

**Inventory to the
Ralph Elliott Controversy
Collection**

AR 149



**Prepared by: Dorothy A. Davis
Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives
May 2008**

I. Historical Sketch

Ralph H. Elliott served as the head of the Old Testament and Hebrew Department at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1958-1962. During his tenure at Midwestern a controversy arose concerning his work, *The Message of Genesis* (1961), published by Broadman Press. Critics charged that the work denied the historicity of Genesis's first eleven chapters with a symbolic interpretation. Despite initial support from the seminary's Board of Trustees and the Baptist Sunday School Board, the "Genesis Controversy" did not diminish. Instead a campaign expanded as pastors in Missouri, Kansas, and other states, began to push for the work's withdrawal. This campaign reached its peak the 1962 Southern Baptist Convention in San Francisco, where Dr. Elliott's opponents secured supportive appointments to Midwestern's Board of Trustees. Following Dr. Elliott's refusal to voluntarily not allow for the republication of the book, the new Board voted to dismiss him on October 25, 1962.

Ralph H. Elliott was born March 2, 1925 in Swansonville, Virginia. After graduating from George Washington High School in Danville, Virginia, he attended Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee from 1946-1949. Dr. Elliott continued his education at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, where he received his Bachelor of Divinity and Doctor of Theology. Following his work at Midwestern, he served as pastor of several American Baptist churches including First Baptist Church, Rochester, New York. He was also the Vice President for Academic Life and Dean of the Faculty at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School until his retirement in 1991. In 2006, Dr. Elliott received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Carson-Newman College.

II. Scope and Content Note

The Ralph H. Elliott Controversy Collection (1961-1986) contains .25 linear feet of materials in one document box. The collection addresses the controversy that arose following the publication of Ralph H. Elliott's work, *The Message of Genesis* (1961) by Broadman Press. Materials included are articles, clippings, correspondence, editorials, press releases, and resolutions from the Board of Trustees and the Student Protest Committee. Correspondence is primarily from former students to Dr. Millard Berquist, then-President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, about the controversy.

Researchers should note that there are several other archival collections with materials related to the controversy: the Herschel H. Hobbs Papers (AR 332), the J. D. Grey Papers (AR 608), the George Allen West Papers (AR 609), and the Clifton J. Allen Papers (AR 795-221). In addition, Sally Rice's "Ralph Elliott: Controversial Figure Among Southern Baptists" (M.A. Thesis, Duke University, BX 6495.E44 R52 1963) and Ralph Elliott's *The Genesis Controversy and Continuity in Southern Baptist Chaos* (BX 6495.E44 A5 1992) can be found in the library collection.

Dr. Albert McClellan donated the collection to the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, today the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, in 1965.

III. Folder Listing

Box 1

- 1.1 Address – Berquist, Millard – “To All Midwestern Seminary Students”
- 1.2 Articles – “Concerning the Elliott Controversy” – 1963
- 1.3 Articles – Edwards, W. Ross – “Midwestern Seminary Situation” – 1963
- 1.4 Articles – Edwards, W. Ross – “Would you be a parson?” – 1962
- 1.5 Clippings – 1962-1963
- 1.6 Correspondence – Elliott, Ralph – 1962
- 1.7 Correspondence – Peacock, Heber F. – 1963
- 1.8 Correspondence – Student Endorsements – 1961
- 1.9 Correspondence – Student Endorsements – 1962
- 1.10 Correspondence – Walls, Donald E. – 1986
- 1.11 Editorials – 1962
- 1.12 List of Trustees – Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary – 1962
- 1.13 Press Releases – 1962
- 1.14 Resolutions – 1961-1962
- 1.15 Student Protest Committee – 1962
- 1.16 White Paper – 1961-1962