

**GEORGE W. TRUETT**  
*Prophet of Freedom, Herald of Faith*  
1867-1944

*Presented by Quinn Pugh, BWA Heritage and Identity Commission, Rio de Janeiro, 8 July 2003*

*The place is Atlanta, 1939; the occasion is the 6<sup>th</sup> World Baptist Congress; the setting is the Ponce de Leon Ball Park where 12,000 delegates from 60 countries are gathered with others in attendance from across the United States swelling the audience to as many as 100,000 persons.*

*Dr. George W. Truett had been elected President of the Baptist World Alliance in Berlin, Germany, in 1934. On this occasion, he was delivering his Presidential Address.*

*Dr. Truett enters the room conversing with Dr. J.H. Rushbrooke of London recalling the six months' trip which they had made together four years earlier meeting with Baptists around the world.*

My dear Dr. Rushbrooke, I cannot tell you how magnificently refreshing it is to be with you again. Since the world journey on which you joined Mrs. Truett and me, there has been rarely a day that we have not spoken of the thrilling moments we shared together with our brothers and sisters in Christ, even in the most difficult circumstances imaginable. Ah, yes, the tears have been abundant in remembering their great faith and their irrepressible courage. And our prayers have been ceaseless as we have spoken to each other and to the First Baptist Church and to our Southern Baptist fellowship.

And you, Dr. Rushbrooke, you have been the object of our prayers, as well. How very much we are in your debt for your leadership of our great Baptist World Alliance. Mrs. Truett and I have with unfailing frequency thanked God that He has placed you in such a position for such an hour as this. Before we mount the podium, I want to say to you personally, what a delight it is to welcome you to the United States. And further I want to say to you how comforting it is to have you beside me as I address this mighty delegation here in Atlanta, Georgia.

You may know this: I was reared no more than a hundred miles from this site in the mountain village of Hayesville in the State of North Carolina and taught school as an eighteen-year-old lad in Hiawasse, Georgia. Have you met Dr. Louie Newton since your arrival? He is a widely read journalist who is now the Pastor of the great Druid Hills Baptist Church in this City. It is he who has chaired the arrangements committee for this 6<sup>th</sup> World Baptist Congress. Through his extensive influence we have been accorded the most cordial welcome to Atlanta. Look at that Choir! I am told that Mr. John Hoffman is among the most celebrated choral musicians in the Southeastern United States. Now look at that sea of faces, from every continent on the Earth. Dr. Rushbrooke, they are our brothers and sisters in Christ representing all the races of mankind. Does that not bespeak the oneness we know in Him, just as we experienced on our journey such a short time ago.

There is Dr. Newton, now, motioning us to the podium. Thank you for sitting alongside here as I go to the lectern. *Indicates the place where Dr. Rushbrooke will sit, Truett moves to the center of the platform and to the lectern.*

My beloved brothers and sisters, "As Baptists from around the encircling globe are gathered in this beautiful, forward looking, and nobly hospitable city of Atlanta, in the 6<sup>th</sup> session of the Baptist World Congress, surely gratitude deep and joyful is in all our hearts, when we recall the grace of God bestowed upon our world wide Baptist fellowship, during the thirty-four years of the life of the Baptist

World Alliance. We are gathered here from five continents and from some sixty nations. These messengers of good will are here from the Far East - - from India and Burma, and China and Japan; from Australia and New Zealand; from Africa and South America; from practically all the countries of Europe, except Russia, and even that great land will be represented by some of her exiled sons. We are here from Canada and Alaska, and Central America and Cuba, and from the Islands of the Seas. We are here manifestly from the United States, North, South, East and West.

One may well wonder whether there has ever assembled on this Continent a more significant religious gathering than in the Congress. The Baptist Communion is now the largest Free-Church Communion in the entire world. The Baptist family is by far the largest non-Catholic communion in the United States, her churches numbering more than ten million members. Included in this large company are between three and four million Negro Baptists, whose remarkable growth in numbers and in glorious achievements, let me say to our fellow Baptist from other lands, will forever stand out as epic chapters in the religious life of America.

All these Baptists here assembled, and the millions of Baptists represented by these messengers, we would fervently salute with Paul's benediction: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ." Nor would we stop with our salutations to our fellow Baptists, but we would also say with Paul, to our fellow Christians of every name and land: "Grace be with all them who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

It is especially gratifying to us all that so many missionaries, from lands near and far, are here with us in the Congress. They are our most honored messengers. The largest and best contribution made to the missionary cause is the missionary. More important than all our gifts in money, important as they are, are the lives of the missionaries. What money gift to missions could compare with the life of the missionary, William Carey? Or with the lives of Adoniram Judson, and Luther Rice, and Matthew T. Yates, and Lottie Moon, and Henrietta Hall Shuck, and Robert Morrison, and David Livingstone, and John G. Paton, and John E. Clough, together with an unnumbered host of faithful men and women whose missionary lives have markedly changed the world? We stand in most grateful salute, upon every thought of our valiant missionaries and the immeasurably blessed work!

I would also speak a very personal word concerning one who is here with us today, one especially dear to my own heart, even our own beloved World Secretary, Dr. J. H. Rushbrooke. Through the years of intimate association and conference and travel and toil with him, he has continually loomed larger in spiritual wisdom and strength, and in epoch-making serviceableness to our needy world. He is the most informed man about Baptist affairs in all the world today.

You have come together in one of the ominous and fateful epochal hours in the life of the world. Stupendous influences and forces are shaking the world to its very foundation. The deadly menace of materialism casts its baleful shadow throughout all realms, and among all peoples. The astounding fact of ghastly persecutions, both racial and religious, continues to challenge the whole world with horror, and to make a blot that is an unspeakable disgrace to civilization. Fear seems to have the pass-key to whole nations, as well as to myriad individuals, whether in palace or cottage. Vast changes of all kinds are rapidly sweeping the world as swirling ocean currents sweep the seas. These changes are economic and financial, political and governmental, educational and social, moral and religious. Misunderstandings, both national and international, seem relentless in their persistence. Wars and rumors of wars, even now are casting their dark shadows across the earth. All these conditions poignantly remind us how desperately we need help above ourselves. We are now facing one of the most fateful days in all the history of the world.

On every hand, the acutely searching question is heard: Have Christians an adequate remedy for the poignantly troubled world situation of today? Is there a Door of Hope in the Valley of Achor? Happy am I to believe that this assembled Congress, with united and unflinching conviction would answer: "Yes," to such a question. We would fervently sing with the poet:

We know of lands that are sunk in shame,  
Or hearts that faint and tire;  
And we know of a Name, a Name, a Name  
That can set such lands on fire.

And there is only one Name that can do it. "Thou shalt call His Name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." He was born in the first century, yet He belongs to all centuries. He was born a Jew, yet He belongs to all races. And He is adequate for the ills of today.

The question arises: What is the purpose of this Baptist World Congress? What brings together this vast company of Baptists? . . . we come to get and to give renewed emphasis to "THE BAPTIST MESSAGE and MISSION for the WORLD TODAY."

The Congress does well to have as its Motto Text, Paul's positive pronouncement: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." I would here frankly say that for Baptists there is one authoritative and final source of religious truth, and that source is the Bible, the Holy Word of God. Our contention is that God's Will for mankind is fully expressed in the Bible, and to that Will we are bound to conform, in all matters relating to doctrine, polity, ordinances, worship and Christian living. How shall we find out Christ's Will for us? He has revealed it in His Holy Word. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the rule of faith and practice for Baptists. Not traditions, nor customs, nor councils, nor confessions, nor ecclesiastical formularies, however venerable and pretentious, guide Baptists, but simply and solely the will of Christ as they find it revealed in the New Testament. Christ is our one foundation, and we are to build alone upon Him. He is our Prophet, Priest, and King, our one authoritative Teacher, our atoning, adequate Savior, our Divine Lord and King. His Word is our Court of last appeal, and His command is to be faithfully obeyed, whatever may be the cost. The mighty preacher, the late Dr. B.H. Carroll, has thus stated it for us: "The New Testament is the law of Christianity. All the New Testament is the law of Christianity. The New Testament is all the law of Christianity. The New Testament always will be all the law of Christianity." The law is Christ; it is the law of Christ's reign. Holding aloft a little book, the name of which is the New Testament, the Baptist shouts this cry: "Let all the world go to bits, and we will reconstruct it on the New Testament."

It matters vitally what we believe. Ideas rule the world. The late President (Edgar Young) Mullins has left on record one sentence that may well characterize the historic significance of Baptists. That sentence affirms the competency of the individual, under God, in matters of religion. The individual is competent. That principle is the keystone truth of the Baptists. Religion is a matter of personal relationship between the soul and God, and nothing extraneous may properly intrude here - - no ecclesiastical nor civil order, no church, nor ordinance, nor sacrament, no preacher, nor priest, may dare to stand between the individual soul and Christ. Out of this cardinal, bed-rock principle, all our Baptist principles emerge. Everyone must give account of himself to God. There can be no sponsors or deputies or proxies in such a vital matter. Each one must repent for himself, and believe for himself, and be baptized for himself, and answer to God for himself, both in time and eternity. Quaint John Bunyan was true to the New Testament teachings, when in his Pilgrim's Progress he made the entrance into the narrow way to heaven, a wicket gate so small that only one person could go in at a time. In the Kingdom of God the individual is always the unit.

One man can no more repent and believe and obey Christ for another, than he can take another's place at God's judgment bar. Neither persons nor institutions, however dear and powerful, may dare to come between the individual soul and God. "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Let both the state and the church, let any institution, however dear, and any person, however near, stand aside, and let the individual soul have his own direct and personal access to God. One is our pontiff, and His name is Jesus. The undelegated sovereignty of Christ makes it forever impossible for His saving grace to be manipulated by any system of human mediation, whatsoever.

And for any person or institution to dare to come between the soul and God is a blasphemous impertinence and a defamation of the crown rights of the Son of God. What a frightful chapter has been written, the world around, by disregard of this lofty principle of freedom of conscience, and its inevitable corollary, the separation of church and state! John Bunyan was kept in Bedford jail for twelve long years, because he utterly rejected the claim of the state to forbid his preaching the glorious Gospel of Christ. Yonder in Massachusetts, Henry Dunster, the first President of Harvard, and one of its chiefest helpers, was removed from the presidency, because he objected to infant baptism. Roger Williams was banished, John Clarke was put in prison, and Obadiah Holmes was publicly whipped on Boston Common; and all this, because they refused to stultify their consciences. In Connecticut, the lands of our Baptist people were confiscated and their goods sold, to build a meetinghouse and support a preacher of another denomination. In old Virginia, the battle for religious and civil liberty was long and grandly waged, and the final triumph recorded there was such as to write imperishable glory upon the name of Virginia forever. Fines and imprisonments and persecutions were everywhere in evidence in Virginia, for conscience' sake. On and on our Baptist forbears waged their unyielding battle for religious liberty. They dared to be odd, to stand alone, to refuse to conform, though it cost them suffering and even life itself. They pleaded, and suffered, and kept on with their protests and remonstrances and memorials, until thank God, forever, their contention was won, in these United States, and written into our country's Constitution, that church and state must, in this land, be forever separate and free, and that neither must ever trespass upon the distinctive functions of the other. The impartial historian will ever agree with Mr. Bancroft, our American historian, when he says: "Freedom of conscience, unlimited freedom of mind, was from the first the trophy of the Baptists." Their contention is not for mere toleration, but for absolute liberty. There is a wide difference between toleration and liberty. Toleration is a concession, while liberty is a right. Toleration is a matter of expediency; while liberty is a matter of principle. Toleration is a gift from man, while liberty is a gift from God. It is therefore, the consistent, insistent, and persistent contention of our Baptist people, always and everywhere, that religion must be forever voluntary and uncoerced, and that it is not the prerogative of any power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, to compel men to conform to any religious creed or form of worship, or to pay taxes for the support of a religious organization to which they do not belong, and in whose creed they do not believe. God desires free worshippers, and no others.

Jesus stated this principle in the two sayings, "My Kingdom is not of this world," and "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's."

"Let Caesar's dues be paid  
To Caesar and his throne;  
But consciences and souls were made  
To be the Lord's alone."

That one utterance of Jesus, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's," marked the divorcement of church and state, once and for all. It marked a new era for the creeds, and deeds of men. It was the sunrise gun of a new day, the echoes of which are to go on, and on, until the doctrine of "A Free Church in a Free State," shall have absolute supremacy, in every land, whether great or small, around the encircling globe.

Concerning the church, Baptists hold that it is a Divine institution, not evolved from the changing conditions of society, but expressing the mind of Christ; that it is an enduring institution, adapted to all times and climes, and to all peoples. They hold that a church of Jesus Christ is a spiritual institution, and that it is a pure democracy, without disbarment of franchise to any member, on the ground of nationality, race, class or sex. There are two ordinances of the church - - Baptism and the Lord's Supper - - neither as a means of salvation, but both figurative and commemorative. It is a vital Baptist principle that spiritual birth must precede church membership and these two ordinances.

Baptists hold the immemorial position that all true believers in Christ as their personal Savior, are saved, having been born again; and this without the intervention of preacher, priest, ordinance, sacrament, or church. Therefore, we profoundly rejoice in our spiritual union with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth. We cherish them as our brothers in the saving grace of Christ, and heirs with us of life and immortality. We love their fellowship, and maintain that the spiritual union of all true believers in Christ is now, and will ever be a blessed reality. Baptists joyfully cherish all these believers in Christ, as their brothers in the common salvation, whether they be found in a Protestant communion, or in a Catholic communion, or in any other communion, or in no communion.

The momentous, epochal days which are now upon us call mightily for renewed clarity of thought, and for deepening of convictions concerning the message and mission of all Christ's people. It is conviction that convinces. The place of the Christian pulpit and the Christian teacher is no proper place for a religious stammerer. We need a reincarnation of the John Bunyan spirit, throughout all the Christian world today. He was long kept in (Bedford) jail, because of his fidelity to his Christian convictions. When he was offered his freedom, if he would put his conscience in shackles, he made the sublime reply: "I will stay in prison till the moss grows on my eyebrows (as thick as on these walls), rather than make a slaughterhouse of my conscience, or a butchery of my principles." That is the spirit for all God's people today.

This incomparably fateful hour in the life of the world calls for the dedication of our all for the furtherance of Christ's Kingdom through every nook and corner of this earth. Our task is nothing less than the evangelization of the whole world, and to bring it into obedience to Christ. Christianity cannot yield its claim to supremacy, everywhere, nor will it consent to enroll Christ in any Pantheon, anywhere. Christ must be Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all. There are not two Saviors but one, and hence Christ's holy religion must be exclusive and adapted to all mankind. "He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet." We are in no losing battle when we follow Christ.

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before the Judgment Seat;  
O, be swift my soul to answer Him, be jubilant my feet,  
Our God is marching on."

Every Christian is to take Christ's world view of the Christian task. To such end, we must major on Evangelism. That is the first note in the marching orders of our risen Savior and Lord. Evangelism is the missionary spirit in action. It is the forerunner and builder of churches. It is essential to all Christian expansion, and must give its benign influence to all sound teaching in the churches. The first and supreme business of every church is to win souls to the salvation and service of Christ. This work is not secondary and incidental, but it is primary and supreme. "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

But it is not enough for us to be given the vision of a lost world - - we must also know of an adequate remedy for such a lost world. And there is a famine in the earth of the Word of God. Just here we come upon the most enchanting theme in the universe. It is the Gospel story of how a sinner may be saved. "There is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." This gospel

is the one, all-sufficient hope for mankind. It is the hope for the individual, and it is the hope for society. Grace is as real as sin, and grace is far more powerful than sin. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Wherever the vital facts of Christ's death and resurrection are faithfully proclaimed, Christ verifies His promise: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto Me." This very hour, Christ is saving Korean demon worshippers, and south Sea Cannibals, and African Hottentots, and Indian Pariahs, and Confucian Scholars, and Brahmin Priests, and (American secularists), and men of every type and temperament under heaven.

Our declared principles inexorably commit us to a large program of service. The whole Gospel for the whole world is our God-given program. The acid test of Jesus is: "By their fruits ye shall know them." The truth is not to be wrapped in a napkin for safe keeping - - the truth is to be promulgated. "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Faith is more than a dogma, it is a passion, it lifts, it achieves, it arrives. Great believers are great doers. Entrusted as we are with such a Gospel, what ought we to be and do about it? If we are to be true to our Baptist Message and Mission, we must be missionary enthusiasts. It was no accident that William Carey became the founder of modern missions. His fundamental Baptist principle of obedience to Christ made him a missionary. And so with Judson and Rice, and with all the valiant men and women who followed in their train. If (all of you) now gathered, have the true Baptist spirit, it will leave us no choice but to go and to give, and to live, and if need be to die, that the glorious Gospel of Christ may be made known to every human being. It is high time for Baptists to take a great step forward. Carlyle's final message is the message for us all: "Give yourself royally." Let us dare to tread the way of the Cross. Let us glorify cooperation and not abuse our liberty, remembering that love and not liberty is the last word in our Baptist vocabulary.

Let us go to our world mission, in no defeatist spirit but with all-conquering courage and faith. We are following a Leader who "will not fail nor be discouraged, till He hath set justice in the earth; and the isles shall wait for His Law. Let us say with Rupert Brooks: "Now God be thanked Who matched us with this hour." Will we be big enough to see our day? Will our leadership be worthy? Will we now as never before cast ourselves upon God? Let us take the long look. The short view is always inadequate. Christ's people are engaged, not simply in a battle, but in a campaign, the outcome of which campaign is certain to be victory for Him Whose right it is to reign, today, tomorrow, and beyond forevermore. "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does his successive journeys run." He is steadily marching on to His coronation, when He shall be crowned with many crowns - - the crown of creation, of revelation, of history, of salvation, of all the crowns. Oh! Who would not wish to link his all with this Eternal Savior and Lord.

All hail the power of Jesus' Name  
Let angels prostrate fall,  
Bring forth the royal diadem  
And crown Him Lord of all.

Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,  
Ye ransomed from the fall,  
Hail Him who saves you by His grace  
And crown Him Lord of all.

Let every kindred every tribe,  
On this terrestrial ball,  
To Him all majesty ascribe,  
And crown Him Lord of all.

O that with yonder sacred throng,

We at His feet may fall,  
We'll join the everlasting song  
And crown Him Lord of all.