

# The Almost-Reformation of Music and Worship in the Southern Baptist Convention, 1926–1946

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The period from 1926 through 1946 was a time of organization and standardization for many organizations and societal structures including the Southern Baptist Convention. Encompassing both the Great Depression and World War II, the sociopolitical undercurrents of the age reached into every area of life, including the worship of the church. The music of Southern Baptist churches was, at this time, fragmented with individual churches independently setting their own music and worship priorities. The national and state conventions left music and worship priorities to the churches of the Convention, but concern was growing about the state of music and worship among those in key leadership positions in both the Convention and its seminaries.

Worship practice in the churches of the Convention was problematic for key leaders, particularly among the School of Sacred Music faculty at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. This concern among Southwestern faculty, especially the department chair I. E. Reynolds, resulted in the school changing its priorities for education and its name from the School of Gospel Music to the School of Sacred Music in the year 1926.<sup>2</sup> That same year, Reynolds made a plea at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in Houston, Texas, urging the Convention to establish a Church Music Department “for the purpose of improving the musical conditions in the church.”<sup>3</sup> This article will trace the developments in music and worship of Southern Baptist Churches and at the convention level over the twenty year period from the time Reynolds introduced his motion to the Convention in 1926 until the end of World War II, when the direction of church music and worship in the Southern Baptist Convention was mostly settled. The relationship and philosophies of I. E. Reynolds and B. B. McKinney will serve as the frame for this exploration with McKinney advocating for the popular gospel song of the day and Reynolds seeking what he considered a more noble church music. The arc of their friendship closely parallels the fight for a reformation in the church’s song staged on a national level during this period.

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<sup>2</sup> Reynolds explains that Albert Venting, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Southwestern, had a profound influence on shaping I. E. Reynolds’s view of music. Encountering Venting’s thoughts “broadened Reynolds’s knowledge of Christian song, and from that time on, he heard a different drummer and marched to a more complex beat as his dream for church music expanded” (William J. Reynolds, *The Cross & The Lyre: The Story of the School of Church Music, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas* [Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994], 18).

<sup>3</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1926* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1926), 43.

## Reynolds and McKinney: Mentor and Colleague

In September of 1915, I. E. Reynolds joined the faculty of Southwestern Seminary as the first music professor, and B. B. McKinney came to campus as one of the first five students in the department.<sup>4</sup> McKinney developed a strong bond with Reynolds, who was a fellow gospel-song singer and revival leader. A year later, in 1916, Reynolds introduced McKinney to one of his acquaintances, Leila Routh, whom McKinney would marry eighteen months later in 1918.<sup>5</sup> The following year, after a brief absence from Seminary Hill for military service in World War I, McKinney joined Reynolds on the faculty of the School of Gospel Music.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to serving on the faculty at Southwestern Seminary together, early in his career, I. E. Reynolds was a proponent of McKinney's gospel songs. This early respect for McKinney's music is evident in a letter from L. R. Scarborough to McKinney in July of 1922 when Reynolds, whom is referred to as Ike, and Scarborough were leading a revival in Lampasas, Texas. Scarborough writes,

We are having a great time at Lampasas. . . . I like you. I like the way you sing and the way you handle the crowd. I do not know of any big raw-boned sinner I love more than I do you. As Ike sang with the crowd here your two songs – “Carry your Burden with a Smile” and “He Lives on High” – yesterday, I said to a big denominational leader that those two songs would immortalize anybody; and he said he agreed with me.<sup>7</sup>

McKinney worked closely with Reynolds, serving the School of Gospel Music as the Assistant Director. The student newspaper at Southwestern Seminary of April 4, 1924, highlights the successes of the school, boasting that it “today enroll(s) the largest body of gospel music students of any institution among theological schools of the world . . . This school has both set the pace and set the standard in the gospel music field.”<sup>8</sup> Although the School of Gospel Music seemed to be on a trajectory of growth and innovation, change was imminent. Listed in the same edition of the paper are those individuals who taught courses in the music program, including Dr. Albert Venting, an Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, who also taught hymnology. Through the influence of Venting, Reynolds would soon reorient the direction and focus of the School of Gospel Music away from its present focus and towards a curriculum rooted in the historical music of the Christian church.

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<sup>4</sup> Gene McKinney, son of B. B. McKinney, recalls that McKinney “heard of a new music program being started at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He showed up on the campus in Fort Worth, now 28 years old, with 200 revivals under his belt and a collection of unpublished songs he had written.” Gene McKinney, “B. B. McKinney Remembered,” 1952, 2, Southern Baptist Historical Archives, B. B. McKinney Collection.

<sup>5</sup> Leila McKinney recalls, “Mac asked (I. E. Reynolds), ‘You see that girl down there? She’s mine if I can ever get to her!’ [Reynolds] said, ‘Well, we know her. We were in a revival at Mary Hardin-Baylor last month and she was there. We met her. We’ll introduce you’” (Leila McKinney, “Mac and Me,” *Circle: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention* 37, no. 8 [1976]: 1).

<sup>6</sup> Gene McKinney writes, “Toward the end of World War I, and after three years as a student at the Seminary, Dad enlisted in the Army. The war ended shortly, and Dad returned, and was offered a position on the faculty at the Seminary. He never did finish that degree” (McKinney, “B. B. McKinney Remembered,” 2).

<sup>7</sup> L. R. Scarborough, Correspondence between L. R. Scarborough and B. B. McKinney, July 24, 1922, Southern Baptist Historical Archives, B. B. McKinney Collection.

<sup>8</sup> “History of School of Gospel Music,” *The Baptist Propeller*, April 4, 1924, 1:13 edition, 1, B. B. McKinney Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

Albert Venting brought a diversity of perspective to congregational song that was, up to this point, not present on the faculty. William J. Reynolds, nephew of I. E. Reynolds and later a Southwestern faculty member, writes, “(Venting’s) study in England had brought him into contact with the wealth of English hymnody, and he shared his knowledge with Reynolds. Here was a tradition of Christian song quite different from the songs of the Alabama singing schools and the gospel songs at Moody Bible Institute.”<sup>9</sup> The influence of Venting on Reynolds exceeded the walls of Cowden Hall at Southwestern Seminary and reached to the convention floor in Houston, Texas, in May 1926 in the form of the report of the Committee on Better Church Music.

### **The Problem with Church Music in Southern Baptist Churches**

The Committee on Better Church Music, of which Reynolds was an integral member, came out decisively in favor of cultivated church music and against gospel song in their report. The committee writes, “The greatest need at the present time is higher standards in the grade of music used in our churches, in its rendition, and in its leadership.”<sup>10</sup> The committee further stated that “50 per cent of the 28,000 churches use music of an inferior grade both in text and in musical arrangement, and 40 per cent of them use music of a medium grade, and that only 10 per cent of them use the very best grade of church music.”<sup>11</sup> According to the committee, the state of music was only acceptable at one in ten churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. In an effort to reverse this trend, the committee, led by I. E. Reynolds, offered the following thirteen recommendations to the Convention messengers:

1. That we recognize that music is worship with all that it involves of reverence, spirituality, and instructiveness;
2. That we insist that hymns should, in their language, carry religious truth expressed in simple but adequate terms;
3. That we urge that music should fit the hymn, be thoughtful and reverent in character, not mere jig tunes or what might be called musical doggerel;
4. That we plead that leaders and conductors of music should be both competent artistically and serious religiously, that the musical leader should have a deep and definite sense of his responsibility in leading worship and not make a music class out of a worshiping congregation, nor put on a vaudeville performance himself;
5. That we insist that ministers and laity alike respect the musical part of the program and accord it the place in the service which it should occupy;
6. That we urge our pastors and churches to exercise greater care in the selection of hymn books and other music, from the literary, musical, doctrinal, and practical standpoints. More attention and encouragement should be given to choirs, orchestras, and especially to congregational singing. We urge a closer supervision of the special musical programs, insisting that when such programs are rendered on

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<sup>9</sup> Reynolds, *The Cross & The Lyre*, 18.

<sup>10</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1926*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

- the Lord's day, they should be made worshipful instead of purely entertaining from the musical standpoint;
7. That we admonish our pastors and churches to be on their guard lest they be imposed upon by unscrupulous music publishers and song book dealers, inefficient choir directors, song leaders, and accompanists, also schools and conservatories of music whose only interest in the church choir or music is that therein is offered an opportunity for self-exploitation, the gaining of reputation or money;
  8. That when at all possible the pastors and churches should employ Church Music Directors whose duties shall be to arrange and direct the music programs for every service and department of the church, instead of the employment of Choir Directors whose duties are only to direct the music for the two regular services on Sundays;
  9. That we urge pastors and churches to call out the young men and young women in their churches who have musical talent and a conviction that they should dedicate that talent to the Lord's service, and also encourage and help them in every way possible to attend some one of our Southwide institutions for such musical and other training as they may need to fit them for acceptable service in their chosen field of labor. We would in this connection, call attention to the very rapidly increasing and widespread demand for trained leaders to take positions in our churches as Musical Directors, often combining with their musical duties, work in Religious Education, finances or as assistant to the pastor (and at comfortable salaries), the demand far exceeding the supply;
  10. That in a special way the pastors encourage those who are interested in church music to attend the "Better Church Music" conference to be held at Ridgecrest, North Carolina, August 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, next, under the direction of the Education Board of the Southern Baptist Convention;
  11. That State Conventions, ministerial gatherings, and other assemblies be requested to provide a place upon their programs for an intelligent presentation of the cause of good church music;
  12. That we ask our denominational schools to pay more particular attention to Church Music in connection with their Fine Arts Departments.
  13. That this Convention instruct the Sunday School Board to give careful consideration at its earliest convenience, to the advisability of establishing and fostering a Church Music Department for the purpose of improving the musical conditions in the stated church, Sunday-school, and B. Y. P. U. services of various churches of this convention.<sup>12</sup>

Terry C. Terry reports that the resolution passed, but "no immediate action was taken and in 1933 the process was unsuccessfully repeated."<sup>13</sup> The lack of action in 1933 likely stemmed from a shortage of funds with the Southern Baptist Convention in the throes of the Great Depression rather than a general indifference to the pleas. In correspondence from Reynolds to I. J. Van Ness dated June 20, 1933, only a month after the Southern Baptist Convention in

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 42–43.

<sup>13</sup> Terry C. Terry, "B. B. McKinney: A Shaping Force in Southern Protestant Music" (Ph.D. diss., North Texas State University, 1981), 28.

Washington, D. C., Reynolds writes: “I want to thank you for your kindness in helping me work out the resolution which I presented to the Convention, which was passed. I trust that your Board will give it due consideration; and although financially you may not be able to do what you would like, as much as you can.”<sup>14</sup>

## Reynolds and McKinney: Divergent Views and Separate Directions

Just as the Southern Baptist Convention was enduring a period of financial hardship, Southwestern Seminary also faced a period of financial difficulty. Robert Baker writes of the faculty at Southwestern during these days, “To keep the seminary alive they willingly persevered when their salaries were slashed by half and even that amount often not paid.”<sup>15</sup> The reductions in salary and other sacrifices of the faculty were not enough to preserve everyone’s position. In 1930, Scarborough let Reynolds know that a member of the music faculty would need to be dismissed for financial reasons. Baker explains that on June 4, 1930, Reynolds wrote a three-page letter to President Scarborough with reference to the bitter decision to be made.

“I am quite sure,” he said, “that the future welfare of our school should have first place in our thoughts and desires at this decisive time,” and that “whatever is done it shall be that which is best for our school, and done in the spirit of Christ.” He reviewed the important work of each of his colleagues and concluded: “So without any thought or feeling of ‘grand-stand play,’ I hereby present to you my resignation to take effect at your pleasure.”<sup>16</sup>

Upon learning of I. E. Reynolds tendering his resignation, the other three professors involved also offered their resignations. William Reynolds explains, “With great reluctance Scarborough accepted the resignation of McKinney, not because he wished to lose him from the faculty, but because, of the four men, McKinney had the greatest prospect of surviving financially in those days.”<sup>17</sup>

The resignation of McKinney potentially had additional contributing factors other than Scarborough’s altruism in letting go the individual that could best support himself. The ideological divide that was growing in the Convention over music was manifesting itself in the School of Sacred Music between I. E. Reynolds and B. B. McKinney. J. D. Grey, former pastor of First Baptist Church, New Orleans states:

It’s a known secret around Southwestern Seminary that a conflict developed between I. E. Reynolds, head of the school of music, and McKinney over the type of music that ought to be used. Reynolds insisted on the more stately hymns as some would call “long-haired” music, but McKinney was a strong one for Gospel music. Well, the conflict got so bad that one day President Scarborough called McKinney into his office

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<sup>14</sup> B. B. McKinney, Correspondence between B. B. McKinney and I. J. Van Ness, June 20, 1933, Southern Baptist Historical Archives, I. J. Van Ness Collection.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Reynolds, *The Cross & The Lyre*, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 38–39.

and said, "Brother Ben, you know I love you. I admire you very much. But in the conflict between you and Ike, I don't see any reconciliation possible. So I think you had better seek another place and let us go with Ike as head of the school of music."<sup>18</sup>

The implications of McKinney leaving the faculty of Southwestern would not be realized fully immediately, but the Seminary would continue steadfastly in defense of a more cultivated church music and McKinney would continue as a gospel song leader and composer while serving Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth and working for the Robert Coleman Company.

## **The Sunday School Board and Church Music**

Although Reynolds began corresponding with I. J. Van Ness in 1923 or earlier about the need for a church music employee at the Sunday School Board, it was not until 1935 that T. L. Holcomb acted on that request. As outlined previously in the committee recommendations, Reynolds sought a church music liaison to help churches improve the state of their music. In correspondence from Reynolds to Holcomb dated September 18, 1935, Reynolds crafted a seven-page plea for the creation of a Church Music Department to improve the state of music in the churches of the Convention. In it, Reynolds expresses his frustration that "the former secretary, who was a dear friend of mine . . . could not see that there was a need in this respect and felt that the Sunday School Board had no responsibility in making provision for it."<sup>19</sup>

Holcomb, however, sought to address a very different need with the hire of a music editor. Holcomb was discontent with outside publishers printing the hymnbooks used throughout the Convention. This led him to seek an employee to spearhead the Board's fledgling songbook business. Holcomb replied to Reynolds's letter, writing, "in studying our situation here from every angle, I decided that we did not need a Music Department, but instead, a man to help create and promote our song books. We have secured Mr. B. B. McKinney . . . I shall greatly appreciate your cooperation and help in making his work a success on the field."<sup>20</sup> Holcomb ends his letter with a conciliatory tone, as if anticipating Reynolds would disapprove of his decision, writing, "All of us working together and seeking the leadership of the Holy Spirit can certainly accomplish something worth while in our Master's name."<sup>21</sup>

To fully understand Holcomb's decision, broader historical context is necessary. W. Hines Sims, later Secretary of the Church Music Department, recounts, "the hymnbooks sponsored were published by outside publishers which resulted in the Board's having to do all the sales promotion while the publishers received most of the benefits."<sup>22</sup> B. B. McKinney, having worked for Robert Coleman and having published during that time 313 of his own

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<sup>18</sup> Robert J. Hastings, *B. B. McKinney, The Man and His Music* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1986), 45–46.

<sup>19</sup> I. E. Reynolds, Correspondence between I. E. Reynolds and T. L. Holcomb, September 18, 1935, T. L. Holcomb Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

<sup>20</sup> T. L. Holcomb, Correspondence between T. L. Holcomb and I. E. Reynolds, September 30, 1935, T. L. Holcomb Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Otis C. Strickler, "The Life and Works of B. B. McKinney" (M.C.M. thesis, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960).

works, was chosen for the newly created position of music editor. The Convention program from 1936 states that in the scope of McKinney's work at the Board "he will help to produce and promote through our periodicals the right kind of music for our churches. As Music Leader in training schools, assemblies, and conventions he will be the exponent and advocate of music that will be sound in its sentiment, inspiring in its melody, and spiritual in its impress."<sup>23</sup> The right kind of music meant by the Convention program and the right kind of music espoused by I. E. Reynolds were two very different styles that represent the division over music in the Southern Baptist Convention emerging from the Great Depression.

Holcomb's wish that Reynolds would fall in lock-step with the direction of B. B. McKinney and the work of the Sunday School Board was merely a pipe dream. The evidence of a strained relation between McKinney and Reynolds is manifest in personal correspondence between them from April 1936. In response to an invitation from Reynolds, McKinney responds not with his usual greeting to his friend of "Ike" or "Ikie" but with "Dear Prof. Reynolds." At a music conference in Mineral Wells, Texas, the pair conducted together, a disagreement occurred concerning the state of music in rural churches. McKinney advocated for simplified church music for the rural church, but Reynolds argued, "The problem, as I see it, is not so much a question of music as it is of efficient leadership. Our one great need, and the one to which we should give our wholehearted attention, is for the development of men and women who are sold on the better types of church music themselves and have the ability to sell others."<sup>24</sup> This public disagreement had upset McKinney. He declined Reynolds's invitation in the letter stating:

Because of reasons well known by all those who attended the Music Conference at Mineral Wells, I feel that it would be best for us not to appear on the same conference program again. There should be harmony and fellowship in all these meetings. Therefore I must decline the invitation to appear on your program next fall. We have and are publishing much literature for the rural people.<sup>25</sup>

Reynolds took exception to McKinney's characterization of events in Mineral Wells, writing, "There was nothing personal in anything I had to say. I was simply backing up the papers, which I had been invited to bring and there was nothing in them except a re-statement of the principles for which I have stood for many years, with which you are familiar."<sup>26</sup> Reynolds goes on to challenge McKinney's definition of harmony and fellowship, stating: "You cannot expect to hold conferences anywhere and have everyone agree with you in your principles and plans. Growth does not come that way. It comes through the consideration and exchange of different ideas."<sup>27</sup> The relationship between the two men improved some by the next year with McKinney returning to his customary greeting of "Ikie" in correspondence from October 1937, but the battles for the place of church music in the Southern Baptist Convention and the greatest test of this life-long friendship were about to occur with the 1940 publication by

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<sup>23</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1936* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1936), 10.

<sup>24</sup> I. E. Reynolds, Correspondence between I. E. Reynolds and B. B. McKinney, May 5, 1936, I. E. Reynolds Collection, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>25</sup> B. B. McKinney, Correspondence between B. B. McKinney and I. E. Reynolds, April 18, 1936, I. E. Reynolds Collection, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

<sup>26</sup> Reynolds, Correspondence between I. E. Reynolds and B. B. McKinney, May 5, 1936.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

the Sunday School Board of *The Broadman Hymnal* under the editorial leadership of B. B. McKinney and through the work of the Committee on Church Music established in 1937.

## **The Committee on Church Music**

The Committee on Church Music, established for the study of conditions and needs of church music at the 1937 Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans, delivered its first report in Richmond, Virginia, in May 1938. Both B. B. McKinney and I. E. Reynolds served on this inaugural committee.<sup>28</sup> The committee “discovered a widespread need for the promotion of higher standards of worship in our churches.”<sup>29</sup> To better assess the state of worship in the Convention, they, in conjunction with the Department of Survey, Statistics, and Information of the Sunday School Board, commissioned a survey of the state of music in local congregations. Already in the early stages of the committee, an education-based solution was adapted. The committee urged to “secure in our various educational institutions, summer assemblies, training schools, institutes, and the like, an emphasis on the importance of higher standard of worship in all of our churches.”<sup>30</sup> This first committee also endorsed the revised edition of the *New Baptist Hymnal*, a publication of the Sunday School Board, for usage in the churches of the Convention.

The endorsement of the *New Baptist Hymnal* oriented the direction of the committee and set it in contrast with the Sunday School Board’s recent gospel songbook focus. This is remarkable because the music editor of the Sunday School Board sat on this committee. The same year at the Convention, the Sunday School Board reported the following:

The Sunday School Board through the Music Editor is promoting and shall continue to promote the very best in gospel music—the music that makes its primary appeal to the masses throughout the Southern Baptist Convention. Our newest song book, *Songs of Victory*, was edited and compiled since our last Convention.<sup>31</sup>

The committee was focused on promoting higher standards, while the Sunday School Board focused on promoting highest sellers.

The following year, the committee presented expanded recommendations to the Convention in Oklahoma City. They cited the “increased emphasis being placed on better music by radio and in all our public and private schools” as a reason the quality of music in the churches could be improved.<sup>32</sup> They cautioned that “we are not primarily concerned with the improvement of the hymn text and tune solely for cultural purposes.”<sup>33</sup> Rather, the committee raised the question: “Do the hymns we use and the manner in which we use them

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<sup>28</sup> The committee was chaired by J. W. Storer, Oklahoma. Also on the committee were D. I. Purser, Alabama; Roy Angell, Florida; Ryland Knight, Georgia; Inman Johnson, Kentucky; E. O. Sellers, Louisiana; McNeill Poteat, North Carolina; B. B. McKinney, Tennessee; I. E. Reynolds, Texas. *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1937* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1937), 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1938* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1938), 20.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 324–25.

<sup>32</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1939* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1939), 124.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



contribute to the spiritual development of our people?”<sup>34</sup> As an answer to the question, the committee speculated “there must be more of a vertical note in church music, and less of a horizontal tendency; that the music which aids worship is that which finds the heart and not the feet.”<sup>35</sup>

The survey of local congregations, which had been instituted at the previous Southern Baptist Convention, gathered responses from more than 1,350 churches. The committee stated the survey “has shown the urgent and compelling needs of our churches.”<sup>36</sup> The report also showed “how great and tragic have been the losses which have already come upon great sections of our Convention because of long delayed action in this important field.”<sup>37</sup> These grave findings led to the Sunday School Board’s first steps toward a changed climate in the music of Southern Baptist churches.

The report brought by the Committee on Church Music to the Southern Baptist Convention in Baltimore in 1940 contained evidence of a shifting tide in the field of church music within the Convention. There was a call for unification in purpose with the committee urging “that our religious education and evangelistic forces on the field, and in the churches, coordinate their music programs with the ideals and standards of the music programs promoted and fostered by the music departments of our denominational institutions.”<sup>38</sup> The committee also commended the Board for its plans to implement Church Music Singing Schools and a “Church Music Emphasis” week at Ridgecrest. Significantly, the Sunday School Board published *The Broadman Hymnal* in 1940, but the committee made no mention of it in their report, much less did they endorse it as they had two years earlier the *New Baptist Hymnal*, even though B. B. McKinney, the compiler of *The Broadman Hymnal*, was on the committee. The committee recognized that to adequately address the challenges with music a larger discussion about the state of worship was necessary. In 1940, the committee called for a broadened scope in examining “the approach to, and furtherance of, a deepened spiritual and reverential conception in all phases of worship in the churches and their organized life throughout the Southern Baptist Convention.”<sup>39</sup>

The Committee on Church Music was critical of the release of *The Broadman Hymnal* on the basis of its silence. I. E. Reynolds, however, was critical with a published review of *The Broadman Hymnal*. Reynolds attempted to clarify the situation by distinguishing that he was, and had always been, critical of the ideas and standards advocated by McKinney and not McKinney. Reynolds writes:

My interest is in principles and not personalities. A worthy church music vs unworthy church music. When principles are discussed individuals are positioned.

For many years I have used, advocated, and recommended only the music publications of the Sunday School Board to the point of becoming very unpopular even during the years when you were associated with the keenest competitor of the Sunday

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1940* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1940), 101.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

School Board. I have all these years given preference to the New Baptist Hymnal for which I have no apology to make for it is a Sunday School Board Publication.<sup>40</sup>

The chasm between the positions of McKinney and Reynolds was indicative of the divide between many of the churches, the Sunday School Board, and the seminaries. These differences could have continued, but shifting sociopolitical tides and new perspectives would force the denomination to seek a unified position.

### **Committee on Church Music and Worship**

The re-formed Committee on Church Music and Worship had a broader scope, but also would be absent the personalities that had caused for dissension among the original committee, which had been present from its inception. In correspondence dated September 1, 1940, Reynolds writes to McKinney:

The suggestion at New Orleans which resulted in the Southern Baptist Convention appointing a Church Music Committee was not made with the idea of kicking any body out. It seemed to be the only chance of getting to the convention with constructive suggestions and recommendations which has proved its worth. The work of this committee speaks for its self which had been accomplished in the face of strong opposition from certain quarters. Your embarrassment at Oklahoma City was not due to any member or members of the committee.<sup>41</sup>

The new committee lacked the history of conflicts that accompanied the previous committee, and, ultimately, would serve as a unifying presence to the Convention.

This re-imagined committee first presented at the 1941 Convention in Birmingham, Alabama. They took from the charter given them the previous year that throughout the Convention “there is serious and widespread dissatisfaction with present conditions among us, also a deep desire for a more vital, beautiful, dynamical, commanding worship in Baptist churches.”<sup>42</sup> They wrote, “Mournfully we confess that apparently we are in one of the historic, periodic slumps in true worship.”<sup>43</sup> The committee pointed to a report of the North Carolina Baptist Convention in justifying this assessment. The North Carolina report showed that of 500,000 Southern Baptists in the state, only 150,000 or 30% regularly attended worship services. The committee went on to claim, “in many of our states the situation is far worse.”<sup>44</sup> This appears to be the first time the Convention relates the dire state of church music with attendance in the churches, which is a pivotal foundational shift for the committee in the coming years.

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<sup>40</sup> I. E. Reynolds, Correspondence between I. E. Reynolds and B. B. McKinney, September 1, 1940, I. E. Reynolds Collection, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1941* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1941), 121.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Seeking to address the problem with worship, the committee outlined a scriptural pattern for worship that included the areas of adoration, communion, and dedication. In describing these areas, the committee addressed the elements of preaching, prayer, Scripture reading, offering, the ordinances, and music, claiming, “music is no longer regarded as a step-child of the worship.”<sup>45</sup>

The committee further explained signs of progress from their observations across the Convention. They noted that instead of “allowing a type of trashy songs which often sadden or anger the thoughtful worshipper, Southern Baptists were awakening to an appreciation of noble, worshipful music.”<sup>46</sup> They also observed the “growing revolt against nondescript songbooks which specialize in the sort-of-swing tunes that find the feet and not the heart and utilize words which are neither literary nor scriptural, such songbooks . . . victimize many congregations.”<sup>47</sup> The greatest sign of progress was “the growing ability of our children to sing the great hymns of the ages, those tried and proven, because they have been taught in the public schools to sing them.”<sup>48</sup> The Sunday School Board was commended for the Music Emphasis Week at Ridgecrest that had been established the previous summer.

Rejoicing in the accomplishments of the past year, the committee made two further recommendations to the Convention. The initial recommendation was that the denominational schools correlate their instruction with the training that was taking place in the churches. The second recommendation was a call for a new hymnal. This was a direct criticism of *The Broadman Hymnal* as a hymnal for worship, since it had been released only in the prior year. The second recommendation would not come to fruition until the *Baptist Hymnal* of 1956, fifteen years later, because B. B. McKinney was still music editor at the Sunday School Board and World War II would prevent the widespread adoption of a new hymnal.

The committee, presenting in San Antonio in May 1942, outlined a clear path for solving the church music dilemma of the past several years with a four-fold plan. This was the most prescriptive presentation to date, and one that would be adopted by the Sunday School Board in directing church music for the next decades. It also marked a radical departure from the initial call of higher standards for music by the Church Music Committee. The committee’s rationale is unknown, but the timing of the shift directly correlates with the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the coming together of the entire country as a nation now at war. The correspondence between the seminaries and the Board from this time suggests that the war was weighing heavily on the minds of those involved. Gospel song, the very thing that had been repudiated by the previous committees, would bring comfort to a nation at war and now would receive the tacit approval of the committee.

The new plan involved four distinct areas, which would produce the desired change. The first area of the plan was creating “within the hearts of our people a great religious and spiritual attitude, that which will love truth and the doctrines of Christianity as taught by the Bible.”<sup>49</sup> The second area involved giving “to our constituency a type of church music both in music and message that will express this religious and spiritual condition.”<sup>50</sup> On this area,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>49</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1942* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1942), 114.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

the committee departs from the previous Church Music Committee's recommendation stating, "congregations will not sing some music which many musicians tell us is good."<sup>51</sup> There is then a call for practical hymn writers in the twentieth century, individuals who will produce the kind of church music now being advocated by the committee. The third area is "a system of training sponsored by our denomination that will increase the appreciation of our laity along good wholesome singable and expressive church music."<sup>52</sup> The Church Music Training Course, a systematized method of instructing the laity, would proceed from this area of the committee's recommendation in the years to come. The final area urged the "churches give special attention to a period in the service for congregational singing and in so doing use many of the hymns and songs not used at all."<sup>53</sup>

Building on the second area, the committee further deviates from its philosophy in previous years with its final conclusions.

We would remind our constituency that all good church music should be used. The oratorio, cantata, anthem, hymn, gospel song, and even the short chorus, that have a real message and are not trashy in their musical arrangement should be freely used according to appreciation and ability.<sup>54</sup>

This shift is undergirded by the belief "that all church music should have as its ultimate goal, not just artistic for art's sake, but to strengthen those who are saved, draw the drifting ones back to Him, and cause the lost to feel their need of a Saviour."<sup>55</sup>

The following year, the committee stayed course, continuing to promote their re-definition of worship and church music from the previous report. The 1943 committee defined the primary function of a church as supplying "an incentive to Worship, and to furnish an atmosphere for Worship."<sup>56</sup> They believed the lack of worship in an individual could be either the fault of that individual or of the church. A causal relationship existed in their perception between church music and worship. The committee states, "We have always been and still are of the opinion that many of our problems in regard to worship will be solved when we have better Church Music."<sup>57</sup> This recognition led the committee to call for the Department of Church Music "to prepare and set going a constructive educational program of Church Music among Southern Baptists."<sup>58</sup>

The committee report in 1944 was almost a complete replication of the 1943 report. The committee chairman brought forth a motion that

in view of the fact that there is an established Church Music Department of the Sunday School Board and in view of a regular Music Emphasis Week at Ridgecrest where the Music Departments of our three theological institutions are invited to take part, and the close co-ordination of all the departments or the Sunday School Board and our

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1943* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1943), 51.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 51–52.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 52.

denominational agencies, the Committee on Church Music and Worship be discontinued.<sup>59</sup>

The strengths the committee cited as cause for its disbanding would be the hallmarks of church music in the Southern Baptist Convention over the next decades.

### A Relationship Restored

Within a year of Reynolds and McKinney sparring over Reynolds's review of *The Broadman Hymnal*, the former colleagues restored their friendship that had spanned nearly thirty years. McKinney had evidently sent a "very ugly"<sup>60</sup> letter to Reynolds, but Reynolds replied on November 2, 1940, with a conciliatory letter to both McKinney and T. L. Holcomb. Reynolds was an integral part of the Music Week program at Ridgecrest in the summer of 1941, and the correspondence between the two resumed its genial nature as they wrote of families and children. The professional positions on church music of McKinney and Reynolds remained unchanged, but in their conferences and interactions, McKinney and Reynolds found a way to work together. McKinney writes to Reynolds in advance of Church Music Emphasis Week in 1943:

I am anxious for us to have a positive program this year. I think too many of our conferences have been on the negative side. I am not interested in what we haven't done in the past, nor what we are not doing now—I am interested in what we have done in the past, what we are doing now, and what we hope to do in the future. . . . I do not mean to be critical of what we had in the past at Ridgecrest—I am trying to say that we need in our work at all times to hold up a positive program.<sup>61</sup>

The positive turn in the friendship of McKinney and Reynolds mirrored the new-found mediated position by the Committee on Church Music and Worship. Although strides were made toward improving church music, the state of the nation in 1942 was not a time to push division and dissension in the denomination. Were it not for World War II and the climate that came with the war, this reformation may have been realized, but largely due to the challenges encountered by a nation at war, a change in what constituted acceptable music and worship was not to happen. The result in this failed thrust was a broadening of the definition of acceptable church music. This almost-reformation in church music from 1926 to 1946 laid the foundation for the varied styles and expressions embraced in the worship of churches in the Southern Baptist Convention at the present time. A crusade was fought during the early part of the twentieth century, a ceasefire negotiated in 1942, and the underlying conflict of what constitutes acceptable church music still lingers nearly 100 years later because in this conflict there was no winner. There was, however, an example set of two men who both loved

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<sup>59</sup> *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention 1944* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention, 1944), 147.

<sup>60</sup> I. E. Reynolds, Correspondence between I. E. Reynolds and T. L. Holcomb, November 2, 1940, T. L. Holcomb Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives.

<sup>61</sup> B. B. McKinney, Correspondence between B. B. McKinney and I. E. Reynolds, February 6, 1943, I. E. Reynolds Collection, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

their denomination and eventually sought to put aside their differences to work for the betterment of music in the local church.

The friendship between Reynolds and McKinney is a poignant model for disagreements within the twenty-first-century church. As we have seen, Reynolds constantly articulated a love for his friend but a criticism of ideas and principles. Reynolds also continued to be actively involved in denominational life, even when his desires were not reflected in the decisions of the denominational leadership. In the final stages of their ministry, McKinney and Reynolds set aside significant disagreements over orthopraxy in favor of focusing on areas where they could work together to strengthen music in the local church, contribute to denominational work, and serve the Kingdom of God.