

RALPH ELLIOTT CONTROVERSY COLLECTION

AR 149



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

Updated November, 2012

Ralph Elliott Controversy Collection

AR 149

Summary

Main Entry: Ralph Elliott Controversy Collection

Date Span: 1961 – 1986

Abstract: Contains articles, clippings, correspondence, editorials, press releases, and resolutions from the Board of Trustees and the Student Protest Committee regarding Elliott's work, *The Message of Genesis*. Ralph H. Elliott served as the head of the Old Testament and Hebrew Department at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1958-1962.

Size: .25 linear ft. (one box)

Collection #: AR 149

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. The campaign reached its peak at 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 voluntary refusal to prevent 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.

Scope and Content Note

The Ralph H. Elliott Controversy Collection (1961 – 1986) contains .25 linear feet of material in one document box and addresses the controversy that arose following the publication of Elliott's work, *The Message of Genesis* (1961), by Broadman Press.

Included in the collection 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.

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

Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically by folder title

Provenance

Donated by Dr. Albert McClellan in 1965 to the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

Preferred Citation

Ralph H. Elliott Controversy Collection, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee

Access Restrictions

None

Subject Terms

Elliott, Ralph H., 1925

Berquist, Millard J.

Edwards, W. Ross

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Kansas City, Mo) – History

Theology, Baptist

Baptists – Doctrinal and controversial works

Elliott Controversy

Related Materials

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). Also, 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)

Container List

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