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---FEATURES

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Criswell Predicts SBC Emphasis On "Conservative Doctrines"

EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is an interview with W. A. Criswell, pastor of the 15,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas and president of the 11.4 million member Southern Baptist Convention. The interview was conducted by John J. Hurt, editor of Baptist Standard in Dallas, and covers Criswell's impressions as he steps down from the convention presidency and reflects on the 1970 convention in Denver, June 1-4.

Q: Looking back over your two years as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, what are your feelings as you prepare to turn the gavel over to another?

A: Personally, I am so bound up in the church and my pastoral ministry that I am very grateful for the privilege to lay the burden down and let another man assume it. God calls different men for different things, and God called me to be a pastor. I love being pastor and I love being pastor of the church here. I will be very happy for someone else to assume the responsibility of president.

Q: What do you see in the future for Southern Baptists?

A: Our denomination has infinite potentialities and I mean infinite. I don't think there is any measure to it. We have God, we have our churches, we have our dedicated pastors and people. All we need to do is stay with the main thing. We don't need anything else.

Q: There probably have been disappointments and there have been satisfactions during your presidential years. What has given you the greatest satisfaction as president?

A: The knowledge that our people are really Christ-committed and Bible-loving and missionary-hearted. All you have to do is go back and look over some of those things that have happened since I have been president to say that.

Q: Do you see that in the leadership as much as in the pew?

A: Yes sir. There is nothing wrong with the leadership of our convention, from the executive secretary, Porter Routh (executive secretary, SBC), on down. Our leadership is sound. They are just God's people. They are God-annointed, They love the Lord and they love the Book. Our people are just like them. You have this little minority, but I am amazed at the infinitesimal smallness of that little minority.

Q: How small is this minority?

A: All you have to do is go down and look at that New Orleans Convention and look at that vote. There are more than 400 people out of our 11 million Baptists who don't like the way I comb my hair. (Criswell's reference was to his re-election as president by a vote of 7,482 to 450 against a protest candidate, William C. Smith of Virginia who announced last month he was leaving the convention).

Q: What has been your disappointment as president?

A: The tremendous surprise that has come to me as though I were a bone of contention among our Baptist people. I am a pastor--a fellow pastor. I'm not out here on a limb somewhere. I am one of 35,000 pastors and I look on myself as such. It is a colossal surprise to me to pick me out of 35,000 men as though--"My land, look at that guy. Look at his funny beliefs about the Bible and look at his strange notions about the authority of the Word of God and the inspired Scriptures." I don't think I am any different than 34,990 of my fellow pastors.

Q: In that same area, in the Executive Committee address in Nashville last September you declared yourself for the 1963 Statement of Faith and previous statements of faith by Baptist bodies. Is there any thought on your part that these statements, rather broad, should be more specific?

A: No. They please me exactly. For example, the 1963 statement declares the nature of the ordinances. It doesn't spell it out that you have got to be, and then all of these discussions concerning alien immersion and closed communion--you don't find them in there. There is room in those articles of faith and has been from the beginning, for every shade of Baptist opinion concerning the ordinances, concerning the Bible, denominational structure, relationship of the churches--all the way through. But you have got to believe something and it ought to mean something to be a Baptist. That is a magnificent, broad, inclusive area where all of us who are Baptists can find ample room to apply. We are doing it.

Q: You are more restrictive in the practices of First Baptist Church of Dallas than you would want the Southern Baptist Convention to be?

A: Absolutely. I don't want Virginia to change. If I could go over there and change the brethren--I'm talking about their attitude toward the ordinances--I would not do it. Here in this church and our churches in the Southwest for the most part, we are like that (more restrictive), but I would not seek to impose that. If you are something else you ought to go over there and be with those people. You ought not to say I am a Baptist and then not be a Baptist.

Q: Do you plan to touch on any of this in your presidential address?

A: Not like that, but I am going to speak of the fact that we were born in that great doctrinal conviction and that to be a Baptist means that we believe some things. We ought not to be timid about shouting them to the house tops. These are the things that for the centuries our Baptist people have said we believe and we have all embraced those doctrines.

Q: The Christian Life Commission seminar in Atlanta dealing with authentic morality has become quite controversial because of some outside the denomination who were on the program. What is your feeling?

A: I am in great sympathy with what the Christian Life Commission wanted to do. What they wanted to do was to challenge the cheap morality expounded by those professors of situation ethics and these downright pornographically minded men like the publishers of Playboy. They wanted to challenge the new morality. I am in sympathy with that. Man alivin', challenge it anywhere in the world. The only thing that I think as a friend of theirs, not as an enemy, is that there is a better way possibly to go about that in the framework of our Southern Baptist people.

Q: Some are planning to reduce the Commission's budget and maybe move to dissolve it at the Denver convention. If they do, will you have anything to say?

A: I do not think it will be done. I think that is something that the denomination would not even think about.

Q: Dr. R. G. Lee in about 1950 when there was a doctrinal battle before the convention left the president's chair and appealed for unity. Would you have any hesitancy if this is necessary?

A: No, I would have no hesitancy at all. I was there when Dr. Lee did that. I thought it was a magnificent thing.

Q: Does the presidency give a feeling of responsibility for holding the convention together that no other office does?

A: Here's another thing that is surprising to me. I think of our Southern Baptist people as being so monolithic. I grew up where a Baptist was a Baptist. I did not know we were Southern Baptist in counter distinctions to some other kind of Baptists. And now to think about our people being pulled apart or separated. I just never had thought of that. We may not all agree...and we may have our clashes and our discussions (and actually do) but it never occurs to me that we are going to pull apart.

Q: This will be the first convention in Denver. Theologically, I guess Baptists do grow more conservative as they settle Westward. Do you see a different convention from that of last year in New Orleans? If so, in what way?

A: Yes. I think that in this coming convention in Denver you are going to have a very decided emphasis spoken in the business sessions and wherever they have an opportunity to say something--decided emphasis on the conservative doctrines of the faith.

Q: You voiced a fear shortly after your election that additional travel and days away from your church might endanger your church program. Has there been anything like this?

A: No sir. The church has grown. Our Sunday School is still growing prodigiously. Last Sunday we had 5,641 in Sunday School. We had 2,450 in Training Union. The Sunday before we had over \$90,000 in our regular offering. I have stayed here at the church. I have tried to do what they wanted me to do as president. I took off five weeks to go to Africa, but our church has been so faithful and loyal and I have tried to remember them and it has not hurt our church at all.

Q: Do you have any idea of the number of days away from Dallas these two years and the number of miles traveled?

A: It has been a good deal. When we figured that up one time before after about a year and some, it was about 50,000 miles then.

Q: Before your election you were already accepting all the invitations your time would permit?

A: That is the reason you don't see any difference in the church. Before I was elected I was just doing everything humanly possible, and when I was elected--if you are carrying all the weight you can you just don't have any more weight you can carry. That was the way it was with my being president. Every year I have made an extensive trip in our Baptist work visiting mission fields and encouraging the brethren just because I love to do it. Now that I was president it made no difference and I just kept on doing it. The only shift I made at all was first in these denominational meetings. I had never been to an Executive Committee meeting before. Consequently, being president I made many of those denominational meetings that otherwise I would never have made--never had made.

Q: Has this given you a new appreciation for the denomination?

A: Yes. You know, it is a shame that our people do not realize how representative and democratic our organizations are. There is nobody that runs this thing. There is nobody that controls it. As I look at the men on these boards, they are just fellow-pastors and committed denominational leaders who are just downright loving God and serving Him with all the strength of their lives.

Q: Looking beyond the moment when you will turn the gavel over to another, what is your prayer or your dream for Southern Baptists?

A: I just pray that we'll go on in the great tremendous missionary, evangelistic, Bible teaching ministries and commitments that we have had in these days past. God has blessed us in these days past, and I think that is why He has. We have been missionary, evangelistic, Bible loving, preaching, soul winning, teaching in our Sunday School...We have just been at it. I just want us to keep on.

Q: What should be the attitude of the people going to the convention in Denver?

A: I would like for us to go to Denver just like I would like for our people to come to church, deacon's meeting, Sunday School or an enlargement campaign. I'd like for us to go Denver with a great, positive, triumphant, conquest attitude. We're not going up there to tear up the earth or to tear up one another. We're not going up there to slay one another with the jaw bone of a jackass. We are going up there with great dreams and visions that we are going to try to bring to reality. We have got a world to preach the gospel to: We have open doors to enter. We have our own America to try to rescue from moral inanity and spiritual insanity. We have the whole world to try to win to Christ. Let us go up there with those things in our hearts.



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May 4, 1970

**Financial Tensions Erupt
At Atlanta Baptist College**

ATLANTA (BP)--A crisis over what its president termed "the style and control of this institution" erupted into the open at Atlanta Baptist College here.

President Monroe F. Swilley was the target of attacks from students, faculty and parents of students at a stormy public meeting at the Baptist college.

The meeting was called by Swilley to share with students and parents the thinking of college trustees and administration about financial problems facing the school.

Opponents of the president, however, seized control of the meeting and charged him with poor communications, with spending too much time away from the college, and with making promises that were later contradicted or never realized.

The emotional meeting ended with Swilley telling the group that once the college is accredited and out of its financial difficulties he will leave. "To use the words of Mr. Nixon, you won't have Swilley to kick around any more," he said.

A few days before the meeting, Swilley had mailed a lengthy letter to all parents of Atlanta Baptist College students, detailing the school's enrollment and financial problems which necessitated cutbacks in personnel and salaries for the coming year.

The school opened in September of 1968 with 236 students. A peak enrollment of 316 was attained last September, but enrollment has dropped to 243 at the present.

Swilley explained that the school received only about \$200,000 in undesignated gifts this year, forcing cuts in salaries of administrators, and realignment of administrative duties.

Swilley himself took a \$5,000 cut in his annual salary. A popular dean of student affairs was released in the administration reorganization, and this was a major source of student agitation, some observers said.

Faculty members will not be given pay raises in September, although they did receive 10 per cent raises this year. They will also be paid for only nine months, with a 12-month contract possibility only if summer school enrollment in 1971 justifies it. The school now has 17 fulltime faculty members, down from a peak of 21.

Swilley's letter to parents explained that trustees have authorized their real estate committee to negotiate the sale or long-term lease of part of the school's 600-acre tract of land in DeKalb County, to help meet a \$1½ million debt due to banks in August.

"When that debt is paid, the school will be debt-free," Swilley explained. "But we are still operating on a strict austerity budget and will be for some time to come."

He added that negotiations for a possible merger with Mercer University, the state's oldest Baptist school located in Macon, Ga., are being held. He explained that no action, however, has been taken by the trustees of either school.

In his letter to parents, Swilley wrote: "At present it appears that there will be no immediate merger with Mercer."

Swilley said "the heart of the charges levelled at the meeting are simply this: a few militant students and immature young faculty members are determined that they are going to run this school, rather than have it run by the trustees and the administration. The trustees and administration are not bucking under their pressure, and they don't like it."

He added: "I assure you we have no plans of closing. We will be open in the fall."

Baptist Layman Named National
Bible Week Industry Chairman

NEW YORK (BP)--E. DeVaughn Woods of Nashville, executive vice president of Genesco, Inc., and a deacon at Woodmont Baptist Church, Nashville, has been named industry chairman for National Bible Week, slated Nov. 22-29, 1970.

Honorary chairman for the week is President Richard Nixon, and national chairman is J. Peter Grace, president of the W. R. Grace and Co., and New York businessman. Another Southern Baptist layman, Wallace E. Johnson of Memphis, is chairman of the Laymen's National Bible Committee, one of the sponsors of National Bible Week. Johnson is co-founder of Holiday Inns of America.

Woods is an elected member of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, a trustee of Baptist Hospital in Nashville, and a trustee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Foundation, Louisville.

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Mother of Arkansas Supreme
Court Chief Justice Honored

5/4/70

LITTLE ROCK (BP)--Mrs. Ada Rogers Harris of Pine Bluff, Ark., mother of Chief Justice Carlton Harris of the Arkansas Supreme Court has been named "Arkansas Baptist Mother of the Year" by the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine.

A life-long leader in South Side Baptist Church in Pine Bluff, Mrs. Harris, a widow, has been superintendent of the single young people's department of the church's Sunday School for more than 30 years.

She considers as her "children" many pastors, missionaries, ministerial students, church music leaders, and others who were in her department at the church as they were growing up.

Mrs. Harris was to receive the award during special Mother's Day services at the church. The presentation was to be made by Erwin L. McDonald, editor of the Baptist state weekly newspaper, and Tal Bonham, pastor of the church and president of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention.

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Illinois Baptist Pilgrimage
Slated During Bill Hearings

5/4/70

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (BP)--The president of the Illinois Baptist State Association has called on Baptists in the state to make a pilgrimage to the state capitol here on the day that the state Senate Education Committee will hold public hearings on legislation proposing state aid to non-public schools.

Charles L. Chaney, pastor of First Baptist Church of Palatine, Ill., urged at least 500 Southern Baptist pastors and as many laymen as possible to join him on May 13 at the State Capitol building here.

This "is a critical time for public education in Illinois," Chaney said, "for...the Senate Education Committee will consider legislation favoring state aid to non-public schools."

"If such bills reach the floor of the Senate," Chaney predicted, "many senators who actually oppose tax aid to private education will vote for the measure for political expediency."

"The day of letter-writing is over," Chaney said. "We must go in person to Springfield and let our legislators know how Baptists feel on this crucial issue."

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Supreme Court Upholds
Church Tax Exemption

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court, in a 7-1 decision, has upheld tax exemption for property used for religious purposes.

The general principle enunciated by Chief Justice Warren Burger, who delivered the opinion of the court, is "that we will not tolerate either governmentally established religion or governmental interference with religion."

The court asserted that there cannot be "absolute" separation of church and state and that there must always be some degree of contact or relationship between the two.

The problem, according to the court, in church-state relations is to avoid excessive involvement of the state with the church or the church with the state.

Tax exemption, the court declared, "creates only a minimal and remote involvement between church and state and far less than taxation of churches."

Such exemption, the court continued, "restricts the fiscal relationship between church and state, and tends to complement and reinforce the desired separation insulating each from the other."

In the historic decision, the court ruling continued that government should be neutral toward religion, even if that might be a benevolent neutrality.

The purpose of a property tax exemption "is neither the advancement nor the inhibition of religion, it is neither sponsorship nor hostility," the court declared.

Therefore, the court concluded, religious entities "should not be inhibited in their activities by property taxation or the hazard of loss of those properties for nonpayment of taxes."

The case of taxation of churches arose in the challenge of Frederick Walz to the Tax Commission of the city of New York. He sought an injunction in New York courts to prevent property tax exemptions to religious organizations for properties used solely for religious worship.

Walz contended that such tax exemption to church property indirectly required him to make a contribution to religious bodies, thereby violating the First Amendment to the Constitution which prohibits an establishment of religion. The Supreme Court denied this contention.

The Walz case attracted unusual attention throughout the nation when it was accepted for review by the Supreme Court. A total of 11 separate Amicus Curiae (friend of the court) briefs were filed in addition to the briefs by Walz and the Tax Commission of the City of New York.

Such widely spearted views as that of the nationally known atheist, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs were presented to the courts.

Mrs. O'Hair wanted the churches to be taxed, while the Baptist committee contended that it would be a denial of the principle of religious liberty if their tax exemption were lifted. The court in its decision agreed with the Baptists.

Justice William O. Douglas was the lone dissenter in the Walz case. He said that "the question in the case therefore is whether believers--organized in church groups--can be made exempt from real estate taxes, merely because they are believers, while nonbelievers, whether organized or not, must pay the real estate taxes."

Douglas further based his dissent on the contention that tax exemption constitutes a subsidy for the churches, which he says is in violation of the First Amendment.

The court rejected Douglas' view on the grounds that payment of taxes by churches would constitute financial support of the government by the churches.

Chief Justice Burger stated that there are as many hazards involved when the church supports the state as when the state supports the church.

The court made it clear that it did not uphold tax exemption for churches on the basis of "absolute" separation nor on the basis of "social welfare services or 'good works' that some churches perform."

To set up standard of good works to justify tax exemption for churches, the court contended, would make the government a judge as to the amount of good a church should do to justify its exemption. This would produce undue interference with the churches by the state, the court said.

In the dicta that accompanied its decision the court virtually upheld its former decisions on bus rides and textbooks for pupils in parochial schools. It also defended the assumption that tax exemption for churches does not violate the original intention of the constitution makers.

In its conclusion the court said: "It appears that at least up to 1865 this court, reflecting more than a century of our history and uninterrupted practice, accepted without discussion the proposition that federal or state grants to tax exemption to churches were not a violation of the religious clauses of the First Amendment. As to the New York statute, we now confirm that view."

Justices John M. Harlan and William J. Brennan Jr., concurred in the finding of the majority of the court, but filed separate opinions along with that of Justice Burger.



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