s universe, motivate readers to higher areas of living, or explain by analogy some moving theological truths.”¹⁰⁷ Catholic editor Dale Francis wrote that Baptists would mourn Macon, but so would “a Roman Catholic who read his writings regularly and came to think of him as one of his friends.”¹⁰⁸

Hudson Baggett. During the interim after Macon’s death, *The Alabama Baptist* turned over its editorial page to a series of guest editors, including Hudson Baggett, who became the next editor. Baggett’s first page as guest editor included editorials on academic freedom, deadlines, giving, vision and the choices that make a life. “Toleration, open-mindedness, free inquiry, scientific method — these are the watch words,” Baggett wrote regarding academic freedom. “Dogma, blind faith, bias, indoctrination, close-mindedness — these are the enemies.” But refusing to take a side after looking at all of them is an evasion of responsibility, he said. “The ideal, from a Christian point of view seems to be a definite Christian commitment along with a desire to know the truth and a dedication to teach it.”¹⁰⁹

He called for graceful giving, not “cutting off the buttons.” This editorial began with an anecdote — a technique used often by Baggett. The anecdote was about those who gave coats for the poor but cut off the buttons because they could be used again.¹¹⁰ People can see things but be blind to their meanings, he wrote. Jesus “saw not only the present conditions of people, but what they could become. The temptation for most of us is to bemoan the predicament of people without seeing their possibilities.”¹¹¹ “[A]ny experience that confronts us with a choice about God’s purpose is crucial in the making of a life,” Baggett wrote in an editorial promoting attendance at the state Brotherhood convention.¹¹²

The newspaper’s board of directors elected Baggett as Macon’s successor, effective June 1, 1966. Baggett, forty-two, had been teaching at Samford University for eight years. He had been a pastor in cities including Florence, Cullman and Birmingham. Born in Cullman County, he graduated from Howard College (which became Samford University) and earned a doctorate of theology from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.¹¹³ Guest editor Herman Cobb welcomed Baggett with an editorial. “He has many qualifications,” Cobb wrote,

¹⁰⁷ “Friends Pay Tribute to Dr. Macon,” December 2, 1965, pp. 2, 4 and 5

¹⁰⁸ “Catholic Mourns Passing of Late Editor,” reprinted from *The Sunday Visitor* in *The Alabama Baptist*, February 24, 1966, p. 2

¹⁰⁹ “Academic Freedom,” February 17, 1966, p. 3

¹¹⁰ “Giving Gracefully,” February 17, 1966, p. 3

¹¹¹ “Eyes that See,” February 17, 1966, p. 3

¹¹² “The Making of a Man,” February 17, 1966, p. 3

¹¹³ “Hudson Baggett Named *Alabama Baptist* Editor,” Baptist Press, April 22, 1966, <http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/2196,22-Apr-1966.pdf>; “Dr. Hudson Baggett Named Editor,” *The Alabama Baptist*, April 28, 1966, p. 1

“but one is of particular significance — he believes it is better to light a lamp rather than bemoan the darkness.”¹¹⁴

As Macon had done under the same circumstances, Baggett compared himself to Elisha. He wrote that the editor had “a responsibility to be fair, honest, ethical and to become acquainted with the facts and interpret them as fairly as possible.”¹¹⁵ The professor who was becoming an editor expressed appreciation to many people, including “the many students who have taught me.”¹¹⁶ Baggett said he wanted to learn and use effective journalism, and he wanted the paper to reflect a variety of views — which it did, partly through letters to the editor.¹¹⁷

Baggett hired Jack Brymer as managing editor. Brymer (one of Baggett’s ex-students) was a former music minister and former pastor with a double major in journalism and Bible at Samford University. Baggett wanted to make the paper’s coverage more current and “to make it a paper of the people,” covering everyday Baptists such as those attending meetings and not just the speakers, Brymer said. (Brymer was managing editor for eighteen years before he left to become editor of the *Florida Baptist Witness*.)¹¹⁸

Kathleen V. Prude, who joined the newspaper staff in 1978 but was already a friend of Baggett, described his first trip as editor to the Southern Baptist Convention in 1966, when “he ‘punned’ along the way in his inimitable style.” Hotels, taxis and unflattering local press coverage plagued the convention in Detroit, but Prude said his editorial comment on it foreshadowed his approach to the editor’s job: “ ‘At any rate, problems are inevitable and our reactions to them will demonstrate how seriously we take the gospel.’ ” During his first decade as editor, Prude saw two major accomplishments:

First, I began to notice a change in the appearance of the paper. The “indelicate” ads disappeared. The format became more reader-friendly. More space was given to state Baptist news. A “Letters to the Editor” page was begun. Most significantly, the editorial and comments page was given a more pronounced and prominent position and would thereafter be the pulpit from which “the man who loved to preach” delivered his weekly messages to the Baptists of Alabama. Almost as strong as Hudson’s desire to preach was his determination to establish a greater financial operating base for *The Alabama Baptist*. He set out to accomplish his financial goals by promoting circulation and adjusting subscription rates, seeking a larger appropriation from Cooperative Program funds, making wise investments, and observing frugal spending and management policies.

Prude recalled that in 1976, the newspaper built, without debt, its present office building at 3310 Independence Drive in Homewood. The paper’s circulation became second only to *The Birmingham News* in Alabama and second only to Texas’ *Baptist Standard* among state Baptist newspapers. In his second decade, Baggett “successfully coped with staggering postal rate increases, the ongoing convention controversy, and improving the content and appearance of the paper.” In his third decade, he “approved of the new in-house computer but was never really comfortable with it.”¹¹⁹

Baggett added editorial cartoons to the paper in 1969 when he offered Joe McKeever, a preacher and cartoonist, \$1.50 a week for his work. In one McKeever cartoon, a man explained

¹¹⁴ “Welcome, Dr. Baggett,” June 2, 1966, p. 3

¹¹⁵ “The Robe of Responsibility,” June 9, 1966, p. 3

¹¹⁶ “An Expression of Gratitude,” June 9, 1966, p. 3

¹¹⁷ “*The Alabama Baptist*: Dreams and Difficulties,” July 28, 1966, p. 2

¹¹⁸ Jack Brymer, telephone interview with writer, February 14, 2018

¹¹⁹ Kathleen V. Prude, “Historical Highlights: Reminiscing about the Baggett Years,” December 15, 1994, p. 9

to his pastor that he was not napping but “momentarily in a passive mode while re-ordering my energy quotient.”¹²⁰

On the front page of November 10, 1994, was an analysis written by Mark Baggett, a staff writer and Hudson Baggett’s son, in anticipation of the annual meeting of state Baptists. “Once a model of harmony, the Alabama Baptist State Convention has been jolted in recent months by several issues that have resulted in strongly divided opinions,” Mark Baggett wrote. It wasn’t a moderate-conservative split such as had occurred in the Southern Baptist Convention, but it revolved around Samford University and the University of Mobile. Both were charged with violating state convention bylaws. Samford’s board of trustees had voted to become self-perpetuating, and University of Mobile President Michael Magnoli had endorsed Fred Lackey for convention president and encouraged students and faculty to attend the state convention in Mobile as voting messengers. Some state Baptist leaders said political activity had reached a crisis, but the State Board of Missions rejected a proposal to postpone the convention and move it to Huntsville. Other recent issues involved bylaws violations by the Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers and by the University of Mobile’s Nicaragua campus.¹²¹ Mark Baggett reported two weeks later that the Mobile convention had been calm, “turning back drastic measures” to deal with the two universities.¹²²

But by that time, one of the biggest news stories in the life of Alabama Baptists was the unexpected death of the editor. Hudson Baggett died of a heart attack on November 17, 1994, at age seventy-one. It was the day after the state convention, and he and his wife, June, were taking a day’s vacation in Point Clear. Among many expressing tributes was Jack Brymer, his former managing editor: “While Dr. Baggett will be remembered for his exceptional gifts of teaching, preaching and writing, I believe history will praise him as well for ensuring the future of *The Alabama Baptist* by putting it on a solid foundation both financially and professionally.”¹²³

Baggett never had the opportunity to write a farewell editorial, but the paper carried the text of his oral *Alabama Baptist* report to the convention on the day before he died. He started with a joke about a weary preacher who, after a busy week of funerals and weddings, mistakenly concluded a wedding by saying, “The service will be concluded at the cemetery.” Baggett’s comment: “And, of course, he was correct. It will be.” He congratulated the convention for dealing with differences in “an orderly and a very decent way.” As for how he had dealt with controversies as an editor, he said: “I’ve been walking the chalk line all my life. In fact, I’ve walked it so much that I’ve rubbed it out, I think.” He expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve as editor. “I would not have chosen this. I would not choose it again, but it’s been a real blessing.” He said the job had been difficult, but the state’s Baptists had blessed his life. Then he spoke of his aspirations for the paper: that it not be one-sided (“It isn’t”) and that it take a

¹²⁰ “Preacher/cartoonist got break in ‘Baptist,’ ” January 11, 1996, p. 11

¹²¹ Mark Baggett, “Messengers to Mobile Convention Face Divided Opinions on Key Issues,” November 10, 1994, p. 1

¹²² Mark Baggett, “Convention Defuses Controversies, Enters ‘Safe Zone’ Agreement with Samford,” November 24, 1994, p. 1

¹²³ Keith Hinson, “The End of an Era: Editor Hudson Baggett Dies of Massive Heart Attack,” November 24, 1994, p. 1

positive outlook. He ended by embracing the hope of John 3:17: “ ‘God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but through Him that the world might be saved.’ ”¹²⁴

Baggett was a man of “humor, frankness, and common touch,” the newspaper reported. “... Baggett sometimes chided people who engaged in what he called ‘God-talk’ — crediting or blaming God for actions that Baggett saw as more human than divine. ... Baggett will be remembered as one who could clear the thickets of muddy language and muddled issues.” He warned about using “trade words” such as *inerrancy*, *evangelical*, *Arminianism*, *liberal* and *conservative* — words whose meanings confused people. Baggett enjoyed poking fun and liked attending annual associational meetings and mixing with people. Earl Potts, retired executive secretary of the state convention, said he received a note from Baggett less than a week before he died, saying that “ ‘some of us are traveling closer to the sunset ... This only means we should be wiser.’ ”

Also quoted in the article was Bobby S. “Bob” Terry, editor of the Missouri Baptist paper, *Word & Way* — who would soon become Baggett’s successor. “He did not appreciate pretentious conduct in anyone,” Terry said. “Hudson spoke forthrightly and candidly to everyone, to board presidents, to pastors, to his fellow editors.”¹²⁵ In a separate article that quoted more than forty Baptists’ remembrances of Baggett, Terry spoke of the late editor’s role as a peacemaker: “When others reacted to tensions among Baptists, Hudson always reminded people of the good, common sense of Baptists. He seldom became discouraged. He always looked for the best in people, individually and in Baptists as a whole. He was an encourager, a friend, and people across the Southern Baptist Convention loved him and appreciated him for that.” The article’s concluding quotation was from Wayne Dorsett, pastor of Central Park Baptist Church in Birmingham: “He was fair, he loved me, and he showed me that he loved me. He did a lot of things for me that he didn’t have to do, and I will never forget that. I know he didn’t treat me any more special than anyone else; that’s just the way he was.”¹²⁶ Frank A. Ruff of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote in a letter to the editor that Baggett’s quoting John 3:17 was no surprise because “he knew more about love than condemnation. To me, it was a sign of his spiritual maturity.”¹²⁷

The paper listed nine of the puns and jokes for which, it said, Baggett was famous. One of them, in the approximate words he spoke to the state convention, offered self-deprecating insight into how his staff produced *The Alabama Baptist*: “Someone asked me, ‘Well, if you’re here, who’s getting the paper out?’ I replied, ‘The same people who get it out when I’m in Birmingham.’ ”¹²⁸ In a resolution, Samford University’s trustees noted Baggett’s love for “rural-flavored Gospel music” and his “imperturbable countenance [that] concealed genuine humility.” They said he did not talk much about his World War II combat experiences, his two Purple Hearts, or professional achievements. The trustees noted his “contribution to the lives of individuals.”¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Hudson Baggett, “The Editor’s Final Message: Speaking on the Last Full Day of His Life, Hudson Baggett Emphasized Appreciation, Aspirations,” November 24, 1994, p. 3

¹²⁵ Keith Hinson, “Hudson Baggett: the Man,” November 24, 1994, p. 6

¹²⁶ “Baptists Express Appreciation for Life of Hudson Baggett,” November 24, 1995, pp. 7-8

¹²⁷ Frank A. Ruff, “Last Quote No Surprise,” December 15, 1994, p. 3

¹²⁸ “Baggett Jokes,” November 24, 1994, p. 6

¹²⁹ “In Memoriam: Dr. Hudson Baggett,” advertisement in *The Alabama Baptist*, December 15, 1994, p. 5

The newspaper's office building in Homewood, which had been completed in 1976 under Baggett's leadership, was renamed as the Hudson Baggett Memorial Building. Associate editor Johnie W. Sentell was named acting editor.¹³⁰

The Alabama Baptist conducted a reader survey in 1992 while Hudson Baggett was editor. The 101 respondents (a tiny fraction of the circulation) weighed in on what they found most useful or interesting in the paper. News of Alabama Baptist people and churches scored highest, followed by news of the state convention, then the Southern Baptist Convention. Letters to the editor were next, followed by Sunday school lessons. "An overwhelming majority" said the paper was fair in reporting controversial issues, although some wrote complaints.¹³¹ Six years later, as Laurie A. Lattimore announced her resignation as news editor, the paper reported some milestones. Lattimore had joined the staff two years earlier under new editor Bob Terry, for whom she had previously worked in Missouri. During her two years, the paper carried at least seventy-five percent Alabama Baptist news in each issue, maintained more than twenty corresponding writers, conducted writing seminars to increase state coverage, and implemented three regional editions. The news staff produced dozens of special reports and won awards that included first place for investigative coverage of the University of Mobile's financial crisis.¹³²

Bob Terry. The newspaper's current editor is Bobby S. "Bob" Terry, a Decatur, Alabama, native who was named Hudson Baggett's successor effective August 1, 1995. Terry served about twenty years as editor of *Word & Way*, the Missouri Baptist paper, and earlier was associate editor of the *Western Recorder*, state Baptist newspaper of Kentucky. He also was a pastor, interim pastor and staff member of churches in Michigan, Mississippi and Kentucky. Terry said the *Alabama Baptist* board's selection of him "is a miracle from God, and I take it as confirmation of the dream the Lord planted in my heart some years ago to serve as editor of *The Alabama Baptist*." The board's search committee cited Terry's high regard among Missouri Baptists for "his professionalism and fairness."¹³³ Terry's first editorial as editor expressed gratitude that the board as a whole had declined the chance to interview him for the job, instead electing him unanimously after the search committee (which *had* interviewed him) recommended him. Terry said the job would not be easy, but state Baptists' love for the paper and for Hudson Baggett would make it easier.¹³⁴

Terry holds the title of editor and president. He said his job is comparable to that of publisher at many newspapers. Day-to-day production of the paper, including copy editing, is another editor's responsibility. Terry writes editorials; helps with editorial planning; and oversees all operations, including financial management, postal matters, circulation and advertising. He serves as spokesperson and liaison to the state Baptist convention, churches, pastors and non-Baptists. "I'm responsible for everything that happens here, good or bad," he said.

Terry sees a peacemaking role for *The Alabama Baptist*, but he said the paper must cover the news, whether it is good or bad. In controversies, he has "tried to bridge a gap and tried to

¹³⁰ Keith Hinson, " 'Baptist' Board Renames Building in Memory of Baggett, Designates Sentell as Acting Editor for Interim Period," December 1, 1994, p. 3

¹³¹ Dianne Shaw Casolaro, "Readers Tell What They Think about the Paper," January 23, 1992, p. 3

¹³² "Lattimore Resigns as News Editor of Alabama Baptist," July 16, 1998, p. 1

¹³³ Keith Hinson, "Missouri Editor and Decatur Native: Bob Terry Elected as Editor of 'The Alabama Baptist,'" June 1, 1995, p. 1

¹³⁴ Bob Terry, "The Joy of Beginning a Journey," August 3, 1995, p. 2

establish some common understanding and tried to make it possible for us to go forward together.” Terry’s journalism has addressed denominational controversies about colleges and other matters, as well as social problems such as world hunger and poverty.¹³⁵

From other religious journalism organizations as well as secular ones, the Alabama newspaper has received more than two hundred awards during Terry’s tenure.¹³⁶ Terry said that eleven times in twenty years, it has been named the best regional Christian publication by at least one of three national religious journalism organizations, and it has been in the top three for twenty-one consecutive years.

I hope to win awards. We’ve got a wall full down there [in the office building], and I want to win more. But I’ve really got to maintain the ministry of this paper, of this communications channel, with Baptists so we can encourage missions, so we can help the members in their Christian piety, so we can point out opportunities for ethical behaviors and some social justice needs and we can teach Scripture. And I’ve got to have that ongoing relationship with them. So I write softer and more indirectly than award-winning writing would do.

His involvement in national and international organizations of journalists and religious leaders, including the Baptist World Alliance, has benefited the Alabama newspaper, Terry said. “Learning about Baptist life from a world perspective brings an entirely different understanding about what God is doing in the world than when one is limited by the parochial boundaries of one’s own world.” Cross-denominational connections yield broader understanding and greater access to national, secular news media. “For me, it’s a mistake for Baptists to live under their own shell. We need to know other parts of the body of Christ.”

Terry said he plans to retire, but he has not announced a date. His post-retirement activities could include serving as an interim pastor in Britain. He has been interim pastor of several churches. “I was initially called to preach. That was my understanding of my call. So I enjoy preaching. I enjoy giving leadership to a local Baptist church, so I have appreciated the invitations to preach and be a part in that kind of way.” He has also enjoyed associational meetings, finding that Baptists are kind to him and receptive to the ministry of the paper. He personally experienced their support after the death of his wife Eleanor in 1998. (In 2002, he married Patricia Creel Hart.)

Asked why he supported Jennifer Davis Rash, who is now the editor-elect, as his successor, Terry answered, “Why not?” He said she is an award-winning, capable journalist and leader, is theologically educated, served in international missions, knows the audience, knows history, knows circumstances and challenges, is well-liked and feels called to the work. “There’s just not anybody better who could step in as well-prepared for this situation. . . . For me, I’ve been committed to women in ministry for a long time, and I’m very glad that perhaps it is significant that I’ve been able to help this happen.” He was referring to her becoming the first female editor of a major state Baptist paper.¹³⁷

One part of Terry’s legacy, according to Rash, is his mentoring of younger editors and other journalists. “Editor after editor out there can say he had an influence. He was behind them

¹³⁵ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

¹³⁶ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

¹³⁷ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

some way.” Also important, she said, has been his coverage of elections and politics — informing people about issues without endorsing candidates.¹³⁸

Jennifer Davis Rash, editor-elect. On January 1, 1996, Bob Terry hired Jennifer Davis (now Jennifer Davis Rash) to join the newspaper staff at age twenty-four. She had been recognized as an outstanding journalism student at the University of Alabama and had served as a Journeyman missionary with the International Mission Board.¹³⁹ She grew up at Mountain View Baptist Church in Phil Campbell, Alabama. In addition to her bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Alabama, she earned a master’s of theological studies from Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School.¹⁴⁰

Eleanor Terry’s death in 1998 and the injury and recovery of her husband, Bob, happened when Laurie Lattimore was preparing to leave the news editor’s job. Rash had not expected to become Lattimore’s successor, but Rash found herself taking on leadership roles. Rash said she was inexperienced, but “Dr. Terry had just trained us so well.” Terry eventually selected her as the next news editor.¹⁴¹

Rash became managing editor in 2002 and executive editor in 2011. She became active in communication organizations, and she and the paper won national awards for reporting, writing, photography and design. Her award-winning stories covered the state’s lottery debate, the Legislature, insurance, prayer in schools and other subjects. She declined an offer to become editor of *Arkansas Baptist News* in 2011. As a member of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville, “she is supportive but at the same time she’s going to ask the right questions and make sure we’re thinking everything through and doing the right things,” said her pastor, Bill Wilks. A 2016 article in *The Alabama Baptist* started by describing her laugh, “high energy, outgoing personality, dedicated work ethic and visionary spirit.”¹⁴² Rash said her treasured memories include writing “human-interest-type features” on people. “It was so touching to just become part of the family in the process of trying to tell their story.”¹⁴³

About the time that Rash turned down the Arkansas position, the *Alabama Baptist* board affirmed her desire to become its top editor eventually. In October 2015, the board made her editor-elect — meaning that she would succeed Terry upon his retirement, resignation, incapacitation or death.¹⁴⁴

“I don’t necessarily feel like the first of anything,” Rash said, “but I do recognize that it’s true: I am the first [female editor] of a major state Baptist paper. . . . I’ve had such support and encouragement. . . . From my standpoint, I just feel like it’s what’s next. It’s what worked out, and I worked through the ranks and happened to be the one they decided was the right one for the time. I’m humbled and excited and honored and scared and all of that. . . . It just kind of

¹³⁸ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

¹³⁹ Neisha Roberts, “Spirited. Loyal. Friend. Executive Editor Rash Celebrates 20 years at *The Alabama Baptist*,” January 7, 2016, p. 3

¹⁴⁰ “Succession Plan in Place at *TAB*: Rash named editor-elect of state Baptist newspaper,” October 13, 2016, p. 3

¹⁴¹ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

¹⁴² Neisha Roberts, “Spirited. Loyal. Friend. Executive Editor Rash Celebrates 20 years at *The Alabama Baptist*,” January 7, 2016, p. 3

¹⁴³ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

¹⁴⁴ “Succession Plan in Place at *TAB*: Rash named editor-elect of state Baptist newspaper,” October 13, 2016, p. 3; Jennifer Davis Rash, email to writer, March 12, 2018

fits. And I think I fit and it fits and we fit, and it's just been fun to watch it just naturally happen."¹⁴⁵

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF BAPTIST JOURNALISTS

The Alabama Baptist has faced challenges and opportunities that are familiar to many journalists in both the religious and secular worlds.

Time, place, printing and distribution. In the early years of *The Alabama Baptist*, its pages consisted mostly of vertical columns that were almost all text, possibly six to eight lines per inch (about eight- to ten-point type, as printers measured it). Both the body text and headlines grew larger as time went on, and illustrations and photographs appeared. Page design became more artful. Black-and-white gave way to occasional decorative color and then to full color. Today's pages are far more attractive and readable, by most people's standards, than those of 1843.

These improvements became possible because of changes in printing technology. In its early decades, *The Alabama Baptist* was probably produced with handset type. In 1886, *The New York Tribune* became the first newspaper to install an automatic typesetting machine.¹⁴⁶ By 1905, such machines (a prominent brand was Linotype) were being used to produce *The Alabama Baptist*.¹⁴⁷ Pages looked crisper because the type was freshly cast metal, not worn letters that had been used and reused. The printing process was called letterpress: raised letters were inked and pressed onto paper, in much the way that a rubber stamp works.

For decades, the editing and writing of *The Alabama Baptist* usually took place physically near the typesetting and printing. When it did not, efficiency suffered. When *The Alabama Baptist* merged with *The Christian Index* in 1866, the printing plant was in Atlanta, but some of the writers and editors were still in Alabama. Alabama editor Samuel Henderson explained the "meagreness of his contributions to the two first issues" (referring to himself in the third person). For the first issue, he submitted about four columns of material, but "it was put in an 'extra,' of which he had no knowledge until its appearance, only one article of which appeared in the regular issue." He submitted more than twice as much material as appeared in the next issue, even though he sent it all in the same envelope. He also called attention to four typographical errors that had appeared in an editorial. "The printers, doubtless, did the best they could to decipher it, for we wrote with a pencil, a thing we never did before. . . . The printers will soon become accustomed to our chirography, meanwhile we shall try to improve it."¹⁴⁸

The February 3, 1866, issue bore the front-page nameplate *Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, with all words in the same size of bold type (possibly about an inch tall, with slender, seriffed, all-capital letters). But the paper apologized for the way the "new head" looked. "The proprietor has had in contemplation the procuring of a new head that should combine, in a neat and appropriate manner, the names of the two consolidated papers, and has been in correspondence with a type founder on the subject of a proper design." The *Index* owner was paying more attention, though, to the content of the paper and to moving to a new building on Alabama Street in Atlanta. "But the importunity of some of our Alabama friends has induced

¹⁴⁵ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

¹⁴⁶ American Printing History Association, "History of Printing Timeline," <https://printinghistory.org/timeline/>

¹⁴⁷ Frank Willis Barnett, "The Leslie Printing ..." March 8, 1905, p. 8

¹⁴⁸ Samuel Henderson, "Explanatory," *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, January 27, 1866, p. 19

him to sacrifice his own ideas of taste, and give the best double head he could improvise from the material at hand. He hopes, however, at some time not very remote, to secure a better design.”¹⁴⁹ That notice was on the same page as the Alabama Department news, which contained an apology to readers from Henderson, the Alabama editor, for mistakes made in Atlanta:

The Alabama editor desires to say to his readers, once for all, that he lives more than a hundred miles from where the paper is printed, and that he cannot, therefore, supervise his proof sheets. If the reader should encounter a word or sentence of which he can make nothing, he will please do the editor the justice to believe that he aims to be intelligible. ... Thus, also, if he sees him using the first person, singular, in any of its forms, instead of the plural, ... he will please consider that he did not design to be egotistical. ... The printer no doubt does his best on his MS., and he does not censure him.¹⁵⁰

Time and distance were also factors in distributing the paper once it was printed. When J.J.D. Renfro of Talladega became an Alabama corresponding editor in 1870, he wrote that Atlanta was as suitable a location to publish as any in Alabama because railways made delivery possible “in a few hours.” “My paper frequently reaches me at Talladega before the printer’s ink is dry, and in 24 hours more it would go to the western border of the State.”¹⁵¹

In 1902, postal regulations thwarted efforts to distribute the first issue of editor Frank Willis Barnett’s newly merged paper. The postmaster rejected it because it bore the words “Entered as second-class matter.” Barnett wrote that he thought these words were required, “but the statute forbade it.” He offered to pay an extra one cent per paper, but the postmaster would not accept the mailing until the offending words were erased from all seven thousand copies. Later, the third assistant Postmaster General gave permission to accept the paper. “We had worked hard to get the paper out on time and were sorely disappointed, but ‘red tape’ is sometimes a very strong cord,” Barnett wrote. The delay on the first issue caused the next issue to be canceled.¹⁵²

Sometimes the problem was late arrival of material intended for publication. The paper apologized in 1905 for leaving out the Woman’s Page, explaining that “the copy reached us after the paper had been set and as we were changing publishers [printers] we could not help ourselves.”¹⁵³ Barnett said he was making that change of printers “for business reasons” but expressed appreciation to the individuals who had produced the paper at the Leslie Printing and Publishing Company, including the proofreader, the foreman, the man who set up the ads, the pressman, the printer who minded the galleys (trays of type), the mailing clerk, and the woman who “rolled the mail with the assistance of a changing corps of girls.” “John Leslie and W.J. Black have fingered the linotype machine which has set the type, the one by day the other by night, for it is a busy machine working night and day.”¹⁵⁴ Current editor Bob Terry remembers when one of his former Baptist newspapers was printed on a letterpress and type was set on a Linotype. “I would stand with a makeup man, and we would ... make each page and lock it in.” Printing began on Tuesday and continued on Thursday; the paper was mailed on Friday.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ “Our New Head,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, February 3, 1866, p. 23

¹⁵⁰ “Apologetic,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, February 3, 1866, p. 23

¹⁵¹ J.J.D. Renfro, “Our Humble Bow,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, January 20, 1870, p. 10

¹⁵² Frank Willis Barnett, “The paper was held ...,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, January 28, 1902, p. 1

¹⁵³ “Editorial Paragraphs,” March 8, 1905, p. 8

¹⁵⁴ Frank Willis Barnett, “The Leslie Printing ...,” March 8, 1905, p. 8

¹⁵⁵ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

The Alabama Baptist missed publishing some issues during World War II to stay within limits on paper consumption imposed by the War Production Board.¹⁵⁶

In the second half of the twentieth century, newspapers began replacing letterpress with offset (lithography), essentially printing from photographic images instead of metal type. *The Alabama Baptist* converted to offset in 1973, printing in a plant at Fairfield operated by Florida evangelist E.J. Daniels. Pages were composed on paper by cutting and pasting. “It made all the difference in the world,” said Jack Brymer, who was managing editor, “especially in the preparation and making the paper more current.” If something happened during the weekend, it could be covered in Thursday’s paper. In 1977, *The Alabama Baptist* installed its own Compugraphic typesetting equipment and began delivering camera-ready pages to the printer.¹⁵⁷

Offset made it much easier to print images and use creative designs. Computers eventually changed typesetting into something resembling today’s word processing. Writers and editors are their own typesetters and proofreaders; if mistakes occur, they have only themselves to blame. In recent years, *The Alabama Baptist* and other newspapers have been able to put together whole pages on computer screens. The job can easily be done on a laptop computer; that, combined with easy transmission of words, images and pages across the internet, has made it possible to produce newspaper content from virtually any location and transmit it to a facility where the paper is printed. The paper can be distributed or mailed from there. A newspaper publisher does not have to own a printing press; in fact, it is often more economical to pay another company to print the paper.

The Alabama Baptist today is miles away from its printing facilities. Since Terry arrived, it has been printed in five locations: Ensley (Birmingham), Montgomery, Atlanta, Nashville, and now Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The paper is mailed on Monday and delivered by the Postal Service on Wednesday and Thursday.¹⁵⁸

Struggling to put out a good paper while paying the bills. In 1854, the proprietors (Chilton, Echols & Co.) of the *South Western Baptist* (which had recently moved to Montgomery from Tuskegee) announced that they had lowered the subscription price by fifty cents, to two dollars, but would require payment in advance. They cited the costs of paper, ink, type and printers and the extra trouble and expense involved in collecting bills, including when people moved or died.¹⁵⁹ Readers in 1863 were told not to worry that the paper was in danger of suspending if they did not receive the paper regularly or it was only half a sheet. “We publish and mail our papers as regularly as formerly and if they do not reach you it is not our fault. The half sheet we must continue or double the price, as paper is going up constantly in the market.”¹⁶⁰ Also in 1863, the *South Western Baptist* announced that if a subscriber found a red cross mark in the margin of his paper, this meant his subscription needed to be renewed within two or three weeks. “We adopt this plan to save the expense of writing and forwarding accounts.”¹⁶¹ In 1882, the publishers of *The Alabama Baptist*, located in Selma, solicited printing business from Baptist associations. “We believe that no Printing Office in Alabama is better prepared to print Minutes of Associations than we are,” they wrote. “... We trust that Clerks of Associations will at least

¹⁵⁶ “Note to the Readers of This Paper,” April 26, 1945, p. 2

¹⁵⁷ Jack Brymer, telephone interview with writer, February 14, 2018

¹⁵⁸ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

¹⁵⁹ “Notice to Subscribers,” *South Western Baptist*, February 23, 1854, p. 1

¹⁶⁰ “A Word to Our Patrons,” *South Western Baptist*, September 10, 1863, p. 1

¹⁶¹ “Notice the Red Cross (X) Mark,” *South Western Baptist*, March 5, 1863

give us an opportunity to say what we will charge for printing their Minutes before giving their work to other printers.”¹⁶²

The annual subscription price was two dollars in 1902, but in late January, new owner Frank Willis Barnett offered to send the paper for the remainder of the year for \$1.50, cash in advance. He asked those who owed money but could not pay to “write us freely, and we will meet you half way” or even wipe out the debt and begin anew for \$1.50. He wrote in all-capital letters: “WE DO NOT EXPECT TO SUE ANY SUBSCRIBER. ... WE NEED CASH AND NEED IT BADLY.”¹⁶³ The next month, Barnett was going through the paper’s books “to see how many of the 1,352 ordained ministers in the State are taking the paper.” He expected the results to be surprising — seeming to imply that too few were taking it. “We are here to stand by the preachers and we want them to help us,” he wrote. The paper’s success was largely dependent on the ministers, Barnett said. (The annual subscription price for ministers was one dollar.)¹⁶⁴ On the advice of “brethren throughout the State,” Barnett had paid more for *The Alabama Baptist* than he thought it was worth “for the sake of denominational peace.” He wanted their help in putting the paper in every Baptist home in the state. In September, the paper announced that its Montgomery office had closed “to reduce expenses” and that associate editor S.M. Provence would move to Birmingham.¹⁶⁵ The paper had sold its “printing outfit” and was “now published by contract.” It did not own “one stick of type.”¹⁶⁶

Provence severed his connection with the newspaper, effective with the December 24 issue. He was returning to the pastorate. Barnett wrote that 1902 had been “the busiest year of our life” — a strenuous one with many stumbles, but “we are thankful that along the pathway we walked with Him and had many friends to encourage us on the way.” He said he was praying that hatchets would be buried. Meanwhile, he noted that “some of the country preachers are sending in their subscriptions for 1903,” setting the pace for city brethren. “[W]e wouldn’t swap our preacher constituency with any editor in the land.”¹⁶⁷ Elsewhere on the same page, subscribers were told: “We need \$3,000 on Jan. 1st. Our subscribers owe it to us. If you are in arrears we beg you to make a special effort to pay what you owe.”¹⁶⁸ Below that item, Provence wrote that he regretted leaving the paper. “I have greatly enjoyed the work, although the strictly editorial part of it has been limited.” He hoped to write even more for the paper in the future, though not as an editor.¹⁶⁹

Barnett’s *Alabama Baptist* reported quality upgrades despite uncollected accounts. Its new printer in 1905 was Advance Publishing Company, “the most up-to-date printing plant in Alabama,” and the paper had taken the opportunity to use a better grade of paper, “better ink, better type, better press work, better make-up” — even though circulation had not reached the desired ten thousand. Content was improving, too, with illustrations and articles written by men of national reputation. The writer had shouldered extra work by becoming business manager,

¹⁶² Jno. L. West & Co., “Associational Minutes,” September 14, 1882, p. 2

¹⁶³ Frank Willis Barnett, “We have decided to send the paper ...,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, January 28, 1902, p. 8

¹⁶⁴ Frank Willis Barnett, “We are going through the books ...,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, February 5, 1902, p. 8

¹⁶⁵ “We closed the Montgomery office ...,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, September 17, 1902, p. 1

¹⁶⁶ “To Clerks of Churches and Associations,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, September 17, 1902, p. 8

¹⁶⁷ Frank Willis Barnett, “Following the custom ...,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, December 24, 1902, p. 8

¹⁶⁸ “Please Read This,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, December 24, 1902, p. 8

¹⁶⁹ “A Word Personal,” *The Southern and Alabama Baptist*, December 24, 1902, p. 8

hoping to save money and use it to improve the paper. “Alabama Baptists owe us more than \$10,000. ... Let everyone in arrears do his best and do it now.”¹⁷⁰

In 1917, Barnett’s new business manager, H.S. Limmer, appealed for readers to pay their overdue bills. He said he had reproved Barnett “for being too *generous* and lenient with his subscribers” — the man was too “big-hearted” to ignore a hard-luck story and had lost nearly two thousand dollars in 1916. He was borrowing money to pay current expenses. “Few realize the great sacrifices of time and money he has and is making for our Baptist cause. ... I hope you are going to stand by me, for I’m going to stand by him, for he is standing by the Baptists of Alabama.”¹⁷¹ In November 1918, Barnett’s paper published an honor roll of those who had paid for subscriptions, divided into three sections: laymen, preachers and women. “Is your name on the list?” readers were asked. “If not, why not? Your \$5.00 may save the paper.”¹⁷² A week later, the paper reported that “we regretfully dropped hundreds from our list this and last week,” but asked preachers to implore those who had been cut off to renew their subscriptions.¹⁷³ The following week, the paper launched a subscription drive, charging two dollars to receive the paper until January 1920. Barnett made this comment in a section titled “Woods Full of Editors”:

We know that quite a few think they are better editors than we are and it may be true; but one thing we know and that is there isn’t any one man who has got enough money to keep it going who will give his time and much of his savings to it as we have done for the past four years in order to keep it alive until conditions get normal again.¹⁷⁴

When L.L. Gwaltney became editor after Barnett sold the paper to the state convention, Gwaltney stated that the convention’s intent was “to make a paper that would foster all the interests of the denomination” — running it not to make money but to tell the truth. “But the plain facts are that the paper is as yet not self-supporting.” The editor would be presenting his plan to his fellow pastors.¹⁷⁵

The thing must go and will go. Our mainstay is on our pastors; if they fail the work of the Kingdom fails to a large extent. The pages of *The Baptist* will not be filled with pleadings of poverty. There is something else to follow. It was felt, however, that the plain facts ought to be stated to the whole brotherhood.¹⁷⁶

In 1923, James T. Murfee wrote that the paper was doing well financially while joining ministers in preaching “the gospel of love and service.” He said:

When our numbers were small and our people did not read extensively, publishers of religious papers found it difficult to maintain themselves financially; but since our population and our membership, as well as general reading have increased, our paper maintains itself admirably; and it is rendering a great and indispensable service to all the enterprises fostered by our churches.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁰ “A New Dress for the Paper” and “Do It Now,” March 15, 1905, p. 8

¹⁷¹ H.S. Limmer, “A Word from the Business Manager,” January 10, 1917, p. 1

¹⁷² “Honor Roll of *Alabama Baptist*,” November 6, 1918, p. 13

¹⁷³ “Willing-hearted Pastors with a Little Effort Can Save the Day,” November 13, 1918, p. 1

¹⁷⁴ Frank Willis Barnett, “Now for a Big Drive for New Subscribers [sic] — \$2 to January 1920,” November 20, 1918, p. 1

¹⁷⁵ L.L. Gwaltney, “A Foreword,” April 3, 1919, p. 3

¹⁷⁶ “A Word about Our Policy,” April 3, 1919, p. 3

¹⁷⁷ James T. Murfee, “Journalism of the Baptist Denomination in Alabama,” in *Our Baptist Centennials*, Montgomery: The Paragon Press, 1923, p. 21

In early 2018, circulation is the newspaper's largest source of revenue to support its annual budget of just over two million dollars. An appropriation from the state convention is the second-largest source, and advertising is third. Circulation pays for printing and postage, but the convention revenue and money from reserves pays salaries and benefits. "It's a strapped organization these days," editor Bob Terry said. Advertising is unlikely to be fifteen percent of revenue this year.¹⁷⁸

Circulation and subscriptions. Circulation — the number of copies distributed and the number of people who read the paper — is not only a key measure of the paper's reach and influence; circulation provides important revenue. Editors have considered building circulation to be an important part of their job, and they have sought pastors' support and encouraged churches to budget funds to buy subscriptions for their members.

In the first issue of the paper on February 4, 1843, editors expressed hope that "[a] little zeal, and energy, and perseverance will place it in the hands of fifteen hundred families."¹⁷⁹ By June 3, there was a note on Page 2 saying that "[a]ll Baptist ministers are requested to procure subscribers."¹⁸⁰ On January 1, 1864, the yearly subscription price went up to five dollars because "[t]he price of material and labor leaves us no other alternative, unless we suspend altogether."¹⁸¹ Some people were objecting to the \$2.50 price of the paper in 1876, and an article noted that the *Baptist* of Memphis cost \$2.70 and the *Index* (no location was specified, but perhaps it was the *Christian Index* of Atlanta) cost three dollars. The article invited "any one who has the three papers to compare them together, and to see if he does not get more reading matter, in proportion to the price, in our paper than in either of the others. But if our paper cost \$5 a year, it would be worth more than any other paper, at any price, to the Baptists of this State."¹⁸² The publishers announced in March 1884 that on June 1 they would "distribute two hundred dollars in gold among our friends" — meaning those who had recruited subscribers. The person who sent the largest list of new subscribers would receive one hundred dollars; the runner-up, fifty dollars. The next five would be given ten dollars each.¹⁸³

W.B.C., a writer in 1900, was concerned about not just the quantity of circulation but also whether the paper was being read and who was reading it. The writer lamented the difficulty of enlisting "the best informed and the most wealthy of the denomination in our work." These business and professional men often did not read literature sent to them, including *The Alabama Baptist*, even if they subscribed to it. Even some who had run for public office, touting "their Baptist face for all it was worth," did not care about denominational endeavors. "Why should not the pastors in the organization of the churches have a committee on religious literature to put the paper in every home, and do something to induce its reading?"¹⁸⁴ In 1917, *The Birmingham Age-Herald* and *The Baptist* were offering subscription discounts when bought as a package.¹⁸⁵ Frank Willis Barnett held two jobs: editor of *The Alabama Baptist* and associate editor of *The Age-Herald*.

¹⁷⁸ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

¹⁷⁹ "Can the *Alabama Baptist* Be Sustained?," February 4, 1843, p. 2

¹⁸⁰ June 3, 1843, p. 2

¹⁸¹ "To Our Patrons," *South Western Baptist*, January 7, 1864, p. 1

¹⁸² "Our Paper," July 6, 1876, p. 2

¹⁸³ Jno. L. West & Co., "Interesting Announcement," March 20, 1884, p. 2

¹⁸⁴ W.B.C., "Some Notes for the New Year Issue," January 4, 1900, p. 1

¹⁸⁵ "This is the last notice ...," December 19, 1917, p. 1

In 1919 after Gwaltney became editor, the annual subscription price was reduced to one dollar, and a campaign resulted in a circulation surge to about fifteen thousand from three thousand. The Montgomery printing facilities were not adequate, and the paper was moved to Birmingham.¹⁸⁶ In 1923, James T. Murfee wrote that postal regulations had required nearly two thousand names to be dropped from the mailing list. “The ruling of the Post Office Department and the withdrawal of press passes by the railroads, has made it difficult for the paper to increase its circulation and accomplish the greatest amount of good for the denomination without the loyal support of all our people,” he said.¹⁸⁷

A front-page article in 1925 outlined a subscription campaign. A single annual subscription would cost two dollars; clubs of five or more would pay \$1.50 each; the rate was \$1.25 per subscriber if a church put subscriptions in its budget for members who wanted them. “Remember the paper will certainly cause the people to contribute far more to the church during the year than the 2½ cents per week it will cost the church in sending it to the homes.” A special appeal to deacons: “Please let not the good deacons oppose the Budget Plan” because “the people ought to read” the paper and others would read it even if the deacons were too busy or tired.¹⁸⁸ *The Alabama Baptist* Day on October 13, 1935, produced more than two thousand subscriptions. “Evidently hundreds of pastors preached on the paper and took subscriptions for it.”¹⁸⁹

In 1961, Baptist Press reported that at least twenty-eight state Baptist papers were serving twenty-nine states, with a total circulation of 1,465,471. The largest circulation was in Texas: 364,548. Alabama and Georgia had more than 111,000 subscribers each. The smallest circulation was one thousand in Hawaii.¹⁹⁰

During Leon Macon’s time as editor, *The Alabama Baptist’s* circulation rose to 135,000 from 45,000, according to his obituary in the paper.¹⁹¹ This was the second-largest circulation in the Southern Baptist Convention, exceeded only by the Texas paper.¹⁹² Six months later, *The Alabama Baptist* credited Macon with a circulation of 138,000. It said that two thousand out of about three thousand Baptist churches in the state had the paper in their budgets, and one thousand of those sent it to every resident member.¹⁹³

Promoting a service that was also a circulation booster, current editor Bob Terry urged churches and associations to use customized editions of *The Alabama Baptist* as their newsletters. The local information was printed on the last one or two pages of the paper. “The local church edition is easier to produce, requires less equipment, is less expensive, and achieves more dependable delivery than doing a local church mailout.”¹⁹⁴ The peak circulation may have been 138,000, but Terry said he had not found postal records to support that number. The peak

¹⁸⁶ Avery Hamilton Reid, *Baptists in Alabama: Their Organization and Witness*, Montgomery: The Alabama Baptist State Convention, 1967, p. 234

¹⁸⁷ James T. Murfee, “Journalism of the Baptist Denomination in Alabama,” in *Our Baptist Centennials*, Montgomery: The Paragon Press, 1923, pp. 19-20

¹⁸⁸ “The Fall Campaign for *The Alabama Baptist*,” August 13, 1925, p. 1

¹⁸⁹ “The Paper Day a Great Success,” November 7, 1935, p. 3

¹⁹⁰ “News Summary, Committee on State Baptist Papers,” June 1, 1961, p. 16

¹⁹¹ “Dr. Leon Macon Passes,” November 18, 1965, p. 3

¹⁹² “Dr. Leon Macon,” December 2, 1965, p. 8

¹⁹³ “*The Alabama Baptist*: Past, Present, Future,” June 9, 1966, p. 1

¹⁹⁴ Bob Terry, “A Partnership, a Stewardship,” January 11, 1996, p. 2

since he arrived in 1995 was about 115,000. “At the end of 2008, the bottom dropped out, and it hasn’t stopped yet.” Current print circulation is about 65,000.¹⁹⁵

The Alabama Baptist established its first website in 2000. Jennifer Rash said it was mainly promotional, describing the newspaper, its history and how to subscribe. In 2004, it started carrying current news, as it continues to do. Archived stories are now available going back to 2000.¹⁹⁶ Fewer than two thousand people pay for digital subscriptions, Terry said, and experience shows that making content available free would not increase readership, although additional current news ought to be available free of charge. Articles have received as many as 65,000 shares on Facebook. “We’ve got more interaction with the new website than we ever had, and we’re having success ... at least moderate success with selling day or week or something access into the archives. That’s become a revenue stream, for which I’m thankful.”¹⁹⁷

Editorial opinions and the futility of trying to please everybody. L.L. Gwaltney’s 1927 “Editorial on the Editorial” described the purpose of an editorial. It said truth will prevail, but “it comes to the race in tiny installments and when it comes it is scarcely welcome.” Furthermore:

The editorial walks with the humble, speaks the language of the people, weeps with those who weep, challenges the cause of the oppressed and exults in the righteousness of the high and low. ... The editorial asks no one either to concur in or demur from its opinion, but rather invites criticism and takes this just as it comes, good or bad. ... The editorial to be worth anything must be unembarrassed, unhampered, independent and free, but it must instinctively know the difference between liberty and license. ... The editorial is ... a voice crying in the wilderness.¹⁹⁸

Editors know, perhaps better than most people, that you cannot please everybody. *The Alabama Baptist* in 1905 described a discussion between New York editor Horace Greeley and a disgruntled reader who told him he had “stopped your paper.” He had quit buying it, but the paper was still publishing. Greeley told him that if he expected to control the paper’s opinions by buying one copy a day “or if you think to find any newspaper or magazine worth reading that will never express convictions at right angles with your own, you are doomed to disappointment.”¹⁹⁹

As the state convention assumed ownership of the paper in 1919, a front-page article commented on the futility of trying to earn universal approval.

It would be glorious if a policy could be adopted which would please all the Baptists of Alabama, but such a hope would be an iridescent [sic] dream. The editor will conscientiously do the best he can and if the brethren like the paper he will be glad; if they do not he cannot help it. If asked to sum up in a word the proposed policy, that word would be “constructive.”²⁰⁰

Such thinking may have been going around among Alabama editors, including Q. Salter of *The Monroe Journal* in Monroeville. In 1920, his paper commented:

The larger number of our patrons have stood loyally by us through all the stress of time and change in our effort to give them a clean, reliable county newspaper, for which we are profoundly grateful. We shall continue the same conservative policy in future, striving only to attain a higher degree of efficiency in service. We wield no “big stick,” have no political axe to grind, no

¹⁹⁵ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

¹⁹⁶ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

¹⁹⁷ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

¹⁹⁸ “Editorial on the Editorial,” July 14, 1927, p. 3

¹⁹⁹ “He Thought He Stopped the Paper,” June 21, 1905, p. 8

²⁰⁰ “Foreword,” January 23, 1919, p. 1

enemies to punish, nor do we desire to “run things” not committed to us after our own peculiar notions. If you like our policy we shall be glad of your association.²⁰¹

Editor Hudson Baggett wrote in 1968 that readers sometimes misunderstood what *The Alabama Baptist* intended to say. A speaker or writer has a responsibility to be clear, he said, but the hearer or reader must try to understand.²⁰²

Frank Willis Barnett²⁰³ was not the first editor whom readers told they could outshine him. When Bob Terry became editor of *The Alabama Baptist*, he reflected on what his predecessor had said:

I recall a conversation with Hudson Baggett about critical letters which editors sometimes receive. Hudson told of getting a few in which the letter writers claimed they could do a better job editing the paper than he did. Hudson’s response surprised me. He wrote them that they may be right, they might be able to do one or two issues better than he did. But the value of the state paper nor the value of an editor’s ministry is not judged by one or two papers or one or two articles, he told me. The ability of an editor is reflected over months and years of work. Hudson felt he did a good job as editor over the long run, and he did. . . . How Alabama Baptists will judge the work of this editor will be worked out in the years to come. My commitment to Alabama Baptists is one made years ago: to put my whole weight on Jesus.²⁰⁴

Terry wrote that state Baptist editors “have sometimes been accused of ‘stirring up a hornets’ nest’ with their editorials and news coverage.” He described a time in the Birmingham area when he and others literally got stung after shaking a tree containing a hornets’ nest. “God never promises us pain-free experiences,” he wrote, but “He promises that we will not be overcome.” Terry concluded that he hoped “never to do that again, literally or figuratively.”²⁰⁵

Terry said in 2018 that often his editorials are devotionals or explanations of historic Baptist positions. (His editorials also are often meticulously documented with facts, statistics and Scripture.) Terry said:

I write too long. My editorials are nine hundred words. No editorial should ever be that long. So I don’t think I really write editorials. I think I write more essays. I do that because an editorial primarily announces a position. If I do that, I’m going to communicate clearly with readers but I’m also going to drive them away when my conclusion differs with theirs. So I try and explain not only my conclusion but how I got to that so people can see the reasoning. And I’ve found over the years if they understand how you got to a position, then I can talk to them next week. . . . They’re a little more sympathetic to it.²⁰⁶

A letter to the editor showed how a headline can have an unexpected impact, perhaps even negating the point of its story. A Muscle Shoals woman wrote in 1996: “Are any of you aware of the shock and pain you caused with the glaring headline ‘Are infants who die eternally lost?’ How dare you give credence to an obscure school of thought by heading the article in such a manner!” An editor’s note followed the letter, saying, “Most of the article told why most Baptists believe infants who die are in the loving arms of their Heavenly Father.”²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ “Twice-a-Week,” *The Monroe Journal*, August 3, 1920, p. 1

²⁰² “The Understanding Gap,” June 20, 1968, p. 2

²⁰³ Frank Willis Barnett, “Now for a Big Drive for New Subscribers [sic] — \$2 to January 1920,” November 20, 1918, p. 1

²⁰⁴ Bob Terry, “The Joy of Beginning a Journey,” August 3, 1995, p. 2

²⁰⁵ Bob Terry, “Stirring Up a Hornets’ Nest,” August 17, 1995, p. 2

²⁰⁶ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

²⁰⁷ Judy McMeans, “Headline Caused Pain,” January 11, 1996, p. 2

Terry said he receives many complaints on subjects ranging from cartoons to Sunday school lessons to items that his paper did not even print but other papers did. News media, politicians and “people who just want to say something to Baptists” come to him. Early in Terry’s tenure with *The Alabama Baptist*, the paper lost more than a thousand subscriptions from a single church after the pastor complained about being quoted during a meeting on a denominational controversy. The pastor told Terry that the quotations took away the pastor’s ability to be a peacemaker. “Covering that controversy was difficult,” Terry said. “But, you know, whenever you cover a controversy, everybody believes that their grasp of the information is the only true understanding.”

During a U.S. presidential campaign, the paper does not endorse candidates but does report on issues with political overtones. Even so, “both sides condemn us,” Terry said. A too-frequent story topic involves former church staff members convicted of sexual misconduct. Churches cancel subscriptions. “They have no appreciation that you tell the truth and trust the people, and if you don’t tell the bad news, no one will believe you when you tell the good news.”

Reader submissions. Readers’ contributions of content have been vital to the paper but not always easy to handle. “The bane of every editor of a religious paper is in the long articles,” Gwaltney complained. He asked contributors to limit most submissions to 1,200 to 1,500 words, remembering that “just as their number of words go up their number of readers come down.” The editor could not stretch “the iron frames which incase the paper when it goes to press.” Many an editor had endured heartache when someone at a meeting moved that a great speech or sermon be printed in the paper.²⁰⁸ “Short articles are more apt to be published and read,” Hudson Baggett told potential contributors in 1966.²⁰⁹ Bob Terry said some submissions are not printable because of limited space, content or length.²¹⁰

In the 1960s, the paper reminded people submitting items for publication to observe deadlines, send high-quality pictures (not “kodak” shots but those made “by a regular flashbulb photographer”), not submit poetry, understand that space and time were limited, and keep articles brief. It asked churches and individuals to help keep mailing lists up to date.²¹¹

Readability. Editors have sought to make the paper interesting by the style of writing and presentation, as well as by the nature of the content.

At the beginning of 1917, editor Frank Willis Barnett announced that he was going to devote his energies to brightening up the paper. H.S. Limmer, who had taken charge of the paper while Barnett was sick, would become permanent business manager. Barnett would have “more time to devote to the editorial page and take care of the news end. I have too long been overburdened with details. Watch out for the brightest and newsiest *Alabama Baptist* that I have ever published.”²¹² Three weeks later, Barnett wrote that friends had advised him to write more and pay less attention to business, and now that he was doing it, “some are hoping we will let up before we upset the ark.” He wanted to make “missions and education the livest [sic] thing in the state.”

²⁰⁸ “On Long Articles,” February 28, 1935, p. 3

²⁰⁹ “*The Alabama Baptist: Dreams and Difficulties*,” July 28, 1966, p. 2

²¹⁰ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

²¹¹ “Please Cooperate with Us,” July 6, 1961, p. 2; “Two Notices,” March 11, 1965, p. 2

²¹² Frank Willis Barnett, “A Better *Alabama Baptist* for 1917,” January 3, 1917, p. 1

We can't be satisfied to utter platitudes. We don't care to get hold of an idea and have to emasculate it or wrap it round in a kind of mental cottonwool and then put it to sleep in cocaine. If we stay in the game we must fight. ... For years we have been thinking about our Baptist idea, and hungering to get in behind it here in Alabama with all of our pent up energies. And now at last we are in the arena, mind, soul, heart and body, and we are going to try and make things happen. We are going to tell the truth as we see it and work for the things in which we believe.²¹³

This statement was surrounded by sharply worded editorials saying that “experts” were overrated vis-à-vis “the average man”; denouncing pretense, class distinctions and those who “strut about giving orders”; saying that some Baptist leaders were advocating “papal democracy,” rather than self-government; calling for a uniform accounting system for denominational agencies; declaring that “most men are born idlers” and need to get busy; and saying that Baptist secretaries and boards should not “give way to timidity because a few conservative business men are pleading for retrenchment.” No individuals were criticized by name.²¹⁴

Editor L.L. Gwaltney wrote in 1935 that both editors and pastors faced the challenge of keeping their pages or pulpits from becoming “commonplace, trite and lifeless.” “The cure for commonplace utterance both of the press and pulpit is perpetual study — not mere reading — but the mental and spiritual digestion of hard books and challenging thoughts. ... But half of the people still have the Hardshell notion that all the minister has to do is to open his mouth and great sermons will flow out.”²¹⁵ After Hudson Baggett’s death, Frank A. Ruff of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops said Baggett had “openly and humbly shared with me his struggle to write the editorials in a more interesting fashion.”²¹⁶

Advertising is the main source of revenue for many newspapers. An advertiser buys the right to say what he pleases in order to sell his product or service, but a publisher has the right and duty to refuse ads that deceive readers or are out of character with the publication.

Many types of businesses have advertised in *The Alabama Baptist*, including Baptist organizations, educational institutions, commercial businesses, those offering services to churches, and — at least in earlier decades — sellers of miracle cures. For example, Wintersmith’s Chill Tonic was touted in 1925 as a solution “when every bone in your body aches.”²¹⁷ Miracle cures are no longer advertised in the paper.²¹⁸ In 1965, editor Leon Macon assured readers that the paper had “thoroughly investigated” its advertisers to see that they were telling the truth and could deliver what they promised.²¹⁹

The need for money to support twenty-nine state Baptist newspapers and magazines was addressed in a report given to their editors at the University of Georgia in 1966. The group’s advertising committee said that production costs were spiraling, and advised “seeking more advertising for the publications and the possibility of endowments, gifts and annuities as other revenue.” The editors voted, on the committee’s recommendation, to consider hiring someone to solicit advertising and endowments for state Baptist papers.²²⁰ But in 2018, Terry said, selling

²¹³ “An Editorial Confession,” January 24, 1917, p. 6

²¹⁴ January 24, 1917, p. 6

²¹⁵ “The Problem of This Page,” February 28, 1935, p. 3

²¹⁶ Frank A. Ruff, “Last Quote No Surprise,” December 15, 1994, p. 3

²¹⁷ Advertisement, August 6, 1925, p. 9

²¹⁸ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

²¹⁹ “Our Advertisers,” March 11, 1965, p. 3

²²⁰ “Editors Elect Officers, Study Ad Man Employment,” March 3, 1966, p. 4

ads is difficult. Baptist-related entities do not run as many ads as they once did, many major companies do not want to be associated with a religious newspaper, and some businesses and their customers think advertising in such a publication is inappropriate.²²¹

Typos. Editors must be vigilant to avoid typographical errors, and sometimes they do not succeed. An editorial by Hudson Baggett, then guest editor, had a misspelled headline: “The Importance of Integrgity.” In the text of the editorial, the word was spelled “intergrity” at least twice.²²² These errors were not necessarily Baggett’s; in those days, printers had to retype text into typesetting machines, and careful proofreading was needed to catch errors. In modern times, computer word processing has eliminated the necessity to retype text.

The newspaper’s occasional errors did not deter readers from looking to it as an authority. Editor E.T. Winkler fielded a question in 1879 about whether the correct spelling was “Savior” or “Saviour.” He preferred the former, but he traced the linguistic history of words like “honor,” “favor” and “Savior” back to the Norman French and concluded that “both modes are admissible.”²²³

Newsmakers’ secrecy. Gwaltney called on boards and commissions to avoid unnecessary executive sessions (private meetings). He quoted U.S. President Woodrow Wilson’s call for “[o]pen agreements, openly arrived at.” Openness deters suspicions, Gwaltney wrote. “The average preacher or layman does not take much stock in decisions arrived at behind closed doors.” It was better to invite Baptists into meetings and welcome their suggestions about subjects under discussion.²²⁴

Deadlines. Hudson Baggett, who would soon face decades of newspaper deadlines, wrote in 1966 as a guest editor that he was haunted by being called “the late preacher” at one church. “A chorus of objections follow when a preacher does not regard the 12 noon deadline on Sunday,” he said. “... Deadlines can drive us to become creative and constructive, or they may drive us to destruction. The decision is ours. Time does not permit further discussion of this dilemma because of a deadline.”²²⁵ Writing about Baggett a few days after his death, Kathleen V. Prude speculated on what Baggett would have said about her article: “ ‘Kathleen, it takes you too long. You are prone to take too much time on these things. Just get it down on paper and turn it in.’ ”²²⁶

Staffing the paper. After returning from Southern Baptist meetings in Nashville, Tennessee, Macon wrote that there was “an appalling need” for Southern Baptist journalism graduates in both the religious and public press. He was passing along remarks by Albert McClellan, director of publications for Southern Baptists, who “pointed out that our young people could serve God in newspaper work and at least 2,500 Baptist writers are needed in the next five years to carry out these hopes.”²²⁷

Calamities. What many people call “acts of God” sometimes interfered with publishing the paper. In 1870, Alabama editor Samuel Henderson was injured in a train accident while

²²¹ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

²²² “The Importance of Integrgity,” February 24, 1966, p. 3

²²³ “Savior or Saviour,” August 28, 1879, p. 2

²²⁴ “Be Slow in Calling Executive Sessions,” October 27, 1921, p. 3

²²⁵ “The Dilemma of Deadlines,” February 17, 1966, p. 3

²²⁶ Kathleen V. Prude, “Historical Highlights: Reminiscing about the Baggett Years,” December 15, 1994, p. 9

²²⁷ “Nashville meetings,” December 22, 1955, p. 3

returning to Fayetteville from Calhoun County. The passenger coach was thrown from the track near Oxford. One man was killed, and many others were injured. Henderson “was wrenched in his back and painfully cut in his face.” It was a narrow escape, but “we believe his injuries are not serious or permanent,” the newspaper reported.²²⁸

In January 1878, *The Alabama Baptist* reported that its building had burned, destroying “[t]he books, the papers, the furniture, the mailing machine, the type, even the names of our subscribers.” The editors confessed to “keen disappointment ... It seemed as if Providence resented our activity and rejected our service. ... And then we reflected that there was a wiser and a deeper lesson to be learned than the vanity of human expectations. ... If we have labored for high and sacred ends, the best fruits of those labors cannot be consumed.” They expressed hope that the paper would “secure a new place in the affections of the Baptist brotherhood of Alabama.” They were moving the publication office to Selma, but items for publication should be sent to the senior editor at Marion.²²⁹

Confusion about volume numbers and anniversaries. Volume numbers printed in the paper have been inconsistent, with different owners and editors adopting different versions of when the paper started.

Some have said that *The Alabama Baptist* can trace its origins to 1835, when John D. Williams founded *The Family Visitor* at Wetumpka. Relatives said Williams was a descendant of colonial Baptist icon Roger Williams, according to twentieth century editor L.L. Gwaltney. John Williams was born in North Carolina in 1800 and moved to Wetumpka in 1834. He was an influential minister in that part of Alabama whose “culture, saneness and consecration was a challenge and a stabilizing influence to the Wetumpka Church during all the years he lived there.”²³⁰

A front page in April 1919 featured an article titled “Eighty-Three Years — Fiftieth Anniversary” — which may have confused those who saw that the folio lines just above said, “Established 1874,” which was forty-five years earlier, and also said, “Vol. 49, No. 51.” Most of the article was attributed to W.B. Crumpton, a former editor. L.L. Gwaltney had become editor at the beginning of April 1919. The article traced the paper’s history, starting with *The Family Visitor* about 1835. “Five years later it was turned over to General E.D. King and Dr. Milo P. Jewett at Marion, where it was published as ‘The Alabama Baptist.’ ” The article concluded that “the Baptists of this State have had in continuous publication a paper since 1835 — eighty-four years.” But the next paragraph said that “this issue is the fiftieth anniversary of *The Alabama Baptist*, as now known.”²³¹ In 1927, Gwaltney announced that the date of establishment of *The Alabama Baptist* was being changed to 1835 from 1878. Accordingly, the current volume number was changed to ninety-two. Gwaltney wrote that he had often thought the 1878 date was absurd, knowing the history, but he decided to make the change after R.E. Pettus, the moderator of the Madison-Liberty Association, asked him during an associational meeting: “Why is it that *The Alabama Baptist* is dated as being established as 1878, when I, myself, have been reading it continually longer than since that time?”²³²

²²⁸ “Accident to Rev. Dr. Henderson,” *The Christian Index and South-Western Baptist*, August 18, 1870, p. 126

²²⁹ “Tried by Fire,” January 10, 1878, p. 2

²³⁰ “Interesting Facts Concerning John D. Williams, Founder of *The Alabama Baptist*,” Nov. 7, 1935, p. 3

²³¹ “Eighty-Three Years — Fiftieth Anniversary,” April 10, 1919, p. 1

²³² “The History of *The Alabama Baptist*,” January 6, 1927, p. 3

But A. Hamilton Reid, in his 1967 history of Alabama Baptists, said he had found no evidence that *The Family Visitor* was a forerunner of *The Alabama Baptist*; in fact, documents showed that *The Visitor* was a nondenominational paper that merged into *The Wetumpka Argus*.²³³ Today, *The Alabama Baptist* considers its founding date to be 1843.

WARS AND WORLD NEWS

Exchange papers. *The Alabama Baptist* has reported on major news events in Alabama, the United States and the world. Especially in early decades, editors obtained much of their information from around the country by exchanging subscriptions with other newspapers, and often they reprinted content from these papers. A 1905 column of “Baptist exchanges” in *The Alabama Baptist* included an excerpt from the *Baptist and Reflector* of Tennessee:

Just to think of having to wade through so many papers every week. Of course, however, we do not read everything in them. Nor can we spend much time on each one. It should be said too, in justice of our editorial brethren, that there is a real pleasure in hearing from them, and as a rule we read the different papers with much interest. Baptist papers in the South have improved wonderfully in the past decade.

Other titles that the Alabama paper quoted in the same column were *Western Recorder*, *Baptist Commonwealth*, *Standard*, *Examiner*, *Argus*, and *Baptist Herald*.²³⁴

The Civil War and slavery. On April 11, 1861 — three months after Alabama seceded from the Union and the day before the Civil War started with the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter — the *South Western Baptist* reported that *The American Baptist* “has seceded from our exchange list, his holy soul is so vexed at the ‘Rebellion in the South,’ and for the part the *S.W. Baptist* has taken in that ‘rebellion.’ ” *The American Baptist* was the organ of the Free Mission Baptists, who opposed slavery. The *South Western Baptist* was not inclined to respond by force: “We shall not attempt to coerce the *Baptist*. We acknowledge the right of secession, however much we may regret it. Therefore, be it known, that, we shall send no army to New York to whip back the ‘rebellious’ *American Baptist* to the exchange list of the *S.W. Baptist*.”²³⁵

In the first edition published after Fort Sumter, the *South Western Baptist* commented on the issues that led to war. “It is by no means inconsistent with the duties of a religious editor, in the midst of revolutionary scenes, to take some humble part in the discussion of such topics as are vital to the interests of the country,” the article began. The paper’s “principles and sympathies” were “eminently Southern.” It was a mistake to say that slavery was the only issue between North and South, the article said. The nation had grown and diversified, making “it simply impossible for any one free government to afford adequate and equal protection to every portion.” Duties on foreign imports were an issue. For philosophical support, the editorial quoted the U.S. Declaration of Independence and cited the revolt of the ten tribes of Israel against King Rehoboam in the Old Testament. “[H]e who sees nothing in this great Southern movement but the Slavery question, has sadly failed to measure its vast magnitude.”²³⁶

²³³ Avery Hamilton Reid, *Baptists in Alabama: Their Organization and Witness*, Montgomery: The Alabama Baptist State Convention, 1967, pp. 46-47

²³⁴ “Once Again — Who Makes the Paper!,” January 4, 1905, p. 10

²³⁵ “Seceded,” *South Western Baptist*, April 11, 1861, p. 2

²³⁶ “‘Is There Not a Cause?,’ ” *South Western Baptist*, April 18, 1861, p. 2

On the same page, an editorial marveled that no one was killed on either side when the Confederates seized Fort Sumter from Northern forces. “Well, the war is upon us!” the editorial continued. “We have exhausted every effort for peace which duty and honor demand. . . . [B]y the blessings of Him who ruleth in the armies of heaven, the sword will never be sheathed until the last invader shall be driven from our shores. . . . Let prayer be made without ceasing unto God, and the result is not doubtful.”²³⁷ The following week, an editorial stated emphatically that it could be a Christian soldier’s duty to kill his fellow man because of “the law of self-preservation, the highest interests of society and government,—nay, the law of God.” The article quoted the command in Nehemiah 4:14 to “‘fight for his brethren, his sons, and daughters, his wife and his house.’”²³⁸

Confederate General Stonewall Jackson received good press in *The South Western Baptist* for his piety. “A correspondent of the *Augusta Constitutionalist*” quoted a sick soldier from Jackson’s division reporting that Jackson never gave an order without raising his hand to say, “Lord give us the victory” or to make a similar request for God’s help. Jackson “never marches on Sunday [sic], but has the sacrament dispensed by one of his Aids [sic], a minister, and himself urges repentance and faith on his men.”²³⁹ Ministers in the Confederate states were encouraged to become military chaplains — “the very best field of usefulness now open to the minister.” Experience had shown that “the army can be made a school of virtue and religion,” but it was often “a school of vice.”

But in those regiments where faithful Chaplains have been at work, blessed revivals of religion have spread over the whole command. Profanity, gambling and drunkenness have been banished; Sabbath schools, Christian associations, singing meetings, and prayer meetings, have taken the place of wicked amusements. Hundreds of religious newspapers have been subscribed for and are eagerly read. God is now in our midst, and a glorious revival of religion is proceeding all over the army.²⁴⁰

Confederate soldiers wanted to read the paper. “Never since the war commenced have we been receiving so many orders for the paper for the army,” the *South Western Baptist* reported in 1864. It asked that the “brethren bestir themselves” with money to meet the need. A company in Georgia had given ten thousand dollars to circulate the *Augusta Christian Advocate* among soldiers. “Why should we be behind our Methodist brethren in works of faith and labors of love? Why?”²⁴¹ The paper reported that a Battlefield Relief Association was organized during a prayer meeting in Tuskegee “for the purpose of affording assistance and supplies for the wounded of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston’s army.”²⁴²

The Georgia Baptist Association had unanimously adopted a resolution saying that the institution of marriage was God-ordained “for the benefit of the whole human race, without respect to color,” and that Georgia law ought to be amended because it failed “to recognize and protect this relationship between our slaves.”²⁴³ The *South Western Baptist* expressed approval of the Georgia resolution, commenting that “[i]n our efforts to prove that they [slaves] are our

²³⁷ “Reduction of Fort Sumter,” *South Western Baptist*, April 18, 1861, p. 2

²³⁸ “Christian Patriotism,” *South Western Baptist*, April 25, 1861, p. 2

²³⁹ “Gen. Jackson,” *South Western Baptist*, September 4, 1862, p. 1

²⁴⁰ L.H. Milliken, et al., “Address to the Ministers of the Confederate States,” *South Western Baptist*, June 18, 1863, p. 3

²⁴¹ “Orders for the Paper,” *South Western Baptist*, March 17, 1864, p. 1

²⁴² “Battlefield Relief Association,” *South Western Baptist*, June 30, 1864, p. 1

²⁴³ “Marriage of Slaves,” *South Western Baptist*, November 10, 1864, p. 1

lawful property, so recognized by the laws of God and our country, many of us have forgotten that they are human beings, subject as we are to the laws of the Creator.” Marriage “is as binding, therefore, upon the servant as upon his master. . . . We are as thoroughly satisfied as any man that slavery is recognized and sanctioned by the word of God — but the institution of marriage stands upon the very same foundation.”²⁴⁴

On April 13, 1865 — actually five days after the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia surrendered to Union forces at Appomattox Court House, Virginia — the *South Western Baptist* was saying that the Alabama Legislature had made a mistake by preventing the Governor from ordering “County Reserves” to go outside their own counties. This legislation had handcuffed the state, “so that it falls an easy prey to any inconsiderable Yankee force that invades the country. The city of Selma had become the first victim and was in “smouldering ruins” after a Union victory on April 2.²⁴⁵

The same edition contained two notices designed to round up troops for the Confederacy, one of which was addressed “To the Slave Holders of Alabama” and described a plan to enlist as much as one-fourth of the male slave population between ages eighteen and forty-five. Enlistment would not affect the owner’s title to the slave, but “during the time of enlistment, which is for the war, the right to the slave, for military purposes, will enure to the Government of the Confederate State.” Slaveholders who refused to comply would be showing that wealth meant more to them than independence, the notice said. The slave troops “are allowed pay, rations and clothing of other troops in the same line of service.”²⁴⁶ More than two years earlier on January 1, 1863, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln had announced the acceptance of black men into the Union military in his Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation freed slaves, but their freedom depended on Union control of their locations.²⁴⁷

Other foes. But the battle was not all against flesh and blood. What first looked like war correspondence in 1863 turned out to be an account of a successful series of evangelistic meetings in Conecuh and Monroe counties. “Over 100 prisoners have just been rescued from the hands of the enemy,” Geo. L. Lee wrote to open his dispatch from Burnt Corn. He went on to tell of 122 people who joined New Prospect Church, Monroeville Church and Salem Church. “Thus you see a great victory has been gained. During those meetings I baptized the Methodist, the Presbyterian and the Campbellite; all were convinced of their error and were ready to forsake it.”²⁴⁸

When did the century turn? A writer in *The Alabama Baptist* disagreed with Pope Leo XIII as to when the twentieth century began. The first *Baptist* issue of 1900 reported that according to the Pope, the century had already started. “Baptists have no Pope to decide these momentous questions for them, so we are free to think as we please, and in my thinking I am going to treat the good year 1900 as the last of the century.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁴ “The Sanctity of the Marriage Tie — Applicable to Our Slaves,” November 10, 1864, p. 1

²⁴⁵ “The Effects of Imperfect Legislation,” *South Western Baptist*, April 13, 1865, p. 1

²⁴⁶ “To the Slave Holders of Alabama,” April 13, 1865, p. 2

²⁴⁷ “The Emancipation Proclamation,” National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation>

²⁴⁸ Geo. L. Lee, “A Great Victory Gained,” *South Western Baptist*, September 17, 1863, p. 2

²⁴⁹ W.B.C., “Some Notes for the New Year Issue,” January 4, 1900, p. 1

Child labor. In early 1907, editor Frank Willis Barnett called for a stronger child labor law. *The Alabama Baptist's* front page showed pictures of children in cotton factories. Lint “clogs young lungs that were meant to expand with healthful draughts of pure air — and hundreds of the immature toilers sicken of pulmonary tuberculosis in the first five years of their inhuman slavery,” said an article attributed to *Woman's Home Companion*.²⁵⁰ The obstacle to stronger laws would be “[h]uman greed,” Barnett wrote, but “Christian sentiment, when this is awakened and massed,” would be mightier. “Study the subject and you will need no further incitement to come to the rescue of the children, both native and foreign.”²⁵¹ A week later, child labor was again the front-page topic, with one article declaring, “To kill a boy or girl by giving [to] him or to her too heavy burdens to bear is cruel! — let us call it by its right name — murder.”²⁵²

World War I. As the United States entered World War I, Barnett declared that “[t]he big question before us is one of food.” He urged country pastors who farmed to plant food crops and to encourage their neighbors to do the same. “A boy who raises an acre of corn is a patriot. A girl who sets out some tomatoes and later cans them is a heroine. ... If you are not compelled to go to the front, it's your duty to serve at home.”²⁵³ Meanwhile, Baptist boards were in debt and Baptists should not forget their duty to carry on the work; wartime opened missions opportunities.²⁵⁴ The following week, Barnett quoted Brother Crumpton (probably W.B. Crumpton) as saying that Alabama had thousands of untilled acres, hundreds or thousands of able-bodied men unemployed, thousands of the strongest young men who would be going to war, and “millions of unemployed money in the banks.” People were “on the verge of starvation,” and food prices were soaring, Crumpton continued. “The idea of making money should be eliminated.” Barnett added that preachers should “stir the people to action.”²⁵⁵

After Germany surrendered in November 1918, an editorial said that the churches' influence “has been unmeasured toward making vivid the flame of devotion and sacrifice for the nation's cause, intensifying and purifying the war conscience.” The paper called now for similar zeal behind “freedom's cause. ... America seeks the good will of all nations, as Germany aimed to be feared of all.”²⁵⁶

Debates with other editors. In August 1921, editor L.L. Gwaltney noted his differences with *The Birmingham News* about prohibition but commended *The News* for supporting enforcement of the Eighteenth Amendment (the prohibition amendment to the U.S. Constitution) and for speaking favorably of Alabama ministers. Therefore, he wrote, “let us forgive the *News* and express the hope that the great paper may yet become a champion of righteousness.” But then he criticized *The News* for supporting certain Sunday activities: movies, open ballparks and automobile riding.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ “This represents the interior ...,” *Woman's Home Companion*, reprinted in *The Alabama Baptist*, February 6, 1907, p. 1

²⁵¹ “A Better Child Labor Law Needed,” February 6, 1907, p. 2

²⁵² “Cheap Bodies, Cheaper Souls,” February 13, 1907, p. 1

²⁵³ Frank Willis Barnett, “We Must All Speak, Act and Serve Together,” April 18, 1917, p. 1

²⁵⁴ “Let's Put the Board out of Debt,” April 18, 1917, p. 1

²⁵⁵ “Mrs. Mathis and Brother Crumpton's Work,” April 25, 1917, p. 1

²⁵⁶ “Terms of Armistice with Germany,” November 20, 1918, p. 4

²⁵⁷ “Has *The Birmingham News* repented?,” August 18, 1921, p. 3

Gwaltney criticized daily newspapers for appealing to “sensation and shame” in their coverage of suicides, murders, robberies and lynchings. Gwaltney said that “the day will come when society will both resent and prevent divorce scandals and crimes of mad and deluded people from appearing in public print. To fill the air with sinful publicity no more prevents the wrong than a nation brandishing its arms will prevent war.”²⁵⁸

Gwaltney debated the editor of another Baptist paper, the *Western Recorder* of Kentucky, on the topic of survival of the fittest. “Now the editor of *The Alabama Baptist* is not looking for a controversy with the *Recorder*, but he does wonder if some of the good brethren who so vehemently and even abusively oppose everything that savors of modern science are not fighting against the truth,” Gwaltney wrote.²⁵⁹ Two months later, Gwaltney noted that the *Recorder* had suggested with irony that the Alabama paper ought to “enlighten” the Kentucky editor on the issue. Gwaltney replied: “The editor of the *Alabama Baptist* would not presume to instruct the *Recorder*, even if its editor were teachable. Men obsessed by one idea only are never to be taught.”²⁶⁰

The Alabama Baptist came into verbal conflict with three major jointly owned Alabama newspapers — *The Birmingham News*, *The Birmingham Age-Herald* and *The Montgomery Advertiser* — regarding what it did or did not publish about illegal floggings that many people connected with the Ku Klux Klan.

A *Birmingham News* editorial commended the Birmingham Baptist Pastors’ Conference for speaking out against these floggings but said *The Alabama Baptist* had maintained “singular silence.” “Is it too optimistic to hope that in its next issue even *The Alabama Baptist* will be nerved to smite the rule of Mask and Lash that now dominates this commonwealth and to smite it as effectively as that rule has been condemned by the Baptist Pastors’ Conference of Birmingham?” the editorial asked.²⁶¹

Grover C. Hall, editor of *The Montgomery Advertiser* (who won a Pulitzer Prize for his 1927 editorials against floggings) wrote that he had “looked in vain” for comments against the floggings by the Methodists’ *Alabama Christian Advocate* and *The Alabama Baptist*. “As much as the use of grog excites them [the editors],” Hall wrote, “they do not even deplore the Horrible Example to Youth set by the gang of praying knights who drank poor Jeff Calloway’s pint of liquor while they beat on his writhing body!” Nor, he continued, did their disdain for covetousness cause them to criticize a gang that flogged a black man “and compelled him to sacrifice his land.”²⁶² To a minister critic, H.H. McNeill of Prattville, Hall later wrote, “If you insist on praying for *The Advertiser*, we shall insist on being represented by counsel at the ceremony!”²⁶³

Gwaltney responded in a letter to *The News* that he also sent to *The Advertiser*. He upbraided *The News* for portraying him and some pastors as cowards and said *The News* was being inconsistent: Its editor was “about to tear his silk shirt because of these floggings,” but “if

²⁵⁸ “Sinful Publicity,” December 8, 1921, p. 3

²⁵⁹ “The *Western Recorder* and the Survival of the Fittest,” August 18, 1921, p. 3

²⁶⁰ “The *Western Recorder* and the Survival of the Fittest,” October 13, 1921, p. 3

²⁶¹ “Roger Williams’ Soul Goes Marching On!,” *The Birmingham News*, July 19, 1927, p. 8

²⁶² “*The Christian Advocate* and *The Alabama Baptist* Discuss a Number of Things,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, July 17, 1927, p. 4

²⁶³ “Dr. McNeill Joins Those Who Would Cramp Our Style,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, August 17, 1927, p. 4

the constituted authorities enforce with a firm hand the prohibition law[,] *The News* almost invariably (by insinuation and implication, at least) takes the side of those who break the law instead of those whose duty it is to enforce it.” He continued:

Finally, if the editors of *The News* and of *The Advertiser* are concerned with the personal faith of the editor of “The Alabama Baptist,” and it seems that they are, I can say that I have never belonged to the klan, therefore, “The Alabama Baptist” has not sold out to the klan, nor to the Jews, from whom *The News* draws much legitimate advertising; nor to the Knights of Columbus, whom *The News* never once attacked for their effort to embroil this country in the late Catholic trouble in Mexico, nor even to the Birmingham Baptist Ministers’ Union, or to any group in Alabama.²⁶⁴

In an *Alabama Baptist* editorial, Gwaltney reported that he had “been in a tilt” with the *News* and *Advertiser* editors. “The writer was quite astonished at the implication of the *News* and *Advertiser* that he would condone such lawless floggings as have been going on of late, whether they were perpetrated by Klansmen or any other group of men,” Gwaltney wrote. He said Alabama Baptist pastors would not condone such floggings. “Indeed, two men who are apparently in a position to know recently told this writer that the Klan itself neither condones nor indorses any such floggings, nor the infraction of any other law.” The Klan “has the same right to exist as the Knights of Columbus or any other secret order.”

If the excellent gentlemen who edit the *News* and the *Advertiser* would cease trying to direct the affairs of this whole mundane sphere, they would probably have more volunteers to follow their leadership. ... And the surest way to double the strength of the Klan in Alabama is for these dear editors to keep on as they are now going. ... [T]he editor of *The Alabama Baptist* very devoutly hopes and prays that Jews and Catholics and Protestants and Baptists and the Negroes and all foreigners with the daily and religious press thrown in may learn to live amicably together in this free and God-favored country under the laws of the civil government only. The thing above all others that makes this writer a Baptist is his denomination’s age-long contention for absolute and unconditional religious freedom.²⁶⁵

Three weeks later, an editorial traced the “History of Secret Organizations” to New Testament times, saying that Revelation may have been written in a way mysterious to Christianity’s enemies but “perfectly intelligible” to those in the faith, and that Christians formed secret organizations to protect themselves from the Roman Empire.

The modern Ku Klux Klan probably came into being by reason of the same fear and for the purpose of what [was] at least believed to be self-protection. At any rate, if the Knights of Columbus were to go out of being the Ku Klux Klan would probably not exist for longer than thirty days. ... Meantime, when the whole history of secret organizations is considered there is not a doubt but they have been beneficial in bringing a larger liberty to the common people.²⁶⁶

The *Alabama Christian Advocate*, official newspaper of the Alabama and North Alabama Methodist Conferences, commented that the *Advertiser* editor had overlooked anti-flogging editorials published earlier. *The Advocate* also mentioned that “dozens of men” were accusing *The Advertiser* of stirring up “a political issue under the guise of a moral question.” Governor Bibb Graves was being “viciously and unfairly fought by a wet press,” the *Advocate* said, and some believed it was because of his opposition to Al Smith, who was a Democratic candidate for

²⁶⁴ L.L. Gwaltney, “ ‘Roger Williams’ Soul Goes Marching On,’ ” *The Birmingham News–Age–Herald*, July 24, 1927, p. 8

²⁶⁵ “The Big Ado about Floggings,” July 28, 1927, p. 3

²⁶⁶ “History of Secret Organizations,” August 18, 1927, p. 3

President of the United States. All laws must be followed, including those against both alcohol and floggings, *The Advocate* said. Attacks on “the Christian ministry” would not deter Methodist preachers from “declaring the whole counsel of God” and refusing to let the daily papers dictate what they said.²⁶⁷

A letter to the *News* editor from J.W. Brown of Homewood accused the newspaper of fomenting distrust of Protestant ministers in order to elect “the wet Al Smith.” The writer blamed *The News*’ “Roman Catholic associate editor.”²⁶⁸ Victor Hanson, president and publisher of *The News* and *The Age-Herald*, denied rumors that *The Age-Herald* had been purchased with Roman Catholic money. He listed names and religious affiliations of various executives and editors — “thirteen Protestants and one Hebrew with not a Roman Catholic in the list.”²⁶⁹

An *Alabama Baptist* contributor also criticized what we now call the mainstream media. In a 1927, Deacon W.R. Sawyer of Beatrice expressed preference for the religious press, writing that “a large majority of the daily press are working against the best interest of the people at large. Some one has said that they are controlled by the Catholic church.” He continued: “The daily press plays up all manner of crime on the front page, magnifying it in every way possible, and puts in small type in some remote corner that which is best for the people.”²⁷⁰

Editor Leon Macon challenged a 1963 editorial in *The Southern Star*, a secular newspaper in Ozark, that made economic arguments for a county to go wet. “An editor is in a strategic place to influence public opinions,” he wrote. “It would be by far better for all editors to seek constantly to exert an influence for civic righteousness and not surrender convictions which are the very essence of that which sustains a good society in which to live.”²⁷¹

The economy. Wall Street financial markets’ crash on Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929, presaged the Great Depression. Only five days earlier, Gwaltney had warned that “[b]uying stocks on margin is nothing but gambling,” a result of “the lure of getting rich quick.” He called for “teaching and preaching,” which might save some people from becoming “hopelessly impoverished.”²⁷²

Bill of Rights, Bill of Duties. Less than two weeks before the 1941 Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor brought the United States into World War II, Gwaltney expressed agreement with two politicians — U.S. Vice President Henry A. Wallace and John Maynard Keynes, who was in the British Finance Ministry — about the roles of nations since World War I. Wallace had attacked the United States’ self-righteousness and isolationism, saying its desire to return to “normalcy” had caused it to refuse to accept world responsibility. Keynes had seen the consequences of what Gwaltney called “the stupidity and greed with which the great democracies pursued their course after the last war.” But what Gwaltney liked most from Wallace was his proposal for a Bill of Duties to supplement the Bill of Rights. “In a rather long observation of things,” Gwaltney wrote, “we have seen some men who were greatly concerned about places of honor and responsibility. We have even known some to pull the wires to get

²⁶⁷ “‘Is Saul Also Among the Prophets?’ ” *Alabama Christian Advocate*, July 28, 1927

²⁶⁸ J.W. Brown, “ ‘A Roman Catholic Associate Editor,’ ” *The Birmingham News–Age-Herald*, July 31, 1927, p. 12

²⁶⁹ Victor H. Hanson, “Religious Affiliations of The News, Its Publisher and Its Executives,” same page

²⁷⁰ W.R. Sawyer, “Concerning the Daily Press,” August 11, 1927, p. 4

²⁷¹ “Legalizing Intoxicating Liquors,” May 2, 1963, p. 3

²⁷² “The Pendulum Swings Back and Forth,” October 24, 1929, p. 3

themselves into such positions, then, they would enjoy their petty honors and become oblivious to their binding obligations.”²⁷³

World War II. “[T]he Baptists have always profited by war, Gwaltney wrote in his 1939 book *Heralds of Freedom*. Four days after Pearl Harbor, he reprinted an excerpt in *The Alabama Baptist*. After tracing history through four wars, he concluded: “The human spirit never ceases to seek relief from oppression, and sooner or later it bursts all the bonds of tyranny. . . . And the cause of the Baptists has always more easily succeeded on wrecked foundations than against the institutions of state and church when they are built on error and are supported by the political and ecclesiastical powers that be.”²⁷⁴

In the issue published five days after Pearl Harbor, Gwaltney thanked Japan — not for its military and diplomatic offenses but for unifying Americans and convincing isolationists that they were wrong. “But the greatest of all [is that] we may expect the Kingdom of God to come in in a new and unheard of way after this war is over. . . . Thus the outcome of this war eventually will be in defeat of the Axis powers, the establishment of an international court, and a fleet built by Britain and America that will completely dominate and control the seas.”²⁷⁵ Trust God, he said; find comfort and strength in churches.²⁷⁶ “This is the time to dream and work for a world in which justice and peace and mercy can live and grow and thrive.”²⁷⁷ The other side would lose “because of God. Because the very stars in their courses are against the hordes of darkness.”²⁷⁸

The eventual Allied victory in Europe showed that “Napoleon was wrong when he said God is on the side which has the greatest battalions,” Gwaltney wrote, “and Gen. Nathan Forrest (of the Southern Confederacy) was wrong when he was reported to have said that victory is on the side which gets there ‘furstest with the mostest.’ ” God was not on Germany’s side. “Thus it has been proved time and again in history that although men begin wars, God wins them and ends them.”²⁷⁹ He also wrote that President Harry Truman had made more references to God than either his predecessor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, or British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. “In this all true Christians may thank God and take courage that a man of God and of prayer is in the White House.”²⁸⁰

After the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan to hasten the end of the Pacific war, G.W. Riddle, assistant editor of *The Alabama Baptist*, noted such weapons’ potential to destroy civilization and expressed hope that “this same scientific achievement [will] be the sobering force which will rally all serious and religious men to pursue ever harder the permanent road to peace.”²⁸¹ Gwaltney, who was on vacation when Riddle published these words, later wrote that the atomic bomb had put churches “on the moral defensive.” Japanese children would “be taught what a supposedly Christian nation did to their country” but not about Japanese treachery. “Thus the atomic bomb has made the way of the Cross of Jesus much harder for the

²⁷³ “When Freedom Becomes Anarchy,” November 27, 1941, p. 3

²⁷⁴ L.L. Gwaltney, “How Wars Have Affected the Baptists,” December 11, 1941, p. 1

²⁷⁵ “Thanks to Japan,” December 11, 1941, p. 3

²⁷⁶ “The Main Thing Now,” December 11, 1941, p. 3

²⁷⁷ “Dream On!,” December 11, 1941, p. 3

²⁷⁸ “The Stars in Their Courses,” December 11, 1941, p. 3

²⁷⁹ L.L. Gwaltney, “He Maketh Wars to Cease,” May 17, 1945, pp. 1 and 5.

²⁸⁰ “Mr. Truman, a Man of Prayer,” May 17, 1945, p. 3

²⁸¹ G.W. Riddle, “The Potsdam Offer to the Japanese,” August 16, 1945, p. 3

Japanese people and all others who may be influenced by them.”²⁸² Gwaltney commended the U.S. Senate’s ratification of the United Nations charter, saying it had now been proven that President Woodrow Wilson was right when the Senate rejected his League of Nations proposal twenty-five years earlier.²⁸³ He warned that “[p]eace and prosperity and good times, as men call them, have their own dangers,” recalling the aftermath of World War I, when Americans “were riding for a fall and didn’t know it. ... And everything that happened in the 1920’s we shall see repeated during the remaining half-decade of the 1940’s.”²⁸⁴

Civil rights. “Treat the Colored People Better” was the title of a Frank Willis Barnett editorial in 1913. He reprinted the story of a dying man who said his particular regret was not being kinder to blacks. The man said his disparaging views of blacks had been colored by a book he read as a young man, but as he got closer to heaven, “I tell you that the souls of many black people are up there.”²⁸⁵

During the U.S. civil rights movement, which included demonstrations and violence in Alabama, editor Leon Macon called for law and order and said the state was more peaceful than many outsiders believed. He urged Alabamians to avoid inciting violence or being incited to it.²⁸⁶ “In many instances,” Macon wrote, “the Negro has not found justice but these things are being overcome very fast, and if the selfish groups will straighten out their own affairs first, and leave the South alone,” the South will probably solve its racial problems before the North does. “We do not believe either race is panting after intergration [sic], but would like to have similar opportunities.”²⁸⁷ He saw evidence that communists were using civil rights protests to divide the country.²⁸⁸

In 1963, *The Alabama Baptist* ran a Baptist Press story with a Birmingham dateline that said five blacks who worshipped on Easter Sunday at the white First Baptist Church of Birmingham “got a hand-shake from the pastor [Earl Stallings] as they left and were greeted by several church members.” First Presbyterian Church had also seated blacks that day, but they were turned away at three or four churches. Stallings had joined Jewish, Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy in urging local blacks to withdraw support from civil rights demonstrations, saying that “when rights are consistently denied,” the courts and negotiations were preferable to demonstrations.²⁸⁹ (Stallings and seven other clergy expressed these sentiments in an advertisement in *The Birmingham News* that provoked a now-famous rebuttal letter from civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., written from a Birmingham jail.²⁹⁰) Later that same year, another Baptist Press story noted that the District of Columbia Baptist Convention had accepted a black church for membership. The church’s pastor, Earl L. Harrison, was quoted as saying that the goal was Christian fellowship — that his church was not “spearheading any preconceived movement for racial integration.”²⁹¹

²⁸² “More about the Atomic Bombs,” September 6, 1945, p. 3

²⁸³ L.L. Gwaltney, “Momentous Events during Three Weeks,” August 30, 1945, p. 1

²⁸⁴ “Peace No Guarantee of the Millenium [sic],” August 30, 1945, p. 3

²⁸⁵ “Treat the Colored People Better,” February 13, 1907, p. 8

²⁸⁶ “Sensational Headlines,” July 6, 1961, p. 3

²⁸⁷ “The South Will Solve Its Problems,” February 15, 1963, p. 3

²⁸⁸ “Red Influence,” May 14, 1964, p. 3

²⁸⁹ “Five Negroes Seated in Alabama Church,” April 25, 1963, p. 6

²⁹⁰ “Statement by Alabama Clergymen,” April 12, 1963,

http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/kingweb/popular_requests/frequentdocs/clergy.pdf

²⁹¹ “D.C. Convention Accepts Negro Church,” December 5, 1963, p. 1

The bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, for which white supremacists were later convicted, drew Macon's condemnation in an editorial:

A Negro Baptist Church was bombed in Birmingham on Sunday, September 15, during services. We deplore such violence and especially so since four children were killed and some 20-odd other people were injured. Although we have never endorsed integration, we certainly do endorse law and order, for when these break down we have anarchy. . . . We do not know who is performing this violence in our largest city in Alabama. It could be radical white people, or radical Negroes who seek to stir up trouble, or it could be Communists. Each one of these areas should be thoroughly investigated and those who are guilty brought to justice.

Macon said he agreed with Governor George C. Wallace (who had drawn attention elsewhere as a vocal opponent of civil rights) in supporting law and order and opposing violence.²⁹²

Macon criticized the National Council of Churches for sending hundreds of students and fifty clergy volunteers as civil rights workers into states like Mississippi in the summer of 1964. This was "the social gospel action at white heat," Macon wrote. Preaching Christ, resurrection and salvation had been abandoned. These people were damaging the South's "Christian atmosphere" and would make law enforcement harder. "Southerners are concerned about the welfare of all races for there has been a warm, understanding relationship between the races for years and great progress was being made. . . . The basic fear of the South is the mongrelizing of the races . . ."²⁹³

The paper printed a Baptist Press story in 1966 concerning two Nigerian students who had joined a Baptist church in Richmond, Virginia. Four church members had challenged their admission, but a court dismissed the suit on a technicality. "The two Nigerian students, both sons of Nigerian Baptist ministers, have meanwhile continued as faithful members of the church."²⁹⁴

Macon wrote that evangelist Billy Graham "stuck to preaching the Gospel" in 1965 in Montgomery, where "people of all races were in full evidence at the meetings without any instances." Macon commented, "All Christians surely agree with Dr. Graham that Christ in the hearts of men will solve our problems where laws often irritate rather than soothe as love does."²⁹⁵ Macon defended the right of a Baptist church in Americus, Georgia, to bar civil rights workers, saying they were seeking not to worship but to generate publicity. "The church is no place to stir a turmoil for publicity's sake but is a place where conscientious people go to worship God. . . . There are not many racists in the South but there are many people who stand for and support fairness toward all."²⁹⁶

Deacon James C. McCary of Sylacauga disagreed with Macon. Race troubles were not caused by outsiders, McCary wrote; rather, outsiders "have brought to the surface conditions that have existed since the Negro was first brought to the South as a slave."²⁹⁷ Other letter writers told Macon that he was not speaking for all Alabama Baptists on civil rights. "I have become rather sick and tired of your 'George Wallace, too' editorials," wrote Earl A. Hasemeyer of Huntsville.²⁹⁸

²⁹² "Bombing Churches," September 19, 1963, p. 3

²⁹³ "The Social Gospel at White Heat," July 16, 1964, p. 3

²⁹⁴ "Richmond Church Suit Over Negroes Dismissed," April 7, 1966, p. 14

²⁹⁵ "Billy Graham Evangelistic Campaign," June 24, 1965, p. 3

²⁹⁶ "The Motive," November 25, 1965, p. 3

²⁹⁷ James C. McCary, "Letter to the Editor," September 17, 1964, p. 4

²⁹⁸ Letters to the editor from Earl A. Hasemeyer and from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Apperson, April 15, 1965, p. 9

After voting rights struggles in Selma erupted into violence, John R. Claypool of Louisville, Kentucky, the chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission, wired Governor Wallace that "you should grant to the Negro what you are willing to grant to any citizen of Alabama — specifically the privilege to vote and to express his opinion in an orderly fashion." William M. Dyal of Nashville, Tennessee, the commission's director of organization, sent Wallace a message "[e]xpressing deep Christian concern over brutal treatment of Alabama Negroes in Sunday's attempted march." *The Alabama Baptist* printed a Baptist Press news story about the telegrams,²⁹⁹ but Macon commented in an editorial that the church "should be more of an instrument to witness to the lost than to reform society." He declared that "alcoholism, dope users, rapes, murders, divorces and other crimes" were more dangerous than the race problem.³⁰⁰

"Regardless of our views," editor Hudson Baggett wrote in 1968, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., "was senseless and needless." His sixty-two-word editorial called for "soul searching and a willingness to help guide our nation in a Christian direction."³⁰¹

In a 2017 editorial following violent acts involving white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia, editor Bob Terry said that Christians and Alabamians must address racism. "Thankfully, Southern Baptists are on the right side of history," he wrote, "and on the right side of scriptural teaching ... Racism and white supremacy are wrong. They are wrong theologically. They are wrong morally. They are wrong socially."³⁰²

Religions and governments. Macon wrote that Baptists should be "very cautious about efforts to unite with the Catholic Church or others on an organizational basis." However, he said, recent dialogue among Catholics and other Christian bodies had caused Catholics to rethink traditions and move "largely in the direction of what Baptists believe."³⁰³ Macon opposed tax funding of sectarian schools, but he acknowledged the private schools might be "necessary" to avoid racial desegregation. He editorialized against a bill in the Alabama Legislature that would have required publicly owned school buses to transport students to parochial schools. "[T]he Roman Catholic Church is definitely seeking to get tax monies to operate its religious schools" as part of its missionary efforts, he wrote. "This is definitely an attempt to breach the Separation of Church and State in Alabama."³⁰⁴ A week later, Macon again addressed church-state separation in the context of private schools and desegregation of public schools. "We understand efforts will be made to close our public schools if integration is forced upon them by the Federal government," he began. "All of us know this will not be the best for our students, but if it becomes necessary to resort to private schools there is something each one of us should be careful to preserve." Granting tax money to "parochial and sectarian schools" would be wrong, he explained.³⁰⁵

Macon commended the U.S. Supreme Court for declaring it unconstitutional to require reading the Bible and reciting the Lord's Prayer in public schools. The decision "upheld our Constitution," he wrote, while not prohibiting such devotions. He said the decision would help

²⁹⁹ "Two Commission Officers Send Wallace Petitions," March 18, 1965, p. 5

³⁰⁰ "The Way of Christ," March 18, 1965, p. 3

³⁰¹ "Tragedy in Memphis," April 11, 1968, p. 2

³⁰² Bob Terry, "Racism Is Wrong," August 23, 2017, <http://www.thealabamabaptist.org/racism-is-wrong/>

³⁰³ "Good Coming out of Unity Movement," May 9, 1963, p. 3

³⁰⁴ "Aid to Parochial Schools in Alabama," May 23, 1963, p. 3

³⁰⁵ "Our Private Schools," May 30, 1963, p. 3

prevent tax money from being given to religious institutions, such as Catholic schools, and would also keep non-Christian and atheistic views out of the classrooms.³⁰⁶

Baggett criticized a federal court for ordering a nativity scene dropped unless the government limited its role in the annual Christmas Pageant of Peace near the White House. He could not quarrel with separation of church and state, but “to eliminate the nativity scene from a Christmas pageant is ridiculous.”³⁰⁷

During the 1997 state Baptist convention meeting, Dean Young of the Christian Family Association chastised Terry during a news conference for saying that a federal judge’s order regarding school prayer did not violate the constitutional guarantees that Baptists had fought for.³⁰⁸ Terry recalled later that he had written in favor of *voluntary* school prayer.³⁰⁹

After the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, Terry wrote that military action against the perpetrators could be a moral response, but striking out simply for revenge would not be moral; he said the Muslim perpetrators were criminals not acting on behalf of any religion because “[n]o religion condemns mass murder.”³¹⁰

Abortion. *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision legalizing abortion, was released January 22, 1973. An *Alabama Baptist* story from Baptist Press quoted Linda N. Coffee, a thirty-year-old Dallas lawyer who had represented plaintiff Norma McCorvey. Coffee was a Southern Baptist, and her mother was a secretary in the Texas Baptist Christian Education Commission. Coffee said the court decision absolved no one of “individual moral or religious responsibility,” and “it would tear me up to have to make a decision on abortion except in the early stages.” She said she would need “a compelling reason even then.”³¹¹

In a companion, exclusive Baptist Press story, McCorvey “shed her ‘Jane Doe’ legal identity” and, in her first public statement, said she had been unemployable and depressed when she decided to challenge Texas’ abortion restrictions. “No one showed me any compassion except my doctor and my lawyers,” she said. As for the morality and timing of an abortion, she said: “It’s hard to determine when life begins. I wouldn’t want to wait over three months for any abortion, because I might be ending a human life after that time.” Her child had been born and placed for adoption before the Supreme Court changed the law.³¹²

Hudson Baggett wrote at the time of Sanctity of Life Sunday in 1992 that the Bible “emphasizes the sanctity of human life as a part of God’s purpose and plan.” Related issues that threatened the human race included abortion, mercy killing, murder, suicide, and “all forms of violence that threaten the life, welfare, and health of human beings. These are moral issues, along with the AIDS epidemic, that cannot be ignored.”³¹³

In 1995, Bob Terry welcomed the conversion and repentance of McCorvey, the *Roe v. Wade* plaintiff. But he said it would be a mistake “to rush this new believer in Christ on to public

³⁰⁶ “The Supreme Court Upholds the Constitution,” June 27, 1963, p. 3

³⁰⁷ “Church-State: Ridiculous Extremes,” October 25, 1973, p. 2

³⁰⁸ Laurie A. Lattimore, “Ala. Baptists Address School Prayer Ruling,” Baptist Press, November 25, 1997, <http://www.bpnews.net/4988/ala-baptists-address-school-prayer-ruling>

³⁰⁹ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

³¹⁰ Bob Terry, “In the Midst of Tragedy,” September 20, 2001, p. 2

³¹¹ Baptist Press, “Fears Misinterpretation: Attorney Interprets Abortion Court Decision,” February 8, 1973, p. 5

³¹² Baptist Press, “Woman Tells Why She Sought Legal Relief,” February 8, 1973, p. 5

³¹³ “The Sanctity of Life,” January 23, 1992, p. 2

stages as an example of the transforming power of God.” Some celebrity conversions do not last, he noted. “A more biblical step would be for a strong Christian to adopt Miss McCorvey as a spiritual disciple and guide her through the struggles faced by every new believer. Yes, Jesus Christ changes the heart the moment one asks forgiveness of sin. Reconstructing a life takes a little longer.”³¹⁴

Gambling. In 1963, Leon Macon wrote favorably about Georgia Governor Carl Sanders’ vetoing a “pinball bill” after receiving a flood of letters “stimulated by the *Christian Index*, Georgia Baptist weekly.” Macon warned against efforts to legalize racing and pari-mutuel betting in Alabama.³¹⁵

Bob Terry said that when a state lottery referendum was held in 1999, some Baptist leaders told him that (in his words, paraphrasing them) “we have to make a token opposition to maintain our credibility, but we can’t win this — we’re going to have a lottery.” Public approval of the lottery proposal was at sixty-four percent. “And I said, not the case; we’re going to defeat it. . . . We started our stories. Week after week, day after day, we were pushing things against it. And after a while, that caught on. And Baptists were a very vital part in defeating the lottery, and everybody played a role. *The Alabama Baptist* played a *significant* role.”³¹⁶

Jennifer Rash, now editor-elect, said that working on that intense lottery news coverage of the late 1990s educated her about politics and what people are willing to do to “get their way.” When the state’s citizens voted on the lottery, “Alabama Baptists showed up and helped turn that around.” Power and money were overcome by “church people with no budget and no money.” About ten years later, the paper responded to the issue of electronic bingo, again with “a level of reporting that you don’t always get to do in any state Baptist newspaper.” The newspaper won a freedom-of-information award from the Alabama Press Association for a 2015 article analyzing and questioning projected state revenues from a lottery and casinos.³¹⁷

Politics and government. In 1966, an election year, guest editor Hudson Baggett (who soon would become editor) called on Christians to vote — even if it was for “the lesser of two evils.” The Bible, he said, “relates how people tried to do God’s will where they were in the midst of uncreative, unpleasant situations — in a slave labor camp in Egypt, under a despotic king named Ahab, in exile in Babylonia, or under cruel Roman rule.” But to give final allegiance to anything in politics would be idolatry because “[o]ur final allegiance belongs to God alone.”³¹⁸ Baggett warned against being expedient instead of doing right: the attitude that “If the race track will benefit business — let’s have it. If liquor will bring more trade, let’s sell it.”³¹⁹

In an editorial published on the day he died and shortly after the 1994 midterm elections, Baggett returned to the issue of politics. Most political issues have moral implications, he said — for example, stewardship of taxpayers’ money and the character of candidates. He said the amount of money needed to run for office bred corruption and influence-buying, and he decried negative campaigning that divided citizens more than unifying them.³²⁰

³¹⁴ Bob Terry, “Jane Doe Repents,” August 17, 1995, p. 2

³¹⁵ “Georgia Governor Vetoes Dangerous Bill,” May 2, 1963, p. 3

³¹⁶ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

³¹⁷ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

³¹⁸ “The Blessing of the Ballot,” March 3, 1966, p. 3

³¹⁹ “‘Made for the Skies — Yet Crammed in a Cage,’” March 19, 1966, p. 3

³²⁰ “Seeing the Good and Bad in Politics,” November 17, 1994, p. 2

News stories in late 1994 told how current events were intersecting with religious life. The Republican Party swept both houses of Congress on Election Day with the help of conservative Christians, of whom more than sixty percent voted for the GOP, according to exit polls. Alabama Senator Richard Shelby switched parties, from Democrat to Republican. Republican New Gingrich of Georgia was to become Speaker of the House of Representatives — meaning that three of the highest federal positions would be held by Southern Baptists: Gingrich, President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore.³²¹ Evangelist Billy Graham’s crusade in Atlanta that year brought what a news writer called a “spirit of reconciliation,” with Graham saying that “black and white will live together, in peace and look after the poor, the hungry, the naked, and the homeless.” Former President Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, was honorary chairman of the crusade, and former President George H.W. Bush, a Republican, showed support by visiting Graham’s hotel room.³²²

During Alabama’s contentious U.S. Senate campaign in 2017, Terry took exception after the state auditor compared candidate Roy Moore’s alleged sexual abuse of a fourteen-year-old girl to the relationship between Mary and Joseph in the Bible. Joseph may have been older than Mary, but they were legally married, Terry wrote. “The biblical story of Mary and Joseph is an account of righteousness, compassion, protection, self-sacrifice and self-control. It has no relationship to the other story currently in the news and it is factually wrong to compare the two.”³²³

Other current events and issues. After political leader William Jennings Bryan’s sudden death in 1925, *Alabama Baptist* writer W.B. Crumpton described Bryan as “a great moral leader,” giving him much of the credit for “an era of moral reform” and calling him “the greatest (lay) champion of the faith of the Gospel.” Crumpton said Bryan was religious — something that journalists didn’t understand, so they called him a hypocrite. Crumpton said he was glad that Bryan volunteered to help the prosecution of a Tennessee teacher (John T. Scopes) who taught evolution.³²⁴ Gwaltney’s editorial “Concerning Evolution” said the writer had always believed in a personal God as creator and that creation of humans was special, without one species crossing over into another. “In view of the fact that there is much about creation that no one knows and very probably no one will ever know, it seems a poor thing for Christian people to have a perpetual wrangle over.”³²⁵ Writing about teaching evolution in high schools in 1965, Leon Macon said that “God evidently used evolution as a process of creation as is seen in certain areas of life,” but the evolution of one species from a different species had “no ground in fact.” And no proven science conflicted with God’s Word.³²⁶

Gwaltney in 1927 observed that Benito Mussolini, premier of Italy, had gone from being “a country newspaper editor to his present position of power.” Mussolini had said that “it is all right to go from hut to palace, provided one is always ready to go from palace back to hut.”

³²¹ “Conservative Christians Play Role in Republican Takeover in Congress,” November 17, 1994, p. 20

³²² “Billy Graham Crusade Breaks Barriers of Discrimination, Generation, and Denomination,” November 17, 1994, p. 20

³²³ Bob Terry, “Opinion: Reference to Mary and Joseph ‘Inappropriate,’” November 15, 2017, <http://www.thealabamabaptist.org/opinion-reference-to-mary-and-joseph-inappropriate/>

³²⁴ W.B. Crumpton, “Reflections on William Jennings Bryan,” August 13, 1925, p. 5

³²⁵ “Concerning Evolution,” August 6, 1925, p. 3

³²⁶ “Evolution to Be Emphasized,” November 25, 1965, p. 3

Gwaltney said this might be a premonition because the world has a way of elevating and then demoting the mighty. He said it happened to preachers — even the Apostle Paul.³²⁷

“A Good Bill before the Legislature,” Gwaltney wrote in 1927, was one that would prohibit Sunday moving pictures, football and baseball where admission was charged. This was not an attempt to force religion on people, but the state had the right to say that “on one day (the Sabbath Day) no remunerative occupation shall be carried on.” The purpose was to avoid commercializing the Sabbath.³²⁸

Macon deplored the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy, offering “our hearts and sympathies as well as our prayers” to the Kennedy family and the nation. “Many do not believe in his political goals but no man has the right to take his life,” Macon wrote.³²⁹ Responding a week later to those who had blamed the Kennedy assassination on hatred in society, Macon decried the failure of “the Social Gospel”: “We ministers who are recognized as moral and ethical leaders should realize how hopeless it is to get people to act right who are not consciously aware of God and have not opened up their hearts to Him.”³³⁰

The paper takes a biblical view of marriage, editor-elect Jennifer Rash said in 2018, so it puts quotation marks around “marriage” when using that word regarding same-sex relationships.³³¹

Alabama odds and ends. Some news was not related to religion or Baptist affairs but resembled the content of a community weekly newspaper, and other newspapers were the sources of many items. Examples from August 1879:

¶ The house of Mr. B. Thompson was recently burned in Lee county. ¶ The boll worm is doing considerable damage to cotton in Marengo county. ¶ Five prisoners escaped from the Monroe county jail on the 19th inst. One of them was recaptured. ¶ A large number of Germans have moved to Birmingham from Cullman, and others are expected to follow. ¶ Mr. A.M. Lester was painfully but not dangerously injured by being thrown from a buggy, near Columbiana. ¶ A shoe maker named Patterson killed Chris Streater, in Eufaula last week, by a blow on his head with a shoe hammer. ¶ Mr. Robert Rabb, of Evergreen, killed a large rattlesnake recently, seven feet in length, with seven rattles and a button. ¶ Dr. Drennen, of Arkadelphia, has an 18 months old pig that weighs 600 pounds. Right good sized little pig, don't you think? — *Jasper Eagle*. ¶ We clip this from the Clayton *Courier*: An old lady called by her friends, “Aunt Sallie Mixon,” said to be 107 years old, died in Cox's Mill Beat one day last week. ¶ Says the Tusculumbia *Alabamian*: We are informed that a large black bear has been depredating on the corn fields three or four miles east of town, for a month or more. ¶ The Alabama State Convention of Universalists, for 1879, will be held at Camp Hill, Tallapoosa county, commencing on Friday before the fifth Sunday in August, and continuing three days. J.C. Burruss, the editor of the *Universalist Herald*, is President of the Convention. ¶ The negro “Faith Doctor,” of Tuscaloosa, is causing some excitement among the colored people of this place. ... Many of the superstitious creatures really have faith in this humbugging doctor. It is bad for the darkies but good for the railroad. — *Eutaw Whig*.³³²

Some items were more directly related to church issues but less specific as to who and where. These are from 1883:

³²⁷ “From Palace to Hut,” January 13, 1927, p. 3

³²⁸ “A Good Bill before the Legislature,” August 4, 1927, p. 3

³²⁹ “President Kennedy Assassinated,” November 28, 1963, p. 3

³³⁰ “‘Something Is Wrong,’ ” December 5, 1963, p. 3

³³¹ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

³³² “Alabama News,” August 28, 1879, p. 3

¶ We have heard of several men who have been excluded from Baptist churches for voting against prohibition and for recommending men as bar-keepers. ¶ A brother was arraigned on the charge of drunkenness. He plead [sic] guilty and said, “Brethren if it is contrary to the rules of the church I am sorry for it. But I didn’t know it was.” We did not learn the name of the pastor of this church.³³³

THE FUTURE OF *THE ALABAMA BAPTIST*: MULTIPLE PUBLISHING PLATFORMS, DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES

In the months between Hudson Baggett’s death in November 1994 and Bob Terry’s succession in August 1995, one guest editorial in *The Alabama Baptist* was especially pertinent to the newspaper’s future. The editorial focused on a central technology challenge and opportunity that Terry and other editors were facing: the dawn of the internet. However, the internet may not be the paper’s most significant challenge.

The guest writer was Dewey E. Mayfield, Sr., director of missions for Columbia Baptist Association in Dothan, who said he could remember driving a Model A Ford on a real highway. Now there was an “information superhighway” that included “e-mail systems, SBCNet, faxes, scanner, pictures on computer disks, and much more.” An associational office could receive information by numerous means, and then “[y]ou can receive it, believe it, refer it, store it, process it, dispense it, organize it, use it, scan it, share it, send it, mail it, fax it, trash it, delete it, embellish it, apply it, or simply ignore it.” Baptist associational workers were coping with an “information overload ... handling more and more information and doing it faster and faster.”³³⁴

The internet was to become an important means of publishing *The Alabama Baptist*, giving it potentially more reach than ever and making instant publishing possible, with a much richer variety of content (text, photos, videos, sound, interaction with readers). But the internet also makes almost everybody a publisher, overloads readers with random information, increases competition, upends revenue models, and often diminishes print circulation. The same opportunities and challenges confront journalists everywhere.

In a January 2018 interview, Terry said the most significant issue during his tenure has been the survival of *The Alabama Baptist* as a communications channel. Some other state Baptist papers have evolved into websites; some have print publications that come out less often than weekly.

But “a lot of our future depends on the nature of Baptists denominationally, and our future is more tied to that than it is whether or not people read in print or on a screen,” Terry said. Some churches are “cocooning” — turning inward, focusing on their own ministries and missions rather than the denomination’s.

They don’t care about information that connects us for missions and ministries. ... The big issue is, what’s the nature of Baptists? [People think] “Do I care that I’m Baptist? Do I want something named *The Alabama Baptist*? Those are distant cousins, and I don’t want to keep up with that part of the family.”

The name “Baptist” may be costing the paper both readers and advertisers, Terry said. But some people who do not identify themselves as Baptists would nonetheless profit from the discipleship resources that the paper offers. Some potential advertisers “won’t touch us with a ten-foot pole.”

³³³ “Alabama News,” November 1, 1883, p. 2

³³⁴ Dewey E. Mayfield, Sr., “Associating and the Information Highway,” June 8, 1995, p. 2

Changing the name of the newspaper would not work: “It’s like you are a new product, and you have to sell it all over again to the audience.” But one day it “might have a second product under a different name.” The acronym “TAB” is used on packets for prospective advertisers, among other places. The paper has a couple of hundred subscribers who are Christians but not Baptists, Terry said.³³⁵ He added later that there are subscribers in forty-eight states and several foreign countries and that starting a regional Christian newspaper might be an option.³³⁶

Since 1843, Terry said, the newspaper has connected Baptists to facilitate missions and ministries. But “that’s no longer our prime responsibility.” The newspaper’s first mission is not evangelism because its readers are already believers, he said. What they need is help in growing as disciples.

Our prime target now is developing the Christian disciples by providing, as we say in our [mission] statement, information for understanding and perspective and inspiration for growth as Christian disciples. You can go to any website or the web generally and Google a topic, and you’ll find a million and one facts. Well, those topics about which we report, we want not just to get facts, but we want to put them together in a way that will bring understanding and will bring perspective — to help our readers grow as Christian disciples because they understand, they have information, they can process it, they can reach their conclusions. And then, of course, inspiration is that part of where we’re trying to encourage people in the disciplines of the Christian life but also in their service so they’ll grow as God’s servants.³³⁷

“I think we have some serious evaluation to do,” editor-elect Jennifer Rash said in early 2018 — “first, to figure out what our role is going forward. I don’t think the concept of a state Baptist newspaper going forward will be the same, but I do think that it is absolutely vital that Alabama Baptists have a communication piece that would serve in what has traditionally been a newspaper role.”

That means that “we inform and we report factually and without promotional-type efforts, where it is a true traditional journalism-type reporting with high standards and high ethics and careful interpretation and informing,” she said. Denominational news will continue to be important, but “I think we are looking at maybe morphing into more of an information piece” for churches and believers. In this role, *The Alabama Baptist* informs them about family issues, personal Bible study, showing Christ’s love, social issues, mission opportunities offered by multiple organizations, successful ministries, and how people and churches can work together. It shows them how they can articulate their beliefs, be involved and make a difference — how to answer the question “What can I do as a believer and individual disciple of Jesus Christ and grow in my own personal journey?” For example, an article could describe the top ten Bible studies being used by Alabama Baptist churches and give an expert’s comments on their pros and cons. She sees a need to translate church jargon for the benefit of nontraditional readers. Rash explained:

If you are an individual Alabama Baptist and/or you’re an Alabama Baptist church, come here to get the highlights of what you need to know — the main points, the priorities, pieces — so you’re in the know, you’re staying connected, you know how to find each other, you can learn how to maybe think through some of the issues of the culture today so that you’re better equipped to have those conversations around the lunch table or at the coffee shop or at your office. You have some

³³⁵ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

³³⁶ Bob Terry, remarks at “*The Alabama Baptist: Celebrating 175 Years*,” Judson College, Marion, Alabama, February 6, 2018

³³⁷ Bob Terry, telephone interview with writer, January 19, 2018

intelligent information, some factual information that you can work with, and everybody's not just talking with emotion.

Rash expects the organization to operate on two tracks in the near future. She said it should keep making the printed newspaper better for the readers who are sticking with it. Meanwhile, it must develop digital products to communicate with “an audience that’s never been loyal to us” — people who use the internet and social media. “That strategy will be all-digital and all-multimedia,” with possibly a glossy magazine (issued less frequently than the newspaper) if those readers want it. Also, she is considering podcasts that could include a weekly news roundup and an abridged audio version of the newspaper. The latter could serve aging traditional readers who can no longer read.

The organization faces revenue challenges, she said. The revenue structure that worked well for decades will not “sustain us going forward.” The future may involve partnerships or memberships “where people will pay an annual fee to be a part of the community that we’re in,” as well as underwriting, endowments, and “al a carte” subscriptions to various products.³³⁸

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY CHANGE, BUT THE WORK OF CHRISTIAN JOURNALISTS GOES ON

Just half a century ago, *The Alabama Baptist* was using printing technology that Johannes Gutenberg would probably have recognized and understood. Gutenberg was a fifteenth-century printer — the first European to use movable type, which profoundly affected future events by making it possible to publish to the masses. The first book printed in Europe from movable type was Gutenberg’s Bible.³³⁹

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, advances in printing and digital communication have transformed publishing fast. Those who love newspapers — as journalists, readers or both — have had to put aside nostalgia and think about what exactly makes newspapers valuable. It is not the technology; it is what newspapers (or whatever they will be called) have always done and must continue to do: informing, inspiring and connecting people; helping them make good decisions; and recording events for history. But people today are not as dependent on editors and publishers, or even on churches and denominations, as they once were. If they need to know something, they can (as Bob Terry said) Google it or find a publisher who fits their needs (or their biases). The challenge for every publication is to compete for readers’ attention by offering valuable content that they cannot find elsewhere and by helping them to organize and understand what they know.

In John 8:31-32, Jesus was talking about more than journalism, but his words, which for years were a slogan of *The Alabama Baptist*, certainly inspire journalists and define an important purpose of their work:

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.³⁴⁰

³³⁸ Jennifer Davis Rash, telephone interview with writer, January 22, 2018

³³⁹ Johannes Gutenberg biography, <https://www.biography.com/people/johannes-gutenberg-9323828>

³⁴⁰ John 8:31-32, King James Version

No matter how its technology platform changes, *The Alabama Baptist* must continue to inform people. And its ministry will not only serve contemporaries, but will also create a record for those to come. That part of its role is described in Psalm 102:18:

Write down for the coming generation what the Lord has done, so that people not yet born will praise him.³⁴¹

John the Baptist described himself as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness.”³⁴² L.L. Gwaltney alluded to that Scripture in describing what an editorial does.³⁴³ The wilderness today is much different from wildernesses past. Previously, people needed information; today, they have so much information that they need journalists’ help to prioritize it and evaluate it. But the words of *The Alabama Baptist* a century ago still ring true:

The whole weight of the denomination ought to be given to our Baptist papers, because it is through them that truth can be disseminated broadly. They are the John-the-Baptist of every great denominational enterprise.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Psalm 102:18, Good News Translation

³⁴² John 1:23, King James Version

³⁴³ “Editorial on the Editorial,” July 14, 1927, p. 3 (described earlier in this paper)

³⁴⁴ J.B. Gambrell, “Get Behind Your Paper,” December 18, 1918, p. 1