

# Crawford Howell Toy and the Weight of Hermeneutics

Paul R. House

This article was first presented in 1997 as a Founder's Day address at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

Few figures in Baptist history engender as divergent opinions as Crawford Howell Toy. One of the most brilliant scholars ever to graduate from and teach at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, he was also the first faculty member to resign for theological reasons, an event that took place in 1879. During his lifetime many of his students and friends thought Toy was unjustly forced from the seminary. Though grieved at Toy's departure, his colleagues James Petigru Boyce and John Albert Broadus disagreed. They concluded that Toy's beliefs were not in accordance with the institution's *Abstract of Principles*, and would eventually lead to his rejection of virtually all supernatural elements of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> C. A. Briggs, who was put on ecclesiastical trial by Presbyterians for holding similar views, lauded Toy as the first American scholar to suffer for historical-critical beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

More recently, Toy biographer Billy Grey Hurt has depicted him as a seeker of truth forced to resign because of denominational politics.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Tom Nettles and Russ Bush have described Toy as a man whose positions had so changed from his earlier beliefs that his resignation was both honest and appropriate.<sup>4</sup> Reflecting yet another opinion, Roy Honeycutt has stated that Toy illustrates the seminary's desire to balance creative challenge and traditional values. He writes, "Despite the fact that Crawford Howell Toy was forced to resign from the faculty in 1879 and later abandoned his heritage, his ideals continued to provide

an impetus to open inquiry and dedicated scholarship."<sup>5</sup>

It is apparent that each interpreter's theological convictions and vision of theological education are reflected in his treatment of Toy. To steal an image from Albert Schweitzer's famous comment on the search for the historical Jesus, when one stares down the well of reflection on Toy, it is amazing how often the historian's face appears. Still, each of these experts has contributed to a better understanding of the man who served as Southern's fifth faculty member.

The goal of this article is to present Toy's interpretative methodology accurately, and to explore its impact on his beliefs. To achieve this aim, it is necessary to survey his life, to examine the development of his theological convictions, and to draw some conclusions from this analysis that may allow us to learn from our heritage. Stated simply, this essay argues that the weight of any theologian's underlying hermeneutical presuppositions is monumental. That is, all interpreters must know why they believe what they believe. It is not enough to believe the right things or even to come to correct conclusions without knowing why, since an individual who does not know why a belief is held may alter or abandon it at any time. Tragically, incognizance of this principle may render a person incapable of discerning when that abandonment came, or even that it has come. In my opinion, Crawford Howell Toy was such a person. Though brilliant of mind, perhaps unparalleled in

his or any other day as a linguist, and sincere and honest in his statements, Toy did not realize the significance of his own hermeneutical system. This unawareness led not only to his adoption of theological views that diverged from conservative Christianity, but from Trinitarian Christianity itself. Sadly, Toy did not heed Broadus when he belatedly warned him of this flaw. Consequently, he found himself holding opinions in later life that he did not think he would hold when he resigned his position in 1879. Though few scholars dispute that Toy's ideas changed over time, none has observed that Toy's interpretative methodology did not change substantially after 1869. All that remained by then was for him to follow the logical path his methodology suggested.

### **Toy's Training**

In many ways, Toy's background was typical of other early students at Southern. Born in Virginia in 1836 to Baptist parents, he entered the University of Virginia in 1852, a time close enough to Thomas Jefferson's death that some professors could still remember the university's founder. Toy quickly established himself as a stellar student who had an uncommon facility for languages. He was baptized by John Albert Broadus, the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1854. Toy maintained a friendly relationship with Broadus until the latter's death in 1895. Indeed, Broadus recommended Toy to Harvard University after Toy's resignation at Southern. Graduated in 1856, Toy was hired as a teacher at Albemarle Female Institute, largely at the request of Broadus, who was president of the school's trustees. In 1857 Toy met a student named Lottie Moon, who became a Christian

under Broadus' influence. Moon and Toy began a relationship that ended in 1880, when the two decided finally not to marry.

Toy entered The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary when it opened in 1859. He desired to be a foreign missionary. He was again a top student, for he managed to complete three-fourths of the three-year course in a single year. In 1860 Toy was appointed a foreign missionary to Japan by the denomination's Foreign Mission Board. He was also ordained that year, with Broadus taking a leading role in the service.<sup>6</sup> Due to the rising national tensions that led to the Civil War, however, Toy could not go to Japan. Consequently, he taught Greek at the University of Richmond in the spring term of 1861.

When the war broke out, Toy served as a chaplain in the Confederate forces. He was captured at the battle of Gettysburg on July 4, 1863, held as a prisoner of war until December 1863, re-enlisted in 1864, and spent 1864-1865 teaching at the University of Alabama.<sup>7</sup> At war's end, Toy returned to the Albermarle Female Institute, where he worked until June 1866 when he departed for graduate studies in Germany.

It is difficult to judge Toy's hermeneutics at this time. He had been a student of Broadus, Boyce, Manly, and Williams. He was considered doctrinally sound enough to be ordained a Baptist minister and to be appointed a foreign missionary. Letters he wrote to Virginia's Baptist state paper *The Religious Herald* during 1866-1867, though, imply that he was greatly impressed by religious feeling, or religious spirit. He praised certain worship services he attended as having the spirit of the Lord, despite their possible divergence from conservative theology, a fact pointed out by at least one troubled reader of the

periodical, who was concerned that Toy did not grasp the Rationalistic tendencies of some of the preachers he was hearing.<sup>8</sup> Toy may have utilized a two-sphere hermeneutic at this time, one that divided spiritual and historical matters. For example, in defending the conservative Old Testament theologian Hengstenberg against his critics, Toy writes that Hengstenberg preached the “more spiritual doctrines of the Scripture” and that his messages were rejected by the unregenerate.<sup>9</sup> In discussing Sabbath observance, he writes that the Sabbath fits “the spirit of the Bible,” a phrase he does not explain.<sup>10</sup> Toy’s theology is orthodox at this point, to be sure, yet he may already display elements of the hermeneutical imprecision that became so telling later in his career.

While in the University of Berlin, Toy was taught by some of the finest scholars in Germany’s best-known university. He studied Sanscrit, Arabic, and Theology. By the late 1860’s the views of Kant, DeWette, Vatke, Graf, and Kuenen were pervasive in Berlin, as were the philosophical opinions of Hegel, a faculty member at the university. There is no question that Toy became thoroughly acquainted with Kant’s separation of reason and faith, with Vatke’s fundamental principles of source criticism, with Hegel’s notion that history consists of an ongoing thesis-antithesis-synthesis collision that leads to progress from the simple to the complex, and with DeWette’s idea that biblical truth is not necessarily tied to full historical accuracy. Toy thereby encountered interpretation based on three hermeneutical principles. First, the Bible’s inspiration and its historical accuracy are not necessarily linked. Second, the Pentateuch must have followed the Prophets because of the neces-

sary evolution of Israelite religion from the simple to the complex and from polytheism to monotheism, and third, the Bible contains many texts that were added after the stated authors lived. At the same time, Toy was also learning about new theories of human origins by reading Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, which had appeared in 1859.

Toy returned from Germany in 1868, and was employed by Furman University. By the fall of 1869, however, he had agreed to teach at Southern Seminary, much to the delight of the founding faculty members, who considered him the first fruits of their desire both to educate pastors and to cultivate first-rate scholars. Toy served on the seminary faculty in Greenville, South Carolina, from 1869-1877, then in Louisville, Kentucky, during 1877-1879.

### **Toy’s “Two-Sphere” View**

Toy’s first duty at the seminary was to present his inaugural address on September 1, 1869. Entitled “The Claims of Biblical Interpretation on Baptists,”<sup>11</sup> this paper demonstrates Toy’s breadth of knowledge on historical, theological, and exegetical matters. It is crucial to examine this address carefully to assess what most historians have considered Toy’s stunning departure from conservative orthodoxy by 1879.

In his preliminary statements, Toy rightly claims that each interpreter ought to pay attention to hermeneutical method, “for method you must have, whether you will or not—right or wrong, safe or unsafe, or, as is commonest, of mixed character, partly right and partly wrong.”<sup>12</sup> He asserts that Baptists must pay particular attention to their methodology, since they have no creed to determine their interpretations.<sup>13</sup> Noting that the Bible is inspired,

Toy states that interpreters must adhere to “the spirit of the Inspired Word,” for “(i)f we miss its spirit, its separate declarations will not be intelligible.”<sup>14</sup> Toy concludes his introductory comments by explaining that only a person brought in sympathy with the word of God by “a supernatural change wrought in him by the Spirit of God” is able to grasp this spirit of the text.<sup>15</sup>

These introductory comments made, Toy argues that there are two basic parts of hermeneutics: “an internal and an external.”<sup>16</sup> Later he explains these two terms by stating, “Hermeneutics is dependent upon Philology and Psychology....”<sup>17</sup> Toy defines these two principles when he writes that “(a)s the Bible is a record of fact, thought, and feeling, written by men for men, it is necessary to learn the grammatical and logical significance of its sentences, and for this we must have learning and thought. And as it is a revelation by the Spirit of God given through men filled with divinely engendered love for God, it is necessary to have the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>18</sup>

Toy stresses the need for both the internal and external principles, but it is clear that he divides the two, assigning each separate tasks, yet without stating how they are to be integrated or what the interpreter should do if the data seems not to cohere. Toy seems to think that the external principle may inform and shape the internal principle, but that the opposite is not true. His definition of inspiration as “men filled with a divinely engendered love for God” is inadequate, since it offers no statement on either historical or doctrinal accuracy.

Having divided the hermeneutical task into two parts, Toy gives a thorough and insightful critique of biblical interpreta-

tion from the early church to the nineteenth century. His only praise of allegorizing is interesting. He lauds the “Christlike feeling” some allegorists display, though he cannot approve of their methodology. He criticizes allegorists and rationalists alike for their pre-determination of what texts mean.<sup>19</sup> Toy highly respects early linguists, on the other hand, since their studies illuminate historical research.<sup>20</sup> He disagrees with Augustine’s interpretative methodology, yet appreciates his “profound insight into the spirit of the Word,”<sup>21</sup> and exhorts his hearers to “join Augustine in this spiritual-mindedness....”<sup>22</sup> Toy concludes his survey of the past with a strong comment that inspired writers wrote in understandable language, which means that interpretation must focus on the clear linguistic meaning of those words.<sup>23</sup> He thinks that spiritual truths can come of faulty interpretations, but he does not condone those interpretations.

Toy begins his program for accurate hermeneutics by repeating his conviction about the distinction between internal and external processes. This time, however, he sets forth these principles as they relate to the Bible itself in the following telling statement: “The gems of truth are indeed divine, but the casket in which they are given us is of human workmanship, and its key made and applied by human skill. To this human side of interpretation we may hold fast without weakening our grasp on the spirituality, which is its divine side.”<sup>24</sup> His division between spiritual truth and historical truth could hardly be clearer. Next, Toy states that interpretation must move from translation, to examination of context, to comparison of the passage with the whole of scripture, to a consultation of Christian conscious-

ness.<sup>25</sup> The first three steps relate to his external/historical/linguistic principle, and the fourth step is tied to his internal/psychological principle.

With his method in place, Toy criticizes those who use what they consider their “Christian consciousness” to dispute the Bible’s spiritual teachings. In this group he includes Schleiermacher, Neander, and even Luther for his questioning of the spiritual value of the book of James.<sup>26</sup> Toy’s next paragraph contains the address’ most-quoted sentences. In the context of criticizing those who reject the Bible’s spiritual statements, Toy writes that

The method indicated above takes for granted a theory of inspiration, namely, that under the absolutely perfect guiding influence of the Holy Spirit, the writers of the Bible have preserved each his personality of character and intellect and surroundings. Here we do no more than refer to the fact the theory of inspiration affects the system of interpretation, and that a fundamental principle of our Hermeneutics must be that the Bible, its real assertions being known, is in every iota of its substance absolutely and infallibly true.<sup>27</sup>

What “real assertions” does he mean? The context, though a bit ambiguous, indicates that he means the Bible’s true spiritual, not historical, statements. Later events bear out this reading of this passage.

Toy advises caution when he addresses the relationship of science and the Bible. He notes that some scientists of his day concluded that Darwin’s hypothesis, recent geological discoveries, and long-established astronomical facts mean that “the divinity of the Bible must be given up.”<sup>28</sup> Toy stresses that science has often illuminated the Bible, and will do so again. He states that the Bible is not a science

textbook, warns against staking the Bible’s truthfulness on the findings of science, and that “at the point at which the Bible touches secular science, we have absolutely nothing to do but sit still and wait for the interpretation of that science.”<sup>29</sup> If scientific or other findings seem to create a contradiction between faith and reason, then Christians must remember that “the harmony of Reason and Faith is impossible, except in the regenerated heart, as the immediate work of the Holy Spirit...”<sup>30</sup>

It is important to grasp what Toy has and has not said in his comments on the Bible, science, faith, and reason. He argues that the spiritual truths of scripture are not eliminated by scientific discovery. He claims that science can illuminate the words of the Bible. What he does not say is whether the Bible is superior to science when a discrepancy appears. Toy attempts to avoid the conflict between reason and faith by moving the conflict to the spiritual realm, where the Holy Spirit will presumably smooth the differences. Like Immanuel Kant, Toy considers historical details facts, but reserves spiritual matters for the realm of psychology, or emotion and will. Science can be verified, so it can inform faith, but faith, albeit of great importance, is subjective, internal, and personal, so it cannot be used to correct scientific theories. Without arguing that the Bible is a science textbook, one can easily see that Toy’s external principle takes precedence over his internal one, and that his faith will eventually be molded by his historical viewpoints, however proven or unproven they may be. He has no other governing hermeneutical presupposition.

Toy concludes his address with a call for Baptists to remain steadfast in their historical aversion to creeds. He notes that

Baptists may be despised for their adherence to the scriptures alone, and writes, "When thus assailed, let us take refuge in the principle that the Bible alone is our guide, and that no interpretation may denude it of the doctrines and commands on which we base our faith and practice."<sup>31</sup> This exhortation became a personal slogan for Toy in days to come. What he does not seem to realize even at this point is that more than scripture has shaped his hermeneutical theory already. This lack of awareness about this matter plagued him the rest of his life.

By 1876 the faith/fact dichotomy became crucial for Toy. Class notes from that year indicate that he now believed that Genesis claims the world was made in six literal days, and that Genesis is simply wrong.<sup>32</sup> This factual error did not negate the Bible's religious and theological value for Toy, though, since he did not think the Bible was written to make scientific claims. The main point was that God made the world.<sup>33</sup> He felt the same way when stating that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, that eighth-century Isaiah did not write all of Isaiah, or that many of the messianic texts cited in the New Testament were not originally intended as such by the Old Testament authors. Toy argued that historical inaccuracies must not cause readers to miss a book's theological importance. To Toy, the texts still retained valuable moral and ethical principles.<sup>34</sup>

Toy described the thinking behind his methodology at this time in an autobiographical letter to *The Religious Herald* dated March 1880, several months after his resignation. Here Toy states that "five or six years ago" he came to the conclusion that the Bible does indeed teach that the world was made in six literal days.

After much hermeneutical wrestling, he took solace in the two-sphere approach to truth he describes in his inaugural address. Noting that the main point of Genesis 1-2 is that God made the world, Toy states, "I asked myself why God, in sending a message of religious truth should not permit his servant to convey the truth in the forms proper to the times, and why I should not take the kernel of truth from its outer covering of myth." This phraseology is obviously in keeping with his earlier gem and casket imagery. Seeing things this way, Toy says, "...I found myself at peace, and in a position absolutely beyond the reach of science. I could now throw myself heartily into the scientific pursuit, knowing that the truth of God had nothing to fear from it."<sup>35</sup> Toy's split between the realm of the spirit and the realm of history was complete.

It is evident that Toy had now decided what to do when a new scientific theory seems to contradict scripture. As his methodology demanded, he made the spiritual principle secondary to the historical principle when determining what is true. Toy clearly considered the Spirit's inspiration of authors to include guidance on moral matters but not necessarily on historical details. He believed that science could not disprove the Bible because the Bible and science do not address identical matters directly. He thought that the Bible's "real assertions" did not extend to the description of events, either mundane or miraculous.

### **Toy's Resignation**

After a time of heated controversy,<sup>36</sup> in 1879 Toy wrote a letter of resignation to the seminary trustees in which he offered a defense of his teaching.<sup>37</sup> It is unclear whether he thought the resignation would

be accepted, but the trustees did indeed vote to release Toy from the faculty. Toy states that he never ceased to accept the statement of the *Abstract of Principles* that “(t)he Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were given by inspiration of God, and are the only sufficient, certain and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience.”<sup>38</sup> At the same time, he admitted that in the “details of the subject” he differed from his colleagues and the majority of the Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>39</sup> He notes that he accepted an evolutionary view of Israelite history that means Moses did not write the Pentateuch, in whole or in part, that he did not consider minor errors and discrepancies a problem for devout believers, and that he did not think it important that biblical claims of authorship are not always specifically true.<sup>40</sup> Near the end of his statement, he asserted, “I beg leave to repeat that I am guided wholly by what seems to me the correct interpretation of the scriptures themselves. If an error in my interpretation is pointed out, I shall straightway give it up. I cannot accept *a priori* reasoning, but I stake everything on the words of the Bible, and this course I believe to be for the furtherance of the truth of God.”<sup>41</sup>

In his resignation letter, Toy’s methodology sounds quite familiar. First, he claims that the Bible alone is his basis for belief on inspiration and authority.<sup>42</sup> Second, Toy makes a clear distinction between historical and theological truth.<sup>43</sup> He argues that

...when discrepancies and inaccuracies occur in the historical narrative, this does not even invalidate the documents as historical records, much less does it affect them as expressions of religious truth. I am slow to admit discrepancies or inac-

curacies, but if they show themselves I refer them to the human conditions of the writers, believing that his merely intellectual status, the mere amount of information possessed by him, does not affect his spiritual truth. If our heavenly Father sends a message by the stammering tongue of a man, I will not reject the message because of the stammering.<sup>44</sup>

Third, when faced with a choice between historical accuracy and religious spirit, Toy tries to choose both, even when the text’s spiritual claims may depend in part on their historical accuracy. For example, though he considers the New Testament errant as well, Toy confesses, “The centre of the New Testament is Christ himself, salvation in him, and a historical error cannot affect the fact of his existence and his teaching.”<sup>45</sup> Clearly, Toy wants to retain Jesus’ religious and moral value despite the Gospels’ historical fallibility. The danger of Toy’s retreat to a history/faith dichotomy is illustrated by the fact that by 1890 Toy believed that the New Testament historical statements must be read to mean that Jesus is not divine. In other words, he came to believe that historical errors did alter what he had previously thought was the center of Christianity.

The difference between the 1869 and 1879 statements lies not in Toy’s method, but in his conclusions. All that had to happen for Toy’s conclusions to change was for what he considered compelling historical data to emerge. Sadly, many of the historical theories he accepted, such as those informed by Vatke, are questioned routinely today by scholars of diverse theological commitments. It is tragic that not until 1879 did Broadus come to understand Toy’s greatest danger. Broadus writes that when Toy resigned, “(h)e

thought strange of the prediction made in conversation that within twenty years he would utterly discard all belief in the supernatural as an element of scripture,— a prediction founded upon knowledge of his logical consistency and boldness, and already in a much shorter time fulfilled, to judge from his latest works.”<sup>46</sup> Continuing his observations on the importance of hermeneutics, Broadus asserts, “Some of us are persuaded that if any man adopts the evolutionary reconstruction of Old Testament history and literature, and does not reach a like attitude as regards the supernatural, it is simply because he is prevented, by temperament or environment, from carrying things to their logical results.”<sup>47</sup>

At the very least, those who adopt Toy’s two-sphere methodology must determine what safeguard against Toy’s eventual conclusions must be included in their interpretative system.

Toy offered his resignation so that the seminary trustees would not suffer embarrassment. But he could not spare his colleagues, or himself, great pain. Broadus reports that when Boyce and Broadus parted with Toy at the train station Boyce held out his right arm and said, “Oh, Toy I would freely give that arm to be cut off if you could be where you were five years ago, and stay there.”<sup>48</sup> Again, sadly, it is not evident that Boyce grasped where Toy was five years before, or that Toy himself could see the potential results of his methodology at that time. His mentors mourned the turn of events, though Toy’s departure did not end his friendship with either man.

It is important to note that Toy himself agreed with Broadus’ account of the events surrounding the resignation. In a letter to Broadus dated May 20, 1893, Toy

congratulates Broadus on the publication of his Boyce biography. He then writes, “You are quite right in describing my withdrawal as a necessary result of important differences of opinion. Such separations are sometimes inevitable, but they need not interfere with general friendly cooperation.”<sup>49</sup> Both men believed that Toy’s views could not allow him to remain at the seminary, yet neither man rejected the other’s friendship because of the separation, nor did either man change his mind about the events.

### **The Impact of Toy’s Views**

Was Toy lying about not changing his views? No. It is not clear that he ever defined inspiration exactly like Boyce and Broadus. Their definition is much more presuppositionally committed to the truthfulness of scripture, though it is no less thoroughly conceived. Toy’s statements in the 1869 address probably led the founders to assume his view of inspiration was the same as theirs, a conclusion still drawn by most historians.

Was Toy correct that he clung only to “the words of the Bible”? Absolutely not. He held strongly to a presupposed division between historical and theological reality. His statements about Mosaic and Isaianic authorship are particularly influenced by the historical philosophy that reigned at the University of Berlin, and that came to dominate the European and American scene after the force of Wellhausen’s *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (1878) was felt. Further, he was as dependent on nineteenth-century scientific methodology as on the era’s historical methodology. He considered the most recent scientific findings conclusive, a move Boyce, Broadus, and Manly refused to make.

Did Toy's conclusions about the biblical data change? Of course. Broadus's memoir of Boyce says as much, as does Toy's resignation letter. The fact remains, however, that he was vulnerable to such changes at any time. How were the changes in conclusions reached? By an application of new data that Toy deemed authoritative to the elements of his method of interpretation. He considered the spirit's guidance to apply necessarily only to spiritual matters. Such details could be divorced from their stated historical context. He did not think the text's true assertions necessarily extended to matters of authorship, date, historical veracity, or comments that could be ascertained to disagree with scientific claims. He believed Hegelian theories of historical progress to be true, which in turn led him to reconfigure the historical order found in the text itself. He thought Darwinian theories of human origins to be factual, so he disagreed with what he considered to be Genesis' claim for a six-day creation process.

In other words, Toy did not grasp the significant hold his own presuppositions had on him. Nor did he see in 1869 that his understanding both of inspiration and historical theory were liable to take him far from his colleagues' beliefs on these matters. If he had, I think he would have resigned earlier, for I do not question Toy's integrity. Likewise, I do not think his colleagues grasped his hermeneutical frailty. It was easy for them to assume that he was one with them on the doctrines they held dear.

As has been stated, at the time of his resignation Broadus told Toy that he feared his young friend's beliefs would lead him to reject all miraculous elements of the scriptures, and that within twenty

years Toy would hold no orthodox theological positions. Broadus now understood the problem, and he was correct. Toy was hired by Harvard University in 1880, and virtually created that institution's department of Semitic languages. He continued there until his retirement in 1909. During the 1880s Toy dropped his Baptist affiliation and began to write for and attend the Unitarian Church.<sup>50</sup> From this decade forward his views began to reflect an increasingly radical division between faith and history.

Though other texts could be cited,<sup>51</sup> his 1890 volume *Judaism and Christianity* best features Toy's evolutionary views of history, source-critical convictions, and identification of inspiration with religious feeling and high moral thought. Applying these methods to the life of Christ led Toy to conclude,

With such evidence that lies before us, it seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus laid no claim, in thought or in word, to other than human nature and power. He was conscious of profound sympathy with the divine mind; the formality and folly of the prevailing religion pressed on his soul as a heavy burden that he felt called upon to bear; he believed himself to be a prophet sent by God with a message of salvation to men, whom he embraced in his deep and yearning love; yea, in the intensity of his conscious union with the divine Father he knew himself to be the Son of God. But beyond this he did not go. It would indeed be a noteworthy thing that a Jew of that period...have equaled himself with God. For so remarkable a departure from the national thought we naturally demand clear evidence, and such evidence we do not find in the existing records of the life of Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

At least, it must be said, Toy finds no evidence that he accepts as being from the time of Christ, since he dates all contrary

evidence to later church editing. It is ironic that he now uses his “scripture only” principle to correct scripture. Toy concludes that Jesus believed that salvation was a reward for obedience to the Law,<sup>53</sup> that the early church explained the disappearance of the messiah from the earth by creating the resurrection stories,<sup>54</sup> that the early church deified Jesus,<sup>55</sup> and that Paul added the doctrine of justification by faith.<sup>56</sup> As before, Toy places what he considers historical truth above what he deems spiritual truth, this time with devastating consequences. His methodology led Toy where Broadus feared it would, to non-Trinitarian, anti-miraculous heresy, for Toy pursued his hermeneutical beliefs strictly.

Toy contributed many other scholarly articles and books during the remainder of his career. Perhaps the best known and most useful of these is his 1899 volume *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, which was part of the International Critical Commentary series.<sup>57</sup> This commentary demonstrates Toy’s mastery of ancient languages, and exhibits his convictions about Israelite monotheism. His retirement marked the end of a great era in Harvard’s department of Semitics. He died in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1919.

## Conclusion

It is neither easy nor safe, nor perhaps even fair, to draw applications for today from a life lived in another time under different circumstances, but comparisons are inevitable. With some trepidation, and with respect for Toy himself, I offer the following observations. First, I wish that Toy, as well as the founding faculty members, had stood for the Constitution of the United States, against sectionalism, and against slavery in their day. In many ways

they were ahead of their time, but in these areas they were painfully men of their day.

Second, there can be no question about the breadth of Toy’s scholarship. He was truly a great linguist. His commentary on Proverbs remains useful. Toy’s study habits and personal integrity are commendable. He was right to reject the notion that ministerial education should be allowed to be inferior to other vocations.

Third, the Toy controversy highlights the importance of the original wording and intent of the *Abstract of Principles* for the long-term health of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Toy’s resignation letter certainly illustrates his respect for both.

Fourth, Boyce and Broadus’ reaction to Toy’s leaving the faculty illustrates the fact that one should never rejoice in the departure of an individual from the seminary family due to theological reasons. We should, instead, feel as Boyce did, that we would rather lose an arm than the fellowship of a brother or sister in Christ. Christian friendship and collegiality are precious, and are not to be lost joyfully.

Fifth, and most importantly, we must all recognize the weight of our own hermeneutics. Carl F. H. Henry has rightly recognized the vital place carefully-constructed theological presuppositions have in a theologian’s ministry. He correctly claims, as did Toy, that every interpreter has an interpretative methodology.<sup>58</sup> But is that methodology fully developed? Is it in keeping with scripture? Does it take its worldview from the text more than from secular culture? Does it engage the world, thus avoiding obscurantism? Is it consistent? Will it bear the force of new evidence? Not everyone who holds Toy’s interpretative methodology comes to his conclusions, though they must make a

decision of where to stop short of his theological beliefs. Each person's hermeneutics must bear sufficient weight. Interpreters must develop an integrative methodology. It is necessary to determine how faith, reason, history, philosophy, and theology interact with and are interrelated to one another. Undue separation of these elements, to say nothing of elevating new approaches to history, science, or literature to the head of them, will lead to a schizophrenic methodology that forces interpreters into virtual hermeneutical nihilism.

Sixth, we must all hold our convictions clearly and gladly. We live in a relativistic age, in which any belief but the belief that beliefs must be convictions is acceptable. Toy, Boyce, and Broadus certainly agreed on at least one thing: none would relinquish the integrity of his theological convictions, even if such integrity cost him his job or treasured companionship.

In conclusion, if this seminary wants to honor its heritage, it must always be a place where each person takes care to secure his or her system of interpretation on sound, evangelical principles. It must be a place where biblical affirmations undergird teaching, preaching, and writing. It must be a place where persons with irreconcilable theological differences part in kindness, not bitterness. It must be a place that offers answers to anyone honestly considering Toy's hermeneutical positions and Toy's ultimate conclusions. It must be a place that challenges imperfect personal and social ethics. In short, it must be a place that produces ministers whose lives can bear the terrible, severe, yet glorious weight of the gospel ministry, not just for a few years, but until each one sees the Christ who claimed to be, and was, the eternal word of God, God in the

flesh, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Note the moving account of the Toy controversy from Broadus' perspective in John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce* (New York: Armstrong and Son, 1893) 259-264.

<sup>2</sup>C. A. Briggs, *General Introduction to the Study of Holy Scripture* (New York: Scribners, 1899) 286.

<sup>3</sup>Billy Grey Hurt, *Crawford Howell Toy: Interpreter of the Old Testament* (PhD Dissertation: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965). Hurt's dissertation remains the most comprehensive account of Toy's life, and is indispensable for reconstructing the events of Toy's life.

<sup>4</sup>L. Russ Bush and Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible: The Baptist Doctrines of Biblical Inspiration and Religious Authority in Historical Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 227-241.

<sup>5</sup>Roy Lee Honeycutt, "Heritage Creating Hope: The Pilgrimage of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary," *Review and Expositor* 81/4 (Fall 1984) 379.

<sup>6</sup>Hurt, 31.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-36.

<sup>8</sup>*The Religious Herald*, November 8, 1866.

<sup>9</sup>*The Religious Herald*, September 20, 1866.

<sup>10</sup>*The Religious Herald*, August 30, 1866.

<sup>11</sup>Crawford Howell Toy, *The Claims of Biblical Interpretation on Baptists: Being the Inaugural Address of Rev. C. H. Toy, on His Induction into the Professorship of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, at Greenville, S.C., September 1st, 1869* (New York: Lange and Hillman, 1869).

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., 8.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., 33.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., 9.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., 24.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., 26-29.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., 30.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., 31.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., 32-33.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., 42.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., 43.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., 44.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., 49.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., 50.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., 50-51.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., 54.
- <sup>32</sup>Cf. Bush and Nettles, 229.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., 230.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., 230-231. Bush and Nettles consider Toy's 1876 views very different from his 1869 convictions. They write, "At the beginning of Toy's tenure at Southern, he gave no indication that he would eventually pursue this critical method of interpretation. Had it been known, he never would have been elected to the faculty. Toy was not dishonest, however. His original views were openly and honestly conservative in every way" (Ibid., 231). As I have already argued, Bush and Nettles do not take Toy's methodology fully into account. They stress his conservative statements without weighing fully their context. Toy comes to tentative conservative conclusions, but does not have an interpretative methodology to sustain those conclusions.
- <sup>35</sup>*The Religious Herald*, April 1, 1880.
- <sup>36</sup>For a thorough treatment of the controversy, consult Hurt, 105-224.
- <sup>37</sup>This letter is included in Robert A. Baker, *A Baptist Source Book: With Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman, 1966) 168-172. The original letter is in the archives of the Boyce Library of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., 168.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., 168-171.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., 171.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., 169.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., 169-170.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., 170.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., 170-171.
- <sup>46</sup>Broadus, 262-263.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., 263.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., 264.
- <sup>49</sup>Personal letter from Toy to Broadus, May 20, 1893.
- <sup>50</sup>Cf. the discussion of these events in Hurt, 72-74.
- <sup>51</sup>For example his *The History of The Religion of Israel: An Old Testament Primer* (Boston: Unitarian Sunday-School Society, 1882). This work incorporates an evolutionary view of Israelite history.
- <sup>52</sup>Crawford Howell Toy, *Judaism and Christianity: A Sketch of the Progress of Thought from Old Testament to New Testament* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1890) 423.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., 425.
- <sup>54</sup>Ibid., 428.
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid., 429.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., 430-31.
- <sup>57</sup>Crawford Howell Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribners, 1899).
- <sup>58</sup>Note in particular Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Volumes 1-2* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), and Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990) 35-60.