

“REMEMBER THE DAYS OF OLD”
NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
FOUNDER’S DAY, OCTOBER 2, 2001
Alan Day

Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. Deut. 32:7

I am especially honored to be invited to participate in this Founder's Day program. I love our seminary. She has been good to this Louisiana boy. I have always been proud to say that New Orleans Seminary is my alma mater.

I distinctly remember the first time I visited this grand old campus. I was in Junior High School and was playing on a Royal Ambassador basketball team. The regional tournament finals were held in the gymnasium here on campus. I don't remember a whole lot about it, except we were beaten by a church from south Louisiana. I won't say they stacked their team with ringers, but when several of their boys made the sign of the cross and said "Hail Mary" before the opening tip off, I knew we were in trouble.

I also recall sleeping in one of the men's dormitories one night during that tournament. It was as clear as anything to me that this seminary would play a significant role in my future. I was mystified by the feelings I had as I tried to go to sleep that night. It was several years later that I surrendered to God's call to preach the gospel, and I reflected on that first visit to this campus.

I also remember being enchanted and mystified by the names of great men who had served their generation and had already gone to glory. On buildings and in portrait galleries I met the names of men like DeMent, Hamilton, Dodd, Christian, Leavell, Lipsey, Shepherd, and a host of others. I figured that these were great men, and that they lived so as to leave a legacy; and I wanted to be like them.

Since leaving the seminary I discovered the answer to the question, why is there so much learning at schools like this. A professor at the University of Chicago said a few years ago that new students bring some knowledge in with them; the graduates take none out, so knowledge just accumulates here.

And may I say that I appreciate the contribution that all of you are making to that stockpile.

Today I could fulfill the assignment given to me by paying tribute to those giants of faith and vision whose courage and foresight and commitment led to the founding of Baptist Bible Institute in 1917. But instead I have chosen to hang my thoughts on three conceptual pegs. These concepts were part of the essence of our seminary from the beginning. And they still are.

Our text reads, "Remember the days of old." I guess we could translate this, "Remember the good old days."

There is an interesting phenomenon developing at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It could be labeled "enamored with nostalgia," or better translated, "in love with the good old days." For instance, check out men's four-button suits, ladies ankle-length hem styles, and the Chrysler PT Cruiser. In a way they are all looking back.

And that is not all bad, especially if we look back to what God has done for His people, and what He has enabled them to do for Him. It really is important and essential on occasion to take a backward glance and see His steady hand on our lives and His work in the world. To some extent I would like to do this with you this morning.

Join me, would you please, in remembering, and thus preserving and inculcating, three essentials of the character and constitution of New Orleans Seminary.

I. REMEMBER THE DIVINE COMMISSION THAT CONCEIVED HER.

On the official seal of our Alma Mater is the text of the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20. That text was not selected haphazardly. It is the seedpod containing the conceptual seed, the seminal ideas that gave birth to this seminary, which is itself a veritable seed-plot or nursery of intellectual and spiritual life.

To say "New Orleans Seminary" is to say, "missions and evangelism." It was so from the beginning, even before the beginning. Decades before BBI opened her doors, there were voices calling for the establishment of a missionary training institute in New Orleans. New Orleans was seen as the gateway, not only to the Mississippi valley, but also to all of Latin and South America.

Then in 1914, P. I. Lipsey, editor of the Baptist Record of Mississippi, advocated the establishment of a missionary training school in New Orleans. About the same time, G. H. Crutcher of Louisiana sounded the same note.

In 1916, representatives of the Home Mission Board, the Mississippi Baptist Convention, and the Louisiana Baptist Convention met at the Coliseum Place Baptist Church in New Orleans to discuss the beginning of such a school. They developed a number of resolutions which were reported back to their respective agencies. The first resolution reads,

"1. That a Baptist Missionary Training School should be established in the city of New Orleans, which should have for its primary purpose the object of missionary propaganda."

Whatever else the new school would become, it is obvious that its founders envisioned that missions would be its heart. Missions and evangelism would be as important, or perhaps more so, than education itself. Not only was New Orleans a gateway city, but also it was a lost city. A school to train pastors and laymen alike would serve as the springboard for evangelizing the city.

In 1917, the year our alma mater was established, there were six struggling Baptist churches in New Orleans with a total of 1300 members. Within a decade the six churches had increased to sixteen, and the 1300 members had increased to almost 5000. In addition, new churches and missions were beginning throughout South Louisiana as the direct result of the efforts of faculty and students of Baptist Bible Institute.

Missions days were observed almost monthly in the early days of the school. Faculty and students were expected to be involved in direct missions and personal evangelistic work. The BBI publication, *The Magnet*, chronicled the evangelistic efforts of students and faculty throughout South Louisiana. Histories of our alma mater show photographs of these missionaries as they boarded busses and launched out into the heart of Cajun country or as they prepared to invade the French Quarter with the gospel.

Students in all programs were required to make written reports of their evangelistic efforts each week. For instance, in 1925 a partial report indicated, "Number of meetings worked in, 423; Addresses delivered, 15, 863; persons dealt with religiously, 16, 940; Additions to churches, 2,741; Additions by baptism, 1,971."

Perhaps no one made a greater contribution to the missions thrust of BBI than John Watson Shepard, whose illustrious career in New Orleans began in 1930. He had

already enjoyed a notable career as a missionary educator in Brazil. Not only was he a New Testament and Greek scholar, but Shepherd also headed up the field mission work of the institute. He organized a study of South Louisiana, decided on the most strategic points for new work, secured transportation for students to reach preaching points, and generated the cooperation of the State and Home Mission Boards. Shepard was responsible for starting over a dozen churches, including the First Baptist Church of Morgan City.

Let us not forget that our alma mater was started as Baptists responded to the Great Commission. We are a missionary school. We are here to reach this region with the gospel of Christ, as well as to prepare God's people for ministries elsewhere.

Why do I emphasize this point? During the past two decades since my graduation from the seminary, I have had to deal with a single question more than any other when talking to a prospective student, or even a prospective faculty member, about our seminary. The question is, "Isn't New Orleans a hard place to live?" Sometimes it comes in the form of a direct statement: "I don't want to go to New Orleans because it is a scary place to raise a family."

Here's what I have to say about that: Since when do missionaries argue with God about where they are to go? Does not God send his people to difficult places?

For the past 7 ½ years I have been privileged to serve as a trustee on our International Mission Board. I have prayed over dozens of couples and single folks who were being sent to some of the toughest and most dangerous places on the earth. We have sent them knowing that they would be separated from their families; they would be separated from their children; they would endure hardship; and some of them would die. Yet we have celebrated their decision to go, and we call on more to follow their examples.

We are on mission with God, and missions is not about comfort, it is about obedience to our Risen Lord.

At the International Mission Board I have learned about the price that Christians in some countries must pay for their faith. In one country all who convert to Christianity are marked for death, usually by members of their own families. So at their baptism, new converts are taught to memorize the following words and to be prepared to give them when they are called upon to lay down their lives for Christ:

"You do not take my life from me, I gladly give it to you in the name of Jesus Christ and with the prayer that you, too, may come to know Him."

Many of our American Christians remind me of the kamikaze pilot in World War II. He was a veteran of 30 missions. So the word "sacrifice" is not in the vocabulary of many today.

Our seminary exists to train missionaries and evangelists, and where better to train them than in one of the most needy cities in our nation.

So we can say to prospective students and faculty: "New Orleans is not for everybody. And honestly there may be more pleasant areas to pursue theological education (although not for this Louisiana boy). But if God has called you, and He alone has that right, then get down here as quickly as you can. If not, stop whining and get on with your life."

Furthermore, as we consider the beginnings of our alma mater, let us

II. REMEMBER THE DENOMINATIONAL COOPERATION THAT CREATED HER.

Our seminary was the first to be created by direct action of the Southern Baptist Convention. Southern Seminary was started in Greenville, South Carolina, by Dr. Boyce and others, and Southwestern was begun by B. H. Carroll as an outgrowth of Baylor University.

Baptist Bible Institute was the child of numerous denominational bodies—the Louisiana Baptist Convention, the Mississippi Baptist Convention, the Home Mission Board, the Sunday School Board, and finally the Southern Baptist Convention itself.

We have already alluded to the efforts of P. I. Lipsey, editor of the *Baptist Record* of Mississippi, and also G. H. Crutcher, chief executive of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. They, along with M. E. Dodd and six others met in February 1916 in this city and developed a number of resolutions calling for the beginning of a missionary training school in New Orleans.

Representatives of this committee attended the 1916 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention and invited the convention to New Orleans in 1917. The convention accepted the invitation.

In May 1917, the Southern Baptist Convention met in the Crescent City. Dr. M. E. Dodd presented the report from the committee that had met the previous year. The convention unanimously approved the recommendation, thus effectively creating the new institution, and instructed the Home Mission Board and the Sunday School Board to join the Louisiana and Mississippi conventions in the enterprise.

Within a few months, the Tennessee, Florida and Texas conventions had voted to become involved with the school.

In these ways and others, our seminary is truly a child of our denomination.

We need to remember this because some have forgotten what it means to be a Baptist. Have you looked at the Articles of Religious Belief recently? Article X reads:

Baptist Loyalty to Distinctive Baptist Doctrines. We believe that Baptists stand for vital and distinctive truths, to many of which other denominations do not adhere, and that we cannot compromise these truths without disloyalty to the Scriptures and our Lord.

Now we may not, and probably should not, be as dogmatic as some of our Baptist Fathers were concerning the historical succession of Baptist churches. But I'm a little like that old Baptist deacon who was asked what he would be if he weren't a Baptist. He replied, "I'd be ashamed."

When Dr. Dement was nearing the end of his life, he was under the care of Dr. Oscar Bethea, who was a Presbyterian. The doctor asked Dr. Dement to recommend a good book on Baptist beginnings. Dr. Dement smiled and replied, "I recommend the New Testament." [from "Dr. Byron H. Dement, First President, As Viewed by a Student and Colleague," by Elmer F. Haight, in NOBTS Anniversary Bulletin, 1967, p. 59.]

We remember the great contribution made to our school and denomination by Dr. John T. Christian, who became professor of Church History and seminary librarian. He donated his 18,000 volume personal library to BBI, and this became the nucleus of the school's library for years. Our library building bears his auspicious name.

Dr. Christian was a great scholar and ardent defender of Baptist successionism. When President Whitsett of Southern Seminary was criticized around 1896 because he wrote that English Baptists did not begin practicing immersion until 1641, Christian was one of many who blasted Whitsett and the seminary.

Most of us here today would not agree completely with Dr. Christian.

But what concerns me is that I am no longer sure that Southern Baptists today have the conviction that Baptists have a distinctive heritage and that we also have distinguishing convictions and doctrines. We seem to have forgotten our denominational roots and these distinctive doctrines.

We need to remember these distinctives because some are saying, and others are thinking, that we no longer need the Southern Baptist Convention. The First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City voted two weeks ago to sever all relations with the Southern Baptist Convention.

And we are being reassured repeatedly that we are now in a "post-denominational age." Since people no longer care which denominational label one wears, why should we care? Let me tell you why.

Southern Baptists have produced some of the largest seminaries in the world. We have created the most effective missionary-sending agencies the world has even seen, the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board. We are sending new missionaries at a record pace. Baptist churches everywhere are known for their missions thrust and their evangelistic emphasis. We have just lived through over two decades of internal struggle, and the result is that we have clearly defined our doctrinal convictions. And those convictions are the bedrock convictions that our Baptist Fathers stood upon.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Hours later, Sherlock Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend and said, "Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see."

"I see millions of stars," he answered.

"And what does that tell you," Holmes queried.

"Watson pondered a moment and said, "**Astronomically** it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and probably billions of stars; **Chronologically**, I deduce that it is about 3:30 in the morning. **Theologically**, I can see that God is all-powerful and we are small and insignificant; **Meteorologically**, I suspect we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. What does it tell you?"

There was a powerful momentary silence, then Holmes shouted, "Watson, you idiot, someone has stolen our tent."

When I first came to this seminary in 1969, we were in danger of losing our Baptist conservative tent to the forces of moderate theology and egregious denominationalism. I could not believe my ears the first time I heard the doctrine of the substitutionary death of our Savior called into question. I was puzzled by the attacks on the accuracy and inerrancy of the Scriptures.

How thankful I am for the theological redirection of our convention.

On this Founder's Day, may we as an institution recommit ourselves to our Baptist heritage and our Southern Baptist Convention. New Orleans Seminary is, indeed, a child of our denomination.

Finally, on this day to honor the sacred history of our alma mater, let us

III. REMEMBER THE DOCTRINAL CONFSSIONALISM THAT CONFIRMED HER.

Before Baptist Bible Institute opened its doors in October 1918, President DeMent, with some assistance, had written the Articles of Religious Belief, the doctrinal standard

for the institution. Every faculty member since has signed these articles at the beginning of their tenure.

Some may think it is an infringement of the rights of professors to require that they sign a doctrinal confession. Indeed a few interpreters of our Baptist heritage have said that Baptists are not a creedal people and that any doctrinal standard is a potential limitation of the rights and freedoms of individual Baptists.

You will recall that James Boyce outlined the future of theological education among Southern Baptists in his inaugural address at Furman University in 1856. Anticipating that a Southern Baptist seminary would be created soon, Boyce suggested what he called "Three Changes in Theological Institutions." The first was that provision should be made to educate ministers who had not had the benefit of formal education. The second change would provide advanced studies to produce biblical and theological scholars who could teach and write without dependence on foreign scholarship. The third change, in his own words, "is the adoption of a declaration of doctrine to be required of those who assume the various professorships."

Boyce was particularly sensitive to the encroachment that Thomas and Alexander Campbell had made into Baptist ranks. He said about Alexander Campbell, "Playing upon the prejudices of the weak and ignorant among our people, decrying creeds as an infringement upon the rights of conscience, making a deep impression by his extensive learning and great abilities, Alexander Campbell threatened at one time the total destruction of our faith. Had he occupied a chair in one of our Theological Institutions, that destruction might have been completed."

We perhaps have forgotten how powerful and attractive was the Campbellite movement. At one time even the First Baptist Church of Nashville, Tennessee, was totally captured by Campbellite doctrine. Historian William Lumpkin wrote, "Alexander Campbell took hold of the popular prejudices against confessions and ministerial education and used them mightily during the early years of his preaching to establish his movement. To the Regular Baptists of the frontier he preached antiorganizationism with great effect, but to the Baptists of Separate background he constantly preached anticonfessionalism and antiministerial education." Lumpkin says that in Kentucky alone ten thousand Baptists defected to the Campbellite movement. [William L. Lumpkin, Baptist Foundations in the South, p. 154]

The statement, "Baptists are not a creedal people," has been made so often that, for some Baptists today, it is their only creed. Of course there is truth in the statement. When we say we are not creedal, we are affirming the ultimate authority of the Scriptures. Furthermore, we require no creedal tests prior to membership in our churches. Also, we have generally referred to our doctrinal standards as "confessions" rather than "creeds." Finally, Baptists are not creedal in the sense that we do not believe that affirmation of a creed makes one a Christian.

But Baptists have found it impossible to achieve lasting unity and purpose without doctrinal standards. Our greatest leaders have acknowledged that. E. Y. Mullins wrote, "Creeds arise as the effort of religious men to interpret and reduce to scientific form the contents of revelation and of Christian experience. . . .So also creeds are formed for purposes of Christian unity and as a means of propagating the faith. . . .Any authority, therefore, which prohibits the formulation of creeds as man's free expression and confession of religious belief is a tyranny to be resisted" [Mullins, Freedom and Authority in Religion].

An interesting anecdote from the early years of our alma mater serves to illustrate that even freedom-loving Baptists believed in the requirement of commitments to doctrinal standards. When Dr. Mullins' committee brought the recommendation on the Baptist Faith and Message to the 1925 Southern Baptist Convention, there was an effort to amend article three so as to condemn evolution. The amendment failed, but the very next year, in his presidential address, the convention president spoke these words, "This Convention accepts Genesis as teaching that man was the special creation of God, and rejects every theory, evolution or other, which teaches that man originated in, or came by way of, a lower animal ancestry" [Claude Howe, Jr., Seventy-Five Years of Providence and Prayer, p. 47]. A motion was made that the Convention affirm this statement and that all the agencies of the Convention would affirm it as well. The motion passed; Southern and Southwestern Seminaries affirmed the action, and Dr. DeMent informed the Convention that each faculty member of the Baptist Bible Institute had signed a personal statement affirming this statement on evolution "without mental reservation."

So there is historical precedent, not only for requiring the adherence to doctrinal standards, but also for the clarification of specific theological points which are being controverted. This seems to have been forgotten in the recent debate over the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message and whether those who have already affirmed the 1963 statement should now be required to affirm the 2000 version.

Those who are agents of the Southern Baptist Convention should gladly endorse the official doctrinal standards of the convention.

What is God up to in our world today? The same thing He has been doing from the beginning—gathering a people for His name, calling out of darkness those who embrace the Lord Jesus as Savior and Lord. He is forming His church from men and women of every kindred, nation, tongue and tribe.

And the thrill of it, the sheer joy of it, is that you and I have been given the opportunity to join God in this mission!

Robertson McQuilken was president of Columbia Bible College for many years. He finally resigned in March, 1990, because his wife, Muriel, was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. In his resignation letter, he sought to answer the question of why he would resign to take care of his wife. He wrote:

"The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel 'in sickness and in health . . . till death do us part.' So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her for the next 40 years I would not be out of debt. Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more; I love Muriel. She is a delight to me—her childlike dependence and confidence in me, her warm love, occasional flashes of that wit that I used to relish so, her happy spirit and tough resilience in the face of her continually distressing frustration. I do not **have** to care for her, **I get to.**"

Beloved, we do not have to give our lives to Christ, we get to. We do not have to participate in Christ's effort to reach this world with the gospel, we get to.

And we do not have to be a part of this great seminary—but, thank God, we get to.