

**The Dead End Trail:  
J. M. Carroll and *The Trail of Blood*  
and Its Impact upon Church Planting  
in the 21st Century**

Rodney A. Harrison

*Vice-President of Institutional Effectiveness*

*Associate Professor of Christian Education*

*Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary*

*Kansas City, Missouri 64118*

*In 1931, Clarence Walker published the body of J. M. Carroll's materials used over two decades supporting the successionist theory of Baptist history. In this article Rodney Harrison reviews his journey through the internet, Texas, Nashville, and Oxford seeking to find and validate Carroll's source documents cited in *The Trail of Blood . . . Following the Christians Down Through the Centuries . . . or The History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, Their Founder to the Present Day*. He discusses the development of Carroll's lectures and his failed attempts to publish his lecture notes during his lifetime. Harrison's conclusion considers the implication of Carroll's work, which to date has sold over 2,230,000 copies. Does the *Trail of Blood* support an anti-intellectual and anti-evangelistic mindset in the hundreds of new and existing churches across North America claiming to use this booklet in their membership classes and instructional programs?*

The notion that "big things come in little packages" can truly be said of *The Trail of Blood*, a diminutive 56-page booklet by J. M. Carroll, published in a compact four inch by six inch format. The full title of this small book originally published in 1931 is *The Trail of Blood . . . Following the Christians Down Through the Centuries . . . or The History of Baptist Churches from the Time of Christ, Their Founder to the Present Day*. By 1994 over 1,955,000 copies were in print. This number increased by over 32,000 copies per year between 1994 and 2002, for a total of 2,280,000 copies covering sixty-six editions in seventy-one years.

The original publisher, American Baptist Publishing Company of Lexington, Kentucky, successfully moved their first 25,000 copies

almost immediately. That same year, the copyright and printing responsibilities were transferred to Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, also in Lexington. Between 1931 and 1998, the church printed over two million copies before transferring the printing rights to Bryan Station Baptist Church of Lexington. Since that time, electronic copies of the book and accompanying study lessons have been available free of charge on the internet. Presently, over 3100 church and para-church websites provide free downloadable copies of this book.<sup>1</sup> A “large print” edition of *The Trail of Blood* became available in early 2006 from the School of Biblical and Theological Studies in Wichita, Kansas. The traditional four by six inch version is still available from Bryan Station Baptist Church, which prints the book in lots of five thousand.

I first read *The Trail of Blood* as an undergraduate student at Dallas Baptist University. At the time, the “Trail of Blood” assignment paled to the reading of Leon Macbeth’s “Baptist History” and “Sourcebook,” so I took little interest in this assignment, other than digesting sufficient information to pass any conceivable essay examination relating to this assignment.

Twelve years later, during a consultation visit as the Church Extension associate with the California Southern Baptist Convention, a pastor shared with me that he was using *The Trail of Blood* in the church new member training. The idea for using *The Trail of Blood* came from his mentor, who also used Carroll’s book for new membership training. Over the next two years, I encountered three bi-vocational church planters supportive of Carroll’s premise of an unbroken succession of Baptist churches. Each of these men endorsed *The Trail of Blood* as an authoritative resource. Due to the lay ministry of these men, I was not overly alarmed until a speaker at a State Baptist meeting challenged conference participants to read *The Trail of Blood*. It was at that point in early 2000 that I refreshed my memory with a re-reading of Carroll’s work, and became interested in exploring the source document Carroll claimed to have used in developing his *Trail of Blood* thesis. Since my peers were also experiencing renewed interest in *The Trail of Blood* by a few church leaders, I would occasionally challenge my colleagues to engage in research as to the source documents cited by Carroll and to gain some additional insights into the life and motivating factors of J. M. Carroll.

---

<sup>1</sup> Advanced scholar search at [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) of “The Trail of Blood” and “J. M. Carroll”; accessed: March 12, 2006. Using Microsoft FrontPage, I was able to determine 3109 active sites and 484 non-active sites providing downloads of J. M. Carroll’s “The Trail of Blood” in Adobe, Microsoft Word, WordPerfect or RTF formats.

In 2002, I had the opportunity to conduct research at Regent's Park College, Oxford. My original plan was to study the "House Church Movement" in England, but that project soon fizzled out, as it soon became evident that those using the Internet had embellished the extent of the movement. With additional time on my hands, my colleagues and I took advantage of availability of the Angus and Bodleian libraries to begin research on the sources cited by Carroll in *The Trail of Blood*. During the fall of 2002 and summer of 2004 the opportunity arose to study the J. M. Carroll collection stored in the archives of the A. Webb Roberts Library at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas. In 2005 a study grant allowed me to conduct research at the Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives in Nashville, Tennessee. This article is the first of several papers that I hope to write based on these research opportunities.

The author, James Milton Carroll (January 8, 1852–January 11, 1931) was a prominent Texas Baptist leader for a period of five decades covering the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. His brother, B. H. Carroll, was the founder and president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Included in his list of personal friends was J. R. Graves, who promoted Landmarkism and Baptist Successionism through *The Tennessee Baptist*, which he edited from 1848 to 1889.<sup>2</sup> According to Carroll, Graves frequently visited Texas and was "loved by the very large majority of Texas Baptists."<sup>3</sup> The influence Graves had upon the Carroll brothers is readily seen in the writings of these two brothers. In addition to the aforementioned *The Trail of Blood*, J. M. wrote *The Eternal Safety and Security of all Blood Bought Believers, A History of Texas Baptists* and *B. H. Carroll, the Colossus of Baptist History*. His brother, B. H. Carroll wrote *Ecclesia—The Church, Jesus Christ, the Baptists and their Doctrines, Christ and His Church, Whitsitt and Wilmington*, and *Dr. Carroll has a Word about the Whitsitt Controversy*. In addition to these publications, both brothers frequently wrote articles for Baptist papers that promoted Landmark ideals, especially during the Hayden controversy.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, "James Robinson Graves," at [http://www.sbhla.org/bio\\_graves.htm](http://www.sbhla.org/bio_graves.htm). Accessed: November 1, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> J. M. Carroll, *A History of Texas Baptists* (Dallas: Baptist Standard Publishing, 1923), 448.

<sup>4</sup> For additional insights into this controversy, see Joseph Early, *A Texas Baptist Power Struggle: The Hayden Controversy* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), and Charles Basil Bugg, "The Whitsitt Controversy: A Study in Denominational Conflict" (Th.D. Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972).

During the late nineteenth century, the Whitsitt Controversy was a major dividing point among Southern Baptists. William H. Whitsitt, the professor of church history at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, published *A Question in Baptist History* in 1896. In his book, he established the premise that English Anabaptists began practicing immersion only around 1641. Whitsitt felt that only with the resumption of believer's baptism by immersion should they take the name "Baptists." A firestorm of objection against Whitsitt's book arose from both pulpits and Baptist papers. Curiously, Whitsitt's detractors included both Landmarkers, who held that Baptists were the true church founded by Jesus, and scholars who agreed with Whitsitt's 17th century view of Baptist origin. Jesse Thomas, in response to *Question* wrote:

Had he confined himself to this question alone (the one of Baptist Succession) it is hard to see how he could have displeased those who are sensitive at that point. But he was not content with this. Boldly, and incautiously, he had committed himself to the demonstration of a wide and drastic negative, viz: that there were never any Baptists whatever either in England or Holland before the year 1641.<sup>5</sup>

John T. Christian volleyed an immediate response to *A Question in Baptist History* in his book, *Did They Dip?* Christian, a prominent Kentucky minister, was a professor of biblical studies at Baptist Bible Institute of New Orleans at the time of Whitsitt's writing. In *Did They Dip?* Christian writes, "The footsteps of the Baptists of the ages can more easily be traced by blood than by baptism."<sup>6</sup> With Bible students and Baptist papers now taking on the Whitsitt Controversy, the topic gained importance in the churches and, over time, one of the most popular lecturers on the subject come to be J. M. Carroll.

Following Carroll's death in 1931, many popular speakers and preachers continued to use Carroll's notes and chart, including A. A. Davis, whose 1945 book, *Ten Sermons on the Trail of Blood*, remains in print today. Such men continued to speak on the subject of Baptist Successionism as outlined in *The Trail of Blood* well into the 1960s.

Today, the subject is again becoming popular on web blogs and coffee house conversations. Recently, even popular "Tuned into America" commentator Sean Hannity has taken up the subject.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Jesse Thomas, "Dr. Whitsitt's 'Question,'" *The American Journal of Theology* (January 1898): 2.

<sup>6</sup> John T. Christian, *A History of Baptists*, Vol. 1 (Texarkana, TX: Bogard Press, 1922), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Sean Hannity, "Tuned into America" web blog, [www.hannity.com](http://www.hannity.com), discussion topic: "Religion; The Trail of Blood"; accessed: October 23, 2006.

The development of *The Trail of Blood* is almost as intriguing as its popularity. According to the introduction to *The Trail of Blood*, a Dr. J. W. Porter was one of those who heard Carroll's lectures. He was so impressed that he offered to publish them as a book if Carroll would put them in writing.<sup>8</sup> Carroll agreed and gave Porter the right to publish them as a book that would include the chart Carroll used in his lectures to illustrate his history of Baptists. Although Carroll died before the book was off the press, the first edition was now "before the public and the whole edition was soon sold out."<sup>9</sup>

Soon, copies of *The Trail of Blood* were being sent to pastors and church leaders. Many Baptist associations bought the books in bulk and sent copies to every church. The wide distribution of the book throughout the South was one of the reasons the theory of Baptist succession was widely accepted. Another was Carroll's extensive use of references to support his theory. To many, these references provided the appearance of great scholarship. In fact, the inside and outside back cover of the book includes, "A partial list of books used in preparing lectures on *The Trail of Blood*," containing seventy-nine resources.<sup>10</sup> This in a book that was under sixty pages in length! For many readers, there was no question that Carroll had done his homework.

However, the actual publication of *The Trail of Blood* was delayed over a decade. Carroll originally penned this first manuscript around 1918.<sup>11</sup> He then submitted this manuscript to his friend P. E. Burroughs of the Baptist Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention for publication. In a letter dated December 19, 1918, Burroughs writes:

I spoke to Dr. Van Ness this morning about your manuscript "Betrayal of Blood." He expresses the wish that you will send the manuscript in at your early convenience. It may not seem possible to fit the book into the schedule of our study books, but we will be pleased to have you send the

---

<sup>8</sup> Agreement letter dated January 30, 1930, from J. W. Porter to J. M. Carroll (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Seminary, Fort Worth TX).

<sup>9</sup> J. M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood* (Lexington, KY: American Baptist Publishing Company, 1931), 1.

<sup>10</sup> *The Trail of Blood*, back cover. The author can only speculate on the reasons the first edition published by the American Baptist Publishing Company includes the list of supporting documents in the back pages while subsequent editions published by the Ashland Avenue Baptist Church include the list on the inside and outside of the back cover. In the Ashland Avenue editions two entries are included twice, "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" appears on the inside cover and "Book of Martyrs—Fox" appears on the outside back cover. "Short History of the Baptists" by Vedder is included on both the inside and outside back covers.

<sup>11</sup> J. M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood*, handwritten manuscript (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

manuscript with the assurance that it will have every kindly consideration in these quarters.<sup>12</sup>

In a letter dated March 11, 1919, Dr. Van Ness writes:

Dear Dr. Carroll,

I have yours of recent date asking about your manuscript. Your manuscript lies on my desk and has been given attention. I have read it with great interest and think if printed it will have a useful place. My difficulty in deciding has been in just what form it should be presented if it is published. I will lay it before our Book Committee at its next meeting and see if we can reach any decision, which will be sometime in April. I am sure you will be glad to leave it with us until this can be done.<sup>13</sup>

Apparently that was not the case, for in a letter dated fourteen days later he writes:

Dear Dr. Carroll,

I have yours of March 21st. I think you construed my letter with a little more interrogation point than existed. My perplexity was in fitting the book into its sphere of usefulness. What you say about making a little book, however, appeals to me. I think if it was worked over it might easily prove to be very acceptable.

Our situation is a little perplexing because we have several historical books before us. We would not know just what to do. Dr. Christian has a manuscript in our hands and then we have the Riley manuscript yet to settle upon.

I am going to return your manuscript as you request . . . .<sup>14</sup>

Beginning in 1920, saved correspondences demonstrate that Carroll decided to begin campaigning for the publication of this work. A letter from the Cloudcast Baptist Assembly pledged the purchase of 1000 copies of *The Trail of Blood*, the name that Carroll was now using for both his lecture series and promised book.<sup>15</sup> A letter from the Baptist Headquarters office in San Antonio, Texas notes the material was “. . .

---

<sup>12</sup> Letter from P. E. Burroughs to J. M. Carroll dated December 19, 1918 (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

<sup>13</sup> Letter from I. J. Van Ness to J. M. Carroll dated March 11, 1919 (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

<sup>14</sup> Letter from I. J. Van Ness to J. M. Carroll dated March 25, 1919 (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

<sup>15</sup> Letter from A. N. Porter to J. M. Carroll dated March 22, 1920 (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

simply remarkable in their scope, marvelous in the fund of information imparted, unapproached in their presentation of interesting and instructive and of inestimable value . . .” This letter goes on to say, “I fully appreciate the efforts of your research, and the careful attention to details and to the authenticity of your statements, and deem them to be one of the most concise reviews of history . . .” However, this letter is also the first to raise the question of source documentation. In his last sentence, Fred Hall writes, “I hope you will find a place in the edition to incorporate some if not all of the facts which you have so ably presented verbally.”<sup>16</sup>

The Baptist Sunday School Board responded with a letter dated December 23, 1922. Part of the letter reads:

Dr. Van Ness spoke to me about your manuscripts afterwards and said that its chief fault was the lack of proper connections between the high points which you touched from age to age. I told him that you supplied these connections in the spoken discourse whereupon he suggested that they ought to be supplied in the written manuscript.<sup>17</sup>

In the second manuscript, Carroll includes a list of thirty-seven works cited and adds numerous parenthetical references in the body of the text.<sup>18</sup> However, these references were often misleading. For example, in the second manuscript and in the final printed form, Carroll notes: “. . . there is not one instance of the baptism of a child till the year 370.” He supports this statement with a parenthetical reference to Christian’s “A History of Baptists, Volume 1,” page 31. However, when one turns to the source Carroll cites, the reader finds the following, “The earliest clear evidence of infant baptism is found in Tertullian who opposed it (A.D. 185). The first direct evidence in favor of it is found in the writings of Cyprian, in the Council of Carthage, in Africa, A.D. 253.”<sup>19</sup>

The Baptist Sunday Board refused to publish *The Trail of Blood*; nevertheless, Carroll proceeded to lay the foundations for publication. Beginning in 1923, churches and Baptist state boards were enlisted to raise funds for the publication of the book. Carroll also benefited from frequent lecture series and seminars, for which his normal remuneration was \$100 per night plus expenses or \$250 plus expenses for a series of

---

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Fred S. Hall to J. M. Carroll, dated July 7, 1920 (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

<sup>17</sup> Letter from E. D. Alldredge to J. M. Carroll dated December 23, 1922 (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

<sup>18</sup> J. M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood*, typed manuscript with handwritten addendum entitled, “Books to be Examined” (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

<sup>19</sup> Christian, *Did They Dip?*, 31.

five lectures.<sup>20</sup> During this same period, Carroll enlisted the help of private supporters in raising funds for the publication of *The Trail of Blood*. Ironically, the timeline for the development of the source material seemed to change over the years. In a letter dated December 26, 1929, W. S. Carter, in a fund-raising authorized by J. M. Carroll, writes,

Dr. J. M. Carroll, of San Antonio, who has studied and preached and preached and studied an exceptionally large amount of history concerning the Baptist faith. He has also studied the history of Christian religion from Christ down to the present time, and is now engaged in writing a book from the information gained from long years of study. He has read many books on the subject, and gained information in many ways concerning the Christian faith and the martyrdom suffered by many God-fearing souls both men and women. The true Christian religion not being protected by the state like some of the other religions were, caused its followers to suffer and loose their lives for the faith that they held so dear. That caused Brother Carroll to call this history The Trail of Blood.

He partially wrote this history about five years ago, and has given lectures of the subject in many of our churches . . . Our foreign missionaries need this history badly. They could do more effective work in soul saving if they had it. And, as that is the great object of missionary Baptists, let's do what we can to get this good book put into the hands of all Kingdom workers.

As afore mentioned this book was not finished; the references were never put in, and, of course, they have to be there to make the book authentic, so Brother Carroll is now rewriting the book and is putting the references in their proper places. It will take him at least six months to finish the book. He is not charging anything for writing the book, but did ask that we contribute to his living expenses while he does this work, which will amount to \$1200.00, and it will take about that much more to publish the first edition of the book.<sup>21</sup>

Carter goes on to tell the story of one good lady in the church who contributed \$50 from her poverty and others who should give \$100, \$500, or more.

So, the contributions came in. Ironically, Carroll continued to share his need for publication funds. In a letter dated March 25, 1930, the pastor of First Baptist Church, Paul's Valley, Oklahoma, in follow-up to

---

<sup>20</sup> The author has copies of correspondence from Bethel College, Knoxville, Tennessee, the Baptist State Board of Missions, Louisville, Kentucky, and the Baptist Bible Institute of New Orleans supporting these amounts as normative. Several other letters from local churches and pastors supporting these figures can be accessed at the A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from W. S. Carter to J. M. Carroll dated February 26, 1930 (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

Carroll's visit to his church, writes, "You remember you said if you had \$400.00 that you could go ahead and finish it. Well, I did the best I could for you and got over half of it for you."<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, Carroll forgot to mention that the publication issue had taken care of itself. In a letter dated January 30, 1930, J. W. Porter, the publisher of the American Baptist Publishing Company, wrote Carroll the following:

My Dear Dr. Carroll,

Your kind and valued letter received and noted with pleasure and interest . . .

Now, in regard to the royalty, I will say that I will allow you twenty percent royalty. In other words if the book sells for one dollar you would get twenty cents. I have never received over twelve and one half percent on any book that I have published. You assume no financial responsibilities what so ever. I should say the book should not sell for less than one dollar. However, if it makes one hundred pages it would be difficult to get more than one dollar per copy. We can decide later as to how the chart should be published. I hardly think it necessary to print it in colors. I feel pretty sure that the book will sell if properly advertised. Have you any idea when you could begin publication?

With prayers and best wishes, I am,  
Cordially yours,

J. W. Porter

Despite the promise to publish, Carroll continued to raise funds for this cause. In a ledger dated April 28, 1930, an additional \$63.50 was raised that month for the publication of *The Trail of Blood*.

Ironically, it was only after Carroll's death that the book was eventually published. The original run of 25,000 copies sold out almost immediately at \$1 per copy. The second edition included an introduction by Clarence Walker, Pastor of the Ashland Avenue Baptist Church and sold for 25 cents. In the second and subsequent editions, the introduction, which constitutes the first five pages of the 56-page book, is significant in that it includes several addendums to Carroll's history. Some of these have taken on "legendary" status among some Baptists and among those who seek to refute everything within its pages. These additions include quotes attributed to Carroll, which, to the uninformed reader, seem authentic. For example, the following is said to have come from Cardinal

---

<sup>22</sup> Letter from R. G. Baucom, First Baptist Church, Paul's Valley, to J. M. Carroll, dated March 25, 1930 (A. Webb Roberts Library, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX).

Stanislaus Hosius, Chairman of the Council of Trent proceedings, which reads,

Were it not that the baptists have been grievously tormented and cut off with the knife during the past twelve hundred years, they would swarm in greater number than all the reformers.<sup>23</sup>

Not surprisingly, this statement cannot be substantiated. Nor can a quote attributed to Sir Isaac Newton be substantiated, in which he is said to have said, “The Baptists are the only body of known Christians that have never symbolized with Rome.” Thus, every printing since the original has fueled the fires of misinformation.

However, of interest and concern to contemporary church ecclesiology are the ten landmarks of the true Baptist or Baptist-like churches. Carroll states in his opening lecture, “If in going down through the centuries we run upon a group or groups of people bearing not these distinguishing marks and teaching other things for fundamental doctrines, let us beware.” He goes on to identify the ten “. . . unerring, infallible marks” of the true church.

1. Christ, the author of this religion, organized His followers or disciples into a **Church**. And the disciples were to organize other churches as this religion spread and other disciples were “made.” (Bapt. Succession—Ray—Revised Edition, 1st Chap.)
2. This organization or church, according to the Scriptures and according to the practices of the Apostles and early churches was given two kinds of offices and only two—pastors and deacons. The pastor was called “Bishop.” Both pastor and deacons to be selected by the church and to be servants of the church.
3. The churches in their government and discipline to be entirely separate and independent of each other. Jerusalem to have no authority over Antioch; nor Antioch over Ephesus; nor Ephesus over Corinth, and so forth. And their government to be congregational, democratic. A government of the people, by the people and for the people.
4. To the church were given two ordinances and only two. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These to be perpetual and memorial.
5. Only the “**saved**” were to be received as members of the church. (Acts 2:47.) These saved ones to be saved by grace alone without any works of the law. (Eph 2:5, 8, 9.) These saved ones and they only, to be immersed in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Matt. 28:19.) And only those thus received and baptized, to partake of the

---

<sup>23</sup> Hosius, Letter, *Apud Opera*, 112, 113.

- Lord's Supper and the supper to be celebrated only by the church, in church capacity.
6. The inspired scriptures, and they only, in fact, the New Testament, and that only, to be the rule and guide of faith and life, not only for the church as an organization, but for each individual member of that organization.
  7. **Christ Jesus**, the founder of this organization and the savior of its members, to be their only priest and kin, their only Lord and Lawgiver, and the only head of the churches. The churches to be executive only in carrying out their Lord's will and completed laws, never legislative, to amend or abrogate old laws or to make new ones.
  8. This religion of Christ to be individual, personal, and purely voluntary or through persuasion. No physical or governmental compulsion. A matter of distinct individual and personal church. "Choose you" is the scriptural injunction. It could be neither accepted nor rejected nor lived by proxy nor under compulsion.
  9. Mark well! That neither Christ nor His apostles, ever gave to his followers, what is know today as a denominational name, such as "Catholic," "Lutheran," "Presbyterian," "Episcopal," and so forth—unless the name given by Christ to John was intended for such, "The Baptist," "John the Baptist." (Matt. 11:11 and 10 or 12 over times.) Christ called the individual follower "disciple." Two or more were called "disciples." The organization of disciples, whether at Jerusalem or Antioch or elsewhere, was called Church. If more than one of these separate organizations were referred to, they were called Churches. The word church in the singular was never used when referring to more than one of these organizations. Nor even when referring to them all.
  10. I venture to give one more distinguishing mark. We will call it—Complete separation of Church and State. No combination, no mixture of this spiritual religion with a tempor [sic] "Religious Liberty," for everybody.

Carroll contends that ". . . Baptists have an unbroken line of churches since Christ. . . ." that bear these marks.<sup>24</sup> However, the marks seemed to have changed even during his lifetime. In his first manuscript, both the order and content are significantly different. In his second known manuscript, the ten marks are as noted above.

Numerous papers and articles explore the propriety of Carroll's affirmation of groups such as the Novatians, Montanists, Paulicans and Waldenses as Baptist and as holding to these ten unerring, infallible marks. Therefore, the focus will turn to aspects of his character and contribution that have contemporary implication to church planting and missional ecclesiology.

---

<sup>24</sup> Carroll, *The Trail of Blood*, Back Leaf Chart, Explanation of the Church, point 1.

In Carroll's chart illustrating his church history, he calls those churches that fell away from the ten unerring, infallible marks (or landmarks) "irregular churches." In his original manuscript Carroll used the term "earmarks." In the second manuscript, one finds in his script a change to the term "landmark," suggesting that Carroll was seeking to reconnect his audience with the Landmark movement, which had won the battle with Whitsitt, but lost the popularity war. Today, the web-sites and web blogs discussing this issue are also seeking to reconnect their members with the Landmark movement. This seems especially popular among pastors and leaders who might best be called "lay-church planters." One of my favorite sites was that for a new church that promoted itself as a "Purpose-Driven Church" upholding the principles in *The Trail of Blood*.<sup>25</sup>

Another contributor to the renewed interest in Landmarkism may be questioning of the necessity of believer's baptism for membership among some historically Baptist churches including Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Pastor John Piper, and Henderson Hills Baptist Church in Edmond, Oklahoma, Pastor Dennis Newkirk. Such conversations might be causing a reflex response that finds comfort in Carroll's clear-cut definition of a true church.

Despite the fact that Carroll's ministry was perpetually under the shadow of accusation, he maintained both popularity and a committed following. Joseph Early, in his recent work, *A Texas Baptist Power Struggle*, recounts Carroll's scuffle over the Hayden Controversy, a ten-year long battle that raised questions of Carroll's financial oversight as General Secretary of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. In his personal correspondence, one finds a letter from an accountant resigning over unspecified irregularities.

Carroll was a shrewd businessman. He was paid at least \$5000 by the Baptist General Convention of Texas to write "A History of Texas Baptists." J. B. Cranfield, the book's editor, suggests that the total amount was even more. In the editor's introduction he writes, "It was I who made the plea with those good-hearted Christians that led them to contribute *the first* [emphasis mine] \$5000 to our author so that he could devote all of his time to this important task."<sup>26</sup> \$5000 was a huge sum in 1922. Apparently to justify this amount, Carroll writes in the author's foreword that the book was the result of "4 years of writing, 10 hours per day." However, during this same period he was actively revising and seeking publication of *The Trail of Blood*, conducting revivals, involved

---

<sup>25</sup> Sangre de Cristo Baptist Church, [www.scfcsantafe.org/](http://www.scfcsantafe.org/); accessed: April 23, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Carroll, *A History of Texas Baptists*, vii.

in denominational activities,<sup>27</sup> and leading *Trail of Blood* lectures and seminars.

When discussing the *The Trail of Blood* with those who embrace J. M. Carroll's work as authoritative, it is apparent that Carroll has taken on an almost "god-like" character. The introduction in the Ashland Avenue Baptist Church edition of *The Trail of Blood* calls Carroll, "not only . . . a leader among Texas Baptists, but an outstanding figure of Southern Baptists, and of the world." In the editor's introduction to "A History of Texas Baptists," Cranfield touts Carroll as having "performed a service of incalculable value to our Texas Baptist people, as well as for the Baptists of the world." To his supporters, the historical shadow over Carroll's character is unknown. Surprisingly, none of the current conversations that are on-going on in web blogs and internet chat rooms has raised the character question beyond the "source documentation" issue.

Although it is premature to declare Landmarkism an up-and-coming debate on the level of Open Theism or Calvinism, the number of discussions on the subject matter, especially among some young church planters, should encourage those engaged in Christian formation and theological education to prepare for a conversation with a ready defense.

---

<sup>27</sup> Carroll served as a messenger at each Southern Baptist Convention annual meetings from 1883 to 1930, Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee. He also served on several committees during this time.