

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

BROOKS HAYS

MY FELLOW BAPTISTS:

For the fourth time in our 113 years the Convention assembles in the great city of Houston, yet the Southern Baptist Convention was nearly thirty years old before it conducted its first meeting in the Lone Star State in 1874, and the first west of the Mississippi River.

There were only 222 messengers in attendance at that meeting which was held in the historic little town of Jefferson. In 1915, when Houston was experiencing growing pains this even more famous city was our host for the first time. Fourteen hundred and eight messengers were registered. The spirit of expansion was animating Southern Baptists, and eleven years later, when the second convention was held here, the registration was 4,268—three times that of the 1915 session.

In 1915 the Convention received gifts totaling \$1,397,000, distributed as follows: The Foreign Mission Board, \$537,000; the Home Mission Board, \$459,000; and the Sunday School Board, \$401,000. This year, the Cooperative Program alone will account for gifts and offerings in excess of \$40 million for both state and S.B.C. causes.

In the eventful 43 years since Houston's first convention, Southern Baptists have experienced unprecedented growth and the assembling of a power and influence undreamed of by our founders in 1845.

Appreciation

Before sketching briefly some of my activities as your president, submitting some recommendations for you to consider, let me say a word of appreciation for the great honor you conferred upon me a year ago.

To be president of this Convention is both an exciting adventure and an exalted privilege. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for this enriching experience and for the opportunity of Christian service which you have afforded me.

I began attending Baptist conventions fifty years ago. In 1908 my mother took me to Fort Smith to the Arkansas State Convention and it made a lasting impression upon my boyish mind. I saw that great and stalwart Texas Baptist, Dr. J. B. Gambrell, on the platform and heard his pungent comments on Baptist service. Of course I never dreamed that one day my name would be listed a few lines below his among the Convention presidents. The first Southern Baptist Convention I ever attended was presided over by Dr. Gambrell in the city of Washington in 1920. As a Treasury Department clerk, attending law classes at night, I slipped away to one of the Convention meetings as an observer and was thrilled by what I saw and heard.

I wish to thank also our two vice-presidents, W. Douglas Hudgins and Noel M. Taylor for their wonderful helpfulness during this busy year. You have been tolerant of my deficiencies during these twelve months.

Laymen-Pastors

I have been constantly aware of two things about my background that did not fit the usual pattern for the Convention presidency. I am a layman. Second, I am in the service of a government which is institutionally independent of all religious societies.

In retrospect, I can say something with which I believe you will concur: To be a layman is not of itself a handicap. The rank and file of Baptist men in the South are conscious of the fact that the choice of a layman represented a drawing together of ministers and men—of the ordained and the unordained—and for this I am grateful. On occasions I have needed professional help, and always I have found it available in spontaneous and generous measure.

I know that Baptist laymen would want me to say in their behalf that there is deep affection and admiration in their hearts for our dedicated ministers.

The Brotherhood which assembled 5,000 laymen in Oklahoma City last Sep-

tember will report upon that eventful meeting, but its significance should be noted also in this report. The influence for good which was generated there will continue through the years. I was pleased that the duties of Christian citizenship received attention there.

Human government is making such an impact upon the daily life of every person, and has opened so many doors of opportunity for Christian service, as it supplies concurrently the tests of moral fiber of men and nations, that there is a certain appropriateness in our reaching across the shadowy line that divides State and Church to proclaim in both forums that all of life is subject to God's law and impressed with God's love.

30,000 Movement

The biggest event in our year, according to the Baptist editors, was the launching of our Jubilee program under the direction of my beloved predecessor, Dr. C. C. Warren, whose message you are eager to hear.

I have tried to give full support to this great undertaking and to provide an accurate interpretation of it in my talks across the country. At one point I was able to devote a few minutes to the subject on a coast-to-coast TV program that would have cost us in excess of \$30,000 had we been purchasing the time. I have not been timid in seizing publicity opportunities for our Baptist cause.

During the past twelve months I have journeyed in the Convention's interest from Hamilton, Ontario, to Houston, and from Los Angeles to Moscow. I was able to attend five state conventions and innumerable local and district meetings.

My First Task

First in importance in the many tasks I have had was to participate in efforts to preserve our unity in a period of tension, to hold together our scattered congregations in this hour of the world's supreme need.

A common faith continues to bind us together. Territorial expansion has, of course, produced interesting new diversities. The problems of California, for example, are quite different from those of our Georgia brethren. Social conditions surrounding Baptist workers in Louisiana vary greatly from those discovered by our representatives in the exciting new outpost in New York City.

It is a great tribute to the skill of those who have fashioned this voluntary assembly called the Southern Baptist Convention and a confirmation of the soundness of the basic principles which underlie Baptist policy. Only in great flexibility can Christian fellowship be found in this complex Twentieth Century.

Just as we have historically given allegiance to the idea that "at the frontier of the soul the power of every state must stop," so in the ecclesiastical world we insist that no Convention pronouncements bind the individual or the congregation.

I do not imply, of course, that this relieves us of the necessity to seek and proclaim moral judgments produced by study, prayer and exchange of opinion, with the full utilization of modern facilities which this mighty organization has supplied.

There should be no reluctance on our part to confront controversy, nor should Christians ever flee from the duty of examining differences. I have had some new exposures to this fact in my service as your president, and never before have I been so conscious of the need of seeking to do the will of God and discovering the mind of Christ. In a year of controversy I have been able to look up with deep gratitude to my brethren, both those who differ and those who agree with me, for having spoken the truth in love.

Survey Committee

In the Houston convention of 1915 a committee known as the Efficiency Committee filed a report indicating that we mid-century Baptists are not the first to concern ourselves with the structure and organization of the convention. I commend to you the work of the Survey Committee.

Without passing upon the merits of specific proposals, I do heartily express appreciation for the dedicated service of these men and women under the chairmanship of Douglas Branch. And whatever our final decision with regard to its recommendations, I trust that the report will be considered solely in the light of

serving the total purposes of our Convention, and that local and personal interests will be secondary.

This activity of the Survey Committee is the kind of work that is never finished. It has to do with a job that, left undone, might finish us. It would be sinful for us to permit an unplanned, unco-ordinated, sprawling organization to dissipate our energies and destroy our effectiveness.

Consequently, I hope that continuing studies of our organizational arrangements may be authorized, preferably assigned to the reconstituted Executive Committee. We need to re-examine procedures by which convention policies are determined. It is difficult to achieve in an assembly of 10,000 or more the deliberative atmosphere and to follow democratic principles under rules devised for the smaller bodies which originated them.

Minority Groups

I find in the minutes of the 1915 Houston convention a message from Negro Baptists simultaneously holding their convention at Danville, Virginia. This message, coupled with a long and deeply moving report of our own 1915 convention's committee on work among Negroes, served to remind me that this task of helping the minority racial group is also a continuing one.

Some of the tragic governmental conflicts involving race have obscured the fact that there are proven and accepted ways by which Southern Baptists may express their Christian concern for the minority's welfare and progress.

During my unforgettable evening with the Mississippi Baptists in their state convention, I heard reports of the work being done in that state in behalf of ministerial training for the Negroes. It was a splendid demonstration of what can be accomplished in that field. I am not suggesting, of course, that traditional methods will always suffice. It would be well for us to recognize that imagination must accompany our compassion.

One of my gratifying experiences was a visit to the American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville. The check for \$500 which I handed to President Turner in behalf of an unnamed friend was a modest symbol of our interest in his institution.

It is not my purpose in this report to dwell upon the complexities of the problem of race or other social issues. I realize that we cannot have complete unanimity in these matters, but it would be tragic for us to assume that we can function as a Christian body without assigning to trusted representatives of the convention the task of pointing out our Christian duty with respect to social evils and current conflicts.

Christian Life Commission

The Christian Life Commission has a dual role to fill. It is authorized to speak for Southern Baptists where specific mandates are given, as in the case of legislation affecting advertising of alcoholic beverages and the suppression of obscene literature upon the newsstands of America.

Equally important is its role of familiarizing our people with problems of this nature, supplying counsel and advice on the subject as well as information on the Scripture teaching in specific areas, and to seek a sensitizing of the Christian conscience wherever evil, injustice and oppression exist anywhere in the world.

The problems of environment must be considered—if for no other reason, because our institutional survival requires it. If Christian institutions are to be swallowed up in a pagan society, freedom will die and the opportunity for Christian service and the evangelization of the world will vanish.

We shall continue to struggle for an incorruptible state and a Christian society—not to relieve ourselves of the obligations of Christian education, which equips the individual to meet the recurring temptations of life.

We know that finally it will be not the absence of allurements in the world that redeems men, but the integrity that springs from transforming spiritual experiences. We owe it to our youth to improve their environment, but any young man is best fortified when, being nurtured by a powerful religious influence, he is able to purpose in his heart as Daniel did, not to defile himself.

We seek not to dominate but to influence the state, and we will send our sons and daughters into the world with a sense of Christian vocation. The Christian and the patriot may dwell in the same heart, but only if the patriot acknowledges the universality of faith and love, and repels the chauvinist.

The generosity with which we support our home and foreign mission programs testifies to our willingness to accept world responsibilities.

Peace Committee

On Friday evening I shall have something to say about my trip to Moscow, a trip financed by the Foreign Mission Board—a sacred mission, perhaps the most solemn and important one I have ever undertaken.

The promotion of peace presents a great challenge to Southern Baptists and we should officially and formally accept it. Consequently, I recommend that the convention authorize the appointment of a committee to report within a year, on what Southern Baptists can do to promote peace and good will in the world.

I wish there were time to speak of many other things in which I have developed a great personal interest as I have pursued my duties as your president. I have visited every one of our great seminaries, and as my pride in these institutions has increased, the conviction has grown that ministerial education must have high priority in our activities.

If time permitted, I would speak of the great significance of the new ministries of the church—of our ministry of healing, viewed with such warm approval by the medical profession; of the ministry of social service, building new techniques in a changing world; of the ministry of campus life, with spiritual adventures to match the intellectual requirements of our times; of the ministry in the prisons, where the need of man's compassion and God's grace is most poignantly exhibited.

Inspiring Experiences

One of the most inspiring experiences of the year was my visit to the grave of our beloved Dr. Truett. It was in the mood of rededication that I stood in silence, recalling some of the eloquent words I had heard him use.

I learned first from him literature's most devotional lines outside the Bible, the moving words of St. Augustine, "Thou hast made me for thyself, and my soul will not rest until it rests, O God, in thee." I remembered how he warned against the pressures of materialism with a simple incident, the anonymous note handed to him: "Pray for a young man who is getting rich very fast."

Prosperity is, comparatively, a new experience for Baptists. As we pray for a denomination that is getting rich very fast, may we determine to use our power with nobility and wisdom.

I recalled, too, the new resolutions that I had made as I heard him speak of our mission on this earth. God did not propose to detract, Dr. Truett said, from the critical importance of this earthly existence. In boyhood I had avoided confusion on this subject by assuming that when a minister said that I should despise the world he meant I should despise worldliness. The Bible told me that God loved the world, and I thrilled to the song, "This Is My Father's World." So in Dr. Truett's words were confirmation of the idea that this world is a Christian's workshop.

I thought, finally, of the action in Chicago in the closing hours of the convention, when in response to the appeal of Dr. Paul Caudill we expressed the desire for a deepened spiritual life. Emphasis was given in that resolution to daily Christian living, to Bible reading, to the practice of prayer and spiritual growth.

The qualities which are most essential to the Christian cannot be measured by statistics. They lie outside the domain of mathematics. But they may be felt, they may be expressed and they may be transmitted.

Let us not tire of this pursuit, for finally the world's redemption rests upon it.