



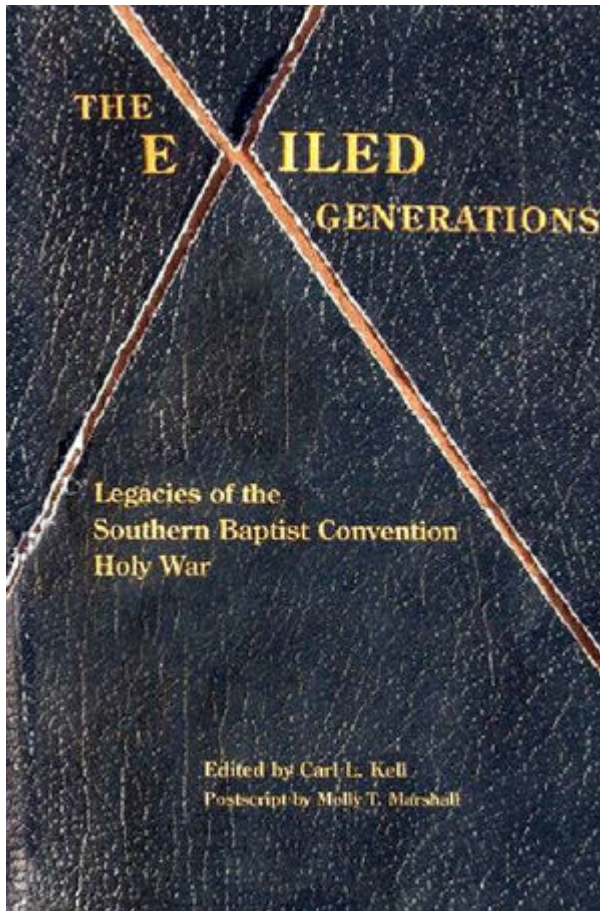
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DAILY NEWS

'Exiled Generations' has wide appeal

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"The Exiled Generations: Legacies of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War," edited by Carl L. Kell. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2015, 173 pages, \$35.95.



"It was in another lifetime, this civil war in America's largest non-Catholic religious denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, pitting brothers and sisters of the same house against one another," Carl L. Kell notes in the introduction to "The Exiled Generations: Legacies of the Southern Baptist Convention Holy War," his new edited volume. "For the victors, time has sweetened the defense of their rhetoric: the inerrancy of scripture. For the vanquished, time has deepened the loss of their home church, old friends and a national convention, all now transformed and unrecognizable."

"Exiled Generations" chronicles the experiences of several devout Baptists following the election of Adrian Rogers as the first fundamentalist president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979. It is revealing to note that all presidents elected since then have been fundamentalists.

Most of the 18 chapters that comprise the book's nucleus are personal accounts of the impact this seismic shift in leadership had on the lives of the

moderates who were most affected. In many instances, those deemed to be too liberal lost pastoral positions, administrative posts, missionary appointments and seminary professorships. But as the various profiles in this elegant collection make abundantly clear, it was often the sons and the daughters who suffered the most as a consequence of the perceived transgressions of their parents.

Twenty-two contributors provided various perspectives to this comprehensive effort, which explores the issue at hand from a variety of perspectives and on a number of levels. The diversity of those who were invited to present their point of view is a key strength of the narrative; Kell obviously put some thought into those selected to offer their personal and surprisingly candid opinions about an event that had an all-consuming impact on their lives.

Consider Ken Satterfield's account of how his father was treated after the conservative takeover of the organization began to filter down to the local level.

"My father began being told rumors that, in the midst of the church's early search for a pastor, prominent leadership in the new conservative SBC contacted the search committee, telling them

that God had revealed who should be the next pastor,” Satterfield explains. “My folks began designating their tithes completely to missions and saw others were doing the same, as a protest that would still allow them to maintain their tithe.”

“When people ask a lot of questions, there is usually one of two responses,” he continues. “One is that others start asking questions too. The other is that the questioner gets ostracized. Unfortunately for my father, he had the second experience. The pastor began proceedings to have him removed as a deacon because of his disloyalty to the church. A hearing was held – ‘trial’ was what my father called it – and the church chose to remove my father as a deacon, a position he treasured. That’s not quite being kicked out of the church, but the effect was the same.”

Another chapter I found both disheartening as well as inspirational was “God, Women and Mayberry,” an account supplied by Bailey Edwards Nelson of her journey as a woman who had been called to the ministry at a young age: “I always knew my ministerial journey would be a difficult one. Growing up in a Southern Baptist church, it was not acceptable (much less popular) for a young girl to pronounce herself called to the ministry. For a time, my calling was met with patronizing smiles and pats on the head. ‘Oh, that’s sweet. Just keep listening to God, darling.’ ”

But the real fun began when she was actually appointed pastor at a church under SBC jurisdiction: “Only days after beginning my work as pastor, the church received a letter from the Surry Baptist Association, the local arm of the Southern Baptist Convention. Our church had been a member of this alliance for many years, but the letter relayed that other member churches and their pastors were concerned about Flat Rock’s decision to call a female pastor.” It was not long afterward that Flat Rock was voted out of the Surry Baptist Association. The firestorm that followed was both enlightening as well as instructive. It seems people who are earnestly trying to worship God “correctly,” however sincere or well-intentioned, are not exempt from the same passions and conflicts that afflict the rest of the human race.

Having been raised in the Church of Christ, it was difficult for me to easily relate to some of the religious nuances or political overtones permeating these poignant, first-hand accounts of an episode that continues to resonate through the hearts and minds of many of my Christian neighbors. Still, my background has given me invaluable insights into the inner workings of the religious mind, both individually and collectively. As such, I was able to empathize with much of what these folks had to say about how they were permanently scarred by one of the most difficult and confusing phases of their spiritual journey.

Kell has taught in the Department of Communication at Western Kentucky University since 1972. His doctorate is from the University of Kansas. Before beginning his tenure at WKU, he taught at Texas A&M University and the University of Georgia. His previous books include “Let’s Talk Business: Improving Communication Skills,” “Fundamentals of Effective Group Communication,” “On Sacred Ground,” “Against the Wind: The Moderate Voice in Baptist Life” and “In the Name of the Father: The Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention,” which he co-wrote with L. Raymond Camp.

“Exiled Generations” should appeal to anyone interested in religion, politics or church history. Those affected by the events described in the book will find the prose poignant and often painful. But even if you are not the most religious person in your neighborhood, my sense is you will still be mesmerized by the stories told in this exquisite volume.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*