

No Shot Fired
 Excused
 Body in the Box
 SUNDAY NEWS
 before the time of courts, if a
 and killed him the mother.
 There was charge and no
 her about such things.
 death in Texas. "It is a man
 expect to have charge before
 that, justice must surely be
 led to self-defense.
 Norris did not exactly beat a man
 out, but he later was shot
 on all a mistake, apparently. You
 do he shot him—several times.
 the impression the man delivered
 was that, apparently, that the
 thing until you see the other man
 killed. Norris was arrested.

**TRUETT,
 CRIST, DIES**
 Dr. George W
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 or Dallas
 for almost 4'

assive-framed
 Baptist World
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 urch June 4
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George Truett
 By HENRY WILSON
 in the scheme of things —
 up spiritual — real values —
 the man who counts.
 the words were coming in over
 other. The voice had a mellow
 nance and a compelling ap-
 But the speaker continued:
 The rectory drunkard, so he
 sgers from the drink shop, God
 him, is worth more than all
 wealth in the world."
 hat was Dr. George Truett, one
 the really great preachers of
 times, still carrying his mes-
 of universal hope to all men.
 we are told George Truett is
 d. True enough, the great
 rman died in August, 1944.

**RE DESTROY
 CHURCH; B
 HOME**
 Burst From Every Part
 Residents of Neighborhoo

D PREVENTS EFF
 ler Process Fast as Tarver
 Should Be Attacked, but

Fire shortly after 2 o'clock
 mb, Thiel and Taylor
 of the pastor, Rev. J. B.
 church.

Dr. Norris did not know
 ed him by phone at 2:29 o
 "What God is that so?" he b

**s Shoo
 Death**
 of the First Baptist Church, shot D. E.
 the flashlight lens. Slightly off-center,
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 idly and without much waiting.
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**Frank Norr
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 k, Norris, pastor
 Church, who is
 Friday wired

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Revivalist Now O
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Dead Man Had Ge
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FORT WORTH, Jui



IN THE NAME OF GOD

*The Colliding Lives,
 Legends, and Legacies of
 J. Frank Norris and George W. Truett*
O.S. HAWKINS

“In this carefully researched, thoughtfully framed, and beautifully written work, O. S. Hawkins has given us a fresh and illuminating look at two shaping figures in Baptist life and American Christianity during the first half of the twentieth century. Even for those who think they are familiar with these stories or who have an overview of Baptist life during this time period, *In the Name of God* will introduce new observations and connections that will provide eye-opening insights into the legendary lives of George W. Truett and J. Frank Norris. Truett, the ubiquitous leader and stately orator, and Norris, the fiery fundamentalist and Texas tornado, overlapped in so many contexts, yet understood their callings and purposes ever so differently. The first half of this book reads like a page-turning novel; the second half of the book offers a hermeneutical guide to the diverse and distinctive contributions of Truett and Norris, as well as to the longer-term implications of their approaches to life and ministry. Even if historians should quibble over some of the interpretive explanations offered, this book will be fascinating reading for all who are interested in twentieth-century religious movements and American culture, and will be essential reading for anyone interested in the various trajectories that Baptist life has taken in recent decades.”

—**David S. Dockery**, distinguished professor of theology,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and president,
International Alliance for Christian Education

“No one is better qualified to tell the untold story of Baptist legends J. Frank Norris and George W. Truett than my lifelong friend O. S. Hawkins. His own family roots run deep in the history of First Baptist Church in Fort Worth, and for several years he was one of George W. Truett’s pastoral successors at the historic First Baptist Church in Dallas. This story of these entwining lives and legacies read like a page-turning novel. It reveals the dangers of elevating denominational loyalty over scriptural fidelity.”

—**Jack Graham**, pastor, Prestonwood Baptist Church, Plano, TX

“Take two titanic personalities, two great cities, two famous pulpits, and two of the largest churches in the world—and then add two men shot dead, two rival visions of Christianity, two lasting legacies, and one earth-shaking feud, and you have O. S. Hawkins’ book, *In the Name of God*. This is one of the most fascinating stories of our time, written by the one man who has a claim upon the entire story. It is incredibly well told and tremendously relevant. I recommend it eagerly.”

—**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, president,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“My roots are deep in First Baptist Church of Fort Worth, having been licensed and ordained to the ministry there. I have enjoyed every page of O. S. Hawkins’ book. It is accurate in its history and has restored some balance to the life of a man who has too often been reviled. O. S. has brought the characters to

life again—a few I actually knew and others whose stories I heard from eye-witnesses. Thank you for a great read.”

—**Bill Monroe**, pastor, Florence Baptist Temple, Florence, SC

“This book by O. S. Hawkins, a Texas legend in his own right, is a marvelous read. It is well-researched, historically conversant, and written by a biographer who has a keen, almost barrel-aged, understanding of the human soul and psyche. Hawkins is close to his subjects in that he clearly honors and, in some ways, reveres them. However, his study of Truett and Norris is never hagiographic. It presents each man in full color, and works in colorful and arresting portraits of their peers, Baptist titans like L. R. Scarborough, W. A. Criswell, and more.

In the Name of God is indeed clear-eyed about how both Truett and Norris failed in different ways. The study of two contrasting styles yields much wisdom in the gleaning, and reminds this reviewer of the outstanding juxtaposition of Hitler and Churchill by elite biographer Andrew Roberts.

In sum, I regard this work with considerable respect and interest. It is academic and well-grounded in historical disputation but eminently readable and arresting. I learned numerous details from each man’s career, and I found the material edifying and engrossing. Rehabilitating J. Frank Norris to some degree is a job for which there are few takers, but Hawkins succeeds in that task, and thus performs a service to the historical guild. All in all, *In the Name of God* is a rich study, and should make a real contribution to the conversation over this most vaunted of Baptist eras.”

—**Owen Strachan**, associate professor of Christian theology,
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“O. S. Hawkins’ best-selling Code books are already considered devotional classics. His *In the Name of God* will become a primary source for those who want to understand Southern Baptist history in general and the Conservative Resurgence in particular. Dr. Hawkins reveals in a new and fresh way how the issues in the Conservative Resurgence simply reflected the earlier controversies of the 1920s in SBC life.

Some today, like George Truett of old, still place denominational loyalty over doctrinal fidelity while others, as Hawkins so skillfully shows, keep their priority grounded in doctrinal truth. Frank Norris’ rallying of thousands of pastors from the “folks from the forks of the creeks” was simply a harbinger of the mobilization of the masses of pastors supporting the inerrancy debate during the 1980s. No one yet has connected these dots as Hawkins so effectively does in this volume. Dr. Hawkins’ unique perspective as a Fort Worth native and as the much-loved pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas qualify him to give us this vital resource.”

—**Jerry Vines**, pastor emeritus, First Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL,
and two-time president, the Southern Baptist Convention

**IN THE
NAME OF
GOD**

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*The Colliding Lives,
Legends, and Legacies of
J. Frank Norris and George W. Truett.*

O.S. HAWKINS

B&H
ACADEMIC
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

*In the Name of God: The Colliding Lives, Legends, and Legacies of
J. Frank Norris and George W. Truett*

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Published by B&H Academic
Nashville, Tennessee

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ISBN: 978-1-0877-4319-6

Dewey Decimal Classification: 286.092

Subject Heading: NORRIS, J. FRANK / TRUETT, GEORGE W. /
BAPTISTS—CLERGY

The web addresses referenced in this book were live and correct at the
time of the book's publication but may be subject to change.

Cover design by Emily Keafer Lambright. Original cover illustrations
by Marcos Rodrigues. Newspaper clippings from the Public Domain.

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 SB 26 25 24 23 22 21

To Susie.

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INTRODUCTION

History repeats itself. At least, that is what the well-worn expression has taught us through the years. As we look back at events of decades gone by, we often view them through our own prejudicial lenses. Sometimes the distance can serve to sharpen our focus today. Perhaps this has never been truer than when we revisit the lives and legends of two iconic figures, J. Frank Norris and George W. Truett, who dominated so much of the first half of twentieth-century ecclesiology and culture—not just in Texas and the Southwest, but in the whole of America.

The turn of the twentieth century found two cities in Texas in stark contrast and in fierce competition with one another. Fort Worth and Dallas have grown up side by side—one, Dallas, like an older sophisticated sister and the other, Fort Worth, like a younger sibling intent on sowing her wild oats. Arising out of these two cities were two churches that had no peer in the first five decades of the century. In our modern world of megachurches in every city, it is difficult to capture how legendary the First Baptist Churches of Fort Worth and Dallas became in their day. They were the two largest churches in the entire world in the 1920s and the 1930s, and the Fort Worth church actually pioneered many of the approaches and programs still in play today in thousands of congregations.

Arising out of these two churches were two men, Norris and Truett, who ruled and reigned from their respective pulpits for almost fifty

years. They shared much in common. Both had the near unanimous and unquestioning following of their flocks. Both lived lives of impeccability in moral and financial matters. Both shot and killed a man, one by accident and the other in self-defense. Both died while still in their pulpits as pastor. Yet their years were spent in almost constant conflict and controversy with each other, while at the same time enjoying the following of multiplied thousands both at home and across the country.

J. Frank Norris was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Fort Worth from 1909 to 1952. He was the most colorful and controversial figure of his day, and whoever was in second place was so far behind it would scarcely deserve mention. He was indicted and tried for arson, perjury, and even murder, but he was quickly acquitted by sympathetic jurors in each case. He was a curious mix of brilliance and belligerence. He was an antagonist par excellence and loved nothing more than getting under the skin of and taunting those he considered his enemies. He had a spy network that his personal friend J. Edgar Hoover, then head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, would envy. Some despised him and thought of him as the devil incarnate, yet masses of people loved him with sincere devotion and would have followed him straight into hell with a water pistol.

George W. Truett was the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas from 1897 to 1944. If ever there was the human antithesis to Norris, it was Truett. He was almost universally beloved, respected, and even revered by the masses of those both in the church and out of it. Today, three-quarters of a century after his death, the name Truett is etched in stone over massive entrances to hospitals, seminaries, universities, public schools, and various other institutions that are all called by his good name. He abhorred controversy and sought by every means to live in peace with those around him.

My own history and heritage afford me a unique opportunity to lead us on a journey of revisiting these two legendary lives. My own family's spiritual roots are found in Norris's church. It was at the altar of that church that my own father, as an eighteen-year-old young man, knelt with Dr. Norris himself and had a life-transforming spiritual experience.

My great uncle, Harry Keeton, served for more than forty years as one of Norris's most loyal and dedicated deacons, and his wife served as one of the pastoral secretaries. Then, it was my high privilege for several years to preach week by week in the same pulpit as did Truett, my own pastoral predecessor, when I served as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas. I was the pastor to many of his sweet family members, including nieces and nephews who essentially grew up in his home.

This volume is gleaned from hundreds of primary sources, including personal letters and numerous interviews with people who witnessed these long-ago days. It contains many yet-to-be revealed stories and includes "the rest of the story" regarding many of the defining moments of each of these men's lives. At the same time, it is the perplexing and paradoxical story of two men whose lives are forever entwined and who both changed their world for the good in so many ways. Some may be offended that anything unkind could be said of Truett. Perhaps no one life has been written about with as much bias, and perhaps no one has achieved in death the level of near-human worship, adoration, and reverence as he. Others may be offended that anything good could be said of Norris. While Truett has been universally revered, Norris has been virtually reviled by those who have sought to recount their lives and legacies. As the old cliché says, "The half has not been told." That is, until now. These two lives present to us a panoply of intrigue, espionage, confrontation, manipulation, plotting, scheming, and even blackmail. And yes, it was all carried out . . . *in the name of God!*

Two Cities, Two Churches, Two Pastors

Two Cities

The cities of Fort Worth and Dallas have lived side by side in perpetual competition throughout the decades. Since their respective inceptions, they have lived in rivalry with one another. Their constant competition, whether in commerce, athletics, education, or the arts, has been fierce. The Ballpark at Arlington, home of the Texas Rangers; Cowboy Stadium, home of the Dallas Cowboys; and the mammoth Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport all sit in the middle of the “Metroplex” as statements of the standoff and compromise between these two cities.

In their adolescent years, Fort Worth and Dallas fought over the railroads. To this day they continue to fight over commerce, industry, and athletics. Before Major League Baseball arrived in the area, the Fort Worth Cats and the Dallas Eagles of the old Texas League were bitter rivals. Their universities, Texas Christian University (TCU) in Fort Worth and Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas, have

fought it out for generations, with TCU emerging victorious most years. TCU had more wins than any football team in the nation in the 1930s and won national titles in 1935 and 1938. The Fort Worth school's dominance has continued with eight out of ten wins in the last decade.

Dallas

In 1841 Dallas superseded Fort Worth when John Neely Bryan settled on the east fork of the Trinity River and opened a trading post to serve passersby on the old Indian trails of North Texas, which later became the first highways of the Republic of Texas. Neely was convinced the forks in the river would make an ideal spot for a town and trading post. He built a log cabin that, with some restoration, still stands on the old courthouse lawn in downtown Dallas.¹

No one knows for certain where Dallas derived its name—most likely from either George Dallas, vice president of the United States from 1845 to 1849, or from Joseph Dallas, who settled near the new town in 1843.² Because of its water source and prime location, it did not take long for the new little village to become the hub of the surrounding rural areas. Within just ten years of its founding, Dallas boasted insurance agencies, dry goods stores, shoe shops, numerous small industries, and even a weekly newspaper, *The Dallas Herald*. By the eve of the Civil War in 1860, the population had grown to almost two thousand and was experiencing an infusion of European immigrants and African Americans.³ One year later, the residents voted to secede from the Union and become a Confederate Army outpost. After the war the city boomed with an influx of freed slaves, and by 1870 the population had risen to more than three thousand.⁴

Knowing that transportation lines are the key to economic growth and expansion, many people attempted to navigate the Trinity River. Most of them failed due to the impracticality of crossing the river. Thus, the city fathers focused their efforts on attracting the railroads. Things came together quickly, and by 1873 they had brought the rail traffic to their new city. In fact, by enticing the Texas and Pacific Railroads

to their city, they made Dallas one of the first significant rail crossings in the entire Southwest. Along with the Texas Central line, they had now positioned themselves to transport goods, not just north and south, but also east and west. Cotton became king and Elm Street became its throne, making Dallas the cotton capital of the country. By 1880, in less than a decade, the population had tripled to more than ten thousand.⁵

The natural outcome of this explosion of commerce was the growth of the banking industry, and with this Dallas was set to become the mega city it eventually became. Insurance quickly followed, and with the addition of electricity and telephones in the 1880s, the city again tripled her population in the next decade. On New Year's Day 1890, Dallas officially boasted forty thousand citizens.⁶

However, the 1890s did not roar in Dallas as the national financial crisis brought the failure of several Dallas banks and a number of industries. Cotton prices bottomed out, and the job rate plummeted. But by the turn of the century, the resilient new metropolis had rebounded and was leading other cities in the Southwest in nearly every venue. In 1910, with a population now soaring to more than ninety thousand people, Dallas boasted the world's leading inland cotton market and led the world in the manufacture and distribution of leather goods and saddles.⁷

Fort Worth

Meanwhile, something new was arising on the clear fork of the Trinity River, thirty miles west of Dallas. In 1849, a small contingency of Texas Rangers brought Army Major Ripley Arnold to a strategic bluff above the Trinity River. From this elevated perspective, Major Arnold could readily see that this was an ideal spot to establish an army outpost to help ward off the increasing Comanche raids on the area. On June 6, 1849, Major Arnold officially established a United States Army Post on the exact spot:

Major Arnold commanded the outpost of Fort Worth at the age of thirty-two. Six feet tall, slender and graceful, gray eyes, a dominant forehead topped with auburn hair, a good chin and

a mouth set in purposeful lines—he had the bearings of youth. He was symbolic of the trait that would dominate Fort Worth’s city pioneering.⁸

This fort marked the original founding of what would later be known as the city of Fort Worth. This new city was named after General William Jennings Worth, a national hero of the Mexican-American War of 1846. Not only did General Worth never visit the city named in his honor, he died before its official establishment. Today his body rests in a tomb within a large monument on one of the busiest intersections in the world—Fifth Avenue and Broadway—at Worth Square in the Manhattan borough of New York City.⁹

The city of Fort Worth was incorporated in 1873, and by 1878, “the great American buffalo slaughter was underway, and hides began to arrive in Fort Worth. Wagon freighters often hauled full loads on each round trip, taking supplies to the Plains and returning with buffalo hides.”¹⁰ At the peak, sixty thousand hides awaiting shipment would be piled on the platform near the railroad; two hundred thousand hides were processed during the year, making Fort Worth the largest direct buffalo hide market in the world.¹¹

During this same period the Chisholm Trail had become the super-highway for Texas cattle drives on their way to the slaughterhouses in Kansas City, going straight through the middle of town. From the “first days of spring until late summer, cattle was the heartbeat of Fort Worth. Northern cattle buyers with ready cash gathered in Fort Worth . . . thousands of cattle from sunrise until late afternoon passed through in continuous procession.”¹² Fort Worth became the prominent rest stop for weary cattlemen along the trail. The last stop before the final destination in Kansas, the city became a virtual oasis for cowboys in search of rest and relaxation. Not surprisingly, hotels, saloons, gambling halls, and houses of ill repute sprung up on almost every corner. Thus, Fort Worth earned the name that has stuck throughout all these years—“Cowtown, Where the West Begins.” When Amon Carter founded Fort Worth’s most prominent newspaper, *The Star-Telegram*, he placed the slogan on the

masthead: “Fort Worth . . . Where the West Begins.”¹³ This slogan has been the rallying cry for the growth and progress of the city until today.

By 1902, the Swift and Armour packing plants had moved their operations to Cowtown, and the economic fortunes of the city were running on all cylinders. The young upstart city was standing toe to toe with Dallas, its rival sister city on the east fork of the Trinity River. Fort Worth had focused every effort on enticing the lucrative company to their new and growing city. Optimism soared as the local paper prophesied that Fort Worth was destined to become “the greatest packing house center in the entire Southwest.”¹⁴

Dallas had its nationally known industrial center, and Fort Worth now had its own nationally known enterprise—a red light district known as “Hell’s Half Acre.” Made wildly famous by the likes of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, along with their female sidekick Etta Place, Hell’s Half Acre actually covered about two acres of the southeast quadrant of downtown and quickly became the home away from home for thousands of cowboys and gunslingers who, from time to time, made their way through Fort Worth. The area was inhabited by dozens of one- and two-story saloons, gambling joints, dance halls, and of course, the sporting houses (more commonly known as “places of ill repute,” among other slang terms). Fort Worth became a popular hideout for desperados, stage coach and train robbers, and every other type of motley character that can be conjured up in the mind. Hell’s Half Acre had a law unto itself. One law enforcer after another failed miserably to maintain any semblance of peace and order. For decades Hell’s Half Acre was a haven for debauchery and depravity. As late as 1911, J. Frank Norris led the First Baptist Church board to approve a statement that no member would be retained on the church rolls “who has any interest, directly or indirectly, in a disorderly house of any kind or class.”¹⁵

In 1878, C. K. Fairfax opened the luxurious and lavish three-story El Paso Hotel on the southwest corner of Third and Houston Streets. The El Paso was not only the city’s first three-story structure but also its first genuine first-class hotel. The hotel “boasted eighty rooms, each with solid walnut furniture and Brussels carpet.”¹⁶ The El Paso became

the favorite attraction for the likes of Bat Masterson, Doc Holliday, and the legendary Wyatt Earp. Quanah Parker, the famous Comanche chief who persuaded his tribe to give up their battle with the white man, was a frequent visitor.¹⁷ When Earp visited Fort Worth, he always requested the room on the third floor of the old El Paso Hotel, located in what is today Sundance Square. From there, he had a direct view into one of the most popular sporting houses at night, and from that vantage point he got a free show put on by the prostitutes and their customers.¹⁸ This also provided Earp with a way to ensure that his own men were not availing themselves of the extracurricular activities of the evening hours.

Dallas got her big break when a nationwide financial crisis in 1873 brought about a national depression. This brought a stark halt to the building of the Texas and Pacific Railroad, which was supposed to run tracks to Fort Worth but was now forced to stop in Dallas due to failed funding.¹⁹ The people of Dallas could not hold back their delight in the assumed demise of their sister to the west. The Dallas media mocked Fort Worth with a caustic report that downtown Fort Worth was so sleepy and empty “a panther had been seen sleeping on the streets in the dying city of Fort Worth.”²⁰ The city fathers in Fort Worth seized upon this and took it as a rallying cry. Fort Worth has been known as “the Panther City” ever since.²¹ For decades their minor league baseball team carried the mantle of “the Cats,” and a large bronze statue of a watchful panther can be seen to this day across the street from the courthouse in downtown Fort Worth.

Thus, these sister cities emerged in the twentieth century with distinct personalities. The rivalry and competition have grown fiercer over time. John Nance Gardner, former vice president of the United States, was quoted in the November 11, 1938, edition of the *Saturday Evening Post* as saying, “Amon [Carter, one of the most influential of all Fort Worth’s city fathers] wants the government of the United States to run for the exclusive benefit of Fort Worth and, if possible, to the detriment of Dallas.”²² Carter was “Mr. Fort Worth,” and as owner of *The Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, WBAP radio, and what is now KXAS (NBC5), he framed and fashioned public opinion and thought in Fort Worth for a

half century until the time of his death in 1955.²³ One of his most well-known position statements about Fort Worth was, “Fort Worth is where the West begins . . . Dallas is where the East peters out.”²⁴ Of the life-long rivalry between Fort Worth and Dallas, Carter was fond of saying the two cities “have tried to bury the hatchet many times but somebody always leaves the handle sticking out.”²⁵ Former CBS television news anchor Bob Schieffer, himself a Fort Worth native and TCU graduate, once even wrote a song that contained this lyric:

Dallas, Dallas how we love you,
But why’s our airport known as DFW?
Move that D. Shift that letter.
FWD sounds so much better.²⁶

These two cities, Dallas and Fort Worth, have grown up together across the decades with diametrically opposite personalities. Dallas is cosmopolitan and extremely class conscious. Fort Worth still strives hard to live up to her reputation of “Where the West Begins” and maintains her former pride as a haven for oil wildcatters and gunslingers bent on protecting second amendment rights. Dallas emits an image of sophistication and social awareness; Fort Worth is like a larger-than-life old friend with open arms and a warm, welcoming smile.

Stark differences show up in myriad ways to illustrate this truth. The two department stores that emerged from the downtown cores of these two cities are examples. In Dallas, the erudite Herbert Marcus and his brother-in-law A. L. Neiman teamed up to launch what would become Neiman Marcus. Today, more than one hundred years later, Neiman Marcus is internationally acclaimed for its high prices and cosmopolitan flare. In 1918 in Fort Worth, the Leonard brothers, J. Marvin and Obadiah (Obie), founded the department stores that, for decades, bore their names and to which the masses from all over North Texas descended to explore their massive offerings and low prices. Their commitment to low profit margins and high volume quickly turned Leonard Brother’s Department Store into the largest retail establishment in Fort Worth and a recognized leader in retail in the entire Southwest. Across

the street from their mammoth store was their subsidiary, Everybody's Department Store, where the common man felt at home shopping for bargains and saving money on seconds and other slightly damaged goods. Leonard Brothers and their cut-rate cousin Everybody's dominated Fort Worth shopping for decades.²⁷ Although Leonard Brother's Department Store closed its doors when downtown shopping fled to neighborhood malls, their good name still exists, and a museum in honor of their success is a popular attraction in Fort Worth today. Taking a not-so-subtle shot at Dallas, Oliver Knight, in the original preface to his volume *Fort Worth, Outpost on the Trinity*, wrote on September 10, 1953: "Fort Worth does not have the supercharged atmosphere of a city that is conscious of itself. Nor is it particularly conscious of culture."²⁸

Two Churches

Arising out of the downtowns of these two cities were two churches that had a dominating influence on early twentieth-century ecclesiology. In the modern world of megachurches in every city, it is difficult to capture how legendary the First Baptist Churches of Fort Worth and Dallas were in their day. By the 1920s, they became two of the largest churches in the world. The Fort Worth church pioneered many of the approaches and programs that are still utilized in thousands of churches today.

Baptist historian Leon McBeth relates that in the summer of 1868:

. . . a tall young man rode into the city of Dallas sitting in his saddle awkwardly. Dismounting near the center of Main and Jefferson, he hitched his horse to a rail and headed toward W. L. Williams's law office. His saddle stance was graceful compared to his ludicrously ungainly walk. This was W. W. "Spurgeon" Harris, Baptist preacher-evangelist, and part-time missionary of the Elm Fork Baptist Association. He was on his way to see Williams, who had invited him to come to discuss the possibility of holding a revival in Dallas.²⁹

They secured the lower floor of the local Masonic Lodge building at the corner of Lamar and Ross Avenue for the services. Lasting two weeks, the revival recorded one conversion.³⁰ At the conclusion of this feeble beginning, eleven persons—three men and eight women—presented themselves for membership and constituted the First Baptist Church in Dallas.

If one person could be called the founding force behind this new beginning, that man was W. L. Williams. However, equally important, his wife, Lucinda, was the driving force behind many of the programs in this new congregation. They prevailed upon Spurgeon Harris to stay in Dallas, and he became the first pastor in the long and illustrious history of this great church. Harris was followed by a succession of pastors for almost thirty years, most serving the church for only two or three years before moving on. In 1897, the church called young, thirty-year-old George Truett as pastor, and for the next forty-seven years he shepherded the Dallas congregation, as Asaph, the psalmist, wrote of King David in Psalm 78:72, “with the integrity of his heart and the skillfulness of his hands.”

Meanwhile, a year earlier over in Fort Worth, a group of Baptist pioneers busily established their own Baptist church. They struggled over the years until, meeting in the old Tarrant County Courthouse, twenty-six charter members officially constituted the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth in 1873. Like their friends to the east, they began meeting in the Masonic Lodge building in Fort Worth. They were driven from their previous meeting place at the courthouse because of the constant noise, dust, and odors from the cattle drives down the middle of Main Street, immediately outside the open windows of their Sunday services.³¹

J. M. Masters is recognized as the founding pastor of First Baptist Church in Fort Worth. His successor, W. M. Gough, led the church to build a new brick meeting house on Jennings Avenue in 1876. A parade of short-tenured pastors followed, and in 1886 Morgan Wells heeded the call to the church. His pastorate saw the church grow to 541 members and witnessed the building of a magnificent 1,100-seat sanctuary at the corner of Taylor and Third Streets. The national Southern Baptist Convention

(SBC) was held in this building in 1890.³² Wells was greatly loved by the congregation, and after his death in 1896, three short-term pastors served the congregation until 1909 and the arrival of J. Frank Norris, who would lead from the Fort Worth pulpit for the next four decades.

Two Pastors

Arising out of these two churches were two men, John Franklyn Norris and George Washington Truett, who led from their respective pulpits for almost fifty years. Like their adopted cities of Fort Worth and Dallas, these men passed the years in almost constant competition and conflict with each other, while at the same time endearing themselves to thousands of followers at home and across the entire United States as radio broadcasts and their printed sermons propagated their ministries. Their personal correspondence reveals close and intimate friendships with people in high places, not the least of whom was President Harry Truman, who on occasion would call upon them for advice and counsel.³³ If ever two men took on and lived out the personalities of their two cities, it was Norris and Truett. Norris was a pioneer and a provocateur who often shot from the hip. Truett sought to be a prophet and peacemaker, always proper in public conduct with an air of sophistication.

J. Frank Norris was pastor of First Baptist Church in Fort Worth from 1909 to 1952. He was one of the most colorful and controversial figures of his day. He built the largest church in the world and at the same time was indicted and tried for arson, perjury, and even murder—yet was quickly acquitted by sympathetic jurors in each case. He was a curious mix of brilliance and belligerence. He was an antagonist par excellence and loved nothing more than taunting those whom he considered his enemies, yet masses of people loved him and followed him with unabashed love and unqualified loyalty. There were also numbers of people who despised him and thought of him as the devil incarnate.

Norris arrived in Fort Worth when the town was rapidly growing. The new meat packing plants were processing five thousand hogs and three thousand cattle a day, and the demand for jobs brought about a

growing employment rate.³⁴ The multiplied hundreds of new laborers who were flocking to Fort Worth for good-paying jobs were just the type of people who were attracted to Norris's confrontational and sensational approach to ministry, enlisting in his army of followers that eventually grew into the multiplied thousands.

Frank Norris was tailor made for the Wild West, moving to Cowtown just a few years after one of the most famous gunfights in western lore took place. Luke Short, the infamous gambler and gunslinger, shot and killed the city marshal, Long Hair Jim Courtwright, on Main Street between Second and Third Streets, directly in front of the White Elephant Saloon. Courtwright drew first, but before he got his Colt 45 out of his holster, Short shot and Courtwright fell. Short fired again, hitting the marshall in the chest, then standing over him, fired three more times at point-blank range.³⁵ A bronze historical plaque marks the spot today in downtown Fort Worth. Not long after, Short met the same fate on the same street, gunned down by an unnamed desperado passing through town.

Norris arrived in this raucous environment in Fort Worth and was introduced to a city that boasted sixty saloons, more than a dozen sporting houses, and only nine churches. Against a backdrop such as this, many were not surprised when Norris himself shot and killed a man in his own pastoral office in 1926. No man ever took on the personality of his city and fit its wild and woolly times as did Frank Norris. He was the true "lone star" in the Lone Star State.

George W. Truett was pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas from 1897 to 1944. He was the human antithesis of Norris. He was universally beloved, respected, and even revered by the masses. He abhorred controversy, avoided conflict, and sought by every means to live in peace with those around him. However, in the case of Norris it was a futile effort. Truett never mentioned Norris by name and reverted, when having to refer to him, as simply "that man in Fort Worth." Yet their lives and influence are forever entwined in the building of the largest non-Catholic denomination in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention.³⁶

Truett and Dallas were a perfect match, and, like Norris, he took on the personality of his own city. He was cultured, sophisticated, and proper in every respect. He was tall and stood erect with a stately demeanor and a sophisticated presence that filled every room he entered. It is said that often upon his entrance into a banquet room or a civic function, “suddenly without warning the entire group arose and applauded.”³⁷ A well-known Houston civic leader often said that Dallas had only two things that Houston envied: “Neiman Marcus and George W. Truett.”³⁸ Always immaculately dressed and refined in character, his very presence demanded awe and respect from the humblest man on the street to the most prominent person in the city. And Truett loved them all. He often would be without an overcoat in the winter, and his wife, Josephine, would discover he had given it to someone he had passed on the street.

George W. Truett was the epitome of a Christian gentleman and statesman. He graced the pulpit in the historic First Baptist Church at Ervay and Patterson Streets Sunday by Sunday for forty-seven years. In a twenty-first-century culture, it is difficult to appreciate the level of stature and respect this solitary Baptist pastor demanded in his day. Hospitals, public schools, seminaries, libraries, and hundreds of individuals have all been assigned his good name. Truett Cathy, founder of the enormously successful fast food franchise Chick-fil-A, says, “My parents named me after George W. Truett, the great preacher and evangelist of the first half of the twentieth century, for whom the theological seminary at Baylor University is named.”³⁹ George Truett was a paragon of faithfulness and stability. However, he thrived on denominational unity, often at the cost of doctrinal compromise.

While both Norris and Truett moved off the scene in the middle of the twentieth century, their influence on Baptists is felt to this very day. There is a sense in which they both morphed into the titular head of the Conservative Resurgence of the SBC.

W. A. Criswell, at only thirty-four years of age, became Truett’s successor shortly after his death in 1944. Criswell was born in 1909, the year Norris assumed the pastorate of First Baptist Church in Fort Worth. He grew up in a home where his father was a devout follower of

Norris and his mother was a passionate devotee of Truett. As a young boy he sat at a multitude of dinner tables listening to the debate that would inevitably ensue between his mother and father as to whether Norris or Truett was the greatest preacher. Criswell rose to succeed the legendary Truett and would lead the Dallas church to unparalleled heights during his own fifty-year pastorate. In theology, scriptural affinity, and practice he aligned with Norris. He employed Norris's strident fundamental theology but managed to wrap it in Truett's more compassionate and relational ministry philosophy, thereby leading First Baptist Church in Dallas to become the father of all modern megachurches. He ascended to become the undisputed leader of the "Battle for the Bible" in the Southern Baptist Convention. Like a rose bush in a chain-link fence, these three lives are forever entwined with one another. Loved by most and despised by some, Criswell left a lasting legacy as did his two mentors before him, Norris and Truett.