THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

BY

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THE INTEGRITY OF THE THEOLOGICAL CURRICULUM

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An Inaugural Address as Dean of the School of Theology in the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, delivered on October 28, 1969, Alumni Memorial Chapel

Since one of my primary roles is to be that of educator in a school of theology, I propose to consider with you today whether and how a controlling theological vision may inform the teaching process by which seminary students learn what it means to be ministers of God. Failure to achieve clarity at this point results in a discontinuity between the concept of the curriculum and the content which it is intended to convey.

Ultimately, this issue is of importance not only to faculty, administration, and trustees, but to the primary constituency which I have chosen to address, the students. Unless they can see that the theology being taught in the classrooms is at least important enough to influence the character of the curriculum, they may rightly wonder whether it should be normative for the churches which they serve. If a theological school magnifies the Christian revelation as a decisive criterion by which to renew everything except its own traditions, the charge may well be leveled, "Physician, heal thyself!"

Hence the choice of my theme, "The Integrity of the Theological Curriculum," by which I refer to that organic wholeness which should unite *what* we teach with *why* we teach it. The selection of this emphasis is not intended as an attack upon the current fashion of defining the paramount need in theology as that of dialogue with other disciplines. While this continues to be a salutary concern, the time has come to redress a growing imbalance by stressing that theology—like any other discipline—has an inward autonomy as well as an outward reciprocity. Otherwise, we may learn a little about every discipline except the one we are responsible to represent and thereby give the impression that theology is but a mélange of insights garnered from hither and yon. Actually, my concern for consistency in curricular design corresponds to a pervasive effort underway throughout the intel-

lectual world to discover the relation between shape and substance, form and function, morphology and meaning.

I.

So vast is this correlating enterprise even within the field of theology that a single praxis must suffice. We may well select for consideration the most impressive theological achievement of the twentieth century, which I take to be a clarification of the Christian understanding of time. In response to the strong sense of history which emerged in the nineteenth century, earlier theological concerns have coalesced at the point of a common attempt to help man come to terms with his temporality, with his capacity to remember the past, experience the present, and anticipate the future. The way in which Christianity, unlike most other world religions, intensifies our involvement in these three dimensions of time has been a leitmotiv in almost all branches of modern theology.

Perhaps a few autobiographical reflections on my personal theological pilgrimage will both illustrate this dominant trend and indicate some of the ways in which I have understood its significance.

When I began my seminary studies at mid-century, biblical theology was in the ascendancy as an attempt to utilize critical historiography in theological inquiry. Everyone was discussing Cullmann's *Christ and Time*, Dodd's *Apostolic Preaching*, and Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch*. The impelling passion was to penetrate the ancient world so completely that we could think the thoughts of the biblical writers after them. To this end we dug up the past with Albright, analyzed Hebrew psychology with Pedersen, and peered into the apocalyptic abyss with Schweitzer. For one who had known only that approach to the Bible in which the ancient events were always contemporized rather than the modern reader being archaized, the net effect was to discover a startlingly unfamiliar yet fascinating world which, precisely because it was firmly anchored in the distant past, I could disentangle from my own cultural milieu and accept as a gift not of my own devising.

Hand in hand with the biblical theology that flourished after World War II was an allied movement called neo-orthodoxy. Having been a science major in a secular university with no deep roots in a particular theological tradition, it was not the "neo-" but the "orthodoxy" that most impressed me. While reading the works of Emil Brunner, for example, I received with equanimity his efforts to update the faith for modern man; however, as the child of a denomination with no towering theologians of its own, I was unprepared for the decisive significance which he attributed to the views of Martin Luther. The use of form criticism in biblical studies had taught me to appreciate the role of the believing community in the enrichment of developing doctrines, but now I began to learn just how meaningfully this process had extended throughout the long history of the church. As a result, I determined never again to be cheated of my rich heritage from the past.

It was not long, however, before I realized that theology was also calling me to rediscover the present. Behind the robust existentialism of Brunner that so appealed to a young Baptist lay the seminal work of Soren Kierkegaard with its impervious summons to come out from behind the safe confines of a theory of history and experience the uniqueness of the Now in all of its radical immediacy. From the melancholy Dane it was but a short step to the dialectical theologians, especially Rudolf Bultmann who became my most helpful guide in moving between the two worlds of past and present, not because I agreed with all of his conclusions but because he took the sheer givenness of time with such utter seriousness. Under his tutelage I learned to appreciate the hermeneutical task and came to realize that biblical theology must never be a call to mere antiquarianism which implicitly scorns modernity by witnessing to the present age in theological Yiddish.

Fortunately, Bultmann's insistence that the church be truly open to the reality of the contemporary situation was reinforced by the emergence of an authentic theological empiricism which began to advance powerful new insights from the psychology and sociology of religion. Once I was drawn into genuine clinical situations, whether the mental hospital, the urban ghetto, or the student pastorate, there was little

danger that I would become so absorbed in the past as to forget the present. Instead, a healthy dialectic developed between the two which gave new balance to my studies in such urgent areas as ethics and apologetics.

With this heightened awareness of both past and present came a new appreciation of the future as the horizon of God's continuing action in the world. In analyzing New Testament apocalyptic, obviously an element belonging to the ancient past, biblical theology nevertheless succeeded in showing that Christianity is a profoundly eschatological religion. Bultmann combined this emphasis with his existential concerns by contending that although man is to live in the present, he is to do so "out of the future," i.e. on the basis of its promises rather than on the basis of the security of the status quo. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in daring to ponder a world "come of age," sowed the seeds which helped give birth to the current theologies of hope with their insistence on the radical futurity of faith.

Thus, at last, twentieth century theology came full circle as all three temporal dimensions were given comprehensive interpretation from a Christian perspective. As never before the church is now able to realize what it means for man to live on the growing edge of a time line. Likewise, since theology and anthropology are correlative, this clarification of human historicality has led to a fresh understanding of God. Static categories of constancy are being supplemented by dynamic categories of change. The nineteenth century lament, "Change and decay in all around I see: O Thou who changest not, abide with me!," has been balanced by a twentieth century view of God as cosmic innovator, as one—to change the hymn—who is not only in the rocks but in the rapids. To borrow Kyle Haselden's phrase, God is now coming to be seen as Lord of "flux" as well as of "fidelity." In a very real sense we have just begun to grasp the profound meaning of that commonplace biblical phrase, "And it came to pass . . ."

II.

The question to which we may now turn is how this central contribution of the twentieth century should affect the theological cur-

riculum. Stated for the student constituency being addressed, how may the teaching process help the seminarian to become "a man for all seasons"? At least two common errors are to be avoided.

First, there is the strong temptation to become a partisan of only one temporal perspective and so give both ontological and epistemological priority either to the past, to the present, or to the future. For example, many scholars in the biblical theology movement have simply assumed that the earlier an idea the better. Implicit in this argument from antiquity, which is also popular in the interpretation of church history, lurks a primitivism which misunderstands the paradise myth to mean that there is an original purity which one may recover if only he goes back far enough. Other scholars castigate this idealization of the past and in the name of such slogans as "incarnational realism" or "holy worldliness" call us to an exclusive preoccupation with the present. Usually bolstering this position is a theory of developmentalism which assumes that although the past is a valuable foundation on which to build, the best view is from the latest floor to be added at the top. Still others denounce contemporaneity as a capitulation to the tyranny of the status quo and insist that everything in Christianity is future-facing, even God himself. Latent in this stress on process, potentiality and promise lies a kind of teleological utopianism which assumes that the best is yet to be.

I realize that the rigorous advocacy of one extreme may be an effective way to attract attention when writing a book, but it is hardly the best way to build a theological curriculum. Unfortunately, some professors become so absorbed in their specialization that they adopt totalitarian attitudes towards its importance within the entire course of study. Usually they are supported by allies on the outside who would restrict the purpose of the seminary to a single stereotype. Always there are those who in the name of "classical learning" or the "sole sufficiency of the Bible" or the "historic Baptist position" would have us study only the past. Then there are those who, under the banner of being "scientific" or "serving the practical needs of the church" or "taking responsibility for the world as it is" would have us study only the present. Again, there are those harbingers of revolution who would make the seminary "God's avant-garde" fostering whatever trend is likely to become the wave of the future.

Any effort to commit the curriculum to one of these extremes must be resisted, not because it is safer to opt for bland balance, or because it would be bad politics to let one segment of the faculty triumph, but because it is theologically illegitimate to absolutize one temporal dimension as the exclusive mode of God's access to man. In biblical faith, for example, the prophets called the people to remember the covenant; Jesus called them to remember the prophets; the apostles called them to remember Jesus. The farther the pilgrim people progressed the richer became their heritage from the past. Likewise, the nearer they journeyed toward their goal the clearer became their hopes for the future. What in the pre-exilic period were but dim surmises became in the New Testament era visions so luminous that they seemed on the verge of final fulfillment. Concurrent with this enlarged understanding of their "whence" and "whither" came a heightened awareness of their "wherefore" as through Scripture and Spirit they poured the realities of both past and future into the present. In conflict with Judaism the church could have repudiated the past; in reacting to Roman persecution it could have fled from the present; in the struggle with Gnosticism it could have compromised the future. None of these temptations, however, shook the determination of the first Christians to be open to the full challenge of historical existence.

Lest it appear that I am belaboring the obvious in this plea for a balanced theology of time let me point out that such a perspective makes it impossible for the seminary curriculum to be committed either to conservatism or to liberalism, a position which many friends and foes alike find difficult to understand. As the names themselves imply, the primary concern of the conservative is to "conserve" for the present what he thinks is the best of the past while the liberal seeks to "liberate" for the present what he thinks is the best that comes to it from the future. The curriculum cannot choose between these alternatives because it seeks to clarify how "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8). For us the First Coming in the past is neither less nor more important than the Final Coming in the future. For us the present is a pilgrimage with that Paraclete who leads into new truth hitherto unknown by calling to remembrance what was spoken two thousand years ago (John 16:12-15). Like the Kingdom scribe who "brings out of his treasure what is new

and what is old" (Matthew 13:52), we can say with the conservative, "We have come not to destroy," while adding with the liberal, ". . . but to fulfill."

A second error is often made by those who reject the first. Granting the need for balanced attention to man's total temporal involvement, they suppose that responsibility for these three dimensions may be divided up by the faculty somewhat along the lines of our divisional structures; i.e. the biblical and historical men would study the past, the practical men would major on the present, while the theologians would speculate on the future. It cannot be denied that there is some affinity between certain subjects and a particular temporal perspective, but this neat division of labor represents a potentially stultifying way to understand the various disciplines. More helpful is the approach which sees each subject in the light of all three temporal aspects. For example, Old Testament study of the exile need not be limited to an exercise in ancient history but may be a splendid way to learn the art of creative adaptation when the future suddenly brings drastic change. Or, again, the search for a "situation ethic" to meet the necessities of the present may be impoverished if it does not take seriously the accumulated wisdom of yesterday and may be irresponsible if it does not consider the consequences of moral decisions for the life of tomorrow.

In calling each discipline to recover its roots from the past, define its relevance for the present, and contribute to the renewal needed in the future, I am not insisting that every professor and student maintain this equilibrium at all times. It is only natural that the young be more concerned with the future, the middle-aged with the present, and the mature with the past. Further, as a matter of temperament some, likes James, feel so bound to the past that they will let history pass them by rather than change; others, like Stephen, feel so utterly committed to the future that they are willing to be martyred for demanding its immediate arrival; while yet others, like Paul, see themselves as conscious mediators between two ages in the name of the present. My only plea here is for an acceptance of the theological necessity for a balanced interaction between all three within the seminary curriculum.

III.

Having sketched one example of the way in which I would integrate theological insight with curricular design, it may prove helpful, in conclusion, to illustrate the practical application of this rationale by making a specific suggestion about each of the three temporal dimensions which have occupied our attention throughout this address.

As regards the past, it seems particularly urgent to foster in today's theological student a deeper appreciation of the vast heritage which is his as a minister of the gospel. The mood of alienation permeating certain segments of our culture has given many seminarians a sense of vocational rootlessness which can be overcome only in fellowship with the "great cloud of witnesses" who have gone before (Hebrews 12:1). I do not claim to understand fully the complexities of the identity crises in which the ministry is said to find itself today, but I am convinced that it may be overcome in part by claiming the promise of the Johannine Jesus, "I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored, and you have entered into their labor" (John 4:38).

That statement will never be given substance by a cut-flower curriculum concerned only with current fads. In a day when many lament the absence of potent ministerial models is it not wise to devote even greater attention to an evaluation of those patterns which have emerged in the long history of the people of God? One thinks immediately of the tension between prophet and priest, of the anguished call of Jeremiah, of the clash between Jesus and Judaism over rabbinic credentials, of the struggle of Paul to define and defend his apostleship, of early Baptist lay preachers languishing in establishmentarian jails. History provides neither easy answers nor instant heroes, but it does combat the baffling despair of a frightened or cynical young preacher who supposes that he is the first to work against overwhelming odds in a hopelessly ambiguous situation. A quiet poise is the permanent residue of having shared deeply what Malraux describes as "the joy of fraternal pain" that binds the called of every age.

As regards the present, the need is urgent to gain both a clearer understanding of and a broader involvement in the kaleidoscopic af-

fairs of the world, particularly as they affect the human condition. Often we have interpreted this to mean listening to the way in which a theologian—or at least an intellectual—views the contemporary scene. This olympian perspective is entirely too restricted to be adequate; we must also be open to the witness of the poet, the journalist, the statesman, the laborer, the scientist. So unaccustomed are the most articulate leaders in these fields to the halls of divinity that we may first have to go where they are in order to build bridges of understanding over which they may then come to where we are.

In preparation for more realistic dialogue, it may be worthwhile to consider greater use of truly interdisciplinary courses on the pressing issues of our time. Thus far, this creative pedagogical technique has been used primarily at the introductory level to achieve further integration of material which is already rather cohesive. Perhaps it would be better to concentrate our team-taught efforts at a more advanced level in a way that cuts across all of the theological disciplines and involves non-theological contributions as well. For example, no one today can avoid the issue of war. Consider a team of professors treating this question from biblical, historical, theological, and psychosocial perspectives, together with two adjunct professors, one an able theoretician from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the other an equally able theoretician from Fort Knox. In similar fashion one might approach the problem of race by utilizing non-faculty resource persons from the Negro community and City Hall, with perhaps a few visits from a man of letters capable of guiding a sensitive study of the great novels on racial estrangement which have been written in the last generation.

In thinking of the future, I shall never forget the advice of a brilliant Baptist laywoman who, after learning of my vocation during the course of a lovely dinner party, ended the conversation by fixing a stern eye on me and admonishing, "Young man, don't domesticate the students who come to your seminary!" This danger is particularly great because we often stand in a breach which might be called the "double generation gap." At the same time that we train ministers to anticipate the 1980s, many in our constituency judge us in the light of concepts and practices formulated in the 1930s. So rapid is the present

rate of change that this half-century lag at times becomes almost unbearable, tempting the seminary to ease the tension by becoming a mirror of things as they are today

One way to narrow the gap from both sides is through an enlarged program of continuing theological education that will both update the perspectives of those who finished seminary several years ago and continually retrain those going out from the seminary today. It is unfortunate that the denomination has not yet seen fit to fund this program on a sustaining basis since generational conflict within the ministry is a prime cause of the leadership malaise that is now the number one problem in the Southern Baptist Convention. A few enlightened donors will not be able to underwrite an enterprise of the magnitude demanded, but the churches are awakening to the advantages of a renewed ministry and may become increasingly willing to provide both the time and money needed by the pastor to participate in a planned cycle of intensive studies.

A gentle lady from Georgia has understood better than many theologians the need for ministers who can face the future without forgetting the past or neglecting the present. At the end of her spiritual autobiography, *The Journey*, Lillian Smith wrote:

To believe in something not yet proved and to underwrite it with our lives: it is the only way we can leave the future open. Man, surrounded by facts, permitting himself no surmise, no intuitive flash, no great hypothesis, no risk is in a locked cell. Ignorance cannot seal the mind and imagination more surely. To find the point where hypothesis and fact meet; the delicate equilibrium between dream and reality; the place where fantasy and earthy things are metamorphosed into a work of art; the hour when faith in the future becomes knowledge of the past; to lay down one's power for others in need; to shake off the old ordeal and get ready for the new; to question, knowing that never can the full answer be found; to accept uncertainties quietly, even our incomplete knowledge of God: this is what man's journey is about, I think.

WILLIAM EDWARD HULL

The new Dean of the School of Theology is Professor of New Testament Interpretation and has been a member of the seminary faculty for the past eleven years. In addition to his teaching role, he served as Director of Graduate Studies for the School of Theology in 1968-69.

A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Dr. Hull received his college education at the University of Alabama and at Samford University, then known as Howard College, a Baptist institution in Birmingham. He entered Southern Seminary in 1951, subsequently earning the Bachelor of Divinity and Doctor of Theology degrees. He pursued post-doctoral studies in New Testament at the University of Goettingen, Germany, in 1962-63.

The new dean is widely known in Baptist circles, having addressed numerous state convention sessions, evangelistic workshops, and Bible conferences. He has appeared many times at summer assemblies and on *The Baptist Hour* on nationwide radio. He has spoken to audiences in Germany, France, Italy, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. In 1963 he was guest professor at the International Baptist Seminary at Ruschlikon-Zurich, Switzerland.

Dr. Hull is a contributor to the new *Broadman Bible Commentary* and has published numerous journal articles. In 1967-68 he served as President of the Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, a group which represents Bible teachers in more than thirty colleges and seminaries.

He is married to the former Wylodine Hester of Alabama. They have two children, David and Susan.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

1859 The first session of the seminary opened at Greenville, South Carolina, with twenty-six students present.

1877 Opening of the seminary's first session in Louisville.

1888 Dr. James P. Boyce was named President of the seminary.

1889 Dr. John A. Broadus was elected second President.

1894 First Doctor of Theology degree was conferred.

1895 Dr. William H. Whitsitt was elected third President.

1899 Dr. Edgar Young Mullins was elected fourth President.

1926 The seminary was moved to its new suburban campus, "The Beeches," on Lexington Road.

1929 Dr. John R. Sampey was elected fifth President.

1937 The seminary was in the first group of institutions accredited by the American Association of Theological Schools.

1942 Dr. Ellis A. Fuller was elected sixth President.

1948 The seminary graduated its 5,000th student.

1951 Dr. Duke K. McCall was elected seventh President.

1953 The seminary was organized into three schools: Theology, Church Music, Religious Education.

1959 Dr. C. Penrose St. Amant was elected Dean of the School of Theology.

1963 Carver School of Missions and Social Work was merged with the seminary.

1967 The seminary graduated its 10,000th student.

1968 Southern Seminary joined with six Louisville area institutions to form the Kentuckiana Metroversity.

1969 Dr. William E. Hull was elected Dean of the School of Theology.