PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

THIS CHALLENGING HOUR

C. C. WARREN

Southern Baptists meet today on the threshold of their most challenging hour. A decade ago stars of hope appeared on the horizon of our war-ridden world, only to fade before a mad race for atomic superiority which now threatens the destruction of every sign of life on earth. The accomplishments of man for a thousand years hang in the balance and civilization, like a time bomb, seems to be ticking away to its final blast.

In His great eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives two days before His crucifixion, our Lord said, “And there shall be upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity—men's hearts, failing them for fear—watch ye therefore, and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape—and to stand before the Son of Man.”

In our world that is shaken to its very foundation, God has placed Southern Baptists in a strategic position “for such a time as this.” There are more evangelical Christians per capita in our territory than in any other area on earth; of these Southern Baptists constitute about one-half. What then, is the challenge of this hour for us? I am deeply conscious of my limitations as an interpreter at this point, but after prayerful considerations, I am venturing to suggest some things which I trust will be at least thought-provoking and helpful.

We Are Challenged by a Unique Relationship

Like the disciples on the Mount of Olives with Jesus, we, too, believe that we are among those whom He has chosen, blesses, trained, and equipped for a significant part in the accomplishment of His redemptive purpose.

NEW TESTAMENT TRUTHS

To us has been bequeathed New Testament truths that will endure until our Lord’s return. We believe that God is the supreme personal spirit, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. We believe that Jesus Christ was and is God’s incarnate son; born of a virgin, He is both deity and humanity. We believe that He lived a sinless life, that He was crucified, buried, and rose again. We believe that when it became expedient for Him to return to the Father, His promise was fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit, who took up his abode as administrator in the infant church. We believe that salvation is by grace alone and that every person is competent to come into the presence of Almighty God without the aid of a priestly intermediary. We believe that a New Testament Church is an organized body of baptized believers, equal in rank and privilege, united in the faith concerning what Christ has taught, covenanted to do what He has commanded and co-operating with other like bodies in kingdom movements. We believe that evangelism should ever be our chief concern and that New Testament evangelism is incomplete until the “evangelized” become evangelists.”

HEROIC PERSONALITIES

Our basic doctrines have survived through heroic personalities, because these doctrines are dearer than life itself. Baptist history is verily dotted with illustrations of men who have died for their faith. Names like Bunyan, Milton, Carey, Judson, Rice, Spurgeon, Johnson, Carroll, Scarborough, Mullins, Robertson, Sampey, Truett, Wallace, and others, constitute a vital part of the heritage that now challenges us.

Meeting here in this great metropolis, we are mindful, also, that it was none other than John Calvin McCoy, the son of a Baptist preacher, Isaac McCoy,
who came here with his father in 1829 and founded Kansas City in 1838. While we would express our humble gratitude to God for those valiant veterans of the cross of other days, let us be reminded that all of God's great are not dead. During the past summer it was my privilege, along with others, to spend a couple of hours at Nazareth, where we had a most delightful visit at our church, school, and orphanage which were housed there at the time. As we were boarding our bus to leave, some 300 Arab children lined up behind our half-dozen missionaries to wave their good-bys. Some member of our group began to sing “God be with you till we meet again.” Others joined in, but in a matter of seconds we realized that we had made a serious blunder. The song faded into silence—the silence into sobs, as the wife of one of our missionaries, baby in her arms, leaning against her husband, wept as thought her heart would break. As our bus rolled away, we realized afresh that we visitors were among the most favored group of people on earth; while our dear friends, 6,000 miles from their homes and loved ones, were left to face deprivation, discomforts, and discouragements that we had never known.

When I think of Dr. Lovegren, superintendent of our hospital at Ajloun, and the courageous manner in which he and his co-workers faced barbaric persecution recently, or of the words of his companion, “I had rather die in my place than live a million years with memory that I had run away,” I know that all of God’s great are not yet dead. Many are they who still “climb the steep ascents of heaven through peril, toil and pain. Oh, God, to us may grace be given to follow in their train.”

UNPARALLELED PROGRESS

God’s blessings upon Southern Baptists have been phenomenal. Much of it will be revealed in the reports that are brought to this convention. In figures released by our statistician on March 1, we noticed that the total membership of our 30,377 churches was 8,474,741. At that time we were reporting the organization of nine new churches and 8,000 baptisms each week. The membership of our approximately 30,500 churches has grown beyond the eight and one-half million mark. Our total receipts last year reached about $334,000,000 of which approximately $30,000,000 was given for missions. Truly we can say with the Psalmist, “The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.”

We Are Challenged by Tensions Which Have Occasioned the Distress of Nations

While recounting God’s blessings, wisdom demands that we take cognizance of the things that threaten our very existence today. Some would prophesy that we are entering a new era of dense darkness, while others would presage the imminent coming of the Son of Man. Probably no hour in Southern Baptist history has confronted us with such a variety of threats, problems, and opportunities. Certainly it is timely for us to hear again the words of our Lord, “In patience possess your souls.”

THE THREAT OF WAR

The threat of war comes now with increasing horror, as the day of cobalt bombs and guided missiles becomes a reality. It seems that we are now forced to choose between the abolition of war and the end of the human race. If man is to prevent war, he must destroy the roots of war. It is therefore imperative for us to try as never before to convince people everywhere that security for all mankind is to be found only in spiritual reality. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, enunciated this great truth in His conversation with Nicodemus when He said, “Ye must be born again.” Spiritual regeneration is the only hope of our world today. Unless the Holy Spirit of God can find an earthly habitat in the hearts of men, He has no way of giving direction that will lead us to a permanent and lasting peace.
ANOTHER PROBLEM WHICH POSES FOR US MORE IMMEDIATE CONCERN
IS IN THE REALM OF RACIAL UNDERSTANDING

Two years ago this convention recognized that the Supreme Court decision
relative to segregation was in harmony with the constitutional guarantee of
equal freedom to all citizens and with the principle of equal justice and love for
all men. The far-reaching implication of this decision has become the most
disturbing issue in many parts of our Southland. I concur in the feeling that it
will be unwise for us to reopen any discussion of it here. It may be well for us to
remember, however, that extremists and agitators have, and will perhaps con-
tinue to do incalculable harm. Those who follow such a course overlook the fact
that economic and social relationships which have been from one to three hundred
years in the making, simply cannot be changed overnight. On the other hand,
open defiance of the constitutional principle will endanger our foreign mission
work throughout thirty-five areas of the earth and play right into the hands of the
Communist who will welcome the privilege of ridiculing, not only our
democratic form of government, but the type of Christianity which seeks to win
the world. I wonder if it has occurred to you that 94 per cent of the people of
this world do not live in the United States. What a comparatively small number
are we! What a precarious position we occupy! What a responsibility God has
placed upon us! It behooves us, therefore, in this situation where there has been
a remarkable lack of humility, to humble ourselves before God and realize afresh
that Christian love as exemplified by Christ is the supreme law of all human
relations. If we who profess to know and love him, show the courage, prudence,
patience, and understanding called for by the President of the United States,
we will find the solution for this question on the local level and demonstrate to
the world that men of every race can live together in peace.

SAFEGUARDING OUR LIBERTIES

Again, if we are to be true to the priceless heritage that is ours, we must
continue on the alert to safeguard our religious and civil liberties. Trite but true,
eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. We must proclaim fearlessly and un-
ceasingly that we are unalterably opposed to any effort, program, propaganda,
device, or scheme that tends to ensnare man's conscience. If and when more
tax funds are made available for non-public schools, demands for parochial
and religious schools to share in them will skyrocket. If and when the principle
is accepted that religious schools are to be supported from the public treasury
the principle of separation of church and state will be gone forever. If this
principle is taken from us, the collapse of our democratic form of government is
inevitable. Forbid it, Almighty God!

DIVISIVE ISSUE FROM WITHIN

A fourth thing which calls for our prayerful watchfulness is conflicting
opinions that divide within our own ranks. Our very size is becoming more and
more a threat to our unity. The strategy of Satan is to divide and conquer.
Divergent viewpoints in such a large group are inevitable, but let us differ as
Christians. Let us freely express our opinions based on convictions, but let us
at all times securely safeguard our fellowship.

"Like a mighty army, moves the church of God,
Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.
We are not divided, all one body we,
One in hope and doctrine, one in charity."

Thirty-one years ago, after struggling for decades for a plan through which
we might channel our gifts in equitable fashion in order to carry out best the
great commission, we adopted the Cooperative Program. Until God gives us a
better plan, let us stand by it. I speak not in total condemnation of all special
offerings, but if in our thinking, sentiment replaces sense and we fail to recognize
some limitation at this point, I predict that the time will come when we will be
back where we were thirty-five years ago. If certain phases of our work deserve and demand greater support, we had better readjust our percentages than to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

We Are Challenged by the Promise of Victory Through a Mighty Offensive

In closing, I would call your attention to the challenge which comes to us in the promise of victory through a mighty offensive.

Not long after admonishing His disciples, "Watch and pray that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things—and to stand before the son of man," He met them for the last time on earth and said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The present tense in Greek denotes not time, but kind of action. When our Lord said, "Go," He meant to keep on going. This great commission is our commission still.

Worthiness to stand before the Son of Man demands nothing short of our best. When the great apostle wrote to the church at Thessalonica in the midst of conditions somewhat similar to those which confront us today, he said, "We waxed bold in our God to declare unto you the Gospel, not as pleasing man, but God which trieth our hearts."

If we are to accept the challenge of today, I believe, if you will permit me to use a military term, that we must launch for Christ the greatest offensive in human history. I am not thinking in terms of a shooting war, as you know. Ours is a conflict between ideas and ideals. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Jesus came into such a world and having the resources of heaven and earth at His command, He chose preaching, teaching, and healing to meet the destructive ideologies of paganism. The same choice constitutes our definite and unmistakable challenge today. A wise general once said, "The greatest defense is a mighty offense, where the enemy considers us most vulnerable." At these points let us mobilize our forces to the limit and attack without delay.

The Local Church

If Satan ever really trembled it must have been when Jesus said, "I will build my church." My first appeal, therefore, is that we launch a mighty offensive for Christ to reproduce the New Testament pattern in every Southern Baptist Church. Our next obligation is to bring our people to a better understanding of the fundamental doctrines of our faith. Then let us teach our people to proclaim daily what we believe. Many puritanical ideals deserved to live, but they died as dead as a doornail because they were not continually proclaimed.

The theme of this convention, "Righteousness Exalteth A Nation," calls attention to our Crusade for Christian Morality which is long overdue. Early Christianity met a pagan civilization and turned it upside down, or perhaps more properly we should say, right-side-up. I believe that Christianity can do it again if we will dare to express in our daily lives what we profess with our lips. Christianity stands or falls upon the facts.

"No Man's Land"

Again, I call upon you, my fellow pastors, to launch a mighty offensive in what has been referred to as "No Man's Land," that area in the immediate vicinity of your local church or in unchurched areas where countless, Godless thousands live. My concern for this group is well-known among you. I claim no credit for pioneering in this field. I have only tried to be faithful to my calling.

"Naught have I gotten but what I received,
Grace hath bestowed it since I first believed.
Boasting excluded, pride I abase,
I'm only a sinner saved by grace."
But with all the energy of my being, I would call upon you to realize the importance of this phase of our work. The forces that would rule this world are seeking the masses. Some of the wisest of the land have boldly predicted that by the end of this century, just forty-four years hence, this world will either be dominated by Christian forces or enslaved by totalitarian power. While we are grateful to Almighty God for all that is being done in our churches, the teeming multitudes without Christ throughout this land of ours can never be reached by the present number of churches alone. We simply must organize more churches and more missions. We know from experience that new units reach more people. For example, the net gain of our Sunday school enrollment for five years prior to the Million More in ’54 campaign was 10 per cent in our older churches; while in the new churches, the average net gain during the first year of organization was 65 per cent. In new churches and missions we will reach more, teach more, and win more people to Christ. Less than one-fifth of the members of my church—those working in our missions last year—won half of the people who were baptized into our membership.

Furthermore, we have scarcely begun to tap the financial resources in this field. I am thinking of a church less than three years old that gave last year $8,000 to the Co-operative Program. Another church in my association organized in 1950 has a budget of $48,000, while still another, organized in 1954, has oversubscribed a budget for this year of $60,000.

Progress made in this so-called “No Man’s Land” has been most encouraging in many sections of our country, but in the overall picture it is by no means commensurate with our ability and what God expects of us for such a time as this.

I, therefore, venture the hope that this convention may request that the secretaries of its Home Mission Board, the Sunday School Board, the Brotherhood, and our state secretaries work together in presenting to us a program that will challenge our people to double the number of Southern Baptist preaching places by adding 5,000 new churches and 25,000 missions before the celebration of our third jubilee in 1964.

Samaritans and to the Uttermost

The larger sphere of Christ’s commission comes also to challenge us in a special manner in this hour. It calls for joining hands with other Baptist bodies in a great nation-wide effort to set forward the kingdom of our Lord as never before.

With the advance plea of Theron Rankin still ringing in our ears, last year in Miami this convention adopted the report of its committee on World Evangelization and called upon the Home Mission Board and the Executive Committee to work out a program for the home front, designed to step up our efforts to win America and the world to Christ and to celebrate in worthy fashion the Sesquicentennial of the Triennial Convention. We have been cheered greatly by the cordiality and enthusiasm with which this movement has been received. Immediately following the action of our convention in Miami last year, the American Baptist Convention endorsed it wholeheartedly. Then came the endorsement of the National Baptist Convention of the U. S. A. Inc., and representatives of five other Baptist bodies soon added their approval. We are confident that others will approve when they understand clearly that our purpose is not to rehash past or present differences, nor for organic unity, but rather to demonstrate that born-again believers can make a special simultaneous effort to win lost people to Christ and carry out the Great Commission of our Lord. I believe that Baptists can work toward the achievement of certain common goals as a worthy recognition of God’s blessings upon Baptist work in North America for 150 years. We dare to hope and venture to predict that the climax of our Baptist Jubilee Advance in 1964 may bring together 100,000 Baptists, (perhaps in Philadelphia), to praise God from whom all blessings flow; while in every nation on earth, where Baptist missionaries have gone, another 100,000, or more, will join in singing,
"All Hail the power of Jesus' name
Let angels prostrate fall,
Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all."

This is no time for drooping heads, lagging feet, limited visions, little plans, or selfish quibblings; it is truly a time for greatness!

Now is the time to join in a prayer uttered by one of our seminary presidents when he said, "God grant that our most glorious era may be yet ushered in by an evangelistic crusade that is spiritually sane in its approach, scripturally true in its message, spirit-guided in its methods, soul-saving in its imperative, society-purifying in its application, sin-destroying in its power and world-girdling in its scope." Such is the challenge of this hour.

On last July 3, it was my blessed privilege to stand on the Mount of Olives. After thinking again about the words of prophecy to which we have referred, I said to myself, "Can it be possible that I am actually standing on the place from which my Lord left the earth and returned to heaven?" I felt that I could almost hear the Heavenly messenger saying, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Then mindful that no man knoweth the hour of His return, I prayed with agonizing fervor, "Oh, Lord, in the light of your goodness to Southern Baptists, in view of the distress of nations, and the perilous times through which we are passing, lead us back to the "Mount of Hope" and revitalize our faith. Spirit of the living God, energize our lives for maximum service that whether we face new darkness or dawn we may be accounted worthy to stand before the Son of Man."