

Editorial: Reflect on what our leaders reflect in us

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As I reflect on the recent selection of new leaders in Southern Baptist and Cooperative Baptist life, I wonder what their selection reflects about us.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Governing Board elected [Paul Baxley](#) on Jan. 15 as the new executive coordinator of CBF, and the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee chose [Ronnie Floyd](#) on Apr. 2 as its new president.

In full disclosure, I don't know either Baxley or Floyd enough to know if they are likable, competent or "good guys." I do know both are highly respected among their peers.

I don't know if either one of them *should* have been selected, but I do wonder what we might see in the fact that both *were* selected.

Whether or not either person was the right choice, time will tell. Our confidence in making such decisions really is only provisional, after all, a statement of our hope and faith.

Skin-deep reflections

Some already have shared their thoughts on social media about white men being selected for top leadership positions in Baptist groups. Regardless of what those thoughts are, it is true that Baxley and Floyd are white men.

Being a white man in and of itself is not a positive or negative thing. Being a white man doesn't equate good or bad leadership. But what does the selection of two white men reflect?

Do Baxley and Floyd—as white men—reflect the available leadership pool from which to choose top leaders? More pointedly, does their selection reflect a history of excluding non-white people—and women, for the most part—from leadership?

If both men do reflect a history of exclusion, should this history be addressed, and how? If a more diverse leadership pool is needed, what should Baxley and Floyd do to ensure more diversity is available the next time leaders need to be selected?

Reflecting on credentials

Baxley and Floyd both have impressive resumé's, as can be seen in lengthy articles published in the [CBF Blog](#) and [Baptist Press](#), respectively.

Both men have been deeply committed to and involved in their churches and respective Baptist families for decades. Both have led many people through challenging social, political and religious situations. Each has demonstrated himself as worthy of consideration for his respective position. As for qualifications, both can rise to the lofty charge of being more than qualified.

Baxley's and Floyd's credentials seem to speak for themselves. In short, they've earned their chops.

While we can feel sure each man is a worthy leader, I still wonder if their qualifications and credentials were the deciding factors in their being chosen to lead?

A cynical view of leadership—prevalent in our culture—sees one's selection to top leadership as a matter of assembling a mountain of qualifications and endorsements to overwhelm voters with evidence in favor of the desired candidate. More cynical still is the idea that being part of the in-group is

required for top leadership.

Given the tendency of our culture and the fact that we are so shaped by it, I wonder as I read the lengthy recitation of Baxley's and Floyd's resumés what other decision might have been made.

I trust each committee prayed continuously over who God was calling to lead the CBF and the SBC, but I wonder what the committees would have done if God led them to a person with no other qualification than God's call.

What would *we* have done if we were presented with their selection and no resumé? What would we have thought? Are we presented with lengthy resumés and reassurances of the best choice made because we wouldn't accept it otherwise?

Reflecting on public associations

Though some in Texas Baptist life don't know Floyd, they do know he has been part of a council of evangelical advisers to President Trump. Regardless of Floyd's actual role on that council or his interactions with the president, for some Baptists, he is guilty by association.

Likewise, while some in Texas Baptist life don't know Baxley, they do know he served on the Illumination Project, which sought a model of unity on matters of sexuality. For some Baptists, Baxley is guilty by association.

Trying to provide leadership to challenging issues—the very thing that led to their respective elections—each man serves as a scapegoat for others who disapprove of their particular interactions with the challenges of public life.

And I wonder, just how close to difficult issues do we want our leaders to get? Do we want them to be present in social, political and religious battles in the same way our military is ever more present on the battlefield—via

drones? Or do we want them to touch lepers?

More pointedly, do we want our leaders to take on the tasks we ourselves are afraid to take on, to go where we ourselves are afraid to go? And when we think they get it wrong, with whom are we really angry?

Reflecting on a dark horse

Still others in Baptist life don't even know this much about Baxley and Floyd—and they don't care. They are in local churches who feel or have become disconnected from national bodies and sometimes state bodies. They may see photos of two white men under headlines about some guys being elected. They may register some significance, or they may not. In any event, they move on.

And I wonder—like so many others—why?

Why do fewer and fewer Baptists care who was elected to lead Baptist groups? Is it because we're asking and answering the wrong questions?

We've been asking a lot of questions about ourselves, and we've been asking them for a long time. I wonder if we're afraid of the answers.

I wonder if we'd rather turn our gaze on what we don't like about the leaders we've chosen than do the hard work of becoming the leaders we need.

Eric Black is the executive director, publisher and editor of the Baptist Standard. He can be reached at eric.black@baptiststandard.com or on Twitter at [@EricBlackBSP](https://twitter.com/EricBlackBSP).