

THE EFFICIENCY MOVEMENT  
IN  
FLORIDA BAPTIST HISTORY

BY  
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## **The Efficiency Movement in Florida Baptist History**

If you're here, give yourself 20%. Being on time gets you another 10%. If you brought your Bible you can add 10% more. An offering is also good for 10%, and I'll give you 20% if you stay for preaching. You get a whopping 30% if you prepared your lesson, but I know you didn't do that, because nobody ever prepares their lesson unless they're showing off and going for 100.

Ah, yes! It's the infamous Southern Baptist six-point record system, the bane of several generations of primaries, juniors, and intermediates. Have you ever wondered where the six-point record system came from? You probably haven't but no need to worry. I'm going to tell you anyway. The six-point record system was just one product of the Efficiency Movement among Southern Baptists.

"Efficiency?" you ask. "Efficiency Movement? Among Southern Baptists? The same folks who gave us a Million More in '54, Lottie and Annie, and the Battle for the Bible?" Yes, the very same.

In fact, there was a time when efficiency was a big word among Southern Baptists – even as big as evangelism. W.A. Hobson, editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, wrote in 1915 that "efficiency in Christian service is the true test of orthodoxy." Hobson noted that the Florida Baptist Convention that year had instructed its State Board of Missions to spend less time and money on associational evangelism, and to use the savings to hire two efficiency experts. Hobson defended this move. "We do not think of giving up evangelism," he wrote, "not before the millennium." And he added, "It scarcely need be said that no one thought of making a comparison of the relative importance of evangelism and efficiency. Both are necessary and both receive Scriptural emphasis. These are indeed the two great fundamental things in the teaching of Christ and his Apostles."<sup>1</sup>

Hobson maintained that at the time he was writing the pressing need among Florida Baptists was efficiency, not evangelism, and he concluded his appeal by saying: "Let our efficiency men come to us in the interest of church efficiency as embracing all the members, agencies and activities, and let them stay until the train is running on the main standardized line and stop trying to run Pullman cars over tram tracks. LET'S HAVE STANDARDIZED BAPTIST CHURCHES."<sup>2</sup>

Hobson received not the slightest bit of criticism for this outburst. Indeed, two weeks later Florida Baptists' Corresponding Secretary picked up the same subject. "The slogan of every Baptist church in Florida should be efficiency," wrote Dr S.B. Rogers.

Here is not only our weak point, but here is where we are destined to fall in the rapid progress of this modern age unless we take steps to bring our churches up to the highest degree of efficiency. Practically every strong pastor in the land, and the best of our churches are starting forth and reaching out towards the goal of efficiency .... The efficiency of a church is its index power. We have a great gospel to preach. Let us maintain a great gospel plan of efficiency."<sup>3</sup>

Roger's appeal did not go unheeded. Within a year Florida Baptists had established a Department of Efficiency, staffed by an Efficiency Secretary, commonly known as "our efficiency man," who traveled throughout the state leading efficiency campaigns in churches and associations, and who wrote about his exploits in a weekly "Efficiency Notes" column in the *Witness*. And if that wasn't enough, the SBC and WMU were also actively promoting efficiency. For a few brief years in the second decade of this century the Efficiency Movement was a powerful force in the life of Florida Baptists.

The efficiency movement gathered force slowly, like an approaching hurricane. From 1900 to 1910 there are only occasional references to efficiency, relating to financial, ministerial, educational, and administrative matters. In 1901 the State Board of Missions reported that there were 288 ministers in the state But when one discounted "the superannuated, the secularized, the lazy, the young men preparing for the work, the anti-missionaries, and all others." It could be safely said that less than half the churches had an efficient minister, and many of those were efficient to a small degree.<sup>4</sup> Five years later the Board argued that efficiency in missions and evangelism would be increased if Baptists would concentrate first on winning and training Floridians, who could then reach out beyond the borders of the state.<sup>5</sup> In 1907 Stetson President Lincoln Hulley reported on the efficiency and growth of the university.<sup>6</sup> Two years later the State Convention urged the Florida Baptist *Witness* "to use such a policy in the publication of the paper as shall make for its greatest efficiency and usefulness in keeping with economy."<sup>7</sup>

By 1910 Americans, including Baptists, were growing more enamored with efficiency. They were busy people and they needed to use their time wisely. It was the Progressive Era in American society. Reform was in the air. The cities were growing. Business and industry were expanding. Women were seeking the vote. There was increasing sentiment for Prohibition. Church people were beginning to talk about bringing the denominations together for missions and social service and maybe even an ecumenical church structure. Baptists were concerned about all of these issues, and the key to their success seemed to be efficiency.

The Northern Baptists acted first, adopting a standard of denominational efficiency in 1911. At the Florida Baptist Convention in January, 1912, this report was commended to Florida Baptists by the State Board of Missions. Seven points were deemed worthy of notice:

1. Non-resident membership should be reduced to a minimum.
2. Every member should render some form of personal service in the varied ministry of the church.
3. Every member should give proportionately, according to ability and need, to the local expenses of the church, and to the spread of the Gospel throughout the world.
4. Every member, as a learner in the school of Christ, should teach or be taught in the educational work of the church.
5. Every church should have a constructive program for serving the social needs of its community, either individually or through the largest possible co-operation with other organizations for human uplift.
6. Every church should appoint a strong missionary committee, composed of both men and women, who, together with the pastor, should inaugurate a vigorous educational campaign for creating greater missionary interest on the part of every member. The various denominational agencies should be utilized in this undertaking. The weekly system of giving to missions

should be adopted, and an every-member canvass of the congregation should be prosecuted with a view of securing a missionary offering from every member.

7. Wherever possible, the local church should co-operate with other local bodies for increased fellowship and efficiency.<sup>8</sup>

It was recommended by the State Board of Missions that some such plan be adopted by the Convention, printed, and distributed to every member in the state.

This report is interesting for two reasons. First, several of the specific recommendations became prominent among Florida Baptists, including the weekly offering, the every-member canvass, and greater organization for religious education and missions education.

Secondly, this report shows how the concern for efficiency gathered into itself the other concerns of the church, including finances, missions, evangelism, education, and organization. Efficiency was not just a means to some end; it was an end in itself.

This is illustrated in the report of the Education Committee to the Florida Baptist Convention in 1912. The report begins with a glowing tribute to the value of education. Education builds character, develops one's powers and faculties, enables one to think independently, opens the hearts and affections of others, and brings one to the pinnacle of success and influence in society. "Education," and I quote, "not only enlarges one's powers and possibilities, but feeds the springs of inspiration and enlarges the vision, enabling one to properly comprehend and appreciate the grandeur, beauty and sublimity of life with its opportunities and obligations." Then comes the shocker. The report says, "No education, however, should be higher or more extensive than is necessary for efficiency."<sup>9</sup> Once one has reached the point of efficiency, all additional education is a waste of time!

One other note from the 1912 convention is of interest. The Layman's Missionary Movement went on record deploring the unbusinesslike method of financial support for missions. They advocated a weekly offering rather than a yearly pledge. This would reduce the need to borrow and pay interest. Not only was the weekly plan – and the use of duplex envelopes – more efficient, they said; it was also "the scriptural method."<sup>10</sup>

Among the strongest proponents of efficiency were women. By 1911, the Florida WMU could report that there were Baptist Young Women, Royal Ambassador, and Sunbeam groups throughout the state as well as regular meetings and literature for adult women.<sup>11</sup> In her 1913 presidential address to the WMU, Mrs. N.C. Wamboldt focused on the need for greater efficiency in missionary education. The WMU that year formed three commissions: one on Organized Efficiency, one on Urban Efficiency, and one on Rural Efficiency. The corresponding secretary that year, Mrs. H.C. Peelman, organized her address around the topics "Efficiency in Associations," "Efficiency in Societies," "Efficiency through the Standard of Excellence," and "Efficiency through Prayer and Mission Study." The address was a call for leadership development, better ways of conducting meetings, and the use of the prayer calendar and other promotional aids to increase activity and usefulness.<sup>12</sup> The women must have responded well, for the next year's report noted increased efficiency across the board. There were now written constitutions, regularly elected officers, associational organizations, and new assistant superintendents for young people's work. And there was the recommendation that every band of Sunbeams across the state "become an honor roll

society, not simply for the purpose of being put on the list, but because of the degree of efficiency for service hereby attained.”<sup>13</sup> Go Sunbeams!

Though organizational efficiency was important, it was financial efficiency that most concerned Florida Baptists. S.B. Rogers, Corresponding Secretary of the Convention, said in his 1914 address to the Convention, “Our present system of finance has had its day. It is now obsolete. To foster it longer is denominational suicide . . . . As Baptists we claim to teach God’s book, to follow God’s plan of salvation for man, but God no more has a plan to save than God has a plan to finance.”<sup>14</sup>

Florida Baptists then did two things that Baptists always do in such situations. They formed a committee and they took up an offering! When the committee reported back it was dubbed “The Committee on Efficiency.”<sup>15</sup> Among its recommendations:

1. That a budget committee be appointed. Some ideas die hard, efficient or not! The budget committee was to bring a unified budget to the convention.

2. That each church adopt its own budget, and cooperate with the other churches in meeting the convention’s unified budget.

3. That each church canvass its members for individual contributions to the ministries of the Convention.

4. That one or two efficiency experts be hired to promote this work.

5. That associational evangelists be eliminated.

Later at the same convention it was decided to appoint a single Treasurer to handle all convention funds. What all of this amounts to is a move to systemize and centralize finances. Previously a church simply gave money to an agency whenever it felt like it. Representatives from the various agencies went from church to church soliciting funds. Each church normally gave one pledge to each agency each year. Thus there would be one offering for state missions, one for foreign missions, one for home missions, one for Columbia College, one for the Children’s Home, one for the *Witness*, one for the needy ministers and so on. Churches and individuals got tired of the constant appeal for funds, and the agencies, never sure how much money they would receive, wasted much time and energy in soliciting. Under the new plan, each member would give a set amount to his or her church every week. The church would send all the money each month to the one Treasurer, who would then disperse it to the various agencies according to a set formula. It was the responsibility of the newly appointed Secretary of Efficiency to get the churches to adopt this plan.

The first, last, and only person to hold the position of Efficiency Secretary was a man named T.F. Hendon. It must be said in Hendon’s behalf that he proved to be an efficient Efficiency Secretary. In his first 22 months he traveled nearly 20,000 miles, visited 153 churches, preached an average of 5.4 times per week, led nine revivals, and put on the financial plan, including an every-member canvass, in some 60 churches. In addition, he taught Sunday School classes, gave out Sunday School diplomas, attended numerous associational meetings and summer assemblies, and collected money for state missions. He also found time to report on his activities through the Efficiency Notes column in the *Witness*.<sup>16</sup>

Hendon's normal approach was to spend a long weekend or – better yet – a week in a church. He would preach on Sunday and also give a lecture or two on the virtues of efficiency. He urged churches to adopt a budget, and encouraged their monthly support of convention causes. He also encouraged them to increase their local giving. Those churches which had preaching services only once each month were encouraged to go half-time. Half-time churches were encouraged to secure a full-time preacher. Those with a full-time preacher were urged to increase his salary. Hendon also promoted fund-raising for new buildings or building improvements. Some of you might be thinking we ought to have Efficiency Secretaries today!

The key to achieving these goals was the every-member canvass. Hendon would assemble the deacons, instruct them, pray with them, and send them out to contact every member of the church. Each member was then asked to pledge a certain amount to be given to the church every week. Hendon was usually off to another assignment before the canvass could be completed, but he always did one more thing before he left. You guessed it! He made sure that every church he visited had an efficiency committee!

The results of Hendon's work were mixed. Those churches which adopted the system were generally pleased with it. But Hendon convinced less than 100 churches to do so in nearly three years on the field. Convention finances continued to falter. The State Board of Missions and the Children's Home continued to plead for funds. Columbia College went broke in 1918. The Foreign Mission Board and Home Mission Board were heavily in debt.

It was the continual debt of the mission boards, as much as anything, that led to another aspect of the efficiency movement. This was the drive for organizational centralization. Many Southern Baptists were concerned at this time that there was too much duplication of effort between the Sunday School Board and the two mission boards. Each had to lease office space; each had administrative costs; each was hiring additional personnel; each was constantly soliciting funds; and yet the mission boards were forever in debt. Furthermore, many pastors resented the salaries being paid to denominational workers, feeling they were extravagant. It seemed that the most efficient solution would be to consolidate the boards, perhaps in Nashville, and thereby save considerable expense. A single board, under a single Secretary, would provide more efficient management.

You can imagine what Southern Baptists did at their 1913 Convention. They established a committee, known as the Commission on Efficiency. This Commission was advised to consider the most efficient organization for the SBC Boards, and asked to report back at the 1914 Convention.<sup>17</sup>

When the 1914 Convention rolled around, the Commission recommended various by-law changes and also suggested some procedural changes in the conduct of the annual meeting. These were heartily approved. The Commission also recommended that the three boards remain where they were. This part of their report was not approved, but was sent back for another year of study. A third recommendation encouraged the boards to work together more amiably, and to work in cooperation with the state boards in the collection and distribution of funds. Finally, the Commission presented a paper on Christian Union and Denominational Efficiency. Here they praised the ecumenical efforts of other denominations but insisted as well on such Baptist distinctives as soul competency, believers' baptism, local church autonomy, and the separation of church and state. The report concluded with the observation that

Southern Baptists could be most efficient in their service to Christ by maintaining their historic distinctives; yet by being willing to cooperate with other Christian groups whenever possible.<sup>18</sup>

The idea of organizational consolidation was also applied to the state operation, where it came to be known as the unit rule. Some Florida Baptists claimed that the unit rule had been tried in other states where it had proved successful, but other Baptists felt it was too early to tell.

Though the agitation for consolidation was rather intense for a few years, the movement was defeated at both the national and state levels. Instead, a compromise was agreed upon. The SBC Efficiency Commission again recommended in 1915 that the three SBC boards be kept separate, and this recommendation was accepted.<sup>19</sup> But in 1917 the Convention also approved an Executive Committee, which would function on behalf of the SBC between annual meetings of the Convention.<sup>20</sup> In the same year Florida Baptists enacted a similar compromise. They too provided for an Executive Committee, which would be independent of the State Board of Missions, but which would have authority between sessions of the Convention.<sup>21</sup> Thus the boards were *not* consolidated, but there *was* increased centralization.

In addition to centralization, standardization was a key element of the efficiency movement. Each organization was to establish standards and strive to meet them. We have already heard that Sunbeam bands were to make the honor roll. WMU societies had rather elaborate ten-point standards. Members were to attend church services and WMU meetings, visit on behalf of the church, enroll new members in the church and WMU, contribute financially, read denominational publications, and observe the special weeks of prayer for state, home, and foreign missions. Each society was expected to hold at least twelve regular meetings each year, each of which must include a devotional service and missionary program.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps only the Sunday School rivaled the WMU in its drive for standards of excellence. In 1914 the *Florida Baptist Witness* issued a call for the “Efficient Fair Deal” in Sunday School work. Some eighteen years before Roosevelt’s New Deal, Baptists in Florida were getting the Fair Deal. The Fair Deal included the “best of officers and teachers who are always punctual,” ... the “proper preparation of lessons by teachers,” and “effective discipline.”<sup>23</sup> If Sunday School students were given this fair deal, they might reasonably be expected to respond by meeting their standard – namely the six-point record system. Thus teachers and students each had a standard to meet.

It was in this same article promoting the Sunday School standard, written in 1914, that the *Witness* waxed poetic. “Efficiency,” it said, “is as old as the world. When the morning stars sang their first matin together, Efficiency was the choir master.”<sup>24</sup> Yet, just four years later, there was no more Efficiency Department, no more Efficiency Secretary, no more Efficiency Notes, and no mention of efficiency at the state convention. In the time remaining I want to call attention to a few significant factors in the rise and fall of the efficiency movement, and conclude with a brief assessment of the legacy of the movement among Florida Baptists.

Florida Baptists were not alone in their enchantment with efficiency. There was much talk of efficiency throughout American society in the years from 1908 to 1918. This may partly be an outcropping of the philosophy of pragmatism, promoted in this period by William James, John Dewey, and Charles Pierce. But the more important influence seems to have come from business and industry. The industrialization and urbanization of America between the Civil War and World War I was nothing

short of phenomenal. America was rapidly moving from a rural, agrarian economy to a much more centralized industrial economy. The growth of big businesses brought along with it a need for greater attention to management; this in turn led business to pay attention to efficiency. The efficiency expert was a new creature of this environment, appearing on the scene in the early years of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most important of these efficiency men was Harrington Emerson, whose expertise was in railroads and engineering. Emerson wrote a series of articles in *Engineering Magazine* in 1910-11, spelling out “The Twelve Principles of Efficiency.” These proved to be so popular that he published them in a book, including a chapter on the philosophy of efficiency, and introducing some chapters with biblical quotations.<sup>25</sup> Southern Baptists, impressed by the success of business and industry, adopted and adapted Emerson’s twelve rules point for point as they created their own standardized Sunday School. Such rules as discipline, standards and schedules, standardizing operations, standard instructions, and efficiency rewards are clearly in evidence in Southern Baptist Sunday Schools even today.

Shortly after Emerson wrote his final article, the American Society for Promoting Efficiency was founded in New York City. It was immediately besieged with membership applications, and had over 1000 members within a year. The organizational meeting was held on March 18, 1912, with leaders from business, education, and government in attendance. Letters of appreciation and support were read from President Taft and Governor Dix, and there were speeches by the Mayor of New York, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Director of the President’s efficiency commission. The self-proclaimed aim of the Society: “to promote efficiency in every activity of man.”<sup>26</sup> Florida Baptists were simply in step with the efficiency sentiment of the day.

And yet, by 1918 it was all over. What happened? Why did efficiency have such a sudden death? Once again, societal factors are important. America had entered World War I, and that occupied the nation’s attention. The efficiency movement in society proved to be something of a fad – one which had run its course by the middle of the decade.

There are also some reasons for efficiency’s decline which were peculiar to Southern Baptists. Essentially, efficiency died on the hard rocks of resurgent denominationalism. Efficiency had been adopted eagerly by the ecumenical movement, but Southern Baptists were suspicious of ecumenism. Should Baptists cooperate with others in theological education? Should the children of Baptist missionaries on foreign fields go to school with missionary children of other denominations in cooperative schools? The answer was no. It was fine to cooperate with other denominations, Southern Baptists reasoned, if the other denominations would recognize the correctness of Baptist views on baptism, soul competency, local church autonomy, and separation of church and state. When the denominations failed to accede to these demands, Southern Baptists distanced themselves from the church union movement and its favorite argument, namely efficiency.

Also, Baptists recognized that one of the principles of efficiency was centralization. This meant one head of the organization, and a centralized management structure. That flew in the face of the Baptist commitment to democracy, as recognized by Rufus W. Weaver in a perceptive article in the *Witness* as early as 1914. Weaver argued that democracy and efficiency were two opposing tendencies, which, ironically, had been adopted by Americans with equal fervor. Baptists, said Weaver, must appropriate the best insights of efficiency without unduly compromising their fundamental commitment to democracy. In any clash between the two, efficiency must yield.<sup>27</sup> Many Baptists with far less insight than Weaver were

already upset at what they perceived to be the high-handed management of their Sunday Schools. These Baptists were tired of being told what to do by the so-called experts.

The final nails were driven in efficiency's coffin by Victor I. Masters, editorial secretary of the Home Mission Board, in a three-page essay which appeared in the *Florida Baptist Witness* on August 3, 1916. Masters reviewed the growth of the movement, and the arguments of Weaver against it, adding his own touches. Then he turned to the Bible. What does the New Testament say about efficiency? First, Jesus and the disciples were concerned with faith – a strange doctrine to efficiency experts – and not with results or the efficiency of management. Secondly, the fruits of the Spirit are joy, love, peace, and long-suffering, but not efficiency. Third, Mary the dreamer was less efficient than her sister Martha, but was the one approved by the Lord. Fourth, in a marvelously quotable style, “The god of modern efficiency is not the God of revelation, though the God of revelation is infinitely more efficient than this new creature of man's imagination.” Fifth, love is more important than efficiency. Jesus does not want us to be wasteful – after all, he did collect twelve baskets of leftovers – but he reprimanded Judas for objecting to the use of costly perfume in anointing him. Masters concluded his biblical survey with this observation: “To those who obey Him rather than the commandments of man, our Lord will say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant,’ not, ‘Well done, good and Efficient servant.’” Masters added a slam at Rome, no doubt popular with his audience. The Roman Catholic Church was by far the most efficient religious organization, Masters declared, but nevertheless is “absolutely devoid of all spiritual power.”<sup>28</sup>

Following this masterful sermon there was little more appeal to efficiency among Florida Baptists. T.F. Hendon continued his work for another year, with some success. But Baptists were moving on to other concerns.

What then is the legacy of the efficiency movement among Florida Baptists? First, there was increased organization and inter-agency cooperation at both the state and national levels, symbolized best by the Executive Committee. Better organization for education is seen at the local level in the widespread adoption of graded Sunday Schools. Secondly, there was an improved method of collecting and budgeting funds. Many churches adopted budgets and financial planning for the first time. Also, the efficiency movement was an important forerunner to the 75 Million campaign of the early '20s and the Cooperative Program adopted in 1925. Hence planning, organization, and cooperation within the denomination are the positive fruits of the efficiency movement. On the negative side, there was a hardening of feeling against the ecumenical movement and an increasing denominational isolationism among Southern Baptists. This would likely have occurred without the efficiency movement, but that movement helped it along. There was also a growing bureaucratization of Southern Baptist boards and agencies – probably inevitable – which increased the distance between local Baptists and their national leaders, and increased enormously the number of forms, reports, and programs to which Baptists were subjected. And then, finally, there was the six-point record system. I'm not sure just what to say of it ... but I do hope that you'll stay for preaching!

## Notes

- 1 W.A. Hobson, "Editorial," *Florida Baptist Witness*, 4 February 1915, p. 6. Italics are mine.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 3 S.B. Rogers, "Efficiency," *Florida Baptist Witness*, 18 February 1915, p. 4.
- 4 *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1901, p. 33.
- 5 *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1906, p. 48.
- 6 *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1907, p. 45.
- 7 *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1909, p. 28.
- 8 *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1912, pp.50-53
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69
- 11 *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1911, pp. 98-100.
- 12 *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1913, pp. 65-68.
- 13 *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1914, p.85.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26, 46.
- 16 These statistics are compiled from Hendon's two reports to the Convention. *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1916, pp. 16-18; *Annual*, Florida Baptist Convention, 1917, pp. 44-45.
- 17 *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention, 1913, pp. 69-70.
- 18 *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention, 1914, pp. 69-78.
- 19 *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention, 1915, pp. 22-25.
- 20 *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention, 1917, pp. 33-34.
- 21 *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention, 1917, pp. 47-48
- 22 *Florida Baptist Witness*, 22 April 1915, p.11.
- 23 L.L. Palmer, "The Rules of Efficiency Applied to Sunday School Work," *Florida Baptist Witness*, 5 March 1914, p. 9.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

25 Harrington Emerson, "The Twelve Principles of Efficiency," *Engineering Magazine* 39-41 (1910-1911). The principles are summarized by Emerson in "Philosophy of Efficiency," *Engineering Magazine* 41 (1911): 23-26. His Book, *The Twelve Principles of Efficiency*, (New York: Engineering Magazine, 1912), went through six editions. An earlier book, *Efficiency as a Basis for Operation and Wages* (New York: Engineering Magazine, 1909), includes a chapter on "The Gospel of Efficiency."

26 See the *New York Times*, 15 January 1912, p. 12; 12 February 1912, p. 7; 19 March 1912, p. 1; 6 November 1912, p.12.

27 Rufus W. Weaver, "Democracy and Efficiency Among Baptists," *Florida Baptist Witness*, 31 December 1914, p. 9.

28 Victor I. Masters, "Efficiency as a Fetich," *Florida Baptist Witness*, 3 August 1916, pp. 1-3.