

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

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ISSUES AND IMPERATIVES

As the Southern Baptist Convention convenes for its 108th session, the question in every mind is "What are the issues that confront us?" For every Convention in recent years has been characterized by some particular overriding issue.

There was the *theological controversy* at San Francisco. But that issue is now behind us. The theological guidelines for our schools and agencies were clearly defined at Kansas City by the Articles of Faith. Christian integrity demands that those who would be our denominational servants shall respect these guidelines. And I have confidence in their integrity that our institutions will observe these guidelines.

A fast-running *ecumenical tide* has concerned us. The dilemma for Southern Baptists has been that to have unity, we must scrap our convictions; and if we keep our convictions, we cannot have unity! There are those who believe we should all get together in one big church, without denominational distinctives. Now, the Lord has not spoken this word to me! I thought that is what the Reformation was all about—to break up such a monopoly. I do not believe that Southern Baptists are interested in abolishing denominationalism, or abandoning our denominational distinctives. But let us remember that our real enemies are the devil and the forces of materialism, secularism, and atheism—not other Christians and Baptists in other national bodies. Let us continue to seek broader channels of communication and cooperation that will not compromise our conscience, our doctrine or our autonomy.

The *race issue* divides us as it divides a nation. But let us not feel that the race problem is an albatross hung around our necks by history. It is a God-given opportunity for Christians to solve the problems that legislation can never solve; not by marches in the street, or pickets at the gate; but by the personal practice of Christian brotherhood in our daily lives. The civil rights legislation has been passed. But we must recognize that legislation can do no more than provide the friendly and orderly environment for moral and spiritual ideals to grow. It still remains the mission of the church and the responsibility of Christians to sow the seeds and nourish the ideals of Christian brotherhood in human relations. And this is our task, today!

We are faced with the *social and moral decay* of society; the "sex revolution," rising crime rates, the criminal exploitation of our citizenship by the liquor industry. A penetrating question haunts us, "How can we create a great society out of a morally sick society?" Legislation can structure the economics, but only the church can produce the moral foundations for that great society. God's mandate to twentieth century America is "behave or be damned."

Then there are the *schisms and divisions* within our own Convention. There are such wide diversities, socially, theologically and geographically, that some believe a split is inevitable. I do not share in this view.

The Single Issue

In my opinion, the single overriding life-or-death issue now facing our Convention is: *Are Southern Baptists going to get to the main task, the main business, of reaching people for Jesus Christ?*

Today, we are the largest evangelical denomination in the United States and the largest free church group in the world with 10.6 million members and 33,000 churches.

But let us be honest with ourselves. With our big churches, fine buildings, great colleges and seminaries, educated ministry, and great prestige, Southern Baptists are less effective today in winning people to Jesus Christ than any of our less privileged forefathers. As Kermit Long says, "Instead of fishers of

men, we have become merely keepers of the aquarium, swiping fish from each other's bowls."

The overriding issue is:

Shall we spend our energies maintaining institutions or penetrating the world with the gospel of Christ?

Shall we deify established churches or glorify Jesus Christ by carrying His message to lost men where they are?

Shall we be absorbed by the mechanics of a program or consumed by a passion for people?

Shall we measure our success by the statistics of church membership or by the statistics of the unsaved multitudes yet to be reached?

Shall we wax fat in our blessings and become insensitive to the lostness of the world about us?

Twenty-five percent of all people who have ever lived are alive today. They are pressing at our doorstep and stretching out to the end of the earth. These millions are lost, without God and without hope in the world.

I believe that God has placed Southern Baptists at this pivotal point in history because the main thrust of our witness, historically, has been *evangelism, outreach, and conquest*.

Let us face today's challenge with a sense of historical continuity and personal destiny. Baptists have a great history, but let us make history today!

Tonight, we assemble in Dallas under the banner of *Proclamation and Witnessing*. Here, in this Convention, may we have a spiritual, yes, even a revival, experience. Here, may we be caught up in a fresh vision of a lost world and launch the greatest evangelistic and missionary thrust this world has ever seen. Here, may the business we consider and the messages we hear, *unify* us as one great people of God, *mobilize* us to action, *empower* us by the Holy Spirit and *send* us out to win this world to Jesus Christ.

My clarion call as president is expressed in three imperatives.

I. Concentrate

First, let us *concentrate* the total resources of 10 million Southern Baptists, 33,000 churches and 21 Convention agencies and institutions in a bold concerted plan of proclamation and witnessing.

A. World Evangelism

Let us concentrate on world evangelism.

In October of 1966, Billy Graham has called a World Conference on Evangelism in West Berlin to mobilize the total forces of Christianity. Let us now say, "Billy, lead on!" and here in Dallas pledge our concentrated support of this worldwide evangelistic thrust.

Last January, in this very auditorium, Dr. Rubens Lopes, president of the Brazilian Baptist Convention, called for the Baptists of North and South America to unite in a hemispheric evangelistic crusade in 1970—simultaneous Baptist revivals from Hudson Bay to Buenos Aires! Let us follow the lead of our Latin brethren in this concentrated united effort to win these sister continents to Jesus Christ.

On Thursday night, Dr. Baker James Cauthen will challenge us with a goal of 5,000 missionaries on the foreign field. We shall hear of the evangelistic crusades in Brazil, Japan, Portugal, Lebanon, Thailand, Malaysia; the two-year Missionary Journeyman program; the use of mass communication; the entering of new fields. Let us undergird with our prayers, our money and our surrendered lives this expanded missionary thrust.

B. The National Field

Let us concentrate our total resources to make America Christian.

Tomorrow night, Dr. Arthur Rutledge will report for 2,400 home missionaries. We shall hear of our work in language missions; the US-2 program; the summer missionaries; the Tentmakers; the Christian Service Corps.

But, the greatest home mission challenge I would call "Operation Penetration"—to penetrate the vast pioneer areas of the north, the east and the west with our Southern Baptist witness.

By 2,000 A. D. ten cities will constitute one-third of the United States population, not one of which is in the old territory of the Southern Baptist Convention. Today, the population of six states can elect a president, not one of which is a Southern state. We must break out of the Bible-belt South, and grow a denomination in these vast urban and industrial centers whose people will determine the future political, economic and moral destinies of our nation.

Let the Brotherhood step up its program of Laymen Crusades into these areas.

Let our seminaries be bridgeheads for an "Operation Penetration," thrusting forth pastors onto the pioneer fields to establish missions and churches.

Let us provide adequate building loan funds for these pioneer churches. For mission money spent in establishing new churches is like seed, returning a harvest fiftyfold and a hundredfold.

Let us give encouragement to Brother Owen Cooper and our Baptist laymen to organize a non-profit corporation to raise \$50 million to be used in the purchase of church building sites in the pioneer areas. Here is our problem: our institutions do not speculate in property. But these dedicated laymen can do this for us! For example, right here in Texas, a group of laymen purchased an acreage and held it for a proposed Houston Baptist college. When the land appreciated in value, they sold off half the acreage which paid for the other half, and they gave the site to the college! This can be done by a non-profit laymen-led corporation all over the north, the west, and the east in these great urban and industrial centers to acquire sites for new churches in "Operation Penetration."

Let the Radio and Television Commission reinforce this "Operation Penetration" with a saturation exposure of our Baptist witness through mass communication media into these pioneer areas.

But this concentrated thrust in proclamation and witnessing on the mission fields must be undergirded by a *concentrated emphasis on outreach* on every local church field. Mission advance waits on more money. And more money waits on more people! For example, if the objective of 5,000 missionaries on the foreign field is to be realized we must begin now, in very local church, to broaden the "people base" of our denomination. *The top priority for Southern Baptist advance is not more money or more program, but more people!*

Tomorrow morning, Dr. James Sullivan will present the correlated program of advance for the local church that concentrates the total resources of the Sunday school, Training Union, Brotherhood, W.M.U., music and evangelism departments in a single emphasis on "proclamation and witnessing."

The Adult Thrust is to continue as a spearhead of advance.

The Sunday School is to take the lead position in outreach.

The Training Union materials in the fall will be on Christian witnessing.

The January Bible Study will be John's witness to Jesus.

The alternate Sunday School lessons for the winter quarter will be on soul winning.

These are but a few of the many facets of this concentrated correlated emphasis on outreach to be presented tomorrow.

To me, this is the most thrilling and exciting development in the history of Southern Baptist programing. If 33,000 Southern Baptist churches would use these forthcoming program tools to the glory of God, we could turn this world upside down.

May I challenge you, each and everyone, to go back to your local churches committed to being a part of this program of proclamation and witnessing as we match our *evangelical theology* with an *evangelistic methodology*.

II. Consecrate

The second imperative is to *consecrate ourselves* anew to the living person of Jesus Christ to match this *concentrated program* with *consecrated personnel*.

Recently I read an article on "Why I Quit the Ministry." The author gave six valid and convincing reasons. I, too, had all six reasons and I wondered why I had not "thrown in the sponge," also. Then I realized the author never

mentioned why he entered the ministry in the first place! If you enter right, you can never quit! Brethren, we entered the ministry with a conviction that God had given us a gospel to preach and a message to proclaim to a lost world. And we said with Paul, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." But time has dimmed the luster of that vision and we have permitted periphery and secondary pursuits to consume us. If God has called you to preach, may I call you to go with me back to the foot of the cross that, together, we may consecrate ourselves anew to the PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL to a lost world.

But someone says, "What is the gospel? Do you not know that this is one of the great theological issues of the day?" Without attempting a definition and, not being facetious, let me simply say, "My fellow minister, the measure of the validity of the gospel that you preach is not how well you can translate its message from the original languages; or how neat a packet you can make of the theological and philosophical concepts in it; or how well you can defend it with an old orthodoxy or a new intellectualism, as important as these things may seem! But its validity is measured by a simple question, 'Does your proclamation of that gospel lead men to become disciples of Jesus Christ?' If it does, you have the gospel. If it does not, I care not how sound is your orthodoxy or how brilliant is your intellectualism, you do not have it!"

Brethren, let us strip our proclamation of passing theological fads and pseudo-sophisticated encrustments that merely tickle our intellectual fancies. Let us sound a clarion trumpet, stripped of doubt and uncertainty, an authoritative proclamation of a Bible-based message that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Be ye reconciled to God."

Let us also consecrate ourselves anew to the task of personal witnessing and soul winning. Occasionally a friend will say to me, "My work is through, here. What's open in Tennessee?" Now what in the world do we as pastors mean when we say, "My work is through."? I may be through because of my indiscretion, or my bad judgment, or my lack of Christian virtue. My leadership in a particular church or institution may be through. But my work of personal witnessing is never through! And when we are faithful in this task of personal witnessing, it seems that the Lord always presents ever widening fields of service for us.

Leobardo Estrada, whose sermons on the Spanish Baptist Hour are heard in fourteen Latin American countries today, was shining shoes and selling hot tamales on the streets of San Antonio when the Lord saved him and called him to preach. He attended college and seminary and began to work with Latin Americans of the Southwest. One day the Lord called Leobardo Estrada to New York City where one out of every ten people walking the streets speaks Spanish. Estrada started to work without a church, without a pulpit, without a building, without a congregation, without a single church member. On a rainy day less than three years ago, he went down into the subways to witness and distribute evangelistic tracts. With each tract he extended an invitation to attend preaching services the following Sunday. Four people appeared at the service to hear his sermon. Today, that church has over 250 members, eight other missions and preaching points as well as a fine new building.

This is our primary task, *preacher and layman alike*, to get on the street corners and in the subways and out into the world proclaiming the gospel and witnessing for Jesus Christ.

Let us consecrate ourselves anew to the task of proclamation and witnessing, even as we consecrate ourselves anew to the way of the cross. For our witness to Him is not only in word but also in deed and example. Two theological students came away from hearing Toyohiko Kagawa speak. Both were disappointed. One exclaimed, "What a poor message by such a great man—nothing but trite sayings and soft platitudes." But then he thoughtfully remarked, "However, I guess when a man is hanging on a cross he doesn't have to say much to bear a witness."

III. Consider

The overriding issue, then, for Southern Baptists is, "Shall we get on with the main task of PROCLAMATION AND WITNESSING and launch the greatest missionary and evangelistic thrust the world has ever seen!" And to move out in this advance, we must be compelled by three imperatives:

First, we must concentrate our total resources in a total program of proclamation and witnessing.

Second, we must consecrate ourselves anew to Christ and to the personal task of proclamation and witnessing.

And finally, to give us the spiritual dynamics for the advance, we must consider afresh the unlimited power of God.

A. Ourselves

If we consider only *ourselves* we are doomed! If we depend upon *our* programs and *our* resources, alone, for success we shall fail miserably. For every human organization and every human program is fraught with human frailties and imperfections. Continued introverted self-study soon degenerates into a debilitating self-criticism. We can dwell on self-analysis so long until "the paralysis of analysis" destroys us. As Southern Baptists we must be done with this sadistic impulse toward self-abuse and self-criticism, the end of which is nothing but a devastating guilt complex and complete inertia. And if I have not made myself clear, let me put it this way—the sophisticated pseudo-intellectualism whose chief calling is always to examine "what's wrong with Southern Baptists" and whose only service is to continually pick at the scabs of our imperfections and inadequacies, not only denies the healing power of God's forgiveness but also the redemptive power of God's grace that can make marred but surrendered vessels serve His cause.

God has no perfect servants, no flawless instruments! God uses imperfect human vessels. Is not this the point of Jeremiah's story about the potter? It is not measure of our perfection, but the measure of our dedication and surrender that determines God's use of us. He can take the crooked stick and the broken vessel and all the imperfections of Southern Baptists, today, and use us to His glory if we fall on our faces before Him in humility and surrender ourselves completely to Him.

So let us not look at ourselves, our faults, our failures. Let us look to God, and believe He has a purpose and a cause for us to serve.

We can believe in ourselves because we believe in our cause. Dr. W. J. Wimpee asked a Frenchman, "Why are you a communist?" He answered, "Because the communists are going to win the world."

If a communist can so believe in himself and his cause, how much more so ought we as Christians to believe in ourselves and in our cause—because we believe in our God and we believe His cause will win! It is God who has brought us as Southern Baptists through twenty-five years of phenomenal unmatched growth to this strategic position of world leadership today. And because the hand of God has been upon us we *can* believe in the rightness of our *theology*, and the rightness of our *emphases*, and the rightness of our *programs*.

B. Our Adversaries

Again, if we consider only ourselves and our adversaries, we will quit in despair!

At this very moment fellow Baptists rotting in Cuban jails are grim reminders of the naked power and demonic purposes of communism. Today, Christians are a shrinking minority in an exploding world population where with every one convert to Christianity twenty-five pagans are born. Secularism, materialism and scientism seem to overwhelm us. If we consider only our adversaries, we will join the parade of pessimists who say that the Christian cause is lost and we are entering a post-Christian era in western civilization.

On Easter Sunday morning in 1799, 18,000 French invaders encircled a little Austrian village. The citizens were panic-stricken. But the pastor said, "Ring the church bells, and let us proceed to worship God on this Easter morn. We have reckoned our strength and find that it fails. But let us ring the bells, and leave the matter in God's hands. We know our weakness. But we do not know the power of God!" When the French troops heard the bells, they thought that an Austrian army had come and fled in panic. Southern Baptists, let us ring the bells, and get to the task of proclamation and witnessing! We know our weaknesses, we know the might of our adversaries, but we do not fully know

the power of God. Let us cast ourselves upon Him that He might give us the victory.

Remember, in the days of Isaiah, the people cried in fear, "Look at Nebuchadnezzar." But Isaiah proclaimed, "No, look at God." Southern Baptists, this is the note to sound and the message to proclaim. Look not at ourselves, look not at our adversaries, but look to our God and to His power and to His promises.

In II Kings 6:8-18 we find the story of Ben-hadad's invasion of Israel when he marched the armies of Syria to the city of Dothan to capture Elisha.

The Bible describes the scene in the morning, when Elisha's young servant looked from the wall to see the city besieged by the Syrian army. Tens of thousands of armed soldiers had come up against one lone unarmed prophet of God! And he cries, "Master, what shall we do?" Elisha answers, "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And the prophet drops to his knees and prays, "Open his eyes that he may see." And, behold, the boy looks, and sees, and the mountains round about are filled with chariots of fire as God's angels come down in power to protect Elisha and to defeat the armies of Syria and to give victory to His cause and His people.

Fellow Baptists, that is our God. The same God who delivered the children of Israel out of bondage and brought them across the Red Sea on dry land! The same God who was with Paul and Silas in jail and turned that jailhouse into a revival meeting! The same God who brought Jesus Christ forth alive from the grave! And the same God who now works the power of that resurrection in our lives to deliver us from the bondage of sin and death.

Southern Baptists, look up now and see Him in that throne! Know that our affairs are His affairs, and our business is His business here in Dallas! Let in power! Today, His cause is our cause! By faith and dedication, His power can be our power! And by His grace, His victory can be our victory.

Southern Baptists, look up now and see Him on that throne! Know that our affairs are His affairs, and our business is His business here in Dallas! Let us go from this auditorium tonight, searching our hearts and asking God to remove every barrier that would hinder, that we might come back into these sessions to dedicate ourselves anew to Christ and *launch the greatest evangelistic and missionary thrust this world has ever seen*. As your president, this is my heart's plea for Southern Baptists!