

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

BROOKS HAYS

Southern Baptists feel at home in the great and historic city of Louisville and in the State of Kentucky, where the churches have so energetically carried forward our program.

For the first time in thirty-two years, we assemble in this home of two of our most important institutions, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Carver School of Missions and Social Work.

Louisville Baptists have not been idle in these thirty-two years, their 112 churches being double the number of those existing in 1927. We are deeply grateful to the people of this city for their warm welcome and their splendid exertions during the last few months in preparation for our sessions.

Since we met a year ago in Houston, our vast endeavors have been crowned with success. Our membership is at an all-time high, and the number of churches, also a record figure, increases daily. Enormous responsibility accompanies these achievements.

During my two years as your president, I have traveled from Hamilton in Canada to Lima in Peru, and from Los Angeles to Moscow. My travels have brought profoundly moving experiences, and many simple and satisfying incidents have come out of the service which I have attempted to render.

It would be impossible for me to describe what your friendship has meant to me. I ask your indulgence for a brief reference to the recent change of fortune in my professional life, since it came at a critical stage in the denomination's efforts to relieve racial tensions and contribute to the mission of reconciliation. The relevancy of events in Little Rock to our work is acknowledged by all who are familiar with the problem. But I make this fleeting reference primarily to acknowledge my everlasting gratitude for the spirit of helpfulness and the personal anxiety for my family and myself which so many Southern Baptists evidenced in this crisis. In my official activities as your president, I have tried to keep in mind that there is a wide diversity of viewpoints with reference to race relations, but I have steadily insisted that this, the nation's number one problem, has an impact upon our missionary enterprise and must be met with high statesmanship and Christian insight.

In my talks with members of the minority race I have thought of them not as members of another group, but as fellow Christians. A simple incident indicates that the response is satisfying. Following a Baltimore meeting in which I discussed the problem, a Negro member of the congregation said to me, "Tomorrow I will go to a white friend to apologize to him for some things I have said and done, and this decision was produced by what you had to say tonight." And on the majority side it is evident that our members are more determined than ever to find a Christian solution.

As one of the few laymen who have been honored with the Convention presidency, I have been conscious, too, of my limitations and have tried not to attempt any service that should be reserved for the minister. I have visited as many states and communities as possible and have tried in what might be called the ceremonial functions of the office to maintain its dignity. One thing I can claim for myself is that I have been happy in the contacts with Southern Baptists, old and young. The superintendent of one of our orphans' homes told me, after a visit by his children to my congressional office in Washington, that a little eight-year-old girl said to him, "He sure was glad to see us, wasn't he?" And I was. I am glad to see all of you, too, in this final gathering under my presidency.

On the occasion of the centennial of the great seminary which has honored Southern Baptists, and which was honored by us last evening, there is a sense of pride and thankfulness for its impressive 100-year record. Yet, there is a feeling of deep concern about the threatened loss of accreditation, and the controversy that surrounds this beloved institution. It has been a great privilege to work with the special committee of former presidents appointed by the Executive Committee to study the problem. Our committee has made its report, but I believe I should bring this personal word to the Convention on my own

responsibility. The Convention's overriding interest should be in the correction of faulty procedures, not in deciding specific questions which certainly remain with our distinguished board of trustees. That high procedural standards for faculty termination were not meticulously followed should be apparent. Responsibility for the defect rests officially, of course, upon the board, but our committee, appreciating the complexities of the situation, is convinced that any criticism must be accompanied with profound appreciation for the unselfish service of the trustees that has been rendered the institution. The board demonstrated true Christian humility in rescinding its action of June 12. The same humility was displayed by the twelve professors in speaking of their mistakes. Further, the priority which I would give to the complaint of individuals discharged without an adequate hearing, is not to make the Seminary's interest secondary. It is rather to identify the institution with the concepts of justice and fair dealing. The grandeur of its service rests partly upon sensitivity to the needs and rights of human beings, including those within its own walls who as faculty members interpret the gospel.

History cannot be rolled back. The status of former faculty members cannot be re-established, and, having adjusted their lives to the change, they have assured us that they seek merely a new and helpful relationship to the Seminary and the Convention. The resources that are available in the board of trustees, the administration, and the faculty are adequate. As the special presidents committee has pointed out, the board is taking steps to improve the rules governing the faculty relationships. We should not assume, however, that a solution has been reached, nor should we assume that any reshuffling of authority will accomplish desired results. The task is challenging and it must be confronted with courage. I see no need whatever for any action by this Convention. Counseling for reconciliation has been sufficient, but now we need increased enlightenment and skill in institutional management. Our prayers for this consummation will persist.

We live in an exciting stage of human progress. Scientific discovery and industrial engineering have suddenly brought changes of breath-taking significance in man's physical life. We are annihilating time and space. It is no longer fanciful to believe that poverty may be abolished. Our capacity to produce in abundance has even created problems for us because we have not matched it with the capacity to distribute efficiently and communicate freely and wisely. The Christian view of these mighty changes is different from that of others. We welcome them, of course. We must study and adjust to them. But, further, the Christian must have regard for spiritual and moral implications. It is thrilling to anticipate the establishment of the rule of plenty throughout the world as a result of new conquests of physical force. The vast needs of the masses of men for food and shelter and raiment and medical care are a deep concern and always will be until they are met. But as we erect our towering cities and span the oceans and the deserts with our commerce, we of Christian faith will ask, "What does it profit a people if they gain whole new worlds but lose their souls?" As we benefit from the discoveries of medical men in foreign laboratories and our own, we see more clearly the oneness of the human family which Jesus taught. In the enjoyment of the results of scientific pursuits we must not let up in our insistence that a powerful Christian witness is essential if such benefits endure and acquire spiritual significance. The inevitability of progress is a myth. Miracle drugs bring surcease of headaches, but proficiency in healing the heartaches of men is an art we must yet perfect. Our Christian undertaking, that of ruling our own spirits and submitting our ways to the Eternal, remains the most engaging task of all. If food in abundance eliminates hunger, there is still man's deepest hunger for God's presence and his love to be met, and this signifies the timelessness of our task.

Abraham Lincoln's counsel for the nineteenth century applies to the twentieth century, too: "The dogmas of the quiet past are not adequate for the stormy present," he said; not the dogmas of conventional life, but the principles of love and mercy, which when fully relied on, have been sufficient in every age.

Our Convention seeks to render a practical service at this point. The amazing physical discoveries of which I have spoken have suddenly placed in human hands weapons of destruction never dreamed of before. Man now holds the power to destroy overnight all that the centuries have produced in structural beauty and impressiveness. We could be catapulted into a primitive and savage way of life, if the strange and frightening new power of the atom is not responsibly used. For this reason, the urgent recommendations of the peace committee which the Convention authorized in Houston last year should be prayerfully and earnestly studied. The cause of peace is precious. Baptists of the world can make a distinctive contribution to it and we should commit ourselves to a sound and carefully devised plan of enlisting our people everywhere in the role of moral leadership for this end. I urge approval of the peace committee's report. It suggests sound steps to be taken at a negligible cost. It establishes no new agency and anticipates full cooperation with other Baptist bodies in promoting the great cause of world peace.

My view of the work on mission fields, home and foreign, gives me a new appreciation of our Baptist Jubilee Advance Program, now well under way. In the spring of 1958 I went to Russia. This year I went to South America for a two-week visit with dedicated and well-trained missionaries of ours in four countries. We at home must not fail them. As lovers of peace and liberty we look upon the Central and South American scene with anxiety, but confident that the potential evils of totalitarianism and violence can be removed and that the Christian forces of the entire hemisphere will prevail. As citizens of a favored nation, enjoying great economic progress, we should be eager to find a sound plan for sharing our productive genius with Latin American neighbors so that poverty, disease, and ignorance may also be reduced as menacing enemies of human happiness. Most importantly, we view the people of our sister republics not in terms of defense and economic stability, vital though these elements are in a period of world danger, but primarily for what they are—God's children, to be redeemed and inspired by his grace and power. During our tour we found our Baptist workers sharing in the Convention's Jubilee Program. During the one Sunday we were in Cali, Columbia, five new missions were established, and the missionaries reminded us enthusiastically that they would count on the 30,000 new churches. My wife and I discovered that the causes of evangelism, Christian education, and social service are being effectively advanced. It is a ministry to gratify and inspire us.

I have not confined my interest to South America. I have also been deeply concerned with our relations with our friends of the Baptist Federation of Canada. Southern Baptists rejoice in the growing spirit of fellowship attained by the Baptist Jubilee Advance, and I hope that this Convention will continue the testing relationship which is proving so effective and helpful to the Canadian Federation and ourselves.

Having spoken of the missions problem and of the race problem, may I relate the two. As all observers know, the patterns of worship and of Christian activity in the foreign mission fields differ from the familiar ones at home. There is no segregation of our colored converts. The voluntary separatism in our own country is responsible primarily for our Negro brethren maintaining their own conventions and generally their own congregations, and is not basically inconsistent with our Christian professions, but we must continue to examine with keen sensitivity the aspirations of our minority people for a status free from all discrimination and injustice. This is a part of the Christian gospel, and we must demonstrate that we believe it. We cannot export what we do not have, and if our Christian devotions here are not adequate, our missionaries cannot transmit the Christian message to unsaved masses abroad. The missionaries plead for a better performance in human relations in America, and while I believe we are making great progress at home, we must keep the challenge always before us.

It is universally conceded that our efforts in almost every mission have been retarded to some extent by American society as a whole permitting disharmonies here. The impact in Asia, Africa, and Latin America is severe. This requires

a prompt and critical re-examination, not necessarily a sweeping penitence, for with our occasional bungling and bad manners we are entitled to the world's tolerant acknowledgment that cleavages are the heritage of history, and that we cannot complete the processes for justice and brotherhood quickly.

Perhaps you are tired of the subject of race conflict, but until perfect justice is done we must stay with the task. There is a provocative thought in Isaiah's words: "God will not rest until he establishes justice in the world." Therefore, we must continue in our own restless undertakings for righteousness and Christian brotherhood with a sense of God's presence and encouragement as we labor. Eventually the world will accept the principle of human dignity for which we contend, and may even applaud us for contending for it. We Baptists have written some bright chapters in history while we were a small and socially unaccepted group; we should be even more concerned about human conflicts now that we have grown strong and numerous.

There are practical steps to be taken within the framework of our congregational system, advancing us toward the day of Christian understanding. Some progress has already been made. Our research in Biblical teaching on race has disproved the claim that existing patterns are divinely prescribed, and while no authoritarian position is assumed as a result of these studies, we would be remiss if we did not make them available, just as our scholars in the seminaries and the Sunday School Board's staff make available their judgments on less explosive questions. Whatever the individual Baptist thinks about legislative policy in this field, it is apparent that scriptural support for state segregation laws cannot be claimed. They did not originate until the end of the nineteenth century, and a lot of wise and effective work in race relations had been done by our Christian forefathers long before these state laws came out of the political ferment of an unhappy period.

There are 17 million Negroes in the United States, and this exceeds the total population of Uruguay, Ecuador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Ghana, and Liberia. The plea for a heightened interest in the co-operative work with Negro Baptists is produced not alone by a concern for their welfare but in the interest of spiritual growth for members of the white community as well.

Discontent of the minority is the symptom of an illness which affects the nation and the world. It constitutes the mission field at our doorstep. Studies and conferences leading to a better understanding between white and Negro Baptists should continue. It is a phase of the Great Commission. On February 24 our Joint Committee on Baptist Work Among Negroes held an important meeting in Nashville, and after a painstaking review of the problem unanimously recommended that a high-level conference of leaders of the two largest Negro Baptist conventions meet with duly designated leaders of our own Convention to promote Christian fellowship and conduct a comprehensive examination of the problem. I am happy to add my personal endorsement to this action and to transmit it to the resolutions committee for their consideration.

Paul's injunction to the individual, "Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall," 1 Corinthians 10:12, is addressed to nations as well. And since nations have no mystic power to order progress and assure their survival, except as their constituents develop integrity and devotion, it is incumbent upon the Christian to take note of his government's needs and his society's deficiencies. And we are fortunate indeed that we live in a country in which the Christian and the patriot may inhabit the same heart. This is consistent with our belief that the Christian has his distinctive part to play—that patriotism is not sufficient. We still must dare to be different, to be in the world, but not of it, to love the world, and to view both its misery and its frivolities with deepest concern.

Our distinctiveness is in the commitment to live by the standards of conduct and service which the New Testament proclaims. It is a common faith in the efficacy of the Christian calling that establishes our fellowship and makes us one. Our doctrine of the competency of the individual forbids our attempting uniformity of belief, but the scattered Baptist legions are bound together by a determination to submit to God's will and to use our diversified talents in all practical ways. In modern times this produces a beautiful variety in our out-

ward expressions of Christian hope and dedication. The growing new ministries, which in good time we must perfect, bear witness to our concern for the mandate given by Christ himself, to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken heart, to preach deliverance of the captives. The growing list of special services in urban associations and in our home missions program is intriguing, and many essential programs await the skillful and healing touch of Christian hands. The new ministries for college students, the farm migrants, in the prisons, and for our men in arms, these are but examples of pioneer programs that will make full use of the resources available to nine million Southern Baptists.

Finally, we twentieth century Christians must be demonstrating more impressively that we differ from the materialists who are so absorbed in the enjoyments of the world and too involved in its power to see the suffering and the tragedies of the hour. We should differ, too, from those of infirm faith, who see only its misery. It is the presence of hope, strengthened by faith, that makes possible the pursuit of love in a world that has not fully known God's compassion. The world beckons us to a holier service than we are now rendering. In reality, it is God who, in the world, is daily renewing his call to us to take up the crosses of human service and to receive the enriching rewards that were long ago promised to those who toil in the belief that love and mercy are in the center of all human existence.