

## Anniversaries and Collective Self-Definition: The Five-Hundredth Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation as Commemorated by the Southern Baptist Convention

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October 31, 2017 was the five-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of an event that shook the Western world, an event largely disregarded by those who should remember it most. This event was the Protestant Reformation. Of momentous importance for Protestant Christians across the world, the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation offered a unique opportunity to examine the commemoration of a globally impactful movement by its ideological heirs, presumably the collective for whom the anniversary ought to mean the most. This study centers around the five-hundredth anniversary's commemoration by the Southern Baptist Convention (S.B.C.), the largest evangelical Protestant denomination in the United States of America, a nation founded to a significant degree by European Protestants and still inhabited by a considerable number of their descendants. By comparing the S.B.C.'s commemoration at both the denominational and congregational levels to scholarly work inspired by the five-hundredth anniversary, this study revealed that the leadership of the former leveraged this commemorative opportunity to redefine themselves as a collective, a group of people united by some common factor.

Oddly enough, anniversaries themselves have not been conceptualized to any significant extent in memory studies scholarship. In fact, while scholars do discuss *specific* anniversaries to aid their exposition of a wider point, they have failed to conceptualize anniversaries *themselves*. My examination of five prominent memory studies sourcebooks amply proves this point. Not only does Oxford University Press's *The Collective Memory Reader*, edited by Jeffrey Olick and others, neglect conceptualization of anniversaries, but it also does not even use the word "anniversary" in its several hundred pages.<sup>1</sup> *The Ashgate Companion to Memory Studies* fares slightly better, referencing a specific anniversary in chapters on monuments and memorials and on the relationship between Hannah Arendt and Thomas Paine, and employing the term "anniversary" both in a definition of "collective memory and as a component of the memory side in the history-memory dichotomy commonly accepted among scholars."<sup>2</sup> Fordham University Press's *Memory: History, Theories, Debates* indicates its agreement with *The Ashgate Companion* by offering a brief and helpful description of anniversaries as methods of preserving memory, since "without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep [memories] away."<sup>3</sup> In addition, this essay collection contains a discussion of five specific anniversaries: the 1617 anniversary of the Protestant Reformation and, incidentally, the first centennial commemoration in the historical record; three patriotic anniversaries instituted in the seventeenth century by monarchs in Elizabethan and Jacobean England; and, finally, an anniversary to solemnly remember and grieve the tragedy of the Holocaust, or "Shoah" in Hebrew, among Jewish communities.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, ed., *The Collective Memory Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Siobhan Kattago, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Memory Studies* (London: Routledge, 2015), 123-124, 233, 253, 307.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Schwarz, "Memory, Temporality, Modernity: Les lieux de mémoire," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 53.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Sherlock, "The Reformation of Memory in Early Modern Europe," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 38-39.;

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Reading between the lines of De Gruyter's *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, one can piece together a vague conceptualization of anniversaries as opportunities for different types of commemoration. Specifically, anniversaries associated with the Civil War have served as prime opportunities for reenactments and for erection of monuments and memorials, that of the founding of the University of Heidelberg prompted lectures and publications, and the 2004 and 2005 anniversaries of D-Day were used by several European governments to craft a European, rather than national, memory of World War II.<sup>5</sup> In addition, an essay in this sourcebook discusses the unique tradition of "commemorative or anniversary journalism," the only purpose of which is to relate the past to the present.<sup>6</sup> The *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* may outperform all the other sourcebooks, however, mentioning thirty-four specific anniversaries as evidence for broader points and noting specifically that "big" anniversaries succeed in highlighting differences between the scholarly work of history and the commemorative work of memory.<sup>7</sup> *Routledge* also groups anniversaries with "centennials" and "holiday rites" as collective observances to "maintain the memory of extraordinary events and persons and to preserve their essence within the collective consciousness" in a brief bit of conceptualization.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, while conceptualization of anniversaries is sparse among memory scholars, the work that exists has been perceptive and intriguing. As this is neither the time nor the place for such a heavy undertaking, we must content ourselves with a cursory examination of a few facets of anniversaries that enhance our discussion of collective commemoration, specifically the S.B.C.'s commemoration of the Protestant Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary.

We begin with the idea of the "will for memory," discussed by Carmen Leccardi in her contributing essay to the *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, entitled, "Memory, Time, and Responsibility."<sup>9</sup> While not referencing anniversaries, Leccardi writes, "We must not underestimate the crucial role that the 'will for memory' (Namer 1987) performs in fusing the past, present and future together to construct collective identity and political projects."<sup>10</sup> That is, conscious remembrance requires intentionality and, I would also add, a specified focus, since to remember *everything* is impossible. The remembering collective must somehow select which memories to retain and *how* to retain them. In the words of Ann Rigney, another contributor to *Routledge*,

A memory must be kept alive through repeated acts of recall if it is not to be *de facto* forgotten by becoming culturally insignificant and ceasing to produce responses. The

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Stephan Feuchtwang, "Ritual and Memory," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 294.

<sup>5</sup> Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, ed., *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc.) 2008, 54, 88, 156.

<sup>6</sup> Erll, *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, 381, 384.

<sup>7</sup> Trever Hagen and Anna Lisa Tota, ed., *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 97.

<sup>8</sup> Barry Schwartz, "Rethinking the Concept of Collective Memory," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, Trever Hagen and Anna Lisa Tota, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Although formulation of the idea of the "will for memory" originally flowed from the pen of Gérard Namer, to whom Leccardi gives due attribution, Leccardi's secondhand examination must suffice, since Namers' own article is written in untranslated French.

<sup>10</sup> Carmen Leccardi, "Memory, Time, and Responsibility," in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, Trever Hagen and Anna Lisa Tota, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 112.

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key to memory is not in storage (the fact of information being archived) but in the capacity of a particular story to stimulate its own reproduction in a new form: to procreate (Rigney 2008). There is no (longer) memory where there are no new acts of remembrance.<sup>11</sup>

Anniversaries present themselves as particularly convenient for those collectives wishing to sustain a memory, since they are inherently repetitive “acts of recall,” similar to Paul Connerton’s idea of a “rite.”<sup>12</sup> “All rites are repetitive,” he explains, “and repetition automatically implies continuity with the past. But there is a distinctive class of rites which have an explicitly backward-looking and calendrical character.... they do not simply imply continuity with the past but explicitly claim such continuity.”<sup>13</sup>

An anniversary, while not a rite itself due to its passive nature, does by definition serve as an opportunity for such rites as Connerton describes – those that claim continuity with a certain aspect of the past on a prescribed date each year. In other words, anniversaries facilitate remembrance, but they do not necessitate it. If we accept these arguments and the categorization of collective memory as a “record of resemblances” by preeminent sociologist and collective memory scholar Maurice Halbwachs, then it follows to draw a direct relationship between anniversaries and the creation and maintenance of collective memory.<sup>14</sup> Combining this idea with our previous discussion about the necessity of remembering selectively, implied by the idea of the “will for memory,” suggests that the collective memory perpetuated by anniversary celebrations does, indeed, claim constancies with the past. Yet, the memory claims only *specific* constancies, effectively allowing collectives to employ anniversaries as moments for self-definition or self-redefinition based upon the connections a collective chooses to draw with its past. The S.B.C. certainly leveraged the Reformation’s five-hundredth anniversary to do so by sharply focusing the commemoration of certain aspects of the Reformation’s doctrinal legacy.

For the sake of academic integrity, I would like to disclose that I myself am an American evangelical Protestant and, as such, a member of the Protestant Reformation’s American legacy collective. A term of my own creation, a legacy collective is the group of people that most closely resembles a now-dispersed collective in terms of members, location, label, or ideas at a specific point in time. As aforementioned, Halbwachs described collective memory as “a record of resemblances,” a description from which the idea of legacy collectives flows quite logically.<sup>15</sup> If perfect constancy preserves and defines a collective, then approximate constancy can preserve and define generations in a family tree of collective memories, connecting the original collective and its legacy collective(s).

In the first case, of approximately constant membership, consider a family over several generations, defining the first generation as the original collective. Every death or birth alters the membership of the family, creating with each new iteration a collective that is both distinct from and the most similar to the original. The legacy collective in this situation at a specific

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<sup>11</sup> Ann Rigney, “Cultural Memory Studies,” in *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies*, Trevor Hagen and Anna Lisa Tota, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 68.

<sup>12</sup> Rigney, “Cultural Memory Studies,” 68; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

<sup>13</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 45.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 86.

<sup>15</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 86.

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point in time is the contemporary succeeding generation. For modern member-based legacy collectives, also consider associations such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, whose members are united by their affiliation with the original collective of America's founding generation. For the second case, approximate constancy of location, consider the occupants of a town from its settlement to its five-hundredth birthday. Barring incredibly extraordinary circumstances, no members of the original collective of the town's founding members will live for several centuries, but the town's inhabitants after five hundred years ought still to be considered the town's legacy collective; even if no descendants of the original collective remain, the uniting factor of location does. Similarly, in the third case, a legacy collective can claim connection with an original collective based on a label. Consider the Lutheran denomination, which overtly claims descent from Luther by the name it gives itself. Finally, in the fourth case, a legacy collective can exist because of its ideological similarity to the original. For example, if we define the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers and laypersons as our original collective, the corresponding legacy collective must be composed of those individuals who today adhere to the ideas that defined the original collective (i.e. the Five Solas, specifically). In America, that collective is evangelical Protestantism.

In each of these four cases of legacy collective creation, the common variable is time since the existence of a legacy collective is predicated upon the dissolution of the original collective. I posit that members of legacy collectives have greater reason than any to celebrate events that defined and shaped the original collective in the form of anniversaries, implying that commemoration in America of the five hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation's beginning belonged uniquely to evangelical Protestants on an ideological level. Significantly, this study places greater weight upon the claims of the idea-based legacy collective than upon the label-based. Although the Protestant Reformation's 2017 anniversary falls on the day on which Luther began the Reformation with his Ninety-Five Theses, it ultimately celebrates the theological movement that he unleashed more than it celebrates the man himself, rendering the Reformation's reliance more upon his ideas than upon his name. Undoubtedly, commemoration of the Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary in the Lutheran church, arguably the movement's legacy collective *by label*, would constitute a quite interesting investigation, but one for another time. This study focuses on the Reformation's ideological legacy collective since the preserved essence of the Reformation centers on its doctrinal legacy.

I now turn to the origins of the Reformation's doctrinal legacy, hinging initially on the convictions of a single man. On October 17, 1517 in the small German town of Wittenberg, an Augustinian monk named Martin Luther posted a 95-item list of theological points on the community bulletin board, the door of Castle Church, the villagers' place of worship and the center of community life. Intended to spark debate among theologians and clergy, Luther's Ninety-Five Theses questioned and demanded reform in several areas of practice in the Catholic church.<sup>16</sup> Particularly odious to Luther, the sale of indulgences – certificates sold to parishioners by papal officials on the pretense that their purchase could shorten the stay of loved ones in Purgatory, the pre-Heaven place of cleansing in Catholic doctrine – played an unsurprisingly prominent role in his Theses, for it had been the appearance in Wittenberg of indulgence

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<sup>16</sup> My usage of "Catholic" here reflects the division that would appear between Protestants and Catholics. The Catholic church was the traditional Christian church in 1517.; Luther, Martin, *The 95 Theses*, English translation (Luther Memorial Foundation of Saxony-Anhalt, 1997).

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salesman Johann Tetzel that became the straw that broke the back of Luther's patience and ultimately catalyzed his authorship of the Theses.

Even before Tetzel, however, unease had filled Luther's mind when he examined Catholic practice and doctrine. Of utmost concern to him was the doctrine of justification, or how one can be declared righteous in the eyes of God. Drawing upon the Bible's Old and New Testaments, Catholic doctrine maintained that all of humanity had fallen into a state of sin when Adam, the first person created by God and the representative father of the human race, disobeyed a divine command. God is holy, and sinful people cannot stand in his presence, so humankind needs a way to be cleansed of sin in order to be justified before him. God provided a way through his Son, Jesus Christ, who came to earth as a man, died on a cross to pay the penalty that his people had earned by their sin, and rose from the dead on the third day.

All of this Luther himself had read in the Bible, but he was troubled by the additional Catholic teaching, derived from church tradition, that Jesus's payment for sin must be supplemented with additional individual practices, such as regular participation in the Eucharist, baptism, indulgences, confessions of sins, and penance, in order for a sinner to earn favor with God. Luther, tormented because of his own shortcomings, knew that he could never justify himself by achieving the perfection needed to inherit eternal life according to this teaching, so he was enormously relieved when he came across this passage in the letter of Paul the apostle to the Roman church in the New Testament: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live *by faith*.'"<sup>17</sup> This short passage prompted Luther to formulate the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone, a teaching that permeated his preaching, his writings, his Ninety-Five Theses, and, eventually, the Protestant Reformation. Luther's Theses, though passionate and definitive in their denunciations of ecclesiastical corruption and doctrinal error, were intended merely as points of debate to *reform* the church from within, not to split Christendom in two, but Luther sealed the divided future of Protestants and Catholics with his refusal to recant his teachings at the Diet of Worms: "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen."<sup>18</sup> Some anecdotal accounts of the first Reformer's speech added the impassioned line, "Here I stand. I can do no other," which became a common rallying cry for the movement he began.

As the Protestant church slowly established itself, it developed its own distinctive doctrine of soteriology, or how one attains salvation, based solely on the teaching of the Bible rather than upon the additional source of church tradition. Since the Reformation happened quite gradually (viz. the peaks of influence of the two central figures, Luther and John Calvin, were separated by roughly two decades), the Reformers themselves had to rely on Protestants in the succeeding centuries to pithily condense this doctrine into the Five Solas of the

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<sup>17</sup> Rom. 1:16-17 ESV. Emphasis mine.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther*, volume 1, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985-1993), 460.

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Reformation, commonly identified as the essence of Protestantism.<sup>19</sup> The five are *Sola Scriptura*, *Solus Christus*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*, respectively translated “Scripture Alone,” “Christ Alone,” “Grace Alone,” “Faith Alone,” and “For the Glory of God Alone.” A theological exposition and affirmation by twentieth-century Protestants offers helpful explanations of each in the order listed above:

We reaffirm the inerrant Scripture to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience....We reaffirm that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historical Christ alone....We reaffirm that in salvation we are rescued from God’s wrath by his grace alone....We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone....We reaffirm that because salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God, it is for God’s glory and that we must glorify him always.<sup>20</sup>

For centuries, these five doctrines have defined traditional Protestant soteriology across the globe, including in the United States. However, even the initial seeds of American Protestantism were quite denominationally diverse, consisting of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century colonies established “by Anglicans, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, Quakers, and continental European Pietists along with Puritans.”<sup>21</sup> While some of these belief systems descended more directly from Reformation theology than others, all rejected the authority of the Catholic church, or of *any* church, over the entirety of Christendom and valued the freedom of religious practice afforded to them by the New World, devoid of the monarchical persecution many had suffered in Europe. In the several ensuing centuries, these original collectives of American Protestantism have further subdivided into thousands of denominations, some considering themselves “mainline Protestants” and others “evangelical Protestants,” the former generally having deviated considerably from traditional Protestant beliefs and practices.<sup>22</sup>

Even outside of the collective of *evangelical* Protestantism, the S.B.C. is “the largest *non-Catholic* denomination in the United States” (emphasis mine), boasting more than 15 million members nationwide.<sup>23</sup> Its roots stretch back to the antebellum year of 1845, when the United States’ Baptist denomination divided over the issue of sending slaveholders into the field as missionaries; the northern mission board refused to authorize their commissions, so the southern Baptist churches formed the aptly named Southern Baptist Convention.<sup>24</sup> Since then,

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<sup>19</sup> ACE Council Members, “The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals,” (Monergism, April 20, 1996), 1; Alexandre Ganoczy, “Calvin’s Life,” In *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3-24.

<sup>20</sup> ACE Council Members, “The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals,” 2-4.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Häberlein, “Protestantism Outside Europe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 350.

<sup>22</sup> Pew Research Center, “Evangelical Protestants,” Last modified 2014.

<https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/#beliefs-and-practices>; Pew Research Center. “U.S. Protestants are Not Defined by Reformation-Era Controversies 500 Years Later” (Pew Research Center Religious and Public Life, August 31, 2017). <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/08/31/u-s-protestants-are-not-defined-by-reformation-era-controversies-500-years-later/>.

<sup>23</sup> Frank S. Mead, Samuel S. Hill, and Craig D. Atwood, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 213.

<sup>24</sup> Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 214.

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however, the S.B.C.'s situation has altered considerably. It issued a formal renunciation of racism in any form in 1995, and its membership has expanded across the country, rendering it increasingly less "southern" than it used to be.<sup>25</sup> Structurally, the S.B.C. consists of thousands of member churches, who elect congregational representatives to attend the denomination's annual convention, who in their turn elect the 83 members of an Executive Committee to oversee denominational proceedings and the presidents of each of the S.B.C.'s several affiliated organizations.<sup>26</sup> Today, as in 2017 during the Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary, it holds standard biblical Protestant beliefs, including the trinitarian nature of God, the Gospel account (as earlier articulated), relatively conservative social values, and the Five Solas, with the addition of its distinctive position on baptism, as its name would indicate. Protestant denominations debate whether baptism ought to be administered to infants (pedobaptism) or only to professing adults (credobaptism), by the sprinkling of water upon the subject's head or by complete immersion, but Baptists have pitched their tent on the doctrine of credobaptism by immersion.<sup>27</sup> Notably, also, the denominational website lists the separation of church and state in order to guarantee individual religious liberty among the S.B.C.'s "basic beliefs."<sup>28</sup> Given these ideologies, it would be reasonable to expect the S.B.C. to have treated the Protestant Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary as of quite personal significance.

In the case of the S.B.C., I posit that the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation served as an opportune moment for our legacy collective to renew its commitment to *selective consistencies* with its Reformational heritage through commemorative rites. In his contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations*, Bruce Gordon discusses some of the movement's twentieth-century commemorations, labeling both anniversaries and their corresponding commemorative acts as characteristically "acts of selective memory and the reading of history."<sup>29</sup> He continues, "That which we choose to honor from the past is deeply informed by our understanding of responsibility to past events and their modern manifestations... The lability of memory and history is reflected in the spinning of accounts... crafted from the need to make the past speak to and inform the present in particular ways."<sup>30</sup> If the necessity to produce a particular story surrounding an anniversary drives the manners in which a collective commemorates it, then our inquiry must now center around the factors that inform the collective's perception of *which story* needs to be told at a particular point in time. Whether or not precisely such a story is actually required is of no consequence to this study, which focuses on the realm of collective perception regardless of its validity, in standard memory studies fashion. Ann Rigney again offers us some clarity:

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<sup>25</sup> Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 213-214.

<sup>26</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, "Understanding the Southern Baptist Convention," *Southern Baptist Convention*, Video File, July 2017.

<http://www.S.B.C..net/becomingsouthernbaptist/UnderstandingTheS.B.C..asp>.

<sup>27</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, "Basic Beliefs," Accessed March 30, 2020.

<http://www.S.B.C..net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>.

<sup>28</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, "Basic Beliefs."

<sup>29</sup> Bruce Gordon, "History and Memory," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations*, Ulinka Rublack, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, December 2016), 765.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon, "History and Memory," 765.

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Collective narratives are produced in a politically charged discursive space which regulates what is important and *sayable* at any given time. The issue of 'sayability' is central to cultural memory studies since finding words and images to deal with certain painful topics is not the straightforward outcome of a willingness to address such topics, but goes hand in glove with the development of an expressive ability to do so (emphasis mine).<sup>31</sup>

In this discussion, Rigney describes "sayability" in the context of collective and cultural memories of atrocity – a scenario that does not apply to the S.B.C.'s 2017 commemorations – but I suggest this concept's further application in less extraordinary circumstances. I propose that "sayability," as it relates to the opportunities for collective self-(re)definition offered by anniversaries, can also be influenced by contemporary cultural sensibilities, of which the United States of 2017 had plenty.

Before delving into the particulars of the S.B.C.'s 2017 anniversary commemoration, however, let us spend some time examining the work prepared by scholars of the Reformation at American universities in preparation for its five-hundredth anniversary. Doing so provides a view of collective commemoration outside of but still comparable to our legacy collective, since these two collectives share the common variable of national location. Indisputably, American Reformation historians form their own non-legacy collective, defined by their academic interests; in fact, these individuals devote their careers to studying and dissecting both the events of the Reformation itself and the activities of its succeeding legacy collectives. In 2017, the scholarly community amply demonstrated its eagerness to commemorate the Protestant Reformation. Numerous academic publications, including the reputable *Sixteenth Century Journal*, even painted entire issues with the brush of a Protestant Reformation theme.

The sheer amount of scholarship this anniversary prompted is remarkable, but perhaps even more so is the utter lack of thematic commonality generally discovered among pieces in this body of scholarly work. While some scholars, such as Ute Lotz-Heumann and Stan Landry, discuss the history of Protestant Reformation commemorations and anniversaries in Germany, a nation very proud to claim Martin Luther as its own, few investigate America's lesser-known Reformation commemorations of the past few centuries.<sup>32</sup> One of the latter scholars is Thomas Albert Howard, whose *Remembering the Reformation: An Inquiry into the Meanings of Protestantism* was published in the year leading up to the five-hundredth anniversary. In it, Howard traces the evolution of Reformation commemorations out of Germany, into Europe, and across the Atlantic to the Americas, ending with a brief description of anticipation of the 2017 anniversary within Christendom.<sup>33</sup> He focuses for some time on twentieth-century commemorations in the United States, electing to focus his study on the ecumenical remembrances planned by various denominations and giving "priority of place in this respect...to the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation....[who] regard 2017 as an opportunity to deplore past divisions, engage in self-criticism for opportunities lost, and strive for greater understanding and unity in

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<sup>31</sup> Rigney, "Cultural Memory Studies," 70.

<sup>32</sup> Ute Lotz-Heumann, "The Varieties of Memory: The Historiography of the German Reformation," (*Marginalia*, January 19, 2018). <https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/varieties-memory-historiography-german-reformation/>; Stan Landry, *Ecumenism, Memory, & German Nationalism, 1817-1917* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Albert Howard, *Remembering the Reformation: An Inquiry into the Meanings of Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 149.



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the future.”<sup>34</sup> Perhaps unintentionally, Howard has himself performed the very study of the five-hundredth anniversary commemoration of the label-based legacy collective that I proposed earlier. Bruce Gordon again provides insightful commentary by asserting the Protestant Reformation’s relevance for all of European society (and, by extension, American society), not just for those in either a Protestant or a generically Christian collective. “The challenge,” he writes, “is to create a public history, a narrative of modernity in which the Reformation plays a crucial role,” an undertaking to which he perceives scholars as resistant for various reasons.<sup>35</sup>

The commemorative work of so many individual scholars stands out, and a brief sample of *Sixteenth Century Journal* articles illustrates their diversity of topics. Historian Susan Karant-Nunn surveys Martin Luther’s lifelong struggle with anger, evidenced in his writings (often as his inspiration), in his relationship with his father, in his preaching, and in his view of God’s wrath against sin.<sup>36</sup> Ronald Rittgers discusses how Luther’s writings reveal how he thought about himself as a man, pastor, and Reformer, while Volker Leppin offers a detailed critique of traditional German historiography of Luther and the Reformation, specifically regarding the Reformation’s generally accepted status as an epochal break with the Middle Ages.<sup>37</sup> Finally, Johanna Rahner, a self-professed Catholic historian, articulates the novel opinion that the Protestant Reformation was actually beneficial for the Catholic church.<sup>38</sup> With themes from anger to ecumenism to the benefits to the Catholic church, it seems that the Reformation’s five-hundredth anniversary served as an opportunity for self-definition not only for certain collectives, but also for individual scholars seeking to distinguish themselves within the greater scholarly community.

After all, how counterintuitive and innovative is it to frame the Reformation as beneficial to the Catholic Church? Perhaps Rittgers made this point most clearly when he wrote, “The Protestant Reformation’s quincentenary invites and requires scholars to ask big questions about the fundamental meaning of the Reformation for both the early modern and modern worlds. The quincentenary also invites and requires scholars to ask big questions about the human being who is traditionally viewed as the father of the Reformation, Martin Luther.”<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the very nature of scholarship, necessitating the type of momentous and disruptive inquiry that Rittgers describes here, does not allow for the possibility of consensus commemoration within the collective of Reformation historians, rendering this collective’s only common thread the diversity afforded by academic inquiry and ideological innovation.

Remarkably, however, the Southern Baptist Convention, our legacy collective, displayed at least two prominently common threads throughout its various avenues of commemoration: *Sola Scriptura* and religious liberty, the latter of which is secondary to the first. Harkening back to the aforementioned twentieth-century document of Protestant reaffirmations concerning the Five Solas, we recall that the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* teaches the Bible “to be the sole source of written divine revelation, which alone can bind the conscience,” free from the influence of an

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<sup>34</sup> Howard, *Remembering the Reformation*, 149.

<sup>35</sup> Bruce Gordon, “History and Memory,” 768.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Karant-Nunn, “The Wrath of Martin Luther: Anger and Charisma in the Reformer,” *16<sup>th</sup> Century Journal* 48, no. 4 (2017): 909-926.

<sup>37</sup> Ronald K. Rittgers, “The Word-Prophet Martin Luther,” *16<sup>th</sup> Century Journal* 48, no. 4 (2017): 951-976; Volker Leppin, “Setting Luther into His Historical Place: My Quarrels with the German Orthodoxy in Luther Research,” *16<sup>th</sup> Century Journal* 48, no. 4 (2017): 927-943.

<sup>38</sup> Johanna Rahner, “A Closer Look: How I Changed My Mind about Luther and the Reformation during the Last Decade,” *16<sup>th</sup> Century Journal* 48, no. 4 (2017): 945-949.

<sup>39</sup> Rittgers, “The Word-Prophet Martin Luther,” 951.

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interpretive and authoritative ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, the S.B.C.'s official webpage of "Basic Beliefs" included the separation of church and state and the protection it affords for religious liberty as part of their denominational distinctives.<sup>41</sup> The annual meeting of the S.B.C.'s Executive Committee in 2017 set the tone for these two common commemorative threads with this published resolution:

WHEREAS, October 31, 2017, marks the five hundredth anniversary of the start of the Protestant Reformation with Martin Luther's nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany; and  
WHEREAS, The Reformation stressed a return to *the sufficiency and primacy of Scripture* as the supreme guide for faith and practice in the church of Jesus Christ; and  
WHEREAS, The Reformation was driven by the biblical conviction that sinners are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone based on Scripture alone to the glory of God alone; and  
WHEREAS, Southern Baptists trace much of their theological heritage to the events, figures, and principles of the Magisterial Reformation and the Radical Reformation; and  
WHEREAS, Southern Baptists particularly value the principles of the Reformation that inspired subsequent generations of Baptists to advocate for *the religious liberty of all people*; now, therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, June 13–14, 2017, express our gratitude to God for the courage and conviction of our Reformation forebears; and be it further  
RESOLVED, That we commit ourselves anew to the biblical convictions of the Reformation, calling all people everywhere to personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as taught by holy Scripture; and be it further  
RESOLVED, That we will promote *the sufficiency of Scripture*, the power of Christ's grace, and the personal accountability of all humanity before God even as we advocate for *the fundamental right of all people to exercise religious liberty*; and be it finally  
RESOLVED, That we will proclaim the priority and preeminence of Christ and His kingdom above all earthly powers to the glory of God alone (emphasis mine).<sup>42</sup>

While this official resolution mentions a renewed commitment to all Five Solas in response to the Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary, it gives primacy to Sola Scriptura, and the many arms of the S.B.C. and its affiliated entities followed suit in their 2017 commemorations.

These arms include the Baptist Press, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (E.R.L.C.), GuideStone Financial Resources, the International Mission Board (I.M.B.), LifeWay Christian Resources, six seminaries – Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (S.E.B.T.S.), Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (S.B.T.S.), Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (S.W.B.T.S.), New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (N.O.B.T.S.), Gateway Seminary of the

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<sup>40</sup> ACE Council Members, "The Cambridge Declaration of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals," (Monergism, April 20, 1996), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, "Basic Beliefs," Accessed March 30, 2020. <http://www.S.B.C..net/aboutus/basicbeliefs.asp>.

<sup>42</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, "On the Five Hundredth Anniversary of The Protestant Reformation" (Southern Baptist Convention, June 14, 2017). <http://www.S.B.C..net/resolutions/2275/on-the-five-hundredth-anniversary-of-the-protestant-reformation>.

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Southern Baptist Convention (G.S.S.B.C.), and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.B.T.S.) – and thousands of churches.<sup>43</sup> Several of these entities, including GuideStone and the seminaries, featured Reformation-themed chapel addresses as part of their commemorative activities, but these were not recorded and, thus, will not be the subjects of our examination. Likewise, we will not discuss the European study tours put together by the seminaries as methods for their students to commemorate the Reformation by exploring its geographical origins, since these tours generally focus more upon geography and site-seeing than upon any specific doctrinal themes; indeed, these tours generally split their focuses between retracing Luther's steps and visiting sites important in the course of the larger Protestant Reformation.<sup>44</sup> Instead, we will focus upon what *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* termed "anniversary journalism," which did indeed make up the bulk of the S.B.C.'s commemoration throughout its branches.<sup>45</sup>

In total, the Baptist Press published thirty-three Reformation-themed articles in the twelve months leading up to the five-hundredth anniversary, beginning in October 2016.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> David Roach, "Reformation: S.B.C. entities celebrate 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary" (Baptist Press, October 31, 2016). <http://www.bpnews.net/47809/reformation--S.B.C.-entities-celebrate-500th-anniversary>.

<sup>44</sup> The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, "The Land of Luther Study Tour," Accessed April 18, 2020. <https://www.sbts.edu/luther-tour/>; College Study Tours, "500 Years of Reformation," (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017). [https://www.sebts.edu/files/events/Reformation\\_Tour.pdf](https://www.sebts.edu/files/events/Reformation_Tour.pdf); New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, "Reformation 500," (Providence Travel, 2017). <https://www.nobts.edu/faculty/atoh/ButlerR-files/Reformation%20Tour%20Brochure.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Barbie Zelizer, "Journalism's Memory Work," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2008), 381.

<sup>46</sup> David Roach, "Luther, Calvin, Menno in 1516" (Baptist Press, October 31, 2016). <http://www.bpnews.net/47808/where-were-they-then--luther-calvin-and-menno-in-1516>; David Roach, "Reformation: S.B.C. entities celebrate 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary," (Baptist Press, October 31, 2016). <http://www.bpnews.net/47809/reformation--S.B.C.-entities-celebrate-500th-anniversary>; Ballard, Mark. "7 Baptist distinctives amid Reformation's milieu." (Baptist Press, April 20, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/48698/7-baptist-distinctives-amid-reformations-milieu>; Randy L. Bennet, "500 YEARS: One verse of Scripture," (Baptist Press, October 30, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49805/500-years--one-verse-of-scripture>; Daryl Cornett, "500 YEARS: Why the Reformation still matters," (Baptist Press, October 31, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49814/500-years-why-the-reformation-still-matters>; Joshua Crutchfield, "500 YEARS: 'Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise,'" (Baptist Press, October 26, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49788/500-years-here-i-stand-i-cannot-do-otherwise>; David S. Dockery, "500 YEARS: Baptist beliefs: Learning from the Reformers," (Baptist Press, October 25, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49777/500-years--baptist-beliefs--learning-from-the-reformers>; David S. Dockery, "500 YEARS: Baptists & the Reformers," (Baptist Press, October 27, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49797/500-years-baptists-and-the-reformers-intersections-and-departures>; David S. Dockery, "500 YEARS: The Reformation and Baptist Life," (Baptist Press, October 23, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49763/500-years-the-reformation-and-baptist-life>; Ben Hawkins, "Do Baptists spring from Anabaptist seed?" (Baptist Press, July 3, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49158/do-baptists-spring-from-anabaptist-seed>; Benjamin Hawkins, "Reformers urged learning of biblical languages," (Baptist Press, February 20, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/48371/reformers-urged-learning-of-biblical-languages>; Ben Hawkins, "Why celebrate the Reformation after nearly 500 years?" (Baptist Press, November 22, 2016). <http://www.bpnews.net/47929/why-celebrate-the-reformation-after-nearly-500-years>; Michael Haykin, "The Reformation was a missionary movement," (Baptist Press, October 31, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49815/the-reformation-was-a-missionary-movement>; Doug Mize, "500 YEARS: 5 biblical charges for our day," (Baptist Press, October 31, 2017).

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These were quintessential examples of *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies'* "anniversary journalism," either commemorative opinion pieces to connect some aspect of Reformation history to the modern S.B.C. or news articles discussing some contemporary commemorative activity. Of these thirty-three, eighteen (over half) give Sola Scriptura a place of prominence in their narratives, discussing topics including the meaning of the doctrine itself, doctrinal differences between Protestants and Catholics, methods for interpreting Scripture, and Baptists' theological heritage from the Reformation.<sup>47</sup>

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<http://www.bpnews.net/49813/500-years-5-biblical-charges-for-our-day.>; David Roach, "ETS meeting focuses on Reformation heritage," (*Baptist Press*, November 20, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/49929/ets-meeting-focuses-on-reformation-heritage.>; David Roach, "Pew: Reformation theology waning among Protestants," (*Baptist Press*, September 7, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/49485/pew-reformation-theology-waning-among-protestants.>; David Roach, "Protestant unity is new confession's focus," (*Baptist Press*, September 18, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/49550/protestant-unity-is-new-confessions-focus.>; David Roach, "Radical Reformation included in Bapt. Commemorations," (*Baptist Press*, October 30, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/49806/radical-reformation-included-in-bapt-commemorations.>; David Roach, "Reformation differences persist, statement claims," (*Baptist Press*, November 1, 2016).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/47817/reformation-differences-persist-statement-claims.>; David Roach, "Reformation insights highlighted by seminary profs," (*Baptist Press*, October 26, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/49787/reformation-insights-highlighted-by-seminary-profs.>; David Roach, "Reformers' Disagreements of Christmas yield lessons," (*Baptist Press*, December 13, 2016).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/48041/reformers-disagreement-on-christmas-yields-lessons.>; David Roach, "Reformers' Pro-life views recounted," (*Baptist Press*, February 1, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/48263/reformers-prolife-views-recounted.>; David Roach, "Reformers' wisdom applied to transgender debate," (*Baptist Press*, July 18, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49227/reformers-wisdom-applied-to-transgender-debate.>; David Roach, "Reformation women's 'tremendous' impact highlighted," (*Baptists Press*, October 30, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49809/reformation-womens-tremendous-impact-highlighted.>; David Roach, "Seminary Reformation tours leave pastors inspired," (*Baptist Press*, September 7, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49500/seminary-reformation-tours-leave-pastors-inspired.>; David Roach, "Sola scriptura cited as Reformation bedrock," (*Baptist Press*, October 27, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49798/sola-scriptura-cited-as-reformation-bedrock.>; David Roach, "TGC celebrates Reformation's 500th anniversary," (*Baptist Press*, April 5, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/48628/tgc-celebrates-reformations-500th-anniversary.>; David Roach, "500 YEARS: Baptists celebrate Reformation," (*Baptist Press*, October 31, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/49812/500-years-baptists-celebrate-reformation.>; Erin Roach, "Reformation's 'Solus' highlighted at NRB in Orlando," (*Baptist Press*, March 8, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/48465/reformations-solas-highlighted-at-nrb-in-orlando.>; S. Craig Sanders, "Protestant, Catholic dividing lines examined in new book," (*Baptist Press*, November 1, 2016).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/47814/protestant-catholic-dividing-lines-examined-in-new-book.>; SBTS Communications, "Reformation yields Gospel unity, Mohler tells conf.," (*Baptist Press*, November 7, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49859/reformation-yields-gospel-unity-mohler-tells-conf.>; Alex Sibley, "New reformation in Germany sought by school's alumni," (*Baptist Press*, August 18, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/49392/new-reformation-in-germany-sought-by-schools-alumni.>; Ray Van Neste, "FIRST PERSON: The Reformation and Baptists," (*Baptist Press*, February 24, 2017).  
<http://www.bpnews.net/48403/firstperson-the-reformation-and-baptists.>

<sup>47</sup> S. Craig Sanders, "Protestant, Catholic dividing lines examined in new book," (*Baptist Press*, November 1, 2016). <http://www.bpnews.net/47814/protestant-catholic-dividing-lines-examined-in-new-book.>; David Roach, "Reformation differences persist, statement claims," (*Baptist Press*, November 1, 2016). <http://www.bpnews.net/47817/reformation-differences-persist-statement-claims.>; David Roach,

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A third as many articles give prominence to religious liberty as a worthy undertaking and a distinctive of Baptists among the Reformation's ideological descendants. The E.R.L.C., the S.B.C.'s policy group, published five articles, one podcast, and one issue of their *Light Magazine* devoted to the Reformation. The podcast and a total of seven articles (three in the magazine and four independent) focused on Sola Scriptura, the podcast's title even being "Why Sola Scriptura Matters."<sup>48</sup> It should be noted as well that the podcast was produced by the President of the

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"Reformers' Disagreements of Christmas yield lessons," (*Baptist Press*, December 13, 2016). <http://www.bpnews.net/48041/reformers-disagreement-on-christmas-yields-lessons>; Benjamin Hawkins, "Reformers urged learning of biblical languages," (*Baptist Press*, February 20, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/48371/reformers-urged-learning-of-biblical-languages>; Erin Roach, "Reformation's 'Solas' highlighted at NRB in Orlando," (*Baptist Press*, March 8, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/48465/reformations-solas-highlighted-at-nrb-in-orlando>; Ben Hawkins, "Do Baptists spring from Anabaptist seed?" (*Baptist Press*, July 3, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49158/do-baptists-spring-from-anabaptist-seed>; David Roach, "Pew: Reformation theology waning among Protestants," (*Baptist Press*, September 7, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49485/pew-reformation-theology-waning-among-protestants>; David Roach, "Seminary Reformation tours leave pastors inspired," (*Baptist Press*, September 7, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49500/seminary-reformation-tours-leave-pastors-inspired>; David Roach, "Protestant unity is new confession's focus," (*Baptist Press*, September 18, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49550/protestant-unity-is-new-confessions-focus>; David S. Dockery, "500 YEARS: Baptist beliefs: Learning from the Reformers," (*Baptist Press*, October 25, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49777/500-years--baptist-beliefs--learning-from-the-reformers>; David Roach, "Reformation insights highlighted by seminary profs," (*Baptist Press*, October 26, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49787/reformation-insights-highlighted-by-seminary-profs>; Joshua Crutchfield, "500 YEARS: 'Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise,'" (*Baptist Press*, October 26, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49788/500-years-here-i-stand-i-cannot-do-otherwise>; David S. Dockery, "500 YEARS: Baptists & the Reformers," (*Baptist Press*, October 27, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49797/500-years-baptists-and-the-reformers-intersections-and-departures>; David Roach, "Sola scriptura cited as Reformation bedrock," (*Baptist Press*, October 27, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49798/sola-scriptura-cited-as-reformation-bedrock>; Randy L. Bennet, "500 YEARS: One verse of Scripture," (*Baptist Press*, October 30, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49805/500-years--one-verse-of-scripture>; Doug Mize, "500 YEARS: 5 biblical charges for our day," (*Baptist Press*, October 31, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49813/500-years-5-biblical-charges-for-our-day>; Daryl Cornett, "500 YEARS: Why the Reformation still matters," (*Baptist Press*, October 31, 2017). <http://www.bpnews.net/49814/500-years-why-the-reformation-still-matters>.

<sup>48</sup> Chris Castaldo, "Is the Reformation still necessary?" (*ERLC*, October 31, 2017). <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/is-the-reformation-still-necessary>; Russell Moore, "A Reformation Day for American Christianity" (*ERLC*, October 31, 2017). <https://www.russellmoore.com/2017/10/31/reformation-day-american-christianity/>; Russell Moore, "Why Sola Scriptura Matters," Podcast audio, *Signposts* (*ERLC*, April 28, 2017). <https://www.russellmoore.com/2017/04/28/signposts-believe-sola-scriptura/>; Andrew T. Walker and Casey B. Hough, "Here We Stand: On the relationship between Reformational theology and religious liberty," (*ERLC*, October 31, 2017). <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/here-we-stand-on-the-relationship-between-reformational-theology-and-religious-liberty>; Andrew T. Walker and Casey B. Hough, "The Reformation and religious liberty: A conscience bound to government or God?" (*ERLC*, July 4, 2017). <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/the-reformation-and-religious-liberty-a-conscience-bound-to-government-or-god>; Andrew T. Walker, "500th year anniversary of the Protestant

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E.R.L.C., Russell Moore, and that religious liberty is also featured prominently in two *Light* articles and two independent articles. The oddball of the group of S.B.C. entities, the I.M.B. neither focused on *Sola Scriptura* in its anniversary journalism in the proportions that the others had, only publishing two articles that gave prominence to this doctrine out of eight total commemorative pieces, nor addressed the theme of religious liberty at all.<sup>49</sup> While this may seem surprising at first, it is also significant that every single article published by the I.M.B. in anticipation of the Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary was centered around a discussion of mission work, an unsurprising fact reflective of the I.M.B.'s status as the S.B.C.'s missions arm, responsible for commissioning and overseeing the denomination's missionaries and mission teams.

Finally, LifeWay, the S.B.C.'s publishing arm and the source of their own official books, study curricula, and church supplies, published a Bible study about the Five Solas, devoting one entire session to *Sola Scriptura*, and the book *Reformation 500*.<sup>50</sup> The latter, an edited collection of essays that examines the impacts of the Reformation on the modern day, gives prominence to the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* once again, since, according to the book's own synopsis, "at its heart, the Reformation was a great revival of the church centered on *the recovery of biblical truth* and the gospel of free grace" (emphasis mine).<sup>51</sup> While these two LifeWay products are not "anniversary journalism" in the most technical sense, they effectively fulfill the same purpose, since their publications were prompted by a desire to connect the past of the Reformation with the S.B.C.'s present in response to the five-hundredth anniversary. Taken as a whole, then, the commemorative journalism and publications of the S.B.C.'s many branches did indeed emphasize the same points that their official resolution had: *Sola Scriptura* and, secondarily, religious liberty. The same cannot be said, however, for the sermons of the S.B.C.'s member churches.

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Reformation," *ERLC*, Video File, October 31, 2017. <https://erlc.com/resource-library/video-explainers/500th-year-anniversary-of-the-protestant-reformation>.

<sup>49</sup> Madeline Arlington and Patrick Royals, "From the Reformation to Today, the Painting Inspiring the Faith of a Nation," (*IMB*, October 23, 2017). <https://www.imb.org/2017/10/23/the-painting-inspiring-the-faith-of-a-nation/>; Michael Haykin, "The Reformation Was a Missionary Movement," (*IMB*, October 19, 2017). <https://www.imb.org/2017/10/19/reformation-missionary-movement/>; Gregg R. Allison, "Is the Reformation Over? Why It Matters for Missions," (*IMB*, October 3, 2017). <https://www.imb.org/2017/10/03/is-the-reformation-over-why-it-matters-for-H4:J12>; Doug Coleman, "Baptism by Fire: 3 Reformation Views on Baptism," (*IMB*, August 23, 2017). <https://www.imb.org/2017/08/23/baptism-by-fire-3-reformation-views-on-baptism/>; Micael Gabriel, "The Reformation, Bible Translation, and the Modern Missionary Movement," (*IMB*, February 27, 2017). <https://www.imb.org/2017/02/27/reformation-bible-translation-missionary-movement/>; Paul Akin, "Sola Christus: Salvation in Christ Alone as the Impetus for Missions," (*IMB*, August 15, 2017). <https://www.imb.org/2017/08/15/sola-christus-and-the-great-commission/>; Paul Akin, "Sola Scriptura: The Primacy of Scripture in the Work of Missions," (*IMB*, April 20, 2017). <https://www.imb.org/2017/04/20/reformation-series-paul-akin-sola-scriptura-imb-S.B.C./>; Shawn Wright, "John Calvin and Missions: That God Gather Churches from All Parts of the Earth," (*IMB*, June 13, 2017). <https://www.imb.org/2017/06/13/john-calvin-and-missions/>.

<sup>50</sup> Brandon D. Smith, "Echoes of the Reformation." (*LifeWay*). <https://www.lifeway.com/en/product-family/echoes-of-the-reformation>.

<sup>51</sup> Ray Van Neste and J. Michael Garrett, *Reformation 500: How the Greatest Revival Since Pentecost Continues to Shape the World Today*. (B&H Publishing Group, February 15, 2017).

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To review the governing structure of the S.B.C., thousands of member churches across the nation elect eighty-three men to a governing Executive Board to oversee denominational concerns. These eighty-three individuals, akin to the processes of the legislative branch of the United States, vote on policy and pass official resolutions, including that passed to commemorate the Protestant Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary. Clearly, these eighty-three valued the doctrines of Sola Scriptura and religious liberty and perceived them as important for the entire denomination to value as well – a fact well-reflected in both the resolution and the various commemoration methods employed by the S.B.C.'s many branches – but the S.B.C.'s Executive Committee ultimately has little coercive power over its many member churches, who proceeded to commemorate the 2017 anniversary or to overlook it as they saw fit. A survey of sermons preached by S.B.C. pastors on Sunday, October 29, 2017, generally recognized by the evangelical Protestant world as the day most fitting for corporate commemoration of the anniversary, reveals the disparity between the themes and doctrines deemed of greatest significance by the Executive Committee and by the general populace of the denomination.

Desiring a geographically representative sample, I used data gathered from a 2014 denominational survey of congregation sizes to identify the single largest S.B.C. church in each of the fifty United States, then proceeded to navigate each of these church's online sermon archives to find the sermon preached on October 29, 2017.<sup>52</sup> Only ten of these churches, however, still afforded access to this three-year-old sermon audio: Saddleback Valley Community Church in California, Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Florida, Cornerstone Church in Iowa, Hillvue Heights Baptist Church in Kentucky, Pinelake Church in Mississippi, The Summit Church – Homestead Heights in North Carolina, Apex Community Church in Ohio, Bellevue Baptist Church in Tennessee, Jacob's Well in Wisconsin, and Thomas Road Baptist Church in Virginia.<sup>53</sup> To supplement this diminished sample size, I also used the same survey data to identify the five largest S.B.C. churches on a national level – Saddleback Valley Community Church, Woodlands Church in Texas, Prestonwood Baptist Church in Texas,

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<sup>52</sup> "S.B.C. 500," Thom S. Rainer, 2014. <https://thomrainer.com/S.B.C.500/>.

<sup>53</sup> Steve Ayers, "Genesis 37," (Hillvue Heights Baptist Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <https://www.hillvue.com/sermons?sapurl=LytjMjlmL2xiL21pLytxbnR6cDI3P2JyYW5kaW5nPXRYdWUzZW1iZWQ9dHJlZQ==>; Jonathan Falwell, "Tiny Giants: Mercy Matters," (Thomas Road Baptist Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. [https://watch.trbc.org/media/t/1\\_p0aq8pjo/116662521](https://watch.trbc.org/media/t/1_p0aq8pjo/116662521); Steve Gaines, "Legacy Leaders," (Bellevue Baptist Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <https://www.bellevue.org/media/#sermons>; J.D. Greear, "Freed to Be Alive," (The Summit Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <https://summitchurch.com/message/freed-to-be-alive>; Chip Henderson, "Second Chances," (Pinelake Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <http://pinelake.org/sermon/second-chances/>; Tom Holladay and Buddy Owens, "How to Experience a Personal Reformation," (Saddleback Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <https://saddleback.com/watch/how-to-experience-a-personal-reformation/how-to-experience-a-personal-reformation>; Grant Schultz, "Messed Up Giftedness," (Jacob's Well Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <http://jacobswellchurch.church/resources/messages-podcasts-devos/messed-up-giftedness/>; Ed Stetzer, "Grace Alone," (Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <https://cfonline.cfmiami.org/english/on-demand/book/series/15/service/641/>; Mark Vance, "Marriage," (Cornerstone Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <https://cornerstonelife.com/resources/marriage/>; Jason Zastrow, "Mission and Vision – Discipleship," (Apex Community Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <https://www.apexcommunity.org/apex-sermons?offset=1512926342550>.

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Thomas Road Baptist Church, and the Village Church in Texas – and then located their October 29, 2017 sermon audios.<sup>54</sup> Since both of my selections resulted in the inclusion of Saddleback and Thomas Road, I was left with a total of thirteen sermon audios that, because of the size of their corresponding church bodies, presumably represent a large portion of S.B.C. member churches across the nation. Of these thirteen, only four even mentioned the Reformation in response to its five-hundredth anniversary: Christ Fellowship Baptist Church focused on the doctrine of Sola Gratia (i.e. Grace Alone), Saddleback Valley Community Church delivered a survey each of the Five Solas, and Summit Church and Village Church gave the Reformation's anniversary a brief sentence-long mention at either the beginning or ending of the sermon. The other nine churches gave no mention at all to the anniversary.

Apparently, the doctrines of Sola Scriptura and religious liberty did not have the same importance to the people of the S.B.C. as they did to its leadership, and the latter knew it. In September of 2017, the Baptist Press ran an article entitled, "Pew: Reformation theology waning among Protestants," in which the author references several studies conducted by the Pew Research Center, including one from late August of 2017.<sup>55</sup> This study, subtitled, "Only about half [of U.S. Protestants] say faith alone is enough to get into heaven, Bible provides all guidance," served as somewhat of a warning and a pulse check for S.B.C. leadership.<sup>56</sup> According to the Baptist Press article, one spokesperson talked about the Pew study as "a source of challenge to Baptist to be sure that we prepare our people adequately in the doctrinal commitments that we have," specifically, it seems, in Sola Scriptura.<sup>57</sup> Perhaps, then, the overwhelming focus on it and religious liberty served as attempts at self-redefinition for the general congregant by S.B.C. leadership, resulting in a system of top-down remembrance in a legacy collective that had largely forgotten its identity and had lost the "will to memory" regarding their Reformation heritage. This scenario begs the question of whether an ideological legacy collective can forfeit its status as such either willingly or through sheer neglect, but that is an exploration for another time.

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<sup>54</sup> JT English, "The Inerrancy of Scripture," (The Village Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. <https://www.tvresources.net/resource-library/sermons/the-inerrancy-of-scripture>; Jonathan Falwell, "Tiny Giants: Mercy Matters," (Thomas Road Baptist Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon. [https://watch.trbc.org/media/t/1\\_p0aq8pjo/116662521](https://watch.trbc.org/media/t/1_p0aq8pjo/116662521); Jack Graham, "Building Spiritual Foundations for Life," (Prestonwood Baptist Church, October 29, 2017), Sermon.

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Even considering this intracollective split along the dividing line between leadership and general population, it is apparent that what commemoration did occur within the S.B.C. differed remarkably from that of the scholarly community. While it was difficult to find common thematic thread in the non-legacy collective of American Reformation historians, it was unchallenging to find two in our legacy collective. If we accept our earlier reasoning that anniversaries serve as moments of self-(re)definition for legacy collectives and of self-distinction for the scholarly community, then this difference should come as no surprise; while the former, not further subdivided into a group of leaders and a group of the people, employed the occasion of the Protestant Reformation's five-hundredth anniversary as a moment for individual distinction and for innovation in academic inquiry, the latter, subdivided into leaders and the people, sought collective self-redefinition from the top down. Indeed, this study of the 2017 anniversary seems to have proved the *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* validated in its position that "big" anniversaries effectively serve to highlight differences between the scholarly work of history and the commemorative work of memory, each with its own distinct function. Although presently unsubstantiated, I assert that this brief conceptualization of anniversaries as opportunities for self-(re)definition likely applies to more scenarios than the one at hand. Perhaps this small study can serve as a starting point for the more intensive work of scholars to come.

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