ChatGPT

Authoritarian Evolution of the Southern Baptist Convention: Institutional Strategies and Power Consolidation

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) transformed from a loose coalition of autonomous churches into a highly centralized and **authoritarian religious system** over the course of its history. This report examines how, especially in the SBC's first century and a half, denominational leaders built institutions and strategies that consolidated power. It analyzes the development of seminaries, publications, and administrative hierarchies in the **mid-19th to early 20th centuries**, how a centralized structure exerted control despite Baptist traditions of congregational autonomy, and the use of **theological education, credentialing, and media** to discipline dissent. It also explores how the *Conservative Resurgence* (1979 onward) leveraged those structures to entrench fundamentalist authority, and how the SBC's early complicity with **slavery and white supremacy** laid groundwork for its authoritarian tendencies. Finally, the SBC's institutional formation is contrasted with the more egalitarian and communal aspects of early Christianity. Key developments are summarized in a timeline, and primary historical contexts are highlighted throughout.

Origins: Pro-Slavery Foundations and Early Authority (1845–1870s)

The SBC was **born in 1845 out of a defense of slavery**, a fact that foreshadowed its authoritarian streak. The convention was founded by southern Baptists who split from northern Baptists specifically to *safeguard the institution of slavery* [1]. Northern Baptist mission boards had decided they would no longer appoint slaveholders as missionaries, so Southern slaveholding Baptists formed their own convention in protest [2]. The SBC's founders openly preached that slavery was sanctioned by God – even calling it "an **institution of heaven**," with the subjugation of Black people described as divinely ordained via the so-called *curse of Ham* [2] [3]. In 1863, during the American Civil War, Southern Baptist leaders formally pledged support to the pro-slavery **Confederacy**, aligning the denomination with a militant defense of white supremacy [4].

Such theological justification of human bondage established a **culture of unquestioning obedience to "biblical" authority** as defined by those in power. Dissenting voices on slavery (or on racial equality after emancipation) found no welcome. Indeed, all four founding professors of the SBC's first seminary were slaveholders who later defended white supremacy during Reconstruction, denying Black equality in church and society [5] [6]. This entrenchment of racial hierarchy required a strong authoritative stance: leaders taught that racial inequality was God's will, and **any challenge to that social order was treated as heresy**. In these early decades, the SBC's institutional identity – *white, male, and authoritarian* – was forged in the fires of a pro-slavery, anti-egalitarian ideology. This foundation in oppression and centralized control for a "righteous" cause would inform how the SBC built its power structures moving forward.

Building Institutions in the 19th Century: Missions, Seminaries, and Publications

Despite Baptist ideals of local church autonomy, 19th-century Southern Baptists moved toward a **more centralized denominational organization** than most Baptists had ever embraced [7]. From the start, the SBC established **common mission boards, educational institutions, and publications under the convention's direction** [8]. This was a strategic shift *away from purely local authority* toward an organized South-wide denomination, which paralleled trends in post-Civil War American religion and society that favored larger bureaucratic structures [9] [10]. Key institutional developments included:

- **1845 – Mission Boards**: The newly formed SBC immediately created a Foreign Mission Board (for overseas evangelism) and a Home Mission Board (for domestic work). These boards centralized missionary coordination and funding, tasks previously handled more independently by state associations or the earlier national Baptist society [11]. By pooling resources and decision-making in national boards, the SBC began exerting unified control over missionary appointments and strategy – including the requirement (at that time) that missionaries not question slavery. This set a precedent that *loyalty to SBC policies was necessary for service*.

- **1859 – The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS)**: The SBC founded its first seminary in Greenville, South Carolina (later moved to Louisville, KY) in 1859. SBTS was not just an educational venture but a mechanism of **theological control**. Its founding charter included the *Abstract of Principles*, a doctrinal statement that all faculty had to sign and teach in accordance with. This meant that the SBC now had a way to **credential its clergy and theologians with an officially approved doctrine**, a notable departure from the more freewheeling ministerial training (or lack thereof) in earlier Baptist life. In practice, it allowed the denomination to *discipline or dismiss professors* who strayed from orthodoxy. For example, in the 1870s–80s, when SBTS professor Crawford Toy adopted liberal views of biblical interpretation, the seminary forced his resignation, signaling that even academic theology would bow to the convention's approved line [7]. By concentrating ministerial education in denominational seminaries, the SBC could ensure that future pastors were inculcated with "safe" beliefs and loyalty to the convention.

- **Publishing Efforts**: Early on, Southern Baptists relied on various state Baptist papers and Northern publishing houses for literature. But SBC leaders recognized that controlling publications was vital for **shaping the message in the pews**. Attempts to start a Southern Baptist publishing arm began mid-century; success came with the establishment of the **Baptist Sunday School Board in 1891** (in Nashville, later renamed LifeWay Christian Resources) [12] [13]. The Sunday School Board centralized the production of Sunday school curricula, hymnals, Bible studies, and other church literature for the whole convention. Very significantly, it even distributed suggested *sermons* for pastors [14]. By producing the lesson materials used every week in thousands of churches, the SBC ensured a **uniform teaching and messaging** across the South. One historian notes that after 1891, the Sunday School Board brought a level of **"uniformity heretofore unknown"** among Southern Baptist churches, standardizing theology and practice through its materials [14]. This publishing apparatus became a soft-power tool to **discipline dissent** – pastors or churches that strayed from the approved interpretations would find themselves out of sync with the official literature and thus more easily identified (and corrected or marginalized).

By the late 19th century, these institutions (mission boards, seminary, and publishing board) were fostering a new **denominational consciousness** [15]. Southern Baptists began to see themselves not just as independent congregations but as part of a larger *"Baptist Zion"* – a term used by leaders who

encouraged loyalty to the SBC as God's instrument. This identity made it easier for central leaders to rally churches to common causes and to expect **cooperation (and compliance)** with convention-wide initiatives.

Early 20th Century Consolidation: The Cooperative Program and Executive Committee

Entering the 20th century, the SBC built on its institutional base to achieve even greater centralization and bureaucratic control, *despite maintaining rhetoric about local church autonomy*. Several key developments between the 1900s and 1920s solidified an **administrative hierarchy** capable of exerting top-down influence:

- **New Seminaries**: To expand its educational reach, the SBC established additional seminaries – notably **Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1908** (Fort Worth, TX) and a Seminary in New Orleans in 1917 (originally Baptist Bible Institute). Each seminary further extended the convention's ability to train and credential ministers under a watchful eye. Importantly, faculty at these schools, as at SBTS, were expected to teach in alignment with Baptist orthodoxy and the convention's positions. Over time, graduates of SBC seminaries formed the core of pastoral leadership across the South, creating an informal **credentialing system**: churches increasingly looked for seminary-trained (and thus SBC-vetted) pastors. This professionalization of the clergy tightened the convention's doctrinal cohesion and *made "outsider" voices (those without SBC degrees or approval) less influential*.

- **1890s–1920s – Women's and Youth Auxiliaries**: The SBC also created auxiliaries like the **Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) in 1888** and later a Baptist Training Union for youth. These organizations were officially "auxiliaries" rather than full governing bodies, meaning they operated under the understanding that they would serve SBC goals exclusively [16]. Notably, the WMU gave women a sphere of service (chiefly in missions fundraising and education) at a time when women messengers were not even allowed on the convention floor until 1918–1921 [16]. The WMU became a huge financial engine for the SBC, raising money through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and others – by the early 20th century, WMU offerings provided *half the budgets* of the mission boards [17]. This separate-but-loyal structure meant that **women's energies were harnessed for the denomination's mission goals** without granting women any decision-making power over those goals. It exemplified the SBC's approach to potentially independent groups – incorporate and direct them, rather than allow an alternative power center.

- **1917 –** Executive Committee***: As the convention grew in complexity, it created an** ***Executive Committee** in 1917 to act on behalf of the SBC between its annual meetings [18]. Initially a modest coordinating body, the Executive Committee was expanded in power by 1919 and again in 1927, eventually establishing its headquarters in Nashville [19]. This committee served as a kind of denominational cabinet, overseeing budget allocations and ensuring that the various boards and agencies stayed aligned with the convention's directives. The formation of the Executive Committee marked a shift from *ad hoc* cooperation to **permanent centralized administration**. It ensured that a small group of leaders (elected by the convention, but practically often the same insiders) could guide the SBC's work year-round – effectively **tightening the reins of control** over far-flung ministries.

- **The 75 Million Campaign (1919–1924)**: In the aftermath of World War I, the SBC launched an ambitious fundraising and modernization drive, seeking to raise $75 million for its causes. *While*

falling short of the goal, this campaign highlighted the need for better central bookkeeping and unified appeals, reinforcing the move toward denominational coordination. Lessons from this effort fed into the next, more permanent change.

- **1925 – Cooperative Program (Unified Giving)**: **1925 was a turning point** in SBC structure. That year, the convention adopted the **Cooperative Program (CP)**, a unified budget and giving plan that fundamentally reshaped power dynamics. Under the CP, local churches would give to one central fund, which the SBC leadership would then distribute to all mission boards, seminaries, and ministries – replacing the prior model where each agency solicited funds separately [20] [21]. This had *two monumental effects*: **financial centralization** and **leverage over churches**. Now, **whoever controlled the CP allocations effectively controlled the entire denomination's agenda**. Also, the SBC instituted a **minimum giving requirement** for churches to send "messengers" (voting delegates) to the annual convention [22]. In other words, a church had to contribute a certain amount to the Cooperative Program to have a voice. This rule meant that *financial loyalty translated to political power* – congregations that did not support the SBC's unified budget could be excluded from decision-making. The Cooperative Program thus became a tool to **discipline dissent or apathy**: churches that might object to some denominational policy still had to pay in if they wanted a seat at the table. Over time, the CP fostered deep loyalty to the SBC as an institution, because local pastors and laypeople saw their giving returned in the form of missionaries, educational resources, and church support, all branded with the SBC identity.

- **1925 – Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M)**: Also in 1925, the SBC adopted its first **Baptist Faith & Message** statement, a confessional document outlining essential doctrines. While Baptists prize freedom of conscience, the BF&M served as an *authoritative benchmark of orthodoxy* (initially crafted in response to modernist trends like Darwinism). It was officially non-binding on churches, yet in practice the BF&M gave the convention a **standard by which to judge theological "errors"**. Seminary professors and missionaries would be expected to affirm the BF&M (eventually editions of 1963 and 2000), and publishing literature would reflect its tenets. The adoption of a denomination-wide confession – however softly enforced – indicated a material strategy to **define acceptable belief** and thereby rein in maverick teachings.

By the late 1920s, these developments had made the SBC a **highly organized federation of churches**. One scholar observes that Southern Baptists, far from seeing centralization as a threat to autonomy, came to view it as a means to amplify their cooperative impact [23]. The centralized structures were even credited with the SBC's explosive growth after the Civil War and into the 20th century [24]. Yet this growth came at the cost of consolidating authority in denominational boards and executives. Average church members increasingly identified *as Southern Baptists first*, rather than just members of a local congregation [25] [10]. In subtle ways, this shifted power upward: churches would seldom contradict or resist the SBC's official positions for fear of being cut off from the larger fellowship and resources.

Sociopolitical context: These early 20th-century shifts occurred amid the Progressive Era's faith in efficiency and the corporate model. American churches broadly were adopting more centralized programs (Sunday schools, youth unions, women's societies) to standardize religious life [26]. The SBC followed this trend but kept it in-house rather than joining ecumenical bodies [26]. In the wider culture, the 1920s brought clashes between traditional religion and modernism (e.g. the 1925 *Scopes "Monkey" Trial* over evolution). The SBC's moves in 1925 – the CP for organizational strength and the BF&M for doctrinal clarity – can be seen as **reactions to modern societal challenges**, ensuring the denomination could withstand external pressures with *united finances and united teaching*.

Congregational Autonomy vs. Centralized Control: How SBC Polity Facilitated Authority

Baptists historically champion **congregational polity** – the idea that each local church is independent under Christ's lordship. The SBC's Constitution affirms that the Convention "does not claim and will never attempt to exercise any authority over" individual churches [27]. *On paper*, this is true; the SBC cannot legally or formally control a church's internal affairs. **In practice, however, the SBC built a system that allowed centralized influence** over churches while preserving the veneer of autonomy.

Several material strategies bridged this apparent contradiction:

- **Financial Dependence and Incentives**: Through the Cooperative Program and other funding mechanisms, local churches grew to rely on SBC programs (mission support, seminary-trained ministers, discounted literature, etc.). This created a strong incentive to **stay in "friendly cooperation"** with the SBC's expectations. A church that openly defied SBC positions might find itself excluded from fellowship or losing access to missionaries and seminary graduates. For example, in recent years the SBC has deemed churches "not in friendly cooperation" (effectively expelling them) for ordaining women pastors or affirming same-sex marriage [28] [29] – a continuation of the principle that *autonomy has limits if a church wants to remain in the convention*. This implicit coercion meant that most churches voluntarily conformed to SBC-wide standards most of the time.

- **Credentialing and Pastoral Placement**: As noted, by controlling the major seminaries, the SBC leadership could influence who was deemed a trustworthy pastor or theologian. There was no official rule that a pastor *must* attend an SBC seminary, but the vast network of SBC-trained ministers created an **old-boy network**. Hiring churches often gave preference to seminary alumni, who were expected to uphold SBC doctrines. This amounted to an informal **credentialing system** where the convention's imprimatur (via a seminary degree or missionary appointment) marked someone as acceptable. Those without were often on the fringes. Additionally, state Baptist conventions (which are part of the SBC ecosystem) often have influence in pastoral search processes and ordinations, further ensuring that **deviation from norms is filtered out**.

- **Denominational Media and Culture**: The SBC, especially by the mid-20th century, cultivated a cohesive subculture. The **Baptist Press (est. 1946)** became the official news service disseminating the leadership's perspective to state Baptist papers. SBC presidents and agency heads had regular platforms to shape opinion. Churches used SBC-produced Sunday School lessons uniformly each week. Big annual events (the convention meeting, state convention meetings, training conferences) reinforced messaging. In these ways, the denomination functioned as an **echo chamber**: a pastor or member whose views strayed too far from the SBC consensus would feel out-of-place and face pressure to conform. The very **language and slogans** of the faith were standardized (e.g. emphasis on "winning souls," promoting the Cooperative Program, etc.), leaving limited room for alternative theological or social interpretations.

- **Peer Accountability and Exclusion**: While the SBC couldn't directly fire a local pastor or close a church, it could do the following: (a) refuse to seat a church's messengers at the convention (in effect, expulsion from membership) and (b) remove or publicly reprimand individuals within its employ or committees. A notable early example of disciplining dissenting views was the **Whitsitt Controversy** in the 1890s: W. H. Whitsitt, president of SBTS, published a historical view that

contradicted Landmarkist Baptist mythology. Outcry from conservative pastors led to Whitsitt's resignation in 1899 – a case of the denomination policing the acceptable narrative of Baptist history. This showed that even without a top-down hierarchy, a coordinated **faction of SBC influentials could oust a leader for unorthodox ideas**. Similarly, in 1961, Midwestern Seminary professor Ralph Elliott's publication *challenging literal interpretations of Genesis* sparked a convention-wide furor; the SBC adopted a resolution against his views and Elliott was pressured to leave his position. These incidents broadcast a clear warning: those who publish or preach contrary to prevalent SBC doctrine may lose their platform. In effect, **self-censorship and alignment with the majority became the price of staying within the SBC fold**.

Thus, the SBC perfected a model of *soft power* control: no bishop needed, just a network of institutions and expectations that guide each church's choices. As one analysis describes, by the mid-20th century the SBC's "**power in the denomination was in the hands of relatively few men**," an elite who rewarded loyalty and doled out positions to insiders connected through seminary and Cooperative Program giving [30] [31]. This *"good ol' boy"* system kept the leadership circle small and like-minded. Any truly independent streak in a congregation or leader (theoretically allowable under autonomy) was checked by the prospect of isolation from the larger Baptist community.

This centralized yet voluntary dynamic was not unique to the SBC, but the SBC's size and resources made its **informal authority** especially potent. Ironically, the very **democratic processes** that did exist (annual elections of officers, votes on resolutions) could themselves become tools for the majority to enforce its will on the minority, as later events would show. The polity was democratic in form, but increasingly **hierarchical in function**, setting the stage for an outright takeover by determined organizers.

Enforcing Orthodoxy: Theological Education and Denominational Media as Tools

By the mid-20th century, the SBC's material strategies for consolidating power crystallized around **controlling theological education and communication**. These two arenas – the seminaries and the media/publications – proved effective in *disciplining dissent and cultivating a monolithic worldview*:

- **Seminaries as Gatekeepers**: With six SBC seminaries eventually in operation (Southern, Southwestern, New Orleans, Southeastern, Midwestern, and Golden Gate), the denomination held a near-monopoly on accredited theological training for its pastors. Each seminary required faculty to affirm the Baptist Faith & Message (after 1963, this was explicitly instituted) or the seminary's own confessional statement. Hiring and tenure decisions became a way to purge or exclude dissenting theological voices. For instance, in the 1950s–1970s, a number of more academically inclined or theologically moderate professors were quietly eased out or pressured to resign due to perceived liberalism. This included scholars who entertained modern biblical criticism or egalitarian ideas. By keeping the faculties within certain bounds, the SBC **shaped an entire generation of clergy** to be theologically uniform. The convention could also directly intervene if needed: after the *Ralph Elliott controversy* of 1961–62 mentioned earlier, the SBC Executive Committee and seminary trustees took steps to ensure faculty taught "in accordance with" the convention's interpretation of Scripture. The **credentialing power** of the seminaries also meant that if a church called a pastor who was a known dissenter (say, someone who advocated women's equality or questioned inerrancy), that pastor would likely *not* be a graduate of an SBC seminary and thus viewed with suspicion. Over time, this created a self-reinforcing cycle: seminaries produce loyal pastors → those pastors lead churches to remain loyal and to send more students to the seminaries, and so on.

- **Denominational Press and Censorship**: The **Baptist Sunday School Board's literature** was ubiquitous; it effectively set the curriculum for religious education from children to adults. Any novel or challenging theological ideas had little chance to reach the average church member unless they somehow made it into these materials. Even the denomination's hymnals and devotional guides went through committee approval. This amounted to a **content filter** at the source. Additionally, the **Baptist Press news service** (and state Baptist papers, which often depended on SBC leadership for access and advertising) served as unofficial arbiters of reputations. Pastors or professors who spoke out could find themselves *criticized or misrepresented* in the official press, while those in favor with the leadership were praised. In the 1950s–70s, the SBC's public image was managed by figures like **Porter Routh**, longtime Executive Committee secretary, who oversaw messaging to ensure that controversial topics were downplayed or framed in the SBC's favor. For example, during the Civil Rights Movement, the Baptist press in many southern states either stayed silent or echoed segregationist rationales, keeping rank-and-file Southern Baptists insulated from calls for change. The denominational media thus not only disseminated the leadership's views but also **disciplined dissent by exclusion** – simply omitting or suppressing voices that challenged the status quo (whether on race, gender, or doctrine).

- **The Annual Convention as a Bulwark**: The yearly SBC Annual Meeting itself functioned as a stage-managed instrument of control. The leadership (through the Committee on Order of Business) set agendas and moderated debate tightly. Resolutions and motions that strayed from the leadership's preferences were usually defeated in the committees before ever reaching the floor. Only a well-organized effort (as would occur in 1979) could overcome this inertia. The **Committee on Committees** and **Committee on Nominations**, whose members were appointed by the president, selected all trustees for SBC institutions. For decades, this system perpetuated a cycle where incumbent leaders chose like-minded successors to trusteeships, who in turn upheld the leaders' policies. It was a *self-perpetuating oligarchy*, albeit one operating under the guise of open elections and rotations. **Insiders quietly agreed on nominees** ahead of time, and the votes at the convention were often formalities, done in large blocs with little discussion [32] [33]. The average church messenger had scant input into who ran the seminaries or mission boards – that power lay with the centralized nominating process. This system worked smoothly to maintain consensus until a group of determined dissidents in the late 1970s learned how to exploit it (see below).

In summary, by the 1970s the SBC had created a **dense infrastructure of control**: a network of seminaries, a vast publishing arm, a loyal press, a cooperative financial system, and an insider-controlled committee structure. These were the *material and organizational levers* by which a small group at the top could exercise outsized influence over a denomination of 15+ million members. It is crucial to note that many Baptists at the time didn't perceive this as "authoritarian" – the control was often subtle, couched in the language of unity and cooperation. Yet, the stage was set for when a more explicitly authoritarian faction decided to assert itself, proving just how powerful those levers could be in the wrong hands.

The Conservative Resurgence (1979–1990s): Takeover and Purge

All the aforementioned structures – centralized funding, seminary control, the press, the committee system – became the weapons used in what is known as the **Conservative Resurgence** (or fundamentalist takeover) of the SBC. This movement, which unfolded from **1979 through the early 1990s**, was a dramatic illustration of how the SBC's institutional framework could be harnessed to impose a more authoritarian regime over the whole denomination.

In the 1970s, a faction of **fundamentalist-leaning conservatives** grew alarmed by what they perceived as liberal drift in SBC seminaries and publications (e.g. professors questioning biblical inerrancy, or the SBC's 1971 modest openness on abortion, etc. [34] [35]). Two architects of the resurgence – **Judge Paul Pressler** and **Rev. Paige Patterson** – devised a plan to take control of the convention by using its electoral processes. Pressler studied the SBC's constitution and realized that, despite the denomination's democratic appearance, **"the historically democratic denomination was structured in a top-down hierarchical fashion"** that concentrated a *"vast amount of power"* in the office of the **SBC President** [36] [32]. The president's ability to appoint the Committee on Committees (which then appoints the Nominations Committee, which selects trustees) meant that if conservatives could capture the presidency for enough years in a row, they could **replace the trustees of every seminary, board, and agency with hard-line conservatives** [36] [37]. It was a brilliant exploitation of the centralized system the SBC had built; earlier leaders never abused this because an informal gentlemen's agreement kept power rotating among moderates. But now, *the latent authoritarian potential of the SBC polity was activated by design*.

Starting with the **1979 election of Adrian Rogers** as SBC President, the conservative faction executed this takeover plan with precision [38] [39]. Each year, they turned out masses of messengers (often mobilized through fundamentalist churches and campaigns warning about liberalism) to vote for their chosen presidential candidate. From 1979 to 1990, conservative presidents won every annual election, thereby flipping trustee boards in favor of fundamentalists who were loyal to the cause of strict biblical inerrancy and conservative social positions [38] [40]. This period, dubbed the "Baptist Battles" or Conservative Resurgence, had the following authoritarian outcomes:

- **Purge of Seminary Faculties**: With boards of trustees now dominated by conservatives, the **seminaries underwent purges** of faculty who did not toe the new party line. Presidents of seminaries who were considered too moderate were fired or forced to resign (e.g. **Russell Dilday at Southwestern in 1994**, and others at Southern and Southeastern seminaries in 1987–89). Dozens of seminary professors were dismissed, denied tenure, or opted to leave as statements on biblical inerrancy and other doctrines were enforced as binding. The SBC seminaries, once places where a range of evangelical thought was possible, became ideological monoliths by the mid-1990s. This consolidation of **intellectual control** ensured future pastors would only learn the Resurgence-approved theology. It was an assertion of raw institutional power unprecedented in SBC history – the boards acted with a top-down authority much like a authoritarian regime "cleansing" a university of dissidents.

- **Control of the Press and Publishing**: Conservative leadership also took over the **Sunday School Board (LifeWay)** and the Baptist Press. Editors of state Baptist papers who opposed the takeover often lost their positions or faced funding cuts. The new regime revised Sunday School curricula to reflect a more fundamentalist theology, and books by moderate Baptist authors disappeared from LifeWay bookstores. The message was clear: **only the orthodox (as defined by the new SBC power bloc) would be given a voice**. Alternative channels – like the independent magazine *Baptists Today* – sprang up for moderates, but these had no official sanction and far less reach. The denominational media became an arm of the conservative leadership, used to promote their narrative and denigrate their critics. For instance, Baptist Press articles in the 1980s frequently painted the moderates as "liberals" who didn't believe the Bible, preparing the grassroots to accept the subsequent changes.

- **Policy and Creedal Changes**: The conservatives introduced ever more explicit doctrinal requirements. In 2000, they revised the **Baptist Faith & Message (2000 edition)** to cement their theology – adding, for example, a statement that **women must not serve as pastors**, and tightening language on Scripture and family roles [35]. While still technically "non-binding," the

revised BF&M was adopted by the SBC entities as a condition of employment. Missionaries, seminary faculty, and others were required to sign the 2000 BF&M or lose their jobs. This was effectively the **imposition of a creed**, something Baptists had historically resisted. The use of the BF&M2000 as an *instrumentum regni* (instrument of rule) marked how far the SBC had moved into authoritarian practice: doctrinal conformity was enforced from the top down. Dissenting churches (e.g. those with female pastors) were now subject to expulsion, which the SBC carried out in multiple cases in the 2000s and 2010s [28] [29].

- **Consolidation of Political Power**: The Conservative Resurgence leadership also aligned the SBC with broader right-wing politics. Leaders like Paige Patterson and Adrian Rogers were founding members of the **Moral Majority** in 1979 [41] [42]. The SBC increasingly used its Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (which they restructured under their control) to push conservative positions on abortion, homosexuality, and school prayer. The denominational machinery thus not only enforced theological purity but also **mobilized churches for political goals**, reflecting a marriage of church authority with political ideology. Moderates who disagreed with this politicization had already been driven out or silenced. By the early 1990s, the conservative faction *stood unopposed at the helm*, with one of their own (Rev. Morris Chapman) even running unopposed for SBC President in 1991 – a symbol that the takeover was complete [38] [43].

The **aftermath** of the Conservative Resurgence was a denomination that, while still claiming democratic polity, functioned in an *authoritarian, top-directed manner*. A former SBC President famously described the new order by saying the **"messengers have spoken"** and the matter of theology is settled – implying that majority vote equated to absolute truth, and minority viewpoints no longer had a place. Thousands of disaffected moderate Baptists left the SBC in these years, forming the **Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF)** and other networks to continue a more open Baptist tradition outside the SBC's control.

Importantly, the Resurgence did not invent the tools of takeover – it **exploited the centralized structures laid down in earlier decades**. As one analysis put it, conservative leaders *"executed their plan to seize control of the denominational machinery"* and redirect the SBC's course [39]. The fact that the SBC could be "seized" at all underscores the authoritarian potential that had been inherent in its institutional setup. While earlier leaders exercised that power more gently, the fundamentalists used it aggressively to permit no dissent. This was the fruition of long-built strategies: **by controlling appointments, money, and information, a determined group was able to dominate a purportedly autonomous fellowship of churches**.

White Supremacy, Patriarchy, and Authoritarian Foundations

The SBC's inclination toward authoritarian structures cannot be separated from its early entanglement with **white supremacy and patriarchal views**. The very origin of the SBC – defending slavery – meant the denomination was founded on a vision of society and church that was *hierarchical and inegalitarian*. This shaped its power dynamics in enduring ways:

- **The Legacy of Slavery and Racism**: As shown, SBC founders taught that **inequality was divinely mandated**, whether it was whites over Blacks, or men over women [1] [3]. This ideological stance required a suppressive environment: to maintain such injustices, the leadership had to *stifle voices of prophetic dissent*. Indeed, Baptists who disagreed with slavery in the 19th century had largely been driven out or left to join Northern Baptist circles. After the Civil War, Southern Baptist seminary faculty and leaders openly supported segregation and Black disenfranchisement, promoting the "Lost Cause" myth that glorified the Old South [44] [6]. By

sanctioning racial oppression as God's order, the SBC normalized **authoritarian attitudes** – the belief that those in power (white male authorities) should be obeyed as bearers of God's truth, even when that meant gross injustice. Dissent from this social order (e.g. advocating civil rights) was viewed not just as a political difference but as *rebellion against God's established authority*. Well into the 20th century, most SBC churches either supported segregation or remained tacit, effectively disciplining any Baptist who pushed for integration by labeling them liberal or troublemakers. This pattern of using religious rationale to silence calls for justice trained the denomination in habits of **authoritarian control over discourse**. It was not until **1995** – 150 years after its founding – that the SBC formally apologized and repented for its racist past [45] [46], acknowledging that systemic racism had deeply infected its history. By then, the authoritarian structures were long cemented, even if the overt racism was being repudiated. Critics note that **elements of white supremacist thinking still linger** in how the SBC handles racial issues (for example, the recent backlash against critical race theory within the SBC shows a reflex to quash perspectives that challenge the majority's comfort [47] [48]). The SBC's reluctance – or slowness – to embrace full racial equality can be seen as a continuity of its authoritarian streak, where those in power define the terms of unity and anyone raising issues of injustice risks marginalization.

- **Patriarchal Authority**: Similar to race, **gender hierarchy** was baked into SBC tradition. While early Christianity had women like Priscilla and Phoebe as co-laborers of Paul, the SBC developed in a Southern culture that largely excluded women from leadership (beyond the separate WMU). The theology of female submission to male authority became increasingly pronounced, reaching a peak in the Conservative Resurgence era with strict rules against women pastors and a doctrine that wives must "submit graciously" to husbands (language added to the BF&M in 1998). Such patriarchy dovetails with authoritarian practice: it promotes a model of *absolute male leadership in the home and church*, discouraging egalitarian relationships. Dissenting voices – e.g. women who felt called to pastor, or men who supported them – have been systematically shut out. The SBC's recent expulsion of churches for having women pastors [28] [29] demonstrates the enforcement mechanism. By institutionalizing patriarchy, the SBC not only marginalized half its membership from decision-making, it also reinforced a **culture of deference to authority** (the authority of male pastors, husbands, and denominational leaders) as a spiritual virtue. This paternalistic mindset made it easier for authoritarian leaders to demand loyalty; questioning leaders (nearly all male) could be framed as undermining God's appointed order.

- **Cultural Conformity Over Prophetic Voice**: In its early years, the SBC often aligned with the prevailing social order of the white South (slavery, then segregation and one-party Democratic rule, etc.), rather than challenging it. This meant the denomination functioned as a *reinforcer of authority* – be it the authority of the slavemaster, the Jim Crow politician, or the patriarchal family. Baptists historically had a heritage of dissent (early Baptists dissented from state churches), but the SBC channeled that impulse instead into *defending its own authorities*. By the 20th century, questioning the denomination's missions, or its growing wealth, or its doctrine, was more taboo than the SBC questioning unjust society. For instance, during industrialization and the rise of social gospel movements (1900s–1910s), some Southern Baptist voices did speak on poverty and labor issues, but the denomination largely avoided robust social reform stances [49]. The implicit message was: **loyalty first, even if it means silence on uncomfortable truths**. This laid groundwork for later authoritarianism, as generations were conditioned to *"follow the program"* rather than push for more egalitarian Christian witness.

In summary, the SBC's institutional formation was intertwined with maintaining racial and gender hierarchies, which in turn necessitated centralized power to uphold. Its authoritarian evolution is thus partly the story of a religious body contorting Christian theology to justify dominating others – and

building structures to enforce that warped theology. Understanding this helps explain why, when opportunities arose to move in a more egalitarian direction (whether in race relations, women's roles, or theological openness), the SBC's ingrained power dynamics *reasserted control* and stifled those movements. The Conservative Resurgence itself can be seen as a backlash of predominantly white male authorities against perceived threats to their long-held dominance (such as the ordination of a few women, or academic freedom that might question inerrancy).

Subverting Early Christian Egalitarianism: A Contrast

The authoritarian system that developed in the SBC sharply **contrasts with the ethos of early Christianity** and even early Baptist principles. The New Testament portrays the first Christian communities as striving for a radical unity and equality across ethnic, gender, and class lines ("there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" – Galatians 3:28). Leadership in the apostolic church was present, but it was **charismatic and communal**, not highly bureaucratic. For example, the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) shows a model where *"important decisions are made by the group as a whole, relying on their equal access to the guidance of the Holy Spirit,"* rather than by a single patron or a top-down decree [50]. In the Greco-Roman context where patrons and rulers dictated to inferiors, the church introduced a *"radical reorienting of social interactions"*, seeking consensus and mutual submission under God's direction [51]. Early churches met in homes, shared resources generously (Acts 2:44–45), and had multiple people exercising gifts in the assembly (1 Corinthians 14). While not a modern democracy, the primitive church was far more **participatory and equal** in spirit.

Baptists emerged in the 17th century partly to recapture some of that New Testament simplicity – rejecting state church hierarchies and insisting on **soul liberty** and the **priesthood of every believer**. Early Baptists often had very **congregational** governance: each member had a voice, and ministers were accountable to the congregation. Ironically, the SBC through its history gradually undermined some of those egalitarian impulses. The formation of a massive convention with centralized seminaries and publishing, run mostly by seminary-educated elites, created a new quasi-priesthood (the professional clergy class and denominational executives). This tended to sideline the **voice of the laypeople**, except insofar as they voted as instructed by those leaders. The **communal discernment** ideal – that the Holy Spirit can speak through any believer, not just those at the top – was muted in the SBC's culture of deference to authority. For instance, local congregations might fear questioning a popular SBC teacher or policy even if members felt uneasy, because *"the denomination must know best."* This is a far cry from the Bereans of Acts 17, who "examined the scriptures daily" to evaluate even the Apostle Paul's teaching.

Furthermore, early Christianity had a counter-cultural stance of inclusiveness: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, rich and poor, all in one body. The SBC's history of **excluding Black Christians (who formed their own conventions)** and women leaders shows a subversion of that inclusive community. One can argue that the SBC **preserved some New Testament forms** (like local church governance) but *emptied them of radical content* by overlaying them with authoritarian controls. The result is a denomination structurally congregational but effectively hierarchical. This top-heavy system subverted the possibility of a more **egalitarian, Spirit-led fellowship** that Baptists might have been, had different choices been made.

In practical terms, the institutional consolidation that made the SBC so powerful in numbers also made it less nimble to the Spirit's promptings from the margins. It became risky for a **prophet or reformer** to rise within SBC ranks – whether that be a voice calling out racism, or a woman teaching scripture – because the material power structures (funding, credentials, media) could swiftly be turned against

them. In contrast, the early church, while it had conflicts, often saw truth vindicated through open council and the surprising work of the Spirit across traditional lines (as in Acts 15 where even apostles had to listen to uncircumcised Gentile believers' experience of God). The SBC's authoritarian evolution meant that *loyalty was valued over truth-speaking*, uniformity over diversity, and controlled order over charismatic freedom.

It is worth noting that there have always been Baptists outside the SBC or on its fringes who **championed a more egalitarian, communal vision** – whether the **"small d" democratic** ethos of some independent Baptist churches or the emergence of breakaway groups like the CBF that emphasize freedom. These can be seen as attempts to reclaim the balance that perhaps more closely mirrors early Christianity's spirit. But within the SBC mainstream, the institutional momentum has long favored centralized authority.

Timeline of Key Institutional Shifts and Power Consolidation

To summarize the historical development, below is a timeline highlighting **major shifts in SBC institutions, governance, and context** that contributed to its authoritarian character:

- **1845** – **Southern Baptist Convention founded** in Augusta, Georgia. Split from Northern Baptists explicitly to uphold slaveholding missionaries, embedding pro-slavery ideology at the core [1]. The new Convention establishes a **Foreign Mission Board** and **Home Mission Board**, beginning centralized coordination of missions.

- **1859** – **Southern Baptist Theological Seminary** founded (Greenville, SC). All four founders are slaveowners [52]; faculty must sign the Abstract of Principles (a confessional statement), introducing doctrinal accountability in education. SBC now has a means to shape and standardize ministerial training.

- **1861–1865** – **American Civil War era**. SBC churches support the Confederacy; in **1863** the convention formally backs the Confederate cause [4]. The war halts some SBC activities, but post-1865 the SBC survives Reconstruction by aligning with Lost Cause narratives. Black members who had been in biracial churches mostly leave to form independent Black Baptist congregations and conventions (e.g. the National Baptist Convention by 1895), leaving the SBC an almost entirely white institution.

- **1880s** – Growth of SBC influence regionally. The SBC holds annual meetings across the South, attendance and offerings increase as the denomination recovers from war. State conventions strengthen and often mirror SBC structures. In **1888**, the **Woman's Missionary Union (WMU)** is founded as an auxiliary, galvanizing women's support for missions under SBC oversight [16].

- **1891** – **Baptist Sunday School Board** established in Nashville [12]. This creates a central publishing house for Sunday school literature, Bibles, hymnals, and more. Rapidly, SBC-produced materials spread uniform theology and practice. By the early 20th century, the Sunday School Board even distributes outlines for sermons, fostering uniform preaching [14]. This significantly increases denominational cohesion and the SBC's influence on local church teaching.

- **1908** – **Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary** founded in Fort Worth, Texas. This marks the SBC's expansion of theological education westward, further extending its training network.

- **1917** – **Executive Committee** of the SBC formed [19]. Initially tasked with modest interim duties, it will later gain an enlarged role. In the same year, the SBC launches the **Baptist Bible Institute** in New Orleans (later New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, formally becoming a seminary in 1918), aiming to reach the Southeast/Gulf region.

- **1919–1924** – **75 Million Campaign** for cooperative fundraising. Southern Baptists pledge unprecedented sums for missions, education, and hospitals. Though the full amount isn't realized due to an economic downturn, the campaign teaches leaders the value of unified budgeting and the need for financial centralization.

- **1925** – Watershed year. The SBC formally inaugurates the **Cooperative Program** (unified giving plan), routing all church contributions through a central SBC budget [53]. This drastically centralizes financial power and ties church representation to giving [22]. Also in 1925, the SBC adopts the first **Baptist Faith & Message** as a convention-wide statement of faith, aiming to counter modernist theology. These moves bring a new level of bureaucratic unity and doctrinal standard-setting to the Convention.

- **1927** – SBC expands and reorganizes the **Executive Committee**, establishing its offices in Nashville and empowering it to act for the Convention between sessions [19]. The Executive Committee henceforth supervises the Cooperative Program allocations and general operations, becoming a key nerve center of the denomination.

- **1940s–1950s** – Post World War II **boom**. SBC churches proliferate beyond the South (following population shifts). The Convention becomes the largest Protestant body in the U.S. The **Baptist Press** news service (founded 1946) begins distributing national SBC news. A culture of loyalty is at its zenith: large churches pride themselves on giving heavily to SBC causes, and denominational leaders like **Duke McCall (SBTS president)**, **Porter Routh (Executive Committee)**, and **Herschel Hobbs (past SBC president)** wield significant influence [30]. The "**Good Ole Boy**" network informally governs trustee appointments and convention decisions – power concentrated among a few well-connected (and all white male) individuals [30] [31].

- **1963** – The **Baptist Faith & Message** is revised. Guided by statesman-theologian Herschel Hobbs, the updated BF&M reaffirms biblical authority (in response to controversies like Ralph Elliott's book) but also emphasizes traditional Baptist distinctives like soul competency. It is meant to settle doctrinal disputes moderately, but foreshadows the coming battle over biblical inerrancy. This is also the era of the **Civil Rights Movement**: the SBC as a body issues only mild statements, and many SBC leaders either quietly support segregation or avoid the topic. The Convention's relative silence on civil rights (until a belated endorsement of racial integration in the late 1960s) demonstrates continued deference to the white Southern status quo.

- **1971** – In a surprising move, the SBC passes a resolution supporting the idea that abortion should be legal under certain circumstances (such as danger to the mother's health, fetal deformity, rape). This reflected the relatively moderate stance of the SBC in the early 1970s on some social issues [34]. However, it alarmed the fundamentalist wing and would later be reversed. Also during the 1970s, women's role in SBC life grows incrementally – a handful of women are ordained as pastors in SBC churches, and women teach at SBC seminaries (within limits). These trends set the stage for conservative backlash.

- **1979** – The **Conservative Resurgence begins**. In Houston, Texas, conservatives organize to elect **Adrian Rogers** as SBC President, marking the first victory in a long-planned campaign [38]. It

catches the moderate establishment off guard. This year is seen as the start of a "denominational revolution" where fundamentalists would methodically wrest control of all SBC institutions [54] [39].

- **1985** – **SBC Annual Meeting in Dallas** draws over 45,000 messengers, the largest in history, as the struggle between conservatives and moderates peaks. The conservatives win key votes, demonstrating their dominance at the grassroots level. The meeting highlights the politicization of the convention – campaign-style tactics, brochures, and endorsements become common. After Dallas, moderates see the writing on the wall.

- **Late 1980s** – **Takeover of boards and seminaries** in full swing. One by one, the boards of trustees of mission agencies, the Sunday School Board, and the seminaries tilt conservative as new appointments are made. In **1987**, the flagship Southern Seminary's board elects a conservative president (removing moderate President Roy Honeycutt by 1993); in **1989**, Southeastern Seminary's moderate president resigns under pressure and is replaced by a fundamentalist. The Sunday School Board leadership changes, and literature takes a more theologically conservative tone.

- **1990–1991** – The last moderates in high office are gone. In 1990 the Foreign Mission Board's president, Keith Parks, resigns rather than enforce new creedal policies on missionaries. In 1991 the conservatives' candidate for SBC President runs unopposed [38] [43], signifying complete control. A group of moderates forms the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) in 1991 as an alternative missions-funding network outside the SBC.

- **1995** – The SBC adopts a landmark **Resolution on Racial Reconciliation**, confessing and apologizing for its racist legacy [45] [46]. This is driven by the now-entrenched conservative leadership, interestingly. It acknowledges slavery's role in the SBC founding and the failure to support civil rights, asking forgiveness. While largely symbolic, it's a significant moment of institutional repentance, even as critics note it doesn't immediately change power dynamics.

- **1998** – BF&M amended to include a **family article** asserting wives' submission to husbands and restricting pastoral ministry to men. This is a prelude to a fuller revision.

- **2000** – The **Baptist Faith & Message 2000** adopted. This revision shifts the SBC's doctrinal statement in a more explicitly conservative direction (stronger language on Scripture, gender roles, etc.) and removes a passage from the 1963 version about Christ being the criterion for interpreting Scripture (which conservatives disliked). The BF&M2000 becomes a litmus test for denominational employees. Many moderates see this as the "creedalizing" of the SBC.

- **2000s** – The conservative-controlled SBC continues to exercise centralized authority. Churches found to affirm homosexuality or women in pastoral roles are **disfellowshipped** (expelled) to maintain doctrinal purity. The **Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission** of the SBC becomes active in Washington, D.C., advocating for conservative Christian positions, illustrating the merger of SBC institutional power with political influence.

- **2018–2021** – New challenges emerge (e.g., a major **sexual abuse scandal** and internal disagreements on approaches to racism and Donald Trump's presidency), causing some internal strain even among conservatives. The SBC's six seminary presidents in 2020 jointly declare **Critical Race Theory** incompatible with SBC beliefs [55] [56], which leads to backlash from Black pastors and some departures (#LeaveLOUD movement). These events show that the

authoritarian impulse remains: the seminary heads (all white men) unilaterally set a stance on a complex issue, and expected the whole denomination to comply. The internal dissent around these issues indicates that the tension between authority and the grassroots is ongoing.

This timeline demonstrates how a combination of **historical context and deliberate strategy** built the SBC into a centrally steered convention. From pro-slavery unity in 1845, to corporate-style reorganization in 1925, to fundamentalist domination by 1990, each phase added layers of authority. The SBC's story is one of a constant pull between **cooperative ideals** and **authoritarian execution**, often resolved in favor of the latter when unity or orthodoxy was threatened.

Conclusion

The Southern Baptist Convention's evolution into an authoritarian religious system was not an overnight development, but the cumulative result of **institutional strategies** and historical choices. In its formative years, the SBC's very purpose – to defend slavery – required a strict enforcement of "truth" as defined by those in power, at the expense of the marginalized. This ethos of **enforcing orthodoxy** (whether pro-slavery theology, or later a particular view of the Bible) set the tone. Over the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Southern Baptist leaders constructed a formidable denominational machinery: mission boards to direct outreach, seminaries to train loyal ministers, a publishing arm to standardize teaching, an executive committee to coordinate policy, and a cooperative finance system to bind the whole together [7] [53]. These innovations undeniably strengthened the SBC into a cohesive force – enabling rapid growth and a strong collective identity – yet they also **concentrated power** in the hands of a few.

By leveraging **material controls** (funds, credentials, media) rather than explicit mandates, the SBC was able to maintain the façade of congregational autonomy while in practice channeling churches into conformity. The Conservative Resurgence dramatically unmasked this reality: a cadre of leaders took command of the levers and executed a sweeping purge to ensure their ideology reigned supreme [39] [36]. What had been a semi-open system closed firmly, illustrating how decades of centralization made such a takeover feasible.

Complicity with **white supremacy** and patriarchy in the SBC's history is not a side issue but central to why authoritarian methods held appeal. Defending an unjust social order (first slavery, then segregation, and male-dominated leadership) meant the SBC often defined *unity as uniformity* – suppressing dissent for the sake of an appearance of biblical fidelity and harmony. This came at the cost of betraying Christianity's early ethos of equality, justice, and shared discernment [50]. The SBC's institutional power structures effectively subverted the ideal of the church as a **"beloved community"** of many voices and gifts, turning it instead into a top-down empire of like-minded agents.

Understanding this history offers lessons both cautionary and hopeful. It reveals how easily religious organizations can drift into authoritarian patterns when **success, size, and self-preservation** become paramount. Yet, awareness of these tendencies also sparks calls for reform among Baptists – to return to principles of local accountability, freedom of conscience, and Christ-like servant leadership. Whether the SBC can ever decentralize its power or embrace true diversity remains an open question. What is clear is that its past institutional strategies created a legacy that current and future generations must reckon with, as they seek to align their practice more closely with the liberating and egalitarian spirit of the faith they profess.

Sources:

- Britannica – *Southern Baptist Convention* (history and organization) [7] [57]
- New Yorker – Eliza Griswold, "Fight for the Heart of the SBC" (founding to safeguard slavery; conservative resurgence summary) [1] [35]
- SBC Executive Committee – historical formation and role [19] [23]
- A. Biggs, *The SBC "Crisis" in Context* (WKU Thesis, 2017) – early 20th-c. institutional trends; Cooperative Program centralization [53] [58]; Sunday School Board uniformity [14]; Pressler's plan exploiting SBC structure [36] [33]
- SBTS Report on Slavery and Racism (2018) – documentation of SBC seminary founders' pro-slavery and white supremacist statements [3] [44]
- Theology of Work Commentary (Acts 15) – early church decision-making by group, not top-down [50]
- SBC.net – 1995 Resolution on Racial Reconciliation (acknowledging slavery role in SBC founding) [45] and SBC Constitution excerpts on authority.

---

[1] [2] [4] [34] [35] [47] [48] [55] [56] The Fight for the Heart of the Southern Baptist Convention | The New Yorker
https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/the-fight-for-the-heart-of-the-southern-baptist-convention

[3] [5] [6] [44] [52] Southern Baptist Seminary Documents History of Racial Injustice
https://eji.org/news/southern-baptist-seminary-documents-history-of-racial-injustice/

[7] [8] [11] [24] [28] [29] [57] Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) | History, Beliefs, IVF, Membership, & Facts | Britannica
https://www.britannica.com/topic/Southern-Baptist-Convention

[9] [10] [14] [15] [16] [17] [20] [21] [22] [25] [26] [30] [31] [32] [33] [36] [37] [38] [39] [40] [41] [42] [43] [53] [54] [58] (PDF) The Southern Baptist Convention "Crisis" In Context: Southern Baptist Conservatism and the Rise of the Religious Right
https://www.academia.edu/32833305/The_Southern_Baptist_Convention_Crisis_In_Context_Southern_Baptist_Conservatism_and_the_Rise_of_the_Religious_Right

[12] Baptists urged to tell the whole truth about their past
https://www.baptiststandard.com/news/texas/baptists-urged-to-tell-the-whole-truth-about-their-past/?print=print

[13] History of Lifeway Christian Resources
https://www.lifeway.com/en/about/history

[18] Explainer: Understanding the SBC Executive Committee's ministry ...
https://thebaptistpaper.org/explainer-understanding-the-sbc-executive-committees-ministry-assignment/

[19] Executive Committee - SBC.net
https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/sbc-entities/executive-committee/

[23] Exec. Committee marks 100 years 'behind the scenes' - Baptist Press
https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/exec-committee-marks-100-years-behind-the-scenes/

[27] 25 years ago, conservative resurgence got its start - Baptist Press
https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/25-years-ago-conservative-resurgence-got-its-start/

[45] [46] Report in Slavery and Racism in the History of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary - The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
https://www.sbts.edu/history/southern-project/

49 [PDF] Nineteenth-Century Baptist Missions and the Anti-Mission Response
https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1305&context=td

50 51 Leadership and Decision Making in the Christian... | Theology of Work
https://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/acts/a-clash-of-kingdoms-community-and-powerbrokers-acts-13-19/leadership-and-decision-making-in-the-christian-community-acts-15/