

## 1987 T. B. Maston Christian Ethics Award to Foy Valentine

The Trustees of the T. B. Maston Scholarship Foundation Present the First T. B. Maston Christian Ethics Award to Dr. Foy Valentine

In appreciation for his service to our Lord, to Southern Baptists, and to the world through his direction of the work of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention; in which position he courageously, unwaveringly, and effectively pricked and quickened Christian consciences, heightened our understanding of the applied Christian ethic, and revived our desire to realize in our lives the truth of *1 John 2:6*, "He that abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked."

Fort Worth, Texas  
November 6, 1987

### **Response by Foy Valentine** ***Crying in the Wilderness: Streaking in Jerusalem:*** ***The Prophethood of All Believers***

*Mark 1:3* says that John the Baptist was "a voice crying in the the wilderness"; and of this prophet who Jesus called "more than a prophet" (*Luke 7:26*) our Lord said, "Among those born of women none is greater than John" (*Luke 7:28*).

*Isaiah 20:1-6 (RSV)* says, "In the year that the commander-in-chief, who was sent by Sargon the king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and fought against it and took it — at that time the Lord had spoken by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, 'Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take off your shoes from your feet,' and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot — the Lord said, 'As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians captives and the Ethiopians exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt. Then they shall be ashamed and confounded because of Ethiopia their hope and of Egypt their boast. And the inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day, "Behold, this is what has happened to those in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?"'"

*Numbers 11:27-29 (RSV)* says, "And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.' And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, 'My lord Moses, forbid them.' But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!'"

*Joel 2:28* has the prophet Joel speaking for God and *Acts 1:17-21* has the Apostle Peter, quoting Joel, to say, "In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.... And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

## ***Activating Our Christian Prophethood***

The concept of the the prophethood of all believers is quite old, traceable at least to Moses (see *Numbers 11:29*). The term itself has been around for at least a hundred years; but I am personally indebted to James Luther Adams, whom I knew, for having jogged me into hot-eyed excitement about the idea through a piece that he wrote in 1947 and which George Beach both included and, at Adams' suggestion, used as the title for a volume of compiled addresses and articles by Adams, published by Beacon Press in 1986.

According to the papers, a leading Methodist bishop, former president of the Methodist Council of Bishops, and former tall-steeple church pastor, who after fifty years of intense homosexual activity recently died of AIDS, built his stunningly successful professional career on a ruthlessly pursued program of rigid "conservatism" and aggressive initiatives for full-speed-ahead-damn-the-torpedoes "evangelism and church growth." Prophethood was not his cup of tea.

When I was enrolled at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, it was the rule rather than the exception for the teachers to fail to get to the latter sections of Paul's epistles, to perambulate around the prophetic, to denigrate the prophetic demands of the Christian calling, and, like a yo-yo stalled on hesitation at the bottom of the swing until its energy is spent, left ethics till the last and then left it out. Prophethood was not their priority.

We do well to remember that Henry IV, who had called his ally, the French soldier of fortune, Louis Crillon, "The bravest of the brave," said to the tardy Crillon after victory had been won in 1587 against a particularly aggressive show of force by the Leaguers in northern France, "Hang yourself, brave Crillon! We fought at Arques and you were not there." (cf. James Luther Adams, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, p. 103.)

The prophetic dimension of revealed religion has everlastingly fallen onto hard times. It has never been the most coveted of callings. There are some obvious reasons for this. Even the Lord's anointed are subject to temptations related to "soft clothing," pleasure, materialism, economic determinism, and love of comfort. When the winnowing and harrowing of Fundamentalism started among Southern Baptists, Baptists were not lean and mean, ready for the war, but soft and satisfied, flabby and floppy.

The craving for adulation has also had its effects. Earl Guinn has spoken of this malady when he said that the churches, instead of hearing God's prophets in the pulpits sounding the trumpet in thrilling, clarion tones, have heard instead "... inoffensive little men tooting piccolos and then running to the door to grin like Cheshire cats at those whose compliments are demanded by their itching ears" ("The Prophetic Ministry," *Southern Baptist Preaching*, ed. H.C. Brown, Jr.; Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959, p. 91).

Perhaps the most chilling reason of all for our resistance to prophethood has been idolatry. For decades now, we Baptists have been bragging that our programs, our missions, our evangelism have made us great, that our institutions, our brick buildings, our budgets have made our God (or god) look good to the heathen. When the death of Northern, essentially German, Fundamentalist rationalism was slipped into the pot of Baptist life, we said that these wonderful things, which we made with our own hands, have always saved us, and that they would surely save us now. It has been an idolatry that a jealous God could never have been expected to cotton to with any real enthusiasm. And it is turning out to be as "one in a certain place has said" (*Hebrews 2:6*) - that it is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (*Hebrews 10:31*).

An exceptionally successful, much lionized Southern Baptist pastor told a young protégé (whom I know) when he was just starting out in the ministry, “Just preach salvation; and don’t make waves.” Prophethood has never been his bag.

A very safe, scrupulously middle-of-the-road, extremely well-paid and highly successful pastor of a big city church recently sought to placate an agitated rich member deeply concerned about the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention by Fundamentalist extremists by counseling, “Just be patient; don’t rock the boat; don’t talk this around; don’t designate your money; this thing is going to turn around; the pendulum will swing.” Prophethood is not for him.

Some time ago, a pastor of a large Southern Baptist church recounted this chilling tale: A Southern Baptist megachurch pastor had been invited to his city to hold a city-wide evangelistic crusade. The megachurch visiting evangelist looked up this pastor of the biggest church in the city and said, “Look, I’m in desperate circumstances: I’ve got to have a good love offering.” The pastor said, “You’re greedy.” “No, I’ve got these huge payments to make on my house.” “No. You’re unconscionably greedy. You’re several times a millionaire.” “How did you know?” “Elementary, my dear Watson.” Nevertheless, the “evangelist” pressed his case with other preachers in the city until he was able to walk away with his \$25,000. He had his reward. Prophethood is not his vocation.

At the 1985 Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas, there were 36,270 seats in all three auditoriums; there were 45,049 messengers registered; and there were 44,248 ballots allegedly cast (with 98.2% of the registered messengers allegedly present and allegedly voting) in the presidential race between Charles Stanley and Winfred Moore; the denominational news services and the editors of state Baptist papers chose not to report those curious statistics. Let-the-chips-fall-where-they-may, tell-it-like-it-is prophethood did not ring their journalistic bells.

Most of the Southern Baptist Convention’s real bishops, during most of the last decade-and-a-half of unprecedented crisis, while the Fundamentalists have gone for the Southern Baptist Convention’s jugular with precinct political organization and bused-into-the-Tuesday-afternoon-Presidential-election votes, have been tongue-tied in words and hamstrung in deeds, waiting for the storm to blow over, hoping for others to rise up and fight the Philistines, watching for that pendulum to swing, straddling the fence from underneath, hunkered down in paralyzed ambiguity, reeds “shaken with the wind” of Fundamentalism, men “clothed in soft raiment” (*Matthew 11:7, 8*); Gamalielized. Prophethood has not been their long suit.

Prophecy has to do with visions and with visionaries, with seeing and with seers, with justice and with judgment, with righteousness and with retribution, and with sometimes striking an uncouth note in the world of possibility thinking. Our world needs few things more now than prophetic words and prophetic deeds. The churches now need few things more than the prophethood of crying in the wilderness like brave John the Baptist, streaking in Jerusalem like courageous Isaiah. By these words and deeds, the demands of God are understood to be not obscure or ambiguous, but understandable and doable, practical and specific, clear and concrete, relevant and redemptive.

### ***Definitions Related to the Prophetic***

*Prophet* is the English transliteration of *prophetes*, a Greek word used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *Nabi*, probably meaning “one who utters a God-given message.” The word originally meant forthteller but came early to encompass the idea of foretelling; and both ideas, forthtelling and foretelling, are properly associated with the term *prophet*. The great prophets of biblical times were driven by an irresistible constraint to declare the word of the Lord, to obey the word of the Lord, and to act in response to the word of the Lord. The prophet

is the priest who is taking the longer look, listening to a different drummer, and feeling the fire in his baptism as it burns to become fire in his belly.

*Prophecy* is the work of a prophet, the vocation of a prophet, the utterance of a prophet. It may be a courageous, communicative, cathartic prophetic act. It may be a prediction. It may be a discernment and interpretation of “the signs of the times” (*Matthew 16:3*).

*Prophetic* is an adjective which refers to things pertaining to the character or function of a prophet or of prophets, including both forthtelling, or the proclamatory, and foretelling, or the predictive. The prophetic word in the gospel presses toward the ideal, champions the moral imperative, stands, stands for right.

*Prophecy* is a verb meaning to speak by divine inspiration, to announce, or to predict. *Amos* said, “The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?” (*3:8*)

*Prophethood* has to do with the word or position or office of the prophet. As we speak of the priesthood of all believers, we may also rightly speak of the prophethood of all believers. There is nothing that would do more to revive authentic Christianity in our time than for us to find the ways and devise the means to press successfully for the prophethood of all believers.

### ***Biblical Roots of Prophethood***

The first mention of a prophet in the Bible is the reference in *Genesis 20:7* in which God said to Abimelech, king of Gerar, concerning Abraham, “he is a prophet.” Moses was a prophet in a truly classic sense. As men and women of heroic deeds, the Judges of Israel performed prophetic functions representing God and pointing to God. The kings of Israel were frequently compelled to fall in line with the visions and calls of the Lord’s divinely inspired prophets. The great prophets like Elijah and Elisha, Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, Jonah and John the Baptist, and many, many more were people of mighty words; and they were men and women of mighty deeds. Prophetesses like Miriam and Deborah and Huldah and Anna and the four virgin daughters of Philip the evangelist (*Acts 21:9*) prove that God is no respecter of persons at the point of sex, that prophethood has no direct connection to gonads or ovaries, to sex or sexuality. The call of these prophets and prophetesses was a call to ethical monotheism, justice, righteousness, goodness, mercy, kindness, forbearance, truth, love, rectitude, and responsibility. They everlastingly highlighted the worth of the individual.

The Lord Jesus Christ was himself a prophet “mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (*Matthew 21:11; Luke 24:19; John 4:19; John 7:40*); and his most profoundly prophetic witness to the world was his incarnation. The scandal of the cross and his awful nakedness there was preceded by his pitifully provincial nakedness as a newborn human baby sucking at the breast of Mary his mother and then wetting his diapers in the barn of Bethlehem. That incarnational witness of God in Christ puts the streaking of Isaiah in Jerusalem into perspective. Isaiah’s witness was but a pale portent, a mere shadow, of the power of prophecy when presented by the Prophet of prophets, Jesus Christ.

The prophetic tradition in church history has not had a brilliant record; and for this, the church is infinitely poorer; for this, the Kingdom of God is sadly diminished. In the early church, of course, prophets are sometimes mentioned as ranking next to the Apostles (*Acts 11:27; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12:28*). The Apostles themselves discharged prophetic responsibilities. Paul was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Peter learned in his vision on the housetop of Joppa that what God had cleansed we may not call common or unclean. Authentic prophecy stumbled on many stones, including the stone of incipient pentecostalism which fostered excesses of emotionalism, dispensationalism, escapism, and moral nihilism.

### ***The Need for the Prophethood of All Believers***

Few biblical insights, concepts, doctrines, or teachings are more neglected, more generally ignored, or more shamelessly rejected than those pertaining to prophets, prophethood, and the prophetic aspect of the Lord's high calling.

In the Reformation, Christians took a giant step toward recovering the priesthood of the believer. Martin Luther's nailing of his 95 theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenburg was a prophetic act. The formulation of those 95 theses was a prophetic utterance or statement communicating a divinely inspired insight. The Anabaptists and the whole radical left wing of the Reformation subsequently took some halting steps toward the prophethood of all believers; but the plane has not ever sustained its flight for very long. Institutionalism keeps metastasizing. The priestly keeps squeezing the life out of the prophetic. Comfort keeps conquering courage.

The need now is not just for a prophet, an Abraham, a Moses, a Rahab, an Amos, an Isaiah to take his clothes off and go barefoot for three years as a sign, or a John the Baptist with his lone voice crying in the wilderness. The need is for an extension of the Reformation, a commitment to the basic agenda of Baptists in the free church tradition, general acceptance of the prophethood of all believers. With this prophethood in place, we can dream dreams and see visions. We can run and not be weary; we can walk and not faint. We can lay hold of the frequent vision (*1 Samuel 3:1, RSV*). We can be salt for the earth and light for the world and leaven for the lump.

The prophethood of believers can smash idols. And we can grind them to smithereens and mix them in the water, and bring the world to drink them. This was a sure sign to the Israelites that their false gods had been irretrievably disintegrated, ingloriously ingested, and ignobly excreted. Gentleness and facile optimism sometimes need to be balanced by justice and hard reality.

The prophethood of believers can foster repentance; and repentance, it is to be remembered, is the keynote of the *New Testament* message. That is, we can encourage the world, which God loves and which He came in Christ to save, to change its mind about its sin. We can foster repentance by first getting the world's attention. Voices crying seize interest; and prophets streaking, naked and barefoot for three years at a time, demand attention. Prophethood, having got the world's attention, then points people to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Then with repentance effected, purification is brought about, renewal is achieved, integrity is apprehended, salvation is realized, and church takes on meaning.

Oh, there is one other little matter. With the prophethood of all believers recovered and then taken seriously, failure is assured. As surely as sparks fly upward, rejection, loneliness, scandal, stoning, banishment, scorn, hatred, and crucifixion go with prophethood. The prophet's mantle is made of tow sacks and old cowhides. The prophet's food may be grasshoppers and wild honey. The prophet's house may be a cave. The prophet's servants may be crows. The prophet's pay may be spit in the face.

But the prophet's reward is God's "Well done, thou good and faithful servant... Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (*Matthew 25:21*).

As we believe in and practice the priesthood of all believers, so let us believe in and practice the prophethood of all believers.

The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy.