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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Limits of Literalism: Race, The Bible, and The Desegregation of Dallas Theological Seminary, 1950–1980

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**Abstract**

The desegregation of Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) offers a critical case study for scholars of American religious history, illuminating how white evangelical institutions responded to the racial transformations of the post-civil rights era. Unlike southern evangelical colleges that defended segregation on overt theological grounds, DTS never explicitly framed its exclusion of Black students within a scriptural mandate. Instead, the seminary's shift from racial exclusion to intentional Black student recruitment in the 1970s reflects what Martin Luther King Jr. once described as a "more cautious than courageous" approach. Anchored in biblical literalism, DTS president John Walvoord's reluctance to use scripture to justify segregation played a key role in the school's transformation. This article fills a gap in the historiography by examining how institutional culture, theological commitments, and broader cultural pressures converged to produce a quiet and incremental model of desegregation—neither overtly racist nor actively prophetic—offering a more complex portrait of evangelicalism and race in the second half of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** desegregation; Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS); hermeneutics; biblical literalism; evangelicalism; american religious history; evangelical theology

## I. Introduction

In the spring of 1974, Ruben Conner received an invitation to attend the International Congress on World Evangelism in Lausanne, Switzerland. Organized by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, the congress aimed to reinvigorate global mission and to shape the theological and practical emphasis of evangelicalism in the decades ahead. While honored to be included among prominent evangelical leaders, Connor faced financial constraints that made international travel uncertain. Drawing on his established relationship with Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), he secured the institution's support to attend the congress, signaling the seminary's evolving engagement with black evangelicals in the mid-1970s.

Upon learning of Conner's predicament, Stephen E. Slocum, executive assistant to DTS president John F. Walvoord, appealed to a known benefactor of black student education to secure support for Conner's participation. "Since there are all too few capable leaders from the Black community," he wrote to Howard C. Miller, "I think [Conner's] presence there in Switzerland would mean a great deal." He further expressed hope that the underwriting of Conner's trip would yield "significant long-range impact" both for the international gathering in Switzerland and for the domestic ministry of Dr. and Mrs. Conner in the United States.[1]

In contrast to prevailing national patterns in the desegregation era, black evangelicals in Dallas benefited from localized support for theological education that diverged from the resistance typically found among white Southern evangelicals. While many conservative Protestant institutions invoked theological rationales to oppose racial integration, Dallas Theological Seminary notably refrained from employing Scriptural arguments to justify the exclusion of black students. Although the seminary delayed the admission of black students until the late 1960s, the resistance to integration was never framed in religious terms. The seminary's theological commitment to biblical literalism rendered it difficult to mount a hermeneutically consistent case for segregation. Lacking clear scriptural warrant to resist desegregation, school administrators declined to invoke the Bible as the basis for preserving an all-white student body.

The desegregation of Dallas Theological Seminary offers valuable insight for scholars of American religious history, particularly in understanding how white evangelical institutions navigated the racial transformations of the post-civil rights era. DTS administrators did not justify segregation as divinely ordained, distinguishing the seminary from other Christian conservative communities where theological defenses of racial separation were explicit and common. Instead, President John Walvoord's commitment to biblical literalism constrained the theologian from using his hermeneutical framework to oppose racial integration so much that desegregation at DTS unfolded with minimal theological commentary.

Despite the omission of theological justification for segregation, close examination reveals that the seminary's record for admitting black students closely mirrored broader patterns across white evangelical institutions. Following *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), most segregationist institutions were marked by initial resistance, followed by gradual accommodation before full embrace of black students in the 1970s. Dallas Seminary's history of racial integration followed in lock step with its southern counterparts even as the school lacked theological arguments to do so. DTS thus serves as a representative case for exploring how evangelical seminaries engaged the desegregation controversy through a blend of theological reticence and institutional pragmatism.

By the time the desegregation controversy was over by the mid-1970s, Walvoord had navigated DTS through the muck and mire of a chapter in the nation's saga of race relations in a way that maintained the support of southern evangelicals all while having admitted and integrated black students in a way that prompted some black graduates to conclude that their studies at the seminary were some of "the greatest years" of their training.[2]

[1]Letter, Stephen E. Slocum to Howard Miller, May 29, 1974, Walvoord Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

[2]Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, The Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011), 234– 5.

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## II. Historiography

Scholars of American religious history have established the role of race in fundamentalism and evangelicalism with measured but continual advancement. Early in the second half of the twentieth century, fundamentalist scholarship gave marginal attention to black Americans engaged in the battles against theological modernism.[3] While the historiography of black American religion is well developed, it often only glances at white evangelicalism or situates it within broader religious or cultural frameworks.[4] Mary Beth Swetnam Matthews blazed a trail in giving one of the first detailed accounts of black Americans' engagement with fundamentalism. In her investigation of black congregants and ministers, Matthews discovered that Black American communities "created their own traditional conservative evangelicalism" in ways that drew from "traditional Protestant doctrines" while rejecting a doctrinal system "that lacked social justice." This often led scholars to the rejection of the fundamentalist label.[5]

Recent scholarship, however, has challenged the hesitation over using the term "fundamentalism" in black communities. Historians such as Daniel Bare argue that Black American ministers and denominations who self-identified as fundamentalist merit closer attention within the broader historiography of American fundamentalism. For Bare, the central issue is not whether black Protestants adhered to fundamentalist theology but whether social and racial factors have unduly influenced scholars' reluctance to classify them as such. Consequently, historians of American religion have increasingly recognized the significance of the social dimensions that shape and define fundamentalism.[6]

Meanwhile, others have recognized the development of black and white evangelicalism as largely two parallel movements. In his panoramic history of twentieth century evangelicalism, Matthew A. Sutton confronted the question of how race helped to define fundamentalism. The fundamentalist commitment to end times, for black Americans, indicated an end to inequality at the inauguration of the millennium. At the same time, white Americans rarely saw calls for racial equality in the Bible. For Sutton, this juxtaposition of prophecy readings across white and black communities "demonstrates how powerfully race functioned."[7]

Beyond examining white and black communities, a more recent scholarly turn investigated how white evangelicals resisted racial integration after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Scholars were quick to recognize the pattern of evangelical responses to

[3]Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918–1931* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954); Ernest Robert Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[4]Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press,1978); C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[5]Mary Beth Swetnam Matthews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2017).

[6]Daniel R. Bare, *Black Fundamentalists: Conservative Christianity and Racial Identity in the Segregation Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2021).

[7]Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 63– 5.

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racial integration to be shaped less by theological coherence than by sociopolitical commitments, using selective biblical passages to mask deeper anxieties about social change, regional identity, and the loss of cultural dominance.[8]

The most recent scholarship has narrowed in on the religious justifications to resist racial integration. Jesse Curtis has demonstrated how white evangelicals rebranded their racial politics through a rhetoric of "colorblind theology" that downplayed the significance of race so much that it allowed them to maintain segregated spaces under the guise of Christian love. J. Russell Hawkins went even further to recognize the explicit use of Scripture to defend segregation and inequality in the South. In the end, it is evident that white evangelicals viewed racial separation as divinely ordained marking both theological and biblical justifications to resist integration.[9]

While these scholars effectively demonstrate that white resistance to racial integration within evangelicalism ranged from rhetorical reframing to explicit religious justification, the existing scholarship has yet to fully grapple with the incompatibility of resisting racial integration with a defining feature of American evangelicalism – biblical literalism. Even as segregationist evangelicals cited biblical passages such as Acts 17:26 – "…and [God] marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands" (NIV)—biblical literalists simultaneously endorsed a plain, common sense hermeneutic which made it difficult to ground segregation in the biblical text without compromising their interpretive consistency. Such was the case at Dallas Theological Seminary even as the school excluded black students for almost five decades.

Thus, this study fills a critical gap in the scholarship on American religious history by shedding light on how white evangelical institutions that were not religiously segregationist nevertheless participated in and benefited from racial exclusion. While much attention has been given to southern evangelical colleges or churches that defended segregation theologically, less has been written about seminaries like DTS that practiced racial exclusion more subtly. This case study reveals how theological restraint shaped by a commitment to biblical literalism, institutional culture, and post–civil rights pressures combined to shape a desegregation process that was neither overtly racist nor actively inclusive, offering a more nuanced portrait of evangelicalism's mid-century racial politics.

To understand the desegregation at Dallas Theological Seminary, this study combines archival research to provide critical analysis of institutional documents, faculty publications, seminary records, presidential correspondence, institutional publications, periodicals, board meeting minutes, faculty correspondences, and publicity materials. In the end, what emerges is a history of desegregation at DTS void of theological resistance yet with a gradual accommodationist policy in three distinct phases. In the initial years, the school restricted black enrollment but founded a segregationist institute for black students during a period of what may be labeled "Anti-Integrationism." Beginning

[8]Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945–1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001); Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

[9]Jesse Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians: Evangelicals and White Supremacy in the Civil Rights Era* (New York: NYU Press, 2021); J. Russell Hawkins, *The Bible Told Them So: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); See also Adam Laats, *Fundamentalist U: Keeping the Faith in American Higher Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

in 1950 and four years before the *Brown* ruling is a period marked by "Passive-Integrationism" where the school established an open admissions policy without accounting for a single black student for nearly two decades before rapidly transitioning to active recruitment and increased institutional enthusiasm for the inclusion of black students in what I have labeled as "Active-Integrationism." At any given time, however, neither the president nor administrators ever retorted to using scriptural justifications for either maintaining or dismantling segregation.

## III. Founding Dallas Theological Seminary

Dallas Theological Seminary was founded amid the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. Established just one year before the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 in Dayton, Tennessee, the school was envisioned by its founders to be a bastion against Protestant liberalism through the propagation of premillennial dispensationalism. The Seminary's commitment to this school of thought emerged from roots in 19th century American evangelicalism. Ideological challenges posed by German higher criticism had prompted conservative Protestants to reaffirm the authority of the Bible. As German higher critics mystified the interpretation of the Bible arguing that the text had many compositional layers which obscured any objective meaning in the text, conservative Protestants, on the other hand, reaffirmed Scriptural authority through a more rigid hermeneutic that defended the text's supernatural coherence and predictive prophecy. During this period, postmillennialists had grown disillusioned by the failure of the postmillennial promises – that society was steadily progressing toward spiritual and moral perfection. For this reason, dispensationalism – a system of interpreting the Bible through a series of divinely ordained dispensations – gained increasing popularity by the end of the nineteenth century through its compelling interpretive lens through which to view the social and moral decay of American cities caused by industrialization and urbanization.[10]

As dispensationalism spread in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it fostered the rise of inductive Bible study a method of Scripture reading which emphasized the clarity and coherence of Scripture for ordinary readers. Rooted in the Protestant principle of the Bible's perspicuity, the methods encouraged lay engagement with Scripture. Dispensationalists helped drive the establishment of Bible institutes and colleges to train Christians in a consistent hermeneutic and challenged the growing influence of liberal theology in established seminaries. Although the movement diverged from the original formulations of John N. Darby (1800–1882), dispensationalism's populist embrace of biblical literalism helped institutionalize a reading strategy that shaped American evangelicalism by the early 20th century.[11]

[10]John D. Hannah, *An Uncommon Union: Dallas Theological Seminary and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 28.

[11]For a comprehensive intellectual and cultural history of dispensationalism see Daniel Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023). For a revisionist perspective that challenges dispensationalism as an "anti-modern" invention, see Brendan M. Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) where the author underscores the popular fascination of applying technological methodology such as quantification and classification to the interpretation of Scripture as a means to counteract Protestant liberalism. For a history of the development of Bible schools in the U.S. see Virginia

During this period, a new generation of dispensationalists championed a "plain" or commonsense interpretation of the Bible in their systemization and dissemination of dispensational theology like never before. In this era, biblical literalism became, as Daniel Hummel has observed, one of the "defining marks of dispensationalism."[12] C. I. Scofield (1843–1921), widely regarded as dispensationalism's most influential expositor, has been described by George Marsden as its "greatest systematizer."[13] In his influential book, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Scofield repeatedly emphasized the necessity of literal interpretation for dispensational theology. For instance, he asserted that since angel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary was "literally fulfilled," that remaining biblical prophecies would likewise come to pass with "perfect literalness."[14] Scofield also maintained that the promises of the Abrahamic covenant would be fulfilled literally – a conviction that shaped a dispensational approach to the entire Bible, most famously disseminated through his *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909). Widely adopted among American evangelicals, the *Scofield Reference Bible* combined dispensationalism with biblical literalism and became not only the best-selling reference Bible in the Unites States but also Oxford University Press's most commercially successful publication.[15]

Scofield's most renown disciple, Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952), established the Evangelical Theological College (later renamed Dallas Theological Seminary) in 1924. Although Scofield had died three years before the school opened, Chafer made it evident that the training institution in Dallas was first envisioned by Scofield during his days pastoring the First Congregational Church in Dallas. With the help of W. H. Griffith Thomas and A.B. Winchester, Chafer established a school where dispensationalism, according to one scholar, found its most "important institutional home," becoming the epicenter for this school of thought over the next century.[16]

## IV. Anti-Integrationism, 1924–1950

Dallas Theological Seminary opened in October 1924 and rapidly gained prominence for its emphasis on rigorous curriculum and character cultivation. Entrance qualifications for students hinged on both academic and personal references. An undergraduate degree was required for enrollment, though some matriculated into the program with the intention of receiving a certificate upon completion. The application also required letters to speak to the applicants' moral integrity, religious commitments, as well as vocational desires. During their coursework, students often engaged in evangelistic outreach in the city which only added to the school's growing reputation.[17]

From its inception, the school served an all-white student body and the trajectory to continue operation as such was settled early.[18] Student-led evangelistic outreaches

Lieson Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880–1940* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[12]Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, 199.

[13]George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 59.

[14]C. I. Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (Philadelphia: Loizeaux Brothers, 1896), **17**, 27.

[15]B. M. Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 174.

[16]Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism*, 197. Hannah, *An Uncommon Union*, 323–4, fn. 4.

[17]Hannah, *An Uncommon Union*, 87, 103.

[18]The term all-white can be misleading due to the presence of Asian and African international students in the years prior to the desegregation era. Scholars have noted the dilemma in the nationwide trend during this

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prompted white students to interact with members of the black community. In 1927, Rev. L. G. Foster, a black bi-vocational minister and elevator operator, was walking in Dallas' downtown and came across DTS students engaged in street evangelism. The preachers' biblical knowledge so impressed Foster that he inquired more about their understanding of Scripture. After learning that the men were from the all-white school and that black Americans would be prohibited from attending, Foster persisted in his desire to learn the Bible from the street preachers privately. Eventually, the seminarians introduced Foster to Edmund Ironside, a fellow DTS student. Unlike the street preachers, Edmund Ironside willingly taught the curious Foster, meeting independently at the Magnolia building bookstore where Ironside was working. Over time, Foster invited other black pastors to join and the group eventually became the first class of the Dallas Colored Bible Institute (DCBI) in 1927.[19]

Later renamed the Southern Bible Institute (SBI), the school was eventually led by Edmund Ironside's father H. A. Ironside, DTS faculty and board member. Over the years, DTS faculty and senior seminary students taught black students in a curriculum that largely mirrored the study at DTS. Additionally, many DTS faculty served on the board for SBI. Given such an arrangement, SBI grew increasingly dependent on the seminary and thereby gained recognition within the broader fundamentalist community. A fundamentalist magazine conveyed the endeavor to educate black men in premillennial dispensationalism with paternalistic attitudes when it described the school as a "Bible institute for colored boys." In the end, SBI served as a foil for segregationists in Dallas to claim a training center for all people.[20]

This Jim Crow-era arrangement between DTS and SBI existed until 1950 when *Sweatt v. Painter* challenged segregation in graduate schools. Heman Marion Sweatt (1912–1982), a Black American, sought admission to the University of Texas Law School but his application was denied solely on the basis of race. Persistent on gaining admission, Sweatt sued the flagship school and won. The ruling reflected the court's pre-1954 jurisprudence for equal educational standards in black schools. The Supreme Court rendered a unanimous decision in which the court reversed the rulings of the state's lower courts arguing that the State of Texas had not provided Sweatt with an opportunity to study law in a manner that was "substantially equal" to the white school. The *Sweatt* decision was not only a catalyst for the civil rights mobilizations that followed in the mid-20th century, but it also raised broad questions about the viability of institutional arrangements such as the longstanding relationship between Dallas Theological Seminary and the Southern Bible

period. According to Wallenstein, "The shorthand term 'historically white'…can be profoundly misleading, for at most (perhaps all) so-called white institutions of higher education across the South, African Americans comprised the only 'nonwhite' group to be categorically excluded during the era of Jim Crow." In light of the presence of select minorities, especially Asians and some Asian-Americans, monikers such as "historically white" or "all white" are problematic. Wallenstein continues, "Rather than 'all-white,' though they may have started out that way, these institutions are better understood on the eve of 'desegregation' to have been 'nonblack.'" See Peter Wallenstein, *Higher Education and the Civil Rights Movement: White Supremacy, Black Southerners, and College Campuses* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 6–8. At DTS, the majority (if not all) non-white students were international students who had intended to return to their native countries. For this reason and to avoid confusion over the novelty of the term "nonblack," I have chosen the moniker all-white.

[19]Gordon R. Mumford, *Southern Bible Institute: The History from 1927–1998* (Fort Worth, TX: Unpublished PhD dissertation, Tyndale Theological Seminary, 1998).

[20]Ibid.; "Progress of Fundamentalism" in *The Christian Fundamentalist* II, no. 12 (1929), 216–17; see also, Hannah, *An Uncommon Union*, 179–81.

Institute. Having exposed the legal and moral tensions embedded in separate educational facilities, the ruling compelled DTS administrators to reconsider the sustainability and implications of racially segregated partnerships. Until this ruling in 1950, however, DTS unapologetically redirected all black applicants to SBI.[21]

## V. Passive-Integrationism, 1950–1970

As early as 1951, a letter probed the seminary on the question of desegregating the school. A black woman named Consuelo Bright responded to a campaign letter from DTS soliciting funds toward campus expansion. Bright had expressed her appreciation for the seminary and was "glad to know the work is growing and receiving the blessing and benediction of the Lord." However, Bright chose *not* to make a contribution. Her letter referenced her previous inquiry in which Bright asked "if negro students were admitted." Having received no answer, she assumed that black students would not be admitted and concluded that she "should make no offering at this time to an institution that my people are not free to attend."[22]

In Bright's estimation, DTS was "without a doubt…in the plans and purpose of God" though her assessment of its leadership was mixed. She daringly reminded President Chafer that "Old testament leaders frequently were perfect in heart toward God yet sometimes tolerated conditions which were not in the mind of God." Ultimately, Bright expressed optimism by "looking forward to the day when any and all of the body of Christ will be welcome to hear his word from the life of men skilled in the Scriptures." In her conclusion, Bright envisioned for the president a future when "every Christian institution can inscribe over its portals 'Whosoever Will May Come!"[23]

Chafer did not reply to Bright but forwarded her letter to his assistant John F. Walvoord for response. In the process, an unnamed administrator got hold of the letter and penned a memo to situate the letter amidst a recent controversy over admitting black students at the University of Texas, Southern Methodist University (SMU), and other graduate schools in the state. The memo at DTS, however, had shifted the focus away from race completely and reminded Walvoord that "[Bright] would not be eligible for admission here because she is a woman," even though the letter made no suggestion that Bright herself was interested in gaining admission.[24]

In his response to Bright, Walvoord sought to update the inquirer on the situation at the school. Walvoord maintained that it was "illegal in Texas for a school like ours to admit Negro students," adding that legal changes have been made possible "only recently." He wrote based on a misconception, viewing the school as a public institution when in fact the school's founding documents identified it as a private institution, granting it the authority to determine its own admissions policies. Perhaps Chafer's

[21]Amilcar Shabazz, *Advancing Democracy: African Americans and the Struggle for Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); "Sweatt V. Painter" in *Encyclopedia of Law and Higher Education*, edited by Charles J. Russo (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Reference, 2010), 444– 8.

[22]Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 179; Letter, Consuelo Bright to Lewis Sperry Chafer, January 20, 1951, Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives.

[23] Ibid.

[24]Memo, Dewey to Walvoord, January 1, 1951, Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives. The president's decision to forward the letter to his assistant for was not uncommon since Walvoord increasingly assumed Chafer's administrative responsibilities including the president's correspondences following Chafer's health crisis in 1945 (see Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 131).

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administration was not ready to consider the question of integration. Regardless, Walvoord proceeded to justify its white student body. "We have never had, as far as I know," Walvoord said, "an application from an American Negro considered by the faculty." Citing the open possibilities of such, he wrote, "If such an application were received, I am sure it would be considered on its merits."[25]

The notion that the seminary did not have an application from a black American considered by the faculty until 1951 has been questioned by recent scholarship. According to the seminary's institutional historian, John Hannah, black Americans did apply to the seminary before the 1950s but were referred to the Southern Bible Institute (SBI). Further, Donald Campbell, who served as the seminary's third president from 1986 to 1994, affirms this fact when he recalled, "[the registrar] always recommended black applicants to go to Southern Bible Training School, a school, Bible college, specifically for African American students." The recommendation of black students to enroll at SBI by DTS administrators suggests that black applicants did apply but never advanced to the level of faculty evaluations to be considered for admission. In the end, the segregated arrangement prompted black applications to be redirected to SBI.[26]

Meanwhile, evangelicals across the nation largely found themselves siding with the resistance as momentum for desegregation grew during the middle of the twentieth century. Following the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* on May 17, 1954, white conservatives nationwide resisted desegregation through a variety of measures, many of which have been categorized under the broader strategy of "massive resistance." Conservative evangelicals in particular erected a flurry of religious justifications to preserve the separation of the races.[27]

G. T. Gillespie, Presbyterian minister and president emeritus of Belhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi gave an address before the state Synod of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. defending segregation from a Christian view. Gillespie called attention to the "considerable [biblical] data from which valid inferences may be drawn in support of the general principle of segregation as an important feature of the Divine purpose and Providence throughout the ages." The ultimate dread of integration was intermarriage. Gillespie warned of its dangers by stating, "Moses strictly warned the Israelites against allowing their sons and daughters to intermarry with the pagan peoples with whom they came in contact, under the penalty of bringing upon themselves the Divine wrath and judgment. (Numbers 25:1–8)." According to Gillespie, integration could not be achieved without divine punishment.[28]

Gillespie's defense of racial segregation was part of a larger pattern of evangelical resistance to integrate after *Brown.* Historians have shown the repeated patterns of civil rights resistance that gained traction in the late 1950s and 1960s through "biblical exegesis that deemed racial segregation as divinely ordered." Christians of various stripes

[25]Letter, John Walvoord to Consuelo Bright, August 28, 1951, Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives.

[26]Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 133–47; Hannah also addresses the difficulties related to the institution's registrar/admissions director noting the job's daunting nature "because records were not properly kept, and the registrat acting singularly on matters of admissions" (133). For Nash's actions see Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 347, fn. 178; for Campbell quote, see Donald K. Campbell, interview by Lolana Thompson in Dallas, TX, September 16, 2011, Transcript, Turpin Library, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

[27]Clive Webb, ed., *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[28]Gillespie, G. T., "A Christian View on Segregation," November 4, 1954. Citizens' Council Collections. Archives and Special Collections. University of Mississippi Libraries, 5–8.

including pastors, theologians, and lay citizens used an array of biblical justifications to resist racial integration. Passages included the Genesis story of the Tower of Babel where segregationists viewed God separating people groups or the various passages demanding Jewish separation from other ethnicities. The Bible verse cited most came from the book of Acts in a passage that stated that God "hath made of one blood all the nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts17:26, KJV). Segregationist Christians favored this passage and saw a direct application between "bounds of their habitation" and the racial color line. In the end, segregationist evangelicals wielded the Bible as evidence of God's support for Jim Crow segregation.[29]

Unlike the rampant use of the Bible to rationalize segregation, the evidence at Dallas Theological Seminary suggests something different. By the time of the *Brown* ruling, John F. Walvoord had succeeded Chafer as President of Dallas Theological Seminary for a little over a year. In a striking contrast to his fellow evangelicals engrossed in a flurry of biblical passages to obstruct integration, Walvoord could not use the Scripture to justify segregation. An opportune time came when he received an inquiry on "the Lord's will regarding segregation…" The author of this letter, Patria Suddarth, recognized the absence of black students and sought to press Walvoord for a response backed by biblical justifications asking, "Upon what Scripture would you base this?"[30] Walvoord responded decisively by setting the record straight: "the Scriptures never discuss the matter of segregation on the basis of race or color." Walvoord went further in his reply seeking to clarify a common misreading of the Old Testament accounts of Israel's relation to other nations: "The Israelites were forbidden to associate with non-Israelites as a means of preserving their purity and distinguishing them from other people." Walvoord reminded her, "Apart from this, there is nothing in the Bible which deals with this subject." Even as Gillespie and other Christians were wielding passages to prevent racial integration across the nation, Walvoord dismissed the idea that segregation can be biblically justified.[31]

As the *Brown* decision rippled across the nation, inquiries about desegregation poured in. On June 27, 1955, C. Stacey Woods, the General Secretary of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and DTS graduate (class of 1933), wrote to president Walvoord inquiring about the issue. Woods wanted to know "how things are going to work out segregation-wise at the Seminary." His interest was to determine if a "policy and a practice [had] been established" for the purpose of being informed "if any queries come my way" regarding black admission.[32]

Walvoord's response to Wood's letter indicated no progress at the Seminary regarding black admission. Up until the summer of 1955, "the problem of colored students has not arisen" and "the faculty has taken no action," according to Walvoord. Lacking a clear

[29]J. Russell Hawkins, *The Bible Told Them So: How Southern Evangelicals Fought To Preserve White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), **7**, 46–52. See also, Adam Laats, *Fundamentalist U: Keeping the Faith in American Higher Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[30]Letter, Patria Suddarth to John Walvoord, July 23, 1954, Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives.

[31]John F. Walvoord was installed as the second president of Dallas Theological Seminary on February 6, 1953 (see Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 140); Letter, John F. Walvoord to Patria Suddarth, July 28, 1954. Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives.

[32]Letter, C. Stacey Woods to John F. Walvoord, June 27, 1955, Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives. See also Donald A., MacLeod, C. *Stacey Woods and the Evangelical Rediscovery of the University* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 45–53, 112–14.

biblical justification on the matter, the seminary president simply explained the situation in pragmatic terms: "Until a few years ago," he wrote "it was illegal for us to enroll a Negro student but now we can do it if we wish." Given the mood over desegregation, the seminary's current plan was "to consider each individual who might apply on his own merits."[33]

The president went on to list what he perceived to be deficiencies among the black community. These included educational standards as the president wrote, "colored people do not have the educational requirements." Additionally, there were moral disqualifications hindering the admission of black students as the president cited the "divorce problem" which for him was "nine out of ten cases." Although the seminary could not account for a single black student after citing an open policy for black students, Walvoord informed his recipient that there were "no rules against receiving one."[34] While it is possible that Walvoord may have been providing disingenuous statements or been motivated by institutional self-interest by not getting embroiled in a national controversy too early, what is evident is that Walvoord did not resort to the growing body of religious justifications prevalent of the time.

The president's hesitation resulted in internal disagreements at the seminary. In 1956, Russell T. Hitt, executive editor of *Eternity* magazine, received a manuscript for his popular fundamentalist periodical on the topic of segregation. The piece was authored by Fred Z. Browne, a DTS faculty member. Browne had written an article in support of segregation and sought to publish the work in *Eternity*. Hitt consulted Walvoord on the matter before moving on to publish the work, asking the president "[W]hat does Dallas teach about segregation and integration?" The editor had been in search for an article on desegregation with respect to the Bible by the time Browne's article had arrived. All the editor knew was that "the Bible does not tell us very much except the verse in Acts which says that we are all of one blood and that in Galatians, we are one in Christ, that is, in the church."[35] Hitt confessed to having limited knowledge on the subject but looked to Walvoord the theologian to set him straight.

In contrast to Christian segregationists rallying to use scriptural justifications for racial segregation, Walvoord used the opportunity to distance himself from Browne's inclination to "support the southern point of view." The seminary president strictly warned Hitt not to associate the article with any views from the seminary. "I urgently ask you," he wrote the editor, "to disassociate both Dr. Browne and the manuscript from any connection with Dallas Seminary." The president's intention concerned the fate of the seminary. "I would much rather not be involved as an institution in any controversy on segregation." Despite the hesitation to admit black students into the seminary, Walvoord had no intention of portraying the seminary as being for segregation either. He clearly stated his views on the biblical implications of desegregation, "I do not believe the Bible teaching anything specific on the matter of segregation and integration…" For President Walvoord, the Bible simply did not address the topic.[36]

However, Walvoord recognized the importance of the subject. In the same letter, Walvoord seemed to get personal about the matter. "I feel that the whole segregation issue is a most difficult problem" Walvoord wrote to Hitt. Yet as a pragmatist he resolved, "…I do not believe it is our duty as an educational institution to attempt to set the world right

[33]Letter, John F. Walvoord to C. Stacey Woods, July 6, 1955, Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives.
[34]Ibid.
[35]Letter, Russell T. Hitt to John F. Walvoord, February 17, 1956, Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives.
[36]Letter, John F. Walvoord to Russell T. Hitt, February 22, 1956, Walvoord Papers, DTS Archives.

on the question."[37] For Walvoord, the 1950s served as a time to preserve what he believed was the integrity of the seminary to *not* get involved in the national unrest. He sought to "save Dallas Seminary from embroilment in a controversy which cannot be finally settled." It is difficult to imagine just how Walvoord or the rest of the seminary leadership anticipated the conflict to play out, especially as the topic of segregation engendered, for Walvoord, "violent differences of opinion…in the south."[38]

Local periodicals confirmed the lack of progress of black enrollment at DTS. In order to keep up with the series of national reports highlighting progress of desegregation across the country, the *Dallas Morning News* published a list of "Integrated Texas Colleges" in 1959. Although DTS could not claim to have any "negro" students, it was listed among colleges "with policies to accept all races, but some without application from other races." The seminary did not make the list in the previous year. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary located in Fort Worth, TX was listed in both reports as having black and white students.[39]

Walvoord's refusal to invoke scriptural justifications in opposition to desegregation was rooted in his commitment to biblical literalism. Walvoord could not find explicit passages that advocated for racial separation with a plain and simple reading of the Bible. There may have been several reasons for this. The Genesis account of a common human origins appeared to undermine racial hierarchies. Scientific (or pseudoscientific) racial categories often conflicted with the Bible because the ideas were largely premised on polygenesis – the idea that human races had separate origins. Whereas traditional understanding for the history of mankind had been rooted in a single human lineage, or monogenesis. Additionally, the longstanding evangelical emphasis on individual salvation and spiritual equality in Christ (Galatians 3:28) minimized race as a theological concern. For committed biblical literalists like Walvoord, deploying Scripture to resist racial integration would have entailed hermeneutical inconsistencies that would compromise the seminary's theological commitments.

During this period, fidelity to biblical literalism was a matter of institutional self-interest. Walvoord's tenure at DTS coincided with an identity crisis within American evangelicalism. While figures such as Harold John Ockenga, Carl F. H. Henry, and Billy Graham sought to stress an intellectually aggressive and socially compassionate defense of the faith, conservative Fundamentalists argued that maintaining a separatist and censorious mood best described fidelity to the Scriptures. By the 1950s, as evangelicalism and fundamentalism became two distinct movements, DTS failed to aligned completely with either side and faced criticism from both. While evangelicals viewed the seminary as too fundamentalist, fundamentalists saw the seminary as too evangelical. This lack of a clear theological camp had significance for the seminary, not least of which was a decline in its applicant base. As a school that fashioned itself as transcending denominational distinctives, the decline posed serious challenges.[40]

[37]Ibid. See also Coker on the "Spirituality of the Church" in which the author establishes a widely held belief among conservatives that saw the church's obligation to lie mainly in spiritual matters as an argument to relinquish matters of social justice, Joe L. Coker, "The Sinnott Case of 1910: The Changing Views of Southern Presbyterians on Temperance, Prohibition, and the Spirituality of the Church," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* **77**, no. 4, 247–262 (1999).

[38]Ibid.

[39]"Integrated Texas Colleges," *Dallas Morning News*, January 6, 1959; "Integrated Texas Colleges," *Dallas Morning News*, March 23, 1958.

[40]Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 150–55.

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Historically, DTS drew its student body from a range of schools nationwide. However, the rift between evangelicals and fundamentalists led many institutions to reevaluate these partnerships. For example, Wheaton College had long sent numerous students to the graduate program at DTS, Walvoord himself being a Wheaton alum. In the early years of the seminary, Wheaton annually supplied up to a quarter of Dallas students. However, the number of Wheaton applicants significantly declined by the mid-1950s as rumors spread that Wheaton faculty criticized the eschatological position of the seminary and recommended other schools. Walvoord grew convinced of the "anti-Dallas feeling" at Wheaton when he learned of an article by New Testament Professor Gilbert Bilezikan in which the author criticized premillennialism, a cornerstone of DTS's eschatology.[41]

Developments at Fuller Theological Seminary only made matters worse. Fashioning Fuller as the "intellectual citadel of orthodoxy" amidst the growing divisions within American evangelicalism, many faculty and board members at Fuller renounced fundamentalism. They also revealed a growing hostility to both dispensationalism and premillennialism during internal debates over inerrancy. The exodus of several original faculty members at Fuller who held to premillennialism (most of whom were dispensationalists) confirmed the threat against the ideological commitments at DTS. Such events reverberated across the nation's evangelical churches and institutions revealing a growing divide among conservative Christians.[42]

In response, Dallas Seminary reaffirmed longstanding commitments by buttressing the merits of premillennial dispensationalism. However, such interpretations hinged on a literal reading of the Bible. In *The Rapture Question* (1957), Walvoord underscored the validity of premillennialism which hinged on a literal reading. Through his hermeneutic for prophetic interpretation, distinction between Israel and the Church, and support for pretribulation rapture, Walvoord affirmed the necessity of literal interpretation. According to Walvoord, while amillennialists from Augustine onward had advocated the need for a literal interpretation of Scripture, they always held that "prophecy was a special case requiring spiritualizing or nonliteral interpretation." Walvoord insisted that a literal hermeneutic was more consistent and required for all genres of Scripture as it "applies to prophecy as well as other doctrinal areas."[43]

Walvoord's position on biblical interpretation became the dominant view of dispensationalist hermeneutics. In *The Millennial Kingdom*, Walvoord noted that premillennialists held to "one general rule of interpretation" in all areas of theology, that of a "literal, grammatical-historical method." Walvoord's elaboration of this rule indicates his framework for biblical interpretation. Walvoord defined the literal, grammatical-historical method to mean that, "a passage should be taken in its literal sense, in keeping with the grammatical meaning of the words and forms." He continued, "History is history, not allegory. Facts are facts. Prophesied future events are just what they are prophesied. Israel means Israel, earth means earth, heaven means heaven." Walvoord endorsed a hermeneutical approach that insisted the words of Scripture be understood at face value.[44]

[41]Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 159. Although evangelicals and fundamentalists during this period differed largely over practical matters with evangelicals favoring engagement with broader culture and scholarship whereas fundamentalists favored separatism, there were occasional disagreement in areas of theology.

[42]Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 160. See also, George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987).

[43]John F. Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Company, 1957), 56.

[44]John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959, 1974), 129– 30.

Through his writings, Walvoord's popularity increased rapidly. Walvoord's defense and use of literalism convinced many evangelicals and fundamentalists to interpret the Bible literally and played a formative role in shaping American evangelicalism. By advocating for the "plain sense" of Scripture, he helped render the Bible accessible not only to seminarians and pastors but also to lay readers who gravitated toward dispensationalism. As Daniel Hummel has noted, Walvoord's name became ubiquitous in evangelical circles that permeated pulpits, classrooms, and popular literature. This influence spurred the proliferation of prophecy tracts and religious periodicals, the expansion of evangelical publishing ventures, and the founding of new Bible colleges and seminaries – many staffed by DTS graduates committed to Walvoord's brand of premillennial dispensationalism.[45]

While Walvoord's theological influence extended far beyond Dallas, practical implications of his hermeneutics were realized in the growing divide over desegregation. From 1950 until the late 60s, Walvoord and the seminary administrators continued to claim to have an open admission policy denouncing any implication the Scriptures had on black admission. As far as the desegregation controversy goes, Biblical arguments could not have been used in favor of either side.

Still, the school could not account for a single black American student even as supporters and stake holders of the seminary wrote in from both sides of the debate. Whether the reason was financial contributors withholding donations, alumni wanting to see their alma matter in a better light, or seminary faculty who sought to resist the decision to include black students is unclear. What is certain, however, is that Walvoord's administration was indecisive up until the late-1960s.

Although Walvoord could not support the rationale of most Christian segregationists, Walvoord's indecisive stance on racial integration had still reflected the wider posture of white Christians against whom Martin Luther King Jr. had addressed his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in 1963. Writing after being imprisoned in Birmingham for his participation in leading peaceful protests, King had expressed sharp criticism of Southern white Christians after Alabama's religious leaders urged Birmingham's black Americans to withdraw support from King and other civil rights activists. Besides a few notable exceptions, King was "greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership." Having expected to gain the support of "the white church," King had witnessed pastors who had been "more cautious than courageous" as they "remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stain-glass windows." For King, white churchmen had stood on the sidelines mouthing "pious irrelevances and sanctimonious trivialities" while black Americans marched on the streets for equality. Other than having to weep over the "laxity of the church," King found no encouragement from many white Christians.[46]

The growing impact of the civil rights movement prompted southern evangelicals to reconsider their position because change was coming.

The legal demise of segregation with the 1954 *Brown* decision emboldened civil rights activists to campaign for the practical implications of the ruling. Activists sought to move the battle from *de jure* segregation to *de facto* segregation through numerous sit-ins, marches, freedom rides, and other demonstrations across the nation from the late 1950s through the 1960s. The culmination of the civil rights movement saw the passage of the Civil

[45]Hummel, *Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, 182.

[46]King, Martin Luther Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail-April 16, 1963" In *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, edited by Milton C. Sernett (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 530– 2.

Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, what race scholar Paul C. Taylor has identified as "history's most important and influential liberation programs."[47]

Despite the importance of key civil rights legislation from the mid-1950s to mid-1960s, scholarship has overlooked the significance of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Whereas the landmark victory in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended racial discrimination in public accommodations, employment, and federally funded programs, it did not address housing discrimination. As a result, practices such as "redlining" persisted, whereby minorities – particularly black Americans – were systematically excluded from purchasing, renting, or securing financing for homes in predominantly white neighborhoods. Whereas *Brown* (1954) and a subsequent ruling to desegregate with "all deliberate speed" in *Brown II* (1955) lacked any consequences for delay, the 1968 bill introduced repercussions for noncompliance. Although the bill faced strong opposition from southern lawmakers, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968 enabled President Lyndon B. Johnson to frame it as a tribute to King, ultimately facilitating its passage one week after the assassination.[48]

Studies on the wider massive resistance to racial integration in the South reveal that the movement began to lose momentum shortly after the passage of these key civil rights legislations. Federal pressure made segregation increasingly untenable as demonstrated by several factors such as the use of the National Guard during the Little Rock crisis of 1957, judicial orders enforcing compliance, and the withholding of federal funds from states and school districts that resisted desegregation. Additionally, local businessmen and city officials, concerned with preserving their city's economic interests, social stability, and public image, contributed to making the fight for segregation a losing battle.[49]

Such was the case in Dallas. The city did not experience the kind of sensational news making headway across the nation during the civil rights era. Historian Brian D. Behnken has shown how "direct action demonstrations" had compelled the city's white leaders to a bargaining table where they often acquiesced to black civil rights demands, leaving little struggle that involved violence. Thus, the "negotiated integration" had relied on an open line of communication between the races that allowed Dallas to experience integration through a movement free of violence and often championed as "The Dallas Way."[50]

Meanwhile, religious justifications to resist racial integration also weakened in lock step with the broader culture after the civil rights legislative gains of the 1960s. As Hawkins notes, "By the middle of the 1960s, explicit segregationist theology…grew sparse in public discourse." As segregationist Christians sought more subtle methods to preserve the racial status quo, they relied less and less on utilizing biblical passages for segregation.[51] Meanwhile, in other parts of the nation's evangelical hotbeds sentiments had evolved considerably *in favor* of integration. Whereas segregationist Christians were finding it increasingly difficult to quote chapter and verse by the late 1960s, a different

[47]Paul C. Taylor, *Race: A Philosophical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 73– 4.

[48]Jonathan Zasloff, "The Secret History of the Fair Housing Act," *Harvard Journal on Legislation* **53**, no. 1 (2016): 247.

[49]Lewis, Massive Resistance, 185–7; Clive Webb, *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[50]Brian D. Behnken, "The 'Dallas Way': Protest, Response, and the Civil Rights Experience in Big D and Beyond," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (2007): 1–29.

[51]Hawkins, *The Bible Told Them So*, 66.

brand of evangelicals increasingly felt that "real evangelical Christianity required unyielding racial egalitarianism."[52]

These changing attitudes over segregation was also seen among conservative Christian leaders in Dallas. The pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, W. A. Criswell (1909–2002), had gained a reputation as an open segregationist who justified racial separation on biblical principles. Criswell had overseen his church's commitment to exclude black Americans from gaining membership until a shocking reversal on the policy delivered through a sermon preached on Sunday June 9, 1968. In a message entitled, "The Church of the Open Door," Criswell exhorted his church to embrace the idea of an open-door policy for non-whites. The preacher had explained his change of heart to listeners over the next several weeks and even dismounted from biblical justification for segregation, going so far as to identify the arguments as being weak.[53]

Criswell's recanting had reflected other moderate policies adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention that year, mostly likely related to Criswell's influence as president of the nation's largest denomination. In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled in *Alexander v. Homes County Board of Education* that school segregation had to be complete by 1970, decisively ending the ambiguous "all deliberate speed" era set by *Brown II* (1955). Rather than support the "white-flight" pattern of congregants who flocked to suburbs and set up private schools, the SBC adopted resolutions that both supported integrated public schools and condemned the practice of establishing of private church schools for the purposes of avoiding integration. Between 1969 and 1971, the SBC commended open church policies that invited black Americans for membership and condemned racial prejudice, which one scholar recognizes as the "continued decline, but not extinction, of racism within the convention."[54]

The decline of segregationist Christianity across the nation in the late 1960s as well as the progressive and cooperative mood of "the Dallas Way" prompted DTS administrators to experiment with admitting the first black students that decade. The seminary made no major announcement when the first Black American student registered for classes in 1966. Tyler Carter, a local pastor from Marshall, Texas, enrolled for classes in 1966 with a "special student" status without ever matriculating.[55] Carter was among those who showed interest in courses with no intention of completing a program of study. The move to admit a black student on a provisional basis reflects a nationwide pattern to begin the process of desegregating gradually, an approach adopted decades earlier in private higher education schools in the south such as Vanderbilt and Tulane Universities.[56]

The late 1960s at DTS reveals that Walvoord faced institutional problems such as financial hardship and declining student applications. Such pressures favored desegregation. After 1967, president Walvoord found it much easier to have direct control of the institution after the Board of Incorporate Members rearranged the organizational flow

[52]Laats, *Fundamentalist U*, 230.

[53]Curtis W. Freeman, "'Never Had I Been So Blind': W. A. Criswell's 'Change' on Racial Segregation," *The Journal of Southern Religion* **X**, (2007): 1–12.

[54]Mark Newman, *Getting Right with God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945–1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 33.

[55]On the category of "special student" see Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 103.

[56]*Dallas Theological Seminary Bulletin*, September/October 1966, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives; Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 347 fn. 178. Gradual desegregation was often the compromise between radical progressives and massive resistors on the subject of integration, see Melissa Kean, *Desegregating Private Higher Education* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 24, 48, 140, 197.

chart. Walvoord found himself more capable of making what he perceived as dire changes to the seminary after learning that the school was so financially weak that the "debt exceeded the budget by 100 percent." Although the "no-tuition policy" had ended in the early 1950s, the Board of Trustees still approved tuition increases in 1966 and 1968 highlighting the financial constraints of the school. Historian of education Adam Laats has acknowledged that concern over tuition amid financial instability often had a calming effect on desegregation. Administrators, frequently confronted with the possibility of closing the school due to financial difficulties, saw expanding admissions – including, if necessary, admitting black students – as a practical measure to sustain the institution.[57]

The seminary took its next step toward desegregation when it admitted its first black "regular" student in 1968. Michael K. Frank of Brooklyn, NY made history that Fall by being the first black student to enter the seminary's core academic program for the Master of Theology (ThM) degree. The admission came 42 years after the seminary was founded in 1925 and 17 years after the school was ostensibly open to black students. In the following years, black enrollment crept at a slow and steady pace. Ruben Conner of Dallas entered in 1969. Ronald Roberts from Camden, NJ enrolled the following year. Black students enrolled steadily through the following years, including two students who would later come into national prominence, Eddie B. Lane (entered 1970) and Tony Evans (entered 1972). Beginning with a trickle in the late 60s, black student enrollment at the seminary grew at a slow and steady pace over the next two decades.[58]

Walvoord's commitment to attracting and retaining accomplished faculty also impacted the progress of desegregation. With the emergence of new seminaries in the wake of neo-evangelicalism such as Fuller Theological Seminary (1947) in the west coast and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (1969) in the east, Walvoord found it difficult to keep and attract accomplished faculty. The emergence of these centers and the transformation of other schools served as attractions for current DTS faculty. The departure of several professors during this period prompted Walvoord to prioritize faculty retainment through salary increases, health benefit programs, retirement plans, workman's compensation insurance, and tuition scholarship for children of faculty. Retaining more accomplished faculty came with a price. Historian of desegregation, Melissa Kean, has noted that the years of desegregation coincided with the rise of academic professional organizations. The more faculty sought prestige and acceptance into the professional guild, the less they exhibited regional markers. In the adjacent city, faculty at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary were instrumental in passing a motion before the trustees to admit black Americans as regular students revealing the attitudes of some faculty toward desegregation. In the end, what was true for faculty across the south was true for the seminary: "Faculties became less southern and more tied to their professional colleagues than their local communities." Without intending it, Walvoord's step toward fashioning faculty repute was indirectly tied to increasing black admission.[59]

Walvoord's administrative prowess was rewarded in December 1969, when the school received full accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

[57]Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 142–3; Laats, *Fundamentalist U*, 219.

[58]Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 347, fn. 178; *Dallas Theological Seminary Bulletin*, September/October 1966, September October 1968, September/October 1969, September/October 1970, September/October 1972.

[59]Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 144; Robert A. Baker, *Tell the Generations Following: A History of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1908–1983* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983), 313; Kean, *Desegregating Private Higher Education in the* South, 234.

DTS initiated the process for accreditation with the SACS in 1965 and faculty voiced their continued approval in the following year for the purpose of placing graduates, favorable outlook on the part of foundations, student recruitment, entrance for graduates into other institutions for further study, among others. At this time, however, national accrediting agencies increasingly incorporated civil rights standards into their evaluations, aligning institutional accountability with the national emphasis on desegregation and equal opportunity. National recognition came at the cost of downplaying regional sentiments such as segregation.[60]

The potential loss of the seminary's tax-exempt status was likely a consequential factor compelling it to accelerate the admission of black students. In 1970, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) announced it would no longer allow institutions like Bob Jones University (BJU) to discriminate on the basis of race while maintaining their tax-exempt status. Although BJU ultimately lost their tax-exempt status in 1983 after it levied the biggest onslaught of suits and appeals against the IRS decision, any school deciding to restrict black Americans from enrolling would have faced similar consequences.[61]

The changing attitudes of faculty and administrators at the seminary was evident among the Administration Committee. During a meeting held on October 31, 1969, Academic Dean Don Campbell presented a resolution that "more active steps be taken to recruit Negro students." The committee approved the recommendation by appointing Campbell to consult Michael Frank, one of the first black students, with the possibility of recruiting his help toward this end. By the close of the 1960s, it was clear that the Seminary had shifted away from its historic pattern of restricting black student enrollment.[62]

## VI. Active-Integrationism, 1970–1980

By 1970, Dallas Seminary categorically reversed its longstanding exclusion of black Americans from admission. That is, rather than excluding or quietly admitting black American students, the seminary undertook measures to actively and publicly recruit black students, allowing the school to boast that it had admitted 28 black students by the end of the decade.[63] During this time, the seminary sought to shed its image of exclusion and established new procedures to proactively recruit black applicants.

President Walvoord's preferred strategy was to pursue partnerships with prominent black evangelical leaders. A consequential initiative unfolded when Walvoord appealed directly to black evangelist Tom Skinner (1942–1994), expressing the seminary's desire to "increasing the number of black students in our student body." However, Walvoord sought to set the record straight given the seminary's legacy of black admission policies. "In the early history of the Seminary," he wrote, "because of

[60]"Dallas Seminary Is Accredited by Southern Association". *This is Dallas* January–February 1970; See also Hannah, *Uncommon Union*, 149–50.

[61]*Discriminatory Religious Schools and Tax Exempt Status* (Washington, DC: United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1982); Laats, *Fundamentalist*, 218.

[62]Administration Committee Minutes, October 31, 1969, DTS President's Office: Walvoord and Campbell, Administrative Cabinet Records, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

[63]"Staff Meeting," Tuesday September 9, 1980, Eddie Lane Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives; "American Minority Scholarship Policy," n.d., Eddie Lane Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

its situation in Texas, it was prohibited by law to admit Black students."[64] Walvoord elaborated for Skinner,

> …when this was changed, we immediately were registered with the government as an integrated school and announce-ment was carried of this in the Dallas papers. If there was any prejudice against Black students it certainly was a very small minority. At the present time, on our board of 25 men and our faculty of 28, I do not know of one who would not welcome Black students in our student body and give them every privilege afforded a white student. We certainly want to erase any feeling that Black students are not entirely welcome in our student body.[65]

For Walvoord, the immediate concern in addressing a prominent black evangelical was to clear the reputation DTS had in the black community across the nation. Stating his interest to "do what I can to help the black people, especially in the field of education," Walvoord, the strategist, sought the attention of black leaders in the efforts to recruit more black students. Walvoord's appeal to Skinner may have been motivated by the black evangelist's publication of *Black and Free* two years prior. The book highlighted Skinner's conversion from gang leader to evangelist along with a scathing critique of white evangelicalism and its neglect for the black community.[66]

Developments at the seminary followed national trends. The 1970s marks an interest with race and urban ministry among American evangelicals at large. For instance, Ron Sider began work to bring together evangelical leaders concerned about the church's legacy in society. In 1973, this group met for the first time in Chicago where they drafted the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern, a pivotal statement signed by over 50 evangelical leaders including John F. Alexander, Frank Gaebelein, Carl F. H. Henry, C. T. McIntire, Richard Mouw, John Perkins, and, Jim Wallis, among others. The wide reception of the Declaration led Sider to found Evangelicals for Social Action in 1978, whose newsletters and publications reflected the growing concern with race, poverty, and injustice among evangelicals.[67]

Noticing national trends, DTS administrators took what it perceived to be necessary steps to accelerate black enrollment at the school. The faculty-student coalition led by Campbell and Frank were tasked with the assignment to increase black student enrollment at the seminary by investigating the national black conferences for student recruitment. The most attractive and viable option was the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA). Walvoord's own executive assistant, Stephen E. Slocum (1920–2012), perceived the best potential in what was then the National Negro Evangelical Association, founded in 1963.[68] Slocum, working on behalf of Walvoord, grew convinced

[64]Letter, John F. Walvoord to Tom Skinner, August 7, 1970, Walvoord Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

[65]Letter, John F. Walvoord to Tom Skinner, August 7, 1970, Walvoord Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

[66]Ibid.

[67]David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*. 1st ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc, 2012), **171**, 206– 7; See also Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *United by Faith the Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2003, 165.

[68]"Stephen E. Slocum, Jr. Appointed Executive Assistance to the President," *This is Dallas* (July 1972), Dallas Theological Seminary Archives. For the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA) see A. G.

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of this "extremely important association," and sought to establish numerous formal partnerships with DTS through the 1970s.[69]

Beginning in 1972, the seminary began sending black students to the NBEA conferences for two distinct purposes. First, Walvoord and Slocum sought to erase the idea that DTS restricted black enrollment. Through their delegates and literature distribution, the seminary sought to convey the simple fact that "Dallas Seminary welcomes Black students." The delegates often returned with a list of contacts for those who wished to enroll. Admission packets were eventually forwarded to individuals who expressed a desire to enroll with instructions to note that they were applying for admission at the suggestion of a DTS delegate.[70]

Secondly, the administrators encouraged their black students to attend NBEA conferences to gain understanding of the barriers for black enrollment. From the reports submitted by the DTS delegates, it was clear that funding was a top priority. As a result, Slocum took the initiative to find donors to support black students and found in Howard C. Miller, a northern businessman, one of the most enthusiastic supporters. Miller's generous donations came with notes indicating his dismay over the church's dealings with black Americans. "It has always been a mystery to me" Miller wrote to Slocum, "as to why the church failed in their mission to the Negroes." Miller felt his contribution paled in comparison to what can be done "to make up for what should have been accomplished over the past hundred years."[71]

During the 1970s, white administrators were vital to the admission and success of black students at DTS. From a myriad of individuals, white administrators and sponsors went a long way to establish policy changes and practices even as the active presence and voice of black students were vital in securing their place in the classrooms. The actions of some white administrators may fall into a type of paternalism that emerged after 1945. Having sensed a need to reach black Americans, they viewed black students as necessary means. Black students therefore were intended to supply black church pulpits when no such restrictions were placed on white graduates. Nonetheless, such practices were characteristic of interracialism in American Christianity during this period that ultimately worked, according to one scholar, for "lasting religious, social, and political change."[72]

By the mid-1970s, DTS made significant gains in refashioning its posture toward black evangelicals. Slocum and the delegates convinced the NBEA to host their 1974 conference in Dallas. The seminary took key steps to increase its support for the event. Leading up to the conference, the administration invited Rev. Ruben Conner to a Faculty meeting, to offer suggestions "to our future course and direction" regarding the black community. Minutes from a Faculty Meeting held on April 26, 1973 reveal that Rev. Reuben Conner,

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Miller, *National Black Evangelical Association*, edited by Jack Salzman, David L. Smith, and Cornel West. Vol 4 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 1956.

[69]Letter, Stephen Slocum to Howard C. Miller, December 9, 1972, Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondence, DTS Archives.

[70]Thomas L. Constable, *Brochure for the National Negro Evangelical Association Convention, 1973*, edited by Dallas Theological Seminary (Dallas, TX, **1973**). See also Letter, Howard C. Miller to Steve Slocum, March 9, 1973, Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondences, DTS Archives.

[71]Letter, Howard C. Miller to Steve Slocum, March 19, 1973, Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondence, DTS Archives. Letter, Howard C. Miller to Steve Slocum, December 14, 1972, Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondence, DTS Archives.

[72]Phillip Luke Sinitiere, "Interracialism and American Christianity," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, December 19, 2017.

president of black Evangelistic Enterprises and a DTS graduate, "spoke with the faculty concerning the spiritual needs of the Black community and the need for recruiting evangelical Black students…" Although it is difficult to obtain the content of Conner's suggestions, for Slocum "[Conner's] remarks to the Faculty constituted a major step forward."[73]

Early in 1974, the seminary celebrated its 50th anniversary from Feb. 19–23. During this time, the seminary continued to partner with the NBEA to simultaneously improve its reputation among black Americans and inform seminary stakeholders of its changing attitudes toward black evangelicals. The anniversary events platformed DTS students and NBEA members Eddie B. Lane and Ruben Conner to give a talk on the topic of "The Evangelical Church & The Black Community." Without giving regard to the outsized attendance for the seminary campus, DTS platformed the voices of black evangelicals as it celebrated its semicentennial anniversary in order to exhibit a new direction.[74]

The participation of black evangelicals at the seminary's 50th anniversary celebrations signaled an openness to racial inclusion and reflected a broader shift in institutional posture toward supporting black evangelicals at large. In preparation for the NBEA conference later that year, the seminary approved to underwrite a "Get Acquainted Workshop and Luncheon" for the administrators to hear the needs of the NBEA conference conveners and show their desire "to be of service in any way we can" with the emphatic notion that "DTS is open to qualified Black Christians."[75]

When the 1974 NBEA conference came around, the school took advantage of the increased presence of black evangelicals in Dallas. Rev. Stanley Long was requested to address an "Applied Cultural Anthropology" class on Thursday April 4th and Rev. Mel Banks addressed a class on "Christian Education Journalism." Both Tom Skinner and Dr. Joseph Daniels were chapel speakers for the seminary during the week, which Slocum later described as "interesting and profitable." The most significant meeting occurred when NBEA president Rev. William Bentley, an outspoken proponent of black evangelical self-determination, met with DTS faculty for "an exchange of ideas and suggestions" to expand black enrollment at the seminary. In the end, the NBEA conference provided an opportunity for DTS administrators, faculty, and students to listen to the voices of black evangelicals as the latter described evangelicalism from their vantage point.[76]

By the late 1970s, sustained institutional efforts at Dallas Theological Seminary began to yield visible results. Through strategic recruitment initiatives, sponsorship of black student delegates at national evangelical gatherings, hosting lectures and panel discussions featuring prominent black evangelical leaders, and its support for the 1974 NBEA conference in Dallas, the seminary undertook deliberate efforts to counteract its longstanding reputation

[73]Letter, Steve Slocum to Howard Miller, May 30, 1973, Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondences, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.; "Faculty Meeting April 26, 1973," Dallas Theological Seminary, Faculty Minutes, 1924–1995. Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

[74]"Schedule of Meetings and Participants," 50th Anniversary Celebration, February 19–23, 1974, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

[75]Memo, Steve Slocum to Dr. J. F. Walvoord, "Subject: Special Luncheon Meeting with representatives from N.B.E.A.," Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondence, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives; Memo, Steve Slocum to Dr. J. F. Walvoord, January 11, 1974, Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondence, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives; Letter, Aaron Hamlin to Steve Slocum, December 5, 1973, Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondences, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

[76]Letter, Tony Evans, "Dear Pastor," March 27, 1974, Eddie Lane Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives; Letter, Roy B. Zuck to Eddie Lane, April 1, 1974, Eddie Lane Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives; Letter, Steve Slocum to Howard Miller, April 25, 1974, Walvoord Papers, Slocum Correspondence, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

for excluding black students from enrollment since its founding. By 1980, the seminary had exceeded its goal for black student enrollment by 40%, prompting inquiries from other evangelical institutions about the model at DTS. On January 29, 1985, the school received a letter from Kenneth A. Epp, Dean of Enrollment at Moody Bible Institute (MBI), requesting insight into how DTS had achieved notable gains in black student enrollment. The seminary's evolving posture thus became a point of reference for other evangelical schools navigating desegregation in the post-civil rights era.[77]

## VII. Conclusion

The desegregation of Dallas Theological Seminary marked a significant and complex turning point in the institution's history. Beginning in 1924, DTS had unapologetically established itself as an exclusively white institution for training in dispensational theology over following four decades. During this period in which DTS took an anti-integrationist or passive-integrationist posture where it could not account for a single black American, it notably refrained from using Scripture to justify the exclusion of black applicants unlike many of its counterparts across the nation who resorted to religious language to justify segregation. The 1970s, however, marked a momentous shift. What had long been an enclave of white evangelical training in dispensational theology gradually opened to black students through deliberate outreach, public engagement, and institutional partnerships with black evangelical leaders and networks. While these efforts did not resolve all underlying racial dynamics, they nevertheless signaled a meaningful departure from the seminary's early posture of exclusion. By the early 1980s, DTS had not only diversified its student body in measurable ways but also emerged, however cautiously, as a model for other evangelical institutions seeking to reconcile theological tradition with racial justice and institutional change. As a result, DTS navigated the eras of segregation and integration with limited biblical commentary.

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[77]"Staff Meeting," Tuesday September 9, 1980, Eddie Lane Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives; "American Minority Scholarship Policy," n.d., Eddie Lane Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives; Letter, Kenneth A. Epp to Eddie B. lane, January 29, 1985, Eddie Lane Papers, Dallas Theological Seminary Archives.

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