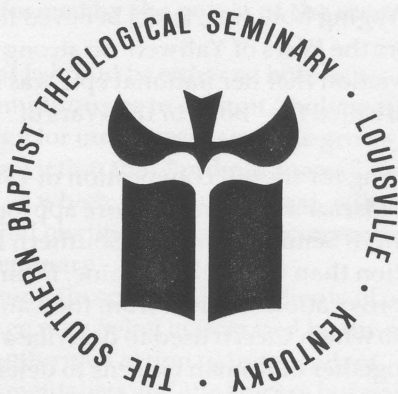

To Your Tents O Israel!

**A Biblical Call to Duty,
Unity and Honor**

Roy L. Honeycutt, President

**The Southern Baptist
Theological Seminary**



On August 28, 1984, Dr. Roy L. Honeycutt, president of Southern Seminary, spoke to an overflow audience of students, faculty, staff and visitors at opening convocation.

Addressing some of the most widely discussed and controversial issues among Southern Baptists today, President Honeycutt voiced his concerns for local churches, institutions and agencies in a strongly worded challenge punctuated by frequent applause.

His words were timely, powerful and well-received. As a result, they have been printed herein for interested readers.

“To Your Tents O Israel!”

For two centuries Israel's war-cry rang through Canaan's rugged mountains and fertile plains. Waging holy war, Israel believed her wars were the Wars of Yahweh. So strong was this conviction that her national epic was sung in a book called the "Book of the Wars of Yahweh."

Gathering for the fall convocation of 1984, the context of Israel's holy war is more appropriate for Southern Seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention than we might imagine. Even the word "convocation" derives from the Latin *convocatio* which Cicero used to describe a calling together of Roman citizens to defend the republic.

We who constitute this fall convocation — this *convocatio* of God's people — are heirs to both the holy traditions of Israel and the calling of the New Testament church.

Consistent with that heritage, this convocation is a calling together of the seminary community with a focus on duty, unity, and honor.

Unlike ancient Israel, Southern Seminary has never developed a war-cry. But like Israel, for 125 years this seminary has lived with heroic qualities of integrity, fulfilled its duty with honor, and matched its convictions with courage. Our heritage demands that we hear again that ancient call to battle — calling us to duty, unity, and honor.

The focus of our challenge is neither the bureaucracy of a denomination nor the continuity of an institution. The crucial issue of this year and of this era in the life of Southern Baptists probes the inner core not only of what it means to be a Baptist, but what it means to be a Christian redeemed by Jesus Christ.

For many of you, it may appear to be extremism of the highest order for me to use the Old Testament commitment to holy **war as an image for the nature of our denominational**

struggle. Yet, such imagery can be used legitimately in a Christian context. Because, in God's providence, Old Testament concepts of holy war and the kingdom of God have been purged of nationalism, stripped of militarism, refined by the ethical imperative of Jesus, and transformed by the power of the resurrected Lord.

That I should be either so bold or so presumptuous as to suggest "holy war" as an analogy for our current struggle grows out of my conviction that "unholy forces" are now at work — which, if left unchecked, will destroy essential qualities of both our convention and this seminary.

Among those crucial ingredients of our heritage now being eviscerated by the myopic and uniformed action of independent fundamentalists and the sincere but naive individuals recruited to support their political party are:

The priesthood of the believer, the primacy and authority of scripture, competence of the individual, soul freedom of conscience, pluralism in worship and in witness, liberation through Christ as the Lord of life, leadership of the Holy Spirit in our convention decision-making, separation of church and state, a world view of the gospel through cooperative missions, and excellence marked by integrity in all aspects of our election to be on mission with God in his world.

The inerrantist political party now seeking to hijack the Southern Baptist Convention is *damaging local churches, risking the destruction of our denominational heritage, and compromising our Christian witness to the world!* — if you doubt this, consider, please:

What is happening to that crucial Baptist heritage, the *priesthood of the believer*. The Bible insists that we are our own priests, with no mediator between God and humanity than Christ our Lord (I Ti. 2:5). We also are priests for one another, with a priestly mission to the world; and that may well be both the most

significant and the most neglected aspect of our belief in the priesthood of the believer.

How long can this treasured Baptist principle survive the assault of those who believe that someone other than God now defines priestly relationships; that priestly calling and functions are determined by convention resolutions; that priestly roles are defined by gender rather than by theology; and that someone else in the "divine chain of command" must provide definitive answers to the soul's deepest longings, for which believers, both male and female, previously sought answers in the sanctity of their priesthood with God?

Such views are not only an aberration of our heritage, they are an absolute danger to our cooperative mission commitment.

What is happening to our *historic emphasis on the primacy of scripture, its authority, and its infallibility when rightly interpreted?* For a century and a quarter, Southern Seminary faculty and staff have affirmed with other Baptists the primacy and authority of scripture.

During C. H. Toy's inaugural address in 1869, he spoke on "The Claims of Biblical Interpretation on Baptists." This first alumnus to teach at Southern Seminary made biblical authority a primary element in his hermeneutic of Biblical interpretation:

"A fundamental principle of our hermeneutics must be that the Bible, its real assertions being known, is in every iota of its substance absolutely and infallibly true."

Yet how long can this fundamental commitment withstand the subversive action of inerrantists who substitute a theory about the Bible for the reality of biblical revelation? For in the most contradictory action, adherents of the inerrantists political party have succumbed to a radical form of scientific rationalism. Holy scripture, according to their insistence, now must give account of itself before the bar of human reason. Consequently, inerrantists propose fidelity to their particular and

restrictive theory about biblical origins as a test of both faith and fellowship.

Where also is the future of **the soul, competence of the individual, freedom of conscience, and pluralism in worship and witness** — if we succumb to the demands of independent fundamentalists?

What is the future of our historic affirmation of the New Testament Gospel of freedom through Christ as Lord of Life? **Hostile critics are misinterpreting both freedom and lordship by propounding a Bill Gothard-like “chain of command”** which places males second only to God; while relegating women and children to the same essential role as families of the Old Testament patriarchs.

I ask you, **do we believe in a limited atonement** by which Christ achieved degrees of redemption, forgiveness and freedom according to an individual’s race, gender, social rank, political views, or ecclesiastical position? Or do we believe He died for all and set humanity free from the bondage of sin and evil, principalities and powers, cultural and religious traditions?

I ask you, **did Christ set only some persons free**; or only some parts of our personalities free; or only some of our institutional relationships free? No, he set the whole person free.

To every twentieth century judaizer now seeking to realign our convention and to purge our institutions, I say without apology, restraint, or hesitation: We shall not submit again to slavery’s yoke.

If Christ has made us free, then we are free indeed. We are free before God. We are free in the family. We are free in society. We are free in the church. There is no dimension of God’s Kingdom in which we are not free — for Christ who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross and despised the shame (Hb. 12:2) that He might make us free. **Because Christ is freedom’s continuing creator, we shall never go back to the bondage from which he set us**

free!

Those in the Southern Baptist Convention who are seeking to legalize life by eviscerating freedom from the gospel have more in common with judaizers of ancient Galatia than with the apostle set free on the Damascus Road.

So, if you meet one of the Southern Baptist Judaizers, give him this message: those of us who are free by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, are free forever. For us there's no turning back to a limited legalism untouched by the grace of God — no turning back, no turning back!

As Israel raised the war-cry to rebel against the oppressive rule of Rehoboam, so every person who is responsive to duty and who is committed to the integrity of the Biblical covenant as the norm of life should raise a denominational battle-cry against injustice and oppression, whatever the source of its leadership:

For this denominational war-cry constitutes a clarion challenge undimmed by the passage of time. It is a call to arms and a call to duty, one to which we pray history shall judge us faithful!

“And when all Israel saw that the king did not hearken to them, the people answered the king, ‘what portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David.’ So Israel departed to their tents” (1 Kgs. 12:16).

Convocation Is A Call To Duty

Convocation as a call to duty is no less a call to unity. The name for our assembly today, “convocation,” (*convocatio*) presupposes that we are called (*vocare*) together (*com*, or *cum*, with, together).

So also of ancient Israel, whose unity came from their response to charismatic leadership or the gravity of national crises. Whatever the

circumstances, as a holy people they were totally committed to the Lord's will. Whether in worship or in war their devotion to Yahweh created a magnetic force which overcame their fragmentation.

To debate whether unity is prerequisite or consequence of community is like arguing about which side of your hand goes into your pocket or purse first. The sides are inseparable and they go together. Yet, there are some who act as though unity is optional for community. By definition and usage unity is not a discretionary choice. Authentic community cannot exist with isolated internal fragmentation.

On this special day which opens the academic year, we cannot celebrate authentic "convocation" as a divided people. Hence, my forthright and candid appeal to you is for a unique **quality of unity consistent with the Old Testament concept of shalom; or solidarity more commonly translated "peace."**

The continuing challenge for this seminary as a community of faith and learning, as well as the Southern Baptist Convention as a community of believers on mission, is **to discover a focus of unity which transcends our differences.** It is this quest which both haunts our journey and hallows our shared life. On such a pilgrimage, we reach out in faith for authentic community with God and with one another in the human family; so broken by discord, distrust and strife.

Honesty compels us to confess that unity cannot be coerced.

Yet, there are times when we so long for authentic community as to seek it by force. Or in more subtle ways we manipulate freedom's birth into the fragmented family of God. But in the process we forget that **authentic community cannot be coerced, manipulated, or massaged into the plastic form of our own image. Unity is authentic only as it is created in the image of God.**

Artificial unity conceived by coercive action

soon withers or evaporates. Despite this caution, some seek spurious manifestations of unity and generate artificial responses to duty by following strategies which include both indirect and direct forms of pressure. **Such coercive efforts to generate unity remind one of Saul, that tragic Old Testament figure who was the last judge and the first king of Israel.** His earliest national leadership emerged when he rallied Israelite tribes against the Ammonite seige of Kabesh-Gilead.

When the spirit of God came upon Saul (I Samuel 11:6), he cut into pieces the yoke of oxen with which he was ploughing, and sent a piece to each of the tribes. With those bloody parts of the oxen, went this message: "Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen." Needless to say, Saul received instant and unanimous cooperation!

Persons in our generation seeking unity by autocratic and dictatorial control, should remember that individuals cannot be coerced into community. History is replete with horror stories of political bosses and demagogic tyrants. Then, as now, that style of leadership always exists in the context of dishonesty, manipulation, and depersonalization.

As in "Cat On A Hot Tin Roof," **"Big Daddy"** is always ready to dominate and control those who are willing to submit. **But the price of that kind of unity is often too high and millions have struggled to overthrow those who would impose it on unwilling subjects. Yet, some people in every age demand a king; saying "Big Daddy" — rather than "Our Father . . .!"**

Not all that some identify as unity is the real thing. For some forms of unity are no more than syrupy-sentimentality substituted for the hard realities which inevitably attend the Biblical concept of unity. Authentic unity neither sublimates differences artificially nor dismisses disagreements inappropriately. Distinctions are maintained and differences of opinion and conviction are not only tolerated but affirmed.

Christian community has no disposition to substitute an insipid, bland sameness for the stringent substance of diversity.

Unity does not mean uniformity, because you can't limit God. He established the boundaries of Christian community with such breadth as to embrace our diversity within the larger unity created by the cosmic Christ. Thus, Christian unity does not drive diversity into exile, nor force it to live in the bondage of an ecclesiastical ghetto. Biblical unity absorbs our differences within a larger purpose discovered in Jesus Christ who is the Lord of history.

As already implied, **an authentic community of faith does more than merely tolerate differences — it celebrates their creative presence.** Communities such as this seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention should affirm not stifle or otherwise restrict pluralism.

Such diversity is a necessary precondition for the maturation of faith and for continuing our participation in cooperative missions. Therefore, at Southern Seminary we affirm the diversity of individuals and the idiosyncratic nature of human personality. We affirm freedom of conscience in the interpretation of scripture and the affirmation of theological conclusions. We affirm the priority of God's call for Christian ministry and concurrently reject artificial disqualifiers which society may erect; whether those barriers are social, racial, political, ecclesiastical or gender. We affirm the variety of cultural patterns and provincial traditions which characterize a people so diverse as Southern Baptists and a Seminary so international in scope as to include students from over 700 colleges and universities, 48 of the 50 states, and 23 foreign countries.

For Christians who believe in God's inclusion of all creation within his redemptive purposes, diversity is not a discretionary option but a divine imperative.

Consequently, **when some are tempted to substitute isolationism for mission**

commitment, myopic self-interest for a world view of the Gospel, and first century legalism for the Gospel of God's grace, we should hear the Lord chastening Simon Peter's ghetto religion: "What God has cleansed, you must not call common" (Acts 10:15).

If the pluralism of the Gospel means that God hears the prayer of a Non-Christian Roman centurion named Cornelius of the Italian cohort who was a "Godfearer" "who prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:1f) — but a member of neither a synagogue nor a church; then we need to rediscover authentic, New Testament pluralism as an essential quality of the church on mission with God.

Assuming the validity of pluralism as a necessary quality of community, then we Southern Baptists in 1984 should reconsider our commitment to a pluralistic convention. Without question, events of the five most recent years inscribe this question indelibly on the agenda of every loyal Southern Baptist: will authentic pluralism survive among Southern Baptists?

Historically, there has been a place in the denomination for every Southern Baptist church and individual identified with the convention through cooperative mission commitment. The fundamental issue currently facing Southern Baptists is not now nor has it ever been whether a church is large or small, rural or urban; whether ministers are graduates of one particular seminary or of no seminary; whether one ministers in one part of the nation or overseas in missionary service.

Nor is the issue theological. We cooperated in missions, evangelism, and education for 81 years before we ever got around to adopting a statement of faith. As for liberalism in educational institutions — one would be at a loss to discover a classical liberal among Southern Baptists, whether in pulpit or classroom, college or seminary.

Nor does the issue focus on who serves as president of the Southern Baptist Convention,

as convention officers, or as members of the executive committee, or as trustees of agencies and institutions of the convention — so long as those individuals are authentic, “convention” Southern Baptists committed to the priority of cooperative missions, evangelism and education, and to an open process for the election of convention officers and members of boards.

No, none of those issues constitutes our problem. **Our problem is that independent-fundamentalist revisionists are rewriting Southern Baptist history to suit their agenda. They would reshape our convention by excluding from both our history and our current polity the Southern Baptist commitment to authentic pluralism.**

Unity within diversity has characterized our denomination during its entire history, and **pluralism continues to be a necessary ingredient for our cooperative mission commitment.**

As Southern Baptists respond to that call, God weaves from the threads of our varied lives a masterful tapestry which displays the richness of his grace and the all-encompassing power of his love. God calls us to exclude no one, but to include everyone committed with sincerity to Christ’s Great Commission and to cooperative missions as a means to its fulfillment.

What future is there for pluralism among Southern Baptists? Can we recover that historic emphasis on pluralism already so seriously eroded by the independent political party in our convention? Or **shall we harden convention lines of relationship into an iconoclastic exclusiveness which affirms only the clones who duplicate a single style of ministry and a monolithic Biblical and theological system?** That is the fundamental issue, and this is the determinative question: where now, Southern Baptists?

Honor is no stranger to the household of faith, no matter how alien it may have become for street life in our society. Authentic

community not only clamors for the moral implementation of justice, honor, and integrity. Those fundamental qualities of covenant life also motivate our response to duty and our demonstration of unity.

Virtuous words like honor, justice and integrity echo in our generation with the hollow ring of forgotten ideals like chivalry and civility.

Yet, how different it was for ancient Israel, demonstrating the demands of covenant faith. Prophetic leaders never forgot the singular demand for duty, honor, justice, and integrity. As Micah summarized God's demands for covenant living (Micah 6:8):

“...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Or, look at Job — responding to unbearable, undeserved, unexplained catastrophes. Yet, again and again reaffirming his integrity. **Even his wife complains about his absurd fidelity to God: “Do you still hold fast your integrity?”** she asked, “Curse God, and die” (Job 2:9). **With inspired fidelity, Job endured her scolding as he did his suffering and God's silence.**

Through successive catastrophes he manifested the same resplendent faithfulness — steadfastly insisting, despite all adversities, “I will not put away my integrity from me” (Job 27:5).

Such commitment stands in marked contrast to the prevailing attitudes of religious zealots who believe that the end justifies the means — and who give little spiritual evaluation to the morality of ends or means!

For example, it is amazing to observe the unscrupulous use of power and manipulation which characterize the current political party created in the Southern Baptist Convention by Judge Pressler of Houston and Paige Patterson of Dallas.

Or, consider the practice of enlisting a few disgruntled seminary students to provide tapes of lectures by seminary professors, or

chapel sermons and lectures, as well as addresses such as this convocation address for the Dallas war-room with its reported information banks.

I was not unduly surprised by recent reports of unscrupulous and unethical acts by politicians heading the Independent Fundamentalist Party in the convention. Their actions only confirm that in every generation there are individuals committed to religious causes who walk on the dark side of ethical conduct.

For example, one of the Texas leaders of the inerrantist political party recently invaded the privacy of the president's office, to say nothing of my personal life. He was in Louisville and called a student acquaintance of former years who also is a friend of the president and who frequently drives the president's car to the airport. The politician asked whether the president may have said anything to the student during those trips to the airport which might "be of help," to the caller and other political leaders of the Independent Fundamentalist's Party. To my student friend's credit, he talked to me the next day — rather than to report our conversations to the politician who sought to corrupt the student's conscience, and his friendship with the president.

Or, consider that a professor reported to me only last week his conversation with a student concerning a breakfast meeting in Kansas City during the Southern Baptist Convention which involved several Southern Seminary students and a Dallas leader of the Independent Fundamentalist Political Party who sought to enlist them as campus subversives, "moles," or "quislings," to tape faculty lectures at Southern Seminary.

Such espionage is needless. And we would gladly provide appropriate taped materials; so long as the recipients were worthy in motivation and committed to study such materials within their appropriate context.

This seminary has nothing to hide, whether at the classroom lectern or the chapel pulpit. At Southern Seminary, we seek to teach and to live without reproach. We invite all the world to hear and see our actions and our words that they may know to whom we belong.

After five years of harrassment, Professor Bruce Corley of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary summarized the issue for many faculty persons in his chapel message on July 3, 1984:

"For five years the light has been blazing on me . . . why all the subterfuge, misinformation, secrecy games and clandestine activity. Do you assume that I will lie unless spied upon? Why should anyone ever come to this seminary (SWBTS) in order to spy and report to a watchdog? My classes, my books, my sermons, my meetings, and my heart are open; ask what I believe, and I will tell you. I still regard personal integrity a Christian virtue.

". . . I have drawn a line of truth in the sands of my life; it runs deeply, as deep as the truth of the Gospel. I have asked, is this a time when silence can pass as a virtue?

I have measured my convictions on the Word of God, made them clear, and here I stand. I call others of courage to stand with me."

Truth needs to engage neither a defense lawyer nor a prosecuting attorney. For truth is both its own surest defender and its most stalwart advocate. Those who stand in the light need not fear the darkness; nor do they need to fear those who stand in the darkness to abuse the light!

Should we as faculty, staff, or student — or external critic of the seminary — disagree with a friend, another student, a professor or a staff person; if we misunderstand what another person says; or if we object to an individual's views for whatever the reason — why not demonstrate the integrity and courage of your deeply held conviction by first talking with the other person? If you have problems which the two of you cannot resolve, then talk with other

appropriate persons in your school or division.

By so doing we would be faithful to Jesus' imperative counsel: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone . . ." (Mt. 18:15). By manifesting such honor and respect toward one another we would fulfill our duty, maintain the unity of this community, and magnify our personal honor.

So, my friends and colleagues, whether student, faculty, staff, or visiting friend — hear my plea this morning. There are few if any qualities or relationships which we have in life which are more crucial than the honor with which we live and the integrity by which we are remembered. Let us, therefore, make this Joban confession our own:

"As God lives, who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter; as long as my breath is in me, and the Spirit of God is in my nostrils; my lips will not speak falsehood, and my tongue will not utter deceit . . . till I die I will not put away my integrity from me. I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go . . ." (Job 27:2-6).

When your children and loyal Southern Baptists in the next generation ask what you and I did during the struggle to preserve the integrity of the Southern Baptist Convention and our historic commitment to cooperative missions; may it be said of us that within the limits of divine opportunity and human possibility we fulfilled God's calling.

For this reason, convocation, 1984, is a time to hear the call of duty, unity, and honor. When the story of the conflict is written, may it never be said of us that their call to battle fell on deaf ears, unresponsive hearts, or unwilling lives.

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