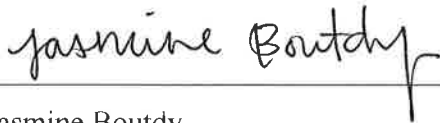


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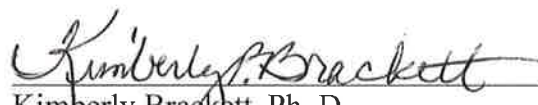
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**The Southern Baptist Convention and their Perception of Climate Change**  
by  
Jasmine Boutdy

An Undergraduate Thesis Submitted to  
The University Honors Program  
Auburn University at Montgomery

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in Sociology

  
David Feltmate, Ph. D. May 10, 2018

  
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The Southern Baptist Convention and their Perception of Global Warming  
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Growing up in Alabama, it was very common for me to have friends who went to church and identified themselves as Christians. I attended a Southern Baptist church through my teenage years and became a Christian at 17 years old. Throughout this time, I always tried to be a good Christian. I grew up in the latter end of the era where my Christian friends wore “what would Jesus do” bracelets. It was always around me and I, too, took on this question as a guide to how I should approach life. David Feltmate says, "A religion consists of the social structures and institutions that facilitate, support, and protect the belief that there is an unseen order and that our ultimate good relies on harmoniously adjusting to it" (Feltmate 2017, 11) If following Jesus was the way to get to heaven, then I would adjust my life accordingly. I listened intently to my youth leaders, pastor, and other members of the church as they taught me about the Bible and how I should live my life according to the Bible. Whenever issues in my life came up, I would seek the guidance of any and all of the people listed above. I trusted the authority of older leaders in the church, often without question. As I grew in my faith, I would encounter challenging circumstances or questions about my faith, I have generally found myself conceding to my leaders' counsel. But I have come across an issue in which I cannot quite adjust myself to the Southern Baptist Convention's side.

Over the past couple of years, I have become increasingly aware of and concerned about the issue of global warming/climate change. I have been taught the science behind the issue and I think that climate change is currently occurring and occurring at the hands of us humans. Agreeing with this urges me to take action to reduce my personal carbon footprint, as well as support action towards nationally reducing our carbon footprint, but some of my fellow Southern Baptists disagree. I have had conversations with only a

handful of friends that have expressed their opposition to the notion of global warming or the idea that human activity influences it. Why do they think so? They explained biblical reasoning behind their stance, coupled with the science opposing human-influenced global warming. This led me to question, “Why do a fair number of my Christian friends oppose global warming? Should Christians believe in climate change? Who do I listen to?”

As I delved into learning about who Southern Baptists are, I found their statement of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message, and a collection of their resolutions on various topics and issues. In 2007, The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) released a resolution stating their biblically-rooted stance on the topic of global warming. They are skeptical of the science backing global warming. That led into their concerns over policies that would result in economic consequences that could negatively impact, not only the United States, but the poor and underdeveloped nations. They also urge politicians to make political decisions with their arguments in mind. What I seek to understand through this research is who are Southern Baptists, how does the SBC form a relationship with politics, and how does the SBC’s interpretation of scripture and their relationship with politics influence their perception of global warming? The significance of studying this is to better understand how such a prominent religious group like the SBC came to have the powerful voice they have today and how that shapes the lives of, not only their members, but society at large.

To do so I will take a historical, sociological look at the events and circumstances that have shaped the SBC. I will navigate their story from their creation in 1845, to their relationship with the culture in which they were formed, to the cultural shifts in the

society, to the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy, and finally to the fundamentalist takeover of the denomination. I will introduce the relationship the SBC has with the culture it resides in and how their relationship plays a significant role in shaping each other. I will rely heavily on Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy* in understanding how the SBC fights for world maintenance through internal conflict between the fundamentalists and modernists over the nature of scripture. In better understanding who Southern Baptists are through their interpretation of scripture, I move forward in seeking to understand their relationship with politics. I will do so by looking at how American religion was restructured through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This section will look at how the SBC is a socially constructed religious institution residing in the social construction of society. Because they are socially constructed by people, they are able to be restructured by people. I will rely on Robert Wuthnow's *The Restructuring of American Religion* and James Davidson Hunter's *Culture Wars* to understand how American religion shifted from an internal structure of denominationalism to a political divide through a "culture war." Again, I will explore the relationship the SBC has with the culture it is surrounded by. As religion and politics interact, they elicit responses from each other and I will utilize the SBC's statement of faith to observe changes between the 1963 and 2000 revision to understand how they interact and influence each other. I will then look to studies that show the restructuring of American religion through the correlation between religious and political stances on the topics of abortion and homosexuality. This will provide insight to the relationship the SBC is able to have with politics coupled with their interpretation of scripture, which gives way for how their perception of climate change is formed. I will look at the resolution they passed on the topic as well as an analysis of a

study that researched the correlation between political party and perception of global warming. The SBC is the largest Protestant denomination, which allows it to have tremendous influence over a significant number of people. How they influence people, through their denomination and through politics, has the power to change the course of action, nationally and globally.

The SBC branches off from the Baptist denomination. Their origin dates back to 1845, after a Southerner, James Reeve was denied the ability to serve as a missionary under the American Baptist Home Mission Society because he was a slaveholder (Leonard, 29). Baptists in the South believed owning slaves was Scripturally-sound, so they then created their own denomination which would allow them to serve on mission. This schism, “division of the social structure of an organization into two or more independent parts,” between Baptists in the North and the South were what lead to the SBC becoming a sect, “a deviant religious organization with traditional beliefs and practices,” of the Baptist denomination (Stark and Bainbridge 1996, 124). The SBC still held onto much of the same theology as Baptists, but differed in some scriptural interpretation. Divisions amongst religious groups are actually common and expected. “We now show a schismatic tendency is inherent in the composition of religious bodies, a tendency that may combine with conducive social structure, as described in the preceding section, to produce overt fragmentation of religious organizations” (Stark and Bainbridge 134). This makes sense in that our understanding of these sacred texts are influenced by our social stock of knowledge as socialized to us by our environment. The South’s dependence on slave labor offers context for their understanding scripture. From this, we are able to see the influence of Southern culture upon the creation of the SBC.



As times evolve and innovations are made, we see society shifting. The phenomena of modernization, “a multifaceted notion, which encompasses the industrialization of work; the shift from villages to towns and cities; the replacement of the small community by the society; the rise of individualism; the rise of egalitarianism; and the rationalization both of thought and of social organization” is in motion through the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bruce 2). As scientific knowledge and technological advancements are expanding, so is the population and integration of the American culture and demographics. Cities are booming and people are moving out of the rural areas to different regions in the U.S. with cities and greater job opportunities. Nancy Ammerman found, “This migration to cities was simply a reflection of what was happening to Southern society. The South was changing in fundamental ways” (Ammerman 1990, 54). Post World War II, industrialization and urbanization are growing at rapid rates. Less than fifty percent of the South was rural, which was a fifteen percent drop from before World War II. Agricultural occupations dropped from thirty to ten percent. People were earning more money and catching up educationally. “The Sun Belt was born [after 1960], attracting non-Southerners into the region in greater numbers than ever before” (Ammerman 1990, 54). Northerners assimilated into the Southern, religious culture. “Having more non-Southerners in the population also introduces greater overall denominational heterogeneity” (Ammerman 1990, 55). This is significant to the Southern Baptist Convention’s identity because we previously saw how important social environment is to one’s understanding of reality. Our social environment provides us with a social stock of knowledge from which we draw on to make sense of our reality. As the social environment is changing, so is people’s social stock of knowledge, which in

turn affects how they understand their reality. As I move forward, this offers a minor background for understanding how people's thought process was shifting.

As the convention moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, scientific knowledge was expanding and some findings begin to contradict their interpretation of the Bible. This was a time the religious nomos was dominant among social institutions. One of the major questions that arose was over the story of creation and the nature of scripture was highlighted in the Scopes trial of the 1920s. The argument was between the State of Tennessee and John Scopes over John Scopes' decision to teach evolution in public schools (Gurrentz). The problem became a problem when the fundamental belief of biblical inerrancy of the Southern Baptist faith was confronted with the scientific theory of evolution. It was the threat of secularization, "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols" (Berger 2). If evolution is taught in schools, that message compromises the literal interpretation of creation in the book of Genesis and it challenges the SBC's system of legitimations understanding of reality. If allowed, a hole would be poked into the sacred canopy of the SBC that saturates Southern life. While Scopes lost the case, it was only the beginning of what would be a decades long controversy between fundamentalists, who believed in the literal interpretation of the Bible, and modernists, who derived moral lessons from the Bible rather than inerrant stories. It was a spark in the growing realization of secularization. The SBC was beginning to face the diminishing authority of the religious nomos in society.

Until 1925, the SBC, like many Baptists, clung to The New Hampshire Confession of Faith as the statement of faith which detailed their beliefs and set them

apart from other faiths. In 1925, the SBC revised and added to the New Hampshire Confession of Faith to form the “Baptist Faith and Message.” The creation of their own statement of faith was described in that “a pervasive anti-supernaturalism in the culture was answered by Southern Baptists in 1925, when the Baptist Faith and Message was first adopted by this Convention” (Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message). The New Hampshire Confession detailed the fundamentals of their beliefs about God, the Trinity, salvation, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, etc. The sections added into the Baptist Faith and Message were “Evangelism and Missions,” “Education,” “Stewardship,” “Co-Operation,” “Social Service,” “Peace and War,” and “Religious Liberty.” Each of the sections listed are intentional in that they establish how to live as a Southern Baptist within other social institutions. This reflects Peter Berger’s “sacred canopy,” where religion is like a covering that encompasses the entirety of one’s reality. As secularization furthers its reach among society, the SBC is also at work attempting to reclaim their authority within these social institutions. Each section is followed by a list of scripture used to justify their beliefs. This is the means through which they defined who they were and what they believe in a time where their system of legitimations was being challenged. Part of the challenge was this internal conflict between opposing view of the nature of scripture, whether it to interpret the scriptures literally or not. The fundamentalist/modernist controversy that began in the early 1900 would be highlighted to the public by the Scopes trial, which will go on to shape the Southern Baptist Convention into who they are today. This led to revisions to the statement of faith in 1963 and 2000. The revisions reflected how the SBC was defining themselves in the

midst over the changing definitions of American culture. How they oriented themselves in the in the shifting culture hinged upon how they interpreted scripture.

Through the first half of the 20th century various seminaries were growing weary of professors' teachings and the spread of liberalism among their schools. Professors found doing so were released from their position. According to the Association of Religious Data Archives, the beginning of the moderate "purge" was in 1958 when 13 moderate professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary were fired after coming forward with concerns about the conservative direction in which the seminary was moving in contrast to their moderate teaching (Matzko). Many of them ultimately moved to teaching at the, then, newly formed Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. One of those professors being Ralph Elliot. Years later, in 1961, the pinnacle of the controversy erupted when Ralph Elliot published *Message of Genesis* (Matzko). Elliot provided commentary on the book of Genesis through modernist theology. He claimed that rather than Genesis being historically accurate, that the stories were parables eluding to religious truths. This upset conservatives, as they firmly believed in the literal truth of the Bible. The Southern Baptist Sunday School Board published it and the backlash was felt from all areas of the convention. Pastors and church members were withholding their financial contributions to the Cooperative Program if it meant their funds were supporting the modernist theology they were against. It was at this point that the fundamentalist/modernist controversy had really sparked the attention of the convention. This led to the decision to formulate a revision to the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message. According to Wills, it was their response to "stem the growth of liberal theology in the seminaries" (Wills 13). As stated by Southern Baptists in the 2000 revision of the Baptist

Faith and Message, “In 1963, Southern Baptists responded to assaults upon the authority and truthfulness of the Bible by adopting revisions to the Baptist Faith and Message” (Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message).

The debate over what was to be taught in schools persisted and the schism over biblical inerrancy intensified. Gregory A. Wills, Associate Professor of Church History and Director of the Center for the Study of the Southern Baptist Convention at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, detailed the educational controversy surrounding the convention around the 1950s and 60s. It was during the late 1800s and through the 1900s that scientific knowledge increased, but along with that came with the increase in disbelief in biblical inerrancy. The science that was being discovered in this time did not align with biblical scripture, but was being taught within Southern Baptist seminaries. As a result there were two different responses from modernists and conservatives. One side Wills found was that “liberal theology spread significantly as [modernists] sought an “intelligent” response to the threat of irreligion posed by the established scientific approaches to evolution and biblical criticism rooted in historicism and comparative religion” (Wills 13). In contrast, “conservatives became convinced that liberalism originating from the seminaries gravely imperiled the denomination” (Wills 13). Both groups held the same fear that as a result of these new scientific, contradictory findings that the SBC was moving towards its demise. Where they disagreed was the means in which the SBC would approach their demise. Modernists saw the contradiction and how their beliefs would be discredited by the science, thus leading to the vast number of people leaving the convention or a decrease in the growth of the convention. Either way, they saw the deterioration of the convention ahead, so they strove to conform their beliefs

according to the science to appeal to society. Conservatives saw liberal theology as a threat to their belief of biblical inerrancy, thus demolishing the foundation of their faith. In response, they disregarded any science that challenged scripture in order to keep their faith “pure.” Both see the threat of secularization, but see different means of combatting the issue. As they take these different approaches, both are fighting for world maintenance of their sacred canopy.

The ability to steer the SBC into a certain direction was being fought for for decades. The gravity of the conflict is that both sides have differing beliefs in the correct way to approach scripture in order to achieve salvation. For fundamentalists, Diane Winston, professor of Media and Religion at the University of Southern California, explained, “Call for inerrancy, the belief that scripture is without error, came about. Either you believed the biblical accounts were real-Jonah's survival in the belly of the whale, Jesus' resurrection- or you didn't...Fighting it meant fighting against the Bible; and within Baptist life, where scripture is paramount, opposing the flag, motherhood, and apple pie would have been an easier mission" (Ammerman 1993, 16). This interpretation of scripture legitimates their means of obtaining salvation, so the fight to preserve it was crucial to that. How are legitimations maintained? They are maintained through the repeated socialization to upcoming generations. Berger stated, “Not only children but adults as well “forget” the legitimating answers. They must be repeated” (31). The repetitiveness of myth and their implication carries on the importance and meaning onto each upcoming generation, thus maintaining the nomos. Myths pass along knowledge and how one interprets that myth frames our way of thinking and behaving. I connect this to Berger when he said, “It will be clear from the above that, in one sense, all socially

objective “knowledge” is legitimating” (30). Once religious myths are objectivated for people, they become seen as an external source of authority among them. That is why fundamentalists found it so crucial that education be framed a certain way to maintain their nomos.

In order to maintain the SBC’s sacred canopy, both sides realized that one would need to seize dominance over the SBC in order to frame the denomination. The dominant group of a culture has the power to set the framework of that society. They have the resources to enforce authority and influence behavior. Graeme MacQueen, retired professor of religious studies at McMaster University, Ontario, quoted Karl Marx explaining, “The class, which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production...The ruling ideas are nothing more than...the ideas of its dominance” (145). Certain fundamentalists saw this as the avenue which they needed to pursue and they did so. Bill Powell and M.O. Owens saw the rise of liberalism in classes at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and supported the firing of those who did not agree and teach biblical inerrancy. Owens detailed the battle they were facing, “The basic issue before Southern Baptists today is the nature of Scripture, and its reliability as a historical document or as attestation to the real person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Southern Baptists are now face to face with this issue. If we accept the secularized, rationalistic view of the Bible we have no place to go except to existentialize our thinking. Then we shall find ourselves led down the same path other denominations have gone, and ultimately cast on the trash pile of history. The crisis is upon us!” (Morgan 31). The dire rhetoric he used was done so to frame the situation as a crisis to illicit emotions that would drive others to rally behind the cause.

As both Owens and Powell crusaded during the 1960s and 70s, they developed a strategy they believed would be the way to reclaiming the convention they saw slipping from their grasp. The strategy was to orchestrate the election of a fundamentalist president of the SBC to then push for the election of fundamentalist trustees who would steer the convention back. The problem to their plan was the lack of funding to increase their influence. But where they fell off, two others came along to pick up the torch and carry it to the finish line. Next came Paul Pressler and Paige Patterson. What would be deemed a “holy war” would meet its end in June 1985 (Ammerman 1990, 3). For years prior to June 1985, Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler had been victorious in the election of convention presidents. In the process of doing so, they were able to control who held what positions in power, which ultimately allowed them to diminish the modernist influence on the denomination. In the 1985 election for the SBC presidency, it was between Charles Stanley (fundamentalist) vs Winfred Moore (conservative moderate). Charles Stanley was victorious. "When the Peace Committee presented its final report in 1987, conservatives declared that the war was over. “We have settled the issue of the Bible," they said. It was clear that a conservative victory was assured and that the Southern Baptist Convention would take a more conservative direction. Those who wanted to remain a part of the denomination would have to accept that change in direction" (11). The end of this holy war is what has shaped the SBC into who they are today in terms of their fundamentalist foundation. Who they are then plays a role in shaping the lives of their members. This is who the SBC is. Following a literal interpretation frames the thoughts of their members a certain way, which is then played out in the actions of their members.



How does the SBC form a relationship with politics? I have reviewed the history of the SBC and how they have come to have this base of fundamentalism that shapes their interpretation of scripture. That navigated a portion of the internal conflict that has played a role in shaping the SBC, but now I look to external challenges that play a role in shaping who they are. While fundamentalists were able to gain dominance over the SBC, they were just one of many denominations yearning to make their voice heard in the public culture. The culture of the United States was changing. Through the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States encountered the Civil Rights Movement, Feminist Movement, the growing question and concern over abortion, etc. With these various cases, the government played a significant role in them through the policy changes they made over these issues. They had the ability to frame the way in which these issues were to be perceived in the public culture. But there were also groups at this time fighting against the framework the government has established. I previously mentioned the Scopes trial where the question over evolution being taught in public schools was a battle being fought between religion and science in the political arena. The case for it to be taught in public schools lost, but what it revealed was that there is this relationship between religion and politics. By understanding it we are able to better understand religious and political decisions. As I seek to understand this relationship, it is also important to understand the nature of the institutions I am looking at.

Society is a social construction. The institutions of religion and politics are social constructions. As I use the term “social construction,” I do not mean any of the above are fake or not real. I utilize social construction to explain how our understanding of these institutions are socially constructed in the rhetoric we use to frame the circumstances.

Joel Best explained, “Saying that poverty is a social construction does not mean that poverty doesn’t exist, that is somehow doesn’t occur in the real world; obviously some people have more than others. But the words we choose to describe those people (impoverished, for instance, rather than wretched or depraved—terms that were once used to describe the poor), how we explain their condition, and what we recommend doing about it are meanings that people create to use” (14). This concept will be significant in understanding the institution of religion and politics in that they are created and maintained by people. It is a dialectic relationship where institutions influence social actors and social actors thus influence the institution. While the institutions are established and exert tremendous restraints upon those who adhere to them, people are still able to enact human agency, and with enough people, the institution can be changed. They may be changed in the diction they use, the way in which they operate, etc. That was what I was able to see previously with the formation of the SBC. Their statement of faith is the means through which they define themselves to others. It was formulated by certain people in a certain time in a certain place. After its creation in 1925, there were two separate revisions in 1963 and 2000. In evaluating how Southern Baptists defined themselves I am able to see how they orient themselves into society.

Sociologist Mary Douglas found that people interact in and around a matrix of lines and boundaries, socially constructed by the society. She said, “Much of our behavior and much of our discourse is, in fact, guided by these boundaries—these structures—and is concerned with making sure that these boundaries are affirmed. Consequently, symbolic boundaries are both powerful in their effects and are accorded power by the ways in which we act and think toward them” (Wuthnow 9). The social

construction of this matrix is done so through the rhetoric used to frame the circumstances in order to achieve a desired outcome. It is a matter of how people define and perceive aspects of society, as well as who has the authority to define them. Society, the public sphere, as a whole has a matrix of its own. As we move into various social institutions within society, we are able to see that each institution also operates within their own matrix. Social institutions seldom exist without interactions with other institutions. People interact with various institutions throughout their life and so as a result, institutions will blend and overlap. Conflict arises as institutions exert, or attempt to exert, dominance over other institutions. That is what we see happening as American religion encounters a growing secular culture and the expansive power of the government. Robert Wuthnow frames the restructuring of American religion well in explaining, “It is concerned with the public dimensions of religious culture in the United States: the utterances and acts of religious leaders, the aggregate categories into which individuals define themselves religiously, the ways in which religious bodies enter into public discourse on matters, for example, of collective value, politics, and economics. Much of this is concerned with what might be commonly recognized as the cultural dimension of American religion. But culture always exists in a social environment. It draws resources from that environment, reflects the categories and distinctions built into that environment, and is influenced by the environment in the very act of trying to influence it” (10). In order to understand the SBC’s relationship with politics, I look to American religion as the encompassing term in which the SBC is incorporated in to study the relationship between religion and politics.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, American religion comprised of various denominations, primarily Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. The religious population appeared to be divided regionally and denominationally. Wuthnow observed, “Traditionally, the South and Midwest were characterized by higher levels of religious observance than the national average, while the West and Northwest had lower than average levels of religious observance...In some ways it may have reflected denominational differences (e.g. more Baptists in the South), but it was a product of regional subcultures as well” (85). Looking at America as a whole, Wuthnow’s observance reveals the segregation of the nation religiously, as well as culturally. Within the regions, the dominant religion and culture played off each other. Culture provides “the common-sense world of everyday life equipped with specific bodies of knowledge. What is more, I know that others share at least part of this knowledge, and they know that I know this. My interaction with others in everyday life is, therefore, constantly affected by our common participation in the available social stock of knowledge” (Berger 56). The dominant religion of a region draws from the knowledge and ways of the culture of the region for understanding. The culture then also draws upon the religion.

The massive regional distinction allowed each denominations’ limited interaction with one another, leaving their legitimations to persist with minimal questioning. Questions that did arise were questions of doctrine between the denominations. Within American religion, there was a general understanding agreed upon the belief in this particular god between Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. The differences arose out of how to interpret, approach, and serve that god. Each denomination provided answers to those questions, which in turn was used as an identity for their members. This denominational

identity was a significant source of the boundaries that constituted American religion. But as the culture began to shift, Wuthnow found, “Greater levels of regional migration, together with forces in the economy that have promoted similarities in social standing among persons of different religious heritages, appear to have contributed to the easing of religious tensions” (97). As demographics of the American population shifted, so did the society. People were moving regionally and immigration brought in people of various backgrounds and beliefs. There is also an economical and educational boom happening. Wuthnow continued, “And perhaps more than anything else, rising levels of education have worked as a social solvent. As the population has become better educated, denominational barriers have ceased to function as hermitic categories of religious identification” (97). As a result, denominational members were becoming increasingly homogenous and society was becoming increasingly secular. As the culture of society is secularized, it affects the religions as we saw their dialectic relationship above. and vice versa. And while religion’s place in various social institutions was decreasing, pluralism’s increase at the same time began to offer various different faiths. Both were a perceived threat to the existing American religious system, but it would not result in the death of American religion. As the sacred canopy of American religion was being poked and prodded, its denominational barriers became increasingly insignificant in light of the issues surrounding the time. The denominations would not become irrelevant, but the core beliefs they similarly held would be what unites them in the war to come.

As the makeup of the society changed, so did the politics. The government is reflective of the people they represent. Political identities were not always divisive on moral issues, but society was changing and more and more people were bring cases to the

court, where they were fighting over the establishments of family, education, media, law, etc. James Hunter explains the phenomena that would be dubbed the “culture war,” “Our most fundamental ideas about who we are as Americans are now at odds. Because this is a culture war, the nub of political disagreement today on the range of issues debated—whether abortion, child care, funding for the arts, affirmative action and quotas, gay rights, values in public education, or multiculturalism—can be traced ultimately and finally to the matter of moral authority. By moral authority I mean the basis by which people determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on.” (42). There was the Scopes trial of the 1920, where the teaching of evolution in public schools was called into question. It was a debate that would persist many decades. What questions on issues like evolution did was challenge the plausibility structure of the religion against science. The core of the arguments that will come to shape American religion are the questions of morality and who has the right to say so.

As this cultural shift is taking place, denominational differences were quieted. Religion’s traditional means of legitimation were not standing up to the legitimations of science. While secularization was a force that played a role in the cultural shift, some integrated the science and rationale into their sacred canopy and others would stand against it at all costs. This cultivated the “religious liberal” and “religious conservative” identities rooted in differing scriptural interpretation and aligned with differing political stances. The larger question of religion was no longer along the lines of doctrine, but of religion’s place in society. It is who gets to define the understanding of society. This urged religious groups to formulate “special purpose groups” that would be the vessel to

carry their voice into the conversation of the public sphere. Groups like Moral Majority, Christian Voice, Religious Roundtable, and the National Christian Action Council emerge. As the denominational lines blurred and as the identifying terms for the opposing sides were formed, the conservative “right” longed to move from the fundamentalist label because of the negative associations it entailed. They “retained an emphasis on scripture...The new label they chose to emphasize was “evangelicalism.” Recognizing the interest in “evangelizing” the world that remained strong in most of the established denominations, they saw this thrust as both vital to the future of American Christianity in general and the key to the success of their own movement” (Wuthnow 173). The matrix of American religion was reframed as it was shaped by the public culture, while it also yearned to shape the social environment it is in.

The fight for the public sphere took place in the political arena. The fight over abortion was one that highlighted the debate over moral authority. Hunter defined moral authority above, but he also defines it as the “fundamental assumptions that guide our perceptions of the world” (119). He goes on to explain how all base their views upon some moral authority whether that be through religious texts or their own logic. Abortion came onto the scene as a major issue that caused a significant divide based on moral authority. In the case of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), as abortion was deemed constitutional, religious groups took great opposition to this. The government’s hand in the issue of abortion raised concerns over the nature of the issue and who was able to have authority over it. The government’s ability to allow for legal abortions offered a lens in which people in America view this issue. How was this significant? Berger said, “Society is the guardian of order and meaning not only objectively, in its institutional structures, but

subjectively as well, in its structuring of individual consciousness” (22). It goes back to that dialectic relationship between the institution and the actor. The government is not necessarily the being making the political decisions, it is the politicians that are voted in by the people to represent the people. The government is a reflection of its people and their ideals and values. The newly aligned groups under American religion, evangelicals and religious liberals, were the battle sides of American religion. These groups could influence the government by pushing for its values and ideals, but the government’s authority could also influence and change people’s values and ideals. Hunter explained, “the assumptions and the interests of each alliance prelude or endorse the specific proposals from the outset. Moral logic reflects those interests and assumptions, thus for example, abortion is murder and must be stopped if human life is defined as beginning at conception. Legalized abortion is morally acceptable and therefore a viable public policy if life is defined as beginning with first breath at birth or perhaps the third or even second trimester of pregnancy” (127). It was the fight to have the ability to define American society, and by defining it, influence the thoughts and actions of society. It was the attachment of religious beliefs to the power of the government in stride towards further legitimations and reach of their beliefs. It is just like I saw with the bureaucratic takeover of the SBC. Gain control of the source of power and you are able to control the narrative.

While this was a macro level look at American religion, it offers insight to how the SBC’s voice was integrated into the conversation. As I mentioned before, the *Baptist Faith and Message* is the SBC’s statement of faith, which they have revised twice since its creation in 1925. This statement tells Southern Baptists who they are by telling them what Southern Baptists believe. This falls in line with Berger’s explanation of world-



maintenance, “Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality, both objective (as common, taken-for-granted facticity) and subjective (as faculty imposing itself on individual consciousness), depends upon specific social processes, namely those processes that ongoingly reconstruct and maintain the particular worlds in question” (Berger 45). Because the SBC was socially constructed it can be restructured and deconstructed, so it must be maintained. To keep challenging thoughts at bay, the *Faith and Message* provides the framework through which members are reminded of their interpretation of scripture, which then guides their beliefs and actions. Below, I created a chart detailing the changes made to the *Faith and Message* from the 1963 statement to the 2000.

Section	1963	2000	Commentary
Preamble		“The Convention added an article on “The Family” in 1998, thus answering cultural confusion with the clear teachings of Scripture. Now, faced with a culture hostile to the very notion of truth, this generation of Baptists must claim anew the eternal truths of the Christian faith.”	The purpose of the revision of the statement is to renew their claim to truth that they find through the Bible in their faith. They renew their claim to truth against the changing culture.
	“Baptists emphasize the soul’s competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer. However, this emphasis should not be interpreted to mean that there is an absence of certain	“We honor the principles of soul competency and the priesthood of believers, affirming together both our liberty in Christ and our accountability to each other under the Word of God. Baptist	The change to refer to the statement of faith as an “instrument of doctrinal accountability” describes the role this document should play in the lives of Southern Baptist. The statements made about the listed topics, rooted in the

	definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified with.”	churches, associations, and general bodies have adopted confessions of faith as a witness to the world, and as instruments of doctrinal accountability.”	writers’ interpretation of scripture, are what Southern Baptists claim to believe. The statement of faith holds Southern Baptists accountable to what SBC leaders say they should believe. This is a response to the fundamentalist/modernist controversy, where the group was divided in how to interpret scripture. The SBC now clarifies that the doctrine and beliefs listed in the statement are what the SBC holds as true. If you disagree, then you are not a Southern Baptist.
I. Scripture		Added “Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy.”	By adding “all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy,” this reaffirms the fundamentalist view on scripture, that scriptural interpretation is to be done literally.
VI. Church	“A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers...committed to His teachings...”	“A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a local body of baptized believers...governed by His laws...”	This shift changes the way the Church and people are to respond to scripture. They should not merely be committed to the teaching, which could give way for differing interpretations people would follow, but they should be governed by the scripture. I think using “governed by His laws” urges people to use the literal interpretation of scripture and that it should directly influence their actions.

VIII. The Lord's Day	<p>“[The Lord’s Day]...should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, and by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employment’s, work of necessity and mercy only being accepted.”</p>	<p>“Activities on the Lord’s Day should be commensurate with the Christian’s conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”</p>	<p>Modernism in the wider culture, the culture many members also live in, changed the daily lives of the people and so here we see the institution also changing as a result.</p>
XV. The Christian and Social Order	<p>“The Christian should oppose, in the spirit of Christ, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice.”</p>	<p>“Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography.”</p>	<p>New cultural movements arise in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century like the Civil Rights, Feminist, and LGBTQ movements that influence the SBC to respond to. I see them standing up against racism, which is interesting to see the shift since their creation was over the issue of slavery. Through their addition to oppose “all forms of sexual immorality,” sexual immorality describing sexual acts and orientation, I see them responding to the LGBTQ movement.</p>
		<p>“We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death.”</p>	<p>Here, they state their stance against abortion through their definition of “human life.”</p>
XVIII. The Family		<p>“Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in</p>	<p>The entire section, “The Family,” was added to the revision and again,</p>

		covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.”	addresses sexual orientation through marriage and the definition of marriage.
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The changes made in the sections, “Preamble,” “Scripture,” and “Church,” reinforce the fundamentalist foundation they previously established. It reiterates the manner in which they interpret scripture literally, which influences how they perceive and respond to issues that arise. Beneath each section, they list scripture from which they drew from to form their stance for each section. Looking at the section, “The Lord’s Day,” I am able to see this dialectic relationship between religion and society play out. Through this dialectic relationship, “it is possible to show in concrete instances how religious “ideas,” even very abstruse ones, led to empirically available changes in the social structure” (Berger 128), but also vice versa. The previous structure of the relationship allowed Sunday, the Lord’s Day, to be a day of rest from the secular activities done. But as the larger society changed in urban-and modernization, so did the religion. How they interpreted the scriptures on the matter changed. It reveals how scriptural interpretation, even literal, is not as firm as I once thought. The argument, “That’s what the Bible says,” does not hold the same weight for me as it did before

because people will continually be in the process of interpreting the Bible and how they interpret it can and will change. The sections “The Christian and Social Order” and “The Family” are what highlight the relationship between religion and society and between religion and politics. The issues of homosexuality/same-sex marriage and abortion are two major issues in the public realm that allow me to more clearly see how American religion was restructured.

In the chart above and in the statement of faith, I saw how the SBC made the additions to the revised statement. They stated their stance against the issues of homosexuality and abortion. But why were they just now adding these statements when these topics have been around? It was because the society at large was taking greater interest in the topics and the growing interest contradicted scripture. The government became increasingly involved with these issues as well. In 1973, the *Roe v Wade* case deemed abortions a right according to the U.S. Constitution. The legal justification for abortion challenged evangelicals Biblical legitimations against abortion. This was where special purpose groups arose to stand against the growing acceptance and institutionalized policies. Gallup polls found that in 1975, 18 percent of Republicans agreed abortion should be legal under any circumstance, while 19 percent of Democrats agreed (Saad). As time went on, it was found that the trends to follow fluctuated but was consistent that Republican grew more conservative and Democrats grew more liberal towards the question. The same poll found that in 2009, 12 percent of Republicans agreed with the previous statement, while 32 percent of Democrats agreed. The growing polarization shows a correlation between Republicans and the SBC in that Republican poll showed a decrease and lower percentage that thought abortion should be legal. The

spark to the LGBTQ movement came in 1969, when police raided Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City, and the people protested and fought back. That encouraged protests around the country. As the U.S. moved into the 1990s, America watched Ellen DeGeneres come out on television. Increased access to media allowed for the increased portrayal of homosexuality in the public sphere, which contributed to the growing political attention and acceptance of homosexuality. Pew Research found that in 1994, 58 percent of Republicans agreed that homosexuality should be discouraged by society, while 42 percent of Democrats did. Then in 2017, 37 percent of Republicans agreed, while 13 percent of Democrats did (Partisan Gap). To align the SBC with one of the two groups, again, ideologies would correlate the SBC to the Republican Party.

I see the increasing polarization between the two political parties on the matter, but why is this so? Philip Schwadel, Sociology professor from the University of Nebraska found, “In particular, the growth of the Christian Right in the 1980s could have promoted political realignment by drawing evangelicals to the Republican Party, by pushing non-evangelicals away, and by encouraging liberals to change religious affiliations or disaffiliate from organized religion (Putnam and Campbell, 2010)... It did so, they argue, by emphasizing moral and social issues, and differences between candidates on these issues.” (293). This reiterates Hunter’s assertion that the conversation moved towards moral issues and the fight was over who had the right over moral authority. He continued in saying, “Several researchers suggest that the mutual emphasis on “traditional values,” “family values,” or “moral values” is a key component in the connection between evangelical Protestantism and the Republican Party (e.g. Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008; Layman and Carsey, 2002); and, as Greeley and Hout (2006: 134) note, in the evangelical

community “‘Family values’ and ‘moral values’ apparently means abortion and homosexuality...it may be views on abortion and homosexuality rather than religious affiliation itself that leads many evangelicals to affiliate with the Republican Party” (Schwadel 293-294). As society was moving away from religious legitimations, the evangelicals were not standing idly. They made their way into the public conversation through the political arena. The importance of the religious groups utilizing American politics as a vessel for their voice was because American politics had the authority to directly shape and influence society. Society’s importance here is that it is “the guardian of order and meaning, not only objectively, in its institutional structures, but subjectively as well, in its structuring of individual consciousness” (Berger 21). It was religion’s way of combatting the growing religious detachment by reaching the society in hopes of garnering the authority of politics to influence individuals that would cultivate a collective group that would provide the strength in numbers to the cause. As these issues were gaining public and political attention in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it correlated with the additions made in the 2000 revision of the Baptist Faith and Message. As the issues remain in the conversation in society, the SBC responded to the issues through the statement of faith. This guided their members in how to respond to the issues accordingly to their interpretation of scripture. As they internalized this, it should permeate their sacred canopy, which should influence their political standing and decisions. The political and religious intertwining seen through correlating ideology between the SBC and the Republican Party displays the restructured American religion and the tremendous influence it has on society.

This all leads me to my ultimate question. How does the SBC’s interpretation of scripture and their relationship with politics influence their perception of global warming? Various circumstances and situations have emerged or occurred where it calls for a response or the SBC finds the need to give a response to state their stance on the issue. While more broad and doctrinal issues are addressed in the *Faith and Message*, the SBC also releases resolutions on topics such as addiction, immigration, war, health, and much more. They speak to personal issues, as well as global issues. The issue that I am particularly interested in is global warming. Global warming has become a fairly divisive topic over the questions of whether the phenomenon of global warming is actually happening, if it is influenced by human activity, and what actions should we should or should not make in light of those answers? I think that global warming is occurring, I do think that human activity does influence it, and I think actions should be taken to combat this issue and our influence. Though, the debate over global warming is not the purpose of my question. I will analyze their resolution on global warming in the context of their interpretation of scripture and their relationship with politics.

The SBC’s resolution on global warming from 2007 expressed their opinion on global warming and how they advise members to proceed in approaching this issue. They began their resolution with statements they rooted in scripture. Then they detailed their understanding and stance on the science and effects observed. Below, I have chunked statements from the resolution where the first column holds the resolution’s statements rooted in scripture and their commentary and the second column holds their advice on how to proceed accordingly.

“WHEREAS, God is not a distant bystander with respect to human affairs,	“RESOLVED, That we continually reaffirm our God-given responsibility to
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<p>but judges all people and holds them accountable for their thoughts and actions (Psalm 24:1; Isaiah 45:5-8; Hebrews 4:12-13)”</p>	<p>care for the earth by remaining environmentally conscious and taking individual and collective efforts to reduce pollution, decrease waste, and improve the environment in tangible and effective ways.”</p>
<p>WHEREAS, The record shows that global temperature has risen and fallen cyclically throughout geologic history, with some periods warmer and others cooler than the present; and WHEREAS, The global temperature has generally risen since 1850 as it recovers from the “Little Ice Age” (1550-1850 A.D.)</p>	
<p>“WHEREAS, Christians are called by God to exercise caring stewardship and dominion over the earth and environment (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8)”</p>	<p>“RESOLVED, That we support the development of environmental public policy that will improve the stewardship of the earth’s resources without resulting in significant negative consequences not only on the United States and other developed economies, but also, and most importantly, on the poor and on developing economies...”</p>
<p>“WHEREAS, Some estimate that compliance with Kyoto would cost the global economy from about \$200 billion to \$1 trillion each year without a policy that would allow for global carbon emissions trading and \$75 billion each year even with a worldwide trading scheme WHEREAS, Forcing developing countries to comply with Kyoto will significantly inhibit their economic development and the development of the international economy; WHEREAS, Proposed carbon offset programs will have little impact on reducing rising temperatures if human activity is not a significant cause of recent global warming”</p>	
<p>“WHEREAS, We share God’s concern that the poor should not be abused, taken advantage of, nor overburdened (Psalm</p>	<p>“RESOLVED, That we urge governments to begin to take steps to help protect vulnerable communities and regions from</p>

<p>140:12; Proverbs 14:31; 29:7; Isaiah 25:4; Ezekiel 22:29, 31; Matthew 25:40; John 14:15); and...</p> <p>WHEREAS, Businesses and municipalities will likely pass along the cost of emissions reduction programs to consumers, driving up the cost of goods and services; and</p> <p>WHEREAS, Poor people and underdeveloped regions of the world will be impacted the most severely by higher costs; and</p> <p>WHEREAS, The poor and most vulnerable people around the world are faced with many more quantifiable, immediate, devastating problems”</p>	<p>the effects of the inevitable continued cycles of warming and cooling that have occurred throughout geologic history; and be it further</p> <p>RESOLVED, That we strongly request that all public policy decision makers ensure an appropriate balance between care for the environment, effects on economies, and impacts on the poor when considering programs to reduce CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions...”</p>
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Just as I previously saw with the *Faith and Message*, the SBC released a statement detailing their stance on a particular matter, this time being global warming. The *Faith and Message* sets up the foundation for the convention in their establishment of the literal interpretation of the Bible. The chart simplifies the resolution down to the scripturally-rooted statements setting up how they approach the issue of global warming and their advice to their members on how they should approach global warming. They recognize people’s responsibility to the Earth as told so by scriptures. They list ways they are to do so like limiting their pollution and waste, labeling them “tangible and effective” ways of being stewards of our environment. This is where they began to address global warming in that they do not address it in their means of stewardship. They go on to say, ““WHEREAS, The record shows that global temperature has risen and fallen cyclically throughout geologic history, with some periods warmer and others cooler than the present; and WHEREAS, The global temperature has generally risen since 1850 as it recovers from the “Little Ice Age” (1550-1850 A.D.)” They acknowledge that there is this recorded global warming in temperature, but they express their skepticism in the

argument of the influence of human activity in referencing the argument against that that says the Earth naturally cycles through periods of warming and cooling. With this logic, there are not “tangible and effective” ways to tackle this issue. They moved into the cost of pursuing actions against the human influence. By regulating organizations and their carbon footprint, there are economic repercussions as a result in much large changes. The SBC foresee the increased cost to cover the losses as a burden on the poor, which contradicts their command to care for the poor and needy. Because of their skepticism towards human influence, they veer away from actions that will hurt, not only the poor, but them as well. That is their stance on the issue of global warming. It is crucial to remember that as they draw on scripture to formulate their stance, their interpretation of scripture may be subject to change as circumstances surrounding the issue change. Just as the culture of slavery influenced the SBC’s acceptance of slavery, I must look to the culture surrounding this time and issue. The area of culture I look to is the SBC’s relationship with politics.

Riley E. Dunlap, professor of Sociology at Oklahoma State University and Gallup Scholar for the Environment with the Gallup Organization, performed the poll, “Climate-Change Views: Republican-Democratic Gaps Expand,” studying trends in political affiliation and response to questions about global warming. He found that in 1998, the when asked if respondents believed that most scientists believe global warming is occurring, 39 percent of Republicans agreed, while 51 percent of Democrats did. When asked the same question in 2008, 56 percent of Republicans agreed, while 74 of Democrats did. There was an increasing trend between the two different times of the poll, but continually displayed the polarization between the two side on the topic. Still, fewer

Republicans than Democrats agreed that scientists believed in global warming. When asked in 2003 if respondents thought that the earth temperature increase was more so attributed to human activities than natural changes, 52 percent of Republicans agreed, while 68 percent of Democrats did. Responses to the same question in 2008 showed 42 percent of Republicans agreed, while 73 percent of Democrats agreed. The gap widened in this poll as the percentage of Republicans that agreed with human-influenced global warming decreased and the percentage of Democrats increased. Just as I found how American religion had been restructured through the 20th century through the religious/political intertwinement, here I see it still at play in the ongoing debate over global warming. How is this correlation between religion and politics continue to playing out?

Dunlap and Aaron M. McCright, an assistant professor of Sociology in Lyman Briggs College, analyzed the data from Gallup's 2008 Environment Poll in their article, "A Widening Gap: Republican and Democratic Views on Climate Change." They looked at the historical perceptions of climate change between the two political parties. Republicans rallied behind Theodore Roosevelt's actions in forest and park conservations, while Democrats rallied behind Franklin D. Roosevelt's Soil Conservation Service and more as a part of the New Deal. There was a shift in the Reagan administration where they "labeled environmental regulations a burden on the economy and tried to weaken them and reduce their enforcement." As a result, the Republican Party had been following this line of thought ever since. Robert Wampler similarly found, "Already in 1988, the U.S. had supported creation within the UN of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to carry out systematic research into

the causes of global climate change and to assess potential strategies to address it...In December 1990, the UN General Assembly created the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Agreement on Climate Change. The committee drafted the Framework Convention on Climate Change that was signed at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development. But in this same period the domestic opponents of strong curbs on greenhouse emissions had grown in number and strength, producing the coalition of Republican political leaders and industrial interests that are so prominent today” (Wampler 2012). I, again, refer back to the creation of the SBC through the culture and reliance of the South on slavery and their previous scriptural justification of slavery. That parallels what I am seeing with the issue of global warming and the threat combatting human activity as a cause of global warming is to the current economic system of America. The institution of economics has its own relationship with the government and with religion that I am unable to explore, but the main thing I take is that as global warming is addressed by the government, religion concurrently responds to the issue as well as other institutions involved, like economics. The intertwining of these institutions thread through their resolution from their scriptural base to care for the poor, to how attributing the cause of global warming to human activity will lead to the regulation of CO2 emission, which will hurt the nation and global economy which will circle back to hurting the poor. The Journal for Cleaner Production published an article that covered climate change denial through the past two decades and found, “Several articles identify the former George W Bush administration as a significant actor in “the war on science”, including climate science (Editorial, 2008; cf. McCright and Dunlap, 2003, 2010). According to Dunlap and McCright (2011:154), this presidency

“institutionalized climate science denial throughout the most powerful branch of the US government, allowing representatives of the fossil fuels industry and conservative think tanks to undermine climate science and policy from within the administration” (Bjornberg 236). This parallels the fundamentalist takeover of the SBC where the one who holds the power is able to control the ideals of the society. And I just explained how Berger explained the importance of society to influencing the individual. Legitimations need people to believe in them in order to survive. Society offers mass legitimations and the institution of religion and politics have grown to legitimate each other. The evident rift between religion and politics and global warming reveals competing plausibility structures striving to define this phenomenon, because the ability to define this phenomenon gives way for the justification for certain economic and political actions.

The SBC’s stance on the matter directly opposed the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), who release reports of collective scientific research from scientists around the world every couple of years as an update on findings and predictions regarding global warming and climate change. The resolution actually has a statement against the IPCC stating, “WHEREAS, The United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), while remaining politically active in warning of catastrophic human-induced global warming, has recently altered many of its previous statements, reducing its projections of the magnitude of global warming and its impacts on the world” (On Global Warming). They reduce the credibility of the organization on the basis that they alter their predictions as the science and findings change. As I searched through the IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report, “Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis,” I found that they stated, “The processes affecting climate can exhibit considerable

natural variability. Even in the absence of external forcing, periodic and chaotic variations on a vast range of spatial and temporal scales are observed...Movement between states can occur as a result of natural variability, or in response to external forcing” (121). They agree that climate change can be a result of natural fluctuation, as seen in the past where climates changes naturally, without external influence. But they also include the chance that the global climate change could be a result of an external force, that being human activity. Collective studies within the report also found, “There is a natural greenhouse effect which already keeps the Earth warmer than it would otherwise be... The atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> has increased by 31% since 1750 and that of methane by 151%... and now far exceed pre-industrial values determined from ice cores spanning many thousands of years. The global increases in carbon dioxide concentration are due primarily to fossil fuel use and land use change, while those of methane and nitrous oxide are primarily due to agriculture” (124). They also acknowledge the Earth’s natural greenhouse effect where the earth releases and processes greenhouse gases, gases that trap heat, that have allowed the Earth to maintain the temperature range it has to maintain life. As they observe the increase of greenhouse gasses tested in the atmosphere, they directly link that to the increased burning of fossil fuels and agriculture dating back to the beginning of the persistent increasing trend of greenhouse gas concentrations in 1750, right around the time the Industrial Revolution is emerging. They couple that with, “The global average temperature has increased since 1861. Over the 20th century the increase has been 0.6°C” (125). As the concentration of greenhouse gases increases, the more heat our atmosphere retains. The more heat that is

retained, the more our global surface temperature increased as well, thus influencing global warming.

I personally side with the science behind the human-influence of global warming. Through middle and high school, I have always learned about the science behind global warming and how we need to lower our carbon footprint in order to better protect and sustain our Earth. As I have come to college, I have learned about the increasing trend of global warming and how it is currently changing climates and is predicted to change even more. I have persistently been taught the science behind these claims and I trust in the science of sources like the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). These are official programs whose purpose is to study the science of earth, and so I trust their authority on the matter reliable. With the IPCC, the organization is a branch of the United Nations and so their research encompasses scientists from around the world reporting global and local research to the program. If people across the globe are coming to similar conclusions, I trust in their findings and estimations. I also never encountered any opposition to the matter, until more recently. In high school, my Chemistry teacher, who was explicitly evangelical, told our class that climate change was not real. I was confused as to how my teacher, a science one at that, was telling us that climate change was not real. As I have come to college, I have had maybe two or three encounters where I was told by people who were evangelical, that climate change is not happening, or that it is not human-influenced. I have been told the argument that it is occurring naturally and that by altering our actions towards this issue we become subservient to Earth when the Lord has given us dominion over it. I have never been told a religious reason against global warming



until now. Because of the sacred canopy that my faith covers over my life, and the SBC facilitates, what leaders of my faith say matters to me. But at the same time, I am looking at the science reporting global warming is happening at the expense of us humans and is effecting people today through global sea rise and shifting climates. The predictions estimate persistent and more severe consequences in the long run if we do not globally limit our contributions to global warming. I choose to believe the science because of the is current, visible effects of global warming and climate change today as opposed to following the SBC's skepticism of the evidence of human influence and concern for the poor who would be effected by predicted changes to the economy. I chose to look at the poor and needy, who are today, facing the brunt of larger organizations, institutions, and nations' negligence in ecological decisions? My decision to take this stance on climate change while the religious institution I follow is important because it highlights an area where the sacred canopy I am encompassed in does not reach. This has now opened me to reevaluate my other opinions and stances on matters because I now do not see the SBC as an infallible facilitator of my sacred canopy anymore. I see a group of people living in a certain time in a certain place, which influences how they interpret the Bible and how they perceive their reality. The influence the SBC has over me transcends to all the members of the SBC and those living in the culture that so closely intertwines with the SBC. And this does not end with the SBC, but it extends to the entire evangelical group that encompasses the SBC. American religion which became coupled with American politics have come together to legitimate each other, which influences and strengthens both, religious and political decisions of the public.

I began the study on this topic because I wanted to better understand the religious institution, the SBC, which I followed. I wanted to better understand why I think the way I do by understanding who the SBC is and how who they are influenced who I say I am. What I previously thought about the SBC coming into this research was that the SBC was a religious institution operating independently in the pursuit of following the Bible. What I learned through this process was that that was not true. The SBC, like any social institution, exists within a larger society. Its members exist in various social institutions. The knowledge they gain from these other institutions and from the society at large form their social stock of knowledge which they draw from in order to understand other institutions and reality as a whole. As these institutions overlap each other, they influence and draw understanding from each other. In order to better understand the SBC and why they think and act the way they do, I have to also look to influential institutions from which they are shaped by and which they also play a role in shaping.

Through this research, I found that the SBC was created as a sect of the Baptist denomination as a result of a schism over the issue of slavery. This introduced the reality that institutions, even religious ones, are shaped by the culture they exist in. As time moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modernization led to industrialization and urbanization which also led to a change in the culture. That was matched with secularization and pluralism, as a result of internal migration and immigration, as social institutions were becoming less dependent on religion and more so on science and other faiths. This cultural shift influenced a shift in the convention which led to two differing groups over the nature of scripture. This became the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy that was resolved in the fundamentalist takeover of the bureaucratic system. This fundamentalist

foundation reestablished the inerrant interpretation of the Bible across the denomination. I then established the social construction of the denomination. Because it is socially constructed, it can be reconstructed. That is what allowed me to understand the relationship between the SBC and politics. American religion as a whole began to move away from the public structure of denominationalism. It is the shift in the societal makeup of the population through regional migration as well as immigration brought about pluralism. The denominational/regional divide of American religion began to change as the population was changing. As society was changing, so was the government, as it is a reflection of the society. Secularization was also increasing and the government was seen making political decisions over issues that were deemed moral issues. The question emerged as to who has the right over moral authority. Special interest groups were formed to mobilize against the cultural and political changes happening. This began to bring people from different denominations together, breaking down the denominational divide. Secularization, along with other influences, cultivated the progressive or liberal thought that increased, which also cultivated a divide within the American religious community that created the “religious conservative” and “religious liberal.” It reflected the wider “conservative” and “liberal” divide in society. And so I was able to see this culture war happening as different groups and sides were competing to define the public sphere through the authority of the government and their policies. Polls revealed the political polarization between Republicans and Democrats over the issues of abortion and homosexuality. It also revealed the correlation between the Republicans and the SBC stance on the issues. How they interpreted the Bible aligned with how they identified politically. The SBC’s revisions in their statement of faith

reflected the changes in the culture and society which were then reflected in the denomination. This then also led into the conservative and liberal and religious stance on global warming. This was again reflected in the correlation between the Republican Party and SBC's stance on the issue of climate change. Through their resolution on global warming and the study and analysis on the political divide on global warming, I was able to see how their scriptural interpretation and relationship with politics influenced their perception of climate change and how that also can influence political leanings and decisions.

That is significant because as the line between religion and politics is blurred, motive and agenda becomes blurred as well. Is it really a matter of what the Bible says about the topic, or does scripture become a legitimation for other matters? As people enter the conversation over different issues, they come with a social stock of knowledge that they draw from to make sense of the issue. If religion is a factor for the person, religion facilitates the sacred canopy through which all of reality is to be interpreted. For me and millions of others, that is the SBC. Millions of people look to them for spiritual guidance. But as I have come to see, their guidance is influenced by their relationship with other social institutions. They have the ability to shape the thoughts and actions of millions of people. Couple that with the authority and influence of the government, the consequence of this is the religious, political polarization that now divide our country. As religion and politics intertwine, ideologies begin to intertwine. As members of the SBC seek guidance in approaching global warming, from the resolution, they are receiving spiritual guidance coupled with economic guidance, which is discretely coupled with a political leaning. The ultimate finding from this research is how the social institution of

religion and politics came together to be a vehicle for mutual legitimations for one another, seen through the issue of climate change. This results in the ability to influence millions religiously and politically, which then also influences the direction of the nation. It unveils how and why people may come to the conclusions they do. People may not know why they know what they know or think they way they do. I did not. The danger of that leads people to being a part of political decisions when they may be misinformed. That misinformation could then negatively impact, not only us, but also the world.

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