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Roland Q. Leavell: a Biography (Mississippi).

Mary D. leavell Bowman

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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ROLAND Q. LEAVELL:
A BIOGRAPHY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of History

by
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ABSTRACT

Roland Quinche Leavell was born on December 21, 1891, as the eighth of nine boys to conservative, religious parents in Oxford, Mississippi. Raised in Oxford, he followed his mother's wishes and entered the ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention. As a pastor, he not only served well in a number of churches, but became renowned throughout the Convention for his success in evangelism. Because of this success, he won appointment to two of the most prestigious offices in the Convention: Director of Evangelism and president of the Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans.

This dissertation is not, however, simply a recital of this man's successes. Based on his large collection of personal papers and on interviews with many friends and associates, it is a discussion of a paradigm, the Southern Baptist religious leader born and raised in the ideas and notions of the conservative South but forced over time to face the conditions of twentieth-century America and the world. Leavell never shrank from observing twentieth-century life. Besides his religious work, he studied early on in Chicago where he first encountered integration; he experienced the First World War as a YMCA volunteer and as a stretcher-bearer; he visited the China of the warlords; in 1934 he witnessed Nazi Germany at first hand; and he preached in Nagasaki soon after that city's destruction by the atom bomb.

Despite all these experiences, he clung to a religion and theology rooted deep in what he learned at his mother's knee, a faith focused on individual salvation and the avoidance of the puritanical sins of drinking, gambling, dancing, and illicit sexual activity. Socially
he made little progress; he believed throughout his life in the in-
equality of the races and the superiority of what he perceived as
Southern values over those of the North. Intellectually he grew little
as well, ducking and dodging the difficult questions the world posed
to him. He stands in stark contrast to the fellow Oxfordian of his
youth, William Faulkner, but he also represents a much more common
type in the twentieth-century American South.
CHAPTER I
THE OXFORD EXPERIENCE

Roland Quinche Leavell would be considered by any standard a compelling individual. At his death many newspapers ran front-page accounts and editorials extolling his varied accomplishments. The New Orleans Times Picayune praised him as a man of "many talents" and spoke of "the Leavell energy" and "utter devotion to his career," while the Clarion Ledger of Jackson, Mississippi lauded his "literary production, preaching and devotion to the education of ministers, vision, and talented and energetic spirit." Baptist denominational papers joined international and non-denominational religious publications in eulogizing Leavell, describing him as "relentless, hardworking, ... a well-balanced man's man who liked to stalk a deer, and a great sport's [sic] fan ... understanding and appreciating fine athletic performances." Educational magazines called him a beloved teacher, counselor par excellence, statesman, devoted family man, possessor of "unusual ability," and "witness to the construction of eighty-five buildings on

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3 The Clarion Ledger (Jackson, Miss.), January 17, 1963, Sec. A, p. 10.
5 Douglas Hudgens, "Moses, My Servant is Dead," First Baptist Church, Jackson, Miss., January 20, 1963. Because of the overwhelming response to the televised broadcast, this sermon was later published in pamphlet form.
the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Campus, . . . the thrust behind the attainment of full accreditation for that institution by the American Association of Theological Schools."

Some time before his death, the New Orleans Item had praised him as

a man of persistent purpose . . . his work characterized by a quality of imagination which endows routine with a certain creativity, . . . an excellent but unconventional executive who types many of his own letters, has a horror of gray double-breasted suits and simply will not sit in a swivel chair!

"His superb memory enables him to recount extemporaneously the most amazing details . . . his mind is incisive. The correct phrase comes instinctively to his lips and subtleties of a situation never escape him. He enjoys living. Whether watching a football game or steering a growing seminary, he has a wonderful time." When Leavell was elected by the Southern Baptist Convention as the First Vice President in May, 1961, his nominator proclaimed him an eminent author, educator, minister, evangelist and world traveler. The ovation that followed his election attested to the prestige and position of respect he held

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6 Southern Baptist Educator, XXVII, No. 5 (1963), 7.


8 Times Picayune, May 26, 1961, Sec. 1, p. 1.
in the minds of colleagues.\(^9\)

What kind of man elicited such eulogies? He was not sui generis. On the contrary, he exemplified a specific type of Christian generally identified with the American South: the evangelical conservative, preoccupied with the saving of souls and the infallibility of the Bible.\(^10\) Roland Leavell's attitudes, both spoken and written, exhibited this form of Protestant Christianity, which gave rigorous attention to personal piety, to hellfire and damnation, to converting the heathen at home and abroad, and to strict adherence to rigid patterns of hard work and disciplined behavior. He was reared in the American South, a provincial stronghold frozen in these religious values, still suffering from defeat and harboring a defiant spirit.

His frequently proclaimed idea of success in life was to "win souls to Christ." Exhorted by his parents throughout his early life to prove his worthiness before God by converting others to his particular brand of Christianity, he spent his life in that pursuit. In June, 1911, his mother wrote to her son:

> I feel that my life has been so useless and unworthy. My great desire has been that it be enlarged and perpetuated through my boys. I realize more and more the greatest thing is the winning of souls, so nothing makes

\(^9\) Southern Baptist Convention, *Minutes of the Annual Convention in St. Louis, May, 1961* (Nashville, 1961), p. 82. Item 132: "President Pollard presented newly elected First Vice-President Roland Q. Leavell and Mrs. Leavell. They were given a standing tribute."

me happier than efforts in this direction.\textsuperscript{11}

Dominance of this concern, that is, salvation of the individual, remained the significant preoccupation of his life. The overt jocular qualities and ringing conviviality referred to in news items and editorials largely served as effective devices in his effort to win souls. This task, overshadowing all other loyalties, caused Leavell to ignore other concerns. Many years later in 1941 as the Nazis marched through Europe, Leavell wrote:

When the Nazi army entered Paris in August 1940, it was distinctly perceptible that our evangelistic interest and efforts began to lag. Our minds were diverted by war, by the universal draft, by the presidential election and our national defense program. Shall we save our nation and lose our souls? Shall we let our national defense chill and kill our concern for saving the souls of men? . . . Let us call back Southern Baptists to . . . earnest soul-winning.\textsuperscript{12}

What kind of man could write of "soul-winning" while ignoring the most soulless of forces as it swept across Europe crushing the bodies and spirits of millions of people?

Roland Leavell was born to Corra Alice Berry and George Washington Leavell on December 21, 1891 in Oxford, Mississippi. Oxford, in Lafayette County, was his home from his birth until 1914, when he left

\textsuperscript{11}Corra Berry Leavell to her sons, June, 1911, Roland Q. Leavell Papers, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary Library, New Orleans, Louisiana. (Hereafter cited as Leavell papers, New Orleans).

it to take up his studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Oxford was founded in 1825, when John Chisholm, John J. Craig, and John D. Martin opened an Indian trading post near what is now the Oxford square, only a year before the state legislature passed the act creating Lafayette County. Thomas Dudley, a medical doctor who moved to the community soon after its founding, suggested that Oxford be the name of the new settlement in the hope that the proposed state university might be located there. In 1844 when the University of Mississippi was chartered, Oxford was indeed chosen as the site. The first classes opened in the fall of 1848.

Lafayette County and Oxford grew rapidly during the antebellum years. The 1840 census gives the county a population of 3,689 whites, of whom 2,018 were males. Of the males, 1,134 were under twenty years of age. The slave census shows 1,840. Several inns were already opened, the best known being the Oxford Inn, advertised as a "large brick mansion." By 1844 newspaper advertisements were extending invitations to meetings of the Oxford Lyceum, which featured lectures, recitations, critical readings from the British poets, and debates on various themes. Private schools were established, and in 1844 twenty percent of the white children of school age attended school in Lafayette County.  


An additional benefit was accorded Oxford when a federal court was established there, attracting lawyers in greater numbers than otherwise would have been true. One man who practiced law and taught at the university in its early days was L. Q. C. Lamar, who later became a congressman, Confederate officer, secretary of the interior under President Grover Cleveland, and a justice on the United States Supreme Court. Other notable figures who lived in Oxford in its early days included F. A. P. Barnard, a president of the University of Mississippi who later became the president of Columbia University. While living in Oxford, he was rector of the St. Peter's Episcopal Church and, as a civic and university leader, was instrumental in bringing academic and professional talent to Oxford. One such individual was Richard Upjohn, designer of the famous Trinity Church in New York City and responsible in part for the vigorous growth of Oxford between 1840 and 1860, when over 455 stone and wooden houses were constructed, some of which still stand today. As Oxford grew, so did its contacts with the outside world. The Mississippi Central Railroad, which eventually became part of the Illinois Central system, reached Oxford in 1857, and soon both Whig and Democratic newspapers appeared in Oxford as political forces of all kinds wooed its voters.

Despite such obvious promise, Oxford failed to grow much there-

15 Richard Aubrey McLemore, History of Mississippi (Jackson, Miss., 1973), I, 610.
16 Historical Catalog of the University of Mississippi, 1846-1907 (Nashville, Tenn., 1910), p. 1.
17 Mrs. Edward McCrady Papers, Mary Buie Museum, Oxford, Miss.
after; indeed it reached its zenith between 1855 and 1861. Several factors slowed the growth of Oxford and eventually reversed it. The most important was geography: the surrounding land was impoverished hill country. Numerous gullies — which are still present — were more pronounced in the nineteenth century. Oxford did not become an agriculturally productive area as did the Delta region to the west with its rich alluvial soil. Oxford was not close enough to the Mississippi River in the days when river trade was making small settlements such as Memphis and St. Louis into thriving ports. Neither factories nor mills made their appearance. Additionally, the mid-nineteenth-century occupants of Oxford, many of whom were immigrants from South Carolina and Alabama, brought with them little formal education. A pioneer mentality and a rigid, simplistic, religious pattern characterized the majority of those who came.

One might think that the founding of the University of Mississippi would have broadened the outlook of the local population. The main purpose of the school was not, however, to enlighten Mississippians, but to preserve what was perceived as a particular way of life from outside influences. In fact, the University came into being as part of a general Southern effort to stop the tradition of sending young men to the North for their education. Most Southerners believed that a Northern education was hostile to their way of life and that exposing young men to such an education would eventually destroy that way of life.

This conservative consciousness influenced religious matters as well, and, early in its history the University -- although a state institution -- established a course teaching the "evidences of Christianity" as a required subject for all students. The course remained compulsory until 1930.\textsuperscript{19} It is true that in the nineteenth century higher education throughout the United States had a strong religious foundation. Indeed ninety percent of all college presidents in pre-Civil War days were clergymen. However, Southern universities, and especially the University of Mississippi, clung to this religious emphasis far longer than did their counterparts in the rest of the country. The University of Mississippi did not see itself as secular in spirit and held that religious truth should not be altered each time some new scientific hypothesis strongly suggested that it should be. With an intrinsic animosity to outside ideas, with an influx of poor people lacking education, and with the absence of industry or agriculture, a conservative pallor wrapped itself around this small, university town.

The Civil War reinforced significantly the religious and social conservatism of the community. The University closed in 1861 when many young men formed a company called the University Greys, which received the governor's sanction and was promptly mustered into the service of the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{20} So few students remained that the school was unable

\textsuperscript{19}James A. Cabaniss, \textit{History of the University of Mississippi} (Oxford, Miss., 1949), p. 196.

\textsuperscript{20}A reluctant secessionist, interestingly enough, was Dr. Isom, one of the town's founders mentioned above. L. Q. C. Lamar was the outspoken advocate of secession.
to operate. Barnard departed permanently for the North, and any faculty members who had expressed Union sentiments were dismissed by the board of the University. With the school closed, the buildings served military purposes, housing for example the Confederate wounded after the battle of Shiloah in June, 1862. Grant occupied Oxford in December of the same year, and a year and a half later a Union Army marched through Oxford and burned all of the commercial buildings around the Oxford square.\(^{21}\) Dr. A. J. Quinche, a faculty member who had remained to protect the campus during the days after the school closed saved the University property owing to a personal friendship with Grant.\(^{22}\)

Such shared misfortune in the community served to produce a mind set that engendered and cemented a suspicion of all outside influences. This provincialism, so common in the post-bellum South, "resulted from the shared sacrifices, the shared efforts, and the shared defeat which is often more unifying than victory!\(^{23}\) Throughout Roland Leavell's lifetime he was ever conscious of "wrongs inflicted on the South by the North." In 1933 Leavell wrote to his wife from New York City: "I can scarcely wait to return home to the South where white folks, happy


\(^{22}\) Roland Quinche Leavell received his middle name from Dr. Quinche. Mrs. Quinche was a close friend of Corra Leavell, Roland's mother.

folks, and Christian folks live." He cautioned his children on many occasions never to live west of the Mississippi or north of the Mason-Dixon line. Oxford was the epitome of what was best in the world for Leavell.

The Leavell family had deep roots in Oxford, but family history can be traced back much further. George Leavell's family came from the Atlantic coast of France, a Huguenot stronghold. The Leavell name had originally been LaVille. With the migration of the Huguenot LaVilles to America the name was changed to Leavell. John LaVille (1675-1740) came to Virginia in 1715 from France to seek economic and religious freedom. Apparently the Huguenot Leavells found compatible beliefs with the Baptists, and before long they began to chafe under Virginia's stringent laws against non-conformity. Robert Leavell (1718-1797) departed for South Carolina where he became a deacon in the Bush River Baptist Church. The Huguenots have been characterized as thrifty, skillful, intelligent, industrious, and true to Calvinist conviction about the value of work and honesty. "As honest as a Huguenot" was a traditional Leavell family saying.

James Leavell, Jr. (1801-1873), grandfather of Roland Leavell and father of George Leavell, left South Carolina for Cherry Creek, Mississippi in 1837. He established a large plantation, owned a number of slaves, served as an active member in the Cherry Creek Baptist Church,

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and was a strong advocate of education. He built a small school house for the children of the community, where his son George was educated. As George learned to read, he apparently taught some young Black youths on the plantation to do the same. One young Black remained attached to him through the years after the close of the Civil War and took the name Alfred Leavell.  

It was George Leavell and his generation that participated in the Civil War. Entering the Confederate army at age seventeen and eventually participating in eight battles, George suffered injuries from which he never fully recovered physically or emotionally. His eldest son wrote, "It seems to me that I never knew him as a really well man, free from suffering."  

The Civil War not only changed the course of life for George Leavell but for other members of his family as well. Many of the male Leavells participated in the Civil War. The father, James, Jr., served as a captain in the Mississippi Militia; a brother, John Griffin Leavell, was killed at Gettysburg; and the eldest brother and George’s school teacher, Richard Marion Leavell, was captured and held in the prison on Johnson's Island. The Leavell homes and many Oxford area residences were threatened with destruction by the Union Army in 1863. James Leavell, paternal grandparent of Roland Leavell, saw his residence and cotton gin burned to the ground and four hundred bales of cotton destroyed. His cattle and horses were confiscated or

26 Landrum Pinson Leavell, Mr. and Mrs. George W. Leavell: Personal Memories (Memphis, 1927), p. 16.

27 Ibid., p. 19.
scattered and his slaves freed. At this same period, the home of Roland Leavell's maternal grandparents, Nathan Manley and Jemima Berry, was threatened.

This home was a two-story frame dwelling not far from Oxford. As Union troops entered the home, Mrs. Berry saw a federal officer pick up a book on Masonry that was on the front table in the wide hall. This book belonged to her husband, Nathan Manley Berry, who was away in Confederate service. "Major," asked Mrs. Berry, "Are you a Mason?" Receiving an affirmative answer, she immediately asked, "Would you let your troop of soldiers burn the home of the Worshipful Master of the local Masonic lodge?" The officer immediately replied, "No, Madam, I will not." The officer then put a cordon of soldiers about the place to protect it. Subsequently, children, grandchildren, and greatgrandchildren visited and picnicked on the front lawn of "Grandpa's farm" at Cherry Creek, Mississippi. 28

Neither the Civil War, Oxford, nor the Father was the dominant influence upon Roland Leavell's character. One scholar of modern evangelicals has written:

The impression left by the accounts of most evangelicals is of an intensely religious family background and early religious training by parents. As important as both parents are according to historians who have chronicled the lives of evangelicals in the shaping of piety and character, evangelicals placed particular emphasis in their memories of their mothers. 29


He might have been describing Leavell personally. In the Leavell home, Corra Berry Leavell was decidedly the dominant figure of the household. Corra was remembered by her sons as being a devoted mother and as shaping their earliest consciousness and character. Some years later, Ullin, the younger brother, wrote to Roland describing his mother in reverential but revealing terms:

My memory of Mama is a portrait of peace, faith and quiet optimism. These characteristics were interwoven with industry, organization and sense of humor. I have no recollection of having seen her greatly excited or in a "flurry." Many times I have seen her convulsed in laughter over some pleasantry or ridiculous story . . . I remember the number of trays of hot rolls, bowls of soup and gruel, baskets of vegetables and sacks of potatoes that I was called upon to 'tote' across the street or town. I remember at Christmas when we took food to the jail. I was with Mama the day she stopped the mayor of the town in the cemetery as we were coming from the family lot, and persuaded the man to throw his jug away that he was going to get wine in, and promise to go to the meeting that night . . . I shall never forget how she gave loads of groceries to Aunt Martha, the Negro woman evangelist.

I slept in Mama's room on a cot during her last years. It was my duty to get up at her call and make the fire in the bedroom. She usually called at about four o'clock. She would tell me to open the door to the little closet just off the bedroom. She would sit before the fire with the Bible and then go into the small room. A few times I opened the door to that little room and I saw her kneeling before that round top trunk in the 'secret place.'

The daughter of Jemima Frances Ball and Nathan Manley Berry, Corra

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never forgot that she was descended from the famous Ball-Washington line in Virginia. Colonel William Ball came from England in 1650 and settled in Lancaster County, Virginia, where he gave the name "Millenbeck" to his estate. His friend and neighbor was John Washington, grandfather of George Washington. Colonel Ball's son, Colonel Joseph Ball, married Mary Johnson, and their daughter, Mary Ball, married Augustine, son of John Washington. Their son was George Washington. In 1784, one "William Ball, Gentleman" moved from Virginia to Cross Hill, South Carolina. This William Ball was Corra Berry's great-great-grandfather, and he was the great-great grandnephew of Colonel Joseph Ball of Lancaster County, Virginia, father of Mary Ball, mother of George Washington. Although the kinship may seem so remote as to be hardly worth mentioning, it figured prominently in the conversations and the consciousness of the family members in Corra Berry's home. It was Corra's grandfather, the Reverend Martin Ball, Sr., a pioneer Baptist minister, who moved to the Oxford area in 1845.

Corra's paternal ancestors were the Berrys, descendants of Hudson Berry (1752-1850), a Revolutionary War soldier, whose ancestors had come from France. Hudson Berry, Corra's great-grandfather, was a wealthy landowner and significant political and religious figure in South Carolina. In 1800 Hudson built a two-story plantation home known as "Sweetwater," located on the Reddy River adjacent to present-day Greenville, South Carolina. The elegance of the Berry South Caro-

31 Charlotte Leavell, Nine Leavell Brothers, p. 19.

32 Ibid., p. 89.
lina ancestral home was well-known to Corra. Hudson Berry owned and operated a saw mill and a cotton factory, and possessed extensive acreage in Anderson and Laurens Counties. His leadership in the Baptist churches of South Carolina is noted in many church records.

Hudson Berry's son, William Berry, of whom we know very little, left South Carolina with his son, Nathan Manley Berry, to move to Cherry Creek. Nathan Manley Berry, the father of Corra Berry, built a home in Cherry Creek that followed the tradition of the South Carolina home of Hudson Berry that he had left.

The Cherry Creek home was a large two-story white clapboard house with multiple bedrooms, drawing rooms, and a kitchen separated from the main building. Orchards and gardens, flowers and vegetables gave an air of luxury and bounty to the estate. Corra often played along the shady walk constructed of slave-made brick which led from the road to the house. A circular drive with neat hedgerows welcomed carriages and horsemen who came to the door. A piano in the drawing room was provided for Corra's music lessons. It was this home, which still stands today, though unoccupied, that was saved from destruction by Grant's men when the Mason Bible was seen on the drawing room table.

Corra left this Cherry Creek home in 1867 to attend Pontotoc Female College in Pontotoc, Mississippi from which she graduated in 1871. The school was a commodious two-story building adjacent to the Baptist

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Church, a "nice, dignified, select school for choice Baptist girls." Corra was one of eight girls in her class. Corra's marginal notes in one text bear some comment. In the text, a chemistry book which has lost its title page, she wrote across the top of the first page, "I want to be an angel/ And with the angels stand/ A crown upon my forehead/ A harp within my hand." The poem seems more than a silly set of verses; it shows an idealism, sentimentality, or a feeling of being set apart. She seemed to detect at this young age an elevated sense of self. She desired to be as "good" as anyone could be. This sense of grasping for heaven or being the "best" was passed on to Leavell and remained a significant personality trait for his lifetime. An "other-worldliness" marked Leavell as it did Corra, and frequently in letters to his daughters and speeches to young people in graduation addresses, he urged them to be "in the world but not of the world." Such thinking, however, also prevented him from grappling with problems of the real world and discouraged questions that might disturb the blissful other world.

Another book, not a text, given to her by her future husband carries the inscription on the flyleaf: "This pleasing little volume,/ Truly presented/ Miss Corra A. Berry/ As a slight testimonial of regard by her Best Friend." Alongside one long passage in the margin is Corra's penciled comment, "A picture worth studying;" the "picture" she

35 Callie Gill Hodges to Roland Q. Leavell, August, 1940, Leavell Papers, New Orleans.
36 Textbooks in possession of Charlotte Henry Leavell.
refers to is the literary description of a mother contrasted to a nun. It begins, "You see she is a wife, and keeps her husband's secrets . . . her prudent affection does him good all the days of his life." The marked paragraph concludes, "Such a woman, if slander, and envy, and malice should attack her, would be uninjured by them, for her own works would give the lie to their accusations, and her own works would praise her openly." Thus Corra apparently saw herself as a future mother and wife. She wished to be an "angel." and later confessed her real desire in life to be a missionary. Her classmates described her as having a "twinkle in her eye" and always being considerate of others.

During her holiday periods from the Pontotoc institution, Corra rode the bumpy carriage roads back to her Cherry Creek home. It is probable, although little is known about her days of courting, that she regularly saw George Leavell, who was at home recuperating from his war wounds. When she graduated from the Pontotoc Female College in July, 1871, she was asked to remain to teach music to the girls. She taught for a year until her acceptance of George Leavell's proposal of marriage compelled her to return to Cherry Creek to make preparations for her wedding.

Corra was fortunate in that she lived in a home which had survived, while most of the neighbors lived in improvised dwellings on lands scorched by the Union armies. "Extreme poverty marked almost every household in Mississippi," reported the New York Times on June 18,

37 Mrs. A. C. Graves, Seclusaval (Memphis, 1870). This is a paraphrase of portions of Proverbs 31.
Means of survival were severely limited. "It was the small farmer -- the average Mississippian who bore the heaviest burden. Fences were down, fields infested with weeds, farm tools and work animals were scarce and emancipation had liberated the labor force." Corra was also fortunate that she secured an education in the immediate post-war period when few men and almost no women attended any sort of school. Finally, Corra indeed felt favored when her bridegroom presented to her a gold chain with a gold watch on it as a wedding gift. "We had just lived through the Civil War and Reconstruction," recalled her cousin and friend Modena Lowrey, "and had never seen many beautiful or expensive things in our lives."

After the wedding on May 14, 1872, George and Corra moved to Memphis, where he studied at night to become a bookkeeper. In 1874 they moved to Oxford where he opened a mercantile business. She called him "Mr. Leavell" to the end of their days together. They appeared to complement each other, Corra being lively and vivacious and George sober and serious. They had grown up in the same community, attended the same church, knew the same people, and came from the same social class of dispossessed plantation owners.

It was difficult for Corra and George Leavell to make the transition from plantation life and its accompanying prestige to town life and the lesser social position of merchant. Land to the southerner was

38 McLemore, History of Mississippi, p. 543.

39 Ibid., p. 632.

40 Leavell, Corra Berry Leavell, p. 8.
more than simply a commodity. It had to do with ancestral tradition, with a special kind of pride about the soil that the forebears watered with sweat and tears. Corra and George were grateful that the Berry home had been spared by Union soldiers, and trips to grandpa's farm were numerous. "When we go to heaven, can we come back to grandpa's every summer?" asked one of the boys, echoing the family attachment to this ancestral land.  

When Roland Leavell was born to the George Leavell family on December 21, 1891, there was little to rejoice about in the household. He was the eighth boy, with seven older ones already in the home to clothe, feed, and educate. On the day of his birth, Corra, so accustomed to having babies, had read her Bible, said her morning prayers in the "closet," seen her early morning churning task through to completion, and made biscuits for the family breakfast. She knew that even if the baby was born that day, there would be no special news to spread around unless, of course, it might be a girl. Otherwise, "the Leavells have another boy, their eighth" would be passed from house to house in the little town.

When Corra's pains began to be pronounced, she went to the wide bed in the north room and sent one of the boys to fetch the doctor. When he arrived, he found the screaming boy on the bedcovers and heard Corra say to the boys, "Go tell my sister Lizzie that we have another boy. No need to tell anyone else." Years later Roland wrote in a diary:

They didn't want me according to Aunt Lizzie's report. She never knew how profound an impression that made on the little boy's mind. Twas just before Christmas, financial affairs and father's health were both low -- with seven boys already, I ... came to spite them before the Doctor got there. But Aunt Lizzie says in two months my mother said I had laughed my way into their hearts.42

There is serious doubt that any two-month-old baby could "laugh." More likely the mother Corra in her characteristic compassion told this to Roland when he repeated Aunt Lizzie's remark. It is significant that Roland throughout his life felt the need frequently to retell this story of being unwanted. He would always follow it with his mother's reassurance that he had soon "laughed his way into the hearts of everyone."

Although he may not have realized it, this anecdote reflected a significant quality of his character and the origin of that quality. Throughout his life he demanded that he be the center of attention. It was not enough to have all eyes upon him while he stood at the pulpit or the lectern. He sought to have all eyes upon him at receptions, conventions, and gatherings of all kinds. Moreover, his need for attention fed two other characteristics of his personality: his ambition and his need to control. Throughout his life his ambition seemed insatiable, reflecting itself in endless activity whether it be traveling, writing, preaching, raising money, or saving souls. And along with his ambition came the need to be always in control, often not only of his

42Roland Q. Leavell, personal papers belonging to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, n.d. (Hereafter cited as Leavell Papers, Bowman).
own life but the lives of others. He judged people not for their own virtues and faults but for how close they met his own standards of activity and effort. Sensing early on that he might have been unwanted, he spent his life in part trying to prove to his mother that he was worth her pains.

Other childhood influences in Roland Leavell's early life were less benign, and he was preoccupied with overcoming some of them later. "Our poverty was our greatest blessing," quoted Roland Leavell in articles, books and sermons he delivered, but one wonders if he meant it. Oxford itself was poor. Not only had the Civil War impoverished the area, but the primary crop, cotton — supposed to be king — had become a tyrant. Cotton moved inland and depleted the land as it went. Even before the Civil War it ruined as many farmers as it made rich.

George and Corra had few financial successes. The business in town, Leavell and Berry Mercantile Company, opened in 1874. The Berry name came from the partnership between two Leavell brothers, George and Fountaine, and Corra's father, Nathan Manley Berry. Shortly thereafter the partnership dissolved and George managed the business alone, realizing some real financial prosperity in his mid-life. However, illness due to war wounds forced him to hire a man in 1893 to run the store for him. Upon his return to the business after two years of re-

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43 In a sermon, "Home Life," delivered in Gainesville, Ga., in 1936, Leavell insisted that the most important cause of stress in the home was finances. Other causes of stress included alcohol and divorce.

cuperation, he discovered that the man had run up such enormous debts that the store had to be closed and its assets sold in 1895. In the wake of this disaster George went to work as a cashier at the Bank of Oxford, determined to pay back all his creditors rather than file for bankruptcy. "Dark days came for the family of nine sons when all struggled and suffered ... chill penury never left the home thereafter." Despite this great hardship, the parents never openly blamed the man who had ruined them; indeed Roland did not learn of the matter until long after it happened. The impact was twofold: his admiration for his mother increased and he too learned to suppress his feelings. In the best gospel tradition, she had taught the lesson of turning the other cheek. "Then we recalled to each other how our mother had sent various ones of us time and again to this man's house with trays of food and messages of concern about his health when he was ill." 

Poverty to Roland Leavell meant a great deal of work, and that influenced his thinking. In later life he wrote, "Privations pay off in happiness in later life. What man does not like to brag about working his way through college?" He reveled in telling stories of working 63 days one summer turning concrete at 10¢ an hour. He made $63 that summer and was able to play football with the university in the fall.

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45 Leavell, Corra Berry Leavell, p. 48.
46 Ibid., p. 44.
He told about getting "one orange at Christmas time and chewing the peelings until February," and of never getting a new pair of pants until he was 21, but wearing hand-me-downs from brothers instead. For his entrance into the seminary he borrowed $100, which he spent for railroad fare, books, and board for one month. He wore torn trousers for weeks, not having the necessary 50¢ to have them patched by a tailor. He reiterated the story of his first honorarium for preaching so frequently that it was included in his funeral service.

I was ashamed to open the folded check when they gave it to me so I put it in the pocket of my coat. Curiosity about that check was eating me up. I thought my host and hostess would never go to bed so I could see my check... When I finally got to my room and closed the door, I jerked out the check and saw it was for twenty-five whole, wonderful dollars. I jumped on the bed and stood on my head at the precise moment the host, Mr. Orem, stuck his head in the door to ask if I wanted a drink of water. There was I, the preacher of the evening, standing on his head on the bed.

Did Leavell's telling these and other stories of deprivation indicate his need to apologize for the comfortable state he found himself in as years progressed? If, indeed, poverty was his "greatest blessing," it was not a condition which he openly sought later on. At age seven, when asked what he planned to do when he grew up, he answered, "I don't know, but I am going to try to do something to try to support my

48Conversation with Dorothea Leavell Hudson, n. d.

Away with this poverty we are experiencing, he seemed to say. Indeed, poverty was never viewed as being desirable in Leavell's subsequent experience. In later life he wore expensive clothes, owned fine furniture, enjoyed travel through the world, and boasted of "presiding at the dining table in my own fine home with guests." Throughout his life he counted among his friends many who were men of great wealth. Poverty was to be overcome. He equated poverty with shiftlessness and lack of imagination. He saw to it that he was never poor again.

The next preoccupation that dominated his life as a youth was the church — and Baptist Christianity. Every service, every prayer meeting was attended by the entire family. "We were more likely to ask to stay away from school on Monday than to stay away from church at any time." The family pews were second and third rows from the front, and were filled with the family of boys. His mother was the teacher of the "infant" class which went up to school age, so she was the first Sunday School teacher for each of the boys.

Leavell's experience as a child in the Oxford Church made him strongly conscious of the expectations of God and of his mother, expectations that were largely the same. He received from this both a sense of guilt and a sense of security in a value system that encouraged him not to pose questions. His guilt was non-specific and resulted from

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50 Ibid., p. 37.
repeated and emphatic references to transgressions Leavell heard in every sermon, hymn, prayer, or Sunday School lesson. The Baptist God was perceived as a God of wrath who was "outraged over human sinfulness." The security provided for the sinner and preached by the church was reflected in the idea that satisfaction demanded to make amends for the sinfulness of man had been paid by the death of Christ. Thus, by merely accepting this pardoning act, compensation was made and there was no need to do anything else; heaven was assured. This salvation process caused soul-winning to become the central mission of the Baptist Church and evangelism to become the "ranking church activity."

He learned from his mother that "winning souls" was the ultimate good in life and that this was done through the church. He watched her weep over "lost souls." He saw her place in the church collection plate the gold watch she had received as a bride, since she had no money to give. He knew that this was the most prized and expensive article in the Leavell household and realized that his mother had donated it for "saving of souls on foreign continents." There is no doubt that, when he saw her cherished watch and gold chain in the hands of the church, he was profoundly impressed with the importance of the church to his mother. In 1905, when Leavell was fourteen, he saw his mother preparing to attend services on the Sunday following his father's funeral. "How can you go to church so soon after papa died?" one of the older

53 Hill, Southern Churches, p. 35.

boys asked. She replied, "There is not another place on earth more appropriate for comfort than the church. We will all go." Again, the young teenager felt the intensity of her devotion. "I know you did not pray for that minister or you would not criticize him like that" was her reprimand if any of the boys criticized a sermon. Later in life Leavell wrote:

The church has withstood fire and sword, prison and persecution, ignorance and learning, ridicule and indifference. Yet spires point toward heaven in all the nations of the world. Why? Because churches supply satisfaction for all men . . . Why would any criticize the church is beyond me. Any troublemaker who tries to destroy the blessed fellowship of the church, him will God destroy. (I Corinthians 3:17)

Later in his life, Leavell wrote that his own "conversion" took place in 1905 when he was fourteen. It occurred at the close of a church service when the minister asked for those to come forward who would accept Jesus' pardoning offer and be saved. "I felt so badly when the minister had preached so long and hard and no one came to confess his sins. I walked down the aisle and told him that I wanted to be a Christian." Although a reader might regard this motive for seeking conversion a rather weak one, Leavell commented that it was a

55Leavell, Corra Berry Leavell, p. 15.
57Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 28.
58Ibid., p. 27.
"rebirth" experience, one in which he felt transformed from a state of sin to a state of salvation. The church provided for him a structure of security, a routine he learned and accepted, a place to assuage his guilt and feel forgiven, and a way in which he could please his mother. Philip Greven, a noted authority on the rearing of Protestant children, wrote, "Important as outward behavior was to evangelicals . . . their principal method of discipline, once the children's wills had been conquered . . . focused upon: their consciences." Thus Leavell accepted the church unquestioningly. He always felt a strong sense of guilt if he displeased his mother. The church and mother flowed together in his conscience.

In addition to poverty and the Church, another influential factor in the life of Roland Leavell was an interest in education. Indeed, when at age 55 he assumed the presidency of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, he wrote to his daughter that, even though he had been in the ministry for many years, this late venture into education "was the phase of my life work for which all the rest has been made and planned." Preoccupation with education began in the home in Oxford. One of his earliest memories was attending his oldest brother Landrum's graduation from the University of Mississippi in 1899. "A like ambition was instilled in me." Also in Oxford, the example and companionship of Professor Richard Marion Leavell, his uncle, instilled

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59 Greven, Protestant Temperament, p. 50.
60 Author's reminiscence; ibid., p. 10.
in him the value of having an education. Uncle Richard, first honor
gradient of the University of Mississippi, taught Ethics and Philosop-
phy at the school. "I remember how our parents delighted to have Pro-
fessor R. M. Leavell, a teacher in the university, come home with us
from church to Sunday dinner. They talked 'education' at the table.
I have often wondered if Uncle Richard, whom we boys all admired ex-
travagantly, was not a part of the 'conspiracy' against us. Anyway, he
had a great influence, and we can never forget that great head and
broad brow."^62

The Oxford public school which Leavell attended was also the school
of Oxford's most noted citizen, William Faulkner. A biographer of
Faulkner devotes considerable space to the description of the school
and to the novelist's favorite teachers.63 Faulkner singled out as
excellent Miss Annie Chandler, the teacher in the first grade and Miss
Ella Wright, who taught in the sixth and seventh grade classes. In
Leavell's private diaries and in later works, he praised the same two
teachers as did Faulkner. Blotner, in his biography of Faulkner des-
cribes Miss Chandler as "one of the loveliest people who ever lived."64
Leavell's recollection of Miss Chandler was that he never received a
whipping in her class and was called "teacher's pet" during the year.
He earned a prize at the end of the first grade for his accomplish-
ments; when he went to accept the prize from Miss Chandler, a classmate


64 Ibid.
whom he remembered with disgust, Hope Caldwell, called out "teacher's pet" thus snatching away some of the day's joy.

Miss Ella Wright is depicted by Blotner as a "handsome-looking woman with a reputation for excellence and versatility . . . she was particularly good at mathematics but she specialized in Mississippi history, with heavy emphasis on the Civil War." Miss Ella taught both Leavell and Faulkner in the upper grades, and she could tell her classes stories of the war "better than the undefeated maiden aunts at the family reunion," according to Faulkner's biographer. Miss Ella taught in Oxford from 1903 to 1946. When she died the Oxford Eagle wrote: "No history of Oxford covering the past fifty years could be written without Miss Ella Wright predominating every chapter." Leavell corresponded with Miss Ella for 32 years, writing her on his wedding day, during the first week in his new home with his bride, and from battlefields in France. He devotes a sizeable section in his own autobiographical work to her. "Miss Ella was the most inspiring friend of my life outside my family." She also served as his Sunday School teacher when he was a teenager, and he was her pastor for five years in the Oxford Baptist Church in later years.

It is apparent that education in Oxford afforded him a pleasurable

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., p. 136.
67 Ibid., p. 137.
experience even though William Faulkner is said to have "stared out the window thinking of something else in spite of Miss Ella's skills."\(^{69}\)

Perhaps a more accurate picture was given by Ullin Leavell when he looked at the Oxford school system in retrospect:

One was not taught to study or to learn to solve problems but simply to recite facts. All of the major problems of the world had been solved as far as the teachers were concerned. All that a pupil had to learn was to find the answer that someone else had arrived at in the book assigned and be able to state it in dissected fragments. There was no library in the Oxford school. Beyond the skill of reading by a poor method, and that without much appreciation of what there was in the world to read, little was done . . . . The only time I attempted to manifest an interest in a piece of art I was called an 'impudent youngster,' sent to the principal and soundly and roundly punished . . . It seems that nothing could have been less educative than such a program as experience. Little wonder that few entered college from our school.\(^{70}\)

In this school system Roland Leavell acquired his early education, and for a short time Roland taught mathematics not only to his younger brother, Ullin, but also to William Faulkner.

The Leavell residence was a mile and a half from the University of Mississippi campus. Roland records that he matriculated in 1908 at seventeen, borrowing $100 for the year and signing a note for meals at home. His early record at the university was undistinguished. He was

\(^{69}\) Blotner, Faulkner, p. 139.

bitterly disappointed that he missed earning honors and the French Medal, which he had hoped for in his freshman year. In his sophomore year he failed Latin and mid-term chemistry. He was active in extracurricular activities. He joined the Sigma Chi Fraternity, to which his seven older brothers had previously belonged. He also held several jobs; he sold aluminum ware and encyclopaedias, mixed concrete, and filled in at churches as interim pastor. After his junior year he temporarily dropped out of the University to teach school to earn money to finance his further education and that of his brothers.

It was in his junior year, begun in 1911, that he noted in his diary that he had "settled down." Three years later he received not only a B.A. but an M.A. as well. Besides his studies, Roland held offices in the University's YMCA, won declamation awards, played football, served as editor of the University annual during his senior year, and continued to work at various jobs. Education at the university, however, did not change him much. He remained in the same church and the same home, and he described the university professors as "the finest group of Christian gentlemen assembled anywhere."71 The Oxford experience ended when he left for the Theological Seminary in 1914, after deciding to "respond to the call" that he felt to go into the ministry while he was in graduate school.

Roland stated that as far as he was able to ascertain, his parents never gave him or any boy in the family a dollar for education. One of the sons did refer to a plan devised by which all the brothers would

71Leavell, George W. Leavell and Corra Berry Leavell, p. 23.
lend each other money. Each one would borrow a small amount and sign a note so that the other boys could continue to attend school. However the idea was introduced into the home, education was all-important to Roland. "We took it for granted that each of us would get the highest education possible."\(^{72}\)

One Oxford influence that never left him, and perhaps intensified as he grew older, was the quest for what one might call "purity" in life. To him, striving for purity meant waging a conscious, constant war against "sin." Throughout his life he attempted to avoid what his parents had considered sin. Sin to them was tangible; it consisted of drinking, dancing, card-playing, gambling, and any form of sexual temptation. His mother, seeing a deck of cards in the home one day, swept them up and threw them swiftly into the fire. When Roland wished to go to Sigma Chi dances, she admonished him to stay away and "avoid all appearances of evil." Once when a showman with the name of Leavell came to Oxford, Roland's mother reluctantly accepted free tickets to a stage show which she had been assured was "pure." At mid-performance she dragged as many of her nine boys as she could find from the theatre because the stage girls wore short dresses.

Drinking was the ultimate sin. "The production, sale, distribution and consumption of alcoholic beverages is the greatest of all social problems in the estimation of Southern Baptists."\(^ {73}\) The Bap-

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\(^{72}\)Ibid.

tists at Oxford were devoted to the Scripture passage (I Corinthians 6:10) which cautions "Nor thieves . . . nor drunkards, nor revilers . . . shall inherit the kingdom of God." They interpreted it to mean that any and all drinking destroyed the desire to enter the kingdom. Certainly Roland deemed this to be true. It was the one social problem which he felt church and state should cooperate to control. "Of all the enemies of her boys, Mama feared and hated strong drink most of all" wrote Leavell in 1952. One of his favorite stories concerned one of the boys who needed some whiskey for a snakebitten foot to control the spread of the poison until the doctor could arrive. Old Aunt Ann, the Black who stayed in the shanty in the backyard, provided a bottle of whiskey. When the doctor arrived and was about to pour a glassful as treatment, Mrs. Leavell stopped him, "Don't give him any more. I have already given him a teaspoonful in a glass of water." Leavell always ended the story by declaring that whiskey was much more feared in his mother's home than the bite of a poisonous snake.

Of course, like other evangelicals, he spent his life not simply in avoiding sin himself, but striving for the purification of all the world about him. "Never do anything that you would be ashamed to be found doing if Jesus came back to earth and found you there," was his favorite admonition to his own children and to congregations for years after his Oxford experience. As a father, Roland gave rewards to his

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74 I Corinthians 6:10 (Revised Standard Version).

75 Leavell, Corra Berry Leavell, p. 13.

76 Ibid., p. 14.
children for every dance they did not attend. He withdrew the allowance from one daughter during her senior year in college when he discovered that she had attended a fraternity dance. He cautioned his children through the years: "just never take your first drink and you'll be safe." He even tore out the alcoholic beverage advertisements from magazines before he read them. This narrow view of sin was not unusual in Southern Baptist families in the early twentieth century. Inordinate personal pride and the social problems of race relations, crime, war, exploitation of labor, agricultural poverty, and industrial depression did not enter the list of wrongs to be corrected. The role of the Christian individual was primarily to heed the teachings of the church in regard to personal conduct and to devote himself to the "winning of souls."

The true church is not to deal directly with communities, states and nations, but with the individual . . . The great question is not how to get ready to live here, but to live hereafter . . . Christ favors social reform but he waited for it as a necessary fruit of the gospel . . . in men's hearts. If we follow the teachings and example of Christ . . . instead of the instruction and example of modern reformers, we will act upon the principle that the regeneration of men comes . . . through the preaching of the word. This is the basis and surety of all true reform.  

A last childhood influence upon the life of Roland Leavell was his "Southern-ness." The cause of the South was a sacred cause to him. He was an advocate of a Southern civil religion which tied together

77 Kelsey, Social Ethics, p. 13.
conservative Christianity and Southern culture. "In a word many Southern whites have regarded their society as God's most favored."\(^78\) Leavell joined other ministers of the South in identifying the Southern cause as virtuous and Southerners as a chosen people "approximating the ideals God had in mind for his children everywhere."\(^79\)

As he feared that the South would lose its traditional values he repeatedly emphasized the "Southern way of life" in his preaching. He agreed with Martin Marty that the priestly celebrant of the southern civil religion was Robert E. Lee.\(^80\) One of Leavell's prized possessions was a copy of the rare book on Robert E. Lee written by a Virginia Baptist minister, J. William Jones, who portrayed Lee as a Christian saint with an heroic army in gray.\(^81\) Leavell stated in letters and sermons that he felt God intended for the nation to be one; however, he reminded his public that the South must never become what the North had become. The South, he maintained, was "God-fearing and pure." The North seemed fragmented and without tradition, while the South was tidy in its hierarchial structure. There were different races and classes, but each man knew his place, stayed there and remained contented. Any movement outside the proper place caused compli-


\(^{79}\) Ibid.


cations and unnecessary deviation from the norm. In such a rigid society, racial bigotry and discrimination were not sins or evidence of hatred, but simply an integral part of the natural "southern" order. The South was a place of rules and every one "good" obeyed the rules.

This "Southern-ness" molded Leavell's attitude toward Blacks. He never favored slavery, of course, but he never favored integration or significant social improvement for Blacks either. It violated his sense of order. "Let me write you to keep my mind off the terrible things that are happening," he said in a letter to his daughter when the University of Mississippi was defying court orders to admit Blacks in 1965. "It breaks my heart to see the awful things that are happening to Ole Miss and in Oxford." 82

Oxford never lost its hold on him, nor did he ever stray far from it in spirit. He remained dedicated to the task of overcoming the poverty he experienced there; he continued the kind of stifling education-without-questioning he began there; and he remained tenaciously tied to the mores of his abstemious upbringing. Yet this was the same Oxford that produced William Faulkner. Indeed, they were contemporaries; their paths crossed at intervals leaving both relatively untouched. Neither did Faulkner stray far from Oxford. Roland taught him mathematics in a high school class and deemed him a hopeless student. Faulkner tried education at Ole Miss for a while, but then dropped out saying that the teachers there were nothing but "worn out

old Baptist preachers."³³

The themes in Faulkner's novels and short stories deal with forgiveness, charity and the dignity of man. Much of Faulkner's bitterest satire was at the expense of stiff-necked piousness. Leavell preached against consumption of liquor in any form, dancing, card-playing and refusal to attend church, and he contended throughout his life that Faulkner was a profane man "who could never amount to anything," without moral scruples, and a "sorry representative of our good town of Oxford."³⁴ While Faulkner drank heavily and continued to write poignantly of man's inhumanity to other men, Leavell published an editorial declaring unequivocally that "Our nation would be more safe in the hands of Herod the baby killer or Attila the Hun than it would be in the hands of those that manufacture, sell and drink liquor."³⁵

Whereas Faulkner gained worldwide acclaim using Oxford as a setting for portrayal of that which was common to all humanity, Leavell considered Oxford to be a unique and sacred stronghold of Southern Christian virtue. He never moved from his early religious beliefs or from his cultural value system, and early on they became indistinguishable in his own mind. In this way Leavell, who became a leader among the numerically superior conservative populace that he served, is a forerunner of many contemporary conservative leaders and an influence upon

³³Blotner, Faulkner, p. 276.


³⁵Roland Q. Leavell, "Liquor The Curse of All the Ages," Gainesville News (Gainesville, Georgia), April 18, 1933, p. 11.
their movements.
CHAPTER 2
SIN AND THE STERLING SILVER SOUP LADLE

When Leavell began to keep a diary in 1911, he was twenty years old, tall, reed-thin, and labeled "Lank" by his brothers and friends. Extending over many years, the entries revealed experiences that layed for a time the influence of his parochial background but failed in the end to counteract them. The diary accounts reflect very little self-analysis and even less anger or rebellion; they do evince an unabashed eagerness to seek approval among townspeople and family members. The humor, warmth, and force attributed to him later in life seldom surface in his early private writings. He simply lists the visits he made and to whom, the tasks he performed on Saturdays for his Mother and the homestead, the Sunday School classes he taught and the grades he found posted on the walls at the University after each examination period. Occasionally he would write "punk" after a grade in the 80's or high 70's. Several days have labels suggesting discouragement -- "a wasted day,"¹ "a hot, bad, miserable day," or "July 13, a day I wish I could erase forever."² Such remarks are not customary but indeed rare. For the most part he gave no hint as to what particular events meant to his life in a deeper sense. He seemed compelled to drive away reality with a varied range of strenuous physical activities. He set the pattern early in life of substituting activity

¹Roland Q. Leavell, Diary, May 12, 1911.
²Ibid., May 27, 1911.
for contemplation, busyness for meditation.

His first venture away from the town of Oxford was to have an appendectomy in March 1911. Local doctors recommended that he journey to St. Joseph's hospital in Louisville, Kentucky where a distant kinsman, Dr. Hugh Leavell, was a surgeon. Leavell's older brother, George, lived at the home of Dr. Hugh Leavell and studied medicine. On the day Leavell left Oxford he walked out to the University to check his history grade, bought his ticket to Louisville, and traded good-byes with his entire Sigma Chi fraternity at the station. His immediate family was accompanied to the "3 o'clock" by Aunt Ann, the Black who lived behind the Leavell home. He writes that she waddled down to the train station and entertained the farewell party by remarking, "Mr. Roland, if they does open you up I hope they find that worm that's eating all that food you put away because you sho' ain't been getting fat on it yo'self." ³ Leavell remarks that his Mother ceased her crying and burst into her characteristic uncontrollable laughter as the train pulled out, and "Lank" embarked on his first long trip away from Oxford.

Before and after the scheduled operation Roland attended vaudeville shows and moving pictures. He records seeing one stage presentation which featured Civil War veterans who played "fiddles." He saw Bessie McCoy, a celebrated singer of that time, in "The Echo" at the Louisville McCauley Theatre.⁴ Yet his diary does not indicate his reaction to any of the performances. The one big disappointment re-

³ Roland Q. Leavell, Corra Berry Leavell, p. 11.
⁴ Leavell Diary, March 8, 1911.
ported was that he could not attend Church School on the Sunday following his surgery. At age 20 he had seldom missed Sunday School. His brother George, and Cousin Hallie, Dr. Hugh Leavell's wife, sensed his disappointment, came to the hospital, and conducted what Leavell referred to as "Private Sunday School." Cousin Hallie taught the lesson and they read scripture and prayed. His record of faithful attendance remained unblemished. By the following Monday, just three days after the operation, he laboriously wrote a letter to his Mother. On Sunday he walked with great difficulty to the Walnut Street Baptist Church to attend Sunday School and church services. In contrast to the noncommittal entries about films and vaudeville productions, his report of this incident recalls that "he enjoyed Sunday School very much." He took a reckless automobile ride up Broadway Street in Louisville before he left to go back to Oxford, later recording that the car raced unbelievably fast at a dangerous forty-five miles per hour. But not even this novel and exciting experience could lessen his wish to return to his home.

Leavell was jubilant to be back in Oxford and in school. Apparently he entertained no thoughts of venturing out again. If this initial trip away from home prompted new beginnings, he was apparently not aware of it. Nevertheless, the appendectomy indirectly brought

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5Ibid., March 12, 1911.
6Ibid.
7Ibid., March 19, 1911.
8Ibid., March 24, 1911.
about changes in his life. He felt it would be necessary to drop out of the University in order to pay some of the surgeon's fee and to repay his family for their contribution. Furthermore, Frank, another older brother, had been admitted to Harvard Law School and needed all the financial help the family could provide. Leavell already owed money to several brothers for education expenditures. Thus necessity led him to his role as school teacher.

To cover his share of the family expenses, Leavell applied for jobs in teaching mathematics in Winona, Greenwood, and other small Mississippi towns. He contacted the trustees of each school board and, to his amazement and growing confidence, found that his name opened many doors. There were apparently no jobs, but many School Board trustees invited him home to meet their daughters and to have sumptuous meals. He recorded every meal that he ate, every girl he visited, and every Sunday School he attended. When he found that he had to take a teacher's certification test, he journeyed to Jackson and passed the examination with a high mark.\(^9\) He was invited to a reception at the capital building and went to the theatre with some new acquaintances. He also attended a lecture on "Juvenile Courts" while there. These activities he mentions briefly and without comment. He received his license to teach school for three years and continued to look for a teaching job.

On May 9, 1911 he received an urgent note from the superintendent

\(^9\)Ibid., May 2, 1911.

\(^{10}\)Ibid., May 9, 1911.
of education in Oxford asking him to accept a position there. He underlined his diary notes and put in capital letters "IMAGINE, PROF. LEAVELL! AHEM!" To remain in Oxford to teach meant that he could continue playing on the Sigma Chi football team that was now in the campus run-off for the intramural championship; he could still go to the Sigma Chi meetings, live at home, and work for Mama on Saturday. More important to him, however, was that he could still attend the same church and teach his same Sunday School class of boys, some of whom would be in his mathematics classes at the high school. He lost his chance to leave Oxford and could not have been more pleased.

The bid of the School Board to the hitherto reticent young man gave him immediate new prestige in town. An invitation to Mrs. Ben Price's house for a party shortly followed and signalled a dramatic move into society. Mr. Price was a wealthy investor, trader, and Oxford bank executive. His family lived on a fifty-acre plantation called Edgecomb on the outskirts of town. To be invited to Edgecomb was a significant social achievement and in Roland's case gave him the opportunity to meet many socially prominent Oxford girls, as well as other young women, who came from all over Mississippi and from Memphis for local houseparties.

Leavell's most frequent female companion during the summer preceding his teaching was Miss Ella Somerville, a native of Oxford and a student of Converse College in South Carolina. Frequently Leavell

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10 Blotner, Faulkner, p. 283.
11 Blotner, Faulkner, p. 283.
12 Leavell diary, (n. d.), Summer, 1911.
stayed at her home and talked with her until after midnight. They took
long walks and were invited as a couple to many of the parties during
the hot summer of 1911. Miss Somerville and Roland read books together,
particularly Moliere's plays. The daughter of a former dean of the
law school at the University, she was known as an intellectual and
scholar as well as a member of the socially prestigious set in Oxford.
He found it necessary, however, to decline her invitation to be her
escort at her own house dance "with great regrets . . . it being a
dance." In July while selling encyclopaedias and pots and pans in
the small town of Tupelo, he received a wire from Ella Somerville
asking him to meet her at the train; they ate dinner together at the
Manoghan Hotel. His delight with the conversation and her attentions
prompted him to note "I enjoyed Ella more than I could tell." On
Christmas night of 1912, Leavell noted that for the "past five Christ­
mas nights, I have been with Ella Somerville." Somerville eventually

13 Plays mentioned by Roland are "The Misanthrope," "Tartuffe," and
"The Physician."

14 Blotner, Faulkner, p. 283.

15 Leavell Diary, July 4, 1911. "The principal objection among Baptists
to dancing arose from their abnormal fear of the intimate association
of the sexes. Dancing might not be wrong but it tended toward evil." Rufus
Spain, At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists,
cases of disgrace and ruin originated in the dance," Religious
Herald (Richmond), May 8, 1878, p. 1. "Baptist inveighed against
other 'worldly amusements,' though not as fervidly as against
dancing," Spain, At Ease, p. 200.

16 Leavell Diary, August 19, 1911.

17 Leavell Diary, December 25, 1912.
became the best friend and colleague of William and Estelle Faulkner. She is the one friend to whom the Governor of Mississippi appealed when time came to persuade the Nobel prize winner to go to Stockholm in 1950 to receive his prize. Ella never married but served as Estelle Faulkner's confidante to the very burial of her famous husband.

Ella was by no means the only lady he saw, however. His diary listed twenty-eight young ladies he met at picnics and parties. "There were more pretty girls there than a little," he stated of one festive occasion. He even met the train when new girls came to the newly established Normal School at the University, but commented that they were all ugly.

When he invited Ella and the other girls out, he took them not only to church but to see films, even though his Mother did not approve of such worldly preoccupations. He also escorted girls to Uncle Top's, a drug store frequented by the University students, where there was a gramaphone that they could play. He now possessed some spending money which he had made from his successful sales venture. On one occasion, he reports, he went with some college friends to Uncle Top's "drinking." It is highly unlikely that they had anything more than soft drinks, although on the following day he remarked that he had a terrific headache which he attributed to his weak eyes. One young lady, Bess Harris, asked him to take her to a fraternity house dance, and he agreed to do so. He, however, went upstairs to sleep while

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18 Blotner, Faulkner, p. 1348.

19 Leavell Diary, June 3, 1911.
letting her dance with his fraternity brothers until 2:00 a.m. He remarked the following day, "What a fool, I, Roland Leavell, be." He did not elaborate but most certainly considered himself humiliated at this point.

He variously characterizes his other evenings with young ladies as "eventful" or as "nothing doing for me." He impetuously gave his fraternity pin to one young lady and had it promptly returned "much to my sorrow and much to my chagrin." On July 10 he bemoaned the fact that it was the first night in over a month that he had not had a date. Nonetheless, he wondered whether he was not pursuing too many girls with too much enthusiasm. Repeatedly, he remarked, "It is awfully hard to keep from getting too sentimental."

One of his male companions for the summer was Cornell Franklin, a recent honor graduate of the University. He had been away at law school for a year and was back at home in Oxford for the summer. Franklin's family had prestige and wealth; he was described as an "able and industrious young man with a passion for gambling." Cornell eventually fell in love with and married Estelle Oldham, who later

\[\text{Ibid., June 30, 1911.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., July 6, 1911.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., July 3, 1911.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., July 10, 1911.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., July 8, 1911.}\]
\[\text{Blotner, Faulkner, pp. 93, 173.}\]
divorced him to marry William Faulkner.

For Leavell the summer of 1911 seemed to be a time of experimentation and mildly unrepressed behavior. He was enthusiastic about his prospective job and the prestige it brought without having to face yet any of the frustration and realities he encountered in teaching. His primary concern was not with lesson plans but with what kind of friends he should cultivate.

While engaged in his whirlwind social life and his vigorous merchandizing, his attention suddenly and dramatically turned toward his young cousin who visited Oxford from Pontotoc, Mississippi. Annie Ball Cooper, the daughter of Corra's younger sister Anna Lou, was beautiful, intelligent, and reared much as Leavell had been in a strict religious environment. Annie Ball's mother was one of the few young ladies of her day who went to college, and Annie herself attended Blue Mountain College, a girls' school sixty-five miles from Oxford. Leavell found "ABC" to be completely to his liking. By the end of the summer he had given her his fraternity pin which she graciously and joyfully accepted.

A rare emotional outburst was recorded in the otherwise sterile diary when Annie Ball's mother forbade them to see or write to each other and forced her to return the fraternity pin because of the close kinship. Leavell made a frantic trip to Blue Mountain in the fall to talk to Annie Ball but stated "only got to see ABC for a few minutes . . . tried later to see her . . . but nothing doing."26 The college authorities had been notified of the parents' desire to keep them

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26 Leavell Diary, October 1, 1911, October 18, 1911.
separated, "It's awful hard to respect some people," he concluded. In spite of the prohibitions, they managed to see each other occasionally and corresponded frequently in defiance of her mother. She attended Leavell's graduation from the University in 1914. On one occasion in later years she wrote him a long letter that kept him distracted from his seminary studies for some days. She wrote to Roland again while she was on her honeymoon, and he recorded these remarks; "I hope he is good enough for her, I do not know how any man could be. She is the finest, most intelligent girl that I know." His affection for Annie Ball represented perhaps the nearest thing to a real rebellion and defiance in his life, and yet she seemed the embodiment of all that the church and his Mother stood for.

In Oxford during that summer Leavell heard Senator Leroy Percy deliver an address during his race against James K. Vardaman for the United States Senate. Leroy Percy represented the aristocracy while Vardaman was the noted champion of the "rednecks" of Mississippi as Percy labeled Vardaman's constituency. Leavell abhorred the Vardaman camp and upon hearing the Senator's speech felt that certainly Oxford would vote for Percy. "His speech was brilliant and he won votes," commented Leavell. When Vardaman with his "ox-cart supporters" won the race instead,

27 Ibid., July 30, 1915.

28 McLemore, History of Mississippi, II, 53.

29 Leavell Diary, August 2, 1911.

Leavell bemoaned the fact and said, "It was a shame and ruin to the county." His disdain for Vardaman, however, did not cause him to work actively for the opposition even though the campaign was a heated one. His interest in the election did not mean that he was becoming active in politics. He supported Percy for his social status. He appeared to appreciate the style and class of Percy; yet he mentioned none of the pending political issues and expressed only a brief sense of regret over Percy's defeat. In the same election Theodore Bilbo was chosen Lieutenant Governor with Vardaman support. In his diary Leavell denounced the renegade Baptist preacher, who was known for his racism, his profanity, and lewd behavior. In summarizing his year at the close of 1911, he did not mention the direction Mississippi had taken, socially or politically. However, he did relate, "I come to the end of 1911, I see my year as full of sin . . . I went through pleasures and temptations. . . ."

If 1911 was full of sin, as he noted, to what sins did he refer? Did he consider it a sin to defy his parents and college authorities as he continued to meet his first cousin clandestinely? Was it a sin to take a girl to a dance even though he did not participate in the dance? His mother had cautioned him frequently to "avoid even the appearance of evil." Was his inner sinful self luring him toward sex, the forbidden unspoken lust?

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31 Leavell Diary, August 2, 1911.

32 Ibid., July 22, 1911; Kirwan, Revolt, p. 255.

33 Ibid., December, 1911.
Throughout the remainder of his life, he preached thousands of sermons and wrote numerous books that contained references to "temp­tations and sin." It was a rare sermon in which he did not condemn sin soundly. He did little more, however, than exhort his hearers concerning the dangers of sin. He never attempted to define what he meant by the term "sin" beyond the usual prohibitions of drink, dancing, and lewd behavior. He approached a definition in perhaps only one sermon that he wrote after his retirement, in the last years of his life:

The Scripture describes sin as a debt, a thief, a plague, the sting of a serpent, leprosy, missing the mark, the poison of asps, transgression of the law, and falling short of the glory of God. The Word of God describes an unbelieving man as having been born in sin and shapen in iniquity, estranged from God, at enmity with God, under God's wrath, without God and without hope in the world.34

Needless to say, this passage provides few clues about his view of the details of sin. What he considered to be specific sin, beyond the routine examples above, was unclear. Yet he felt that his twentieth summer in Oxford was "full of sin."35

Whatever these nameless sins were, however, he forgot them in the fall of that year when he began to teach mathematics at Oxford High School. He coached the basketball team, studied late, and graded


35 Leavell Diary, December 31, 1911.
papers; he frequented films less often, and social contacts with the girls seemed to be a thing of the past. He was periodically discouraged with his schoolmastering. He slept restlessly at night, dreamed of students that had to be reproved; "I woke up as tired as if I had carried bricks all night long." He saw Ella Somerville infrequently and had no time to read her books or enjoy her intellectual conversation. He instead turned to his older colleague and former history teacher, Ella Wright, who remained his mentor. She could advise him on school matters, such as controlling cheating and the publication of a yearbook that he was trying to arrange. He set up a remedial class for the "bonehead" kids who had learning difficulties. He worked hard, long hours and commented in his diary that he "had the blues all day" or "made mistakes in class today, fouled up everything." "I am a darn poor teacher," he concluded in one entry. In reality he was conscientious as a teacher, and at the close of the year a School Board member characterized him as "serious, earnest and diligent . . . a good influence on the students." He consistently lacked confidence in himself and his performance. He also went into periodic depressions when he received letters from Annie Ball Cooper and could find no way to answer them without school authorities intervening.

Hunting season gave him an occasion to hunt rabbits on several weekends, and he played football with the high school students for

36 Ibid., September 13, 1911.

37 Ibid., December 8, 1911, February 5, 1912.

38 Ibid., November 3, 1911.
exercise during the week. Even though he was not enrolled in the University at this time, he attended Sigma Chi fraternity meetings frequently. Again activity predominated and introspection was confined to discouraging and degrading thoughts about himself. On the other hand, he was elated over his weekly salary of $65 and soon paid his debts. He cleared his obligations to his brothers and sent the handsome sum of $10 to the surgeon for his operation. He paid his mother for his room and board as well.

During the fall of 1911, W. C. Handy came from Memphis to play for a dance in Oxford. Leavell turned down invitations to attend the "sinful pleasure." Although he liked music and loved girls, he concluded that he should not attend this function because "dancing led to temptation and sin." Moreover, he was too busy and too tired to attend such frivolities now that he was teaching.

The summer of 1912 offered Leavell another opportunity to broaden his horizons, a few weeks spent at the University of Chicago. Encouraged by his professors at the University of Mississippi, he matriculated at the University of Chicago to study advanced mathematics, the history of mathematics, and psychology. He dropped the history of mathematics during the term, appeared to study his other subjects very little, and spent much of his time sightseeing and waiting on tables at

\[\text{39}^{\text{Blotner, Faulkner, p. 155.}}\]

\[\text{40}^{\text{Spain, At Ease, p. 200.}}\]

\[\text{41}^{\text{Leavell Diary, June 12, 1912-August 28, 1912.}}\]
the University Commons in exchange for his meals. He searched constantly for Southern girls to go out with and was elated over the individual Sigma Chi's whom he met, but he did not frequent the house after the initial visit to meet the Chicago "brothers." He recorded no serious impression of his academic pursuits and earned B's in his two subjects. He later wrote that his most traumatic experience came as he waited on tables at the University Commons. He was given a table where Blacks were seated, and he asked for a table where there were none. "I just could not wait on them," he later confided to his family. It dismayed him that Blacks and Whites should attend school together, and he remarked that he could not concentrate while he sat by them in class.

While in Chicago, he attended the parades for the campaign of Teddy Roosevelt and witnessed the birth of the Bull Moose party. "We went to see the beginning of the 1st National Progressive Republican Party. Theodore Roosevelt came in at 9:00 . . . There must have been five thousand or more automobiles on Michigan Avenue." He was unable to get into the Republican Convention but stood outside to hear the announcement that William Howard Taft was nominated. He further commented with amazement that two hundred women marched "bearing banners of VOTES FOR WOMEN." "Everyone is wearing bandana handker-

42 Ibid., August 28, 1912.
44 Leavell Diary, August 5, 1912.
45 Ibid.
Leavell's sojourn in Chicago provides new evidence of his insular outlook. Despite his exposure to important political activities, he never thought more than superficially about political issues. Serious consideration of rights for women or Blacks or even a cursory examination of Southern attitudes and actions toward Blacks seem to have been impossible for him. Many years later he acknowledged to a friend that his experience in Chicago "helped me understand what was coming to the South eventually and that I would have to accept the fact that I would necessarily be forced to accept this." There is no evidence in the Chicago diary accounts to indicate that Leavell felt that integration would eventually come to the South. It is more likely that many years later in retrospect he was interpreting his experience long after the fact. In 1912 he undoubtedly belonged among Southerners who would never remotely consider the possibility of change from the accepted standards of Southern racial policies.

Another significant fact of the trip to Chicago was that this religiously oriented man, who had brothers in the ministry, a constant preoccupation with church, and a Bible ever at his side, never referred to the Chicago Divinity School. He did attend Sunday School and church in the city, noted "good" and "bad" sermons, and lamented that he found but one "real" Sunday School, presumably one such as he attended in

46 Ibid.

Oxford. But he never mentioned the Divinity School, which at the time was famous world-wide. 48

The Chicago Divinity School was known as one of the country's most liberal and progressive schools of religious thought. 49 The faculty numbered noted Biblical scholars, psychologists of religion, and philosophers of religion who would later lead the Protestant denominations of the nation in the so-called "golden age of liberal theology."

"So dynamic and accomplished was its faculty, and so great a . . . need did it fill that Chicago remained throughout the first third of the twentieth century probably the country's most powerful center of Protestant liberalism." 50 The goal of the studies of the professors was to construct a system of theology that was sympathetic to the religious heritage of America and yet would lead the Protestant churches into the "world of modern science, scholarship, philosophy and knowledge." 51 The work of the School forced a confrontation between conservatism and liberal forces in religion, modified evangelism, and prepared the way for the social gospel movement, which advocated primarily that the church should remake society not exclusively by the "saving of souls" but by ministering to real social ills. This objective, of course, sharply contrasted with Leavell's evangelical views that "saving of souls" was all that was needed to better the conditions of the world.

48 Leavell Diary, July 7, 1912.
49 Ahlstrom, Religious History, pp. 775, 783.
50 Ibid., p. 775.
51 Ibid.
Had Leavell been warned by his conservative brothers to stay away from the influence of the school? Perhaps he was not even aware of the institution and its global reputation. Did he come into contact with the school and refrain from mentioning it in the daily accounts of his activities? Whatever the reason, he never alluded to the Chicago Divinity School nor registered the faintest influence from its teachings.

Neither did he make any mention of Moody Bible Institute, an influential school which operated under the auspices of the Chicago Evangelization Society. This school was founded along religious conservative lines with the idea of fitting laymen to minister to the laboring poor. This school was certainly more in line with Leavell's background and beliefs than was the Chicago Divinity School, but he did not choose to visit it either. We can only surmise that he simply was suspicious of any new religious ideas particularly from the North.

In Chicago Leavell essentially avoided any contact with influences other than those which were an outgrowth of his Southern environment. The decision to perpetuate in his way of life the Southern culture and religion learned in Oxford reflects certain peculiarly Southern attitudes that have been analyzed in part by James Sellers:

A sense of place, which may be contrasted with the Northerner's sense of time. . . . A high valuation on the rootedness and personalness of man, which may be contrasted with the Northerner's high valuation on the equality of man. . . . A passion for concreteness, which may be contrasted with the Northerner's thirst for universality in the abstract. . . . A longing for stability, which may be contrasted with the Northerner's
hankering for progress

Leavell apparently found his identity in this sense of belonging to a place from which he found it impossible to separate himself. Thus he was imprisoned in a "space." The people of Oxford hallowed the small town; their "localness" grew out of a fierce sense of "the need to join" together in order to justify themselves in the face of external criticism of a system which they did not know how to change and yet the fundamental injustice of which they sensed. The Southerner was always tempted by his surroundings to succumb to the traditional argument for slaveholding and the feeling of superiority that it gave to him. After slavery was over, white supremacy in the South came to be associated with the gift of God, a natural benefit accompanying the land-place that the Southerner occupied. Defensiveness against outsiders who dared to condemn or to interfere with the beneficial institution readily contributed to the close-knit society that was engendered in the South. Leavell shared this set of mind, and, while in Chicago, he could not tolerate the thought of any different pattern. All the potentially broadening experiences that his summer offered to him had no effect. Even William Faulkner said in an interview, "I will go on saying that the Southerners are wrong and their position is untenable . . . but if I have to make the same choice Robert E. Lee made, then


53 Wilber J. Cash, Mind of the South (New York, 1941), p. 73.
I'll make it." At this age Leavell would have eagerly endorsed the second sentiment while probably not comprehending the first. The sense of place later led him to say in letters to his children, "When I die, be sure my bones are interred in Oxford where I belong."  

He returned from Chicago unchanged in any way. Thirty-four years later, when one of his daughters left the South after graduation from college to take a position in Connecticut, his parting words of farewell were "Promise me you will return home exactly as you have left." The remark contained no hint of encouragement to search for anything different or new, and that she would not "return" was inconceivable to him.  

In the autumn of 1912 Leavell resumed his position as teacher at Oxford High School, but he now faced a far more serious trauma than the frustrations caused by his students: his mother's health was failing. Throughout the fall she became progressively weaker, and by November she was bed-ridden. Only Roland and Ullin were at home at this time, and they shared the responsibility for her care while they carried on their school work, Roland as teacher and Ullin as student. By mid-January, 1913 it was evident that Corra had not long to live. During the days preceding her demise, Leavell anticipated the tangible Heaven awaiting her soul:

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56 Roland Q. Leavell to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, May 6, 1946, Leavell Papers, Bowman.
Sunday, January 26, 1913 — Mama is slowly sinking, getting weaker . . . oh, how she wants to go. What a blessing it will be for her when she gets to Heaven. She has been such a marvelously good woman, we are sure they are making big preparations for her up there. If there is such a thing as 'a more abundant entrance' surely she will receive one.

January 30, 1913 — Mama passed quietly into Heaven this morning. We all hastened downstairs to see her gloriously go from this world to the bosom of her Master.

January 31, 1913 — What would I do if I did not have God to call on . . . We had services after the funeral, all the boys just by ourselves in the family parlor . . .

February 4, 1913 — How sad our home is . . . not like home at all.

In her will, Corra Berry Leavell left a silver soup ladle to Leavell and a letter to all the boys which was found after her death. She expressed her desire that all of her boys should spend their lives turning others toward God. The letter was pinned to a wall and photographed, and each of the boys received a copy. In the lives of evangelicals "devoted mothers shaped their earliest consciousness and character and this remained fixed in their memories for the rest of their lives." The self-enclosed household had permitted no outside influence on the life and consciousness of Leavell, even holding him fast within its grasp in a summer of "sins" and a summer in a far distant city. Now with the death of his mother, her will became the will of God in his mind -- his own will as he sat and listened to his brother preach in the Oxford church.

Coincidentally as the mother lay dying, two older brothers returned to Oxford to reside permanently, James as minister at the Oxford Baptist Church and Landrum as an official of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board who decided to make his mother's home his base of operations. Both had a profound impact upon Leavell's future, especially James whose sermon titles Roland began to record:

"Self-Abasement," "The Worst Temptations of Man," "How Shall We Escape?", "What is Man that Thou Art Mindful of Him?", "Though Your Sins be as Scarlet!"

Some of these moved Roland profoundly, as his comments about them reveal: "this is the only time I ever cried in church."58 "Jim preached a great sermon. It was a stunner." "He knows how to rare around [sic] in the pulpit."59

In memoires written after his retirement and published in 1961, Roland Leavell recalls his own decision to enter the ministry.

For years I had wanted to become a preacher, but I wanted the unwavering assurance of a divine call. . . . I challenged God, so to speak. I asked Him to reveal His call by helping me to win to Christ seven unsaved sixteen-year-old boys in my class. These boys had been on the high-school football team I had coached.60

After teaching a lesson in which Leavell depicted life as if it

58Leavell Diary, May 4, 1913–June 26, 1913.

59Ibid., May 4, 1913.

60Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 41.
were a football game with God and the Devil playing against each other, he relates that the boys all joined the church for baptism that same morning. Thus he concluded that this was the sign he needed that God wanted him to preach. The diary account of this incident varies significantly from the account above. He relates that on Saturday night he began to worry about his Sunday School class of unsaved boys and to wonder if he was even a Christian himself. He asks the question "What sin am I committing to hold me back?" He then records that he walked to his brother Jim's house and talked to him until midnight and returned to his own home to write "I believe I am called to preach." The following morning, Sunday, the diary does not mention the boys joining the church but states that Jim announced to the congregation that his brother Roland had decided to become a preacher. Roland then penned in the diary at the end of the entry for June 15, 1913, "'Oh! If I could only tell Mama,' was my great thought."61

The following day he sent his resignation to the School Board and decided to finish his education in preparation for the ministry. He wrote Annie Ball Cooper of his intention, went to see Miss Ella Wright and told her "about it all," and attended a revival at church that Monday night. He recorded that Jim preached on "Soul Winning." "A powerful sermon. God help me to be a soul winner. Oh! I am so happy that God wants me to preach."62 Whoever wanted Roland to preach -- God or his brother Jim or his Mother -- he was now out of the rigors of

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61Leavell Diary, June 15, 1913.

62Ibid., June 14, 1913.
school teaching, had the promised financial support of his brothers to aid in his necessary education, and headed toward a seminary degree.

The diary does not mention the following incident reported in the autobiography.

That night I asked from the pulpit if anybody knew any people who wanted some preaching for I was ready to try. A flood of satisfying joy swept over my soul then as I felt a sense of mission in life, a call of God.63

In William James' Varieties of Religious Experience he defines conversion as . . .

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.64

In the light of James' definition of conversion, it would seem that Leavell's call to the ministry was far more unifying and forceful than was his earlier so-called conversion experience. His early conversion had not removed the preoccupation that sin was in his life, or alleviated his sense of unworthiness and fragmentation. With the focus of Leavell's life now centered on his vocation call, he believed that he now was assured of God's approval. According to Samuel Hill a con-

63Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 41.

sciousness of assurance was necessary to conversion, that is "the individual's yearning to know that he has been justified by the Almighty." He further states "It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of assurance to popular southern theology." Leavell did not acquire this assurance until after the decision to become a preacher. The theological doctrine touted assurance as being essential, according to Hill, "was derived from the situation of the frontiersman who, uncertain of everything else, longed to be sure of his standing before God." Whatever Leavell felt on this day of his decision to preach, he later could point to it as a definite event which occurred at a particular moment of time. Conversion, in the Baptist sense of the experience, usually incorporates an identifiable moment which may be indicated as the time of "instanteous change." Thus, it might appear that Leavell's call to preach, if not considered by him as his conversion experience, was decidedly analogous to it. He not only felt the assurance of God but the approval of his brothers, and at last he knew that he was following the will of his deceased mother.

His brother Jim provided a model and an affirming mentor. Jim invited him to meals in his home, and he spent many nights and days with Jim's family. Jim secured a small rural pastorate for him in Holly Springs, Mississippi, and each week provided a sermon outline for him to preach. Miss Ella Wright praised him for his decision and gave him a sermon book. Ella Somerville was never mentioned again.

65 Hill, Southern Church, p. 42.

66 Ibid., p. 43.
Leavell seemed to reconsider his choice only when the Oxford School Board came to offer him an increase in salary if he would stay in the school system. They cited his accomplishments at the high school, and praised his efforts in promoting the successful art show arranged for the town, his creation of remedial classes for students who needed assistance, and his work in obtaining entrance for the Oxford school into the Mississippi School Meet Competition. The School Board members also remarked that Leavell had been the first to arrange for a special train for citizens to go to Grenada to cheer for Oxford in declamation and athletic contests. \(^{67}\) "Besides," they stressed, "you are a hero to these boys." Clearly, Roland had been successful in his first venture of service, and Oxford appreciated him. Landrum advised him to stay in the teaching position. But Jim opposed this and convinced Leavell to cancel plans he had made for another summer in Chicago.

On the day that Leavell graduated from the University of Mississippi in the spring of 1914 he dedicated his talents to God. The Graduation Day was spectacular; he was to deliver the address for the University exercises, and two of the girls in whom he had been interested were on hand for the graduation. One, of course, was his cousin Annie Ball Cooper. It was at this time he told her of his love for her. "What bad luck we play with that we are cousins," he wrote in his diary. "How I love that little lassie." The day was a resounding success. "I said my speech without any bobbles and friends were kind indeed about

\(^{67}\) Marion Frost Leavell, Conversation with Mr. Pete Ramey, n.d., 1945.
my speech . . . my B.A. and M.A. look good to me."\textsuperscript{68}

The remainder of the summer he preached and wrote in his diary. "I have a heavy heart for those lost in sin and for my failure to do my duty."\textsuperscript{69} He invited Jim to preach for him: "Jim preached a stunner, he preached on 'Sin.'"\textsuperscript{70} "I spent the day talking to fellows in Holly Springs about their salvation. That night, forces of the Devil and Righteousness were at battle, for there was a dance in town. The church was full . . . the sheriff came to church but was not converted.\textsuperscript{71}

Leavell now enjoyed many of the ingredients of what might be regarded as contentment: two college degrees, a call to preach, and feelings of young love. But he also knew and his brothers reminded him that, to be a successful and respected pastor in the Southern Baptist church, he would need formal theological training. Consequently, in the autumn of 1914 he boarded the train for Louisville and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary with $100 in his pocket and some of his brother's discarded clothes.

\textsuperscript{68}Leavell Diary, June 2, 1914.

\textsuperscript{69}Ibid., June 25, 1914.

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., June 26, 1914.

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., June 22, 1914.
CHAPTER 3
FROM NEW CASTLE TO NEUF CHATEAU

When Leavell arrived at the Seminary on September 29, 1914, he did not seem to know what a theological education was supposed to do for him. He spent the next five years of his life either at the Seminary or in France serving in World War I, but neither of these two experiences was as significant to him as the central focus in his life, that is, "winning the lost" or "converting people from their sinful ways." The theological study was regarded as an obstacle rather than a help to his evangelical efforts, and he did not believe it really essential to his religious goals. World War I seemed only a means bestowed on him by God to "win the soldiers to Christ." His experience "over there" differed significantly from that of most Americans in 1917. "It seems a wonderful opportunity if a man can get a hold on the power of Christ and utilize that power in the places over there so full of sin and vice," he penned in August of 1917.¹

He found no sin and vice on the Seminary campus in Louisville when he arrived and registered for Greek, Hebrew, Biblical Introduction, and Church History. He cordially despised his subjects. He resented the fact that he must expend such strenuous effort and valuable hours with studies that he considered to be essentially useless. "This Hebrew would give a buzzard a bilious attack,"² he stated after three

¹Leavell Diary, July 3, 1917.
²Ibid., October 21, 1914.
weeks. Later in the semester, as he struggled with that difficult language, he lamented, "Another day all gone to waste studying Hebrew." His other classes were equally dismal. "Dr. Carver [Dr. W. O. Carver, Professor of Missions and Greek New Testament] may have called on me, I don't know. I was asleep all the class." "Dr. Sampey [Dr. John R. Sampey, Professor of Old Testament] called on me and I failed completely." "Dr. Carver called on me in Greek and pronounced my recitation 'very good indeed.' Quite unusual for me in Greek." "Dr. Mc. [Dr. William J. McGlothlin, Professor of Hebrew] called on me in Hebrew and I made a miserable recitation." "Made a plum flat in Hebrew, Dr. Mc. scratched every word of my work." His previous academic record suggests that he could have performed better, but he could see no correlation between his studies and his ability to achieve his goal of winning the lost.

It was winning the lost that gave him his only joy at the Seminary. His first chance to win the lost came only one week after classes began. "After supper a whole lot of men went in bunches out on the streets to preach on the corners. It was a great experience for

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3Ibid., February 9, 1915.
4Ibid., April 12, 1915.
5Ibid.
6Ibid., April 9, 1915.
7Ibid., April 20, 1915.
8Ibid., April 22, 1915.
me, and I was crazy to preach, but 'I'm a Freshie,' I believe there
were some conversion in our bunch. Came home in the mtn. top atti-
tude."9 On the following Saturday night he did preach in the streets,
and his exhilaration was obvious. "We had a good meeting on the
street and I think some good was done. It certainly felt good to get
back to preaching."10 When such opportunities were not present he was
restless and irritable. "I want to preach so bad [sic] I can taste it.
It is awfully hard to go along and not preach. I am better satisfied
any day in the week than on Sunday, up here."11

He suffered weeks of depression and homesickness when he faced the
prospect of three grim years studying at the Seminary. "This business
is getting into the regular grind now, and prospects look serious. I
can't help but think about how I wish I were at home again."12
"Weather bad, lessons hard, food bum and body weary. Can't think of
anything good except a letter today telling me the Oxford news."13

Fear of failing his subjects was the major factor that kept him
working at his unhappy academic tasks. Even though he saw no purpose
in his tedious work, too many people expected him to stay and to do
well. He felt responsible to the Holly Springs congregation, which
continued to support him with packages of cakes, canned goods, and

9 Ibid., October 3, 1914.
10 Ibid., October 10, 1914.
11 Ibid., October 25, 1914.
12 Ibid., October 14, 1914.
13 Ibid., October 21, 1914.
dollar bills in envelopes. Miss Ella wrote him letters of encouragement. His apprehension over the possibility of failure was so strong that he did not attend a lecture given by William Jennings Bryan, one of his heroes in later life, and remarked that he "cut it to study Hebrew." Leavell's decision to give rigorous attention to his subjects because "it is a case of have to," continued; and on his twenty-third birthday he wrote, "worked all day long on Greek, Old Testament. Biblical interpretation is dry as dust . . . I would like to stop here and philosophize or spiritualize on passing my twenty-third but am so tired of studying, I won't do it."15

He passed his subjects, but at the close of the year he wrote in retrospect, "Surely goodness and mercy have followed me. I can see the hand of God ruling my life, guiding me against my will, chastening me for my sin, and in a small way using my poor sinful little life for His Glory."16 In his mind, what he perceived to be a difficult path came as punishment for his sins. His own will had been overruled, and he was in the hands of a God who chastened sin. Of course, he could not stop his studying, for this was his atonement.

Although he felt at that time that school was punishment for sin and that the dreaded class recitations had seemingly nothing to do with his calling to save men, many years later, when he was installed as president of a theological seminary, he included in his inaugural

14 Ibid., October 12, 1914.
15 Ibid., December 21, 1914.
16 Ibid., December 31, 1914.
address the following statement: "A minister's life of usefulness may be compared to a pyramid; the broader the educational base, the higher the structure can be built." Yet perhaps the early lack of clarity of purpose is not so unusual in the light of a comment by H. Richard Niebuhr concerning theological education:

Studies in the history, literature and theology of Old and New Testaments occupy a large part of the time of almost all theological students. Why they should do so is rarely clearly understood by them and perhaps only somewhat more frequently by their teachers . . . the apparent conservatism of the schools is really indicative of uncertainty of aim.18

It still seems strange that Leavell did not find some satisfaction in or praise for the professors at the Seminary, many of whom were men of some stature. He relegated the entire process to a performance of duty and receiving punishment by God. "Dr. Bob is a regular old bear."19 "Dr. Bob" was Dr. A. T. Robertson, who had just published the fourteen-volume Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research,20 the most authoritative work of its kind in the field. It has been used as a standard reference text at the Vatican and throughout the Protestant world since its publication. For

17Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p.


19Leavell Diary, January 30, 1915.

Leavell, however, the author seemed only a source of terror and har­rassment. "Dr. Bob made a fool out of me in class today."21 "Dr. Bob came pretty near getting me. I am having bad luck all the way around."22 As a student, Leavell never extolled the man and resented his biting sarcasm and his brilliant intellect. Nevertheless, many years later Leavell agreed with those who spoke of the inspiration of Dr. Robertson's disciplined life. "Dr. Bob was a prodigious author and was convinced that the most effective way a teacher or preacher could extend his ministry beyond the limits of his earthly life was to write."23 "Either do something worth writing about or write something worth reading,"24 Leavell stated as his own philosophy. Years later, when he appreciated the value of Biblical study and theology, Leavell took Dr. Robertson's daily routine as his own, rising early for meditations and Bible study; writing, studying and reading through the morning hours; reserving the afternoons to contact people. When Leavell became a classroom professor, he continued Dr. Bob's hated method of classroom recitation. One of his own students later said, "I dreaded Dr. Leavell's classroom recitation method. We all did. It was so outdated as a teaching method, and he struck terror to even

21Leavell Diary, October 11, 1915.

22Ibid., January 30, 1915.

23Mueller, Theological Seminary, p. 204.

24Author's reminiscence.
grown men in graduate school." Dravell adopted as a model the man whom he most feared and yet recognized as the most scholarly of his own professors.

Dr. E. Y. Mullins, the Seminary president, was another man Leavell emulated. In his autobiography, Leavell called Dr. Mullins one of the eight people who most influenced his life. He claimed to be so awe-stuck by the man that he never knew what to say to him. Observing Dr. Mullins's strong physique, Leavell asked him one day in an informal campus encounter if he ever played football. "No, Brother Leavell, I never did. But I was in a stampede of mules once!" Leavell was never as fearful of Mullins after this remark and later noted: "Whether I was leading chapel, teaching classes, writing books, speaking on denominational programs, or administering the affairs of the seminary, Dr. Mullins was the model I was always trying to imitate." He described the President as a "gracious and cultured Christian gentleman, erudite scholar, strong administrator, world-renown theologian and prolific author," even though he did not play football.

George W. Marsden in *Fundamentalism and American Culture* categorized Dr. Mullins as a "non-fundamentalist conservative." By this

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27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, p. 216.
the author meant that he accepted as fact the divinity and the virgin birth of Christ; his sinless life, his miracles, the atonement, and the resurrection; as well as a second coming in the future and inerrancy of the Bible -- as most conservatives believed. Non-fundamentalists differed from fundamentalists in their methods of proving the validity of these tenets. The non-fundamentalists believed that supernatural Christianity should be held separate from the discoveries of modern science and philosophy. In other words, "religion had its own principles." The non-fundamentalist proof of Christianity lay in "personal experience and not direct knowledge and was based on subjective experience." What Christianity produced in the lives of persons who subscribed to it was proof enough of validity. Mullins and Leavell agreed on at least this aspect of non-fundamentalism. Mullins's famous book *Christianity at the Crossroads*, published in 1924, sought to bridge the gap between the traditional conception that no proof, only faith was needed, for Christian belief and modern thought that demanded proof; he argued that Christianity could be proven by facts, but a different set of facts, subjective facts.  

Mullins and Leavell found ridiculous those fundamentalists who tried to stretch scientific lines to prove Christianity valid. Schemes such as correlating the seven days of creation with the seven notes in the octave and relating them to the seven sayings of Christ and seven parts of certain scriptures were ridiculed by the non-fundamentalist conservatives as irrelevant and anti-intellectual.

Dr. Mullins and Leavell disagreed with each other however, concerning the mission of the church. Throughout his ministry, Leavell believed that evangelism overshadowed everything else as the mission of the church, and that the church was not to be concerned with civic and social reform. The church, Leavell felt, should not be occupied with reforming the present society; because Jesus Christ had been no reformer in that He did not speak out against war or slavery, neither would he. Dr. Mullins, on the other hand, believed that man could be effective in this world to bring about peace or other needed changes and that the church should be active in such endeavors. Mullins, assuming a position between advocates of the social gospel and the traditional religionists of his day, saw the role of the Church as going beyond evangelism. Unlike Calvin at Geneva, he did not think that the Church had a mission to control or regulate the government; but he did believe that it should not completely separate itself from this world; it should improve and strengthen the good that it found. Leavell rejected Mullins's more moderate view and clung to the belief that only God could transform man's nature and only transformed men could change the world. As an illustration of his view, Leavell frequently pointed out that a pig could not be changed from being a pig by putting him in a beautiful flower garden. The nature of the pig had to change before any real transformation could be made. Only God could change a man's nature and that must come through the mysterious experience of conversion. Thus, Leavell spent his life in an effort to lead men to this personal, subjective experience. He put great stock in Jesus's statement, "My kingdom is not of this world." He interpreted
it to require Christians to separate themselves from "this worldliness."
Both fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists labeled each other as
anti-intellectuals, but Leavell always considered himself a man of
learning after he awoke to the value of his theological education.
Leavell eventually saw Dr. Mullins, whom he dreaded while in class, as
"a man of wide judgment, denominational effectiveness, and profound
scholarship."\(^{31}\)

Perhaps Leavell's professors would have affected him more had it
not been for the influence of his brothers. During the three years
Leavell attended school, five of his brothers moved to Louisville for
various reasons. Clarence took a position as educational director in
the Walnut Street Baptist Church, a job which Roland had turned down
saying he had "neither the time nor the ability." Roland particularly
enjoyed visits to Clarence's home, and a new baby there "made me think
briefly of marriage." Landrum, the oldest brother, came to the Semi-
nary in 1915 as a faculty member and remained as an Associate Profes-
sor of Religious Pedagogy until 1920.\(^{32}\) Jim resigned his pastorate in
Oxford and moved to Louisville, entering the Seminary to work on his
Doctorate in Theology in 1917. Ullin, the youngest, took a job in New
Castle, Kentucky, where Roland obtained his first pastorate. Leonard
or "Greek" as he was called, came in 1916 and registered to begin his
theological studies. Seldom a day went by without visits from one or
more of the brothers, and on many days several would meet in town at a

\(^{31}\) Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 32.

\(^{32}\) Mueller, Theological Seminary, p. 242.
cafe. Only Frank, who was at Harvard; Arnaud, who was a practicing dentist in California; and George, who was a surgeon missionary in China, were absent from the fraternal circle. Roland and Leonard were the only unmarried brothers, so they ate many meals with their brothers' families and through them met various women whom they saw socially. The social life around the family was met with enthusiasm and provided a sought-after escape from the horrors of Hebrew. Thus the influence of Oxford, now transplanted to Louisville, served to temper maturation of independent attitudes that could have taken place.

But the long-awaited and most welcome escape from study came when Roland began preaching again on a regular basis. For months the only opportunity for active ministry, other than Saturday night sessions on the streets of Louisville, had come when a young seminary colleague asked him to preach in a settlement house where drunks and ne'er-do-wells were housed. It was Leavell's first contact with a congregation of "old slobs," as he called them. Leavell was inspired with the story of the colleague who himself had been converted in a settlement house in New York City. It was not the "old slobs," however, that impressed him most. The colleague had prayed to God that he would receive the bar next to the settlement house for a church; his prayer was answered when the bar was purchased by the settlement house. This example before him, Leavell entreated God for a church of his own (but not a bar).

The call to become the pastor of First Baptist Church in New Castle, Kentucky, came after his Mother's Day sermon in 1915. He knew he had the call as soon as the sermon was over because all the congre-

33Leavell Diary, November 14, 1914.
gation had been reduced to near sobs over his tearful stories. Now he could relax and feel successful, and his complaints about school and professors became less frequent. He journeyed to New Castle each Friday night and stayed until Monday morning, when he returned to the campus. He preached, visited, and ate bountiful dinners at the homes of church members who increasingly adored the young preacher. When summer came he moved to the town and was housed with different families. "Those greathearted people had me booked solid in different homes for months and months ahead." He knew every person in town, and they came to hear him preach and to praise him. He became such a part of the local activities that he kicked the deciding field goal when New Castle defeated a rival town in football. "They all but crowned me king of New Castle that night." He fished with the men, helped hang curtains for the ladies' Sunday School class, and continued to play on the football team for two years. He was accepted even though he preached on such topics as "Lovers of Pleasure Rather Than Lovers of God" and "Discipline in the Christian Life." He frequently counseled church members about their sinful lives; as usual the sin consisted largely of cardplaying and dancing. When several men gave up drinking whiskey, Leavell wrote joyously in his diary "Hallelulah."

34Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 32.
35Ibid.
36Leavell Diary, August 22, 1915.
37Ibid., August 26, 1915.
He became discouraged if no one responded to the weekly invitation at
the close of each sermon to be saved or to give up a sinful practice.
"I get so anxious for visible results, it almost pops my faith when
they don't come down the aisle." There were few Sundays when persons
did not "walk down the aisle." At the end of the summer, he "preached
the most serious sermon of my life." It concerned the evil practices
in the town — naturally gambling, dancing, and whiskey. "I went down­
town and found everyone talking about what I'd said in the pulpit. It
was a sensation."39

His trips to New Castle helped him not only to escape studies but
also to reduce his own temptations to sin. The several girls that he
saw socially in Louisville were eventually narrowed down to one, Lu­
cille Money, whom he met at the Walnut Street Baptist Church when he
first arrived in the city. Most of their social engagements involved
going to church, but he also escorted her to the opera and to concerts.
He seldom commented on the quality of the performances they attended,
but had many things to say about Lucille. "She is about as cute as
they are made."40 "She makes it difficult for me to stay away from
her and I must."

Ibid., December 26, 1915.

Ibid., August 22, 1915.

Ibid., July 22, 1915.

Ibid.

Ibid., March 2, 1915.
When she invited him to accompany her to a party, he said, "I don't have the time, money, nor shoes for society." Although he declined the invitation, however, he walked to town and sent her red roses with his refusal. He complained frequently that she was too forward, and he was shocked when she performed such scandalous acts as bringing doughnuts and homemade candy to the dormitory. On their frequent picnic outings, he said, he found great joy in being with her; when they came home, they both "needed drowning in a cold tub."

It was during his infatuation with Lucille Money that Leavell wrote in his diary, "How I wish I could love some other girl in the way that I love Annie Ball Cooper." His despair was unbounded when he received a special delivery letter telling him of Annie Ball's engagement to another man. "How can I study Hebrew at a time like this? I don't know how anyone could be good enough for her. I wrote Annie Ball a letter until 2:30 a.m." "I cannot get my mind on my studies thinking of my dear little Annie Ball" he lamented during the days when she was on her honeymoon.

His approach to his religious beliefs precluded any real need for deep or serious intellectual speculation on his part. He had no need to examine his faith theologically and thus contented himself with the use of his excellent gift for memorization and for ringing rhetoric. His oratorical talent had given him the chance to make the graduation

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43 Ibid., March 8, 1915.
44 Ibid., June 3, 1915.
day speech at the University of Mississippi, where he was not the leading scholar in his class; and again at the Seminary, he made one of the ten-minute addresses at graduation. He had no need to go into deep theological discussions when he was not naturally inclined to do so. He was satisfied that he was a successful preacher and could evoke sentiments that helped to convert sinful persons; that, he was confident, was what he was supposed to do. It may have been evident to him at his graduation that he was not ever to be an extraordinary scholar, even though he had a good mind and a persuasive personality. Nevertheless, Roland was not like Billy Sunday, the vaudevillian anti-intellectual revivalist fundamental, who said, "I do not know any more about theology than a monkey does pingpong, but I know I am on my way to glory." After Leavell's death, a former colleague, who had obtained doctorates in Languages, Philosophy, and Theology, commented:

"Roland Leavell may never have been a great scholar, but he knew one when he saw one and valued him. He certainly was not afraid or defensive about scholarly men. In fact, he liked to gather them around him."46

Leavell's appreciation of the value of all types of education grew steadily throughout his life. The serious purpose of the Seminary may have eluded him for the time being but not permanently.

Concerns of the Seminary, theological study, and many of the other routine matters of Leavell's life were increasingly overshadowed by the early twentieth century event that altered the lives not only

46Conversation with Nicholai Alexandrenko, January 14, 1981.
of individuals but of entire nations: the First World War. From its outbreak in August, 1914 newspapers had featured stories of the war, and on several occasions Leavell attended lectures at the Y.M.C.A. and public debates in town which discussed the war and American preparedness. On March 1, 1915, he heard Fritz Kreisler perform in concert on a Louisville stage and was impressed with the spectacular talent of "the world's foremost violinist," but he also commented that the artist was just "back from the war in Europe where he had been twice wounded." On Saturday, May 8, 1915, Leavell recorded with more intensity "the gravest situation of the whole war now confronts the United States. The Germans sank the 'Lusitania' yesterday and 130 United States citizens perished." Along with many other Americans, Leavell felt this act represented an indefensible violation of neutrality, and war became a less remote affair.

However, also along with many others, he believed that the United States would not have to go to war, because he put great faith in the rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson. Had the President not promised to keep the nation out of war? Wilson was a hero to many Americans. On one Labor Day during his Seminary studies, Leavell trudged miles, after a long train ride, to see and hear Wilson speak in a Kentucky town. Wilson's open automobile passed him on the road as he was running toward the town. Leavell recalled that he took off his hat and bowed to the ground as the President looked his way, and, in return, Wilson tipped

47 Leavell Diary, March 2, 1915.

48 Ibid., May 8, 1915.
his hat to him. After the event, Leavell recorded that he could write a book on what he saw in the face of this "foremost statesmen of the age." "I was very near and heard every word. His face was full of deep lines. He had iron gray hair, sober eyes and firm mouth." He called the President the "morning star of world peace." "No man can help but be thankful to God for Woodrow Wilson who has led our nation these years away from two wars, one with Mexico and the other with the nations of Europe in their gigantic struggle." Many Americans shared his adulation and praise of Wilson, who occupied considerable space in Leavell's autobiography. Leavell's views of Wilson never changed, and he told frequently of his pride and joy in Paris as he witnessed the Frenchmen welcome the President with great cheers and with banners that proclaimed him "Savior of the World." Roland considered Wilson "best fitted [sic] man to propose far-seeing plans for world peace." Leavell's idealism found a hero for a lifetime. Neither Wilson nor Leavell budged an inch from the idea that he had within his hands a way to "save the world."

When the President came before Congress to ask for a declaration of war on April 2, 1917, Leavell felt that Wilson had done the best he

49Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 63.

50Ibid.

51Leavell Diary, December 31, 1914.

52Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 63.

53Ibid.
could to keep the United States out of war in the face of hopeless problems, particularly submarine warfare. The declaration came on April 6, 1917, exactly six weeks before Leavell graduated from the Seminary. He was harried with final examinations and by the task of preparing a speech for graduation as well as attending to his pastorate in the town of New Castle each weekend. When rare thoughts about the war intruded on his mind, he comforted himself with the belief that God would solve the problems of the world; he had enough of his own to solve at the time. But even the graduation ceremony was directed toward the coming fighting. The opening hymn contained a strong war theme and suggested the call to enlist:

The Son of God goes forth to war
    A Kingly crown to gain
    His blood-red banner streams afar
    Who follows in his train?

After the awarding of diplomas and the speeches, the last hymn sung by the congregation began:

Soldiers of Christ in truth arrayed
    A world in ruins needs your aid
    A world by sin destroyed and dead
    A world for which the Savior bled.

One could not help but be aware that life was now surrounded by blood and battlefields and rewards for the volunteers. The graduates were challenged to recognize the Christian duty to save the world in God's army.

Had Leavell wrestled with the ethical questions of the Christian's role in war and the killing of human beings? We do not know because
neither private diaries nor his sermons and publications address the issue. His autobiography does not contain any suggestion of a philosophical or theological struggle in his own mind. It is almost certain that he had questions about Christian participation in war, but it was August before he took a step in any direction.

After graduation he moved to New Castle and spent the summer there as minister. On occasions when he was in Louisville to visit his brothers, he began to discuss with Leonard who, though older, was still in the Seminary studying theology, what they should do about the war. They knew that, as ministers, they could claim exemption from service. However, some men from the New Castle church, as well as seminarians and professors, were volunteering, and both of the unmarried brothers felt that they should contribute somehow. Then in July a YMCA national officer was assigned to speak in Louisville about the ways a Christian could serve the war effort. The Leavells listened intently, as he told them that they had an opportunity through service in the overseas YMCA to save the souls of the men who were going over there to save the world for democracy. On August 12, 1917, Leavell resigned his church in New Castle having made up his mind to "go to war." On August 18, he "spent the morning in Louisville getting exempted . . . claimed it because I am a minister, expecting to go into YMCA work. Guess it will get through, Spent afternoon packing . . . fellows were coming in to

54 Ibid., August 18, 1915.
tell us good bye."\(^5\)\(^5\) No time was left for serious thoughts or reasoning about the ethics of war.

Like the nearly two million other men who left the United States to go to France, he regarded the war as an adventure, "an extraordinary interlude in their lives."\(^5\)\(^6\) Beyond that, Leavell felt that he could be a part of a divine plan to bring "good" out of the evil, if indeed it was evil. He joined many clergymen who, troubled over the war, avoided the real issues by proclaiming that it would result in a religious revival which they would be instrumental in effecting.\(^5\)\(^7\) Unlike some American and British clergymen, however, Leavell never expressed the idea that the war was a punishment for national or individual sins.\(^5\)\(^8\) He was too happy to be going to save souls in a great Christian crusade. During the orientation sessions scheduled by the YMCA he related, "I am more and more thrilled with the wonderful opportunity of YMCA work in the war. Possibly the greatest opportunity ever offered to Christianity . . . the feeling that I am going is now real and I am glad."\(^5\)\(^9\) The questions came on the battlefront later in France, when, as a stretcher bearer gazing at the mangled, bloody

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55 Leavell Diary, August 12, 1915. Leavell did not seek exemption to stay out of the war but so his YMCA work in France would not be interrupted by the draft.


58 Ibid., p. 53.

59 Leavell Diary, August 8, 1915.
bodies of young men, asked, "At whose soul will be laid the charge of all this?"  

His decision to serve in the YMCA may have been influenced by the fact that Woodrow Wilson had appointed Dr. John R. Mott, a minister and the director of the YMCA evangelistic expansion program in America, as General Secretary of the National War Work Council for the YMCA. Wilson had termed Mott a "robust Christian" and had asked him to extend the usual services of the "Y" to that of post exchange functionary and major morale builder for the overseas troops. When the "Y" accepted this challenge, it was recognized as a major Christian force in America. The vast amount of criticism leveled at its programs during and after the war was no doubt caused by the same factor Leavell encountered: over-extension of its mission beyond a capacity to provide what it had promised to do. The red triangle badge worn by YMCA members before the war promised men a Christian "body, soul and mind," and to Wilson and Mott this seemed a reasonable commitment for the "Y" to make to American soldiers. But Leavell could never see that giving cigarettes to trench-weary soldiers was a Christian duty or a fulfillment of worthy goals. "I cannot believe that these people are religious" he observed after the initial conference for "Y" workers on the ship.

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60 Ibid., October 20, 1918.


63 Ibid., p. 12.
Leaving from New York however, Leavell had nothing but religious thoughts in his mind. "As I walked on the gang plank I committed myself to the Lord anew. He led me here." Besides the Lord, he found five Sigma Chi's on board, while his brother Leonard, who enlisted with him for "Y" work, slept in the next bunk. "We're in for a great trip," he rejoiced. He was further pleased on board to hear Dr. Guy Benton, the Chief Organizing Secretary of the YMCA-AEF, state that their duties overseas were to be "religious." "Many of the fellows did not understand it that way" he stated after a group session led by Dr. Benton. "I trust we can make it so . . . we feel rather strange, Leonard and I are the only real Southerners in the bunch." Dr. Benton, "though a Vermonter," shared Leavell's religious ideas, at least as he was described by another passenger on La Touraine: "Dr. Benton is on leave from the Presidency of the University of Vermont and is the living image of the spirit of the Y service to fellow man although on occasion I found him as Puritanic as can be." Leavell did not find him to be Puritanical and agreed that the war work should be religious. Leavell noted after a Sunday service on board ship, "Per-

64 Leavell Diary, September 13, 1917.

65 Ibid., September 24, 1917.

66 Ibid.


68 Leavell Diary, September 16, 1917.

69 Shillinglaw, American in YMCA, p. 15.
haps I'll have to have more of this tolerance to practice in France. I do very much desire to get so I can touch the point of contact with men, try to get down to the root of their real religious nature, and see how he is [sic] trying to feel God just as I am."^70 Leavell had no natural inclination toward tolerance or understanding, and to expect him to think that religious work would be providing chewing tobacco to soldiers -- as much of it turned out to be -- was asking a bit much of him as he started out.

Upon their arrival in France, Dr. Benton asked Leavell to remain in Paris rather than to go on to the battlefront. His assignment was to conduct sight-seeing tours for American soldiers and war workers who were possessors of the coveted pink tickets allowing them to visit Paris. Leavell was complimented by Dr. Benton's confidence, and he enjoyed a few months of showing soldiers and guests Versailles, Napoleon's Tomb, and Madelaine, and Notre Dame. He used his knowledge of French and history, as he shepherded the "gawking raw troops about the various sights" in Paris.\textsuperscript{71} He enjoyed meeting French families and maintained lifetime friendships with Robert and Gaston Mansfield and with Suzanne Billet, a young French lady he saw socially while there. But such activity was not war, even though many times bombs fell near his residence in Paris; and he could not find a religious element in his work. He felt deprived. "We miss being out on the front. I rather crave the boom of the cannons and ministering to the

\textsuperscript{70}Leavell Diary, September 16, 1917.

\textsuperscript{71}Kennedy, \textit{Over Here}, p. 209.
dying and wounded is what I wanted."\textsuperscript{72} He remained in Paris conducting sightseeing tours until February, when he prevailed upon Dr. Benton to transfer him closer to the battlefront, where he was put in charge of a YMCA hut. He wrote after a farewell scene with Suzanne Billet, "I am glad I am leaving Paris for I think I had better not get too intimate with some French folks."\textsuperscript{73}

To his delight the site of his new post was named Neuf Chateau, New Castle. To his horror he was assigned to a room over a manure pile with a small open-grate fireplace and a tiny fire. The odor of manure was quickly forgotten when two young soldiers asked him for New Testaments for "nobody ever did that in Paris."\textsuperscript{74} But he suffered a shock after payday that was infinitely more traumatic than the cold and uncomfortable housing. "All the men got drunk and came to the "Y" service in a real singing mood. The only trouble was to make them sing one song at a time."\textsuperscript{75} The following Sunday he noted, "Had one more glorious day, found my lost trunk and got to preach a sermon about the Cross and two fellows came up confessing Christ and saying they were off of booze forever. Hallelujah!"\textsuperscript{76} He also taught French in the YMCA hut and lectured at night on French history.\textsuperscript{77} He remarked that

\textsuperscript{72}Leavell Diary, September 29, 1917.

\textsuperscript{73}Ibid., February 13, 1918.

\textsuperscript{74}Ibid., February 18, 1918.

\textsuperscript{75}Ibid., March 3, 1918.

\textsuperscript{76}Ibid., March 1, 1918.

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid., March 3-5, 1918.
both classes were well attended; "the soldiers said they liked it."
He read French newspapers to the soldiers to acquaint them with what
was going on in other parts of France.

In the midst of this activity, he received a clipping quoting a
Methodist minister in America who had maintained that soldiers fighting
in France for the cause of liberty and justice need fear nothing in
their life hereafter, because "everyone of our brave soldiers who is
killed in battle will be saved whether he is now a professing Chris-
tian or not." Although Roland made no comment about the minister's
medieval assertion, it must have caused him consternation. After the
clipping, which pointed to another way to achieve salvation, he left
several pages of his diary blank. His next entry, however, related
his request to go to the real front, rather than remain in the hut
behind the lines. He was permitted to go as an interpreter and hur-
riedly packed to follow the troops in battle. He was stationed one
mile behind the forward trenches. "I can see the flash of Boche guns.
Surely Heaven must be angry at the madness of men. The fellows are
content to march to the front. I see them and they fear nothing. They
are glad to get into it. As the crowd passed for the trenches, I en-
vied them all. How I did long to preach to them the "Old Old Story"

78 Ibid., May 9, 1918.
79 Ibid., May 21, 1918.
80 Ibid., May 23, 1918.
before they went out to face it all. "Still the booming goes on from Boche planes and still they kill one another. I talked to a German lady, she showed me her two sons' pictures, they are in the German army. She cried and I did too. It is sad for the Germans as well as us."

Leavell made no reference to "the cause" of the Allies or of France. Whereas many doughboys perceived participation with a sense of reverence or sacrifice for a just cause, Leavell wrote of "the fighting" as if he had come to be a spectator. He enjoyed the aerial battles and bombings, "several whizz bangs came down... My! I never heard such a screech... my canteen has been hit twice... believe me... it is exciting." During the German offensive in the spring of 1918, he wrote "I am having an experience which dwarfs anything I have ever lived through before... I am back from a four days' trip to the Front... I had a wonderful time -- a most exhilarating time -- at moments, a most exciting time." Leavell exclaimed further, "After dinner we saw the Boche shoot down a French balloon, in flames, with guns and an airplane. Oh, but it was a thrill." "Fritz sails peacefully on while black clouds of smoke trail after him, the bombs

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81 Ibid., May 21, 1918.
82 Ibid., May 23, 1918.
83 Ibid., May 29, 1918.
84 Ibid., May 16, 1918.
85 Ibid., June 6, 1918.
bursting with shrapnel — I hope to see a hit someday."  

86 His nonchalance was not unique of course. Other accounts spoke of boys going to the battlefields singing. "You can't bet them they are surely a game and happy bunch,"  

87 one observer noted. "Funny how calm a fellow can be under bombardment . . . we laughed, joked and carried on about it like it was an everyday affair,"  

88 wrote Leavell. "Today I lugged a tow sack full of stuff on my shoulders from Done Marie to the trenches. Oh, I was tired but the men were glad to get it. I shot a pistol twice into a visible German dugout. I guess I didn't kill over 50 Boche. The Boche shelled the road I went out on. I am too lucky for a Boche to get me."  

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Roland Leavell reflected that he was "lucky." Perhaps he felt the assurance that God would solve all of the problems of war for him including steering Boche bombs away from his path. The innocence he revealed as he shot into the German dugout indicated that he was yet untouched by the reality of war. When the first casualties from his outfit began to come in he remarked "It seemed to do for the soldier a thing badly needed . . . it [the death] strengthened their grit and determination. He died to make the others fight better. May the Lord

86 Ibid., June 8, 1918.

87 Kennedy, Over Here, p. 214.

88 Leavell Diary, May 28, 29, 1918.

89 Ibid., June 6, 1918.
By June, however, one unanswered question emerged to his consciousness. "Today I saw a Boche, I wonder what I would have done had I had a gun . . . would I have killed him? Could I have slept at night had I killed him? This war is right and war means killing folks. Perhaps I could have killed him . . . who knows?" Leavell clearly had determined that war and killing could be justified, but he still could not resolve the question that confronts all soldiers: could he himself kill? "If war is worthy of a nation surely it is worthy of an individual," he had surmised earlier.

On June 9, he attended a Catholic Mass for the first time. He came away from this service more disturbed and puzzled than he did from the front. "They were so religious, more religious than any people I had ever seen. They cried and they prayed. I never in my life wanted more to think clearly." Leavell wondered whether these persons could be as devout as the congregation at New Castle, "the plain, bare church with no decorations." The Catholic Church at Neuf Chateau was ornate, and the incense burned his nostrils as strongly as unanswered questions burned his mind. "I never saw people so religious. What is their religion? Are they right and we are wrong? Yet, after reflection, he

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90 Ibid., May 27, 1918.

91 Ibid., June 5, 1918.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid., June 9, 1918.
went on, "No, they aren't like we are and the practical effect of the service in the everyday lives of these people helps me to conclude that we are right and they are wrong."  

"Practical effect" meant that all the French drank. Leavell could scarcely believe that the village priest gave the soldiers his oldest, strongest liquor. "Met your cook, almost drunk 'Where did you get that booze?' 'The priest gave it to me' he said." "The American organist for the priest's church is paid with booze that is 20 year old stuff," he noted with alarm. So he settled the question about religion easily, Catholics were unsaved because they drank.

But could a man be saved, as the newspaper clipping indicated, by killing other men? On June 14 when a German plane "swooped down on a crowd at the cemetery around a grave and shot their machine guns at the crowd," Leavell was outraged. He wrote, "We must kill such people to save the world." He was confronted with the moral dilemma of war that theologians and philosophers have struggled with for centuries and was deeply disturbed. It is obvious that he longed to get into actual battle. "They are going for Metz," he said as he saw the men march off. He lamented, "I wish I could go. I would enlist as a buck private if I could go."

95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., June 14, 1918.
97 Ibid., September 16, 1918.
Perhaps his consternation was intensified when war details were extolled in a booklet, *The Practice of Friendship*, circulated by the YMCA during the war. The authors, one of whom was a professor from Yale Divinity School, "urged the lads as they entered upon their training as soldiers to be to 'see Jesus himself sighting down a gun barrel and running a bayonet through an enemy's body.'"  

As he desired more and more to participate in combat, he found his YMCA job less and less fulfilling. As he described it to his cousin Mary Spalding:

I have to sweep up, sell canteen things like chocolate, tobacco, soap, cookies, etc., build fires, teach French lessons, get up shows, stunt nights, minstrels; act an interpreter when a soldier gets in a fuss with the French people, preach on Sunday nights, drive the Ford truck, send money home for the fellows, lead in singing, read letters which the fellows think I should enjoy as much as they do, give out stationery, play the victrola, get their watches repaired, deposit their money in Paris banks, run a library for them on and on . . . so I am really a preacher, grocer, janitor, teacher, carpenter, chauffeur, sympathizer, banker, postmaster, librarian, interpreter all in the course of a week.  

He wrote in his diary in more searching terms, "When I came over here I was so keen for Christian work. My work seems now to have dwindled to a grocery money man affair. Wish I could connect it all up with

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99. Roland Leavell to Mary Spalding, June 7, 1918, Leavell Papers, Bowman.
religion." He had been encouraged to connect killing with religion but not giving out groceries.

A talk with Dr. Benton convinced Leavell of a way to "connect it to religion." Leavell applied for a commission as chaplain. "Dr. Benton says that the reason men resented me in the 'Y' is my age. I feel that I am persona non grata because I am young enough to be in the trenches." "My age makes me undesirable to help the fellows. I think they resent me." The men swear and curse," he explained, when he would give out of food stuff or writing paper, or would not let them drink in the "Y" hut. "I am tired of it all." He especially envied the chaplains. "About dark the last of the soldiers moved up. The Major got them all together and gave them instructions about care and safety on the front line. The chaplain was there and I surely wanted him to tell them of a little safety for the soul. But the splendid chance was lost."

While waiting for the chaplain's commission to come through, he volunteered as stretcher bearer. A man searching for meaningful work could have found no better, no bloodier task. Surely this task could be "connected to religion," he thought, as he trudged through the mud of the trenches and across barbed wire to retrieve the bodies blown to

100 Leavell Diary, August 24, 1918.
101 Ibid., August 16, 1918.
102 Ibid., October 9, 1918.
103 Ibid., September 19, 1918.
bit or left in the mire to die. After the first day, he no longer began the entries with "wonderful barrage of guns today." Instead "a top sergeant in a shell hole, shot through the hip. Terrible. Then we found another and another all day long . . . ." Horribly depressing to go get those fellows so shot up . . . found an old German dugout to sleep in." "This chamber of horrors has no charm for me. I've seen enough." "Today is Sunday under shell fire. I would like many things this morning. Peace victorious, first, then a bath for I haven't had one in two weeks, then to go to Sunday School in New Castle or Oxford, but more than all that I think I want relief for this poor division, so tired so shot up. Men still call for stretcher bearers and we bring them in shot and mangled. It is a fearful, fearful horror. Hell it is. No words can describe it. We have been under terrible Boche barrage the shells broke a few yards from me but the Lord spared me." "Today two of my fellows got their feet blown off, two others badly injured. How can men do it? What is there in men to make it so? 'God save me,' I cried. But why me, more than others? But I have ambitions for good . . . I want to work for Him. So do they, maybe." "I gave out of cigarettes and Bull Durham and I

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104 Ibid., September 26, 1918.
105 Ibid., September 27, 1918.
106 Ibid., September 28, 1918.
107 Ibid., September 29, 1918.
108 Ibid., September 30, 1918.
had to apologize." He left the front lines and went for supplies, and gave away in one day to the 363rd Regiment, "2,000 packages of cookies, 2,000 packages of gum, 1,100 bars of chocolate, 750 cigars. It did not satisfy all, but we did help some of them." When passing out goods, he remarked, "I never went through such an experience as I did distributing this stuff. I never underwent such insult, such infamy, never heard such swearing. I never was so sorry being a human being like these beasts. I worked as hard as I could giving out the stuff but we could not control them . . . oh such cursing they did." He did not seem to realize that they were not cursing him and his groceries, but their condition, the shells, the war, and death itself.

"Slept in the wagon with the rest of the stuff and the fellows were coming all times of night to steal my stuff! Such men. I am sick and tired!! I hated the world. I most despise myself." Still waiting for the chaplaincy which would keep him from despising himself and the task he could not "connect to religion," he was sent to Belgium along with many other soldiers in one of the famous "40 Hommes-8 Chevaux" box cars. He arrived "somewhere in Flanders" on October 18 after passing Calais and Dunkirk. Soon he found his

109 Ibid., October 2, 1918.

110 Ibid., October 5, 1918.

111 Ibid., October 9, 1918.

112 Ibid., October 10, 1918.

113 Ibid., October 17, 1918.
campsite to be near devastated Ypres. "How could even cruel German 
hands work such destruction. Many a man has fought nobly here yet I 
cannot see the glorious side. I can see only destruction and sin and 
hell." The grim reaper has gathered thousands in this place. 
The war demon looks here and laughs for here he did his worst. At 
whose souls will be laid the charge of all this?" 
It was while "waiting" near Ypres that he first heard the news 
on October 31 that Austria-Hungary had asked for a separate peace 
settlement. "So may it be" he noted. He further commented that 
streams of wounded were still "coming through" as well as "news came 
that the boys were advancing rapidly." 

Today I saw an unforgettable scene. Refugees 
returning home. Every sort of vehicle, pulled 
by every kind of animal or human. Women and 
children, half dressed, in the rain, crying, 
trying to get home. Old ladies in wheel bar-
rows, nearly dead, getting back home. Such 
suffering, such misery! To whom will it all 
be charged? 

From November 3 to 10 the news became more exciting. Leavell’s time 
was spent translating the French newspapers telling of revolutions in 
Austria, of the Austrian and Turkish requests for a separate peace, 
and of the steady retreat of the Germans. Roland commented, "I just
hope they do not give the Boche an armistice until the Kaiser is no
more.""It looks like the end is coming soon. How glorious peace
will be. We want only the complete surrender of Germany and the abdi-
cation of the Kaiser.""Only French papers come but I grab them
eagerly and read for the men.""Peace!! You ought to have been the
Frogs! A courier came through saying all hostilities would cease to-
night. I just wish I could preach on the 'Prince of Peace' or 'Peace
that Passeth Understanding,'" he wrote on the night of November 11,
1918. But he was denied that privilege in France.

On November 27, two weeks after the war was over, he received his
commission as a 1st Lieutenant to be a Chaplain in the United States
Army; it had been lost in the mail for months. Even though he would
not accept the appointment because the war was over, he at least
followed the orders accompanying it and left for Paris. "... it is
farewell to YMCA for me, got my stuff ready." In Paris he enjoyed the celebration of peace which few American
soldiers witnessed. He saw King George V, President Raymond Poincare,
Prime Minister George Clemenceau and the thousands of French soldiers

\[118^\text{Ibid., November 4, 1918.}\]
\[119^\text{Ibid., November 6, 1918.}\]
\[120^\text{Ibid., November 7, 1918.}\]
\[121^\text{Ibid., November 11, 1918.}\]
\[122^\text{Ibid., November 27, 1918.}\]
screaming in the streets when these leaders appeared. In December he saw King Albert of Belgium, with his queen and eldest son. Leavell called him the "Hero King" and extolled him for guiding his country through "Hun atrocity and savagery . . . what a night on the boulevard . . . Champs Elysee." He witnessed the hysterical joy that attended the arrival on December 14 of Woodrow Wilson, General John Pershing, Field Marshal Ferdinand Foche, and Clemenceau for the Peace Conference. "I never saw such mobs, parades, music, dancing, confetti, kissing, hugging, laughing, pushing, fighting. All the world was happy. Such kissing! Leonard and I hugged and kissed them all."

Bad memories forgotten, he left "gay Paree" with some regret. On board ship, however, he began to feel keenly disappointed that he could not "return home as a real soldier." There was no mention of regret that he had not fulfilled his original purpose of saving the world from sin and vice. And no well-deserved self-congratulations that as a YMCA secretary he had made trench life a bit more bearable for many soldiers and that as a stretcher-bearer he had saved lives. "I return home almost shamefacedly. I tremble to think that I must go home. . . I tremble to try to preach again."

123 Ibid., November 29, 1918.
124 Ibid., December 5, 1918.
125 Ibid., December 14, 1918.
126 Ibid., December 28, 1918.
127 Ibid.
the mud and slime of it all."\textsuperscript{128}

When the lights of the New York Harbor came into view, he joined the crowd lining the deck as they sang "My Country 'Tis of Thee." Still in a euphoria that gripped the men as they prepared to disembark, he penned, "When we sang I couldn't help thinking how the mocking birds used to sing each spring when they came back to build their nest in the same old tree by the tower in our front yard."\textsuperscript{129} So as the mocking birds did, so too he returned to Oxford, not only for a spring but to become the pastor of his old home church. "How can a man refuse a Mother's call?" he said when he was asked to serve, referring to the Oxford Church as the mother of his innocence.

Paul Fussell noted in \textit{Great War and Modern Memory} that "One reason the Great War was more ironic than any other is that its beginning was more innocent." "Never such innocence again," observed Phillip Larkin.\textsuperscript{130} Both were wrong in regard to Roland Leavell. He returned to his innocence, and by his stubborn refusal to "talk about the war" to others, he proclaimed that the war had never happened to him, that he could forget it if only they would let him. Throughout the remainder of his life he belittled his participation in the Great War, obviously because he had not saved souls or served as a fighting man. But he proved -- although not perhaps to his own satisfaction or realization -- that he was no physical coward. He experienced the horrors

\textsuperscript{128}\textit{Ibid.}, December 31, 1918.

\textsuperscript{129}\textit{Ibid.}, January 5, 1919.

of the front as a stretcher-bearer and undoubtedly saved the lives of many men. This kind of bravery, which he tended to discount, stood him in good stead for the rest of his life.

Paul Fussell wrote that "an army in the Great War could attain the knowledge of good and evil." If this was true of Leavell, he promptly obliterated the evil from his mind. He was now back among the "good" in Oxford as if the "evil" had never existed. This way he did not have to explain anything . . . particularly "why I can't connect it all with religion." He did not have to, back in the "same old tree."

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
CHAPTER 4
EVELESS EDEN ENDS

When Leavell returned to Oxford, he wished to leave the war behind him and to return to the peace and security Oxford represented. He chose Oxford in particular -- rather than churches in Texas and South Carolina from which he had received invitations -- in order to fulfill the dying request of his mother. She had challenged him on her deathbed to win a particular lost neighbor to "salvation." He had promised her that he would try.

He may have chosen Oxford to forget the war and return to peace, but Oxford was not about to receive him as anything less than a war hero. Against his own inclinations, he was pressured to speak about the war at a high school assembly and at a chapel service at the University of Mississippi. He jested about these talks and discounted them, saying he was merely "blowing off steam about the war, since they have to hear something." After a YMCA banquet in his honor, he remarked, "I heard a lot more of that line of hot air about the Christian role of the YMCA." Clearly it was his return to preaching and not his military career that satisfied his need to be useful and to receive acclaim. He would later write, "The sweetest compliment I ever had

1Leavell Diary, March 4, 1919.

2Ibid., January 15, 1919.

3Ibid., January 17, 1919.

4Ibid., March 19, 1919.
paid me was the call from Oxford. No true son would turn a deaf ear
to the call of a mother. May I be worthy of her love and trust."\textsuperscript{5}
Initially he did not suffer the disillusionment and restlessness expe-
rienced by many Americans after World War I; he was too engrossed
in a vigorous effort to save the world not for Democracy, but from sin.

He not only assumed the pastorate of the Oxford Baptist Church
but immediately began to preach revivals in the small towns in Missis-
sippi. Some of these meetings were rewarded with conversions and
earned a "Hallelujah" in his diary; others, however, were less re-
warding. "Never was so glad to get home from a revival. Terrific
place, caught everything from a bad cold to cooties and the itch" was
his assessment of Shady Grove Baptist Church fifteen miles from Ox-
ford.\textsuperscript{6} One revival in a rural community resulted in two young ladies
coming to confess their sins every night, obviously displaying less
interest in the Lord than in the marital status of the Lord's visiting
servant. At the close of that revival, the local minister announced
the results to the congregation, "We had 16 professions in Jesus Christ
and two in Roland Q. Leavell."\textsuperscript{7} However, a revival held in Oxford was
the one that he recalled in his autobiography:

\textquote{The revival in my hometown ... an experience such as
comes few times in life. I began to find people in their homes on their knees praying.
The deacons and other groups began voluntarily to

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., March 4, 1919.

\textsuperscript{6}Ibid., July 16, 1919.

\textsuperscript{7}Leavell, \textit{Sheer Joy of Living}, p. 73.
hold prayer meetings. The high school students voted to use their recess periods for prayer meetings. Business women of the town had a prayer service in the directors' room of the bank every afternoon at four o'clock. The business houses were closed each morning from eight-thirty to nine o'clock for a men's prayer meeting in the courthouse. There were professions of faith at every preaching service in the church for fifteen days. The sheriff was saved, after driving aimlessly all over the country under the conviction of sin. Men who had not been in a church in twenty years were saved in the courthouse meetings. Gambling rings were broken up; drinking clubs were dissolved; evil home situations were purified. There were people saved in all the denominations in the town.  

Everything that he had hoped and failed to do in France he did at home. He was a "hero," publicly acclaimed; he extracted others from the grip of sin and corruption; and beyond that he answered his mother's ambition for him. The neighbor he had vowed to save came down the aisle in that revival. The congregation was so shocked that it stopped singing the hymn in mid-stanza. In six months the Methodist Church had made the new convert a steward in their congregation.  

As was his custom, Leavell enthusiastically entered the social as well as the religious life of the town. He fished and played golf with the men. He joined the loafers on the square for conversation. He spent long, congenial hours with Miss Ella Wright, his former teacher and colleague, and referred to her as his best friend and helper in administering church activities. He organized a sports league for all the churches of Oxford. Apparently the Baptist Church teamed played  

Ibid., p. 72.
with the same ardor that the young preacher demonstrated in the pulpit. Faulkner's biographer commented:

Bill liked to watch the games, even when it included the church league teams. One day he sat looking on, bemused at the vociferous intensity of members of the Baptist team. 'I don't know what church God belongs to,' he murmured to a friend, 'but I know he isn't a Baptist because he permits the other sects to exist.'

Leavell's religious life was not confined at this time to revivals, socials, and athletic events. He began to examine the Fundamentalist movement, which was emerging at the time and appealing to many conservative Christians. The World's Christian Fundamentalist Association began shortly after the end of the war under the leadership of William B. Riley with the purpose of reviving what it believed was the morality of pre-war America. The morals of Americans, the SCFA stated, had been undermined by the war; "young men and young women were even smoking in public." One prominent minister, Dr. Oliver W. Van Osdel, a pastor in Michigan and follower of Riley, summed up the typical Fundamentalist view in a sermon preached in response to the American upheaval as he perceived it:

Sometimes people ask what are the objections to dancing and theatres and card playing and such things; they say these are not to be

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9 Blotner, Faulkner, p. 279.
10 Marsden, Fundamentalism, p. 152.
11 Ibid., p. 156.
severely condemned; but you will notice that the people who indulge in worldly things are always loose in doctrine... the two go together, then apostasy easily creeps in... 

On the surface, Fundamentalists such as Dr. Van Osdel seemed to favor the same religious and social principles that Roland Leavell believed in. He agreed that dancing, drinking, and card playing were destructive influences, and he affirmed Fundamentalist doctrines such as the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth, atonement, resurrection, and the second coming. However, he could not agree with Dr. Riley, who stated that his was a "super-patriotic" organization meant to "do battle royal for the fundamentals" by exerting pressure on political figures to have Fundamentalist beliefs confirmed as American beliefs. Leavell stated in later years, that he would rather go to jail than have his views forced on anyone else. Leavell was an evangelical conservative, but not a religious militant. He believed that America had a mission to save the world; but America must be saved first by saving individual souls, not by using political influence to enforce religious practices. His mission was to hold revivals, to condemn specific sins, and to concentrate on individuals. In a sermon that was later published in Saving America to Save the World, Roland Leavell stated the following:

Only as individuals accept God, can our land

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12 Ibid., p. 152.

13 Ibid.
be fitted for its heaven-planned mission to
the other peoples of the earth. Greece was
once a land of mighty mentality, with archi-
tects, sculptors, poets, philosophers, and
artists such as the world has never equalled.
Today her sons scramble eggs in restaurants
and shine shoes on the streets. Liquor and
vice cut away the mentality of the Greeks.
Rome rose to be the lawgiver and lawmaster
of the world . . . but the decay of licen-
tiousness and drunkenness was present among
the profligate patricians of Caesar's court.
May God send a revival of soberness of body
and purity of heart, that our land may be
preserved from the doom which liquor and
vice will bring. The spiritual life of
America must be purified if America is to
be saved to serve the world. Oh, that we
could learn from history.14

One of America's foremost Fundamentalist preachers was J. Frank
Norris, who contacted Leavell at a Southern Baptist meeting in Fort
Worth. Leavell stated, "We met with Frank Norris at 11 a.m. Mr.
Norris took me to lunch. He is a wheel horse, full of religion, I
don't care what else you say about him."15 Leavell did not join the
movement, despite Norris's efforts, for other reasons than his objec-
tion to political militancy. Most of the leaders of the Fundamental-
ist movement were from the North, and Leavell harbored a deep suspicion
of anything that came from the North. Leavell also disapproved of this
movement for its opposition to celebrations of the anniversary of the
Armistice by public dancing in the streets and, more significantly, for
its antipathy toward the League of Nations. Fundamentalists believed

14 Roland Leavell, Saving America to Save the World, (New York, 1940),
p. 19.
15 Leavell Diary, February 11, 1919.
that the League was "incompatible with the fundamentals of American Independence."\(^\text{16}\) They agreed that the issue of the League was more a political than a religious one but that the world organization most certainly would lead to war. In a twisted flight of fancy, they called the League a "latter-day revival of the Roman Empire . . . that Christians should do all they could to oppose."\(^\text{17}\) Leavell could never support any group so steadfastly opposed to the principles of Woodrow Wilson. In 1961 he remarked on Wilson's attempt to achieve world peace through the League of Nations: "Alas! His lofty Christian idealism was too exalted for a partisan Senate and for revenge-minded European statesmen to catch even a glimpse of it."\(^\text{18}\) And as for dancing in the streets to celebrate the Armistice, he wrote that he and his brother had danced in the streets with the French and "kissed them all." Although he admired the Fundamentalists and went so far in his autobiography as to commend their sincerity and to praise them for their effort to protest the rising tide of German Kultur, humanistic philosophy, and liberal theology, he did not join them, preferring to wage war against specific sins and to convert individuals.\(^\text{19}\)

Leavell was successful in his evangelistic efforts because he was preaching in primarily rural areas and small towns. According to William Warren Sweet, a noted religious historian, evangelism generally

\(^{16}\) Marsden, Fundamentalism, p. 155.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 155.

\(^{18}\) Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 75.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 47.
declined after the First World War. Although Sweet agreed that the growth of the Social Gospel was one factor in this decline, he also cited another cause:

The churches which have the largest membership today are those bodies which in the past have profited most from revivalism, a type of religion that is dominantly personal. Revivalism tends to disappear when the impersonal becomes dominant over the personal. The great American churches are now less interested in individuals and more and more concerned with the advancement of causes. The rural and village churches remain evangelical.20

Leavell's description of the decline of revivalism emphasized the immediate causes primarily and indicated little insight into the reasons set out by Dr. Sweet:

The ravages of World War I and its aftermath had taken their toll on the spirit of the people . . . During the hectic decade of the 1920's evangelism was supersensational, hyper-emotional, and ultracommercial . . . Evangelism seemed to have fallen among robbers, who stripped it of its scriptural methods, took away its good reputation, and left it half dead.21

Evangelism was discredited for a time, and Leavell became aware of it. His impression was perhaps reinforced by his trip in August, 1919 to the fundamentalist conference ground in Winona Lake, Indiana to hear the noted evangelist Billy Sunday. He observed Sunday's sensational evangelistic techniques and was appalled. Billy Sunday (William Ashley

20 Sweet, Revivalism in America, pp. 177-78.

21 Ibid., pp. 178-80.
Sunday) was a farm boy who called himself "a rube of the rubes."\textsuperscript{22} He began his career as a baseball outfielder with the Chicago White Stockings. He was noted for his showmanship on the baseball diamond and, when converted, simply moved his antics to the pulpit of the nearest church. He hired his own troop of musicians, and the towns in which he preached erected pineboard and tarpaper tabernacles for his meetings. He drew large crowds by utilizing his vaudeville dramatic skills before audiences. At Winona Lake Roland was horrified when Billy Sunday broke furniture and pulled off his tie and coat and unbuttoned his shirt while he screamed torrents of words against the "weasel-eyed, sponge-columned, mush-fisted, jelly-spined, pussy-footing, four-flushing Christians."\textsuperscript{23} Leavell was depressed about the future of evangelism even though Billy Sunday was deemed successful by many people of America (he had counted 98,264 converts in New York City during one ten-week revival using these same methods).\textsuperscript{24} Leavell was at least partially comforted by knowing that, while he was not a scholar himself, neither was he the kind of evangelist he perceived Sunday to be. He felt discouraged by what he saw and left Winona Lake disgusted and confused at such theatrical "shenanigans." "When anything boils, the scum rises to the top,"\textsuperscript{25} he commented.

When Leavell attended his first Southern Baptist Convention held

\textsuperscript{22} Alstrom, Religious History, p. 748.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 47.
in Atlanta in 1919, he was genuinely disturbed about the future of evangelism. But at Atlanta he discovered an alternative to tent revivals in rural Mississippi as an expression of Christian witness. The emphasis at the Convention was missions abroad, particularly in China. Leavell wrote in his autobiography, "When my former seminary president, Dr. Mullins, read the resolution proposing that Southern Baptists raise seventy-five million dollars for missions ... I was swept into ecstasy with the mighty possibilities of the program." A proposal followed that in 1920 the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention should send out one hundred missionaries to China on one Pacific liner. Leavell felt that the plan offered a providential answer to his concern about his future in evangelism.

He hurried back to Oxford and asked for a leave of absence from his pastorate to go to China in 1920. What better way could he fulfill his life purpose of evangelism? With evangelism being "stripped of its good name" in America, the best way to convert thousands to Christianity seemed to be for him to become a missionary. In fact he had already fulfilled his vow to his mother in Oxford. Moreover, he had a brother who was serving in China. George, a medical missionary, was a surgeon in the Stout Memorial Baptist Hospital in Wuchow. Another factor affecting his decision to leave for the Orient was the ratification of Amendment XVIII to the Constitution, outlawing the sale of alcoholic beverages; he had lost one of the most flagrant sins to denounce publicly. It is likely he also knew that America was disillusioned with

26 Ibid., p. 50.
crusades and satiated with revivalistic promises. On a national level this truth was indicated by the landslide vote which elected Warren G. Harding who, guessing the public temper correctly, had announced in his campaign speeches, "America's present need is not heroics but healing; not nostrums but normalcy; not revolution but restoration . . . not surgery but serenity." For many reasons, Leavell felt after one year of preaching that evangelism was not as fulfilling as he had believed it would be. He decided to go to China to determine if he wanted to be a missionary. His route "back to normalcy" took him to a most abnormal place in his estimation.

During the decade of the twenties, missionaries of all denominations took advantage of the Open Door Policy negotiated in 1899 by Secretary of State John Hay. China, in its weakened condition, had not been able to prevent the intrusion of imperialistic nations, and Hay had urged that the Open Door would preserve Chinese territorial and administrative dignity and safeguard for the world the principle of impartial trade with all parts of China. Missionaries, as anxious to purvey their wares as the industrialists were who followed Secretary Hay's invitation to move into China, regarded the Open Door Policy as part of God's plan to convert the Chinese to Christianity. They argued that "as between the Han and the T'ang Dynasties, Buddhism won a lasting place in China, so Christianity might now establish itself as an integral part of Chinese Life." American missionaries, both

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Protestant and Catholic, agreed that conditions in China had never been so favorable for the acceptance of a foreign faith. The old structure of Chinese life was crumbling and with it much of the resistance to Christian ideas. At the Southern Baptist Convention in 1919, the advocates of missionaries to China declared that the educational system that had done so much to perpetrate Confucianism had been discontinued and that new subjects including the English language had been introduced. The overthrow of the ancient Empire and the acceptance of the Republic in 1911 seemed to herald a new day in China. Although a bit far-fetched as an analogy, leaders at the Convention called upon the delegates to carry the Christian idealism generated in the Great War to the task of converting the Chinese.  

Leavell left for China in the fall of 1920. He had obtained the money for the expensive journey while preaching in a revival in Duncan, Mississippi. After he had expressed his strong desire to go to China, the church took up a special collection and presented it to him at the close of the revival services. He left as soon as he could get passage. A letter written to Miss Ella Wright from Seattle on the eve of sailing mentioned almost nothing about the purpose of his trip. Instead, he told her how dreadful the sermon was in the Seattle Baptist Church; the minister had spent thirty minutes talking about New York City's restaurants and theatres and had never once mentioned saving souls. He also noted that he was already anxious to return to Oxford:

29Ibid., p. 468.

Your letters awaiting me this morning in Seattle were like food to the starving — I never was so homesick in all my life, not even in France . . . the time of my trip will soon pass and I'll be gloriously happy to be back where I love most of all to be . . . the boat is here and we are ready to depart . . . our last two Sundays made me awfully happy, and will keep me keenly anxious to return. Best love, Roland.31

On board ship, he found that he was definitely not with a boatload of missionaries; he complained consistently about the drunkenness and wild parties.

But the horror of a ship full of brawling passengers was minor compared to the horror that he felt as he viewed China. He related the following experience:

. . . went through the city of Canton, streets were 5 to 6 feet wide . . . everyone lives in filth and dirt and the smell of fish and vegetables and vile smelling soups . . . much gambling and smoking water pipes in the dirty streets . . . went through for two hours, my nose was sore from the smell. When I went later to the "Sun Building Tower," I saw the sun shining down trying to cleanse all that filth. Man built high walls and narrow streets to shut out God's sun, so it is with sin, man shuts out God's love.32

He was appalled as he saw hundreds of dirty little slave girls not over ten years of age carrying the babies of their owners tied on their backs. The infants had sores all over them, and the little slave

31 Roland Leavell to Ella Wright, September 21, 1920, Leavell Papers, Bowman.

32 Leavell Diary, October n. d., 1919.
girls would play hopscotch or jump rope with the baby's eyes straight
toward the sun. At the hospital where his brother George served as
surgeon, he made daily ward rounds with him and with George's colleague,
Dr. Beddoe. The Chinese women's hatred of baby girls and protest at
their birth appalled him. Revulsion engulfed him as he viewed the
bound feet of the women of China and observed their enslavement to
their husbands; he heard old men say, "Woman has neither mind nor
soul." "So sickening to see Mothers having no idea of care for chil-
dren. The coolie class or the boat folks give their dead babies to
coolies to let them throw away somewhere."  

Other experiences repelled him as well. He hated riding in a
ricksha: "I felt like a cad, having him pull me in that ricksha. He
is a man, has a soul and should have feelings like mine. I hope I
never look on him but as a man with a soul that is precious." "Every-
where beggars, beggars. They are under a syndicate, beg for a salary
and give all proceeds to a common fund. Old women are often blinded
for the purpose of making them better beggars."  

All was not repulsive, however. One evening a wealthy American
merchant, appropriately named Mr. George Banker, invited him to his
palatial home for a thirty-course dinner. After the dinner, during
which he said he "ate with chopsticks without wounding myself," he re-
marked, "This is the only Chinese home yet I have seen where I would

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
have put a mouthful of food in my mouth."\footnote{35}

He saw the traditional Chinese funerals with the drummers to beat away the evil spirits, and he visited many mission compounds throughout southern China. He took down written messages from all the missionaries to relay to the church people of America. By December, 1920 he was on board ship more ready to return home than he had ever thought possible. He did not wish to become a missionary, that was certain.

Despite his horror at what he saw, he retained an intense admiration for the missionaries who were in China and envied his brother George, who found such "peace of mind with God." Roland was also profoundly moved by one incident in the Baptist compound in Wuchow. On November 20, 1920, Dr. Beddoe's only son was killed in a playground accident and was buried at the foreigner's cemetery by the West River. Roland watched the missionaries, so broken over the tragedy, and heard their message read in English and translated into Chinese at the grave "... God in his fathomless wisdom has brought this great sorrow to our hearts, which, instead of turning us from our purpose, will only serve to increase our zeal and efforts to serve the people of China, our adopted country. We can no longer be called foreigners for now the bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh is mingled with the dust of this land."\footnote{36} Roland copied the message as he wept with them, but could not follow their example to make China his adopted home.

Roland did not simply reject China because of the way it looked or

\footnote{35}{Ibid.}

\footnote{36}{Ibid.}
smelled; he tried hard to understand the misery of it. In his view, China's problems stemmed from six sources. Spiritism instead of deity worship, civil wars caused by dishonesty of officials, unbelievable illiteracy, (only 4 out of every 10,000 could read or write), lack of a common dialect, scarcity of railroads and decent highways, and a lack of knowledge of God.\(^{37}\) Visualizing such overwhelming problems, Leavell realized that they were simply too vast and too complex for him to make the effort to solve them. He later championed Protestant Chinese Christians -- among them Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek -- who were educated and converted to Christianity during the missionary activity of the early twentieth century. He was appalled at the Communist takeover of China in 1949 and felt strongly that the United States should have supported Chiang in his efforts against the Japanese and the Communists.\(^{38}\) He never lost hope that the Christian religion could accomplish what indeed the Communists later did to erase illiteracy, build roads, and stop civil wars.

Before leaving the Orient, he visited Japan and, in contrast to his response to China, began a life-long love affair with that country. He visited several cities but recounted his visit to Nagasaki in greatest detail. Little did he realize that he would return there, only a few years after the first atomic bomb had destroyed the city, and to see again "the beautiful harbor, surrounded by mountains." He commented on Japanese militarism and the strong fortifications around the

\(^{37}\) Ibid., November 20, 1919.

\(^{38}\) Author's reminiscence, March (?), 1951.
various cities. He witnessed a Japanese festival with a fifty-foot
dragon and geisha girls dancing on the tables. He watched ten-year-
old boys dressed in gold-braided military uniforms who brandished
swords as they marched. Roland commented that he made "monkey faces"
at one of the little boys so that he laughed and broke attention and
was "bawled out" by his Japanese commander. He "... visited Temple
of Shinto on one hill and saw hundreds worshipping. On opposite hill
a fine lot of Christian mission schools. Two forces, two great giants
arrayed against each other to gain the hearts of the people below who
still believe in militarism and the dragon." Roland retained a
strong fascination for the Japanese and their country. He particularly
approved of their cleanliness, mannerliness, and abundant energy. He
commended the beauty of the Japanese landscape, especially Mr. Fuji,
which he visited. During World War II he deplored the militarism of
Japan and blamed the war on their warlords. In 1955 he spent several
weeks again in Nagasaki preaching and, as a result of that visit,
formed a strong attachment to his interpreter whom he subsequently
sponsored on a trip to America to study theology. As he left to return
to America, Leavell believed the Japanese more progressive than the
Chinese, and he expressed the hope that their military leaders would
not become more powerful than the influence of the mission schools.
In spite of his love for Japan he did not stay to be a missionary there
either, and on January 1, 1921, he was on his way home to America.

He sailed on the Korea Maru which encountered rough seas and

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39Leavell Diary, undated.
carried rowdy passengers. New Year's Day he penned: "Last night was a wild night. The sea was as drunk as the majority of our passengers and our passengers were as rowdy as the roughest of the waves. It was one awful way to start a New Year, I'll be honest about it . . . and to stop the headaches from last night's debauchery they all got gloriously pifflicated again."\(^{40}\) However disagreeable this company was, by January 7 he found some shipboard friends "who love Oxford as I do." When the ship arrived in Honolulu, Cornell and Estelle Oldham Franklin met him at the dock. Franklin had become a federal judge whose circuit court moved from one Hawaiian island to another. They entertained him in their home and were "royal hosts."\(^{41}\) Franklin had been Leavell's summer companion when Ella Somerville was in love with Roland. Estelle had been in love with William Faulkner throughout her younger days, but, because of family disapproval of Faulkner's drinking and apparent shiftlessness, she had married Cornell instead. Leavell entertained Estelle and Cornell by telling of his ten-hour ride in a shenza to Pingtu, China, the shenza being a cotlike canvas stretched between two poles, carried by one donkey in front and one behind. After this and other tales, they agreed with Roland that China was not the place for him. Neither was China the place for Estelle Franklin; eight years later, when Cornell was transferred to Shanghai, she divorced him, went back to Oxford, and married William Faulkner.\(^{42}\)

\(^{40}\)Ibid., January 1, 1921.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., January 7-8, 1921.

\(^{42}\)Blotner, Faulkner, p. 40.
Leavell returned to Oxford after a brief stop in California to see his brother Arnaud, at that time a successful dentist in Hollywood. Arnaud chauffeured Roland around the city of the early cinema days, and Roland, perhaps anticipating the seamier side of life associated with that city, said he would not exchange Oxford for Hollywood for any amount of money.

Back in Oxford and the only resident who had ever been in China, he was again the center of attention. Unlike upon his return from France, he was anxious to make speeches about his trip to China. He spoke at clubs and churches in the Oxford area, and soon invitations came from towns all over Mississippi. The stories he told of China revealed more of his own personality than they did the essence of China:

I was on a boat going down the west River. George sat with two Chinese officials talking politics. It turned into a conversation about religion. We talked about peace ... George finally said 'The hope of peace for China is finding Christ. He is the cause of our peace in America and he must be in China also.' 'I believe. I believe.' said the official. 'I will join the church of the Christian.' The official continued, 'I see boys come from your mission schools and they make better men than boys out of government schools.'

George and Roland believed the man converted, and Roland concluded the story by telling that the officials donated needed land for the Baptist Mission Kindergarten of which Mrs. Frances Peay Leavell was in charge.

Roland also told the following story to his sympathetic American

43Leavell Diary, n.d.

44Daughter of Governor Austin F. Peay of Tennessee and wife of Dr. George Leavell.
The most convincing testimony I have seen to the power of the Christian Gospel is one sight I saw . . . a class of boys and girls 10-15 we took off the streets . . . hair stringy, ragged, some almost nude, faces tired, dull and worn, sorrowful. Many were little slave children and sat there with the baby of their owner tied on their little backs . . . little 10 year old girls had to carry a 20-pound baby on their backs. Then we went in to see the class of boys and girls who were being taught in our mission schools. They have for the most part become Christians, and all were under the influence of the Christian Gospel. Their faces were clean, clothes clean and their hair combed. No sign of disease. Faces bright, happy, intelligent. There were no smiles on the faces of the other class.45

In his presentations Roland offered more the appearance rather than the reality in China. Kenneth Scott Latourette, in writing about China during the early Republic, agreed that Protestant denominations, seeing the Chinese hunger for a Western type of education, founded and maintained some of the best educational institutions in the country.46 However, he pointed out what had escaped Leavell's attention: the ones who took advantage of these schools primarily were the privileged officials' children, not the little waifs of the streets. Nevertheless, the stories Leavell told of the destitute lost people impressed the Mississippians. The pathetic story with which he always concluded his China sermons concerned an old Chinese woman who was dying in the mission hospital. "She was asked by a missionary, 'In whom is your

45 Leavell Diary, n.d.

46 Latourette, Chinese, p. 470.
faith and trust?' Puzzled a bit, and with a glow on her face, she said, 'I forget his name but he is up there.' And she pointed to heaven. She died a victorious death trusting Him whom she loved but could not remember His name."47 Leavell's tales were well received, and the offerings swelled for China missions. He now spoke of that world as needing saving, but he definitely did not feel that his call was to go there to do it. 48 He was, however, overjoyed to accept invitations of many churches to speak on China's behalf.49

Leavell and his audiences had a China in their own backyard. The same deplorable circumstances which Roland and his fellow Southern Baptists decried in China -- the dirt, poverty, lack of education, and filthy living conditions -- were only too evident on the back streets of every Southern town, especially among the Black population. In spite of the fact that the Southern Baptist Convention Social Service Commission offered some hope that Southern Baptists might "assume greater obligations for improving the Negro's social position."50 Leavell did not conceive helping Blacks to be an opportunity for mission work. The Social Service Commission's ignored suggestion was correctly the "noble gesture."51 For all Southern Baptists, it was much simpler

47 Leavell Diary, n.d.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 108.
to transform the social order in China because it would not interfere with the basic patterns of their everyday life, particularly that of white supremacy. Leavell occasionally preached to Black congregations -- which he enjoyed because of the loud "amens" and visible response to his stories and pleas to come to the front to confess their sins -- but he could not bring himself to mention to them the poor of China since not one member of his Black congregations had indoor plumbing, and most were simply a few steps away from the slavery their parents had experienced. Nevertheless, Leavell continued to speak to white churches about the wretched conditions he saw in China which only Christianity could correct. It was an invitation to speak about China in one of these Mississippi churches that took him from his "Eveless Eden" as he called Oxford, to meet his Eve.

One weekend Leavell was invited by Dr. W. F. Yarborough to come to the First Baptist Church of Hattiesburg, Mississippi to speak on China and to conduct a Young Adult Church Training School. He arrived to find that Dr. Yarborough had two daughters who were enrolled at Womans' College in Hattiesburg, now William Carey College. After Leavell had spoken at the evening service, he made two entries in his diary: "The study course went well, we had 275 in attendance," and "I met the Misses Yarboroughs." The following morning he went to Dr. Yarborough's study and spent the morning talking "books" with him. Leavell was favorably impressed with the "kind, scholarly and genteel man." That evening he was invited to the Yarborough home after

52 Leavell Diary, March 22, 1921.
53 Ibid., March 23, 1921.
church and afterwards wrote, "I certainly do like Miss Lilian, she seems to be a deeply spiritual and dedicated young lady." Miss Lilian" was nineteen years old, and her college annual said that she was anything but a "deeply spiritual person." She had told Leavell that she truly wanted to be a missionary to China after his emotional address at chapel at Womans' College. Years later she told her children in a mood of levity, "I knew then God didn't call me to be a missionary when he said there were huge rats in China." Yet, whatever she managed to convince Leavell about herself worked; he made numerous visits the following year to Hattiesburg.

For the first time Oxford lost it charm and Lilian became the object of his new devotion. First he gave to her a Sigma Chi fraternity pin with pearls and tiny diamonds and then a diamond ring. Their affections for each other confirmed, they both promised Mrs. Yarborough that they would not marry until Lilian finished college. Under Lilian's picture in the college annual their impatience was stated succinctly: "End this dreadful year and make two lovers happy." Graduation was exciting to Lilian only because it freed her from the restraint that kept her from marrying Roland.

After an elaborate wedding on June 24, 1923, they left on a honeymoon that lasted a month and took them to Chattanooga's Lookout Mountain, to Atlanta to visit some of Leavell's distant "Peachtree Street cousins," and to scenic spots in Kentucky. Roland was nearly eleven

54 Ibid., March 24, 1921.
55 Conversation with Lilian Y. Leavell.
years older than Lilian and from the day he met her until he died he indulged her as a child. With a sense of awe she took every word he said as literal truth. He called her "radiant Lilian," and gave her a weekly allowance, and told her what she could and could not do; she basked in this security. For the rest of her life she never had a thought that she did not utter aloud, and she never entertained any thought that did not begin or end with "Roland." But most of all, she enjoyed from the very first being "Mrs. Roland Leavell"; he was sensational, and her life was from that point onward simply and totally vicarious. She was stylish, vivacious, and as spoiled as most Southern girls in her social class. She had never cooked, so he hired a cook. She had never ironed or swept floors because her family had two Black maids who took care of such tasks. She frequently talked about her childhood in Jackson, Mississippi, when her father was the pastor of the First Baptist Church and how her playmates were the governor's children who lived next door.56 After she and Roland became engaged, she told Roland, "I just hope I don't ever have to cook, wash clothes, or milk a cow." During World War II, when most former maids were in the shipyards earning good money, Roland came home one day to find his bride, now forty-four years old and married for years, crying at the clothes line in the back yard. It was her first experience as a laundress. As he put his arm around her, she said tearfully, "Just go on and get the cow."57 Roland never minded paying for household help for


57 Author's reminiscence, n.d.
his "radiant Lilian;" he somehow felt that the elegance he had missed in his life was now his through her. She gave him a sense of social standing that he had never had. Roland, who not only had milked cows but scrounged for nickles, married a Southern lady. He frequently in later years teased her in the presence of the children. "Your mama didn't like my friends in Oxford. She always was too hi-falutin' for them."58 But Lilian ended up in Oxford. When she died ten years after Leavell's death and was buried in Oxford, her tombstone read "Radiant Lilian reunited with Roland." Nothing more did she ever want.

Not only did Roland marry in 1923, but he resigned his pulpit in Oxford to pursue a Ph.D. in theology. After the honeymoon, he took his bride to the small, elegant town of Lawrenceburg, Kentucky, a few miles away from the Louisville Seminary, where he had obtained his M.A. in 1914. In Lawrenceburg he became the pastor of the First Baptist Church and at the same time enrolled in the nearby Seminary for full-time post-graduate work.

It is difficult to say what prompted him to resume his education at this time, but a number of possibilities exist: He may have realized that his initial period of study at the Seminary had been less than productive; he may have assumed that his former professors would welcome him back and give him the encouragement that he had lacked before; he may have still felt some disappointment over his effort in the war and hoped to compensate for it by achieving academic success; he may have responded to the example of his former YMCA head, Dr. Guy

58 Ibid.
Benton, who had returned to the presidency of the University of Vermont; he may have sought an alternative to missionary work in China; he may have wished to put educational distance between himself and the popular evangelism and anti-intellectualism associated with Billy Sunday; he may have been attracted to the life of his prospective father-in-law, a scholarly man with a doctorate in theology; and finally he may have wanted to be worthy of his new bride. Whatever the reasons, whether he saw it as a last resort or a new beginning, he returned to education with great exuberance and this time did exceptionally well.

While he attended school, his bride boasted to all the church members in Lawrenceburg that he was an absolutely brilliant man. Leavell basked in her praise and sought to prove her assertions true. She never thought otherwise about him during their life together, and he tried to make certain she did not. Leavell's enthusiasm did not subside in spite of his heavy fall schedule. He rode the train into Louisville for his classes, spent as much time as possible with church affairs, and yet kept his bride supremely happy. He was able during those two years, 1923-25, to do well in all areas of this demanding life. He successfully complete his doctoral program on April 3, 1925 and received a Magna Cum Laude on his dissertation and defense, a rare honor. He solved the problem of preparing sermons by preaching each Sunday on his dissertation subject, and with Lilian, happy as the pastor's wife, the two were able to accomplish the work of keeping the church constituency in Lawrenceburg satisfied. He wrote a four-page letter to Miss Ella Wright from the pastorium in Lawrenceburg during this period:
I hardly know where to begin, for I could never describe all the delights and events of the trip, the cordial welcome here in Lawrenceburg, the thrill of our nice new home... everything good seems to have come my way... our home is lovely. We can't decide which is the prettiest room. The dining room is really our joy for I bought a beautiful walnut Queen Anne suite, including table, buffet, china cabinet, and six chairs. It is wonderful quality and shows up well with all of our... silver, cut glass, china and embroidered wedding gifts. We gave a dinner party... you should have seen your pastor presiding at his own table serving chicken to his guests! We have a dandy good cook to work for us so Lilian can spend her time learning the people and just enjoying our home... the people have won our hearts and Lilian has made a big smash on them... she is going to be the biggest sort of help and inspiration to me. She seems supremely happy... the task of being a pastor's wife seems to delight her beyond all measure.  

Whatever made the difference, he exuded a confidence and assurance he had not had before. It seldom left him thereafter. From now on he was in charge, not only of himself, but often of everyone with whom he came in contact. His exuberant and contagious laugh had a tone of rejoicing and triumph. "He just made you glad you were alive and made you think you, or he, could accomplish anything." Perhaps it was the adoration of his bride, Miss Lilian, and his need to deserve her adulation that established this new pattern in his outlook and actions. Perhaps he at last lost the strange uprooted feeling that had not left him since the death of his mother, a feeling which even going back to

59 Roland Leavell to Ella Wright, July 30, 1923, Leavell Papers, Bowman.

60 Author's taped conversation with Marjorie Rowden Kelly, September, 1982.
Oxford to live had not completely replaced. If a wife and home did make the difference, paradoxically, the hero and model he began to follow in 1924-25 led him without any deviation, straight away from that home.

Roland wrote his dissertation on Paul, the first-century apostle of the New Testament, and Paul became Roland's unseen mentor. Roland used as his dissertation topic "Paul's Missionary Ideals and Methods." (This dissertation was later published under the title The Apostle Paul: Christ's Supreme Trophy). There was a recognizable problem for Leavell using Paul as a model: Paul was single; all of his efforts could center on the primary endeavor of evangelism. Leavell had to consider his wife and later his children. As Paul wrote, "This one thing I do forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Leavell adopted Paul's methods: travel, writing, and preaching; and as Leavell grew older, his evangelistic endeavors became more important to him than even "Miss Lilian" or their children. His preoccupation with work prompted his children later to make statements such as: "I never had many serious talks with him about anything in my whole life." The only time I

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63 Philippians 3:13, 14, Revised Standard Version.

64 Conversation with Dorothea Leavell Hudson, January 24, 1983.
ever tried to talk to him about questions about my doubts and beliefs, he listened, and he just walked off." He was always gone just when I needed him, it seemed, whether it was a crisis with Mother or I needed help with my geometry, especially during my crucial high school days. It is certain that Paul, in Leavell's dissertation, never had the demands of three daughters and a child-bride wife. Paul won out, and Leavell's devotion to "soul-winning" and his earlier evangelistic concerns dominated his life from then on.

Now with a doctorate, a successful marriage, and an end of all his indecision of the past, he accepted the pastorate of a small church in Picayune, Mississippi in 1925. The town had only 2,100 residents; the church was made up mostly of saw mill workers. In later years Leavell referred to this difficult period in his life by saying, "When we were at Pic." It is hard to say with certainty why he left the beautiful, cultured town of Lawrenceburg, Kentucky for Picayune. He may have wanted to return to Mississippi and took the first opportunity presented to him. It was more likely however that, when the first child was born fourteen months after their marriage and the child bride then found herself pregnant again only five months later, she was distraught with a sense of helplessness and fear. As soon as he obtained his degree, they packed and moved to the small undistinguished town of mud streets and mill workers in order to be forty-five miles from Lilian's protective mother in Hattiesburg. In fact, as soon as they arrived in Picayune,


66 Author's reminiscence.
Lilian packed up her young baby and went to Hattiesburg. She stayed there until the second child was born. Some ladies of the Missionary Society of the Picayune Baptist Church remarked forty years later that "We didn't even know she was pregnant and she could have let us know about it . . . we were furious with the preacher's wife." That was not all that went wrong in Picayune. When one of the more prominent mill owners died and Roland was to conduct the funeral, he went fishing early in the morning knowing that by afternoon he could get home, prepare the sermon for the service, and dress appropriately. To his dismay his T-Model Ford became stuck in the mud, and he was unable to budge. When he found help and arrived back in town, he had to borrow a man's coat to put over his fishing outfit and had to deliver the funeral message extemporaneously. But those misfortunes could have been forgiven had he realized as he drove his mud-covered Ford in the funeral procession that his fishing poles were still tied to the top of the car. For this, the community did not easily forgive him.

However, the event that sealed his doom in Picayune resulted from what Mr. S. G. Thigpen called one of the most traumatic events in his 91 years:

When my son Tate Thigpen was eight years old he left with Professor Stringer, the Superintendent of Picayune Schools, to go spend the summer with his grandparents at Bay Springs. When they started out about sun up . . . across the bridge over the Hobolochitto River, they saw a man hanging by his neck from the bridge. The Saturday afternoon before, a group of 5 men came into my store and wanted to buy some rope. It was a strange

67 Telephone interview with Ann West Preston, February 3, 1983.
request, but I went ahead and cut off 40 feet of a good sized rope, after listening to them discuss what they needed. They did not tarry long. I wondered why a group of men wanted 40 feet of rope. Early the next morning I found out what had happened. I went to the bridge to see for sure if I had cut the rope. Yep, I had. It was from my store. Two agents of the U. S. Agricultural Department had been murdered on the Mississippi side of the bridge on old Highway 11. In all my 91 years I have never seen such excitement as over these murders... my memory is that a big majority of people in Picayune thought a good deed had been done.68

Leavell did not think that a good deed had been done. According to witnesses,69 he found out earlier that a group of men were headed for a lynching; and, as they walked through the dusty streets toward the river, he preached in the dark street, pleading with them to stop, to turn around. He was roughly pushed aside and feared for his life. On Sunday next, his sermon denounced murder. "Thou shalt not murder" and "Vengeance is mine saith the Lord" were the texts that he used.

Some of the men involved in the lynching were members of the church and stalked out during the sermon70 when he said:

Any man who masks is a coward... if he will do in a crowd what he would not do alone he is a coward... no doubt lynching is murder... children in this town have murderers for fathers, women who know that their husbands were away in this cowardly crowd can never say to their boys 'be just like your father'...

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68 Mr. S. G. Thigpen to George Ritchey, September n.d., 1980.

69 Ibid.

70 Telephone interview with Ann West Preston, February 3, 1983.
lynching cannot be justified under any circumstances.\textsuperscript{71}

For a preacher in a small Mississippi town to condemn openly members of his congregation was a courageous thing to do. For a new preacher to do so was bravery to the point of danger. But Leavell had not shied from danger in the War, and he had no intention of doing so now. Equally startling was his sweeping condemnation of all lynching. In this case men of the town had lynched two white agricultural agents who had destroyed some distilleries. But Leavell was suggesting that lynching was wrong for Blacks too, and here he was treading on especially thin ice in the early twentieth-century South. Indeed, during his sermon five men in the congregation ostentatiously walked out, revealing not only their disapproval of the message but potential menace for the messenger.

After this episode many people were eager for Roland to leave Picayune. Frank, his brother, who was in religious education work in Atlanta said, "We've got to get Roland out of Pic." And they did. As from France and China and now from a confrontation with another impregnable enemy, Roland was released. With two babies, a terrified young wife, and little to recommend him from his beleaguered pastorate, he received and accepted an invitation to be the pastor of the Baptist Church in Gainesville, Georgia. Here he would experience the depression years and a demon tornado that demolished his church. But he later said, "Gainesville days were the happiest days of my life."\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{71} Roland Leavell, "Thou Shalt Not Murder," First Baptist Church, Picayune, Mississippi, April 15, 1926.

\textsuperscript{72} Author's reminiscence.
CHAPTER 5
GREEN PASTURES ON GREEN STREET

The tumultuous twenties were in full swing when Leavell accepted his new pastorate in Gainesville, Georgia in 1927. The theological issue at stake in the twenties centered around the effort to prevent the teaching of evolutionary theories in public schools. After the Scopes trial in 1925, devout fundamentalists in America sang with fervor and conviction:

William Jennings Bryan is dead, he died one Sabbath day
So sweetly was the king asleep, his spirit passed away:
He was in Dayton, Tennessee, defending our dear lord,
As soon as his work on earth was done, he went to his reward.

He fought the evolutionists, the infidels and fools,
Who are trying to ruin the minds of our children in the schools,
By teaching we came from monkeys and other things absurd
By denying the works of our blessed Lord and God's own holy word.¹

As a conservative, evangelical minister, Leavell could endorse every line of the song with no hesitation. Neither did he need to explain his stand to the people in Gainesville, who totally agreed with him. William Jennings Bryan became a revered name in his sermons while Clarence Darrow was branded an "infidel who sought to destroy God's truth."² Since Seminary days and his study with Dr. Mullins, Leavell

¹Hodding Carter, Southern Legacy (Baton Rouge, La., 1950), p. 27.
²Roland Leavell, "Fears of Faith," First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Georgia, July 5, 1935.
had settled any theological quandary he might encounter that might refute what he judged to be Biblical truth, including the Genesis account of creation, by arguing that religious proof should be held separately from scientific or philosophical proofs. Religion was governed by its own set of principles and science was subject to its own methodology. In the case of evolution, however, Leavell did not perceive it as a scientific theory divorced from religion, but the intrusion of science into the sanctuary of religion itself. Thus Charles Darwin and Clarence Darrow were partners in the attempt to discredit the literal truth of the Bible. Roland agreed with William Jennings Bryan in the belief in inerrancy of Scripture, but he felt Bryan should not have allowed Darrow to attack Biblical truth with scientific facts; instead he should have used inner experience and personal revelation, a different set of principles belonging to the religious arena only, or as Dr. Mullins said, "confirm the truth by the immediate presence of God." Roland used the thunderous rhetoric of the fundamentalists, and the citizens of Gainesville were swept up in admiration of the man who could voice their views of the wicked evolutionists in such eloquent phrases. They felt that Leavell gave them a voice of protest against forces that caused unanswerable questions about God's word.

The front page of the *Gainesville News* heralded Leavell as "... a man of deep piety, dramatic eloquence, and in the prime of his life. The largest congregation ever assembled in the auditorium welcomed this

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3 Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, p. 216.
great man we are so fortunate to have in our community."

He preached his first sermon on "Mother, Home and Heaven." In Gainesville the Leavells did, indeed, think they had all gone to heaven. The Leavells were given a Southern home on Green Street Circle, the finest section of town. White Doric columns on the wide veranda and the spacious, shaded lawn were all Lilian could have hoped for in her love of elegance. Furthermore, she was overjoyed to find Fannie Ruth Wilkins, a Black woman in her mid-twenties, who spoke infrequently, and who worked hard each day from 7 o'clock in the morning to 5 o'clock ironing, cleaning, cooking, washing dishes, and caring for the children — all for five dollars a week. The pantry in the new house was stocked by the church people with canned goods, fresh farm eggs, flour, and produce. The newspaper announced all the receptions and parties to follow. Gainesville loved Leavell from the outset and never stopped telling him so. When after ten years he attempted to resign to take another position, the church refused to accept his resignation. Consequently, he never officially resigned. The minutes of the church simply read, "He left our pastorate and everyone cried."

Leavell was aware throughout his pastorate that America was changing, and in his initial sermon on "Mother, Home and Heaven," he lamented that the era had passed when his grandmother and others like her sat and read the Bible to slave children on Sunday afternoon. He charged that now families were too busy with "father at the golf

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5 First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Ga., Minutes, January 4, 1937.
course, mother at the bridge table, sister at the dance, brother in
the flivver with a flapper, while all the children were at the
movies.6 He harkened back to the days of early pioneers who took
three things of major importance as they crossed the frontier in
covered wagons: the family, the blue back speller and the Bible. "At
a pause in the clearing, the family built a home, the speller inspired
the school house, and the Bible instigated the church. Thus, our
civilization grew."7 In a time when the people of Gainesville asked
about the frightening revolution in morals and manners, he told them
what they wished to hear -- that "back to normalcy" would be a return
to the past. Leavell, the conservative, used his persuasive preaching
to assure them that all would remain the same. He convinced Gaines­
ville by his very manner that he was the backward-looking visionary
and warrior who could preserve things just as they had been or die
trying. And one element of society he intended to preserve was the
subordination of Blacks to Whites.

White supremacy was the order of the day in Gainesville. In this
secluded Southern town of 15,000 people, his speech to the Kiwanis
Club shortly after his arrival confirmed the opinion of the community
leaders in town that here was a man who would not upset the status quo.
"In our blood flows the purest blood of the Anglo-Saxons" he told his

6 Roland Leavell, "Character," First Baptist Church, Gainesville,
Georgia, January 4, 1928.

7 Ibid.
fellow townsmen. He cited statistics that showed Gainesville had a Black population of sixteen percent which was "exactly right for an ideal Southern town." Presumably, he approved of the Blacks in their role as servants in the community: more than sixteen percent could conceivably cause problems. He agreed with the editor of the Atlanta Constitution who said "the best blood of the Southerners was shed to defend the principle of white supremacy." He decried the decision of Herbert Hoover, who was running as the Republican candidate for president in 1928, to permit Whites and Blacks to mingle during his administration of war relief efforts during World War I. Hoover allowed them to "feed together, to use the same rest rooms, and this was not corrected until Wilson found out and made new regulations." What could one expect of a man, Leavell noted, who had lived outside the United States and spent years in another culture as Hoover had done?

Although Roland did not sanction the methods of the Ku Klux Klan -- and was clearly opposed to lynching as his Picayune days had shown -- he clearly demonstrated his belief in many of the same ideals of white racial supremacy and the necessity of protecting white womanhood set forth by the Klan. On one occasion a publicly announced Klan wedding was held there amid, not candles, but torches which gave the ceremony

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8 Roland Leavell, "Valleys of Hall," Kiwanis Club, Gainesville, Georgia, October 10, 1928.

9 Ibid.


11 Gainesville Eagle (Gainesville, Ga.), October 12, 1928, p. 8.
an eerie cast. Leavell mused that not only the bride wore white but the Klan minister did as well. The newspaper, in giving the account of the Klan wedding, said that "order was maintained."12 "Order" to Gainesville and the vigorous new preacher meant white supremacy and protection of Southern womanhood. Leavell was frequently heard to say, "I don't like to think about my little daughters going to school with little white boys, much less Black ones."13 White supremacy, chastity of womanhood, and preservation of the prohibition statute were supreme in the Gainesville code. While Leavell preached often on such topics as salvation, baptism, closed communions, and the second coming of Christ, no sermons focused on inequality, oppression, and subjugation as contemporary evils.

The seven worst evils of the day were listed by Roland as easy divorce, sexual impurity, political corruption, greed, business dishonesty, the moving picture show (which he had enjoyed in his younger days), and strong drink, which had been illegal since 1920. Almost all of his Gainesville constituents agreed with him on these issues. Members who drank in secret sat in church as they heard his booming sermons against liquor and nodded in agreement. One sermon, "Liquor the Curse of All the Ages," created a remarkable stir in North Georgia after it was reprinted in the Gainesville paper and copied by papers of neighboring towns as well as the Atlanta Constitution.


13 Author's reminiscence.
... if Satan should assemble all the demons in Hell to send as emissaries to this earth to destroy civilization, to blight the gospel, to corrupt character, and swell the population of Hell, he could do no better than to send liquor ...

The greatest enemy in our land has been the big booze promoter. Woe betide us if our land is turned over to him. We would be safer in the hands of Ivan the Terrible, Attila the Hun, Herod the baby killer, Jezebel the patron saint of the harlot, Benedict Arnold, the traitor or Tom Paine the infidel, as we would be in the hands of the booze promoter. Liquor is a liar; lying liquor says that there are more alcohol deaths now than when it was allowed to run free. That is a lie. Statistics show that the peak of alcohol deaths were in 1912, 1913, and 1916. Liquor promises to bring cheer and brings sorrow, promises to bring health and brings disease, promises to bring prosperity and brings poverty, promises to bring happiness and brings misery. Liquor is a notorious liar. Liquor is a murderer; it is a land of drunkenness where the ravens of hell build, and hatch, and croak, buzzing serpents crawl, and hiss, and spit their venom, hellish demons flit and scream through the air as they kill and destroy. Hear a poor, drunken victim laugh like a fool, bray like an ass, curse like a blasphemer, and wallow in his own vomit. See him beat his wife and sell his children's shoes to buy more drink. See his body gone, nerves shattered, mind upset, soul damned, reputation gone, and fortune wasted. Liquor delights to murder young boys. Hear the Retail Liquor Association pronouncement in 1912 in Ohio 'we must create an appetite for liquor among young boys or else our counters will be empty.' Home brew makers join hands with these murderers so that through the years you can hear the sound haunt you 'You murdered me.' Liquor has the brain of a beast, the heart of a hyena, the appetite of a vulture, and the smell of a skunk. Did you ever see a drunkard die? I have ... He raves, and cries, and weeps, and fights, and curses, groans, and screeches. Your first drink, young person, is a barbed arrow which will open a wound to your soul to fester, rot, and kill. Let us have our blood running in the gutters before we allow our country to be run by the black-hearted spawns of
hell who would deliver us into the hands of the liquor traffic . . . 14

This sermon gained notoriety for Leavell. Letters praising it were printed in the newspaper. In some instances, it had been read to entire churches, and many standing ovations were reported. Individuals wrote in to thank the paper for the "knock-out blow" against liquor. 15 Leavell was even asked to preach his sermon in the Gainesville high schools. The extravagant popular reaction reflects the views of the community on drink. Gainesville was a town where the local W.C.T.U. rang the bells of all the churches at noon on each anniversary of the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment. The citizens knew that the man who now preached from the pulpit and wrote with a fiery pen was there to keep the evil of liquor away from their streets.

To further his anti-drinking campaign, Roland made it a practice to fraternize as much as possible with those who were noted drinkers in town. He hunted, fished, and visited with men whom he thought he might lure away from their habit of home-brew indulgence. He often said that he loved the drunkard away from his cup but hated with vehemence the evil in the cup. Around the square each day he shook hands and traded jokes with those he considered "worldly men," but when he stepped into the pulpit to thunder against drink, his message possessed no trace of joviality.

The election of 1918 in many ways crystallized his basic views on


15Ibid., April 7, 1932, p. 8.
sin, faith, and proper Southern living. Although the South had by this time been persistently Democratic for many years, the Party's candidate for president in that year was Al Smith, Roman Catholic, Yankee from New York, and advocate of the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment — all the things Leavell disliked. In the face of Smith's nomination, Leavell felt called upon to encourage the people of Gainesville to reject him as a candidate, not to protest his political platform (for Leavell, repealing the Eighteenth Amendment was not a question of politics but of morals), but because Smith was simply not "our kind" of man.

Roland's view of "our kind" also appealed to the people in Gainesville as he delivered speeches to clubs and schools as well as sermons in the churches. By this time he had conformed to the prevailing view among conservative Protestants that Catholics were not true Christians, were somehow un-American, and consequently were worthy objects of his evangelical mission. There were very few Catholics in Gainesville, and he spoke of Catholics from the pulpit as aliens and enemies in the land. "Catholics are like lambs when they are in the minority. They are like foxes when they are equal in population to the Protestants, but they are like bears when they are in the majority." He warned against what he considered the false teachings of the Catholic Church; infant Baptism, veneration of Mary, and the infallibility of the Pope. Catholic ritualism he denounced as empty and meaningless, and he frequently recounted lurid descriptions of the burning of the Anglican Bishops,

16 Roland Leavell, Unpublished sermon.
Cranmer and Ridley, by Mary Tudor in sixteenth-century England. As Federal immigration laws became more rigid, prohibiting Southern Europeans, almost surely Catholic, from entering the United States, he congratulated legislators for finally supporting what the South had always known, "that we should keep our land pure."17 Roland used historic episodes to support his idea that God destined America for white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. "God willed to turn Columbus to the South by causing him to follow a flight of birds, thereby sending the civilization of Southern Europe to South America, and thus saved North America for Anglo-Saxon culture."18 He cited the sixteenth chapter of Acts, saying that God had His finger pointed to America when Paul, as the missionary apostle, was led to go toward the west into Europe rather than return to the east.19 "Christianity moved continually in our direction." "God saved Western Europe and America from the Moslem religion when the Saracens were turned back at Tours in 732."20 As he cited the defeat of the Spanish Armada by Elizabeth's Protestant England, he concluded, "none of us can fail to see the hand of God in preserving this land for us and for our kind."21 It made no difference to the people of Gainesville that his selection of historic events to

17 Roland Leavell, "America and Her Mission," Gainesville, Georgia, March 9, 1933.

18 Leavell, Saving America, p. 20.


20 Leavell, Saving America, p. 10.

21 Ibid., p. 12.
bolster his claim for a pure American race carefully omitted — among other things — the relevant facts of slavery. Roland regarded the facts that Gutenberg printed the Bible in 1450, that Columbus discovered America in 1492, and that Martin Luther tacked his ninety-five theses to the cathedral door in 1517 as events sent by God to insure freedom for Protestants to read the Bible in America. The people of Gainesville were proud to have such a well-informed man who could cite history to support what they knew was the providential purpose of God. Roland did not burn fiery crosses with the Klan, but he did proclaim with a vehement ring of assurance that the "cross of Christ" was behind the kind of elitism that controlled Gainesville and the South.

"Our kind" essentially consisted of Southerners, white people, Protestants, usually members of the middle or upper classes, and, preferably, Baptists. Calls to help the Blacks or the disadvantaged who were not "our kind" did not enter his preaching. This does not mean that there were no such calls in the Southern Baptist Church at this time. Indeed, one of his most admired professors of the Louisville Seminary was now writing and preaching extensively throughout the South for a "Christianizing of the social order." This professor, Dr. A. J. Robertson, saw to it that courses offered in social ethics, social problems, and welfare work be incorporated with the usual theology courses at the Seminary. Other prominent ministers such as Dr. J. M. Price, a professor at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 22

22 Catalogue of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, 1926-30.
published books such as *Christianity and the Social Problems*, in which he charged that the weakest point in contemporary Christianity was the application of Christ's teaching to modern conditions. Therefore, social efforts by Baptists were not unfamiliar to Leavell at this time. However, he chose to remain with his early persuasion that personal evangelism was the church's sole mission. Leavell generally felt it was a waste to spend any time or effort on Blacks. Blacks were needed for manual work, and he thought they should be thankful to be in America where they were far better off than in Africa. "They have their own religion so leave them alone," he frequently said. Leavell enlisted a choir of one hundred Black voices to sing at one of his tent revivals, and huge crowds of whites thronged to hear them. In 1934 a young five-year-old boy, brought to the Baptist Association meeting in Newnan, Georgia, stood up on a table to sing a solo, accompanied on the piano by his mother. The boy, Martin Luther King, Jr., received a standing ovation after his performance. He lived and died in an effort to see repudiated much of what Roland Leavell and Gainesville's green pastures stood for.

Curiously, one of the persons whom Leavell influenced greatly at this time was Clarence Jordan, one of the most prominent Southern Baptist promoters of social justice and interracial cooperation as well as

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24 Author's reminiscence.

the author of the "Cotton Patch Gospels." At a revival at the University of Georgia, Jordan responded to Leavell's call to rededicate his life to Christ. He became a student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and excelled in the study of the New Testament. As a result of his studies, he became convinced that his mission was to demonstrate brotherly love between the White and Black community. He received remarkable international press coverage because his efforts were rewarded by frequent bombings and harassment when he established the Koinonia, an experimental communal farm in Americus, Georgia.

As renowned as Jordan became, Leavell regarded him as a failure because he had strayed from the path of soul-winning to minister to people other than "our kind." Leavell frequently shook his head when Clarence Jordan was mentioned. "What a waste! I had such high hopes for Clarence. What a waste of that scholarly mind and superior personality. I had no idea that he would turn out to be an off-beat fanatic."26

Leavell's views of the need to maintain some distance between "our kind" and "others" persisted to the end of his life, although he recognized the practical need to make adjustments as times changed. In 1960, many years after the Gainesville pastorate had ended, Leavell sat by his television set during the confrontation between James Meredith and Governor Ross Barnett in Oxford, Mississippi, and wrote to his daughter, "It breaks my heart to see what is going on at my beloved Ole Miss."27

26 Author's reminiscence.

He frequently said disparagingly, "There is no way out of this mess except that in years to come our Anglo-Saxon race will have more kink in our hair and there will be more music in our souls," meaning that intermarriage was inevitable. He finally admitted that the South had done this to itself and quoted Thomas Jefferson in regard to future effects of slavery in the South: "I tremble when I think we have a just God." By this he meant that Jefferson's God was meting out His punishment upon the South for bringing Blacks in the first place.

Leavell succumbed to integration when he had to do so. He was President of the New Orleans Theological Seminary when Blacks were first admitted, but he was always fearful that some of the racist supporters of his Southern Baptist school would withdraw their financial help when they saw Black faces on the campus and in the dormitories. He would have preferred to exclude Blacks from the Seminary, but he did not wish to confront Federal authorities or to spend time battling in courtrooms or on the campus as leaders of many Southern secular universities were doing at the time. He regarded integration as a deplorable fact of life, but it was less important than peace and harmony on the campus.

He quoted from the scriptures "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" but he frequently added in regard to integration "Now Caesar has gone to meddling," using a Black colloquial expression to indicate that the Federal government had injected its influence beyond proper

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28 Conversation with Dr. Leonard Sanderson, June 9, 1982.

29 Author's reminiscence.

30 Matthew 22:21
boundaries.

In regard to racial issues, the decade of the twenties brought no significant changes in Leavell's attitude, and apparently throughout his life he was never seriously troubled by an awkward social conscience, even though he was aware that in 1925 the Southern Baptist Convention had published a testament of faith encouraging Baptists of the South to work "with all men of good will in every good cause." This statement of Baptist principles described the kingdom of God as one which embraced every human relationship and "every form of organized human society." These tenets were in direct conflict with Roland's own views that the present social order could not be helped by human effort, because "only God's transforming grace can change a man." "Change," of course, meant a change to being one of "our kind" with "our set of beliefs." Certainly it did not mean a change in the social status of Blacks with more equality before the law, more education, or less poverty. Convert the drunkard and the Catholic; enlist the unchurched White person; but because not even God could make a Black person white, Blacks could never become "our kind."

To proclaim these and other views, Roland employed the flamboyant, revivalistic style characteristic of the Fundamentalist preachers. William James, in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, stated, "No prophet can claim to bring a final message unless he says things that have a sound of reality . . . but the deliverance must come in as strong a form as the question, if it is to take effect; and that seems a reason why

31Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity*, p. 130.
the coarser religions, revivalistic, orgiastic, with blood and miracles and supernatural operations, may possibly never be displaced. Some constitutions need them too much." 32 Leavell judged his listeners correctly as they entered his church from the world of flagpole sitters, new automobiles with wicked rumble seats, movies with seductive titles, and bootleg rum. His parishioners needed his high-sounding logic and convincing, booming voice to match the day. He differed, however, from other revivalists of the time in that he considered himself an intellectual. An intellectual evangelist was a rarity indeed.

He filled his sermons with illustrative stories and quotes taken from world history and literature. Clovis, Constantine, St. Francis of Assisi, Savanarola, Augustine, Alexander the Great, Plato and the American forefathers were all mentioned in his sermons. His knowledge of Shakespeare was employed in nearly every sermon to substantiate his ideas; Lady MacBeth's "Out, damned spot" to dramatize the stain of sin and King Lear's "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child" for man's ingratitude to God for blessings. His ability to quote long passages from countless poems by Tennyson, Shakespeare, Homer, Browning, Kipling, Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Byron, Keats and others brought praise and admiration. In his later years, a paralyzing stroke left Leavell unable to remember the hundreds of passages he had memorized. He angrily took each page from the notebook in which he had compiled his memorized poetry, and, as he struggled to recuperate physically, rememorized each poem one by one and then replaced

32 William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 192.
it in the book. At the time of his death, five years after the debili­
tating stroke, he had recaptured his ability to memorize and to recite.

He never needed to analyze issues of the day or theological dis­
putes, since rhetoric and showmanship were what Gainesville appreciated. He charmed audiences and held them spellbound. Sermons introduced by a description of a great piece of art or architecture were decidedly dif­ferent from most evangelical, conservative preachers or any fundamen­
talists of his day, so he was considered by many as atypical of his breed. They did not have to think or reason or concern themselves with puzzling questions. He had the answers all worked out and could use the most appealing methods to convince his listeners of their correct­ness. A favorite story to illustrate the unmasking of God by the coming of Jesus to earth was taken from Homer. Hector's wife, Andromache, went to the gates of Troy to bid her husband farewell. His tiny son saw his warrior father clad in burnished armor, steel helmet, waving plume, and clanging sword; and the child, stricken with terror, did not recog­nize him. Thus Hector put down his weapons, laid aside the helmet, and threw back the visor, and the little boy with tears still on his cheeks recognized his father. Leavell described this scene just as Thorwaldsen had captured it in marble sculpture. He then said to the listeners, "the holiness of God may frighten you, a sinner . . . but God unmasked himself in the person of Jesus and thus you, the sinner, will spring into the loving arms of God." 33 This kind of story, derived from an­cient pagan sources, was unusual for any evangelist. By exposing his

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congregation to such sources, he believed himself to be intellectual, and many others were convinced that he indeed was.

All Gainesville waited, however, to see if Leavell could hold his own with a prominent atheist in town, a long-time resident and physician named Dr. A. C. Downey, for whom the Gainesville hospital was named. Revered for his gentle, humanitarian manner, Downing did not go to any church and openly avowed that he did not believe in God. The eagerly-expected encounter between the new preacher and the skeptical doctor occurred on the town square where Leavell was accustomed to spend afternoons visiting with people who would not or did not attend church. Dr. Downey approached him and expectant onlookers multiplied quickly around them. "Parson," he said, "I want to ask you a question. Recently a young, unmarried woman came to the hospital here, and I delivered her of a fine, healthy baby boy. She declared that her baby had no human father. I want to ask you if you would believe her story."

Leavell, after a long minute of anxiety, replied:

Sir, if that mother's son had been born in fulfillment of prophecy for fifteen hundred years, if his birth had been acclaimed by angels and stars of heaven, if he had lived a life so sinless that his worst enemies could not convict him of a sin, if his touch had healed lepers and opened blind eyes, if his word called forth dead from the grave, if his words had been so full of truth men for ages said that never man spake like him and ... if they put soldiers to guard his grave but he came forth ... and if his words had been preached for 1900 years inspiring institutions of mercy wherever he was known ... if all these things were true of that unmarried mother's son, oh yes, sir, I would believe that mother's story.34

34Leavell, Saving America, p. 62.
Dr. Downey shook his hand; they became friends. Dr. Downey and Leavell hunted together, and Dr. Downey subsequently performed surgery on the Leavell children and delivered Lilian of a third child, another little girl. Neither converted the other to his views, but each professed admiration for the other. Conducting Dr. Downey's funeral was one of the most difficult things Leavell ever had to do. Only those human beings who believed in the divinity of Christ and accepted Him in a personal encounter during which they acknowledged Him as their hope for eternal life could be saved; thus, Dr. Downey, by his own admission, was not saved according to Leavell's views. Leavell actually thought his friend Downey to be in Hell, and that was desperately tragic to him.

Leavell also sustained other disappointments while he was in Gainesville. Doubtless, he wanted a son. He felt strongly that men were the anointed carriers of the gospel. When the third child was born and was a girl, Leavell, who had grown up with eight brothers and no sisters, was sorely disappointed. However, his first few hours of disappointment turned to horror when it appeared that his fragile, young wife would die in childbirth. She remained desperately ill for days but then recovered. The little girl was named Dorothea, a word meaning "gift from God." Another gift was the life of his wife, Lilian, whom he wished to make happy in spite of his own disappointment.

Lilian was never as happy in Gainesville as Roland was. She found it difficult to make friends. The socially prominent ladies with personality and style, with whom she felt comfortable, played bridge several afternoons a week. She could not associate with them because
her husband preached against card playing. On the other hand, she did not find the older ladies of the W.C.T.U. to her liking and never joined any of the chapters so active in Gainesville. Lilian was young, vivacious, and too pretty and well-dressed to convince many people that she was spiritual. However, she found her place of service in the church by organizing a Sunday School class of girls from Brenau College, an expensive, well-established, prestigious girls' school just a few blocks from the church. The girls came from wealthy homes all over the United States. They were members of the best sororities and dressed in furs and tight felt cloche hats. Lilian enjoyed teaching them on Sunday, and they came to her house for parties and class meetings. She took them on afternoon picnics and had elegant teas for them in her Green Street Circle home. She invited members of the faculty to come to the social festivities of the class as well. Leavell was proud that Lilian was able to be "such an influence on the community by getting these girls to church."35 The truth, of course, was that most of them came to Sunday School and to the parties but seldom stayed for his preaching services. They were not serious converts but Lilian's substitutes for the social circles forbidden her.

Lilian joined several literary or study clubs that she was allowed to attend, and frequently she rode the opera train to Atlanta to attend cultural functions there. However, she was miserable beyond expression when Roland was away from her. She felt deprived, slighted, and rejected when he left to hold revivals, deliver addresses, or attend

35 Roland Leavell to Lilian Leavell, July 20, 1937, Leavell Papers, Bowman.
conventions elsewhere. She found herself alone much of the time and felt some pain when Gainesville was singing his praises and many Southern Baptists were taking note of his obvious successes. She never resented his activity as long as she could be by his side. His poignant love letters from afar showed unmistakably the nature of the relationship. "You may rest assured that I do love you even though I have to be away from you and I am lonesome for you even though I know you don't believe me," he wrote. In the evenings when he was away fulfilling a speaking engagement or ensconced in his study preparing messages and manuscripts, Lilian sat with the neighbors out in the front yard on Green Street Circle. The children played tag under the street light and put fireflies in glass jars. While other husbands sat with their wives on the lawn, Roland was always busy in some other place, and his impatience with such a waste of time was obvious. Anyway, his sense of urgency always gave others around him an uncomfortable feeling, so he never joined Lilian in her leisure. She, however, never missed a chance to accompany him to funerals, weddings, or conventions when it was possible for her to go. She particularly begged him to take her on out-of-town engagements. She frequently left her three children with neighbors or church members, or she invited her parents and unmarried sister to come and take over the household when she traveled with Roland. She and Roland left for seven weeks on a trip to Europe and the Holy Land when the youngest of her three was less than two years old. To be with Roland was all that she wanted,

36 Ibid., August 23, 1933.
but much of the time that was impossible. She cried frequently and once seemed on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Roland arranged for her to go to a rest home to restore her. They drove to the scenic spot located on the South Carolina coast, where he spent the night to help her get settled. But when he was ready to return, she got in the automobile with him and came home. She needed no other care but his presence.

For him, however, work was always pressing. He continued to accept invitations to preach in Canada, in the Canal Zone, and in cities throughout the United States. On one occasion he wrote to Lilian from New York City:

This day — the 21st of July 1937 — will stand out in my memory as one on which I found out all over again how much I do love you. I've scarcely had a minute when you haven't been on my mind. I wish I could take you all the places you want to go. Nothing makes me more unhappy than to see you unhappy. I feel that I'd give all I could possess to see you right now and hold you in my arms. You will ever be my own precious sweetheart and I could never be happy without you. I am yours in utter abandon.37

Yet the next day he left for Europe taking a party of fifty persons to be gone for several weeks — and without Lilian. He wrote from Europe, "I am so proud of you for the brave way you took your disappointment in not getting to go to Europe. I have missed you terribly. I have seen all of Europe I want. All I want to do now is get home

37Ibid., July 21, 1937.
and see the girls I love and to preach Christ."  

Somehow "preaching Christ" always meant more travel, more engagements, and more absences from home. Her unhappiness at his frequent absences and his awareness of her unhappiness spawned some trying times for both of them.

During Leavell's pastorate in Gainesville he experienced considerable sorrow over the death of his eldest brother, a death that notably inspired Leavell to add a new profession to his life: that of authorship. Landrum died in 1929, and not long after Leavell published a biography of him which enjoyed some success among Southern Baptist readers. He called in *An Unashamed Workman*, the title of Landrum's most frequently-used address based on the scripture 2 Timothy 2:15 "study to show theyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."  The account of his brother's life was designed primarily to be a biography, but Roland also wished to describe the early history of the development of the teaching arms of the church, Sunday School and Baptist Young People's Union, enterprises in which Landrum had played a significant role.

Landrum, indeed, had organized and promoted teaching skills throughout the Southern Baptist Convention and had amplified the ministry of the church from one of merely preaching to teaching through his platform, classroom, and writing skills. Landrum was a dignified, restrained teacher, organizer, writer, and seminary professor, who, in the early stages of Leavell's career, had urged him to stay in Oxford and teach rather than to go away to preach.

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38 Ibid., August 13, 1937.

It was also Landrum who, early on, encouraged Leavell to study Shakespeare and introduced him to other literary masterpieces. Landrum's knowledge of English literature influenced his own writing as well as Roland's. He prepared a simplified adaptation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, designed for use by young people in church training sessions. The book, as Landrum intended it, was to be studied over a week's time during which the spiritual significance of Bunyan's work would be interpreted. Roland taught Landrum's book first from the original manuscript before it had been published; the author himself sat in the room, at the back, delighted with the audience response to his brother as the teacher. Although Leavell, when he first taught it, was skeptical about its success, the published book became extremely popular among many denominations. Roland Leavell claimed subsequently to have taught the book to thousands of young people.

By teaching Landrum's interpretation of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Leavell was able to simplify the Christian experience for himself and others. He always wanted simple answers, and this work seemed to provide them, nicely labeled for his use. For the remainder of his life, he called people by titles that Bunyan had given to his characters. Mr. Faithful was Mr. T. H. Robertson, the longtime Superintendent of the Gainesville Sunday School and Chairman of the Board of Deacons; Mr. Greatheart was Mr. Lowrey Eastland, who gave much money and time to the New Orleans Seminary; Leavell pictured himself as Evangelist, who pointed the way to the struggling Christian who climbed the Hill of

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40 Landrum Pinson Leavell, *Pilgrim's Progress for Baptist Young People* (Nashville, 1921).
Difficulty and finally escaped Vanity Fair where Mr. Worldlywise tried to lure Christians into the paths of sin. C. S. Lewis stated that the worst possible thing that one could do to Bunyan's great allegory was to make the "speakers step out of the allegorical story"; Leavell's teaching of Landrum's book did just that. "Allegory frustrates itself the moment the author starts doing what could be done in a straight sermon or treatise," continued Lewis. "This fault is rare in Bunyan. If such dead wood were removed from Pilgrim's Progress, the book would not be very much shorter than it is." The two Leavell brothers, however, treated the vehicle of allegory as if it needed to be translated. Everything symbolized experiences specific to the Christian life as they interpreted it.

When Leavell died, he had a prepared manuscript entitled The Christian Experience in Pilgrim's Progress. It was his only one that was never accepted for publication, and he did not understand why the publisher refused to print it. He did not realize that he had done the worst thing possible to an allegory. Of course, what C. S. Lewis and others have described as Bunyan's narrowness and exclusive religious outlook are exactly what appealed to both Landrum and Roland. "One small sect and all are damned beside." Moreover, the "dark doctrine"

42Ibid., p. 152.
44Lewis, Essays, p. 152.
of Hell has never been more horrifyingly stated than in the words that conclude Part 1: "Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction." The flames of Hell always flickered on Bunyan's horizon; likewise Leavell seldom preached a sermon that did not contain the flames of a Hell as hot and threatening as Bunyan's. Landrum's influence in introducing Roland to Pilgrim's Progress was indeed great. Roland made four visits to the Bunyan countryside in England during his frequent overseas trips. He attributed the simple tinker's work to "inspiration" as did C. S. Lewis.

Leavell's biography of his brother served him in several ways. It made public the life of the Leavell family and the varied accomplishments of the educators, ministers, and missionaries who were the nine boys of George and Corra Leavell. Illustrations from the book were quoted in Sunday School lessons and Baptist Training Union Quarterly studies and were idealized by the Baptist denomination, which was trying to prescribe a Christian response for the period of depression. Being poor did not matter was the message the Leavell family offered to those in anguish over economic deprivation; only character and determination instilled by strict family dedication to Christian principles mattered. This ideal family demonstrated the kind of upbringing that Baptists could heartily recommend.

Leavell was delighted with the positive reception of the book. Few things gave him more satisfaction in his subsequent ministry than

\[45\] Ibid.
to see his numerous books and scores of articles in print. His children and lonely wife stated that throughout most of their lives with him, they went to sleep at night with the sound of a typewriter pounding behind the closed door of his study as he produced his latest manuscript. Leavell's publications reflected what he believed and proclaimed from the pulpit. With the rare exception of an article that he published in Field and Stream about a quail hunting episode, he wrote only of religious matters. Even a small book about his mother and a sentimental autobiography written after his retirement for the benefit of his children and grandchildren were conscious thrusts toward one end: salvation for the sinner now with assurance of heaven in the hereafter.

He wrote books of sermons for preachers; he wrote books to instruct lay people and the clergy in evangelistic methods; he wrote expository books dealing with the Old and New Testaments to be used in Southern Baptist study courses; and he wrote a textbook for seminary evangelism classes. He wrote articles that appeared in almost every Southern Baptist publication — mission magazines, young people's quarterlies, and Sunday school materials. In all of these efforts he hoped to inspire readers to become united against the evils of the world primarily by adopting his evangelistic ideas. He frequently said, "Do something in life worth writing about or write something worth reading."

Writing or being written about he perceived as a criterion for success; writing gave him a wider audience for his views and kept his name ever

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47 Author's reminiscence.
before the public. He frequently justified his writing by saying that it helped pay the bills. On one occasion he wrote to his oldest daughter who was away at college, "I will never be able to pay your tuition at college if I do not get busy and finish my book already contracted for, Christianity Our Citadel and get some royalties coming in." Writing became an obsession with him and the biography of Landrum was the genesis of this passion. As Landrum's death had stimulated his writing, Jim's death reinforced Roland's dedication to evangelism. Indeed, his funeral oration included a statistical analysis of how many persons Jim had brought to public conversion during his ministry. Jim had been pastor of one of the largest churches in Texas, the First Baptist Church of Houston, and for fifteen years he was acclaimed for his intense evangelism. Jim went to China, as Leavell had done, thinking to be a missionary, but, after a few short, frustrating months, borrowed money and brought his family home. He remarked on his homecoming, "I can preach in English so much easier than I can in Chinese. I am preaching in America." Jim, according to Roland, brought "multiplied thousands to Christ . . . during the last twenty months of his all-too-brief fifty-three years of life, Jim has seen over two thousand souls united with churches on profession of faith in Christ in the wake of his preaching." Leavell planned to be as successful if not more so.

48 Roland Q. Leavell, Christianity Our Citadel (Atlanta, 1943).

49 Personal Questionnaire, James B. Leavell, 1930, Possession of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

50 Roland Q. Leavell, "Manifestations of a Mighty Ministry," funeral sermon for Dr. James B. Leavell, December 6, 1933.
Upon Leavell's return to Gainesville from the funeral, he entered into a new and vigorous effort to "carry the torch my brother Jim has left for me." He went to Chicopee and New Holland (cotton mill villages outside of Gainesville), conducted a house-to-house census, and established new churches for these communities, preaching as often as he could to their congregations. He pitched a tent near the courthouse square in Gainesville, laid sawdust on the ground, and preached to benches full of the poor people in town who would not or did not come to his more elite First Baptist Church. He conducted a three weeks' revival in his own church and, instead of inviting an outside preacher as was the custom, conducted the services himself. Editorials in the Gainesville paper attested to the widespread influence on Gainesville these revivals had. Said one editorial, "everyone is hunting these days, hunting for money, hunting for deer and birds, hunting for bootleggers, hunting for Lindburgh's baby; may we should hunt more for God as the great preacher at the First Baptist Church is now asking us to do in his revival messages that have packed that church to capacity every night."51

Leavell's reputation as a revivalist began to spread, and he was invited to other localities to teach less successful ministers his evangelical methods. He commented that he was grateful that the Gainesville church was more generous with his time and did not limit the number of engagements he could accept outside his own home community. The Capitol Avenue Baptist Church in Atlanta enjoyed one of his

more successful revival campaigns, and, as a result, C. Frank Garrison, the Chairman of the Board of Deacons for that church, wrote a letter to the Gainesville Eagle thanking the entire community for sharing "the greatest man who held the greatest revival this church has ever experienced." Later Frank Garrison, as a member of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board of trustees, would be instrumental in enticing Roland away from Gainesville to accept the major evangelistic position in the Southern Baptist Convention, Superintendent of Evangelism. The torch he picked up from his brothers brought him success and fulfillment. However, there was one issue that he had to face for which he and other Americans had few mentors to follow: the Great Depression.

In the fall of 1919, just when businesses were booming, the cotton mills were expanding, an airport was under construction, and merchants around the square were anticipating great sales at Christmas, the financial crash that stunned all America occurred. Gainesville absorbed the news slowly, and it was not until late 1930 and early 1931 that the real brunt of the Depression struck there. Numerous sales of farms, tracts of farm land, and contents of local stores were held in Gainesville, the county seat of Hall County, to satisfy tax requirements. Hoboes began to drop off the passing freight cars, and some died in the Gainesville Midland Railroad yard. Beggars solicited from door to door. Country people came in wagons to sell country butter, roasting ears (corn), and chickens to the townspeople, but no one had money to buy. Men of honor and responsibility in town suffered humiliation and

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52 Letter to the Editor, Gainesville Eagle, April 21, 1932, p. 8.
the same sense of displacement and hopelessness that sapped the spirits of so many Americans. Roland came home on a Sunday afternoon from one of his adjunct positions as chaplain for Gainesville's Riverside Military Academy and announced, "Well, I have been fired." Thinking he had lost his position as pastor of the First Baptist Church, Lilian burst into tears before he told her that the Academy simply could no longer pay his salary as chaplain.

Leavell's sermons during the depression continued to be mostly on spiritual salvation rather than economic salvation. His one sermon entitled "Depression" blamed the Depression on the fact that so many people had abandoned God in their lives of sin. He decried big business, remarking that hard times were simply proof that one could not trust business, only God. He urged the members to rededicate their lives to the spiritual side of existence and to take the Depression one day at a time. He ended his sermon by offering to have his salary cut by ten percent. Roland never mentioned the causes of the Depression set forth by financial experts of the time, who blamed unwise borrowing for speculation, overproduction of capital and goods, and dislocations resulting from the Great War.

In the midst of the economic hard times, Leavell suggested a

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seemingly impossible task to his church: to raise money for a new Sunday School building. He announced his plans on April 5, 1931. The estimated cost of the new multi-story building was $31,000, an ambitious goal for a church of 1,150 members in the depths of the Depression. He announced that they would not even start the building until $10,000 had been collected.56 He described to the incredulous congregation the features of the new building: a nursery and cradle roll department, classrooms for young people and adults, and a central assembly room for each age group in the Sunday School. The basement of the present church would be renovated to have a kitchen and dining area suitable as a site for banquets, complete with a stage for dramatic productions. Many other churches in the Convention had already acquired such facilities, and Roland told his congregation that their church lagged behind. This was particularly significant to him since it was Landrum, while he was at the Sunday School Board in Nashville, who pioneered the idea that such facilities were necessary to the success of any church in its educational efforts. The Gainesville First Baptist Sunday School met in the dark church basement, and Leavell determined against almost hopeless odds to correct this. In spite of the Depression, it was accomplished. By September, 1931, the Sunday School Building Committee was authorized to contract for plans and specifications for one floor or unit of the building. In 1934 the entire building was completed.57

56 Ledford, First Baptist Church, p. 37.

57 Ibid., p. 37.
Leavell's "business as usual" attitude in response to the Great Depression was in sharp contrast to some religious leaders who grappled with the economic needs of their communities. Many Southern Protestant ministers purchased food in wholesale lots, so members of the congregation could purchase food at reduced costs. The Southern Baptist Fundamentalist minister, J. Frank Norris, considered those who suffered from the Depression as his responsibility and solicited donations over the radio to help feed the unemployed. He installed cots and shower baths in his Texas church building and made medical treatment available to the ill. Kenneth Bailey wrote "it was a strange role in which Norris was cast, but the times were unusual as the role."\(^{58}\) Leavell's response suggests that perhaps he did not consider playing an unusual role. Could he have more wisely channeled the money spent for the Sunday School building into charitable works?

Just as Leavell did not participate in any relief work during the Depression, he viewed Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal with some reservations. He ridiculed the Work Progress Administration, as many others did for being non-productive; however, he looked with favor upon the Civilian Conservation Corps created in 1933. He felt that the army camp training was beneficial for young men who were unemployed. In Georgia numerous lakeside recreational areas were build with C.C.C. labor, providing tangible evidence of significant achievement by this New Deal relief measure. He praised the fact that the young men received room and board and $30 each month with $25 automatically sent

home to their families. Leavell, however, frequently expressed the fear that government relief programs would lead to socialism. He hoped that "the radical in the White House" would consider the measures as temporary and would rescind them once the nation's economic predicament was remedied.

Although Leavell did not initiate or assist in relief programs of any sort during the Depression, he frequently used as sermon and club topics his own poverty-ridden childhood and the hardships of the defeated South in an effort to inspire his listeners. He told his audiences, "Depression is largely a matter of the heart." He expressed sympathy with the unemployed, but told of the terrible conditions after the Civil War: 89 railroads were in the hands of the receivers; half of the iron and steel plants had failed; and the "houses of your grandfathers had no furnaces, no running water, no sweepers, toasters, or hair curlers. The South recovered from that disaster and will recover again. If you do not have a car, walk to church." He encouraged the listeners by telling of his fourteen-mile walk to save $2.00 rent on a horse that was to take him back to Oxford during his early days as a young preacher.

He frequently cited the example of Robert E. Lee, who had undergone the greatest of calamities and defeats but had survived to become the esteemed president of Washington and Lee University. A major address on Robert E. Lee, delivered on numerous occasions, extolled Lee

59 Roland Leavell, "During the Depression—What?"
60 Ibid.
for turning down lucrative offers from British and American business firms after the war: "I have a self-imposed task which I must accomplish. I shall devote my remaining energies to training young men to do their duty in life." Although Roland's audiences during the Depression had no lucrative offers to turn down, they were impressed by the message that their economic distress was surely not as great a tragedy as the South's defeat.

The other Southerner to whom Roland looked for example in those hard times was the poet, Sidney Lanier. Lanier, a native of Georgia, wrote one of his most famous poems about Gainesville's Chattahoochee River; it contained the theme of acceptance of duty in order to meet the demands of life in adversity. Lanier's life was full of physical difficulties because he suffered from tuberculosis. His prevailing themes stressed the sufficiency of God to sustain him. Roland's address on Lanier was in great demand. His hearers went away singing the praises of the man who could so eloquently recite long passages of lyric poetry while recounting the life of the beleaguered Lanier, who had lived through great tribulation.

Leavell was a spiritual hero to many during the Depression. Roosevelt told America that there was nothing to fear but fear itself; Leavell added that there was really nothing to fear because God took care of His own. "A stone cannot suffer, the oyster can suffer only a little, a bird will suffer a day or so for his young, the deer will

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anguish for his young perhaps a week, an Indian mother will suffer for some weeks, Christian mothers will suffer for years, God, however, suffers eternally with and for his children, and you are his children."

In 1932, he arranged a great event for Gainesville: he invited the Georgia State Baptist Convention to hold their annual meeting there. Ordinarily it would have been unthinkable to hold the convention in such a small town with only two hotels and a few boarding houses. Roland personally made a census and solicited the homes and help of the entire community, and the town entertained the delegates. Many Georgia Baptist pastors hesitated to invite the Convention to their towns because they felt it would be too great a burden to place on a community during the bleak economic conditions. Leavell, however, enjoyed the challenge and the contact with people necessary to get the sluggish townspeople involved. He asked ladies who seldom left their homes to meet incoming delegates at the train depot. The church deacons ushered during the meetings and chauffeured guests to their overnight accommodations. Many homes provided bed and board for the guests. As host pastor Leavell took great pride to introduce the mayor and other town leaders to the conventioneers at the opening session. He had stimulated the town to do what most thought to be impossible. All went well, and, at the close of the convention, he was happy, exhausted, and grateful. He had done a good deed for the town; the people were proud of their efforts when they had little of which they could be proud.

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63 Leavell, "During the Depression—What?"

64 Ledford, First Baptist Church, p. 33.
He had put Gainesville in the limelight as well as himself; he was elected vice president of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Holding of the convention did not address the Depression the same way as the New Deal programs of Franklin Roosevelt, but the psychological boost for Gainesville was not unimportant.

The news of Leavell's achievements did not go unnoticed. He had built a Sunday School building and entertained hundreds at a convention during the Depression, had held spectacular revivals, and had written a successful book on his unusual family. Many churches throughout the South contacted him to become pastor. The First Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, approached him in 1933 to serve that church. It was a unique period in Louisiana history, as Huey Long, who had his own remedies for pulling America out of the Depression, was then governor of the state. Roland declined the offer expressing fear of Long's radical ideas, but noted one of Long's accomplishments, "Just think the children would have had free school books if we moved to Louisiana."65 Roland continued to preach in Gainesville and accepted a part-time pastorate at Talmo, a small farming community fourteen miles away. The church was small and poor even in good times, and the Depression meant that it could not pay him except with fresh-churned butter, fig preserves, and hand-designed quilts made by the ladies. He drove the dusty route to Talmo on Sunday afternoons to preach to the farmers and their wives while they fanned themselves and swatted flies with free fans from the Gainesville funeral parlor. Although the added burden

64Author's reminiscence.
appears to be unrewarding, Roland considered his trips there as pleasure. First, he was preaching "the simple gospel" and the farm community accepted him unconditionally. They lavished praise upon him and he was reminded of the early days in small churches outside Oxford. Perhaps this was another way to return to the comfortable innocence he had experienced.

In the midst of these challenges and hard times, a disaster of major proportions struck Gainesville. On April 6, 1936, early in the morning, a devastating tornado hit the town. Roland rushed to his church after the dreadful news reached the house. His brand new Sunday School building, built at such great sacrifice to the congregation, was destroyed, the church roof and stained glass dome were gone, and the janitor lay severely injured. As rain water poured through the shattered fragments, Roland sat and cried as "I had not done since the war in France." His personal grief soon gave way to fear and concern for the lives of his fellow townsmen. He ran the short distance to the center of town and saw, to his horror, that the entire main square had been demolished. Since the storm had come in the early morning hours, the stores were not open and only a few people were downtown, but he could hear muffled cries for help. He began to work, uncovering bodies of injured and dead. He did not return to his home until after dark that evening, covered with blood and with ashes from the fires that engulfed the town. Since his own home had not been damaged, day after day he conducted funerals from the front parlor.

Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 34.
Frequently he changed from his ministerial suit into his khaki hunting suit and boots to go into the devastated areas to help clear debris and aid the distressed. Red Cross estimates of the losses numbered 200 persons dead -- many of them his church members -- 960 injured, and 992 structures of the town destroyed or damaged. The Red Cross stated there was no way to ascertain how many people were given first aid, because the lines seemed unending, and no one bothered to keep accurate records. Chain gangs from Georgia prisons were brought to help search for bodies. On April 9, Franklin D. Roosevelt came from Warm Springs, Georgia to speak to those citizens of Gainesville who could walk to the depot. Roland was there and heard him say:

My friends, it is a sad occasion that brings this stop of mine to Gainesville. I have been in touch with this great disaster that has come to your city ever since the tornado. We in the federal government have done everything that is in our power to make things more easy for you. I want to express to you, all of you, my very deep sympathy in the loss of life that has occurred here . . . the various agencies of our government have been trying to be of assistance and there are two things, I think, that stand out for which we can be proud as Americans. The first is that all of the agencies have cooperated, not only sincerely, but with very practical results. The other thing I want to refer to is the fine spirit that all of you people in Gainesville have shown in the way you have cooperated to bring order out of great chaos . . . it makes me very proud of all Americans. And so, my friends, I hope to come back some day at a less tragic time . . . to see a greater and better Gainesville.

68 Ibid., p. 24.
Franklin Roosevelt's speech almost won Roland over to the "radical in the White House" as he referred to him. Gainesville gradually recovered from the most devastating tornado to strike a city in Georgia, and Roland continued to work endlessly throughout the strenuous and emotion-packed aftermath of the storm.

His days in green pastures, however, were at an end. He was a hero to his town, and he met with no serious opposition on any front. As evidenced in sermons, his gospel was plain: that God required purity and was wrathful over man's depraved condition and transgression; that God cannot accept mankind until some restitution for sins had been performed; that the required work of restitution was enacted by the death of Christ; that this act of faith must be accepted by man to effect the necessary pardon and thus the task of the saved was one of bringing other souls to "accept Christ as the only answer." Answers were simple in Gainesville. He did not experience any of the conflict or frustration with ethical problems that he had suffered after World War I. The large number of persons who were converted as a result of his preaching seemed to prove to him that his way of imitating Paul the Apostle was, indeed, the correct path. He further declined to question God even about the tornado and curiously never referred to it as punishment for hidden sin in the town. He bypassed any theological implications by simply saying that the tornado was a "holocaust from which Gainesville would rise with triumph." He was not aware that a new, more complex job, a new war, and a more deadly holocaust of another sort would not be so easy to explain.

CHAPTER 6
SAVING AMERICA TO SAVE THE WORLD

On July 24, 1934, Leavell sailed to Europe on the German luxury liner Europa, his first trip there since his return from World War I. As the ship left New York harbor he recalled saying in 1919, "If the Statue of Liberty ever sees me again she will have to turn around." He jokingly rationalized that now he was sailing under cover of darkness, so that she did not have to see him at all. The occasion of the European voyage was a meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in Berlin; Leavell was the leader of a large group of Southern Baptists who were to attend. In addition to participating in the meeting, they were to tour Europe and the Holy Land.

In spite of heavy responsibilities as tour director, Leavell was elated over the trip for several reasons. First and foremost, he had Lilian with him, and she was overjoyed to be away from her everyday responsibilities as wife and mother under such exciting circumstances. Leavell was euphoric as he wrote, "I have sailed on the LaTouraine, the Louisville, the Empress of Russia and the Korea Maru. The Europa is as large as all four combined and so grand." Moreover Leavell simply loved motion. To go any place excited him, but to be returning to Europe without having to go to war enthralled him. He could scarcely wait to visit familiar scenes in Paris and to introduce Lilian to his French friends, and of course he was excited by the prospect of

1 Leavell Diary, July 24, 1934.

2 Ibid., July 25, 1934.
participating in the Baptist World Alliance.

Events in Germany were front page news in America in 1934. On January 30, 1933, one year and seven months prior to the Alliance meeting, Adolph Hitler had become the chancellor of Germany. It was no secret to anyone in America that Hitler had come to power citing unkept promises and grievances which he blamed on the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler charge openly that Wilson had made promises that had been ignored, that Germany had lost her colonies, and that, even more unjustly, she had been forced to take the blame for the war. Hitler vowed that he hated America and targeted Americans, particularly "big Jewish firms," as the perpetrators of the Depression, which he pledged to remedy as chancellor. ³ American newspapers reported the famous Reichstag fire and its subsequent trials, and by March 5 news of the appearance of the first concentration camp was reported in publications in the United States. ⁴ By March 28, 1933, the boycott leveled against Jewish shops, goods, doctors, and lawyers was also in the news. "By the end of 1933, all laws restricting or excluding Jews from public life, education, government, the arts and professions were in place." ⁵ It is certain that Leavell and his travel companions of the Baptist World Alliance were aware of these events.

Leavell habitually read several denominational and non-denomina-


⁴ Robert W. Ross, So It Was True (Minneapolis, 1980), p. 3.

⁵ Ibid.
tional publications and so should have known, even from Christian jour-
nals, the nature of the government in Germany. One of these papers was
the Christian Index, the Georgia Baptist paper. On January 28, 1933,
an article from the Index cited vitriolic, anti-Semitic sentiments in
a "Hymn to Hitler" and commented, "It is after such collective prayers
as these, preferable, after all, to the obnoxious hymn type, such as
'When Jewish gore from the swordblade drips' that the political murders
are committed."\(^6\) Leavell also subscribed to and regularly read the
Christian Century, a weekly non-denominational paper acknowledged as
the outstanding Protestant religious periodical during the 1930's and
1940's.\(^7\) On April 5, 1933, the Christian Century focused on the happenings in Hitler's Germany and particularly on the persecution of the
Jews: "The apparent shock was suffered by the new government of Ger-
many at the storm of indignation in other lands aroused by the Nazi
persecution of Jews . . . There have been violent attacks on Jews by
bands of Nazis."\(^8\) Throughout the spring and summer of 1933, consider-
able attention was given in many denominational papers to Jewish pro-
fessionals who were deprived of their businesses and to Jews suffering
beatings or disappearing. On August 16, 1933, the Christian Century
sent its own editor to visit Europe and to report on these matters.
He wrote upon his return, "The actual brutalities inflicted on Jews,
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 7.
\(^7\)Ibid., p. 5.
\(^8\)Ibid., p. 11.
socialists, communists, and pacifists have been even more severe than the American press has published." 9 Reinhold Niebuhr, the noted theologian, further warned in sobering articles published in 1933: "American Protestants should not be anything but disturbed over the religious persecution in Germany." 10 In September a *Christian Century* editorial entitled, "The Nazification of German Protestantism Continues," reported the famous Aryan paragraph forbidding "pastors with Jewish ancestry the right to hold office." 11 This mandate applied also to church executives, pastors, and officials who had wives with Jewish blood. As if the writer himself was skeptical of what he reported, the editorial asked the question, "Is it really true that persecution of Christians has begun in the land of the Reformation?" 12 The press, secular and religious, referred to persecution of Jews not only apart from the Christian context, but of Jews who had been baptized into the Christian faith. The alarm had been sounded, but the Baptist Alliance continued with plans to meet in Berlin.

Many American Baptists questioned the decision of having the Congress convene in Berlin and maintained American Baptists should not go. Some charged that Baptists were violating the principle of freedom of

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9 Ibid., p. 12.


12 Ibid.
religion by meeting in a land where the government practiced strict censorship of secular and religious matters. Others contended the meeting would further endanger the native Baptists living in Germany. Still others argued that the Alliance should not be held at all, since the Baptist denomination still owed debts incurred during the Depression and should devote the funds set aside for travel to the Alliance to retire those debts. On the other hand, many American Baptists expressed the view that they would be witnesses to their distinctive Baptist principles of freedom in Berlin and pointed to the encouraging invitation received from the German Baptists, who were hosts for the meeting. The latter rejected any idea that a free exchange on all topics would be endangered if the meeting was held in Berlin and insisted that they would have never invited the Congress had they not been assured by the government that all would be well. The German Baptists added that, when they sent their advance program to the Nazi government, not one item had been removed or modified in the agenda. Many Baptists, including Leavell, did not interpret government approval of a religious program as in itself an example of censorship and secular interference.

Roland agreed wholeheartedly that the Congress should proceed with plans to meet in Berlin. He believed what many Americans at the time were saying: that Hitler was simply trying to do for Germany what Mussolini was doing in Italy, namely to remove the beggars from the streets and to "make the trains run on time."13 His views were

strengthened when, on the Europa, he was invited as leader of the Baptist group to come to the cabin of a certain Karl Fisher to discuss the conditions in Germany. They talked until after midnight on several consecutive nights, and Leavell penned in his diary on July 27, 1934:

After dinner I went with several of the Baptists to a cabin and talked until midnight with Mr. Fisher, a Hitler propagandist, who told us of the conditions in Germany. He told of Hitler fighting one-handed in a battle against German Catholic Jesuits, Russian Jewish materialism, and Communism. He described the killing of Rhoem and the 77 [sic] recently showing how he was spreading immorality in the army and because Hitler was about to dismiss him he organized a revolt which was to flash at midnight. Hitler caught it some five hours ahead and killed out the leaders. Had the revolt been successfully started it would have meant civil war between the 100,000 Reichmen or Regular Army and the 250,000 militia under Rhoem. Killing 77 saved civil war. He explained much about religious conditions, and Hitler's opposition to complete domination of the country by the Jews, in government, money, and business. It was a most interesting interview. Mr. Fisher was in Hitler's revolution of 1923, (unsuccessful) and was imprisoned with Hitler and Rhoem. He is a very brilliant man and surely gave us new light on Hitler.  

Leavell's conversation with Mr. Fisher convinced him that Hitler's extermination of his enemies was justified by the need to rid Germany of Communists and to prevent civil war. Leavell shared with many American conservatives the view that the greatest danger to the world was Communism. In family conversations he repeatedly stated with resounding authority that the United States as a Christian nation sus-

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14 Leavell Diary, July 28, 1934.
tained a great threat from "Godless Communism and the Russian Bear."
The atheistic teachings of the Communists particularly as practiced in
the Russian government, provoked the ire of religious conservatives
like himself. Any government based on denouncing God was unthinkable.
Moreover, they feared Communism in America, notably what they perceived
to be the infiltration of Communists into American labor ranks. Many
also opposed the New Deal as a threat to capitalism through creeping
socialism and "an end to our religious and economic way of life" as
Leavell pointed out in his sermons. "Dozens of pulpits rang with anti-
Communist denunciations, and pages of the church press were filled with
warnings."15 Compared to the "godless menace of Communism," Hitler did
not seem so bad. Many American Protestants agreed with Frank Buchman,
a well-known Lutheran pastor:

I thank heaven for a man like Adolph Hitler, who
built a front line of defense against the Anti-
Christ of Communism. Think what it would mean
to the world if Hitler surrendered to the con-
Through such a man God could control a nation
overnight and solve every last bewildering prob-
lem.16

Roland Leavell could not have concurred with Buchman more, as he
sailed toward Berlin in 1934. He sang Hitler's praises until 1939 and
watched Hitler's rising Germany with admiration. He praised Hitler's
rejuvenation of the German economy and the well-constructed, tree-lined

15 Robert Moats Miller, American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-

16 Ahlstrom, Religious History, p. 926.
motorways that crisscrossed the country. He was impressed with the absence of wicked jazz music and lewd movies that Hitler banned (along with books that did not fit into his schemes). Leavell listened to and perhaps agreed with the argument that the actions of Hitler toward the Jews were justified in order to encourage them to return to Palestine to fulfill the ancient Biblical prophecy that made the return a precondition for the end of the world. In this way Leavell viewed Hitler as God's positive tool. However, Leavell's primary support for Hitler's Germany resulted from the dictator's fight against Communists.

While the Baptists were in Berlin, events could not have gone more smoothly, according to Roland. His diary recorded the following:

We were allowed utmost liberty of speech while we were in Berlin. The Berlin papers gave us far more publicity than the Washington, D.C. papers did when the Northern and Southern Baptist Convention met there. One Berlin paper gave an article on 'Who Are These Baptists?' The article gave us a fair and just discussion of our position and historical contentions.\(^\text{17}\)

Leavell's observations were not borne out by an editorial in *Christian Century* on August 15, 1934. The editor cited portions of an address by the president of the Baptist World Alliance, Dr. J. R. Rushbrooke, and commended him for bravery in "openly placing Christian conscience above all other claims, including those of nationalism."\(^\text{18}\) In reporting a speech by a German Baptist Bishop, the *Christian Century* quoted his

\(^{17}\) Leavell Diary, August 7, 1934.

\(^{18}\) Ross, *So It Was True*, p. 53.
response to Dr. Rushbrooke: "Germany's internal concerns are of no im-
port to outsiders."¹⁹ He also argued that "while all races are equal
in the sight of God, a government has to protect itself from a race
that is destructive by nature."²⁰ Thus this German Baptist affirmed the
racist policy of Hitler's Germany. Later the Congress passed a resolu-
tion denouncing "discrimination against the Jews and the right of any
state to interfere in the government of the church."²¹ Additional
resolutions called for an end to nationalist ambitions. In reporting
these actions, the Christian Century commented that the German papers
printed only those speeches and parts of resolutions which were favor-
able to governmental policies.²² Even though Leavell made positive
pronouncements concerning the even tenor of the Alliance, there were
indications of concern over Hitler's Nazi regime.

Many Baptists felt, as did Leavell, that Hitler's Germany was not
dangerous and could be justified. Some Baptists told of the incessant
street marching of brown-shirted troops and how they, in fun, joined
German citizens who gave the Nazi salute as the soldiers passed.

When he returned home, Leavell contended in his speeches to the
Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce, and religious organizations that the
prejudices harbored about Germany were all unfounded. Germany was

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

peaceloving, orderly, decent, clean, efficient, and lively. Leavell's Seminary colleague, John D. Freeman, editor of the Baptist and Reflector, the Tennessee Baptist paper, wrote these words which Roland quoted frequently:

The Reich Bishop assured us that no forcing of Baptists into a joint church would take place. Many are saying that our presence in Berlin saved the Baptists from being forced into a joint Protestant church. Berlin is truly the scene of an all new social revolution. These people here are certainly against war. Any anti-war speech always brought enthusiastic response.  

Leavell then ended many of his speeches and personal conversations by suggesting that Americans had much more to fear from Franklin Roosevelt, the "radical in the White House", than the world did from Hitler.  

Indeed, for Leavell the true menace to America was not Hitler or the Jews, but Roosevelt himself. Leavell joined many conservative Christians in 1933 who felt that American capitalism was in danger with Roosevelt as president. As illustrated in a survey of Protestant periodicals in the 1930's by Robert Miller, Leavell was among the majority of conservative churchmen who questioned the wisdom of repudiating capitalism and who opposed federal aid to the unemployed, social security, minimum wage guarantees, greater regulation of business, aid to organized labor, and the like.


24 Roland Leavell to Frank H. Leavell, November 13, 1934, Leavell Papers, Bowman.
Leavell, along with other conservatives, basically opposed the entire New Deal. The Protestant conservative, according to Miller, was more inclined to support candidates on the issues of Prohibition or anti-Catholicism rather than those of unemployment or hunger. "The Literary Digest poll in 1936 revealed that of 21,606 clergymen, 70.22 percent were opposed to New Deal policies. A similar poll in 1939 indicated that a majority of Protestant church members voted for Landon in the Roosevelt landslide." In 1938, the Southern Baptist Convention termed the American economic system the "best in the world." It went on to say:

In our opinion no thoughtful, intelligent, patriotic citizen can look with unconcern upon the trend of affairs in our government. Already we have gone a long way toward a regimentation and toward a centralization of power which would rob the American people of their fundamental freedom . . . .

The Alabama Baptists, alarmed at the growing governmental authority, passed a resolution in their state convention to refuse to cooperate in a federal census of denominational institutions. The Western Recorder, a Southern Baptist weekly paper, criticized the government program for giving money to those "who never worked if they had work and who won't work after the administrative socialistic schemers finish

25 Miller, American Protestantism, p. 119.

26 Ahlstrom, Religious History, p. 294.


28 Miller, American Protestantism, p. 122.
squandering the money of the taxpayer upon them.” J. Frank Norris informed a large group of people in Carnegie Hall in 1938 that "Roosevelt was a dictator under whom the American people suffered grave regimentation." Some conservative clergy ridiculed the name "New Deal" saying that it smacked of the card table and the habits of the gambler, a fitting implication for a scheme for taking care of the "lazy, dole-seeking laborers." Southern Baptists by and large agreed with Leavell that a "radical" was in the White House and that poverty was the result of sin and indolence while prosperity was the reward of righteous living. They agreed that if everyone trusted God, all the problems would be solved. Leavell's article in Southern Baptist Home Mission in 1938 reflected views of the majority of Southern Baptists:

Jesus Christ is the solution to the four problems of fallen humanity, namely sin, poverty, ignorance and death ... Jesus' principles will abolish poverty if adapted in the economic order ... His embodiment of all truth will dispel ignorance ... evangelism is the good news. Jesus Christ is the solution of the problems of earth.

A later article was more specific in protesting the New Deal:

Some people ... have been thinking about riches and poverty with little thought about salvation

29 Ross, So It Was True, p.

30 Miller, American Protestantism, p. 123.

31 Ibid.

for the rich man and the poor man. They have been concerned about management and labor to the exclusion of concern for the soul of the manager of the laboring man . . . The church may have bread to spare, may abolish tenements, may adjust race relations, may offer social security and economic justice . . . but the supreme offer is the Gospel . . . be born into the Kingdom and become a child of God.33

Poverty was punishment for the sinful twenties, and to placate God only a religious revival would suffice. Professor Thomas Cochran in The Great Depression and World War II underscored this sentiment: "The widespread conservative attitude particularly in fundamentalist country was that the nation's ills were a visitation on the country for the sins of the 1920's and could be cured by renewed devotion."34

Persuaded that the Depression could be overcome by a religious revival, the Southern Baptist Convention appointed Leavell to the one major position in the Convention that would bring the favor of God. He was invited to become the Superintendent of Evangelism for the Southern Baptist Convention under the auspices of the Home Mission Board. He was commissioned to lead the sixteen states of the South in massive revival efforts. The president of the Home Mission Board, Dr. Ellis A. Fuller, who later assumed the Presidency of the Louisville Seminary, wrote at the time of Leavell's appointment:

I am happy in our choice of this man. We looked for a man with scholarship, evangelistic fervor,


a pastor's viewpoint, pulpit ability, organizational talent, ability to write, denominational interest and viewpoint, and a strong body. We believe that we have found the man in Dr. Roland Q. Leavell, who possesses all these qualities. He is known throughout the South already, and is recognized by all as a man with rare fitness for the kind of work we are asking him to do. . . . By his pen, by his attendance upon conventions, by his many conferences . . . by the simultaneous evangelistic campaigns which he will organize and conduct for our major cities his ministry will be tremendous.35

The Atlanta Journal, in an article by Luke Green entitled "Atlanta to be the Center of Southern Baptist Revival," said "everywhere the name of Roland Q. Leavell is synonymous with evangelism . . . ."36

When Leavell took over his new post, evangelism had become associated with far more than winning souls for Christ. Many journalists and religious leaders viewed evangelism as a conservative social and political force, specifically as a movement to combat what they perceived to be growing Communist influences among the rural poor and the factory workers. In an interview before the revival campaign began, Leavell emphasized that his primary effort was not to combat Communism but to win people to Christianity. "The revival is not designed as a movement to kill Communism. It will attempt to overcome anything that is anti-Christ, but it is not specifically aimed at Communism. It will attempt to show that the way of Christ is the way to a more abundant life . . . ."37


37 Ibid.
In this same interview Leavell also emphasized that the revival must not be construed as pacifistic. Although he acknowledged that war and the threat of war often detracted people's attention from evangelism, he would not turn his efforts into a political rally to avoid war. His goal was to save souls for Christ, no more, no less.

Leavell moved his family to Atlanta in June, 1937 after he resigned his pastorate in Gainesville. Many times in the next five years he wondered why he ever left, but Leavell began his evangelistic efforts with great enthusiasm and saw encouraging success at the outset. The goals that he announced as he moved into his new office at the Home Mission Board in Atlanta in January, 1937, were reiterated for the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in New Orleans, May 13-16, 1937:

> In our denominational activity we have had a program for about everything in the whole field of religious endeavor except evangelism, the most important thing. Pastors have their own evangelistic programs for their churches but they are clamoring more and more for a concerted movement and a coordinated plan of aggressive evangelistic strategy. The new approach will be the idea of training and inspiring the rank and file of the church members to lead others to Christ... a pastor and a church of Christian people can win souls... not just the professional paid evangelist of the past...  

The new approach to evangelism was to enlist and train the ordinary church member, according to the following points:

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38 Leavell, Sheer Joy, p. 34.

(1) Foster the spirit of evangelism in the South.
(2) Create and circulate fresh, new, stimulating literature on evangelism.
(3) Organize and promote city-wide simultaneous campaigns involving coordination by the Southwide Superintendent.
(4) Conduct association-wide campaigns similar to the city-wide campaigns but with the approach entirely adapted to the rural churches.
(5) To create in each state convention an office of Evangelism and see it staffed and trained.
(6) To extend service to unevangelized sections of remote areas of the South.
(7) Conduct evangelistic methods training conferences on college campuses, summer religious assemblies and ministerial groups in cities and associations.
(8) To rebuild the spiritual life of the individual families of the South by promoting the institution of family worship.

He tackled his new task feeling that, with this program, revivalism would flourish in the South. He did not seem to be daunted by the fact that the former large staff of evangelists and singers in his Department had been drastically reduced during the Depression. Actually, a small rather than a large professional staff was part of the plan: "It has been acceptable to me not to have a large staff of workers for these programs in order that I might place the responsibility of soul-winning on the pastors and their people." In his autobiography he admitted his feelings in retrospect that, even though he felt his evangelistic efforts were successful, he remembered that initially his methodology was largely a happy accident:

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40 Ibid., p. 275.

41 Ibid.
I never laughed at myself all night but once. I had never been pastor in a town of more than 11,000 people. I laughed at myself all night in the sleeper December, 1936 as the train roared on toward St. Louis, a metropolitan area with a population of over a million, to address the Baptist pastors' conference on how to put on a city-wide evangelistic campaign. My work with the SBC was to begin next month . . . I drew up an outline for a program and had it mimeographed. I tried to tell them how to build the ship while taking the voyage. The plan I outlined had in it almost all the elements of city-wide campaigns used today by contemporary evangelists . . . six weeks of preparation, and day-by-day programs for the fifteen days of the campaign . . . breakfasts each morning for all preachers and visiting evangelists . . .

These methods were put in motion in Southern evangelistic crusades, and he never changed any part, no matter how accidentally they were devised. He claimed that modern day mass evangelists have used his ideas since that time.

His program was to train individuals in what he called "the superlative in Christian joy," that is, soul-winning, or individual evangelism. "It is the noblest task that God gives any Christian in this life. It is the only way Baptists can grow, since they do not baptize babies, and they have no state church into which babies are born as Baptists."

By 1939 Roland Leavell's report to the Southern Baptist Convention contained glowing accounts of successes in major cities of the South: Tampa, Florida; Baltimore, Maryland; Jackson, Mississippi; Asheville,

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42Leavell, Sheer Joy, p. 75.

43Southern Baptist Convention Annual, 1937, p. 70.
North Carolina; St. Louis, Missouri; Houston, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia; Miami, Florida; El Paso, Texas; Birmingham, Alabama; Knoxville, Tennessee, and Fort Worth, Texas. He cited especially St. Louis, which had thirty-seven churches cooperating in a joint effort that officially enrolled 1,001 new members. In Houston thirty-nine churches recruited an aggregate of 1,565 Baptists. These were typical revivals with the average number of new Baptists for all the cities surpassing 1,000 per two-week revival. Roland also announced a pastor's evangelistic training conference in each of the sixteen Southern Baptist State Conventions. He published thirty-eight magazine articles in one year and distributed 60,000 "Handbooks for Southwide Revival" dated January 10, 1939. His book *Helping Others to Become Christians*, published in December, 1938, sold 17,000 copies in four months, and 30,000 in the following year with numerous reprints until the present time. He brought out another book *Saving America to Save the World* in 1939, and his brochures were distributed by thousands for use throughout the Southern Baptist Convention.

He accepted invitations to attend Baptist state conventions and summer assemblies to give lectures on soul-winning techniques, and he spent two weeks in Cuba giving evangelistic instruction. By the end of 1939 statistics did make it appear that Leavell was well on the way to

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46 Roland Leavell, *Saving America to Save the World* (New York, 1940).
saving Southern Baptists:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>BAPTISMS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>191,993</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>204,567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>256,814</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>269,155</td>
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"We are experiencing what future historians may call the great revival of the Twentieth Century" he stated in the summary of his first years as Superintendent of Evangelism. 47

In 1940-41 he continued to conduct successful campaigns in strategic cities, but enthusiasm seem to be waning. In 1940 the baptisms dropped by 23,055 from the year before. At first Leavell did not become discouraged. He published fifty additional magazine articles on evangelism and produced a bibliography on evangelism for all pastors of the Southern Baptist Convention. He composed four additional books for the effort:

Preaching the Doctrines of Grace 48
A Handbook for Southwide Baptist Revival of 1939
A Handbook for Southern Baptist Participation in the Nationwide Evangelistic Crusade for 1940 49
The Romance of Evangelism 50

He continued his heavy preaching schedule. During one city campaign he alone delivered fifty-nine sermons or addresses in one fourteen-day period. He conducted revivals in the Panama Canal Zone, where church memberships in some areas increased by one-sixth after his visit. In Ontario and Quebec, he lectured to over fifty percent of all the Canadian Baptist ministers and set up evangelistic programs in eight major associations. At home in the South, his successful city campaigns continued, but he began to focus more attention on the country. Following a letter from his brother Frank chiding him, "I hate to see you spend so much time in the cities and neglect the rural areas," he announced, "We must recapture small churches to preserve them from inroads of the unscriptural off-brand types of religion." But by 1942 people in America were counting ration stamps for gasoline, rubber tires and granulated sugar, and religious revivals and salvation did not interest either the small, rural, or the large city churches. Roland, however, continued to plead for evangelism and indicated that America's victory in war against Japan and in Europe depended on the support of evangelism at home:

Our nation is beset with fierce and relentless foes in war. America needs to get right with God. No nation ever fell when its people were right with God . . . more than one-half of the population of our nation are without church or any religious affiliation. We must evangelize.

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51 Southern Baptist Convention Annual, 1942 (Nashville, 1942), p. 266.
53 Southern Baptist Convention Annual, 1942, p. 266.
During the years that Roland served in the capacity of Evangelism Director for the Convention, letters to his wife and children seemed less buoyant than did his annual report to the Convention. He hated the long weeks away from home. Expressing more than a few unhappy moments, he wrote in various undated letters to his wife:

Lilian dear, Mr. Wilkie and I felt about alike tonight,— 'all snowed under.' Today I spoke four times, twice to colleges in London, Ontario, and stayed out with the 'tweet-tweet' sissy preacher drinking hot chocolate tonight until about 11:00 p.m. so if anyone called me to ask for another speech tomorrow I would not be at home. My meeting isn't attracting too much attention . . . They do not expect anyone to join and they get about what they expect.

Hit New Orleans on the record heat day of the year was my luck. But we had a satisfactory conference of pastors and the evangelistic steering committee. Hope it is not as hot in Atlanta as it is here. I am at the St. Charles Hotel with not enough clothes on to flag a freight train, and I'm sweating like I would if I were plowing. I am miserable.

The day in Montreal was extremely strenuous, as I spoke in six full periods and have the same schedule today. But the men here are cordial, receptive, reserved, dignified and toward the close almost enthusiastic.

From August, Georgia: I been bothered this week with my old nemesis, insomnia . . .

The impersonal, large churches did not respond to him as he wished. He wanted instant success everywhere, and he had no time to cultivate a relationship with individuals in his congregations. Moreover, he hated having to depend on local preachers who generally did not match his

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high standards of activity and enthusiasm. And it bothered him that he had to share the limelight with someone else. The experience in these churches frustrated two of his strongest psychological needs: to be in control and to be always the center of attention.

I'm waiting now for 'Pacing Sally' this sweet little sister who is the pastor of the church here. He rarely gives an invitation at the close of the service except to announce that those who desire to unite with the church may see him or any of the deacons privately!

After a discouraging meeting last night, and after a restless eight hours in bed, I am discouraged. We had 165 people last night rattling around in a building that will hold 1,000 or more. Fred sang too long, and the pastor talked nearly 20 minutes, and I got credit for preaching an hour when I spoke only 30 minutes. I wish we could go to the Ole Miss-Georgia football game Saturday in Athens, but I know we can't.

He missed the reassurance he once gained from his own congregations, and he began to doubt also that he was still in the will of God. He believed that success was a sign of God's favor, and that such success was determined only by tangible results in terms of numbers of professed salvations.

I wish I had greater faith for the results of this meeting. We have had 20 additions only . . . maybe the Lord will help us as the days wear on. Or maybe He doesn't mean for me to hold revivals. I just can't tell what it all means.

Our meeting is going apace. I am discouraged about the crowds for they have prepared, organized and advertised better than any I've ever seen. They are working too but somehow things aren't

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55 Ibid.
going big. We only had seven additions. The singing is not enthusiastic, the crowds are small, and . . . maybe God wants to humble the church and me . . . 56

Cities such as Montreal, St. Louis, or Atlanta were not like Oxford. They did not want a revival, and he found this posture incomprehensible. He could not persuade them to share his views, and he became discouraged as a result.

People in these cold, First Baptist city churches treat a visiting evangelist with formal gush, all of which reeks with insincerity, every bit of which shows clearly that they are treating both the evangelist and the meeting as a sort of necessary ordeal which they must endure. This is the first place I have ever gotten to yet where they positively refuse to raise their hands asking for prayer for any unsaved people. Guess they are sincere in that, for they simply aren't interested in other folks. The strongest leaders in the church say that if they were joining the church, they would not join during a revival. Ho, hum!

People here did not want a revival. They think of revivals as being of the Billy Sunday or Holy Roller type, or something and for want of a better word they say "emotionalism." It has taken me ten days to break down that spirit. It will take faith the size of Pike's Peak to ever get me back here. 57

Leavell had his chance to save America and in spite of his personal discouragement some success surfaced in retrospect. He did stimulate a brief stir among Southern Baptists. He did emphasize that evangelism should not be left to the highly visible preachers like Billy Sunday

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.
but should be a duty of each Christian working through his own church in his own community. "He did more to encourage personal soul-winning than anyone in the entire history of the Convention" testified Dr. C. E. Autry, a noted Southern Baptist professional evangelist. He provided instruction for laymen on how to witness. He also stressed cooperation among the Southern Baptist churches; mass campaigns were impressive but less successful than less unified efforts.

Leavell definitely felt that evangelism should be carried on by the local pastors through the local churches. He convinced other preachers that evangelism was a natural, normal activity of every church; because evangelism had fallen into disrepute, they should restore it to dignity and sanity. He stressed proper techniques and sound sermons. He discouraged any church from relying on the largely emotional minister to lead in the revival campaigns. He himself studiously avoided excessive emotionalism. "His personal bearing brought a striking dignity to both personal and pulpit evangelism" according to one observer who evaluated his evangelistic efforts.

Leavell believed that the baptismal record was the prime indicator of success or failure. He repeatedly made references to the statistics concerning the baptisms. He essentially brought about a resurgence of evangelism, which laid the groundwork for the present-day evangelism of the Southern Baptist Convention.

There were, however, obvious weaknesses in his approach. In spite


59 Leonard M. Sanderson to Wesley Bowman, June 8, 1982, Leavell Papers, Bowman.
of the detailed organizational structure followed in his campaigns, he
did not include any serious effort (other than counting baptisms) to
evaluate what had been accomplished; thus he had no basis for modifying
unsuccessful measures to make them more effective in the future. In­
deed, there is no indication that he altered any of his original ideas.
All aspects of his program remained unchanged from the time he first
unfolded it in St. Louis, where, as he noted, he "built the ship while
on the voyage." There seemed also to be little effort to keep the
new converts. This allegedly had been one of his initial objectives,
but concrete evidence that he succeeded is lacking. His efforts re­
mained focused on the initial conversion, and then he moved on. Ad­
ditionally, as in the past, he never considered social problems in
his ministry. He seemed to "assume that if people were converted, they
would grow in Christianity so that these problems would be solved by
themselves."60

Perhaps a basic cause of these weaknesses was that Roland Leavell
essentially ignored serious theological study during his years as an
evangelist with the Southern Baptist Convention. He mostly used the
same sermons over and over again as he continuously preached in differ­
ent locations. His books either dealt with his training techniques or
consisted of sermons that he had used in past revivals and wanted other
prachers to use. He spent the vast majority of his time in organiza­
tional activities and instructional classes for ministers and laymen
with little opportunity for examination of theological issues. He

60John Langlois, "A Study of Roland Q. Leavell's Concept of Evangelism,"
(Th. D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1971)
p. 153.
continued to state his own views in simple and unequivocal terms and looked askance at anyone who thought that anything was more important than soul-winning.

He completely ignored the growth of neo-orthodoxy, which had some significant points to make about the church and the modern world. Neo-orthodoxy was an intellectual movement that came to fruition during the 1930s and took the social gospel advocates to task for thinking that they could make a better world by social transformation. The neo-orthodox thinkers felt that Christianity should be rescued from what they considered to be errors or religious liberalism. Of course, Leavell could agree with this aspect of their teachings, but he would have rejected others. Supporters of neo-orthodoxy also believed in the collective sins of mankind from which no one could escape through individual effort. According to the Bible, Leavell, believed, the church had one task and one message: to convert individuals to belief in Christ. Paradox and the dialectical methods that Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr advocated in seeking contemporary answers for the troubles of society had no place in Leavell's thought. He liked his religion straight and simple. He agreed with Barth and Kierkegaard that human depravity was, indeed, the human condition and that only God could transform that condition, but he disagreed that there should be any dispute about the primary function of the church. The one purpose of the church was individual soul-winning, not the retreat from the world "to find itself," re-group, and analyze its position. Salvation of individuals could bring about heaven on earth, and one did not have to wait until the end of the age for this to come about, as the neo-orthodox group believed. "The
church is no place to dispute theological questions.\textsuperscript{61} Conservative evangelists believed then and now, and Leavell agreed with them. "Let the church be the church" argued conservatives. Leavell would be the last to agree with present-day historians who now credit the neo-orthodox movement with restoring the "prestige of the Apostle Paul as first Doctor of the Church."\textsuperscript{62} By following what he perceived to be Paul's methods in evangelism, Leavell thought that he was restoring Paul's prestige. It was not necessary for him to study Paul's theology, and so he put it aside; it was enough for him to follow the apostle's methods. It is claimed that the neo-orthodox movement was successful in "freshening the Calvinist strain in the American tradition" and in "correcting the errors of liberalism by returning to the idea of God as all powerful."\textsuperscript{63} Leavell knew that soul-winning would save humanity, and he needed no other answers.

It was not neo-orthodoxy, but World War II that dampened the evangelistic fervor of the 30's. In Sheer Joy of Living, Roland Leavell explained this phenomenon:

\begin{quote}
Alas! Alas! the German goose-stepped into Paris in June 1940 and America became war-conscious, became 'the arsenal of democracy,' as Roosevelt called it. The fervor was chilled, the seal of evangelism was killed. War, or any unusual condition that diverts the minds of people from the main values of life, always hurts evangelism . . .
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{62}Ahlstrom, Religious History, p. 947.

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., p. 948.

\textsuperscript{64}Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 77.
The outbreak of the Second World War did more than bring Leavell to the realization that his evangelistic efforts were not bringing the success he had hoped for. It also convinced him that he had been wrong about Hitler and Germany. As soon as the invasion of Poland took place in 1939 and France and Great Britain declared war, he changed his position. His children, who had parroted to their school classes his views on the virtues of the Nazi movement, had to relinquish their stand in support of Adolph Hitler to the delight of their teachers. He resumed his position against the Germans that he had taken during World War I but before Pearl Harbor continued to think that the United States might be able to stay out of war. He felt less secure with Roosevelt than he had with Woodrow Wilson. "Maybe the radical in the White House can keep us out of war" he wrote to Frank, his brother, "but he has gradually gotten us more and more involved." After the attack at Pearl Harbor, he, like most Americans, moved from his anti-war position to regarding the war as a crusade for righteousness. One sermon declared "it is not a case of war versus peace, but peace versus seeing justice done in the world." He attacked the unjust deeds of the Japanese and overt German aggression in Europe. He had never been an overt pacifist, as many Protestant ministers had been in the inter-war period, so he did not have to apologize for his previous viewpoint as many Protestants did in the early days of the war. He never in any way openly denounced the reported ex-

65 Roland Leavell to Frank H. Leavell, March 7, 1940, Leavell Papers, Bowman.

66 Roland Leavell, "Why Doesn't God Stop the War," First Baptist Church, Tampa, Florida, June 14, 1942.
termination of the Jews in Europe.

The realization that his revivals had come up short and that the United States had now dedicated itself to a new and more awful war convinced Leavell to resign his post as Superintendent of Evangelism. He did so in May, 1942, and immediately accepted a call to become pastor at the First Baptist Church in Tampa. It represented a challenge, being the first city church he had ever served, but he also hoped it would provide him with the approval, authority, and fellowship he had missed as superintendent of evangelism.
CHAPTER 7
TAMPA INTERLUDE

When Leavell assumed the pastorate of the First Baptist Church in Tampa, he hoped to recreate Oxford, New Castle, and Gainesville -- but to no avail. The polyglot population and wartime focus of the populace disconcerted him. He frequently said, "Everyone here is from somewhere else." The people were mostly transients, and he could not interest them in soul-winning. Later he said about his Tampa experience:

I would say the Tampa pastorate gave me a very sobering and disciplinary experience. I had been travelling the continent over, telling preachers "how to do it." I found out that some of my theories wouldn't work, wouldn't work at all, and they just were not sufficient for the task of being a pastor of a great downtown church situation.¹

What he did do was attempt to reestablish a relationship with his wife and three daughters as well as to meet the needs of transient servicemen who knocked on the pastor's door to be married, to get consolation before overseas duty, or to be entertained and distracted in the midst of their interrupted lives. Not many souls were won in Tampa.

Since soul-winning was not primary in Tampa, Leavell agonized over what good was being accomplished. The transition from his intense evangelistic efforts throughout the South to the more humdrum and mundane matters of a local congregation proved difficult for him. He also now had more serious financial obligations since his eldest daughter was in

¹Langlois, "Leavell's Concept of Evangelism," p. 23.
college and his second daughter soon would be. Primarily Leavell was restless because every day mail arrived containing invitations to conduct revivals, some of them city-wide, even though he was now out of the professional position he had held. It was obvious that he had made a name for himself. Southern Baptists had read his numerous ebullient articles, while ministers had read in the Southern Baptist annual of the increase in the number of baptisms and had heard his addresses to the Convention. His persuasive language, laughter, and winning personality convinced the city preachers of his ability to lead people to God. Many ministers who had found it impossible to book him during his stay with the convention now wished him to come to their churches in spite of the war-time economy and general decline in interest. He literally wept because he could not accept all those invitations, but he still accepted as many as he could.

The highlight of his years in Tampa came in October, 1942, when he conducted a successful and stimulating revival in Washington, D.C. During his stay, he was asked to lead a prayer in Congress, and he was taken up to the Capitol by Senator Walter F. George of Georgia and introduced to many Congressmen. He wrote to his daughter enroute to Washington on the train:

Yes, I am going to Washington to the city-wide campaign which I have been planning for so long. I do not intend to help Franklin D. try to find Eleanor, that would be too difficult, but I will try to help the Pastors find some 100,000 lost or indifferent sinners in the city.²

²Roland Leavell to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, October 15, 1943, Leavell Papers, Bowman.
While in Washington, he preached at the National Baptist Memorial Church and directed the campaign titled "Washington for Christ." The announcement of his coming heralded him as the man who had "led 53 successful city-wide simultaneous meetings, and as Secretary of Evangelism Committee member for the Baptist World Alliance." Letters in regard to the campaign indicated the excitement and thrill he felt getting back into city-wide evangelism. After lunch with Congressman Rankin from Mississippi, he wrote on official Senate stationery:

I have the honor of writing you from the Senate Chamber of the United States of America, informing you that you have been chosen by the government to take charge of education of young girls in the nation to see that every girl in the nation is taught to respect her Daddy who may be in Washington hob-nobbing around with the big-wigs. Of course your first duty is to set the right example. Again, yesterday I had lunch in the Senate dining room with Rankin . . . met a whole slough of Senators, Congressmen, etc. So you see, you must take all those facts into account!!!

He closed the letter with the excitement evident in every word:

Tonight we close out our meeting and this morning we have the last of the breakfast meetings for the best city-wide campaign I have ever been in. We have had wonderful results in National Memorial Church . . . but I failed to get Eleanor to find a maid for your Mother. Alas, alack! . . . be assured that your ole Dad will get back to earth soon after having been up in the

3 Ibid., October 19, 1943.

4 Ibid., n.d.
Leavell received many invitations to lead revivals like the one in Washington, but his sense of duty to his church in Tampa compelled him to decline most of them. He was asked to become the state executive secretary in the Florida Baptist Convention but refused to do so. He did remain active locally. He was president of the Tampa Ministers' Association and spoke frequently to civic and religious clubs throughout the city. He organized a preachers' Bible study and wrote books to pay for his children's college tuition. Letters to his children at college indicate his activities, which reflect his own mild impatience with the drudgery of day-to-day ministry:

Tomorrow I have three funerals to conduct along with all routine matters such as getting out the church bulletin, teaching the preacher school at night, etc. It is getting sort hard to sleep at times . . .

Perhaps I should be writing out a script for my 7:30 radio address tomorrow morning, but I'm sure I would rather short-wave you a little word or two . . . we are having a departmental training school in the church this week, with several other churches cooperating, and all out-of-town faculty. 'Tis going good but it is nearly killing your Ma to have to come down each night to the meetings.

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
The war intruded upon his activities, but it certainly bore no resemblance to the impact of the First World War. His efforts to help soldiers this time involved no stretcher-bearing, but a periodic call to help out a soldier with some personal need.

... life is one round after another. For a while I had a new wife and baby, but they have left me now. Just as I was going to the Thursday night class for preachers the telephone rang and some Lt. said, 'Is this the preacher? I am here with my wife and 2 month old baby just arrived from San Francisco on the bus, am broke, and must go on this bus to Avon Park. I am leaving them here at the station for you to take care of.'

Take them somewhere until I hear from you or you hear from me.' When he found out that I was going to the meeting for preachers, he said, 'O.K., I'll send them in a taxi to the church.' ... He did, and I got them a room in town and gave her money. Haven't heard from them since.

Marriages were not uncommon either:

Last week a soldier called me and said he wanted me to do his wedding ceremony that night. I asked him his name and then his girl's name. He said 'Her name is Mary Frances . . . Mary Frances . . . uh . . . er . . . Oh, what is your name?' I heard her meekly answer back . . . I hope the boy knows her last name now, since she has taken his.

"D-Day and the Hand of God" was the title of Leavell's sermon on
June 11, 1944, five days after the invasion of the Normandy coast by
the Allied armies. He began his message recounting his experience in a
dugout in the Argonne Forest in 1918 when the last major Allied thrust
began. "The Captain turned to me and said, 'Leavell, hell is about to
break loose.'" Leavell then told his large Tampa congregation:

The words of Captain Johnson were brought back
to my mind as I read and heard over the radio
last Tuesday of how 7,500 planes with 31,000
flying men flew across the English Channel to
protect our force . . . reports are that there
were four airborne divisions and two parachute
divisions along with 4,000 ships taking Allied
land fighters to the field of battle. Along
the Channel there were twelve battleships,
eighty destroyers, and many cruisers . . .
Hell had broken loose.

The Germans must have been terrified. The
French were delighted . . . the English grim
and determined . . . Russians jubilant. We
delight to think that Americans were prayer-
ful. American people are in church today as
you are, in large numbers because you believe
that the hand of God was in the important
events of that day. As we think of other in-
vasions of past history, we know that the hand
of God was there shaping the future . . . in
spite of the folly and fierceness of men.11

The D-Day message to his congregation compared the invasion to the
destruction of Sennacherib, the ancient Assyrian power, and likened the
policies of Rab-Sahkah, the Assyrian who sneered at God, with those of
Joseph Goebbels, the German Minister of Propaganda. He quoted John
Wesley who had written, "I read the newspapers to see how God rules the
world." "Ultimate victory," he continued, "for the Allies at Normandy

11Roland Leavell, "D Day and the Hand of God," First Baptist Church,
Tampa, Florida, June 11, 1944.
beachhead today will mean that God has again turned the pages of history;" he then depicted occasions on which he perceived God to have intervened in past wars. Judea was saved so that out of it Christ could come. The Persian Empire allowed Jews in exile to return to Judea for the same reason. Later Antony and Cleopatra were defeated by the Romans, so that Roman law, Roman roads, and Roman peace might make it possible for Christianity to spread in the Roman world. Leavell was a bit vague in trying to show how the battle of Hastings glorified God, but the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 was:

"... at the very same place where God tempered the winds and fog for our invading ships last Tuesday. Clearly we see that in 1588 God determined that Anglo Saxon Protestant Christians should mold the civilization of England and America.

Leavell credited God's rain at Waterloo with the defeat of Napoleon and claimed that Robert E. Lee's defeat was of God:

"Since I now believe that God was pleased to preserve our union, ... we are the most powerful nation among nations of the earth and God was at the Argonne Forest and God saved England at Dunkirk and God has saved America since Pearl Harbor. Surely God turns the pages of history.

With this assertion he further stated that God has used Hitler to scourge America and bring the nation to prayer.

France was the haughtiest with her drunkenness, her vice ... she was knocked out first. England at the Disarmament Conference in the 1920's refused to outlaw the airplane as a weapon of war just as poison gas was outlawed. England was the first to suffer greatly from bombing ... Holland refused to share her colonial possessions and all
her colonies have been captured by the Japanese. Russia officially declared herself atheistic but today Russia has been humbled by her fearful sacrifice of property and population. European nations have all quarrelled over exploiting unhappy Africa, but now sons of all European countries lie half buried on the battlefields of Africa. The United States refused to enter the League of Nations saying it might involve us in another war . . . but in spite . . . of our selfish isolation we find ourselves today fighting a global war . . . Money has been our god; today our money-god has let us down and money is being poured out like water . . . United States sold munitions to Japan and now it is shot into the bodies of our boys . . . Last Tuesday night President Roosevelt over the radio, led the nation in prayer. He did not pray as I would have prayed or as you might have prayed. But in spite of the manner in which he prayed, I am glad that he did pray and suggest to the nation that we should pray . . . We pray as King Hezekiah did and not as Roosevelt: 'Save us that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only.'

Thus Leavell perceived history as a tool in the hand of a controlling God. He sought to prove to his listeners after D-Day that God used wars as punishments or rewards. Leavell took selected "sins" such as France's "vice and drunkenness," Russia's atheism, and Europe's imperialistic endeavors and coupled each with an appropriate punishment. France was knocked out "first" as a result of drunkenness, the foremost crime in Leavell's litany of sins. Essentially he made God act as he wanted Him to act, or as he himself would have acted in God's place. Leavell not only portrayed his punishing God at work in the past, but he assumed the role of prophet to predict that, if America let the

\[12\] Ibid.
victory pass without using it to win the world, America would suffer again.

We do not pray that our enemies may have success in battle, but we must pray that God will determine the end of the war in a way to make our enemies recognize God and glorify His name . . . get ready with a world force to win Japan and Germany for Christ.¹³

Leavell joined many other Protestant pastors in abandoning the idea popular during the First World War that war could be justified as a holy crusade.¹⁴ Instead, many ministers advocated contrition and penitence for past sins as a way to stop all wars. Men such as Reinhold Niebuhr disagreed with this stance and suggested that it was important for Christians to cease enlarging upon the well-known evils of the western world by equating them with totalitarian regimes.¹⁵ Leavell begged for his listeners to be contrite and apologize for their sins and indicated that Hitler was a scourge to bring America to its knees in prayer. Leavell never did suggest, as one Canadian pastor did, that "This is the saddest war in history. We . . . are dejected . . . we expect nothing from this war except that everything precious will be taken out of life for many of us . . . nevertheless we could do no other."¹⁶

¹³Ibid.


¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.
Neither did Leavell take a stand like that of the *Christian Century*,
which said of World War II that everyone in the world was drawn into it
unwillingly; that it was an irrational struggle which no country de-
sired; and that it was a futile use of power with undiscriminating
weapons which smashed alike defense plants, cathedrals, troop trains,
and air-raid shelters filled with women and children. The *Christian
Century* saw the war as without morals or justification. "This was not
a just war; it was just war." None of the reluctant participants
could do anything about it, and Americans and the world alike should
view it with "unexpressible grief." Leavell's sermons instead were
full of pleading for contrition over the sins of the American nation
such as the adulation of money and non-missionary motives of the past.
He did not realize that it was perhaps cruel to send soldiers into
battle regarding themselves as victims either of the terrible mistakes
of men in high places or of God's condemnation for past corporate sins.

Only when conducting memorial services for men killed in action
and praying for prisoners of war, was Leavell forced to consider the
human questions raised by war and the death it brought. In the
memorial services for Lt. Col. Loy Edmondson, a long-time friend who
was killed in action on Okinawa, he spoke primarily of duty: "He slept
and dreamed that life was beauty. He woke and found that life was
duty . . . . He faced duty without question, faced danger without
hesitation; faced death without fear." Thus, he intimated that Edmond-
son's death was more glorious because he entered into the experience

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without question or hesitation. Leavell further stated that "duty is the stern voice of God" and he quoted from the "Song of the Chattahoochee," written about the river where he and Loy used to fish; "accept my bed or narrow or wide, as the river so must I."¹⁸

Of young Staff Sgt. Edgar Mills, also killed in battle, Roland told the bereaved family and friends, "sacrifice such as this must not be allowed to go in vain." He used the example of "Winged Victory of Samothrace," a statue created to celebrate a military victory won by that island. He described the statue, with no head or arms, as "mutilated." "The head is gone which would have been a crown and the arms are broken which would hold the palm branch." Thus "Victory is mutilated and broken. Always thus will it be." Yet the victory in this war would be more glorious because Staff Sgt. Mills worshipped in churches wherever he served and gave his Christian witness in North and South America, Africa, and Europe. "The last letter I received from Ed Mills said that he was in Italy helping to clean out a wine cellar, to make a place for the chaplain of their outfit to have a place to conduct services."¹⁹

In these and similar messages to families of dead soldiers, Leavell used the conventional reassurances of the time. On no occasion did he try to reconcile the death of basically innocent men and women with his notion that war somehow serves a good God’s higher purpose. He pre-


ferred instead to focus on such petty matters as Mills cleaning out the wine cellar for the chaplain, a deed of considerable importance because drinking ranked first in his hierarchy of sins. He believed such tales would comfort the family and reveal the nobility of the deceased young man. In the case of Edmondson, he spoke of duty and the acceptance of duty as the "stern voice of God." Basically Leavell avoided asking serious questions about war. Like most conservative Baptists, he considered such questions an indication of doubt about God's goodness as a sign of a serious lack of faith. Leavell's mother, whose theology never left him, taught him that acceptance of God's will was a Christian obligation. She also taught him that the world was in God's charge; thus throughout his life he was forced to assign motives to God for any and all world affairs, including war. It was easy to justify wars of the past by showing how they had produced favorable results for Christianity. But to confront the problem of present wars and the deaths they brought was a more difficult task. And he dealt with it as he had done with so many fearsome questions in his life; he moved on to something else.
CHAPTER 8
A VICARIOUS WAY TO SAVE THE WORLD

Frustrated continually in his efforts to save souls in Tampa during the war, Leavell was delighted with an opportunity which came in 1946, when the Southern Baptist Convention met in Miami, Florida. Prior to the meeting, a committee of the convention spoke seriously with him about accepting the office of president of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, a position that, he declared, he wanted more than anything else he could imagine. He was aware of the central- ity of theological education in the Baptist scheme of things and therefore knew that such a position would bring him added honor; besides he was attracted by a place of leadership with more prestige than the pastorate. He was now fifty-two years old, and he felt that he was ready for a position with more status and opportunity. He was well-known throughout the Convention and the Baptist world; he had received two honorary doctorates and had been elected secretary of the Baptist World Alliance Evangelism Committee. He had gone as far as he could in this pastorate.1

The presidency of a Theological Seminary was what he now believed to be God's plan for his life even though he had never indicated this ambition at any previous time. Just as he interpreted history as the

1He had served as moderator of the Tampa Bay Baptist Association, member of the Executive Board of the Florida Baptist Convention, and the Executive Committee chairman of the Board. He had turned down the Executive Director's position when it was offered to him. He was Florida's representative on the Home Mission Board, was President of the Tampa All-Denominational Ministerial Association, and served on the faculty of the University of Tampa by teaching a course on religion in the philosophy department.
outcome of God's will, so he did for his own life, saying, "For this purpose came I into the world." While considering the offer, he wrote his daughter away at college:

Confidential: This must not be talked to anyone but the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the New Orleans Seminary looking for a president is coming to Tampa to talk to me. What do you think of it? There are many angles to the question. First, it means leaving the pastorate forever. It means leaving Tampa after four years. This does not appeal to me. BUT IT MEANS ... I would take over a job that I could grow increas­ singly strong in leadership as I grow older — exactly the reverse from the pastorate where the trend is toward the 36-40 year group exclu­ sively. It would give me a strong place of leader­ ship in the Southern Baptist Convention, and it would afford me an opportunity to direct and in­ fluence the lives of the younger generation of preachers who come there. I would make that Seminary a soul-winning institution.

He was unanimously elected on Tuesday, May 14, in Miami.3 Essentially this honor meant that he had never given the Convention any rea­ son to doubt that he was completely predictable and orthodox in follow­ ing Southern Baptist tenets. They believed he was properly austere; he gave the appearance of being scholarly, and yet he had never ventured into an innovative or unusual path. The conventioneers recognized him as a symbol of evangelism for Southern Baptists, since no other Southern Baptist had written so many different books on the subject. They also

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recognized the appropriateness of his heading the New Orleans Seminary, which was first and foremost to train men for evangelism. The Board of Trustees and Southern Baptists in general had no reason to doubt that he was the proper man to serve.

They did not know that, while he would stay well within the confines of the accepted doctrine, his ambition was to accomplish something lasting as a memorial to his life. He also believed, as he told his eldest daughter, that this appointment would fulfill God's intended purpose for his life:

> From now on you may address your pore ole Dad as President of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, . . . I'll cease to be pastor of the First Church, Tampa, at midnight, tomorrow . . . I feel I am entering into that phase of life work for which all the rest has been made and planned. May God grant that it be so.4

"Every great evangelist in history", Leavell concluded, "has given the last years of his theological life to education in order to train men to come after him and follow in his path."5

When he remembered his decision at the time of his retirement many years later, he recalled:

> On my election in 1946 I told the trustees; "If you want me to go there to be a friend to those students and try to make that a better seminary, there is nothing I would rather try to do; if you

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4 Roland Leavell to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, June 29, 1946, Leavell Papers, Bowman.

5 Ibid.
want me to raise money, there is nothing I want less to do. Much of my twelve years there was absorbed with receiving and spending millions of dollars. It was the joy of my life to teach Evangelism classes during those years. Evangelism is part of the core curriculum of all Southern Baptist seminaries. It reaches into the Biblical realm for the record of methods that succeeded or failed; it reaches into Theology for the message of it; it reaches into the Practical Fields area for the application of it. The teacher of Evangelism has a captive audience of . . . dedicated young people who want more than anything to lead others to be Christians.6

It is doubtful that Roland Leavell really believed that he would not have to raise money. He knew that he would have to generate the resources in order to build a worthy memorial to himself and his aspirations. He had to know that it would be difficult to acquire the amounts necessary to accomplish his goals, but he obviously felt that he was equal to the task, and he was willing to pay whatever the price in time, effort, and energy. While the years between his election and his retirement contained tasks that frequently seemed beyond his capacity to complete, he never doubted that his endeavors served the divine purpose that he was, at last, worthy of his mother's praises.

While he may have written that he did not want primarily to raise money for the Seminary, he went to his new position well recommended for that task. Not only had the church in Tampa praised him for retiring all the debts of the church and doubling the contributions for missions, it passed a special resolution (written by Doyle Carleton, a

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6 Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 82.
future governor of Florida) commending Leavell for his ability to raise funds. Undoubtedly his reputation as a money-raiser contributed substantially to the Board of Trustees' choice of him as president. Leavell probably knew from the beginning that his old nemesis, insomnia, would still be with him, but during his life at the Seminary, his sleepless nights were often spent thinking of ways to raise money for his ventures.

Leavell faced two serious tasks at his new post. His primary chore was to move the Seminary to a better location with little or no funds available for the purpose. When the Seminary was founded in 1917, the Southern Baptist Convention purchased the suitable and valuable property of Sophie Newcomb College on Washington Avenue after that college had moved out to the Tulane University campus. The grounds were magnificent; among the structures were a lovely old chapel and classroom buildings with typical New Orleans decor: high ceilings and iron grillwork gates. Live oak trees with hanging moss and spacious faculty houses completed the appearance of the beautiful campus. Unfortunately, there was no room for expansion, and student dormitories, classrooms, and married student apartments were needed. Leavell knew he must find a way to build a completely new campus. His second and perhaps more difficult task was to gain full accreditation for the Seminary with the American Association of Theological Schools and accreditation for the School of Religious Education. It is well that

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7 "Pastor Resigns, Church Chimes (Tampa, Florida), June 30, 1946.

8 Leavell Sheer Joy of Living, p. 85.
rest, as most people thought of it, was not in his past experience, for he pursued these two major objectives with unflagging vigor.

Leavell had never been in a position where his natural authoritarianism could be so readily exercised as it could be at the Seminary. Since he considered himself under divine command, as a minister, to relate messages on behalf of God, he felt, like many other evangelical conservatives, that he should control and direct people and events. He had learned authoritarianism at home in Oxford in his rigorously repressed early years and was indoctrinated with the idea that God expected much.

As a pastor, however, even if he was aware of what he perceived to be God’s will for men, he could not command obedience because the democratic nature of Baptists churches thwarted this tendency. Baptist churches in America lived out the early part of their existence on the frontier in conditions which spawned the concept of autonomy for each individual church and for each individual believer within the church. There were few opportunities for Roland, as pastor, to be an authoritarian, and, as much as it chafed him, he frequently had to sacrifice personal views or efficiency for the democracy demanded by the church. Even a degree of individual interpretation of the Bible had to be permitted to each believer, no matter how misled Leavell felt a member of his church might be. The Baptist denominations had no hierarchical structure and maintained a strong commitment to congregational responsibility and local church government. The practice was to regard denominational officials as servants with no right or authority to discipline a congregation or an individual member of a congregation. In
Southern Baptist churches the congregation regarded itself as the supreme authority in decision making. The Board of Deacons acted on behalf of the congregation, and pastors were, as a rule, beholden to the Board of Deacons. Leavell had to operate within the system. No matter how keenly he may have felt that he was supposed to impose God's judgment on the congregation by divine right; he could not. On Sunday afternoon upon leaving for Deacons' meeting, he would say as he put on his hat, "Wonder what the Dekes have for me today?"

The need to answer to an entire congregation was an obstacle that he learned to work around. Through the years he developed a talent for being diplomatic and jovial. He avoided controversial matters if he possibly could. He possessed the wit and the ability to make everyone think he or she was exceptionally important. A joke about his diplomacy which made the rounds of the Southern Baptist Convention concerned the lady who brought the ugliest baby he had ever seen for him to admire. He said the baby actually looked like a "pig in a poke," but to the proud mother he said with great warmth and admiration in his voice, "Now that is a baby if I ever saw one . . . now that IS A BABY . . . what a BABY!" The mother was delighted. He knew how to placate mothers, deacons, janitors, or recalcitrant old ladies.

During the years as pastor, he developed a sugar-coated authoritarianism. It was effective with his children, his wife, his churches, and later with a diverse faculty and with a student body whom he sometimes referred to as "a bunch of high school sophomores who have come to this Seminary thinking they want to be preachers. I'll make them grow up." He had the opportunity to act independently at the Seminary
because the Board of Trustees only met twice a year and usually acted as a rubber stamp for his decisions. They were elected, to be sure, by the Convention, but only after he suggested names to the Convention's Committee on Nominations. He packed the Board with his supporters and with the richest, most cooperative men he could find. He was always looking for Christians "with four aces and a million dollars."

These men did not necessarily have to be intellectuals, nor did they have to be particularly devout as long as they agreed with him on how he might achieve his goals. Most of the Trustees were men whom he felt had achieved material success in business. He gave them a way to feel that they were sanctifying their own success by contributing their time and effort to an institution with a religious orientation. At the helm of the Seminary he was freed from the restraints of a congregation and deacons that had to be cajoled; no longer was he at the mercy of the many city preachers whom he directed in crusades during his years with the Evangelism board. His natural authoritarianism was allowed full rein. He had the authority to make decisions and the power to implement them as he saw fit.

Leavell's happiness stemmed from the fact that his work at the Seminary, like virtually every other experience he had had, was a vicarious way to save the world. He happily stated, "Students at the New Orleans Seminary win enough souls to Christ and people to church membership each school week to start a new Baptist church, if all the converts were in the same locality." At last, he had found the best means

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9Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 82
to fulfill all of his mother's dreams for him. Her last letter to the
Leavell boys had stated, "May your chief aim and desire in every ac-
tion in your life be to bring lost men in to the cross in the extension
of His kingdom." Roland had spent his entire life attempting to
follow his mother's admonition, and now the Seminary provided an excep-
tional way to carry out her wishes.

The first of his two primary tasks, the relocation of the Seminary,
demanded consideration immediately upon his taking office. For some
years before, the committee of the Convention evaluating the Seminary
had been recommending that the campus be moved from its location on the
old Sophie Newcomb site, but no desirable property was available in the
crowded city of New Orleans. Within six weeks after Leavell assumed his
duties as President, however, 376 acres of land which had been in liti-
gation for forty years became available. Many business and religious
concerns in New Orleans were anxious to acquire the property. At the
precise time the title to it became clear, the Southern Baptist Con-
vention started a capital-funds drive, and the Convention promised
Leavell enough money, $25,000, for a 90-day option on 75 acres, during
which time he could try to obtain the remainder of the necessary
financing. To arrange the transaction required clever negotiation, as
Leavell related:

The providential hand of God rewarded us. Virtu-
tually all the real estate dealers wanted those
75 acres. A wealthy New Orleans politician and
real estate promoter had offered a million dollars

Corra Berry Leavell to her nine sons, n.d., 1911, Leavell Papers,
Bowman.
for the acreage but the holding company offered to sell it for a million and a half. The real estate agent said . . . 'our archbishop wants the part you want, to build a boys' school.' That was stiff competition for Baptists in New Orleans, a Catholic city, especially when we scarcely had the down payment for a portion of it . . . I persuaded the agent that the holding company would eventually compromise and sell it for a million and a quarter. If he would sell us seventy-five acres -- one fifth of it for a quarter of a million, the rich promoter would give him his million for the remaining three hundred acres. I let him know I knew that if the owners sold it to the Baptists, he would get a fat commission; if they sold it to the archbishop, he would have to give his commission to the church. I scraped the bottom of the barrel to get up the down payment. The very next day the promoter offered the real estate agent a million and a quarter for the entire acreage. He went into a rage when he found out that Baptists had signed the ninety-day option for the most desirable part . . . fronting Gentilly Boulevard.\textsuperscript{11}

He then began to raise money for the full purchase. The competitors were told that the Baptists probably would not be able to obtain such a large amount in such a short time. A few days before the option was up, however, after letters, phone calls, and telegrams, Leavell had the money in hand and purchased for the Convention the present location of the Seminary. The sum amounting to $3,300 per acre, came from the Convention, from current operational funds, and from designated gifts which he raised through personal solicitation of all the supporters he had gained in past pastorates and revivals in the South. In July, 1948, ground was broken for student apartment buildings. In 1950 more apartments and the library were begun. In 1951, construct-

\textsuperscript{11}Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 83.
tion started on a residence hall for women, an administration building, and the John Bunyan building for the School of Theology. In the eyes of the Southern Baptist Convention it was a miracle that such progress could be made in such a brief span of time with such a scarcity of resources. The construction continued with the beginning of the book store, faculty residences, a cafeteria, and a children's building as well as a residence hall for men. All the building had been done on a cash basis, and the Seminary had purchased one third of the assets of a housing corporation, which had been formed by wealthy, interested friends of Leavell to finance the apartment building. Money came from three sources: capital funds of the Southern Baptist Convention, the successful sale of the old property, and donations from Roland's friends, some of whom were Baptists, but many of whom were from other denominations. Leavell was happy to receive money from the non-Baptists, who included some of his Oxford Sigma Chi brothers, now successful in business and professions. He also cultivated many New Orleanians who were potential contributors whether they were Baptist or not. Only one large gift was rejected; when the owner of a large brewery offered to make a contribution, Leavell declined and said that he could not accept money knowing how it had been acquired. Obtaining the Convention money by claiming priority for the needs of the Seminary above the other causes of the Southern Baptist Convention was more difficult than raising the funds from private donations. He justified appeals on the grounds that the Seminary had an evangelical mission. He said in his inaugural speech, "The dominant dedication of the school will be evangelism," and he wrote to friends and potential donors from strongly
Protestant Georgia, Kentucky, and Mississippi that the "location is in one of the strongest Catholic centers of the country."

"Construction on the campus never ceased for one day from that time until a very brief period in 1957. The sound of saw and hammer was music to my ears," Leavell reminisced.\textsuperscript{12} Construction meant that more students could be accommodated at the Seminary and thus more souls would be won through student efforts at missions. As to converting the Catholics, the students preached on the streets of New Orleans and in the riverfront sections of the Mississippi River, but somehow prominent Catholics were never on the list of those to be evangelized. If they could be won, not to Protestantism, but to give money, that was acceptable.

"Sunrise of a New and Glorious Day" was the headline which appeared in Vision, the Seminary journal, as the institution began its first year of complete operation on the new campus. Buildings had been occupied as they were built, and in 1953, the entire Seminary was relocated; the first registration on the new site was held the first two days of September and formal dedication of the new campus on September 3. That is the way Leavell did things best, under pressure, with full authority, with excited and devoted followers who wanted to please him. With all the chaos and turmoil which surrounded the move, it is no wonder that the theme of the dedication ceremonies was "Things Which Abide in a World of Change." Leavell had dedicated his life to two ambitions: soul-winning and his own success. To Leavell the buildings of the Seminary were visible symbols of the fulfillment of both.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 82.
All had not been easy during the time of construction. His efforts provoked some criticism. One Baptist pastor said openly from the pulpit, "He should be sending Bibles to Brazil instead of building those expensive buildings." Roland heard of the remark and countered, "Just wait, he'll be the first one out here showing everyone around saying, 'look at our new Seminary.'" It was an accurate prediction because that pastor later attended conferences and classes on the campus and encouraged prospective young ministers to attend. A more material obstacle for Leavell to overcome arose when the United States government began restricting steel during the Korean War. When work on the administration building had to stop because no steel was available, he got on the train and went to Washington. He was told that the only way he could secure the necessary steel would be for someone in the southeastern district of the United States to whom steel had been allocated to release his portion. Leavell's response to the incredulous bureaucrat in Washington was, "Then I will get it because God is in our building program. Too many miracles have happened for me not to believe that." Returning to New Orleans on the train two days later, he bought a paper at Gulfport, Mississippi. He read that steel for two major buildings had been allocated to the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary; an unknown buyer had fortuitously released his allocation. The architects and contractors stated later that they felt they were truly on holy ground because they had been unsuccessful in obtaining the steel that Leavell had been able to secure by relying on

13 Author's reminiscence.
Seventeen buildings were built and occupied from 1946 to 1953. During his long administration eighty-five buildings were built.

When the architect first drew up plans for the new campus, he felt that the library should occupy the central building, as the center of learning. Leavell, however, believed the chapel should be the focal point. In *Vision* he wrote:

> What the temple was to Israel, a chapel will be to this Seminary . . . What the sanctuary is to the church, a chapel in the center of our campus will speak . . . Come this is a trysting place with God.\(^\text{15}\)

He persuaded the architects to place the chapel in the center of the campus in the architectural drawings. It was 1956 before construction could begin, and it was not an especially good year to undertake a half-million dollar building. Since the Seminary had been at the top of the Convention's priority list for several years, the Southern Baptists were now ready to focus on other areas of need. Leavell believed, however, that he could finance the building with the help of generous friends of his kind of education. And he was again correct.

The *Times Picayune* of September 11, 1956, gave considerable space to the chapel plans including the architect's sketch showing the proposed spire, 185 feet high, which was a replica of one atop the First

\(^{14}\)Leavell, *Sheer Joy of Living*, p. 84.

Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, the oldest Baptist church in America. Leavell's optimism was apparent when he was quoted by the newspaper as predicting:

The seminary hopes to dedicate its new chapel, with its historic spire, in October of 1958, the 320th anniversary of the founding of the Providence Rhode Island Church and the 40th anniversary of the opening of the New Orleans Seminary.

Mayor deLesseps Morrison, commenting on the Seminary's plans, said:

We, in New Orleans are very pleased that the Baptist Theological Seminary is starting a drive to build a new chapel . . . the chapel with a spire similar to the one in Providence is a very real symbol of the historical ties of friendship which exist between the people of New Orleans and the people of Providence.

In spite of the lack of documentation about the friendship of Providence and New Orleans, Leavell was happy at least to gain the friendship and good will of Mayor Morrison. It was Morrison who had helped him to secure access streets into the campus, who sat beside him at the New Orleans Rotary Club each week, and who presented him with a key to the city and his personal friendship. It was Catholics like Morrison who caused Roland to adjust his earlier narrow views that Catholics were not Christians. Anyone who helped him build his campus, wrote him letters

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17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.
of warm appreciation for community activities, and called on him to lead in prayer at various civic functions must truly be a good Chris­tian. Chep Morrison was on hand when the chapel was dedicated in Sep­tember, 1956.

Although the building program of the Seminary remained his foremost concern, Leavell did not neglect the academic status of the school. He was chagrined that Baptists frequently felt that education spelled death to evangelistic zeal, and he believed that the widespread suspicion of education and educated men could surely be alleviated. However, what Leavell insisted to be theological education was indoctrination and superficial refinement, not search for new truth or reflective thought. Education at Leavell's seminary had one purpose: to make Baptist ministers more efficient at winning converts to their own beliefs. To do this they must dress well, speak well, and win souls exactly as Leavell prescribed. He deplored the fact that so many men in the Baptist ministry appeared uneducated; they spoke improperly, were rough mannered, and did not know simple rudiments of writing. He wanted Baptist preachers to acquire the exterior refinements of the educated man in order to become soul-winners. However, because Baptists had no standards for ordination, any church could officially "set a man apart as a minister of the gospel." Many young ministers who were "called of God" had never been beyond high school. It was usually a simple matter to convince these novices that evangelism was pre-eminent, but to teach them to act as cultured Southern gentlemen was another matter. This, he perceived, was a major goal of theologi­cal education.
Leavell stated that each minister should appear as "educated" as possible. He frequently emphasized that the Apostle Paul was educated at the better schools of his day in Tarsus as well as at Gamaliel's school in Jerusalem. He recalled that Augustine was the best educated man of his time and was able thereby to contribute so much to his own and to later generations. Leavell also pointed to Luther as a highly-educated man, in law as well as theology, and to John Wesley as a graduate of Oxford University. "Battles," he insisted,"cannot be won with the dull weapons of an uneducated ministry." In what battles did he feel the educated ministry should be enlisted? The battle to save the souls of the world's people of course. Thus whatever education he fostered was directed toward this end. Anything that caused his ministers to waver from this single purpose he considered destructive. He did not sanction theological disputes he feared might divert his young students into critical inquiries rather than the evangelical action. To Leavell, a properly educated minister appeared refined and won others to Christ.

Yet Leavell encouraged scholars to come as professors to the Seminary, even including some who were not primarily interested in his goal of soul-winning. He valued them not for their beliefs or for their insights into theological matters, but for the repute they brought to the Seminary. He retained them and protected them, even when they espoused views that appeared contrary to his own and the Convention's beliefs. He hired some men whom his successor released

19Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 80.
from their positions because they were considered too liberal, and several remained on Leavell's faculty throughout the years of his administration. Once when the Seminary was severely criticized for the views of a faculty member, Leavell called the man in and said, "All you have to do for me is get up and read the Articles of Faith you signed when you came to teach here. If you will do this in chapel, we'll have no problem from anyone." After the scholar had complied, a fellow professor wrote, "I never dreamed he would stand up and read this at Dr. Leavell's request, he was such a resolute, stubborn man; but he did, and Dr. Leavell affirmed openly that there was nothing wrong with Dr. ____'s theological beliefs.\footnote{Eugene Patterson to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, n.d., Leavell Papers, Bowman.} If Leavell knew what the controversial professor taught, he may not have understood it, but his purpose was not to pass judgment on the man or to analyze his teachings but retain him on the faculty because he had a sound reputation for scholarship. Roland himself never spent time in scholarly or reflective thought; however, he frequently quoted his friend and fellow Baptist, Brooks Hayes, one-time Under Secretary of State and Congressman from Arkansas, who said, "Evangelism and scholarship are not mutually exclusive."\footnote{Brooks Hayes, \textit{The Baptist Way of Life} (Macon, 1963), p. 168.} Leavell thought of Christian scholarship as an external refinement needed to make evangelism respectable. His faculty knew this full well.
In his inaugural address in 1946 Leavell explained why the Seminary needed a good faculty:

We must remember that a student will not cross the street just to sit in a comfortable, air-conditioned classroom. He will cross the United States to sit at the feet of a great teacher. While we construct buildings we must keep developing an outstanding faculty.

Higher learning is not incomparable with deep piety ... it is no sign of extra unction if the heart is full and the head is empty and to attain this high standard of scholarship, the first requirement is a scholarly faculty.22

He gathered together men whom he thought could best fill this need. He promised them research time and freedom to accept speaking engagements; he obtained grants for sabbaticals for academic purposes and provided them rent-free homes on campus. Among his scholarly appointments were Dr. Penrose St. Amant, professor of church history and theology, who later became the academic dean of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville and President of the European Baptist Seminary in Switzerland; Dr. Eugene Patterson, professor of biblical backgrounds, who became president of Grand Canyon College; and Dr. Frank Stagg, who was at the time the outstanding Greek scholar of all theological denominations. These were only a few of his distinguished faculty. In thirteen years he quadrupled the number of faculty members; he made some mistakes in his choices, but seldom admitted it.

Each year he arranged for a faculty fishing trip to Grand Isle, Louisiana, where the men fished for other than human souls and partici-

pated in light-hearted dialogue and a great deal of late-night laughter. Once when Dr. Patterson unknowingly got his fishing line entangled with Leavell's, he shouted triumphantly: "I've got something so big that I don't think I can handle it." Leavell, seeing what had happened, shouted gleefully with more truth than he intended, "You sure have, Mr."

Many of his faculty members expressed fear, awe, respect, and love for Leavell. Dr. Ray Frank Robbins, professor of New Testament, once spoke of his superior's keen mind:

He asked me to go with him once in New Orleans when he was a guest speaker at the English Club of New Orleans. The English Club was made up of people who were natives of England who resided in New Orleans. Dr. Leavell, for one hour, without any notes, not even a scrap of paper, quoted poetry from famous 18th century British poets. He said at the beginning, that he could do the same for 17th, or 19th century poets, but since the 18th century was his favorite, this was his choice. Tears rolled down the faces of those English people and they were astounded at the brilliance of this man. I was appalled at the wide scope of his talents. Can you believe he is the same man who came over to my house when I came to the Seminary and helped me move furniture and unpack boxes?

Again rote memory was considered by many to be a manifestation of a "keen mind" and brought expressions of admiration from some of his professors. Many also admired his great oratorical skill. Dr. J.

\[23\] Eugene Patterson to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, n.d., Leavell Papers, Bowman.

Hardee Kennedy, who became the Academic Dean of the Seminary, asked Leavell once how he had such power in his preaching.

Dr. Leavell told me that before he preached a sermon he re-read the book of Amos in the Bible. 'You cannot read Amos the prophet without knowing what you must feel in order to preach effectively.' Since that time, I do the same. I never have achieved the same result, but at least I know it has helped me and many of my students I advise to do the same thing.\textsuperscript{25}

Dr. Patterson stated, "There will never be another one like him. I always appreciated him but after I became president of a college I wondered every day of my life, how in the world he was so capable in so many areas."\textsuperscript{26} Leavell may not have understood all that his faculty taught or thought, but they appreciated his leadership and his willingness to support them in their scholarship and teaching. They thought of him as a benevolent monarch, not always wise, but fair and always in complete charge.

His willingness to allow his professors to teach rather freely did not mean that Leavell cared little for what happened in the classroom. He maintained a constant watch on classroom activities. Indeed, when he accepted the position as President, he told the search committee that he planned to teach courses in evangelism himself. His evangelism classes were dreaded and ridiculed by many of the students. He knew this but it mattered not one whit to him. His students were required

\textsuperscript{25} J. Hardee Kennedy to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, n.d., Leavell Papers, Bowman.

\textsuperscript{26} Eugene Patterson to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, n.d., Leavell Papers, Bowman.
to memorize long portions of the scriptures. This he thought was education at its best; education did not include analyzing the meaning of the scriptures; it consisted of memorizing appropriate sections which substantiated the beliefs that all men were lost and needed to be saved. Memorization was Leavell's peculiar gift, and when he molded young men, he wished to make them like himself. Memorization indicated obedience to authority, which Leavell always commanded or cajoled if necessary. When a student recited the scriptures, he was first to stand and to answer to his name with a "Yes, Sir." This side of Leavell's personality was difficult for his students to explain and almost impossible to understand. One of them said, "It was as if one man was in the hall and another one walked in the classroom . . . almost a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." No doubt, Leavell was reliving his own early seminary days, when he had called the scholarly Dr. Robertson the "old bear." His peculiar teaching methods seemed to indicate again his desire to be considered a scholar in his own right. If he acted as Dr. Robertson had acted, others would look upon him as the great professor Dr. Robertson had been. Leavell was, in reality, a great salesperson, a remarkably affable personality who was an excellent manipulator of people, buildings, curricula, and committees.

Students knew that, during the first years he taught the class, he was writing his own textbook. It came out in 1951 and contained every aspect of his evangelistic methods but was devoid of any

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searching theology whatsoever. Entitled *Evangelism, Christ's Imperative Commission*, the work stated its purpose in a forward: "It is offered as a textbook for seminaries, colleges, and churches, designed to serve as a handbook on methods of evangelism for pastors and soul winners. It attempts to suggest many of the methods which have characterized evangelism throughout Christian history." The early chapters set for Leavell's conviction that evangelism was the imperative of the Christian life; later chapters depicted the history of evangelism, which included the coercive methods of Constantine and cited the disastrous results that Leavell perceived to come from involuntary membership in state churches. He acquainted the reader with his conception of the methods used by Augustine, whom he called the greatest of Christian writers; with those of St. Francis of Assisi, who had won others by self-sacrifice; and with those of such famous Protestant leaders as Luther, Calvin, Knox, John and Charles Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards. When he wrote about twentieth-century evangelism in America, he condemned the men and methods of "big business evangelism" and used as his example Billy Sunday. "His revivals did not always strengthen the local churches. He lived to see the time when he could hardly draw a crowd to fill a church auditorium. That type of city-wide union meeting was supersensational, hyperemotional, and ultracommercial. It died." He could not foresee that television would renew interest in this type of "big business evangelism." He extolled the scholarly Dr.


29 Ibid.
George Truett, a Southern Baptist evangelist, as modern Christianity's example of productive evangelism. The final portion of the text cited the variety of evangelistic approaches to be employed successfully. One entire section was devoted to the self-discipline of the soul-winner and the psychological basis of conversion.

The text was, however, primarily a methods book and embodied the obsession of Roland's life: evangelism. One former student, Dr. T. V. Farris, who served at a large Texas Baptist Church, wrote in this regard:

Recently I came across a letter I received from Dr. Roland Q. Leavell . . . as I glanced over the letter and observed his signature, my memory was flooded with thoughts and scenes from the past . . . I recalled the deep impact that Dr. Leavell had made in my life -- the abiding influence of his dignity, grace, and poise that was part of his Christian compassion. I believe that Dr. Roland Leavell was one of the most consistent, gentlemanly, but bold witnesses for God that I have ever known. That recollection also brought to mind the permanent benefits from the experience of sitting in his class on Evangelism and hearing him teach from the text which he had written . . . what unforgettable lessons I learned from his writings and lectures . . .

Leavell's text on evangelism reflected views that had changed very little since he absorbed them from his mother. He amplified his belief that separation from the things of "this world" left the Christian free to pursue the normal and natural activity of all Christians, that of reconciling others to God. The textbook represented another step in

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30 T. V. Farris, "Memories of Dr. Leavell," Church Advocate (Fort Worth), January 10, 1968.
fulfilling his lifelong goal of pleasing his mother.

In the midst of the wide variety of activities which demanded his attention during the thirteen years at the New Orleans Seminary, Leavell extended his ministry beyond education to other parts of the world. In 1951 he was invited by the Foreign Mission Board to spend several weeks preaching in Japan. He wrote of the trip in two articles published the following year. They focused not on his own preaching, but on the personalities of two Japanese men whom he met. One was the world-renowned Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa, a Christian who lived in the slums of Tokyo to promote his Kingdom of God Movement; and the other was Takaji Mitsushima, Leavell’s interpreter. In the article about Kagawa, he expressed how he was greatly moved by the evangelist’s vast social program in teaching farmers to plant English walnuts on the mountains where they could not plant rice. "We need to raise walnuts and goats on the mountain slopes. That would give meal, meat, and other goods," Kagawa explained to Leavell. 31 "We must combine Biblical agriculture with Biblical evangelism, preach first, then teach agriculture," he continued. "I am now translating the New Testament into every Japanese, from the Greek original," Kagawa added. "You know two of the princes, brothers of the Emperor, have been baptized into Christianity. The Emperor asked me to come to his palace to teach him about the social welfare I do. I went."

After the visit with Kagawa, Leavell showed a new appreciation for social welfare as a means for reaching people. He established a semi-

nary liaison with Tulane University School of Social Work so that student exchange in some courses was available. He bought books on Kagawa and Albert Schweitzer to give to his children and grandchildren. He never spoke again of "rice Christians," that is, those who came to the mission churches simply to be fed. For this brief time in his life, he became sincerely aware of the social ministry of Christianity, and it came not from observing starving people in China or impoverished Blacks in Mississippi but from seeing the work of a frail Japanese Christian. His awareness remained just that, however; soul-winning was still paramount in his interpretation of true Christianity.

The other Japanese who impressed him was also the subject of an article after his trip to Japan.\(^\text{32}\) The man was Takaji Mitsushima, a pastor and Leavell's interpreter while he was in Japan. Mitsushima, a native of Hiroshima, was in China as a prisoner of war on August 6, 1945, when the atomic bomb was detonated. Before Mitsushima returned to Hiroshima, he had believed that the story of the bomb was simply American propaganda. Upon his return to Japan, the sight of the ghastly spectacle shocked him beyond endurance, and the fact that his mother and father had been killed caused him to attempt suicide. It was during his long and tedious recovery that he came into contact with persons who were Christians. He became a Christian himself, attended the Baptist University in Fukuoka, and majored in English literature, graduating with honors.

Leavell was greatly impressed with Mitsushima and his wife Fumie.

Of course, Japan and the Japanese had held a fascination for Leavell since his earlier visit in 1920. However, this time as a visiting minister-missionary, he felt as if he were fulfilling his earlier dream of serving on the mission field. He wrote later, "Preaching to such great crowds and seeing so many Japanese people find salvation satisfied every longing I ever had to be on the mission field." But in private conversations he more frequently referred to his admiration and unbounded appreciation for Mitsushima. Humility -- the one quality which Leavell never inculcated in his own life of activism -- was predominant in Mitsushima's daily life. Somehow through the many days they travelled together, Leavell became aware that this was a trait which Christ had praised and which he himself lacked. While Leavell came home as usual with a diary full of daily statistics about how many Japanese were converted, he now reflected for the first time on humility as something Christians should experience.

Concerning another of the great experiences of the twentieth century, the destruction of Hiroshima by the atomic bomb, Leavell had virtually nothing to say. In the article about Mitsushima entitled "My Alternate Heartbeat," published in 1952 only seven years after the destruction of Hiroshima, Leavell took no note of the event. His only reference to the bomb was to mention Mitsushima had interpreted for him on the same street where the man's family had perished on August 6, 1945 "when the first atomic bomb was used." Unable to deal with

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33 Leavell, Sheer Joy of Living, p. 54.

34 Ibid., p. 53.
such stark horror, Leavell preached salvation and kept a record of the number of Japanese who accepted his offer of Christianity. In recounting his mission trip to Japan in his autobiography, he simply stated, "My headquarters were in the bombed city of Hiroshima." If conventional warfare presented problems that he could not face, the possibility of world destruction was even more difficult to confront. He neither condemned nor condoned nuclear war; he simply ignored it. Mitsushima made a greater impression on Leavell than did the specter of the nuclear annihilation.

Another invitation took Leavell to several countries in South America, travelling at the request of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. He stayed several weeks, visiting numerous mission churches and conducting conferences on evangelistic methods for native pastors and missionaries. His longest stop was in Buenos Aires, where he delivered the dedication address for the newly established International Baptist Theological Seminary and again held evangelistic conferences for seminary students, pastors from the thirty-three Baptist churches in Buenos Aires, and various Southern Baptist missionaries. During the question-and-answer period at the end of each session, Leavell listened to members of the audience take issue with his ideas on methods of evangelizing communities in South America. As one example, the South American ministers felt that taking a religious census was an unsafe venture in Catholic communities. Unaccustomed as he was to having his views questioned, he was largely unswayed by

35Leavell, "My Alternate Heartbeat," p. 3.
criticism. Leavell agreed that in predominately Catholic countries, problems and methods could be different, but he stoutly maintained that the New Testament was unalterable. In closing the conference, the professor of evangelism at the Buenos Aires Institution, Dr. Cachini, said, "Dr. Leavell's morning conferences were like a group of men trying to catch a bird. Sometimes a North American bird leaves us Argentine preachers without his tail feathers, but Dr. Leavell has all his."

Leavell not only managed to keep his tail feathers in Argentina but for his entire thirteen years as President of the New Orleans Seminary. His list of activities and achievements was impressive. While still engaged in building, moving, and upgrading the faculty at the Seminary as well as taking mission trips overseas, he also managed several visits to Europe and Palestine. In 1947 he attended a meeting of the Baptist World Alliance in Copenhagen. He recruited persons for the trip, made all the overseas arrangements, and gave lectures on the history and culture of the various countries visited. He traveled to Rio de Janeiro in 1953 with a group of young persons to attend the Baptist World Alliance Youth meeting. In 1856, he went on a preaching mission to several areas in Guatemala. Additionally, he was asked to give a guest lecture at each Seminary in the Southern Baptist Convention, all of which adopted his textbook on evangelism. He delivered commencement sermons for numerous colleges and universities including Tulane, Baylor, Brenau, Wake Forest, University of

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Mississippi, Mississippi College and others. He delivered the sermon at the installation of E. D. Head as President of Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He organized and participated in annual fishing expeditions for the five Southern Baptist Seminary presidents, during which they travelled to the West Coast and fished for salmon in the cool streams while they talked and shared common problems. He attended University of Mississippi and Sigma Chi alumnae functions. He hunted and killed deer each winter in Texas on the Wylie Johnson ranch, Johnson being a wealthy rancher and contributor to the Seminary. He attended Southern Baptist Conventions each year and personally delivered the somewhat euphoric reports on the progress of his seminary. He attended most of the Sugar Bowl games and frequently entertained out-of-town guests who accompanied him.

Besides all of this activity, he preached every Sunday in various Baptist pulpits and for a time held an interim pastorate in First Baptist Church, Pensacola, Florida. When the weekend drive from New Orleans to Pensacola became too time consuming, he resigned, and the church honored him with the gift of a television, a gun, a mammoth leather chair, and a new office desk, of which he made much. Gifts were tangible proof of approval and esteem, as well as of the wealth in churches that he served.

Of all the places Leavell served, New Orleans pleased his wife the most. Lilian relished her place as first lady of the campus and was exceedingly happy to have dinners for faculty, trustees, and dignitaries. Her ability to entertain graciously was regarded by Roland as a great asset. He and Lilian at last found that they could make each
other happy; she lived elegantly in a multi-storied presidential home which was full of antiques and elaborate chandeliers. The social life among prominent academics was especially pleasant for Lilian as well as Roland. Dr. Rufus Harris, President of Tulane, invited the Leavells to be his guests when Tulane played Baylor or the University of Mississippi. Dr. Harris — a Baptist and later in his retirement president of Mercer University, a Baptist school in Georgia — also included Roland and Lilian in luncheons and dinners when he entertained such guests as Dr. Nathan Pusey of Harvard in January, 1956.

Leavell saw each of his children graduate from college and took each one to Europe, which he said was "not in place of but equal to one year in college." He performed the marriage ceremony for each daughter; their husbands observed that he made them promise things they had never heard in wedding ceremonies before. His middle daughter married a Presbyterian minister. When she first came to her father to tell him of her choice, Roland Leavell said "He will become a Baptist minister of course." She replied, "No, you just told us we had to marry Christian gentlemen, you never did say they had to be Baptists." He did not attend the christening of his first grandson in the Presbyterian church and said only partly in jest, "I hope the Baptist blood in that baby boils when they sprinkle water on his head."

One of his proudest achievements at the Seminary was the construction of the president's home, a handsome, red brick, Doric columned edifice. Leavell himself contributed a substantial sum to the home's

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37 Lilian Leavell Fountain to Mary D. Leavell Bowman, October 8, 1982, Leavell Papers, Bowman.
building and persuaded his remaining brothers to do so as well. Because of the money offered by the Leavell men and, of course, because of Leavell's position, the home was named the "Corra Berry Leavell Home for Presidents," a fitting memorial for the much-loved mother.

If the new home on the campus reminded Leavell of his family in a happy way, he was reminded also at this time in a sorrowful way by the deaths of his brothers, one by one. As each brother died, Leavell left for Oxford to serve at the funeral. He watched the large plot of cemetery space around George and Corra's gravestones become crowded. He conducted the services for each brother except Ullin, whose wife wished no sermon, and Clarence, who survived him.

Roland's own health seemed to be excellent. His brisk walk and robust physique gave outward evidence of his feeling that he was indestructible and indispensable. Yet these appearances proved misleading. The entry in Leavell's diary for January 19, 1958, reads in scarcely legible handwriting, "This is the day I suffered a stroke of paralysis." Written long after the event itself, this terse notice memorialized a sudden and disastrous change in his fortunes. As he spoke laboriously to his eldest daughter, who stood by his bedside shortly after the debilitating cerebral hemorrhage his bitter disappointment was evident: "I don't want to die yet. I didn't live long enough. There is so much more I need to do."

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38 Leavell Diary, January 19, 1958.

39 Author's reminiscence.
Leavell lived on for almost five years after the stroke. For all of his married years he claimed in half jest, "If the devil ever gets me in hell, he can just put your Mama at the wheel of a car and let her drive me around for the rest of eternity." She was indeed a miserable driver, but essentially he simply hated to have anyone at the helm other than himself. During his recuperation, he had to turn his engagements over to his colleagues; he was forced to depend upon an acting president appointed by the Board of Trustees to take over the Seminary duties until his retirement. He struggled each day with physiotherapists' prescriptions for exercise to regain his speech and the movement of his right hand and leg. Three weeks after the stroke, he took fifteen steps with a walker but still could not move his fingers. A month after that he was sitting up several hours a day trying to re-memorize his poetry book of literally hundreds of poems. After another three weeks, by sheer will power and to the concern of all present, he went to the groundbreaking for the new chapel and symbolically turned over the first shovel of dirt. By the end of March, he led the congregation in prayer at the St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church. However, April brought the dreaded verdict from the physician that he must formally resign as president of the Seminary. Lilian's notes in her diary on April 28, 1958, read "Roland is heartbroken over giving up his place, simply heartbroken." The Board of Trustees at their annual meeting accepted the resignation, but formally designated him President Emeritus. They voted to continue his salary and to pay his house allowance for the remainder of his life. They also voted to
provide a two-bedroom apartment on campus for Lilian after his death. Roland and Lilian knew that he would never have resigned, except by necessity. On May 2, 1958, the Times Picayune carried an editorial which extolled Dr. Leavell and cited his accomplishments in the New Orleans area:

Expressions of regret are in order because illness has been responsible for Dr. Leavell's giving up of the post of active president . . . the physical works wrought by Dr. Leavell are visible for all to see. However, the spiritual good which he has accomplished dwarfs physical achievement which he had made . . . he deserves a hearty "well done" from the entire community. His wise counsel we are sure, will continue to be of great value to the institution . . . may this counsel be available for many years.

The Leavells bought a home in Jackson, Mississippi, near Lilian's two brothers; Roland felt that he should not be in close proximity to the campus after retirement. After the vans were packed and they drove away from the Corra Berry Leavell home toward Jackson, Leavell dedicated himself to physical and mental recovery. He took most of his library and his typewriter because he had learned to type with one hand. In the five years of retirement, he prepared six complete book manuscripts for publication: Prophetic Preaching: Then and Now; The Christian's Business: Being a Witness; The Apostle Paul: Christ's Supreme Trophy; Sheer Joy of Living; Studies in Matthew, the King and the Kingdom; Christian Experience in Pilgrim's Progress. All except the last were published and well received. The Studies in Matthew was adopted throughout the Southern Baptist Convention in the annual January Bible Study. Sheer Joy of Living was to be his autobiography
(the last chapter had the dubious title, "The Sublime Joy of Growing Old). He attempted unconvincingly to contend that he was happy at this stage of his life. He quoted Julia Ward Howe, who said of old age: "All the sugar is at the bottom of the cup," but his family members recall his daily complaints that the physician would not let him even have sugar on his standard bowl of oatmeal everyday. Neither life nor oatmeal was as sweet now. He quoted Paul the Apostle, "Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day." But on his desk under his papers there was a trite motto that probably more accurately expressed his feelings: "We grow old too soon; too late, smart."

He did, however, experience numerous moments of satisfaction in these last years. The beloved campus chapel was completed and named in his honor by the Board of Trustees. In 1961 he was asked to appear before the House Ways and Means Committee in Washington to testify about retirement benefits. He opposed legislation to use tax money for various aid programs for retired persons who were able to support themselves. He declared that most persons at retirement could continue to work in varying capacities and did not need benefits that were costly to the taxpayer. His basic Southern Baptist conservatism in social areas would not release its grip on him. After his appearance before the committee a letter came from Congressman Bruce Alger of Texas:

This is just a note to express my appreciation to you for your splendid presentation before the Committee on Ways and Means in opposition to H. R. 4222, the medical aid bill . . . because you know that we
may be calling on you in the future for additional information which will be helpful in keeping the country aware of ill-advised legislation.

To his eldest daughter he sent a card in laborious handwriting saying that he was in Washington. The most important thing to him was not that he appeared before the Congressional Committee, but that he was well enough to travel alone on the train. He soon became strong enough to preach and accepted two Mississippi interim supply pastorates, one in Jackson when Northside Church was without a pastor. He preached two sermons each Sunday with the understanding that he would not speak at the mid-week prayer service, would not be responsible for church administration, or for visiting the church constituency. The other interim pastorate he held was beyond anything he could have ever hoped for. Oxford was without a pastor in the winter of 1961, and he accepted this place at their invitation. Lilian drove him to Oxford each weekend, and he preached two sermons on Sunday and then remained a day to recover from the exertion of preaching before they drove back to Jackson. He actually did go home, as the former Leavell home where he was reared was still in the family, and he could visit there.

Another gratifying moment of his retirement years came in June of 1961, when he was elected First Vice President of the Southern Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Missouri. At his election, the conventioneers in the commodious Kiel Auditorium stood and applauded for what seemed to him an endless amount of time. He stood with Lilian and said, "It's too late . . . it's too late for me to really do anything." He knew by this time that his strength was ebbing, and he probably realized that his election marked affirmation and approval for what he had al-
ready done. However, he still thought nothing was satisfying unless he was able to "get something done." For an impatient activist, the election he had coveted all those years was almost ironical. However, the following year, he presided with great pride at several sessions of the 1962 Southern Baptist Convention in San Francisco.

His death came on January 15, 1963, while he was in Chattanooga, Tennessee, teaching his newly-published book on Matthew to the First Baptist Church study group. The pastor of the church, Dr. Luther Joe Thompson, a former student of Leavell's conveyed in the church bulletin the circumstances of his death:

Last week our church had an unusual experience. We were associated with a good and great man in the last hours of his life . . . all of us who heard Dr. Leavell on Monday evening experienced a rare sense of exhilaration and joy. He was in fine spirit and taught as one inspired. Mrs. Leavell relates that he awoke at 4:30 a.m. and indicated that he was having difficulty breathing. This, she said, was not unusual. Then . . . while sitting looking out of the window, he turned and said, 'I am afraid this is it. You know I am ready. We started out here together 40 years ago and perhaps it is a good place to part for awhile.' Dr. Leavell came to Chattanooga on their wedding trip after their marriage in 1923 . . .

Many newspapers and periodicals, both religious and secular, carried the story of the "eighth of nine brothers" who had just died; among them were the Memphis Commercial Appeal, the Chattanooga Times, and the New Orleans Times Picayune. The Times Picayune carried his picture on the front page and recounted his achievements, the next day an editorial followed saluting his retirement days: "It was characteristic of the Leavell energy and devotion to his career, that his retirement from the Seminary was more a shift in activities than a
cessation of useful effort in which he persisted until his death on a visit to Chattanooga this week." The Clarion-Ledger of Jackson, Mississippi carried news of his death on the front page and devoted a two-column tribute on the editorial page:

No retiree of recent years contributed more to the life of his adopted city than did the late Roland Quinche Leavell, outstanding Southern Baptist leader, who excelled in the fields of preaching, teaching, writing and soul-winning... few Jackson churches of his Baptist faith there are in which he has not adorned the pulpit... his literary production has been prolific... the great growth of Baptist work in New Orleans and South Louisiana is directly traceable to the Seminary... what does one say of the high profession of teaching, training, and developing hundreds of young men for the highest of all callings, preaching about God to people.

The Watchman Examiner, the National Baptist paper, chose to speak of the nine brothers who "came up the hard way." Roland Leavell was always a prodigious worker... his lot was cast with Southern Baptists, to whose interests he devoted his versatile talents... he did still in harness, teaching his book." All state Baptist papers headlined his death, and many included personal notes like the one in the South Carolina Baptist Courier:

This editor was privileged to serve for two terms as trustee of the New Orleans Seminary... we came to admire and love Dr. Leavell and to appreciate his unusual ability and his devotion to his important task.

The two most comprehensive tributes were extended in the memorial issue of Vision, the Seminary paper, and by the televised memorial broadcast presented by Dr. Douglas Hudgens, Pastor of First Baptist
Church, Jackson, Mississippi. The Vision had appropriate pictures such as Roland with Mayor Chep Morrison, as well as scenes on the campus as he chatted with his faculty or autographed his new books in the library. The memorial service written and delivered by Dr. Hudgens entitled "Moses My Servant is Dead" stated "Perhaps no other Baptist now living was as widely known or admired as Roland Leavell." Leavell would have loved the great demand for the television script, which was printed several times over. He especially would have liked the remark that he was the best known of all Southern Baptists. This was so important to him.

Although this study has cited only a few of those who praised Leavell in life and death, many more joined them. With them this study may not be well received for several reasons. First, Leavell never gave the slightest outward indication that he was not master of any situation. However, he was not at home in Chicago with the Blacks or with the men in France whom he called beasts. He was uncomfortable around "old slobs" in the settlement houses, and the slothful he disdained as sinful. Neither did his admirers see Leavell as conservative. But he never modified his views on even the slightest issue; he only sought new ways to bolster or extend what he had believed since his youthful days in Oxford. He was hungry for life and experiences, but not for thoughts to explain the life and experiences. He seemed to be a scholar. His photographic memory was phenomenal, and when combined with his oratorical skills, what he quoted convinced many that he possessed the scholar's mind. Yet he never engaged in serious theological study or entered any of the major religious debates of his
time.

Of all the traits which endeared him to his admirers, his overt conviviality was the most obvious. He seemed to relate well to all persons and made every individual feel as if he was at one with him. "I am all things to all men in order that I might win some," he frequently quoted from Pauline scriptures. However, he felt as much "one of the elect" as did the most sober Calvinist in Geneva. He viewed any outsider with the severest judgment. Even his extensive travels were not gateways to understanding other cultures with varieties of men and matters alien to his own way of life. He saw the South American as poor and ignorant, the Black as something less than human, the lazy man as sinful, the westerner as uncouth, the northerner as unfeeling and lacking in grace. The Christian traits of forgiveness and submission that he fancied in the Japanese, he failed to realize, were Buddhist traits apparent long before Christianity was known in Japan.

The intriguing fact is that these personal attributes were exactly what he needed to be successful as a missionary-evangelist; apparent affability, excellence as a salesman-communicator, a messianic view of his own correctness, and the conviction that everyone else was somehow off the proper path.

The men in his life, his brothers, all had these same characteristics, almost to a man. They were all conservative, exercising the utmost care never to veer from a narrow, accepted course. No better illustration could be cited than a page taken from the Charlottesville, Virginia Daily Progress of May 26, 1960. That page featured Dr. Ullin
Leavell, Roland's younger brother, as the famed author, editor and promoter of a return to the old moralistic McGuffey eclectic readers. Ullin was the chairman of the Department of Education at the University of Virginia and received nationwide acclaim for the McGuffey textbooks, which included puritanical moral lessons in each story. Ullin was indeed a success as a moral conservative, finding a new way to revive the old patterns. On the same page another Oxford boy was featured, William Faulkner, who served that same year as a visiting professor at the University of Virginia. Faulkner and Ullin had been contemporaries as Roland's high school mathematics students in Oxford. The article on Faulkner was headlined "William Faulkner Laments the Closing of Libraries Over Integration." The novelist was quoted as saying to his University of Virginia audience, "Books and libraries should be open to everyone . . . the ends the white man is trying to gain are not worth the means he is using to get them." Faulkner's then progressive ideas contrasted with those of his conservative former schoolmate, Ullin, who could as well have been Roland or any of the other brothers. History has seen Faulkner's ideas treated as the expressions of a truly caring, moral man, while the McGuffey readers with their narrow moralism have again fallen by the wayside. Once when William and Estelle Faulkner invited Ullin and his wife for cocktails, the Leavells declined, refusing to go where liquor was served. Like his brothers, Roland never changed any of his ideas about race or liquor, nor his conception that separated science and religion into individual, impenetrable troughs.

Even though Leavell's wife, his daughters, Miss Ella Wright, and
Annie Ball Cooper, were all important women in his life, the one woman
who held his devout allegiance and obedience throughout was his mother.
He thought that after death he would go to her literal heaven, and in
life he saved souls in answer to her dying request.

Roland Leavell was a product of his environment who resembled most
other Baptists cradled in Southern evangelical conservatism. He was
not one of a kind, but one among his kind. He did possess characteris-
tics which distinguished him from the rest and enabled him to excell
among them; personal ambition, aggressive leadership, desire for ap-
proval, and dexterity in dealing with people. These personal attribu-
tes were, however, superficial qualities. The deeper characteris-
tics that he held in common with other Southern Baptists were more
numerous; the inability to tolerate contradictions which could en-
danger earlier prejudgments or accepted standards; a distrust of
methods of inquiry; refusal to deal with practical or social problems.
He joined hosts of Southern Baptists who perceived that evangelism was
the single purpose of the church and that salvation solved the prob-
lems of the world. He, along with most Baptists, was more concerned
with standards of personal conduct, prohibition, and individual re-
generation than with labor relations, racial injustice or the impover-
ished masses. He was an acceptable spokesman for his own like-minded
Southern Baptists and for many now who still share his views.

Perhaps the most poignant cry of his entire life was penned in
France as he saw sincere, devout persons attending Catholic Mass, "Are
they right and we're wrong? I never wanted to think more clearly in
all my life." He was at least brought briefly to look at possible
alternatives, but he could not allow himself to follow those inclinations. His method of search was to find whatever facts he could to substantiate his trusted beliefs from childhood. History provided him with an abundant and pliable source of arguments.

Of the three forces that influence most religious men -- rationalism, mysticism, and activism -- the last dominated Dr. Leavell to the exclusion of the others. He understood all he wanted to understand, and mysticism often led him to unanswerable problems that he could not penetrate. However, activities were tangible; they made it possible for him to feel worthwhile and successful and enabled him to measure success by the number of buildings built, the number of converts baptized, and the number of sermons preached to audiences of particular sizes.

It was one way to live, and he was successful by most standards. He claimed it was sheer joy to live according to these lights.
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